

Reformed Developments in Two Kingdoms Doctrine or Two Kingdoms Doctrine in the Reformed Tradition

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This article will first explore the Reformation and post-Reformation roots of “two kingdoms doctrine”, specifically in the Reformed or Calvinistic tradition. Then it will move on to consider and compare contemporary Reformed expressions of the doctrine.

Historical Background

Sir, as divers times before, so now again, I must tell you, there are two Kings and two Kingdoms in Scotland: there is Christ Jesus the King, and his Kingdom the Kirk, whose subject King James the Sixth is, and of whose kingdom not a king, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member!¹

So spoke Andrew Melville (1545-1622) to King James VI of Scotland, soon to become James I of England and Ireland following the union of the Scottish and English crowns in 1603. Melville’s point was to affirm the independence of the Church of Scotland from state control, a principle for which the Scottish Covenanters would later give their lives.² As the late G. N. M.

¹ Translated into modern English in Elizabeth Whitley, *The Two Kingdoms* (Edinburgh: The Scottish Reformation Society, 1977), 26.

² For a popular history of the Covenanters, see the above reference. A more extensive treatment can be found in Alexander Smellie, *Men of the Covenant: The Story of the Scottish Church in the Years of the Persecution* (London: Andrew Melrose,

Collins (1901-89) wrote in the Foreword to Elizabeth Whitley's *The Two Kingdoms*, Melville "was enunciating no new principle of Church and State relations, but merely reasserting one which had been basic to the Scottish Reformation, and which inhered in the concordat between Church and State relating to the establishment of the Reformed Church in Scotland."³

The language of two kings and two kingdoms suggests the influence of Martin Luther and Lutheranism, with whom the doctrine is most commonly associated. Back of this is Augustine's massive work, *City of God*, with its distinction between the City of God (or Heavenly City) and the Earthly City. However, while there was early Lutheran influence in the Scottish Reformation, the predominant influence on its leading reformer John Knox (1514-72) and his successor Andrew Melville came from John Calvin, who wrote of a distinction between the "spiritual" and "civil" kingdom.⁴

Matthew Tuininga, Assistant Professor of Moral Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, wrote his doctoral dissertation on Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine and has summarized his findings in Part Two of a three-part article in *Reformation 21*. He stresses that:

Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine has to be understood in the context of the reformer's eschatology because most of the terms he used to describe the doctrine – spiritual/temporal, heavenly/earthly, soul/body, inward/outward, ecclesiastical/political – are eschatological in Calvin's thought.⁵

Quoting Calvin's *Institutes* 2.2.13, Tuininga notes,

For Calvin, things that are political or earthly are things that are temporal, secular, or passing away. [However,] while Calvin constantly referred to this world or the body as things that are passing away, he qualified such comments by his clear teaching that the work of Jesus is to redeem the entire cosmos. Calvin repeatedly

1908). See also James Barr, *The Scottish Covenanters* (Glasgow: James Smith & Son, 1946).

³ G. N. M. Collins, Foreword to *Elizabeth Whitley*, op. cit., v. The two kingdoms doctrine embraces more than church-state relations, but this will be our focus in this article.

⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3 vols., trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), 3.19.15.

⁵ Matthew Tuininga, "The Two Kingdoms Doctrine, Part Two: John Calvin" in *Reformation 21* (<http://www.reformation21.org/articles/the-two-kingdoms-doctrine-part-two-john-calvin.php>), October 2012. See also, "It is this distinction between the two ages, and the institutions of one age and the kingdom of the age to come, that forms the foundation of the classic doctrine." (Tuininga, Part One, September 2012). The doctoral dissertation, scheduled for publication in late 2016 by Cambridge University Press as *Calvin's Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church: Christ's Two Kingdoms* was not available at the time of writing.

states that, when Jesus returns, he will bring all things back to the order that they lost by virtue of the Fall.... On the other hand, Calvin passionately and consistently argued that, short of Christ's return in glory, believers should expect nothing but life under the cross.⁶

Calvin "broke with the Zwinglian or Swiss Reformed by arguing that civil law was insufficient for the discipline of the church, and that the ecclesiastical process of discipline was integral to the church's exercise of the keys of the kingdom."⁷ Calvin went further than either Luther or Zwingli in developing what he understood to be a New Testament form of church government separate from civil government, governed by elders or presbyters.

At the same time, Calvin believed that "civil government is necessary to preserve outward order and piety in the age before Christ's return." He argued that civil government "is to enforce the first table of the law, as well as the second.... To be sure, Calvin did not believe civil government was obligated to conform slavishly to the civil laws and penalties in the Torah. But he did believe government was to be concerned with the preservation of outward piety, in addition to justice." He insisted that government "had the duty of 'rightly establishing religion' (4.20.3) in order that God might be honored, the public protected from scandal, and people who did not yet believe the gospel or accept the law might be exposed to its proclamation."⁸

His view found expression in various Reformed confessions, such as the *Belgic Confession* (1561) and the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647). The latter confession, in its original wording, strikes Calvin's balance between the roles of the two kingdoms. In Chapter XXIII, paragraph III, it reads:

The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven: yet he hath authority, and it is his duty, 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. For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God.⁹

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ *The Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechism* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1970), XXIII. III.

