

**The Coming
~ of the ~
Kingdom**

**Christianizing
The World**

Prof. David J. Engelsma

The Coming of the Kingdom: “Christianizing the World”?

by Prof. David J. Engelsma

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“Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews?....Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?” (John 18:33-38)

Introduction

For more than one hundred years, now, Reformed Christians—Calvinists—especially in Europe and North America, have had dinned into our ears by fellow Calvinists that it is our solemn duty to “Christianize” our nation and, indeed, all the world.

This mandate originated with the influential Dutch Reformed theologian, churchman, and politician, Abraham Kuyper, and with his colleague, the brilliant Dutch Reformed theologian, Herman Bavinck. “Christianizing” the world was the theme of Kuyper’s six “Stone Lectures” at Princeton in 1898. These lectures have been published as the book, *Lectures on Calvinism*.¹

Basic to this gigantic project for the Dutch theologians of the past century was God’s “common grace.” According to Kuyper and Bavinck, in addition to His special, saving grace, which God gives only to the elect, God has another, entirely different grace, which He gives to all humans. This grace, in reprobate, ungodly, anti-Christian men and women, does three things: It restrains sin in them, so that they are no longer totally depraved; it enables them to do good works in civil society, including especially their impressive cultural works—Aristotle’s philosophy, Beethoven’s symphonies, and Shakespeare’s plays; and it develops a good, even godly, culture, or way of life, in a society and nation.

Every knowledgeable Reformed believer recognizes immediately the contradiction of the Reformed confessions by this teaching of common grace. The Canons of Dordt ascribes whatever order there is in ungodly society, works of ungodly men and women that

¹ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953).

appear good outwardly, and the marvelous cultural and scientific achievements of the wicked, not to grace, but to nature: “glimmerings of natural light” and “the light of nature.”²

Especially the third, alleged operation of common grace is important for the Calvinistic “Christianizing” of the nation and the world. Christians supposedly share common grace with the wicked and, therefore, can and must cooperate with the ungodly, by this common grace, to make their society and finally the entire world Christian. In volume two of his three volume work on common grace, Kuyper wrote that “there is beside the great work of God in *special* grace also that totally other work of God in the realm of *common* grace.” Kuyper went on to declare that common grace is the power of “the great work that God is doing to consummate the world’s development.”³

Similarly, Bavinck wrote that by the power of “common grace,” which he shares with the ungodly, the believer “presses forward to the conquest of the entire world.”⁴

Promoting this mission of Calvinist Christians in North America today is the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), especially through its Christian school system, and more especially through its colleges. The Christian colleges of the CRC confront the students with the calling, “Christianize America! Christianize the world!” as their solemn calling from God. The schools see as one of their main purposes that they prepare the students to transform society into a Christian kingdom.

The CRC is not, however, the only proponent of this project. Many non-Reformed evangelicals have also been preaching this mandate, for example, the late Charles Colson.

The Roman Catholic Church has long had this conviction, understanding by the Christianizing of the world bringing the world under the control

² Canons of Dordt, 3&4, 4, in Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966), 588: “There remain...in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural light...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. Nay farther, this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted, and holds it [back] in unrighteousness; by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God.”

³ Abraham Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 176.

⁴ Herman Bavinck, “Calvin and Common Grace,” tr. Geerhardus Vos (n.p., n. d.), 126, 127.

of the pope. One agency in North America carrying out Rome's mission is the Acton Institute. The stated mission of the Acton Institute is "to promote a free and virtuous society characterized by individual liberty and sustained by religious principles...within Judeo-Christian morality."⁵

It is significant that the Roman Catholic Acton Institute is presently cooperating with the Dutch Calvinists of Kuyper College in Grand Rapids, Michigan and other Reformed theologians to translate into English and publish Abraham Kuyper's three volumes on common grace. In this cooperation with Rome, the Calvinists are faithful disciples of their theological and ideological master, Abraham Kuyper. Kuyper advocated that Reformed Christians cooperate with Roman Catholics in Christianizing nations and the world, and he himself practiced this cooperation in his effort to Christianize the Netherlands.⁶

Evangelicals have joined with Roman Catholics to fight the culture wars in North America. Fighting the culture wars is part of the effort to Christianize North America. The organization that unites evangelicals and Roman Catholics to fight the culture wars is "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" (ECT). Involved are such evangelical luminaries as Colson, Richard Mouw, and J. I. Packer and such prominent Roman Catholics as Richard John Neuhaus, Avery Dulles, and George Weigel. These and other prominent evangelicals insist that such efforts, involving cooperation with Roman Catholics, are right, indeed necessary, as the calling from God to Christianize America in the face of the rampant demonizing of American culture by the powers of darkness.⁷

⁵ Wikipedia.

⁶ "In this conflict [of the culture wars of modern times] Rome is not an antagonist, but stands on our side... Therefore... is it not the part of wisdom to accept the valuable help of [Rome]?" (Kuyper, *Lectures*, 183, 184). Charles Colson appeals to Kuyper's example of cooperation with Roman Catholics in Christianizing the culture in his day in support of Colson's cooperation with Roman Catholics in the present-day movement, "Evangelicals & Catholics Together": "Kuyper forged a coalition of fellow Calvinists and Dutch Roman Catholics led by Hermanus Schaepman. Together, they helped bring moral and social reform to the Netherlands" (Charles Colson, "The Common Cultural Task: The Culture War from a Protestant Perspective," in *Evangelicals & Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission*, ed. Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, Dallas, Texas: Word, 1995, 39).

⁷ See *Evangelicals & Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission*, ed. Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus (Dallas, Texas: Word, 1995). The editors describe ECT as "cooperation among his [Jesus Christ's] disciples in the moral and spiritual renewal of our culture" (xiii). In the first chapter of the book, Colson speaks of his organization's intention to "evangelize the culture" (30, 31).

And then there is the militant movement of Calvinists bent on Christianizing the United States known as Christian Reconstruction. For Christian Reconstructionists, disciples of R. J. Rushdoony, himself influenced by Kuyper, the one, main calling of Reformed churches and believers is to rule the nation, thus controlling the culture. Anyone who declines this calling is charged with practicing “impotent religion.” This band of cultural warriors is motivated by the conviction of their victory within history. This victory is the guarantee of their postmillennial eschatology.⁸

All these advocates of making the way of life in nation and world Christian present their project as the coming of the kingdom of God. Their message is: God is king over all with absolute sovereignty, and this sovereign kingship extends over all of human life—politics; science; education; art—all. As Christians, indeed Calvinistic Christians, who know and confess God’s sovereignty, we must press God’s claims in all spheres of earthly life. As we work at this, we may expect God’s kingdom to come, in answer to our prayer in the second petition of the model

