

# CHRIST'S KINGSHIP IN ALL OF LIFE: BUTCHERS, BAKERS, AND CANDLESTICK-MAKERS IN THE SERVICE OF CHRIST

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## 1. Introduction

SOME YEARS AGO I received a questionnaire from the Christian academy I attended while a teenager in northern California. Like many schools, my *alma mater* was interested in maintaining contact with its alumni and ascertaining what they were doing in life, especially whether their alumni were putting their Christian education to good use. As I read through the questionnaire, my eyes fixed on one of the first questions: "Are you presently engaged in *full-time* or *part-time* Christian service?" (emphasis mine). Upon reading this question, I couldn't resist the temptation to write in the margin, "I am engaged, or attempting to be engaged, in 'full-time Christian service,' but I reject the assumption of this question. All believers are, or ought to be, engaged in some form of full-time Christian service."

No doubt the question was well-intentioned, but it assumed a common notion that, unless you are a minister or a missionary, or engaged in some form of direct or indirect service within the institutional church of Jesus Christ, your work or calling is not part of your Christian service as a member of Christ. In the case of the Christian academy I attended, which was a ministry of the local General Association of Regular Baptist congregation in Walnut Creek, California, this assumption was not surprising. At this school, the only Bible worth reading was the Scofield Reference Bible, preferably in its first edition, and the view of God's administration of his purposes throughout history was thoroughly dispensational. Within the dispensationalist understanding of God's purposes in history, the kingdom of God lies in a yet-future period during which Christ will reign upon the earth for one thousand years and his earthly people, Israel, will enjoy the fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament prophets. Meanwhile, in these "end-times," the exclusive purpose of gospel ministry and teaching is to snatch as many "brands from the burning" as possible while there is still time, since the "rapture" is just around the corner. At any moment, Christ will come and snatch all Christian believers up to heaven where they will enjoy the "marriage feast" of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9). Why bother seeking the coming of the

kingdom of Jesus Christ, when the world is destined for destruction, the church is about to be whisked away to heaven, and any endeavor to see life flourish under the kingship of Jesus Christ is akin to polishing the brass on the Titanic as it is about to sink into the depths of the ocean?<sup>1</sup>

## 2. The Challenge of the “Two-Kingdoms/Natural Law” Perspective

While it came as no surprise to me on this occasion that my *alma mater* assumed that life is distinguished into two parts, the one spiritual and churchly, the other non-spiritual and worldly, I have been surprised in recent years by the emergence of a similar kind of dualistic world-view among Reformed theologians who teach what has come to be known as the “two kingdom/natural law” (2KNL) doctrine.<sup>2</sup> Advocates of the 2KNL perspective have advanced a sophisticated and alluring case for the idea that the kingly rule of Jesus Christ obtains exclusively within the four walls of the church, and that in the remainder of life believers are citizens *simpliciter* of a common kingdom that they occupy with nonbelievers. In this perspective, believers live in two separate kingdoms or worlds.<sup>3</sup> In the first or redemptive kingdom, believers live in a realm that Christ rules as mediator of redemption by means of his Spirit and Word. However, in the second or common kingdom, believers live together

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1. Though the writer may have based his sentiment upon different grounds than that of dispensationalism, a recent letter to the editor of the *New Oxford Review* expresses a similar view: “All discussion of how to live the Christian life is otiose.... [The Bible] does not really tell us how to live, but how to *avoid* living the evil life of the world and how to await redemption in the next life. ... [Satan] “rules this world and we cannot really do much about it except to escape it through faith in Christ and His redeeming power” (as quoted in *First Things*, 237 [November 2013], 69)

2. For an exposition and defense of the two kingdoms paradigm, the following sources are representative: David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); idem, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010); idem, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, 2006); idem, “Calvin, Kuyper, and ‘Christian Culture’,” in *Always Reformed: Essays in Honor of W. Robert Godfrey*, ed. R. Scott Clark and Joel E. Kim (Escondido, CA: Westminster Seminary California, 2010); idem, “The Two Kingdoms and Reformed Christianity: Why Recovering an Old Paradigm is Historically Sound, Biblically Grounded, and Practically Useful,” *Pro Rege* 40/3 (2012): 31-38; Michael Horton, *The Gospel Commission: Recovering God’s Strategy for Making Disciples* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), esp. chapters 8 & 9, 210-93; and Darryl G. Hart, *A Secular Faith: Why Christianity Favors the Separation of Church and State* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006). For assessments of this paradigm, see Ryan C. McIlhenny, ed., *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2012); and Cornelis P. Venema, “One Kingdom or Two? An Evaluation of the ‘Two Kingdoms’ Doctrine as an Alternative to Neo-Calvinism,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 23 (2012): 77-129.

3. The title of VanDrunen’s popular presentation of the two kingdoms view, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, is instructive.

with nonbelievers in a realm that Christ rules as mediator of creation by means of the common standard of God's natural law, which is known by all human beings as image-bearers of God.

### 2.1. The "Two Kingdoms"

As the language of 2KNL indicates, the first feature of the 2KNL paradigm is its dualistic view of the way the Triune God governs the conduct of human beings within the distinct realms of the redemptive kingdom of the church and the common kingdom of creation and providence. These "two kingdoms" correspond to the two ways God governs human life, whether within the order of creation and providence or within the order of redemption.

In the 2KNL perspective, the biblical story of redemption is not regarded as a story of God's restorative or re-creative grace. The purpose of God's work of redemption is not to re-establish his blessed reign within a creation disordered and broken through human rebellion and transgression of his holy law. The story of redemption focuses narrowly upon the gracious work of Jesus Christ, the mediator of redemption, who restores believers to favor and fellowship with God. Rather than viewing the Triune God's purpose of redemption as the redemption of a new humanity in Christ, *together with the renewal of the creation itself*, the 2KNL perspective views the purpose of redemption as the introduction of a new, spiritual kingdom which stands alongside or above the common kingdom of creation.<sup>4</sup> The two kingdoms correspond to the distinct offices of Christ, first as the eternal Son of God in his office as mediator of creation, and second as the incarnate Son of God in his office as mediator of redemption. In the first of these offices, Christ maintains the order of creation; and in the second of these offices, Christ grants the redemptive grace of free justification and the promise of a future inheritance of the kingdom of God in the age to come.

David VanDrunen, a leading contemporary proponent of the "two kingdoms" perspective, offers a fairly representative summary of the 2KNL distinction between the common kingdom of God and the redemptive kingdom of Christ. Whereas the common kingdom encompasses all of natural life within the order of creation—including such things as the institution of the state, and the normative ordering of human life, society, and culture by the "natural law" of God—the spiritual or redemptive kingdom refers to the church, which represents the exclusive realm where Christ's redemptive/eschatological reign is a present reality. These two kingdoms may not be confused, but must be carefully distinguished.

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4. VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 15.

