



“A gold mine. . . . A strategic book.”

—CHARLES DUNAHOO

# K I N G D O M S

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# A P A R T

*Engaging the TWO KINGDOMS Perspective*



EDITED BY RYAN C. MCILHENNY



“One of the most significant controversies of our time among Christians of Reformed conviction is that generated by the Two Kingdoms perspective and its stringent critique of the neo-Calvinist interpretation of the implications of the paleo-orthodox confession that ‘Jesus is Lord’ over all of life, and that ‘life is religion.’ This is not only an academic debate. Its outcome will have broad implications for Christian schools, colleges, seminaries, and churches and for Christians in the academy, politics, business, the arts, and other realms of cultural activity. The essays in this volume contribute clarity to our understanding of what—and how much—is at stake.”

—**Gideon Strauss**, Executive Director, Max De Pree Center for Leadership, Fuller Theological Seminary; Senior Fellow, Center for Public Justice, Washington, DC

“The church, particularly in ‘old Christendom’ (an admittedly provocative term in this debate, but still useful, I think), is in desperate need of a ‘public theology.’ Our desperation, in my opinion, is linked to increasingly secular and anti-Christian assaults on religious liberty, sanctity of marriage, sanctity of life, and the very meaning of our humanity, as well as the Christian’s place in this pluralistic culture. Wearied Christian activists who have personally endured the corrupt kingdom of this world’s turning a deaf ear (and now active, relentless personal attacks) to their cries are understandably discouraged. For others, pastors are chided for being ‘too political’ by their congregations who have been sedated by the dualistic charms of secularism. Could it be that this discouragement has metastasized into a theological skepticism that shrinks from prophetic engagement with culture and the kingdom of this world? If so, sympathy for war-worn soldiers of the cross notwithstanding, this is the wrong time to retreat from prophetic preaching to human kingdoms. Talk of Two Kingdoms—a secular and a sacred—has possibly provided a supposed Calvinistic safe harbor from the vicissitudes of cultural engagement and its invariable struggles (and defeats). But as the Christian citizens of a 1930s German Republic would now surely testify, such a radical discontinuity—and, I would add, misunderstanding—of Two Kingdoms theology can lead to national and even worldwide catastrophe. And yet we may be living in such a day once more.

“It is for these reasons, and more, that I have prayed for wise and courageous scholars to step up—and step into—this fraternal debate within the Reformed Christian community concerning Two Kingdoms. I am praising

God, therefore, for a new book by general editor Ryan McIlhenny: *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective*. From razor-sharp scholarly engagement with biblical, historical, philosophical, civil, and theological sources, this new collection by ten trusted theologians treats the issues Christianly, fairly, and respectfully, without the dark smoke of polemics, yet with the unfettered urgent appeal for the reader (and the church) to consider the calling of believers in this age—and especially those who serve the Lord as preachers and teachers—to announce the lordship of Jesus Christ as both Creator and Redeemer until that day when, indeed, the kingdoms of this world become the once-and-for-all kingdom of our God and of his Christ. The Reformed churches and the seminaries who serve those churches need this timely book now more than ever before. I thank the editor, the contributors, and P&R Publishing for producing this critical book and pray that it will encourage twenty-first-century Reformed believers to return to the brave heritage of our spiritual forefathers who lived in the tension of the world now and the world on its way to cry, like John Knox, ‘Give me [this kingdom] or I shall die!’”

—**Michael A. Milton**, Chancellor/CEO, James M. Baird Jr. Professor of Pastoral Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, North Carolina

“Too many Christians, especially in the American evangelical Reformed renaissance, speak as though one must choose between Christ and culture, gospel and kingdom, salvation and justice. The Kuyperian tradition, with its rich, multiform, and I believe biblical vision, provides a counterweight to all that reductionism. This book engages this conversation and deserves a careful hearing by all who believe God has made Jesus of Nazareth the rightful and ultimate king of everything.”

—**Russell D. Moore**, Dean, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

“For centuries, Reformed Christians have debated and divided over the question whether the cultural mandate retains abiding force in the contemporary setting and whether Scripture is the only rule, not just for faith but for cultural life as well. The new debate, stimulated by those who would answer those questions in the negative, is proving to be a matter of life and death for those Christian educational and social institutions dedicated to

answering those questions in the affirmative. This volume will be of critical interest for those who support such institutional endeavors as they sort out whether their efforts have truly been God's work or whether, as their critics imply, these educational social institutions have simply become the new idols of our age."

—**Carl E. Zylstra**, President, Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa

"*Kingdoms Apart* is a strategic book because it compares and contrasts the one-kingdom view and the Two Kingdoms view. The church has fallen into the Two Kingdoms view, both consciously and unconsciously, and consequently has struggled with its role and message within the kingdom. Each chapter, written by a different author, carefully and fairly leads the reader to a clearer understanding of the importance of the kingdom issue. This is a challenging and straightforward book that deserves to be read, studied, and taught by the church."

—**Charles H. Dunahoo**, Chairman of the Board, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia

"This is a very fine collection of essays on the issues surrounding Christ and culture, marked by careful scholarship, an irenic spirit, and a deep commitment to a Reformed understanding of the gospel. Though occasioned by the challenge mounted by David VanDrunen and others to the comprehensive and holistic view of the kingdom advocated by Dutch neo-Calvinism and its heirs, these essays are much more than a reflexive defense of neo-Calvinism against this challenge. They also represent creative theologizing that not only is rooted in Scripture and the classical Augustinian and Reformed tradition, but also is actively engaged in the philosophical and theological currents of the twenty-first century. The contributors include both seasoned older scholars and promising young academics who are just beginning to make their mark. A number of the contributors also give us much-needed access to the Dutch theological and historical background of neo-Calvinism, and introduce us to little-known but seminal thinkers such as S. G. de Graaf and Klaas Schilder. What I find particularly attractive in this volume is its tone. Though in some ways a work of polemical theology, it avoids the rhetorical excess and partisan characterizations that so often mar this genre of discourse. Instead, it freely acknowledges that there are unresolved tensions in the work of such Reformed giants as Calvin, Kuyper,

and Bavinck, and at the same time is animated by a quiet passion for the comprehensive claims of Christ's rule. I believe this volume represents a valuable and constructive advance in the often heated debates surrounding the themes it treats."

—**Al Wolters**, Professor of Religion and Theology/Classical Languages, Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ontario

"The difference between neo-Calvinism and the Two Kingdoms perspective is much deeper than theology. It is a matter of a fundamental disagreement on the nature and scope of the gospel. And the way one understands the gospel has implications for the missional calling of the church. The writers of this volume commend to us the neo-Calvinist vision as more faithful to Scripture than the dualism of the Two Kingdoms perspective. I welcome this book, which joins a growing chorus of voices critically analyzing the Two Kingdoms approach in an attempt to understand the gospel and the church's mission more faithfully."

—**Michael W. Goheen**, Geneva Professor of Worldview and Religious Studies, Trinity Western University, Langley, British Columbia

"Charles Hodge, the great nineteenth-century Princeton theologian, affirmed the 'spirituality of the church' in the face of those who would have him confuse the institutions of church and state. At the same time, Hodge refused to allow 'spirituality of the church' to mean that the church had nothing to say to or about the state. In recent times, some proponents of a Two Kingdoms approach have advocated a separation of church and state without addressing the necessary relation that subsists between church and state. The essays in this volume, while not confusing different realms or spheres, such as church, state, and family, show that there are both distinctions and connections between these spheres. In other words, these essays seek to account for the one and the many. Hodge referred to the relation of the church and the state as 'an exceedingly complicated and difficult subject.' This writer agrees with Hodge and wears of those who either simply merge all spheres, on the one hand, or, on the other hand, separate kingdoms without any clear integration points. This volume seeks to reflect the complexity of the subject matter and to treat it with both sophistication and clarity."

—**Alan Strange**, Professor of Church History and Librarian, Mid-America Reformed Seminary, Dyer, Indiana

“This thoughtful survey of the thought of Reformed exemplars such as Calvin, Kuyper, Bavinck, S. de Graaf, and others calls us toward a global Christianity, instead of dividing vital sectors into hemispheres with some normed by God’s Word and others left essentially normless. Modernity’s program has surely persisted in seeking to arm-wrestle the church into such a diminished posture—normally leading to some hideous or inhumane trend or other—and the church’s dubious wisdom wishes to go back to the effect of a secularism-of-all-but-the-soul, as spawned by modernity. These deliberate scholars have saved the church much time and interacted with a reincarnated idea that is finding some renewed popularity. Instead of needlessly bifurcating our discipleship or abandoning a calling, however, these essays call us to take every thought captive and follow Christ in all that he commanded. The church and students cannot but be enriched by this bracing reminder toward unified Christian living in all areas of life, as our Reformed parents rediscovered. Our day should hardly beg for a shrunken witness; this balanced collection emboldens the church toward comprehension. We are glad to welcome it.”

—**David W. Hall**, Senior Pastor, Midway Presbyterian Church, Powder Springs, Georgia

“This collection of essays, both varied and subtle, and mostly emphasizing the Dutch Reformed perspective, should be a helpful guide for anyone seeking to think through the issues of the Two Kingdoms view of culture and its alternatives. Highly recommended.”

—**Donald N. Petcher**, Professor of Physics and Department Chair, Covenant College, Lookout Mountain, Georgia



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A P A R T



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*Engaging the TWO KINGDOMS Perspective*

EDITED BY  
RYAN C. MCILHENNY

  
P U B L I S H I N G  
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To all the Reformed academic institutions in North America dedicated to Christ and his kingdom and, in particular, to the faculty, staff, and students of Providence Christian College.

Heidelberg Catechism  
Lord's Day 48

What is the second petition?

*Thy kingdom come.* That is: so rule us by Thy Word and Spirit that we may submit ourselves more and more to Thee; preserve and increase Thy Church; destroy the works of the devil, every power that exalts itself against Thee, and all wicked counsels conceived against Thy holy Word, until the perfection of Thy kingdom arrive wherein Thou shalt be all in all.



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## Foreword

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J A M E S W . S K I L L E N

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THE ESSAYS IN THIS VOLUME are of great importance for Christian life and thought in the twenty-first century. From biblical times to the present, Christians have understood that their life in this age anticipates the age of God's fully revealed glory to come. They await the return of Christ and the climax of the revelation of God's kingdom. Yet what is the relation between this age and the age to come? And how should Christians think about and conduct their lives in the societies in which they live now? What does it mean to be *in* the world but not *of* the world? Should the church keep itself separate from the world or become fully immersed in it? Should Christians be trying to reform society or focusing on evangelization and strengthening the church to keep itself pure in a godless world?

In medieval Christendom, the church served as a moral guide as well as a blessing for secular society. In the period of the Reformation, different approaches were taken, either to distinguish more sharply between the “spiritual” and the “civil” or to relate them closely in new ways. With the sharpening of a distinction between the faithful, Christ’s elect, and those outside the circle of faith, a distinction developed between “special grace” (redeeming grace in Christ) and “common grace” (God’s mercy shown to everyone for temporal blessing and for the restraint of sin, but not for eternal salvation). Yet the question remains: What is the relation between these two kinds of grace and the effects that they have? Does God’s common grace give reason for Christians to be more vigorously and extensively involved

in the affairs of the common life and to do so with the aim of trying to reform the world in keeping with Christian principles? Or rather, does it mean that Christians should act in this world on terms that Christians and non-Christians can hold in common, while expending their distinctively Christian energies on church life and evangelization?

The great merit of the essays that follow is their careful and critical evaluation of one tradition in the Reformed Calvinistic line that offers a *Two Kingdoms* answer to the questions posed above. In the Two Kingdoms approach, this age and the coming age are not closely connected, and the “two graces”—common and special—that pertain to the two ages are quite distinct as well. The church, then, has a spiritual calling, while civil government and other earthly responsibilities belong only to life in this age.

The basis on which the authors of this book develop their critical evaluation of the Two Kingdoms view is that of a more integral, nondualistic commitment. While it is true, they argue, that human sinfulness stands against (or antithetical to) God’s will and that God’s redeeming grace in Christ calls believers away from the way of death, it is not right to try to fit every distinction between church and civil government, between this age and the coming age, and between common grace and special grace into the framework of that antithesis. John Calvin, for example, insisted that civil authorities are ultimately answerable to Christ. The antithesis between obedience and disobedience to God also runs through the heart of every Christian insofar as Christians are still sinners being saved by grace. And the age to come should not be thought of as antithetical to life in this age if one recognizes that life in this age is life in God’s creation (however much marred by sin) and that the coming age is the fulfillment of God’s creation purposes and not only the outcome of the defeat of sin and death.

This means, as the essays here suggest or argue directly, that the best place to start to understand the Christian life in this age is not with the distinction between church and state, between church and world, between special grace and common grace, or between the spiritual and earthly. What is needed is a recovery of the integral meaning of creation—the single reality that God loves and governs for one purpose, namely, to reveal the divine glory. Sinful humans are indeed pushing antithetically against God and his purposes for creation, but sin does not stand on its own platform or define the meaning of life in this age. Creation comes first as God’s thesis. God’s restraint and punishment of sin aim in the end to defeat sin

and death so that his creation purposes can be fulfilled. Moreover, if we look more closely at the covenantal disclosure of God's mercy and grace in upholding and redeeming creation, we can see an eschatological orientation of the creation from the beginning. God's redeeming grace in Christ did not launch a second creation—another world—to which the redeemed would be carried to escape from this one. The meaning of life in this age is not discarded when Christ returns to reveal the kingdom of God. The One in and through whom all things have been created is the One who, in full incarnational identity with us, endured the cross and was raised from the dead to sit at the right hand of glory on high, taking with him in resurrection power the brothers and sisters of this age.

The spirit of this book, it seems to me, is one of seeking both to appreciate and to develop further Abraham Kuyper's sense that the whole creation belongs to Christ and that in Christ believers should be seeking to develop all their talents and capabilities in every sphere of life to the glory of God. "Creation judged and redeemed" rather than "Two Kingdoms in tension or conflict" is the framework in which we should take up the important questions about church and world, sacred and secular, this age and the coming age, common grace and special grace.



## Acknowledgments

THE SUPPORT OF a number of people helped carry me through this rather arduous project. Along with my beautiful wife, Becky, my three *religiously* energetic boys—Fish, Canon, and Josey—were readily patient during my late nights while I executed my editorial duties.

Particular thanks must go to my colleagues at Providence Christian College: Steve Kortenhoeven, for his question on the Two Kingdoms position; Russ Reeves, for his very early suggestions as to how the book should be structured; Scott Swanson, for his contribution to the book (chapter 8); Justin Bleeker, for his promptness in reading and offering supportive comments on first drafts of the project; and Troy Lamberth, for his excellent promotional video for P&R Publishing.

Second, I wish to acknowledge the enthusiasm and willingness of the various authors of *Kingdoms Apart* as they took a chance on a scholar of somewhat emerald hue. Thank you for your patience and collegiality.

I offer special thanks to P&R Publishing’s project team: John J. Hughes, Brian Kinney, and Karen Magnuson promptly and skillfully put the final touches on the book. Great work! Particular gratitude must be extended to P&R’s Marvin Padgett for his immediate interest in and continual advocacy of the book. (Thanks also, Marv, for the discussion and cup of coffee in San Francisco during the ETS conference.)

An educator’s calling would be nothing without students. I am supremely encouraged to interact with students. To that end, I want to thank the many Providence students who have taken the HUM 101 (Reformed Perspectives on Calling and Culture) course. The class provided an opportunity to discuss many of the issues addressed in this volume. Thank you, *Sea Beggars*, for your commitment and faithfulness, first to the kingdom and second to Providence.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Finally, I would be remiss if I failed to recognize my father, Charles McIlhenny. Were it not for his theological tutelage from childhood, I—as an American Presbyterian, no less—would not have been able to enter into dialogue with neo-Calvinism. I suspect that for the vast majority of young boys, the most memorable times with Dad often fall into the category of “all things manly,” such as camping or sports (although I do remember wrestling). But for me, father-son time revolved around reading passages from Geerhardus Vos, Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, Cornelius Van Til, and Herman Dooyeweerd. I mark these revolutionary thinkers as contributors to my sanctification. Thanks, Dad.