⁸ See among many other books published by this prolific movement R. J. Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come: Studies in Daniel and Revelation* (n.p.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1971), in which book Rushdoony declares “the certain victory of the kingdom of God...in history” (84); David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (Tyler, Texas: Reconstruction Press, 1985); Norman Shepherd, “Justice to Victory,” the *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* 3, no. 2 (Winter, 1976-77): 6-10; Douglas Wilson, *Heaven Misplaced: Christ’s Kingdom on Earth* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2008); and Martin G. Selbrede, “Reconstructing Postmillennialism,” the *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* 15 (Winter, 1998): 146-224. In this article, Selbrede responds to my criticism of the prevailing postmillennialism of Christian Reconstruction by affirming “eschatological universalism” and by denying that Revelation 20 teaches an attack on the church by vast Satanic hordes at the very end of history. See also the writings of Gary North, including *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1997). North devotes a large part of his preface to this work to criticism of Prof. Hanko and myself. They are “among the very few remaining Dutch-American Calvinist defenders of traditional amillennialism who are willing to go into print on the topic” (xxviii). North’s charge is that “Rev. Engelsma’s eschatology denies the transforming power of the gospel in history.” It is a “defeatist eschatology” (xxxiv). In his *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), North promises “the progressive triumph of God’s visible kingdom in history” (168). The victory of the kingdom of God in history will be an “earthly victory” (344). Not much has been heard from North lately. Evidently, he is still hunkered down in some southern redoubt, to which this bold dominion-theorist fled in fear before the terrifying approach of Y2K. In my opinion, the fantastic earthly kingdom of God of Christian Reconstruction is far superior to the imaginary, Christianized world of the cultural-Calvinists. The victorious kingdom of Christian Reconstruction has regenerated, genuine children of God as its citizens. The life of their kingdom is obedience to the laws of God from the heart. The Christianized world of the cultural-Calvinists is merely a whitewashing of ungodly men and women. The comparison, however, is idle. Both kingdoms are mythical.

prayer (“Thy kingdom come”), by virtue of our own aggressive labors and hard struggles, and, in the thinking of the CRC and its allies, by the power of common grace, which, we must not forget, is also working in the world of the ungodly (difficult as it may be to see this in AD 2013).

Confronted with this calling to Christianize the world from many quarters, and warned that if we say no we shall be judged as Anabaptists, guilty of the cowardly and unbiblical activity of “world flight,” we address the issue of the relation of the Christian to the culture of his or her nation and of the world: “The Coming of the Kingdom: ‘Christianizing the World?’”

The question mark in the title of this article suggests that neither is the Christianizing of the world as a calling of Reformed Christians an established fact, nor is it established that the kingdom of God comes by a Christianizing of the world. Both notions are questionable. This article questions the notions.

The Proposal of Common Grace, Cultural-Calvinism

Let us begin by having clearly in mind what the proponents of Christianizing American culture, and then the world, by the power of common grace, mean by this. Obviously, in some sense we are called to make the whole of the American way of life Christian—business and labor; science and the arts; education; politics and government; marriage and the family. Kuyper referred to all the “spheres” of life in a nation.⁹

But Kuyper did not mean, nor do his common grace, cultural disciples mean, that a majority of the citizens of a nation are to be converted to Jesus Christ, so that they take over the nation, dominate all the spheres of life in the nation, and, thus, order life in all the spheres according to the will of Jesus Christ. Kuyper recognized, as do the contemporary, common grace, cultural-Calvinists, that many, indeed the vast majority of, citizens are, and remain, unbelievers—atheists, humanists, complete secularists, idolatrous members of false religions, cultists, and members of false churches.

⁹ The title of Kuyper’s address inaugurating the Free University, “*Souvereiniteit in Eigen Kring*,” is popularly and accurately translated as “Sphere Sovereignty.” In the address, Kuyper observed that “human life...is...structured...[by] ‘spheres.’” Concerning all these “spheres” of human life, Kuyper famously concluded, there is not one “over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: ‘Mine!’” (Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in *Abraham Kuyper*, ed. Bratt, 467, 488).

This is why Kuyper and his disciples need a common grace of God working in these unbelievers, supposedly making them willing to cooperate with Calvinists in making the nation Christian. Apart from this common grace, that ignores and bridges the breach between believer and unbeliever, it is inconceivable that we make the culture of a majority of unbelievers Christian.

In the second volume of his three volume work on common grace, Kuyper described what he meant by making a nation Christian by the power of a common grace of God.

“Christian” [in the project of Christianizing the nation] says nothing about the spiritual state of the inhabitants of such a country but only witnesses to the fact that public opinion, the general mind-set, the ruling ideas, the moral norms, the laws and customs there clearly betoken the influence of the Christian faith...the elevation of all that is human from its sunken state to a higher standpoint....¹⁰

The Christianizing of a nation has nothing to do with a change of the hearts of the citizens of the nation, has nothing to do with faith in Jesus Christ or love for God, has nothing to do with obedience to the law of God from hearts that are regenerated and, therefore, aflame, as Psalm 119 expresses, with love for God’s commandments as holy, righteous, and good.

When a nation is Christianized by Calvinists, Roman Catholics, and avowed unbelievers cooperating in the power of common grace, according to Kuyper and the cultural-Calvinists, the hearts of the majority of citizens remain unregenerated, and the citizenry are as hostile to Jesus Christ as they were before the Christianizing of their way of life.

But there has been an influence upon the way of life of the nation, in every sphere, from government to the people’s recreation and amusement—an influence that dominates and controls the behavior of the society, outwardly. What this influence consists of, and what the life of a Christianized America will be, in concrete detail, the cultural-Calvinists never inform us. They stick safely to generalities. One can only surmise, but the following description of the peculiar behavior of a Christianized United States is true to the idea of an external influence of Christianity upon the culture of the nation. At the same time, this description points up the absurdity of the idea.

¹⁰ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in *Abraham Kuyper*, ed. Bratt, 199.

In a Christianized America, the people will observe the Sabbath, not by attending a true church, to worship the triune, one, true God in spirit and in truth (which is, in fact, the *sine qua non* of Sabbath observance), but by not working, by not mowing their lawns, and by not scheduling the Chicago Cubs or Detroit Tigers baseball games on Sunday.

With the authorization of the majority of unconverted members of the Department of Education, all the teachers in the state schools will teach Genesis 1 and 2 as the possible explanation of origins with the theory of evolutionary science, and all will require as reading on the subject the opening chapters of the Bible with Darwin's *Origin of Species*.

In a Christianized America, the state schools will also teach all the students that sex before marriage and sex outside of marriage between one man and one woman are sin, instead of instructing the children to be sexually active and promiscuous, distributing condoms, as the schools do now in their very definitely un-Christianized condition.

Of the greatest, indeed fundamental, importance for the Christianizing of the nation will be the influence of Christianity on the government. The legislative branch—Congress—though composed mostly of unbelievers, will pass laws in accordance with the ten commandments, as elucidated and applied by the New Testament. All the laws, therefore, will defend the institution of marriage, punishing adultery and prohibiting divorce. I choose laws concerning marriage first, deliberately: Solid marriages are fundamental to a stable, healthy society, and the honoring of marriage is prominent in the Christian religion of the Bible.