At the heart of the two kingdoms doctrine is the conviction that though this world has fallen into sin, God continues to rule over all things. Nevertheless, God rules the world in two different ways. He is the one and only king, but he has established two kingdoms (or, two realms) in which he exercises his rule in distinct ways. God governs one kingdom, which Luther often called the kingdom of God's "left hand" and Calvin the "civil" kingdom, as its creator and sustainer, but not as its redeemer. This civil kingdom pertains to temporal, earthly, provisional matters, not matters of ultimate and spiritual importance. For Calvin (Luther put it slightly differently), the civil kingdom included matters of politics, law, and cultural life more generally. The ends of the civil kingdom were not salvation and eternal life but a relatively just, peaceful, and orderly existence in the present world in which Christians live as pilgrims away from their heavenly homeland. The other kingdom, which Luther termed the kingdom of God's "right hand" and Calvin the "spiritual" kingdom, is also ruled by God, but he rules it not only as creator and sustainer but also as its redeemer in Christ. This kingdom pertains to things that are of ultimate and spiritual importance, the things of Christ's heavenly, eschatological kingdom. Insofar as this spiritual kingdom has earthly existence, Calvin believed it must be found in the church and not in the state or other temporal institutions. In this kingdom, the gospel of salvation is preached, and the souls of believers are nourished unto eternal life. Although necessarily existing together and having some mutual interaction in this world, these two kingdoms enjoy a great measure of independence so that each can pursue the unique work entrusted to it.<sup>5</sup>

In this delineation of the two kingdoms, the first or common kingdom embraces *all aspects of ordinary human life* after the fall into sin. These aspects of human life include: the institutions of marriage and family; the state or civil community with the "power of the sword" to maintain justice and outward order in society; the cultural mandate to exercise stewardly dominion over the creation; the development of human culture in the arts, music, science, education, recreational pursuits, and the like. The full range of human conduct before God, the Lord of creation, belongs originally and properly to the common kingdom of God, whose citizens and subjects are non-Christian and Christian alike. In distinction from this common kingdom, the redemptive kingdom is inclusive only of those aspects of the life of God's redeemed people that properly belong to the ministry of the institutional church of Jesus Christ. The redemptive or spiritual

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5. *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, 24.

kingdom of God is the church, the one realm over which Christ reigns directly as the mediator of redemption.

## 2.2. Natural Law: The Norm for Human Conduct in the Common Kingdom

The distinction between the spiritual and civil kingdoms is the appropriate context for a brief comment on the role of “natural law” in the 2KNL perspective. Whereas the spiritual kingdom, the church, is governed by Christ as redeemer through his Spirit and Word, and this governance is an inward matter of the heart, the civil kingdom is governed by God as Creator through the natural law, especially in its moral content. According to VanDrunen, natural law “generally refers to the moral order inscribed in the world and especially in human nature, an order that is known to all people through their natural faculties (especially reason and/or conscience) even apart from supernatural divine revelation that binds morally the whole of the human race.”<sup>6</sup>

If the civil kingdom is a moral realm, then the civil kingdom must have a moral standard appropriate to it. At least one basic fact demonstrates that natural law is certainly an appropriate moral standard for the civil kingdom. That fact is that the civil kingdom has been ordained by God as a *common* realm, a realm for all people of whatever religious conviction in which to live and pursue their cultural tasks, while natural law is God’s *common* moral revelation given to all people of whatever religious conviction. A common moral realm, in which all of created humanity enjoys membership, is rightly governed by a common moral standard that is revealed to all of created humanity. The civil kingdom is for human beings insofar as they are created and sustained by God; natural law morally obligates human beings insofar as they are created and sustained by God.<sup>7</sup>

In the 2KNL understanding of how the believer’s conduct is regulated in the redemptive kingdom or church, Christ’s lordship is expressed through the authority of special revelation, which is inscripturated in the Bible. Christ governs the life and ministry of the church by means of his Spirit and Word. The Bible is a book for the church, which tells the story of redemption in Jesus Christ, regulates the church’s worship, describes how its ministry of Word and sacrament is to be carried out, and reveals the distinctive features of the “law of Christ” that characterize the Christian life (e.g., tempering

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6. *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, 1.

7. *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, 38.

justice with mercy, turning the other cheek, being forgiving and patient when sinned against). However, the believer's conduct in the common kingdom is governed by means of what can be known of God's will through the natural law, which is accessible to all human beings. On the one hand, the Bible governs the life of the church. On the other hand, natural law and God's providence are the "most elegant book" (Belgic Confession, Art. 2) that governs the common life of all human beings in God's world. When it comes to the believer's conduct and calling within the realm of the common kingdom, it is generally sufficient to ascertain what is right and good and true by way of a reading of the natural law.

Within the framework of this construction of the two kingdoms and their respective standards for human conduct, it is not surprising that defenders of the 2KNL doctrine roundly reject the idea that Christian believers should pursue their common tasks alongside nonbelievers in a distinctively "Christian" manner. 2KNL proponents are especially opposed to the use of the language of "transformation" or "redemption" to describe the calling of believers within the orbit of the common kingdom. Advocates of the 2KNL view disparage the notion that there is such a thing as a distinctively "Christian" approach to activities that are properly carried on within the common kingdom. VanDrunen, for example, argues that it is "unhelpful to describe our common kingdom activities in terms of 'transformation,' and it is inaccurate to describe them in terms of 'redemption.' ... We do not seek a uniquely Christian way to perform these activities and order these affairs, but we conduct ourselves as sojourners and exiles who share them in common with unbelievers and do not really feel at home when pursuing them. We desire to make the common kingdom better when we can, but we should not try to 'transform' it into something other than the common kingdom."<sup>8</sup>

### 3. The Case for Christ's Kingship in All of Life

While my brief sketch of the 2KNL perspective could be greatly expanded, it is sufficient to explain why proponents of this perspective reject the idea that Christ's work of redemption has any direct implications for the way believers fulfill their calling or vocation in every area of human life. One of the most frequent claims of 2KNL advocates is that there is nothing distinctively Christian about the way believers carry out their callings in the common kingdom. We may

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8. *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 170. Cf. Michael Horton, *Calvin on the Christian Life: Glorifying and Enjoying God Forever* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 228, who expresses a similar sentiment in his exposition of Calvin's doctrine of vocation: "There is no such thing as Christian farming, holy medicine, or kingdom art, even though believers engaged in these callings alongside unbelievers are holy citizens of his kingdom. The service that a janitor, homemaker, doctor, or business person provides is part of God's providential care of his creatures. It requires no further justification."

speak of the common callings of “butchers, bakers, and candlestick makers,” for example, but we should not regard the work of believers in these callings as an uncommon service that advances the interests of Christ’s redemptive kingdom.

Rather than directly refuting the 2KNL rejection of the distinctive calling of believers to acknowledge the kingship of Jesus Christ in all of life, I want in what follows to offer a defense of the thesis that Christians are called to a transformed life of obedience to Christ in every area of human life, whether in the home, the workplace, the school, science, culture, the arts, and the like. My thesis is that we may properly speak of a distinctively Christian approach to the calling of believers in all of their respective vocations, whether as “butchers, bakers, or candlestick makers,” to use an old—and no doubt, outdated, in some respects—expression.

The case I would offer for my thesis derives from four themes or theses that belong to a biblical understanding of the Christian life in the world: (1) the biblical view of the redemptive work of Christ, which involves nothing less than the renewal and perfection of human life within the created order; (2) the believer’s participation in Christ’s threefold office of prophet, priest, and king; (3) the Christian life as a Spirit-authored life of “good works”; and (4) the “vocation” that Christians perform in their work and labor under the rule of Christ. When each of these themes is biblically construed, they offer a compelling case for viewing all of the Christian’s life as grateful obedience under the lordship of Christ (cf. Matt. 28:16-20).

