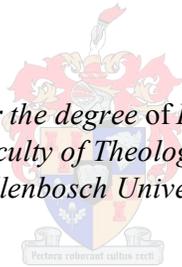


RECOVERING THE CALVIN OF “TWO KINGDOMS”? A  
HISTORICAL-THEOLOGICAL INQUIRY IN THE LIGHT OF  
CHURCH-STATE DISCOURSE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Simon Nicholas Jooste

*Dissertation presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
Faculty of Theology at  
Stellenbosch University*



Promotor: Professor Robert R. Vosloo

March 2013

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To begin, I must express my deepest gratitude for the supervision of Professor Robert R. Vosloo over the past three years. Despite his reservations from the outset about the central claims of this thesis, he has nevertheless provided wise and insightful guidance, and always with the most irenic spirit.

Professor Vosloo is indicative of the warm reception I have received from the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch. I would like to express particular thanks to Professor Dirk J. Smit and Dr. Gerrit Brand for challenging me to think in ways I had not done before, and for being good traveling companions. I also acknowledge with gratitude the many opportunities presented at Stellenbosch to be exposed to world-class visiting scholars as well as Extraordinary Professors of the Stellenbosch Faculty. I am especially grateful for my stimulating interactions with I. John Hesselink and John W. de Gruchy.

Special thanks must also go to Stellenbosch University for the generous bursaries that have helped make it possible for me to pursue my research full time.

Still within the arena of academia, I would like to acknowledge the support and encouragement of fellow two kingdoms scholars in North America. Darryl Hart and Matthew Tuininga provided valuable insights into the development of the two kingdoms paradigm by sharing yet to be published work. This thesis would not have been possible – period – without the tutelage and friendship of David VanDrunen. In God's good providence, my exposure to his development of the early Reformed two kingdoms and natural law doctrines at Westminster Seminary, California, gave rise to the passion that has led to this study. VanDrunen's compelling historical, theological and practical case for these doctrines in the North American context persuaded me of their promise for the churches in South Africa.

On the family front, the love and support shown by my wife, Deana, my boys, Andrew and Adam, my parents, and my brother, Adam, throughout the past three years have been a testimony to God's steadfast love.

And finally, thank you to the members of the Reformed church plant in the southern suburbs for giving me the joy of sharing in their enthusiasm for living out life in God's two kingdoms, by faith unto his glory.

## ABSTRACT

This study is a historical-theological inquiry into the social thought of John Calvin through the lens of the “Calvin” of the church struggle with the purpose of recovering his doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law for Christianity and culture discourse in South Africa today. This thesis enters into conversation with a body of scholarship in North America that has sought to recover and refine these early Reformed theological categories, which is suggestive of their promise in other contexts. Is there perhaps a compelling alternative to the apartheid and anti-apartheid “transformationist” reading of Calvin, which might provide some resolution to his contested legacy as well as more adequately equip the church as it engages the challenges of life in South Africa’s young democracy? In order to answer such questions, this thesis sets out on the road back to Calvin through the lens of his appropriation in the church struggle, with the hope of gaining instruction in cultivating a more faithful historical hermeneutic. Once in sixteenth-century Geneva, both the theology and practice of Calvin’s social thought are examined for evidence of substantive doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law. The findings of this historical inquiry generate the claims of this thesis. Central among them is that Calvin did make constructive and meaningful use of the doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law in relating Christianity and culture, church and civil magistrate. Herein lies a different portrait of Calvin, which challenges his previous appropriations in the South African context and offers fresh theological resources for critical reflection in ongoing Christianity and culture discourse. To provide a sense of their ongoing promise, this thesis outlines the major contours of North American theologian and ethicist, David VanDrunen’s, development of the Calvin-informed and early Reformed two kingdoms and natural doctrines as a normative paradigm for Christians living in South Africa today. When considered against the backdrop of Calvin’s contested legacy and the challenges presented by South Africa’s young liberal democracy, this paradigm offers liberating trajectories for the Reformed churches today, and therefore potential for reformation and renewal by “goods” already constituting its broader historic tradition.

## OPSOMMING

Hierdie is 'n histories-teologiese ondersoek na die sosiale denke van Johannes Calvin deur die lens van die "Calvin" van die strydende kerk, met die doel om sy twee doktrines van twee koninkryke en natuurwet vir die Christendom te herwin asook vir die kultuur-diskoers in Suid-Afrika, vandag. Hierdie tesis tree in gesprek met 'n groep vakkundiges in Noord-Amerika wat streef om hierdie vroeë Gereformeerde teologiese kategorieë te herwin en te verfyn, wat op sigself belowend is in ander kontekste. Is daar dalk 'n aangrypende alternatief vir die apartheid en anti-apartheid "transformatoriese" lees van Calvin, wat dalk 'n mate van oplossing vir sy betwiste nalatenskap kan bied, asook om die kerk meer doelmatig toe te rus waar dit betrokke raak by die uitdagings van die lewe in die jong demokrasie van Suid-Afrika? Om hierdie vrae te beantwoord, hebesoek die tesis Calvin se erfenis deur die lens van sy resepsie tydens die kerklike strud teen apartheid, met die hoop om sodoende 'n meer getroue historiese hermeneutiek te ontwikkel. Eens terug in sestiende eeuse Genève, word sowel Calvin se teologie as die praktiese uitvoering van sy sosiale denke ondersoek vir bewyse van die substantiewe doktrines van twee koninkryke en natuurwet. Die bevindings van hierdie historiese ondersoek genereer die bewerings van hierdie tesis. Sentraal in hierdie bewerings is dat Calvin konstruktief en betekenisvol gebruik gemaak het van die doktrines van twee koninkryke en natuurwet in sover dit relevant is tot die Christendom en kultuur, kerk en burgerlike wetgewing. Hierin lê 'n ander beeld van Calvin, wat sy vorige toe-eiening in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks uitdaag, asook om vars teologiese middele vir kritiese refleksie in die voortdurende Christelike en kultuur diskoers aan te bied. Om 'n smakie van die volgehoue belofte te gee, bied hierdie tesis 'n oorsig van die hooflyne van die Noord-Amerikaanse teoloog en etikus, David VanDrunen se ontwikkeling van die Calvin-invloed en vroeë Gereformeerde twee koninkryke en natuur doktrines as 'n normatiewe paradigma vir Christene wat vandag in Suid-Afrika woon. Wanneer hierdie paradigma teen die agtergrond van Calvin se betwiste nalatenskap en die uitdagings wat Suid-Afrika se jong demokrasie bied, gestel word, dui dit 'n bevrydende rigting vir die Gereformeerde kerke van vandag aan en daarom potensiaal vir reformasie en hernuwing deur 'goedere' wat reeds die breë geskiedkundige tradisie onderskryf.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 1. INTRODUCTION.....   | 1  |
| 1.1. Background and motivation.....  | 5  |
| 1.1.1. Why this thesis in current discourse?.....                                    | 5  |
| 1.1.2. Calvin in the context of other traditions.....                                | 7  |
| 1.1.3. Why Calvin is important for theologians to engage today.....                  | 8  |
| 1.1.4. Calvin’s reception in North America.....                                      | 9  |
| 1.1.5. The challenge for church-state relations in a post-Constantinian context..... | 12 |
| 1.1.6. Personal motivation.....  | 13 |
| 1.2. Methodology.....  | 14 |
| 1.2.1. Literary study.....   | 14 |
| 1.2.2. Genre.....  | 15 |
| 1.3. Research questions and hypothesis.....  | 16 |
| 1.4. Promise in theological discourse today.....                                     | 18 |
| 1.5. Argument and contribution.....  | 19 |
| 2. CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE IN CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGICAL<br>DISCOURSE.....            | 23 |
| 2.1. Contemporary critics of liberalism.....   | 24 |
| 2.2. Contemporary Reformed social thought: Kuyper, Barth and (neo-)Calvinism.....    | 29 |
| 2.2.1. Abraham Kuyper’s legacy.....  | 30 |
| 2.2.2. Abraham Kuyper and Karl Barth: continuity and discontinuity.....              | 34 |
| 2.2.3. Neo-Calvinism in North America.....   | 37 |
| 2.2.4. (Neo-)Calvinism in post-apartheid South Africa.....                           | 39 |
| 2.2.5. Redeeming culture from an ultimate perspective.....                           | 48 |
| 2.3. Reformed transformationist influence upon broader ecumenical discourse.....     | 49 |
| 2.3.1. The New Perspective on Paul.....  | 49 |
| 2.3.2. The Emerging Church movement.....   | 51 |
| 2.3.3. Desmond Tutu and the ecumenical movement in South Africa.....                 | 52 |
| 2.3.4. Contemporary evangelicalism: The Third Lausanne Congress.....                 | 55 |
| 2.4. To change the world or toward a new city commons?.....                          | 57 |
| 2.5. Two kingdoms and natural law.....   | 67 |
| 2.5.1. David VanDrunen and the North American context.....                           | 69 |
| 2.5.2. The South African context.....  | 73 |
| 2.6. Concluding remarks.....   | 75 |
| 3. JOHN CALVIN’S RECEPTION IN SOUTH AFRICA: ENGAGING A CONTESTED<br>LEGACY.....      | 76 |
| 3.1. The “Calvin” of apartheid.....  | 78 |
| 3.1.1. The Dutch Reformed Church.....  | 79 |
| 3.1.2. The Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk and the Gereformeerde Kerk.....               | 81 |

|        |  |     |
|--------|--|-----|
| 3.1.3. | Sacred history, ‘will-to-order legalism’, sphere sovereignty and ‘volkskerk’ .....   | 81  |
| 3.1.4. | Concluding remarks .....   | 86  |
| 3.2.   | The “Calvin” of the anti-apartheid church struggle .....                             | 89  |
| 3.2.1. | The seminal influence of Barth, Bonhoeffer and Barmen .....                          | 90  |
| 3.2.2. | Beyers Naudé .....   | 91  |
| 3.2.3. | Allan Boesak .....   | 94  |
| 3.2.4. | Prophetic theology and the <i>Kairos Document</i> .....                              | 95  |
| 3.2.5. | Liberation theology .....  | 96  |
| 3.2.6. | The <i>Belhar Confession</i> .....   | 97  |
| 3.2.7. | John de Gruchy and “Liberating Reformed Theology” .....                              | 101 |
| 3.2.8. | The “end” of apartheid .....   | 105 |
| 3.2.9. | Concluding remarks .....   | 106 |
| 3.3.   | Calvin for the future? Seeking resolution to his ambiguous legacy in South Africa .. | 107 |
| 3.3.1. | The split-portrait of Calvin and the ongoing church struggle .....                   | 108 |
| 3.3.2. | Calvin: an ongoing source of life for the Reformed tradition in SA? .....            | 112 |
| 3.4.   | Learning from the past: a case for revisiting Calvin’s social thought .....          | 114 |
| 3.4.1. | A more faithful historical hermeneutic? .....  | 115 |
| 3.4.2. | Better Calvinist and Reformed scholarship? .....                                     | 118 |
| 3.4.3. | Transforming traditions .....  | 119 |
| 3.4.4. | Challenges for the church in a liberal democratic state .....                        | 123 |
| 3.5.   | Concluding remarks .....   | 125 |
| 4.     | A CHURCH HISTORICAL STUDY OF CALVIN ON CHURCH AND STATE .....                        | 127 |
| 4.1.   | Forerunners to Calvin: St. Augustine and <i>De civitate Dei</i> .....                | 127 |
| 4.1.1. | Background and context .....   | 127 |
| 4.1.2. | Sources for the City of God .....  | 130 |
| 4.1.3. | Resident aliens: Antithesis and commonality in <i>De civitate Dei</i> .....          | 132 |
| 4.1.4. | Analysis .....   | 135 |
| 4.1.5. | Concluding remarks .....   | 137 |
| 4.2.   | Forerunners to Calvin: Martin Luther and his “Temporal Authority” .....              | 138 |
| 4.2.1. | Background and context .....   | 138 |
| 4.2.2. | Two kingdoms and two governments in “Temporal Authority” .....                       | 140 |
| 4.2.3. | Luther’s doctrine of natural law .....   | 147 |
| 4.2.4. | Analysis and concluding remarks .....  | 150 |
| 4.3.   | John Calvin: the making of a man .....   | 152 |
| 4.3.1. | Preparations for Geneva .....  | 153 |
| 4.3.2. | French refugee .....   | 154 |
| 4.3.3. | Calvin’s first stay in Geneva (1536-1538) .....                                      | 155 |
| 4.3.4. | Strasbourg (1538-1541) .....   | 159 |
| 4.3.5. | Calvin’s organizing efforts (1541-1546) .....  | 160 |
| 4.3.6. | Calvin’s travail and triumph (1546-1555) .....                                       | 162 |
| 4.3.7. | Consolidation, revolution, and beyond .....  | 166 |
| 4.3.8. | Calvin: a man of tumultuous times .....  | 169 |
| 4.3.9. | Calvin’s Anabaptist and Roman Catholic opponents .....                               | 170 |
| 4.4.   | Calvin on church and state: living in God’s two kingdoms .....                       | 170 |

|          |   |     |
|----------|---|-----|
| 4.4.1.   | Calvin’s commentary on <i>De Clementia</i> .....                                  | 171 |
| 4.4.2.   | The 1536 edition of the <i>Institutes of Christian Religion</i> .....             | 175 |
| 4.4.3.   | The <i>Genevan Confession</i> .....   | 181 |
| 4.4.4.   | The <i>Catechism</i> of 1538.....   | 181 |
| 4.4.5.   | God’s two kingdoms in the 1559 edition of the <i>Institutes</i> .....             | 182 |
| 4.5.     | Calvin on natural law.....  | 199 |
| 4.6.     | Calvin’s theology and practice of church and state relations.....                 | 214 |
| 4.7.     | Concluding remarks.....   | 223 |
| 5.       | ANALYSIS: CALVIN ON CHURCH AND STATE.....   | 224 |
| 5.1.     | Salvaging the Calvin of two kingdoms.....   | 224 |
| 5.1.1.   | Toward easing some theological tensions.....                                      | 224 |
| 5.1.2.   | Calvin: a sixteenth-century man with a passion for order.....                     | 228 |
| 5.2.     | Development: Calvin on two kingdoms and natural law.....                          | 234 |
| 5.2.1.   | Calvin’s version of two kingdoms.....   | 234 |
| 5.2.2.   | Two kingdoms reinforced: Calvin’s natural law thinking.....                       | 237 |
| 5.3.     | Calvin and the tradition of two kingdoms and natural law.....                     | 238 |
| 5.4.     | Concluding remarks.....   | 243 |
| 6.       | TWO KINGDOMS FOR SOUTH AFRICA TODAY?.....   | 245 |
| 6.1.     | A tradition in flux: Abraham Kuyper on two kingdoms.....                          | 246 |
| 6.2.     | A tradition eclipsed: Karl Barth’s Christological critique.....                   | 248 |
| 6.3.     | Theological tensions in contemporary Reformed social thought.....                 | 250 |
| 6.4.     | A tradition recovered and renewed: two kingdoms for South Africa today.....       | 252 |
| 6.5.     | The two Adams, justification and cultural activity.....                           | 254 |
| 6.6.     | Lessons from Old Testament sojourners living in God’s two kingdoms.....           | 259 |
| 6.6.1.   | Antithesis and commonality.....   | 259 |
| 6.6.2.   | Two covenants and two kingdoms.....   | 260 |
| 6.6.3.   | Abraham and exilic Israel: prototypical two kingdoms living.....                  | 261 |
| 6.7.     | New Testament pilgrims living in God’s two kingdoms.....                          | 264 |
| 6.7.1.   | The redemptive kingdom and Christ’s church.....                                   | 265 |
| 6.7.2.   | The Sermon on the Mount.....  | 266 |
| 6.7.3.   | The common kingdom and the state.....   | 270 |
| 6.7.4.   | A Christian outlook on the common kingdom.....                                    | 272 |
| 6.8.     | Natural law.....  | 273 |
| 6.8.1.   | Natural law and the Divine and human natures.....                                 | 275 |
| 6.8.2.   | Natural law and the Noahic covenant.....  | 278 |
| 6.8.3.   | Natural law and the two kingdoms.....   | 282 |
| 6.8.3.1. | Natural law as the moral standard for the common kingdom.....                     | 283 |
| 6.9.     | Two kingdoms and natural law: liberating trajectories for the Christian life..... | 289 |
| 6.9.1.   | The central importance of the church.....   | 290 |
| 6.9.2.   | The church’s distinct ethical life.....   | 293 |
| 6.9.3.   | The spirituality and ministerial authority of the church.....                     | 294 |
| 6.9.4.   | Christianity and culture.....   | 299 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 6.9.5. Relating church and state.....  | 304 |
| 6.9.6. A two kingdoms evaluation of liberalism.....  | 307 |
| 7. CONCLUSION.....   | 311 |
| 7.1. A renewed portrait: the Calvin of natural law and two kingdoms.....                                       | 311 |
| 7.2. Transforming traditions: two kingdoms for South Africa today?.....  | 313 |
| 7.3. <i>Semper reformanda</i> : two kingdoms and the development of Christianity and culture<br>discourse..... | 321 |
| 7.4. Final remarks.....  | 328 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY.....  | 330 |

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I endeavor to recover John Calvin's doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law through the lens of his reception in the Reformed church struggle<sup>1</sup> against apartheid, with the hope of bringing some resolution to his contested legacy in South Africa. In turn, I suggest the liberating potential of such categories for Christian life in South Africa's young liberal democracy. I do so by bringing contemporary Reformed Christianity and culture discourse into conversation with a fledgling renaissance of two kingdoms and natural law thinking in the United States, particularly that of Reformed theologian and ethicist, David VanDrunen.

Calvin – or better read: Calvinism – has exerted seismic influence upon the contours of ecclesiastical and political life in the modern West, and perhaps no more poignantly than in his contested legacy in the recent history of South Africa. Divergent interpretations of Calvin have been used in support of and against the socio-political ideology advanced by Afrikaner nationalism called apartheid. An influential and far-reaching politicised reading of Calvin began to take shape in the early part of the twentieth-century within the Reformed family of churches. The kind of Calvinism that emerged found theological justification for endorsing the racial policy of the Afrikaner Nationalist Party that rose to power in the 1940s and 1950s. This reading of Calvin, however, did not remain unchallenged. With the intensification of racial tension in the 1960s, a new portrait of Calvin began to emerge in opposition to the Calvin of apartheid, thus pitting Calvin against Calvin. One prominent instance of this development was the re-appropriation of Calvin in the civil disobedience movement of the 1970s and 1980s, which called into question blind obedience to the apartheid government. For many, the Calvin of the

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<sup>1</sup> According to de Gruchy, the church struggle in general should be understood as the struggle of those churches and institutions (the 'ecumenical church') that found common cause in the struggle against apartheid through their membership of the South African Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches. Ecclesiastical participation included the 'daughter' churches of the Dutch Reformed Church. During the 1970s and 1980s in particular, the church struggle became intertwined with the broader social and political struggle for liberation. "The struggle for justice and the struggle for the soul of the church were the same – a struggle for an authentic Christian witness against apartheid. So the ecumenical church had to fight on two flanks: it had to engage state-sponsored injustice and repression in all its many forms, and it had to engage those who sought to undermine its witness to the gospel. As such, the church was both an agent and a site of struggle." See John W. de Gruchy and Steve de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, Third ed. (London: SCM Press, 2004), 185.

anti-apartheid church struggle was a much-needed corrective to his conflicted legacy and at least a partial vindication of his name.

Nevertheless, one may wonder: Is there not perhaps more to Calvin's social thought than what has already featured in the South African context? Is there not perhaps more resolution awaiting his contested legacy, specifically on the question of how the church should relate to the state? Are there perhaps further theological resources to be found in Calvin for helping to determine the appropriate relationship between Christianity and culture in South Africa's young democracy?

Such questions seem plausible for a number of reasons, many of which are derived from observations of both the South African and North American contexts. In the case of the former, not everyone within the Reformed tradition is satisfied that the most recent appropriation of Calvin in the church struggle adequately addresses ongoing questions surrounding church-state relations as well as deeper issues of Reformed identity and witness. Indicative of this is the widespread ambivalence and even doubt among Reformed believers as to how to relate Christianity to broader culture in general, and the state in particular. This has in large part been fueled by the haunting memory of a failed kind of cultural Christianity in the form of apartheid. What is more, this uncertainty and lack of confidence has been compounded by the challenges posed by a new and conflicted liberal democracy. Once Christianity was the privileged and dominant voice in the public square. But now she must find her voice again in a context where opinions on public policy from every religious and metaphysical persuasion enjoy (at least constitutionally and therefore in theory) equal footing. Like other church traditions in South Africa, the Reformed family of churches has struggled to adjust to and understand her new role in society.<sup>2</sup>

Another set of reasons suggesting that a new orientation in Calvin's social thought may be in order stems from observations of recent developments in contemporary Reformed Christianity and culture discourse in North America. More specifically, there is a strand within the North American Reformed tradition that has been developing an alternative to the reigning Christ transforming culture position, which has dominated the social discourse in both North American and South African contexts in recent decades. This alternative represents a recovery

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<sup>2</sup> Relative to these observations, see, e.g., part four of Dirk J. Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, ed. Robert Vosloo, 3 vols., vol. 3, *Collected Essays* (Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA, 2009). For a more in-depth discussion, see Chapter 3.

and refinement of the early Reformed categories of two kingdoms and natural law. Supporters of this renewal and reforming effort include Calvin among the early Reformers making substantive appeal to such ideas in their theology and practice.

Considering its lengthier exposure to the machinations of a liberal society, North America provides South Africa with an informative example of the diverse ways in which Christians have evaluated and tried to find their place in a liberal society. Among the many perspectives at play, advocates of two kingdoms and natural law find theological grounds for affirming many aspects of a liberal democracy – not least of which is the promotion of religious freedom – without making such a political paradigm biblically normative. Can the South African context perhaps learn from a corner of the Reformed tradition that also has a history of grappling with questions of relating Christianity and culture, while utilising theological resources bequeathed by Calvin and the earlier Reformed tradition?

In view of Calvin's contested legacy and the perceived theological and practical exigencies of relating Christianity and culture in the South African context, this thesis is concerned with testing the claims of a different angle on Calvin's social thought proposed by certain Reformed voices in the North American discourse. Did Calvin make substantive use of the doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law, thereby providing a fuller rendering of his historical portrait and further resolution to his contested legacy in South Africa? If so, and in turn, can such a paradigm help expand the theological resources for Christians as they meet the challenges of life under South Africa's new liberal constitution?

In addition to the above motivating reasons for returning to the second generation Reformer in search of the Calvin of two kingdoms and natural law, another defining feature of this thesis is to retrieve Calvin through the contextual lens of his re-appropriation in the church struggle against apartheid. Because this thesis also seeks to re-read Calvin *in* the South African context and *for* the South African context, the natural point of re-entry seems to be his most recent appropriation in various movements associated with the 1970s and 1980s church struggle against apartheid. The emergence of the Calvin of church unity and socio-political liberation in the church struggle facing off against the Calvin of oppression and segregation of apartheid highlights most acutely his contested legacy in the South African context. Adding to such ambiguity is the fact that both portraits were the fruit of Calvin's so-called transformationist or Christianising vision of culture. This thesis intends to learn important lessons from Calvin's

reception during this period as it in turn seeks to recover a potentially more liberating and transformative portrait of Calvin for Christian life in South Africa today.

By studying the appropriation of Calvin in movements that challenged his reception for church-state relations under apartheid, questions regarding continuity and discontinuity between the historical Calvin and his later reception will come to the fore and be engaged. A number of questions arise, like: What kind of historical discernment is necessary in order to do justice to the contextual gap separating the world of the sixteenth-century and ours today, thereby avoiding unwarranted anachronisms? How much of Calvin's social thought, constructed in the Genevan world of a unified Christian state, is relevant to the challenges facing the West today, characterised by religious pluralism? Does Calvin's theology of church-state relations offer a positive enduring contribution for today, especially in the light of his prior negative reception? To what degree is the recovery of Calvin during a period of societal upheaval coloured by a political ideology (even if good) versus a faithful hermeneutic of historical inquiry? What is the value of reading Calvin in conversation with the early Reformed tradition, which also engaged and appropriated Calvin? Being pressed to answer such questions will heighten requisite sensitivity to both the promise and pitfalls inherent in yet another engagement of Calvin in yet another unique and challenging context in South Africa's socio-political history.

This thesis also intends to learn important lessons from Calvin's reception in the North American context. In addition to helping motivate the search for a different angle on Calvin's social thought, the North American context will also serve as an instructive conversation partner throughout both the historical and constructive parts of this thesis. By engaging a strand of Calvin's reception in the North American context, South Africa will be located within the broader Reformed phenomenon of ambiguity surrounding Calvin's reception on church-state relations, as evidenced particularly in the twentieth-century. More specifically, interaction with the historical contention over Calvin in the North American context will help to sharpen important questions relative to his most recent reception in South Africa, as well as to suggest answers. Familiarity with recent Calvinistic and Reformed social discourse in North America will also help orient this thesis to the wider landscape of contemporary ecumenical discourse on Christianity and culture. What is more, by taking special note of the recovery and development of the contemporary Reformed two kingdoms and natural law paradigm, particularly in the work of theologian and ethicist, David VanDrunen, this thesis will endeavor to set forth a (Calvin-

informed) normative<sup>3</sup> paradigm for Christian engagement of culture in South African's liberal society.

## 1.1. Background and motivation

### 1.1.1. Why this thesis in current discourse?

In 2009, the life of Calvin has received renewed attention on a global scale with the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of his birth. This fact has in part fueled a recent spate of publications relative to Calvin's monumental influence upon the contours of Western society.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the troves of Calvin studies from previous generations, the questions raised and claims made in the emergence of fresh 'cutting-edge' Calvin scholarship<sup>5</sup> invites further thoughtful interaction. This thesis is an enthusiastic attempt to engage such a ripe opportunity.

This thesis is particularly concerned with engaging Calvin's theology and practice on church-state relations as understood within the stream of his broader vision of Christianity and culture. This choice seems worthwhile for a number of reasons. For one, the Genevan 'social experiment' in which Calvin found himself deeply embroiled forced him to give a great degree of thought to questions of relating church and state. What is more, fewer men have been better qualified to speak on the doctrine of the church than Calvin, a theologian of massive intellectual ability as well as a practicing minister and qualified lawyer. Calvin was also uniquely qualified to dissect the machinations of the state, being a prominent leader in Geneva with a ready hand in its socio-political well-being. The fact that Calvin wrestled with matters of relating Christianity and culture, church and state, is given ample evidence in his *Institutes of Christian Religion*.

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<sup>3</sup> I suggest VanDrunen's paradigm as "normative" for the South African context in the sense that it provides an alternative standard to the dominant transformationist paradigm by which ongoing Christianity and culture discourse may be evaluated and critiqued.

<sup>4</sup> In South Africa, see, e.g., the articles published in the "Teologie 150+ en Calvin 500," *NGTT* 51, no. Supplementum (2010), and John de Gruchy, *John Calvin: Christian Humanist and Evangelical Reformer* (Cape Town: Lux Verbi, 2009). Indicative of the global interest, see, e.g., the Calvin 500 Series by David Hall, which includes David Hall, *Calvin in the Public Square*, The Calvin 500 Series (Philipsburg: P&R, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., H. J. Selderhuis, *The Calvin Handbook* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2009).; Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven [Conn.]; London: Yale University Press, 2009).; de Gruchy, *John Calvin: Christian Humanist and Evangelical Reformer*.; and Darryl Hart, *Calvinism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

History teaches us that Calvin's social thought has produced an enduring legacy. Calvin has left an indelible imprint upon Reformed tradition, as well as the Western society at large, which continues into the present. Hence, this thesis seeks to re-engage such a prolific and influential social thinker.

Considering Calvin on the subject of Christianity and culture is also relevant because of its contested nature in current discourse, both in the North American and South African contexts. What does the way forward look like for Christians grappling with life in a modern liberal democracy? This thesis seeks to provide some answer by returning to the historical Calvin. The South African context presents itself as an appropriate point of re-entry into Calvin studies, especially in view of his acutely contested legacy around apartheid. One pertinent example of a site of conflict over Calvin's legacy is the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University. This thesis gives special attention to specific voices associated directly and indirectly with this institution.

This thesis also takes note of Stellenbosch University's ongoing role as a leader in Reformed, Calvinistic, and broader ecumenical theological discourse. Illustrative of this is the 2009 conference held by the Faculty of Theology dedicated to the 500-year anniversary of Calvin. The broad theme of this conference was: "John Calvin's relevance for today?"<sup>6</sup> The celebration of Calvin's centennial also gave rise to a number of articles dedicated to Calvin in the 2009 September and December editions, as well as a 2010 supplemental edition, of *Ned Geref Teologiese Tydskrif (NGTT)*. One theme that emerges from this reflection on Calvin is his deeply ambiguous legacy relative to church-state relations. Piet Naudé has coined it the "two faces" of Calvin in the history of South Africa in his *NGTT* article, "The Two Faces of Calvin in South Africa". Here Naudé extends a call to preserve the better portrait of the Calvin emerging out of the civil disobedience movement in particular (and anti-apartheid movements in general).<sup>7</sup> This thesis seeks to engage what it perceives to be an ongoing challenge of rounding out the historical portrait of John Calvin for Christians facing new challenges in South Africa. This thesis wishes to do so in conversation with the contemporary Reformed Christianity and culture discourse in North America.

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<sup>6</sup> See "John Calvin's Relevance for Today?," <http://academic.sun.ac.za/tsv/calvin09/programme.htm> (accessed: March 24, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> See Piet Naudé, "The Two Faces of Calvin in South Africa: In Honor of the 500th Commemoration of John Calvin's Birth (Parts 1 & 2)," *NGTT* 50, no. 3 & 4 September and Desember (2009): 607-19.

### 1.1.2. Calvin in the context of other traditions

The theological contribution of Calvin to historic Christianity is commonly called Calvinism. Broadly speaking, Calvinism has found its systematic expression in the Reformed tradition. Seeing that this thesis intends to write from within the Reformed tradition, it is significant that its subject of inquiry – Calvin – is one of its chief architects.

Finding its roots in the Protestant Reformation, Calvinism has distinguished itself from Roman Catholicism on a number of theological levels, including papal control of the state (cf. *The Council of Trent*). Nevertheless, this thesis argues, along with many reputable scholars, that Calvin shared with the medieval church (cf. Thomas Aquinas) the basic working category of natural law. This thesis expects to find overlap at points between Calvin and the earlier Christian and medieval traditions.

The Calvinist tradition is also distinguishable from other Protestant churches arising out of the Reformation in that it built upon the early Reformation in Switzerland. Hence, Calvinism is a distinct tradition from Lutheranism, with its genesis in Germany under Martin Luther. In addition, the Calvinist system of doctrine embodied in the international Reformed movement – Dutch, Swiss, German, French, English, and Scottish – differs from other traditions such as Anglican, Methodist, and Baptist. This is evident in the Reformed confessional statements, such as the *Three Forms of Unity* and the *Westminster Standards*. Generally speaking, the Calvinist (Reformed) tradition differentiates itself from other Protestant traditions with respect to its form of church governance and the sacraments.

While the Calvinist tradition is distinct in many respects from other Protestant churches, it has also learned from and in turn taught the broader Protestant tradition. Pertinent to this thesis is the opinion of some that Calvin's doctrine of two kingdoms drew inspiration from both Augustine's "two cities" and Luther's doctrine of the "kingdoms of the left and right hands". In the contemporary Protestant discourse, there is the case to be made that Reformed social thought has exerted significant influence upon the broader Christian tradition, especially with respect to how church and state should relate. Traditions such as evangelicalism<sup>8</sup> and Radical Orthodoxy<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> See John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock, *Radical Orthodoxy* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1998).

have taken their cue, at least in part, from the transformationist paradigm argued by the majority of the contemporary Reformed tradition. At the same time, the contemporary Reformed transformationist tradition has received an implicit challenge from modern proponents of the radical reformation, such as Stanley Hauerwas.<sup>10</sup> This thesis seeks to take note of these important connections as well.

### *1.1.3. Why Calvin is important for theologians to engage today*

The indelible influence that Calvin has left upon the Reformed tradition, as outlined briefly above, is reason alone for modern theologians to engage him. In the introduction to John T. McNeill's edited version of Calvin's *magnum opus*, the *Institutes of Christian Religion* is given a place on the "short list of books that have notably affected the course of history, molding beliefs and behavior of generations of mankind."<sup>11</sup> Pieter Coertzen observes that the writings and viewpoints of Calvin have had a profound influence on the Western world, not least of which has been his steering it in the direction of freedom and democracy.<sup>12</sup> Hence, this thesis seeks to engage a theologian of no little influence, and concerning whom no little ink has been spared.

In addition to his broad influence upon Western history, Calvin has frequently been invoked as an authoritative arbitrator in doctrinal disputes in the Reformed tradition especially, but also in broader Christian traditions as well. The relationship between Christianity and culture is one area of contemporary Reformed inquiry in which significant reference to Calvin is made. Indicative of this are the disparate readings of Calvin relative to the doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law. Hence, this thesis wishes to engage a figure that continues to exert significant influence in shaping the contours of Christianity and culture debates.

For those theologians in South Africa, Calvin's contemporary currency is further enhanced by the dominant role he has played in influencing the Reformed tradition in South

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<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom : A Primer in Christian Ethics*, Second edition. ed. (London: SCM Press, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Jean Calvin, John Thomas McNeill, and Ford Lewis Battles, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Two vols., vol. One, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), xxix.

<sup>12</sup> See Pieter Coertzen, "Calvin Revisited: Acknowledgement and Challenge Re Church and State," *NGTT* 50, no. 1 & 2 September & Desember (2009): 567.

Africa. He is perhaps best known for his association with opposing brands of Calvinism that helped lend theological credibility to the rise and demise of apartheid. While Calvin certainly does have great lustre as a figure for historical inquiry, his deeply conflicted reception within the Reformed family of churches should temper any unqualified enthusiasm in re-engaging him for constructive purposes in the present. In this regard, Stellenbosch University church historian and theologian, Robert Vosloo reminds us that Calvin's ongoing importance in the context of South Africa should not be argued for uncritically and without sensitivity.<sup>13</sup> Any reengagement of Calvin must take into account his painfully mixed legacy in South Africa. According to Vosloo, any re-appropriation of Calvin should be done with openness to learning from our past mistakes, a keener appreciation of his original historical context and our socio-political agenda in reading him.<sup>14</sup>

In view of his disputed legacy, which is not a uniquely South African phenomenon, it seems that another good reason for engaging Calvin today is that his historical portrait beckons further sharpening. It will surely benefit the church to gain better clarity on a theologian of such calibre and influence. Hence, this thesis seeks to contribute to ongoing historical studies on Calvin in the area of his social thought.