The judicial branch of government—the Supreme Court—though made up of a majority of non-Christians, will decide all cases brought before it in harmony with the Christian God's condemnation of murder. Therefore, the Court will rule that abortion, as the murder of the unborn and partially born, is unlawful in a Christianized nation. And the Court will decree the death penalty for all murderers, including the doctors who perform abortions.

The executive branch of government—the president—will use the bully pulpit of the presidency to condemn sodomy and lesbianism as gross perversity and as the cause of dreadful disease and huge expense in the nation.

All branches of government, as well as the now Christianized media, will advocate the Christian virtue of working for a living and will implement

the law, that if one will not work neither shall he eat. This law will radically transform our present welfare state, which encourages, indeed rewards, sloth, at the expense of those who labor.

This, in part, would be a Christianized America and then a Christianized world. This is the goal, evidently, of the modern crusade launched by the cultural-Calvinists and others. The realizing of this goal is the main calling of Reformed Christians with regard to their relation to the world, according to Kuyper and the cultural-Calvinists.

The Coming of the Kingdom of God

The common grace, cultural-Calvinists urge this calling by presenting it as the calling to promote the kingdom of God, by viewing the activity of Christianizing the world as kingdom life and activity, and by describing a Christianized nation as the kingdom of God in the world. Bringing about the kingdom of God is the appeal of the project.

Where the notion of Christianizing the world reigns, “kingdom” is on everyone’s lips: “seeking the kingdom”; “promoting the kingdom”; the “coming of the kingdom.” One hears little or nothing about the church or the covenant. Kingdom is all.

What these advocates of Christianizing the world mean by “kingdom” is this outward, visible, earthly state of affairs—a society influenced, even outwardly transformed, by Christianity.

Abraham Kuyper identified the common grace Christianizing of the world as the coming of the kingdom of God. At a crucial point in his *Lectures on Calvinism*—the playbook of the project—where he is pleading for the Christianizing of politics, Kuyper appeals to the “Sovereignty of the Triune God over the whole Cosmos, in all its spheres and kingdoms,” that is, to the kingship of God.¹¹ Indicative of Kuyper’s view of the project of Christianizing the culture of an ungodly nation is what he wrote in a series of articles on “Common Grace in Science”: Christianizing the science and art of a nation is based on the fact “that the Kingdom of God is not in the least limited to the institutional church but rules our entire world-and-life view.”¹²

¹¹ Kuyper, *Lectures*, 79.

¹² Kuyper, “Common Grace in Science,” in *Abraham Kuyper*, ed. Bratt, 458

Kuyper's contemporary disciples, especially in the Christian colleges, emphasize this theme: The Christian instruction of the college proclaims the kingdom; the graduates become agents of the kingdom; their kingdom mission is the Christianizing of society; and to what extent there is some external, earthly, visible influence on some sphere of life in society, that represents the coming of the kingdom of God—nothing less than the coming of the kingdom, as prayed for in the second petition of the model prayer.

Charles Colson titled his book on the culture wars and the Christianizing of America, *Kingdoms in Conflict*.¹³

From this lofty conception of the common grace, cultural project, it follows that the cultural-Calvinists are severe in their condemnation of us who do not share their thinking and decline to take part in their effort to Christianize the world. We sin, and our sin is nothing less than a deficient understanding of the kingdom of God and a failure to live the kingdom life. Beginning with Kuyper and Bavinck, the shaming charge against us Calvinists who reject the culture-Calvinism of common grace is that we are pietists and Anabaptists. That is, we are charged with the grievous, plainly unbiblical error of world flight. We are consigned to the ranks of the Anabaptists of the time of the Reformation. We are put in the camp of Munzer, John of Leyden, and Menno Simons. We are no genuine Calvinists at all! We are no red-blooded children and heirs of Luther, Calvin, and, evidently, the Reformed confessions, although the cultural-Calvinists offer precious little proof for their theory from the creeds.

I describe world flight as a “plainly unbiblical error” because our Lord forbade world flight: “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world...I have sent them into the world” (John 17:15, 16).

In fact, dissenting from the doctrine of the cultural-Calvinists, we make ourselves guilty of opposing and obstructing one of the two great works of God in history and, therefore, one of His two main purposes with His world: the realization of beautiful, noble, good, godly culture by virtue of common grace. The other great work of God, which tends to fade into the background in the vision of the cultural-Calvinists, is the salvation of the elect church. Hear the father of cultural-Calvinism, Abraham Kuyper:

¹³ Charles Colson, *Kingdoms in Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987). The book has been republished in a revised edition with the title, *God & Government* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

There is a particular grace which works Salvation, and also a common grace by which God...relaxes the curse which rests upon [the world], arrests its process of corruption, and thus allows the untrammelled development of our life in which to glorify Himself as Creator. ¹⁴

In his work on common grace, Kuyper wrote that “there is beside the great work of God in *special* grace also that totally other work of God in the realm of *common* grace.” This totally other work is to “consummate the world’s development.” ¹⁵

When we (I speak now on behalf of the members of the Protestant Reformed Churches and, I hope, other Calvinists) repudiate the mentality, mandate, and mission of Christianizing the world, the reason is not that we are oblivious to the kingdom-vision of Kuyper and the cultural-Calvinists and have felt nothing of its tug. It is obnoxious to us to be regarded as Anabaptists and to be charged with world flight. In addition, our blood, too, stirs at Kuyper’s well-known, rousing claim on behalf of his common grace venture: “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!” ¹⁶

Stimulating the urge to be involved in Christianizing at least our nation, which includes engagement in fighting the culture wars, is the advance, all across the spheres of life in the United States, at present, of the kingdom of the beast—the kingdom of Satan in the form of the kingdom of sovereign, deified Man. Holy anger wells up in the soul of the Reformed believer as the kingdom of Satan takes over every sphere of life in our nation, dishonoring God, mocking Jesus Christ, and trampling under foot God’s commandments in sheer lawlessness.

Politically, the president advocates sodomite couplings as “holy marriages.” The judicial branch of government decrees the murder by abortion of millions who are innocent before the law of the land. The legislative branch is directed, not by the will of God, the lawgiver, in Scripture and nature, but by the whims of a majority of the people, by developments in society, by greed, and by the will to retain power.

¹⁴ Kuyper, *Lectures*, 30.

¹⁵ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in *Abraham Kuyper*, ed. Bratt, 176.

¹⁶ Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in *ibid.*, 488.

Everywhere, by many means, not least television and the movies, there is an all-out assault on marriage and the family, two parents and their children.

Education in the state schools is increasingly godless. The schools not only ignore God, but express hostility to the God of Christianity, to His church, and to His word.

American society promotes a life of amusement rather than work, pleasure rather than duty, self-gratification rather than responsibility, and the amusement, pleasure, and self-gratification are usually filthy and violent.