Ryan C. McIlhenny, PhD  
*In Christo Omnia Nova*

## Abbreviations

ARP	Anti-Revolutionary Party
CDU	Christian Democratic Union
CGK	<i>Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken</i> (Christian Reformed Churches)
<i>ChrRen</i>	<i>Christian Renewal</i>
CNTC	<i>Calvin's New Testament Commentaries</i> , ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960)
CO	John Calvin, <i>Calvini Opera (Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia)</i> , ed. Guilielmus Baum, Eduardus Cunitz, Eduardus Reuss et al., 59 vols., <i>Corpus Reformatorum</i> 29–87 (Brunsvigae: Schwetschke, 1863–1900)
<i>Comm.</i>	Commentary of John Calvin
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
GKN	<i>Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland</i> (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands)
<i>Institutes</i>	John Calvin, <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> , ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960)
JCS	<i>Journal of Church and State</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
MAJT	<i>Mid-America Journal of Theology</i>

## ABBREVIATIONS

NHK	<i>Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk</i> (Netherlands Reformed Church)
NSB	<i>Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging in Nederland</i> (National Socialist Movement in the Netherlands)
OS	John Calvin, <i>Opera Selecta</i> , ed. Peter Barth and Wilhelm Niesel, 5 vols. (München: Kaiser, 1926–52)
RD 4	Herman Bavinck, <i>Reformed Dogmatics</i> , vol. 4, <i>Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation</i> , ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008)
Serm.	Sermon of John Calvin
VU	<i>Vrije Universiteit</i> (Free University of Amsterdam)
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>

# Introduction: In Defense of Neo-Calvinism

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RYAN C. MCILHENNY

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THE SUBJECT OF CHRISTIANITY'S relationship to culture has occupied the church for millennia, and it will remain an important topic of discussion until the Lord's return. Intellectuals in the Reformed tradition have spent a considerable amount of time debating the issue, yet they remain divided. Two differing positions originating from within the Reformed tradition, neo-Calvinism and the Two Kingdoms perspective, continue to generate fertile discussions on this unavoidable topic. Both sides have sought to understand the relationship of Christ, his kingdom, and its impact on the broader culture from an explicitly biblical standpoint. The intent of this volume is to defend—with no less a self-reflectively critical eye—the continued relevance of neo-Calvinism as it collegially interacts with the Two Kingdoms perspective. Not only will readers become familiar with what is called neo-Calvinism, distinct from the currently popular “New Calvinism” among evangelicals, but they will also read more in-depth analyses of neo-Calvinism’s historical, philosophical, and theological influence. The book is for those in the Reformed community who daily grapple with the relationship of their faith, their kingdom citizenship, and their cultural surroundings.

## IS NEO-CALVINISM RELEVANT FOR TODAY?

Maturing in the Netherlands in the late nineteenth century, with a continuing impact on Dutch Reformed transplants here in the United

States, neo-Calvinism has been one of the most cogent responses to the secularization that has shaped the contemporary Western world. Modernism, a cultural mood and intellectual agenda that began with the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, offered liberation from all forms of tyranny—political, religious, and economic—over the human mind. Humanity not only moved to the center of the universe, but became sovereign over it. The metaphysical world, which includes human nature, the soul, and God, became, especially by the early twentieth century, an increasing problem for intellectuals committed to the methods of scientific empiricism and philosophical positivism. For much of the twentieth century, Christians felt the urgency to wage a kind of Manichean battle against the ascendancy of secular humanism. One such figure was pastor, journalist, politician, and academic Abraham Kuyper, founder of what would become neo-Calvinism. Kuyper believed that Calvinism, a tradition that, among other things, stresses the absolute sovereignty and ultimate victory of God over all of life, was the best weapon against the secularism of the modern age.

Although younger than its counterpart at least in the present-day context, the growing popularity of the Two Kingdoms perspective is because of its standing at a crucial historical juncture. The “modernism” that Kuyper and other Reformed culturalists exposed failed to deliver in its promises. Indeed, the hegemony of institutional atheism produced not human liberation but one of the most violent and dehumanizing periods in world history. Given the realities of events such as the Holocaust and the invention and use of the atomic bomb, it became glaringly obvious that the evolutionary liberation promised by modern secularism was tragically unsuccessful. (In an important sense, the term *postmodernism* should be understood as more of a reaction against the hubris of modernism.) Thus, the urgency to formulate an alternative intellectual force to counter the evils of modernism, which galvanized neo-Calvinists over a century ago, along with a host of Christian conservatives a few decades ago, seems unnecessary today.

Everyone, Christian and non-Christian, has been ready to reintroduce the metaphysical. Many intellectuals view with a skeptical eye disinterested objectivism, the infallibility of science, and evolutionary nationalism. Many are ready to reevaluate the importance of faith in the public sphere. Perhaps (and I say this tongue in cheek) the resurgence of Two Kingdoms is part of the “postmodern condition” that postures an attitude toward the Enlightenment project as something that needs to be sent to the metanarra-

tive dustbin. More directly, maybe the desire to restore the Two Kingdoms reflects an incredulous mood among theologians toward evangelical grand narratives, a mood that, unfairly, has included neo-Calvinism. This, of course, is pure speculation, but the notion that some new atheistic force out in the world—as if the church has not dealt with this since its inception—is threatening to destroy the church is ostensibly impotent.

The error, however, is to think that since neo-Calvinism has had its “15 minutes of fame,” it is no longer a necessary position to defend. Such a dismissal is hasty at best. First, the ghost of modernism still haunts both the academic and popular worlds. Intellectuals, for instance, may hate modernism, but they work in institutions that continue to function in a modernistic way (e.g., institutions still have trouble incorporating and taking seriously the importance of faith and spirituality). Religious studies departments have not been replaced by and are still in conceptual conflict with theological studies. A desire to better appreciate religion, to consider it as more than an invention of humans to cope with the struggles in life, may take some institutional gerrymandering if not full-scale revolution. The growing interest in spirituality among scientists, especially in neuroscience, as a case in point, continues to be guided by empirical methods. Spirituality, while scientifically testable, can never move outside the human “I” having the experience, since such methods are guided by Cartesian rationalism and Humean empiricism. The New Atheism—not something coming wholly from within the walls of the academy—has failed to acknowledge that it bears a striking resemblance to its predecessor, which, as mentioned above, created some of the most horrific atrocities in human history. (The New Atheism is a pop-cultural phenomenon, not an intellectual one.)

Second, neo-Calvinism’s endurance rests on the fact that it is more than a historical movement; it is also a philosophy that rests on a theological foundation. Indeed, it is quite difficult to divorce philosophy, history, and theology from one another. Every philosophical idea has its historical context that must be appreciated, but philosophy, providing various ways to analyze and synthesize through critical reasoning, has a way of staying with us over time. The Reformation was an important historical moment, but its influence, especially the contributions of Martin Luther and John Calvin, is transhistorical. This does not mean history is unimportant; ideas cannot be properly understood apart from their historical context. Neo-Calvinists such as Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd have sought to unravel,

both theoretically and practically, the full implications of the Reformation, not just for the church but for society and culture at large. Faithful Christians, especially those in the pews every Sunday morning and evening, believe that their faith impacts their lives outside the institutional church. How does the layman (and woman) act as a witness of the gospel or as a minister of reconciliation to the world? What is the impact of faith on all that he or she does? These questions have been raised by the faithful for millennia.

## DEFINING NEO-CALVINISM

So what features of neo-Calvinism can Christians continue to appreciate (and appropriate) in understanding the relationship of Christ, his kingdom, and Christianity's impact on human culture? At the heart of neo-Calvinism is the claim that God's sovereignty extends to every square inch of the cosmos. God rules, upholds, directs, and gives meaning to all things. This can be broken down further into four critical tenets in what is often referred to as the "grace-restores-nature" scheme: the cultural mandate, sphere sovereignty, the antithesis, and common grace.<sup>1</sup>

### Cultural Mandate

Genesis 1:26 presents the cultural mandate, which requires of the Lord's crowning creation, humanity, to subdue, rule, fill, and tend to (i.e., cultivate) the created order. Humans, under the guidance of divine providence, continue the work of cultural (small *c*) creation. The cultural mandate is both imperative and indicative. God commands humanity, through Adam,

1. In their latest book, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew identify the major themes of neo-Calvinism: [1] "In and through God's redemption in Christ, grace restores nature. Grace is like medicine that restores health to a sick body. Christ's work of salvation is aimed at the creation as a whole in order to renew it to the goal that God always had in mind for it. [2] God is sovereign and orders all of reality by his law and word. [3] The cultural mandate given in Genesis 1:26–28 (to exercise royal stewardship over the creation) has ongoing relevance: God calls humankind to develop his creation through history, to his glory" (16). Contemporary neo-Calvinist Al Wolters states that the central aspect of neo-Calvinism ("grace restores nature") "means simply that the new life brought about by redemption in Jesus Christ does not (A) stand in opposition to created reality, nor does it merely (B) supplement or (C) parallel it, but rather (D) seeks to penetrate and restore the reality of creational life. Redemption is a comprehensive salvage operation, the goal of which is nothing short of recovering all of life as it was meant to be lived according to God's creational design from the very beginning." Al Wolters, "What Is to Be Done . . . toward a Neocalvinist Agenda?" *Comment*, Oct. 14, 2005.

to fill and watch over the earth. This is part of God's natural order; it is not eradicated by the fall. Such a mandate requires responsible cultivation that accords with God's intent for his good creation. As an indicative, the cultural mandate reflects human nature. It is part of our being: humans tend to their responsibility over creation because that is how they are made and because they cannot help but live accordingly.

Furthermore, the imagery of cultivating extends to the outward expression of Christian love, mercy, and justice, and to the more specialized focus of proclaiming the gospel. The seed of the good news is spread throughout all the earth. Ministers plant and water; God causes the growth. New Testament Christians, in general, cannot help but be witnesses of the gospel. Being a disciple of Christ is *not* an option. Mark 16:15 encourages Christ's disciples to preach the gospel to *all* creation—a creation that “groans” and awaits the consummation (Rom. 8). Reconciliation to the Father through the redemptive work of Christ has made Christians ministers of reconciliation. Even those Christians not ordained to the gospel ministry have an imperative, based on the indicative, to be witnesses of Christ to the world. Whether or not they preach the gospel in their various callings, Christians, through word and deed, bring with them the light of the gospel to a dark and dying world. Unbelievers can be won over to Christ through the preaching of the gospel and the demonstration of Christian love and good works. Thus, for the neo-Calvinist, understanding the continued relevance of the cultural mandate, a changed life through the gracious work of Christ, opens one's eyes to attend to the wounds of a broken world, spreading the gospel and demonstrating the love of Christ to the whole earth. Christians necessarily act on their transformed lives. Whatever Christians do, even the most quotidian of things such as eating and drinking, they must do for the honor and glory of God.<sup>2</sup>

According to David VanDrunen, the Robert B. Strimple Professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics at Westminster Seminary California and one of the leading spokesmen for the revived Two Kingdoms

2. Granted, Scripture is silent as to *how* this is done, but it is misleading to suggest that neo-Calvinists narrowly devise one program for the engagement of culture. What is more, neo-Calvinists have been better advocates of Christian freedom to create, once again, in the context of the cultural mandate and in submission to the creational norms put in place by God. (Christ told his disciples to spread the gospel throughout the world, but he did not provide information related to the mode of transportation in getting from A to B or the kinds of architectural layouts for the gathering of the saints.)

approach, the cultural mandate is no longer relevant for Christians today: “By his life, death, resurrection, and ascension, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the second and last Adam, has completed the work of the first Adam and attained his original destiny.”<sup>3</sup> The mandate has ceased in Christ, the second Adam. “God’s original plan for creation,” VanDrunen writes in *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, “is indeed fulfilled—but *not* through the cultural works of Christians. The Lord Jesus Christ, as the second and last Adam, has fulfilled Adam’s original commission once and for all. Christ has already attained the original goal by entering the new creation through his resurrection and ascension. And we already have a claim to this new creation by virtue of his work. We are citizens of heaven through faith in him.”<sup>4</sup> But since the cultural mandate was given before the fall, what exactly did Adam fail to complete? The creation and the cultural mandate were given in a sinless context. Adam’s pre-fall cultural responsibility was not to make restitution because of sin to satisfy the righteous demands of God. There was no such demand on the table. It was the fall that perverted Adam’s “original destiny,” which then required the active and passive obedience of Christ. But did the fall negate humanity’s mandate to rule over and subdue the earth? Perhaps not. Besides, the work of ministers utilizes the imagery of cultivation—scattering, watering, growing, harvesting, etc. What about the layman? Does he or she play a part in the gospel directive?

Challenging neo-Calvinists on the continuing relevance of the cultural mandate is not a benign interpretive disagreement, however; the danger of this central point, according to VanDrunen, is not in the tendency (or inconsistency among neo-Calvinists) to devalue the importance of the institutional church or that Christians’ redemptive intents may not be transformative (even neo-Calvinists disagree on the practical implications of what this means), but in its potential threat to gospel orthodoxy. The transformational language used among neo-Calvinists, for VanDrunen, sounds a lot like contemporary theologians and evangelicals whose doctrine is theologically troubling at best. This is a subtle implication of guilt by association. Neo-Calvinists fall into a category similar to those who identify with the New Perspective on Paul and its rejection of the “traditional Reformation view of justification,” as well as those of the Emergent Church Movement, echoing

3. David VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 52.

4. Ibid., 34.

“a great many of [neo-Calvinism’s] central and standard themes,” which is dangerously close to Emergent’s “special dislike for rigid doctrine.”<sup>5</sup> For VanDrunen, those committed to the doctrine of justification by faith alone should not find neo-Calvinism attractive. Granted, VanDrunen does not argue that neo-Calvinism necessarily leads to a compromise of the doctrine of justification, but I wonder whether his readers will be as discerning.

In associating neo-Calvinism with those who hold to a less-robust view of justification, Two Kingdoms proponents suggest that neo-Calvinism is too dangerously close to works-righteousness spirituality. Kuyper’s comment that “everything that God has hidden in nature and the world must be brought to light before the end can be ushered in” certainly looks *prima facie* like works-righteousness.<sup>6</sup> But as Cornelis Pronk writes, “The very notion that Christ’s second coming is contingent on the progress we make with our cultural endeavours is preposterous, to put it mildly.”<sup>7</sup> What needs to be clarified at the outset is that the Christian’s cultural engagement does not in any way force the hand of God to usher in the new heaven and new earth. Christian cultural activity is always done within the context of the completed work of God in and through Christ and the now/not yet completion of his kingdom. Even as it relates to the missional activities of the church, God does not need the work of humans to preach the gospel, but these are the ordinary means he uses—and requires—to save sinners. Christ has restored and will restore all things, and it’s on this basis, Pronk continues, that “the character of our work and activity has fundamentally changed. Good works, cultural or otherwise, are now performed by the believer out of gratitude.”<sup>8</sup>

As salt and light to a dying world, Christians testify to the goodness of the creation, and battle against the destructive effects of the fall. Albert Wolters suggests that the distorting and perverting impact of the fall “must be opposed *everywhere*—in the kitchen and the bedroom, in city councils and corporate boardrooms, on the stage and on the air, in the classroom and in the workshop.”<sup>9</sup> Every sphere must be exposed to the light of the gospel, when it comes to the “biblical accounts of sin and redemption.” Redeemed

5. Ibid., 21, 23.

6. Cornelis Pronk, “Neo-Calvinism,” *Reformed Theological Journal* (November 1995): 42–56.

7. Ibid., 5.

8. Ibid., 7.

9. Al Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, with a postscript by Michael Goheen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 73.

humans are part of this process, but not in a works-righteousness sense. Wolters continues, “It is still *humanity* that plays the pivotal role. Just as the fall of man (Adam) was the ruin of the whole earthly realm, so the atoning death of a man (Jesus Christ, the second Adam) is the salvation of the whole world. The Adamic human race perverts the cosmos; the Christian human race renews it. If Christ is the reconciler of all things, and if we have been entrusted with ‘the ministry of reconciliation’ on his behalf (2 Cor. 5:18), then we have a redemptive task wherever our vocation places us in his world.”<sup>10</sup>

On a related note, another Two Kingdoms charge against neo-Calvinism is the place of contemporary cultural artifacts in the new heaven and new earth. First, believers, in both the Old and New Testaments, carry the moniker of exiles, wanderers, and aliens, suggesting that this world is not their home. The Two Kingdoms position appeals to passages in Scripture that highlight the émigré status of believers in both the Old and New Testaments (Jer. 29 and 1 Peter 1), passages that are admittedly silent on cultural transformation. The term *exile* suggests a place in which believers live, not their ultimate or final home. Second, cultural activity is important, Two Kingdoms supporters will acknowledge, but such “handiwork” will not last (1 Tim. 6:7; Rev. 18:11, 21–24). Humans cannot take their cultural products into the new heaven and new earth. A favorite passage in support of the Two Kingdoms position is 2 Peter 3:10. Accordingly, upon the return of the Lord “the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the works that are done on it will be exposed.” In other Bible versions, the phrase “will be exposed” has been translated “will be burned up.” The implication for Two Kingdoms advocates is that spending time trying to “redeem” culture apart from Word and sacraments is an inappropriate use of time or resources for the Christian community.

