

THE ANTI-LOGIC TENDENCY  
OF THE THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE:  
A RESPONSE TO AND CRITIQUE OF CHRIS GOUSMETT’S REVIEW  
OF CHRISTOPHER CONE AND *REDACTED DOMINIONISM*

*Christopher Cone, ThD, PhD, PhD*  
*ccone@drcone.com*

President / Research Professor of Transformative Learning and Leadership  
Vyrarsity / Colorado Biblical University

INTRODUCTION

In 2021, Chris Gousmett<sup>1</sup> penned a rhetorically forceful critical review entitled “Christopher Cone and Redacted Dominionism,” in which he critiques the author and the work entitled *Redacted Dominionism: A Biblical Approach to Grounding Environmental Responsibility* (Wipf & Stock, 2021). Gousmett launches his critique with the observation that while the redacted dominionism perspective “may well avoid some of the harsher criticisms levelled against Genesis 1:26-28, it does so at the cost of abandoning core beliefs that are central to a sound and coherent interpretation of Scripture **and, I would argue, also vital to a reformational perspective**”<sup>2</sup> [emphasis mine]. Gousmett’s first stated objection to Cone and Redacted Dominionism (hereafter, C/RD) is in two parts: Critique #1 – RD abandons core beliefs necessary for a sound and coherent interpretation of Scripture, and Critique #2 – RD abandons core beliefs vital to a reformational perspective. A third critique becomes quickly evident, and is explicitly stated in Gousmett’s concluding remark:

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Chris Gousmett is retired Corporate Information Manager for the Hutt City Council, on North Island, New Zealand. He studied Hebrew and Philosophy at the University of Otago, and completed a Master of Philosophical Foundations degree, focusing on philosophical theology, at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto. He has a PhD in Patristic theology from the University of Otago, with a thesis on the inter-relationship of philosophical anthropology and the structure of eschatological thought in the Patristic writers. His interests are in Reformational philosophy and theology, the history of thought, including history of science, and political and social theory. He has preached in a number of churches, and some of his sermons are available at <https://hearinganddoing.wordpress.com/>. From Chris Gousmett, “Christopher Cone and Redacted Dominionism: Review Essay” in *Pro Rege*, Volume 50, Number 1, Article 1, September 2021: 1, viewed at [https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3146&context=pro\\_rege](https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3146&context=pro_rege).

<sup>2</sup> Chris Gousmett, “Christopher Cone and Redacted Dominionism: Review Essay” in *Pro Rege*, Volume 50, Number 1, Article 1, September 2021: 1, viewed at [https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3146&context=pro\\_rege](https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3146&context=pro_rege).

The intellectual and spiritual poverty of dispensational hermeneutics is clearly shown in Cone’s approach, which leaves the Christian community powerless before its accusers (since their accusations are accepted *in toto*) and bereft of a clear statement of responsibility for caring for God’s creation. Christianity in this perspective is indeed a world-flight focus on personal salvation to the neglect of all else.<sup>3</sup>

While there is much about this statement that this author asserts to be wildly fallacious (and is to be addressed below in some detail), it is simply worth noting at this point that this conclusion exposes Gousmett’s Critique #3 – RD relies on dispensational hermeneutics which is intellectually and spiritually impoverished.

Gousmett’s critiques in these statements show his own reliance on reformed (“reformational”) theological pre-commitment and underscores a failure to examine the Biblical text on its own terms independent of the theological interpretation of Scripture (hereafter, TIS) of his reformational tradition. Further, Gousmett explicitly assumes (erroneously) that this author similarly reads the Scripture through TIS.<sup>4</sup> Because C/RD represent an abandonment of core beliefs vital to Gousmett’s reformational perspective, it cannot be the product of a sound and coherent interpretation of Scripture. The presumption of Gousmett’s critiques as self-authenticating helps to show them to be at times logically fallacious and illustrates the problem that TIS often has in cooperating with logic – often begging the question and overriding elementary principles of logic.

This analysis considers fourteen of Gousmett’s critiques of C/RD in their assumptions, methodology, conclusions, and implications. These critiques show a reliance on TIS to ground and support the critiques. That reliance underscores a recognizable theological pedigree and exposes a tendency of TIS to fall into logical invalidity.

This author has proposed elsewhere that the *pedigree* of “reformational perspective” is more grounded in the Roman Catholic inclusion of Church dogma in its hermeneutic process than it is grounded in the Biblical text itself.<sup>5</sup> If Gousmett’s is a typical instance of TIS, then this particular application may provide a caution to the danger that TIS, with its reliance on precommitments (reformational or dispensational), poses to objective truth and sound logic – both of which are best uncovered and co-engaged by the use of the literal grammatical historical (hereafter LGH) method of understanding communication.

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<sup>3</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 14.

<sup>4</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 14 (Note the first sentence of footnote 11).

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Christopher Cone, *Priority in Biblical Hermeneutics* (Exegetica, 2018), 51; Christopher Cone, “The Hermeneutic Roots of the Green Tree” in *The Green Tree and the Hermeneutic Roots of Biblical Faith and Practice*, eds., Christopher Cone and John Oglesby (Exegetica, 2021), 14.

This writer hopes that Biblical interlocutors, being so cautioned, might have a heightened suspicion of TIS in every area of philosophy, worldview, and theology – and especially in those areas which have traditionally been most severely injured by TIS at the hands of the pre-commitments and methodology of Gousmett’s reformational tradition.

## GOUSMETT’S CRITIQUES OF C/RD METHODOLOGY

Gousmett targets C/RD methodology, recognizing in this context that methodology is a determinative factor in philosophical and theological conclusions. He points out two methodological concerns.

### 1. Abandons Soundness, Coherency, and Reformational Perspective

#### *Critique*

Gousmett diagnoses that, “While this approach may well avoid some of the harsher criticisms levelled against Genesis 1:26-28, it does so at the cost of abandoning core beliefs that are central to a sound and coherent interpretation of Scripture and, I would argue, also vital to a reformational perspective.”<sup>6</sup> While Gousmett acknowledges that C/RD avoids some of Lynn White’s critiques of Judeo-Christian approach to environmental responsibility, he notes that there is a price paid. C/RD abandons core beliefs that are necessary for a sound and coherent hermeneutic and theology. The methodology is not sound or coherent without the right beliefs at the outset. Thankfully Gousmett identifies, at least generally, what are those core beliefs when he makes them synonymous with “a reformational perspective.” Particular beliefs (consistent with reformational perspective) are necessary to have the right hermeneutic, which produces reformational perspective.

#### *Response*

It is evident, by this logical fallacy of **circular reasoning**, that any conclusions other than those agreeing with reformational perspective might be viewed through this lens as necessarily unsound and incoherent. The questions begged here relate to what is sound and coherent and who gets to determine the answers.

C/RD does not begin with reformational preunderstanding, and thus does not draw the reformational conclusions. The critique of C/RD methodology underscores the necessity of preunderstanding to outcomes in the reformational system, and illustrates at least a degree of circular reasoning that this C/RD works to avoid by separating theological outcomes from the hermeneutic principles and exegetical process.

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<sup>6</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 1-2.

