7. Summary and Conclusion

This study has established the theology of the Dutch theologian A. A. Van Ruler to be a strongly eschatological theology. On this point especially there is a clear consistency of thinking throughout the entire body of his writings. He stresses that eschatology must not be seen as an appendix to dogmatics, but as a focus or prism through which the whole of theology is seen and thought out. His theology is centred around the kingdom of God, which comes from the future; so strongly does it come towards us from the future, that it overwhelms us.

In his emphasis on the kingdom Van Ruler does not want to create a false dualism between creation and kingdom. The kingdom is not another, or higher, realm than the creation. He often says: “In our Christian faith everything turns around the redemption in Christ, yet the real purpose is the salvation of the creation”.¹ This is another reason why he defines salvation, not in the narrow sense of personal salvation, but as the wholeness of creation, including humanity. Not that Van Ruler denies the important theological elements of sin and chaos; on the contrary, he maintains that the whole creation needs to be uncovered from the blanket of sin and darkness. He does, however, make a distinction between sin and chaos and states that God is involved in a hidden manner in the darkness of the world.²

Speaking about the coming kingdom of God, he maintains the tension between the already and the not yet of the kingdom, in that the kingdom has come, is now, and will come among us.³ In fact, so clearly is the kingdom among us, according to Van Ruler, that it is possible to say that it has been ‘fulfilled’. This means that as a future reality it is already among us, proleptically

² Cf. Chapter 2, especially 2.3, 47ff.
³ Cf. Chapter 1, 37ff.
and in an anticipatory sense. This does not deny the fact that the kingdom still needs to be ‘fulfilled’ in the sense of ‘consummated’. It is here that the dual meaning of ‘fulfilment’ can become confusing. It is difficult to find a better translation for the Dutch term ‘vervulling’, which can be used as a noun as well as the gerund form of an ongoing action. It is by this term that Van Ruler maintains that the kingdom of God is pre-actualised, anticipated in the present experience of believers.⁴

Van Ruler articulated a strongly trinitarian theology, not only stressing the importance of the salvific work of Christ, but also that the inclusion and involvement of human beings can only be explained by the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit, according to Van Ruler, who enables Christians to live the future life already here and now. Time and again he said, ‘the coming of the kingdom of God is only possible due to the work of Christ, through the Holy Spirit.’⁵ Humankind will need the grace of the work of the Spirit in order to become and be more and more the ‘image of God’, to be enabled to be and do and will as God intends the human person to be and do.⁶

This study has shown that Van Ruler’s eschatology contains to a significant degree the notion of the ‘presence of the future’. After placing his eschatology in the context of his predecessors and contemporaries (chapter 1), an extensive overview was given of his views of the kingdom in relation to creation and history (chapters 2 and 3), followed by his understanding of the church and the Holy Spirit (chapters 4 and 5). The heart of the study was Van Ruler’s sense of the anticipation of the kingdom of God. Perhaps, surprisingly, this concept, which is very prominent in Pannenberg’s theology, is also found throughout the whole of Van Ruler’s theology. It was demonstrated (chapter 6) that in fact Van Ruler was ahead of his time in using

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⁴ Cf. Chapter 3.
⁵ Cf. Chapter 5.
⁶ Cf. Chapter 5.5c and 5.5d, 158ff. Cf. also Ch 2.2 above.
this concept, often stated in different terms from Pannenberg. The idea was not used as concisely and precisely as Pannenberg, but it is demonstrably present and recognisable.

Some careful attention was given to Pannenberg, for he, more than most, stresses the eschatological nature of theology and builds his theology around the coming of the kingdom of God from the future. He also maintains the tension between the *already* and the *not yet* of that kingdom, understood as God’s rule, and relates it to God’s deity. “God’s deity is his rule.”7 God has created the world, the cosmos, and therefore has sovereignty over it. For God to be God he must manifest his sovereignty in the eschaton. That rule will be completed and revealed in its totality in the future. This explains why, for Pannenberg, God comes from the future. God’s rule is based in his power over creation. This is revealed particularly in the resurrection of Jesus. “In this event the end of history is anticipated in order to demonstrate the truth of the Christian faith.”8

This study has been particularly interested in Pannenberg’s use of the concept of anticipation. As shown, Pannenberg uses ‘anticipation’ to denote a ‘pre-actualisation of the future reality’. That future reality is already present with us, even though it is not yet here in its fullness. The future will have to verify it as the anticipation of the experience claimed for it. With his strong ontic concept of anticipation, Pannenberg, in Mostert’s words “… overturned some standard ontological assumptions, such as the priority of the past over the present and the future, and argued for the priority of the future.”9 God, as the power of the future, is Lord of

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all time and history. It was also shown that Pannenberg views history as a whole because it is God who moves history.  