Commenting on the 2 Peter 3 passage, Wolters suggests that “all but one of the oldest and most reliable Greek manuscripts do not have the final words ‘will be burned up’ but instead have ‘will be found,’” which, again for Wolters, does not necessarily mean “annihilation or complete destruction.”<sup>11</sup> There is, indeed, something that emerges from God’s incendiary judgment: “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (v. 13). Wolters may overextend his speculation when suggesting that the things purified

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., 47.

“must surely include the products of human culture.”<sup>12</sup> He believes that on the day of consummation, humanity’s cultural works will be purified at the current state of development. Author Andy Crouch, it seems to me, faces similar difficulties. In *Culture Making*, Crouch indulges the reader with his own ideas of what cultural items will be in the new earth: “My own personal list of ‘the glory and honor of the nations’ would surely include Bach’s *B Minor Mass*, Miles Davis’s *Kind of Blue* and Arvo Spart’s “Spiegel im Spiegel”; green-tea crème brûlée, fish tacos and bulgogi; *Moby Dick* and the *Odyssey*; the iPod and the Mini Cooper.” Yet these items, he continues, will not “appear without being purified and redeemed.”<sup>13</sup> But will all products of human culture be preserved? If the cultural works of non-Christians appear in the new heaven, then could we not also include Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Stanley Kubrick’s *A Clockwork Orange*, P. T. Anderson’s *Boogie Nights*, or Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*? What would these products look like after purification? Purification may fundamentally alter or even demolish certain cultural artifacts. Yet does God abandon his good creation? Will the people of God not live in a materially established New Jerusalem? Furthermore, how does the Two Kingdoms’ ultimate immolation negate the responsibility of Christians to be participants in culture for the sake of the kingdom?

Without a doubt, what cultural items will look like in the new heaven and new earth after undergoing purification is certainly shrouded in mystery (not all neo-Calvinists agree on this point). Nonetheless, apart from how Christians may imagine these renewed human products, how should Christians understand the “glory and honor of the nations” in relation to the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21)? A Two Kingdoms interpretation restricts “glory and honor” to Christians and their worship. Why the restriction? Will we not have human bodies and material spaces in which to live? Would this not suggest that portions of God’s good creation will continue? Neo-Calvinists believe that “glory and honor” includes human work. They can agree that the “present form” of such works will pass away, but that does not entail the annihilation of God’s good creational elements any more than the passing away of a child’s toddler stage means the eradication of my son. Still, what the works in this eternal city will look

12. Ibid., 48.

13. Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 170.

like remains to be seen. Discussing Revelation 21:24–27 in *He Shines in All That's Fair*, Richard Mouw rightly identifies as mysterious the works brought into the New Jerusalem:

The apostle foresees that the nations of the earth will walk by the light of the Holy City, “and kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. . . . People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.” To be sure, the Spirit-guided author is pointing here to something that is enshrouded in mystery. How will the state of things in our present world contribute to this final manifestation of glory? And how is it possible that the honor and glory of pagan cultures can be brought into a City where “nothing unclean will enter in” (Rev. 21:27). The God who is unfolding his multiple purposes in this present age calls his people to be agents of those diverse Kingdom goals. It is important for us in these difficult days to cultivate an appropriate Calvinist sense of modesty and humility in our efforts at cultural faithfulness.<sup>14</sup>

## Sphere Sovereignty

An important reason for engaging culture is to challenge the tyranny of sin over the world and to call back (or buy back, as in *redeem*) the created order to its original state as God intended. Confronting the fall likewise means recognizing and returning to the law-order of God’s creation, that is, maintaining the distinct function of creatural spheres. This relates to another central element of neo-Calvinism, namely, the concept of sphere sovereignty. Sphere sovereignty first acknowledges that there is not a square inch of all reality that escapes the rule and ownership of the triune God. It also maintains that God has created distinct social, economic, cultural, and political spheres that have their own unique functions but find unity and ultimate ontological dependence on the Creator. “Each sphere,” according to Gordon Spykman, “has its own identity, its own unique task, its own God-given prerogatives. On each God has conferred its own peculiar right of existence and reason for existence.”<sup>15</sup> Each sphere, Vincent Bacote further articulates, “possesses its own authority within itself,” meaning that the spheres of the state, church, business, family, and academic institutions,

14. Richard Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 50.

15. Gordon Spykman, quoted in Richard Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 24.

to name a few, “have the liberty to function on their own according to the divine ordinances that God established for each one.”<sup>16</sup> A social sphere that attempts to take the place of God’s lordship, as in the case of a tyrannical state or an academic institution that becomes judge over God’s Word and world, has stepped beyond the limits ordained by the Creator. A number of contemporary scholars have followed Kuyper’s call. Herman Dooyeweerd, a Reformed philosopher whose erudition is arguably comparable to Immanuel Kant, sharpened Kuyper’s idea by articulating the “*mutual irreducibility, inner connection, and inseparable coherence* of all aspects of reality,” extracting the dimensions of sphere sovereignty beyond merely social or political spheres.<sup>17</sup> The cosmos forms, according to Kuyper (and Dooyeweerd after him), “an infinitely structured organism.”<sup>18</sup> Humans inherit from God the normative spheres of the family, the state, and the church, as well as the biological, physical, noetic, and aesthetic norms that find their being in the person and work of Christ.

Although not immediately apparent, given its focus on boundaries, sphere sovereignty makes possible human freedom and creativity. James Bratt articulates a double meaning of sphere sovereignty: “‘Souvereiniteit in Eigen Kring’ can mean sovereignty in *its* circle, referring to the pluralistic ontology Kuyper unfolds in the text [or] sovereignty in *our* circles, spelling out a pluralistic sociology and epistemology which Kuyper also argues for but which does not have ontological warrant.”<sup>19</sup> Recognizing the mutually dependent yet distinctive boundaries separating spheres within the cosmos opens up the richness of the world to the human mind, which then allows humanity to flourish and reveals much more about the Creator. Not only does neo-Calvinism stress the independent yet overlapping spheres of the family, the state, and the church, it also emphasizes, given its strong understanding of creation, the activity of Christians to create institutions that, when abiding by God’s Word, congeal into their own sovereign spheres (e.g., political, economic, and intellectual organizations and institutions). In other words, humanity can utilize the imagination to create institutions

16. Vincent Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology: Appropriating the Legacy of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 81.

17. Herman Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture* (Toronto: Wedge, 1979), 43.

18. James D. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 467.

19. Ibid., 461–62.

and cultures, seemingly out of nothing, when they accord with the wisdom of God.<sup>20</sup>

## The Antithesis

In reclaiming God's creation from the totalizing effects of the fall, believers encounter opposition from those who want to redirect what God has instituted. Integral to humanity's cultural pursuits, especially related to the life of the mind, is the antithesis, the third important tenet of neo-Calvinism. A renewed mind, according to Romans 12:2, compels Christians to destroy "arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God" (2 Cor. 10:5). (Christians need to ask why the need for such belligerence against the spirits of this "secular" age. Christians are not only to endure with patience the trials of this life but also to confront them head-on.) The antithesis proposes that the world is divided between two diametrically opposed belief systems—or, to use Kuyper's language, "world" systems—that inform and interpret every aspect of life. In his Stone Lectures at Princeton in 1898, Kuyper argued that there needs to be an acknowledgment of "two kinds of human consciousness: that of the regenerate and the unregenerate; and these two cannot be identical":

[All knowledge] proceeds out of faith. All science presupposes that we ourselves believe; presupposes a belief that the laws of thinking are correct; presupposes beliefs about life; and presupposes above all faith in the principles from which we proceed . . . . The conflict is not between faith and science, but between the claim that the present state of the cosmos is normal or abnormal . . . . It is not faith and science, but two scientific systems that stand, each with their own faith, over against each other. . . . They are both in earnest, disputing with each other across the entire domain of life and cannot desist from the attempt to pull to the ground the entire edifice of each other's contradictory claims.<sup>21</sup>

Kuyper offers something compelling here: when it comes to ultimate moral and cognitively assenting issues, no common ground exists between

20. What is more, even the most egregiously foul cultural products cannot escape God's creative law or the essential goodness of his creation. Each sphere manifests, to use the words of John Calvin, "at least some sparks of his glory." See *Institutes*, 1.52.

21. Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 131, 133.

Christians and non-Christians. These two opposing viewpoints develop “logically and systematically the whole complex of ruling ideas and conceptions that go to make up our life and world-view.” He encourages Christians to oppose the antithetical worldview of modernism and to “successfully defend” their own sanctuary “by placing in opposition . . . a life and worldview” of their own.<sup>22</sup> Since Calvinism elevates the sovereign rule of God as King and “meaning-maker” of all things, Kuyper believed that it offered “the ready solution,” the coherent system of philosophical thought, to counter the apostate mind.

The antithesis manifests the religious core of being. Calvin described humanity as inescapably religious. “Religion,” Kuyper wrote, “is and will always be the expression of what is central in our lives. However degenerate and obscured a people’s religion may be, you will always find expressed in it their fundamental ethos. In any given case this [religious] ethos will be bound up with a people’s character and nature, with its history, even with the conditions of the soil on which it lives and the climate in which it breathes.”<sup>23</sup> Dooyeweerd referred to it as humanity’s deep-seated religious and pretheoretical ground motive, which undergirds and motivates all worldviews.<sup>24</sup> He also labeled humanity’s religious center the “heart,” “the fullness of our selfhood in which all our temporal functions [that] find their religious *concentration* and *consummation* of meaning.”<sup>25</sup> It is through the heart that humans submit to some form of divine Archimedean point—an axis point from which everything in the world pivots. All knowledge claims, in other words, derive either from a faith reliance on something in the created order that is dependent on the totality of the cosmos, what Dooyeweerd called immanence philosophy, or from the Author of such created reality, a being by nature independently self-sufficient and sovereign over all.<sup>26</sup> Meaning and being, which for Dooyeweerd are one and

22. Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism: The Stone Lectures of 1898, Calvinism and Science* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), 190; Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, intro. Benjamin B. Warfield, trans. J. Hendrik De Vries (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 154, 189–90.

23. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 198.

24. James Skillen and Rockne McCarthy, ed., *Political Order and the Plural Structure of Society*, Emory University Studies in Law and Religion (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 281.

25. Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, vol. 1, *The Necessary Pre-suppositions of Philosophy*, trans. David Freeman and William Young (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 506 (emphasis added).

26. Neo-Calvinist and Dooyeweerd scholar Roy Clouser, author of *The Myth of Religious Neutrality*, has offered a powerful argument defending the idea that all knowledge, even at the

the same, are not static; both depend on the triune God who alone has no (dependent) meaning, since he is self-contained and self-authenticating.

Dooyeweerd's student at the Free University, H. Evan Runner, who later helped organize what would become the Institute for Christian Studies, likewise emphasized the faith center of all knowledge claims. Every person has a faith commitment, beliefs situated at the core of his or her being. Humans are inescapably religious. As Runner wrote in *Scriptural Religion and the Political Task*, "Our whole life is religion. And that not only for Christian believers (true religion), but also for unbelievers. For unbelief is not described in Scripture as absence of belief, but as mis-directed belief. Religion . . . is man's ineradicable situation: he has been created 'before God' . . . and must render an account." As a religious presupposition, unbelief shapes the way in which one looks at the world: "Apostate man appropriates to his own heathen pistical phantasy the role that the Word of God really has, and thus from the beginning places himself in a world where the relations are (imagined) other than they really are. Human analysis always takes place within the context of the Lie or the Truth."<sup>27</sup>

Like knowledge claims, cultural activity, therefore, reveals the presuppositions of those who submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ over every area of life, contrasting with those who suppress that reality in unrighteousness. The heart, according to Henry Van Til, "serves as the presupposition of every culture."<sup>28</sup> Culture manifests humanity's religious core. In the sphere of culture making and culture transforming, according to Wolters, a student of Runner, the religious ground motive determines the direction in which human activity moves against the unmovable structure of God's created order.

As a nontheological specialist and professor at a Christian college, I have found Dooyeweerd's and Runner's reworking of Kuyper's "world systems" immensely helpful. Their work on the religious nature of world-

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basic surface level (e.g.,  $1 + 1 = 2$ ), reveals foundational religious motives behind it and thus affirms a Christian view of everything. "Is There a Christian View of Everything from Soup to Nuts?" *Pro Rege* (June 2003). Clouser makes a distinction between reducibility and irreducibility in the direction of humanity's perspective on the world. The unbelieving mind reduces knowledge to a creation starting point, a foundation derived from a creational thing (e.g., matter for the Marxist). But this is impossible, for matter is dependent on other created things. Thought is derived from a Christian root, however, with an irreducible reality, namely, the triune God, whose being cannot be dependent on anything in the created order.

27. H. Evan Runner, *Scriptural Religion and the Political Task* (Toronto: Wedge, 1974), 15.

28. Henry Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959), 39.

views has given meaning and drive to my own scholarship. Let me offer an example related to my own pedagogy. Christian institutions of higher learning regularly utilize the term *integration* to discuss the coupling of faith and learning. Privately, I have always wondered about the term *integration*, which suggests that faith and learning are somehow naturally separated and must be pulled together—a reality, I assume, of the professionalization of academia that began in the late nineteenth century, and not of the various disciplines in themselves. Indeed, the disentangling of faith from learning, a project inaugurated by Enlightenment thinking and unfortunately widely accepted by many evangelical colleges, is a much more difficult task to execute. Integration presupposes a modernist duality. Faith is already involved in learning. Neo-Calvinist Robert Sweetman, who holds the H. Evan Runner Chair in the History of Philosophy at the Institute for Christian Studies, suggests the substitution of *integral* for *integration*, wherein one's faith commitments can never be evicted from an investigation of the world.<sup>29</sup> The religious root of all worldviews and how such ground motives or concentrations of being shape our understanding of the world is something that even the Two Kingdoms perspective cannot escape.