#### 1.1.4. *Calvin's reception in North America*

As has been mentioned already, South Africa is not the only country to have been shaped by Calvinism in a significant way. While Calvin has had a considerable impact on the West at large, his influence has been particularly concentrated in those countries where the church has included a significant witness to the Reformed tradition, like North America<sup>15</sup>. North America has been chosen as a dialogue partner for South Africa, over the likes of Europe, in part because both countries share a contested legacy of Calvin and both countries face the challenge of recovering Calvin for Christian life in a modern liberal democracy. This thesis intends to interact with Calvin's appropriation in North America in order to illumine important aspects of

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<sup>13</sup> See Robert Vosloo, "Remembering John Calvin in South Africa Today?," *NGTT* 51, no. Supplementum (2010): 1.

<sup>14</sup> See *Ibid.*: 1-5.

<sup>15</sup> Defined as that region comprising the continental United States and Canada.

Calvin's legacy in South Africa. For one, the North American story will help contextualise South Africa in the historical unfolding of the broader Reformed tradition. Familiarity with Calvin's reception in the history of North America will serve to reinforce and sharpen issues surrounding Calvin's reception in the anti-apartheid church struggle. In turn, ongoing Calvinist and Reformed discourse around Christianity and culture in North America will also provide important theological categories and dialog partners to help formulate a forward-looking normative paradigm for Christian engagement of culture in South Africa.

For the purposes of introducing North America as a conversation partner, the following is a brief historical sketch of the ambiguous development of its Reformed social thought. For this outline, I look to theologian and ethicist, VanDrunen, and his recent volume, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (2010).<sup>16</sup>

VanDrunen sets the stage for his historical (and analytical) treatment of the Reformed tradition in North America by noting that “[f]or the better part of four centuries Reformed thinkers widely affirmed the doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law as foundational concepts for their social thought.”<sup>17</sup> Calvin is included among these early Reformed thinkers. Theoretically, the early Reformed tradition grounded social life, including the state, in God's work of creation and providence, and not in his work of redemption, even if in practice theory was not always worked out with complete coherence.<sup>18</sup> VanDrunen begins the tale of the contested early Reformed doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law in North America with the New England Puritan experiment exemplified by its chief defender John Cotton (1584-1652). While Cotton held to these standard Reformed doctrines, he nevertheless tended toward practical inconsistencies similar to Calvin and the Reformed orthodox, such as the civil suppression of religious heterodoxy for social peace. However, with the approach of the Revolutionary War (1776), the Virginian Presbyterians began to iron out some of these practical inconsistencies. With aspirations for religious disestablishment, the Virginia Presbyterians had by the 1780s aligned themselves with the swelling liberal American approach to church-state relations. Indicative of this was the 1788 revision of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, which stripped

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<sup>16</sup> See David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought*, Emory University Studies in Law and Religion (Grand Rapids/ Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>18</sup> See *Ibid.*, 15.

the civil magistrate of authority in church affairs and bound them to protect the rights of all citizens no matter their religious preference. Further strides in two kingdoms thinking came with the contribution of nineteenth-century Presbyterianism. Arising out of some Presbyterian debates in the Civil War era (1861-1865), theologians like Stuart Robinson wed the related ideas of *jure divino* Presbyterianism and the spirituality of the church, thereby ascribing the church the authority to exist and act according to Scripture alone.<sup>19</sup>

VanDrunen continues with his account of the evolution of Reformed social thought in North America by noting an ambiguous transition beginning around the turn of the twentieth-century, largely due to the influence of the Dutch polymath Abraham Kuyper. While Kuyper implicitly affirmed categories like two kingdoms and natural law, his lack of clarity with respect to how cultural endeavors are grounded in the created order, coupled with his theological handling of matters such as the Christianisation of culture, sowed the seeds for a new school of Reformed social thought at significant odds with the earlier tradition. Subsequently, and with the varying influences of the likes of Karl Barth, Herman Dooyeweerd, and Cornelius Van Til, Reformed social thought in North America has for the most part looked with suspicion upon the Calvinist doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law, if not rejecting them altogether.<sup>20</sup>

It seems fair to say that at a fundamental level both the South African and North American contexts have much in common with respect to the development of Reformed social thought, and hence the apparent value of bringing them into conversation with one another. Both contexts share a contested legacy with respect to the Calvinist and Reformed attempt to relate Christianity and culture. Both contexts share the dominant contemporary Reformed vision of Christ transforming culture.<sup>21</sup> And in both contexts, the church is faced with the challenge of working out this paradigm in the face of complex challenges presented by a liberal democratic state. One point of significant difference, however, is that the two kingdoms and natural law paradigm has not featured positively or constructively in the South African context. Hence the aspiration of this thesis, following the lead of a strand within the contemporary Reformed tradition in North America, is to explore the promise of recovering these doctrines for the South African discourse.

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<sup>19</sup> See *Ibid.*, 212-75, 47.

<sup>20</sup> See *Ibid.*, 276-422.

<sup>21</sup> See H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2001), 190-229.

*1.1.5. The challenge for church-state relations in a post-Constantinian context*

As long as Christians inhabit this world, the difficulties of relating Christianity to broader culture are inescapable. These challenges are perhaps most concentrated and best captured in terms of church-state relations.

As confessed in the Reformed tradition, God has established both the church and the state, and he rules over both in his Son. It is, therefore, little wonder that Christians throughout the ages have grappled with how to relate these two institutions. Depending on when in history, Christians have done so with different theological presuppositions, which have been shaped in no small way by their socio-political contexts. Since Constantine's rise to power in the fourth century, the church existed in a socio-political milieu characterised by a single unified Christian society, otherwise known as Christendom. This social reality began to change, however, with the advent of the European Reformation. Slowly the church began to lose its civil power, and the respective authority and jurisdiction of church and state began to separate. The disestablishment of the church and the constitutional enshrinement of religious pluralism are most dramatically illustrated by North America's experiment in liberal democracy, which dates back to the late eighteenth-century revolutionary war.

Throughout the transition from Christendom to modern liberal democracy the Reformed tradition in both North American and South African contexts has appealed to Calvin or at least a brand of Calvinism in support of its approach to culture in general, and the state in particular. Differing portraits of Calvin have emerged as Christians have encountered new and different social and political challenges. In the South African context, the Calvin of apartheid and the Calvin of the anti-apartheid church struggle movement are conspicuous examples.

The questions and challenges facing the church in a secular state today are in many ways distinct from the era of Constantinianism, a version of which has hung over in South Africa until as recently as the church struggle period of the 1970s and 1980s. For example, what voice, if any, does the church have in a religiously plural society? How should Christians be stemming the tide of secularisation? What should the church make of the marginalisation of biblical symbolism in the public square?

Widespread evidence suggests that Christians in North America and South Africa are wrestling profoundly with how to relate their faith to the realities of life in a post-Constantinian West. One South African theologian, Pieter Coertzen, suggests that that Calvin and his doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law may help.<sup>22</sup>

#### 1.1.6. *Personal motivation*

Civil unrest and tensions between church and state had a shaping influence upon my childhood in Cape Town, South Africa, just like anyone living in the thick of the social and political upheaval of the 1980s and 1990s. My upbringing in the (Anglican) church enhanced my sensitivity and curiosity regarding the religious legitimisation of the rise and fall of apartheid ideology. Hence, this thesis is in part an exploration into the Calvin indicted for being behind the segregation, oppression and poverty that I witnessed during apartheid, as well as a window into the so-called Calvin informing one of the most remarkable peaceful political transitions in modern history. What is more, having been exposed to a different historical portrait of Calvin in the United States, where I lived for a number of years, I have often wondered what might have been, had such a reading been taken seriously in South Africa – and what effect it could still have on the future.

My eagerness to reengage Calvin has also been heightened by my observations of his reception in the history of Protestantism in North America, especially in the recent past. I have at times been confounded by his curious legacy with respect to church-state relations on this continent as well. During my seminary studies, I was challenged by the social ethic of the late J. Gresham Machen, a prominent figure in the early days of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) (my former denomination), who defined the church's mission in a way that was out of step with the social gospel of his contemporaries. Furthermore, the work of VanDrunen (a former seminary professor of mine) has persuaded me that Calvin contributed significantly to shaping early Reformed doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law, and that such a historical claim deserves renewed attention for the benefit of contemporary Christianity and culture discourse. Hence, I would like to consider such a claim in light of the unique challenges posed by the South African context.

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<sup>22</sup> See generally Coertzen, "Calvin Revisited."

As a person with civic responsibilities, I share a desire common to all Christians of wanting to make a substantive contribution to society. I think such a desire is further elevated in a place like South Africa where political injustices of various kinds have such an immediate impact on everyday life. What can we as Christians do about them? How can we work proactively toward enacting laws for a more dignified and well-ordered society? Can we turn the tide of immorality? If so, what might that look like? Is the answer a return to some kind of Christianised society?

As a licensed preacher who desires to one day be an ordained minister, I also feel an acute duty to safeguard the gospel from certain views of church-state relations that may obscure it.

As someone who identifies with the Reformed tradition, I am motivated to re-examine one of the ‘founding fathers’ of my tradition, with the hopes of recovering a neglected part of my heritage.

## **1.2. Methodology**

### *1.2.1. Literary study*

In my thesis, I intend to engage in an in-depth literary study of the primary sources on Calvin’s doctrine and practice relative to church-state relations. This will include a study and analysis of his *Institutes of Christian Religion*, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, sermons (such as *Sermons on the Ten Commandments*), personal letters (found in *Letters of John Calvin, 4 Vols* and *Sex, Marriage, and Family in John Calvin’s Geneva* by Witte Jr.), and Genevan social documents such as the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*. In turn, I plan on engaging the pertinent secondary sources such as *The Calvin Handbook* by Selderhuis, *Sober, Strict, and Scriptural: Collective Memories of Calvin* edited by De Niet *et al*, *The Oracles of God: An Introduction to the Preaching of John Calvin* by Parker, and *Natural Law and Two Kingdoms* by VanDrunen. This thesis also intends to provide a brief engagement of Augustine and Luther as influential precursors to Calvin’s social thought.

In addition, seeing that I plan on examining those theological and rhetorical movements in South Africa critical of the Calvin of apartheid – as an instructive lens in returning to Calvin –

I will engage primary source writings of significant figures at the time, as well as the secondary literature of those who provide helpful analysis.

Finally, in arguing for Calvin's promise for making sense of Christian life in South Africa's fledgling liberal democracy, I set forth the defining contours of David VanDrunen's developed two kingdoms and natural law paradigm. In doing so, I bring him into critical dialogue at points with select South African theologians advocating the dominant transformationist position as well as those open to and already working with the makings of an alternative perspective.

### *1.2.2. Genre*

The primary genre of this thesis is one of historical-theological inquiry and analysis, which will in turn culminate in outlining some normative contours for Christian engagement of culture in the final chapter.

The chief concern of this thesis is the social thought of John Calvin and how he sought to relate Christianity and culture in general, and church and state in particular in sixteenth-century Geneva. More specifically, this thesis intends to test via historical-theological inquiry the claim made by a strand of the contemporary North American Reformed tradition that Calvin made substantive use of the doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law.

In revisiting the social thought of the second-generation Reformer, a defining feature of this thesis is the choice of Calvin's most recent reception in various Reformed movements associated with the church struggle against apartheid as the contextual lens back to the sixteenth-century world. In other words, this thesis and its attempt to recover Calvin with historical faithfulness will be critically informed by a historical-theological examination of Calvin's appropriation in the anti-apartheid church struggle.

Throughout the historical inquiry and analysis sections of this thesis, I hope to cultivate and employ a faithful historical hermeneutic in retrieving Calvin's social thought. The post-modern turn, in rightly chastising the failed modernist epistemological project, has taught us that neither the writers of our sources nor we the readers and receivers of them engage texts neutrally. Accordingly, I intend to pay special attention to reading Calvin with an awareness of his original context, taking note of significant factors in the development of his theology and practice: such

as his French refugee status and the givens of Christendom. In conjunction with lessons learned from Calvin's contested legacy as concretised in his reception in the anti-apartheid struggle, I hope to cultivate a responsible historical hermeneutic<sup>23</sup>.

### 1.3. Research questions and hypothesis

The research questions that this thesis endeavors to ask of the historical Calvin will focus on his theology and practice of church-state relations, understood within the context of his more general attempt at relating Christianity and culture.

To prepare for this undertaking, some important lessons will be learned from Calvin's use in the theological critique of church-state relations under apartheid. In studying Calvin's appropriation by various Reformed movements and theologians in the church struggle against apartheid, a number of questions centering on continuity and discontinuity with the historical Calvin, his prior use and abuse, will come to the fore and be addressed. Questions like: Has Calvin's contested legacy been adequately resolved, especially in view of the new challenges posed by South Africa's new conflicted democracy? Can Calvin be "re-used" in light of his abusive apartheid memory? Does a sixteenth-century French exile in Geneva have anything relevant to say to the church today? Can aspects of Calvin's social thought be extricated from his Christendom context? What is the value of reading Calvin along with the early Reformed tradition?

While the anti-apartheid church struggle will be the primary contextual and instructive lens through which Calvin will be revisited, this thesis nevertheless sees the value of comparing and testing lessons learned from the South African context with those gleaned from Calvin's contested reception in the North American context.

Having endeavored to learn important lessons from Calvin's previous reception, this thesis will in turn approach the historical Calvin by first considering some of the historical figures and traditions of social thought that either influenced him or exhibit resonance with his

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<sup>23</sup> See Robert Vosloo, "Reformed Tradition? Remarks on Reformed Theology in South Africa in Conversation with Alasdair MacIntyre," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 139 (March 2011): 18-31., and ———, "Quo Vadis Church History? Some Theses on the Future of Church History as an Academic Discipline," *Scriptura* 100 (2009): 54-64.

perspective. St. Augustine and Martin Luther in particular will be examined. Matters like the continuity between Calvin and the medieval natural law tradition will be explored as well.

Having considered some of the important precursors to Calvin's social thought, questions will then be asked concerning the interplay between the man himself and his times. Questions like: What aspects of Calvin's personality might have influenced the ways in which he sought to relate church and state? How was Calvin's social thought shaped in reaction to the socio-political disorder and pressures of his times? How did the socio-political milieu of Christendom shape Calvin's views on the relationship between church and state?

With respect to his theology proper, the question upon which the aspirations of this thesis turn is: Does Calvin give substantive theological evidence for working doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law? In order to answer this question, I will examine how Calvin applied various heads of doctrine derived from Scripture – like the doctrine of God, humankind, the church and the state – to the challenges presented by Christian life in broader culture, including life under the authority of the civil magistrate. To what degree did Calvin keep the church, in her official ministry, distinct from the state? To what extent did he permit them to interpenetrate each other? What was Calvin's conception of the kingdom of Christ? Did he restrict it to the church?

In seeking to test and analyse the claim of a Calvin of two kingdoms and natural law, this thesis will be particularly sensitive to the matter of Calvin's theological consistency. How uniform was Calvin's treatment of the relationship between church and state as he moved from theology to practice? In light of the answer to this question, how internally coherent was Calvin's systematic theological treatment of church-state relations? And depending on the degree of ambiguity and inconsistency found in Calvin's social thought, how much of it can be excused because he was a man of his times?

Assuming that historical evidence suggests Calvin did in fact make substantive use of the doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law, this thesis will in turn ask whether these aspects of Calvin's social thought are still relevant for the church today. In seeking to answer this question, the focus will once again shift to the North American context where the Calvinist and early Reformed two kingdoms and natural law doctrines have a positive and constructive legacy. What can the South African Reformed social discourse learn from considering the historical and theological justification for this paradigm, as well as its practical appeal as evidenced by its track

record in North American? More specifically, what is the potential value of introducing North American theologian, David VanDrunen's, refined Calvinist and early-Reformed two kingdoms and natural law paradigm into the South African context?

The hypothesis of this thesis is that Calvin's contested legacy in South Africa relative to relating Christianity and culture may indeed gain further resolution by recovering the Calvin of natural law and two kingdoms. In turn, the natural law and two kingdoms portrait of Calvin offers both a transformative critique and liberating alternative to the reigning Christ transforming culture paradigm for Christians trying to make sense of life in South Africa's struggling liberal democracy. Such suppositions draw upon aspects of Calvin's legacy as it has unfolded in concert with the North American experiment in liberal democracy, and especially in the recent development of the two kingdoms and natural doctrines by David VanDrunen.

#### **1.4. Promise in theological discourse today**

This thesis is motivated by the belief that the recovery of the Calvin of two kingdoms and natural law promises significant value for Christianity and culture discourse in South Africa today. This claim rests on a number of observations from Christianity and culture discourse in both South African and North American contexts. The first is that there is more to the portrait of Calvin's social thought than the so-called transformationist Calvin of apartheid and the Calvin of the church struggle. Secondly, the dominant contemporary Reformed approach to Christianity and culture betrays some significant biblical and theological inconsistencies, such as seeing Christ's peaceful kingdom as redeeming the sword-bearing state. Thirdly, many South African Christians are unsure of their responsibilities toward broader culture. And fourthly, the exigencies of Christian life in South Africa's new and contradicted liberal democracy makes addressing the previous concerns all the more pressing.

In view of such present needs in the South African context, among the chief promises of this thesis are, for one, to bring further resolution to Calvin's conflicted legacy by providing a more faithful historical-theological rendering of his social thought. Secondly, and closely related, this re-appropriation of Calvin promises to help explain the ambiguity and inconsistency in his own social thought. Such insights suggest additional possible reasons behind his contested legacy in the South African context as well as help in salvaging his contribution to ongoing

Christianity and culture discourse today. Thirdly, this thesis suggests that by recovering the Calvin of two kingdoms and natural law, and by understanding the basic theological compatibility of these doctrines with the basic tenets of a liberal democracy, Calvin's relevance for today is enhanced. Fourthly, Calvin's doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law promise to be a compelling alternative to the reigning transformation of culture paradigm. Not only does this alternative promise more theological consistency, but the practical outworking of this paradigm also offers liberating trajectories for Christian life in this world.

### **1.5. Argument and contribution**

In this final section of the introduction, I set forth the main argument and contribution of this thesis, which I do so in terms of a brief outline of the chapters that will follow.

In Chapter 2, I set the stage for considering Calvin's social thought by providing a taxonomy of contemporary Christianity and culture discourse. The purpose is to give a sense of where Calvin and his legacy fits in among the dominant perspectives at work in the Reformed and broader ecumenical traditions in South Africa as well as in the West more generally. In order to do this, I engage heavily with recent Christianity and culture discourse in North America. The insights of various individuals and movements in this context help articulate the major paradigms at play. Select voices, particularly that of David VanDrunen, help provide the basic outline for this taxonomy.

There is little doubt that the reigning paradigm in contemporary Reformed Christianity and culture discourse is some variation of Christ transforming culture.<sup>24</sup> Whether of a Kuyperian or Barthian persuasion, the general consensus is that the cultural realm outside of the church is in some way being redeemed by Christ and therefore incorporated into his kingdom. Put in terms of evaluating the merits of a liberal society, the benchmark for critique is some ideal based on the ultimate claims of the gospel, the bible or God's kingdom. This basic paradigm also pervades broader ecumenical discourse, which in many cases is the result of direct influence by the contemporary Reformed tradition.

While the transformationist paradigm continues to grow in popularity, it is nevertheless not without thoughtful and well-qualified critics. One astute critic is James Davison Hunter,

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<sup>24</sup> See, generally, Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*.

whose concern is that such an approach to relating Christianity and culture tends to capitulate to the world it wishes to change by politicising the faith. Hunter's alternative of "faithful presence" helps pave the way for introducing the distinctly different two kingdoms and natural law paradigm developed by the likes of David VanDrunen. Throughout this chapter, attention is given to those South African theologians who are sympathetic to aspects of this approach and therefore suggest a willingness to engage such a perspective in South African discourse.

In Chapter 3, I trace the legacy of Calvin's reception in South Africa with particular attention given to his appropriation by various Reformed theologians and movements in the church struggle against apartheid in the 1970s and 1980s. The primary reason for considering this most recent portrait of Calvin is to learn important lessons from it as I seek to revisit him in search of his so-called doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law. Such lessons suggest that another historical-theological inquiry into Calvin's social thought is indeed a worthy undertaking. They also provide important insights into cultivating a more faithful historical hermeneutic for further Calvin study.

In Chapter 4, I begin testing the claim to a Calvin of two kingdoms and natural law by considering the main early Christian, medieval and Reformation precursors to his social thought. The evidence suggests that by the time Calvin began formulating his views, the basic tenets for the doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law were already in place within the broader Christian tradition. In this chapter I conclude that Calvin did in fact make substantive use of a doctrine of two kingdoms, which, among others, evidences the influence of St Augustine and resembles strong continuity with the thinking of Martin Luther. For Calvin, God's redemptive kingdom finds institutional expression in the church only, while God's civil kingdom finds expression in all those institutions outside of the church, like the state. Both church and state are ordained by God, and are ruled by God's Son, but nevertheless possesses distinct authorities and jurisdictions. For instance, the church does not have the authority to bear the sword, while the state does. In other words, in certain crucial ways, church and state have contrasting ethics. With respect to jurisdiction, the church is not to meddle in state affairs and vice versa. Church and state have different purposes and ends. With two kingdoms affirmations like these, Calvin broke in significant ways with the prevailing Constantinian model of his time, which closely aligned the respective authorities and jurisdictions of church and state. His outlook also

distinguished himself from the Anabaptists of his day, who denied the divine legitimacy of the state and used Christian liberty as a pretense for civil disobedience.

When it comes to the moral basis for God's governance of the civil kingdom, I evaluate evidence that suggests Calvin appealed to the concept of natural law. In doing so, he found himself in continuity with many medieval theologians, like Aquinas, and the first generation Reformer, Martin Luther. Broadly speaking, for Calvin, natural law is God's moral law that is accessible to all humanity by virtue of their divine image-bearing. What is more, it makes little sense outside the context of the doctrine of two kingdoms. In other words, Calvin infers that the two doctrines are interlocking and should, therefore, be understood in light of the other. Among other things, natural law enabled Calvin to explain the great moral and cultural accomplishments of non-believers. It was for him that shared moral language that Christians and non-Christians speak, thereby enabling them to join forces in all manner of social and political endeavors for the common good. In addition, the evidence suggests that Calvin believed natural law, rather than Scripture, should serve as flexible standard for civil government.

While this history suggests that Calvin exhibited substantive doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law in his social thought, they were nevertheless not without tension and ambiguity, especially in the case of the former. This becomes especially apparent when one studies how he moved from theology to practice in Geneva. Hence, Chapter 4 ends with the question of whether or not tension in Calvin's doctrine of two kingdoms does indeed give way to crippling inconsistency, a matter of central concern in my analysis of Calvin's approach to church-state relations in Chapter 5.

In Chapter 5, I start by attempting to relieve some of the theological tension attending Calvin's social thought with a view to salvaging his doctrine of two kingdoms. While such tension may be relieved at points, I conclude that Calvin does not escape the charge of theological inconsistency altogether. This reality is perhaps best captured in terms of his theology and practise of insisting that the sword-bearing state helps enforce religious uniformity. Hence, I contend that it is perhaps more accurate to describe Calvin's vision for church-state relations as a hybrid of Luther's two kingdoms paradigm and the medieval "two-swords" model.

What then does this conclusion imply for Calvin's doctrine of two kingdoms? Are his insights in this regard perhaps now irrelevant and irredeemable for ongoing discourse today? In the latter half of Chapter 5, I provide a number of reasons for suggesting the ongoing relevance

and recoverability of this central aspect of Calvin's social thought. For one, I suggest that the reason why Calvin did not follow through more consistently on his two kingdoms insights is due to a combination of the kind of person he was and the times in which he lived. If modern readers of Calvin can appreciate Calvin's well-documented passion for order and the context of Christendom in which he lived, it is easier to understand and be sympathetic to the various ways in which he commingled the jurisdictions of church and state (and in so doing, theologised at cross-purposes with his at other times clear two kingdoms distinctions). What is more, and lending further weight to the claim that Calvin is salvageable for today, I provide evidence for the robust Calvin-informed and early Reformed two kingdoms and natural law legacy in the United States. While it is true that the two kingdoms and natural law paradigm fell on hard times during the twentieth-century, I take special note of the resurgence and development of this perspective in the twenty-first century, particularly through the work of David VanDrunen, which brings me to my final chapter.

Building upon the findings of the previous historical chapters, Chapter 6 suggests some parameters for a normative paradigm for Christian engagement of culture. Having tested and defended the claim to a Calvin of two kingdoms and natural law through the lens of his appropriation in the anti-apartheid church struggle, I in turn set forth an outline of a corresponding contemporary normative paradigm developed by North American Reformed theologian and ethicist, David VanDrunen. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a sense of the biblical and theological persuasiveness of VanDrunen's position, as well as suggest some potentially liberating implications of it for Christian engagement of culture for Christian life in South Africa's young democracy. The central claim of this chapter is that VanDrunen's critical development of the Calvin-informed two kingdoms and natural law doctrines promises to transform a redemptive transformationist tradition of relating Christianity and culture, church and state, in the South African context.

## CHAPTER 2

# CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE<sup>25</sup> IN CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

In this chapter I survey the major paradigms informing contemporary Reformed social thought in North America and South Africa, while also making relevant connections to wider ecumenical discourse. I open the discussion by framing it broadly in terms of recent Christian critiques of modern liberal society. In so doing, I concretise the ongoing debate about Christianity and culture in general and church-state relations in particular by linking it to the practical challenges facing the church in South Africa's young democracy, as well as introduce the North American context as a conversation partner. I then connect the contemporary critics of liberalism with the more recent transformationist legacy of the Reformed tradition in the North American and South African contexts, which in many ways anticipated, influenced or sympathises with arguments made by the former. Here I pay special attention to Abraham Kuyper – arguably the most influential twentieth-century figure in shaping contemporary Reformed social thought – and prominent neo-Calvinists sharing his basic Christ transforming culture vision. I also include comments on the social thought of Karl Barth, in light of his influential role in the South African context. In turn, I provide a sense of how contemporary Reformed social thought has influenced or at least resonates with broader ecumenical discourse. Finally, I describe the resurgence of the early Reformed two kingdoms and natural law paradigm, which provides a critical alternative to contemporary Reformed and broader ecumenical social thought. Throughout the taxonomy leading up to this final section, I draw attention to select

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<sup>25</sup> When using the term “culture” throughout this thesis, I have in mind all the various human activities and their products, as well as the way in which we interpret them and the language we use to describe them. In other words, culture is more than the stuff of nature. It includes, very importantly, the meaning we communicate to it. I use culture primarily to describe those broad range of activities – scientific, artistic, economic, political, sporting etc. – in which human beings engage this world. There is a sense in which everything we do is “cultural”. See David VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 32., and Ryan C. McIlhenny, "Christian Witness as Redeemed Culture," in *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective*, ed. Ryan C. McIlhenny (Philipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2012), 260-61.

figures that are in varying degrees critical of the standard transformationist paradigm and accordingly suggest that refinement or even an alternative in the two kingdoms direction is needed.

Since this thesis is seeking to follow the lead of, as well as introduce in the South African context, contemporary Reformed two kingdoms thought in North America, I make use of one of their leading proponents, David VanDrunen, in providing the general outline for the taxonomy in this chapter. VanDrunen sees himself as extending the age-old debate concerning how Christians should relate to the world around them. Hence, his sketch of contemporary Christian social engagement enters into conversation with other taxonomies of Christian engagement of culture, such as H. Richard Niebuhr's monumental work, *Christ and Culture*.<sup>26</sup> Where appropriate, I supplement VanDrunen's survey with my own related observations from the South African and North American contexts.

## 2.1. Contemporary critics of liberalism

A liberal society understood in the classic sense is a free, open, tolerant and pluralist social order: one characterised by liberty of speech and religion, democratic participation in the political process, free markets and the rule of law. This way of ordering society is dependent on the idea that "some sort of limited, common morality is possible in the social realm despite religious pluralism".<sup>27</sup>

The United States is one social experiment that since its early days has generally aspired to this ideal of a liberal society. Many formerly non-liberal societies now aspire to democracy, including the likes of South Africa with the advent of its new constitution in 1996. It is an ideal that has nevertheless received scathing critique from a number of prominent Western

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<sup>26</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 11., and Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*. Certainly VanDrunen's taxonomy is by no means an exhaustive treatment of such a complex and vast field of inquiry, and could be supplemented and enhanced by a number of valuable works on the subject. (Nevertheless, this should not detract from the unique value of VanDrunen's work, which defends the historic two kingdoms position and critiques other reigning paradigms from this perspective.) Indicative of the recent proliferation of scholarship on Christianity and culture coming out of more ecumenical circles (yet exhibiting some remarkable similarities to VanDrunen's articulation of the two kingdoms paradigm) is James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>27</sup> See David VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate: Reformed Social Thought and the Contemporary Critiques of the Liberal Society," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 9, no. 2 (2006): 219.

philosophers and theologians in recent times, many of whom adhere to something of a robust orthodox Christian theology. According to VanDrunen, the problem that such critics have with liberalism is not its abuses or the particular freedoms or characteristics associated with it (which one could embrace without having to embrace liberalism itself). Rather, the focus of attack is on that core feature of liberalism: the notion of a *common* social life built upon no shared religious or philosophical foundation.<sup>28</sup> In order to provide a sense of the substance of such a critique, I offer a few examples of its leading exponents, who have not only influenced but also raised important questions and challenges for various Christian traditions – including the Reformed – in both the North American and South African contexts.

As a pioneer in the contemporary critique of liberalism, philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre's most influential and radical work is arguably his 1981 volume, *After Virtue*, in which he wages a devastating critique upon modern, post-Enlightenment, liberal, secular, value-free Western society. In doing so, he challenges not only aspects of the reigning mode of moral inquiry but questions its very core. In MacIntyre's estimation contemporary moral discourse lacks the rational grounds for arbitrating rival moral claims or reaching moral consensus.<sup>29</sup> This is because modern society has moved away from a pre-modern social ethic built on a common human *telos* informing human life, and the assumption that individual human identity is bound up in the narratives of various communities.<sup>30</sup> In MacIntyre's analysis, the intellectual and cultural disaster of modernity gave rise to a liberal society that presupposes the "autonomous moral subject" as the starting point for moral discourse<sup>31</sup>, which has in turn produced moral degeneration and dismal hopes for human flourishing. He suggests that the remedy lies in a return to a kind of pre-modern communitarianism.<sup>32</sup> In the final words of his classic, he writes: "We are not waiting for a Godot, but for another – doubtless very different – St. Benedict."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See *Ibid.*: 219-20.

<sup>29</sup> See Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue : A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 8, 11.

<sup>30</sup> See *Ibid.*, 59; generally chapter 5.

<sup>31</sup> See *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>32</sup> "For MacIntyre, then, the reintroduction of rationality to morality by means of the concept of a human *telos* can be brought about only by rejecting the abstract, ghostly emotivist self and regarding the person as necessarily implicated in and defined by his social, cultural and historical circumstances. These three elements (moral judgments as factual, a human *telos*, and the encumbered self) were central to the moral understanding of Ancient Greece, and formed the original and sense-conferring context for the incoherent fragments of morality with which modernity is left; so it is to that context that MacIntyre turns for advice on how to reconstruct such a framework

Another influential contemporary critic of the liberal society is Stanley Hauerwas, who acknowledges his debt to MacIntyre.<sup>34</sup> Many themes similar to MacIntyre's emerge in his writings. He too laments the chaotic and morally fractured modern world, which has been shaped by the exaltation of the individual and an attempt to provide a foundation for the moral life without the contingencies of history and community. Hauerwas rejects the quest for a universal, common human morality rooted in human nature. Instead, he proposes an ethic rooted in the narrative of the Christian community. In dismissing the natural law social ethic, he argues for a distinctively *Christian* social ethic, grounded in the history of a particular people and in a narrative that forms their community. The Christian life is first and foremost about the communal life of the church and about reflecting the ethic of God's kingdom. When it comes to the state, Christians are to witness to the world about the peaceable alternative of God's kingdom to the insufficiency of a politics built on violence and falsehood.<sup>35</sup> A key component of Hauerwas's critique of liberalism is his attack on capitalism.<sup>36</sup>

Also echoing the above lines of critique is an increasingly prominent movement known as Radical Orthodoxy (RO). The origin of this movement can most likely be traced to what is probably still RO's most influential text, John Milbank's 1990 *magnum opus*, *Theology and Social Theory*. While professing common cause with MacIntyre's attack upon modern, liberal, secular society, he goes further than MacIntyre in critiquing the virtue traditions of *both* antiquity

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within modern culture"; see Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* (Oxford [England] ; Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1992), 80. See also VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 8., and ———, "The Importance of the Penultimate," 221. On the debate surrounding the communitarian critique of liberalism in 1980s, see, e.g., Mulhall and Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians*. For critical perspectives on MacIntyre and debate over the evolution of his thought since *After Virtue*, see, e.g., John Horton and Susan Mendus, *After MacIntyre : Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Cambridge [England]: Polity, 1994).

<sup>33</sup> See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 263.

<sup>34</sup> Among more immediate influences are Karl Barth and Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder; see Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, xix-xxv.

<sup>35</sup> Among Hauerwas's extensive writings over the past few decades, these themes find expression in perhaps his most famous work, *Ibid*. For an example of his earlier critique of liberalism, see Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character : Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981). Among his other works, see ———, *Learning to Speak Christian* (London: SCM Press, 2011).; ———, *After Christendom? : How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991).; and Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens : Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989). See also VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate," 221-22.

<sup>36</sup> See, e.g., Stanley Hauerwas, *A Better Hope : Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2000).

and modernity.<sup>37</sup> Milbank is concerned with overcoming the pathos of modern theology and its capitulation to secular social theories instead of the metadiscourse of theology.<sup>38</sup> He is of the opinion that the notion of the secular is closely related to classical liberalism, both of which depend on ideas of autonomous human reason and an atomistic, individualistic view of society (and are in reality heretical parasites on orthodox Christianity).<sup>39</sup> Indicative of other proponents of RO, Milbank asserts that Christian orthodoxy is the only solution to secular nihilism and Christian Platonism is the necessary ontological basis for cultural life.<sup>40</sup> Advocates of RO have also derided the notion of a common morality or universal ethics built upon ideas such as natural law.<sup>41</sup> What is more, when it comes to economics, like Hauerwas, RO proponents have also been sharply critical of capitalism and propose a specifically Christian alternative to economic life; one supporter even going as far as arguing for the church to be the basis of a political economy.<sup>42</sup>

Another important contemporary voice that offers a more modest and mitigated critique of liberalism is Oliver O'Donovan, particularly as argued in his work, *The Desire of the Nations*. He argues for a renewed theological approach to politics that entails a careful and qualified recapturing of the Christendom idea. According to O'Donovan, the Christian state, which may be disclosed from time to time, is a foretaste of the eschatological age, and need not be coercive.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory : Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK ; Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 5. For a sense of the central claims of the movement and its major early contributors, see Milbank, *Radical Orthodoxy*.

