

# ONE KINGDOM OR TWO?

## AN EVALUATION OF THE ‘TWO KINGDOMS’ DOCTRINE AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO NEO-CALVINISM

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### 1. Introduction

WITHIN THE NORTH American Reformed community, a number of writers have recently advocated what is popularly known as the “two kingdoms” paradigm or perspective.<sup>1</sup> Proponents of the two kingdoms approach to the Christian’s calling in the world have vigorously argued that it represents an older, even predominant, Reformed perspective upon the Christian’s calling in the world, especially in the areas of culture and the so-called public square. According to its advocates, the two kingdoms perspective expresses a biblically satisfying and practically useful understanding of the calling of Christians who are to live “in” but are not to be “of” the world.<sup>2</sup> In particular, the two kingdoms perspective on the complicated issue of Christianity and culture offers a more satisfying and coherent approach to the Christian’s vocation in the world than the neo-Calvinist perspective of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, which was advanced in the late-nineteenth century in the Netherlands.<sup>3</sup> Contrary to the neo-Calvinist insistence upon the Christian

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1. 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); 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).

2. David VanDrunen, “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.

3. For an exposition and defense of the neo-Calvinist paradigm, the following sources are representative: Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005 [1985]); Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Engaging God’s World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of*

believer's vocation to transform all of life in conscious subjection to the lordship of Jesus Christ, the "two kingdom's" alternative sharply distinguishes between Christ's "redemptive" kingdom, the church, and Christ's "common" kingdom, which comprises all those areas of human life and culture that are not properly part of Christ's redemptive kingdom.

Although the topic of the two kingdoms approach to the vocation of Christians in public life and culture is much too large to consider adequately in an article like this one, I am convinced that it needs to be addressed in a preliminary way, and in a manner that is accessible to a general audience. This is the case for several reasons.

First, proponents of the two kingdoms perspective often claim that it is not only the most cogent approach to the question of Christianity and culture but it is also the oldest, most common approach in the history of Reformed theology. If not on the side of the angels, the two kingdoms perspective is on the side of history, so far as a distinctively Reformed understanding of the Christian's calling in the public square is concerned. Whereas the neo-Calvinist alternative is treated somewhat condescendingly as a proverbial new-kid-on-the-block, the two kingdoms doctrine is alleged to be the venerable, original position of the Reformed churches. From the vantage point of a convinced partisan of the two kingdoms doctrine, neo-Calvinism and other perspectives on the Christian life in the world appear sub-Reformed. Though the historical claim on the part of two kingdoms advocates will not be my focus in this article, it represents a tendentious reading of the historical record. In the history of the Reformed churches, there are diverse perspectives on the difficult question of the Christian's calling in the world. To speak of "the" Reformed doctrine of the "two kingdoms," therefore, lumps together a range of views that are anything but uniform.<sup>4</sup>

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*Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959); and Michael Green and Craig Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008). For a classic presentation of neo-Calvinism by one of its principal architects, see: Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931); and James D. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). While I would acknowledge that some features of neo-Calvinism represent a revision (and improvement) upon some aspects of the public theology of John Calvin and the early Reformers, I believe it is in many respects less new than some of the emphases of the two kingdoms paradigm.

4. Interestingly, while working on this article, I received a recent volume of essays on the theology of John Calvin. One of the essays in this volume, a study of similarities and differences between John Calvin and Heinrich Bullinger, offers a direct criticism of the claims of contemporary two kingdoms authors who claim greater unanimity among the leading Reformers on the topic than is warranted. See Emidio Campi, "Probing similarities and differences between John Calvin and Heinrich Bullinger," in *Calvinus clarissimus theologus: Papers of the Tenth International Congress on Calvin Research*, ed. by Herman J. Selderhuis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 97-105. Campi not only argues against the attempt

Second, among the biblical arguments for the two kingdoms perspective, there are some that seem to me to be at variance with more common interpretations in the history of Reformed theology. In the course of presenting a biblical case for the two kingdoms perspective, advocates have offered rather eccentric interpretations of: 1) the relation between God's work of creation and redemption; 2) the pre-fall covenant of works in relation to the post-fall covenant of grace; 3) the relation between Christ's office as Mediator of creation and as Mediator of redemption; 4) the necessity and sufficiency of Scripture as a norm for Christian conduct in all areas of life; and 5) the adequacy of natural law for a fulsome discernment of God's will for public life and culture. Admittedly, these are large subjects that will only be addressed in a limited way in what follows. However, the alignment of the two kingdoms perspective with these kinds of biblical-theological emphases, which do not represent mainstream Reformed readings of the biblical story of creation, fall, and redemption, belies the claim of two kingdoms proponents that theirs is simply the older Reformed view of the Christian's calling in the public square. Rather, in respect to these issues, the two kingdoms view is often tethered to a new, revised form of covenant theology that has roots in more recent developments in Reformed theology as much as in older, more traditional formulations.

Third, some of the attraction of the two kingdoms approach derives from the problems that are allegedly inherent in the neo-Calvinist view of the Christian's vocation in public and cultural endeavors. When neo-Calvinists speak of the Christian's calling to "redeem" or "transform" culture, two kingdoms advocates argue that this language implies a somewhat pretentious and triumphalist expectation for what Christians are capable of accomplishing in the world prior to Christ's return at the end of the present age. Such language also begs the question regarding how Christian conduct in cultural and social endeavors differs from that of non-Christians. For those who advocate the two kingdoms perspective, human conduct in the common kingdom of life and culture is the same for believer and unbeliever alike. The two kingdoms perspective, therefore, liberates Christians from the burden of having to find a distinctively Christian way of living in the "common kingdom." It also liberates believers from the temptation to confuse common human obligations under the cultural mandate with the particular obligations that hold for believers alone within the redemptive kingdom of Christ, the church. Within the "common kingdom," believers and unbelievers alike are governed by the same standards and norms,

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to lump the early Reformers together on the topic of the relation of church and state, but he also directly rebuts the claim of two kingdoms proponents that Calvin derived a "dual ethic" from the distinction between Christ's twofold rule in church and state (100, fn 27).

which are accessible to all through God's natural law and providential ordering of all things. Unlike the neo-Calvinist project, which calls for the transformation of human life under the lordship of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, the two kingdoms project promises a far simpler, less pretentious and burdensome view of the vocation of human beings within the framework of the common kingdom of God.

And fourth, though proponents of the "two kingdom" approach to the Christian life claim that it does not undermine the enterprise of Christian education or schooling, the main tenets of this approach do pull the rug out from underneath one of the most important arguments for Christian education. Because the two kingdoms approach regards education as an enterprise that belongs to the "common" or "natural" kingdom," it rejects the notion that Christians should pursue the integration of faith and learning, or cultivate a distinctively Christian approach to the academic disciplines. The calling to "take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5) may well be a proper one in the "spiritual kingdom" of the church, in the study of Scripture and theology, but this calling does not include the obligation to develop a distinctively Christian approach to the sciences within the academy. Though proponents of the two kingdoms perspective acknowledge a variety of reasons to establish Christian schools, they oppose the claim that such schools fulfill a biblical mandate to furnish the children of believers with a God-centered and Christ-honoring Christian education. Accordingly, there is a considerable difference of viewpoint between the two kingdoms perspective and neo-Calvinism, when it comes to the important issue of the desirability of Christian education and schools.

For these reasons, a careful evaluation of the two kingdoms perspective, even if it be only a preliminary one, is incumbent upon Reformed Christians who wish to address responsibly the important question of the Christian's calling in the world. This question is an inherently important one. Every Christian needs to think carefully about what it means to serve Christ in the world in every legitimate area of human conduct. But it has become an especially timely one within the Reformed community, due to the emergence and vigorous promotion in recent times of the two kingdoms approach. As these four considerations illustrate, the two kingdoms approach has far-reaching implications for the way Reformed Christians behave in the public square of human life and culture. For those who have historically supported the cause of Christian education, it is especially important to think anew about the rationale that has historically undergirded the difficult enterprise of Christian education.

In order to achieve my goal in this article, which is to offer a preliminary and somewhat popular evaluation of the two kingdoms perspective, I will begin with a relatively brief summary of the main

features of the two kingdoms position. Since there are differences among its proponents, I will primarily rely in this summary upon the writings of David VanDrunen, the most prominent and prolific defender of the two kingdoms viewpoint.<sup>5</sup> Where it helps to clarify the distinctiveness of the two kingdoms perspective, I will occasionally offer a comparison with the neo-Calvinist alternative. After providing a summary of the main features of the two kingdoms perspective, I will turn, in the main and most important part of my article, to an evaluation of its principal tenets. In the course of my evaluation, I will identify several attractive features of the two kingdoms perspective, some of which offer a necessary corrective to possible vulnerabilities in the neo-Calvinist view. In the concluding portion of my evaluation, I will return to some of the more troublesome features of the two kingdoms perspective that I have briefly noted in my introduction.

## 2. A Summary of the Main Features of the Two Kingdoms Paradigm

While the two kingdoms paradigm is more complex and sophisticated in its view of the Christian's calling in the world than our summary will suggest, for our purpose it will be sufficient to identify briefly two of its principal features. The first of these features, the sharp distinction between the "two kingdoms," is most important. As the language of two kingdoms attests, the distinction between God's "common" kingdom and his "redemptive" kingdom is the basic principle that shapes many of the characteristic emphases of this approach to the Christian's calling in the world. Once the legitimacy of a sharp delineation of these "two kingdoms" is acknowledged, the other features of this paradigm for the Christian's engagement with the world find their appropriate place. The second feature of the two kingdoms perspective is a companion of the first. Because the two kingdoms are distinct realms or spheres within which God exercises his sovereign rule throughout the course of history, they are governed by two likewise divergent norms or standards. The standards for the conduct of human beings in the first, or common, kingdom are not the same as the standards for the conduct of believers in the second or redemptive kingdom. In addition to an identification of these two principal tenets of the two kingdoms perspective, our summary will also identify the biblical

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5. David VanDrunen is undeniably the principal contemporary architect and proponent of the two kingdoms paradigm. Since I recognize that there may be proponents of the two kingdoms paradigm who differ with VanDrunen at some points, my summary and evaluation should be read primarily as an analysis of his view, and only secondarily of others where they may share a number of his emphases.

arguments that are advanced in support of them. Finally, since proponents of the two kingdoms view claim that it offers a more satisfying and coherent approach to the calling of Christians in society and culture, several of the alleged benefits of this paradigm will be noted.

### 2.1. The Two Kingdoms

The most compelling feature of the two kingdoms paradigm is its relatively clear presentation of the way the Triune God governs the conduct of human beings within the distinct contexts of creation and redemption. The two kingdoms roughly correspond to the two ways God governs human life within the order of creation and providence and within the order of redemption. In the two kingdoms perspective, the biblical story of redemption is not understood so much as a story of God's restorative and re-creative grace, which re-establishes God's reign within a creation disordered and broken through human rebellion against God's holy law, but as a story of a new creation that God sovereignly grants to his people through the person and work of his Son, Jesus Christ, the Mediator of redemption. Rather than viewing the Triune God's purpose in redemption as the renewal of the creation, which was broken through the sinful rebellion of the human race in Adam (and his posterity) and lies under God's curse, the two kingdoms perspective views the purpose of redemption as the introduction of a new, heavenly kingdom which stands alongside or above the common kingdom of creation. On the one hand, God governs the creation by his natural law and providence; on the other hand, God governs the redemptive kingdom by his redemptive Spirit and Word. These two different ways of governing correspond to Christ's distinct offices as Mediator of creation and 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 graces of justification or acceptance with God and the inheritance of eternal life in the consummation of the redemptive kingdom.

David VanDrunen, one of the leading contemporary proponents of the two kingdoms perspective, offers a useful description of the distinction between what he prefers to term 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:

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>6</sup>

In VanDrunen's 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 introduction of the state or civil authority with the "power of the sword" to maintain justice and outward order in society; the cultural mandate to exercise 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 are non-Christian and Christian alike. Whatever does not pertain directly to the redemptive and spiritual rule of Christ in the affairs of his church, belongs to the common kingdom. In this

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

realm, believers and unbelievers are subject to the rule of God as the Creator of all things, and not as the Redeemer. 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 calling and ministry of the institutional church of Jesus Christ. The redemptive or spiritual kingdom of God is the church, the one realm over which Christ reigns directly as the Mediator of redemption.