This is summarised succinctly by Moltmann:

> The revelation of God in history is therefore to be understood as anticipation of the end, in which the whole of history can be overseen. The anticipatory understanding of history in the midst of history cannot only be said of the special historical revelation of God in the biblical witness, but also of all historical understanding, as Wilhelm Dilthey already thought.

Pannenberg applies the concept of ‘anticipation’ to the widest possible circle of being, to history, revelation and time. Even though the future is central in his entire theology, he acknowledges that we do not actually know the future as such. However, we can know it by anticipation, since it is proleptically present. Of course, what is anticipated will need a final verification as such. An example of this is that Christ’s resurrection anticipates the general resurrection in the eschaton; the latter will confirm that Jesus’ ‘resurrection’ was properly understood as a resurrection from the dead. Only in the eschaton will it be verified that Christ was really raised from the dead.

Van Ruler clearly understood and worked with the idea of the ‘anticipation’ of the kingdom. More often he used it intuitively and gave it content by using a range of different terms and images. This fits Van Ruler’s style; he was an imaginative and creative writer, using vivid and picturesque language, which actually made him a very popular speaker and writer. His use of the idea of the ‘anticipation’ of the kingdom is not as precise or prominent as it is in Pannenberg’s theology. One has to dig deeper to discover how Van Ruler uses the concept. Once recognised in his writings, the idea is pervasive throughout much of his published work.

> It must be said that he applied the concept in a wide-ranging way, covering the whole of life

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10 Cf. Chapter 6, 2c.
and reality. It has been argued in this dissertation that it is an underlying principle in his 
theology. As demonstrated, Van Ruler used a range of different terms to express the idea of 
‘anticipation’ but in doing so he clearly had a strong sense of the future presence here and 
now.\textsuperscript{12}

Pannenberg and Van Ruler both centre their theology around the principle of the coming 
kingdom of God and see this as a major topic for dogmatics. Both see the kingdom of God 
commence with the creation, but receiving marked emphasis and form in the ministry of 
Jesus Christ, his teaching, his death and his resurrection. Each of them sees the kingdom of 
God coming from the future and breaking into this world and into our lives. They both state 
that the kingdom is among us now in an anticipatory but real sense. Both use the concept of 
anticipation or realisation to describe that presence. Each of these theologians stresses that 
the work of the Holy Spirit is important in enabling us as persons to receive the grace 
necessary to become and be the ‘image of God’, thereby enabled to participate in the coming 
of the kingdom and to live in the proleptic reality of the kingdom here and now.\textsuperscript{13} Both 
these theologians stress that a one-sided emphasis on the salvific work of Christ or the Holy Spirit 
is incorrect. Theology not only needs to be thoroughly eschatological, but also trinitarian and 
each of these theologians, in his own way, speaks about the presence of a future reality.\textsuperscript{14}

A major divergence from Pannenberg is Van Ruler’s ideas about so-called ‘emergency 
measures’ or the ‘intermezzos’. Van Ruler claims that the incarnation of Christ will be ended 
when he hands back the kingdom to the Father.\textsuperscript{15} The kingdom of Christ is a modality of the 
kingdom of God and will last only until the Son hands back the kingdom to the Father. The

\textsuperscript{12} The different terms have been described in chapter 6.
\textsuperscript{13} Cf. Pannenberg, \textit{Systematic Theology}, Vol 3; the section on ‘Creation of New Life’, 551, 552.
\textsuperscript{14} Cf. Chapter 6.1g.
\textsuperscript{15} Cf. Chapter 5.3 where the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit as ‘rescue operations’ are discussed. These could 
also be termed ‘interim’ or ‘emergency’ measures. Van Ruler used the terms interchangeably.
‘interim measures’ also extend to the work of the Spirit. In fact, the emergency measures extend to all that is necessary to undo the power of sin and evil, which has corrupted the creation. But this will disappear when the creation is uncovered from the ‘blanket of corruption’. A critique of Van Ruler’s view on ‘emergency measures’ was given in chapter 5.3. On this point both Velema and Moltmann criticised Van Ruler for being too speculative and lacking in biblical foundation. Using Calvin’s exposition proved an insufficient basis for claiming that they are ‘interim measures’.

Another divergence from Pannenberg is Van Ruler’s ideas about theocracy. As explained in chapter 2.6, the idea of theocracy played an important role in the theology of Van Ruler. It is not found as such in the theology of Pannenberg. Even though both stress the reign of God in the world today, we find that in the theology of Van Ruler it had a far more dominant role, particularly in the early years of his theological work. Van Ruler never changed his views on theocracy, but its emphasis was much less apparent in later works.

