

The Distinctives of “Two Kingdom” Theology

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Abstract

In recent years the Reformed world has tackled a number of doctrinal issues, the most recent being the Two Kingdom theology, the epicenter being Westminster Theological Seminary in California. This theology is intensely practical, since it impacts the daily work of the Christians as pilgrims through God's world. The practicalities are depicted by the title of David VanDrunen's intriguing book and defense, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*. This article examines Two Kingdom theology, reviews the main issues, and proposes a constructive criticism.

I. *Identifying Two Kingdom Theology*

The premise of Two Kingdom theology is that there are two realms of Christ's rule: the secular, which is ruled by the moral law that is imprinted on the hearts of all men, and the spiritual, his church, which he rules by the written Word of God. While Christ exercises sovereignty over both realms, he rules each differently. In one sense, both realms are sharply divided, but in another, they are homogeneous because the moral standard that underlies the realms is virtually the same. While the standard for the kingdom outside the church is God's law "in the heart," the norm for the church is "the law in the hand," that is, God's inscripturated law summarized by the Ten Commandments. The law "in the heart" is considered sufficient to govern institutions exterior to the church, including all families and all civil governments.

Further, the church as an institution and Christians as individuals are not called to impose God's inscripturated laws on the secular kingdom (which Two Kingdom theologians call "the common kingdom," since it is composed of believers and unbelievers). The term "transformers" is often used as a soft epithet for those who attempt to impose these inscripturated laws, thus underscoring the dictum that Christians are not summoned to redeem culture as a whole. Transformation is applicable only to individuals who are members of the only transformed institution there is, the church.

The above is unlike One Kingdom theology, where there are broader and narrower dimensions of Christ's worldwide empire. The Two Kingdom theologian posits a redemptive kingdom, which is the church, and a common kingdom, where Christians and unbelievers live and work together. The One Kingdom theologian designates the church as the kingdom in the narrow sense and the whole cosmos in the broader perspective with the caveat that *God's inscripturated law* is the supreme standard for both in this kingdom. This contrasts with Two Kingdom theologians, who posit natural law in the common kingdom and the inscripturated in the spiritual. Arguing that Christianity has little to say about politics in the public forum and that it is basically an "apolitical faith," Darryl Hart challenges those who lobby for a greater cultural canvas to meditate upon Christ's famous words, "My kingdom is not of this world."¹ Hart claims that the kingdom outside the church can never be distinctively Christian "because Christianity was a religion without specific land, city, or place."² He writes that it is "essentially an otherworldly faith."³

What is more, Two Kingdom theologians maintain that their ideas faithfully mirror the teachings of John Calvin and his Reformation progeny so that the One Kingdom theology that characterizes many Calvinists (who are identified as "neo-Calvinists") is a recent and even radical departure from their Reformed forebears. To support their view, Two Kingdom writers have forged a unique Christology that sharply distinguishes the human and divine natures of Christ in his heavenly rule over all. They submit that Christ rules what is external to the church as God, but not as the *God-man*. They disbelieve that Christ *as Redeemer* rules any institution except his church. Accordingly, the Dominion Covenant/Cultural Mandate in Genesis 1:26–30 has been fulfilled in Christ, so that Christians are not surrogate "second Adams" engaged in a futile quest for cultural transformation.

¹ Darryl Hart, *A Secular Faith: Why Christianity Favors the Separation of Church and State* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), 12.

² *Ibid.*, 251.

³ *Ibid.*, 16.

We present these contrasts:

	One Kingdom Theology	Two Kingdom Theology
1.	The Dominion Covenant is binding.	Dominion is fulfilled in Christ and largely inapplicable.
2.	Christ rules over all as the God-man.	Christ rules only the church as the God-man.
3.	The Ten Commandments are intended for all.	The Ten Commandments are unique to the church.
4.	The Noachian covenant is Christological.	The Noachian covenant is a common grace kingdom.
5.	Christ calls Christians to transform culture.	Christians are pilgrims and not called to transform culture.
6.	Natural law is insufficient for the unregenerate.	Natural law is sufficient to govern the unregenerate.
7.	The creeds favor One Kingdom theology.	The creeds support Two Kingdom theology.
8.	Culture is religion externalized.	Culture is the sum total of broad activities in which humans act.
9.	The new heavens and new earth are “ <i>already-not yet.</i> ”	The new heavens and new earth are “not yet.”

These contrasts are not always absolute, as there is room for some interpenetration. In fact, some Two Kingdom advocates favor an invasive role for the Second Table of the Sinai Law into the secular kingdom, usually beginning with the Fifth Commandment.⁴

II. *The Dominion Covenant*

The first contrast spotlights the Dominion Covenant/Cultural Mandate of Genesis 1:26–30, which is reiterated in Psalm 8:4–8 and applied to Christ in Hebrews 2:6–8: “And God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion ...’” (Gen 1:26).