This being said, however, the Reformed community needs to be careful as to how the antithesis is employed. The spiritually renewed Christian continues to struggle with sin. “We know, after all,” Dooyeweerd writes, “that in the heart of the Christian himself the apostate selfhood and the selfhood redirected to God wage a daily warfare . . . . Humanity which is renewed in Him still shares in the apostate root of mankind.”<sup>30</sup> This is, if anything, humbling vis-à-vis our engagement with culture. A failure to affirm this leads to the rigid taxonomy that identifies certain thoughts or actions as either saved or apostate. I am not entirely convinced that every cultural item produced by the unbelieving mind is done in willful suppression of the Creator. Unbelievers may be ambivalent when it comes to how they perceive God in their cultural work, for instance. (Of course, ambivalence is not excusable.) The unregenerate are condemned for their latent or manifest suppression and for their failure to acknowledge Christ

29. The distinction between *integration* and *integral* can be found in Robert Sweetman’s “Christian Scholarship: Two Reformed Perspectives,” *Perspectives: A Journal of Reformed Thought* 16, 6 (2001): 14–19.

30. Dooyeweerd, *New Critique*, 1:137, 175.

as Lord. Still, unbelievers must presuppose God's law-ordered world, which allows them to produce God-honoring works despite their rebellion. In his reflections on Kuyper, Mouw reminds us that neo-Calvinism allows us to avoid such facile typecasting of the world:

The same apostle who warns against “all that is in the world” also tells us that “what we will be has not yet been revealed”—that will only be clear to us when “he is revealed [and] we be like him” (1 John 3:2). Sin still affects the way we think and act. And just as we are not as holy as we might predict on the basis of our theology of depravity, it is a fact of our Christian experience that the church often disappoints us, while the unbelieving world sometimes pleasantly surprises us.<sup>31</sup>

Whatever we may say about the thoughts and works of unbelievers, Christians are definitely moved by the Holy Spirit to glorify God in everything they do.

## Common Grace

Recognizing the “good” work of unbelievers—“good” in the sense of being in accordance with God’s creational structures—relates to a fourth feature of neo-Calvinism. Discerning the antithesis demands an understanding of its counterpart: common grace. Common grace, or what Calvin referred to as “universal grace,” is defined as (1) God’s offering of his creation to all of humanity regardless of spiritual state; (2) God’s restraining of the full devastating consequences of the fall (i.e., bridling the “perversity of nature, that it may not break forth into action,” according to Calvin); and (3) the ability of the nonelect to have moments of clear insight regarding truth, justice, goodness, and beauty.<sup>32</sup> A familiar passage used to formulate the idea of common grace, a phrase that does not appear in Scripture, is Matthew 5:45: “[God] makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” As Louis Berkhof writes, common grace refers to *“those general blessings, such as rain and sunshine, food and drink, clothing and shelter, which God imparts to all men indiscriminately where and in what measure it seems good to Him.”*<sup>33</sup> This is inextricably tied to the sovereignty of God, for it is he who owns the sun and the rain that

31. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 63.

32. *Institutes*, 1.5.3.

33. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 436.

are enjoyed by all humans. Humans are offered the freedom to flourish without being immediately judged by God.

Neo-Calvinists and Two Kingdoms theologians, I believe, have a point of contact here. Common grace is similar to the idea of a natural or creational law. Since all humans are image-bearers of God, they have the ability to grasp creational truths. Reason, says Calvin, is “by nature implanted in men . . . It is certainly a free gift of his beneficence to each . . . upon pious and impious, it is rightly counted among natural gifts.”<sup>34</sup> Although humans are born in sin, “by nature children of wrath, incapable of any saving good,” according to the Canons of Dort, “[t]here remain, however, in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, and discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining an orderly external deportment.”<sup>35</sup> In support of its perspective, the Two Kingdoms school of thought refers to Calvin’s distinction between heavenly and earthly activities:

There is one kind of understanding of earthly things; another of heavenly. I call “earthly things” those which do not pertain to God or his Kingdom, to true justice, or to the blessedness of the future life; but which have their significance and relationship with regard to the present life and are, in a sense, confined within its bounds. I call “heavenly things” the pure knowledge of God, the nature of true righteousness, and the mysteries of the Heavenly Kingdom. The first class includes government, household management, all mechanical skills, and the liberal arts. In the second are the knowledge of God and of his will, and the rule by which we conform our lives to it.<sup>36</sup>

Common grace likewise includes a universal moral sense. The “desire to search out the truth,” according to Calvin, “through natural instinct,” is done in order to “foster and preserve society.”<sup>37</sup> God has written his law on the hearts of all humans, as Romans 2:14–15 explains: “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that

34. *Institutes*, 2.2.14.

35. Canons of Dort, 3.3.4.

36. *Institutes*, 1.2.2.13.

37. *Ibid.*, 2.2.13–15.

the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.” Scripture provides numerous examples of those outside the covenant of God who without the specific revelation of the law nonetheless exhibit a basic understanding of right and wrong. Consider the example of Abraham and Abimelech: the latter, not a member of the covenant community (or at least not represented by the covenant head), confronts Abraham for lying about his wife Sarah in Genesis 20.

Common grace and natural law accord with the Kuyperian notion of sphere sovereignty. Following Calvin and the Canons of Dort, VanDrunen argues for “a distinction between the spiritual kingdom (finding institutional expression in the present age only in the church) and the civil kingdom (encompassing the various nonecclesiastical cultural endeavors, particularly the work of the state).”<sup>38</sup> He reiterates the idea in *Biblical Case for Natural Law*: “The civil kingdom pertains to temporal, earthly, provisional matters not matters of ultimate and spiritual importance.” The spiritual realm or kingdom, VanDrunen continues, “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.”<sup>39</sup> The job of the state, for instance, is to administer justice, not preach the gospel, and justice includes protecting a citizen’s right, according to civil law, to preach the gospel.

A few points of clarification need to be made in regard to common grace and natural law. First, in no way does this mean that those without the law are exonerated for their failure to acknowledge the Author of such laws. Unbelievers will be condemned for their failure to believe in the saving work of Jesus on the cross; they will equally be condemned for their rejection of God’s authorship of creational laws—laws that are *not* the central means of salvation. Second, although there are duties related specifically to the institutional church, these two realms remain under not only the authority of God the Father but also the lordship of Jesus Christ. Third, “this light” is rendered “wholly polluted” because it is held

38. David VanDrunen, “Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed Natural Law and Two Kingdoms Tradition,” *CTJ* 41 (2007): 283–307.

39. David VanDrunen, *Biblical Case for Natural Law*, Studies in Christian Social Ethics and Economics, ed. Anthony B. Bradley (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, 2006), 24.

back “in unrighteousness.”<sup>40</sup> When neo-Calvinists talk about two competing “life” or “world” systems, they do not mean there are two different worlds. The antithesis acutely manifests itself when the two competing sets of views engage one common realm in the pursuit of opposing ultimate concerns. The idea of a common realm must not be confused with “neutrality” and should be distinguished from common grace.<sup>41</sup> The lack of common ground is distinct from the presence of a common realm. The former addresses the fundamental orientation of the heart as affected by the fall and redemption; the latter refers to the creational structures given to Christians and non-Christians alike. Thus, as there is no common ground in terms of *weltanschauung*, there is common ground in how such worldviews are constructed. Christians and non-Christians have the same creational “stuff” to work from. Christians worshipfully affirm the Creator, while non-Christians, although knowing the Creator, suppress him in unrighteousness. In *Christ and Culture*, Klaas Schilder writes, “Within the framework of time after the Fall, the antithesis was inevitable not in nature but in the use of nature, and hence in culture.”<sup>42</sup> Wolters’s distinction between structure, “the ‘essence’ of a creaturely thing,” and direction, either the “sinful deviation from that structural ordinance” or the “renewed conformity” in the direction of Christ, is helpful here.<sup>43</sup> The sanctified mind “spreads to the full range of human activities.”<sup>44</sup>

While Christians and non-Christians have access to the same things of this world—metaphysically, ontologically, and epistemologically—the unregenerate mind takes such things in a direction they were not

40. Canons of Dort, art. 4, in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom, With a History and Critical Notes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 588.

41. Unfortunately, the notion of the antithesis, like most other theological extrapolations, may be taken in a multiplicity of directions. In one corner, it has created great confusion; in another, it has created fundamentalist escapist Christians. At least one Dutch Reformed thinker, Klaas Schilder, challenged the terminology of common grace: “There is indeed ‘common’ grace in culture (grace for more than one person). But there is no universal (or general) grace for all men. Therefore Abraham Kuyper’s construction was wrong.” Klaas Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, trans. G. van Rongen and W. Helder (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing, 1977). For Schilder, restricting common grace to God’s gracious restraint of human depravity, which is generally what theologians mean when talking about common grace, neglects the fact that God also restrains redemption from the nonelect, which cannot be construed as gracious. Theologians define common grace as God’s restraining power on fallen humanity and, in some cases, as those moments of true insights that unbelievers can have.

42. Ibid., 47.

43. Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 88.

44. Ibid., 91.

originally meant to go. They take the good creation and make it into an idol of their own imagination. With this in hand, many Reformed Christians have argued that the non-Christian cannot truly know God's creation. One such thinker was Westminster theologian-philosopher Cornelius Van Til, who wrote in *Common Grace and the Gospel* that both believer and unbeliever

are epistemologically self-conscious and as such engaged in the interpretive enterprise [and] they cannot be said to have any fact in common. On the other hand, it must be asserted that they have every fact in common. Both deal with the same God and with the same universe created by God. Both are made in the image of God. In short, they have the metaphysical situation in common. Metaphysically, both parties have all things in common, while epistemologically they have nothing in common.<sup>45</sup>

This unnecessary separation between metaphysics and epistemology has in many instances not allowed for serious dialogue between Christians and non-Christians, a direction Van Til would not have approved. A few of the followers of Van Til tend to engage culture for the sole purpose of battling anything that comes from the unregenerate mind, not to gain insights from unbelievers. They come to culture with an oppositional attitude. This indeed is the tension that exists between the antithesis and common grace. Mouw suggests that when it comes to common grace, Christians should recognize an element of "mystery regarding God's dealings with humankind," and, he says later, "assessing the thoughts and deeds of the unconverted is to operate with what we might think of as a hermeneutic of caution, though not a hermeneutic of outright suspicion."<sup>46</sup>

45. Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1972), 5. John Frame has pointed out that Van Til recognized the difficulty of articulating this point. In *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, Van Til writes, "We are well aware of the fact that non-Christians have a great deal of knowledge about this world which is true as far as it goes. That, there is a sense in which we can and must allow for the value of knowledge of non-Christians. This has always been a difficult point. It is often the one great source of confusion on the question of faith in its relation to reason. We should admit that we cannot give any wholly satisfactory account of the situation as it actually obtains." Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974), 26; see John Frame, "Presuppositional Apologetics," in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 212; John Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995), 187–213.

46. Mouw, *He Shines*, 93.

Fourth, the distinction between ecclesial and political functions cannot be easily applied to human beings and to all human activity. In book 3 of the *Institutes*, for instance, Calvin articulates the functionality of two kingdoms that are intertwined in the undivided (one) human person:

Let us consider that there is a twofold government *in man*: one aspect is spiritual, whereby the conscience is instructed in piety and in reverencing God; the second is political, whereby man is educated for the duties of humanity and citizenship that must be maintained among men. These are usually called the “spiritual” and the “temporal” jurisdiction . . . by which is meant that the former sort of government pertains to the life of the soul, while the latter has to do with the concerns of the present life—not only with food and clothing but with laying down laws whereby a man may live his life among other men holily, honorably, and temperately. For the former resides *in* the inner mind, while the latter regulates only outward behavior. The one we may call the spiritual kingdom, the other, the political kingdom. Now these two, as we have divided them, must always be examined separately; and while one is being considered, we must call away and turn aside the mind from thinking about the other. There are *in man*, two worlds, over which different kings and different laws have authority.<sup>47</sup>

Observe the initial and final phrasing of the passage. The “twofold government”—with “two worlds,” “different kings,” and “different laws”—is housed within a single person; it cannot be ontologically separated. Christians, who are redeemed as a whole (i.e., body and soul), do things related to the eternal through the temporal. The Westminster Confession of Faith even affirms that “there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature.”<sup>48</sup> The church cannot do its job (i.e., function properly) without mediating the secular. This is why Kuyper could make the claim that “special grace presupposes common grace.”<sup>49</sup> In his *Systematic Theology*, Berkhof writes that common grace “does not affect the salvation of the sinner”; rather, the “forms” of common grace (e.g., “external calling and moral

47. *Institutes*, 3.19.15 (emphasis added).

48. WCF, 1.6.

49. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 169.

*illumination*") are "closely connected with the economy of redemption and have a soteriological aspect."<sup>50</sup> "If there were no common grace," Vincent Bacote says, "creation would have been destroyed, or at the very least, the conditions for life would have been so horrific that the church of God would not have had a place to strike root anywhere."<sup>51</sup> Without common grace, special grace is irrelevant.

Finally, the use of the common in all cultural activities puts all humans in contact with God. In his commentary on John 1, Calvin writes, "There is no man, therefore, whom some perception of the eternal *light* does not reach." The point is likewise explored in the opening sections of the *Institutes*:

Wherever you cast your eyes is no spot in the universe wherein you cannot discern at least some sparks of glory. You cannot in one glance survey this most vast and beautiful system of the universe, in its wide expanse, without being completely overwhelmed by the boundless force of its brightness. The reason why the author of the Letter to the Hebrews elegantly calls the universe the appearance of things invisible [Heb. 11:3] is that this skillful ordering of the universe is for us a sort of mirror in which we can contemplate God, who is otherwise invisible . . . . Indeed, men who have either quaffed or even tasted the liberal arts penetrate with their aid far more deeply into the secrets of the divine wisdom.<sup>52</sup>

Thus even in the so-called earthly realm, humans make contact with the eternal. The Two Kingdoms side may have a hard time talking about Christian learning, for instance, but one's pursuit of learning has an important relationship to the artistry of the Creator. The burden of justification lies on the shoulders of those who wish to remove "Christian" from a pursuit of knowledge and morality. All truth is Christ's truth.

What then is the difference between neo-Calvinists and Two Kingdoms theologians on the issue of common grace? On the one hand, the distinction is one of accent. The theology of the latter makes it difficult to fully understand the antithesis and common grace. The Two Kingdoms side seems to play down or apply inconsistently the importance of

50. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 436.

51. Bacote, *Public Theology*, 98.

52. *Institutes*, 1.5.1.52.

an individual's heart motive, the influence of one's religious core. The antithesis is inconsistently applied by VanDrunen in *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*. The muting of the antithesis has a reciprocal effect on common grace. Common grace seems to be reduced to what is common or natural. Common grace is what God gives to man, who is, in a nonredeemed way, blessed by God while in (antithetical) rebellion. To say, for instance, that cultural production need not take into consideration one's religious motive is to ignore, not fully understand, or deny the antithesis. If the antithesis is irrelevant, then why talk about God's nonredemptive graciousness to fallen humanity?

On the other hand, while arguing for the relationship between common grace and special grace, Kuyper recognized the potential to mishandle grace (common and saving) and nature. According to Bacote, "a problem occurs when grace is distinguished from nature, rendering the significance of Christ exclusive to the spiritual realm."<sup>53</sup> "Reflecting on Christ," Kuyper writes, "[people] think exclusively of the blood shed in atonement and refuse to take account of the significance of Christ for the body, for the visible world . . . . By taking this tack you run the danger of isolating Christ for your soul and you view life in and for the world as that exists *alongside* your Christian religion, not controlled by it."<sup>54</sup> The tendency is to leave nature alone; it has no place in a Christian's cultural responsibility and certainly not a part of God's eternal kingdom. Contemporary Two Kingdoms theology tries to escape this dilemma by reiterating the fact that God is sovereign over all creation, yet it fails to adequately address the place of Christ not only as the source of creation but as the continual and integrally dynamic center of the ontology of creation. There is no "nature" without Christ.