Though the distinction between these two kingdoms might suggest that the common kingdom is morally neutral or not subject to the kingship of the Triune God, the two kingdoms perspective "strongly affirms the biblical truth that God rules all things in his Son."<sup>7</sup> What the two kingdoms view denies is that Christ's rule in the common kingdom is directly related to his rule in the spiritual kingdom. Because the purposes of Christ's rule as Mediator of creation are distinct from his purposes as Mediator of redemption, the neo-Calvinist emphasis upon the redemptive transformation of all of life, including life in the common kingdom, represents a confusion of creation and redemption. Contrary to the neo-Calvinist encouragement of distinctive Christian conduct within the realm of the common kingdom, the two kingdoms perspective argues that "Christians are to pursue the full scope of cultural vocations with obedience, excellence, and godliness, but also that *redemptive transformation is not the correct grid for understanding this work.*"<sup>8</sup> Within the common kingdom, there are no "uniquely Christian" ways of acting that believers are burdened to discern and pursue. Since God's rule in the order of creation is common to unbelievers and believers, there is a considerable "commonality" among them in their mutual subjection to God's rule through providence and natural law. So far as the common kingdom is concerned, the antithesis between believers and unbelievers is relatively unimportant.<sup>9</sup> The antithesis pertains principally to God's redemptive or spiritual kingdom, which represents a new and heavenly reality born of the working of God's grace in Christ.

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7. VanDrunen, "The Two Kingdoms and Reformed Christianity," 32.

8. VanDrunen, "The Two Kingdoms and Reformed Christianity," 32 (emphasis mine).

9. There is some ambiguity regarding the difference between the two kingdoms paradigm and the well-known distinction of the influential church father, Augustine, between the "city of God" and the "city of man." In some instances VanDrunen draws a fairly close connection between the Augustinian doctrine of two cities, and the two kingdoms paradigm. See, e.g., *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 23-24; *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 13, 24-25; and *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, 24-25. In one instance, however, VanDrunen argues that the "two cities" view of Augustine, though compatible with the two kingdoms doctrine, differs rather significantly from it. See "The Two Kingdoms and Reformed Christianity," 32: "The Reformers shared Augustine's basic Two Cities perspective, but the Two Kingdoms doctrine that emerged in Reformed circles got at a different issue."

## 2.2. The Twofold Rule of Christ as Mediator of Creation and as Mediator of Redemption

The second feature of the two kingdoms paradigm is its emphasis upon two different norms or standards for the conduct of believers in the common and in the spiritual kingdoms. In his office as Mediator of creation, Christ rules the common kingdom by means of his providential will and natural law. By means of his rule as Mediator of creation, Christ preserves the world, including its appropriate institutions and activities, so that they may adequately serve legitimate temporal and provisional ends. However, in his office as Mediator of redemption, Christ rules the spiritual kingdom by his Spirit and Word. By means of his rule as Mediator of redemption, Christ graciously calls a heavenly kingdom into existence (the church) so that it may serve eternal and ultimate ends that will be consummated in the new heaven and the new earth. Thus, in the language of traditional Reformed theology, the two kingdoms perspective maintains that “general revelation” is a sufficient norm for the conduct of human beings in society and culture on the one hand, and that “special revelation” is a sufficient norm for the conduct of believers in the church of Jesus Christ on the other.

## 2.3. Natural Law: The Standard for Human Conduct in the Common Kingdom

In the two kingdoms perspective, human life within the common kingdom is based upon the preserving and governing work of Christ as Mediator of creation. The norm for human conduct in the common kingdom is the “natural law” of God, which is known by human beings through conscience and the apprehension of God’s will for human life within the order of creation. The “natural” law refers to the law of God as it relates to the natural order or creation. The requirements of the natural law, unlike the requirements of the law as it was revealed throughout the course of redemptive history to God’s covenant people, are known by all human beings who bear God’s image (Rom. 2:12-16). 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>10</sup>

Unlike the standard for the conduct of believers within the spiritual kingdom, the church, the natural law is an appropriate moral standard for the common kingdom. A common moral realm in which all human beings are members, is properly governed by a

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10. *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 1.

common moral standard. Because the common kingdom serves common ends and fulfills common tasks, it must be governed by a standard that is objectively given and knowable to all of its members. Regardless of their divergent religious convictions, all human beings are inhabitants of the common kingdom. As such they are obligated to fulfill the cultural mandate and to maintain a just order through the institution of the state, which is entrusted with the power of the sword to maintain justice and equity in human society. Because the common kingdom is for human beings insofar as they are created and sustained by God, it is governed by the natural law, which morally obligates all human beings as creatures who bear God's image and likeness. The common kingdom is governed, therefore, by a common or natural law that is a sufficient standard for the fulfillment of its tasks.<sup>11</sup>

#### 2.4. The Spirit and Word of Christ: the Standard for Christian Conduct in the Spiritual Kingdom

Though all human beings are able to apprehend adequately what the natural law of God requires for human conduct in the common kingdom, this is not true in the redemptive or spiritual kingdom. The church of Jesus Christ, which is the present expression of the spiritual rule of Christ as Mediator of redemption, is not governed by the natural law or the rule of natural justice. The church is governed by the special revelation of God in Scripture, and is called to express a distinctive culture that radically differs from the culture that obtains in the common kingdom. The church is ruled directly by Christ as the Mediator of redemption, and is exclusively commissioned to minister the gospel of God's redemptive grace in Christ. By means of the ministry of the Spirit and Word of Christ, the church exercises a spiritual power to admit or exclude human beings from membership. In the worship and ministry of the church, whether in terms of the appointment of church officers, or the administration of the Word and sacraments, or the exercise of faithful church discipline, the church answers directly to Christ alone. The scepter of Christ's spiritual kingdom is the Word of God, and the church is called to be subject to this Word alone.

Although it is not necessary here to spell out all of the ways in which Christ's redemptive rule expresses itself in the church, there are some obvious differences between this rule and Christ's rule over the common kingdom. According to the two kingdoms construction,

[u]nlike the institutions of the common kingdom, the church lives by an ethic of forgiveness that transcends the claims of

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11. VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 38.

justice, by an ethic of generosity that defies the scarcity of economic resources, and by a missionary evangelism that shuns coercion. The church does not trample on the authority of common kingdom institutions. Unlike these other institutions, its authority derives from the Scriptures *alone*.<sup>12</sup>

As this statement suggests, there are a number of ways in which the redemptive rule of Christ through Scripture differs from the common rule of Christ through natural law. In Christ's redemptive rule, the Holy Spirit subdues the hearts of believers so that they submit their consciences inwardly and freely to his authority. In his rule over the common kingdom, Christ outwardly constrains obedience by his providence and through the dictates of the natural law. Whereas believers freely submit to Christ's gracious rule over the church, the institution of the state, which is one of the primary instruments of Christ's rule over the common kingdom, is only able to coerce an external submission to the rule of law, upon pain of punishment in the event of disobedience by lawbreakers. Furthermore, the obedience of human beings within the common kingdom is governed by a natural law that is liable to diverse applications in practice. Because the common kingdom is not directly governed by Scriptural teaching, it is not appropriate to appeal directly to Scripture for insight with respect to concrete tasks in the common kingdom that fall to both believers and unbelievers.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, though Scripture is the governing authority within the redemptive kingdom of the church, it is not the governing authority in the common kingdom. The calling to engage in the activities of education, politics, and culture, is a common calling, and therefore one in which believers are "to work alongside unbelievers in pursuing them."<sup>14</sup>

## 2.5. The Biblical Arguments for the Two Kingdoms Paradigm

In my introduction, I observed that advocates of the two kingdoms position believe that it offers a more biblically satisfying and practically useful approach to the Christian's calling in the world than that offered by neo-Calvinism. Now that we have summarized the most important features of the two kingdoms view, it will be helpful to consider these two items. How do advocates of the two kingdoms position argue from Scripture? And why is it regarded to be more practically useful than the neo-Calvinist view?

Consistent with its distinction between the common kingdom and the redemptive kingdom, the two kingdoms perspective begins

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12. VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 31 (emphasis VanDrunen's).

13. VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 31.

14. VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 31.

with a consideration of the original state of creation and the calling of human beings, represented in Adam, before the fall into sin. In the biblical account of creation, Adam was created as the first human being who bore the image of God, and who was given the mandate to be fruitful and multiply and to exercise dominion over the creation under God. The cultural mandate was given to Adam, and in Adam to the entire human race. With this mandate, God also promised Adam the “goal and reward” of eternal life in a new and perfected creation, which would far surpass the sinless world into which Adam was first created.<sup>15</sup> The original covenant relationship that Adam (and the human race in him) enjoyed with God was a “covenant of works.” Were Adam to have obeyed God perfectly in accordance with the demands of the pre-fall covenant relationship, he would have “earned” for himself and his posterity the reward of the “eschatological world-to-come.” However, by falling into sin, Adam lost any possibility of securing the covenant inheritance of eternal life by way of his work of obedience, plunging thereby the entire human race into sin and bringing upon himself and his posterity the judgment-curse of God.

Since the fall into sin by the first Adam, the only way to secure the inheritance of a glorified life in the world-to-come is through the work of the second Adam, Jesus Christ. The obedience of Christ, the second Adam, included not only his suffering the penalty for sin on behalf of his people but also his fulfillment of the task that was given to Adam. By virtue of Christ’s obedience to the task that was originally given to Adam, believers have become the heirs to the promise of a future world-to-come. As recipients of this promise by grace, believers are no longer subject as believers to the cultural mandate and obedience required of Adam. Christ has discharged all that was required of Adam, and to suggest that those who belong to Christ by faith need to obey this task in order to receive the promise of glorified life would be to treat them like “little Adams” whose inheritance of glorified life must be “earned” through obedience. VanDrunen expresses this claim clearly:

We are not little Adams. Instead, God gives us a share in the world-to-come as a gift of free grace in Christ and then calls us to live obediently in this world as a grateful response. Our cultural activities do not in any sense usher in the new creation. The new creation has been earned and attained once and for all by Christ, the last Adam. Cultural activity remains important for Christians, but it will come to an abrupt end, along with this present world as a whole, when

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15. VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 28.

Christ returns and cataclysmically ushers in the new heaven and new earth.<sup>16</sup>

Because Christ fulfilled the task first given to the human race in Adam, and because his redemptive work secured the inheritance for believers of glorified life in the age-to-come, believers are not to view their cultural activities in the world as a redemptive transformation of the brokenness of the created order. Though they engage in such activities in common with unbelievers within the framework of the common kingdom, they may not ascribe any ultimate significance or abiding value to such pursuits.

In the two kingdoms paradigm, the biblical view of history under God's dominion is defined by the two different covenants, the covenant with Noah and the covenant with Abraham, that formally established the common kingdom and the redemptive kingdom respectively.

Early in Genesis God established two covenants, by which the two kingdoms were formally established. In his covenant with Noah God entered covenantal relationship with the entire human race (and with the entire creation), promising to preserve its cultural activities such as procreating and securing justice. This was the formal establishment of the "common kingdom." In his covenant with Abraham, in contrast, God entered covenantal relationship with a chosen people, upon whom he bestows eternal salvation by faith, thereby distinguishing them from the rest of the human race. This was the formal establishment of the "redemptive kingdom." God's people are thus called to live under two covenants—that is, in two kingdoms. On the one hand, they respect the terms of the Noachic covenant as they pursue a variety of cultural activities in common with unbelievers. On the other hand, they embrace the terms of the Abrahamic covenant of grace as they cling to the promises of salvation and eternal life in a new creation and as they gather in worshiping communities distinguished from the unbelieving world.<sup>17</sup>

The course of human history, therefore, is defined in terms of the respective place of the two kingdoms. On the one hand, believers are joined in a common task with unbelievers to engage in cultural pursuits and activities. "Civil governments, families, economic associations, and many other cultural institutions continue to exist under the covenant with Noah, and Christians and non-Christians

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16. VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 29.

17. VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 29.

alike participate in them and, in many respects, cooperate in their activities.”<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, believers are distinguished from the world and non-believers by virtue of their membership in the redemptive kingdom, the church. As citizens of this kingdom, Christians are pilgrims and exiles on the earth, waiting for the coming of Christ and the creation of the new heaven and the new earth.

## 2.6. The practical benefits of the Two Kingdoms Paradigm

In the estimation of proponents of the two kingdoms paradigm, there are several practical benefits that commend it as an alternative to neo-Calvinism. These practical benefits redress some problems that are inherent to neo-Calvinism, and provide a more useful answer to the challenges confronting Christians as they engage in cultural endeavors.