## 2. Uses a Dispensational Hermeneutic

### *Critique*

Gousmett perceives that C/RD is using what he repeatedly identifies as a dispensationalist hermeneutic. He notes that, “This view would be consistent with Cone’s dispensationalist hermeneutic.”<sup>7</sup> Gousmett asserts that, “Cone works with a dispensationalist hermeneutic.”<sup>8</sup>

He offers some definition in his clarification that, “the dispensationalist approach, separating the redemptive acts of God into different periods with different requirements, must mean for Cone that anything pre-Fall no longer applies. This approach makes for strange results, and it leaves human beings basically devoid of any purpose except reproduction.”<sup>9</sup> Here Gousmett distinguishes separating the redemptive acts of God into different periods with different requirements as part of the dispensationalist approach. Further he adds that the logical conclusion of employing such an approach *must* mean that anything pre-Fall is not applicable, because presumably it falls in a previous and concluded dispensation. He adds that the results are strange, and limits human purpose to simply reproduction.

### *Response*

In this writer’s perspective, this particular critique is the most significant and the most alarming because of the degree of its claims and the implications if true. Because of the most serious nature of this critique, it is worth unpacking and addressing each element.

Element #1 – Separating the redemptive acts of God into different periods with different requirements is a uniquely dispensationalist approach. This statement employs the logical fallacy of **special pleading**. Reformational perspective *also* separates the redemptive acts of God into different periods with different requirements – that is why in reformational perspective the shedding of the blood of goats and bulls is not applicable today. The question at issue is not whether such distinctions are made, but the details of how those distinctions are to be measured.

Element #2 – This must mean that anything pre-Fall no longer applies. This statement employs the logical fallacy of **hasty generalization**. *Anything?* Is C/RD really saying that nothing pre-Fall is intact? The claims made by C/RD are very specific to certain pre-Fall conditions that have been *changed* or *diminished* by sin. Further, if one concludes that C/RD perceives too great a change in earthly conditions as to be sound and coherent, then perhaps such criticism might address whether Paul goes too far when he says that the *whole* creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth until

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<sup>7</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 10.

<sup>8</sup> Gousemett, Cone and RD: 14.

<sup>9</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 10.

now.<sup>10</sup> Then again, it is evident in reformational perspective that *all* or *whole* (Gr. *pasa*) doesn't always really mean *all* or *whole*.

Element #3 – This approach makes for strange results. This assertion utilizes a form of the *ad populum* logical fallacy. In order to determine whether or not *strange* is negative or positive the entire argument should be evaluated. To be surprising in an unsettling way or hard to understand (as strange can be defined), is not inherently bad. If the results of such an argument are strange, then perhaps the problem may be with the perceiver who finds the results surprising or unsettling.

Element #4 – It leaves humanity devoid of any purpose but reproduction. This claim is subject to two logical fallacies. First, in **affirming the consequent** (or converse error), the critique assumes that because function was prescribed in Genesis 1:28 that *all* function was prescribed there. If part of that function (rule and subdue) becomes non-applicable, then all that remains (be fruitful and multiply) is all that is prescribed. The simple fact is that there are *many* purposes for humanity besides those mentioned in Genesis 1:28 – not the least of which is to glorify God.<sup>11</sup> A second related fallacy evident in this critique is the **slippery slope**. If one perceives that the rule and subdue prescription has been redacted, then there can be no other purpose but reproduction, otherwise humanity is devoid of any purpose.

Further, regarding the pejorative attribution of the label of dispensationalist hermeneutic, it is noteworthy that Gousmett writes his critique in 2021, *after* the publication of several books by this writer, on the specific topic of hermeneutics and exegetical method, and which directly contradict Gousmett's assertion. For example,

Dispensationalism is absolutely not a hermeneutic. It should be, on the other hand, simply the product of a methodology and a hermeneutic consistently applied. If we treat dispensational theology itself as a hermeneutic lens, then we are no better off than those who appeal to historical theology as their authority for understanding Scripture (as the Catholic Catechism prescribes its followers must do<sup>37</sup>).<sup>12</sup>

And,

If we claim to hold to a dispensational hermeneutic, then on the one hand we are asserting our lack of bias in consistently applying an objective hermeneutic, while on the other we are showing our bias by claiming a dispensational presupposition. One can't have it both ways. Dispensationalists have struggled

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<sup>10</sup> Romans 8:22.

<sup>11</sup> E.g., 1 Corinthians 10:31.

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Cone, *Priority in Biblical Hermeneutics* (Exegetica, 2018), 51.

with this to some degree. Reformed theologians, on the other hand, have virtually dismissed this issue altogether.<sup>13</sup>

And,

But as we begin to acknowledge that dispensationalism is not a hermeneutic through which we view the Bible, but is instead the result of the Bible examined through a particular method (the literal grammatical historical hermeneutic), we may recognize the necessity of attending to the foundational aspects of dispensational thought instead of simply borrowing foundations from other theological traditions.<sup>14</sup>

And,

A truly Biblical dispensational theology is *not* a hermeneutic method; rather it is the *result* of a consistently applied literal grammatical-historical hermeneutic method.”<sup>15</sup>

And,

“While by necessity there must be a certain degree of preunderstanding in the hermeneutic process, elements which should be preunderstood are those regarding the text itself (i.e., words have meaning based on their historical grammatical usage) and how to approach the text (the hermeneutic method), but this preunderstanding should not extend to *a priori* doctrinal conclusions.<sup>16</sup>

In the more immediate context of C/RD, this clarification is offered:

At least three major traditions are presently discernible within the EC<sup>17</sup> – dispensationalism, covenant (or reformed) theology, and progressive dispensationalism – and they are distinguished primarily by the degree to which they apply the hermeneutic method.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Cone, *Priority*, 51.

<sup>14</sup> Cone, *Priority*, 207.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Cone, *Prolegomena on Biblical Hermeneutics and Method, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (Exegetica, 2015), 167.

<sup>16</sup> Cone, *Prolegomena*, 247.

<sup>17</sup> In C/RD, EC refers to Evangelical Community.

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Cone, *Redacted Dominionism* (Wipf & Stock, 2012), 21.

It is important to note this statement is not an acquiescence to a dispensational hermeneutic, but rather is an assertion that the traditions and theological outcomes are primarily determined by the degree LGH is applied. Readers are reminded that this is a point not lost on reformational thinker John Gerstner, who clarified that, “We all are literalists up to a certain point. At the point where we differ, there is a tendency for the dispensationalists to be literalistic where the non-dispensationalist tends to interpret the Bible figuratively.”<sup>19</sup> This writer adds that, “Each of these three traditions affirms literal hermeneutics as a core value, yet the three disagree on subtle nuances in application (of course, the distinctions are profound in application and result).”<sup>20</sup>

To claim that C/RD relies on a dispensationalist hermeneutic implies that dispensational conclusions are read into the method as reformational conclusions are read into reformational hermeneutics – or the theological interpretation of Scripture (TIS). This writer has argued against that implication consistently for decades. The critique commits **moral equivalence**, making a faulty assumption that “dispensationalist” methodology is employed and relies on TIS in the same way as “reformational” methodology, despite a surplus of evidence in this context to the contrary. This is not to say that some dispensational thinkers do not utilize TIS (as they may be unaware of the self-defeating nature of that device), but only to say that TIS is not part of the methodology (LGH hermeneutics) from which dispensational conclusions are derived.

### GOUSMETT’S CRITIQUES OF C/RD ASSUMPTIONS

As part of the methodological critique of C/RD, Gousmett expresses his concern regarding some of the assumptions he perceives as guiding the redacted dominionism perspective.

#### **3. Prioritization of Outcome Over Method Based on Insufficient Premises**

##### *Critique*

Gousmett expresses concerns about constraints on the method of C/RD due to precommitments to an agenda. “His [Cone’s] project, then, is to come to an understanding of the Scriptures that supports environmental responsibility (if it actually does that – and this is by no means certain in Cone’s view).”<sup>21</sup> Gousmett infers a C/RD prioritization of outcome over fidelity to hermeneutic method. Gousmett underscores the critique, noting, “His concern to avoid the criticisms of White similarly constrains his approach: he is intent on avoiding the charge of anthropocentrism, as

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<sup>19</sup> Cone, *RD*, 22.