When the Presbyterian Church in the United States was formed in 1788, it revised this paragraph so that it now reads:

Civil magistrates may not assume to themselves the administration of the Word and sacraments; or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven; or, in the least, interfere in matters of faith. Yet, as nursing fathers, it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest, in such a manner that all ecclesiastical persons whatever shall enjoy the full, free, and unquestioned liberty of discharging every part of their sacred functions, without violence or danger. And, as Jesus Christ hath appointed a regular government and discipline in his church, no law of any commonwealth should interfere with, let, or hinder, the due exercise thereof, among the voluntary members of any denomination of Christians, according to their own profession and belief. It is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the person and good name of all their people, in such an effectual manner as that no person be suffered, either upon pretense of religion or of infidelity, to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or injury to any other person whatsoever: and to take order, that all religious and ecclesiastical assemblies be held without molestation or disturbance.¹⁰

This change predated and anticipated the First Amendment to the United States' Constitution (1791) which states in part, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." It has also been defended on historical and biblical grounds.¹¹

The well-known words of the United States' Declaration of Independence (1776) that all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, including life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, are widely considered to be an adaptation of language used by the English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704). Francis Schaeffer (1912-84) in *A Christian Manifesto* asserts that Locke had secularized and drawn heavily from the Scottish divine Samuel Rutherford's (1600-61) classic work, *Lex Rex* (1644).¹² Written in defense of the Scottish Covenanters against the im-

¹⁰ *The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms As Adopted by the Presbyterian Church in America* (copyright 2005, 2007 by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church) 23. 3.

¹¹ See, for instance, Charles Hodge's "The Relation of Church and State", first published in the *Princeton Review* (1863) and reprinted in Hodge's *The Church and Its Polity* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1879), 106-118.

¹² Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1981, revised 1982), 32.

position of the divine right of kings,¹³ *Lex Rex* argued that, rather than the king being above the law, he was subject to it. All civil power is derived from God. Power is a birthright of the people that the king borrows from them. If the king abuses that power by oppressing the people, they are entitled to recover it by means of armed revolution.¹⁴

There are certainly echoes of this in the Declaration of Independence and Constitution of the United States. John Macleod in his 1938 lectures at Westminster Seminary, published as *Scottish Theology: In relation to Church History*, notes that Rutherford's influence, and that of others who followed him, "told directly through the teaching of John Witherspoon... and indirectly through the teaching of John Locke.... Jefferson was of this school."¹⁵ However, Rutherford also wrote in *Lex Rex* that "God is the author of civil laws and government, and his intention is therein the external peace, and quiet life, and godliness of his church and people, and that all judges, according to their places, be nurse-fathers to the church (Isa 49:23)"¹⁶ He was a commissioner to the Westminster Assembly and agreed with the teaching of its resulting *Confession of Faith* that the civil magistrate had the authority and duty to suppress "all blasphemies and heresies". He did not envision a situation where equal rights were granted to people of all faiths and none.

Thus, while Calvin's followers in Scotland and elsewhere held to a form of what came to be known as "two kingdoms doctrine" with separate and limited jurisdictions for church and state, they also believed that both institutions were mutually interdependent expressions of Christ's lordship. The establishment of national churches, opposed by the United States' Constitution and the American revisions to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, was the norm.

Contemporary Developments

As stated previously, two kingdoms doctrine has typically been associated with Luther and Lutheranism. In recent years, however, there has been a revival of interest in Reformed circles more closely identified with the Calvinistic tradition. The principal locus of this has been the faculty of Westminster Seminary in California (as distinct from the original Westminster in Philadelphia). John Frame, a founding faculty member of what was then called

¹³ *Lex Rex* was written in response to a 1644 work by John Maxwell, onetime Bishop of Ross, *The Sacred and Royal Prerogative of Christian Kings*, defending absolute monarchy and the divine right of kings.

¹⁴ Samuel Rutherford, *Lex Rex, or the Law and the Prince: A Dispute for the Just Prerogative of King and People* (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1980 reprint).

¹⁵ John Macleod, *Scottish Theology: In relation to Church History* (Edinburgh: The Knox Press and The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974 reprint), 72.

¹⁶ Rutherford, op cit., 105.

Westminster West (1980) who now teaches at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida, has become a trenchant critic of this development and has coined the term “The Escondido Theology”, based on the location of Westminster in California. His book of that name is subtitled *A Reformed Response to Two Kingdom Theology*. The implication of this is that two kingdoms doctrine is not properly Reformed. In one place, Frame concedes that, even though he disagrees with the ideas of the Escondido theologians, they are “within the bounds of Reformed orthodoxy”.¹⁷ Elsewhere, he states that these positions are “an idiosyncratic kind of teaching peculiar to the Escondido school. Those who teach them are a faction, even a ‘sect’.”¹⁸ Yet again, Frame describes them as a mixture of Lutheranism, Calvinism and Klineanism, meaning by the last designation the influence of the late Meredith Kline (1922-2007), who bookended his varied career by teaching Old Testament at both Westminster Seminaries; Philadelphia at the beginning, California at the end. Kline taught some original views of the biblical covenants, making a sharp distinction between grace and works, special revelation and natural law, special and common grace, holy and common, cult and culture, covenant and civil society, spiritual and temporal blessings, and this can be seen in the current formulation of two kingdoms theology.

The leading advocate of two kingdoms doctrine is David VanDrunen, the Robert B. Strimple Professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics at Westminster in California. His views are developed in a number of books and articles, including his semi-popular *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (2010). The influence of Kline seems evident here, but more directly in VanDrunen’s most recent scholarly work, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law* (2014), although he is also critical of Kline at points. For our present purposes, it may be sufficient to focus mainly on *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*.

VanDrunen believes that Scripture “requires a distinction between the holy things of Christ’s heavenly kingdom and the common things of the present world.”¹⁹ He briefly outlines opposing views, especially that of neo-Calvinism which “traces back most immediately to the work of the Dutch philosopher and jurist Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977),” and “also claims

¹⁷ John Frame: *The Escondido Theology: A Reformed Response to Two Kingdom Theology* (Lakeland, FL: Whitefield Media Productions, 2011), 18.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, xxxix. “These positions” are a list of 32 views (not all of them directly related to two kingdoms doctrine) Frame attributes to the Escondido theologians, noting that “Not all of them make all of these assertions, but all of them regard them with some sympathy” (p. xxxvii). Recently retired Westminster in California President Robert Godfrey denies that these views are held there. See <http://wscal.edu/blog/westminster-seminary-california-faculty-response-to-john-frame>.