The first, and perhaps the most significant, benefit of the two kingdoms paradigm is that it preserves the unique and primary calling of the church to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ through the ministry of the ordinary means of grace, the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. Whereas it is alleged that the neo-Calvinist perspective tends to diminish the role of the church in the realization of God’s purposes of redemption, the two kingdoms doctrine reserves to the church the exclusive right and competence to proclaim the gospel and fulfill the “great commission” given to it by the risen Christ. Rather than encouraging the church to become preoccupied with issues that pertain to the common kingdom of human culture and society, the two kingdoms perspective insists that the church remain focused upon its peculiar calling, the ministry of the gospel of the redemptive kingdom of Christ. The church is the only divinely-appointed instrument for gospel preaching, and it is the only institution that embodies in the present age the presence of the redemptive kingdom of Christ. In a period of history that has witnessed the unfortunate meddling of the church in the affairs of the civil community, the two kingdoms view repudiates any confusion of the Christian gospel with a political and moral program for the re-ordering of the civil and cultural order. By insisting that the church remain true to its particular calling and task, the gospel of Jesus Christ is preserved in its integrity and not identified directly with any political or cultural agenda, whether “conservative” (Moral Majority) or “progressive” (social gospel). The gospel should be not confused with a political and cultural agenda, and the two kingdoms paradigm is precisely aimed at ensuring that this not occur.

The second benefit of the two kingdoms paradigm is closely linked to the first. The integrity of the gospel depends upon a clear

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18. VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 30.

distinction between the gracious benefits of free justification and eternal life, which are obtained for believers exclusively by Christ through his perfect obedience and fulfillment of the requirements of the original covenant of works, and the non-redemptive nature of the Christian's conduct in the common kingdom. For advocates of the two kingdoms perspective, any insistence upon the "redemptive" or "transformative" character of Christian obedience in the order of creation inevitably compromises the freedom of the Christian from obligations to fulfill the cultural mandate as part of his or her Christian calling in the world. If Christian believers are subject to the cultural mandate as part of their obedience as members of Christ, then the redemptive kingdom of Christ would be confused with the common kingdom. Rather than viewing the redemptive kingdom as a wholly gracious regime, which Christ governs by his Spirit and Word in the redemptive sphere of the church, it would be viewed as a regime whose presence is partly dependent upon human achievement under terms that belong to a non-gracious and non-redemptive covenant. In the two kingdoms perspective, Christ alone achieves by his obedience the present reality of the redemptive kingdom, the church. And Christ alone will graciously grant the consummate or eschatological form of the redemptive kingdom with his coming at the end of the present age. So far as the new heaven and the new earth are concerned, Christian believers wait upon Christ to grant what he alone has obtained for them. To express this point in more theological terms, the "inauguration" (the already) of Christ's redemptive kingdom is restricted to the gathering of the church as a new community of redeemed persons. The "future" (not yet) realization of this redemptive kingdom awaits the return of Christ in glory. From the point of view of the two kingdoms perspective, neo-Calvinism has an "over-realized" eschatology, which expects for this age prior to Christ's return what belongs properly to the age to come.

A third benefit of the two kingdoms paradigm is a corollary of the first two. In the biblical depiction of the status of Christ's people in the redemptive kingdom, there is little or no hint that they are called to transform human life and culture in a comprehensive way. The ethic of the redemptive kingdom is marked by a call to show mercy, to exercise forgiveness, to forswear the patterns of conduct that govern the affairs of the civil community and the shapers of culture. The culture of the redemptive kingdom is in many respects a "counter-culture," the expression of a manner of life that goes against the grain of the kind of life that characterizes the common kingdom. Though Christian believers are motivated differently in their activities within the common kingdom, they are subject to the same objective standards that obtain for the behavior of all human beings. Until Christ comes to consummate the kingdom in the new heaven and the new earth, Christians remain sojourners and pil-

grims, exiles whose citizenship is a heavenly and not primarily earthly. Believers are responsible, of course, to engage the world and culture, and to maintain the order of creation to the extent possible. But they may not succumb to the kind of worldly pride that presumes that the kingdom can be brought in by dint of human effort. For Christian believers, the best posture is that of the pilgrim who waits patiently for a heavenly city to come, not one of their own making, but one whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10).

The fourth, and final, benefit of the two kingdoms perspective, at least according to some of its proponents, is the way believers are liberated from the burdensome and intrinsically impossible task of pursuing a distinctively “Christian” pattern of conduct in vocations that belong to the common kingdom.<sup>19</sup> From the vantage point of the two kingdoms perspective, the whole enterprise of pursuing a uniquely “Christian” way of performing tasks that belong to the public square, to the civil community, or to activities that properly belong to the common kingdom, is impossible. No such uniquely Christian way of performing these tasks exists, precisely because they are common tasks that belong to a common kingdom of which believers and unbelievers alike are citizens. Thus, when neo-Calvinists encourage a kind of transformative approach to these tasks, one or both of two consequences follow: either believers are placed under obligations that are not warranted by the Scriptures or it is implied that their works contribute something to the completed work of Jesus Christ. In the first instance, the believer’s conscience is brought into captivity to non-biblical stipulations. And in the second instance, believers are encouraged to think that their cultural and social achievements add something to what Christ has already accomplished for them. The two kingdoms paradigm liberates believers from the kind of extra-Scriptural and impossible demands with which neo-Calvinist zealots would burden them.

### 3. An Evaluation of the Two Kingdoms Paradigm

Our treatment of the main features of the two kingdoms paradigm confirms that it represents a comprehensive approach to the difficult question of the Christian’s calling in culture and society. It also represents an approach that diverges considerably from the neo-Calvinist paradigm, which views the relation between creation and redemption in far more integrated terms. The claims of the two kingdoms perspective are far-reaching, and constitute an inescapa-

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19. See, e.g., VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 4, where he pans the neo-Calvinist attempt to form a Christian “goat breeding” society in the Netherlands and the attempt of Dordt College to fashion a football program within a “Reformed world and life view.”

ble challenge to Reformed Christians who wish to be responsibly obedient in their life before God in the world in this period between Christ's first and second comings.

In my evaluation of the two kingdoms perspective, I will begin with some observations about aspects of this approach that are commendable. In some respects, the two kingdoms view offers a corrective to the excesses of some versions of the neo-Calvinist view. If the adage is true that "iron sharpens iron," there are features of the two kingdoms paradigm that challenge neo-Calvinists to consider whether certain aspects of their view are in need of refinement. The commendable features of the two kingdoms paradigm that I will identify represent a modest attempt to acknowledge where such further refinement of neo-Calvinism may be desirable. Subsequent to my identification of these commendable features of the two kingdoms paradigm, I will identify a number of its troublesome features. The presence of these troublesome features in the two kingdoms paradigm causes me to demur finally from embracing it as a more biblically satisfying and coherent view of the Christian's calling in the world. The burden of my comments regarding these troublesome features will be that the two kingdoms perspective is not as biblical or as beneficial in terms of its implications as its proponents suggest.

### 3.1. Commendable Features

That the two kingdoms paradigm endeavors to address the difficult question of the Christian's calling in society in culture is itself commendable. The tendency within many evangelical and Reformed churches in more recent history is to narrow the claims of the gospel and the implications of the Christian faith for public life. In the western European and North American contexts, a long history of secularization has occurred, dating back roughly to the time of the eighteenth century Enlightenment.

Secularization can have at least two meanings. In one sense, secularization may simply refer to the process whereby the institutional church has lost its influence and sway in many areas of public life. The older Constantinian alliance between church and state has been deconstructed, and all citizens of the civil community are permitted a diversity of confessional commitments and practices that are in accord with them. But in another sense, secularization can also mean that human society is thoroughly desacralized and the Christian faith (and any other competing religious faith) is banished from the public square altogether. In many secularized western nations, the Christian faith is regarded as a purely "private" matter, which has no stake or interest in the broader affairs of human society and culture. Christians may worship God on Sunday

and experience communion with God within the precincts of their private prayer closet, but they may not allow their religious convictions to intrude into the arenas of public life, politics, and culture.

In a significant way, the two kingdoms perspective does not wish to divorce the Christian faith from meaningful engagement with the world. Nor does the two kingdoms view want to deny that the biblical worldview encompasses an interest in the calling of believers in the world as well as in the church. Though the two kingdoms paradigm offers a rigorously dualistic conception of how believers are to fulfill their calling before God in the respective realms of the common and the redemptive kingdoms, it nonetheless aims to offer a comprehensive account of how the full range of the activities of believers relate to biblical teaching. For the clear way in which the two kingdoms perspective engages the questions of Christianity and culture, it deserves the attention of all Reformed believers who take seriously their calling to serve God and neighbor in every area of human life and culture.

In addition to the broad service that the two kingdoms paradigm serves in keeping the question of Christ and culture alive among contemporary Christian believers, there are several positive features of this paradigm that require special notice.

### 3.2. The Distinctive Calling and Competence of the Church

One of the most attractive emphases of the two kingdoms approach is its insistence that the church remain true to its unique calling to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. No other human institution has the calling or the competence, which follows from Christ's promise to accompany the gospel with the power of Christ's Spirit, to proclaim the unsearchable riches of God's grace toward fallen sinners. By virtue of Christ's commission, it is the special task of the church to disciple the nations by means of a resolute preaching of the biblical gospel, the administration of the sacraments that accompany the Word, and to exercise faithful discipline, admitting into the fellowship of Christ all who repent and believe while excluding all who remain impenitent and unbelieving. Proponents of the two kingdoms paradigm are undoubtedly justified in their worry that the church not be distracted from this calling by a preoccupation with penultimate affairs. They are likewise on the right track in their resolution to preserve the church's singular focus upon its proper calling, particularly in the face of the temptation to enter areas of human life and culture that lie outside of the church's special competence. When the gospel of Jesus Christ is directly linked to a specific political agenda or program (whether the Moral Majority, the platform of a major political party, a particular political figure), economic system, or particular cultural agenda, the

church unnecessarily puts at risk its reputation as the steward of Christ's gospel to the nations.

In the history of the church, it is not difficult to find illustrations of the church's abandonment of its special commission for the sake of meddling in matters that lie outside of its particular competence. Nor is it difficult to find instances where the church and its members confused loyalty to Christ and the gospel with loyalty to some earthly authority, nation, or program for societal improvement or cultural transformation. For example, throughout the history of the church during the middle ages, an on-going struggle took place between the church and the civil authorities regarding their relative authority and inter-relationship. During this struggle, the church often asserted its right to exercise direct oversight in the affairs of the civil order. The "spiritual" sword wielded by the church was viewed as a higher and all-inclusive authority, including the "temporal" sword wielded by the magistrate or civil authority. During the Nazi era in Germany during the twentieth century, some segments of the church were captivated by what was known as the "German Christian" movement, which identified the emergence of the Third Reich under Hitler with God's particular purpose at that moment in history.<sup>20</sup> Civil religion, which encourages an exaggerated patriotism that views a specific nation as the pre-eminent object of God's favor, also deprives the church of its freedom to preach the gospel unfettered by competing political loyalties. Within the circle of progressive, mainline churches, the temptation during the last two centuries to conflate the gospel with progressive programs of social and economic justice has often been irresistible. A similar failure to remain true to its proper mission is evident, when the church makes pronouncements regarding contemporary issues in society and culture that lie outside of its competence.<sup>21</sup>

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20. To combat the German Christian movement, the German Evangelical Church met in Barmen, May 29-31, 1934, and issued a "theological declaration" whose principal claim was: "Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death. We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation." Historically, the Barmen Declaration was linked to Karl Barth's radical repudiation of any doctrine of general revelation. Though Barth's repudiation of general revelation went too far, his evangelical instinct to oppose a discernment of God's will by an appeal to general revelation, independent of the teaching of Scripture, was appropriate.

21. For example, the 2012 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America recently made a number of claims regarding the disputed question of "global warming." It is difficult to imagine that the Synod was acting within its mandate and competence to make judgments in a disputed matter, which continues to be studied and examined by scientists in the field—not all of whom agree about the causes of the apparent increase in earth temperatures in recent years.