Here God’s command is interpreted by Two Kingdom writers (most notably David VanDrunen) as severely injured by the fall so that the Cultural

⁴ The late Meredith G. Kline applied the neighborly commandments of the Decalogue to the state. In *Kingdom Prologue*, he wrote, “The State is forbidden to undertake the cultic function of the covenant community, nor can it execute the discipline of the covenant cultus. It cannot use its power and sanction to compel obedience to the first four commandments of the Decalogue.” Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (1981; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 111 (emphasis mine).

Mandate continues today, but only in the “modified *form to Noah* in Genesis 9.”⁵ The content of this “modified form” enlists dominion over the earth by procreational fruitfulness, and it licenses civil governments to inflict death upon murderers (Gen 9:6). The paring down of the Cultural Mandate is attributed to significant, post-fall factors, including the following:

First, the error of neo-Calvinism is that it “emphasizes the centrality of Christian cultural work as a means of building the kingdom of God and anticipating the new creation.”⁶ VanDrunen sees this as shifting the emphasis from the Great Commission to our cultural achievements. Nevertheless, he tries to balance the seesaw, writing that “cultural activity remains important for Christians, but it will come to an abrupt end, along with this present world as a whole, when Christ returns and cataclysmically ushers in the new heavens and the new earth.”⁷

Second, cultural activities not only fail to attain the world-to-come, but the products of our labors will not “survive into the new creation.”⁸

Third, VanDrunen writes that the unmodified demands of the first Dominion Covenant are not required of us because they have been fulfilled in Christ. Since Adam failed his probation, Christ assumed the role of a second Adam and thereby fulfilled its conditions to usher in the eternal kingdom, which will arrive simultaneously with the creation of “the new heavens and the new earth.” Thus, Dominion in its fullest will be realized at the parousia, when “the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Rev 11:15 NKJV).

Fourth, by urging the Cultural Mandate, we are downplaying justification by faith and frustrating God’s grace.⁹

Those opposed to the Two Kingdom worldview argue that *all* the duties of the Dominion Covenant are extant and even a substantive article of Christ’s missionary commission. For example, John Frame writes that Jesus did not abrogate the Cultural Mandate, but “restates it for his church in the Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20).”¹⁰ Further, “The Great Commission ... can be understood as a republication of the Cultural Mandate for the semi-eschatological age,”¹¹ even though in its broadest sense “the cultural mandate cannot be fulfilled until the Great Commission is fulfilled.”¹²

⁵ David VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 23.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 21, 50, 57–58.

¹⁰ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 862.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 310.

¹² *Ibid.*

As to the obsolescence of the Dominion Covenant, contrarians argue that there are two mountains that need to be scaled before it is given an honorable burial. First, if the redeemed do not share the dominion fulfilled in Christ, then how does this impact the image of God in man? Genesis 1:26–30 states that man was made in God’s image and that dominion issues from this selfsame image. Although there is not a tit-for-tat equivalence between “image” and “dominion,” man’s role as God’s vicegerent originates in his commission to subdue all the earth for God’s glory. Dominion is so linked to the *imago Dei* that it would be nonfunctional if Christ did not share it with his redeemed people. Of course, it might be countered that because of Adam’s first sin, the image became so distorted that man consecrated himself instead to satanic imitations like domination and exploitation. That may be true, except that the real issue is that Jesus’s achieving dominion is much more than a future sharing to be apportioned during the *eschaton*. Scripture teaches that in all of Jesus’s saving work, we are united with him, especially in his life, death, resurrection, and even his heavenly enthronement (Eph 2:6–7). Why, then, would dominion be deemed passé in God’s “already-not yet” kingdom? Is not the present world *the beginning* of “the age to come” (Heb 2:5)? Geoffrey Wilson quotes Geerhardus Vos, who wrote that our salvation is so gloriously majestic that “God has subjected the inhabited world to the rule of His people. This was the original goal of creation, but it was effected only in Christ. With Christ, therefore, we have a new creation.”¹³ Frail man who was made “a little lower than the angels” is now God’s fully equipped vice-regent on earth, even though “present experience sadly proves that the full accomplishment of this divine decree is still awaited.”¹⁴ Because Christ is the appointed heir of all things, Christians share his dominion. This is why John Trapp exhorted, “Be married to this heir, and have all!” (cf. Rom 8:17).¹⁵ It is precisely because we have union-and-communication that we enjoy dominion, too.

Second, if the Cultural Mandate is fulfilled so that Christians are forbidden to usher in the “new heavens and the new earth” by their cultural works, then how can we justify even the “modified” form, for would not the modifications (which also express dominion) continue to tempt the church to establish the kingdom by the labors of its hands? It is not clear why subduing the earth is forfeited, but the other cultural duties remain.

¹³ Geoffrey B. Wilson, *Hebrews* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 33.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁵ John Trapp, *Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 666 (on Heb 1:2).