¹⁹ David VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2010), 26.

to be the heir of the Dutch theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and of the Reformer John Calvin (1509-64).²⁰

Neo-Calvinism is associated with the idea of transforming or redeeming all of life, and so fulfilling the cultural mandate of Genesis 1: 26-28.²¹ Contrary to this, VanDrunen asserts that:

The kingdom of God proclaimed by the Lord Jesus Christ is not built through politics, commerce, music or sports. Redemption does not consist in restoring people to fulfill Adam's original task²² but consists in the Lord Jesus Christ himself fulfilling Adam's original task once for all, on our behalf. Thus redemption is not 'creation regained' but 're-creation gained.'²³

Central to VanDrunen's argument is the view that God's covenant with Noah in Genesis 8:20-9:17 established what he calls the "common kingdom", operated by the principle of natural law. This common kingdom "concerns ordinary cultural activities... it embraces the human race in common... it ensures the preservation of the natural and social order... and it is established temporarily."²⁴

By way of contrast, the Abrahamic covenant "concerns religious faith and worship... it embraces a holy people that is distinguished from the rest of the human race... it bestows the benefits of salvation upon this holy people... and it is established forever and ever."²⁵ At the same time,

Scripture portrays Abraham as living a two-kingdoms way of life... The stories about Abraham's life in Genesis 12-25 show that he managed to live as a citizen of two kingdoms by remaining radically separate from the world in his religious faith and worship but simultaneously engaging in a range of cultural activities in com-

²⁰ Ibid., 16.

²¹ In his classic work, *Christ and Culture*, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1951). Richard H. Niebuhr classified Calvinism's relationship to culture as one of transformation. D.A. Carson argues that these typologies are too rigid. "Instead of imagining that Christ against culture and Christ transforming culture are two mutually exclusive stances, the rich complexity of biblical norms, worked out in the Bible's story line, tell us that these two often operate simultaneously." D.A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2008) 227. Frame notes that "'Transformationalism' may be too grandiose a term," – adding that "two kingdoms" is too pusillanimous (Frame, op.cit., 271).

²² That is, the cultural mandate.

²³ Ibid., 26. The phrase 'creation regained' is the title of a book by a leading neo-Calvinist, Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001).

²⁴ Ibid., 79.

²⁵ Ibid., 82-83.

mon with his pagan neighbors.... Though God had promised that one day his descendants would possess the entire land, in the meantime Abraham and his household could not be identified with any particular geographical location, but lived as ‘sojourners’ and ‘strangers’ among pagans (Gen 12:10; 15:13; 20:21; 21:34; 23:4; Heb 11:13).²⁶

Next we come to the Mosaic covenant. “Old Testament Israel under the Mosaic covenant teaches us much about the redemptive kingdom. As a ‘kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ (Ex. 19:6; see vv 5-6) Israel was the manifestation of the redemptive kingdom during the time between Moses and Christ.”²⁷ “Israel’s experience under the law of Moses in the Promised Land of Canaan was not meant to exemplify life under the two kingdoms. The cultural commonality among believers and unbelievers ordained in the Noahic covenant was suspended for Israel within the borders of the Promised Land.”²⁸ Unlike Abraham, “the Israelites were not sojourners in the land.”²⁹ “Though Israel was to show kindness to foreigners residing temporarily in Canaan (Deut 10:18-19; 26:12-13), it was not to maintain a common cultural life with pagans in the Promised Land.... In fact, Israel was to destroy the pagan nations who had been living in Palestine.”³⁰

However, the provisions of the Noahic covenant were suspended only inside the borders of the Promised Land. “When Israelites stepped outside of their borders or dealt with nations who lived outside the land...they could once again make alliances and trade in common with the world.... Outside the boundaries of the Promised Land they were again to conduct themselves as citizens of two kingdoms.”³¹

Interestingly, VanDrunen does not deal with the Davidic covenant, which was specifically a covenant of the kingdom (2 Sam 7). He moves on to Israel’s exile in Babylon. Here the model is Daniel and his three friends who became important officials in the kingdom. As such, they never attempted “to impose the Mosaic law upon the Babylonian people”, but neither did they “compromise their higher allegiance to God or give up the hope that they possessed as citizens of the redemptive kingdom.”³²

The portrayal of life in exile in the book of Esther points in a similar direction. Scripture also says that “the godly Israelite Nehemiah, while still in exile, served the Persian king as cupbearer (Neh. 1:11, an important position in the royal court).”³³ These individuals were living out the instructions re-

²⁶ Ibid., 85-86.

²⁷ Ibid., 88.

²⁸ Ibid., 89.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 95-96.