Compared to Pannenberg, Van Ruler is much less inclined to use the analysis of other sciences and their relevance to theology. Pannenberg encourages and demonstrated this; he exploits the natural sciences for use and application in his theology, as for example in his use of ‘energy field theory’ to describe the Holy Spirit. It must be said, however, that Van Ruler wants theologians to note what philosophers and scientists are saying; this is clear from some of his major writings.16

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A strong point in Van Ruler’s theology is his rejection of any kind of dualism. Time and again he states the danger of false dualism, for example in relation to ‘heaven and earth’, ‘higher and lower creation’ (cf. chapter 2.1) and ‘time and eternity’ (cf. chapter 3.7). Instead of dualism, Van Ruler works with the model of ellipses which take in one or two points or ‘foci’. It is orbital rather than linear thinking.\(^\text{17}\)

Both theologians worked within a few hundred kilometres of each other at about the same time (although Van Ruler died in 1970 and Pannenberg is still alive). One may wonder about the extent to which they knew each other and each other’s work. There is one instance where Van Ruler alludes to Pannenberg\(^\text{18}\), but none the other way round. However, there is a note in the archives of Van Ruler that indicates that he received a book from Pannenberg as a personal gift.\(^\text{19}\) The question arises whether the idea of anticipation was a ‘discovery’ by both theologians more or less independently, or whether for their ideas they fed on each other?\(^\text{20}\) It is less likely that they worked in collaboration with each other. However, both were in communication with Moltmann. It is clear that Pannenberg developed the idea of ‘anticipation’ much further and used it more explicitly than Van Ruler.

It has become clear that in their theologies both theologians stress the presence of the future in their theologies. In this study it has been shown that Van Ruler made a strong connection between the work of the Spirit and the presence of the future, just as Pannenberg did.

Pannenberg, on the other hand, worked more systematically and with more precise

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\(^{17}\) Cf. Chapter 3.7 esp. pag.105. This is a point missed by Van der Sar (cf. 3.2).


\(^{19}\) It is recorded in the archives in Kampen, the Netherlands, that Van Ruler received a personal copy of one of Pannenberg’s books including a written note from Pannenberg. There is also anecdotal evidence that they met each other at Van Ruler’s home. On the Sunday afternoon Pannenberg was invited to watch a soccer match – Van Ruler loved to watch soccer – something that was very far from Pannenberg’s interest.

\(^{20}\) Pannenberg pioneered the concept in the development of his ontology. Kugelmann traced the historic use of the ‘proleptic’ idea, rather then ‘anticipation’, through the ages. And even though the two concepts are related, not Kugelmann, but Pannenberg, applied the concept extensively in his theology.
definitions, which can be seen in many of his works, especially his three volumes of *Systematic Theology* and his *Metaphysics and the idea of God*. Van Ruler was a popular theologian in his day. People loved to listen to his radio devotional messages, which were always brief and to the point. His lectures, too, were keenly attended; students would go out of their way to hear his ideas, which were creative, but at times also provocative; they stimulated both lecturer and students.\(^{21}\) He was a caring pastor, who visited his students in their first congregation. He was a hard worker, who at times overlooked self-care in spite of the fact that he had a weak heart. His contemporaries found it difficult to categorise his theology; it was not accepted by the ultra-conservatives (e.g. *de Gereformeerde Bond*) nor among the liberals of his day. But his theology does have some outstanding characteristics. Impressive is his insistence that spiritual life is not a higher level of existence and that to portray heaven as a higher realm is creating a false dualism between heaven and earth. The kingdom of God is coming, has come and will come to this earth from the future. Eternity will enter time and the earth will be renewed, not replaced. His emphasis that it is *this* world that will be renewed in the kingdom of *God* has a strong message for our day, in relation to our responsibility to care for the earth. Making the kingdom central in his theology was not common in his day. It overcomes the danger of dualism between earth and heaven, between the here and now and the life to come. He also avoided a narrow ecclesio-centrism.

In summary, drawing attention to these points, and comparing Van Ruler and Pannenberg, has brought clarity about the fact that Christians are living ‘images of God’, living in the reign of God in anticipation of the fullness of the kingdom of God, in the strong ontic sense,

\(^{21}\) It would be a mistake to claim that because Van Ruler wrote much devotional material, he was not academic. The academic side of his work is evidenced by the fact that Van Ruler always came with yet another angle to the matter presented. Cf. G Punchinger, *Hervormd-Gereformeerd, één of gescheiden? [Hervormd - Reformed, one or separated?] A series of interviews. [Conversations over Reformed one or divided?]*, (Delft: Meinema 1969), 349ff.; and also what other theologians say about Van Ruler in the same volume.
of ‘anticipation’. Herein humankind fulfils its destiny of praising and glorifying the Creator today. It is well stated in a contemporary hymn:

Lose your shyness, find your tongue,
Tell the world what God has done:
God in Christ has come to stay.
Live tomorrow’s life today.  

This ‘presence of the future’ is a theological theme of the greatest importance. The kingdom of God is a reality for us here and now.

May the Kingdom come; Maranatha!

Sola Deo Gloria.

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22 Together in Song 414, v.2. Italics added.