### 3.1. The Relation between Creation and Redemption

Perhaps the most important question that needs to be addressed, when considering whether Christians are called to serve the Lord Jesus Christ in their daily callings, is how Christ’s work of redemption is related to the doctrine of creation. If redemption restores and perfects the brokenness of life in God’s creation, and if grace perfects but does not displace or stand alongside the natural order, the work of redemption has important implications for life and work in God’s world. On the other hand, if redemption has no direct connection with the original purposes of God in creation and human life, then this too will have considerable consequences for the way we view our calling as Christians.

The story that is told in Scripture is best read as a story that recounts the great works of the Triune God, first as the Creator of all things, and then as the redeemer or re-Creator who reverses all the effects of the creature’s sinful rebellion against him. The big story—the “meta-narrative” of Scripture as it sometimes described—takes place in four dramatic stages or movements: first, the creation of the heavens and the earth, which God declared to be good or pleasing to him in its original state of integrity; second, the introduction of sin

and evil into God's good creation, first within the heavenly realm of angelic beings, and second within the human race through the fall and disobedience of our first parents, and of Adam in particular as the covenant head or representative of the human race; third, the redemption or restoration of the human race by means of the covenant of grace whose mediator is Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, whom the apostle Paul terms the "last" or "second" Adam (Rom. 5; 1 Cor. 15); and fourth, the consummation of God's eternal kingdom in the new heavens and earth, which occurs with Christ's coming at the end of the present age. In short, the story-line of the Scriptures is commonly described as that of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.<sup>9</sup>

Within the framework of this story, how are we to understand the relation between creation and redemption?

Against the dark backdrop of the brokenness of sinful human life and the divine curse upon the created order itself, the biblical narrative primarily recounts the story of the Triune God's work of redemption through Jesus Christ, the last or eschatological Adam through whom all the deleterious effects of sin and rebellion in God's world are redressed. At the consummation of God's work of redemption in Christ, which will not occur until Christ returns at the end of this present age, the redemptive work of God will realize God's good purposes for the creation, and human life within the creation, in the "new heavens and earth" in which all things will be made new. In the consummation, the original end of God's purposes in creation, particularly in the creation of human beings after his image to glorify him and tend the creation under his lordship, will be achieved.

In the work of redemption, therefore, God is making all things new, but he is not making all new things. Because God is making all things new, not discarding but renewing the work of his hands that was terribly deformed through sin, the calling of believers to renewed obedience in all of life is a beginning or foretaste of the eschatological life that belongs to the new creation. As those who are inwardly renewed already and indwelt of Christ's Spirit, the pledge of their ultimate life in communion with God (2 Cor. 5:5), believers make a beginning of the kind of life that will be theirs in perfection in the age to come (2 Cor. 4:16ff.). In keeping with the literal meaning of the term "redemption," God's purpose of redemption is the liberation of his people and the whole of creation from the tyranny of the devil and the ravages of sinful disobedience. Redemption reclaims and regains

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9. For more comprehensive treatments of the relation between creation and redemption that support my summary, see Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965); Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); and Michael Green and Craig Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).



what was lost through the fall, and brings the whole of creation to its God-appointed destiny.

In Christ, what was lost through Adam's sin, namely, union and communion with God, is granted to a new humanity—God's elect people, comprised of Jews and Gentiles alike, and drawn from every tribe, tongue, people and nation. Through Christ's redemptive work, all who through faith are united to him enjoy the grace of free acceptance with God and the beginnings of their full restoration after the image of God. In this way, the destiny of the human race, which was lost or forfeited through Adam's disobedience, is realized for a new humanity in Christ. But that is not all. Just as the first Adam was created from the dust of the ground and placed in the garden of Paradise, so the new humanity in Christ will ultimately be fitted for life in communion with God in a renewed heavens and earth. Accordingly, the work of redemption in Christ includes both the redemption of a new humanity and the re-creation of an entirely renewed world, one in which righteousness dwells and every remainder of sin and the curse has been vanquished (Rom. 8:18-25; 2 Pet. 3:11-13). Redemption in Christ involves nothing less than the realization of the eschatological goal of creation itself: the new heavens and earth will be a renewed creation-temple where God enjoys communion or fellowship with the whole company of the elect, the new humanity in Christ, and all of the life of the redeemed people of God serves one great purpose of glorifying God and enjoying him forever. Paradise lost has become paradise regained, but now in consummate glory (Rev. 20-22).

The biblical understanding of the relation between creation and redemption can be illumined in terms of the doctrine of the kingdom of God. According to the Scriptures, before the fall into sin, the whole world and its inhabitants comprised the realm over which the King of creation reigned. Though good and bereft of any rebellion against God's kingly rule, the world and the human race were not yet perfected or glorified. The calling of God's image-bearers—to rule the world under God's authority, and to be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth (Gen. 1:26-27)—was not yet fulfilled. Since the fall into sin through Adam, the covenant head of the human race, God did not relinquish his kingdom but immediately commenced the great work of gathering to himself a new humanity through the person and work of Jesus Christ, the last Adam, who is the head of the new humanity (Gen. 3:15; Rom. 5; 1 Cor. 15). The kingdom of God has now become the kingdom of his Son, Jesus Christ, whom God appointed heir of all things and through whom the power of sin and death will be finally vanquished. Sin in all its expressions has broken and ruined what God originally created good. Human life and culture evidence in all sorts of ways that the world is "not the way it's sup-

posed to be.”<sup>10</sup> But in and through Jesus Christ, God is making all things new—restraining sin, restoring fallen sinners to fellowship with himself, forgiving sins, healing diseases, mending what was broken, renewing what was in disrepair, reiterating the obligations of obedience stipulated in his holy law, and so on.

Thus, the story of redemption unfolds in Scripture as a thoroughgoing kingdom project: God redeems for himself a new people in Christ, the last Adam, and thereby reasserts his kingship over the human race with a view to the ultimate triumph of his kingdom in the consummation at the end of this present age. God’s work of redemption accomplishes in Christ what was forfeited in Adam: the granting of unbreakable and perfected communion with God in the context of a renewed creation.

By contrast to the biblical understanding, the lack of integration between creation and redemption in the 2KNL paradigm is evident in its failure to link the renewal/resurrection of the believer’s body with the correlative renewal/resurrection of the creation itself.<sup>11</sup> In the Scriptural view of the future consummation of God’s work of redemption, the resurrection of the body of believers is paralleled by a renewal or resurrection of the whole creation. Just as the first Adam’s destiny was linked to his life in the body within the framework of creation, so the destiny of those who belong to the last Adam is linked to their everlasting life in renewed bodies within the framework of a sanctified creation. The same kind of continuity and discontinuity between the present and the future resurrection body of believers, obtains as well between the present creation and its future resurrection or cleansing. The radical discontinuity that the two kingdoms paradigm posits between the present state of the world and the world-to-come does not appear to do justice to this element of Scriptural teaching.

There are two passages in Scripture that bear witness in an especially direct way to the correlation that obtains between the resurrection of believers and the renewal of the whole creation. These passages also confirm that the new heavens and the new earth will not be radically discontinuous with the present state of the creation.

The first of these passages is Romans 8:18-25. In this passage, the apostle Paul emphasizes three points. First, we are reminded that sin has adversely affected not only the human race but also the whole creation. As the apostle expresses it, the creation has been subjected to “futility,” to “vanity” or “pointlessness,” because of the sinful rebellion of God’s image-bearers. Without becoming unreliev-

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10. The phrase derives from the title of a book on the doctrine of sin by Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. (*Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995]).