There is a danger, of course, that attends this emphasis of the two kingdoms paradigm. For it is one thing to emphasize the special calling and competence of the church to preach the gospel. But it is quite another thing to say that the gospel does not speak, whether directly or indirectly, to all of life. The difficult challenge for the church is its obligation to preserve the integrity of the gospel without denying the implications of the gospel for service to God in all areas of life in his world. I will have occasion to return to this point in what follows, but it is possible to separate the redemptive message of the gospel, which the church is called to proclaim, from the social, economic, political, and cultural implications of the gospel. Just as the church may err in speaking where it is not called to speak, or pronouncing in areas outside of its competence, so the church may err (and has erred!) in failing to address social and cultural sins that are evident in contemporary society and culture. Though this is not the place to sort out the complex issue of what historically Presbyterians in North America have termed the “spirituality” of the church, there is undoubtedly a doctrine of spirituality that mutes the gospel’s testimony to the world by declaring illegitimate any social or moral pronouncements by the church. The church must remain true to its special calling to preach the gospel, but in doing so the church must recognize that it is the gospel of Christ’s *kingdom*, which addresses all of life in God’s world.<sup>22</sup>

### 3.3. The Distinctive Calling and Competence of the State

Two kingdoms proponents are fond of arguing that their position is simply the expression of the prevailing position of the Reformed churches throughout their history. Perhaps the one place where this claim has some merit is the difficult issue of the relative authority and calling of the church and the state. While there is considerable diversity on this issue in the Reformed tradition, John Calvin, who is generally recognized to be the most influential theologian in the formation of Reformed theology, articulated his doctrine of Christ’s “twofold government” (*duplex regimen*) or jurisdiction primarily to resolve the problem of the relation between ecclesiastical and civil authority. For Calvin, the twofold government of Christ articulates the way Christ governs his church spiritually by his Spirit and Word on the one hand, and the way Christ governs

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22. Neo-Calvinism has historically dealt with this question by comparing the church to the “hub” of a wheel. Though the church does not directly enter into the various spheres of life, which are under the direct authority of Christ, the church does minister a gospel of the kingdom that speaks to all of life. The church is indeed a “sign” of the presence of the kingdom of Christ, and it is the firstfruits, so to speak, of the kingdom. But it does not exhaust the whole of what belongs to Christ’s kingdom.

the civil community by the civil magistrate (with the power of the sword) on the other.<sup>23</sup>

In Calvin's doctrine of Christ's twofold rule in the church and state, two contrary impulses are resisted. The state or civil magistrate, who serves at Christ's behest and ministers his authority through the power of the sword and the administration of justice, may not usurp the special task that Christ has given to the church. The civil magistrate is not directly responsible for the calling to preach the gospel, administer the sacraments, and exercise church discipline. While the civil magistrate ought to exercise its authority in a way that promotes the cause of Christ's kingdom and church, the civil magistrate has no right to intrude into the proper affairs of the church. Calvin was in this respect opposed to what is known as an "Erastian" church polity where the state has direct authority over the church. However, Calvin was also anxious to preserve a proper respect for and subjection to the civil magistrate as a servant of Christ. Against the ana-Baptist repudiation of the legitimate authority of the civil magistrate, Calvin insisted that the civil magistrate governs all members of the civil community in accordance with its peculiar calling or office. When Calvin speaks of a "twofold government," therefore, he does not speak so much of two different realms or kingdoms. Calvin's language of "twofold government" is intended to distinguish the different manner in which Christ rules over his people and the civil community. While the rule of Christ within the civil arena is "external," and includes the coercive power of the sword to maintain order and punish law-breakers, the rule of Christ within the ecclesiastical arena is "spiritual," and includes the work of the Spirit in binding the hearts of believers to free and grateful obedience. Broadly conceived, Calvin's doctrine of the twofold government of Christ in church and state roughly corresponds to the traditional distinction between the "second" or "civil" use of the law of God and the "third" use of the law as a "rule of gratitude."

While Calvin's view of Christ's twofold government is more complicated than my simple summary might imply, his distinction between the respective callings and corresponding limits of authority that belong to church and state is a commonplace in the history of Reformed theology. To the extent that the two kingdoms paradigm distinguishes between Christ's spiritual rule over his people and the civil magistrate's rule over the civil community, it is simply affirm-

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23. For a more thorough evaluation of the appeal to Calvin in support of the two kingdoms paradigm, see my chapter, "The Restoration of All Things to Proper Order: An Assessment of the 'Two Kingdoms' Interpretation of Calvin's Theology" (chapter 1 of the volume, *Kingdoms Apart*, to be published by Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co. in the fall of 2012). It is important to observe that the language of "two kingdoms" has roots in the medieval Roman Catholic tradition, which distinguished between the "spiritual" and the "temporal" sword, ascribing ultimate and comprehensive authority to the church as it wields the spiritual sword.

ing what Reformed theologians have generally affirmed.<sup>24</sup> When two kingdoms advocates speak of “the” Reformed doctrine of the two kingdoms, they speak justifiably of a common distinction between what orthodox Reformed theology called the Christ’s “kingdom of grace” (*regnum gratiae*) and his “kingdom of power” (*regnum potentiae*).<sup>25</sup> Christ spiritually rules over his people through the power of his Spirit and Word, regenerating and recreating them after the image of Christ. However, Christ also rules in power over all things, including over those who may not inwardly submit to his kingship. To the degree that the two kingdoms doctrine aims to affirm only this traditional Reformed distinction between the two ways Christ exercises his dominion in history prior to the consummation at his coming, it has title to the claim of being Reformed.

### 3.4. A Modest and Unpretentious View of the Christian’s Calling in the World

A recurring theme in the advocacy of the two kingdoms paradigm is the claim that neo-Calvinism tends to be over-reaching in its understanding of the Christian’s task in society and culture. Theologically expressed, neo-Calvinism has an “over-realized” eschatology, which expects that more can be accomplished by Christian believers in the public square than is warranted. In the Scriptural descriptions of the status of believers in this present age before the return of Christ, believers are viewed as pilgrims and aliens in relation to the world. These descriptions do not lend encouragement to the idea that believers will be successful in transforming human life and culture before Christ returns. When neo-Calvinism speaks of the need to “redeem” human culture and society under the lordship of Jesus Christ, advocates of the two kingdoms paradigm respond by emphasizing the sufficiency of Christ’s work as Redeemer. Christians should not view their obedience as in any way supplementing or completing the work of Christ. Nor is it proper for Christians to assume responsibility for an enterprise, the renewal of human life and culture, which lies beyond their reach in this world.

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24. For an example of this use of the doctrine of the two kingdoms, see Matthew J. Tuininga, “Remembering the Two Kingdoms Doctrine: A plea for understanding, clarity, and unity,” *Christian Renewal* 30/8 (2012): 31. The modest use of the language of “two kingdoms” in Tuininga’s article does not exhibit the kinds of problems that attend the more expansive doctrine of two kingdoms that I am addressing in this article.

25. For a classic presentation of this distinction, see Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (4th ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939, 1941), 406-12. In his understanding of the relation between these two forms of government under Christ, Berkhof clearly views Christ’s kingdom of power to be subservient to his kingdom of grace. According to Berkhof, Christ rules “over all things in the interest of the Church” (410).

When neo-Calvinists speak of the Christian's calling to "redeem" politics, economics, family life, culture, art, the sciences, and so on, they suggest that the work of Christ is somehow incomplete. Furthermore, the neo-Calvinist paradigm burdens believers with an impossible assignment, namely, the obligation to pursue a distinctively Christian approach to matters that belong to the common kingdom. Because the tasks of the common kingdom are in the nature of the case not distinctive to Christians, there is no obvious or objective difference in the way they are carried out by believers and non-believers.

Though not all neo-Calvinists are liable to the charge of triumphalism, there are some post-millennialists and reconstructionists who may lend credence to these concerns of two kingdoms protagonists. It is quite possible to view the activity of Christians in society and culture in a manner that exaggerates their accomplishments or fails to reckon adequately with the limitations that will always accompany Christian conduct in the present age. In some circumstances, Christian believers are hardly in a position to exercise significant influence in the public square. In the increasingly secular environment of the Christian church in North America, there is little room for pressing the claims of Christ in the public domain. In many instances, pursuing a distinctively Christian agenda in the public square will provoke considerable hostility and resistance. Though Christians in North America are not yet subject to the kinds of overt persecution and oppression that fellow believers experience in many parts of the world, the likelihood of growing opposition to the promotion of Christian standards of conduct in society and culture is great. There are aspects of the two kingdoms paradigm—particularly the criticism of exaggerated claims for Christian obedience or the effectiveness of Christian witness in the public arena—that offer a cautionary note against any pretension or immodesty on the part of believers in the efforts to serve Christ in public life and culture. Such pretentiousness and immodesty does not necessarily belong to the neo-Calvinist paradigm. But it undoubtedly has occasionally infected the rhetoric and the actions of some proponents of a transformative approach to Christianity and culture.

### 3.5. "Natural Law" and the Common Kingdom

One of the complaints of the two kingdoms paradigm against the emphases of neo-Calvinism is that the latter paradigm unduly exaggerates the antithesis that obtains between believers and non-believers. When neo-Calvinists insist upon a distinctively "Christian" form of obedience in all of life, even in the affairs of the common kingdom, insufficient attention is given to the way God main-

tains the created order by his providence and orders human life by his natural law. Within the common kingdom, human beings, however sinful and incapable of obtaining salvation by their own obedience, are still the beneficiaries of God's common grace, which sustains human life, restrains the extent of human rebellion and wickedness, and grants some ability to apprehend God's will for the created order without the aid of special revelation. The natural law of God, which is objectively available and capable of being apprehended by all human beings who bear God's image, is a sufficient guide for human life and culture in the common kingdom. The relative justice of civil government, the advance in knowledge among the various sciences, marriage and family life, the pursuit of the arts, and the like—in these aspects of the common kingdom, believers and unbelievers are able to work together in peaceable co-existence. Indeed, in many of these aspects of the common kingdom—think of the sciences of mathematics, physics, and bio-chemistry, for example—non-believers are often able to surpass believers in knowledge and achievement.

According to the two kingdoms paradigm, the excellence of the accomplishments of non-believers is due to the working of God's common grace and the apprehension of the natural law within the common kingdom. The neo-Calvinist paradigm is unable to account for this, due to its exaggerated emphasis upon the antithesis that cuts through all aspects of human life and culture. Whereas neo-Calvinism is required to deny the excellence of the artifacts of human culture, at least those produced by non-believers, the two kingdoms view is able to account for them. Though these excellent fruits of human culture have no redemptive value and will not pass over into the world-to-come, they are genuine and undeniable proofs of the reality of the common kingdom.

Though I will offer some criticisms of these claims of the two kingdoms paradigm in what follows, here I would simply observe that there is a moment of truth in them. It is certainly possible to over-state the truth of the antithesis between faith and unbelief. For example, some neo-Calvinists might choose to affirm the truth of the antithesis between faith and unbelief, but deny the working of God's common grace in the restraint of human sin and rebellion. Though this is not the classic position of neo-Calvinism, which is known (and sometimes criticized) for its doctrine of common grace, it is certainly possible to emphasize the antithesis in such a way as to deny that unbelievers can do anything that is even relatively righteous or good in any area of life. It is also possible to deny the objective reality of God's natural law, as well as any possibility of a limited discernment of God's moral will upon its basis. Among neo-orthodox Reformed theologians influenced by Karl Barth, this is indeed the case. But this too is not the common position among neo-Calvinists who typically affirm both the doctrines of the antithesis

and of common grace. Neo-Calvinists also typically affirm the reality of God's natural law, though they often use the terminology of "order" or "structure" of creation under God's law rather than "natural" law.

The significant point to note here is that the two kingdoms paradigm challenges the neo-Calvinist to account for commonality between believers and non-believers where it exists. Unless neo-Calvinists can offer a viable account of genuine commonality between believers and unbelievers in some aspects of human life in society and culture, they are in the unenviable position of seemingly denying the obvious. To use but one trivial example: better to have an unbelieving brain surgeon who is sufficiently knowledgeable and skilled in his field than to have a believing brain surgeon whose intentions are good but whose knowledge and skill are not sufficient to the task. Whether in the academy, the art gallery, literature, medicine, social relations, economic development, technological innovation, political structures, and the like—there are many accomplishments by believers and non-believers alike in society and culture that are valuable and good. These accomplishments should be acknowledged and able to be explained. While I am convinced that the challenge of the two kingdoms paradigm at this point can be met within the framework of the neo-Calvinist paradigm, it is no doubt true that it cannot be met easily by neo-Calvinists who repudiate altogether the doctrines of common grace and natural law.

#### 4. Troublesome Features

In the course of my identification of commendable features of the two kingdoms paradigm, I have occasionally observed that these features are not absent from the neo-Calvinist paradigm. Though these emphases of the two kingdoms paradigm may offer a correction to some versions of neo-Calvinism, they involve emphases that are also included within the neo-Calvinist view of the Christian's calling in the world. While I am grateful for the presence of these features in the two kingdoms paradigm, including the challenge they present to some versions of neo-Calvinism, I am not convinced that the two kingdoms paradigm offers a more biblically satisfying, coherent, and practically useful perspective on the difficult question of the Christian's responsibility to serve Christ in the world and in human culture.

As I observed in my introduction, there are a number of biblical and theological arguments for the two kingdoms paradigm that appear to me to be at odds with more common views in the history of Reformed theology. The time has come for me to identify these arguments further and offer a preliminary evaluation of their viability. While each of these features is worthy of more extensive treatment,

my treatment of them in what follows is intended to offer a basis for continued reflection and engagement with the two kingdoms paradigm. In the course of my treatment of them, I will have occasion to indicate why I believe neo-Calvinism remains a more biblically satisfying and coherent approach to the question of the Christian's calling in the world.

#### 4.1. Two Kingdoms or a Twofold Government?

The central emphasis of the two kingdoms paradigm is well expressed in its nomenclature of a "common" kingdom and a "redemptive" kingdom. The predominant emphasis of the two kingdoms perspective is an emphasis upon the delineation of two different realms, which are clearly demarcated. Some dimensions of human life and conduct belong to the common realm; other dimensions of human life and conduct belong to the redemptive realm. Accordingly, the two kingdoms paradigm can be properly described as *radically dualistic* in its approach to the question of the believer's calling in the world and human culture.