## CONCLUSION

The tenets of neo-Calvinism must be carefully considered. Indeed, I commend Two Kingdoms thinkers for pointing out the inconsistencies of many associated with the neo-Calvinist tradition, especially in the tendency to ignore the boundaries between spheres, but again, this is no reason to retire it or stop the debates within the Reformed community

53. Bacote, *Public Theology*, 99.

54. Kuyper, quoted in *ibid.*

## INTRODUCTION

concerning Christ, culture, and the kingdom. Since its appearance in the late nineteenth century, neo-Calvinism, following the lead of Kuyper, has tried to work out the full implications of Reformational thought. Calvinism has far-reaching implications for society and culture because at its core it unabashedly proclaims the majestic authority of God over the entire cosmos, the triumph of Christ over sin, and the response of his people to bring the light of the gospel through the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and works of Christian charity. During his ministry on earth, Jesus told his disciples that the kingdom was in their midst, yet Christians continually pray “thy kingdom come.” The kingdom is both a present and future reality. As Christians, we have inherited and are therefore citizens of a kingdom—a kingdom introduced by the coming of the true King, Jesus Christ. The following essays provide insights as to how Christians can live kingdom lives as they confidently wait for the kingdom to come.

# P A R T   1

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*Kingdom Reign and Rule*



# I

## The Restoration of All Things to Proper Order: An Assessment of the “Two Kingdoms/Natural Law” Interpretation of Calvin’s Public Theology

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CORNEL VENEMA

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IN HIS DEFENSE OF the “Two Kingdoms/natural law” interpretation of Reformed social thought, it is not surprising that David VanDrunen, one of the principal proponents of this interpretation, appeals to the theology of John Calvin.<sup>1</sup> Although recent interpreters of Calvin’s theology have acknowledged that Calvin was not the sole fountainhead of the Reformed tradition, he arguably remains one of its most important and influential figures. Since advocates of the Two Kingdoms/natural law position insist

1. See David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 67–118; idem, “The Two Kingdoms: A Reassessment of the Transformationalist Calvin,” *CTJ* 40, 2 (2005): 248–66; idem, “The Context of Natural Law: John Calvin’s Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms,” *JCS* 46 (2004): 503–25; idem, “Medieval Natural Law and the Reformation: A Comparison of Aquinas and Calvin,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 80, 1 (2006): 77–98; and 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), 135–53.

that this was the reigning paradigm of early Reformed orthodoxy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is not surprising that the theology of John Calvin is adduced as an important piece of evidence for this claim.<sup>2</sup> Even though the case for the Two Kingdoms/natural law perspective also includes a consideration of the relevant biblical data, which is foundational to the construction of a Reformed public theology, VanDrunen and other advocates of this perspective offer a historical case that grants special importance to Calvin's role in the development of a distinctively Reformed public theology.<sup>3</sup> One of the most important dimensions of any assessment of the Two Kingdoms/natural law position, therefore, must be an evaluation of the historical case for this position, especially its interpretation of Calvin's public theology.

The aim of this chapter is to evaluate whether VanDrunen's Two Kingdoms/natural law interpretation of Calvin's public theology is valid. Because of the complexity of Calvin's public theology, not to mention the large body of secondary literature on the subject, my assessment of the historical case for the Two Kingdoms/natural law interpretation of this thought will be only a preliminary one. A thorough examination of Calvin's public theology requires not only an examination of his principal theological writings, which include his *Institutes*, commentaries, and sermons, but also a consideration of Calvin's practice. It is scarcely possible to draw conclusions regarding Calvin's position without some reflection on the way Calvin addressed, as the principal reformer of the church in Geneva, Switzerland, a myriad of social and cultural questions. Nor is it possible to reflect accurately on Calvin's understanding of the claims of the Christian gospel in the public square without an analysis of the way he addressed such questions throughout the course of his lengthy ministry. Nevertheless, I will attempt to assess in this chapter the principal elements of the Two Kingdoms/natural law perspective.

In order to accomplish this purpose, I will begin with a brief summary of VanDrunen's interpretation of Calvin's public theology, followed

2. Throughout the chapter, I use the expression *Two Kingdoms/natural law* as a shorthand way of referring to VanDrunen's distinction between what he terms the "natural" and the "spiritual" kingdoms, and to his claim that the conduct of human beings in the natural kingdom is governed principally by the natural law. In my use of this expression, therefore, I am not suggesting that VanDrunen equates the Two Kingdoms with the natural law.

3. For a summary of the biblical case for the Two Kingdoms/natural law view, see David VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, n.d.); and idem, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

by three features of Calvin’s position that require special attention: first, Calvin’s view of the “Two Kingdoms,” or as I prefer to express it, the “twofold government” of Christ; second, Calvin’s view of the natural law, especially in relation to the special revelation of God found in Scripture; and third, Calvin’s conception of the interrelation and integration of God’s works in creation and redemption. Although I will have occasion to acknowledge ambiguities in Calvin’s public theology, my thesis is that the Two Kingdoms/natural law interpretation of VanDrunen does not provide a satisfactory account of Calvin’s public theology. In Calvin’s social thought, a far more integrated and coherent view of the lordship of Jesus Christ in every area of life is presented than that which VanDrunen proposes when he characterizes Calvin’s Two Kingdoms theology. Furthermore, I will argue that VanDrunen separates too sharply between Calvin’s understanding of the revelation of God’s will through natural law and through the more full, clear light of Scripture. Rather than viewing redemption as a kind of overlay or addendum to creation, Calvin views redemption as the restoration of all things to proper order under God’s sovereign lordship and through the office of Christ as Mediator of both creation and redemption.

## **A SKETCH OF VANDRUNEN’S “TWO KINGDOMS/NATURAL LAW” INTERPRETATION OF CALVIN**

According to VanDrunen’s interpretation of Calvin, the themes of the “Two Kingdoms” and “natural law” represent two comprehensive and foundational principles in Calvin’s theology. Contrary to a common neo-Calvinist representation of Calvin’s public theology, which views Calvin as the proponent of the universal, redemptive kingship of Jesus Christ in all areas of human life, VanDrunen argues that Calvin sharply distinguished between the civil or natural kingdom and the ecclesiastical kingdom. Whereas Calvin has often been co-opted by a neo-Calvinist vision that advocates the transformation of all areas of human life and culture under the redemptive lordship of Jesus Christ, VanDrunen maintains that Calvin actually drew a sharp line of separation between these two kingdoms. In the civil kingdom, Christ’s kingship expresses his office as Mediator of creation and providential lordship over the non-ecclesiastical realm of human society and culture. By contrast, in the ecclesiastical kingdom, Christ’s kingship expresses his office as Mediator of redemption and head of the church.

Within the framework of his Two Kingdoms theology, Calvin appeals to the natural law as the norm for human conduct within the civil kingdom, and to the Scriptures as the norm for Christian conduct within the ecclesial kingdom. Far from advocating a transformationalist view of the kingdom of Christ, Calvin advocated a common or secular approach to life within the natural kingdom, and advocated a distinctively Christian culture only within the sphere of the church.

### **Calvin's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms**

Citing passages in Calvin's *Institutes* that draw a sharp separation between the civil and the ecclesial kingdoms, VanDrunen identifies three important attributes that distinguish them.

The three attributes of the kingdom of Christ are its redemptive character, its spiritual or heavenly identity, and its present institutional expression in the church. The three attributes of the civil kingdom are its non-redemptive character, its external or earthly identity, and its present (though not exclusive) expression in civil government.<sup>4</sup>

The distinction between the two kingdoms in Calvin's theology corresponds to the distinction between Christ's offices as Mediator of creation and as Mediator of redemption. Although Calvin acknowledges the universal lordship of Jesus Christ, he maintains the difference between the non-redemptive rule of the Son of God as the Mediator of creation and the saving rule of Christ as the Mediator of redemption. Within the redemptive kingdom, Christ rules in the hearts of believers in a spiritual way, and the obedience of believers is a dimension of the Christian liberty that is a fruit of the gospel of free justification.<sup>5</sup> Whereas believers freely serve Christ within the spiritual jurisdiction of the church, all human beings, believers and unbelievers alike, are subject to a civil or natural jurisdiction in which Christ constrains the outward conduct by the requirements of the natural law. Furthermore, the spiritual kingdom has a heavenly identity; it addresses the concerns of the soul and the believer's redemptive relationship with the triune God. The civil or natural kingdom, by contrast, concerns the earthly and natural life of believers and nonbelievers alike, who continue to live

4. VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 73.

5. Ibid.

as creatures under the jurisdiction of the natural law, sustained by God's providence and enabled by the working of God's common or general grace.

Although VanDrunen does not offer a comprehensive identification of what aspects of human life fall within the redemptive and nonredemptive kingdoms, he suggests that the redemptive kingdom corresponds to the institutional church and that the nonredemptive kingdom includes all other aspects of human life and culture. Although the natural or civil kingdom finds its primary institutional expression in civil government, it includes as well everything that has to do with life in the body and this present world.<sup>6</sup> Any feature of human life in the created order that does not properly pertain to the calling of the institutional church belongs to the civil kingdom. The presence of the redemptive kingdom of Christ is, so far as this present age is concerned, restricted to the church. As citizens of the spiritual and ecclesiastical kingdom, believers are pilgrims who know that the eschatological fulfillment of the redemptive kingdom awaits Christ's coming at the end of the age. Believers are citizens of two kingdoms, the ecclesiastical and the civil. As such, they are under no obligation to "redeem" life in the civil kingdom. Rather, the calling of believers is to live appropriately in these two kingdoms, according to their distinctive identities and their distinctive norms.

### **Calvin's Doctrine of the Natural Law**

In VanDrunen's estimation, Calvin's doctrine of the Two Kingdoms provides a framework for a proper understanding of the disputed question of Calvin's view of natural law. In the history of the interpretation of Calvin's theology, a great deal of discussion has taken place regarding his understanding and use of the doctrine of natural law. According to VanDrunen, the resolution of the debates about Calvin's doctrine of natural law can be found only when it is placed within the setting of his Two Kingdoms doctrine. Not only did Calvin follow closely a long tradition of Christian theology, which affirmed the natural law as an expression of God's will for his creation and human beings as his image-bearers, but he also closely linked the doctrine of natural law with the calling of human beings within the natural kingdom. For VanDrunen, "correlating Calvin's doctrine of natural law with his doctrine of the Two Kingdoms is of great help for reconciling

6. Ibid., 79.

the seemingly discordant strains of his statements about natural law and thereby proves to be a key aspect of its distinctiveness in comparison to the medieval traditions.<sup>7</sup> Contrary to the neoorthodox interpretation of Calvin's theology, which views his affirmation of a natural knowledge of God's will and purpose through natural law as inconsistent with his insistence that God can be known properly and fully only through special revelation, Calvin clearly affirms a knowledge of God's will through the natural law as well as a knowledge of God's will as Redeemer through special revelation. Moreover, even though Calvin emphasizes the inability of human beings after the fall into sin to do what the natural law requires and thereby find favor with God, he nonetheless affirms that human beings are able to know and perform externally what the natural law requires within the realm of the natural kingdom.

In his treatment of Calvin's doctrine of natural law, VanDrunen begins with a summary of Calvin's understanding of the natural law that exhibits considerable continuity with a long-standing tenet of Christian theology. For Calvin, the natural law reveals God's moral will to human beings who bear his image, and constitutes the basis for the capacity of human consciences to judge between what is good or evil. Consistent with his general emphasis on a natural knowledge of God as Creator, Calvin taught that God's image-bearers know the moral will of God through the testimony of natural law and the conscience.<sup>8</sup> Although the natural law provides no knowledge of God's will and purpose as Redeemer, it does provide "a far greater amount of specific moral knowledge" that is "immediately accessible to all people" than was acknowledged by even St. Thomas Aquinas, the classic Roman Catholic proponent of a natural knowledge of God.<sup>9</sup> Rooted in God's moral character, the natural law in its moral content is reiterated in the Decalogue of Moses and discloses the moral obligations that express God's holy will for his creatures. While Calvin follows closely the long-standing medieval emphasis on natural law, VanDrunen acknowledges that he also emphasized

7. Ibid., 95. In his article "The Context of Natural Law: John Calvin's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms," VanDrunen offers an extensive defense of this claim. According to VanDrunen, Calvin's negative assessment of the role of natural law pertains to its use in the spiritual kingdom, not the natural kingdom. Although sinful human beings are not able to obtain favor with God on the basis of their obedience to the natural law, they are able to order their lives in a relatively righteous manner within the natural kingdom by the standard of the natural law.

8. VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 100.

9. Ibid., 102.

more than his medieval predecessors the “dire effects of sin and the consequent necessity of supernatural revelation.”<sup>10</sup> Although many interpreters of Calvin conclude from his emphasis on the inadequacy of natural law because of the corruption of human sinfulness that the natural law plays no positive role in the ordering of human life after the fall, Calvin was able to affirm a continuing role for natural law within the civil kingdom.

Calvin ascribed surprisingly positive use for natural law (in the form of various cultural achievements) in his discussion of life in the civil kingdom and consistently negative use for it (in the form of leaving all people inexcusable for their sin) in his discussion of life in the spiritual kingdom. Calvin’s different evaluations of the use of natural law were not the result of intellectual inconsistency but of his view that though natural law permits even pagans to form good laws and produce other social goods in the civil kingdom, it is completely incapable of producing true spiritual good in people for the attainment of heavenly bliss, the realm of the spiritual kingdom.<sup>11</sup>

In VanDrunen’s interpretation of Calvin’s doctrine of natural law, therefore, the solution to some of the long-standing questions of interpretation regarding the consistency of Calvin’s view is readily apparent. Although Calvin denies to natural law a positive use and role within the spiritual kingdom of the church, emphasizing human sinfulness and inability to perform what the law requires as a basis for acceptance into favor with God, he does affirm the abiding usefulness and positive role of the natural law within the natural or civil kingdom. The failure on the part of many interpreters of Calvin to understand how Calvin could simultaneously affirm the natural law and its positive role, and at the same time deny that human beings as sinners can find acceptance with God on the basis of obedience to that law, stems from a failure to see this close correlation. Calvin’s doctrine of the Two Kingdoms offers a coherent explanation of Calvin’s viewpoint and provides a resolution of this apparent inconsistency in his thought.

For Calvin, the sinful human person, by use of reason and natural knowledge, can attain great things in the domain of earthly things, that is, in the civil kingdom. By use of reason and natural knowledge, in contrast,

10. Ibid., 105.

11. Ibid., 110–11.

the sinful person cannot even begin to approach knowledge of salvation and eternal life, that is, knowledge of the heavenly kingdom of Christ. Natural law, therefore, has a positive function to play in the life of the earthly, civil kingdom, according to Calvin. But . . . natural law has only a negative function to play in regard to spiritual things and the heavenly kingdom of Christ, where it serves merely to convict people of their sins and to strip them of all pretexts for ignorance.<sup>12</sup>

According to VanDrunen, Calvin's Two Kingdoms/natural law public theology represents a clear and compelling vision of the distinct callings of the church, which constitutes the redemptive realm or spiritual kingdom, and of the natural kingdom, which constitutes the common or secular realm. The rule or norm that governs the spiritual kingdom is the redemptive revelation of God in Scripture, whereas the rule or norm that governs the civil kingdom is the natural law of God that is known by all human beings who bear God's image.

## **AN ASSESSMENT OF THE “TWO KINGDOMS/NATURAL LAW” INTERPRETATION OF CALVIN**

In order to assess VanDrunen's Two Kingdoms/natural law interpretation of Calvin's theology, we need to consider three broad topics in Calvin's theology. The first of these topics is the distinction Calvin makes between the spiritual and natural kingdoms. VanDrunen is certainly justified in calling attention to Calvin's distinction between these kingdoms. However, it remains to be seen whether Calvin views them primarily in terms of two separate realms, and whether he makes the clear identification of the spiritual kingdom with the institutional church and the natural kingdom with the remainder of human life and culture, as VanDrunen maintains. Does Calvin use this distinction to restrict distinctively “Christian” conduct to the life and ministry of the church, in distinction from all other aspects of human conduct? The second of these topics is the strict correlation that VanDrunen posits between the natural kingdom, which is governed by Christ as Mediator of creation through the natural law, and the spiritual kingdom, which is governed by Christ as Mediator of redemption through the moral law as it is set forth in Scripture. The third topic is one that VanDrunen

12. Ibid., 112–13.

inadequately acknowledges in his interpretation of Calvin's theology, namely, the relation that Calvin emphasizes between God's purpose and work as Creator and as Redeemer. How does Calvin construe the relation between God's purposes in creation and redemption? In VanDrunen's interpretation of Calvin's theology, Christ's work as Redeemer is regarded as a kind of overlay or higher stratum of spiritual renewal that has little or no direct relation to the order of creation or human life in the natural kingdom. The redemptive kingdom of Christ does not have any direct implications for the present reordering of human life and conduct within the natural kingdom. However, in Calvin's conception of the relation between creation and redemption, there is a clear affirmation of God's purpose in redemption to reverse the consequences of human sin and disobedience and to restore the whole creation to proper order.