With the holy anger at this takeover of our country by the forces of spiritual darkness, there is the keen awareness that the result of these developments in the United States will soon be the persecution of the true church and of faithful, loyal citizens of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

When some of us Calvinists, who are not, and are determined never to be, Anabaptistic, repudiate the project of Christianizing society, our nation, and the world, that is, repudiate cultural-Calvinism, the explanation is not that we have not thoroughly considered and examined the project, or even that we are complete strangers to its appeal.

But the explanation is that we have weighed the project and found it wanting—wanting with regard to the kingdom of Jesus Christ and wanting with regard to living the life of the kingdom in all spheres of earthly life. We repudiate the project of Christianizing the world, not because we deny that Calvinists must live the life of the kingdom in all spheres of earthly life, much less because we think this unimportant. Rather, we judge the project of Christianizing the world as a false conception of the coming of Christ's kingdom. We are determined that the kingdom of Christ come in our lives, and in all the world, rightly, that is, in accordance with Scripture and the Reformed creeds.

The question to professing Calvinists is this: Is the Christianizing of the world as taught by Kuyper and his cultural-Calvinists today what our Lord had in mind in the second petition of the model prayer, "Thy kingdom come"?

I now present the kingdom alternative of genuine Calvinism. I ask the cultural-Calvinists to consider our thinking and activity, as we have considered theirs.

The Kingdom Alternative of Genuine Calvinism

A genuine Calvinist lives, and must live, in such a way as to honor Kuyper's stirring claim on behalf of Christ, "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!" In every sphere of our life, earthly as well as spiritual, in government, education, science, and labor, as well as in prayer and at church, we live the life—the holy, unique life—of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. In every sphere of life, our behavior and speech witness that Jesus the Christ is king. Thus, over whatever sphere of life we enter, we raise the banner, "Jesus Christ is king."

However, and this is of fundamental importance, the Christ on behalf of whom we raise the banner is the man who was crucified, raised from the dead, and now sits enthroned at the right hand of God in heaven.

The Christ whom we honor and obey is not only the second person of the Trinity, which was what Kuyper meant by "Christ" in his famous statement. For Kuyper, the kingdom of God and of Christ that Calvinists must promote and advance in cooperation with the ungodly by common grace is not the reign of God in the crucified and risen Jesus. But it is the rule only of the second person of the Trinity, as the second person of the Trinity—a kingdom different from the reign of God in the man, Jesus. It is not as "the human being Jesus Christ" that Christ is the sovereign of the common grace kingdom of Abraham Kuyper and the cultural-Calvinists. Rather, Kuyper's common grace Christ is the "eternal Word." Christ is the "root of creation and therefore of common grace" as the second person of the Trinity.¹⁷

The kingdom of common grace is not the reign of God triune in the crucified and risen man, Jesus. It is not the kingdom revealed and promoted by the gospel. Of this kingdom, the crucified and risen Jesus is not the king. In this kingdom, therefore, no believer should have any interest, except to regard it with suspicion as a rival to the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Of the kingdom of Kuyper and the common grace, cultural Calvinists—the kingdom consisting of a Christianized world—the king is not the crucified and risen man, Jesus the Christ! This alone, this especially, proves that the common grace kingdom is not the kingdom of God. Thus, the common grace kingdom is exposed as fraudulent.

¹⁷ Kuyper, "Common Grace," in *ibid.*, 184-187

In the course of distinguishing his common grace kingdom from the kingdom of the man, Jesus, Kuyper seriously misinterpreted Colossians 1:13-20, a passage that was fundamental to Kuyper's conception of a kingdom of common grace in history.¹⁸ Kuyper identified the Christ who is the "firstborn of every creature" (v. 18) as the second person of the Trinity in distinction from the babe born in Bethlehem. This enabled Kuyper to theorize that the Christ who Christianizes the world by common grace is distinct from the babe of Bethlehem, who saves a church by special grace. The kingdom of common grace is not that of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ.¹⁹

But this interpretation of the glorious Colossians passage is utterly, and grievously, mistaken. The "firstborn of every creature," by whom and for whom all things were created, by whom all things consist, who must have the preeminence in all things, and who will reconcile all things to himself is not the second person of the Trinity in distinction from the man, Jesus. Emphatically not! Rather, He is the man, Jesus, who is also as to His person the eternal Son of God.

The second person of the Trinity is not "the firstborn of every creature." In fact, it is heresy to say so. This would put the eternal Son of God in the category of creatures. The eternal Son and Word of God is the "only-begotten of the *Father*," not the "firstborn of every creature." The firstborn of every creature is a creature, that creature—the human being—who opens the womb for all creation and all creatures in the eternal counsel of God. That is, He is first, primary, central, and fundamental in relation to all of creation and history in God's purpose regarding creation and history, as Colossians 1:13-20 makes abundantly clear regarding the man, Jesus. "All things were created...for him" (v. 16). He is "before all things" in the mind of God (v. 17). "In all things, he [must and shall] have the preeminence" (v. 18). "It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell" (v. 19). One grand day, "all things" will be reconciled to Him (v. 20).

And the gospel of Colossians 1 is that this firstborn of every creature is the man, Jesus. Verses 13 and 14 establish that the subject of the entire passage is God's dear Son, into whose kingdom the believers at Colosse

¹⁸ Editor James Bratt calls the Colossians passage the "Scriptural *locus classicus*" of Kuyper's position regarding the kingdom of common grace (*Abraham Kuyper*, ed. Bratt, 186).

¹⁹ Kuyper, *ibid.*

had already been translated (which was certainly in those days not the Christianized world fantasized by the cultural-Calvinists of our day, or the earthly kingdom over which Christians have dominion as is the dream of Christian Reconstruction and other postmillennialists) and “in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.” This is not the second person of the Trinity in distinction from the man, Jesus, the babe of Bethlehem.

The Christ of Colossians 1 is the crucified and risen man, Jesus, whose person is the eternal Son—the babe of Bethlehem.

The kingdom of Colossians 1 is the kingdom realized by the gospel of the cross, not by the Christianizing efforts of cultural-Calvinists.

And the grace that establishes and extends the kingdom and that translates men and women into the kingdom is the one, saving, special, particular, and sovereign grace of God by the Spirit of the exalted Jesus.

Thus is exposed as false the Kuyperian project of Christianizing the world, inasmuch as the project needs the distinction of Christ as only the second person of the Trinity in order to account for a common grace of Christ in distinction from the particular, saving grace of the crucified and risen man, Jesus. On the explanation of the Christ of Colossians 1 as only the second person of the Trinity, for Kuyper and his cultural-Calvinist disciples, rests the cultural work of Christ in history in distinction from the saving work of the man, Jesus.

The common grace kingdom of Kuyper and his cultural disciples in Reformed churches and colleges today collapses for lack of biblical foundation.

When I echo Kuyper’s confession, by “Christ” I mean the crucified and exalted man, Jesus—the Son of God as He is in our human flesh. Over every square inch of the whole domain of our human existence, this Jesus is sovereign. He sits at God’s right hand, with all authority in heaven and in earth (Matt. 28:18)²⁰ and possessing and exercising the “exceeding greatness of [God’s] power” (Eph. 1:19, 20).