The radical dualism of the two kingdoms perspective raises some basic questions of definition. The biblical idea of kingdom is a rich one, and includes at least three indispensable components: a king or governor who rules over the kingdom, the realm or sphere in which this rule is exercised, and the citizens or subjects who are called to submit to this rule. In the Scriptural understanding of God's kingdom, the first of these components is the root from which the full doctrine of the kingdom of God grows. The Triune God, whether in creation or in redemption, is the sovereign and only King over all creation and history (see, e.g., Gen. 1; Ps. 2; 46; 72; 103:10; Matt. 12:26, 28; 1 Cor. 2:8; 15:24-25; Col. 1:13; Rev. 11:15). In this first sense of the kingdom of God, there can ultimately be only *one* kingdom, the beneficent and wise superintendence of all things creaturely within the over-arching purposes of the Triune God. The second component of the biblical doctrine of the kingdom of God likewise focuses upon a *single* realm, the creation and its history. Due to the introduction of sin and rebellion within the creation on the part of human beings who bear God's image, there is a penultimate *duality* between the "kingdom of light" and the "kingdom of darkness" (Col. 1:13). There are counterfeit powers, authorities and kingdoms in the fallen creation. But the presence of these counterfeit kingdoms never for a moment threatens to remove ultimately any part of creation from the Triune God's sovereign rule and redemptive re-assertion of his right of ownership over all things. For our purpose, it is especially significant that the realm of God's kingdom, however variously it may be governed under the conditions of sin after the fall, remains the whole of creation and all of

history. With respect to the third component of the kingdom, the subjects or citizens who are under the kingship of the Triune God, *all human beings* who bear God's image are obligated to submit to his holy will as Creator and Redeemer. Admittedly, some whose hearts have not been renewed and made subject to Christ by his Word and Spirit are not heartily willing and ready to be subject to God. The rule of God over such rebels within the realm of his kingdom is a "rule of power" and not a "rule of grace." But it is real nonetheless. Since the fall into sin in Adam, there are only two kinds of human beings who bear God's image: those who are unwillingly (willy-nilly) subject to the rule of God, and those who are willingly (though by no means perfectly) subject to his rule.

I offer this brief, simple sketch of the biblical view of God's kingdom in order to illustrate one of the troublesome aspects of the two kingdoms doctrine. Because the two kingdoms paradigm starts from a basic duality between two realms, it cannot offer an integrated view of the kingdom or rule of God in creation and redemption. While we will have occasion to treat a number of further problems generated by this lack of integration, the one I would like to emphasize at this point is the equivocation that occurs regarding the two kingdoms. There is a considerable difference between a doctrine of two kingdoms that means only to affirm two ways Christ governs the conduct of believers in civil and in ecclesiastical matters, and a doctrine of two kingdoms that also affirms two different realms that are governed by two different rulers for the achievement of two different purposes. In the history of Reformed theology, the one feature of the two kingdoms paradigm that has legitimacy is the idea of two kinds of jurisdiction or government. Christ rules the civil community or state in a manner that is distinct from his rule over his people. The twofold government of Christ corresponds broadly to the difference between Christ's outward rule through the civil magistrate and his spiritual rule by his Spirit and Word, between a kingdom of power and a kingdom of grace. However, the legitimate distinction between Christ's twofold jurisdiction over the conduct of his people in the respective spheres of the church and state does not compromise the more basic unity of God's kingly rule over all creation and his redemptive purpose to re-establish his rule over all of human life. The rule of God in the civil realm is distinct from his rule in the ecclesiastical realm. But this is a distinction between two ways of governing, each of which in its own way serves God's comprehensive kingdom purpose. It is not a distinction that requires a thorough-going dualism in the definition of what constitutes the kingdom of God in creation and in redemption.<sup>26</sup>

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26. Though it would take me beyond the confines of the focus of this article, it would be interesting to explore the Kuyperian doctrine of "sphere-sovereignty" as an alternative to the two kingdoms doctrine of Christ's twofold government. The

#### 4.2. What Belongs to the Common Kingdom?

Because the two kingdoms paradigm especially emphasizes that Christ's rule is exercised differently in two distinct realms, the obvious question arises: what areas of human life and conduct belong to the one kingdom in distinction from the other?

Though the answer to this question is not entirely clear from the writings of two kingdoms proponents, the likeliest one is something like the following. Everything that belongs properly and uniquely to the calling of the institutional church of Jesus Christ is constitutive of the redemptive or spiritual kingdom. The principal tasks of the church are: the fulfillment of the great commission; the preaching of the gospel; the administration of the sacraments; the exercise of faithful church discipline; and the instruction of church members in the Word of God. When and where these tasks are being performed by the church in the fulfillment of its Christ-mandated calling, there we may recognize the presence of Christ's redemptive kingdom. All other aspects of human life and conduct in God's world belong to the common kingdom. The principal tasks of the common kingdom are: the fulfillment of the cultural mandate, which includes any activities that involve the exercise of dominion over and care of the creation; the mandate to be fruitful, to multiply and to replenish the earth, which includes the institutions of marriage and family life; the provision for civil government and the maintenance of public order and justice; all the proper activities that belong to human culture, whether in the arts, the sciences, education, economics, recreation, and so on. Though there may be some diversity of opinion about some aspects of life that seem to traverse the boundaries between the two kingdoms (consider a para-church seminary that teaches Bible and theology), the basic line of separation is that between the church, and everything that belongs to its official calling and mandate, and the world.

At first glance this line of demarcation between the redemptive and the non-redemptive aspects of life seems neat and clean, almost self-evident. Upon further analysis, however, it raises questions that seem to me insoluble. The redemptive kingdom of the church inevitably finds itself entangled in the web of much that belongs, at least on the assumptions of the two kingdoms perspective, to the common kingdom. Because the two kingdoms paradigm expands the territory of the common kingdom to include all aspects of life that are not directly ecclesiastical, it is obliged to view any

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Kuyperian doctrine affirms the direct authority of Christ over all "spheres" of human life and conduct, but rejects the idea that one sphere may assume the task and calling of other spheres. In my judgment, the Kuyperian view appears to offer a better, more integrated, and sophisticated account of how Christ exercises his authority or rule. See Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, 461-90, for an English translation of Kuyper's 1880 address on "Sphere Sovereignty."

church involvement in such aspects of life as inconsistent with its divinely-appointed calling. Consider any number of the following activities: church school classes on matters that pertain to the common kingdom, such as medical ethics, marriage and family life, God-centered education and schooling, sexual ethics, the duties of the civil magistrate; a church-sponsored youth-ministry that includes a diversity of educational, social and recreational activities; a comprehensive missionary strategy that accompanies the proclamation of the gospel with a wide range of deed ministries; the training of students for the gospel ministry by schools that are not directly owned and ministered by the church; the use of a variety of “para-church” ministries (Bible translation societies, medical missions, distributors of Christian literature) in the fulfillment of the church’s calling to make disciples of the nations.

These are only a few samples of activities in which the boundary between the church and the common kingdom seems to be traversed or partially erased. While these activities are hard to condone within the framework of the two kingdoms perspective, none of them constitutes a problem, if they are viewed within the broader context of legitimate Christian service within and also beyond the limited boundaries of the institutional church. Within the framework of a neo-Calvinist paradigm, the distinction between the “institutional” church and the church as “organism” is used to recognize that believers often engage in distinctively Christian endeavors in non-ecclesiastical areas of life. These non-ecclesiastical actions serve to aid the church in the carrying out of its mission, and belong to the arena of the obedience of Christians as citizens of God’s kingdom, which is larger and wider in its reach than the institutional church alone.

The neat distinction between the common kingdom and the church becomes even more doubtful, when it comes to the subject of “Christian” marriage and family life. Though the church of Jesus Christ is not a “natural” community, based upon blood relationships and natural ties of affection, it does not carry out its mission without a proper acknowledgment of the created structures of marriage and family. Indeed, the most common biblical analogies that identify the church are drawn from the created realm: the church is the “bride” of Christ, the “household” of faith, the new humanity in Christ. In the prosecution of its calling, the church proceeds upon the promise that God will gather believers and their children in the line of the generations to himself.<sup>27</sup> God honors the created order

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27. See Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 3.224-32, for an excellent treatment of the intimate interplay between God’s work of creation and redemption (re-creation), between the “covenant of nature,” as Bavinck terms it, and the “covenant of grace.” On the point I am making here, Bavinck observes that “[t]he covenant of grace is the organization of the new humanity under Christ as its head, as it links up with the creation order, and,

even in the way he builds his church and gathers a new humanity joined through faith in Christ, the last Adam. The well-being of the church goes hand-in-hand with the well-being of marriages and families. As the “cradle of culture,” the Christian family serves not only the well-being of the church but the well-being of society and culture. Thus, the church may be distinguished from the created institutions of marriage and family, but this distinction does not permit any separation between them. Nor does it seem possible to exclude marriage and family from what properly belongs to the redemptive kingdom of Christ.

#### 4.3. The Standard for Human Conduct: General and Special Revelation

The basic dualism that governs the two kingdoms paradigm also generates serious problems with respect to the standard for human conduct in the common and redemptive kingdoms. Since the two kingdoms paradigm proceeds from a fundamentally dualistic view of two separate realms (think of two circles, one alongside or perhaps above the other, though scarcely touching it), it insists upon two fundamentally different standards for the conduct of human beings in them. In the common kingdom, God’s providence and natural law are the norm for the conduct of believers and non-believers. In the redemptive kingdom, God’s Word in Scripture is the norm for the conduct of the church and its members. The two kingdoms are two distinct realms with two distinct standards for human conduct.

Before I offer several arguments against this construction of the way human conduct is governed in the two kingdoms, I do wish to acknowledge the propriety of the two kingdom paradigm’s affirmation of the objective reality of the natural law. The two kingdoms paradigm legitimately affirms the objective presence and normativity of the so-called natural law. In the history of Reformed theology, there is a general consensus regarding the apostle Paul’s teaching, for example, in Romans 1 and 2, that all human beings are inescapably and universally confronted by God’s revelation of himself in the government of the world and its history. The creation is a “most elegant book,” to use the metaphor employed by the Belgic Confession, whose preservation and government testify to the power and wisdom of the Triune Creator. All human beings who bear God’s image are recipients of this general revelation and have the “works of the law” engraved upon their consciences. By means of this general revelation, all image-bearers of God are irrepressibly aware of the difference between right and wrong, the role of the law in the

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reaching back to it, qualitatively and intensively incorporates the whole of creation into itself.” The human family first represented in Adam is redeemed in the household of faith, the church, in union with the last Adam, Christ.

maintenance of order in human society, and the penalties that follow upon the violation of moral duties. The consensus of the Reformed tradition at this point is expressed in the Canons of Dort:

There is, to be sure, a certain light of nature remaining in man after the fall, by virtue of which he retains some notions about God, natural things, and the difference between what is moral and immoral, and demonstrates a certain eagerness for virtue and for good outward behavior. (III/IV.4)

Although there is considerable diversity of opinion in Reformed theology regarding the natural law's content and the degree to which it is apprehended by all human beings under the conditions of sin, there is a broad consensus that the natural law, including the moral content of what God's holy will requires for human conduct, is an objective standard that remains accessible to all human beings. Thus, the strong repudiation of the doctrine of general revelation and natural law by Karl Barth in the early part of the twentieth century, diverged from the majority opinion within the Reformed tradition.

While the two kingdoms paradigm appropriately affirms the objective presence of the natural law and its accessibility to all human beings, it articulates a doctrine of natural law that is ultimately untenable and out of accord with Scriptural teaching and historic Reformed theology on several points.

First, the two kingdoms paradigm fails to acknowledge adequately that general revelation, including the disclosure of the natural law and its moral content, never functions without the accompaniment of special revelation. Throughout the entire course of the Triune God's dealings with human beings who bear his image, the revelation of his moral will and purpose always occurs through both general and special revelation. To use the language of Geerhardus Vos, in the pre-fall state God revealed himself and his holy will for Adam's conduct in the covenant of works by means of "pre-redemptive special revelation."<sup>28</sup> Subsequent to the fall into sin, God's redemptive covenantal dealings with his people were communicated and realized by means of his special revelation. When God redeemed his people and called them into restored communion with himself, his redemptive deeds were always accompanied by an interpretive Word. The covenant relationship between God and his people, both before and after the fall into sin, is one that requires the sovereign and gracious disclosure of God's will and purpose through his Word revelation. Just as communication is the foundation for a good relationship in marriage between a husband and

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28. See Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 19-44.

wife, so the history of the covenant is marked by God's continual speaking, communicating and unveiling his will and purpose to his people. At no point in the course of the history of the covenant could human life flourish in the presence of God without the knowledge of his will that is given through special revelation. Special revelation always accompanies, supplementing and clarifying what was made known through general revelation.