### **Calvin on the “Twofold Government” of Christ**

There are two passages in Calvin's *Institutes* that distinguish between the natural and spiritual kingdoms of Christ, which constitute an important basis for VanDrunen's interpretation of Calvin's public theology.<sup>13</sup> The first of these passages occurs in the *Institutes*, 3.19.15, which describes the two-fold benefit of Christ's saving work in the life of the believer who is joined to Christ by faith and the work of the Holy Spirit. By virtue of their union with Christ through faith, believers enjoy the grace of free justification and acceptance with God, not on the basis of works performed in obedience to the law of God but on the basis of the imputation of Christ's righteousness and the forgiveness of sins. Inseparably joined to the grace of free justification is the second benefit of union with Christ, the grace of regeneration or repentance whereby the Holy Spirit renews believers after the image of God and in obedience to the moral law of God. When believers are joined to Christ by faith, they enjoy simultaneously the “double grace” (*duplicis gratia*) of free justification before God's tribunal and the sanctification of their lives by the Spirit of Christ.<sup>14</sup>

13. In addition to these key passages in Calvin's *Institutes*, VanDrunen appeals to Calvin's commentary on Rom. 13:1 and his broad distinction between “earthly” and “heavenly” things in his *Institutes*, 2.2.13. See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 76–77.

14. For a comprehensive treatment of Calvin's understanding of the “twofold grace of God,” see Cornelis P. Venema, *Accepted and Renewed in Christ: The “Twofold Grace of God” and the Interpretation of Calvin's Theology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008).

Toward the close of his extended treatment of the doctrine of free justification, Calvin takes up the subject of Christian freedom as an “appendage of justification.”<sup>15</sup> According to Calvin, Christian freedom consists of three parts. First, Christian believers are freed from the condemnation of the law, since their acceptance with God is firmly based on the righteousness of Jesus Christ alone, which is graciously imputed to them. Second, the consciences of Christian believers are free to obey the requirements of the law, however imperfectly, “not as if constrained by the necessity of the law,” but as those who joyfully and gratefully seek to please their heavenly Father. The life of Christian believers becomes, on the basis of their free justification in Christ, a free obedience and an obedient freedom. Rather than the law’s functioning as a “yoke” that enslaves, the law, enlivened by the Spirit who writes the law on the hearts of believers, serves as a rule of Christian gratitude. And third, Christians are free in respect to matters “indifferent” (*adiaphora*) where the law of God neither requires nor forbids the use of God’s good gifts. All three parts of Christian freedom, Calvin observes, are “spiritual” in nature. The believer’s conscience is not constrained to obedience by a fearful prospect of judgment or condemnation. Rather, believers, who are freely and graciously accepted by God on the basis of Christ’s work on their behalf, joyfully and gladly obey God’s commandments from a good conscience and are enabled by the Spirit to live a life that is pleasing to him.

Calvin concludes his extensive discussion of these three parts of Christian freedom by noting that some inappropriately argue that the believer’s freedom of conscience implies that he or she has no obligation whatever to submit to any human laws or constitutions. Although Calvin acknowledges that ecclesiastical constitutions, such as those imposed by the Roman Catholic Church on the consciences of believers in respect to the worship and service of God, may not bind the consciences of believers before God, he notes that the freedom of the believer does not entail a freedom from obedience to the civil magistrate or the laws of the state. Although Calvin does not expressly identify those whose position he intends to oppose, he clearly intends to rebut the Anabaptist denial of the Christian’s obligation to obey the laws of the civil government.<sup>16</sup> In order to rebut the “seditious”

15. *Institutes*, 3.19.1.

16. This is evident as well in Calvin’s comments on Rom. 13:1. See *Comm. Rom. 13:1*, CNTC 8.280: “There are always some restless spirits who believe that the kingdom of Christ is properly exalted only when all earthly powers are abolished, and that they can enjoy the liberty which He has given them only if they have shaken off every yoke of human slavery.” For an extended

implications of the denial of the legitimate claim of the civil magistrate on Christian obedience, Calvin offers a distinction between two kinds of jurisdiction or government, the spiritual and the civil.

Therefore, in order that none of us may stumble on that stone, let us first consider that there is a twofold government in man [*duplex est in homine regimen*]: one aspect is spiritual [*spirituale*], whereby the conscience is instructed in piety and in reverencing God; the second is political [*politicum*], whereby man is educated for the duties of humanity and citizenship that must be maintained among men. These are usually called the “spiritual” and the “temporal” jurisdiction [*iurisdictio spiritualis et temporalis*] (not improper terms) by which is meant that the former sort of government pertains to the life of the soul, while the latter has to do with the concerns of the present life—not only with food and clothing but with laying down laws whereby a man may live his life among other men holily, honorably, and temperately. For the former resides in the inner mind, while the latter regulates only outward behavior. The one we may call the spiritual kingdom, the other, the political kingdom [*regnum spirituale . . . regnum politicum*]. Now these two, as we have divided them, must always be examined separately; and while one is being considered, we must call away and turn aside the mind from thinking about the other. There are in man, so to speak, two worlds, over which different kings and different laws have authority. Through this distinction it comes about that we are not to misapply to the political order the gospel teaching on spiritual freedom, as if Christians were less subject, as concerns outward government, to human laws, because their consciences have been set free in God’s sight; as if they were released from all bodily servitude because they are free according to the spirit.<sup>17</sup>

In this extended passage on the Two Kingdoms, there are several features of Calvin’s position that need to be noted carefully. First, the principal emphasis in this passage, with its distinction between the “spiritual” and the “political” kingdoms of God, is on the *manner in which God governs* the conduct of believers. In the spiritual government of God, believers are freely and *inwardly* subject to the requirements of God’s law, not as a means

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treatment of Calvin’s commentary on this passage, see Richard A. Muller, “Calvin, Beza, and the Exegetical History of Romans 13:1–7,” in *Calvin and the State*, ed. Peter De Klerk (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 1993), 139–70.

17. *Institutes*, 3.19.15 (OS 4.294).

to obtain God's favor but as an expression of grateful devotion. In the civil or political government of God, all members of the civil community are obliged to obey *outwardly* the laws of the political kingdom, which serve to maintain public order and peace. Obedience to the civil magistrate is obligatory, not by reason of conscience or as a means to obtain favor with God, but by reason of what Calvin elsewhere terms the "civil use" of the law of God.<sup>18</sup> Second, consistent with his emphasis on two kinds of jurisdiction or government, Calvin's "Two Kingdoms" language does not so much refer to two separate realms or worlds as to a *twofold government* of God over the conduct of believers who are being renewed after his image and are subject to his rule. Although Calvin undoubtedly aims to distinguish by means of his conception of God's twofold government between the institutions of the church and the state, it is not immediately evident that this twofold jurisdiction can be neatly divided, as VanDrunen maintains, between two comprehensive realms, the institutional church on the one hand, and all other institutions and aspects of human life and culture, especially the state, on the other. Whereas VanDrunen interprets Calvin's language of "Two Kingdoms" in spatial terms, as though they were primarily two separate realms of human life and conduct, Calvin's emphasis is on the twofold way in which God governs the conduct of believers in whom these two jurisdictions coexist.<sup>19</sup> And third, the particular interest of Calvin in drawing this distinction between the spiritual and political jurisdictions is to emphasize the legitimate obligation of believers to obey the laws of the civil magistrate. Such obedience does not compromise Christian freedom, since it is an outward obedience to the civil jurisdiction that God has ordained for the maintenance of civil order and righteousness.

The second passage in Calvin's *Institutes* that offers a broad definition of the Two Kingdoms is in the last chapter of book 4, which addresses the topic of the civil government. This comes at the close of Calvin's extensive treatment of the doctrine of the church. In this passage, Calvin alludes to

18. See *Institutes*, 2.7.10–11 (OS 3.335–36), where Calvin distinguishes the "civil" use of the law from its first or "pedagogical" use and its third or "principal" use as a rule of gratitude for believers. According to Calvin, in its "second function" [*secundum officium*] the law restrains "certain men who are untouched by any care for what is just and right unless compelled by hearing the dire threats of the law."

19. It is significant that Calvin primarily uses the terms *regimen* and *iurisdictio* in this passage, and only secondarily speaks of the *regnum* that corresponds to them. It is more accurate, therefore, to speak of Calvin's doctrine of a "twofold government" or "jurisdiction" rather than primarily of two separate "realms" or "kingdoms."

his earlier distinction between the spiritual and civil jurisdictions, which he introduced in the context of the doctrine of Christian freedom but now calls to mind before treating more extensively the divine institution and calling of the civil government.

First, before we enter into the matter itself, we must keep in mind that distinction which we previously laid down so that we do not (as commonly happens) unwisely mingle these two, which have a completely different nature. For certain men, when they hear that the gospel promises a freedom that acknowledges no king and no magistrate among men, but looks to Christ alone, think that they cannot benefit by their freedom so long as they see any power set up over them. They therefore think that nothing will be safe unless the whole world is reshaped to a new form, where there are neither courts, nor laws, nor magistrates, nor anything which in their opinion restricts their freedom. But whoever knows how to distinguish between body and soul, between this present fleeting life and that future eternal life, will without difficulty know that Christ's spiritual Kingdom and the civil jurisdiction are things completely distinct [*spirituale Christi regnum et civilem ordinationem res esse plurimum*]. Since, then, it is a Jewish vanity to seek and enclose Christ's Kingdom within the elements of this world, let us rather ponder that what Scripture clearly teaches is a spiritual fruit, which we gather from Christ's grace; and let us remember to keep within its own limits all that freedom which is promised and offered to us in him. For why is it that the same apostle who bids us stand and not submit to the "yoke of bondage" [Gal. 5:1] elsewhere forbids slaves to be anxious about their state [1 Cor. 7:21], unless it be that spiritual freedom can perfectly well exist along with civil bondage? These statements of his must also be taken in the same sense: In the Kingdom of God "there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female, neither slave nor free" [Gal. 3:28, Vulgate; order changed]. And again, "there is not Jew nor Greek, uncircumcised and circumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman; but Christ is all in all" [Col. 3:11]. By these statements he means that it makes no difference what your condition among men may be or under what nation's laws you live, since the Kingdom of Christ does not at all consist in these things.<sup>20</sup>

In this passage, Calvin reiterates the main emphases of his earlier distinction between God's twofold jurisdictions, but now within the context of

20. *Institutes*, 4.20.1 (OS 5.472).

an exposition of the role and calling of the civil government. Contrary to the Anabaptist claim that believers are subject only to a spiritual jurisdiction, and radically at liberty from any obligations to civil authority, Calvin reaffirms his positive view of the continued usefulness and necessity of civil government.

Immediately after reaffirming the distinction between God's spiritual and civil governments, Calvin goes on to observe that the civil kingdom, although it is "distinct" from the spiritual kingdom of Christ, is in no wise "at variance" with it. While the "spiritual Kingdom of Christ" is already

Initiating in us upon earth certain beginnings of the Heavenly Kingdom . . . yet civil government has as its appointed end, so long as we live among men, to cherish and protect the outward worship of God, to defend sound doctrine of piety and the position of the church, to adjust our life to the society of men, to form our social behavior to civil righteousness, to reconcile us with one another, and to promote general peace and tranquility.<sup>21</sup>

For Calvin, the spiritual and the civil government of God do not stand independently alongside each other. The civil government or jurisdiction, although it is not to usurp the distinct spiritual government that Christ exercises through his Spirit and Word, has the task within God's design to secure the kind of public order and tranquility that is indispensable to the prosecution of the church's calling. In this way, the civil jurisdiction serves the redemptive purposes of God by protecting the church and ensuring its freedom to pursue its unique calling under Christ. Furthermore,

21. It is interesting to observe that article 39 of the Gallican Confession of 1560 reflects Calvin's view, when it declares that God "has put the sword into the hands of magistrates to suppress crimes against the first as well as the second table of the Commandments of God" (Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds* [1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985], 382). The same is true of the original text of article 36 of the Belgic Confession. Although Calvin's view on the calling of the civil magistrate may fit uncomfortably with a modern view of the separation of church and state, it reflects Calvin's conception of the comprehensive lordship of Christ in both the civil and spiritual jurisdictions. Because this emphasis in Calvin seems inconsistent with his interpretation of his Two Kingdoms conception, VanDrunen accounts for it by suggesting that Calvin was either "inconsistent" in the application of his principles or simply a "man of his time" who was unable to see the implications of his Two Kingdoms theology for the separation of church and state in a religiously pluralistic society. See, e.g., VanDrunen, "The Two Kingdoms: A Reassessment of the Transformationalist Calvin," 260–66; and idem, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 82–86.

as servants of God, civil magistrates have the task of ensuring that both tables of the law—the first table dealing with the service and worship of God, the second table addressing the mutual service of all human beings to each other—are honored and obeyed. Although the civil magistrate is not authorized to usurp the distinctive prerogatives of the spiritual kingdom, namely, the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word in renewing human life in free obedience to God’s law, it does serve to advance the redemptive purpose of the spiritual kingdom by requiring an outward conformity to the requirements of God’s moral law.<sup>22</sup>

Although it would be premature to draw any far-reaching conclusions from these two passages in the *Institutes* regarding Calvin’s comprehensive public theology, it should be apparent that Calvin’s Two Kingdoms conception focuses primarily on the legitimacy of the Christian believer’s continued subjection to the civil magistrate. Christian freedom, which includes freedom from the condemnation of the law and for grateful, Spirit-authored obedience to the law as a rule of gratitude, does not exempt believers from an obligation to obey the civil magistrate. Christ governs believers inwardly and spiritually by his Spirit and Word; but he also governs believers outwardly by the institution and positive laws of the civil magistrate. Christ’s government is comprehensive of both a spiritual and a political jurisdiction.

However, it is not evident that Calvin employs this distinction in the way VanDrunen interprets it, namely, as a means to divide all of human life and conduct into two hermetically separated domains or realms. Nor is it evident that Calvin identifies the spiritual kingdom of Christ *simpliciter* with the institutional church, and consigns the remainder of human conduct and culture to the natural kingdom. Calvin’s Two Kingdoms conception is principally addressed to the distinct way in which Christ governs the conduct of believers, whether spiritually by the Spirit in the renewal/sanctification of believers or outwardly by the institution of the civil magistracy. The pri-

22. Calvin’s view of the respective callings of church and state is a complicated one. Although Calvin struggled in Geneva to achieve freedom for the church to administer discipline, particularly excommunication, without the interference of the civil magistracy, he maintained the idea of a Christian commonwealth in which the civil authorities were obliged to uphold the standards of the Word of God in the public sphere. For accounts of Calvin’s struggle to distinguish the jurisdictions of church and state, especially in his reformatory work in Geneva, see T. H. L. Parker, *John Calvin: A Biography*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 108–45; Josef Bohatec, *Calvins Lehre von Staat und Kirche* (Aalen: Scientia, 1961); and John T. McNeill, “John Calvin on Civil Government,” in *Calvinism and the Political Order*, ed. George L. Hunt (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 23–45.

mary emphasis in Calvin's Two Kingdoms construction falls on the manner of God's governance in the spiritual and natural kingdoms; the former is an inward, spiritual government, the latter an outward, political government. Moreover, in his description of the calling of the civil magistrate, Calvin insists that the civil government must fulfill its calling under Christ's authority in a way that serves and advances the interests of his spiritual government in the lives of believers. Although VanDrunen correctly calls attention to Calvin's distinction between these two forms of divine government, it is not evident that his neat bifurcation of all of human life in terms of two realms, the one spiritual and the other natural, is consistent with Calvin's public theology as a whole. At least in a preliminary way, it seems that VanDrunen overstates the contrast between these Two Kingdoms and tends to downplay Calvin's clear emphasis on the way they are interrelated.