³³ Ibid., 96.

ceived by the exiles from Jeremiah urging them to buy houses, plant gardens, have children and “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jer 29:7).³⁴

In an article in the Dordt College publication *Pro-Rege*, VanDrunen notes that:

Abraham and the Babylonian exiles remain important examples for us as New Testament Christians... The Noahic covenant is still in effect, and Christ providentially upholds and governs all the world (Col 1:17; Heb 1:3). Simultaneously, Christ is building his church and thereby bringing to fruition all the promises of the Abrahamic covenant (Matt 16:18-19; Gal 3:23-29). Because Christ has a twofold kingship, we Christians have a twofold citizenship. By his redeeming grace we are members of his church and citizens of heaven (Phil 3:20); our very lives are hidden in Christ in heaven, where he is seated at God’s right hand (Col 3:1-3). At the same time, by God’s common grace under the Noahic covenant, we are citizens of earthly societies, attached to particular communities, nations, businesses, families, and ethnic groups, all of which are significant for our present lives but none of which defines our identity as Christians.³⁵

Frame sharply criticizes the idea of the Noahic covenant as a covenant of common grace. He agrees that this was a covenant with “all human beings”. But at the time,

“all human beings” consisted of one family, a believing family, who had embraced God’s promise of deliverance through the ark. There is no specific reference to unbelievers, or to a secular state... Indeed... God’s covenant with Noah is an administration of God’s redemptive grace, religious through and through, just as those with Abraham, Moses, David and Christ.”³⁶

Frame also objects to VanDrunen’s use of natural law as the operating principle of the common kingdom. He agrees that “there is such a thing as natural law”. But, “natural law itself is profoundly religious. That is perfectly

³⁴ Ibid., 92.

³⁵ David VanDrunen, “The Two Kingdoms and Reformed Christianity: Why Recovering an Old Paradigm is Historically Sound, Biblically Grounded, and Practically Useful” in *Pro-Rege* – March 2012: 35-36. A much more detailed development of this argument is included in *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*.

³⁶ Frame, op. cit., 137. This criticism is in a review of earlier book by VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2009).

evident from Romans 1:18-32, arguably the fundamental text on natural law. There, natural law gives a clear knowledge of God – not just morality, certainly not some secular civil morality – but God himself.”³⁷ Even so, *The Escondido Theology* ends with thirteen reasons why natural revelation is not sufficient to govern culture.³⁸

Frame reserves some of his most severe criticisms for another author in the contemporary two kingdoms movement. Darryl Hart was Academic Dean at Westminster in California from 2000-2003, having previously served as librarian at Westminster in Philadelphia, where he also taught church history. He is now director of academic projects and faculty development at the Intercollegiate Studies Institute in Wilmington, Delaware. Hart is the author of several books, some of which explore the political implications of two kingdoms doctrine. One of these, *A Secular Faith: Why Christianity Favors the Separation of Church and State*, is reviewed in *The Escondido Theology*.

Noting that “secular” is a “scare word to most contemporary religious adherents in America,” Hart takes some time (albeit in the last chapter of his book) to explain the way in which he uses the term. It is derived from the Latin *seclorum* which “typically means an age or generation, similar to the English words ‘era’ or ‘period.’ As such the word accurately signifies a somewhat definite period of time and especially its provisional or temporal quality.” Thus, mainstream Western Christianity has historically “understood that the period of salvation history between the first and second advents of Christ was literally a provisional or in-between time.” In the new heavens and new earth that Christians await, human sinfulness will be “completely and forever gone, thus eliminating the need for government to perform its important earthly function of restraining evil and executing civil justice.”³⁹

The church’s relationship with the state is “deeply intertwined with the periodization or age-diverse character of salvation history.” Here the difference between Israel and the church is key. “While Israel fused the political and religious by making Judaism the law of the land...Christianity separated what the Old Testament bound together.... Consequently, even though religion and politics were one in the period of the Old Testament, in the new *seclorum* of the church these spheres were divided.”⁴⁰

A Secular Faith –

...starts from the premise that Christianity is an apolitical faith. Its message and means, though not indifferent to civil society, transcend all political rivalries, whether between Republicans and Democrats, big business and labor unions, the right and the left... Historically the Christian religion, with the major exception of its

³⁷ Ibid., 146-147.

³⁸ Ibid., 325-329.

³⁹ Darryl Hart, *A Secular Faith: Why Christianity Favors the Separation of Church and State* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), 240-243.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 243.

American expression has been concerned not with life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but with salvation from sin and death.”

Hart’s book is dedicated to the memory and legacy of the original Westminster Seminary’s founder, J. Gresham Machen, who “opposed any church pronouncements on the social or political questions of the day because in so doing, he believed, churches were turning away from their proper mission: ‘to bring to bear upon human hearts the solemn and imperious, yet also sweet and gracious, appeal of the gospel of Christ.’”⁴¹

However, “even though Christianity will not yield social or political norms, it does produce individual Christians who are supposed to love their neighbors, obey laws, and submit to government, and who may be capable of holding political office responsibly.... A fundamental difference exists between the work the church is called to do in proclaiming the message of Christianity and the vocations to which church members are called as citizens.”⁴²

As with VanDrunen, the Old Testament Daniel is a model of public service in a pagan culture. Not only did he refuse to allow the king’s laws to interfere with his religious practices, Daniel also “learned the literature and wisdom of the Chaldeans and excelled to such a degree that he emerged as the wisest of the pagan king’s counselors.” It follows that if Daniel “retained his own forms of Jewish devotion and worship” while “he participated in Babylonian public life even when it explicitly rejected his God, American Protestants may be able to live contentedly with a political arrangement that claims to be religiously neutral and doesn’t require them to abandon their rites, ceremonies or religious practices.”⁴³

Frame offers several biblical and historical criticisms of Hart’s work, complaining that his “treatment of Scripture is very sketchy, though he does argue that his position, and only his position, is scriptural.”⁴⁴ What he finds particularly troubling is Hart’s objection to Abraham Kuyper’s appeal to “the Lordship of Christ over all temporal affairs” on the ground that such an appeal “fails to do justice to the reduced character of Christ’s sovereignty in the Christian era.”⁴⁵ Likewise, Matthew Tuininga, although much more favourable to Hart’s overall thesis, nevertheless finds that “at times Hart presses the distinction between the two kingdoms to the point of separation.” If the historic doctrine “denotes the difference between two ages and two governments,” Hart often writes as if the distinction were between “two airtight

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, x-ii.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 13-14.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 254,257.