11. For a more extended treatment of this question, see: Cornelis P. Venema, *The Promise of the Future* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2000), 456-68; and John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 178-81.

edly evil, sin has brought corruption to the entirety of God's handiwork. The fabric of creation has been torn and broken, corresponding to the humility and weakness that now affect the human body (1 Cor. 15; Phil. 3:21). Second, the redemption for which the children of God eagerly await and the redemption of the creation itself are intimately connected. Individual eschatology and cosmic eschatology are so joined together that what is true for believers holds true for creation. When the children of God are revealed in glory and freedom, a similar glory and freedom will be granted to creation. Its present corruption and distortion will be removed. Its torn fabric will be mended. Remarkably, the language describing the restoration of creation corresponds exactly to the language describing the restoration of the children of God. The same process of renewal that will transform the believer's present bodies of humiliation into bodies of glory will transform the creation itself. And third, the metaphor of childbirth that dominates this passage suggests that the transformation of the creation will be in substantial continuity with its present state. The creation groans, according to this passage, like a woman in childbirth prior to the delivery of her child. So the new creation, born of the old, will bear a resemblance and similarity to the original. To suggest that the new creation will be radically other than the former creation would violate the clear implication of this passage.

The second passage of special importance on this question is 2 Peter 3:5-13, in which the apostle Peter answers mockers who conclude that the promise of Christ's coming is untrue. The gist of Peter's answer to these mockers is clear: the Lord will indeed fulfill his promise, but in his own time and in accord with his desire to grant all an opportunity for repentance. In his patience and mercy, the world continues so that the gospel might be preached and the day of salvation prolonged. No one, however, should misjudge the Lord's patience and conclude that the day of his coming will not arrive. Two features of this passage speak about the present and future state of creation. First, Peter compares the destruction of the world in the great flood with the future destruction of the world at the "day of God" (vv. 6-7, 10-12). When God's judgment fell upon the world at the time of the flood, the world was destroyed only in the sense that its inhabitants were subjected to judgment and the earth cleansed of wickedness. And second, imagery drawn from the field of metallurgy suggests a process of refinement and purification, but not of utter annihilation. The language of this passage suggests a process of extraordinary power and destructiveness by which the present creation is refined and left in a state of pristine purity. Just as the refiner's fire is used to produce the highest and purest grade of gold or silver, so the refining fire of God's judging this sin-cursed creation will yield a holy and pure heavens and earth.

Both of these passages confirm that God's powerful and redemptive work will involve the renewal of all things. This creation will un-

dergo cosmic sanctification, and all of God's renewed creation-temple will be holy unto the Lord (Zech. 14:20-21), suitable for his dwelling with his people and their service to him.

However, for the two kingdoms proponent, there is a much greater discontinuity between the present creation and the world-to-come. In the words of one advocate of this perspective, "[t]he New Testament teaches that the natural order as it now exists will come to a radical end and that the products of human culture will perish along with the natural order."<sup>12</sup> Because the present world will be completely destroyed with all of its cultural artifacts and activities, the believer's life in the common kingdom has no lasting value. The believer's calling in the common kingdom is not a distinctively Christian calling, and is of strictly penultimate significance. When Christ returns to commence the world-to-come, the present creation with all that belongs to the common kingdom will be cataclysmically and entirely destroyed. Though believers will enjoy the resurrection/renewal of their bodies in the life to come, there will be no corresponding resurrection/renewal of the creation.<sup>13</sup> Grace adds to nature, but does not perfect it.

Contrary to this dualistic view of Christ's mediatorial rule, the Scriptures typically identify Christ's present kingship as a comprehensive, all-inclusive kingship, in which his rule over all things is administered in the interest of his purposes of redemption. Even the title, "Christ," which refers to his anointing to a threefold office as prophet, priest, and king, is used inclusively to designate the way he simultaneously sustains and governs all things in order to effect his work of redemption. When Christ gives the great commission to the church, he declares that "all authority in heaven and on earth" belongs to him. As the king over all, he claims the nations as his rightful inheritance (cf. Ps. 2). When the apostle Paul speaks of Christ's kingship, he speaks of the one mediator who is the "head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:22). The work of reconciliation that Christ accomplishes aims to re-unite all things, whether in heaven or on earth, under his lordship (Eph. 1:8-10). The same Christ who is the "firstborn of all creation," and through whom all things were created, is the one who through his work of redemption wills to be "pre-eminent" in all things (Col. 1:15-20). According to the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, the great chapter on the resurrection of Christ, the present reign of Christ is one that involves a work of subjecting all his enemies under his feet, including the "last enemy," death itself

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12. VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 64.

13. VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 66: "Our earthly bodies are the only part of the present world that Scripture says will be transformed and taken up into the world-to-come."

(vv. 25-28). Christ is the Son of God, whom God appointed “the heir all things, through whom also he created the world” (Heb. 1:2).

### 3.2. The Threefold Office of Believers

The second theme that undergirds the calling of Christian believers to acknowledge the lordship of Jesus Christ in all of life is the threefold office of believers. Even as Christ, the risen and ascended Lord, continues to exercise his threefold office as prophet, priest, and king, so believers are called in union with Christ to exercise the threefold office of prophet, priest, and king.

In Lord's Day 12 of the Heidelberg Catechism, we find a classic statement of the biblical and Reformed doctrine of the threefold office of Christ and the believer's participation in that office.

Q. & A. 31: Why is He called *Christ*, that is, *Anointed*? Because He is ordained of God the Father, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, to be our chief Prophet and Teacher, who has fully revealed to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption; and our only High Priest, who by the one sacrifice of His body has redeemed us, and makes continual intercession for us with the Father; and our eternal King, who governs us by His Word and Spirit, and defends and preserves us in the salvation obtained for us.

Q. & A. 32: But why are you called a Christian? Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus a partaker of His anointing, that I may confess His Name, present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him, and with a free and good conscience fight against sin and the devil in this life, and hereafter reign with him eternally over all creatures.

Reflection upon the catechism's description of the threefold office of believers leads to several conclusions regarding their calling in union with Christ.

First, the threefold office of Christians, which is sometimes called the “office of believer,” should not be viewed in a way that detracts from the uniqueness and sufficiency of Christ's work as mediator. There is an important difference between the way Christ fulfills his threefold office, and the way believers participate in this threefold office. Christ is our “chief” Prophet and Teacher, and therefore the original source and authoritative norm for whatever Christians are able to know and profess concerning him. The knowledge and speech of Christians are true only insofar as they are conformed to the Word of Christ. Christ is the “only” High Priest, whose sacrifice upon the cross is altogether unique, perfect and sufficient to cleanse his people of their sins. Upon the basis of Christ's priestly sacrifice and contin-

ual intercession, believers are able to enjoy restored communion with God. Consequently, the priestly service of the Christian is not a redemptive sacrifice for their sins, but a sacrifice of thanksgiving for God's grace in Christ (Rom. 12:1-3). Christ is also an "eternal" king, who governs his people by his Word and Spirit and ensures their victory over his and their enemies. Thus, Christians struggle with sin and every power arrayed against Christ's kingship, not in their own strength, but in the strength that is Christ's and that he shares with them by the Spirit. However we understand the threefold office of believer, we may not view it as a kind of supplement to, or completion of, Christ's threefold office.