### **Calvin on the Relation between “Natural Law” and Special Revelation**

As I noted in my summary of his Two Kingdoms/natural law interpretation of Calvin's public theology, VanDrunen maintains that Calvin correlated his distinction between the spiritual and the civil kingdoms with a distinction between the natural law and the revelation of God's will through special revelation. Whereas human conduct within the natural kingdom is primarily, although not exclusively, regulated by the natural law of God, Christian conduct within the spiritual kingdom is exclusively regulated by special revelation in Scripture.<sup>23</sup>

Although VanDrunen's interpretation of Calvin's doctrine of the Two Kingdoms tends to exaggerate the distinction between the twofold ways in which Christ governs the conduct of believers, and considerably enlarges the scope of what belongs to the civil kingdom, his interpretation of Calvin's view of the respective roles of the natural law and Scripture in the twofold government of believers is especially flawed. In Calvin's theology, there is a much closer relation between the natural and special revelation of God than VanDrunen's interpretation implies. Calvin's conception of the

23. VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 113, does acknowledge that Calvin appealed to Scripture in developing his view of human conduct in the civil kingdom, but maintains that the natural law retains a kind of primacy in regulating this kingdom: "Of course, Calvin did not think Scripture irrelevant for civil law in the other kingdom, as his practice of applying the example of Old Testament kings and events to contemporary civil issues illustrates. But Calvin did not believe that the civil kingdom can be governed solely or primarily by the teaching of Scripture."

relation between natural and special revelation grants a priority to special revelation as a more clear and full disclosure of God's will as Creator and Redeemer for human conduct in every area of life. Whereas natural revelation, including the moral content of the natural law, can disclose only a rudimentary knowledge of God and his will as Creator, special revelation is a more comprehensive revelation, which discloses the knowledge of God's will as *Creator and Redeemer*. Special revelation is more rich in its scope, more full and complete in terms of what it reveals of God's moral will, and far more clear and distinct than the revelation of God in the natural law. Calvin's metaphor for the Scriptures as "spectacles" through which the revelation of God as Creator is clearly discerned, for example, represents an especially important feature of his doctrine of revelation that VanDrunen's Two Kingdoms/natural law interpretation tends to diminish. When believers seek to fulfill their distinctive vocations in every area of human society and culture, whether in marriage and family, social relations, economic endeavors, or the arts and sciences, Calvin does not shy away from appealing directly to Scripture as a more clear and comprehensive disclosure of God's will for the conduct of those whom he is restoring after the image of Christ through the sanctifying, regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

The subject of Calvin's doctrine of natural law is undoubtedly a complicated one, especially because of the influence of a neoorthodox interpretation of Calvin's theology that radically rejects the whole idea of natural revelation and natural law. Contrary to the neoorthodox claim that the doctrine of natural law in Calvin's theology represents an incidental and inconsistent feature of his theology, VanDrunen properly argues that Calvin clearly affirmed a doctrine of natural law. Although Calvin's treatment of the natural law is often "imprecise and unsystematic," there can be no doubt that he taught a revelation through natural law of God's moral will for the conduct of human beings whom he created in his image.<sup>24</sup> In two

24. The language "imprecise and unsystematic" is used by Susan Schreiner in her comprehensive study *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1991), 77. For general treatments of Calvin's understanding of natural law, see J. Bohatec, *Calvin und das Recht* (Feudigen in Westfalen: Buchdruckerei G.m.b.H., 1934); Arthur C. Cochrane, "Natural Law in Calvin," in *Church-State Relations in Ecumenical Perspective*, ed. E. A. Smith (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1966), 176–217; John T. McNeill, "Natural Law in the Teaching of the Reformers," *JR* 26 (1946): 168–82; Mary Lane Potter, "The 'Whole Office of the Law' in the Theology of John Calvin," *Journal of Law and Religion* 3 (1985): 117–39; Paul Helm, "Calvin and Natural Law," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 2 (1984): 5–22; *idem*, "Equity, Natural Law, and Common Grace," in *John*

extensive passages on the topic of the natural law, one in Calvin's commentary on Romans 2:14–15, the other in book 2 of the *Institutes*, where Calvin is treating the knowledge of man as God created him, Calvin argues that all human beings have a natural awareness of God's moral will and the distinction between vice and virtue:

Since, therefore, all nations are disposed to make laws for themselves of their own accord, and without being instructed to do so, it is beyond all doubt that they have certain ideas of justice and rectitude, which the Greeks refer to as *prolepseis*, and which are implanted by nature in the hearts of men. Therefore they have a law, without the law; for although they do not have the written law of Moses, they are by no means completely lacking in the knowledge of right and justice. They could not otherwise distinguish between vice and virtue, the former of which they restrain by punishing it, while commanding the latter, and showing their approval of it, and honouring it with rewards. Paul contrasts nature with the written law, meaning that the Gentiles had the natural light of righteousness, which supplied the place of the law by which the Jews are taught, so that they were *a law unto themselves*.<sup>25</sup>

Now that inward law, which we have above described as written, even engraved, upon the hearts of all, in a sense asserts the very same things that are to be learned from the two Tables. For our conscience does not allow us to sleep a perpetual insensible sleep without being an inner witness and monitor of what we owe God, without holding before us the difference between good and evil and thus accusing us when we fail in our duty. But man is so shrouded in the darkness of errors that he hardly begins to grasp through this natural law what worship is acceptable to God. Surely he is very far removed from a true estimate of it. Besides this, he is so puffed up with haughtiness and ambition, and so blinded by self love, that he is as yet unable to look upon himself and, as it were, to descend within himself, that he may humble and abase himself and confess his own miserable condition. Accordingly (because it is necessary both for our dullness and for our arrogance), the Lord has provided us with a written law to give us a clearer witness of what was too obscure in the natural law, shake off our listlessness, and strike more vigorously our mind and memory.<sup>26</sup>

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*Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 347–88; and Susan E. Schreiner, “Calvin’s Use of Natural Law,” in *A Preserving Grace: Protestants, Catholics and Natural Law*, ed. Michael Cromartie (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 51–76.

25. *Comm. Rom.* 2:14–15, CNTC 8.48 (CO 49.37–38).

26. *Institutes*, 2.8.1 (OS 3.334).

In passages such as these, Calvin does emphasize the way God as Creator continues by his providence and the revelation of the natural law to preserve order and a relative righteousness in human society and government. Accordingly, in his exposition of the calling of the civil government, Calvin acknowledges a legitimate appeal to the “general equity” of the natural law in order to discern God’s will for the civil government. For Calvin, the different forms that the civil government may assume in different times and places, as well as the “positive laws” that magistrates may promulgate in the discharge of their duties under God, may be inferred from a consideration of the “general equity” of the natural law rather than simply appealing to biblical civil and case laws.<sup>27</sup> In his representation of Calvin’s public theology, therefore, VanDrunen correctly argues that Calvin appeals to the natural law and a natural apprehension of God’s moral will to account in part for the preservation and ordering of human life and society. In spite of the pervasive corruption of human sinfulness, God as Creator maintains order and preserves human society among unbelievers and believers alike by his all-embracing providence, which includes the revelation of his will through natural law to all human beings as his image-bearers and through the restraining effect of a nonredemptive “general grace of God” (*generalem Dei gratiam*), which curtails the full expression of human disobedience in many areas of human life and culture.<sup>28</sup>

While VanDrunen’s interpretation of Calvin’s public theology rightly calls attention to these features of Calvin’s view of the natural law, there are three important respects in which his interpretation of Calvin’s doctrine of natural law inadequately represents Calvin’s position.

First, although Calvin affirms the reality and benefit of natural law to disclose God’s will for human conduct in society and culture, and although Calvin acknowledges the relative excellence and value of human endeavors in what he terms “earthly” and “natural” things, he emphasizes far more than his medieval predecessors, including Thomas Aquinas, the destructive effects of human sin and disobedience in these dimensions of human life as well as in dimensions of human life that are more obviously spiritual in

27. *Institutes*, 4.20.16 (OS 5.487–88). For treatments of Calvin’s doctrine of the “general equity” taught in the natural law, which he terms “the goal and rule and limit of all [civil] laws,” see Guenther H. Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin’s Ethics* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997); and Paul Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 347–88.

28. *Institutes*, 2.2.17 (OS 3.259). For a treatment of Calvin’s doctrine of “general” or “common” grace, see Herman Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Smitter Book Co., 1928).

nature. Commenting on Calvin's affirmation of the natural law, coupled with his insistence that human sinfulness significantly corrupts the ability to apprehend correctly what the natural requires, Paul Helm observes that

there is one crucial difference [between Aquinas and Calvin]. When we turn to the extent to which the natural law is naturally known Aquinas is much more sanguine than is Calvin about whether human reason unaided by special grace can identify it, and the degree to which it recognizes its obligatoriness. The natural law [for Aquinas] allows men and women to have the knowledge of good and evil. For Aquinas the natural law is natural both in the sense that it is a divine law for human nature given at creation, and in the sense that it may now be successfully apprehended as a set of precepts, by unaided fallen reason alone.<sup>29</sup>

When VanDrunen argues that Calvin ascribed a considerable role to natural law in governing the civil or natural kingdom, he represents a feature of Calvin's public theology, which does include a positive use of the natural law in the preservation of human society and the ordering of human life. However, VanDrunen posits a more positive and robust assessment of the apprehension of the natural law than Calvin's position and actual practice warrant. Although Calvin affirms the reality of natural law and a corresponding universal apprehension of the distinction between vice and virtue on the part of unbelievers and believers alike, he also emphasizes the insufficiency under the conditions of sin of natural law to obtaining a full apprehension of God's will for human conduct, not only in the spiritual but also in the natural kingdom. Even in the passages that we have cited as examples of Calvin's affirmation of the natural law, Calvin emphasizes the debilitating effect of human sinfulness on the ability of human beings to apprehend God's will rightly without the aid of special revelation.

Second, consistent with his emphasis on the corrupting effects of human sinfulness on the ability of human beings to apprehend the natural law, Calvin grants, both in theory and in practice, an indispensable and foundational role to special revelation in the discernment of God's moral will for human conduct in all areas of human society and culture. Although it is often inadequately appreciated, Calvin's treatment of the doctrine of Scripture in the *Institutes* occurs in book 1 in the context of a general

29. Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, 372.

exposition of the knowledge of God as *Creator*.<sup>30</sup> Because of human sin and disobedience, Calvin insists that the knowledge of God as Creator, insofar as it depends on natural revelation alone, “is either smothered or corrupted, partly by ignorance, partly by malice.”<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the knowledge of God available through the created order is unable to supply a true knowledge of God even as Creator, since “we have not the eyes to see this unless they be illumined by the inner revelation of God through faith.”<sup>32</sup> In Calvin’s estimation, the knowledge of God as Creator serves primarily to deprive human beings as sinners of any excuse for their willful disobedience. The natural knowledge of God does not provide positively for a knowledge of God’s will as Creator that is a sufficient guide for human conduct even in the natural order. Consequently, Calvin maintains that a special revelation of God, also as Creator and not only as Redeemer, has become necessary. For Calvin, it is “needful that another and better help be added to direct us aright to the very Creator of the universe. It was not in vain, then, that he added the light of the Word by which to become known unto salvation.”<sup>33</sup> Because of the obscurity and sinful suppression of the knowledge of God as Creator that is disclosed through natural revelation, Calvin’s discussion of the knowledge of God the Creator through Scripture consists of two parts, the first dealing with Scripture in its function of clarifying the obscured knowledge given in creation, and the second dealing with Scripture in its function of complementing this knowledge. Within the first part, Calvin employs his important and much-discussed image of Scripture as “spectacles” (*specillis*) by which we may “begin to read [the book of creation] distinctly” (*distincte legere*).<sup>34</sup> In this way, Scripture communicates a knowledge of God as Creator that cannot be derived from natural revelation alone because of the effects of sin.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, Calvin’s doctrine of sanctification does not support the kind of sharp distinction that VanDrunen posits between the role of the natural law in the natural kingdom, and the role of the scriptural revelation of

30. For an extensive treatment of Calvin’s understanding of the relation of special revelation to general (or natural) revelation, including the way special revelation clarifies and supplements the knowledge of God as Creator, see Edward A. Dowey Jr., *The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 86–147.

31. *Institutes*, 1.4.1–4 (OS 3.40–44).

32. *Institutes*, 1.5.14 (OS 3.59). See also *Institutes*, 1.5.4–15 (OS 3.47–60).

33. *Institutes*, 1.4.1 (OS 3.60).

34. Ibid.

35. *Institutes*, 1.4.4 (OS 3.64).

God's moral law in the spiritual kingdom. Consistent with his emphasis on the superiority of scriptural revelation, which enables believers to rightly discern the natural law in its moral content and supplements it with a more full revelation of God's moral will, Calvin's doctrine of sanctification emphasizes that believers are subject to the life-embracing requirements of the moral law of God revealed in Scripture. Furthermore, since Calvin's doctrine of sanctification amounts to an extended description of the spiritual government of Christ in the lives of believers who are being restored to new obedience through the work of his Spirit, the spiritual kingdom of Christ is as broad and life-embracing as the claims of the moral law of God are on the believer's conduct in relation to God and to all human beings who bear his image. Therefore, it is not possible to maintain, as VanDrunen claims, that Calvin primarily identifies the spiritual kingdom of Christ with the calling of believers in the setting of the official ministry and life of the institutional church. In Christ's gracious work of sanctification, the Holy Spirit subdues the hearts of believers to new obedience to all the requirements of God's holy law, which in its two tables calls for perfect love toward God and selfless devotion to the well-being of others.

Although this is not the place to offer a comprehensive account of Calvin's doctrine of sanctification, several features of Calvin's view are of particular importance to an evaluation of VanDrunen's interpretation of Calvin's public theology. In Calvin's understanding of the gospel of Christ's saving mediation, the sanctification of believers is one of the two principal benefits of Christ's work as Mediator. Through union with Christ, which Calvin understands to be worked by the Holy Spirit through the gospel Word, all believers partake of the "double grace" of free justification and regeneration or repentance, which are Calvin's preferred terms for what later theologians call "sanctification." In free justification, believers are granted a status of acceptance with God on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ. In regeneration or repentance, believers are graciously enabled to fulfill the calling of human beings who bear God's image, namely, to glorify God with body and soul in every legitimate area of human conduct and society. Although Calvin insists that justification is by faith alone, exclusive of the righteousness of works, he also emphasizes that justified believers are simultaneously sanctified by the ministry of the Spirit, who "enlivens" the moral law of God by writing it on their hearts. Christian freedom is a freedom for a glad-hearted and grateful obedience to all the require-

ments of God's moral law as they are clearly and fully revealed through special revelation. Sanctification or repentance, as the second benefit of the believer's union with Christ, constitutes Calvin's comprehensive category for understanding the redirection and alteration of the lives of those who are indwelt by Christ through the Spirit.