III. *Two Kingdom Christology*

The Two Kingdom construct in the second contrast features a bizarre, somewhat irregular Christology that flirts with heterodoxy. Succinctly stated, while the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is the exalted Lord of the cosmos, he rules only the church in the capacity of God *and man*. To be sure, Christ rules all events outside the church as sovereign Lord, except that he *circumvents his human nature* when wielding the reins of his cosmic government, separating his two natures. VanDrunen explains, “Christ rules the one kingdom as *eternal God, as the agent of creation and providence, and over all creatures*. Christ rules the other kingdom as *the incarnate God-man, as the agent of redemption, and over the church*.”¹⁶ Again, he writes, “After his incarnation Christ according to his divine nature continues to exist and work even outside of his human nature (the so-called *extra Calvinisticum*).”¹⁷ VanDrunen cites both Francis Turretin and Samuel Rutherford as significant precursors who believed that “the Son of God rules the temporal kingdom as an eternal member of the Divine Trinity but does not rule it in his capacity as the incarnate mediator/redeemer.”¹⁸

To their credit, Two Kingdom advocates *do* acknowledge that Christ is not a mere titular “King of kings and Lord of lords,” either in the church or the secular realm. On the contrary, the Son of God governs the city of man by the “natural law” stamped on all men’s hearts, although this governance is divorced from his person as the incarnate redeemer.¹⁹

One reason that the aforementioned Christology is “irregular” rests upon it being nowhere articulated in the Reformed creeds. Still, VanDrunen honors this Christology as “Reformed Orthodoxy,” even if it is a stranger to creedal Protestantism.

Many Scriptures such as Matthew 28:18 and Hebrews 2:5–9 are relevant to a rebuttal. In the first, Christ’s “All authority is given to Me in heaven and in earth” was the result of his triumphal resurrection, when God declared him “the Son of God with power” (Rom 1:4). This is when he officially

¹⁶ David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 177.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 430. *Extra Calvinisticum* means “Calvinistic beyond.” The thought is that Christ’s divine nature is not bottled up in his human nature so that his movements are restricted.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁹ VanDrunen *does* aver that institutions and communities that belong to the common kingdom are ruled “through the incarnate Lord Jesus.” VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 118. In his *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, however, he equates the limitation of Christ’s rule as the God-man over the church with “Reformed Orthodoxy”; see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 177–82.

assumed the mediatorial reins over his church and the whole creation, where he now exercises his rule as the God-man, the firstborn over all creation (Col 1:15–20). This means that no earthly institution, indeed, no fact at all, escaped his kingdom when he sat down at God’s right hand, upholding “all things by the word of His power” (Heb 1:3). Louis Berkhof describes his exalted station:

This investiture was part of the exaltation of the God-man. It did not give Him any power or authority which He did not already possess as the Son of God; neither did it increase His territory. But the God-man, the Mediator, was now made the possessor of this authority, *and His human nature was made to share in the glory of his royal dominion*. Moreover, the government of the world was now made subservient to the interests of the Church of Jesus Christ.²⁰

IV. *Natural Law and the Ten Commandments*

The third contrast pinpoints the differing residences of God’s law. Two Kingdom authors teach that even unbelievers “do” the works of God’s law: “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 the work of the law is written on their hearts” (Rom 2:14–15a). Here Calvin is regularly subpoenaed, who testified,

Now, as it is evident that the law of God which we call moral, is nothing else than the testimony of natural law, and of conscience which God has engraven on the minds of men, the whole of this equity of which we now speak is prescribed in it. Hence it alone ought to be the aim, the rule, and the end of all laws. Wherever laws are formed after this rule, directed to this aim, and restricted to this end, there is no reason why they should be disapproved by us, however much they may differ from the Jewish law, or from each other.²¹

Calvin’s perspective of “natural law” also includes civil punishments, which he supports as the common law of the nations.²² Accordingly, he

²⁰ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 411 (emphasis mine).

²¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 664 (4.20.16).

²² There is scarcely space to discuss Calvin’s position, even though Two Kingdom advocates admit that Calvin taught things that conflict with his natural law premises. For example, Calvin spoke of the state as “holy,” and even as “Christian,” whereas Two Kingdom champions view the kingdom outside the church as neither holy nor unholy, but secular. For a cogent presentation of Calvin’s transformationist views, see Timothy P. Palmer, “Calvin the Transformationist and the Kingship of Christ,” *Pro Rege* 35.3 (March 2007): 32–39. See also Cornelis P. Venema,

writes, “The Lord did not deliver it by the hand of Moses to be promulgated in all countries, and to be everywhere enforced.”²³ Hence Calvin (and Augustine and Martin Luther, etc.) are cited as authorities who believed that “the common law of the nations” is the “equity” of natural law, that is, “the work of the law written in their hearts” (Rom 2:15a). Hence the norm that governs the secular world and the church is essentially identical, except that their respective residences differ. One law is mediated through common grace, while the other is God’s law written on our hearts through the gift of regeneration (Jer 31:33). The former is “secular”; the latter is spiritual and ecclesiastical. (Two Kingdom advocates call this the “law-gospel” dichotomy, which means that the law governs the world but the gospel the church.) Thus, the Two Kingdom doctrine censures the church whenever she imposes God’s inscripturated laws upon the state; there is one exception—when the church makes a special request of the state or vice versa. The Westminster Confession of Faith 31.4 is cited for support:

Synods and councils are to handle or conclude nothing but that which is ecclesiastical: and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth, unless by way of humble petition, in cases extraordinary; or by way of advice for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate.²⁴

V. *The Noachian Covenant*

The fourth contrast concerns the Noachian covenant in Genesis 6:8–9, where God allays man’s fears of future deluges. Indeed, he promises that he will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, and that “seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease”; that to mitigate violence, civil government would be established so that “whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image” (Gen 8:21–22; 9:6). The *lex talionis* (“law of retaliation”) of Genesis 9:6 is of colossal significance because it teaches that God ordained the state to ensure civil order throughout the post-deluge world. Two Kingdom advocates declare this to be a common-grace kingdom so that Christ rules two kingdoms, “the one through his providence and *common grace* in the world and the other through his miraculous *saving grace* in the church.”²⁵

“One Kingdom or Two?: An Evaluation of the ‘Two Kingdoms’ Doctrine as an Alternative to Neo-Calvinism,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 23 (2012): 77–129.

²³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 665 (4.20.16).

²⁴ Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom* (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1983), 3:670.

²⁵ Michael Horton, *Pilgrim Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 115.

The compartmentalization of the two kingdoms is hard and fast, so there is little interplay. While the church is Christian, the state is common, non-Christian, and not even theocentric in the sense of the first four commandments of the Decalogue. In fact, Two Kingdom writers (influenced by the church in the Babylonian Captivity) regularly call the state “Babylon,” the net result being two “kingdoms apart.”²⁶ While some allow for a tidbit of interaction, others are committed to a totally secular state, where even God’s name in the public square is censured as “monstrous confusion.” Even though the Lord Jesus Christ rules both kingdoms, the church must neither invade nor seek to Christianize civil government because the state was designed to be true-blue “common.” What qualifies as interference is anything that violates the truism that the “Bible functions as the constitution for the covenant people, not for the secular state.”²⁷ Their doctrine is that the Noachian covenant created the state, and since it is nonredemptive and functions under common grace, it operates by natural law.

In Two Kingdom thinking, God’s covenant with Noah is non-Christological because its central focus is believers and unbelievers juxtaposed in a common kingdom. Scripture, however, teaches that the Noachian covenant is, in fact, Messianic, although not in ways that are readily observable. Henry Van Til clarifies the matter: “Common grace has no independent goal apart from the coming of the kingdom of God through Christ, the second Adam. Christ is the key to history and to culture.”²⁸

The legislative details of the Noachian covenant were revealed after Noah’s burnt offerings, which foreshadowed the holy gospel (Gen 8:20–22). Two Kingdom writers by contrast view this covenant as thoroughly nonredemptive and the mandate for a common kingdom. But we offer the following rebuttal:

First, the state is ordained by God so that when men assault the image of God in man “He deems Himself violated in their person.”²⁹ Civil authority, then, has theological grounds for inflicting the death penalty because his position is “the most sacred, and by far the most honourable, of all stations in mortal life.”³⁰

²⁶ For an irenic critique of the Two Kingdom position, see Ryan C. McIlhenny, ed., *Kingdoms Apart* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012).

²⁷ Michael Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 127.

²⁸ Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1959), 237.

²⁹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 294.

³⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, 654 (4.20.4).

Second, the Noachian flood was a type of our being “saved by baptism” (1 Pet 3:20–21). Baptism is the antitype of the flood. God made a covenant with Noah to *save him and his family* from his wrath so that Noah’s salvation became a type of ours (Gen 6:18).³¹ The pre-announcement of the covenant in Gen 6:18, formally instituted in Genesis 9, is instructive because it

shows us that God’s covenant with Noah in ch. 9 is no ad hoc arrangement, hatched in God’s mind once the floodwaters had disappeared. Even before he unleashes his anger God announces his intention to save at least one human being. This sequence of grace and indignation has already appeared two times in Genesis. Before God banished Adam and Eve from the garden he clothed them. Before he exiled Cain he placed a mark on him to protect him. And here God announces his covenant even before he sends his flood.³²

Third, while the penultimate purpose of God’s covenant was to preserve creation, its grander aim was to prepare humankind for Christ’s advent, hence making its purposes both civil and redemptive.