<sup>20</sup> Cone, *RD*, 23.

<sup>21</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 3.

levelled by White against Western Christianity in particular, as the origin of the environmental crisis.”<sup>22</sup> Gousmett voices his concern more specifically, concluding that, “In effect, Cone says that any evangelical concern for the environment must avoid each of the criticisms White makes. Unfortunately, Cone is not as critical of White’s views as White is of Christianity, and so he assumes that the criticisms are legitimate.”<sup>23</sup>

In these statements, Gousmett communicates three essential concerns with what he perceives to be a precommitment on the part of C/RD to the outcome: First, there *is* a precommitment, second, that precommitment constrains the method, and third, the precommitment assumes flawed premises without critical evaluation.

### *Response*

Countering the claim of a precommitment to a philosophical/theological outcome, C/RD shows that there is embedded in the Biblical text a solution to the problem: “Because White’s proposed solution is less than Bible-based, it is not one that should expect to be lauded by the EC. However, there are other options besides those White offers. I propose that *there is a Christian environmental ethic* (emphasis mine) consistent with the core beliefs of the EC: namely, redacted dominionism...”<sup>24</sup> C/RD further asserts its focus on methodology rather than outcome, observing that, “to discard or deemphasize the Bible as God’s exclusive descriptive and prescriptive revelation for this age in order to generate environmental responsibility will not be as effective to that end as would be simple heightened attentiveness in applying principles already commonly assented to within the EC.”<sup>25</sup> C/RD therefore asserts that, “*redacted dominionism...is an attempt at applying a consistent literal grammatical-historical hermeneutic to the entire early Genesis narrative.*”<sup>26</sup> The benefit of this understanding to discussions of environmental responsibility is secondary to its fidelity to Biblical methodology: “Besides allowing for the highest degree of textual integrity in light of EC methodology, the literal grammatical-historical method is advantageous in this context as its consistent use allows for the total immunity of the early Genesis narrative from the critiques levied against it by Leopold, McHarg, and White.”<sup>27</sup> Environmental benefit is a *consequence* of proper and consistent handling of the text, and not determinative of methodology.<sup>28</sup> Gousmett’s claim of a constraining precommitment **does not correspond to the truth** of what was communicated in C/RD.

C/RD is not constrained by any precommitment other than to the authority of the Bible and resulting hermeneutic principles, as evidenced in the assertion that “the

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<sup>22</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 12.

<sup>23</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 2.

<sup>24</sup> Cone, *RD*, 7.

<sup>25</sup> Cone, *RD*, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Cone, *RD*, 30.

<sup>27</sup> Cone *RD*, 30.

<sup>28</sup> “[C]onsequently it represents the strongest possible biblical environmental ethic...” (Cone, *RD*, 30.)



underlying principles of Biblical authority and hermeneutic methodology, to which the EC submits, require the EC to reject the basic premises of Leopold’s, McHarg’s and White’s rejection of the creationist worldview in Genesis.”<sup>29</sup> This statement of methodological prioritization over outcome further recognizes that the critiques by Leopold, McHarg, and White are flawed in their rejection of Biblical authority. Only in submitting to the constraints of Biblical methodology C/RD poses the research question and seeks to work it out: “Is it possible, then, to reframe the critiques in a way that the EC can receive and positively respond to them, without demanding an abandonment of the EC’s own defining principles? To propose just such a reframing is the aim of this book.”<sup>30</sup>

Regarding the claim that White’s critiques are assumed correct without suitable evaluation, in fact, C/RD dedicates three chapters, encompassing roughly one third of the entire project – and including one-hundred and seventeen footnotes in those chapters – to discussion and analysis of White’s critiques. This hardly reflects an *assumption* of the legitimacy of Lynn White’s critique, rather it shows a researched case including both critical and sympathetic material. Further C/RD offers yet another chapter examining critiques of Judeo-Christian perspectives similar to White’s, as summarized, here: “Beyond investigating what the Bible, read from within the EC context, indicates about the environment, this project will also seek to answer the central questions raised by Leopold’s, McHarg’s, and White’s critiques of the Genesis-based worldview. Namely, whether or not man has dominion over nature and whether or not the world was designed with anthropocentrism as a defining principle, and consequently whether or not such a worldview is antithetical to environmental concerns.”<sup>31</sup> Again, this accusation against C/RD **does not correspond to truth**. Perhaps Gousmett is not evaluating this critique objectively because White’s critique is damning to Gousmett’s own anthropocentric dominionist presuppositions, which are integral to Gousmett’s reformational approach.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4. Avoids Value Hierarchy

##### *Critique*

The presence or lack thereof of a value hierarchy among creatures is an important aspect in the discussion of any Biblical model for environmental responsibility. Gousmett infers a *precommitment* by C/RD to avoid value hierarchy, thus making it a methodological concern. Gousmett suggests that, “The avoidance of a “value hierarchy” is central to Cone’s argument, which he asserts is based on the view

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<sup>29</sup> Cone, *RD*, 23.

<sup>30</sup> Cone, *RD*, 24.

<sup>31</sup> Cone *RD*, 11-12.

<sup>32</sup> Cone, *RD*, 6-7.

that “all creatures have equal instrumental value to God”<sup>33</sup> “The difficulty presented by this view, however, is this: the idea that human and non-human beings are of equal value, and thus there is no “value hierarchy,” seems to be a conclusion to be demonstrated, and not a presupposition to be accepted without argument. Why should an “anthropocentric theology,” for instance, be discarded if it can actually be demonstrated from Scripture.”<sup>34</sup> Gousmett is certainly correct that if an anthropocentric emphasis can be demonstrated from Scripture, then it certainly should be embraced, not avoided.

### *Response*

Gousmett critiques C/RD’s avoidance of value hierarchy as a presupposition, perceiving it to be a methodological precommitment. This characterization oddly neglects the assertions in context that redacted dominionism is an outcome derived *from the text*. C/RD affirms that, “the interpretation must meet at least the following criteria: (1) it must be justifiable from the text itself, (2) it ought to maintain the highest degree of textual integrity... it does not derive from an anthropocentric theology, and it avoids a value hierarchy within the creation... Consequently, no value hierarchy exists...”<sup>35</sup> C/RD asserts that the redacted dominionism understanding is “the only one of the four [interpretations] that *supports* [emphasis mine] the universal instrumental value of all created things.”<sup>36</sup> Further, C/RD asserts that redacted dominionism is “an interpretation of the early Genesis narrative and related contexts proposing a biblical environmental ethic that is theocentric rather than anthropocentric in its explanation for the existence and function of all created things – human and non-human, an environmental ethic that is based on the instrumental rather than intrinsic value of all created things.”<sup>37</sup>

C/RD’s avoidance of value hierarchy is not a precommitment, rather it is an outcome. Only in expressing the necessary conditions for immunity to the critiques levied by Leopold, McHarg, and White, the interpretation needs to avoid value hierarchy. C/RD recognizes that in order for an interpretation of Genesis to avoid those critiques, “ideally, it should represent human and nonhuman beings as having equal value...”<sup>38</sup> That immunity is not asserted as a precommitment nor a presupposition, but as an important outcome of the literal grammatical historical hermeneutic consistently applied to the early Genesis narratives. This critique illustrates the proclivity of the TIS that Gousmett espouses **to juxtapose precommitment and outcome**. Because that

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<sup>33</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 4.