Second, the two kingdoms paradigm treats general and special revelation as though they could be construed to stand alongside each other, and not in a manner that gives pre-eminence to special revelation. Rather than viewing special revelation as the "spectacles" that enrich and clarify our understanding of general revelation, special revelation is viewed as another means of revelation that pertains to a different kingdom. General revelation adequately reveals God's will for the order of creation; special revelation adequately reveals God's will for the order of redemption. To view general and special revelation in this way, however, abstracts from the integral and comprehensive way in which God reveals his will to his image-bearers throughout the course of history before and after the fall. God was never content to allow general revelation to stand alone, but always supplemented and considerably enriched his people's knowledge of his will through his revealed Word. Furthermore, compared to the non-verbal disclosure of God's natural law through the order of creation, God's Word "more clearly and fully" reveals what is "necessary for us to know in this life, to his glory and our salvation" (Belgic Confession, Art. 2). Though the natural law may impress upon human consciences the obedience that creatures owe to the Creator and to others, the rudimentary elements of God's moral will that can be derived from the natural law alone are hardly to be compared to the rich and fulsome disclosure of God's moral will, for example, in the two tables of the law given through Moses to Israel. The moral content of the natural law does not ultimately differ from the moral content of the revealed, positive law of God. But it is foolish to attempt to ascertain the will of God for human conduct merely through the natural law, when God has provided a far more extensive disclosure of his will for all of human life in his Word. As a result of God's special revelation, a young and well-instructed catechumen could know considerably more about the moral will of God than an unbelieving and uninstructed, albeit brilliant, unbeliever.

Third, general and special revelation may also not be set alongside each other in the fashion of the two kingdoms paradigm because of human perversity and willful disobedience under the conditions of sin. In the Canons of Dort, general revelation and the "light of nature" are affirmed, but it is crucial to note that the Canons go on to observe that "in fact ... man does not use it [the light of nature] rightly even in matters of nature and society. Instead, in

various ways he completely distorts this light, whatever its precise character, and suppresses it in unrighteousness" (III/IV.4). Even in the best circumstances, human beings as image-bearers need the richer and clearer light of special revelation. But the circumstances that obtain because of sin now include the willful suppression of the truth that is given through general revelation. In the history of Reformed theology, the language of the "noetic effects of sin" has been used to emphasize the manner in which fallen sinners resist the truth of God, twist and distort it to serve their own ends, and need the illuminating work of the Spirit through the Word to gain an understanding of God's will. In the well-known metaphor of John Calvin, which is a commonplace in Reformed theology, the Scriptures are an indispensable "spectacles" that are needed for a discernment of God's will as Creator and Redeemer. As the old adage would have it, "there is none blind as he who will not see." In order to be able to see even the things that are clearly set forth in God's creation and natural law, believers require and depend upon the light of God's Word in Scripture. And in the light of the Word of God, believers are enabled to see the light that is manifest in the works of God's hands. It is difficult to see how the two kingdoms paradigm, with its conception of the functioning of the natural law in the common kingdom, fits with this feature of Scriptural teaching. For in the two kingdoms paradigm, non-believers are almost as apt as believers to profit from their discernment of the natural law and to coexist peacefully in their outward obedience to its requirements.

Fourth, the assumption of the two kingdoms paradigm is that human conduct in the common kingdom is governed only by a standard that is objectively available to all human beings. Unbelievers are not members of the redemptive kingdom, and are therefore not governed by the Scriptures, which are the proper standard for the conduct of believers with the church. Therefore, Christians ought not to appeal to the Scriptures when they labor together with non-Christians in the public square, in the civil community, or in matters to ordinary human culture. Within the common kingdom, unbelievers should not be called to obey the imperatives of Scripture because they are not participants in the indicatives of God's redemptive work. Without the benefit of the gospel indicative of Christ's work on their behalf, human beings are not able to be subject to the gospel imperative (s).<sup>29</sup>

While it is undoubtedly true that many of the imperatives revealed in Scripture depend upon the gospel indicative in order to be (imperfectly) obeyed, it is not true that these imperatives cease thereby to be applicable to all human beings, believers and unbelievers alike. In the most profound sense, the revelation of God's

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29. See VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, 38-42.

moral will for human conduct, whether given through general and special revelation, obligates every moral creature to obey. The obligations that flow from the gospel are consistent with, even include, all obligations that belong to the moral content of the natural law. The summary of the law in Scripture, which requires perfect love toward God and self-less love of others, is a re-iteration of what is required of all human beings as image-bearers of God. The elaboration and specification of what such love toward God and others requires, which is provided throughout the history of special revelation in different times and places, is an application of the comprehensive claim of God through his moral law upon all persons. Furthermore, the universal call of the gospel, which requires faith and repentance of all fallen sinners, places all human beings under the common claim of the lordship of Jesus Christ. The work of discipling the nations is a work that re-establishes the claim of God over all peoples and over the entire spectrum of life's activities. The obligations for husbands and wives, for parents and children, for masters and servants, which are spelled out in the Scriptures, are gospel imperatives that call all human beings to obey the holy will of God.

And, fifth, there seems to be confusion among some proponents of the two kingdoms perspective regarding what theologians call the "decretive" and "perceptive" will of God. God's will of decree is his sovereign foreordination of all that will take place in creation and history. God's will of precept is his revelation of his moral will to all moral creatures. God's precepts or commands declare what pleases him, and are to be made known to all moral creatures. When proponents of the two kingdoms paradigm teach that the common kingdom is governed only by the providence and natural law of God, they not only err in limiting the obligations of special revelation to the redemptive kingdom of the church. They also err in the implication that God's providence serves as a kind of moral compass. While it is no doubt true that "the civil kingdom has been ordained by God as a common kingdom,"<sup>30</sup> this ordinance of God's providence includes a delay of God's wrath upon those who deserve death, a beneficent provision of sunshine and rain upon the just and the unjust alike, and the creation of an arena in which his patience provides all human beings with a reprieve and an opportunity to repent and call upon his name. God's providence in the maintenance and ordering of the world in the present period of history does not serve to reveal what God wills in terms of his moral or preceptive will. In many instances, God's providence permits conduct that is contrary to his revealed will. God's preceptive will is made known, as we have argued, through both general revelation and the more fulsome revelation of the Scriptures. In terms of God's will of

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30. VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, 38.

precept, we might say that it would “please” God, if all human beings were to obey all that he has commanded in his Word and do so in all aspects of their lives (Matt. 28:16-20).

An interesting test case for the two kingdoms conception of the role of natural law in the common kingdom is the created ordinances of marriage and family. Most of what we know as believers about God’s will for human life in marriage and family is based upon special, and not general, revelation. This was also true before the fall into sin. Even under the corrupting influence of sin in the lives of many unbelievers, there remains a considerable awareness of what is required in these divinely-instituted creation ordinances. But this awareness, even among unbelievers, includes not a little of the “residue” of the knowledge of God’s will that has insinuated itself into nations and cultures that have known the influence of the Christian gospel and the Scriptures. The claim of the two kingdoms paradigm that human life be governed in the common kingdom primarily through natural law is neither biblically warranted nor practically feasible. There is no reason Christians shouldn’t appeal in all spheres of life to the whole of God’s revelation of his moral will in general and special revelation. When it comes to marriage and family, Christian believers ought to encourage the application of biblical standards of conduct in marriage and family in the public square, in the policies of the civil community, and in a variety of contexts. In doing so, they should assuredly be as “wise as serpents, and as harmless as doves.” If the case for a biblical understanding of marriage and family can be credibly based upon considerations largely derived from the natural law of God, then let it be made in this way to avoid undue objections to an appeal to Scriptural arguments. But there is no biblical warrant to abandon the so-called common kingdom to the standard of what can be known through the natural law alone. Christians are free to express their biblically-informed convictions in the public square, and they should not be unduly reticent to do so.

#### 4.4. What about the Antithesis between the Kingdoms of Light and of Darkness?

In my summary of the two kingdoms paradigm, I noted that it encourages Christians to engage the world and the activities of the common kingdom in a way that contributes to “peaceful coexistence” with unbelievers. I also noted that the two kingdom view insists that in the common kingdom it is quite possible for believers and unbelievers to collaborate in a variety of common activities and to do so according to identical standards of excellence. Even though there is an element of truth in these claims of the two kingdoms paradigm, there is also an element of naiveté about them. The Scriptures do encourage believers to live “at peace with all men,”

and to respect the governing authorities that exercise the power of the sword (Rom. 12:18; 13:1-7). Cooperation with unbelievers in a variety of public, civic, and cultural endeavors, seems wise and desirable. But the Scriptures also teach that there is a radical line of division in human history between those who belong to the “kingdom of light” and those who belong to the “kingdom of darkness” (Col. 1:13). The antithesis between two kinds of people, believers and unbelievers, is an antithesis between those whose hearts are willingly subject to the lordship of Jesus Christ and those whose hearts are bent upon opposing his lordship. In the two kingdoms paradigm, the antithesis between these opposing kingdoms hardly finds adequate expression. In many respects, the two kingdoms paradigm offers a benign, even sanguine, view of the possibilities for peaceful co-existence and cooperation between believers and unbelievers in society and culture. In doing so, aspects of the Scriptures’ teaching about the opposition between Christ’s kingdom and counter-kingdoms that resist his gracious rule are muted.

The subject of the antithesis between Christ’s kingdom and the kingdoms of the world that oppose him and his rule, is a large one, certainly too large for us to do it justice here. However, there are two aspects of this antithesis that may be illustrative for our purpose. The first aspect concerns the way Scripture describes the unbeliever’s reception of and obedience to the claims of God’s holy law and will. The second aspect concerns the way Scripture often represents the civil magistrate harnessing the power of the sword, not to just and proper ends, but to unjust and improper ones. In both of these respects, the Scriptures provide a far less benign view than that proffered by the two kingdoms paradigm.

Throughout the Scriptures, we are often told that unregenerate persons are unable to discern rightly the will of God upon the basis of the revelation granted to them. In a remarkable and early passage in Genesis 6:5, we read that “[t]he Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Since the fall into sin, all human beings, absent the gracious work of God in their hearts and live, live in a state of hostile rebellion against God and his holy law. When the apostle Paul affirms the objective reality of general revelation and the “works of the law” that are written upon the hearts even of the Gentiles who do not have the written law of God through Moses, he does so to emphasize the culpability and inexcusability of all who suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness. Far from producing the kind of knowledge and service of God to which these means of revelation summon them, fallen sinners willfully flaunt God’s law and excuse their disobedience to his precepts (Rom. 1:18ff.; 2:1-11). In response to such willful disobedience, God delivers the obstinate and disobedient over to a “debased mind to do what ought not to be done” (Rom. 1:28).

The consistent testimony of the Scriptures is that the unregenerate are in their hearts and minds hostile toward God and unable, because unwilling, to submit to the truth and revelation of God. The apostle Paul frequently declares that those who are outside of Christ do not receive or apprehend in a proper way what God has revealed to them (1 Cor. 2:14-16). As he says in Romans 8, “the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot” (vv. 7-8). The implications of these kinds of passages are that unbelievers are bent upon opposing the kingdom of God in all of its demands and perversely guilty of distorting and corrupting whatever God has made known to them. There is little or no evidence in the Scriptures for a naïve optimism about the conduct of unbelievers in the affairs of the common kingdom, as is proposed by advocates of the two kingdom perspective.

Even in respect to the institution of the civil authority with the coercive power of the sword, the Scriptures alternately represent the state as a means to maintain justice and order on the one hand, and as a means in the hands of the enemies of Christ’s kingdom to destroy and oppress the people of God. Normatively considered, the state is indeed a manifestation of the jurisdiction of Christ in the civil arena. In service to Christ, the state should grant the people of God the freedom to live their lives in all quietness and godliness before the Lord (1 Tim. 2:2). The state should also ensure that the gospel may be preached without hindrance, and that the people of God be at liberty to assemble to worship him and hear his Word (Belgic Confession, Art. 36). In the actual history of the world and the nations, however, the power of the civil magistrate has often been harnessed to wicked and anti-Christian ends. In the book of Revelation, which provides a panoramic vision of the circumstances of the church of Jesus Christ in the period between Christ’s first and second comings, the state is typically represented under the symbolism of Babylon as a great beast that seeks to destroy and devour the church (Rev. 13, 18-19). The portrait of the civil magistrate that is provided in the Scriptures is, accordingly, more negative at times than the one often presented in the two kingdoms paradigm.