We also underscore the role of Noah’s son, Shem, who was the ancestor of Christ (Luke 3:36), which confirms that God made his covenant with Noah “and your seed after you”—the word “seed” highlighting Shem’s line (Gen 9:9). The Noachian covenant, therefore, anticipates the Abrahamic with its emphasis upon Christ as the capital “S” Seed (Gen 17:7). All in all, Two Kingdom devotees need to re-address the Christological question more realistically so that none will cry like Mary Magdalene, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him” (John 20:13 NKJV).

VI. *Pilgrims, Not Transformers?*

Contrast five concerns the ethics of God’s people, whom Two Kingdom adherents call *pilgrims*. This pilgrim motif means that besides our resurrected bodies, we can take nothing out of this world. The Scriptures that broadcast “pilgrim-theology” are illustrated especially by Hebrews 11:8–16, where our spiritual ancestors “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (NKJV). Initially, it may seem—especially when the term is not

³¹ The tie between Gen 6:18 and Gen 9 is denied by VanDrunen, who sees two entirely different covenants: one for Noah and the other for creation. He also denies that Noah’s “burnt-offerings” after the Flood were redemptive; see VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 80.

³² Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 284.

qualified by “kings,” “salt,” and “light”—that a pilgrim is little more than a drifter or tourist who is summoned to “occupy” until Christ returns. Therefore “pilgrim” by itself might imply that our labors are inconsequential, perhaps even flaky. Michael Horton, however, explains,

This does not mean that they then are no longer citizens of the earthly city, but that they do not derive their ultimate comfort, satisfaction, or hope from it. Secular society is a gift of God before and after the fall, and it must be cultivated by Christians as well as their non-believing neighbors.³³

Again,

While a nation need not be governed by Christian rulers or Christian laws in order to be just, and Christian conviction does not necessarily demand a certain set of policies, individual believers are simultaneously members of both heavenly and earthly kingdoms and cannot divorce their citizenship in one from the other.³⁴

Horton also dubs our employments “callings,” signifying that the Christian’s work is God ordained. And most important of all, he assures us that as long as we

recognize that there is no everlasting rest from violence, oppression, injustice, and immorality through our own political or cultural works, we are free to pursue their *amelioration* with vigorous gratitude to God for his saving grace in Jesus Christ.³⁵

Still, Two Kingdom advocates insist that our cultural labors “can never be redemptive,” even though God’s people view cultural challenges with concern for their neighbors and to fulfill the neighbor-commandments of Leviticus 19:18 and Matthew 22:39. They say nothing, however, about applying the first four commandments of the Decalogue.

Two Kingdom advocates are mostly correct about the caution required in the use of the soteriological word “transformer.” Consequently, other words are deemed more fitting, as Horton urges us *to ameliorate* crime but hedges about calling this activity transformational. His reasoning is fixed to the sharp distinction he makes between “law and gospel,” as God’s law in itself cannot redemptively transform. The best that the Christian can do is “clean house” by means of civic righteousness, but never redemptively because God’s law cannot quicken hearts and redeem institutions. Perhaps “transformer” best

³³ Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology*, 123.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 126–27.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 128 (emphasis mine).

suits the preacher who witnesses new creations and sees old things passing away and all things becoming new (2 Cor 5:17). Preaching alone is transformational, not reformational. It is Pelagian to congratulate ourselves as “transformers” if our cultural efforts purposefully exclude the redeeming grace of God. Here, the Two Kingdom people have scored, for how can institutions be transformed when the message of the cross is on holiday?

The dilemma of “law” or “gospel” can be resolved by remembering that the real goal is to purify the Augean stables by “the law *in* the gospel.” An insight by James Buchanan is helpful:

The law points the eye of a convinced sinner to the cross; but the cross throws in upon his conscience a flood of light which sheds a reflex luster on the law. Hence we believe that the Gospel of Christ, and especially the doctrine of the cross of Christ, is the most powerful instrument for impressing the conscience of a sinner, and for turning his convictions into genuine contrition of heart. And this is because the Gospel, and especially the doctrine of the cross, contains in it the spirit and essence of the law; it recognizes and proceeds upon the moral principles of God’s government, and affords a new and most impressive manifestation of the holiness of the Lawgiver ... The cross,—the cross of a crucified Savior—is the most powerful, the most impressive demonstration of sin, and righteousness, and judgment. ... It is the law by which we obtain the knowledge of sin; but the law is magnified in the cross; and it is the *law in the cross* that carries home to every awakened conscience the most alarming convictions of guilt.³⁶

Here it is not the law apart from the cross or the cross apart from the law, but the “the law in the cross” that thoroughly transforms. Thus, the “law-gospel” choices proffered by Two Kingdom disciples are false choices.