⁴⁴ Frame, *op. cit.*, 262.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 258; cf. Hart, *op. cit.*, 228, 230.

spheres, one the sphere of faith and religion, and the other the sphere of everyday life.”⁴⁶

Frame is by no means the only critic of two kingdoms doctrine. Besides several articles and blogs, another book-length critique is *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective*, edited by Ryan McIlhenny. It consists of several chapters by various critics of the movement with varying degrees of criticism, especially of VanDrunen, along with some strongly worded endorsements, one of which suggests that what is at stake is “a fundamental disagreement on the nature and scope of the gospel”⁴⁷

Another strongly worded criticism of two kingdoms doctrine in general and David VanDrunen in particular is in Nelson Kloosterman’s introduction to two articles he translated from the late Dutch pastor-theologian S.G. de Graaf on “Christ and the Magistrate” and “Church and State”. After sketching the historical background to de Graaf’s articles, originally given as lectures in 1939 on the eve of the German invasion of the Netherlands, Kloosterman states that he finds it “unspeakably difficult” to take seriously Van Drunen’s “timidly innocuous recommendations” that the church should teach “all that Scripture says” on topics such as war (as well as abortion and marriage) “as moral issues but should be silent about such topics as concrete political or public policy issues.”⁴⁸

Kloosterman acknowledges that “in today’s North American context”, de Graaf’s language sounds like that of theonomy/Christian Reconstruction (a competing contemporary vision of the lordship of Christ over all of life). However, the difference between theonomy/Christian Reconstruction and de Graaf and neo-Calvinism lies in the former’s –

...claim that today the state must use the whole Bible as the direct source of public moral standards. In contrast with using the Bible as the direct source, de Graaf shows how the Reformed confessional and theological tradition uses the whole Bible as an indirect source. The church must interpret the precepts of Scripture in terms of their place and function in covenant history, in order to distinguish a precept’s principle from its covenantal-historical application so that we may apply that principle in our living today.⁴⁹

Kingdoms Apart does contain some more irenic chapters, including an introduction by the editor “In Defense of Neo-Calvinism”,⁵⁰ as well as a concluding chapter which is a revision of an earlier article in which he had pro-

⁴⁶ Matthew Tuininga, op. cit., Part One.

⁴⁷ Michael W. Goheen in Ryan C. McIlhenny, ed., *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2012).

⁴⁸ “‘Christ and Magistrate’ and ‘Church and State’: Two Addresses” by S.G. de Graaf, translated with Foreword by Nelson Kloosterman,” *Ibid.*, 85-94.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁵⁰ Ryan C. McIlhenny, “Introduction: In Defence of Calvinism,” *ibid.*, xvii-xl.

posed “A Third-Way Reformed Approach to Christ and Culture.” MacIlhenny notes that he has now further entrenched himself in the neo-Calvinist position. Following a lengthy discussion of the definition of culture, taking as his starting point H. Richard Niebuhr’s classic work, McIlhenny then moves on to discuss what “redeemed culture” looks like, concluding that “Christians are redeemed culture”.⁵¹

Reflections and Conclusions

More could be said. For instance, VanDrunen is concerned to refute the common perception that two kingdoms doctrine is distinctly Lutheran. In addition to Calvin, he cites the seventeenth-century theologian Francis Turretin as stating, “Before all things we must distinguish the twofold kingdom, belonging to Christ: one natural or essential; the other mediatorial and economical.” Turretin later “explicitly uses this distinction to explain the difference between civil and ecclesiastical authority.”⁵²

We saw how VanDrunen opposes contemporary neo-Calvinism, which he says *claims* to be the heir of Abraham Kuyper. He in fact believes that Kuyper’s views were compatible with two kingdoms doctrine, most notably in his doctrine of common grace:

Kuyper’s theology of common grace raises many interesting issues, but I wish to highlight here simply one thing: he grounds common grace in the work of Christ as creator of all things, and special grace in the work of Christ as redeemer. Kuyper continues to use the old Reformed distinction, seen in Turretin, between the Son as mediator of creation and as mediator of redemption. As Kuyper’s colleague Herman Bavinck put it, in language echoing that of Turretin and other earlier Reformed theologians, “the kingship of Christ is twofold.”⁵³ Though Kuyper was not using the terminology of “two kingdoms,” his distinction between common grace and special grace, rooted in the twofold kingship and mediatorship of Christ, reflected the standard categories of his Reformed forbears. That a Two Kingdoms doctrine was part of the Reformed tradition for many centuries cannot be seriously doubted. Further, that the more recent emphasis upon the one kingdom of God and the redemptive transformation of all social spheres according to the terms of this kingdom is, at least to some degree, in tension with

⁵¹ McIlhenny, “Christian Witness *As Redeemed Culture*”, *ibid.*, 251-275.

⁵² VanDrunen, “The Two Kingdoms and Reformed Christianity,” 33. Cf. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992-97), 2.486.