<sup>38</sup> "The pathos of modern theology is its false humility. For theology, this must be a fatal disease, because once theology surrenders its claim to be a metadiscourse, it cannot any longer articulate the word of the creator God, but is bound to turn into the oracular voice of some finite idol, such as historical scholarship, humanist psychology, or transcendental philosophy. If theology no longer seeks to position, qualify or criticize other discourses, then it is inevitable that these discourses will position theology: for the necessity of an ultimate organizing logic... cannot be wished away"; see Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 1.

<sup>39</sup> See, e.g., *Ibid.*, 1-3.

<sup>40</sup> See *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>41</sup> See, e.g., James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy : Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004), 240-41.

<sup>42</sup> See, student of Hauerwas, D. Stephen Long, *Divine Economy : Theology and the Market*, Radical Orthodoxy Series (London ; New York: Routledge, 2000), 260. Relative to these points, see VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate," 222-23.

<sup>43</sup> See Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations : Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996)., and VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate," 223.

In VanDrunen's estimation, the common thread that runs through the arguments of the above critics is their interest in promoting an alternative social order, one that is specifically Christian in its vision and that seeks to recover or reinvent some form of Christendom.<sup>44</sup> Another way of putting it is that they all take their aim at liberalism from an *ultimate perspective*, critiquing it as a worldview or all-encompassing vision from the standpoint of God's reign in Christ. In short, they "all desire a social order that, in one way or another, manifests the eschatological kingdom of Christ in the here and now."<sup>45</sup>

One final contemporary critic of liberalism for consideration is the Roman Catholic political scientist Robert Kraynak. His work, *Christian Faith and Modern Democracy* (2001), distinguishes him from the other critics mentioned above. While sounding similar to them at certain points – such as in his claim that modern liberal democracy lacks the inherent resources to warrant its most serious moral claims – he nevertheless goes beyond Hauerwas and other critics of liberalism in a very crucial respect. In addition to arguing that liberal democracy should not be deemed *the* Christian social arrangement, he asserts that *no* particular social construction or political ideology can be identified with Christianity. He does so by appealing to Augustine's two-cities doctrine and its subsequent development through the likes of Martin Luther and John Calvin. While Christianity can provide a religious foundation for government, Kraynak nevertheless contends that the ordering of the temporal City of Man should be a function of (penultimate) prudence, rather than the outworking of some (ultimate) theological, spiritual ideal. "In other words, the choice of one political system over another is to be based on prudential decisions about what means will best promote the limited ends of the temporal realm rather than discovering the Christian political ideal."<sup>46</sup>

Kraynak's contribution to contemporary discourse is noteworthy in view of the aspirations of this thesis. He provides a basis for asking questions that challenge the thrust of contemporary Reformed social thought in both the North American and South African contexts.

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<sup>44</sup> VanDrunen qualifies this assertion with the following: "A positive appropriation of the Christendom idea is more explicit in O'Donovan and RO. Hauerwas has gone to great lengths to attack the Christendom idea, but he himself has admitted that his target has been the specifically Constantinian manifestation of Christendom and that he in fact does uphold a vision of Christendom in his seeking a society fully integrated under Christ's Lordship"; see VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate," 223.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.: 223-24.

<sup>46</sup> See Robert P. Kraynak, *Christian Faith and Modern Democracy: God and Politics in the Fallen World* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2001), and VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate," 224.

Can a Christian who is inclined to separate church and state still be a critic of liberalism's flaws without insisting upon a Christianised alternative? What is more, can a Christian recognise and critique the shortcomings of liberalism, and then in turn provide a theologically-informed argument for liberalism as the prudentially best option for ordering society in a fallen world?<sup>47</sup>

Having opened my discussion of the contemporary Christianity and culture discourse in terms of recent theological and philosophical critiques leveled at modern liberal democracy, I now consider the contribution of recent Reformed social thought.

## **2.2. Contemporary Reformed social thought: Kuyper, Barth and (neo-)Calvinism**

In VanDrunen's estimation, the controlling paradigm in more recent Reformed social thought is perhaps best described as an extension of Abraham Kuyper's legacy.<sup>48</sup> When applying this claim to the South African Reformed context, it must be noted that Kuyper's reception here has been more contested than in North America. While an adaptation of his social thought enjoyed considerable currency in the heyday of Afrikaner Calvinism, Kuyperianism came under significant critique among Reformed supporters of the anti-apartheid church struggle – especially with regard to its natural theology and doctrine of sphere sovereignty.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, what I intend to show in this subsection is that the predominant contemporary Reformed paradigm for Christian engagement of culture in South Africa bears much family resemblance to the basic Kuyperian approach, otherwise known as transformationism or neo-Calvinism – an approach to relating Christ and culture that lived on into the anti-apartheid church struggle and continues into the present day. Hence, whether of a more Kuyperian or Barthian persuasion, contemporary Reformed social thought in both North America and South Africa shares with contemporary critics of liberalism an overarching desire to make broader society conform to some ultimate Scriptural ideal.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> See VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate," 24-25.

<sup>48</sup> See Ibid.: 225.

<sup>49</sup> See Jaap Durand, "Church and State in South Africa: Karl Barth Vs. Abraham Kuyper," in *On Reading Karl Barth in South Africa*, ed. Charles Villa-Vicencio (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).

<sup>50</sup> See VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate," 225.

### 2.2.1. Abraham Kuyper's legacy

Like Hauerwas and other critics of liberalism, the Kuyperian tradition has historically encouraged Christians to evaluate and transform society and culture from an ultimate (kingdom of Christ) perspective. Accordingly, it is the responsibility of Christians to identify the divergent epistemological starting points of those around them and expose the clash of antithetical worldviews. Fundamental to Kuyper's approach to the relationship between the Christian faith and public life is that all knowledge flows from one basic starting point. The correct starting point is that God is sovereign over all things, an affirmation that only the regenerate can make. Because believers and non-believers reason from ultimate antithetical points of departure, resultant worldviews are evaluated in terms of the radical contrast between truth and falsehood, hence worldview against antithetical worldview.<sup>51</sup>

Growing out of the conviction that there is no such thing as rational neutrality, Kuyper and his followers have sought to make manifest the eschatological kingdom of Christ in every facet of society and culture. In practice, and with respect to the relationship between church and state, Kuyperians have generally affirmed the freedom of religion (on principled theological grounds) while at the same time espousing a kind of Christian leavening of the state. In the case of Kuyper, while not insisting that official government embrace Christianity or that the majority of society profess the Christian faith, a "Christian society" is nevertheless one in which "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."<sup>52</sup>

Integral to Kuyper's social vision is his complex doctrine of common grace, that non-redemptive grace, which enables the whole human race to continue the work of cultural

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<sup>51</sup> See, e.g., Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1931), Chapter 1. This approach to evaluating public life influenced the way Kuyper interpreted Western history. While not overlooking the cultural gains of earlier history, he nevertheless saw the Calvinist Reformation as the great turning point and the catalytic fountain for nearly every laudable aspect of modern culture, such as the enjoyment of constitutional liberties. At the same time, he saw the unfolding of subsequent European history, especially embodied in the French Revolution, as a series of destructive "isms" welling up from the broken cisterns of anti-Christian presuppositions. In response to the perceived threat of non-Christian worldviews gaining ascendancy in the public square, Kuyper developed a grand vision for the re-Christianisation of Dutch society. See VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate," 225-26.

<sup>52</sup> See Abraham Kuyper, "Common Grace," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, Mich. Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans ; Paternoster Press, 1998), 199., and VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate," 225-27.

development ordained by God in the creation mandate. This gave him theological warrant to grant the cultural endeavors of non-believers a certain level of respect as well as justification for cooperative efforts among people of different worldviews. However, Kuyper did not believe common grace should remain and function independently of redemptive grace. Rather, he believed that special grace ought to leaven common grace to enhance its functionality. Accordingly, the “Christian spirit must modify, transform, and Christianise the various organic connections of human life upheld by common grace”.<sup>53</sup> This intersection of common and special grace flowed from Kuyper’s conviction that Christ, being both creator and redeemer, holds common and special grace in a higher unity. Hence, Christians have no basis for dividing life into two distinct realms of thought, and thereby separating religion from civil life.<sup>54</sup> All of life is Christ’s kingdom. Any attempt to impose a kind of “dualism” upon the religious “monism” of all of life must be rejected.<sup>55</sup>

While Kuyper and his followers have been able to appreciate the cultural accomplishments of non-believers on the basis of common grace, their social vision – like the critics of liberalism above – has nevertheless emphasised the critique and intellectual breakdown of modern society. This central thrust is based on Kuyper’s recognition of antithetical epistemological starting points and worldviews, which makes neutrality in the social realm impossible. Hence, the associated vision is to transform every sphere of society in accordance with Christian (Calvinist) presuppositions – the correct starting and ending points.<sup>56</sup>

The Kuyperian social vision has enjoyed something of a global reach, with prominent followers emerging in the Netherlands, North America and South Africa. One way in which Kuyper’s influence can be shown is by tracing it through the mediation of his successor, Herman Dooyeweerd, a law professor and philosopher at the Free University of Amsterdam – who developed Kuyper’s thought in a distinct direction. For instance, he spoke of the Christian

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<sup>53</sup> See Kuyper, "Common Grace," 188-89., and VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate," 227.

<sup>54</sup> Kuyper famously exclaimed: ‘Oh, no single piece of our mental world is to be hermeneutically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’’; see Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," in *Abraham Kuyper : A Centennial Reader*, 488.

<sup>55</sup> See Kuyper, "Common Grace," 171-73, 83-87., ———, "Sphere Sovereignty," 488., ———, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 53-54., and VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate," 227.

<sup>56</sup> See VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate," 225, 27. For more on Kuyper’s social thought, and more in terms of his doctrines of creation ordinances and sphere sovereignty, see ———, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 276-315.

“ground motive” for all of temporal life being “creation-fall-redemption”, in sharp contrast to the autonomous human thought of non-Christians. With respect to politics, Dooyeweerd formulated the Christian view of the state in terms of this antithesis. In short, there is nothing like a neutral sphere in any aspect of life: all of society is connected to the kingdom of God – the root of all social structures. Like Kuyper, Dooyeweerd affirmed the role of common grace in curbing sin and sustaining creation ordinances. And yet, he also rejected the separation of common grace and special redemptive grace, Christ being the religious root of both.<sup>57</sup>

Dooyeweerd’s role in the extension of Kuyper’s legacy has not been limited to North America<sup>58</sup>, but has also featured in the South African context<sup>59</sup>. Indicative of this has been scholarship that emerged out of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Potchefstroom (now the University of the North West, Potchefstroom). Dooyeweerd gained prominence through the mediation of H.G. Stoker, a significant contributor to the theological legitimisation of apartheid.<sup>60</sup>

The intersection of Dooyeweerd’s social thought with apartheid theology draws attention to another chapter in Kuyper’s legacy, which is his close association with Afrikaner Calvinism in South Africa. The general consensus among Reformed theologians commentating on apartheid in the last few decades is that Kuyper did indeed provide some impetus – especially in terms of his doctrines of creation ordinances and sphere sovereignty – for Afrikaner Calvinism and its theology of racial segregation. The degree to which lines of continuity can be drawn between Kuyper and Afrikaner Calvinism, however, continues to be a matter of debate.<sup>61</sup>

One line of obvious continuity that is perhaps not been highlighted as it should by Reformed theologians amidst so much attention given to those “apartheid-friendly” – and

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<sup>57</sup> See VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate," 227-28.

<sup>58</sup> See “The Kuyperian Legacy (I): Herman Dooyeweerd and North American Calvinism” in ———, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 348-85.

<sup>59</sup> See Charles Villa-Vicencio, "Introduction: Reclaiming the Christian Heritage," in *On Reading Karl Barth in South Africa*, ed. Charles Villa-Vicencio (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 10.

<sup>60</sup> See Ernst M. Conradie, "Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for Contemporary Ecotheology: Some Reflections from within the South African Context," in *Creation and Salvation: Dialogue on Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for Contemporary Ecotheology*, ed. Ernst M. Conradie (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 17, 20, 74. See also Nico Vorster, *Restoring Human Dignity in South Africa* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom Theological Publications, 2007), 92.

<sup>61</sup> For more recent commentary on Kuyper’s legacy in South Africa, see generally Conradie, "Abraham Kuyper's Legacy.", and Piet Naudé, *Neither Calendar nor Clock: Perspectives on the Belhar Confession* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 25-32.

therefore dispensable – aspects of Kuyper’s theology, is that Afrikaner Calvinism worked with the fundamental Kuyperian conviction that Christ or Christianity should transform culture. While it is generally beyond dispute that the theological program involving a conception of creation and salvation resulting in the transformation of church and society along racial and ethnic lines is morally abhorrent and contrary to the witness of Scripture, the fact remains that it was significantly driven by the transformationist worldview of Kuyper. And the Reformed tradition in South Africa did not dispense with this transformationist impulse like it did apartheid. Indicative of its ongoing acceptability is the overarching role it played in the anti-apartheid church struggle, and its enduring significance in Reformed Christianity and culture discourse in South Africa today.

Evidence of Kuyper’s influence upon the anti-apartheid church struggle is perhaps best captured in terms of his appropriation as a theological ally in the fight for social justice in the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC; established 1881) and the Dutch Reformed Church of Africa (DRCA; established 1910). Both the DRMC and the DRCA were formed to “house” people of color in apartheid South Africa, and they later joined to become the Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa (URCSA) in 1994. Among the formative theological forces informing a more “liberating” recovery of Kuyper within the ranks of what was then known as the DRMC, are the Alliance of Black Reformed Christians in South Africa (ABRECSA), the Confessing Circle (Belydende Kring<sup>62</sup>), and the likes of individual DRMC theologians, Russel Botman, Allan Boesak and Hannes Adonis. In turn, both ABRECSA and the Confessing Circle influenced the basic tenets of the DRMC’s Belhar Confession, thereby ensuring that Kuyper’s legacy of justice for the oppressed became part and parcel of the basic confessional tenets of the URCSA. Here is an instance of “Kuyper” against “Kuyper” and “Kuyper” for “Barth”. In short, it is undeniable that Kuyper is found in the theological underpinnings of URCSA, a church that was at the forefront of the struggle against the theological justification for racism, and one

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<sup>62</sup> Formerly known as the Broederkring. In 1974, through the influence of the Christian Institute and Beyers Naudé, a number of black ministers established a ‘Broederkring’. This was an effort to organise a biblical, Reformed and relevant witness in the struggle for justice, liberation and reconciliation within the DRC family context. Due to, among other things, accusations of exclusivity, the Broederkring decided to change its name to the Belydende Kring (the Confessing Circle) in 1983. See Christoff Pauw, "Anti-Apartheid Theology in the Dutch Reformed Family of Churches: A Depth-Hermeneutical Analysis" (Vrije Universiteit, 2007), 179-82.

which continues to lead the way among the Dutch Reformed family of churches in the quest for social justice and transformation as confessed in the symbol of *Belhar*.<sup>63</sup>

These brief historical remarks on Kuyper's legacy help provide the necessary theological backdrop for understanding arguably the most influential twentieth-century voice in shaping contemporary Reformed – and perhaps even ecumenical – Christianity and culture discourse. Before considering more contemporary appropriations and developments of Kuyper's legacy in both the North American and South African contexts, I examine briefly another formidable influence in the twentieth-century Reformed world that came after Kuyper, namely Karl Barth. While his theology has enjoyed global exposure, I nevertheless focus here on his reception in South Africa. One reason for this is that Barth has helped highlight both oppressive as well as liberating strands in Kuyper's theology by virtue of their common participation – often on opposing sides – in the anti-apartheid discourse.<sup>64</sup> What is better known is the Barthian exposure of Kuyper's so-called oppressive side. What I highlight in the next subsection, however, is a significant point of continuity between Kuyper and Barth in terms of their common basic vision of Christ transforming culture.

### 2.2.2. Abraham Kuyper and Karl Barth: continuity and discontinuity

Since the advent of the church struggle against apartheid, Barth has played a significant – though also controversial and ambiguous – role in shaping Reformed social thought in South Africa.<sup>65</sup> Among the themes in Barth's theology to which Dirk J. Smit assigns enduring importance are the moral, social and political responsibilities that attach themselves to the church and believers as they fulfill the *missio Dei*. For Barth, the gospel translates into human freedom,

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<sup>63</sup> See Leslie van Rooi, "The Legacy of Abraham Kuyper and Its Impact on the Theology and Ecclesial Identity of the URCSA: A Church Historical Overview," in *Creation and Salvation*, 235-45., and H. Russel Botman, "Is Blood Thicker Than Justice? The Legacy of Abraham Kuyper for South Africa," in *Religion, Pluralism, and Public Life*, ed. Luis E. Lugo (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 341-62. See also J.C. Adonis, "The Role of Abraham Kuyper in South Africa: A Critical Historical Evaluation," in *Kuyper Reconsidered: Aspects of His Life and Word*, ed. Cornelius van der Kooi (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1999).

<sup>64</sup> For background on the prominent and conflicting influences of Kuyper and Barth in South Africa, see Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 241. On the prominence of Kuyper and Barth's thought upon the South African Reformed social thought, see Durand, "Church and State in South Africa: Karl Barth Vs. Abraham Kuyper," 121-37.

<sup>65</sup> See generally Naudé, *Neither Calendar nor Clock*, and *On Reading Karl Barth in South Africa*, ed. Charles Villa-Vicencio (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).

justice and peace in society. What is more, Smit notes the attractiveness of Barth's moral ontology: that alternate, critical, prophetic, challenging and undermining ontology, which is at odds with popular opinion on what the role of the church should be in the new pluralist democratic South Africa.<sup>66</sup> In speaking to Barth's influence upon the Reformed tradition in South African as a whole, Smit observes that Barth is perhaps unrivalled when it comes to his understanding of confession and appealing to the bible in the face of social challenges.<sup>67</sup> In the midst of the church struggle, Charles Villa-Vicencio once wrote: "We have discovered that what has until now been regarded as secondary in the theology of Karl Barth – namely, his quest for a theological basis for his sociopolitical engagement – is, in fact, primary. We are also discovering that this is true not only with regard to the theology of Karl Barth but also with regard to the theology of many of the great theologians."<sup>68</sup>

In VanDrunen's estimation, while Kuyper introduced a significant element of tension to the historic two kingdoms doctrine by simultaneously holding to something like the early Reformed position and espousing the notion of a "Christianised" society, Barth made a radical break. While Kuyper advocated a kind of "Christian" culture, he still sought to ground social and political life in the created order through his doctrines of divine ordinances and special and common grace,<sup>69</sup> Barth rejected the theological foundation under-girding these doctrines for a Christological understanding of all of reality. More specifically, Barth resisted the notion of a "Christian" culture built on Kuyper's common-special grace distinction and an understanding of a sharp epistemological antithesis between Christians and non-Christians. Underlying these convictions is his assertion that to know God as creator is also to know him as redeemer, for both orders of creation and redemption are united in Christ. God deals with all people as creator *and* redeemer in the purview of his *one* kingdom. Both church and state share a higher unity in Christ (and his kingdom). Accordingly, he rejected the idea of a non-redemptive preserving

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<sup>66</sup> See Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 288-91.

<sup>67</sup> See *Ibid.*, 307. Smit has written a number of articles on the reception of Karl Barth in South Africa which is evidenced in ———, *Essays on Being Reformed*.

<sup>68</sup> See Villa-Vicencio, "Introduction: Reclaiming the Christian Heritage," 5.

<sup>69</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, chapter 7. Durand argues that while Kuyper approaches more the Lutheran than Calvinist idea of two kingdoms, he nevertheless "continues to support the Reformed conviction that sanctification embraces the whole life of the believer and is not restricted to the institutional life of the church or the religious life of the individual"; see Durand, "Church and State in South Africa: Karl Barth Vs. Abraham Kuyper," 127.

grace and was unwilling to give Christians the higher ground in their cultural endeavors in the world. Instead, he relativised the epistemological and existential gap between Christians and non-Christians on account of their common existence under the gracious, electing, redemptive reign of Christ. Hence, Barth could speak of the cultural realm as being good and true insofar as it was indeed “Christian”, that is, part of the kingdom of God, grounded in Christological grace and witnessing to the redemptive Word of God (even apart from any explicitly Christian profession). In other words, culture is “Christian” insofar as any goodness and truth is found in it, which can only be explained in terms of the creating *and* redeeming work of Christ.<sup>70</sup>

In the South African context, Barth’s theology was used to critique those doctrines – like creation ordinances and sphere sovereignty – that helped lend theological support to apartheid. In this regard, there is a sharp discontinuity between Barth and Kuyper. At the same time there is a significant continuity between Barth and Kuyper when it comes to relating Christ and culture. A point that is often lost in the midst of the opposition set up between Barth and Kuyper, is that they shared in common a vision for Christ transforming culture. They both held to the basic notion of a Christianised society. For many in the Reformed community in South Africa, Barth succeeded in throwing off the shackles of natural theology and sphere sovereignty, thereby giving back to a once muted institutional church its unbridled prophetic voice. In doing so, he recovered continuity with Calvin and the early Reformed tradition. At the same time, those sympathetic to a transformationist paradigm have appreciated Kuyper’s notion of the organic church in overcoming the weakness of Barth’s notion of the “anonymous” Christian in the public square.<sup>71</sup> Hence, it is perhaps fair to say that the dominant contemporary Reformed social paradigm in South Africa is an amalgamation of the “best” of both Kuyper and Barth: one which gives the church license, both as institution and as organism, to play an active role in transforming and redeeming society.<sup>72</sup>

More could be said in this sub-section about the specific theological foundation of the Barthian approach to Christian engagement of culture as an influential paradigm in contemporary

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<sup>70</sup> For further discussion on these points, see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 344-46. See also Durand, "Church and State in South Africa: Karl Barth Vs. Abraham Kuyper."

<sup>71</sup> See generally Durand, "Church and State in South Africa: Karl Barth Vs. Abraham Kuyper." See also Vorster, *Restoring Human Dignity in South Africa*, 90-95.

<sup>72</sup> For evidence of this, see, e.g., Allan Aubrey Boesak, *Black and Reformed : Apartheid, Liberation, and the Calvinist Tradition* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984).

Reformed circles, particularly in the South African context. Barth, nevertheless, receives additional substantive attention in the remainder of this chapter as well as in the rest of this thesis. The focus in this chapter, nevertheless, will continue to be on Kuyper and his legacy both in North America and South Africa, which is in keeping with the assumption that he has been the dominant shaping influence upon global contemporary Reformed social thought. Evidence for Kuyper's enduring legacy can be found in both the North American and South African contexts. I consider briefly the development of Kuyperianism in each context, with the former helping elucidate and highlight many of the themes common to the latter.

### 2.2.3. *Neo-Calvinism in North America*

According to VanDrunen, there is perhaps “no voice more eloquent” in contemporary discourse on Christianity and culture than what is sometimes referred to as Kuyperianism, transformationism or “neo-Calvinism”.<sup>73</sup> This school of thought is the fruition of Kuyper's and Dooyeweerd's legacy, and has exercised significant influence in contemporary Christian Reformed and ecumenical circles. Though a diverse movement, certain common themes emerge among its proponents when it comes to a vision for Christianity and culture. Two contemporary advocates summarise “neo-Calvinism” in three points: first, grace restores nature through redemption in Christ; second, God orders all of reality through his sovereign rule; and third, the original pre-fall cultural mandate has enduring relevance.<sup>74</sup> In order to further elucidate these central themes, and in keeping with the scope of VanDrunen's taxonomy, I concentrate mainly on Albert Wolters' *Creation Regained* and Cornelius Plantinga's *Engaging God's World*.<sup>75</sup>

To begin with, perhaps the most important organising framework or pattern informing the heart of the neo-Calvinist's Christian worldview proposal is Scripture's story, which according to them is one of *creation, fall* and *redemption*. In this narrative God created all things good, including the full range of human cultures acting in accordance with his design. But evil has corrupted not only the cultural realm but also the natural world. Hence, Jesus Christ the Lord

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<sup>73</sup> See VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate," 225.

<sup>74</sup> See Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture : Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004), 16., and VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 17.

<sup>75</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 17-19.

must redeem the whole cosmos.<sup>76</sup> Crucial to the neo-Calvinist position is its understanding of salvation or redemption brought by Christ to a world on account of humankind's inability to secure the new eschatological world through their cultural labors. Salvation or redemption is essentially God's *restoration* or *re-creation* of everything corrupted by sin, including the created order, through Jesus Christ. In other words, God does not start over again, but seeks to accomplish his Edenic plan by giving believers "another chance in Christ" at fulfilling the original mandate as his reinstated managers on earth. The new humanity plays a pivotal role in bringing about the restoration and redemption of creation through Christ, which is as pervasive and all encompassing as the fall itself.<sup>77</sup>

It therefore follows for neo-Calvinists that because all of creation and human culture was God's kingdom before the fall, it remains so after the fall through the renewing and redeeming work of Christ. In other words, for the Christian all cultural labor is "kingdom service" and contributes towards and "provides the building materials" for the full realisation of God's kingdom in the new creation.<sup>78</sup>

In putting forward this grand vision for Christianity and culture, neo-Calvinists have at the same time been critical of "dualistic" views that vitiate the holistic character of God's singular and all-encompassing kingdom in this world. For example, Wolters is very critical of "two-realms" theories that divide life into the "sacred" and "secular", "kingdom" work and "profane" work. His concern is that such positions deprecate or treat as inferior broader cultural activities, restrict Christ's Lordship, and promote an otherworldly escapism. This error is due to a combination of an individualised and "escape from this world into heaven" view of salvation guided by Gnostic and Platonic tendencies, instead of following Scripture.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> "What follows is that all of life is sacred: the whole of it stands under the blessing, judgment, and redeeming purposes of God"; see Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), xv. Note that he arranges his chapters according to the themes of creation, fall and redemption. See also Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2005), 11-12., and his chapter divisions.

<sup>77</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 18., and Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 12, 69-73.

<sup>78</sup> See Plantinga Jr., *Engaging God's World*, 109-13., and Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 287. As Plantinga writes, "What we do now in the name of Christ – striving for healing, for justice, for intellectual light in darkness, striving simply to produce something helpful for sustaining the lives of other human beings – shall be preserved into the next life"; see Plantinga Jr., *Engaging God's World*, 137-38. See also VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 19.

<sup>79</sup> Wolters and fellow neo-Calvinists use terms such as "secular" and "profane" to denote that which is inherently evil or at least compromised for the Christian. See, e.g., Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 11-12; 64-65; 78-83.;

#### 2.2.4. (Neo-)Calvinism in post-apartheid South Africa

As mentioned above, any reference to Kuyper's influence upon the theological landscape in the South African context is a controversial and contested one due to his close association with Afrikaner Calvinism and apartheid. Amidst the negative press often accompanying scholarship on Kuyper in recent decades, it is nevertheless undeniable that Kuyper was retrieved for more positive (social transformational) ends in the anti-apartheid church struggle. What is more, there are a number of theological indicators, which suggest that the "best" of Kuyper's transformationist legacy continues to be developed in South Africa into the present day. From the "church struggle" quarters of the Reformed tradition, one could cite the work of Allan Boesak<sup>80</sup> and the general influence of the URCSA; and with regard to the latter, the ongoing influence of the *Belhar Confession* in Christianity and culture discourse.<sup>81</sup> A prominent example from another corner of the Reformed family of churches is the work of theologian and philosopher, Ben van der Walt.<sup>82</sup>

Instead of elaborating here on these indicators of Kuyperianism or neo-Calvinism in post-apartheid South Africa (which I do in Chapter 3), I focus rather on what I deem to be a significant engagement of Kuyper's social thought in the recent work of eco-theologian and

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Plantinga Jr., *Engaging God's World*, 96, 123.; and Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads*, 52, 64-65, 135. See also VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 19.

<sup>80</sup> It is perhaps helpful to note that over the years Boesak has enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship with neo-Calvinist Nicholas Wolterstorff, the North American theologian and philosopher known for coining the term "world-transformative" Christianity. For examples of places where each claims the influence of the other upon their respective work, see Boesak, *Black and Reformed.*, and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace : The Kuyper Lectures for 1981 Delivered at the Free University of Amsterdam* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983). For an example of a recent work by Boesak where his Kuyperian transformationist vision comes through, see Allan Boesak, *Radical Reconciliation: Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism* (New York: Orbis Books, 2012).

<sup>81</sup> See generally Naudé, *Neither Calendar nor Clock.*, and Johan Botha and Piet Naudé, *Good News to Confess: The Belhar Confession and the Road of Acceptance* (Wellington: Bible Media, 2011).

<sup>82</sup> In one place he bemoans the fact that a "Christianised" continent like Africa allows its Christianity to be confined to individuals and established churches, and suggests that the antidote is the broader kingdom vision of Kuyper through his Christian philosophy of a pluralist society. See BJ van der Walt, "Christian Religion and Society: The Heritage of Abraham Kuyper for (South) Africa," in *Kuyper Reconsidered: Aspects of His Life and Word*, ed. Cornelius van der Kooi (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1999), 229, 34-35. See also van der Walt, "Christian Religion and Society.", and more recently BJ van der Walt, *At Home in God's World: A Transforming Paradigm for Being Human and for Social Development* (Potchefstroom: The Institute for Contemporary Christianity in South Africa, 2010).

ethicist Ernst Conradie. One reason for choosing Conradie is that he writes from within a tradition sympathetic to the anti-apartheid Kuyper as embodied by the likes of Boesak and his political theology. He is thus something of a representative of ardent advocacy for social (and through his own pioneering work, ecological) justice in the Reformed family of churches in South Africa. Another reason relates to his particular interest in the relationship between creation and salvation for the purposes of developing a theology of eco-justice. Unlike most theologians contributing to Christ and culture discourse – particularly those of Barthian persuasion – Conradie is open to working with Kuyperian categories generally considered off-limits due to their association with the theological underpinnings of Afrikaner Calvinism: such as general revelation and common grace. Yet another closely related reason is Conradie's willingness, at times, to question the sufficiency of Barth's Christological rendering of creation and suggests revision according to a Kuyperian version of natural theology. He believes that Kuyper possesses theological resources that will help do better justice to the earth (and culture for that matter) in the economy of God's sovereign rule over the cosmos. In terms of the central burden of this thesis, the kinds of questions that Conradie looks to Kuyper for answers, and his corresponding critique of Barth, suggests openness to new ways of relating Christianity and culture in South Africa based on older wisdom (even though Conradie himself would not necessarily be supportive of the direction that this thesis takes).

In a recent work that Conradie both edited and made a major contribution, entitled *Creation and Salvation: Dialogue on Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for Contemporary Ecotheology* (2011), he seeks to delve deeper into the Reformed tradition by engaging Kuyper in pursuit of theological categories that best do justice to and capture the relationship between God's works of creation and salvation. More specifically, Conradie finds in Kuyper's dialectic of general and special revelation, common and special grace, at least a starting point for developing a new natural theology for a post-apartheid and post-Barthian South Africa. His search is for a theological rendering of the earth in God's economy that avoids the twin historic dangers of compartmentalising the themes of creation and salvation – leading to a potential Gnostic separation – or a comprehensive unification, which often leads to a docetist-like subsuming of creation under redemption.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> See Conradie, "Abraham Kuyper's Legacy," 5-12. Indicative of the global interest in Conradie's critical retrieval of Kuyper's legacy in the South African context is the enthusiastic support he received during his tenure at the

Conradie is fully aware of the controversial nature of choosing Kuyper as a conversation partner in the South African context. This is largely due to Kuyper's dominance in Reformed circles during the infamous years spanning 1930 to 1974, only to be replaced thereafter by the "liberating" anti-apartheid and anti-natural-theology voice of Barth (through 1990). Conradie nevertheless sets forth a number of reasons for a return to the twentieth-century Dutch polymath. For one, and to begin on an autobiographical note, he describes how his initial misgivings about Kuyper's theology over time gave way to qualified sympathy. For instance, he became attracted to Kuyper's doctrines of the pervasive sovereignty of God over "every square inch" of society; pluriformity in society and the notion of sphere sovereignty; the affirmation of the created order; and the potential of theological categories like "general revelation" and "common grace".<sup>84</sup>

Another set of reasons emerges from Conradie's questioning of the theological assumptions driving the Barthian critics of creation theology during the church struggle. As the dominant conversation partner for a generation of Dutch Reformed theologians (most notably Willie Jonker), Barth played a pivotal role in a Christological deconstruction of a most disastrous kind of natural theology, which gave theological legitimisation to apartheid and became associated with Kuyper. Little wonder then that the longstanding struggle between Barthians and Kuyperians centered precisely on the issue of creation theology. Conradie's concern is that despite their laudable efforts, Barthian critics of apartheid theology failed to provide room for an adequate theology of creation. For Barth, God the Creator can only be known through God the Redeemer. In other words, Barth maintained a distinctly Christian doctrine of creation, instead of providing room for common ground with the likes of the natural sciences or other religious and metaphysical traditions. What is more, Barth's emphasis was not on the created order but rather on the God who created in Jesus Christ.<sup>85</sup>

While sympathetic to the concerns driving Barth's aversion to natural theology, his particular Christocentric rendering of creation nevertheless raises a number of questions for Conradie.

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Center of Theological Inquiry at Princeton and the Dutch publishing house responsible for putting *Creation and Salvation* into print; see ———, "Abraham Kuyper's Legacy," 25.

<sup>84</sup> See Conradie, "Abraham Kuyper's Legacy," 15-25.

<sup>85</sup> Relative to this critique, Conradie references Colin Gunton who suggests that there is a "critical consensus" relative to the weakness of Barth's ability to do justice to the created order itself; see C.E. Gunton, *Christ and Creation* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992), 94. See also Conradie, "Abraham Kuyper's Legacy," 26-32.

Does this not erode the significance of the natural realm? What is the significance of God's unique revelation in Jesus Christ for the whole universe as God's creation, for the ordering of human life in society? Is a cosmic Christology the only avenue available in this regard? How can one affirm the role of science, culture, the arts and social engagement on this basis, i.e. after the status of ordinances in society, moral conscience, and the role of religious worldviews have been questioned so radically? Is the only route to do this an affirmation of the vocation of God's elect in society?<sup>86</sup>

In short, how should creation and salvation be related to one another in a way that would do justice to both?