As for Christians as pilgrims, Two Kingdom theologians are over accentuating the metaphor that depicts the journey of the Christian to God’s celestial city, which is but one among many, for Christians are “hyphenates,” living hyphenated lives as prophets, priests, and kings. As kings especially, the Christian by virtue of union-and-communion (and dominion) with Christ is called to subdue the earth in faith. Christian pilgrims occupy a domicile, working from a royal house, “the house of my pilgrimage” (Ps 119:54). Tellingly, Two Kingdom eschatology denies the reality of the “already” aspect of the “new heavens and new earth,” which is oft declared (Isa 11; 65). Eschatologically, “the new heavens and the new earth” are a present reality, although not yet in the full effervesce and glory of the flower. In this life, all things are becoming new to those who are in Christ. This is significant, for if the new heavens and new earth are present in the bud, then the

³⁶ James Buchanan, *The Office and Work of the Holy Spirit* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 64–65.

kingdoms of this world are already becoming “the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” (Rev 11:15; Ps 2:8, 10–12). But in the Two Kingdom scheme, there is scarcely any “already” in the “already” and a lot of “not yet” in the “not yet.”

Two Kingdom advocates also claim there is much common ground shared between Christians and unbelievers, declaring “when it comes to childbirth, love making, disease, tragedies, earthquakes, and famines, there is no distinction between the Christian and non-Christian.”³⁷ While VanDrunen recognizes important “subjective” differences in the common kingdom, Horton’s presentation sometimes lowers the bar, for is there realistically no distinction in the “love-making” of the Christian and the unbeliever? In terms of common grace, surely the unbeliever is capable of love and does love (Luke 6:32–33). But the unbeliever does not love those who hate him, nor can he love as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it (Eph 5:25). And, in the light of Romans 8:28, does the Christian experience “tragedies”? Two Kingdom advocates, of course, know these things, but since their common kingdom is neither holy nor unholy, they passionately lobby for the “melting-pot” of the Noachian covenant. This conception is especially highlighted by substantive but differing views of culture, for while One Kingdom theologians define culture as religion externalized, or “lived religion,”³⁸ the Two Kingdom position is more superficial. VanDrunen simply defines culture as the “broad range of activities—scientific, artistic, economic, etc.—in which human beings engage.”³⁹ Such a definition lends itself to the depiction of religion as one cultural pillar among many instead of the cornerstone of all. This nonreligious definition of culture works to soften the antithesis in the interests of an assimilating commonality that creates the chimera of neutrality. Horton even writes that “Scripture does not ... address every area of moral concern” and urges us to join the quest for wisdom with unbelievers.⁴⁰ There is an adage that the same things done by Christians and unbelievers are *not* the same things (Prov 21:4; Heb 11:29). The danger is that the inflated common denominators in the common kingdom will so mesmerize believers that evangelism is chilled and schizophrenic Christians are created. A church that does not seek to transform can easily render itself so irrelevant that she becomes a parachurch herself.

³⁷ This is from Michael Horton’s lecture at Westminster Theological Seminary California on June 15–16, 2010.

³⁸ Van Til is quoting T. S. Eliot; see his *Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, 35.

³⁹ VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 32.

⁴⁰ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 105.

VII. *Creedal Contrasts*

Contrast seven concerns differing interpretations of the Reformed creeds. For example, Horton maintains that in these creeds “one easily discerns a consensus around the biblical and Augustinian two-kingdoms doctrine.”⁴¹ He highlights the “confessional standards of Reformed and Presbyterian bodies,” appealing specifically to chapter 31 of the Westminster Confession of Faith.⁴²

Here we canvas the Reformed confessions to determine if they synchronize with the major tenants of the Two Kingdom doctrine. Zwingli’s Sixty-Seven Articles (1523) teach that “the temporal power ... does have power and confirmation in the doctrine and work of Christ” (Article 35).⁴³ Also, when rulers “are unfaithful and do not act according to the rule of Christ, they may be deposed in the name of God” (Article 42).⁴⁴ The Geneva Confession (1536) speaks of rulers as “holy” and as following “a Christian vocation” (Article 21).⁴⁵ The First Helvetic Confession (1536) charges civil magistrates to punish blasphemy “and to exercise all possible diligence to promote and to put into effect what a minister of the Church and a preacher of the Gospel teaches and sets up from God’s Word.” It also argues that civil government should rule the people with “just, divine laws” (Article 26).⁴⁶

The Scottish Confession of Faith (1560) speaks of the duties of rulers to “maintain true religion and to suppress all idolatry and superstition” (Chapter 24).⁴⁷ The First Confession of Basel (1534) declares that “every Christian government ... should do all in its power to see that God’s name is hallowed among its subjects, God’s kingdom extended, and His will observed by the assiduous extirpation of crimes” (Article 8).⁴⁸ The Second Helvetic Confession (1566) commands magistrates to be

truly God-fearing and religious; that is to say, when, according to the example of the most holy kings and princes of the people of the Lord, he promotes the preaching of the truth and sincere faith, roots out lies and all superstition, together with all