Second, the threefold of Christians is nonetheless a genuine participation in Christ's threefold office. As those who are united to Christ and participate in his anointing by the Spirit, believers ministerially share in Christ's threefold calling as prophets, priests, and kings. In their prophetic office, they know and profess the truth concerning Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God (Col. 2:3). Believers are summoned to bring their every thought captive to Christ (2 Cor. 10:4-5), and to be thoroughly conversant with all that he teaches them by his Spirit and Word. In their priestly office, believers are called to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice of thanksgiving to God, which is their spiritual service (Rom. 12:1). And in their kingly office, believers are called to fight with a good and free conscience against sin and the devil in this life, knowing that in the life to come they will share in his eternal reign over all creatures. In the fulfillment of their threefold office and calling, believers participate directly in Christ's anointing and are furnished by the Holy Spirit for the comprehensive, life-embracing task that it entails. In the most profound sense, Christ himself works by his Spirit and through his people as his instruments to execute his threefold office in the world.

Third, although the Catechism does not deny the unique calling of believers who are set apart within the church for the special offices of minister of the Word, ruling elder, and deacon, the office of believer is the most basic expression of the Christian's participation in Christ's threefold office. The ecclesiastical offices are Christ-appointed offices, which participate in Christ's threefold office in their own peculiar manner, but they do not displace or render insignificant the primary way in which all believers share in Christ's anointing.

And fourth, it is not possible to separate the threefold office of believer from the original calling of all human beings who bear God's image. While the threefold office of believers is a participation in Christ's threefold office as redeemer, this threefold office finds its roots in the doctrine of the creation of human beings in God's image. When believers participate in Christ's threefold office, they are restored to the fullness of their creatureliness and furnished for the

resumption of the work to which all God's image-bearers were summoned at creation. As Herman Bavinck remarks in his treatment of Christ's threefold office,

[t]o be a mediator, to be a complete savior, he [Christ] had to be appointed by the Father to all three and equipped by the Spirit for all three offices. The truth is that the idea of humanness already encompasses within itself this threefold dignity and activity. Human beings have a head to know, a heart to give themselves, a hand to govern and to lead; correspondingly, they were in the beginning equipped by God with knowledge and understanding, with righteousness and holiness, with dominion and glory (blessedness). The sin that corrupted human beings infected all their capacities and consisted not only in ignorance, folly, error, lies, blindness, darkness but also in unrighteousness, guilt, moral degradation, and further in misery, death, and ruin. Therefore Christ, both as the Son and as the image of God, for himself and also as our mediator and savior, had to bear all three offices.<sup>14</sup>

Just as human beings were created in God's image with a threefold mandate—to exercise a kingly dominion over the creation under God's authority, to serve as priests in offering themselves and all their work in praise to God, and to know and speak the truth in conformity to God's Word (Gen. 1:26ff.)—so Christ's threefold office, and the believer's participation in it, is a restoration to the fullness of what it means to be human before God. Christ, by means of his threefold office, restores and perfects his people for their renewed service to God.

The traditional doctrine of the Christian's participation in Christ's threefold office has far-reaching implications for determining the nature of the Christian's calling in the world. From the standpoint of the doctrine of the threefold office of believer, it seems most appropriate to view the kingly rule of Christ as redeemer in a way that includes all aspects of the believer's life and calling in the world. If believers are the purchased property of Christ, the Lord, then surely they need to act accordingly in all of their endeavors and in every sphere of life. Furthermore, if believers in union with Christ are called to participate in his kingly rule, they are obliged to resist all the works of the evil one and every work that fails to honor Christ's lordship over any aspect of human conduct. It is impossible to carve out certain dimensions of human life in society and culture where believers are not called to exercise their threefold calling as prophets, priests, and kings under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

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14. *Reformed Dogmatics*, gen. ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 3:367.

In the estimation of some proponents of the two kingdoms paradigm, any emphasis upon the redemptive transformation of all of life endangers the biblical doctrine of the sufficiency of Christ's obedience to secure the inheritance of eternal life for his people in the world-to-come. If Christians are obliged to engage the world in a transformative way, they are allegedly encouraged to believe that their works contribute in some way to their salvation. While it is certainly true that the obedience of Christians in the world contributes nothing to their justification before God, this objection of the two kingdoms paradigm does not do justice to the legitimate sense in which Christian believers, as members of Christ, participate in his threefold office.

Admittedly, the language of "redeeming" the world or culture can easily suggest that believers are completing the work of redemption that Christ alone accomplished. Perhaps for this reason it should not ordinarily be used as a descriptor of Christian obedience in the world.<sup>15</sup> But there is no biblical reason to avoid terms like "renew" or even "transform," when speaking of Christian engagement with the world in their daily callings.<sup>16</sup> To say that Christian believers are called to be "transformed" or "renewed" after the image of Christ in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, is to speak in an eminently biblical fashion (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). Or to say that believers ought to "take every thought captive to obey Christ" is likewise to echo the language of Scripture (2 Cor. 10:5). The work of the Holy Spirit in the sanctification of believers is variously described in the Scriptures as a work of redemption, regeneration, re-creation, renewal, and restoration. In one passage in the New Testament, believers are even summoned to "redeem the times, for the days are evil" (Eph. 5:16). In all these descriptions, the fundamental idea of the renewal and transformation of human life in grateful obedience to God is expressed. When believers participate in Christ's anointing and threefold office, they are renewed and enabled to discharge the prophetic, priestly, and kingly service for which they were originally created.

### 3.3. The Christian Life of "Good Works"

In the Reformed confessions' summary of Scriptural teaching, the Christian life in the world is represented not only as a participation in Christ's threefold office, but also as a life of "good works," which believers perform by the power of the outpoured Spirit of Christ.

For example, in the Heidelberg Catechism's well-known third part, which deals with the theme of gratitude, the whole of its exposi-

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15. See D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 216-17.

16. See Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 69-70.



tion of the Christian life is framed by the following question: "Since, then, we are delivered from our misery by grace alone, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we yet do good works?" (Q. & A. 86). The way this question is framed hearkens back to the Catechism's emphatic teaching that the salvation of the believer is entirely based upon God's grace in Jesus Christ alone. In Lord's Days 23 and 24, the Catechism vigorously declares that believers find acceptance with God and are entitled to eternal life upon the sole basis of Christ's work on their behalf. The great comfort of the gospel is that believers are justified before God, declared righteous and properly heirs of eternal life, upon the basis of the imputation of Christ's entire righteousness to them. Only Christ's perfect obedience and sacrificial death constitute the ground for the believer's justification. The gospel promise of free justification need only be received by the empty hand of faith, a heartfelt trust that Christ's righteousness is a sufficient basis for reception into favor with God. Though such faith is never alone in the justified person, the works that faith produces contribute nothing to our justification before God. Because such works are always corrupted and stained with sin, they are not able to contribute anything that would warrant God's pronouncement that believers are acceptable to him in Christ. Whatever good works believers may perform, they are not the kinds of works that could satisfy God's judgment or add anything to what Christ has accomplished on their behalf.