To begin answering such complex questions, Conradie believes that despite the contention of Barth and his followers to the contrary, a proper biblical-theological hermeneutic necessitates a natural theology of some kind.<sup>87</sup> He believes Kuyper may be helpful in getting beyond the impasse created by neo-Calvinist apartheid theology and prompt Barthian critics to start addressing theological problems previously overlooked or even avoided.<sup>88</sup> To this end, Conradie suggests that there may be the need to "search behind the towering figure of Barth" and in turn calls for a retrieval of the distinctively different legacy of Abraham Kuyper as read through the eyes of Herman Bavinck, on the doctrine of God's revelation, and of Arnold van Ruler, on creation and salvation. He describes the route for this post-Barthian return to Kuyper as a pneumatological one. For Conradie, the question driving further inquiry and debate is whether Kuyper may be able to help the Reformed tradition in South Africa in ways that Barth cannot?<sup>89</sup>

To address such a complicated agenda, Conradie suggests a number of possible options and routes for further inquiry, which would include recourse to Kuyper. These may include, for one, an investigation into the scholarly output on creation theology in South Africa since the 1970s, particularly with respect to the relationship between creation and salvation (though Conradie's suspicion is that very little work has been done with regard to the latter). Another possibility would be to explore discourse on natural theology or on nature and grace, thereby

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<sup>86</sup> See Conradie, "Abraham Kuyper's Legacy," 32-33.

<sup>87</sup> See *Ibid.*, 34-48.

<sup>88</sup> For example, theological problems like those posed by ecological challenges, dialogue between Christians and people of other faith traditions, discourse on the relationship between faith and science etc.

<sup>89</sup> This is not to imply that South African Reformed scholars have not had other conversation partners in the past two decades, such as the likes of Bonhoeffer, Hauerwas and Moltmann; see Conradie, "Abraham Kuyper's Legacy," 48-51.

potentially gaining better clarity on issues like the relationship between general and special revelation, the status of general revelation, and whether God is revealed to us other than in Jesus Christ. Such questions bring to mind the Barth-Brunner controversy, and its connection to debates around apartheid theology in South Africa, which still remain largely unresolved.<sup>90</sup>

In his contribution to *Creation and Salvation*, Conradie argues that Kuyper's notions of general and special revelation are the best categories currently available to the Reformed tradition to begin doing justice to the relationship between creation and salvation in post-apartheid South Africa. According to Conradie, while Kuyper worked with the classic Reformed distinction between general and special revelation as two sources of divine knowledge, he nevertheless rejected any attempt to compartmentalise, juxtapose or coordinate them. Rather, he considered them in continuity with one another on the basis of the whole work of God in history. While Kuyper emphasized the significance of general revelation, he nevertheless kept church and society, religion and culture, faith and reason, God and the world together. Every square inch of society is under the sovereign reign of Christ.<sup>91</sup>

Furthermore, Kuyper's position on general revelation takes on unique characterisation by emphasising his roughly synonymous (but not always correlating) doctrine of "common grace". It is with God's providence – and specifically the doctrine of common grace – in view that Conradie believes Kuyper's understanding of the relationship between creation and salvation comes into sharper focus. The doctrine of common grace provided Kuyper with the basis for introducing the notion of a Christian "worldview" and Calvinism as a "life system". It is here, however, where Conradie sees ambiguity creeping into Kuyper's conception of common grace, and hence more broadly speaking the relationship between creation and salvation, common and particular grace, Christianity and culture. On what basis did Kuyper develop his notion of a Christianised culture: on the basis of common or special grace? Does common grace have a role independent of special grace? Does special grace have cosmic significance?<sup>92</sup>

Conradie believes that tensions surrounding the interplay of common and special grace in Kuyper can perhaps be best resolved in terms of a particular conception of "re-creation". For Kuyper, the Holy Spirit's work toward re-creation is intimately linked to God's original creation.

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<sup>90</sup> See Ibid., 51-53.

<sup>91</sup> See Ibid., 63-77.

<sup>92</sup> See Ibid., 95-116.

In other words, redemption is not limited to the regeneration of individual sinners, but is rather cosmic in scope. Calvinism is cosmological rather than a soteriological form of religion. Hence, one could say that, for Kuyper, common grace is to particular grace what creation is to re-creation. Thus, for Conradie, the main strength of Kuyper's version of the story of God's work is its narration in terms of creation-fall-redemption.<sup>93</sup>

As Conradie considers the future of discourse relative to creation and salvation in post-apartheid South Africa, he suggests a number of theological clarifications and improvements for going beyond Kuyper, as well as the likes of Bavinck and Berkouwer, and even Barth. For one, and with respect to the relationship between special and general revelation, he suggests that compartmentalising the two sources as if they are two sharply distinct sources ("books") of God's self-revelation is problematic. Rather, the difference between special and general revelation should be understood qualitatively, where the former has priority over and forms part of the locus of the latter.<sup>94</sup> With regard to the ambiguous legacy surrounding Kuyper's account of the interplay between common and special grace, Conradie suggests that the way forward is to gain more clarity on the term "re-creation", and recommends developing Van Ruler's reading of Kuyper at this point. Accordingly, he argues that re-creation – contrary to the Anabaptist dualistic tendency to see it as an entirely new work of God – should be understood as the restoration of the original creation: where grace renews or transforms nature, thereby producing fundamental continuity between this world and the one to come.<sup>95</sup>

By emphasising this notion of continuity between creation and salvation in Kuyper, and by using it for his own theological ends, Conradie believes he is getting to the core of the dispute over Kuyper's legacy in South Africa. More specifically, for Kuyper's (Barthian) critics, it is the idea that structures embedded in the created order somehow determine re-creation (creation structures re-creation) that is so dangerous, and which in part led to the theological legitimisation

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<sup>93</sup> See *Ibid.*, 116-17.

<sup>94</sup> See *Ibid.*, 79-94.

<sup>95</sup> See *Ibid.*, 116-28.

of apartheid.<sup>96</sup> The better alternative is to argue that God the Creator can only be known through God the redeemer. Creation must be understood in terms of salvation and not vice versa.<sup>97</sup>

However, unlike Kuyper's critics, Conradie still believes in the promise – and even inevitability – of natural theology (or orders of creation): one appropriately checked by special revelation. He argues that if the likes of apartheid theologian F.J.M. Potgieter's position on a version of natural theology had been tested on the basis of Scripture, tradition, experience, reason or ecumenical recognition, it would have been found wanting on all accounts. Neither Kuyper nor his followers can maintain that common grace determines (or acts independently of) other aspects of God's work if it is properly integrated into the creation-fall-redemption story of God's acts in history. At the same time, any attempt to eradicate "nature" (the orders of creation) from church and theology signals a distortion of God's work as well. To see creation almost exclusively through the lens of redemption and faith in God the creator as merely an extrapolation of faith in God the Saviour, the tendency is toward a mystified, and if not, docetic notion of grace. Alternatively, if re-creation is construed without reference to fallen creation, this too makes re-creation less than fully creative (and thus material). The idea that re-creation is a radically new creation replacing fallen creation also tends toward a docetism that undermines the Scriptural witness.<sup>98</sup>

In Conradie's estimation, categories derived from our understanding of nature (including orders of creation) are possible only if the continuity between creation and re-creation (as both act and product) can be made evident. What is more, only through affirming this continuity can a truncated view of or independent interest in common grace and special grace, soteriological and eschatological docetism be avoided. It is this continuity that he believes the best of Kuyper exhibits. While not above critique, Conradie contends that Kuyper should be honored as the first Dutch theologian to consistently tell the story of God's work in terms of creation-fall-re-creation, thereby neither allowing creation and salvation to be swallowed up by one another nor compartmentalised, but rather enabled to stand in creative tension with one another. As Conradie continues to reflect further on creation and salvation for his own ecotheological project,

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<sup>96</sup> For apartheid theologians, redemption involves the restoration of the order of racial segregation (identified irrespective of Christ) embedded in creation. Accordingly, the orders of creation and history also become determinative of the understanding of church and its mission: for example, on the basis of ethnicity or nationality.

<sup>97</sup> See Conradie, "Abraham Kuyper's Legacy," 128-29.

<sup>98</sup> See *Ibid.*, 130-32.

he recommends as particularly promising the value of engaging Van Ruler (following in part in the footsteps Kuyper and Bavinck), especially in those areas where Kuyper is subject to ambiguity, such as the nature of salvation and the cosmic scope of God's work. At this point in his own development, he is confident that there must be some material continuity between God's original creation and the eschaton. Furthermore, he suggests that the "chapters" of God's work may be opened at any point in the creation-fall-redemption narrative, and should perhaps be best described as a juggling act by the theologian. What he is less confident of is how exactly to articulate the notion of "re-creation" in view of its contested legacy.<sup>99</sup>

### 2.2.5. *Redeeming culture from an ultimate perspective*

At this point I bring this subsection to a close by asking what the contemporary theological critiques of liberalism and a Kuyperian- or Barthian-influenced kind of neo-Calvinism might have in common when it comes to evaluating modern liberal culture? In helping answer this question, VanDrunen is correct in observing that many of the cardinal tenets of the Kuyperian tradition correspond closely to the central convictions of the critics of liberalism.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, not only do I think it fair to extend this generalisation to the South African context, but also to include that part of the Reformed tradition of a more Barthian persuasion. Hence, the critics of liberalism appear to have allies in contemporary Reformed camps in both the North American and South African contexts. The points of convergence include, for one, that there is no such thing as a religiously neutral public space governed by autonomous reason. Secondly, they appeal to presuppositions and worldviews as determinative of one's approach to society. Thirdly, they engage contemporary culture from a fundamentally critical posture. And fourthly, they propose a specifically Christian alternative that expresses and anticipates the eschatological kingdom of God. In other words and in sum, they emphasise the evaluation of society from an *ultimate* perspective.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> See *Ibid.*, 128-45. Indicative of the ongoing probing work of Conradie in the area of natural theology, see Ernst Conradie and J. Christoff Pauw, "The Ebb and Flow of Creation Theology at Stellenbosch University: A Story in Six Chapters," in *Strangers and Pilgrims on Earth*, ed. E. Van der Borgh and P. van Geest (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 739-59.

<sup>100</sup> A conviction also shared by other scholars. See VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate," 229. See also, e.g., Guenther Haas, "Kuyper's Legacy for Christian Ethics," *Calvin Theological Journal* 33 (November 1998).

<sup>101</sup> See VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate," 229.

Accordingly, those holding to this ultimate approach have often generated explicitly biblical models for the transformation of society. Critics of liberalism like Hauerwas have pointed to the non-violent ethic of the Sermon on the Mount as the paradigmatic ideal for a kingdomised culture.<sup>102</sup> In the case of Kuyperians, some have looked to the orders of creation for support,<sup>103</sup> others the Mosaic law,<sup>104</sup> and still others the visions of shalom in the Old Testament prophets<sup>105</sup>. Perhaps most predominant in the South African context – cutting across both Kuyperian and Barthian lines – is that of prophetic critique, though tempered by solidarity in the new post-liberation dispensation, coupled with God’s preference for the poor. For the church to be in critical solidarity means always adopting a stance of resistance against the forces of injustice and falsehood, while also lending support to those initiatives that lead to the establishment of a new just social order.<sup>106</sup>

With this portrayal of the Kuyperian and neo-Calvinist tradition in view, it should come as no surprise that it has found strong affinity with the theological critics of liberalism.<sup>107</sup> In evaluating the Kuyperian tradition as a whole, VanDrunen describes it tentatively in terms of a mixed approach to liberalism and its trappings.<sup>108</sup> This perhaps best describes the neo-Calvinist or contemporary Reformed tradition in South Africa as well. Like Kuyper himself<sup>109</sup>, there are few today who do not support the cause of religious liberty and democratic government. And yet, also like Kuyper, many are also quite critical of the perceived excesses and abuses of

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<sup>102</sup> See Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom : A Primer in Christian Ethics*, 105.

<sup>103</sup> See, e.g., Wolters, *Creation Regained*.

<sup>104</sup> Such is the view expressed by a small but vocal “theonomic” or “reconstructionist” movement. Among the formative texts of this movement are Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, NJ: Craig, 1973)., and Greg L Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Nutley, NJ: Craig, 1973).

<sup>105</sup> See, e.g., Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace.*, and Plantinga Jr., *Engaging God's World*. In the South African context and explicitly appreciative of Wolterstorff is Boesak, *Black and Reformed*.

<sup>106</sup> See, e.g., Naudé, *Neither Calendar nor Clock.*, Allan Aubrey Boesak, *The Tenderness of Conscience : African Renaissance and the Spirituality of Politics*, 1st ed. (Stellenbosch, South Africa: Sun Press, 2005).; John de Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (London: SCM Press, 2002).; and Dirk J. Smit, *Essays in Public Theology: Collected Essays 1*, ed. Ernst M. Conradie (Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch, 2007).

<sup>107</sup> See VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate," 230.

<sup>108</sup> See *Ibid*.

<sup>109</sup> See, e.g., Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism.*, and Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Abraham Kuyper's Model of a Democratic Polity for Societies with Religiously Diverse Citizenry," in *Kuyper Reconsidered: Aspects of His Life and Word*, ed. Cornelius van der Kooi (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1999).

unbridled capitalism.<sup>110</sup> Especially in light of South Africa's ongoing history of the socio-political oppression of the poor, the Reformed tradition has developed a sharply critical voice in this regard. So much so that prominent South African theologians have embraced – though not always uncritically – the proposals of the Latin American liberation theologians.<sup>111</sup>

Given the mixed attitude of Kuyperians towards capitalism, VanDrunen makes another important observation, which I think extends to contemporary Reformed discourse in South Africa as well. He argues that the kind of neo-Calvinism or cultural transformationism outlined above is:

willing to embrace one or more aspects of the liberal society when they believe these aspects are biblical or defensible upon explicitly Reformed presuppositions. In other words, they may defend aspects of liberalism, but not as such; rather, as aspects that happen to coincide with elements of the social system that properly flows from biblical, Calvinist presuppositions. For example, Kuyper supported democracy and religious freedom as *Calvinist* ideas.<sup>112</sup>

### 2.3. Reformed transformationist influence upon broader ecumenical discourse

A taxonomy of contemporary Reformed social thought would be incomplete without mentioning the considerable influence it has had on broader contemporary discourse on Christianity and culture, church and state. Far from a being a parochial affair, the ecumenical clout of Reformed social thought makes the resources it possesses all the more valuable and subject to debate. VanDrunen observes that other Christian traditions, particularly Protestant, have often looked to the Reformed tradition as the leader in articulating Christian social thought. Evidence suggestive of this accolade can be found in that many of the ideas shaping contemporary Reformed social thought have gained wide acceptance in many Protestant circles and beyond. For instance, in North America one finds the influence of twentieth-century Reformed social thought and its call for cultural transformation and the development of a

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<sup>110</sup> See also VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate," 230.

<sup>111</sup> See especially, e.g., Boesak, *Black and Reformed*., and John W. de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991). At the same time, some working within the Kuyperian tradition – at least within the North American context – have taken a more positive stance towards the merits of the free market; see VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate."

<sup>112</sup> See VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate," 230. With respect to Kuyper's opinion that the fundamental ideas of Calvinism provided the genesis and genius of the American experiment in ordered liberty and orderly pluralism, see John Witte Jr., "The Biography and Biology of Liberty: Abraham Kuyper and the American Experiment," in *Religion, Pluralism, and Public Life*, ed. Luis E. Lugo (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

Christian world and life view in the curriculums of many historically non-Reformed evangelical colleges. In broader ecumenical discourse, many have advocated the importance and even necessity of religious arguments in the public square.<sup>113</sup>

It should be made clear that the people/institutions which follow are by no means all directly dependent upon Reformed sources, but all nevertheless suggest at least some family resemblance.

### 2.3.1. *The New Perspective on Paul*

In addition to MacIntyre, Hauerwas and Milbank discussed above, N.T. Wright is another representative of broader ecumenical Christian thought, who seems to have affinity with the last century of Reformed social thought. As a leading light of the so-called New Perspective on Paul, Wright and others in the movement are better known for their revisionist critique of the historic “Lutheran” (but also Reformed) views of Paul on the doctrine of justification. At the same time they have also disputed the historic “Lutheran” (and Reformed) doctrine of two kingdoms and its alleged dichotomisation of religion and politics, thereby obscuring important aspects of Paul’s thought.<sup>114</sup> It is in regard to this latter critique that the likes of Wright find greatest resonance with the most recent few decades of Reformed social thought.<sup>115</sup>

In one of his recent books, *Surprised by Hope*, Wright has much to say about matters of Christianity and culture. In this volume he sets out clearly to defend his central thesis, which has much in common with the Reformed neo-Calvinist redemption of culture proposal. Over against popular misconceptions of Christian hope – which are supposedly more Gnostic and

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<sup>113</sup> Most importantly, see Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square : Religion and Democracy in America*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1986). In addition, and more broadly speaking, are connections that can be made between Reformed social thought and the insights of the postmodern turn in mainstream Western intellectual thought. Postmodern philosophy has exposed the epistemological fallacies of neutrality and the absence of world-view assumptions behind any theory or idea, insights that were largely anticipated by Reformed figures such as Dooyeweerd and Cornelius Van Til (though not postmoderns themselves). See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 6-7.

<sup>114</sup> See, e.g., N. T. Wright, *Paul : In Fresh Perspective*, 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 49, 60-61.

<sup>115</sup> Hence, it is perhaps of no little surprise that some contemporary Reformed neo-Calvinists have expressed their appreciation of and debt to Wright; see, e.g., Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 12-13. With regard to these points on Wright and the New Perspective see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 7.

individualistic than biblical – consisting of “going to heaven” after death,<sup>116</sup> Wright argues for the great expectation of the physical resurrection and the physical new heaven and new earth, which establishes a deep continuity between this world and the eternal state.<sup>117</sup> Accordingly, he sets out to prove that this resurrection hope provides Christians with the motivation to transform this present world, pursue justice and peace, in anticipation of the world to come.<sup>118</sup> In contrast, the predominant (Platonist- or Gnostic-like) Christian escapist perspective tends to encourage ambivalence toward social and cultural affairs.<sup>119</sup>

In order to defend these claims, Wright finds recourse in three grand themes he believes emerge out of Scripture: namely the goodness of God’s creation; the evil in this world due to human rebellion; and God’s redemption of the world. The latter consists of God’s “liberating” and “remaking” of creation in order to accomplish his original plans for it.<sup>120</sup> Wright’s understanding of redemption may be explained in terms of his conception of the kingdom of God. He argues that the kingdom is not an eschatological immaterial reality but has rather to do with this present earth as it will be fully renewed in the new creation.<sup>121</sup> In order to accomplish this final cosmic renewal, which is ultimately God’s work, he enlists the help of human beings who through their efforts at social transformation in the present anticipate the future consummation of God’s kingdom.<sup>122</sup> One of Wright’s chief burdens in defending these claims is to reshape the church’s understanding of her mission: which consists of evangelism *and* working

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<sup>116</sup> Wright spends considerable time critiquing what he believes to be the predominant perspective of the Western church in recent decades: one in which salvation is individualistic and consists of our immortal souls being rescued from this present evil world and entering into heaven. Heaven in this perspective is a nonmaterial world that will survive when the present world is completely destroyed at the end of history. See, e.g., N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 15, 17-19, 80, 88-91, 104-05, 48, 94., and VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 21.

<sup>117</sup> Though Wright does acknowledge discontinuity too; see, e.g., Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 26; 103.

<sup>118</sup> The resurrection is central to one of the chief thrusts of Wright’s book, which is to provide the “groundwork of practical and even political theology”; see *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>119</sup> See, e.g., *Ibid.*, 5, 26-27, 90, 192., and VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 21-22.

<sup>120</sup> See Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 93-97.

<sup>121</sup> See, e.g., *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>122</sup> Wright speaks of human beings as “part of the means” by which God brings ultimate salvation and as “rescuing stewards over creation”, which is the “inner dynamic” of the kingdom of God. At various points he finds recourse in 1 Corinthians 15:58, which promises that our work in the Lord is not in vain. From this he deduces that what we do now is “building for God’s kingdom” and “will last into God’s future” and “become in due course a part of God’s new world”, although Wright confesses he has no idea what this will actually look like. See *Ibid.*, 46, 182, 93, 200, 02, 08-09.

for justice, peace and beauty in this present world,<sup>123</sup> as exemplified by the Tutus of this world<sup>124</sup>.

In short, Wright's creation-fall-redemption motif coupled with his view of the kingdom of God bears strong resemblance to the neo-Calvinist vision espoused by the likes of Wolters and Plantinga. It is this perspective that drives his contention that Christian cultural work both anticipates and provides the building blocks for the new creation<sup>125</sup>

### 2.3.2. *The Emerging Church*

Another prominent voice in contemporary Christianity and culture discourse is that of the "emergent" or "emerging" church movement. Although it is not always clear what this "conversation" about a new kind of Christianity is and what it stands for positively,<sup>126</sup> one emphatic emphasis is placing the redemptive transformation of culture at the heart of the Christian faith. Especially indicative of this latter emphasis is a recent book by the movement's leading spokesman, Brian McLaren, called *Everything Must Change*.<sup>127</sup>

One way in which McLaren echoes many of the central and standard themes of contemporary Reformed social thought emerges from what he is against. He is critical of a kind of Christianity that assigns this sinful world to eventual destruction, save for "souls" who "escape" it and eternal punishment and are taken to "heaven".<sup>128</sup> He opposes "dualistic" kinds of Christianity that contrast the "spiritual" and the "secular", thereby creating an antipathy toward

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<sup>123</sup> See, e.g., *Ibid.*, 193, 212-32. Relative to these points on Wright's defence of a redemption of culture vision for Christians and the church, see VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 22.

<sup>124</sup> See Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 248.

<sup>125</sup> Indicative of the respect that neo-Calvinists have for Wright is the debt expressed to him in, e.g., Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 127., and Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 13, 21, 197, 99.

See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 21, 23.

<sup>126</sup> Among its defining characteristics are a critical attitude toward traditional forms of Christianity and the recent megachurch movement, a dislike for rigid doctrine, and the quest for something fresh and authentic. See, e.g., Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006)., and VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 23.

<sup>127</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 23.

<sup>128</sup> See, e.g., Brian D. McLaren, *Everything Must Change : Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 3-4, 18-19, 77-80.

social engagement and the present global crisis.<sup>129</sup> As the alternative, McLaren proposes a this-worldly kind of Christianity with its “framing story” (something akin to a world-view) being social “transformation”.<sup>130</sup> This framing story asserts that Jesus came to “retrain and restore humanity to its original vocation and potential. This renewed humanity can return to its role as caretakers of creation and one another so the planet and all it contains can be restored to the healthy and fruitful harmony that God desires.”<sup>131</sup> Hence, Christ proclaimed a vision or dream in which the injustice and disharmony of this earth is replaced with God’s justice and peace. For Wright, the vision of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 inspires Christians with hope (“within history”) for what this world can become: a new way of living and a new societal system.<sup>132</sup> In brief, McLaren and emergent movement in general holds that the gospel of the kingdom of God is about working to transform this present world according to God’s standard of peace and justice, and in so doing help usher in the New Jerusalem.<sup>133</sup>

### 2.3.3. *Desmond Tutu and the ecumenical movement in South Africa*

When it comes to broader ecumenical circles in South Africa on issues pertaining to Christianity and culture, church and state, there has perhaps been no more influential figure than Desmond Tutu. He is perhaps best known for the key roles he filled in the ecumenical church struggle against apartheid, ranging from Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town to being president (alongside the likes of Beyers Naudé and Frank Chikane) of the South African Council of Churches (SACC), and his chairmanship of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). In these previous capacities and in his ongoing fight for democracy in the new South Africa, Tutu has echoed many of the themes of his contemporary Reformed church struggle compatriots. In short, Tutu’s legacy of “prophetic witness against” and more recently “critical solidarity with” the state has been from an ultimate gospel or kingdom of God ideal perspective.

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<sup>129</sup> See, e.g., *Ibid.*, 81-83.

<sup>130</sup> Which has nothing to do with Christ’s atonement or the forgiveness of sins. See, e.g., *Ibid.*, chap. 9 generally (and 72-73 especially). References to “transformation” occur repeatedly throughout the book.

<sup>131</sup> See *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>132</sup> See *Ibid.*, 21, 296.

<sup>133</sup> On these points relative to the McLaren and the emerging church movement, see VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 23-24.

The theological intersection between the socio-political aspirations of Tutu and his Reformed church struggle counterparts is perhaps best captured in terms of their shared sympathy towards liberation theology in general, but more specifically black theology emerging out of the black consciousness movement of the 1960s.<sup>134</sup> In his foreword to Reformed theologian, John de Gruchy's, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, Tutu describes the struggle movement as having been fundamentally about establishing a more just society along racial and ethnic lines.<sup>135</sup> Both Tutu and the likes of de Gruchy saw the insights of black liberation theology as critical to achieving this end. After quoting with approval Tutu's endorsement of black theology as a type of liberation theology, de Gruchy defines the same as a "reflection on 'doing the truth', that is, on 'praxis', in obedience to the gospel amid the realities of contemporary suffering, racism, oppression, and everything else that denies the Lordship of Christ." It was both a theology of socio-political protest as well as one of liberating socio-political reconstruction.<sup>136</sup>

One way in which Tutu exemplified what he perceived to be the church's responsibility of critical but pastoral solidarity<sup>137</sup> in the post-apartheid period of reconstruction, is in his defining role as leader of the TRC. Steve de Gruchy describes the Christian ethic and agenda that Tutu and other TRC commissioners employed in seeking to bring about broader civil justice and reconciliation in view of the atrocities of apartheid. Made up of predominantly Christians, "the language and conceptualisation of the TRC was largely Christian, and its mode of operation sometimes resembled a pastoral counseling chamber presided over by a father confessor rather than a court of law chaired by a judge. This led cabinet minister Kadar Asmal to refer perceptively to the TRC as a 'civic sacrament'. Certainly all the elements we associate with the sacrament of penance were present in one form or another, from confession of sin and guilt,

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<sup>134</sup> de Gruchy observes: "Liberation theology, though associated initially with Latin American theology, soon became an umbrella term which included several other theologies including black theology in South Africa"; see de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 153 and Chapter 4 in general. For the influence of liberation theology upon the reading of Karl Barth in Reformed and ecumenical circles in South Africa, see generally *On Reading Karl Barth in South Africa*. Among other prominent examples of the influence of liberation and black theology upon Reformed social thought in South Africa, see Boesak, *Black and Reformed.*, and de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*.

<sup>135</sup> See de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, ix.

<sup>136</sup> See *Ibid.*, 154-55.

<sup>137</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 241.

through absolution and amnesty, to penance or reparation.”<sup>138</sup> Tutu and the TRC capture the ecumenical church’s attempt to transform society – through a civil platform – by imitating the ethic of God’s ultimate gift of reconciliation in Christ towards greater social justice and peace.

Tutu continues to be an influential and dynamic leader in the ecumenical church struggle for socio-political transformation, both locally<sup>139</sup> and abroad<sup>140</sup>, and especially in the fight for human rights in the face of state oppression. In reflecting on his motivation to get involved in the sociopolitical arena, Tutu recently wrote that

[i]t is in obedience to the imperative of the gospel of Jesus Christ, to the commandment of God, and to the teaching of the Bible that I am involved in sociopolitical and economic matters. And for this I do not apologize at all. I reject all false dichotomies as between the sacred and secular about things that are called religious and others that are merely secular. For me religion is about all of life and not only about certain aspects of it. The God whom I worship is the Lord of all of life. There is no aspect of human existence where his writ does not run.<sup>141</sup>

So far in this subsection I have attempted to provide a sense of the rich currency that contemporary Reformed social has enjoyed in broader ecumenical discourse, through various degrees of interplay and interdependence. In addition to VanDrunen’s taxonomy, other recent studies have revealed the dominant transformationist impulse that cuts across contemporary Reformed and broader Protestant traditions. For instance, James Davidson Hunter has noted the common denominator among the Christian Right, the Christian Left and the neo-Anabaptists in North America being some variation of a politicised religious agenda: where some kind of

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<sup>138</sup> See de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 225-26. For an extensive discussion of the TRC from a theological perspective, see de Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice*. In reflecting on his involvement, Tutu writes: “I saw the power of the gospel when I was serving as chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa”; see Desmond Tutu and Douglas Abrams, *God Has a Dream : A Vision of Hope for Our Time*, 1st ed. (New York ; London: Doubleday, 2004), 10. See also Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1999).

<sup>139</sup> An example of the living legacy of black liberation theology and Tutu’s prophetic witness against the state is an excerpt from a document prepared by Kairos Southern Africa for the ANC centenary that appeared in a major South African newspaper. In this piece, the group of South African theologians behind Kairos critiqued the ANC for, among other things, its factionalism. They also implored the ruling party to take a stand against the worship of Mammon (money) and corruption to help ensure the future of South Africa’s hard-earned democracy. Among the signatories of the document were John de Gruchy, present Anglican Archbishop Thabo C Makgoba and Anglican Archbishop Emeritus Desmond M Tutu. See “Kairos South Africa: A Word to the ANC in These Times,” *Cape Times*, January 9 2012.

<sup>140</sup> Indicative of Tutu’s involvement in the global Christianity and human rights discourse is his forward to *Christianity and Human Rights: An Introduction*, ed. John Witte Jr and Frank S. Alexander (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>141</sup> See Desmond M. Tutu, *God Is Not a Christian: And Other Provocations* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 129.

Christological or eschatological kingdom of God ideal is held out as the blueprint to which society must be held accountable.<sup>142</sup> Similar observations could be made about the general landscape of Christian social thought in South Africa.

#### *2.3.4. Contemporary Evangelicalism: Third Lausanne Congress*

One example worth highlighting briefly as revelatory of the social thought of contemporary evangelicalism in South Africa, is “a confession of faith and call to action” entitled The Cape Town Commitment, which is the fruition of The Third Lausanne Congress held in Cape Town in 2011. Not only is the confession helpful in gauging the attitude of a large sector of the ecumenical church with evangelical emphasis in South Africa, but the international appeal that the congress enjoyed also helps provide something of a commentary on the general global sentiments of contemporary evangelicalism. In what follows, I highlight some of those themes found in The Cape Town Commitment that have strong resonance with the contemporary Reformed tradition and broader ecumenical lines of thought already mentioned above.

With respect to the grand story that the Bible tells and echoing neo-Calvinists like Wolters, the confession speaks of the “universal story of creation, fall, redemption in history, and new creation”, which provides a coherent biblical worldview.<sup>143</sup> God’s redemptive purposes extend to all of creation, and hence the call for, among other things, urgent and prophetic ecological responsibility. In short, the good news of salvation is for individual persons, and for society, and for creation.<sup>144</sup>

In regard to broader society, Christians are called to love and seek justice for the poor and suffering. After stating that God holds those appointed to political and judicial leadership especially responsible, the confession goes on to admonish Christians to follow the biblical model established by the likes of the prophets and Jesus as normative for pursuing practical love and justice in the civil realm.<sup>145</sup> In another place, which suggests that the respective ethics of the cultural mandate and the great commission are in a sense interchangeable, the confession states

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<sup>142</sup> See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 111-66.

<sup>143</sup> See *The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action*, African ed., The Third Lausanne Congress (Panorama: AcadSA Publishing, 2012), 1.6.B.

<sup>144</sup> See *Ibid.*, 1.7.A.

<sup>145</sup> See *Ibid.*, 1.7.C.

that rather than seeing evangelism and social engagement as running on separate tracks, they should be integrated.<sup>146</sup> As to the truth of Scripture in the face of the challenge of pluralism, church leaders and pastors are urged to “equip all believers with the courage and the tools to relate the truth with prophetic relevance to everyday public conversation, and so to engage every aspect of the culture we live in.”<sup>147</sup>

When it comes to the more practical outworking of this vision, the confession raises a familiar Christianity transforming culture warning concerning the falsehood of a sacred-secular divide that has permeated the church’s thinking and action. Rather than only seeing religious activity as belonging to God, it must be affirmed that God is Lord of all of life. All of life holds out possibilities for ministry and mission.<sup>148</sup> The public nature of truth (theology)<sup>149</sup> emerges, for instance, when the church is confronted with the division and brokenness of this world. Here, the reconciliation and justice found in Christ should be the basis for the church seeking justice for those harmed by violence and oppression. Christians should view biblical peace-making in the name of Christ as having currency in all spheres of life. Christ’s peace is both the ultimate and penultimate transformative solution to ethnic conflict.<sup>150</sup> When confronted by the likes of slavery, poverty and HIV suffering, Christians are called to prophetic action as part of the integral mission of the church.<sup>151</sup>

In sum, while the confession affirms the need for Christians to labor for common cultural ends: “to be good citizens, to seek the welfare of the nation where we live, to honour and pray for those in authority, to pay for taxes, to do good, and to seek to live peaceful and quiet lives” and to affirm religious freedom for all people<sup>152</sup>; all of this is nevertheless to be done from an ultimate kingdom of God or worldview perspective. In the closing address to the third Lausanne Congress – included as an appendix to the confession – it is stated: “The mission statement for this Congress was ‘to seek to bring a fresh challenge to the global church to bear witness to Jesus Christ and all his teaching, in every part of the world – not only geographically, but in every

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<sup>146</sup> See *Ibid.*, 1.10.B.

<sup>147</sup> See *Ibid.*, 2.A.2.

<sup>148</sup> See *Ibid.*, 2.A.3.

<sup>149</sup> See *Ibid.*, 2.A.7.

<sup>150</sup> See *Ibid.*, 2.B.1.B - 2.B.2.

<sup>151</sup> See *Ibid.*, 2.B.3-6.

<sup>152</sup> See *Ibid.*, 2.C.6.B.

sphere of society, and in the realm of ideas.” In keeping with the vision of Abraham Kuyper, the church must be committed to the Lordship of Christ in every area of human activity: that is, to apply biblical principles to every area of society, like for example media, business, government, public policy and the university.<sup>153</sup>

#### **2.4. To change the world or towards a new city commons?**

The common thread that runs through the above paradigms as organised around VanDrunen’s taxonomy – whether Reformed or more broadly ecumenical – is that they all espouse some version of a Christ transforming culture vision for the church. This vision is not, however, without its critics. One more ecumenical dissenter is the professor of religion, culture and social theory at the University of Virginia, James Davidson Hunter. In what is to follow, I use aspects of his recent work, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (2010), to supplement VanDrunen’s taxonomy. My focus will be how Hunter helps expose some of the flaws in the transformationist paradigm as he considers its legacy in the last sixty years in North America. (Like I have said above of VanDrunen’s taxonomy in general, which focuses predominantly on the North American context, my assumption here too is that the substance of Hunter’s insights has currency in the South African context as well.) In turn, I will set forth his clarion call as well as his basic groundwork for an alternative to the dominant Christianity engagement of culture paradigm. Hunter’s proposal helps to set the stage for the two kingdoms and natural law approach, the final perspective considered in this taxonomy.