⁴¹ Ibid., 124.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Arthur C. Cochrane, ed., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 40.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 41.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 126.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 110–11.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 183.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 94.

impiety and idolatry, and defends the Church of God. ... the care of religion belongs especially to the holy magistrate. (Chapter 30)⁴⁹

This Confession also enjoins rulers to codify “good laws made according to the Word of God in his hands” (Chapter 30).⁵⁰ This Confession speaks of the “the Law of Nature” that “was at one time written in the hearts of men by the finger of God” (Rom 2:15) and of God’s finger also writing “the two Tables of Moses” (Chapter 12), but without affirming that “the Law of Nature” has replaced the inscripturated Ten Commandments as a rule of duty.⁵¹ Before it was later amended, the Belgic Confession of Faith (1561) proclaimed that kings must

protect the sacred ministry, and thus may remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship; that the kingdom of antichrist may be thus destroyed, and the kingdom of Christ promoted. They must therefore countenance the preaching of the word of the gospel every where. (Article 36)⁵²

Returning to the Westminster standards, the Larger Catechism says that the “moral law” is of “great use thereof, *as well as common to all men*” (WLC 94, emphasis mine).⁵³ And, this “moral law” that is “common to all,” is defined not as natural law but as what is “summarily comprehended in the ten commandments, which were delivered by the voice of God upon mount Sinai, and written by him in two tables of stone; and are recorded in the twentieth chapter of Exodus” (WLC 98).⁵⁴ We also note that the original Confession of 1647 allowed the civil ruler

to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed. (WCF 23.3)⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Ibid., 299–300.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 300.

⁵¹ Ibid., 247.

⁵² Ibid., 217. This article was amended and enjoyed undisputed acceptance around 1580 in the Low Countries.

⁵³ *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1958; repr., Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1990), 179.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 181–82.

⁵⁵ Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3:653. The Confession’s statement about civil magistrates was amended in the American Church at the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA in 1789, some 142 years after its acceptance.

That the civil standard for good government is God’s inscripturated law is underscored by the Confession’s declaration that to Israel “as a body politic, *he gave sundry judicial laws*, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any other, now, further than the general equity thereof may require” (WCF 19.4, emphasis mine).⁵⁶ Clearly, if only the judicial laws have “expired,” then the moral law expressed in the Ten Commandments remains the norm for both church and civil jurisprudence.

After tallying the confessional math, it would seem that Two Kingdom advocates need to lessen their dogmatism that God wants natural law to be the exclusive norm for institutions outside the church. To declare that all the Reformed creeds “easily” prove that natural law was the undisputed standard for civil life seems gratuitous and grates against the confessional data.

VIII. Two Kingdom Positives

The Two Kingdom viewpoint contains pluses that warrant appreciation. Most notably is the abiding authority of natural law and its role in the operations of unregenerates and institutions outside the pale of Christ’s church. It is heartening that the choices before civil rulers are not restricted to autonomy or theonomy.⁵⁷ A third choice is available: the natural law that God has engraved into man’s moral fabric at creation, which—although defaced by man’s sin—is often performed. This is why Horton calls it “the canon of natural law,” signifying that even the moral hunchbacks of this age implement it in their lives. This is comforting to know, especially if we—like Paul, who was shipwrecked on Malta—are terrorized by the thought of falling into the hands of barbarous chefs whose culinary specialty is missionary soup!

Still, significant problems bubble to the surface.

First, if natural law is a universal standard to which institutions outside the church must submit, then *all* the natural law should be included, especially the first four commandments. For God’s Ten Commandments are a seamless robe in which even the neighbor-commandments of the Second Table are inextricably linked to the theocentricity of the First. If Two Kingdom advocates are correct about the Two Kingdom sympathies of Calvin and his ancestors, why is it “problematic” (as Two Kingdom writers claim) for a Christian magistrate to legislate the whole natural law, including the first four commandments? And, why is Calvin repeatedly called

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 3:641.

⁵⁷ *Theonomy* here means “God’s law.”

“inconsistent” by Two Kingdom devotees when he praises Christian magistrates who codify Christian laws when most Two Kingdom supporters own that the boundaries between the First and Second Tables of even natural law are indivisible?⁵⁸

Second, if natural law is so “sufficient,” where was its sufficiency for our first parents before they sinned against God? Scripture teaches that our first parents were environed by both natural *and* word-revelation in the Garden. Clearly, Adam could not have lived unless the natural law was augmented by additional word-revelations from God’s voice in the Garden. He relied upon God to interpret the natural revelation (e.g., the tree of the knowledge of good and evil). Even man, when *not* in sin, needed much more than natural law.