²⁰ “Power” in Matthew 28:18 is the Authorized Version’s translation of the Greek word for ‘authority,’ the right to rule.

The Truth about the Kingdom

Calvinists and evangelicals, indeed all Protestant Christians, must know the truth about the kingdom of God, the kingdom of the heavenly Father whose coming we pray for in the second petition of the model prayer, “Thy kingdom come.”

The kingdom is the reign of the triune God in Jesus Christ, God’s great servant, by the word and Spirit of this Jesus Christ.

There is a rule of sovereign power by the triune God (not only the second person) over all, including Satan (which includes God’s rule over the current demonic developments in North America), but this is not the kingdom of God in the world, either in the Old Testament or in the New Testament.

The kingdom of God is not a reign of sheer power, but a reign of grace—sovereign, saving, empowering, transforming, ruling, particular grace. The grace of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ transforms rebels into citizens. It makes these citizens willing in the day of Christ’s power. This grace makes us believers in, and disciples of, King Jesus. As disciples, we confess, follow, obey and serve the Lord Jesus.

Of this kingdom of God in Jesus Christ, not all humans are citizens, but only those in all nations and among all peoples who are true believers. And they are believers because God “hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son,” out of the “power of darkness” (Col. 1:13). God translated these persons into His kingdom, because He elected them from eternity (Eph. 1:4).

As to its nature, the kingdom of God’s dear Son is heavenly, not earthly; spiritual, not carnal. That was Jesus’ description of the kingdom to Pilate on the morning of Jesus’ establishment of the kingdom by His death, according to John 18:33-37: “not of this world”; “not from hence.” Explaining Jesus’ description of His kingdom, Calvin wrote, “spiritual”; “heavenly”; and “separated from the world.” From Jesus’ description of His kingdom, Calvin expressly inferred that Jesus’ kingdom is not “earthly.”²¹

²¹ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 209.

Because the kingdom is spiritual, it is invisible in its coming. It comes not with “observation” (Luke 17:21).

In accordance with the spiritual nature of the kingdom, it does not consist of earthly dominion. Nor does it bestow earthly benefits. But it consists of, and bestows, “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 14:17)

One thing more Jesus emphasized to Pilate, and cultural-Calvinism should pay careful attention to it: The kingdom of Jesus Christ, in distinction from all other kingdoms, including the kingdom of common grace, comes by “the truth.” To Pilate’s question about kingship and kingdom—urgent concerns of Pilate and Rome—Jesus responded, “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth” (John 18:37). Undeniably evident about the kingdom of common grace, the kingdom that cultural-Calvinists are building with the cooperation of Roman Catholics and with the cooperation of outrightly ungodly men and women, is that this kingdom is not coming by the truth! The truth is the gospel of salvation by sovereign grace alone through faith alone, bearing fruit in a life of obedience to God’s law from the heart. The truth is this gospel as summarized in the ecumenical and Reformed creeds. Roman Catholics and unbelievers do not cooperate with Calvinists in preaching and teaching the truth of the gospel as confessed in the Reformed creeds. The common grace kingdom of a Christianized world does not come by, and is not marked by, the truth. It comes by disregard of the truth, if not in opposition to the truth. It is not the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Where in the World is the Kingdom? in the Heart of the Elect Believer

That the kingdom is heavenly in origin and spiritual in nature does not imply that it is not on earth and in the world. The kingdom is in the world, and its primary location is the heart of the elect believer. There, Christ has His throne. There, God reigns in Jesus Christ, by His grace and Spirit.

Kuyper and the cultural-Calvinists disparage the reign of grace in the hearts of the people of God. They criticize those Calvinists who emphasize that the kingdom is in the heart of the child of God as though

by this emphasis we restrict the kingdom to the heart. Such Calvinists are, in fact, “pietists.” When Kuyper wrote that “the chief purpose of my lecturing in this country was to eradicate the wrong idea that Calvinism represented an exclusively dogmatical and ecclesiastical movement,” he had in mind those Calvinists who stressed that the kingdom of Christ is established in the heart of the elect child of God.²²

But the rule of God in the human heart is fundamental to the presence of the kingdom on earth. Apart from this rule in the heart, whatever outward conformity there may be to Christianity, the entire project is obnoxious to God and is certainly not His kingdom. God looks to the heart! God is pleased with love for Him and willing service from the heart!

In fact, apart from the reign of grace in human hearts, men and women will not, do not, and cannot seek the kingdom of God, even outwardly. As slaves of Satan, they hate even the appearance of the kingdom of God and exert themselves to destroy God’s kingdom, and build, rather, the kingdom of antichrist.

And, if Christ reigns in one’s heart, that man or woman will, and must, live the life of the kingdom in all the spheres of earthly life.

The fear of the cultural-Calvinists that Reformed believers will be passive and Anabaptistic is groundless. The fear does not reckon with the heart as the source of all the issues of life, nor with the mighty, all-comprehensive lordship of Jesus in the heart.

Do not underestimate the reign of Christ in the heart! With this, the Heidelberg Catechism begins its explanation of the second petition of the model prayer: “That is: So govern us by thy Word and Spirit that we may submit ourselves unto thee always more and more.”²³ The meaning is: Govern us *in our hearts*.

Out of the Heart into All the Spheres

Such is the rule of Christ in the heart of the Christian that he or she submits to Jesus Christ in all spheres of earthly life. Thus, the kingdom is extended to every sphere. Thus, the believer raises the banner over every sphere: “Jesus Christ is king.”

²² Kuyper, *Lectures*, 171.

²³ Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 123, in Schaff, *Creeds*, 352.

First and foremost of the spheres is the institute of the true church of Jesus Christ in the world. The citizen of the kingdom of God, in whose heart God reigns, will be a lively member of a true church, worshipping the triune God in spirit and in truth every Sabbath. This aspect of kingdom life is minimized, and even ignored, by many of the advocates of Christianizing the world. Not only do they not stress this sphere, but also they usually say nothing about it at all in their manifestos on the kingdom. This is understandable. If one is promoting a kingdom in cooperation with atheists, unbelievers, and Roman Catholics, he had best say nothing about church membership. He is compelled to ignore the fourth commandment of the law of God, as explained by Lord's Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism, and Articles 27-29 of the Belgic Confession. He will likely reduce Question and Answer 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism to an unauthoritative and easily overlooked footnote.

But minimizing or ignoring the church is mistaken and utterly inexcusable for one who claims to be Reformed. The reign of Jesus Christ in and over the church is the second explanation of the second petition by the Heidelberg Catechism: "preserve and increase thy Church."²⁴

The true church is the institutional form of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. The Westminster Confession of Faith states correctly, "The visible Church...is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ."²⁵ The Belgic Confession teaches the same when, in Article 27, concerning the church, which has been from the beginning of the world and will be to the end, the Confession states, "which is evident from this, that Christ is an eternal king."²⁶ Christ is king of the church, and the church is His kingdom.