In Hunter’s estimation, the common view – whether conservative or progressive – among Christians today is that the essence of culture should be understood in terms of “values”, “worldviews” or “big ideas” that are found in the hearts and minds of individuals, which should

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<sup>153</sup> See Ibid., 56-57. For a similar evangelical manifesto on social engagement formulated in North America, see "The Manhattan Declaration," <http://www.manhattandeclaration.org/the-declaration/read.aspx>. (date accessed: July 3, 2012) . Drafted by Princeton political science professor Timothy George and evangelical leaders Chuck Colson and Timothy George, the declaration was released in 2009 in an attempt to defend the truths of human dignity, the sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman, and religious liberty, against undermining forces in Western societies like North America. In his review of the declaration, Michael Horton observes: “Although these impressive figures point to general revelation, natural law, and creation in order to justify the inherent dignity of life, marriage, and liberty, they insist on making this interchangeable with the gospel”; see Michael Horton, "A Review of the Manhattan Declaration," <http://www.whitehorseinn.org/blog/2009/12/01/a-review-of-the-manhattan-declaration/>. (date accessed: July 3, 2012)

in turn drive socio-political action. Accordingly, if Christianity can win the battle against competing worldviews and dominate enough individuals in society, it can change the world. The chief means of accomplishing this goal is politics. If enough individual Christians can rally together and collectively vote into office politicians, judges and policy makers with the right (biblically informed) worldview then Christianity can change the world. Another integral tactic for culture transformationists is the involvement of Christians in broad-based voluntary reform movements (like marriage and teen-abstinence movements), which act as mediating institutions between citizens and the state and market. In short and at the end of the day, the message is clear: even if not in the lofty realms of political life, in your sphere of influence, you too can be a Wilberforce, a Martin Luther King, a Mandela and so on. “If you have the courage and hold to the right values and if you think Christianly with an adequate Christian worldview, you too can change the world.” Hunter, however, contends that this “account is almost wholly mistaken.”<sup>154</sup> Why?

For one, and on a more practical and social-historical level, Hunter contends that the track record of this paradigm is at best mixed, with little indication of improvement. This is because of a flawed understanding of the complexity of culture and how it changes. Instead of change coming through the aggregate will of ordinary individual Christians, often on the periphery of society, operating within a framework of market populism, history suggests cultural transformation “at its most profound level occurs through dense networks of elites operating in common purpose within institutions at the high-prestige centers of cultural production.”<sup>155</sup>

To put the problem in more theological terms, Hunter believes that contemporary Christianity basically has the wrong conception of power when it comes to fulfilling the creation mandate. Following the “politicising-of-everything” spirit of modern Western culture, Christianity cannot imagine power without it leading to final political domination.<sup>156</sup> He sees three dominant ideology-driven “political theologies” vying for power in contemporary North American society, but could just as well be generally descriptive of the South African context as well.

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<sup>154</sup> See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 6-17.

<sup>155</sup> See *Ibid.*, 18-96; 274.

<sup>156</sup> See *Ibid.*, 93-110.

First, there is the Christian Right or conservative movement, whose vision, Hunter argues, turns on the mythic ideal of recovering America as some kind of Christian nation. Such Christians see themselves in mortal combat with the harmful forces of secularism that have crept into almost every sphere of society. In order to accomplish this, the Christian Right has been unabashed in its turn to politics; in the hope it places in politics; and in its ambition and desire for a controlling influence in American politics and culture. In short, Christian conservatives hold to something of a mythic fusion or conflation of the Christian faith and America, so strong that in indefinable ways each is constitutive of the other. While the tactics of the Christian Right has expanded to include worldview and culture more broadly, the leading emphasis is still nevertheless one of political activism that majors on (prophetic) negation. Initiatives commonly include words and phrases like “take back,” “overthrow,” “reclaim their nations for Christ,” “occupy and influence [spheres] of power in our nations,” and “advancing the kingdom of God.”<sup>157</sup>

The second political-theological movement can be described as the Christian Left or politically progressive Christians. If the Christian Right is about pursuing the mythic ideal of moral order in a society disordered by secularism, the Left sees history as an ongoing struggle toward the mythic ideal of equality and community. Drawing on the legacy of the Enlightenment as crystallised in the rallying cry of the French Revolution, the threefold ideal of progressives is: liberty, equality and fraternity. Tending to be more communitarian than social libertarian, Christian progressives often understand liberation as freedom for individuals and communities from poverty induced by the oppression of the privileged. Equality is largely understood in economic terms and lies behind the keyword in the progressive lexicon: justice. Fraternity or community conveys the idea of solidarity among equals – transcending the boundaries of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and social class.<sup>158</sup>

The biblical tradition that Christian progressives appeal to is the prophetic tradition – of both the past and the future – in its condemnation of the wealthy for their abuse of the poor, the weak and the marginalised. With respect to the future, the eschatological realisation of the kingdom of heaven is the abiding ideal: one where justice, peace, equality, and community reign

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<sup>157</sup> See *Ibid.*, 111-31.

<sup>158</sup> See *Ibid.*, 132-33.

in ultimate perfection. In other words, the vision of the *eschaton* is what animates social justice on earth.<sup>159</sup>

For politically progressive Christians, salient moments in American history that have reinforced their mythic ideals include abolition, women's suffrage, child labor reform, social reforms under the Social Gospel movement, the civil rights movement, and the war against Vietnam. In the South African context, the anti-apartheid struggle is a prime example. Hero's of this struggle tradition would include, for example, Frederick Douglass, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu and Oscar Romero. The Christian Left arguably reached its zenith of influence during the decades of the 1960s through the 1980s in the form of liberation theology. This was especially the case in the liberation movements of Third World Latin America and South Africa.<sup>160</sup> Indicative of the ongoing social activism of the Christian Left in general and the mainline churches in particular, though weakened significantly in visibility and influence since the 1980s, is the "public policy ministry" of the Presbyterian Church, USA.<sup>161</sup>

To add to the socio-political clout of the Christian Left, Hunter also notes the emergence in the early twenty-first-century of the progressive evangelical movement. Among the names and organisations associated with this movement are Jim Wallis, Tony Campolo, Brian McLaren, Sojourners and Evangelicals for Social Action, with Wallis being the most visible figure of this movement. The movement is particularly dominated by a concern for the poor and disadvantaged of the world.<sup>162</sup>

With all the diversity in the Christian Left over the years, Hunter observes one important point of solidarity, which is hostility toward the leaders, organisations, ideology and agenda of the Christian Right. Leading the list of indictments is the Right's legitimisation of the inequalities of power and wealth in the name of biblical Christianity. Hence, the Left's priority has been to take back the faith from the religious Right in order to fulfill its eschatological vision of a more just world. But how? Through the power play of politics. The irony for Hunter is that while Wallis and other political progressive Christians have rightly complained about the

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<sup>159</sup> See *Ibid.*, 133-34.

<sup>160</sup> See *Ibid.*, 134-35.

<sup>161</sup> See *Ibid.*, 135-36.

<sup>162</sup> See *Ibid.*, 136-39.

Christian Right promoting “civil religion” instead of biblical Christianity, the Left is nevertheless no less guilty. Imitating the religious Right, the Left also has no problem arguing for public policy based on biblical texts and using Scripture to justify its political interests – for a more compassionate kind of civil religion. Among the problems with this approach, according to Hunter, is the invocation of the Old Testament prophetic tradition for social justice, which confuses theocratic Israel with America, or any Western democracy for that matter (depending on which unjust context is in view).<sup>163</sup>

Also wary of a religious agenda being enforced through the power of the state is the neo-Anabaptist movement, the third political theology that Hunter analyses. While sharing with the progressive Left a mutual contempt for the Christian Right, as well as many other themes that at certain points make neo-Anabaptists and progressives indistinguishable, the former nevertheless differentiates itself by a deep distrust of the State. Driven by the mythic ideal of true and authentic first-century Christianity, central to the identity of the neo-Anabaptist tradition and its vision of social and political engagement, is opposition to and independence from the power and coercive nature of the state. In positing a peaceful Christian alternative to the corrupt state, neo-Anabaptists believe they are avoiding the Constantinian error that has gripped so much of the church in the past and into the present. The paradox that Hunter observes, however, is that the neo-Anabaptist movement is no less committed than the Christian Right and Left to changing the world through the language and framework of politics. Operating with notions like the church is *the* true social strategy and the *true* social ethic, and Jesus as the model of radical political action in a world governed by a corrupt state, neo-Anabaptists see the church as an instrument for social change. Like the Christian Right and the Left, neo-Anabaptists also politicise the cross, albeit through indirect and negative intervention against the dominant extra-ecclesial powers and processes of social change. Neo-Anabaptists have used the language of politics to turn social marginality into social relevance (while also assuming all sorts of baggage that comes with it), and have made their very identity dependent on the State.<sup>164</sup>

In short, the problem that Hunter sees with the above three paradigms of Christian engagement of culture is that they all in some way mirror broader society’s conflation of the public with the political, by conflating the witness of the church with the power play of politics.

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<sup>163</sup> See *Ibid.*, 139-49.

<sup>164</sup> See *Ibid.*, 150-66.

He contends that, for the Christian Right and Left in particular, the reduction of faith to a political ideology trades upon the illusion that the state can indeed change the moral fabric of society for good in more than a limited way. The irony of this position is that its chosen vehicle for effecting moral reform and social justice – politics – is dependent upon a realm with moral criteria beyond itself: comprising institutions in which Christians already participate and offer the potential for generating social and political transformation. Hence, for Hunter, the tragedy is that church (especially in its Christian conservative expression) has accommodated itself to the spirit of the age by trying to change the world through politics. In an attempt to resist the internal deterioration of faith and the corruption of the world around them, Christians have allowed the kingdom of God to become characterised by resentments, negation and will to power, thereby unwittingly participating in the cultural breakdown they so ardently wish to decry.<sup>165</sup>

The alternative paradigm for Christian engagement of culture that Hunter proposes centers around a critical theological re-thinking of power. While not denying that faith communities wield power, he is nevertheless concerned that Christians fail to use it in a way that does justice to the tension created by being in the world but not of it. Hence, his call is for a postpolitical understanding of power, which rests upon a better grounding in the biblical narrative. To clear the way for a postpolitical Christian witness in the world, Hunter suggests that the first task is to disentangle the life and identity of the church from its Constantinian-like attachment to the life and identity of broader society. The second is to decouple the “public” from the “political”, thereby both reclaiming and imagining new institutional/ general social avenues for doing social good. Having cleared the public square of what he believes to be unworkable theological as well as practical presuppositions, Hunter in turn argues that the church should follow Jesus as the prototypical model for embodying a new kind of “social” power: what he calls “faithful presence”.<sup>166</sup>

To this end, he focuses more narrowly upon the teachings of Jesus on the power one finds in ordinary life.<sup>167</sup> In his brief survey, he concludes that Jesus demonstrated a different kind of

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<sup>165</sup> See *Ibid.*, 167-75. See also generally ———, *To Change the World*, 101-66.

<sup>166</sup> See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 176-87.

<sup>167</sup> “It is exercised every day in primary social relationships, within the relationships of family, neighborhood, and work in all of the institutions that surround us in daily life and therefore it is far more common to people than political power”; see *Ibid.*, 187.

power from the destructive kind that all too often pervades the world. And this he did not only in the spiritual and political realms, but also in the ordinary social dynamics of everyday life. Among other things, the life of Jesus repudiated the symbolic trappings of elitism and served the good of all, not just the community of faith. In short, neither the Christianising of the social order – wherein the civil realm is infused with ultimate meaning – by the Christian Right and Left, nor the evasion of the world by the neo-Anabaptist movement, does justice to the different kind of “social power” envisioned by Jesus. Hence, Hunter sets about constructing an alternative for faithful Christian living according to this basic vision.<sup>168</sup>

Before elaborating more on the theological underpinnings and practical implications of this alternative, Hunter suggests that Christians need to be aware of the challenges to cultivating faithfulness in the late modern world. He acknowledges the enormity and complexity of the task of finding categories to articulate such ever-evolving challenges. For theological conservatives the main challenge has been the solvent of secularism. For most progressives it has been inequality. And for many neo-Anabaptists the most significant challenge of our time has been the violence and coercion built into a liberal democracy and consumerism of global capitalism. These, Hunter believes, are parts of the puzzle, to which he offers two more. First, there is the challenge of difference: how do Christians live in a religiously plural world that is not ultimately their home? One way to describe this problem for Christians is that, unlike predominantly religious cultures of the past, the increasing marginalisation of the language of faith in the public square in the present has meant that “God-talk” has little or no resonance outside of the church. Once the dominant culture-shaping force and defender of social order, Christianity now finds itself on the fringes of a marketplace of competing ideas. What is more, not only does its ongoing participation in cultural transformation offer as much potential for harm as it does good (as argued above), but the church also runs the risk of capitulating to the pressures of the world. The second aspect of the complex of challenges posed by modernity is that of dissolution or relativisation of reality, and hence the Christian witness, introduced by the post-modern turn.<sup>169</sup>

In Hunter’s estimation, while difference and dissolution have their positive aspects, they have nevertheless produced an environment conducive to nihilism: that philosophical milieu in

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<sup>168</sup> See *Ibid.*, 187-93.

<sup>169</sup> See *Ibid.*, 199-210.

which the human will is subject to no authority higher than itself.<sup>170</sup> How then should Christians respond to such challenges – challenges that undercut the capacity to believe, and to believe coherently, thoroughly and effectively?

For Hunter, the three political theologies that he believes dominate the Christian landscape today – which he correlates with a “defensive against” (Christian Right), “relevance to” (Left) and “purity from” (neo-Anabaptist) taxonomy of Christian engagement of culture – all more or less minimise the inevitable tension facing Christians called to be “in the world and not of it.” Hence, he calls for and attempts to lay the groundwork for an alternative way.<sup>171</sup>

In the remaining paragraphs of this subsection, I set forth some of the defining features of this alternative, many of which resonate strongly with themes informing the paradigm argued in this thesis. For Hunter, to live as Christians in the modern world means the art of cultivating faithful presence, which means promoting the shalom of God in all spheres of life. Part and parcel of this vision is the acknowledgment that Christians live in tension with this world: which means relating to the world within a dialectic of affirmation and antithesis. Affirmation is based on the recognition that creation is intrinsically good, and that culture and culture-making are valid before God despite the fall. By the operations of his common grace, God brings forth from both believers and non-believers alike the fruits of goodness, beauty and truth, as expressions – albeit imperfect – of the divine image.<sup>172</sup> As a backdrop for these things, Hunter points to a “natural life originating in creation and a natural order in things that can be understood, developed, and enjoyed.” In other words, he believes that lying behind culture- or world-making is at least a minimalist notion of natural law.<sup>173</sup>

While underscoring the validity of culture-making in the eyes of God, Hunter is at the same time careful to point out that such work is not, strictly speaking, redemptive or salvific in nature. He argues: “This side of heaven, the culture cannot become the kingdom of God, nor will the work of Christians in the culture evolve into or bring about his kingdom.” For Christians

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<sup>170</sup> See *Ibid.*, 210-12.

<sup>171</sup> See *Ibid.*, 213-24. For more specifics on the points of contention between Hunter’s alternative and the three political theologies mentioned, see ———, *To Change the World*, 248-51.

<sup>172</sup> “The qualities nonbelievers possess as well as the accomplishments they achieve may not be righteous in the eschatological sense, but they should be celebrated all the same because they are gifts of God’s grace”; see Hunter, *To Change the World*, 232.

<sup>173</sup> See *Ibid.*, 225-33.

to regard fulfilling the cultural mandate in any literal sense as “kingdom-building” is, according to Hunter, to be begin with an assumption that tends to lead to one version or another of the Constantinian project: the Christianisation of culture.<sup>174</sup> Elsewhere, he writes: “Even if our tasks in this world do not have “ultimate significance,” that does not mean that the tasks we perform have no spiritual significance.”<sup>175</sup>

The second moment in the dialectic of the Christian life, which highlights the pilgrim status of Christians in this world, is the antithesis. In light of the fall, “all human aspirations exist under judgment, and all human achievement is measured by the standards of the coming kingdom.” Hence, all social organisations are ultimately parodies of eschatological hope. Human endeavor is never the final word. Thus, however much Christians are able to affirm the good, the true and the beautiful in the world, the church is always a “community of resistance” – which should not be understood as pure negation, but rather a constructive subversion that offers an alternative reality of the kingdom of God destiny based on the Word of God. And, “nowhere is the task of critical resistance more urgent than in the church itself for the ways it too has accommodated to the spirit of the late modern age.”<sup>176</sup>

In other words, the task of the church is to teach Christians to live in this world with discernment by faith through the Word, which means knowing the difference between the script of the world on the one hand and the script of God’s kingdom on the other; “to live with and reflect in life the dialectical tension between affirmation and antithesis.”<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Hunter elaborates elsewhere on the Constantinian temptation that besets so much of the church by beginning with an anecdote. “Consider the matter in this way: a young leader in the emerging church movement recently made the case that Christians “must redeem entire cultures, not only personal souls.” It is difficult to know what this might mean practically, but the phrase is interesting, for it is a new iteration of an old way of speaking about the world and the way the church should engage it... [W]e need a new language for how the church engages culture. It is essential, in my view, to abandon altogether talk of “redeeming the culture,” “advancing the kingdom,” “reclaiming culture,” “reforming the culture,” and “changing the world.” Christians need to leave such language behind them because it carries too much weight. It implies conquest, take-over, or dominion, which in my view is precisely what God does not want us to pursue – at least not in any conventional, twentieth- or twenty-first-century way of understanding these terms.” See *Ibid.*, 279-80. To end his section on affirmation, Hunter writes: “Let me finally stress that any good that is generated by Christians is *only* the net effect of caring for something more than the good created. *If there are benevolent consequences of our engagement with the world, in other words, it is precisely because it is not rooted in a desire to change the world for the better but rather because it is an expression of a desire to honor the creator of all goodness, beauty, and truth, a manifestation of our loving obedience to God, and a fulfillment of God’s command to love our neighbour.*” See ———, *To Change the World*, 233-34.

<sup>175</sup> See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 253.

<sup>176</sup> See *Ibid.*, 234-36.

<sup>177</sup> See *Ibid.*, 236-37.

When it comes to providing a biblical picture of “faithful presence within” for Christian engagement for the world, Hunter suggests the book of the prophet Jeremiah. The premise of Jeremiah’s message is that Israel is in exile for the long-term; a condition they need to come to terms with without being nostalgic for the past or revolting in the present. According to Jeremiah, God was calling Israel to act contrary to their natural inclination to be hostile to, withdraw from, or assimilate, into the world, by being faithfully present within it through the mundane activities of building, planting, marrying and procreating. Israel was to understand that God was even working for their good as they sought the good of their captors. In short, Hunter sees the story of Jeremiah 29 comporting well with the New Testament description of Christians as “exiles” and “strangers” in this world.<sup>178</sup> According to Hunter, the words of Jeremiah constitute older wisdom, but in today’s world it nevertheless holds the makings of a new paradigm.<sup>179</sup>

Further evidence for the pursuit of a new city commons, grounded in a theology of faithful presence, draws on wisdom from of old is Hunter’s appeal to the apologetic literature of the second and third century. He draws particular attention to the picture – though romanticised and idealistic – of Christian engagement of the world provided by the anonymous Letter to Diognetus.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> See, e.g., 1 Peter 1.1, 2.11.

<sup>179</sup> See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 276-79.

<sup>180</sup> See *Ibid.*, 284-85. Another recent volume aimed at engaging the contemporary Christianity and culture debates in North America, which reinforces many of the arguments about politics and evangelical activism made by Hunter is Darryl Hart, *From Billy Graham to Sarah Palin: Evangelicals and the Betrayal of American Conservatism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011). He suggests that what can be added to Hunter’s non-negotiable post-Constantinian outlook for the future is political conservatism. He explains: “Since it [political conservatism] appropriates the form of government established for the United States in 1789, it is clearly post-Constantinian. But it may not fit Hunter’s own categories, because this book suggests that the conservatism Hunter eschews is in fact more varied than the current antagonism between the Left and Right might suggest. Traditionalist conservatism represents a better form of politics, one that takes the faith of evangelicals seriously while also acknowledging the diversity of the United States and the significance of its form of government. It is on the side of much of what evangelicals want – strong families with parents determining what is best for their children, alternative forms of education that are not dominated by the state’s monopoly on schools, respect for the ideal and institutions that have defined American society, and churches that enjoy freedom of worship, speech, and forms of governance. The stumbling block for evangelicals is that conservatism is not inherently or obviously biblical.” See D. G. Hart, *A Secular Faith : Why Christianity Favors the Separation of Church and State* (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 2006), 224-26.

## 2.5. Two kingdoms and natural law

Until this point in this taxonomy of contemporary Christian engagement of culture – whether in Reformed or more broadly ecumenical circles – I have tried to provide a sense of the reigning paradigm, which is one of transformation or redemption. No explicitly positive appeal has been made to a distinct alternative that is gaining popularity in quarters of the contemporary Reformed tradition in North America, which finds its roots in the early Reformed tradition: a developed doctrine of two kingdoms. There are, however, three thinkers mentioned above who are critical to varying degrees of the reigning transformationist model and whose insights are at points conducive to or even suggestive of a two kingdoms approach. Early on in this chapter, I noted briefly the work of critic (albeit more indirectly and by implication) of liberalism, Robert Kraynak, who challenges the thrust of contemporary Reformed social thought in asserting that ordering the temporal city of humankind is a function of prudence and not some theological or spiritual ideal. In other words, no political ideology can be identified with Christianity; the flaws of liberalism may be exposed without insisting on a Christianised alternative. In making his case, Kraynak finds recourse in the earlier Christian social thought of Augustine as developed by Luther and in turn Calvin. In the subsection on neo-Calvinism in post-apartheid South Africa, Ernst Conradie suggests that the Reformed tradition in South Africa must confront the reality of some kind of natural theology if it is going to do justice to both creation and salvation in God's economy. The kind of questions that Conradie is asking of contemporary Reformed social thought in South Africa as well as his willingness to retrieve certain aspects of Kuyper's legacy, suggests that a two kingdoms alternative might at least start enjoying a fair hearing in this context again. In the previous subsection, James Davidson Hunter wages a sharp critique of the transformationist paradigm and in turn makes many points that resonate with a two kingdoms way of relating Christ and culture.

For all the value that can be ascribed to Hunter's recent volume, especially in terms of its exposing many of the pragmatic as well as theological shortcomings of the dominant politicised and Christianised social paradigms in the Protestant world today, there is oddly little mention of the two kingdoms approach – despite its boasting a half-millennium of Christian reflection. Furthermore, and as one of his reviewers, Terry Eastland, notes: what Hunter does say about two kingdoms is a caricature. According to Hunter, the doctrine leads its adherents “to increasingly

withdraw into their own communities with less interest in any engagement with the larger world.”<sup>181</sup> At this point, Eastland engages another title (which he reviews in juxtaposition with Hunter’s) in his mini-review of current “Christ meets culture” discourse, which is David VanDrunen’s, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms* (2010). He observes that Hunter fails to consider the historical-theological evidence that VanDrunen sets forth, which supports the proposition that the two kingdoms doctrine encompasses the notion of promoting the welfare of society, or in Hunter’s words, its “overall flourishing.” What is more, it seems strange to Eastland that for someone so vigorously opposed to transformationists at every turn, Hunter makes no positive appeal to the two kingdoms doctrine, which offers little support to world changers. On the other hand, there is an ambiguity in *To Change the World* that makes one wonder whether Hunter’s dismissal of two kingdoms belies his ultimate inability to escape the allure of world changing.<sup>182</sup>

Taking my cue from Eastland, I now turn to VanDrunen’s *Natural Law and Two Kingdoms* volume to provide the historical-theological backdrop for the two kingdoms paradigm, one which has experienced something of a comeback in the recent past and poses itself as a legitimate conversation partner in ongoing Christianity and culture discourse. VanDrunen argues that although much has been written about Reformed social thought from many angles, there yet remain aspects of the tradition largely unknown and frequently overlooked. Two important aspects in the development of Reformed social thought, having their roots in the early Christian tradition, are the doctrines of natural law and two kingdoms.<sup>183</sup>

A neglected part of the story of the Reformed tradition is that for the better part of four centuries it affirmed doctrines of natural law and two kingdoms as integral to its social thought.

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<sup>181</sup> See Terry Eastland, "Cities of God: Christianity Meets Culture," <http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/cities-god> (accessed on August 17, 2012), and Hunter, *To Change the World*, 218.

<sup>182</sup> “The ambiguity arises in his discussion of faithful presence, and it concerns the critical issue of redemption. For while Hunter emphasizes that “culture-making... is not, strictly speaking, redemptive or salvific in character,” and that “world building” is not to be confused with “building the kingdom of God,” he also says that the church should “offer an alternative vision and direction” for prevailing institutions and seek “to retrieve the good to which modern institutions and ideas implicitly or explicitly aspire.” Putting aside whether the church is even capable of offering such vision and direction, or retrieving such goods, it would seem without authority to do so – unless it is now being charged with (to borrow a phrase) “redeeming the culture.” See Eastland, "Cities of God: Christianity Meets Culture."

<sup>183</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 1. For a similar thesis, see generally John Witte, *The Reformation of Rights : Law, Religion and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), and ———, *Law and Protestantism : The Legal Teachings of the Lutheran Reformation* (Cambridge, UK ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

In espousing natural law, Reformed thinkers held that God has written his moral law on the heart of every person, and through the instrumental testimony of conscience provides all human beings with knowledge of their basic moral obligations. More specifically, natural law provides a universally accessible standard for the development of civil law. At the same time, they affirmed the interlocking doctrine of two kingdoms as God's rule over all human institutions and activities, but in two fundamentally different ways. On the one hand, God rules the church – as the sole (incomplete) expression of the kingdom of Christ – as redeemer in Jesus Christ. On the other hand, God rules over all other institutions – as expressions of the civil kingdom – as creator and sustainer. The result of God's distinct Lordship over his two kingdoms is that each has different ends, functions and modes of operation. In short, by utilising these doctrines, older Reformed writers grounded political and cultural life in God's work of creation and providence, as distinct from his work of redemption and eschatological restoration through Jesus Christ.<sup>184</sup>

### 2.5.1. *David VanDrunen and the North American context*

In his recent study of the development of Reformed social thought, VanDrunen concludes that the doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law have a formidable unfolding legacy in the history of the church in general and the Reformed tradition in particular. This legacy, VanDrunen contends, predates the advent of the Reformation in that some of its formative ideas can be found in works as early as the second century, such as the *Didache* and the *Epistle to Diognetus*. Both of these works resonate at points with Augustine's monumental fifth-century work, the *City of God*.<sup>185</sup> The latter, along with medieval figures like Poper Gelasius I, Pope Boniface VIII, William of Ockham and Aquinas,<sup>186</sup> all made their contribution to the development of the doctrines of natural law and two kingdoms (despite their Christendom context), and each in turn helped lay the foundation for Luther and his doctrines of natural law and two regiments (kingdoms) and two governments<sup>187</sup>. Among these precursors, Augustine and

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<sup>184</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 1-2.

<sup>185</sup> See *Ibid.*, 21-32.

<sup>186</sup> See *Ibid.*, 32-55.

<sup>187</sup> See *Ibid.*, 55-66.

Luther stand out as critical shaping influences upon Calvin and other early Reformed formulations and refinements of the doctrines of natural law and two kingdoms<sup>188</sup>.

VanDrunen writes from within a context in which the legacy of natural law and two kingdoms still has some semblance of life. Its survival is in large part due to the North American socio-political experiment in religious freedom, and how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American Presbyterians were able to embrace such a tenet of liberal society through its refined categories of natural law and two kingdoms.<sup>189</sup> However, like other contexts such as South Africa, North America also saw these doctrines fall on hard times during the twentieth-century due to the ambiguous influence of Kuyper,<sup>190</sup> and later the suspicions and critiques of Barth<sup>191</sup> and Kuyper's neo-Calvinist descendents<sup>192</sup>.

Evidence of the enduring effect of this turnaround in the North American context is that most present-day adherents to the Reformed tradition are either ignorant or suspicious of, or reject outright the historic Reformed doctrines of natural law and two kingdoms. Telling is VanDrunen's assessment that most observers outside of Reformed social thought would not link these ideas with the Reformed tradition. As to natural law, many contemporary Reformed Christians associate it at best with Roman Catholic dogma and its combination of an overly optimistic view of human moral and epistemological capabilities wedded with a low view of the importance of Scripture. At worst it is an Enlightenment idea that makes possible social discourse without reference to religion or God. With respect to two kingdoms, the contemporary Reformed tradition typically dismisses the doctrine as a Lutheran invention that creates an unnecessary dualism between the church and the world. This dualism in turn tends to confine religion to private life while fostering an uncritical conservatism and passivity in public life. In other words, contemporary Reformed social discourse in general has not simply been ambivalent toward the formidable legacy of natural law and two kingdoms, but has dismissed these doctrines as inherently foreign to Reformed theology. However, in VanDrunen's opinion few recent Reformed writers of such persuasion have demonstrated significant familiarity with how the

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<sup>188</sup> See *Ibid.*, chapters 3-6.

<sup>189</sup> See *Ibid.*, chapter 6.

<sup>190</sup> See *Ibid.*, chapter 7.

<sup>191</sup> See *Ibid.*, chapter 8.

<sup>192</sup> See *Ibid.*, chapter 9-10.

earlier Reformed tradition actually defended and used these categories.<sup>193</sup> Hence, his burden is to meet this perceived historical-theological need: to trace the development of natural and two kingdoms doctrines in the history of Reformed social thought.

Convinced of the substantive use of natural law and two kingdoms in shaping early Reformed social thought – though recognising concomitant inconsistencies due largely to the trappings of Christendom – VanDrunen has sought to recover and develop these resources in accord with the biblical witness. While harnessing the insights of the likes of Augustine, Luther, Calvin and American Presbyterian, Stuart Robinson, VanDrunen has also built upon Reformed voices in the early part of the twentieth-century, such as J. Gresham Machen,<sup>194</sup> and in more recent decades, Meredith Kline<sup>195</sup>. Among contemporary Reformed figures interested in recovering the older categories of natural law and two kingdoms, and seeking to develop them in similar ways to VanDrunen at points, are Darryl Hart,<sup>196</sup> Michael Horton<sup>197</sup> and Stephen J. Grabill<sup>198</sup>.

VanDrunen is adamant that there is an alternative to the redemptive transformation of culture perspective with Augustinian and Reformation credentials, which retains a positive view of broader culture. Nevertheless, the cultural activities of Christians outside the church must be carefully distinguished from the coming of God's kingdom and the hope of the new creation. According to this vision, the affairs of humans in the civil realm are deemed temporary and provisional, and therefore do not constitute labor in or for the advancement of God's kingdom. In other words, "[r]edemption does not consist in restoring people to fulfill Adam's original task, but consists in the Lord Jesus Christ himself fulfilling Adam's original task once and for all, on

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<sup>193</sup> See *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>194</sup> See, e.g., J. Gresham Machen, *Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. D.G. Hart (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 375, 94-95., and D. G. Hart, "Introduction: The Forgotten Machen?," in *J. Gresham Machen, Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. D. G. Hart (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004). See also VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 426.

<sup>195</sup> See, e.g., Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Overland Park, KS: Two Ages Press, 2000). See also VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 411-21.

<sup>196</sup> See, e.g., Hart, *A Secular Faith*.

<sup>197</sup> See, e.g., Michael S Horton, "In Praise of the Profanity: A Theological Defense of the Secular," in *Evangelicals and Empire: Christian Alternatives to the Political Status Quo*, ed. Bruce Benson and Peter Goodwin (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008).

<sup>198</sup> See, e.g., Stephen John Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006). For a more extensive bibliography on the growing corpus of scholarship sympathetic to this paradigm, see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 6, 424-27.

our behalf. Central to this understanding of redemption is the church and its ministry and life, which is the site in and through which the kingdom of Christ is expressed and advances.<sup>199</sup>

In addition to grounding his paradigm in classic doctrines of creation, fall and resurrection, VanDrunen also utilises the *loci* of classic federal theology to make his biblical case for two kingdoms. In doing so, he finds warrant to distinguish – without creating unwarranted dualisms – between God’s rule over the holy and enduring things of Christ’s kingdom and the temporary cultural endeavors of the common kingdom. The latter should be understood as divinely ordained and sustained by God’s providence, making cultural life legitimate but not sacred.<sup>200</sup> It is in the context of the distinction between God’s two kingdoms that VanDrunen argues for the value of natural law as the standard for civil law and the grammar for moral discourse in a religiously diverse society. Hence, VanDrunen contends that the doctrines of natural law and two kingdoms provide Christians with a holistic and liberating account of all of life, while maintaining necessary distinctions, such as being simultaneous members of church and state. For instance, such a paradigm enables the Christian to affirm (but not be bound to) the penultimate<sup>201</sup> value of a liberal democracy without transforming it according to the kingdom of God ideal or forfeiting one’s faith in the process.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 24-26.

<sup>200</sup> See *Ibid.*, 26 and in general.

<sup>201</sup> Here it perhaps helpful to differentiate VanDrunen’s use of the term “penultimate” from that of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s, a theologian who has had enduring influence upon the church in South Africa, particularly the Reformed tradition, and especially during the anti-apartheid church struggle. See John W. de Gruchy, *Bonhoeffer and South Africa: Theology in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1984)., and Robert Vosloo, "Interpreting Bonhoeffer in South Africa? The Search for a Historical and Methodological Responsible Hermeneutic," (Forthcoming, 2013). In his chapter entitled “Ultimate and Penultimate Things” in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr., trans. Reinhard Krauss et al, vol. 6, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005)., Bonhoeffer relates ultimate and penultimate things in a similar way to that of the critics of liberalism and (neo-)Calvinists described above. Bonhoeffer speaks of the ultimate in terms of the justifying grace that has come in Jesus Christ. So much VanDrunen can affirm. However, Bonhoeffer sees the ultimate – that which includes what is human and good in this life – as all that precedes and follows the penultimate. The ultimate and the penultimate are so closely related so as to be in continuity with one another: in such intimate relation that the preservation of the one necessarily entails the preservation of the other. Here Bonhoeffer sounds similar to the Christological rendering of all life offered by Barth, and therefore at odds with VanDrunen’s two kingdoms rendering of the penultimate. For VanDrunen, “penultimate” is a fitting way to characterise liberal society, as that expression of the civil kingdom, which is temporary and outside of purview of Christ’s redemptive and eschatological kingdom.

<sup>202</sup> See VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate."