<sup>34</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 5.

<sup>35</sup> Cone, *RD*, 31, 66.

<sup>36</sup> Cone, *RD*, 30.

<sup>37</sup> Cone, *RD*, 40.

<sup>38</sup> Cone, *RD*, 31.

chemistry is part of Gousmett’s reformatory method, it is no surprise that he would assume it of other methods, though in this case, quite incorrectly.

## GOUSMETT’S CRITIQUES OF C/RD CONCLUSIONS

### 5. Assumption of Revocation Without Explicit Revocation of the Dominion Mandate

#### *Critique*

Gousmett argues that there is a lack of explicit revocation of the dominion mandate, that it is a “theological assumption,”<sup>39</sup> and that all C/RD “can assert is that there ‘appears’ to be such a change.”<sup>40</sup> Gousmett summarizes that “‘the *imago Dei* is the only reason given in the Genesis narrative for the dominion mandate’ (RD, 96), implying that the change to the *imago Dei* as a result of sin results in the rescinding of the dominion mandate.”<sup>41</sup> Gousmett finds this unsatisfactory, noting that “this view can be challenged on Cone’s own hermeneutical principles. Can we say that the mandate of Genesis 1:26-28 no longer applies, when there is no explicit revocation?”<sup>42</sup> He adds that “Cone claims that the mandate was indeed adjusted in such a manner, even though all he can assert is that there “appears to be” such a change. This is an extraordinary claim by Cone, who insists on a strict hermeneutic, which must be based on the text.”<sup>43</sup>

#### *Response*

This critique is a syllogism:

P1 – Explicit exegetical evidence is needed to assert that the dominion mandate has been revoked.

P2 – There is not explicit exegetical evidence to that end.

C – The dominion mandate is not revoked.

If the premises are true, then the conclusion must necessarily be true. First, it is worth noting that P1 represents an additional instance of **special pleading**. If reformatory precommitments are allowed within Gousmett’s reformatory methodology, then why wouldn’t other precommitments likewise be allowed? Why is *explicit* evidence required at this point when other points are not held to that standard? The answer is obvious. Nonetheless, C/RD presents a *cumulative case* argument for the revocation of the dominion mandate, never asserting an *explicit* revocation of the dominion mandate.

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<sup>39</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 7.

<sup>40</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 7.

<sup>41</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 7.

<sup>42</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 7.

<sup>43</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 7.

That case is based on the specific verbiage of the judgments rendered on the creation and on Adam because of Adam’s sin in Genesis 3:16-19, the image of Adam passed on to his progeny, as cited in Genesis 5:1ff, and the post-flood repetition of the exact terminology of the original mandates minus the dominion mandate. While there are other evidences cited, these are the three primary evidences upon which C/RD builds the case for the revocation of dominionism. It is not a theological assumption, nor is it presented as a theological dogma. Gousmett recognizes the attempted humility of the approach, but presents it as weakness of argument. On numerous occasions, C/RD uses the word *appears* to avoid an explicit claim where the text does not warrant it.

Genesis 3 does not explicitly say anything about the *imago Dei* – one would have to read ahead to Genesis 5 to see anything further on anything to do with the *imago* impacting humanity, and that *is* explicitly addressed in Genesis 5:1,3ff. For this reason, C/RD suggests that the context of Genesis 3 appears to have impact on the *imago Dei*. That theological conclusion isn’t earned until later in the text – namely Genesis 5 and Genesis 8-9, and even then, it is not explicit. Gousmett exposes his own **double standard** when he demands *explicit* evidence, and yet dogmatically critiques C/RD as “implying” untenable things regarding the *imago Dei* and the dominion mandate. Why is he allowed *implicit* evidence in the critique, yet C/RD must meet the threshold of *explicit* evidence only?

## 6. Image of God Tarnished to the Point of No Longer Applying

### *Critique*

Gousmett suggests that in C/RD perspective, “...Human beings subsequent to Adam and Eve do not seem to bear God’s image,”<sup>44</sup> recognizing a significant implication, Gousmett infers that, “Thus, the ontological nature of the *imago Dei*, assumed to be tarnished to the point of no longer applying, leads to this remarkable conclusion. If the *imago Dei* is not ontological in nature (and it is not, as it refers to our office before God), then his whole argument collapses.”<sup>45</sup>

### *Response*

C/RD asserts that the *imago Dei* is an ongoing ontological reality, noting that it is an “ontological distinction from the rest of nature.”<sup>46</sup> The enduring distinction is affirmed and rooted in the *imago Dei*: “Man and nature are not ontologically the same (importantly, metaphysical distinctions are irrelevant to instrumental value). The *imago Dei* remains, though it has been augmented by a fallen image. Thus man bears enough of the *imago Dei* to keep him distinct from the remainder of the natural world,

<sup>44</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 5-6.

<sup>45</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 6.

<sup>46</sup> Cone, *RD*, 35, 88, also see 133-134.

but that image is tarnished sufficiently to keep man from the qualification and ability to govern the world.”<sup>47</sup> It is evident from the C/RD affirmations that human beings subsequent to Adam and Eve *certainly do* bear God’s image.

A further question at issue in this particular critique is the nature of the *imago Dei*. C/RD makes no assertions about that beyond referring to it as an ontological reality, an enduring definitive essential of human existence. On the other hand, Gousmett suggests without any further mention or supporting data in this context that the *imago Dei* is *not* an ontological reality, but it refers to an “office.”<sup>48</sup> Based on this characterization, Gousmett claims without further explanation that if this is correct, then the whole C/RD argument collapses. This seems to fall short of avoiding the **burden of proof fallacy**, as no evidence or support is provided for the claim, though it may be that the critique is merely hypothetical, based on the if/then structure Gousmett offers.

## 7. Dominion Mandate is Antiquarian with No Current Significance

### *Critique*

Gousmett makes it clear that he disagrees with any idea that the dominion mandate is no longer in effect, but he goes a step further in this critique of C/RD, concluding that, “For Cone, the dominion mandate of Genesis 1:26-28 is, therefore, an antiquarian curiosity of no current significance.”<sup>49</sup>

### *Response*

While the C/RD case is that the dominion mandate is no longer in effect, it is hardly of no current significance. C/RD presents, in the context Gousmett critiques, an explanation of why C/RD understands that the dominion mandate is not currently in force:

...the dominionist understanding fails the consistency test, as it infers a *theological* principle with universal implications: that man's ontological and functional value is established in Genesis 1:26-28 and is not altered thereafter. To maintain this theological premise requires the application of a theological (rather than literal) hermeneutic to the postdiluvian cultural mandate of Genesis 9:7 - specifically, in that the dominion mandate is read into the postdiluvian cultural mandate which seems to deliberately omit the details of the dominion mandate which appeared in 1:26-28. In short, if one were to examine the postdiluvian context exclusively, there would be no reason

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<sup>47</sup> Cone, *RD*, 122.

<sup>48</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 7.

<sup>49</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 4.

whatsoever to conclude that man was to exercise any sovereignty over nature. Only by reading the previous conditions into the latter passages can one derive a continued dominion mandate. Thus, the fountainhead of the dominionist interpretation is, at least for the EC, an unjustifiably inconsistent hermeneutic, by the EC's own standards.<sup>50</sup>

C/RD further confirms “the despotic condition to be temporary in application.”<sup>51</sup>

Gousmett's critique here is fair, as C/RD focuses on the redacting of the dominion mandate, without really offering any explanation of the present value of the dominion narrative. C/RD does address the future messianic application of dominion in the context of Psalm 8,<sup>52</sup> so the original dominion mandate provides a backdrop of past failure to elevate the forthcoming redemption and restoration, but does not – as Gousmett critiques – address the *current* value of the dominion mandate. Perhaps C/RD should have presented in context the Pauline principle that whatever was written in earlier times was for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.<sup>53</sup> Based on Paul's principle, it is clear that whether a passage of Scripture is currently *binding* or not, it has immense current significance. Particularly in this context where past failure prefigures future hope, Paul's words are especially poignant.