It is precisely this emphasis upon free and gracious justification that prompts the first question and answer of the third part of the Catechism. If believers are justified by grace alone through faith alone, then is there no basis for insisting upon the importance of good works or Christian obedience to the law of God? To this question, the Catechism answers with a resounding affirmation of the necessity of a Christian life of good works. While such good works are not born out of an unbelieving and self-righteous spirit, they represent the fruits of the work of Christ's Spirit in us. Believers perform good works

[b]ecause Christ, having redeemed us by His blood, also renews us by His Holy Spirit after His own image, that with our whole life we may show ourselves thankful to God for His benefits, and that He may be praised by us; then, also, that each of us may be assured in himself of his faith by the fruits thereof, and that by our godly walk our neighbors also may be won for Christ. (A. 86)

What is often missed at this point is the realization that the entirety of the Christian life is born out of the gospel grace and work of Christ's outpoured Spirit. Believers do not produce good works in order to obtain God's favor; they produce good works out of a grateful

acknowledgement of God's grace in Christ and by virtue of the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in renewing them after Christ's image. For this reason, the catechism goes on to describe the Christian life comprehensively as a daily conversion or repentance, which consists in the "mortification of the old man, and the quickening of the new" (A. 88). Such daily conversion expresses itself in the believer's Spirit-authored "love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works" (A. 90).

But what, according to the catechism's exposition, does this mean concretely in the life of believers? At this point, the catechism prefaces its comprehensive exposition of the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer with an important explanation of what such "good works" entail. In answer to the question, "what are good works?", the catechism answers this way: "Only those which are done from true faith, according to the law of God, and to His glory; and not such as are based on our own opinions or the precepts of men" (Q. & A. 91). Even though this answer is quite familiar to many Reformed believers, its implications for our question regarding the Christian life under the lordship of Jesus Christ cannot be overstated. What stands out in this answer is the comprehensive claim of the Christian gospel upon the Christian life in all of its expressions. To appreciate what this entails, it will be useful to note briefly each of the components that the Catechism identifies that belong properly to any good work.

First, the Christian life in its entirety is performed from true faith. Unless believers know that they have been accepted by God for the sake of the work of Christ alone, they will inevitably act from "bad faith," that is, serve God, not out of gratitude or by virtue of the work of Christ's gracious Spirit in them, but out of a desire to obtain or curry favor with God.<sup>17</sup> Nothing Christian believers do as members of Christ may be motivated by the aim of securing thereby favor with God. Faith works through love, to be sure, but it is faith that works and produces a thankful Christian life (Gal. 5:6). As the apostle Paul declares in Romans, "whatsoever is not of faith is sin," whether it be eating, drinking, marrying, buying or selling (Rom. 14:23). Or as the apostle Paul reminds Timothy, "[f]or everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer" (1 Tim. 4:4).

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17. For a similar description of the "good works" of believers, see The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chap. 16, esp. section 7, which reads: "Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands; and of good use both to themselves and others: yet, because they proceed not from an heart purified by faith; nor are done in a right manner, according to the Word; nor to a right end, the glory of God, they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God: and yet, their neglect of them is more sinful and displeasing unto God."

Second, the Christian life of good works aims to offer to God what is due him. It is always a life that seeks to express what it means to glorify God and enjoy him forever. As Creator and redeemer, God is the Author of every good and perfect gift. And his gifts are to be received with praise and thanksgiving, and used in his service and in the service of others. For this reason, sin is defined in the Lord's Prayer as "debt," an unmet obligation that is owed to God. Whenever believers (or any creature, for that matter) fail to give God what is due him, which is nothing less than the love of all their heart, mind, and strength, they deny their duty and forget who they are his redeemed creatures.<sup>18</sup>

And third, the Christian life of good works is normed by the standard of God's holy law. This standard is summarized in the Ten Commandments, whose two tables describe what we owe God as the foremost object of our love and delight and what we owe our neighbor who bears God's image and in whom God is represented to us. When the catechism expounds at length the positive obligations and negative prohibitions of these commandments, it does not describe the Christian life as one that is restricted to the precincts of the church. Rather, it describes the manner of conduct that pleases God in all of life, whether in respect to God or to others. Furthermore, the catechism treats the obligations of the holy law of God as binding upon all human beings, believers and unbelievers alike. The law of God in its moral content binds all human beings as image-bearers of God, whether they acknowledge this obligation or not.<sup>19</sup> The law of God, as

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18. VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 166ff. acknowledges that this is true and therefore speaks of "subjective" versus "objective" differences in the conduct of Christians in the common kingdom. According to VanDrunen, believers perform the same duties and tasks as unbelievers, and they do so according to the norms of God's "natural law." The one distinguishing feature of Christian conduct is that it arises from a different "inner motivation and subjective attitude" (167). While I do not deny that believers and unbelievers alike perform actions that conform to the same standard, the "natural law" of God, and that these actions are not always "materially" different, if I may use such language, I do not believe VanDrunen and the 2KNL perspective do justice to the degree to which unbelievers suppress and distort the natural law of God. Nor does the 2KNL perspective recognize the extent to which Scriptural revelation clarifies and enlarges our knowledge of God's will for human conduct, which has real (objective) consequences for their life in obedience to God. As I shall note in my conclusion, for the conduct of believers to be described as "distinctively Christian" in the fulfillment of their various vocations in the world, it does not have to be technically or materially different in every respect. For this reason, I cannot agree with VanDrunen's taking exception in this connection to the thesis that "to be a Christian is to be truly human." This is exactly the point I would wish to make: being truly human is precisely what it means to be a Christian, for God's work of redemption transforms us into the kind of persons we ought to be and for which we were destined at creation.

19. The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chap. 19.5: "The moral law [summarized in the Ten Commandments] doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that, not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it. Neither doth Christ, in the gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation."

it is encapsulated in the Ten Commandments, does not norm a peculiar realm or dimension of human life before God. No sharp delineation is drawn between the norms for human life in the “common” kingdom in distinction from the “spiritual,” as is customary in the 2KNL perspective. Rather, the catechism describes in detail the whole life of God’s redeemed people in all of its diversity and richness. The assumption of the catechism is that the ordinary duties of human life in God’s world are addressed in these commandments. While the moral content of these commandments coincides with the moral content of the so-called natural law, the catechism does not hesitate to appeal directly to Scriptural applications of the law of God for the behavior of believers in all of the spheres of human conduct, whether in marriage and family, in business or labor, in the civil community, and the like.

### 3.4. The Believer’s Vocation

The last theme that I would like to explore briefly is that of the believer’s “vocation.” While in our modern society and culture in the West, we have come to speak of our daily calling or work as our “career,” the better language from the vantage point of Scriptural teaching is to speak of the “priesthood of all believers” and particularly of their “vocation” to serve the Lord in their work. One of the most significant contributions of the Reformation was the restoration of the dignity and honor of human work, which is to be performed in service to God and others. The older medieval pattern of sharply distinguishing the “religious,” contemplative life, from the “secular” or worldly life, was displaced by a comprehensive view of the calling of all believers to serve God in whatever station they may find themselves. In this respect, there is considerable agreement between Luther and Calvin, although Calvin (and the Calvinists) tended to view this calling to include, not only the service of others in the daily work of believers, but also the task to reform the structures and institutions of human society and culture.