### 2.5.2. *The South African context*

To my knowledge there has been no branch of the Reformed tradition in the South African context that has constructively utilised the natural law and two kingdoms paradigm of the earlier Reformed tradition as articulated by VanDrunen above. This reality is as much a function of theological developments in the twentieth-century Reformed tradition at large as it is the association of these doctrines with Afrikaner Calvinism. As part of his famous critique of a kind of apartheid-endorsing neo-Calvinism, de Gruchy once wrote of Luther's teaching of two kingdoms: "The disastrous consequences of the doctrine were most clearly demonstrated in Nazi Germany. But neo-Calvinism, especially as interpreted in South Africa, has had a similar effect, through its doctrine of the sovereignty of spheres, in preventing the church from prophetically challenging the government."<sup>203</sup> By being equated with a kind of Kuyperian natural theology and sphere sovereignty, the doctrines of natural law and two kingdoms have – along with apartheid – become shameful relics of an oppressive past. Coupled with the sophisticated and pointed theological critique of Barth, these doctrines are in contemporary Christianity and culture discourse for the most part deemed the furthest thing from a liberating, let alone Reformed, paradigm for socio-political engagement.<sup>204</sup>

With this said, not all contemporary Reformed theologians in South Africa have been bound to every aspect of the Barthian and neo-Calvinist transformationist critique of natural law and two kingdoms, and to its alleged contamination by Afrikaner Calvinism. Reformed theologian and ethicist J.M. Vorster is an example of someone who finds in these doctrines constructive value for Reformed social discourse today. Of particular interest to Vorster are ethical questions surrounding human rights in South Africa.<sup>205</sup> In his volume, *Ethical Perspectives on Human Rights*, Vorster opens his second chapter on "Calvin and the rights of people" by setting forth its central argument: "that aspects of Calvin's view of God, man and civil authority can be used as a sound foundation for the formulation of human rights applicable

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<sup>203</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 272.

<sup>204</sup> On these points, see Villa-Vicencio, "Introduction: Reclaiming the Christian Heritage.", and Durand, "Church and State in South Africa: Karl Barth Vs. Abraham Kuyper.",

<sup>205</sup> For a more recent example, see J.M. Vorster, "Constitutional Implementation of Religious Freedom," in *Freedom of Religion*, ed. A. van de Beek et al (Boston: Brill, 2010).

to a modern constitutional democracy.<sup>206</sup> According to Vorster, who finds secondary historical support in the likes of John Witte Jr, these features of Calvin's thought include natural law, two kingdoms, common grace and the image of God.<sup>207</sup> In the next chapter, he proceeds to trace the development of human rights in the Reformed tradition where he judges the Reformed tradition in eighteenth-century North America to have been more successful in applying Calvin's ideas than its European counterparts.<sup>208</sup> In evaluating the development of human rights into the nineteenth-century, he apportioned the greatest positive influence to the Reformed tradition in North America and its separation of church and state.<sup>209</sup>

While Vorster makes constructive use of the Calvin-informed doctrine of natural law<sup>210</sup> and has qualified sympathy with a two-kingdoms-like separation of church and state model,<sup>211</sup> his overall social vision – at least as it is applied to human rights – still reflects a strong redemptive transformation of culture worldview. Evidence for this stems from his overall evaluation of the Reformed tradition as always having a strong emphasis on the social calling of the church, which goes all the way back to Calvin himself.<sup>212</sup> What is more, in his analysis of twentieth-century Reformed contributions to the human rights discourse, he contends that Calvin's *lex naturae* is only one of many valuable theological frameworks within the tradition, which include common grace (Kuyper), Christology (Barth) and the Exodus motif (Moltmann).<sup>213</sup> In his conclusion to *Ethical Perspectives* he quotes with approval de Gruchy's description of the role of the church in a time of reconciliation and transformation, which is one

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<sup>206</sup> See ———, *Ethical Perspectives on Human Rights* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom Theological Publications, 2004), 26-27.

<sup>207</sup> See *Ibid.*, chapter 2. See also generally ———, "Calvin and Human Dignity," *In die skriflig* 44, no. 3: Supplement - John Calvin 1509-2009 A South African Perspective (2010): 197-213.

<sup>208</sup> See Vorster, *Ethical Perspectives*, 46-50.

<sup>209</sup> See *Ibid.*, 50-57.

<sup>210</sup> Vorster makes constructive use of natural law in his biblical-theological case for the human dignity of man; see, e.g., *Ibid.*, 93-96.

<sup>211</sup> Vorster believes it is up for debate whether the state, with its ideological presuppositions can be neutral or secular. Nevertheless, he argues that history has proved it to be the best guarantee of religious freedom; see *Ibid.*, 208-10.

<sup>212</sup> See *Ibid.*, 1, chapter 2.

<sup>213</sup> See *Ibid.*, 65. See also ———, "Constitutional Implementation of Religious Freedom," where after outlining what he perceives to be the five options utilised in the past or present human rights discourse, he endorses "The Active Plural Option", which, among other things, sees all religions as having an active role in the public sphere (rather than being relegated to the private realm).

of prophetic critique and solidarity. For Vorster, religious liberty frees the church up to be an agent of critical solidarity toward the state and broader culture. “Churches are well situated in society to promote morality, human dignity, compassion, reconciliatory acts and symbolism, and to visualise hope.”<sup>214</sup>

## 2.6. Concluding remarks

From the above taxonomy it seems fair to conclude that the dominant emphasis animating contemporary Reformed social discourse – one also shared by broader Christian traditions – is some variation of a Christ transforming culture vision. Whether trenchant theological critics of liberalism or contemporary Reformed thinkers of Kuypertian or Barthian persuasion, and whether in the North American or South African context, the common denominator is a transformed, Christianised culture as the social ideal. When such a paradigm has the state in particular in view, and its promotion of a liberal society, its proponents may stand in solidarity with those tenets that accord with this ideal. And yet, at those points in which the state fails to meet the ultimate kingdom of God standard, such parties assume the role of (prophetically) unmasking and critiquing the shortcomings of liberal society. In contrast, the minority contemporary Reformed position of natural law and two kingdoms as espoused by VanDrunen offers a distinctly different vision for Christian engagement of culture. Such a vision encourages Christians to discharge their various God-given callings and vocations in the civil realm in faith and unto the glory of God, but nevertheless from the perspective that such endeavors are temporary: in that God is not transforming the civil realm into the redemptive kingdom. This does not, however, preclude Christians from seeking the promotion of truth and justice in non-redemptive ways as they have the opportunity. Hence, this paradigm provides the resources for evaluating – and even defending, though not dictating – the goods of a liberal state from a penultimate perspective.<sup>215</sup>

Both these majority and minority reports claim continuity with Calvin and the early Reformed tradition. Central to this thesis is an examination of which contemporary wing of the tradition can rightfully claim continuity with its earlier heritage.

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<sup>214</sup> See Vorster, *Ethical Perspectives*, 211, 85-86.

<sup>215</sup> See VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate," 219, 30.

## CHAPTER 3

### JOHN CALVIN'S RECEPTION IN SOUTH AFRICA: ENGAGING A CONTESTED LEGACY

In recent history, there is perhaps no other context in which Calvin boasts such an ignominious and ambiguous legacy as South Africa. The history of the Reformed churches in South Africa reveals that disparate readings of Calvin played a pivotal role in giving theological legitimisation to apartheid *as well as* the church struggle against apartheid has challenged the life and identity of the Reformed tradition. How could the tradition have reached such divergent interpretations of Calvin, a man of unparalleled influence upon Reformed identity in South Africa? Which reception of Calvin most faithfully represents the historical sixteenth-century Reformer?

When it comes to ethnic division *within* the church, few would want to return to the earlier 'apartheid' reading of Calvin. The majority in the Reformed family of churches – at least in theory and not necessarily always in practice – have embraced the Calvin of church unity and ecumenicity recovered in the church struggle as a better rendering than the apartheid Calvin of ecclesiastical division along racial lines. This development represents a much-needed correction to Calvin's legacy, thereby restoring a vital measure of credibility to the Reformed tradition in South Africa.

However, when it comes to how the church should engage culture in general and the state in particular – life *outside* the church – Calvin's legacy remains more ambiguous and contested. Both the Calvinism behind apartheid *and* the Calvinism behind the church struggle embraced a vision for transforming society, but produced starkly contrasting outcomes.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> According to de Gruchy, the Calvinism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries contributed significantly to social movements that managed to turn a theology of evangelical salvation into a program of political transformation and potent social force. This legacy continued into the twentieth-century, as evidenced by Kuyper and Troeltsch, who perceived Calvinism to be more than a set of doctrines and denominations, but a life system contributing in a decisive way to the social construction of reality. This Calvinist tradition contributed in part to the laudable social achievements of social democracy and human freedom, but also to secularised versions of the kingdom of God, thus contributing to the rise of nationalist doctrines of manifest destiny: such as 'Americanism' and Afrikaner civil religion, and its sanctification of the ideology of apartheid. See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 1-4.

In the first part of this chapter I tell the story of how Calvin was ‘used’ in support of the theological legitimisation of apartheid, giving rise to what many have called one of the gravest failures of world-transformative Calvinism.<sup>217</sup> In turn, I tell the story of a transformationist Calvin recovered in a different and more liberating key in the church struggle movement: the portrait of Calvin that continues to be most dominant among Reformed churches in South Africa today. In sketching both historical accounts, I pay particular attention to how each rendition of Calvin was brought to bear upon church-state relations during a unique chapter of South Africa’s socio-political evolution.

In the second part of this chapter I reflect on some lessons that can be learned from Calvin’s contested legacy as highlighted by his reception on church-state relations in the anti-apartheid church struggle, with a view to revisiting his social thought. I suggest that such lessons may help provide a compelling alternative to the historical and theological portrait of the transformationist Calvin already retrieved in the Reformed tradition in South Africa.

In the final part of this chapter, and in light of the pedagogical lens of the Calvin of the church struggle, I make the case for returning to Calvin’s social thought – in particular his doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law. In doing so, the conclusion of this chapter anticipates subsequent chapters where I will determine whether there is substantive evidence for such doctrines in Calvin. And if so, whether they might provide further resolution to Calvin’s contested legacy and supply the church with additional resources for facing the challenges of Christian life in South Africa’s young liberal democracy.

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Allan Boesak, in his letter to the Minister of Justice in 1979, wrote the following: “There is not one inch of life that is not claimed by the lordship of Jesus Christ. This includes the political, social, and economic spheres... The Dutch Reformed Church professes this in its report ‘Race Relations in the South African Situation in the Light of Scripture.’ The report states plainly that in its proclamation the church must appeal to its members to apply the principles of the kingdom of God in the social and political sphere. When the word of God demands it, the church is compelled to fulfill its prophetic function vis-à-vis the state even *in spite of popular opinion*. The witness of the church with regard to government is a part of its essential being in the world, says the report. This is sound Reformed thinking, and the Dutch Reformed Church accepts this because it wants to be Reformed. Why, then, are you refusing to grant other churches and Christians (also other Reformed Christians!) this witness and participation?”; see Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 37-38.

<sup>217</sup> See, e.g., de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, xvi. See also generally Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*.

### 3.1. The “Calvin” of apartheid

The story of the rise of the ideology of apartheid is a complex one and is not easily identifiable with a form of Calvinism or even Calvin himself.<sup>218</sup> A brief tracing of its roots illustrates this fact.<sup>219</sup> De Gruchy paints a picture of seventeenth-century Dutch and French Huguenot settlers in the Cape as being far from theologically informed and dedicated to a holy cause.<sup>220</sup> While the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC/ Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk) played a prominent role in shaping the settled Cape colony, it was largely captive to colonial needs and interests of the times. As the established state church, the DRC was subservient to colonial policy and its ministers were in the pay of the Dutch East India Company. Instead of the Calvinist distinction between elect and reprobate that initially structured Cape society, it was rather the Company’s distinction between legal status groups, and the attitudes and institutions inherited from earlier Dutch experience in Europe and the Indies. Later in South Africa’s history, and in the wake of British colonisation at the turn of the nineteenth-century, “it was not Calvinism, but British colonial policy, settler interests, land hunger, and imperial greed that determined attitudes and government policies and helped lay the foundation for apartheid.” In short, neither the Dutch settlers nor the later Trekkers interpreted their experience in theological, let alone Calvinist, terms.<sup>221</sup> In the words of André du Toit: “The theory of an authentic Calvinist tradition going back to primitive Calvinism nurtured in the isolated *trekboer* society on the open frontier, and ultimately derived from the golden age of ‘seventeenth-century Calvinism’, is an historical myth.”<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 4-7.

<sup>219</sup> For more well-known historical reconstructions of apartheid other than the work of John de Gruchy (of which I predominantly make use), see e.g., T. Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid and Afrikaner Civil Religion* (Berkeley: Univ of CA Press, 1975).; Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003).; and WA de Klerk, *The Puritans in Africa: A Story of Afrikanerdom* (New York: Penguin, 1983).

<sup>220</sup> This was in contrast to the well-informed Calvinists like the Puritans of New England.

<sup>221</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 8-11.

<sup>222</sup> André du Toit, "The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology," *American Historical Review* 88, no. 4 (1983): 234. See also ———, "Puritans in Africa? Afrikaner 'Calvinism' and Kuyperian Neo-Calvinism in Late Nineteenth Century South Africa," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 27 (April 1985)., and D.J. Bosch, "The Roots and Fruits of Afrikaner Civil Religion," in *New Faces of Africa: Essays in Honour of Ben (Barend Jacobus) Marais*, ed. J.W. Hofmeyr & W.S. Vorster (Pretoria: 1984).

How then does Calvinism factor into the entrenchment of apartheid? De Gruchy explains:

Rather than being the origin of Afrikaner nationalism, racism, and subsequently apartheid... Calvinism was later adapted to further their cause and legitimate them. In this way, Calvinism was not only co-opted by Afrikaner nationalism, becoming instrumental in its transition to power, but was itself transformed into Afrikaner Calvinism, a religious ideology sufficiently Calvinistic to be recognized as part of the Reformed tradition, but also sufficiently deviant to seriously undermine and damage its witness. Afrikaner Calvinism's legitimization of apartheid became the heresy, not Calvinism as such.<sup>223</sup>

Hence, the first portrait of Calvin with the Reformed tradition in South Africa emerged, for many today unrecognisable and for most best forgotten. But how did the DRC in South Africa become so intertwined with a cultural ideology of racism and segregation, in the name of Calvin?<sup>224</sup>

### 3.1.1. *The Dutch Reformed Church*

Important background to the unfolding of this story is the nature of the *piety* of the DRC, the dominant church in the land and mother of the Reformed tradition in the nineteenth-century.<sup>225</sup> In reaction to a liberal element within the church, some became firmly committed to the Calvinist theology of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed confessions. Others sought to counter the liberal downgrade under the influence of Scottish evangelicalism and Dutch pietism. In regard to the latter, Dutch Reformed leader Andrew Murray Jr., through his involvement in the revivals of the mid-nineteenth century, played a significant role in inculcating evangelical pietism as the pervasive spirituality of the church.<sup>226</sup> This brand of evangelicalism sought to be politically neutral and was for the most part pietistic (read: primarily concerned with

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<sup>223</sup> de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 12.

<sup>224</sup> It is important to note that not all Afrikaners have historically been Calvinists. What is more, the theology of the Dutch Reformed Church cannot be equated with Afrikaner Calvinism. "Afrikaner Calvinism is a particular ideological blend of various sources that emerged within the Dutch Reformed Church in the late nineteenth century, and that dominated its life during the heyday of Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid in the twentieth." This does not imply that white English-speaking South Africans are exonerated. They too have shared in the racist psyche that has dominated most European Christian traditions. See *Ibid.*, xvi.

<sup>225</sup> At the same time the Reformed tradition has been wider than the DRC, including Presbyterians and Congregationalists, and their respective missionary societies; see *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>226</sup> See *Ibid.*, 21-23, 25., and W. D. Jonker, "Die eie-aard van die Gereformeerde spiritualiteit," *Nederduitse Geref. Teologiese Tydskrif* 30 (July 1989): 291. See also Willie Jonker, "Kragvelde binne die Kerk," *Aambeeld* 26, no. 1 (1988).

personal salvation and the well-being of the church). And yet, it was under the dominance of such evangelicalism, rather than the strict Calvinism of Dordt, that led the DRC to assimilate tenets of racial segregation in broader culture. At the Synod of 1857 she finally agreed that congregations could – on the account of the “weakness of some” – worship separately along racial lines. (There was already something of a precedence for this dating back to 1829 when some rural Dutch congregations asked for separate facilities and services for black converts.) What was initially a formulation of a group of white congregants (in the Kat River area) pleading for a separate ministry for white members amidst a predominantly colored congregation, led to the Synodical formulation giving permission for the separation of coloured members in predominantly white congregations. This decision helped pave the way for the constitution of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC/ NG Sendingkerk) in 1881: the first of several racially based Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa. The rationale was part missiological: people were best evangelised and best worshipped God in their own language and cultural setting. Segregation was also defended on practical grounds: it furthered white communal interests. This was nothing but a capitulation to colonial interests and pressure. Hence, the foundation for an ecclesiological and theological justification of “apartheid” was laid. It is precisely for this reason that apartheid was rejected as “nothing but heresy”.<sup>227</sup>

The pietistic tradition within the DRC, while not consciously committed to a political agenda, also generated from within its ranks the notion of a *volkskerk*. This idea emerged during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) as an attempt to relate the church more directly to the needs of the Afrikaner people who suffered so severely during the war. This was done at the expense of other ethnicities and people groups, thereby denying the catholic identity of the church.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> See Pauw, "Anti-Apartheid Theology", 71-76., and de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 23-24, 190-91. See also Chris Loff, "The history of a heresy" in John W. de Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Apartheid Is a Heresy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983), 10-23., and Smit, *Essays in Public Theology*, 28.

<sup>228</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 24-25., and J.J.F. Durand, "Afrikaner Piety and Dissent," in *Resistance and Hope: South African Essays in Honour of Beyers Naudé*, ed. Charles Villa-Vicencio and John W. de Gruchy (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 42-43.

### 3.1.2. *The Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk and the Gereformeerde Kerk*

The tradition of strict confessional Calvinism within the Dutch Reformed Church also lent theological impetus to apartheid. This part of the story is however complicated by two splits from within the DRC in the nineteenth-century. The first division led to the establishment of the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk (NHK) in 1853, a result of the Great Trek. This offshoot became the established church of the Transvaal Republic. Its constitution barred black political representation and non-Calvinist church participation in the Republic. The second split led to the formation of the Gereformeerde Kerk (GK; with roots in Holland and popularly known as the “Dopper” church) in 1859, a church committed to the restoration of the strictly orthodox Calvinism of the Synod of Dort and therefore opposed to Calvinism’s dilution through evangelical pietism. Of particular importance to the formation of the GK’s identity was the influence of Dutch statesman-theologian Abraham Kuyper.<sup>229</sup>

Kuyper’s version of Calvinism was an all-embracing “life-system” in which God exercises his sovereignty over all of life through autonomous spheres (*inter alia*: culture, education, church, politics). His views proved to be particularly influential towards the end of the nineteenth-century and in the decades following the Anglo-Boer War at the beginning of the twentieth. Kuyper’s neo-Calvinism soon spread beyond the “Dopper” church, not least through the Afrikaner patriot and Afrikaner Bond founder, Rev. S.J. du Toit.<sup>230</sup>

### 3.1.3. *Sacred history, ‘will-to-order legalism’, sphere sovereignty and ‘volkskerk’*

Unfolding in concert with these developments was the reinterpretation of Afrikaner history as “sacred history”. De Gruchy writes:

President Paul Kruger of the Transvaal Republic, also a founding member of the “Dopper” church, had made powerful rhetorical use of this theme and its symbols in his speeches in the years leading up to the Anglo-Boer War. Later, especially in the 1920s and 1930s, the notion of Afrikaner history as “sacred history” became the only hermeneutic filter through which Afrikaner history was to be read and interpreted by all

<sup>229</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 25.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-26. See also P.J. Strauss, "Abraham Kuyper and Pro-Apartheid Theologians in South Africa - Was the Former Misused by the Latter," in *Kuyper Reconsidered: Aspects of His Life and Word*, ed. Cornelius van der Kooi (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1999), 225-26.

true Afrikaners. It was during this period that the architects and ideologists of Afrikaner nationalism made capital out of the mythology of Afrikanerdom as the Chosen People. The Great Trek was the Exodus from the bondage of British rule at the Cape which led, in turn, to the years of struggling in the Wilderness against all odds, en route to the Promised Land of the Boer Republics.<sup>231</sup>

These myths and symbols drawn from the Old Testament became powerful tools in the hands of those seeking to advance the cause of Afrikaner nationalism through Afrikaner Calvinism. The wedding of these sacred and secular, ecclesiastical and civil horizons took on the “Calvinist” label due in large part to the vast majority of Afrikaners belonging to one of the three Reformed churches and the influential role played by DRC ministers.<sup>232</sup> De Gruchy observes that what one had in Afrikaner Calvinism was the conflation of God’s providence in history with his redemptive calling of a people to be a light to the nations. “This inevitably conflates nation and church, and it confuses the achievement of political goals with the arrival of the kingdom of God.”<sup>233</sup>

In de Gruchy’s judgment, the formation of Afrikaner Calvinism can also be traced back to the theological embodiment of a “will-to-order legalism” present in the Reformed tradition that can be traced back to Calvin himself (see Chapter 5).<sup>234</sup> He argues that a clear line of connection can be drawn between this Calvinist “pathos for order” and the Afrikaner Calvinist attempt to order society and transform it according to God’s will for the nations. Afrikaner Calvinism believed that it was fulfilling God’s special calling upon them to civilise and Christianise South Africa. However, instead of pursuing law and order in the service of justice

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<sup>231</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 26. A critical event during the Great Trek, providing the most sacred of symbols for Afrikaner nationalism, was “the covenant” entered into with God before the Battle of Blood River on December 16, 1839 (the Day of the vow). This occasion provided the powerful impetus for blending Afrikaner nationalism and Afrikaner Calvinism into a potent form of “civil religion”; not unlike that which emerged in the United States through the interaction of Puritan religion and the struggles and aspirations of the nation’s founding fathers. See ———, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 264. Again, in this instance, it must be emphasised that it was not a robust Calvinism per se, at work during the Great Trek that helped give rise to the notion of Afrikaner civil religion, but rather a later Afrikaner Calvinism reading its nationalistic aspirations back into such an event. See Bosch, “The Roots and Fruits of Afrikaner Civil Religion,” 14-35.

<sup>232</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 26-27.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 129-30.

<sup>234</sup> de Gruchy argues that Calvin can neither be held fully responsible for nor be fully exonerated from the toxicity of legalism in his spiritual descendents, which can be derived from Calvin’s emphasis on proving the efficacy of faith through works and his articulation of the third use of the law; see *Ibid.*, 142-46.

and upholding human dignity, this notion of a mission motivated by “manifest destiny” in reality often masked the opposite: base material self-interest.<sup>235</sup>

Over time – inspired by a sense of sacred destiny and propelled by a will-to-order legalism – Afrikaner Calvinism gained greater traction in both church and society.

Indicative of this was the neo-Calvinist initiative promoting Afrikaner nationalist ideals in the formation of The Federation of Calvinistic Student Organisations.<sup>236</sup> During the 1930s, and as Afrikaner nationalism was reaching new heights of fervor in anticipation of gaining power, this organisation gave rise to the publication of three volumes published under the title *Koers in die krisis* (“Direction in crisis”), under the editorship of H.G. Stoker, F.J.M. Potgieter, and J.D. Vorster. These neo-Calvinist editors not only used the mythology of sacred Afrikaner history but were also unequivocal in reinterpreting Calvinism for a new and different context: a South Africa with distinct cultural, racial and political problems. In doing so, they made heavy use of Kuyper, augmenting his ideas to suit the needs of Afrikanerdom. Of vital significance in this respect was the elevation of the Afrikaner *volk* to a “separate sphere”. While Kuyper had no sympathy toward the notion of a *volkskerk*, his South African counterparts adapted his theology in order to legitimate the same. More specifically, Kuyper’s notion of the “sovereignty of spheres” together with the principle of diversity as something rooted in creation, were used to give the Afrikaner nation an independent status before God endowed with a special calling from among a (divinely ordained) diversity of peoples/ethnic groups/nations.<sup>237</sup>

In order to appreciate how Afrikaner Calvinism found something of an “ally” in Kuyper, a few comments are in order regarding his theology, specifically with respect to his doctrine of common grace. To provide a theological account for God’s reign over all of reality, Kuyper’s cosmology involved a close analogy between Creator and creation on the basis of the notion of common grace. Piet Naudé explains:

From eternity, all principles of life are hidden in God, carrying a particular essence and potential. Through creation, the Holy Spirit brings this essence into physical reality.

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<sup>235</sup> This social phenomenon was not altogether unlike that of Puritanism in New England; see *Ibid.*, 147-48.

<sup>236</sup> See Vosloo, "Remembering John Calvin in South Africa Today?," 429.

<sup>237</sup> See Piet Naudé, "The Two Faces of Calvin in South Africa: In Honor of the 500th Commemoration of John Calvin's Birth (Part 1)," *NGTT* 50, no. 3 & 4 September and Desember (2009): 607-13.; Robert Vosloo, "Calvin and Anti-Apartheid Memory in the Dutch Reformed Family of Churches in South Africa," in *Sober, Strict, and Scriptural: Collective Memories of John Calvin, 1800-2000*, ed. Herman Paul, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 223-24.; and de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 27.;

This reality, or created order, is marked by a rich pluriformity and develops through time according to different particular life-principles. God-willed orders of creation like family, state, and church exist in sovereign spheres but are held together by God's common grace, which prevents the world from degenerating into chaos. Common grace (sometimes called general grace) allows for the evolutionary development of life-streams inherent in creation. In this way, creation, including the different people of the world, fulfills its potential in nature and culture, under God's reign and to God's glory.<sup>238</sup>

Kuyper's concept of common grace had implications for his ecclesiology.

Kuyper believed that the church exists both as institution and organism, the former being a result of special grace, but the latter not always so. When Christians leaven broader society with their faith, the church is acting as organism and on the basis of special grace. However, when positive developments occur in the world, even in the absence of the explicit influence of faith, the church as organism is acting on the basis of common grace.<sup>239</sup>

A related aspect of Kuyper's ecclesiology is that he did not believe the institutional (i.e., external) form of the church belongs to its essence. Rather, the traditional marks of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity constitute the invisible church that will be realised only eschatologically. Accordingly, Kuyper saw a multiplicity of institutional churches as no threat to the spiritual unity of the church. In fact, he held that differentiation among peoples would and should lead to the development of different churches.<sup>240</sup>

Kuyper's doctrine of common grace also informed his views on human and social development. He asserted that by virtue of common grace all humans have a natural knowledge of God and stand equal before him, thereby forming the basis and stepping-stone for special grace, which leads to a higher knowledge of God in Christ. While Kuyper's doctrine of common grace enabled him to affirm the unity of humanity before God, it also provided the hermeneutical key in explaining the ethnic and cultural diversity introduced by the Babel event. He envisioned various people groups from around the world participating at different levels in a hierarchy of grace. At the base level are those people, like Africans (following the descendants of Ham) among whom common grace has yet to reach its full potential. At the next level are people from more developed areas, like parts of Asia (following the line of Japheth), where there is a greater

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<sup>238</sup> Piet Naudé, *Neither Calendar nor Clock : Perspectives on the Belhar Confession* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2010), 26-27. For an example of Kuyper's cosmology, see Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*.

<sup>239</sup> See Naudé, *Neither Calendar nor Clock*, 27.

<sup>240</sup> See *Ibid.*

predomination of common grace. And at the highest level of development are those civilisations, like Europe and North America (children of Shem), which have experienced the maximum leavening of Christianity through the predomination of special grace.<sup>241</sup>

With these aspects of Kuyper's theology in view, one can better appreciate how he has been associated with the theological legitimisation of apartheid. If, according to Kuyper, God has established various orders of creation through common grace, then according to Afrikaner Calvinism it seemed reasonable to argue for the existence, development and protection of different peoples – each as a separate people group on the basis of its own potential and cultural law – as the will of God. In the case of the devout Afrikaner people, they deemed themselves to be the special object of God's providence and the means of bringing the gospel to the African people.<sup>242</sup> In other words, it seems fair to say that Kuyper's idealistic thinking about a natural or organic principle in creation that is developed through the dialectic of common and special grace provided a starting point “from which a closed or permanent system of apartheid could be made.”<sup>243</sup> With this said, one should nevertheless beware of drawing a simple line of connection between Kuyper and Afrikaner Calvinism. Rather, one should understand Afrikaner Calvinism as harnessing a *kind* of Kuyperianism for its ideological ends. What is more, Kuyper's influence must be understood against the wider backdrop of other theological influences as well as the unique socio-political history that gave rise to Afrikanerdom (as discussed above).<sup>244</sup>

In short, a type of Kuyperianism helped provide the theological grounds for the notion that the Afrikaner race as well as other ethnic groups were considered as having the God-given responsibility of maintaining their separate identity; the natural right to survival and self-determination culturally, ethnically and nationally. Over time, representatives of Afrikaner churches increasingly made appeals to government for laws to protect these rights.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> See *Ibid.*, 27-28.

<sup>242</sup> See *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>243</sup> See Strauss, "Abraham Kuyper and Pro-Apartheid Theologians in South Africa," 227.

<sup>244</sup> See Naudé, *Neither Calendar nor Clock*, 29. Strauss adds that Kuyper's own inconsistencies regarding common grace also add to the complexities surrounding how Afrikaner Calvinism could have taken his social thought in the direction of giving theological legitimisation to apartheid. Furthermore, Kuyper was never confronted with the possibility of more than one nation inhabiting a single political territory; see Strauss, "Abraham Kuyper and Pro-Apartheid Theologians in South Africa," 222-27.

<sup>245</sup> See Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 242. See also George Harinck, "Abraham Kuyper, South Africa, and Apartheid," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* XXIII, no. 2 (2002): 184-87.

In its fully developed form, apartheid theology, working with the notion that grace perfects nature instead of destroying it, was based on the premise that “creation structures recreation.” In utilising Scriptural accounts like the tower of Babel, apartheid theology asserted that “creation – in all its richness, variety, complexity and difference, especially including the differences of race, nation, culture, language and civilisation – should structure recreation, should determine the form, the structure, the order, the life of salvation, of the new creation in Christ, of the church as the carrier and visible form of recreation.” This led to, among other things, the split of churches, congregations and corporate worship gatherings along cultural, racial and ethnic lines.<sup>246</sup> The church during apartheid uncritically mirrored the dominant culture and its grotesque undercurrents of group interest.<sup>247</sup>

Smit observes that the hegemony of this Reformed tradition in public life was so powerful during the rise and entrenchment of apartheid that it was even possible to equate “Reformed”, meaning this Dutch-Calvinist-Afrikaner type of Reformed, with “Christian religion” itself and “*volk*” with “nation;”<sup>248</sup> and the nation (*volk*) with the church.<sup>249</sup>

In likening Afrikaner Calvinism’s hermeneutic, at least in part, to the subjective methodology of liberalism, de Gruchy observes that it made many of its claims about church and society “on the basis of social analysis determined by the norms of Afrikaner communal experience, piety, culture, and politics”, instead of the Bible alone. What lay behind this was a natural theology derived from the “orders of creation”. Barth vehemently critiqued this form of culture-theology during the German Third Reich. However, it was not until the anti-apartheid church struggle that Barth’s voice would be heard.<sup>250</sup>

#### 3.1.4. Concluding remarks

By the time the racial ideology of apartheid became the government policy of the National Party in 1948, the foundation for its theological legitimation was firmly in place. And

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<sup>246</sup> See Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 463.

<sup>247</sup> See *Ibid.*, 470.

<sup>248</sup> See *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>249</sup> See *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>250</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 72., and Jaap Durand, “Church and State in South Africa,” 134.

because the Dutch Reformed Church and its sister churches were virtually coterminous with Afrikanerdom, the state had the church's blessing. In the years that followed, all three white Afrikaans-speaking Reformed Churches more or less attempted to justify apartheid on biblical and theological grounds within the framework of neo-Calvinism as adapted by Afrikaner ideologists. This vision was institutionalised, thereby gaining significant influence, through the school system, the chaplain's corps, the public media and the direct access of the Dutch Reformed Church in particular to the Nationalist government. This process continued until 1986 when the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church deemed such grounds to be fallacious. (In the case of the NHK, in 2010 its General Assembly finally rejected apartheid as contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ, thereby ending a 60-year debate on racial segregation and apartheid.<sup>251</sup>) The Synodical decision also signaled the Dutch Reformed Church's withdrawal from taking sides on political issues that were increasingly dividing Afrikanerdom.<sup>252</sup>

In light of the brief historical sketch above, the portrait of the so-called Calvin of apartheid begins to emerge in the form of Afrikaner Calvinism. In sum, it can be described as the uneasy mixture of nineteenth-century evangelical piety and adapted Kuyperian neo-Calvinism forged in the fires of the Afrikaner struggle for cultural identity and political and economic power. This included the blending of Afrikaner "sacred history" with the Afrikaner *volk* as a "chosen people" and neo-Calvinism with its "sovereignty of spheres", thereby providing the powerful ideological base for Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid.<sup>253</sup> Willie Jonker has helpfully characterised the DRC as reflecting three force fields (*kragvelde*), namely its association with the Afrikaner people, its Reformed doctrinal heritage, and a pietistic form of spirituality.<sup>254</sup>

In terms of church and state, the social vision of Afrikaner Calvinism succumbed to the "theocracy temptation".<sup>255</sup> Regardless of the immoral nature of apartheid and its underlying socio-political underpinnings, the DRC nevertheless provided biblical and theological

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<sup>251</sup> See Wim Dreyer, "Journey from Isolation," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 67, no. 1 (2011).

<sup>252</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 27-28., and Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 205-14.

<sup>253</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 27-29. David J. Bosch described Afrikaner nationalism as a curious and complex blend of "orthodox evangelicalism, Kuyperian Calvinism, and neo-Fichtean romanticism"; see Bosch, "The Roots and Fruits of Afrikaner Civil Religion," 32.

<sup>254</sup> See Willie Jonker, "Kragvelde binne die Kerk," 11-14., and Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 243.

<sup>255</sup> See DE de Villiers, "Challenges to Christian Ethics in the Present South African Society," *Scriptura* 69, no. 1 (1999): 75-91.

legitimation for the state as serving the sacred interests of the one unified Afrikaner Christian people. Both the church and state needed each other to help realise the kingdom of God along ethnic lines in South Africa. In other words, the church was complicit in transforming society in the name of Christ according to an oppressive secular ideology. It was a classic example of the so-called Reformed world-transformative vision<sup>256</sup> gone awfully wrong: at once failing to oppose as well as sanctifying the apartheid ideology of group interest.<sup>257</sup> Furthermore, de Gruchy observes that throughout the process of attempting to legitimate apartheid and Afrikaner nationalism, the DRC made no appeal to Calvin or the historic confessions of faith. Not only were her arguments based on bad exegesis, but were in fact contrary to the teaching of Calvin as well.<sup>258</sup>

Nevertheless, while the DRC may have made no explicit appeal to Calvin's *teaching* to legitimate apartheid, scholars like de Gruchy have also claimed that Calvin's *practice* in Geneva did have some bearing on the subsequent Calvinist legacy of "will-to-order" legalism. (I explore the significance of this claim in more detail in Chapter 5.) It is asserted that Calvin was ambiguous in the way he sought to live out God's claim to Lordship over all of life. Accordingly, some Reformed theologians in South Africa have found a more prophetic and world transformative *early* Calvin in conflict with the "domineering, intolerant, moralistic and imperial" *later* Calvin.<sup>259</sup> De Gruchy argues for a similar ambiguity in Kuyper's life and work, thus also helping explain his contested legacy in South Africa. Hence, Afrikaner Calvinism has in part been attributed to imbibing the spirit of dominating and restrictive trends found both in (the later) Calvin and the later neo-Calvinist Kuyper<sup>260</sup>: an "imperial Calvinism" which was in essence "fearful of spontaneity, openness, equalities and diversities." However, this reception of

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<sup>256</sup> See Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 201-02.