⁵³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 371-72.

this earlier tradition also seems to me an inevitable conclusion (for which I have argued at length elsewhere).⁵⁴

The above is a quote from VanDrunen's *Pro-Rege* article previously cited, in which he seeks to defend two kingdoms doctrine from attacks arising from neo-Calvinist writers. The "elsewhere" he refers to is an article in the *Calvin Theological Journal*, "Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed Natural Law and Two Kingdoms Tradition." Frame dismisses this article as "very implausible" but John Bolt of Calvin Theological Seminary, perhaps the foremost contemporary Kuyper scholar in North America, finds it to be "exactly right" and identifies himself as also holding to the two kingdoms view. Bolt notes that:

Berkhof (and Bavinck) insist on a twofold kingly office for Christ: a *regnum potentiae* and a *regnum gratiae*. Christ indeed rules the world but he governs his church differently. Today, ...we are losing the limited task of the church (preach the gospel, make and nurture disciples) and turning the church into a world-changing institution. If we keep this up, we will lose the church's candlestick. The spiritual irony of this should not be lost on us: the gospel DOES change the world but it does so indirectly, over a long period of time, by changing persons, families, clans, tribes, nations who then end up creating new institutions that are compatible with a Christian (i.e. biblical) anthropology...⁵⁵

In addition to his doctrine of common grace, Kuyper distinguished between the church as institute and organism. This was in keeping with his doctrine of sphere sovereignty, whereby Christ is sovereign over all of life, which is divided into several spheres (including ecclesiology, politics, science, education, commerce, art and more). No sphere may usurp the authority of another sphere. Thus, for instance, the church as institute deals with strictly spiritual matters related to eternal salvation and should not involve itself in the politics of the state. The church as organism, on the other hand, consists of believers everywhere carrying out their various vocations, including politics, consistent with Kuyper's well-known assertion that "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!"⁵⁶ Kuyper himself demitted his ministerial credentials to enter politics and ultimately become Prime Minister of the Netherlands (1901-1905).

⁵⁴ VanDrunen, "The Two Kingdoms and Reformed Christianity," 34.

⁵⁵ Personal email correspondence, June 8, 2016. See also John Bolt, *A Free Church, a Holy Nation: Abraham Kuyper's American Public Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2001).

⁵⁶ James D. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 488.

Kuyper's sociological doctrine of sphere sovereignty is open to criticism. The only spheres clearly delineated in Scripture are the family, church and state. But it seems not unreasonable to find some common ground between the two kingdoms doctrine and the church as institute and organism.⁵⁷ Many critics of two kingdoms doctrine accuse it of being dualistic, even docetic, compromising Christ's lordship over all of life. In this connection, it is worth quoting VanDrunen again where he says, "Perhaps some versions of the two-kingdoms doctrine have fit such stereotypes. My task... is not to defend everything that has gone by the name 'two kingdoms,' but to expound a two-kingdoms approach that is thoroughly grounded in the story of Scripture and biblical doctrine."⁵⁸ Again, "Some people indeed fall into unwarranted 'dualisms,' but dualism-phobia must not override our ability to make clear and necessary distinctions."⁵⁹

Frame points out that the two kingdoms doctrine taught at Westminster in California is a novelty in that it builds on the distinctive views of Meredith Kline, and that it is distinctively American in its view of church-state separation.⁶⁰ In the first section of this article, we saw how the Reformation and post-Reformation advocates of the doctrine believed that the state had a right and duty to support the Christian church. This found expression in Reformed confessions of faith such as the Belgic and Westminster. For the most part, this belief was supported by references to the Old Testament theocracy. But did this do sufficient justice to the fact that under the new covenant, "the Israelite theocracy no longer exists, and there is no other nation that is covenanted with God as Israel was"?⁶¹

Frame, from whom the immediately preceding quotation is taken, goes on to say that "this does not take away from the fact that God continues to rule the nations."⁶² He is insistent that this means God has one kingdom, not two. On the face of it, this seems patently obvious. Scripture nowhere speaks of two kingdoms of God, but then neither does it use the language of common grace or cultural mandate (or Trinity) even if the concepts are there. It is al-

⁵⁷ Other writers have referred to the church as organization and organism. D.A. Carson wonders if too much emphasis on the church as organism does full justice to the biblical definition of *church*. He suggests that it may be more helpful to distinguish between the roles and duties of the *church* and those of *Christians*. D.A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 148-153.

⁵⁸ VanDrunen, *Living In God's Two Kingdoms*, 14.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁶⁰ It could equally be said that neo-Calvinism as developed by Kuyper and his followers was a novelty in giving priority to the political implications of Calvinism and in its development of sphere sovereignty.

⁶¹ Frame, *op. cit.*, 265. See also David VanDrunen, chapter 4 in *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2004).

⁶² *Ibid.*

ways preferable to use explicitly biblical language, but the real question is whether the concept is there.

One need not agree with all VanDrunen or other two kingdoms advocates say to affirm that the New Testament model of the church is of sojourners travelling through this world to the final consummation (Psalm 39:2; 1 Chron 29:15; Phil 3:20; Heb 11:9-10, 13, 16; 1 Peter 1:1, 2:11)⁶³ seeking to be preserving salt and light to the nations (Matt 5:13-14), but as an often persecuted people to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs (Matt 5:10) and who desire to be with Christ, which is “better by far” (Phil 1:23). While it is true that the Old Testament prophets did not confine their warnings to the nation of Israel,⁶⁴ it seems equally true that the Old Testament models of political engagement relevant to us today are Daniel and Esther in Babylonian exile.

Reformation and post-Reformation advocates of two kingdoms doctrine, especially in the Reformed tradition, made significant strides in promoting the spiritual independence of the church. In their personal piety, they often meditated on the above themes. For instance, those most familiar with Samuel Rutherford’s writings do not think first of his *Lex Rex*, but of his letters and sermons suffused with an otherworldly piety.⁶⁵ (This is an emphasis often lacking in modern neo-Calvinism, as one of its own leaders has acknowledged.)⁶⁶ But Rutherford and others like him lived in a time much different from ours, one where Christianity was still the official religion of the state, and this influenced their thinking on church-state relations.

In discussing Calvin’s significance for contemporary debates, Matthew Tuininga notes how Calvin’s view of the responsibility of the civil magistrate influenced the original wording of the *Belgic* and *Westminster* confessions of faith that was subsequently modified by most Presbyterian and Reformed churches (at least in North America). He then notes, “The question is, did these confessional adjustments simply reflect the influence of the times, or

⁶³ Frame, mistakenly in my view, states that “God’s people are rarely called pilgrims in Scripture, 1 Peter 2:11 being a somewhat isolated example” (op. cit., 6). He also downplays the temporary nature of life in this world in his critique of “otherworldliness” (254-55). See Psalm 103:15-16, James 1:10, 4:14; 1 Peter 1:24, 4:7a etc.