The New Testament church is God's "holy nation"—the reality of Old Testament Israel. The Netherlands under Kuyper's prime ministership was not the holy nation. Neither is the United States, nor has it ever been. No Christianized earthly nation is, or can be, the holy nation. The church is.

The dream that men can make some earthly nation God's holy nation and kingdom is false and foolish.²⁷

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Westminster Confession of Faith, 25.2, in *ibid.*, 657.

²⁶ Belgic Confession, Art. 27, in *ibid.*, 417.

²⁷ John Bolt expressed the goal of Abraham Kuyper's cultural efforts regarding the United States, as well as the Netherlands, in the title of his book on the subject: *A Free Church, a Holy Nation: Abraham Kuyper's American Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

Addressing the New Testament church of believers and their children, Peter declares, “Ye are...an holy nation” (I Peter 2:9).

This is a reason why we doctrinal, ecclesiastical, and spiritual Calvinists so highly treasure the true church, involve ourselves in her life, seek her welfare, are concerned about her purity of doctrine and behavior, and defend her against her enemies. She is God’s kingdom on earth, God’s New Testament Zion.

In the church occurs the main cultural activity of any human: the public worship of God in spirit and in truth. The emphasis of the cultural-Calvinists on the cultural activities of art, science, politics, drama, and the like, to the minimizing, if not ignoring, of the activity of public worship by and with the true church, is inexcusable error. Worship of the triune, one, true, and living God in spirit and in truth is the main thing with regard to the cultural calling and activity of every human. The very word, “culture,” has as its root, “cult.”

In addition, the true church gives the believer the directions and spiritual energy to live the life of the kingdom in all the other spheres of human life. The dynamo of the kingdom of God is not the Christian college, and certainly not the Christian college that thinks to equip the kingdom builders with the feeble power of a common grace of God. The dynamo of the kingdom is the true church, and the power with which she equips the citizens of the kingdom is the mighty, irresistible, invincible, resurrection grace of the Lord Jesus, by means of the preaching of the gospel and the use of the sacraments.

A second sphere of earthly life, in which most citizens of the kingdom submit to King Jesus and fly His banner, is marriage and the family. Common sense realizes the fundamental importance of this sphere for all of societal life and for the welfare of an earthly nation. That our political leaders evidently are unseeing, and are actively at work to destroy marriage and the home, are due, not only to the natural darkness of their understanding because of unbelief, but also to God’s blinding of them, in His judicial wrath, with the purpose to bring the nation to destruction for its wickedness.

Scripture insists on the importance of this sphere, and gives thorough instruction concerning the will of King Jesus for life in this sphere. The Creator married one man and one woman in an intimate union of one

flesh for life, and blessed the marriage with fruitfulness in bringing forth children, whom the married couple, their parents, must rear (Gen. 1:27, 28; 2:20-25). King Jesus took this ordinance over into His kingdom, and made His will concerning our life in marriage and the family known in Ephesians 5:22-6:4 and in other passages.

The sixteenth century Reformation of the church restored this sphere of marriage and the family to its place of honor and importance, after Rome had degraded it, by monasticism and by the decree that the clergy may not marry, as though single life were a higher, more spiritual state than marriage, to say nothing of the tolerance by Rome, then as now, of sexual promiscuity, including perversity.

There is a slander today in Reformed theological circles of that great, glorious servant of God, Martin Luther, in connection with a debate over what is called the “two kingdoms” theory of the Christian and culture. The slander is that Luther taught that Christians were to live the life of the kingdom only at church, whereas in earthly society they were to be governed, not by Jesus Christ, but by the earthly rule of the temporal government. Luther was under no illusion that Christians could Christianize the world by a common grace of God. But he did more to teach believers to live as citizens of the kingdom of heaven in all of earthly life than any Christian theologian before him, from the last apostle, and than most theologians who have followed him, always excepting the Reformer who completed Luther’s work, John Calvin.

The section of Luther’s writings on “The Christian in Society” in the set of *Luther’s Works* published by Fortress and Concordia Presses consists of four fat volumes, and they are only part of Luther’s writings on the Christian life in all the spheres. In these four volumes, marriage and the family are prominent. The very first chapter of volume one of “The Christian in Society” is “A Sermon on the Estate of Marriage, 1519.”²⁸

²⁸ Martin Luther, “A Sermon on the Estate of Marriage,” in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 44 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966): 3-14. In the written sermon, Luther exclaims, “O what a truly noble, important, and blessed condition the estate of marriage is” (13). He sees marriage as the sign of the union of the divine and human natures in Christ and of the covenant communion of Christ and the church (10). As a “covenant of fidelity,” marriage bars the way to any other than the two who marry (10, 11). Expressing the reality of the life of the kingdom, in contrast to the showy deeds that Rome and the cultural-Calvinists emphasize, Luther declares that married people should know that “they can do no better work and do nothing more valuable either for God, for Christendom, for all the world, for themselves, and for their children than to bring up their children well” (12).

There is much talk today by the cultural-Calvinists in the CRC about Christianizing our society. These same people and their churches are tolerating rampant divorce and remarriage in their own churches. The flagship college, Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, is a hotbed, among both professors and students, of agitation on behalf of homosexuality and homosexual relationships.²⁹ There is even open promotion of sodomy and lesbianism in their denominational magazine, the *Banner*.³⁰ This unconcern for marriage and the family shows that these people are not serious about the coming of the kingdom of God and about living the life of the kingdom. They are not even serious about influencing the culture of Grand Rapids and of the United States. Marriage and the family are the urgent social issues in Grand Rapids and in all of North America. The great evils plaguing our country are divorce, remarriage, sexual promiscuity, and the break-up of the family.

The man (a male) who lives faithfully with his wife (a female) for God's sake, the woman (a female) who keeps her vow to her husband (a male), the parents (a male and a female) who together raise their children in the fear of the Lord, and the children and young people who honor their parents and heed their godly instruction—these are living the life of the kingdom. These are extending the kingship of God into the sphere of the family. And these are flying the banner of King Jesus in the sphere of home and family for all to see.

²⁹ Google "Calvin College homosexuality" for the evidence of this shameful condition of a Reformed college. This is the college that takes the lead in North America in developing the theory and promoting the practice of Christianizing the world by a common grace of God. We now learn that the name of this Christianized world will be Sodom.

³⁰ Writing in the January 18, 2011 issue of the *Banner*, editor Rev. Bob De Moor proposed that the CRC needs "to modify it [their official position that homosexual sex is sin] in some way to address differently those who are in committed same-sex relationships." He told the denomination that he knows of "a number of [CR] congregations who have members living in committed homosexual relationship and in which church leaders are not actively applying church discipline." Rather than call the attention of the denomination to the fact that this failure to discipline for gross, public sin is the mark of a false church, De Moor boldly advocated (as the liberals always do until their position prevails, at which stage in the development of apostasy discussion is summarily halted and the faithful are either silenced or driven out of the church) conversing and dealing openly with each other "in seeking God's will and God's way in this very significant pastoral matter—without the chilling effect of ecclesiastical censure. It's time to take another look [at the condemnation of sodomy and lesbianism]." It must not be overlooked that Rev. De Moor and his plea for sodomite relations represent the contemporary phase of the movement to Christianize the world by common grace. It must be evident even to the most committed cultural-Calvinist that, in reality, the common grace venture to Christianize the world is a project that makes the church worldly—grossly and utterly worldly. To use the equivalent of the barbarous term, "Christianizing," common grace, cultural-Calvinism "world-izes" Christianity.