<sup>257</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 31. See also Bosch, "The Roots and Fruits of Afrikaner Civil Religion," 14-35.

<sup>258</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 29. See also Douglas Bax, "The Bible and Apartheid 2," in *Apartheid Is a Heresy*, ed. John W. de Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983), 112ff., and Vosloo, "Remembering John Calvin in South Africa Today?," 428-30.

<sup>259</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 18-20.

<sup>260</sup> The "imperial Calvinism" of Kuyper that dominated his first reception in South Africa has been explained on the basis that Kuyper was a child of European Romanticism and that his political views were in part informed by a romanticising of the glorious past of the Netherlands and a specific type of Dutch nationalism. This nationalism was grounded in a theology that accorded too much weight to the value of separateness. See Naudé, *Neither Calendar nor Clock*, 31.

Calvin and Kuyper was to be dramatically reversed in the anti-apartheid church struggle where more liberating and evangelical portraits were retrieved.<sup>261</sup> In a cry for liberation and life, Calvin would be pitted against Calvin, and Kuyper against Kuyper.<sup>262</sup>

### 3.2. The “Calvin” of the anti-apartheid church struggle

Although a form of Calvinism intertwined with Afrikaner nationalism continued to make inroads in the 1940s, it did not go unchallenged. In the 1940s and 1950s, Professors B.B. Keet and Ben Marais critiqued the status quo in the DRC by questioning the Scriptural justification for apartheid (both men in part influencing and paving the way for Beyers Naudé). Prof. Keet, who lectured at the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch, argued that apartheid could not be justified on theological grounds.<sup>263</sup> By the time of the Sharpeville massacre (21 March 1960), which signaled a socio-political turning point, the intensity of racial tensions emboldened certain theologians and church leaders to launch a more thorough critique of the Calvin of Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid discourse. Shortly after the massacre, an ecumenical consultation at Cottesloe (7-14 December 1960) responded to the crisis. It offered moderate resolutions by way of emphasising church unity and denying biblical support for apartheid.<sup>264</sup>

Before turning to some of the more influential Reformed clergy, theologians and associated movements that played a role in re-appropriating Calvin for the church struggle against apartheid, I give some introductory comments on the seminal influence of Karl Barth and the church struggle in Germany upon the South African context.

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<sup>261</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 18-20. See also Naudé, *Neither Calendar nor Clock*, 30-31.

<sup>262</sup> See Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 242-43., and Lebakeng Ramotshabi Lekula Ntoane, "A Cry for Life: An Interpretation Of "Calvinism" And Calvin" (Kampen University, 1983).

<sup>263</sup> See Vosloo, "Calvin and Anti-Apartheid Memory," 225. See also Murray Coetzee, *Die "Kritiese Stem" teen Apartheidsteologie in Die Ned Geref Kerek (1905-1974): 'N analise van die Bydraes van Ben Marais en Beyers Naudé* (Wellington: Bybel-Media, 2011).

<sup>264</sup> See Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 280.

### 3.2.1. The seminal influence of Barth, Bonhoeffer and Barmen

In the words of Smit: “To be sure, the tradition of the *Theological Declaration of Barmen*, of the Confessing Church in Germany, of Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and their contemporaries, has deeply inspired the resistance against apartheid in South Africa church and theological circles and particularly also within the Reformed community.” With respect to Barth, he notes that his influence upon the likes of Beyers Naudé, Willie Jonker, David Bosch, Jaap Durand, Allan Boesak, John de Gruchy and Russel Botman cannot be underestimated.<sup>265</sup> Illustrative of this is the observation of arguably South Africa’s greatest DRC systematic theologian of the twentieth century, Willie Jonker, regarding his contemporaries: “The generation to which I belong was, theologically speaking, dominated by Barth... He was undoubtedly the greatest theologian of our age.”<sup>266</sup> Barth’s influence was nevertheless highly controversial, especially during the apartheid years and within neo-Calvinist circles in South Africa.<sup>267</sup> Smit notes that Barth’s positive influence was not so much scholarly and academic as it was pervasive in church circles and public life. In short, it “was more a kind of Barthian theology, the history of his effects, his *wirkungsgeschichte*, the impact of his life and work in the German Church Struggle, in the Confessing Church, in the *Barmen Theological Declaration*, together with the impact of the life and work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.” In essence, Barth provided the church and Christians in South Africa with a theological response to apartheid.<sup>268</sup>

Drawing attention to two elements perhaps best captures the parallels between the heavily Barth-influenced German and South African church struggle movements. First, they renounced as idolatrous any attempt to replace Jesus Christ as the one Word of God with humanly chosen revelation in history. And second, they encouraged Christians not to withdraw from the political consequences of what they have learned by faith.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> See *Ibid.*, 242-43, 75-78. See also Naudé, *Neither Calendar nor Clock*, 44.

<sup>266</sup> See Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 275. See also Willie Jonker, "Some Remarks on the Interpretation of Karl Barth," *NGTT* 29, no. 1 (1988): 29-40.

<sup>267</sup> See Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 277. See also, e.g., FJM Potgieter, "Die Teopneustie van die Heilige Skrif met besondere verwysing na Karl Barth," *NGTT* 4, no. 3 (1963): 131-49.

<sup>268</sup> See Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 277-78.

<sup>269</sup> See *Ibid.*, 285.

In the case of the former, the influence of Barth in South Africa meant that many within the church were able to say “yes” to the gracious humanity of the Triune God revealed in Jesus Christ, the one Word of God. But it was the critical flipside of this affirmation in Barth’s theology that was particularly influential.<sup>270</sup> It was the Barth-informed ability to say “no” to apartheid, thereby “rejecting both the powerful and popular forms of natural theology underlying forms of *volkskirche* and separateness, as well as popular and pervasive forms of natural religiosity and spirituality underlying privatised, subjectivist, and expressivist understandings of the faith.”<sup>271</sup> “Over against all self-confident theology, ecclesiology and moralism built on anthropology including the *volk* and understandings of human history, and over against all familiarity with God built on subjective spirituality and religious feelings and experience, Barth “prophetically testified to the deity of God,” he “opted for a theology of the Word” and he “turned towards a consequent Christocentrism” – in short, he was increasingly convinced “that the reality of the knowledge of God precedes all questions about the possibility of our knowing Him.”<sup>272</sup>

In brief, and of importance to this thesis, Barth’s thoroughgoing Christocentrism, which led to his critique of any form of natural theology and his affirmation of the socio-political implications of the gospel, played a significant role in shaping the Calvinism of the anti-apartheid church struggle.

With these general observations in mind, I now proceed in considering some of the key Reformed figures and movements informing the church struggle in South Africa. Where appropriate, I will highlight in more detail the theological influence of Barth, Bonhoeffer and Barmen upon Calvin’s legacy in South Africa.

### 3.2.2. *Beyers Naudé*

The 1960s saw the legacy of Calvin increasingly become a site of struggle and debate. For example, the likes of right wing apartheid advocate Albert Hertzog (influenced by figures

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<sup>270</sup> See Jonker, "Some Remarks on the Interpretation of Karl Barth," 30-32.

<sup>271</sup> See Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 285. See also “Laudatio of John W. de Gruchy” in *Theology in Dialogue*, ed. Lynne Holness & R Kingdom Wüstenberg (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002), xxii.

<sup>272</sup> See Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 287.

like Andries Treurnicht) with *his* version of Calvin, was challenged by the Calvin scholar Dr André Hugo. It was in this context that Beyers Naudé, a former Stellenbosch student, Dutch Reformed minister and anti-apartheid activist, would emerge rallying behind a more ecumenical Calvin: a Calvin *against* the neo-Calvinism of Dr. Hertzog.<sup>273</sup>

In de Gruchy's estimation, Naudé is the modern apostle of liberating Reformed theology in South Africa, and was also something of a Bonhoeffer-like figure in the South African context.<sup>274</sup> Naudé is also considered to have played something of a Bonhoeffer-like role in the church struggle. As one of the forerunners in the church struggle, he sought to respond to the challenge of liberation theology, much of which was anticipated by Barth and the German Confessing movement.<sup>275</sup> Naudé's break with the DRC in the 1960s and his establishment of the Christian Institute (in 1963), which sought to emulate the confessing movement of the Confessing Church in Germany, provided inspiration to many and a catalyst for transformation in the church struggle in South Africa. The influence of Barth upon Naudé is very clear, as evidenced not only in his life and thought, but also in the history of the Christian Institute.<sup>276</sup> The Christian Institute signaled the first attempt at "creating an ecumenical confessing church in South Africa in relation to apartheid, thus laying the foundations for many of the confessing and prophetic initiatives taken by Christians since then."<sup>277</sup> Naudé symbolised "not only the radical break of a white Afrikaner from cultural captivity, but also a Reformed theology captive to apartheid transformed into a liberated and liberating Reformed theology serving the cause of the oppressed."<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> See Vosloo, "Remembering John Calvin in South Africa Today?," 430-31., and Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 516-17. See also Beyers Naudé, "What Calvin Really Stood For," *The Rand Daily Mail*, 29 April 1969. This article was reprinted in Afrikaans in the journal *Pro Veritate*. See ———, "Waaroor het dit eintlik vir Calvyn gegaan?," *Pro Veritate* 15 May (1969): 6-8.

<sup>274</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 44., and John de Gruchy, "Bonhoeffer, Apartheid, and Beyond: The Reception of Bonhoeffer in South Africa," in *Bonhoeffer for a New Day: Theology in a Time of Transition*, ed. John de Gruchy (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 355.

<sup>275</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, xvii.

<sup>276</sup> See Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 281.

<sup>277</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 206.

<sup>278</sup> See Charles Villa-Vicencio, "A Life of Resistance and Hope," and John W. de Gruchy, "A Short History of the Christian Institute," in Beyers Naudé, Charles Villa-Vicencio, and John W. de Gruchy, *Resistance and Hope: South African Essays in Honour of Beyers Naudé* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 3-26. See also de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 44.

Indicative of Naudé's stature and commitment to the cause of justice and liberation was his inclusion, as a minister of the gospel, in the African National Congress delegation to the historic talks with the South African government in May 1990.<sup>279</sup>

While Calvin was not the sole influence upon the dissident voice of Naudé (as noted above), he did use Calvin to challenge the *ad hoc* legacy of Afrikaner nationalism.<sup>280</sup> Through publications such as his popular newspaper article, "What Calvin *really* stood for", he argued that the ideology of Afrikaner Calvinism had no grounds in the writings of Calvin or in the Reformed confessions. Naudé played a significant role in forging the memory of, among other features, the "ecumenical Calvin", against the false views of Afrikaner neo-Calvinism. Naudé concludes his famous newspaper article with a word on the high stakes involved in retrieving the 'true' Calvin: "If only South Africa were to heed the *true message* of Calvin, how vastly different our whole *ecclesiastical* and *political life* would be."<sup>281</sup>

Other more academically astute theologians also joined Naudé in the 1960s to argue for a Calvin of ecumenism and prophetic liberation over against the oppressive civil religion advanced by Afrikaner neo-Calvinism. Such scholars of Afrikaner background included Jaap Durand, David Bosch, and Willie Jonker. In the case of Jonker – upon joining the faculty of Stellenbosch – he offered a reading of Calvin that departed from some of his neo-Calvinist colleagues in arguing against the Calvin of *volk* and *kerk* fusion, and its associated pietistic escapism from the pressing social and political questions of the day. In turn, he affirmed the view that "Calvinism must be a permanent force for political and societal reformation and transformation."<sup>282</sup> With this reading of Calvin, Jonker was appealing to the so-called *deepest identity* of the Reformed tradition as a critique of the identity of the Calvin of Afrikaner nationalism. He was "appealing to the community and the tradition in order to critique and challenge the tradition and the community." In other words, he pitted Calvin against Calvin.<sup>283</sup>

It was in this spirit of transforming a life-quenching tradition that other Reformed theologians joined the church struggle. Figures like Allan Boesak, John de Gruchy, Dirk Smit,

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<sup>279</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 206.

<sup>280</sup> See Vosloo, "Calvin and Anti-Apartheid Memory," 227.

<sup>281</sup> Naudé, "What Calvin *Really* Stood For," 13. (emphasis added). See also Vosloo, "Remembering John Calvin in South Africa Today?," 430-31.

<sup>282</sup> See Vosloo, "Remembering John Calvin in South Africa Today?," 431-33.

<sup>283</sup> See Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 31-32.

Leluka Ntoane and Russel Botman believed that the problem in South Africa was not too much Calvin but too little. They therefore sought to retrieve and revitalise the Calvinist tradition: as a life-giving and liberating one.<sup>284</sup>

### 3.2.3. Allan Boesak

As a minister active in the political sphere, Allan Boesak contributed to the growing tide against the oppressive ideology of Afrikaner Calvinism in the 1970s in the form of a particularly bold expression of prophetic Reformed theology on behalf of the black struggle for liberation and justice.<sup>285</sup> Boesak's influential and controversial contribution to the cause of public theology in general and discourse on church-state relations in particular continues into the twenty-first century.<sup>286</sup> In advocating, among other things, civil disobedience, Boesak has considered himself a faithful adherent to the Reformed tradition and modern-day Calvinist reformer.<sup>287</sup>

In his work, Boesak has made conscious and repeated use of Calvin in his rhetoric on behalf of the oppressed against the social injustices of apartheid. In 1979, Boesak gave the keynote address at the national conference of South African Council of Churches (SACC), during which the SACC adopted a resolution promoting civil disobedience against apartheid laws. Boesak also played a leading role in the founding of the Alliance of Black Reformed Christians in South Africa (ABRECSA). In an address at their first conference in 1981, Boesak characterised the movement as one concerned with fostering the relationship between the Reformed tradition and social justice. In perhaps his most famous work, the 1984 volume *Black and Reformed: Apartheid, Liberation, and the Calvinist Tradition*, Boesak argues with recourse to Calvin that when justice is lacking in a society, the government comes into conflict with God, and in such an instance resistance from the church is demanded and warranted.<sup>288</sup> In his estimation, because blacks under apartheid lacked a political voice, the only vehicle for social

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<sup>284</sup> See *Ibid.*, and de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 34.

<sup>285</sup> The black struggle gained particular momentum against apartheid in the Black Consciousness Movement and the rise of Black Theology in the 1970s.

<sup>286</sup> See, e.g., Boesak, *The Tenderness of Conscience*.

<sup>287</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 41. See also Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 281., and Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, xiii.

<sup>288</sup> See Boesak, *Black and Reformed.*, and Vosloo, "Remembering John Calvin in South Africa Today?," 433-34.

transformation available to them was the church. Hence, conflict between church and state was inevitable.<sup>289</sup>

Boesak makes it clear that he sees as integral to the Calvinist and Reformed tradition the church's prophetic witness to civil institutions like the state.<sup>290</sup> Among those of the more contemporary Calvinist tradition, Boesak is indebted to the world-transformative/"every-square-inch" visions of Kuyper and more recently Nicholas Wolterstorff.<sup>291</sup> (Here is an instance of South African Reformed political theology in dialogue with the North American context during the church struggle.) Accordingly, it is the responsibility of the church and every Christian to extend the sovereign Lordship of Jesus and the bible-based principles of his kingdom to all social and political spheres of life.<sup>292</sup> Like those before him and others after him, Boesak sought to pit Calvin against Calvin, as well as Kuyper against Kuyper.<sup>293</sup>

### 3.2.4. *Prophetic theology and The Kairos Document*

Boesak is indicative of many South African theologians of Reformed persuasion sympathetic to the influence of both prophetic and liberation theology. These influences helped shape his re-appropriation of Calvin in service of the church struggle. One expression of prophetic theology worth noting in the South African context (but not Reformed per se) is the *The Kairos Document* of 1985 (which was in turn followed up by the more international, *The Road to Damascus* in 1989). This document attempts to capture the hermeneutical struggle over the interpretation of Scripture in the South African context. It sets forth three hermeneutical trajectories – as the product of diverse theological perspectives, but also very different perceptions of social reality and the influence of material interests – namely, “state theology,” “church theology” and “prophetic theology”.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> See Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 30.

<sup>290</sup> See, e.g., *Ibid.*, 54. This is in critical reaction to the notion of being Reformed under apartheid, which was characterised by silent acceptance of the status quo; see ———, *Black and Reformed*, ix.

<sup>291</sup> See Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 95-96.

<sup>292</sup> See *Ibid.*, 37-38.

<sup>293</sup> For explicit references to his Calvinism, see generally Allan Aubrey Boesak, *Running with Horses : Reflections of an Accidental Politician* (Cape Town: Joho, 2009).

<sup>294</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 76.

Accordingly, “state theology” is that ideology committed to legitimising an unjust status quo. Despite claiming to be apolitical, it clearly has an agenda in shaping the civil sphere. “Church theology”, as defined by the *Kairos Document*, is depicted as even more troublesome. This is because while it is explicitly committed to reconciliation between racial groups, its representatives – most of the mainline churches in South Africa, whether Afrikaans- or English-speaking – have nevertheless been devoid of any adequate analysis of the challenges besetting South African society, and in turn a strategy for change that transcends the level of personal relations, thereby revealing an essentially private and individualistic piety. “Prophetic theology”, however, serves as a critique of both of these theologies. As openly political, it is committed to the struggle for justice on behalf of the oppressed. *The Kairos Document’s* prophetic critique of “state theology” was clearly directed at Afrikaner Calvinism, while the critique of “church theology” was directed at more liberal English-speaking churches, and the Reformed tradition throughout the world more generally “as a predominantly bourgeois movement” that has “tended to affirm reconciliation between classes and races without dealing with the underlying causes that produce social conflict.”<sup>295</sup>

### 3.2.5. Liberation theology

As both a contextual and kind of prophetic theology, liberation theology in South Africa has sought to critique the Reformed tradition by being a socially committed discipline on the side of those who are disadvantaged and socially oppressed. And accordingly, calling the church to be self-consciously critical in its role in facing oppression. Fundamental to this way of doing theology is its struggle for justice and liberation.<sup>296</sup> Advocates of this position have looked to Calvin for support in doing theology through the “spectacles of victims” by citing, among other things, his status as a refugee ministering to French exiles in Geneva.<sup>297</sup>

In his indictment of the church in South Africa as well as much of the West for lacking this concern for the poor and oppressed, de Gruchy cites the influence of the Constantinian

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<sup>295</sup> See *Ibid.*, 76-78.

<sup>296</sup> “What distinguishes liberation theologies from others is not the introduction of new dogmatic themes, but the way in which dogmatic and ethical tradition is reinterpreted within the struggle for liberation”; see *Ibid.*, 37. See also Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 65.

<sup>297</sup> See, e.g., de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 78-83.

worldview from the fourth-century onwards, which aligned the church with the dominant culture. As a result, the church has tended to define its mission primarily in terms of the spiritual welfare of its members, while sanctioning the authority of the state in its exercise of temporal power. In following the Anabaptist rejection of the Constantinian captivity of the dominant church, *The Kairos Document* in South Africa signaled a decisive break with the colonial and neo-colonial captivity of the churches in southern Africa and with the “state” or “church theology” underpinning it. In distinction from traditional Anabaptists, and with similar burdens to black theology, liberation theology has explicitly sought to give a political voice to the oppressed in the struggle for a more just society.<sup>298</sup>

### 3.2.6. *The Belhar Confession*

According to de Gruchy, the influence of prophetic and liberation theologies upon the Reformed and Calvinist tradition in South Africa is perhaps best captured in creedal form in the *Belhar Confession* of 1986.<sup>299</sup> In something of a culmination of movements and figures in the church struggle discussed above, *Belhar* finds itself in the general theological continuum that led from Cottesloe to *The Kairos Document*.<sup>300</sup> Smit observes that *Belhar* would not have come into being without the influence of, among others, Beyers Naudé and the Christian Institute and its many supporters who saw the parallels between the struggle against apartheid and the church struggle in Germany; without Reformed theologians like John de Gruchy, Jaap Durand and Willie Jonker; and especially not without the role of Allan Boesak, who also struggled against apartheid within the tradition of Calvin, Barth, Bonhoeffer and *Barmen*.<sup>301</sup>

The *Belhar Confession* was drafted in 1982 as a result of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) declaring that a moment had arrived where the gospel itself was at stake: a

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<sup>298</sup> See Ibid., 34-39.

<sup>299</sup> According to Ibid., 215., *Belhar* “reinterprets the confession of Jesus Christ from the liberatory perspective of a commitment to the poor. In this we see a creative Reformed response to the challenge of liberation theology.” To equate liberation theology with the *Belhar Confession* is nevertheless a contested claim among many traditional Reformed theologians; see, e.g., Dirk J. Smit’s review article of the aforementioned title of de Gruchy in Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 195-99.

<sup>300</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 218.

<sup>301</sup> See Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 282-83.

*status confessionis* in South Africa. (This move followed a similar declaration by WARC.)<sup>302</sup>

The decision of the DRMC to confess was made with direct appeal to Barth, and *Belhar* is clearly the product of a long conversation with the *Barmen Declaration*.<sup>303</sup> According to Barth, a *status confessionis* is a moment in which a crisis facing society is of such a nature that it threatens the life and gospel confession of the church. In keeping with the so-called tradition of the “old Reformed Creed”, which Barth believed to be wholly ethical and always addressed to the public sphere, it behooves the church to confess the gospel anew in the face of such crises.<sup>304</sup> The adoption of *Belhar* by the DRMC in 1986 signaled the first time since the seventeenth century that a new confession had become an authoritative standard for faith and practice within the Dutch Reformed family of Churches.<sup>305</sup>

*Belhar* was drafted in order to address the problems of separation, alienation and injustice of the apartheid legacy as the fundamental challenge to Reformed theology. Its response is formulated in terms of concrete expressions of living *unity, real reconciliation* and *caring justice*. For the churches that have accepted *Belhar*, the major challenge has been to make their confessional language and convictions real and visible. According to Smit, this is in keeping with the spirit of the Reformed tradition, where confessions have always called for concrete forms of practice, embodiment and life.<sup>306</sup> As for Reformed confessions of recent decades, such as the *Barmen Declaration*, the United States Presbyterian Confession of 1967<sup>307</sup> and the *Belhar*

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<sup>302</sup> “In 1982, at the Ottawa meeting of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, eight representatives from the so-called “daughter churches” in the DRC family refused to participate in the official Eucharist, claiming that it would be false to do so in an ecumenical context, while they were excluded from the Eucharist in the DRC back in South Africa; see *Ibid.*, 281, 462. See also de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 189-90., and Dirk J. Smit and G.D. Cloete, *A Moment of Truth: The Confession of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

<sup>303</sup> See Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 282. For a discussion on many of the formal similarities between *Barmen* and *Belhar*, and on the content of the latter more generally, see ———, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 283-84. See also ———, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 325-34. It is also worth noting that during October 2004 conferences were held in Belhar and Stellenbosch to commemorate the 70<sup>th</sup> year of the *Barmen Theological Declaration*. Several of the papers delivered there, including those that brought *Barmen* and *Belhar* into conversation, were included in the *NGTT*, volume 47/1&2, 2006, 234-312.

<sup>304</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 211.

<sup>305</sup> See *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>306</sup> Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 232-33.

<sup>307</sup> With respect to the Presbyterian Confession of 1967, de Gruchy notes that it signaled the introduction of a strong socio-ethical hermeneutic of faithful obedience; something lacking in the *Barmen Declaration*, but present in the confessional documents emerging out of the South African context. In distinction from the *Barmen Declaration* and its focus on addressing the heresy of Nazi ideology, the Confession of 1967 reflects the burning, critical issues of its time, and in many respect ours, with direct reference to “the fact that God’s revelation in Jesus Christ requires

*Confession*, de Gruchy has noted a shift within the Reformed family of churches towards doing theology in relation to the kingdom of God understood in historically transformative terms. Instead of seeing political issues in terms of providence and predestination, these confessional documents see them from the eschatological perspective of the kingdom of God. “This change from the old Reformed confessions to the new reflects both a theological as well as a sociological shift within the Reformed community. The theological shift is not so much a movement away from traditional Reformed doctrines but a reworking of those doctrines on a new theological, or, better, eschatological foundation.”<sup>308</sup>

Before considering the general confessional claims of *Belhar*, a few observations regarding the influence of *Barmen* are in order. The following are some central theological claims of *Barmen* that find family resemblances to *Belhar*. First, the Christological foundation of *Barmen* rejects any natural theology. This spoke powerfully to the heart of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa and the natural theology under girding it. Second is God’s mighty claim on all of life, which is nothing but the foundation for Christian ethics. This entails a rejection of the so-called autonomy of different spheres of (modern) life, as if the gospel of Jesus Christ does not have implications over all of reality. Third, and getting to the heart of *Barmen* and *Belhar*, the church should not reflect the unjust ideological and political convictions of society, but instead the Lordship of Jesus Christ: in its ecclesiastical order, visible form and structure. The fourth claim has to do with the public role of the church, its political responsibility and its relationship to the state. Here, on the one hand, is an affirmation of the two-kingdoms insight that the state is not the kingdom and church is not the state. The state exists in God’s unredeemed world by divine appointment to serve the ends of justice and peace. In turn, any notion of a totalitarian state or the church as an organ of the state must be rejected. And yet at the same time, in accord with the lordship-of-Christ understanding, while the church is not the state it also exists in and as part of God’s unredeemed world, bearing a responsibility to remind rulers and ruled of their respective responsibilities.<sup>309</sup> In other words, the church is to play a role in transforming broader civil culture.

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that the church must work for the abolition of racial discrimination, engage in the struggle for justice and peace in society, work to end poverty, and promote genuinely Christian understanding of human sexuality”; see de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 211-12.

<sup>308</sup> See *Ibid.*, 86-87.

<sup>309</sup> See Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 327-30.

In regard to this final claim, Smit observes that commentators like Barth and later, Wolfgang Huber, have argued that political ethics today must go further, although in the same theological direction.

In a very definite way, Belhar and again the URCSA Church Order have already done this to some extent, for example, by not concentrating on church and state relations, but rather situating the church in more complex spheres of life, civil society, the formation of public opinion and economic life, but specifically also by focusing explicitly on real reconciliation and compassionate, caring justice.<sup>310</sup>

As for the specific content of *Belhar*, it made three confessional claims in the face of apartheid ideology and reality. First, it confessed God as the God of *unity* in the face of the wedge driven between people through apartheid's legal, social, economic and political measures. The church must strive for unity so that the world might believe. Second, to address the separation, alienation and distrust brought about by apartheid, it called urgently for *reconciliation*. Because God has conquered the powers of sin and death, which includes irreconcilability and hate, bitterness and enmity, God's people can, through the life-giving Word and Spirit, live in a new obedience that offers new possibilities to the world and society. The gospel can have a wholesome influence on a racially fractured society. And third, it called for *compassionate justice* for those suffering from the social, systemic and structural oppression of apartheid. Because God is especially the God of the destitute, poor and wronged, the church is called to witness and struggle against every form of injustice. According to Smit, *Belhar* signified for Reformed life in South Africa, a moment of liberating and lasting truth. It is important to keep in mind the underlying links between these three confessional claims.<sup>311</sup>

The *Belhar Confession* later became the basis for reuniting the two largest ethnic (or racial) churches born from apartheid theology and ecclesiology, thereby signifying the embodiment of the confession in a new Church Order.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> See *Ibid.*, 330.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, 246, 366-67. For background and discussion on the *Belhar Confession*, see Smit and Cloete, *A Moment of Truth*. In support of the many of the points made above relative to the content of *Belhar*, and for further commentary, see Naudé, *Neither Calendar nor Clock.*, and Botha and Naudé, *Good News to Confess*.

<sup>312</sup> See Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 247. In Article 12 of the *Order*, the church's public responsibility is defined in so-called "typically Reformed fashion". "The URCSA sees it as her kingly task to set an example to humankind and society in obedience application of the demands of God's Word in regard to love of neighbour, the exercise of justice and the realization of reconciliation, and the pursuit of true peace in her own life. She sees it as her prophetic task to proclaim these demands of God's Word as they have bearing on society as a whole and on individual institutions, particularly the state, without respect for persons. She sees it as her priestly task to pray for

### 3.2.7. John de Gruchy and “Liberating Reformed Theology”

While the work of John de Gruchy has already featured in my narration of the rise of apartheid and its subsequent undoing, the story of the anti-apartheid church struggle coming from within the Reformed tradition would be incomplete without further mention of the influential theological and ethical insights of one of South Africa’s foremost theologians. Like other anti-apartheid figures mentioned above, de Gruchy also finds himself in the liberating trajectory of Barth and Bonhoeffer, Beyers Naudé and *Belhar*. As an active member of the Christian Institute and a long-time faculty member at the University of Cape Town (in both departments of religion and humanities) he is perhaps best known for his internationally acclaimed volume written in the midst of church opposition to apartheid, called *The Church Struggle in South Africa* (1979; most recent edition, 2004). Within the global Reformed community, he is perhaps better known for his work called *Liberating Reformed Theology* (1991). In this work, which represents the publication of his Warfield Lectures delivered at Princeton, de Gruchy argues for the retrieval of liberating resources in the Reformed tradition – especially Calvin – as the answer to the oppressive kind of Reformed theology that has featured in South Africa and elsewhere in the world. Integral to his case is the so-called liberating trajectory within Calvin that finds affinity with the liberation theology that came out of Latin America.<sup>313</sup>

Indicative of de Gruchy’s insightful analysis of Calvin’s reception in South Africa is his 1986 article entitled, “The Revitalization of Calvinism in South Africa: Some Reflections on Christian Belief, Theology, and Social Transformation”, where he argues for what he saw then as

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and intercede for the government and society and to intervene for the suffering, the poor, the wronged, and the oppressed within this society, also by way of organized service”; see ———, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 472. In his smaller writings, Jonker appealed to the legacy of Calvin in pleading for the reformation of the Reformed churches in South Africa. He contends that the most challenging aspect in the fight against apartheid was for the church to put her ethical convictions into practice: to embody her confession. He saw this in terms of the church reordering her ecclesiological vision in new ways, not least in her role and witness in public life in the concrete embodiment of visible unity, real reconciliation and compassionate justice. It was for this reason that writing a new “Calvin-informed” *Church Order* for the Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa was such a significance moment. It saw the black churches in the DRC reunited on the basis of the *Confession of Belhar*. See ———, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 29.

<sup>313</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 13-21.

a resurgence of interest in Calvin, but in two different and distinct forms.<sup>314</sup> Accordingly, one form has emerged out of the *Gereformeerde Kerk* through the Institute for Reformational Studies at the University of the North-West (formerly the University of Potchefstroom), which has by and large continued the tradition of Afrikaner Calvinism.<sup>315</sup> The other is what de Gruchy calls the evangelical Calvinist alternative, which is characterised as “being revitalized, even radicalised, as a theology of social transformation.”<sup>316</sup> He sees the latter as finding its roots back in the nineteenth century and reaching forward to the witness of Beyers Naudé and Boesak, and others, and broad confessional embodiment in the *Belhar Confession*.<sup>317</sup> The development of this line of Calvin retrieval continues to this day, with particular concentration at the Beyers Naudé Center for Public Theology hosted by the Faculty of Theology at the University of Stellenbosch. De Gruchy, himself, holds a post with the Faculty as Extraordinary Professor and seeks to perpetuate the legacy of liberating Reformed theology by – in addition to his writing – heading up a regular seminar that meets at Stellenbosch called Transforming Traditions. The fruit of these seminars has been published in the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*.<sup>318</sup>

De Gruchy’s career has been punctuated by his stand against the bondage of Afrikaner Calvinism and for a more biblical and confessional brand of Reformed theology that hears the cry of the oppressed.<sup>319</sup> He speaks for himself as well when he writes that for many Dutch Reformed theologians, the discovery of Barth and his critique of religion and natural theology

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<sup>314</sup> John W. de Gruchy, "The Revitalization of Calvinism in South Africa: Some Reflections on Christian Belief, Theology, and Social Transformation," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14, no. 1 (1986).

<sup>315</sup> See Vosloo, "Calvin and Anti-Apartheid Memory," 218, 20 fn.7.

<sup>316</sup> de Gruchy, "The Revitalization of Calvinism in South Africa: Some Reflections on Christian Belief, Theology, and Social Transformation," 27.

<sup>317</sup> Early forerunners to the Reformed liberation and prophetic theology in South Africa included Dr John Philip and Johannes Van der Kemp of the London Missionary Society, African nationalist Tiyo Soga and African National Congress leader Albert Luthuli; see de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 42-43.

<sup>318</sup> See, e.g., John de Gruchy, "Transforming Traditions: Doing Theology in South Africa Today," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 139 (March 2011): 7-17., and Vosloo, "Reformed Tradition?," 18-31.

<sup>319</sup> In reaching this conclusion, de Gruchy makes connections between the tension inherent in Calvin himself – between the rational, scholastic theologian-philosopher, and the humanist, biblical scholar and preacher – and the subsequent Reformed tradition. Accordingly, he identifies the extremes of tyrannical confessional dogmatism on the one the hand – a danger exacerbated by Protestant scholasticism of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries – and the subjective relativity of the liberal theological method. In turn, he proposes that Barth navigated these pitfalls best in providing inspiration for Reformed Churches in South Africa seeking the liberating and creative power of the Word and Spirit in response to the challenges of their historical context; see de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 47-73.

proved to be a liberating source that enabled them to hear the Word of God as it spoke to them in their situation.<sup>320</sup>

De Gruchy believes that the theology of liberation that drove the church struggle within the Reformed tradition in South Africa can be traced back to Calvin and the Reformation. He says:

The original impulse or ferment that led to the Reformation and to Calvin's interpretation of it was a rejection of human tyranny of all kinds and the proclamation of the liberating power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is what first led to Calvin's break with Rome, and it was this which motivated his attempt to create a new, just, and equitable if not egalitarian society. Likewise, this has been the motivation of all those prophetic Calvinists who have taken the side of the oppressed, whether in the past or present. The fact that this has invariably threatened the dominant culture, whether it claimed the name of Calvinist or not, is indicative of the ambiguity of the tradition. But a theology that is true to the ferment created and nourished by the whole gospel cannot be anything but prophetic.<sup>321</sup>

It was this notion of the indispensable prophetic voice of the church that demands to be heard in all spheres of life that played such an important role in the dismantling of apartheid. The Reformed theology that emerged in the church struggle insisted that part of its biblical mandate is to bear prophetic witness towards the end of transforming society.<sup>322</sup>

The assumption here is that the same grace that frees individuals from their sins also brings liberation to the world in all its social dimensions "for individual men and women in their personal struggles, their search for forgiveness, meaning, and eternal life, as well as their corporate struggles for justice, reconciliation, and peace."<sup>323</sup> Building upon this "evangelical foundation" the prophetic, socially active and world-transformative impulse in the church-struggle drew upon a particular vision of the kingdom of God and the accompanying calling and responsibility of the church to proclaim God's rule within and over the world – the reign of God in Jesus Christ over the kingdom of God – in which evangelical grace and prophetic justice are united.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 72. See also Jaap Durand, "Church and State in South Africa," 134.