⁶⁴ See Frame, op. cit., 264. See also Van Drunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order*, 164-208.

⁶⁵ *Quaint Sermons of Samuel Rutherford: Hitherto Unprinted* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1885). *Letters of Samuel Rutherford* was reprinted in 1973 by the Banner of Truth (Edinburgh). My copy is from 1894, published in London by Oliphant, Anderson, Ferrier.

⁶⁶ See Al Wolters, “Generally speaking, neocalvinists are more noted for their intellectual ability and culture-transforming zeal than for their personal godliness or their living relationship with Jesus Christ” in “What Is to Be Done...Towards a Neocalvinist Agenda”, <https://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/282/what-is-to-be-done-toward-a-neocalvinist-agenda/>. It is worth pointing out, as e.g. Carson does (op. cit., 152-53), that significant social reforms have historically been a by-product of spiritual renewal rather than political activism as such.

were they motivated by Scripturally grounded, theological convictions?" Tuininga continues,

Certain contemporary two kingdoms advocates argue that the theological basis for these shifts can be found in Calvin's own two kingdoms doctrine, although not in his application of that doctrine. They tend to argue that Calvin was inconsistent, simply a product of his time, and bound by the assumptions of Christendom. But if such is the case, where does Calvin's argument, or his exegesis, break down? And how can we be so sure that it is not we who are simply products of our time, bound by the assumptions of modernity?⁶⁷

Later, Tuininga answers his questions as follows:

Although Calvin and the other reformers argued that magistrates should enforce the first table of the law and even work to establish the true church, I believe their argument for this was based on flawed exegetical, philosophical and experiential reasoning. The exegetical flaw was the assumption that the Mosaic penal code was an expression of the timeless natural law, resulting from their failure to see how it too was typological. The philosophical flaw was the reliance on Plato and other pagan philosophers as evidence that even the natural law requires magistrates to enforce the true religion. The experiential flaw was their lack of confidence in the preaching of the gospel and the sovereignty of God to preserve the church against the gates of hell.⁶⁸

Tuininga's last point might be debatable,⁶⁹ but in general I believe he puts the matter well, as does the revised version of the *Belgic Confession* (reflecting Kuiper's language of sphere sovereignty) in its teaching that God has placed the sword in the hands of the government to:

⁶⁷ Tuininga, op. cit., "Part Two: John Calvin."

⁶⁸ Tuininga, op. cit., "Part Three, The Teaching of Scripture," November 2012.

⁶⁹ He has subsequently clarified, "Calvin would have said that he had full confidence that God would protect his church. But then he would have said that God uses magistrates to do this, and one way he does so is by having magistrates enforce revealed and received religious truth. And when Calvin makes that argument, he actually argues that if magistrates don't do this, the truth will be polluted and the masses won't know what to believe. So in point of fact, Calvin seems to argue that God will not preserve the church through the ministry of the church alone, or even through the work of secular governments, but only through governments that actively promote and defend the truth. And that's where I think he was wrong, and that's what I meant by that statement" (Personal email correspondence, September 8, 2016).

...punish evil people and protect the good. And being called in this manner to contribute to the advancement of a society that is pleasing to God, the civil rulers have the task, subject to God's law, of removing every obstacle to the preaching of the gospel and to every aspect of divine worship. They should do this while completely refraining from every tendency toward exercising absolute authority, and while functioning in the sphere entrusted to them, with the means belonging to them. They should do it in order that the Word of God may have free course; the kingdom of Jesus Christ may make progress; and every anti-Christian power may be resisted.⁷⁰

In other words, it is the task of the church to advance the kingdom of God by the preaching of the Word of God and the resistance of every anti-Christian power. It is the state's responsibility to preserve and maintain an orderly and peaceful society in which the church is free to go about its God-given task (see 1 Tim. 2:2-4).

No one has said this with more biblical balance and passionate devotion than the late Edmund P. Clowney (1917-2005), Westminster Seminary's first president in Philadelphia and later in California.⁷¹ Clowney's method of teaching and writing has been called "bicycling through the Bible". Whatever the subject, he would start with Genesis and move rapidly to Revelation, packing in as much rich biblical material before forming his conclusions, which in this case are as follows:

The "politics" of the kingdom are the pattern, purpose, and dynamic by which God orders the life of the heavenly polis in this world.....

The heavenly community of Christ is called to an earthly pilgrimage....

The distinction between the state as the form of the city of this world and the church as the form of the heavenly city remains essential....The church is the new nation (1 Peter 2:9), the new family of God (Eph 3:15)

Since the church anticipates the form of the world to come, it transcends the social and political forms of the world....

To be sure, the life of the worldly kingdoms is influenced by the life of the church in their midst; the people of God are like salt to preserve the world from its corruption; the kingdom works as a

⁷⁰ *The Belgic Confession*, Article 36 in *Ecumenical Creeds and Confessions* (Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications).

⁷¹ Michael Horton has expressed appreciation for Clowney "who helped me understand, among many other things, 'two kingdoms' thinking without calling it that" (Michael Horton, "A Response to John Frame's *The Escondido Theology*," Blog in *White Horse Inn.org: For a New Reformation*, Friday, 10 February 2012).

leaven, penetrating the world with the influence of Christian faith, hope, and love....