For Christ imparts the Spirit of regeneration to us in order that he may renew us within, and that a new life may then follow the renewal of mind and heart. For if the function of giving repentance belongs to Christ, it follows that it is not something that has been put in the power of man. And since it is truly something of a wonderful reformation, which makes us new creatures, restores the image of God in us, transfers us from the slavery of sin to the obedience of righteousness, men will no more convert themselves than to create themselves.<sup>36</sup>

Although it would be tempting at this point to provide specific examples in Calvin's writings of the comprehensive lordship of Jesus Christ over the conduct of believers in every area of life, this brief summary of Calvin's doctrine of sanctification is enough to illustrate the implications of Calvin's position for an interpretation of his public theology. Whether in the natural or the spiritual government of Christ, believers are called to honor the requirements of God's ordering of human life and conduct. Whether in the natural or the spiritual government of Christ, the determination of God's will for the conduct of believers is never based merely on the rudimentary revelation of the natural law. Rather, believers discern the will of God for their proper obedience to Christ by attending to the more clear and full disclosure of his will in Scripture, acknowledging that Scripture clarifies and supplements the knowledge of God as Creator and provides a rich disclosure of God's moral law in its life-encompassing claim on human conduct in every legitimate vocation or task. Furthermore, the sanctification of believers, which expresses the spiritual government of Christ by his Spirit and Word in the hearts and lives of believers who are being renewed after the image of God, is not narrowly confined to the ministry of the institutional church. Christian believers under the lordship of Jesus Christ are called to obey God, instructed and enlightened by the light of his special revelation, to pursue their vocation, order their marriage and family, conduct their social and

36. *Comm. Acts 5:31* (CO 48.111).

economic enterprises, educate themselves and their children, obey the civil magistrate, and pursue the arts and sciences. Although the language is not Calvin's, the words of Abraham Kuyper faithfully echo Calvin's doctrine of sanctification in its wider implications: "No single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: 'Mine!'"<sup>37</sup>

### The Relation between Creation and Redemption in Calvin's Theology

One of the important questions that VanDrunen's Two Kingdoms/natural law interpretation of Calvin's theology raises is that of Calvin's conception of the relation between creation and redemption. VanDrunen's interpretation of Calvin's theology is explicitly *dualistic*. The natural kingdom is sharply distinguished from the spiritual or ecclesiastical kingdom, and the present and future realization of God's redemptive purpose does not entail the redemption, renovation, or perfection of the creation as a whole, including human life and culture within the natural kingdom. Although Christ as Mediator of creation continues to preserve and order human life in the natural kingdom, Christ as Mediator of redemption only renews and reorders the life and culture of the church. For VanDrunen, the demarcation between the natural and the spiritual kingdoms means that Calvin's public theology does not encourage, at least when it is consistently followed, a transformative or redemptive purpose for human life and culture beyond the boundaries of the institutional church. In this interpretation of Calvin's public theology, redemption is viewed as a kind of second-story overlay on the order of creation. God's redemptive purpose in relation to the created order is not integrally related to God's original design and purpose for creation. Nor does the future fullness of the redemptive kingdom entail the renewal and perfection of the present order of creation, or the enrichment of the final state by the fruits and artifacts of the believer's present service to God in society and culture.<sup>38</sup>

37. Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty" (1880), in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 488.

38. See, e.g., VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 78–82; and idem, "The Two Kingdoms: A Reassessment of the Transformationalist Calvin," 263. VanDrunen concludes from Calvin's language, which distinguishes "earthly" from "heavenly" things, that all nonecclesiastical accomplishments, including the artifacts and fruits of human culture in general, belong strictly to the nonredemptive kingdom of this world that is passing away. For a different interpretation

The problem with VanDrunen's dualistic interpretation of Calvin's public theology, however, is that it fails to do justice to the way Calvin explicitly emphasizes the *positive* and *integral* relation between creation and redemption. One of the principal motifs of Calvin's theology is his insistence that Christ's work of redemption involves the *comprehensive reordering and renewing of the entire created order*. Although Calvin distinguishes between the knowledge of God as Creator and as Redeemer, he does so in order to underscore the way God's purpose of redemption entails no less than the restoration of the whole creation to a state of glorified perfection. Among some recent students of Calvin's theology, reference is sometimes made to what is termed the "extra dimension" of Calvin's theology.<sup>39</sup> This language means to call attention to the way Calvin distinguishes and correlates Christ's work as Mediator of creation and as Mediator of redemption. The presupposition for Calvin's treatment of redemption in Christ is the biblical doctrine of the creation and ordering of all things by the Word and Spirit of God. According to Calvin, the knowledge of God as Redeemer can be understood only within the framework of the doctrine of creation. The eternal Son through whom all things were made is the One through whom all things are being redeemed. Redemption, accordingly, amounts to nothing less than the restoration of all things to proper order through the mediation of Christ and the work of his Spirit.

Because Christ is the Mediator of creation and redemption, Calvin views the first advent of Christ as a decisive moment in the realization of God's redemptive purposes. With Christ's coming, the promises of the old covenant are being fulfilled and the purpose of God to renew all things has advanced. In describing the significance of Christ's coming and his saving work, Calvin is fond of speaking of the comprehensive purpose of God as a "restoration" of all things to "proper order."<sup>40</sup> In his commentary

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of Calvin at this point, and one with which I tend to concur, see Paul Helm, *Calvin: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 134–35.

39. See Heiko A. Oberman, "The 'Extra' Dimension in the Theology of Calvin," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 21 (1970): 43–64. By the "extra" dimension of Calvin's theology, Oberman refers to the "mutuality" and "discontinuity" (48) between the created order and redemption in the work and purposes of God. See also E. David Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology: The Function of the So-Called Extra-Calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 1966).

40. For a more extensive treatment of this theme in Calvin's theology, see Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, chap. 5, "Creation Set Free," 97–114. The opening sentence of Schreiner's chapter captures well Calvin's view: "Throughout his polemics against the Anabaptists, Calvin

on John 13:31, for example, Calvin offers a broad view of the purpose of Christ's advent and crucifixion:

For in the cross of Christ, as in a splendid theatre, the incomparable goodness of God is set before the whole world. The glory of God shines, indeed, in all creatures on high and below, but never more brightly than in the cross, in which there was a wonderful change of things—the condemnation of all men was manifested, sin blotted out, salvation restored to men; in short, the whole world was renewed and all things restored to order.<sup>41</sup>

Calvin uses similar language in his comments on John 12:31:

The word *judgment* is taken as “reformation” by some and “condemnation” by others. I agree rather with the former, who expound it that the world must be restored to due order [*legitimum ordinem*]. For the Hebrew word *mishpat* which is translated as *judgment* means a well-ordered constitution. Now we know that outside Christ there is nothing but confusion in the world. And although Christ had already begun to set up the kingdom of God, it was His death that was the true beginning of a properly-ordered state [*status rite compositi*] and the complete restoration of the world.<sup>42</sup>

In these and similar statements, Calvin views the work of Christ as issuing in nothing less than the renovation of the whole creation, a reversal of the consequence of human sin and disobedience. In his threefold office as Prophet, Priest, and King, Christ reveals the fullness of the Word of God, reconciles a new humanity to God, and by means of the “scepter of his kingdom,” the Word of God, subdues all things to new obedience. Calvin’s conception of the person and work of Christ, therefore, includes a compelling eschatological vision in which the whole course of history is brought to its appointed end—the renewal of the fallen creation in service to the triune God. Contrary to VanDrunen’s dualistic and incoherent portrait of

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eschewed all views that would see the church as an oasis isolated from a lost creation or salvation as the rescuing of the elect from a demonic world” (97).

41. *Comm. John* 13:31, CNTC 5.68 (CO 47.317).

42. *Comm. John* 12:31, CNTC 5.42 (CO 47.293). See also *Comm. Isa.* 65:25, *Calvin’s Commentaries* (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 8.405–6 (CO 37.434): “But since it is the office of Christ to bring everything back to its condition and order, that is the reason why he declares that the confusion or ruin that now exists in human affairs shall be removed by the coming of Christ; because at that time, corruptions having been taken away, the world shall return to its first origin [*primam originem*]”; *Comm. 2 Thess.* 1:5, CNTC 8.388–90 (CO 52.188–89).

Calvin's understanding of Christ's distinct offices as Mediator of creation and of redemption, Calvin views Christ's work of redemption as one that reorders and renews the creation, which has been disordered and broken through human sin and the judgment of God.

There are two particularly important illustrations of the coherence and interrelation between creation and redemption in Calvin's theology. The first is Calvin's view of the consummation of the redemption of believers through union with Christ, which entails the resurrection of the body. The second is Calvin's teaching that Christ's work of redemption will retain and perfect all that originally belonged to the substance of God's good creation.

In his conception of the resurrection of the body of believers in union with Christ, Calvin rejects the error of those who teach that the bodies of the saints will be altogether new, and not a glorified form of their present bodies. According to Calvin, this error is similar to the ancient error of the Manicheans who disparaged the body and earthly existence. The resurrection of the body does not entail the bestowal of another body, but rather the renewal and glorification of the present bodies of believers. In an important statement, which provides a general principle regarding the relation between creation and redemption, Calvin notes that "if death, which takes its origin from the fall of man, is accidental, the restoration which Christ has brought belongs to that self-same body which began to be mortal."<sup>43</sup> The corruption and weakness of the flesh is an adventitious or accidental quality that does not belong intrinsically to the body as God first created it. Therefore, Calvin, utilizing an Aristotelian distinction between "substance" and "accidents," maintains that "as to substance" believers "shall be raised again in the same flesh we now bear, but . . . the quality will be different."<sup>44</sup> Christ's redemptive work in the lives of believers will ultimately restore the fullness of human life in the body as God originally created it, although in a state of greater glory in union with Christ. Redemption restores what sin has corrupted and deformed; but it does not displace what God created good. Consequently, Calvin insists that there is a substantial continuity between the present body and the resurrected body, although he simultaneously observes that the glory of the believer's resurrected body will surpass that of the original state of Adam before the fall into sin.

43. *Institutes*, 3.25.7 (OS 4.447).

44. *Institutes*, 3.25.8 (OS 4.449).

Calvin employs similar language to describe the way Christ's redemptive office will renovate the entire created order. The present and future consummation of Christ's work of redemption will not annihilate or discard the substance of the created order. Rather, it will remove all the "accidental" features of disorder and corruption that are a result of the introduction of human sin and God's curse on the whole creation. Just as the accidental features of sin that adversely affect human life in the body will be removed through Christ's work of redemption, so the accidental features of sin that adversely affect the creation will be removed when the creation itself is restored while its "substance" remains: "I will say just one thing about the elements of the world, that they will be consumed only in order to receive a new quality while their substance remains the same."<sup>45</sup> The restoration of the creation will involve a work of redemptive "purification," but it will not involve the complete destruction of what belongs properly and substantially to God's creation in its original integrity or its renewed glory at the final consummation. Commenting on Romans 8:20, which speaks of the creation itself groaning in anticipation of the redemption of God's people, Calvin observes that the whole creation has been subjected to corruption and stands in need of renewal: "There is no element and no part of the world which, touched with the knowledge of its present misery, is not intent on the hope of the resurrection."<sup>46</sup> According to Calvin, then, there is a close parallel or correlation between the redemption of human life in its entirety, including life in the body, and the redemption of the whole creation. Even as the body of believers will finally put on "incorruption," so the creation itself will be renovated and perfected in the incorruptible state of glory.

The whole machinery of the world would fall out of gear at almost every moment and all its parts fail in the sorrowful confusion which followed the fall of Adam, were they not borne up from elsewhere by some hidden support. . . . However much, therefore, created things may be inclined by nature to some other course, yet since it has been God's pleasure to make them subject to vanity, they obey His command, and because He has given them a hope of a better condition, they sustain themselves with this, and postpone their longing until the incorruption which has been promised them is revealed.<sup>47</sup>

45. *Comm.* 2 Peter 3:10; CNTC 12.365 (CO 55.476).

46. *Comm.* Rom. 8:19; CNTC 8.172 (CO 49.152).

47. *Comm.* Rom. 8:20; CNTC 8.173 (CO 49.152–53).

The implications of Calvin’s view of the relation between creation and redemption for an interpretation of his public theology are not difficult to ascertain. While Calvin suffered no illusions regarding the renovation of human life and the restoration of all things to proper order prior to the consummation of all things at Christ’s second advent, he vigorously addressed the life-embracing implications of the gospel throughout his writings, sermons, and reformatory endeavors. In her fine study of Calvin’s view of nature and the natural order, Susan Schreiner offers a remarkable summary of these implications with which we will conclude this section:

In his reclaiming of creation, Calvin’s God makes use of the societal and ecclesiastical activities of Christians. While Calvin charged the Anabaptists with Donatism, his own ecclesiology and spirituality was the reverse of isolationism. . . . The Reformer’s “activist” piety must be seen in terms of his theology of creation as a whole. The renovation of creation renews all of life. Therefore, after submitting their knowledge and will to Christ, the elect are encouraged to turn outward for the common upbuilding of the church and the good of their neighbors. Such ordered outward activity, Calvin assumed, contributed to the sanctifying or reordering of the world. Instead of positing a church that stood in isolation from a threatening world, Calvin saw the church as the organ that led the renewal of both the cosmos and society.<sup>48</sup>

## CONCLUSION

While acknowledging the preliminary character of my assessment of VanDrunen’s interpretation of Calvin’s public theology, I have identified three key features of his interpretation that are problematic.

First, when Calvin speaks of “Two Kingdoms,” he means primarily to identify the twofold way in which Christ governs the life and conduct of believers. Although the obedience of believers to the law of God is a free obedience, which is born of the Spirit’s working in them, subduing their hearts to new obedience, believers remain subject to the laws and constitutions of the civil magistrate. Rather than representing two separate realms,

48. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 114. VanDrunen appeals to Schreiner’s study in making his legitimate case for a clear doctrine of natural law in Calvin’s theology. However, he does not adequately address the kind of evidence that Schreiner adduces for a robust doctrine of ecclesiastical and societal renewal (transformation) in Calvin’s public theology.

the one limited to the church and the other inclusive of the remainder of human life and conduct, Calvin's language of "Two Kingdoms" is addressed specifically to the question whether believers are not only freely subject to the moral law of God but also obligated to obey the civil magistrate. Although the civil magistrate may not bind inwardly the consciences of believers, the civil magistrate does have a legitimate role to play in ordering human life and conduct in the civil sphere. As we noted, Calvin even ascribes to the civil magistrate a responsibility to enforce both tables of the law, and to contribute in its own way to the church's fulfillment of its divine mandate. Indeed, it is impossible to restrict the spiritual kingdom of Christ to the realm of the church, as VanDrunen suggests, since the obligations of obedience to the law within the spiritual government of Christ are as extensive and far-reaching as the demands of God's moral law.

Second, although VanDrunen claims that Calvin appeals to the natural law as the source and norm for the ordering of human life and conduct in the natural kingdom, he fails to account adequately for the indispensable and vital role of the Scriptures' revelation of God's will for a right understanding of the moral obligations of the natural law. For Calvin, the Scriptures provide a more full and clear revelation of God's will both as Creator and Redeemer. Through the "spectacles" of Scripture, believers are enabled to discern more clearly the will of God for every legitimate area of human vocation and culture. VanDrunen's claim that the Scriptures are principally a norm for the conduct of believers in the ecclesiastical kingdom, and not in the natural kingdom, is belied by Calvin's theology and practice throughout his life and ministry in Geneva.

Third, rather than advancing a sharply dualistic view of the relation between creation and redemption, or between the natural and the spiritual kingdoms, as VanDrunen claims, Calvin's public theology offers a robust and bracing view of redemption as the restoration and perfection of creation in general, and of human life in particular. Contrary to VanDrunen's insistence on the duality of Christ's office as Mediator of creation and redemption, or the duality of Christ's rule in the natural and spiritual kingdoms, Calvin's public theology offers a coherent and integrated conception of the sovereign and gracious rule of Christ over the entire range of the believer's activities and callings. The *telos* of Christ's work as Mediator of redemption is nothing less than the perfection and restoration of all things to proper order.

THE SUBJECT OF CHRIST AND CULTURE has occupied the church since its inception. Some emphasize the reality of redemption and the imperative of cultural transformation; others criticize this approach because of the transient nature of this current life and the specific function of “kingdom” activity.

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