In Luther’s understanding of the vocation of believers, there is a clear connection between the gospel and the freedom of the Christian to lovingly serve others within the ordinary callings of life. While Luther distinguishes between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of earth in a way that 2KNL advocates find appealing, he does not divorce or separate them from each other. For Luther, the kingdom of heaven concerns our relationship to God, which is based upon faith’s whole-hearted trust in the work of Christ as redeemer. Upon the basis of Christ’s righteousness, believers may be assured that their acceptance with God does not depend upon their own works or performance of their duties toward God or others. In contrast to the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of earth concerns our relationship to our neighbors, which expresses itself in love toward others whom we are

called to freely serve in God's name. The ordinary tasks and works that belong to our particular vocations belong to the earthly kingdom. The performance of whatever legitimate tasks belong to our earthly vocations does not spring from the motivation to obtain God's favor upon this basis. Rather, the performance of our duty or vocation is an act of Christian freedom in which we love others and serve them in Christ's name.

In Luther's doctrine of vocation, all of the tasks that pertain to our daily work are so many ways in which we relate to others and serve them in Christ's name. Whatever our station in life—whether we are husbands or wives, parents or children, magistrates or subjects, masters or servants, yes, even butchers or bakers or candlestick makers—we have a calling to serve others in God's name and in accordance with his holy will. Contrary to the medieval practice of privileging the so-called “religious” life of the monastery, Luther encouraged believers to “put our whole trust in his [God's] mercy, and with utter certainty and without any doubt to have faith that both we ourselves and all our works are pleasing to him, not because of our worthiness or merit but because of his goodness.”<sup>20</sup> As Lee Hardy writes in summary of Luther's view of vocation,

By maintaining that one's relation to God is established through faith alone and relocating works of religious significance in the earthly realm, Luther showed it possible to respond to God's call even in the lowly and mundane occupations of this life. To follow Christ it is not necessary to abandon one's earthly station, for Christ commands us to do such works “as concern people here below who are in need, not those that concern God or angels. Therefore the Christian life does not consist of that which such men as monks invent; it does not drive people into the wilderness or cloister. ... On the contrary, the Christian life sends you to people, to those that need your works.” According to Luther, virtually all occupations are modes of ‘full-time Christian service’—except those of the usurer, the prostitute, and the monk. The point of the Christian religion is not to leave the world behind to live the life of faith, but to live the life of faith in the midst of the world.<sup>21</sup>

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20. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, gen. ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia, 1966), 44:277.

21. Lee Hardy, *The Fabric of This World: Inquiries into Calling, Career Choice, and the Design of Human Work* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 50-51. For general treatments of Luther's doctrine of vocation, see Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (St. Louis: Concordia, 1957); and Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972). Althaus, *The Ethics of Luther*, 10, summarizes Luther's position well: “[S]ince the Christian has received the meaning and value of his life through God's gracious act of justification, all tasks and works of

For my purpose, it is significant that Luther, despite his clear affirmation of the distinction between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of earth, views the work of believers in their respective worldly vocations as a priestly service. When believers engage their callings in order to promote the good of others, they do so *as believers*, as those who have received the promise of free justification and acceptance with God on the basis of Christ's righteousness alone. When believers perform the duties that belong to their proper vocation in life—whether as a husband, wife, father, mother, son, daughter, schoolteacher, farmer, tradesman, etc.—they are performing a religious service that is born of faith and offered in grateful obedience to Christ. Even the rich biblical teaching regarding the Christian life as a self-denying and cross-bearing life is directly linked by Luther with the Christian's vocation: "I ask you where our suffering is to be found. I shall tell you: Run through all the stations of life, from the lowest to the highest, and you will find what you are looking for ... therefore do not worry where you can find suffering. That is not necessary. Simply live as an earnest Christian preacher, pastor, burgher, farmer, noble, lord, and fully your office faithfully and loyally."<sup>22</sup> When Hardy speaks of the "full-time Christian service" that belongs to the Christian's fulfillment of his or her legitimate calling in life, he accurately reflects the implications of Luther's teaching regarding the Christian life.

In the case of Calvin's doctrine of vocation, it is even clearer that Christian service to others in one's daily calling is an act of spiritual service. Calvin shared Luther's repudiation of the medieval emphasis upon the monastic and contemplative life as the privileged form of service to Christ. In his commentary on Luke 10:38-42, a passage that recounts Jesus' visit to the home of Mary and Martha, Calvin strongly condemns the customary medieval allegorical interpretation of this passage. According to the medieval interpretation, Jesus' commendation of Mary was an affirmation of the contemplative life, which is the best and most desirable form of Christian service. However, in his comments on this passage, Calvin offers a robust defense of the broad understanding of the Christian's vocation in all of life:

Now this passage has been wickedly perverted to commend what is called the contemplative life. But if we aim at bringing out the genuine sense, it will appear that Christ was far from intending that His disciples should devote themselves to idle and frigid speculations. It is an ancient error that those who

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life are equally important and holy because they have been assigned to him by God's direction of his life. There are no particularly holy works. Everything that we do is secular. However, it all becomes holy when it is done in obedience to God's command and in the certainty that he will be pleased, that is, when it is done in faith."

22. Martin Luther, *Werke Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus, 1883), 51:404.

flee worldly affairs and engage wholly in contemplation are leading an angelic life. The nonsense that the Sorbonne theologians invent about this betrays their debt to Aristotle, who placed the highest and ultimate good of the human life in contemplation, which he calls the fruition of virtue. ... But we know that men were created to busy themselves with labour and that no sacrifice is more pleasing to God than when each one attends to his calling and studies to live well for the common good.<sup>23</sup>

Throughout his writings, Calvin frequently took issue with the medieval preference for a contemplative life, separated from daily work and industry. A significant dimension of human life in the image of God is our participation in the administration of God's handiwork, and our discharge of daily tasks in service to God and others. Just as God is "not the empty, idle, and almost unconscious sort that the Sophists imagine, but a watchful, effective, active sort, engaged in ceaseless activity," so those whom God redeems in Christ are called to active service and engagement with their earthly tasks.<sup>24</sup> According to Calvin, "God prefers devoted care in ruling a household, where the devout householder, clear and free of all greed, ambition, and other lusts of the flesh, keeps before him the purpose of serving God in a definite calling."<sup>25</sup> Unlike our tendency to withdraw from public life, particularly the civil and political arena, Calvin is well-known for his active engagement with the civil community. In his treatment of the calling of the state and civil magistracy, Calvin notes that "they have a mandate from God, have been invested with divine authority, and are wholly God's representatives, in a manner, acting as his vicegerents."<sup>26</sup> For this reason, political service is not to be disdained by believers, but embraced as a high and legitimate calling. "Accordingly, no one ought to doubt that civil authority is a calling, not only holy and lawful before God, but also the most sacred and by far the most honorable of all callings in the whole Christian life of mortal men."<sup>27</sup>

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23. *A Harmony of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke*, trans. T.H.L. Parker, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 2:88. For general treatments of Calvin's view of the Christian life, including his doctrine of vocation, see Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1959); John H. Leith, *John Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1989); W. Fred Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary: John Calvin and His Socio-Economic Impact* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1971); and André Biéler, *The Social Humanism of Calvin*, trans. Paul T. Fuhrmann (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1964).

24. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), I.xvi.3.

25. *Institutes*, IV.xiii.16.

26. *Institutes*, IV.xx.4.

27. *Institutes*, IV.xx.4.