Third, VanDrunen explains the interplay between natural law and civil/judicial law when commenting on “the general equity” of the Mosaic “judicials”:

The civil or judicial law of Moses has been abrogated at the coming of Christ, yet has continuing applicability insofar as it reflects the natural law. For Reformed orthodoxy, as for the Reformation and medieval traditions of the past, civil magistrates ought not impose the Mosaic civil laws *as such* upon contemporary societies. Yet at times they will implement Mosaic civil laws, not because they are Mosaic laws but because they are particular applications of the natural law still appropriate under present circumstances.⁵⁹

Here, the chasm between the One and Two Kingdom theologies may appear razor thin, since civil magistrates will occasionally implement Mosaic civil laws. But the chief issue concerns the perspicuity of natural law in the present context of man’s plunge into the dark mine of sin. Indeed, even the Old Testament people who were commanded to conform themselves to the Mosaic law were habitually apostate, as the Lord often bemoans (Ps 95; Acts 7:51–52; Heb 3:15–19; 8:8). How then can sinners under the less perspicuous influence of natural law discern the written Ten Commandments, given their inveterate blindness to God’s truth (Rom 1:18–32; 3:10–20; 8:7–8)?

The pitfall of natural law is its alliance with the “natural man,” which results in natural law becoming a veritable corrupt manuscript. Of course,

⁵⁸ This is particularly true of Meredith G. Kline, whose *Treaty of the Great King* anchors the Second Table to the First. For an excellent treatment of the relationship between the First Table and the Second of God’s Ten Commandments, see Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 113–30.

⁵⁹ VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 171.

it is not corrupt per se, but only so by the natural man's depraved glosses and annotations. Thus the Canons of Dort rightly taught that only "glimmerings of natural light" remain in fallen man (Matt 6:23).⁶⁰ Therefore, a corrupt canon has become the *Textus Receptus* (received text) of Two Kingdom lobbyists. Wisdom teaches that we should no more make natural law the unique standard of righteousness in the common kingdom than we would make Marcion's canon or the Samaritan Pentateuch the norm in God's spiritual kingdom.

Tellingly, Horton argues that natural law is sufficient to direct the civil magistrate, praising the Roman Caesars in Romans 13, and writing that "Even unbelievers can rule justly and prudently."⁶¹ Horton's point is well taken, especially when one considers that none of the Roman rulers and judges were even vaguely Christian; yet he makes no allowance for dross or anything beastly in their statutes; for if it is desirable to cultivate a just society, then why should the alloys of godless laws escape the expurgations of the written Ten Commandments? Here the Two Kingdom position inexplicably downplays the depth of man's depravity, which is realistically depicted in the Canons of Dort and even applied to natural law: "But so far is this light of nature from being sufficient to bring him to a saving knowledge of God, and to true conversion, that he is incapable of using it aright *even in things natural and civil*" (Canons of Dort 3/4.4, emphasis mine).

IX. Clarifying the Kingdoms

An interesting inquiry is whether Two Kingdom theology is a "package deal"? Does the toppling of one domino spell the doom of the rest? One answer is that Two Kingdom adherents allow for some crossing over between the kingdoms, such as churches importuning the state with their humble petitions. Hence, it is possible that some of the main features of Two Kingdom theology will suffer further modification or even "die the death of a thousand qualifications."

This is illustrated by Two Kingdom apologists insisting that the state is common by virtue of the Noachian covenant. We have already heard the pronouncement that the Roman government of Paul's day was "just." But if just, then why not holy? And if not holy, then why not unholy? Does anything transcend the categories of holy and unholy? We are naive to deny that "he that is not with me is against me" and to forget that the word

⁶⁰ Canons of Dort 3/4.4; Schaff, ed. *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3:588.

⁶¹ Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology*, 122.

“common” tends to camouflage the profound moral antitheses that exist in the common kingdom.

The response to a question posed to VanDrunen at a 2011 forum concerning the exact kingdom-slot of Westminster Seminary California reveals the vagaries of the Two Kingdom thesis. Since Westminster is not a school of a church denomination, the questioner wanted to know if the seminary was a member of the common kingdom or the spiritual kingdom? VanDrunen answered,

And so in essence I would look at this institution as a common kingdom institution that houses and hosts this very important work the church does through certain ministers set apart for the task ... It does not mean that we can always put every single plot of ground here in one kingdom or another. Sometimes it is more complex than that.

Again he explained,

I would say that a place like Westminster, in and of itself, is part of the common kingdom in that it does not have the promises of the eternal kingdom of God ... and has all the trappings of a business in a lot of ways.⁶²

This explanation would mean that ministers are trained in an unredeemed kingdom that is neither holy nor unholy, and that the seminary as a commercial business is not properly Christian, since its address is the common kingdom. This is one of many minuses that hamper the acceptance of the leading distinctives of Two Kingdom theology.

⁶² Ryan C. McIlhenny, “Christian Witness *As* Redeemed Culture,” in McIlhenny, *Kingdoms Apart*, 266–68.