## GOUSMETT'S CRITIQUES OF C/RD IMPLICATIONS

### 8. Rejects Anthropocentrism, Despite Reasonable Reading of the Text

#### *Critique*

The C/RD assertion that the Biblical data is theocentric rather than anthropocentric is a problem in Gousmett's estimation. He introduces the issue, noting that, “It seems, from Cone's discussion here, that he accepts the validity of White's criticism of Christianity as “anthropocentric” due to its rejection of the equitable value of both human and non-human creatures. But if we accept that the text is “anthropocentric” (which is a reasonable reading of the text), why should this be considered a negative assessment?”<sup>54</sup> In short, if anthropocentrism *is* the Biblical position, then White's criticism becomes invalid. Gousmett poses that conclusion in a question, and mentions other key doctrines he believes should be handled the same way: “Is acceptance of an anthropocentric interpretation of Scripture therefore not

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<sup>50</sup> Cone, *RD*, 26.

<sup>51</sup> Cone, *RD*, 91.

<sup>52</sup> Cone, *RD*, 128.

<sup>53</sup> Romans 15:4.

<sup>54</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 8.

legitimate if that is how the text can and should be read? Cone seeks to avoid White's criticisms, but that should not be the criterion that determines which readings can and cannot be accepted. White probably also rejects such Christian doctrines as the incarnation and the resurrection. Should we also reject them so as not to be subject to White's criticisms?"<sup>55</sup> If countering anthropocentrism is a precommitment to assuage White's criticism, then what about other doctrines White might oppose? Should we introduce alternative perspectives in those areas as well in order to minimize criticism? Of course, Gousmett opposes this idea. He warns, "We should indeed state the Christian position in such a way as to defeat criticisms by others, but that should not be the sole aim and purpose, and we may just have to accept that some criticisms will be made no matter what we say. The important thing to evaluate is whether the criticism is valid, and if not, there is no need to change our position to suit the preferences of non-Christian thought."<sup>56</sup>

### *Response*

Gousmett is correct in saying that the reasonable reading of the text and not extra-biblical criticisms should guide our thinking. In fact C/RD simply seeks to apply this principle consistently by allowing the Biblical text to formulate *every* aspect of doctrine. In other critiques, Gousmett has voiced his willingness to espouse precommitment and preunderstood doctrines. Yet here he critiques C/RD, perceiving the same methodology, but disagreeing with the C/RD precommitment. As Gousmett correctly says – there is no need to change our position to suit the preferences of non-Christian thought, C/RD is essentially building a case premised on the idea that there is no need to change our position to suit the preferences of *Christian* thought. C/RD makes no exception for precommitments from Christian thinkers, while Gousmett's method requires precommitment, but disallows precommitment from non-Christian thinkers. Gousmett's critique of C/RD here can be applied to his own reformational perspective, and underscores a tendency of **special pleading** for authenticating the reformational theological method – some (non-textual) precommitments are allowed, others are not. In this particular case Gousmett asserts that anthropocentrism *is* the reasonable reading of the text, but provides no explanation or evidence for anthropocentrism as a valid reading<sup>57</sup> – only the assertion. Without any evidence, this appears to be **begging the question**, as the critique is entirely based on the assumption that the statement is true.

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<sup>55</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 8.

<sup>56</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 8.

<sup>57</sup> Neither in his review of Cone and RD nor in "A Covenantal Perspective on the Earth and its Human Management."

C/RD provides a chapter introducing important aspects of anthropocentrism and theocentrism,<sup>58</sup> noting that scholars Steven Bouma-Prediger and Calvin DeWitt reject the anthropocentric reading in favor of a theocentric one.<sup>59</sup> While not a definitive observation, it is worth noting that C/RD is not appealing to an unprecedented reading of passages to arrive at a theocentric conclusion. Further, the question at issue is not what precommitments are held, nor which scholars hold to which view. The question is *what the text actually says*. C/RD builds a case through exegesis of key passages in Genesis 1-2 and 3-9 that the normative (reasonable) reading of the Genesis narrative shows an inherent (to the text) theocentric emphasis. C/RD concludes based on this textual analysis that redacted dominionism “is consistent with the textual evidence of Genesis and anticipates an exegetically derived grounding for a biblical environmental ethic, it is also consistent with a theocentric rather than anthropocentric understanding of the Genesis account.”<sup>60</sup>

## 9. No Recognition of the Cultural Mandate

### *Critique*

Gousmett’s critique of C/RD as failing to properly recognize a *cultural mandate* underscores the TIS emphasis in Gousmett’s methodology. He notes that, “There is no recognition that it was also a “cultural” mandate that enjoined on humankind the task of opening up and developing the skills and abilities given to human beings.”<sup>61</sup> Several times Gousmett repeats the significance of this failure, and shows an emphasis on what he calls the cultural mandate. While offering no specific definition, Gousmett at least gives a hint of what he means when he negatively assesses what remains if the dominion mandate is redacted: “This means that the function of human beings between flood and eschaton is basically to support themselves from the fruit of the soil and from animals as food, and reproduce. The rest of human life, culture, civilization, work, entertainment, leisure, etc., has no place in this vision of life.”<sup>62</sup>

Gousmett identifies several areas of human engagement that he asserts are ignored by C/RD. He restates this as *cultural* development, noting that, “This view leaves him with no basis on which humans can and should engage in cultural development of the creation.”<sup>63</sup> Because Gousmett equates the dominion mandate to a cultural mandate effecting every area of cultural development, by affirming the dominion mandate as redacted, any divine guidance on cultural development is also redacted. C/RD would then be left with an impoverished view, limiting human purpose: “Since Cone considers

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<sup>58</sup> Cone, *RD*, Chapter 6.

<sup>59</sup> Cone, *RD*, 64.

<sup>60</sup> Cone, *RD*, 134.

<sup>61</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 8.

<sup>62</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 12.

<sup>63</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 9.



that the cultural mandate consists **solely** of reproduction for proliferation, there seems then to be no further purpose for humankind to exercise in the world, save to care for it so that species proliferation can take place.”<sup>64</sup> Gousmett questions the meaning such a view can provide, he says, “One wonders what the point of this proliferation is, as all Cone can say is that it reflects the glory of God.”<sup>65</sup> Apparently, to Gousmett, the doxological purpose is an inadequate purpose for human activity. “What is the purpose for the creation, in whole or in part? Simply to bring glory to God, or as Cone paraphrases it, to show God’s beauty through the creation. This “beauty” seems to be simply an aesthetic appreciation of how wonderful the creation is, presumably **only** in its created form. This concept owes more to romanticism than to Biblical Christianity.”<sup>66</sup>

Bereft by C/RD of any sufficient purpose or meaning for human existence, this view is typical of a particular theological perspective, Gousmett diagnoses. “The invisibility of a wider “cultural” mandate in Cone’s approach is typical of an evangelicalism that, by and large, has nothing to say to life outside of a narrow focus on faith (understood in a very constricted way) and faith expression (typically through corporate worship).”<sup>67</sup>

### *Response*

It is clear from the critique that Gousmett believes the mandate for human purpose and cultural development to be inextricably linked to the dominion mandate. The normative reading of Genesis 1:26-30 shows the ruling and subduing to be over the earth and other creatures – but having nothing whatsoever to say about “human life, culture, civilization, work, entertainment, leisure, etc.”<sup>68</sup> While certainly one might expect that each of those areas would be impacted by a dominion mandate, there are many other clear passages providing guidance in those areas. There is no exegetical warrant nor theological need to embed those areas into the dominion mandate. Still, Gousmett perceives those and more as essential to the dominion mandate and pre-fall dogma. He says in a different context, “Human beings were created for two purposes: firstly to have fellowship with God and to offer a loving response to his goodness towards us, and secondly to care for the world he has made and to explore and uncover its riches, developing them in a stewardly way for the benefit of others... Neither of these purposes have been abrogated by human rebellion against God.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 9.