Although I have only provided a sampling of Calvin's understanding, it should be evident that Calvin, even more than Luther, had a robust view of the believer's calling to serve God, and all who bear his image, in every legitimate sphere of human endeavor within God's creation. Like Luther, Calvin did not ascribe any religious value or merit to such service, as though it formed a partial basis for our acceptance with God. In this respect, Calvin shared Luther's emphasis upon the doctrine of justification by grace alone through the work of Christ as a liberating doctrine. Within the framework of the believer's acceptance with God, Calvin viewed service to God and others as an expression of free obedience and obedient freedom. In every legitimate vocation, believers are called to a life of holiness in self-sacrificial service to God and to neighbor.

#### 4. Conclusion

When the four broad themes that I have identified are correlated, they constitute a compelling case for viewing the entire life of the Christian as one of service to Christ, the mediator of redemption. Rather than separating life into two compartments, the one a "common" realm of worldly or secular activity, the other an "uncommon" realm of spiritual or churchly activity, these themes contribute to an integrated view of all of life in service to Jesus Christ and the coming of his kingdom. The Christian life is not relegated to the domain of the church or to the activities of the church on the Lord's Day. Rather, the Christian life is a life of new obedience worked by the Spirit of Christ in all those who share his anointing. Even though believers, to use the language of the Heidelberg Catechism, only make "a small beginning" of the perfect obedience that is required of them (Q. & A. 114), they do make a beginning. And that beginning is a foretaste of what will be true of believers in perfection in the life to come.

To illustrate what I mean by this, let me turn to each of these themes and summarize how they address the question of the Christian's calling to serve Christ in all of life.

The first theme, which addresses the relation between creation and redemption, militates against the dualism that lies at the core of the 2KNL perspective. If Christ's work of redemption aims to restore human beings to fellowship with God, and to enable those whom God redeems to fulfill their destiny as image-bearers of God, then *the Christian life is nothing more or less than human life being restored to the way it is supposed to be.*

When 2KNL advocates press the question—what specific difference does it make, at a technical or behavioral level, to the calling of butchers, bakers, and candlestick makers, that some are Christians and others are not?—they put the question badly. No doubt, at the technical level there is a great deal of similarity, even apparent identi-



ty, between the way Christians and non-Christians slice a piece of meat, bake a loaf of bread, or perhaps even make a candlestick. After all, Christian and non-Christian alike live in God's world and can only ignore its order and laws at their own peril. Just as both are subject to the laws of gravity in the physical order, so both are subject to the same rules and procedures that belong to the rich diversity of life in God's world. But since Christ's office as redeemer is to reclaim the human race (in the elect) for God, and to redress the brokenness of human life in sin and under the curse of God, he makes it possible for believers to live genuinely in every proper and normal (according to the norm) area of human life before God. Christ's work of redemption aims to realize God's original purpose for the destiny of human life in communion with God, and in cultivating the garden of creation to his glory. The world that Christ redeems, including the new humanity, is a world that he shares with believers who are co-heirs with him of all that properly belongs to him. Christians belong to Christ body and soul, and they live in a world that Christ claims for himself—how then could they but live as those who serve, love, and give thankful praise to Christ in everything?

While this way of putting things may seem rather abstract, it can be further refined in terms of the Christian's participation in Christ's anointing by the Spirit. Whatever Christians know or say is inseparable from the truth as it is in Christ, the Word through whom all things were created and in whom all things cohere. What do Christians know or say that can be separated from the truth as it is in Christ, or the prophetic calling that is theirs in Christ? In their priestly service in union with Christ, believers offer their "bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Rom. 12:1). They place themselves in service to God and others who bear his image, consecrating their lives, marriages, families, earthly vocations, political witness, eating and drinking, to God's glory and their neighbor's good. In Christ, they begin to "redeem the times" that God gives them (Eph. 5:16), offering a life that is a kind of firstfruits of the worship that will be theirs in the world to come. And as kings they participate in Christ's kingdom, opposing every conspiracy against his Word and fighting against their sworn enemies, the devil, the world under the tyranny of sin, and their own sinful flesh. The scope of the Christian's participation in Christ's threefold office leaves no area of their lives untouched or unsanctified by the renewing work of the Holy Spirit. In the discharge of their holy calling as prophets, priests, and kings, believers are never severed from, or able to carry out their work without recognizing that they are the purchased property of Jesus Christ.

The theme of the Christian life as a life of grateful obedience, normed by the holy law of God, likewise underscores the impossibility of drawing a sharp divide between a Christian's service in the disparate realms of a "common" and a "spiritual" kingdom. When Christ

by his Spirit renews the believer after his image, the comprehensive claims of the moral law of God, summarized in the Ten Commandments and fulsomely disclosed throughout the Scriptures, lay claim to the whole of life. Contrary to the 2KNL suggestion that the “natural law” of God is a sufficient norm for the conduct of Christian and non-Christian alike in the “common kingdom,” the biblical revelation of God’s will for human conduct clarifies and enriches our understanding of what it means to serve God and neighbor in all of life. As any student of the Scriptures is able to confirm, the Scriptures speak to all of life, offering a rich resource for ascertaining what manner of life is pleasing to God. While the Scriptures require careful interpretation by means of a responsible hermeneutic, they are able to equip thoroughly the believer for every good work (2 Tim. 3:17). When believers seek to live by the Spirit in a manner that is pleasing to God, they do so recognizing the radical and comprehensive claim of the law of God upon them, a law that demands perfect and undivided love for God and his kingdom and self-denying love for the neighbor who bears his image. There is no nook or cranny of the Christian life that is non-spiritual or common, as if it were unsanctified by the life-giving Spirit of Christ.

Within the framework of these biblical themes, Christians engage their worldly calling or vocation in the confidence that it is a genuinely Christian, spiritual service. Christian husbands and wives are called to live within the estate of marriage from the conviction that this estate was fashioned by God for their good, and for the good of society as a whole. Furthermore, they seek in their marriage to reflect the relationship between Christ and his church (Eph. 5:23-25). Christian parents and children are likewise summoned to serve each other “in the Lord” (Eph. 6:1), honoring God’s will for parents and children. The same holds true for Christian laborers, businesspersons, students, artists, writers, scholars, even “butchers, bakers, and candlestick makers.” All are called to serve God and others in his name in the discharge of their holy vocation. What this entails precisely in every case and circumstance is not easy to determine. But that it is required seems to me undeniable. How else could we make sense of the Christian’s spiritual service as a royal priest and prophet of God?

Perhaps the most lamentable feature of the 2KNL perspective is that it discourages Christians from properly addressing the question, how am I called to serve Christ in my particular station or calling? Indeed, from the standpoint of the 2KNL perspective, this question is wrongly put, even inappropriate. While 2KNL proponents do not deny that believers serve God, or Christ as mediator of creation, in the arena of the common kingdom, they do deny that such service has any other warrant than that provided by the doctrines of creation and providence. Consequently, there is nothing in the Christian gospel and the work of Christ as redeemer that gives direction to, or

warrants, the believer's life within the common kingdom or world. The service of Christians in the common kingdom is of a piece with the service of non-Christians, and it has no vital connection with the gospel or Christ's work of redemption. It is, strictly speaking, a "secular" and not a "spiritual" service. The problem with this perspective is that it can only encourage Christians to withdraw from engaging the world in a distinctively Christian manner. Or, to put it differently, it can only encourage the secularizing of human life in God's world and the privatizing of the claims of Christ upon it.

A better perspective on the Christian life is provided for us in the well-known first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism. The themes I have outlined are all nicely captured in this first question and answer, and so I will conclude with it:

Q. What is your only comfort in life and death?

A. That I, with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, wherefore by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him.