A third significant sphere is the education of children, as both Scripture and nature teach us. Citizens of the kingdom of God submit to the reign of Jesus Christ in the sphere of education. Thus, the kingdom extends into the sphere of education. Over the sphere of education, we raise the banner: “not one square inch about which Jesus Christ does not say, ‘Mine!’” We give our children a godly upbringing at home, including the example of our own lives of submission to King Jesus and including discipline of the children. We see to it that the children receive thorough instruction in the history and doctrine of the Bible in the solid catechism program of a true church.

In addition, with like-minded Reformed believers we provide for our children good Christian schools, in which trained, knowledgeable, competent Calvinist teachers prepare the children to live and work, ably, in twenty-first century America as subjects of King Jesus. This preparation of the children is the teachers’ instruction of the children in all the branches of knowledge in light of the word of God, something most parents have neither the time nor the ability to do themselves.

Here, in a special way, our zeal for the kingdom is evident to all. We pay for these schools ourselves. The state, that is, the other tax-paying citizens, does not support our schools. We support our schools in addition to funding the state schools—an obvious injustice, that the government does not redress and that, apparently, does not trouble the other citizens of the country, upset as they are over the least social injustice.

The result of this rearing of the children of Reformed believers is that our sons and daughters become good citizens of the United States—the best citizens: capable, responsible, hard-working, law-abiding, tax-paying.

But our motive in this rearing is not, primarily, to influence the United States, is not to make it Kuyper’s “holy nation.” Rather, our motive is the kingdom of God. Our children are, from birth, citizens of the kingdom of God, as their baptism as infants signifies. They belong to King Jesus, as He Himself said plainly on more than one occasion: “Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: *for of such is the kingdom of God*” (Luke 18:16). Therefore, the children must be educated in the truths and ways of the kingdom of God.

A fourth sphere of earthly life in which we hold aloft the banner of King Jesus is labor. Calvinist businessmen, financiers, and farmers run their

enterprises honestly, provide fairly, even liberally, for their employees, and with their well-gotten wealth “do good...and are rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate (that is, to give to the needy),” in obedience to the charge of Jesus Christ (I Tim. 6:18).

This is the conduct of the Calvinist businessman, not because some labor union, in disobedience to the fifth commandment and to the New Testament precept that employees be subject to their employers (I Pet. 2:18-25), forces them to do so, or because a civil government, influenced by Karl Marx, usurps the authority to redistribute wealth. But the explanation is that the Christian, Calvinist businessman, although fully conscious that he *did* build his company, knows that he is not the lord of his company. Jesus Christ is lord in business and finance.

In the sphere of labor, the Reformed workingman is diligent and reliable, submitting to the authority even of a “froward” employer, for God’s sake (I Pet. 2:18). The Reformed workingman rejects the revolution and violence of the labor unions, even though this means financial loss and suffering. He is willing to suffer loss because the reign of King Jesus in his heart causes him to subject himself to Jesus Christ in the sphere of labor.

I may instance the example of my own father in this regard. For more than forty years, he worked, diligently and reliably, in the Keeler Brass factory in Grand Rapids, a non-union factory. Despite the fact that wages in the factory were lower than in union factories and despite the fact that as the father of twelve children he could have used more money, again and again he led resistance to the unionizing of the plant. He did not join in the grumbling and complaining of many of the other workers concerning wages and employer. At his retirement, his fellow workers gave him a small farewell party in the factory, thus showing their respect for him despite their differences of attitude and behavior regarding job and work. To my father’s surprise, if not amazement, the owner of the company, Mr. Keeler, uninvited, showed up at the farewell party. My father began his prepared farewell remarks this way: “I thank Mr. Keeler for more than forty years of work, so that I could support my family, support my Protestant Reformed church, and send my children to the Christian schools.”

That was the confession of King Jesus in the sphere of labor. That attitude, conduct, and speech flew the banner of the kingdom of God in the Keeler Brass factory and in the sphere of labor.

Finally, I mention the sphere of politics and government. On this, the cultural-Calvinists place heavy emphasis. Kuyper did. A prominent feature of his program to Christianize the Netherlands was the forming of a political party that would propel him into the office of prime minister of the nation. This achievement of political power by that extraordinary man fascinates his disciples today. This sort of showy accomplishment by a uniquely gifted Calvinist is what impresses them. Public prominence, national recognition, and earthly power are what they are striving after when they proclaim the coming of the kingdom and the Christianizing of the nation and the world. Whether they are the common grace, cultural-Calvinists of the CRC and evangelicalism or the Christian Reconstructionists, the advocates of an earthly kingdom of God and its carnal victory in history lust after political power.

But this is exactly contrary to the message of the gospel of the kingdom in New Testament Scripture. Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, not many Abraham Kuypers has Jesus Christ called into His kingdom. Rather, He has chosen the foolish, the weak, the base, and the nobodies “that no flesh should glory in his presence” (I Cor. 1:26-29). Accordingly, the kingdom is extended into every sphere of life, for the most part, in very ordinary, unnoticed, obscure ways. No trumpets blare; no balloons drop from the ceiling; no television cameras follow the action; no evening news reports the event.

This is true, particularly, of the kingdom life of Calvinists in the sphere of government: Submit to your rulers, and pay your taxes, because you know that God has ordained civil powers (Rom. 13:1-7). At the beginning of the twenty-first century in godless, anti-Christian, threatening America, I must add, “Obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

At such simple, ordinary behavior, the cultural-Calvinists jeer. They want political parties. They want noble men and women in high office. In fact, some advocate and take part in high-profile, glamorous revolution, traipsing off to Africa to overthrow some oppressive government or other, thus bringing the continent into worse chaos and destitution than it suffered before.

But the word of God teaches that those who simply submit and pay taxes—the vast majority of Christians in all ages and in all nations—“have praise” of the government on behalf of God, whose servant government is (Rom. 13:3).

In his inimitable way, Luther affirmed the ordinary behavior of the lowly and no-account as the usual life of the kingdom:

A faithful servant girl does more good, accomplishes more, and is far more dependable—even if she only takes a sack from the back of an ass—than all the priests and monks who sing themselves to death day and night while making bloody martyrs of themselves.³¹

This is the kingdom life of doctrinal, ecclesiastical, and spiritual Calvinists, in distinction from the kingdom dream of the cultural-Calvinists. We are citizens of the kingdom of Jesus Christ by the power of the gospel of the cross. Jesus reigns in our hearts by His Spirit and word. Therefore, we live the life of the kingdom in all spheres of life, earthly as well as spiritual—in the family, on the job, and at play from Monday through Saturday, as well as at church on the Lord's day. This we do without the slightest intention, or delusion, of Christianizing our nation or the world. The gospel gives us no such calling. It is an utter impossibility. Indeed, it is contrary to the revealed will of God for history and for His kingdom in history.