The irony of the two kingdoms paradigm at this point is that it seems less realistic than the more nuanced conception of neo-Calvinism. The principal author of historic neo-Calvinism in the Netherlands, Abraham Kuyper, is well-known as the founder of an “anti-revolutionary” party. The name Kuyper gave to this party attests to its resolute opposition to the revolutionary spirit of the Enlightenment in Europe, and the influence of that spirit in the repudiation of the authority of God and of his Christ in the public affairs of the European nation states. For Kuyper, Christians have an obligation in the public square, particularly in respect to the civil authorities, to insist upon the appropriate limits and obligations that

are granted to the state by God who alone is absolutely sovereign. In keeping with a long-standing conviction and confession of the Reformed churches, Kuyper and his neo-Calvinist co-laborers were committed to the idea that the state was subject to Christ as Creator and Redeemer. But Kuyper was also keenly aware of the difficulty of Christian witness to the state in a world where the revolutionary spirit of unbelief was predominant.<sup>31</sup>

#### 4.5. The Relation Between Creation and Redemption

A critical feature of the two kingdoms paradigm is its conception of the relation between creation and redemption. Whereas neo-Calvinists emphasize the integral relation between the work of the Triune God in creation and redemption, two kingdoms proponents view the work of redemption to focus in the present upon the church alone. Within the broad biblical framework of the story of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation, neo-Calvinists affirm that the new heavens and the new earth will be the perfection and glorification of the entire creation. The original telos or 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. *For the neo-Calvinist, 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 the beginning of the life to come in 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, believers make a beginning of the kind of life that will be theirs in perfection in the age to come (2 Cor. 4:16ff.). There is continuity as well as discontinuity between the first creation and the second, perfected creation. Grace does not add to nature, but perfects it.

However, for the two kingdoms proponent, there is a much greater discontinuity between the present creation and the world-to-come. According to one author, "[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>32</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 call-

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31. See Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, 364, for a brief note regarding Kuyper's realism about the opportunities for Christian witness in an anti-Christian culture.

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

ing, and is of strictly penultimate significance. For the two kingdoms proponent, *God is making all new things, but he is not making all things new.* 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>33</sup> Grace adds to nature, but does not perfect it.

Since I touch upon some of the troublesome features of the lack of integration between creation and redemption in the two kingdoms paradigm at other points in my evaluation, I will limit my critical observations at this point to three.

First, contrary to the two kingdoms position—which appears to view the creation as an abortive project that is replaced by a different, redemptive project that leaves the creation behind—the Scriptures offer a more coherent view of the relation between creation and redemption. In the broad framework of the biblical account of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation, the work of redemption is a work in which the Triune God reclaims for his own glory the world he first created and declared good. In keeping with the literal meaning of the term “redemption,” God’s purpose of redemption is the liberation of his people and the whole creation from the tyranny of the devil and the ravages of sinful disobedience. Redemption reclaims and regains what was lost through the fall, and brings the whole of creation to its God-appointed destiny.

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—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 second or 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 as good. Human life and culture evidence in all sorts of ways that the world is “not the

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33. 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.”

way it's supposed to be."<sup>34</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 thorough-going 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. 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. In its own fashion, the book of Revelation tells this story, and especially in the rich symbolism of chapters 20-22 suggests that "paradise lost" will ultimately be "paradise regained." Though the end will surpass the beginning, it will nonetheless be the consummation of a great redemptive project that restores and perfects human life within the creation to God-appointed shalom. And so, when the work of redemption is completed, all things will be ordered in just the way they ought to be.

Admittedly, this is only a sketch of the large story that is recounted in the Scriptures. But it is a far more integrated and coherent story than the one advocated by the two kingdoms paradigm. In the two kingdoms paradigm, the story of redemption runs in a narrow channel, separated from another channel that runs parallel with but hardly intersects with it. The work of redemption is suspended over over the work of creation like a hover-craft that does not actually touch the water. Only within the precincts of the institutional church does the redemptive reign of Christ have its effects. Outside the boundaries of the redemptive kingdom, God's work is merely a work of preserving a world that is destined for destruction. When Christ returns, the world-to-come will be altogether new, and the present world will be cataclysmically ended.

Second, the two kingdoms appeal to the Noahic covenant provides an interesting illustration of the lack of integration in its conception of the relation between creation and redemption. In the two kingdoms interpretation, the Noahic covenant represents the formal establishment of the common kingdom. The covenant with Noah was not a redemptive covenant in any meaningful sense. The purposes of the Noahic covenant included such things as: the preservation (and not redemption) of the natural and social order; the temporary maintenance of the world, human life and culture until the end of history; the reiteration of the cultural mandate, which in-

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34. 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]).

volves common cultural activities that are non-religious in nature; and the preservation of the human race, including believers and non-believers.<sup>35</sup> None of the specific purposes of the Noahic covenant were redemptive or restorative. The singular purpose of the Noahic covenant was the preservation and maintenance of the common kingdom in which ordinary human life and culture continues. No direct relation obtains between this covenant and the redemptive covenant that God formally established with Abraham and his descendants.

Although there are features of the Noahic that the two kingdoms paradigm properly acknowledges, it is not possible to distinguish this covenant so sharply from the covenant of grace. Undeniably, the Noahic covenant was a “covenant of preservation” that promised the maintenance of the world, the human race, and the possibility of the fulfillment of the cultural mandate in history. But it is not a covenant that is wholly unrelated to the covenant of grace and God’s purposes in redemption. The “common” grace that the Noahic covenant extends to all human beings and the world serves the purposes of redemption by maintaining the creation order, and also by sustaining the nucleus of the new humanity redeemed through Christ. As O. Palmer Robertson observes in his *The Christ of the Covenants*, “[t]he covenant with Noah emphasizes the close interrelation of the creative and redemptive covenants. Much of God’s bond with Noah entails a renewal of the provisions of creation, and even reflects closely the language of the original [creation] covenant. ... The explicit repetition of these creation mandates [subdue the earth, be fruitful and multiply] in the context of the covenant of redemption expands the vistas of redemption’s horizons.”<sup>36</sup> By repeating the original mandates of the covenant relationship between God and the human race in Adam, the Noahic covenant links God’s redemptive purposes to the continuing fulfillment of the mandates that were given to the human race before the fall.

Furthermore, there are two clearly redemptive aspects to the Noahic covenant, which require that it be viewed in relation to God’s purposes in redemption. The first of these is the preservation of believing Noah and his family, the nucleus of the redeemed humanity that God is gathering throughout the history of redemption into restored communion with himself. For this reason, the apostle Peter can directly associate God’s dealings with Noah in the great

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35. VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 79.

36. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980), 110. For similar treatments of the Noahic covenant, which include an affirmation of its importance for the accomplishment of God’s redemptive purposes in the covenant of grace, see: Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 294 (“There is no objection to this terminology [“covenant of nature or common grace”], provided it does not convey the impression that this covenant is disassociated altogether from the covenant of grace”); and H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3.218.

flood with the saving significance of Christian baptism (1 Pet. 3:20). It is also the reason that Noah's Ark has, in Christian tradition, often symbolized the church of Jesus Christ, which is a safe haven for the true people of God in the midst of this world's storms. The second is the covenant method whereby God's people are saved, not as isolated and discrete individuals, but as members of human households. God is pleased, even as in the days of Noah, to save his people in the line of the generations. Thus, the Noahic covenant is a fine illustration of the intimate interplay between creation and redemption, which is denied when it is viewed only as the formal establishment of the common kingdom.

And third, the lack of integration between creation and redemption in the two kingdoms paradigm is evident in its failure to connect the renewal/resurrection of the believer's body with the correlative renewal/resurrection of the creation itself.<sup>37</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 renewed or 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 unrelievedly evil, sin has brought corruption to the entirety of God's handiwork. The fabric of creation has been torn and broken, corre-

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37. 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.

sponding 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 wait 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" (verses 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, not the creation

of all new things. This creation will undergo 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.

#### 4.6. The Coherence of Christ's Office as Creator and Redeemer

In the two kingdoms paradigm, a sharp distinction is drawn between Christ's office as Mediator of creation and as Mediator of redemption. Christ's rule in the common kingdom is an expression of his office as the one who, together with the Father and the Son, created the world and continues to maintain it by his power and wisdom. Christ's rule in the redemptive kingdom is an expression of his office as the one who, together with the Father and the Son, is gathering his people and governing them by his Word and Spirit. The twofold office of Christ as Creator and Redeemer neatly corresponds to the two kingdoms or realms over which he rules by the standards that apply to them. In the one kingdom, Christ rules by his natural law; in the other kingdom, Christ rules by his redemptive Word. To use the language of historic Lutheranism, Christ rules the "kingdom on his left hand" as Creator, and Christ rules the "kingdom on his right hand" as Redeemer.

This sharp demarcation between Christ's office as Mediator of creation and as Mediator of redemption is in some ways reminiscent of what is known as a "Nestorian" Christology. In the history of Christian theology, the language of "Nestorianism" has served to identify a doctrine of Christ's person that separates his humanity and deity so that they refer to two different persons rather than two natures. An orthodox doctrine of Christ's person maintains both the unity of the person of the incarnate Son of God and the distinction of his two natures. There is one and the same Christ who is both truly God and truly man. Nestorianism, however, tends to separate the two natures of Christ so that the unity of his person is compromised and you have a kind of schizophrenic Christ: two persons, the man Jesus and the Son of God, dwelling together in a unity that falls short of true one-ness. Although the two kingdoms view of the twofold office of Christ as Creator and Redeemer is not, strictly speaking, symptomatic of a "Nestorian" Christology, it does suggest a kind of duality within the exercise of Christ's kingly office that divides the rule of Christ in a manner that seems incoherent. Rather than viewing the kingly rule of Christ in a manner that is coherent and unified, the two kingdoms view implies that Christ's rule is comparable to two parallel lines that remain perfectly equidistant. Like two rails of a railroad track that never converge or intersect, the rule of Christ on the one (left) hand never coalesces or serves a purpose that coincides with the rule of Christ on the right hand.

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. Psalm 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 "preeminent" in all things (Col. 1:18). 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 (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).

In these and many other Scriptural representations of the kingship of Jesus Christ, there is a close and intimate link between Christ's rule in creation and redemption. The redemptive kingship of Jesus Christ does not stand alongside or above the non-redemptive kingship of Jesus Christ. Rather, the redemptive kingship of Christ entails a work of restoring all things to their proper order and place under the dominion of God. The redemptive reign of Christ aims to renew fallen humanity after his image, to grant forgiveness and the healing of all diseases, to reverse every consequence of sin in the world, and to perfect the whole of creation so that it becomes a creation-temple wherein righteousness dwells. In the Scriptural understanding of Christ's office as Mediator of redemption, the same Christ who created all things is in the process of re-creating and perfecting all things unto the glory of God. Christ's redemptive rule aims to rid the creation of every remainder of sin and the curse, and to bring the created world and the new humanity united to him to its appointed destiny within the purposes of God. The one great end of Christ's reign is the redemptive reclaiming and transformation of all things. Whether in creation or in redemption, Christ is the one king who rules over all, and who rules to redeem the whole of creation from whatever forms of brokenness that may have resulted from creaturely sin and rebellion against him.

#### 4.7. The Threefold Office of Believers

In the estimation of some proponents of the two kingdoms paradigm, the neo-Calvinist 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. Because Christians are obliged to engage the world in a transformative way, they are encouraged to believe that their works contribute in some way to their salvation. According to the two kingdoms view, Christ has fulfilled all of the obligations of obedience that God gave to the human race in Adam before the fall. Inasmuch as Christ has perfectly accomplished what Adam was required to do in the pre-fall covenant, believers are now justified freely and liberated from the original requirements of the cultural mandate.

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 fairly represent the position of neo-Calvinism. Nor does it do justice to the legitimate sense in which Christian believers, as members of Christ, participate in his threefold office.

A responsible neo-Calvinist has no quarrel with the claim that the language of "redeeming" human life and culture may be misleading and potentially dangerous. Christ is the Redeemer, and it is important to recognize that the obedience of Christians adds not one whit to what Christ has done to purchase them, body and soul, with his precious blood. Since the language of "redeeming" the world or culture can easily suggest that believers are completing the work of redemption that Christ alone accomplished, it should not ordinarily be used as a descriptor of Christian obedience in the world. Furthermore, since it may also imply that Christian believers are capable of accomplishing more than is realistically possible in this world, it is not the best term to describe the nature of Christian obedience in society and culture.<sup>38</sup>

However, it should be noted that neo-Calvinists have typically used the word "redeem" to express what might just as well be expressed with words like "renew" or even "transform."<sup>39</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 be-

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

39. See Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 69-70.

lievers 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. 4:16). In all these descriptions, the fundamental idea of the renewal and transformation of human life in grateful obedience to God is expressed. When neo-Calvinists speak of the “transformation” or even “redemption” of human life, they mean to say no more than what the Scriptures say about the calling of believers in the world. They intend merely to insist that believers should pursue, by the Spirit, the renewal of every aspect of their life after the image of Christ and in obedience to the holy law of God. Due to the likelihood of misunderstanding, this language may not be the most apt. But it need not imply the idea that believers are “adding” to the redemptive work of Christ on their behalf.