<sup>65</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 10.

<sup>66</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 12.

<sup>67</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 12.

<sup>68</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 12.

<sup>69</sup> Chris Gousmett, “A Covenantal Perspective on the Earth and its Human Management” in *Christian-Brethren Research Fellowship Journal* 124 (March 1991): 9.

Gousmett ties these two purposes to the dominion mandate, and perceives it all to be sealed with a covenant. In Gousmett’s own assertion of a Covenantal perspective on environmental concerns,<sup>70</sup> Gousmett *never mentions* the “cultural mandate,” instead referring to a covenant relationship between God and humanity that grounds human environmental responsibility. Gousmett asserts that, “This is the essence of the covenantal relationship between us and God: a relationship in which both God and humankind are partners, and in which the land is included as the context in which that partnership will be worked out, as well as being specifically entrusted to our care as the basis of that covenant. The most fundamental characteristic of humanness is therefore the covenantal relationship in which we have been placed by God, the senior partner in the covenant. **Without that covenant, we cannot understand either our own nature, or our place in this world.**” [emphasis mine]<sup>71</sup>

As there is no exegetically demonstrable Biblical data, content, or components of such a covenant in the proper sense, Gousmett speaks of a “covenantal bond which unites all Scripture runs like a thread through the passages which speak of creation.”<sup>72</sup> Gousmett shows a strong **reliance on TIS** that causes him to theologically require the dominion mandate as part of the covenantal material. If the dominion mandate is no longer in force, then we would need to admit that God can and does change how He relates to people and how they relate to the world around them. That seems problematic for Gousmett and his reformational methodology.

Gousmett’s criticism that C/RD does not recognize the cultural mandate as part of the dominion mandate is accurate for reasons addressed above. C/RD doesn’t find exegetical warrant nor theological need to view human purpose, meaning, and responsibility as limited to one context of Scripture. With the progress of revelation (or progress of the narrative<sup>73</sup>) comes further detail and broader handling of meaning, purpose, and responsibilities.

On the other hand, Gousmett’s characterization of this approach as “typical of an evangelicalism” that has little to say about broad aspects of life does not correspond to truth. This seems a misplaced critique for a work that was written in part with the stated intention of spurring the evangelical community to more environmentally responsible action.<sup>74</sup> It is also worth noting that Gousmett’s critique was written after this writer authored and published books dealing with social justice and racial issues,<sup>75</sup> a book dealing with human responsibility,<sup>76</sup> a book dealing with traditional areas of

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<sup>70</sup> Gousmett, *Covenantal Perspective*: 9-15.

<sup>71</sup> Gousmett, *Covenantal Perspective*: 9.

<sup>72</sup> Gousmett, *Covenantal Perspective*: 9.

<sup>73</sup> Cone, *RD*, 29.

<sup>74</sup> Cone, *RD*, 9.

<sup>75</sup> Christopher Cone, *Authentic Social Justice* (Exegetica, 2020).

<sup>76</sup> Christopher Cone, *The Sofa Rule: A Biblical Approach to God’s Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* (Exegetica, 2019).

philosophy,<sup>77</sup> and a book on Christian ethics.<sup>78</sup> Since Gousmett wrote his critique, this writer has also published a book on psychology and counseling,<sup>79</sup> and a book on leadership and management.<sup>80</sup>

These works are worth mentioning in this context for two reasons. First, they show that C/RD methodology lends itself toward addressing broad subject matter, and is not relegated to a narrow aspect of life. If that methodology is typical of a particular kind of evangelicalism, then that evangelicalism might be less subject to Gousmett's *narrowness* critique than he seems to conclude. Second, these works show that Gousmett's critique in this area is more based on a caricature rather than fact. This is a historic **strawman** often levied against those who draw dispensational conclusions that they are only concerned with the eschatological future and have little concern for present stewardships and responsibilities. These works cited – published before Gousmett penned his critique – illustrate Gousmett's lack of understanding of the perspective he is critiquing. It is worth reminding the reader that Gousmett is not simply critiquing the redacted dominion perspective, he is critiquing the writer, the methodology, and the community to which that writer belongs.

Finally, in this context, there is the matter of human purpose. While Gousmett seems to find the doxological purpose an inadequate explanation for humanity's purpose, the Bible provides ample evidence that the purpose of all that has been created, and even God's own purpose in His activities is for the expression and reflection of His glory. In a context cataloging some of the explicit Biblical statements to that end, this writer notes that, "The major works of God revealed in Scripture *all* serve the doxological purpose. As a matter of fact, Scripture identifies no greater purpose...the doxological purpose is not only man's highest calling, but it is the intended design of all that is."<sup>81</sup> Recognizing the theocentric emphasis of Genesis, C/RD asserts that the doxological purpose is entirely sufficient.

## 10. Individualistic and Escapist

### *Critique*

In a separate context that helps explain Gousmett's critique here, he postulates that "Ever since Adam and Eve violated the covenant in Eden, humankind has been living in rebellion against God, continuing to violate the covenant relationship, and we see all around us the consequent despoliation of the land entrusted to us in that

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<sup>77</sup> Christopher Cone, *Life Beyond the Sun: Worldview and Philosophy through the Lens of Ecclesiastes* (Exegetica, 2016).

<sup>78</sup> Christopher Cone, *Applied Biblical Worldview: Essays on Christian Ethics* (Exegetica, 2016).

<sup>79</sup> Christopher Cone and Luther Smith, eds., *Biblical Foundations of Psychology and Counseling* (Exegetica, 2022).

<sup>80</sup> Christopher Cone, *Led by a Lion* (Exegetica, 2023).

<sup>81</sup> Christopher Cone, *Prolegomena*, 14-16.

covenant.”<sup>82</sup> In Gousmett’s reformational view, the curse on creation is the result of a violated covenant, and the resultant circumstances are disastrous. While he advocates for environmental responsibility in responding to these circumstances, he perceives that C/RD does not: “But for Cone, we are not called to do anything about this condition since there is nobody qualified to address the problems.”<sup>83</sup> He infers that because C/RD asserts dominion to be redacted because of human disqualification, we are therefore not called to do anything about the condition. Gousmett summarizes that, “Overall, it leaves the impression of an individualistic, world-flight Christianity that struggles to justify any involvement in stewardship of the earth or any “earthly-oriented” activity whatsoever.”<sup>84</sup>

### *Response*

Counter to Gousmett’s assertion that “we are not called to do anything about this condition,” *Redacted Dominionism* concludes with affirmations of responsibility and accountability for those within the evangelical community and for those outside:

The key environmental ethical consequence of redacted dominionism, then, is found in the idea that all created things are accountable to their creator for how they interact with other created things, irrespective of any intrinsic value ranking system, because all created things possess the same instrumental value (albeit with different functions) to the one who created them. As such, redacted dominionism offers a textually viable non- anthropocentric grounding for a biblical environmental ethic within an EC framework. Consequently, for those outside of the EC, redacted dominionism may prove to be a valuable catalyst for dialogue and a means whereby those outside the EC may hold the EC accountable for their own methodologies and environmental impact.<sup>85</sup>

Environmental philosopher Baird Callicott likewise recognizes the work as a call to action. He writes, “Cone has achieved something very rare in environmental philosophy – a genuinely novel environmental ethic, one that may illicit the full commitment of evangelical Christians to be part of the solution and not part of the problem of environmental degradation.”<sup>86</sup>

While C/RD affirms the loss of human qualification to fulfill the dominion mandate, C/RD catalogs numerous calls to environmental responsibility in Scripture. In fact, this is the core subject matter of the work – to examine critiques of the Judeo-

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<sup>82</sup> Gousmett, *Covenantal Perspective*: 15.