The Christian will be charged with otherworldliness, aloofness, non-involvement. He cannot forget his heavenly citizenship to be conformed to this world

Yet the church is not a retreat where the pious await the parousia. The church has an agenda, set not by the world but by the Lord. Christ commissioned the church to live for the purpose for which he lived and died.... Christ's great commission expresses the political objectives of his kingdom—the evangelization and edification of the nations in adoring fellowship with the Triune God.

The politics of the kingdom demand that Christians take seriously the structure of the church as the form of the people of God on earth.⁷²

On this understanding, the church of Jesus Christ is not one institution in the kingdom of God, as in neo-Calvinism. It is the institutional kingdom of God on earth. This position has an honourable pedigree and in fact reflects the language of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.⁷³ Yet, because of the institute/organism distinction, its members are called to be active in all legitimate spheres of life, including the vocational, educational⁷⁴ and political. They may do so as individuals or as organizations of individuals. They may be co-belligerents (to use Schaeffer's term) with those of other faiths and none, or they may organize into distinctly Christian lobby groups, perhaps even Christian political parties. But in seeking to represent the name of Christ, they must always remain vigilant not to simply baptize secular agendas with his name and thereby bring reproach on the mission of his church.

This is not to say that the institutional church has no responsibility to the state. Some critics of two kingdoms doctrine point to the nineteenth-century doctrine of the spirituality of the church in Southern Presbyterianism as a precursor. It is said that one effect of this was that leading Southern theologi-

⁷² Edmund P. Clowney, "The Politics of the Kingdom," *Westminster Theological Journal* (Spring, 1979): 303-310. See also Clowney's *The Doctrine of the Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976) and chapter 9 of *The Church: Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: 1995), 187-197.

⁷³ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXV. II. "The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion and of their children; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation."

⁷⁴ Clowney was a strong advocate of Christian schools as extension of the family. My own sons attended Christian schools, although I did not have that option for myself. But as VanDrunen demonstrates in the final chapter of *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, "Christians must also be on guard against condemning other Christians' decisions about matters for which Scripture does not bind the conscience" (162).

ans like Thornwell and Dabney were able to support slavery and slaveholders. Likewise, the complicity of the German church in the rise of Nazism and of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa during the apartheid era are pointed to as massive failures of ecclesiastical responsibility and thus of Christian witness. But these tragic outcomes were not and are not necessary outcomes of two kingdoms theology, or its twin, the spirituality of the church. The doctrine of the spirituality of the church is clearly taught in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* when it states: “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.”⁷⁵ This still leaves room for “humble petition in cases extraordinary; or by way of advice for satisfaction of conscience.”

Michael Horton, in a *White Horse Inn* blog on “Two Kingdoms and Slavery”, discusses how a two kingdoms approach could have addressed this issue in the nineteenth century. First, in exercising its spiritual function, by preaching the whole counsel of God against the sin of modern slavery, including kidnapping, theft and murder, much different from the largely debt-based indentured servitude of ancient (including biblical) societies. This would be accompanied by the exercise of discipline (the keys of the kingdom) against slaveholders and slave traffickers. Second, while the church has no authority to determine the details of public policy, “it does have the authority – indeed the obligation – to declare God’s condemnation of public as well as private sin.” This means that “there is nothing in the ‘two kingdoms’ or ‘spirituality’ doctrine to keep the church from proclaiming to the civil powers directly what it proclaims to the world from the pulpit.” These two points relate to the official proclamation of the institutional church. Horton’s third point corresponds to the institute/organism principle discussed above. The church “is not only the people of God gathered, but the people of God scattered into the world as parents, children, neighbours and citizens.”⁷⁶

Matthew Tuininga has also made the point that the spirituality of the church, properly defined, does not mean an avoidance of the church’s social responsibility:

That the kingdom of Christ is spiritual means that it is of the age to come, though it breaks into the present age through the power of the Holy Spirit... The church is not to meddle in politics, abusing its spiritual power for political ends, as Calvin argued and the Westminster Confession rightly maintains, but that does not mean it should cease proclaiming the righteousness of the kingdom, with all of its political and social implications.... Until we understand

⁷⁵ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, (1647 edition), XXXI. V.

⁷⁶ Michael Horton, “Two Kingdoms and Slavery,” <https://www.whitehorseinn.org/2013/09/two-kingdoms-and-slavery>.

how the spirituality doctrine not only permits the use of church discipline and the diaconate to promote the righteousness and justice of the kingdom, but *requires* it, we have not grasped just what it is that spirituality means. To politicize the church is surely a horribly misguided attempt to manipulate the Spirit for our own purposes, but to muzzle the Spirit or partition the social dimension of human life from the gospel is hardly less a display of rebellion.... Our call is to make and train disciples of the gospel of Christ, a gospel that is spiritual even as it is comprehensive, a gospel that saves individual souls even as it promises the restoration of all things in Christ.⁷⁷

Applying this line of thinking from Horton and Tuininga to two kingdoms doctrine, it becomes clear that this doctrine does not require a withdrawal from the world and a compromising of Christ's universal lordship, something of which contemporary exponents of the doctrine are often accused. On the other hand, as Tuininga has also pointed out, neither does it require a commitment to post-Reformation views of the relationship between the church and the civil magistrate. As VanDrunen and Bolt have argued, it may even be compatible, rather than in conflict, with the legacy of Abraham Kuyper as they describe it. Certainly, there are differences, but to the extent that both stress the spirituality and the unique mission of the church, along with the obligation of Christians to be salt and light in society, there may be room for more fruitful dialogue and cooperation in the ongoing reformation of Christ's kingdom on earth.

⁷⁷ Matthew Tuininga, "Rightly Defining the Spirituality of the Church," February, 2016. <http://www.reformation21.org/articles/the-kingdom-and-its-righteousness-rightly-defining-the-spirituality-of-the-church.php>