The two kingdoms objection to the neo-Calvinist view of the Christian’s calling in the world goes beyond a legitimate concern about diminishing the sufficiency of Christ’s work of redemption. It also expresses a flawed view of the way believers share or participate in the threefold office of Christ by virtue of the indwelling Spirit of Christ. 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. To be sure, the Christian’s threefold office does not “add” to what Christ has accomplished redemptively for them. But it does express instrumentally what Christ is now doing through believers. The Christian’s office as prophet requires that he or she know and speak the truth according to the teaching of the Word of God. The Christian’s office as priest is to offer him- or herself as a sacrifice of thanksgiving in view of God’s mercy, not to make an atoning sacrifice for sin. And the Christian’s office as king requires that he or she fight with a good and free conscience against sin and devil in this life (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 12). In the fulfillment of this 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 carry out his threefold office in the world.

The traditional doctrine of the Christian’s participation in Christ’s threefold office has far-reaching implications for an assessment of the two kingdoms paradigm. Proponents of the two kingdom view reject the idea that believers engage worldly and cultural pursuits in a distinctively Christian manner. They also limit the kingly rule of Christ as Redeemer to the redemptive kingdom or the church. But from the perspective 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 conceivable 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 under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

One of the strangest claims of the two kingdoms perspective is the idea that Christ's obedience fulfills the requirements of obedience under the cultural mandate in such a way as to exclude any further obligations for Christian obedience to this mandate. When Christ subdues the hearts of Christians to new obedience, Christians respond with a life of obedience to the holy law of God. True faith produces good works, which are any works performed from true faith, done to God's glory, and conformed to his perfect will. The original calling that God gave to the human race in Adam is fulfilled through the obedience of Christ, which includes not only the present exercise of his three-fold office but also the participation of believers in that office. At this juncture, the two kingdoms paradigm appears to have an under-realized eschatology. The only realm that is touched directly by Christ's redemptive work is the church. The remainder of human life in the common kingdom remains what it was and always will be until Christ's comes. The problem with the two kingdoms paradigm at this point is that it has far too restricted a view of the broad reach of Christ's work of redemption. Ironically, the two kingdoms perspective diminishes the work of Christ *in* the lives of believers in order, ostensibly, to magnify the exclusive obedience of Christ *for* them. In this fashion, the two kingdoms paradigm fails to recognize that God's work of redemption aims to create a new humanity in Christ, persons who live before God in his world in the way that the first Adam failed to do.

#### 4.8. Christian Education: A Test Case?

The final troublesome feature of the two kingdoms perspective has to do with the important question of the rationale and mandate for the provision of a God-centered, distinctively Christian education for the children of believers. Although some advocates of the two kingdoms view acknowledge the desirability of Christian education, including Christian schools, for various reasons, the principal tenets of the two kingdoms position tend to undermine one of the most basic reasons for the pursuit of Christian education. In the

two kingdoms paradigm, the only disciplines that belong properly to the redemptive kingdom are Bible instruction and theology. All of the other disciplines belong to the common kingdom, and may be pursued upon the basis of general revelation and natural law alone. Because the common kingdom involves tasks that are shared by all citizens of the common kingdom, the idea of a distinctively Christian understanding and approach to the academic disciplines is diminished, if not repudiated altogether. Since the provision of Christian education, including the establishment of Christian schools at the elementary, secondary, and collegiate level, is a difficult and expensive one, the objections of the two kingdoms perspective to distinctively Christian scholarship will likely corrode enthusiasm for it within the Christian community.

In fairness to proponents of the two kingdoms paradigm, it must be acknowledged that there is a range of opinion among them regarding the rationale and mandate for Christian education and scholarship in the academy. Some are of the opinion that a proper two kingdoms view in no way undermines the desirability and mandate for Christian education or Christian scholarship in the academic disciplines.<sup>40</sup> Others are of the opinion that Christian education, whether provided through home-schools or Christian schools, is at least a desirable option under certain circumstances. Though education is an enterprise that belongs to the common kingdom and Christian parents are not biblically obliged to provide a distinctively Christian education for their children, it may be desirable if the alternatives are bad public schools. If the available public schools are academically deficient, Christian parents may choose to send their children to a quality private, though not necessarily Christian, school. Or if the available public schools are hostile to the inculcation of Christian values, Christian parents may choose to send their children to a Christian school. But such parents are under no biblical obligation to do so, and it would be improper to suggest otherwise.<sup>41</sup>

What proponents of the two kingdoms paradigm primarily object to is the traditional rationale for Christian education. Rather than simply appealing to circumstantial considerations, advocates of Christian education usually emphasize the necessity of a Christian approach to the academic disciplines and sciences. Neo-Calvinist proponents of Christian education are particularly emphatic about the need for a Scripturally-directed approach to the study of the

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40. See, e.g., Tuininga, "Remembering the Two Kingdoms Doctrine," 31.

41. See, e.g., VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 182-187. VanDrunen does acknowledge the possibility that some public schools might display anti-Christian biases in their educational program. However, he does not seem to believe that an anti-Christian bias is ordinarily the case, and that it inevitably has an adverse effect upon the curricular content and approach of so-called "public" schools.

created order. From the standpoint of the two kingdoms paradigm, however, this rationale for Christian education is not valid. Christian education may be a legitimate choice, if the arguments for it are restricted to such considerations as: the subjective motivation of the enterprise, which is to glorify the Triune God; the Christian environment and moral values are in keeping with Scriptural teaching; the instruction meets certain standards of academic excellence; and the curriculum includes instruction in the Bible and theology. While all of these considerations may provide reasons to choose Christian schools for the children of believers, none of them include the rationale often given for Christian education, namely, that there is a distinctively Christian approach to the academic disciplines themselves. From the standpoint of the principal tenets of the two kingdoms paradigm, the idea of a distinctively Christian approach to learning and the academic disciplines is untenable. According to the two kingdoms perspective, scholarship is scholarship, science is science, mathematics is mathematics, and so on. Therefore, education in the non-biblical and non-theological disciplines is a common task for believers and unbelievers.<sup>42</sup>

The difference at this point between the two kingdoms understanding of the educational enterprise and that of neo-Calvinism is stark. While it is always possible to debate the particulars regarding *how* to provide a Christian education for the children of believing parents, the deeper issue goes to the very idea of *Christian* education itself. If there is no such thing as Christian scholarship in the non-biblical and non-theological disciplines, then the question becomes moot whether it should be provided. Neo-Calvinists are willing to grant that there may be circumstances that lead believers to opt to send their children to a non-Christian, public school—perhaps no good Christians schools are available to them and their children; the cost of sending their children to a Christian school is prohibitive; they have special needs children who require services that the Christian school cannot provide; they do not have the competence to home-school their children, etc. However, for neo-Calvinists the circumstantial component of the debate about the desirability of a Christian education for the children of believing parents is not the issue. Neo-Calvinists argue for Christian education upon the basis of a principled commitment to a biblically-directed and Christian approach to the academic disciplines. Neo-Calvinism maintains that believers are called to pursue the biblical mandate to be subject to the lordship of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, in all areas of life, in-

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42. For a fairly strong assertion of the insignificance of Christian commitments to the specific study and content of the academic disciplines, see e.g., Darryl G. Hart, "Christian Scholars, Secular Universities and the Problem of Antithesis," *Christian Scholar's Review* 30 (2001): 383-402; and John Noe, "Is there such a thing as Christian education?" *Ordained Servant Online* (April, 2012) (<http://www.opc.org/os>).

cluding the areas of education and the academy. For neo-Calvinism, the Scriptures provide the indispensable spectacles through which life in God's world, including the life of the mind, is to be viewed. In contrast to these neo-Calvinist convictions, the two kingdoms view maintains that the educational enterprise is a task of the common kingdom in which believers and non-believers may work together upon the basis of a common standard or law.

## 5. Conclusion

At the outset of this article, I noted that the two kingdoms paradigm represents an important challenge and opportunity for the Christian community to engage the question of the Christian's vocation in the world and culture. In the history of the Christian church in general, and of the Reformed churches in particular, the question of the relation between Christ and culture has been difficult, yet inescapable. What does it mean to honor the lordship of Jesus Christ in the public square and in the activities that belong to human culture? The two kingdoms paradigm seeks to answer these questions, and to do so in a way that is markedly different from the neo-Calvinist paradigm. Indeed, the two kingdoms paradigm claims to represent something of a return to an older answer to this question, which prevailed in the early, foundational period of Reformed theology.

In my assessment of the two kingdoms paradigm, I have argued that the two kingdoms paradigm offers a helpful challenge to neo-Calvinism. I have acknowledged that in some respects neo-Calvinism warrants several of the criticisms that proponents of the two kingdoms paradigm have registered against it. The rhetoric of neo-Calvinism, especially its language of "transforming" and "redeeming" every area of human life and culture, often betrays a triumphalistic and pretentious spirit. Christ is the Redeemer, and he alone will cause his kingdom to come in this world and in the consummation. As the chief prophet, the only high priest, and eternal king, Christ redeems his people and perfects his kingdom. Christians share in Christ's threefold office, to be sure, but they do so in ways that exhibit modest and small steps of obedience prompted by Christ's Spirit. The two kingdoms paradigm properly scores neo-Calvinism where it has exhibited an unduly boastful spirit, and made claims that surpass the reach of God's pilgrim people in this time-between-the-times of Christ's first and second coming. In the course of my evaluation of the two kingdoms paradigm, I have also acknowledged its legitimate insistence upon the difference between Christ's kingship over the world, particularly the civil community, and his kingship over his people. Within the framework of the comprehensive providence of God, it is possible and necessary for be-

lievers to pursue peaceful coexistence with all human beings, and to recognize the limits of civil authority in the restraint of injustice and disorder. These features of the two kingdoms paradigm warrant careful reflection and response from those who represent the neo-Calvinist paradigm.

However, despite these helpful challenges to neo-Calvinism, the two kingdoms paradigm betrays a number of troublesome features that lead me to the conclusion that it does not finally constitute a satisfactory answer to the issue of Christ and culture. As the title of my article intimates, my chief objection to the two kingdoms paradigm is that it rends asunder what belongs ultimately together. The kingdom of God, in all of its components, is one kingdom. The rule of the Triune God over his creation-kingdom, though disrupted through creaturely rebellion and human sin, will ultimately triumph in the consummation of the kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth. The biblical story of redemption is the story of the Triune God's restoration, renewal, and perfection of his original purposes of creation: the promise of life given to Adam before the fall is fulfilled through Christ after the fall. The ruins of the fallen human race will ultimately be repaired through the election and gathering of a new humanity in Christ. Even the ruins of human life in God's world will be ultimately repaired, renewed, and cleansed in the world-to-come. The work of redemption does not stand alongside or above the work of creation. The work of redemption reverses the consequences of sin and graciously realizes God's ultimate intentions for his people and his world. The shalom of a well-ordered and God-honoring life in God's renewed creation is the *telos* of all of God's redemptive works in Christ throughout history. Compared to the coherence of the biblical doctrine of God's kingdom, the two kingdoms paradigm offers a non-integrated and therefore incoherent view of the relation between creation and redemption, between this world and the world-to-come, and between Christ's rule over creation and over the church.

So far as the calling of believers is concerned, the two kingdoms paradigm offers no satisfactory answer to the question: how may I as a believer, in union with Christ and indwelt of his Spirit, seek to live a manner that pleases him in society and culture? Indeed, the thrust of the two kingdoms paradigm is to say that this question is itself wrongheaded. The claims of Christ as Redeemer do not directly relate to human life in the common kingdom. But this is to go beyond a proper acknowledgment of the limitations of Christian conduct in society and culture. Though believers may make, to use the fine language of the Heidelberg Catechism, only a "small beginning of that perfect obedience" that God requires of them in his holy law, they surely make a beginning of it in this life (Lord's Day 44). And it is a beginning of "perfect" obedience: whatever God requires in his holy law is required of believers who are being renewed by

Christ's Spirit after his image in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. No facet-dare I say "square inch"?-of the Christian's life is off-limits, so far as the redemptive rule of Christ's Spirit and Word is concerned. Though it may be difficult task to discern what obedience to Christ's will requires in all the myriad circumstances of human life in his world, the obligation for Christians to ascertain and obey Christ's will seems to me inescapable. However weak and feeble may be the obedience of Christian believers in society and culture, the neo-Calvinist claims rightly that it represents, in a small way, obedience to the life-embracing claims of Christ's lordship.