<sup>83</sup> Gousmett, *Cone and RD*: 11.

<sup>84</sup> Gousmett, *Cone and RD*: 12.

<sup>85</sup> Cone, *RD*, 136.

<sup>86</sup> Baird Callicott in Cone, *RD*, back cover endorsement.

Christian worldview, and contextualize those critiques in a way that the evangelical community can receive and respond to them without violating core methodological principles.<sup>87</sup> *C/RD* does assert that because of sin, there remains “no qualified or able member remaining who might direct and manage nature appropriately.”<sup>88</sup> Also affirmed is human responsibility “to continue fruitful existence, *without hindering the fulfillment of that same responsibility shared by the remainder of nature*.”<sup>89</sup> In addition to these qualified activities, humanity is responsible “to look to the creator for guidance and provision in resolving both the spiritual and temporal consequences insofar as they may be resolved.”<sup>90</sup> While *C/RD* recognizes limits to the stewardship and reparative activities of humanity, they are ethical prescriptions nonetheless.

In this critique, Gousmett erects and decimates a **strawman** caricature. Perhaps this maneuver is necessitated by TIS methodology and precommitment to a theological covenantal structure that is thoroughly violated by *C/RD*. If the covenantal purpose is embedded in the dominion mandate as Gousmett has asserted, then a kind of theological slippery slope is necessary: if one abandons covenantal purpose and responsibility in the dominion mandate, then there can be no other purpose or responsibility. Perhaps this may be a false dilemma: Door #1 – acknowledge the enduring nature of the dominion mandate and retain covenantal purpose and responsibility; Door #2 – fail to acknowledge the enduring nature of the dominion mandate and lose all purpose and responsibility. It is evident from the data of Scripture that there is another door. That third door is espoused by *C/RD*.

## 12. Fails to Support Environmental Responsibility, Abandons Accountable Stewardship,

### *Critique*

Despite Gousmett’s earlier critique of *C/RD* as failing to recognize an integral call to address environmental issues, Gousmett recognizes that *C/RD* is attempting to support environmental responsibility, when he notes that, “His [Cone’s] project, then, is to come to an understanding of the Scriptures that supports environmental responsibility (if it actually does that – and this is by no means certain in Cone’s view).”<sup>91</sup> Evidently, however, *C/RD* falls far short of establishing environmental obligation, and in fact abandons it. Gousmett explains, “If we abandon, as Cone does, the idea that humans are responsible for exercising accountable stewardship of the

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<sup>87</sup> Cone, *RD*, 24.

<sup>88</sup> Cone, *RD*, 134.

<sup>89</sup> Cone, *RD*, 134.

<sup>90</sup> Cone, *RD*, 134.

<sup>91</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 3.

earth, with this responsibility being cancelled as a consequence of the Fall, this abandonment leaves the earth without any stewards to care for it on behalf of God.”<sup>92</sup> Here Gousmett asserts (twice) that C/RD has abandoned environmental responsibility.

He does concede that it may not be a complete abandonment, though, as he notes that responsibility is an *option*: “Cone’s attempt to create space for environmental concern through his “redacted dominionism” fails, as it renders this concern simply an “option” for Christians: as such, it is a permissible activity but not a creaturely calling for all human beings, or specifically for Christians who are conscious of their place as stewards. Those who neglect their environmental responsibilities are not sinning; they are just “not interested.””<sup>93</sup> An optional environmental ethic is not adequate for Gousmett, and he asks a series of rhetorical questions that such an optional ethic likewise cannot sufficiently answer: “The question for Cone is this: can this reality [that we are stewards] be explained by “redacted dominionism” if all that humans are called to do in this life is to reproduce? Does the rest of their lives have meaning and significance for God when they are not reproducing or caring for their offspring? What about those who cannot have children for one reason or another—can they be said to be without a “mandate” to do anything? Can there be, in this view, such a thing as overpopulation?”<sup>94</sup> If C/RD presents merely an optional environmental ethic and abandons the idea of human responsibility, then there is much to answer for.

### *Response*

C/RD finds much about human purpose and responsibility in other passages of Scripture – some in Genesis, some elsewhere. In doing so, C/RD avoids the TIS-derived covenantal approach which incorporates the dominion mandate as a cultural mandate impacting every area of human engagement, including entertainment and leisure (as Gousmett specifically asserts). Just because C/RD does not imbue the dominion mandate with the theological augmentations as Gousmett’s reformational model does not in any way support the assertion that C/RD has abandoned environmental responsibility. The only way the critique is valid is *if* the **false dilemma** observed in the previous critique is not false. This critique is subject to the same logical scrutiny, and fails in the same way. C/RD builds a case for environmental responsibility on exegetical and not simply theological grounds.

Gousmett’s concession that there is an *optional* responsibility – which is, of course, no responsibility at all if optional. Because of the false dilemma fallacy, Gousmett seems to assume that there is no other way for environmental ethics to be supported, and perceives the assertion of a redacted dominion mandate as an abandonment of responsibility. Curiously, Gousmett characterizes what his theological

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<sup>92</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 13.

<sup>93</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 13.

<sup>94</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 14.

system calls sin, as being “not interested,” in the C/RD approach. Yet, in neither the earlier dissertation nor the later book form, the words “not interested” do not appear. Using quote marks around a critique of a text seems to represent those words as coming from the text, yet...they are nowhere to be found. The word “interest” is only used seven times in the entire project, and never in any such context. The level of interest on the part of interlocutors is not at issue in the project. At worst this is a blatant misrepresentation. At best it is a **red herring**, and an irrelevant distraction from the case being presented. Never does C/RD present a Biblically derived environmental ethic as an option (despite Gousmett’s using quote marks around the word option to imply that C/RD stated that it was), nor is the condition of lack of interest ever a part of the discussion.

Gousmett’s posed questions concluding this critique are assumed to be unanswerable by C/RD, yet, answers to these questions are readily available in the text or readily discernible from it:

Question #1: Can this reality [we are stewards] be explained by “redacted dominionism” if all that humans are called to do in this life is to reproduce?

If the premise upon which the question is based is assumed – that all that humans are called to do in this life is to reproduce – then the question is harder to answer, but the premise is **reductio ad absurdum**. If all of human purpose and responsibility were embedded in one mandate, and that mandate was only to reproduce, then the mandate would not be to be stewards, unless stewardship and reproduction are the same. The question assumes the outcome.