What now is the expectation of us citizens of the heavenly kingdom of Jesus Christ? What is our expectation with regard to the kingdom of which we are citizens, the kingdom we promote, and the kingdom whose banner flies over our life in all the spheres?

Are we to entertain the expectation that it will attain earthly dominion in history, as Christian Reconstruction predicts?

Are we to envision its carnal success in the form of a Christianized world, as the cultural-Calvinists portray the future of the kingdom of God?

The Hope of the Citizens of the Spiritual Kingdom

In this life, in history, and, in fact, in the near future, we doctrinal, ecclesiastical, and spiritual Calvinists expect hatred, fierce opposition, and outright persecution from the world of unbelieving men and women in the West and from the false church, headed by the Roman Catholic Church. We expect the very opposite of the appreciation and cooperation

³¹ Luther, quoted in William H. Lazareth, *Luther on the Christian Home* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 159.

on the part of the world of the ungodly that Kuyper and the common grace, cultural-Calvinists look for and receive.

There is antithesis—opposition and hostility—between the kingdom of Jesus Christ and its citizens, on the one hand, and the kingdom of Man (with a capital “M”) and its citizens, on the other hand. God Himself has put this enmity between the two kingdoms: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed” (Gen. 3:15). The two kingdoms are at war. This war does not disappear, but rather intensifies in the time of the establishment of the reality of the kingdom of Christ in the New Testament era. Such was the warning of the king to His citizens: “The world hath hated them [the citizens of the kingdom of Jesus Christ], because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:14).

If the world does not hate the citizens of the kingdom of common grace, that must be because that kingdom is not the kingdom of Jesus Christ and because the citizens of that kingdom show themselves to be “of the world.” The world does not hate its own.

The Heidelberg Catechism recognizes this warfare between the two kingdoms in its explanation of the petition about the coming of the kingdom of God: “Destroy the works of the devil, every power that exalteth itself against thee, and all wicked devices formed against thy holy Word.”³²

We do not expect the carnal triumph of the kingdom of Christ in history. We do not expect the Christianizing of the world.

Nevertheless, we who now live the kingdom life of Jesus Christ and who promote the kingdom of the Lord Jesus will have the victory, for the kingdom that is now established solidly in our hearts, the kingdom that is, institutionally, the true church (which endures despite all the opposition of Satan, the ungodly world, and the false church), and the kingdom that now extends, powerfully, into all the spheres of earthly life in the lives of the believers and their children will triumph. The kingdom of Jesus Christ is victorious throughout history after a spiritual manner. Its final, perfect victory is certain.

³²Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 123, in Schaff, *Creeds*, 352.

It will destroy the rival kingdom of the beast. It will punish and cast into hell all the citizens of the kingdom of the beast (Rev. 18, 19). It will establish itself perfectly over all the new creation (Rev. 21). In it, we will reign with King Jesus over all things, forever (Rev. 22:5).

To this future victory of the kingdom, the Heidelberg Catechism directs the hope of the believer in the conclusion of its explanation of the second petition of the model prayer: “until the full coming of thy kingdom, wherein thou shalt be all in all.”³³ The Catechism’s quotation of I Corinthians 15:28 (that God may be “all in all”), which, as the preceding context makes undeniably plain, refers to the second coming of Christ, makes binding upon all Reformed Christians the confession that the full coming of the kingdom of God is not within history, but at the second coming of Christ.

Not within history!

Within history, as is taking place before the eyes of all in our day, Satan’s outwardly grand kingdom of Man, in which Man is all in all, as much as possible, develops itself to the fullest. This grand kingdom of Man is anti-God, anti-Christ, and anti-church. It hates the truth that God is God. It rages against the Bible. It is lawless. It will persecute the citizens of the kingdom of God for their witness to Jesus, for their confession that God is God, and for their obedience to the law of God.³⁴

And, *mirabile dictu*, according to Kuyper himself this godless, anti-christian kingdom of Man will be the final, full development of the common grace project of Christianizing the world. The effort to Christianize the world produces Antichrist! “The closing scene in the drama of common grace can be enacted only through the appearance on stage of the man of sin...[common] grace leads to the most powerful manifestation of sin in history.”³⁵

All those, therefore, presently engaged in erecting and promoting the kingdom of common grace are, in fact, knowingly and willfully helping Satan to realize his anti-christian kingdom.

³³ *Ibid.*, 352, 353.

³⁴ For the rage against God, His Christ, and His word of those who have formed and are forming the culture of the United States and the rest of the West, see Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Black Swan, 2007) and Andrew Ferguson, “The Heretic,” the *Weekly Standard* 18, no. 27 (March 25, 2013): 24-30.

³⁵ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in *Abraham Kuyper*, ed. Bratt, 180.

I have bad news for them: The wrath of God abides on their project throughout history! And their kingdom will be demolished in the day of Jesus Christ! The little stone of Daniel 2 will fall upon it and grind it to powder. In that day, not only Herman Hoeksema, but also all the saints will rejoice over the exposure and destruction of the program and project of common grace (Rev. 18:20).

The victory and perfection of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of the grace of God in Jesus Christ—our kingdom—will triumph, not within history, but as the *goal* of history, in the glorious advent of Jesus Christ. The victory of the kingdom and the kingdom itself will be everlasting.

This is certain, as certain as it is that Jesus arose to become lord over all, and as certain as it is that the God and Father of Jesus Christ must be all in all.

This is our hope.

In this hope, let us live the kingdom life faithfully, promote the kingdom actively, fly the banner of the kingdom without shame or fear, yes, and patiently endure scorn and suffering for the sake of this kingdom and its king.

The kingdom of Jesus Christ and of His particular grace is coming.

O God, our Father for Jesus' sake, "thy kingdom come."

About the Author

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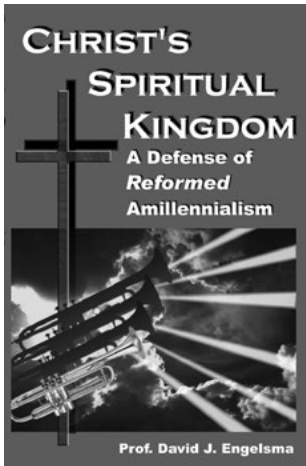
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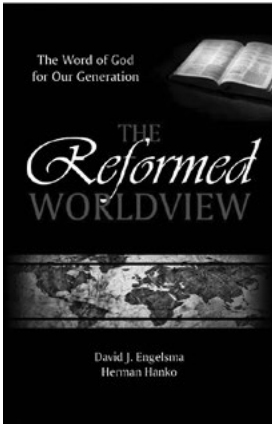
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