Still, C/RD affirms that we are stewards, but reflects awareness of the historical and contemporary debate to rightly recognize the distinction between stewardship as a concept and the historical stewardship interpretation which redefines and softens the dominion mandate – an interpretation C/RD soundly rejects on hermeneutic grounds. Gousmett seems not to be aware that these are two different things altogether, and absent an approval of the one (the historical stewardship interpretation) he concludes the absence of the other (stewardship as a concept). Countering this conclusion, C/RD affirms the stewardship concept, and not the stewardship interpretation: “Of course, certain stewardship ideas do hold true to the text: humanity is to be responsible and to use resources wisely because God provides them; thus the concept of stewardship is not to be dismissed in its entirety. Only insofar as it is considered the enduring primary ontological grounding of human relation to nonhuman nature is stewardship problematic.”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Cone, *RD*, 132.

Question #2: Does the rest of their lives have meaning and significance for God when they are not reproducing or caring for their offspring?

This question assumes the same premise as the previous one, that the only divine human calling is reproduction – a premise already disputed with textual evidence. Human lives have meaning and significance because there are multiple specific passages that reveal that meaning and significance – most importantly, to glorify God. While Gousmett disputes the adequacy of the oft revealed in Scripture doxological purpose, C/RD does not.

Question #3: What about those who cannot have children for one reason or another—can they be said to be without a “mandate” to do anything?

It is worth noting that the fruitfulness and multiplication mandate in Genesis 9:7 is *plural*, and not an individual mandate. The same is also true of the dominion mandate in Genesis 1:26-28. Gousmett’s question relates to individual cases when the Biblical text addresses *only* in this context, collective, plural cases. C/RD has no dilemma in trying to address purpose and meaning for those who cannot have children, because the doxological purpose and other ethics revealed in Scripture are broadly applicable. On the other hand, Gousmett’s own TIS-derived perspective that all purpose and meaning are reliant on the dominion mandate has a significant dilemma *if* the dominion mandate is no longer in force.

Question #4: Can there be, in this view, such a thing as overpopulation?”

If the C/RD assertion is correct, that the Biblical approach is a theocentric one, then we are responsible “to look to the creator for guidance and provision in resolving both the spiritual and temporal consequences insofar as they may be resolved.”<sup>96</sup> Where there are no clear directives, then the common-sense application of revealed principles may be employed. For example, one responsibility affirmed by C/RD is “to continue fruitful existence, *without hindering the fulfillment of that same responsibility shared by the remainder of nature.*”<sup>97</sup> If by overpopulation, Gousmett means human population exceeding the capacity of the ecological setting, then yes, of course it would be possible to overpopulate an area. Perhaps this is why God added to the be *fruitful and multiply* mandate the instruction to scatter and fill the earth.<sup>98</sup> Perhaps, as C/RD cites, this was one of several factors in the judgment of the tower of Babel.<sup>99</sup> rather than fulfilling the

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<sup>96</sup> Cone, *RD*, 134.

<sup>97</sup> Cone, *RD*, 134.

<sup>98</sup> Genesis 9:1, 7.

<sup>99</sup> Cone, *RD*, 90.



scatter and fill the earth aspects, in deliberate attempt to avoid scattering and filling the earth, they embarked on an urbanization project.<sup>100</sup> Based on Genesis 9 and 11, C/RD could conclude that overpopulation is possible, and apply the principle of scattering and filling the earth as part of a practical solution. In other words, both the problem and the solution are discernible from Scripture. No TIS is necessary.

### CONCLUSION: THE ANTI-LOGIC TENDENCY OF TIS

Gousmett summarizes his critique of C/RD as beginning with dispensational methodology *and other* flawed assumptions, resulting in a weakened form of Christianity lacking clear stewardship responsibility, that is focused on individual deliverance from this world to the neglect of everything else: “The intellectual and spiritual poverty of dispensational hermeneutics is clearly shown in Cone’s approach, which leaves the Christian community powerless before its accusers (since their accusations are accepted as legitimate *in toto*) and bereft of a clear statement of responsibility for caring for God’s creation. Christianity in this perspective is indeed a world-flight focus on personal salvation to the neglect of all else.”<sup>101</sup> Gousmett’s critique of dispensational thought as an impoverished methodology that is not intellectual nor spiritual, creating an untenable, even laughable version of egocentric Christianity that eschews all earthly responsibility, is a caricature, and neither represents dispensational thought generally, nor C/RD specifically in a way that corresponds with truth, and that the evidence presented here exposes.

While Gousmett perceives C/RD through the lens of a caricature of dispensationalism, this writer asserts that C/RD does not use a method that is intellectually impoverished (otherwise it would certainly be spiritually impoverished), that because the LGH ascribes the highest value to the Author and the authority of His words, this method is *not* spiritually impoverished. Further, C/RD’s approach encourages the Christian community to be more Scripture-reliant, and in so doing offers the most powerful way for that community to address any criticisms. C/RD doesn’t accept all accusations *in toto*, recognizing that the critiques of Leopold, McHarg, and White are in some degree caricatures of Christianity because they critique traditions associated with Christianity but not rooted in the Biblical record. Rather than relying on merely one context and presupposing all human purpose and meaning into that context, C/RD recognizes a thoroughgoing Biblical environmental ethic rooted in theocentrism and God’s doxological purpose. This all bears no resemblance to Gousmett’s caricature of this as “a world-flight focus on personal salvation to the neglect of all else.”

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<sup>100</sup> Genesis 11:4.

<sup>101</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 14.

Still, in order to justify his critique as valid, Gousmett evaluates C/RD in light of his TIS derived precommitment to reformational perspective. He concludes that C/RD abandons "...core beliefs that are central to a sound and coherent interpretation of Scripture and...vital to a reformational perspective."<sup>102</sup> In Gousmett's perspective, sound and coherent is that which is vital to a reformational perspective. If it leads to a conflicting perspective, then it cannot be sound and coherent. The pedigree of Gousmett's critique is born of TIS, and the precommitments that undergird TIS.

This is a pervasive flaw in Gousmett's critique of C/RD, the methodology employed, and the community sympathetic to C/RD method and conclusions (dispensational thinkers). His TIS-derived precommitment simply doesn't allow him to handle the Biblical text objectively. As Gousmett leans on TIS, his arguments increasingly conflict with essential principles of logic. As catalogued in the responses to Gousmett's specific critiques, this writer asserts and outlines a number of logical failures due to Gousmett's commitment to TIS and the precommitments that are implied, including:

- Circular reasoning (two instances)
- Special pleading (two instances)
- Hasty Generalization
- Ad populum
- Affirming the consequent
- Slippery slope
- Moral equivalence
- Not corresponding to truth
- Juxtapose precommitment and outcome
- Double standard
- Burden of proof fallacy (possibly)
- Strawman (two instances)
- False Dilemma
- Reductio ad absurdum

Even if *some* of these asserted errors in logic may be exonerated, there are at least enough occurrences directly connected to TIS to support a thesis that TIS, as applied by Gousmett in this critique, has a tendency toward anti-logic, since the theological (reformational) precommitment outweighs all other concerns – textual or intellectual. Because of the intellectual maneuvering that TIS requires as evidenced in this critique, there may be supported an additional premise for further examination: the more a Biblical interpreter relies on TIS, the greater the tendency toward anti-logic. If this

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<sup>102</sup> Gousmett, Cone and RD: 1-2.

premise is true, then dispensational thought – which (in its purest form) is derived not by theological precommitments, but by the consistent application of the LGH hermeneutic method to the Biblical text – has at least a lesser tendency toward anti-logic than its reformational counterpart. In this writer's estimation, Gousmett's critique is a cautionary tale underscoring the importance of sound exegesis and the subsequent development of philosophical and theological conclusions *from* that exegesis, rather than the juxtaposition of the two processes and the inherent jettisoning of the authority of Scripture through the imposition of precommitments that must be upheld at any exegetical cost, and which often demand departure from sound principles of logic.