<sup>321</sup> de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 44-45.

<sup>322</sup> See Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>323</sup> See Ibid., 180, 84-88.

<sup>324</sup> See Ibid., 20, 83-84.

De Gruchy's vision for Christianity and culture at large also informs how he relates church and state in particular. In his chapter entitled "Theology framed by politics", in *Liberating Reformed Theology*, de Gruchy argues that it is the church's duty to struggle for justice on behalf of the poor and oppressed when the state does not. The responsibility of the church is to speak out against political injustice on the basis of the freedom of the gospel and not the dictates of the state. In turn, she is to work for the transformation of all of life, including the state, in accordance with the Word of God.<sup>325</sup> From this worldview stems "the determination to place the whole of public life under the command of God, an ethic which extends its critical scrutiny beyond private morality of individuals into culture and economy, and finally, the readiness for political resistance to tyranny."<sup>326</sup> It was with this Calvin-informed social paradigm that supporters of the church struggle went beyond the traditional priority given to the maintenance of law and order over justice and social transformation found in the earlier Reformed confessions. With recourse to the likes of André Bieler, de Gruchy saw the church as a transforming agent for all of life.<sup>327</sup>

While ascribing to the church an explicit socio-political role in broader society, de Gruchy nevertheless warns against the danger of repeating "Calvinist imperialism" and "absolutism" of the past. Because the church always lives on the "knife-edge" of genuine prophecy, she must therefore always be self-critical. Hence, the Word of God and not the whims of culture must check her quest for social renewal and her involvement in the broader struggles of society.<sup>328</sup> "The real challenge facing the Reformed tradition has always been to hold its evangelical center and its world-formative dynamism in creative tension in the service of truth and justice."<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> For example, and following Kuyper, de Gruchy asserts that it is through the conflict between church and state – and the state and other social spheres – that human rights, constitutional law and government are generated; *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>326</sup> See *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>327</sup> See *Ibid.*, 258ff. See also André Bieler, Edward Dommen, and James Greig, *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought* (Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, World Council of Churches, 2005). Other theological influences upon de Gruchy during the apartheid years included Barth and Bonhoeffer.

<sup>328</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 21, 166, 262-63.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

With mounting pressure from the church, other institutions and political voices, during the 1970s and 1980s, the 1990s eventually saw the transformation of the state from one of racist tyranny to a fledgling democracy.

### 3.2.8. *The “end” of apartheid*

In the years leading up to the fall of the apartheid government, the church and state experienced greater confrontation. Indicative of this was the government’s clampdown on numerous political organisations and the banning of a number of community leaders on February 24, 1988. In response, several church leaders, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak, issued a strong statement to the effect that they were committed to exploring every possible avenue for continuing to “carry on the activities which have been banned in so far as we believe they are mandated by the gospel.” On March 1, after a worship service at St. Georges Cathedral, an ecumenical group of church leaders marched outside the Houses of Parliament nearby. Arrests were made, followed by release. In a political address delivered shortly thereafter, the state president condemned the march as an act of civil disobedience (seeing that such an act violated South African constitutional law.) On the heels of Tutu’s last minute attempt to block the execution of the “Sharpeville Six”, President Botha presented a personal letter to the Archbishop admonishing him for his February petition. The letter ended with the President questioning the right of the church to be engaged in “secular power-play.” The DRC also issued statements condemning the actions of Tutu and Boesak. A subsequent meeting of the Anglican bishops emphatically voiced their support for their archbishop and other church leaders. In a statement issued, it was written: “The Church has a spiritual responsibility not only to individual Christians but to the lives of the nations and we shall endeavor to meet that responsibility.”<sup>330</sup>

The tensions between church and state were to subside however with the election of F.W. de Klerk (a descendent of the Huguenots). Soon several black-nationalist leaders were released, anti-apartheid organisations were unbanned and the death penalty for political offenses suspended, and, on February 11, 1990, Mr. Nelson Mandela was freed from prison after twenty-

<sup>330</sup> See *Ibid.*, 236-40. See also Robert Vosloo, “The State of Exception and Religious Freedom: Revisiting the Church-State Confrontation Correspondence and Statements of 1988,” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* XXXIV, no. 1 (2008).

seven years. All of this led to the return of political exiles and the commencement of discussions to prepare the way for negotiations for a new constitution. These events signaled the beginning of the end of apartheid.<sup>331</sup>

The same year also saw members of the DRC – most notably Willie Jonker – offer public confession of guilt for the church’s support of apartheid. “The full meeting also issued a Declaration, confessing guilt for supporting apartheid in different ways, rejecting its theological support as heresy and sin, and calling for concrete forms of restitution.”<sup>332</sup>

### 3.2.9. Concluding remarks

The story of Calvin’s appropriation in service of the ideology of apartheid and later in the church struggle against apartheid during the 1970s and 1980s serves to highlight his ambiguous legacy. I have focused on Calvin’s conflicting portrait in terms of Christianity and culture in general and church-state relations in particular. I have focused on those figures and movements within the more recent South African Reformed tradition that directly challenged the social thought of earlier Afrikaner Calvinism.

By way of summary, I offer three observations concerning this history with a view to setting the stage for the contribution of this thesis to ongoing historical-theological Calvin discourse. First, both the sketches of Calvin featured in *Afrikaner Calvinism* and the church struggle sought to be faithful to the so-called Reformed worldview of socio-political transformation, perhaps best captured in the (also ambiguous) legacy of Abraham Kuyper. Second, the socio-theological experiment that produced apartheid represents what can go wrong with a transformationist worldview when it embraces the imperialist and oppressive side of Calvin and the early Reformed tradition, and in turn attempts to accommodate Calvin and the Reformed tradition to its cultural agenda, thereby losing its prophetic edge. And third, those in support of the recovery of Calvin during the church struggle claimed more fidelity to the so-called historic Reformed vision of social transformation by recovering the (more dominant) liberating and prophetic trajectories in Calvin.

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<sup>331</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 240-41.

<sup>332</sup> See Smit, *Essays in Public Theology*, 22. See also Louw Alberts and Frank Chikane, *The Road to Rustenburg: The Church Looking Forward to the New South Africa* (Cape Town: Struik, 1991).

But has Calvin's ambiguous legacy on church-state relations been adequately resolved by the brand of Calvinism emerging out of the church-struggle? Is there not perhaps more to Calvin's social thought than what has featured thus far in the South African Reformed tradition, thus offering greater clarity to apparent ambiguity in Calvin himself as well as adding further correction to his contested legacy in South Africa and elsewhere? Could there perhaps be more constructive theological resources in Calvin that might help steer the church through the tumultuous waters of South Africa's new liberal democracy? In seeking to answer questions like these, one does well to ask what lessons the contemporary Reformed tradition can learn from her appropriation of Calvin in the past, especially during the church struggle. Can the tradition improve upon its past as it seeks to recover and develop Calvin for the future: perhaps to an extent that his portrait undergoes yet another transformation, not unlike its facelift during the church-struggle? These are some of the questions I endeavor to answer in the remaining part of this chapter as I seek to make a case for returning to the historical Calvin and his social thought.

### **3.3. Calvin for the future? Seeking resolution to his ambiguous legacy in South Africa**

At an ecumenical level, the dramatic succession of events leading up to the dismantling of apartheid signaled a change in the political role of the church – from being at the forefront of civil protest and resistance to one of critical but pastoral solidarity with all committed to the birth of a new nonracial and democratic South Africa. According to de Gruchy, the history of church-state conflict in South Africa raises a number of “complex yet urgent issues and problems with regard to the role of the church within the political arena, and concomitantly, the relationship between theology and politics.” According to him, the church had to go beyond its “normal” mandate and assume a political role due to the exigencies of apartheid in South Africa. But what is its role in the wake of political change and struggle for a more just and democratic society?<sup>333</sup>

For de Gruchy and others of Reformed persuasion – both English and Afrikaans – the so-called historic Reformed vision of cultural transformation still holds sway (see Chapter 2). According to them it is imperative that the church does not lose its critical prophetic voice – both

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<sup>333</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 242-43. See also de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, especially the last chapter; and, generally, John W. de Gruchy, *Christianity and Democracy: A Theology for a Just World Order*, Cambridge Studies in Ideology and Religion (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

directed towards itself and broader society – and become shaped by the dominant culture, as was the case with Afrikaner Calvinism. The twin temptations of imperial Calvinism and pietistic neutral withdrawal must be avoided. Like other Reformed figures involved in the church struggle, de Gruchy looks to the basic content and structure of Calvin’s political thought as the basis for a Reformed theology of politics, which casts a vision for “just transformation of society irrespective of who is in power”, a theology framed by politics.<sup>334</sup>

However, not everyone within the Reformed tradition, particularly those churches of Dutch origin are certain of their ongoing public role in South Africa’s new political dispensation. Some are unsure of the ongoing relevance of Calvin and his social thought in view of his ambiguous and shameful legacy, and the new challenges facing the church in a new liberal democracy.

### *3.3.1. The split-portrait of Calvin and the ongoing church struggle*

In reflecting upon the Calvinist and Reformed legacy in South Africa, Reformed theologians like Dirk J. Smit have described it as a tale of many conflicting stories and contradictory perceptions.<sup>335</sup> He is also someone who has sought to ask difficult questions of the tradition as it grapples with the past and its ongoing life in the present. He observes that appeals to Calvin and the Reformed faith were at the very heart of the church struggle against apartheid ideology and policy. He then goes on to ask whether the contemporary Reformed tradition can learn anything about Calvinist impulses for life in society from such an ambiguous legacy?<sup>336</sup>

With respect to its past, one major concern for the Reformed family of churches in South Africa has been how the Afrikaans churches during the apartheid era could have mirrored broader culture with an ecclesiastical ideology of racial segregation and exclusion? In the wake of the anti-apartheid church struggle such churches have been almost unanimous in their agreement that they lacked theological grounds for ecclesiastical divisions along racial lines. Hence, one significant way in which the Reformed tradition has responded to her prior failings has been through the recovery of the Calvinist and Reformed teachings of church unity

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<sup>334</sup> de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 242-43.

<sup>335</sup> Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 201-02.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 494.

(irrespective of race etc.) and a posture of self-directed criticism and prophesy. Put another way, the Reformed tradition in South Africa has in many ways recovered a stronger doctrine of the church.<sup>337</sup> Some, however, still wonder if she has not gone far enough?<sup>338</sup>

What the Reformed tradition in South Africa has been less unanimous about is her ongoing role both ecclesiastically and individually as agents for social change in a newly minted democracy. From the brief history outlined above, it is evident that the Reformed tradition – both in its theological support of and struggle against apartheid – believed that Christianity should play some kind of role in transforming society. Both looked to Calvin and his so-called transformationist legacy for support, yet with starkly opposing outcomes. For most it has become accepted that Afrikaner Calvinism produced *the* case-study for much that has gone wrong in the Reformed tradition: the wrong kind of cultural transformation.<sup>339</sup> However, the question of the legitimacy of the church’s socio-political role in the struggle against apartheid – in its public critique of civil institutions like the state – is more contested and complex. While churches may now be united and have found resolution (at least theologically, but not always in practice) with respect to its internal legacy of racial division, the same cannot be said for its role in engagement of broader culture. This is arguably where the ongoing ambiguity of Calvin’s legacy in the South African Reformed tradition becomes most acute.

Ambivalence regarding the church’s socio-political role in broader society stretches back to the days of the anti-apartheid struggle itself. Smit observes: “Our common faith, tradition and confessional heritage were not strong enough to break the historical barriers of ethnicity, class and racism. South African society set out on the road to a non-racial, democratic society for reasons other than the influence, the witness or the example of the Reformed communities in its midst.”<sup>340</sup> There were those within the Dutch Reformed tradition, like Smit, who have embraced the so-called Calvinist vision of prophetic social transformation (as noted above), but many did not. And this trend of ambivalence and uncertainty has lived on beyond the collapse of the apartheid government.

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<sup>337</sup> It has been the opinion of those involved in the church struggle that what is at stake in South Africa is not just ethics, “but ecclesiology, the nature and calling of being the church, faith itself”; see *Ibid.*, 480.

<sup>338</sup> See *Ibid.*, 441-60.

<sup>339</sup> See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, xvi.

<sup>340</sup> Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 203.

According to Smit, Reformed Christians in South Africa are at least unsure and if not divided over whether the church should play an active role in the renewal of society, thus calling into question the very heart of what it means to be Reformed. In other words, the Reformed tradition in South Africa is in the midst of an ongoing identity crisis. Smit observes that the majority of Reformed churches of Dutch origin are doubtful whether Christians should participate in the ongoing reconstruction and reformation of public life – whether the will of God revealed in the Bible can be obeyed in the political and social order: thereby denying the heart of their Reformed identity.<sup>341</sup> He suggests a number of interrelated reasons for this.

One obvious reason stems from its dubious past, namely its failed experiment in social transformation that produced apartheid. The effect of this history has been a tendency among Afrikaans-speaking Reformed Christians to distance themselves as much as possible from crippling aspects of their past identity (of playing a major role in *transforming* South Africa into an oppressive, immoral and unjust society). The resultant lack of credibility and self-confidence induced by this legacy has seen white Afrikaans-speaking Reformed Christians to a large extent retreat from the ongoing struggle for the soul of the nation. A popular slogan is: Christianity and politics should not be mixed.<sup>342</sup> Some critics have sought to explain this reaction as in keeping with the *kragvelde* (force fields) that have historically characterised the DRC: namely, its close association with the Afrikaner people, its Reformed doctrinal heritage and a pietistic form of spirituality – all contributing to a seeming otherworldly flight from reality, not unlike the days of endorsing the status quo of apartheid.<sup>343</sup>

Another reason is closely related. While many Reformed Christians were deeply involved in opposing apartheid ideology and theology, laws and practices, with the gospel, their ongoing public role is unclear. Some feel as though the struggle years failed to prepare them adequately for their role in a radically transformed, secular, democratic and pluralistic society. How the gospel should be obeyed in the fullness of social life is not a given. Others simply

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 423-26. Similar observations have been made of the church at large in South Africa. “Christianity finds itself relieved of having to play either blanket legitimizing or oppositional roles. But it wonders what that “other” role might be”; see Stephen W. Martin, "Editorial: Christianity and the Transformation of Tradition in South Africa," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 139 (March 2011): 2-3.

<sup>342</sup> See Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 427.

<sup>343</sup> See Ibid., 222-23. See Jonker, "Kragvelde binne die Kerk."

contend that the church's prophetic role is over, since apartheid has been "successfully" opposed.<sup>344</sup>

Even for those committed to a clear Calvinistic vision of transforming society, the challenges posed by South Africa's young liberal democracy are significant. No longer does the church enjoy the kind of social influence that it once did (in the more pre-modern South Africa). "The sacred canopy provided by religion or metaphysics no longer exists. The typically modern society no longer has a centre." The church no longer has access to those institutions – such as schools, colleges and universities – once deemed to be "vehicles" of the Reformed faith and tradition. It is therefore no longer possible for religion to play its overarching and integrating role in society. In short, with the advent of liberalism and secularism, Christianity in South Africa has had to come to terms with its new marginalised role in society. For many Reformed Christians a transformationist world-view is not only practically impossible to implement, but has simply lost any possible meaning or credibility. The only seeming alternative is a privatised and individualised religion.<sup>345</sup>

A final set of reasons that Smit suggests adds further fuel to the doubt and division over the public role of the church and Christianity in South Africa, can be explained in terms of the state of theology and ecclesiology within the Reformed family of churches. First, the "images, notions or *Leitmotifs*" informing a transformative vision for all of life have always been met with a strong measure of criticism if not rejection. Doctrines such as the "notion of the Kingdom of God, of diverse covenant and federal theologies, of ideas about a Reformed commonwealth, of theocratic ideals, of Christocracies and Lordship of Christ-theologies, of claims to be a prophetic church and religion, of comprehensive philosophical world views, claiming every inch of this world to belong to Christ (and Calvinism) and church and state-constructions like Article 36 of the *Confessio Belgica*" have always been associated with ambiguity and controversy.<sup>346</sup> A second reason, arguably compounding the first, was the lack of a solid theological foundation under girding those engaged in the church struggle, which has ongoing consequences for the Reformed tradition and its future. Indicative of this is the plea of Coenie Burger and Willie

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<sup>344</sup> See also Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 428.

<sup>345</sup> See *Ibid.*, 428-32. See also Jaap Durand, "Secularism, Pluralism, and the Afrikaner Churches in the Twenty-First Century," in *Theology in Dialogue*, ed. Lyn Holness & R Kingdom Wüstenberg (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002), 175-89.

<sup>346</sup> See Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 426-27.

Jonker, in view of the deficiencies of practical theology during the church struggle, for more theology in a distinctively Reformed accent.<sup>347</sup> A third reason, which is in part a function of the one just mentioned as well as the others listed above, is the lack of confessional church unity and associated antipathy toward traditional forms of piety and practice among the Reformed family of churches (an indication of the church at large).<sup>348</sup>

Smit summarises the condition, as he sees it, of the Dutch Reformed family of churches with the following remarks:

Our Reformed churches seem to lack all vision for social, political, economic and cultural developments and to exercise no prophetic voice at all... We are absent from the public debate about the soul of the nation and about common values and norms. And we are silent about the urgent social and moral crises our society is facing...<sup>349</sup>

Does the historic Reformed tradition offer compelling resources to change this trend? More specifically, is there perhaps something previously neglected and even overlooked in Calvin that might help chart the future course of the Reformed and ecumenical traditions in South Africa?

### *3.3.2. Calvin: an ongoing source of life for the Reformed tradition in SA?*

Calvin's ambiguous and contested legacy coupled with South Africa's radically new and secularised socio-political climate has given many Reformed theologians reason for critical reflection, and caused some to even question his ongoing relevance for the church today. Similar questions and concerns have been raised regarding the Reformed tradition itself. The nature of Reformed identity is an ongoing site of "struggle" and ambiguity relative to the goods that constitute its tradition.<sup>350</sup> Is the answer for the church to abandon the intertwined legacies of Calvin and the confessional Reformed tradition when it comes to addressing questions relative to relating Christianity and culture, and church and state? I join other South African theologians in suggesting not. But the burning question then remains, what does the road forward look like? Should the Reformed tradition in South Africa work with what it has already retrieved of the

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<sup>347</sup> See *Ibid.*, 267-70.

<sup>348</sup> See *Ibid.*, 429, 32-34. On these reasons that Smit suggests lie behind the doubt and division over the church's socio-political role in the public square, see also, e.g., ———, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 226-30.

<sup>349</sup> Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 436.

<sup>350</sup> See, e.g., *Ibid.*, 250-53, 433.

historic Calvin – in other words, the transformationist Calvin of the church struggle? Or are there not perhaps other resources within Calvin’s social thought that have yet to be harvested and that could bring further resolution to the conflicting Calvinist and Reformed legacy in South Africa?

Smit is someone critically optimistic about the promise of the resources found within the Reformed tradition in dealing with ongoing doubt and division in the church regarding its identity. He argues that addressing questions surrounding the church’s role in the world is fundamentally a theological task: “to keep searching for *a fully Trinitarian theology, responsible biblical hermeneutics, a faithful church and socially involved and responsible believers.*” While always subject to the normative critique of the Word of God, Smit contends that the future of Reformed theology and faith in South Africa depends upon a return to the central claims and insights of the Reformed tradition. Crucial to this task is a willingness on the part of scholars to dialogue with one another, despite their complex and conflicting memories of the past. What is more, theologians need to be more sensitive to challenges facing the church and its members both from within its walls as well as from broader society without.<sup>351</sup>

Smit is of the opinion that the contemporary Reformed tradition in South Africa recovered the correct orientation in Calvin during the anti-apartheid church struggle, namely the Calvin of ecumenicity and social transformation: the Calvin of Barth, Bonhoeffer, Beyers Naudé and *Belhar*. For Smit, this interpretation of Calvin faithfully captures the heart of what it means to be Reformed and harnesses the correct Calvinistic impulses for the future.<sup>352</sup> He is heartened by what he believes to be a changing of the tide in this direction in recent years – in that Christians and churches are taking their calling in public life more seriously. Indicators of this trend include the DRC General Synod declaration of 2002, which declared publicly its commitment to serve both nation and continent in the midst of their complex challenges; the work of the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology at Stellenbosch University; and the growing corpus of scholarly work done on the new relations between church and state in South Africa.<sup>353</sup> Speaking from the Calvinist and confessional tradition of Barth, Barmen and *Belhar*, Smit surmises that the “adventure for Reformed theology in the years ahead will probably be

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 437-39.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 423-39. See also ———, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 494.

<sup>353</sup> See Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 230.

how to be a church practising and embodying living unity, real reconciliation and caring justice.<sup>354</sup>

But do Smit and others sympathetic to the “church-struggle” reading of Calvin have the full story – the full portrait of the sixteenth-century reformer? Certainly they must be commended for raising critical questions surrounding the relationship between church and state, Christians and culture, in the uncharted and challenging territory of South Africa’s new liberal democracy. But is there not perhaps more to Calvin’s social thought than a Christianity transforming culture vision? Put more pointedly, is there not perhaps a neglected and if not more dominant strand in Calvin’s social thought that challenges the transformation of culture paradigm of both Afrikaner Calvinism *and* the anti-apartheid church struggle? In the next section I make a case for revisiting Calvin’s social thought in search of evidence for a different orientation on his social thought, one that enjoyed considerable currency in the early Reformed tradition and is enjoying something of a resurgence in the North American Reformed context: namely, the Calvin of two kingdoms and natural law. In doing so, I argue that Calvin’s prior appropriation in South Africa – particularly during the church struggle – and its ongoing legacy, suggests that future Reformed scholarship on his social thought may yet have work to do in recovering a more historically faithful and rounded portrait of the sixteenth-century Reformer for today.

### **3.4. Learning from the past: a case for revisiting Calvin’s social thought**

The Reformed tradition in South Africa is in the midst of something of an identity crisis due to its ambiguous past, in which conflicting portraits of Calvin have played no small part. I have argued that the Calvin of unity and ecumenicity emerging in the church struggle provided a significant degree of resolution to internal theological tensions within the Dutch Reformed family of churches with respect to racial segregation. The theological ideal of racial diversity and unfettered access to the Lord’s Table, irrespective of ethnicity, is for the most part accepted, although not always a visible ecclesiastical reality. Nevertheless, the question of whether or not or how the church should go about transforming culture remains highly contested within the

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid., 233. Correlating this challenge in terms of the story of the URCSA, Smit’s home denomination, he speaks of “the challenge to be a confessing church, to embody the confession, to face contemporary challenges of injustice and destruction, and to faithfully practise these convictions in the social form and everyday life of the church”; see ———, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 245-46.

Reformed tradition in South Africa for reasons described above. While many remain doubtful about the church's ongoing role, Reformed theologians such as de Gruchy and Smit believe that the Calvin of prophetic witness and liberation retrieved in the anti-apartheid church struggle is not only the necessary corrective for Afrikaner Calvinism but essential to the ongoing vitality and identity of the Reformed tradition.

I would like to challenge this latter claim by suggesting that there is more to Calvin's social thought than what has featured thus far in his contested legacy in South Africa, thereby offering the potential for both further resolution to his "split-transformationist-portrait" as well as valuable resources for navigating the new challenges of an increasingly marginalised church in a young liberal democracy. To this end, I take as my point of departure questions and concerns – lessons – emerging from the Reformed tradition's retrieval of Calvin during the church struggle as raised by Smit above, and by others within the Reformed tradition. I then suggest additional reasons for revisiting Calvin by considering indicators of sympathy toward a new orientation in Calvin in more recent Reformed discourse in both the South African and North American contexts.

#### *3.4.1. A more faithful historical hermeneutic?*

The reality of Calvin's ambiguous reception in South Africa raises, among others, questions surrounding the hermeneutic employed in retrieving the past. A widely held critique of Afrikaner Calvinism is that it accommodated Calvin to suit the aspirations of Afrikaner nationalism. It allowed the self-interest of Afrikaner culture to dictate its selective and distorted reading of Calvin. Hence the so-called imperialist and oppressive impulses in Calvin became the dominant focus. In turn, there was selective use and at times outright perversion of the theological insights of later Calvinists, like Kuyper, in order to further entrench a particular ideological reading of Calvin. At the same time Afrikaner Calvinism has also been critiqued for its very meager and if not total disregard for serious historical-theological engagement of Calvin and his social thought. Afrikaner Calvinism failed dismally in showing how its apartheid-legitimising brand of Calvinist and Reformed theology and practice evidenced substantive continuity with Calvin and the earlier Reformed tradition. Rather, its historical hermeneutic

could not “see through” the immediate trappings of Afrikaner nationalism and a pietistic form of Christianity.

What then of the recovery of Calvin in the anti-apartheid church struggle? Can it be subject to a similar critique? Certainly one would be hard-pressed to find fault with the motives surrounding the retrieval of Calvin on church unity and ecumenicity as historical-theological grounds for exposing the ecclesiastical sins of segregation along racial lines. This was a commendable recovery of aspects of Calvin’s theology in response to a serious breakdown in church governance. However, the so-called recovery of a different kind of culture-transforming Calvin seems more susceptible to critique along hermeneutical lines. Is it possible that the Calvin of socio-political critique and liberation also represents a capitulation to a cultural agenda, thereby creating unwarranted discontinuities with the historical Calvin? No doubt the social ideal of racial equality and justice for the oppressed is more morally virtuous than racial segregation. But did Reformed theologians in the church struggle not perhaps also allow their recovery of Calvin to be skewed by a cultural ideal, thereby leading to at least a selective, if not distorted reading of Calvin? A similar question may be asked of the church struggle movement in Germany, which in significant ways shaped the church struggle movement in South Africa. Like Afrikaner Calvinism, has there not perhaps also been inadequate engagement of the historical Calvin in the church struggle tradition because of pressing socio-political concerns? Is it perhaps guilty of allowing the laudable moral quest for a more just and equitable South African society to keep it from a more objective and thoroughgoing historical-theological engagement of Calvin’s social thought?

I am not suggesting that reading any historical text is ever purely objective. (The insights of the post-modern turn have exposed this fallacy.) However, just like Afrikaner Calvinism has been subject to the critique of allowing its social and political presuppositions dictate its version of Calvin, so it seems reasonable to apply the same logic of critique to the Calvinism of the church struggle.<sup>355</sup> As Vosloo notes, recovering Calvin for today cannot be dictated purely by creative reaction to the needs of the present context, but includes establishing substantive continuity with the past. Such an endeavor involves reading Calvin in conversation with others

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<sup>355</sup> See Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 53-85.

in the early Reformed tradition and contemporary Reformed scholars in other socio-political contexts.<sup>356</sup>

In my estimation, the ambiguity of Calvin's legacy in South Africa with respect to how Christianity should engage broader culture and how church should relate to state, seems in and of itself sufficient warrant to re-examine Calvin. More controversial is my suggestion that *both* portraits of Calvin featuring in the South African context were to some degree shaped by cultural ideals or myths, hence providing further motivation for a fresh historical examination of Calvin.<sup>357</sup> Yet further motivation relates to a history within Reformed church-struggle tradition of associating the doctrines of natural law and two kingdoms with the theological legitimisation of apartheid as alluded to above. The tendency to link these early Reformed doctrines with a perverted kind of natural theology and sphere sovereignty harnessed by Afrikaner Calvinism has perhaps at least in part skewed the historical hermeneutic of many Reformed theologians involved in the church struggle and the new dispensation of nation-building. This might explain in part why evidence for these doctrines in Calvin and the early Reformed tradition has been largely overlooked, and the corresponding theological value of these ideas in relating church and state underappreciated.<sup>358</sup> If there is some plausibility to these claims, which will be tested in the chapters to come, it seems reasonable to also ask whether the Reformed tradition in South Africa can engage in better Calvin scholarship in general, and particularly in regard to capturing the spirit of his social thought for the future.

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<sup>356</sup> See Vosloo, "Reformed Tradition?," 18-31.

<sup>357</sup> Along similar lines, Abraham van de Beek has argued more pointedly that the church during the apartheid era as well as since the liberation struggle has perpetuated Christianity's legacy, since Constantine, of being a religious ideology in the service of the powers of the world. He notes that just like during apartheid days, theologians in the new dispensation also use theological arguments to endorse aspects of the cultural status quo, such as the concept of the 'Rainbow nation'. As in the past, they make religion and theology servants to state ideology. "The hermeneutic method has actually not changed, only the regime. Theology in South Africa has difficulties with a clear distinction of public life and Christian identity. Certainly this has to do with a predominance of creation theology over Christology"; see Abraham van de Beek, "To Be Free, Religion Should Keep Herself Free," in *Freedom of Religion*, ed. A. van de Beek et al (Boston: Brill, 2010), 223-25. I would disagree with van de Beek's diagnosis of the reason for the church's capitulation to culture in recent South African history. In keeping with the claims of this thesis, it seems more accurate to say that previously inadequate distinctions between Christianity and culture, church and state have more to do with an eschatological and/or Christological rendering of culture, rather than (an idiosyncratic and less than consistent kind of) natural theology.

<sup>358</sup> I realise that another significant reason behind why the doctrines of natural law and two kingdoms did not receive favorable attention in the church struggle is because of the influences of Barth and the broader Confessing Movement in Germany, both of which were critical of these doctrines. One does well to remember that the Confessing Movement in Germany was also providing a theological response to the grave socio-political ills of its day, in the form of Nazi oppression.

### 3.4.2. *Better Calvinist and Reformed scholarship?*

In the above, I have drawn attention to Smit's contention that the lack of unity among the Dutch Reformed family of churches concerning questions of Christianity and culture can be attributed in some degree to a lack of a solid theological foundation under-girding those engaged in the church struggle. Other voices in recent Reformed discourse share similar concerns regarding the condition of theology in the more recent history of the Reformed tradition in South Africa. For instance, de Gruchy, writing towards the end of the church struggle, opined that the problem in South Africa has not been Calvinism but rather a lack of a truly Reformed theology; not too much Calvin but too little.<sup>359</sup>

Despite the laudable scholarly efforts of de Gruchy and others in seeking to reclaim anew those "liberating" trajectories in Calvin, might there not be more of Calvin's theology still waiting to be recovered? Since the turn of the century, both Russel Botman and Piet Naudé have described the DRC's biggest challenge as theological.<sup>360</sup> According to Naudé, the greatest challenge remains the construction of a coherent theological discourse.<sup>361</sup> In one place, Smit bemoans the lack of serious ethical reflection in academic circles in the recent past, and wonders if moral discourse could have been more Reformed had things been different.<sup>362</sup> In another, he wonders whether his tradition has cared enough about the spiritual polity of the church in the past.<sup>363</sup> Such observations suggest a call for a better theological and ethical foundation informing the Reformed tradition in South Africa, one in which Calvin has featured very prominently.

I take the above call for more coherent Reformed theological reflection in general and better Calvin scholarship in particular as another reason to return to the sixteenth-century Reformer. In the next chapter, I seek to determine whether the doctrinal *combination* of two kingdoms and natural law played a significant role in Calvin's social thought. To my knowledge,

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<sup>359</sup> de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 34. See also Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 259.

<sup>360</sup> See Russel Botman, "Belhar and the White DRC: Changes in the DRC: 1974-1990," *Scriptura* 76, no. 1 (2001).

<sup>361</sup> Piet Naudé, "Constructing a Coherent Theological Discourse: The Main Challenge Facing the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa Today," *Scriptura* 83, no. 2 (2003).

<sup>362</sup> Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 270-71.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

no such inquiry has been undertaken in the South African context, especially in view of his contested legacy as highlighted by the church struggle. Could revisiting Calvin perhaps provide the Reformed tradition in South Africa with a different theological conception of natural law and the two kingdoms theology that might dispel some of the deeply held prejudices previously held against such doctrines; and perhaps even reclaim them for positive use? Is there perhaps more to Calvin's social thought – or perhaps even something *other* – than Christ transforming culture and the church transforming the state?

Thus far I have argued that the Calvinism that emerged out of the church struggle in South Africa has the potential for being critically developed and refined in terms of a more faithful historical hermeneutic and better theological scholarship. I have also taken note of developments in South African Reformed scholarship that suggest a willingness to entertain another orientation – other than cultural transformation – in Calvin's social thought, thereby following the lead of other Reformed thinkers in North America. In addition to these reasons for returning to Calvin, and perhaps a way of bringing them together, is the legacy of ongoing willingness within parts of the Reformed tradition in South Africa to return to those liberating moments and theological trajectories in the early tradition that might be retrieved for the reformation of the church today. This ongoing project may indeed be the kind of "space" for considering another angle on Calvin's contested legacy in South Africa, which may in turn be the catalyst for reengaging his social thought in a new and critical way.

### 3.4.3. *Transforming traditions*

The fallout of Afrikaner Calvinism in the history of South Africa brought about a concerted effort among Reformed theologians to salvage their tradition, which has necessarily involved recovering a different reading of Calvin. The church struggle against apartheid and its theological underpinnings can be seen as an attempt to transform the Calvinist and Reformed tradition in South Africa by retrieving liberating resources in the earlier tradition for a more truly Reformed theology and worldview. de Gruchy's *Liberating Reformed Theology* from the early 1990s is a monumental work in this regard.<sup>364</sup> In commenting on de Gruchy's vision, Smit writes, "his whole work then becomes a sustained effort of critical retrieval, suspicious and

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<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 259-60.

creative reclamation, and self-critical engagement with the Reformed tradition itself, appealing to its liberating moments and trajectories, and unmasking and criticising oppressive moments and trajectories.”<sup>365</sup> De Gruchy has taught his students to look for the transformational kernel even in the most conservative expression of the Christian faith.<sup>366</sup>

For de Gruchy the ongoing project of transforming theological traditions is dictated by the overarching concern to see society transformed by the gospel. He writes,

As I understand it, the transforming trajectories are those that address the personal, social and political realities that we associate with overcoming injustice and the legacies of apartheid, and creating a society and a world in which human life and the environment can flourish... In other words, the transforming trajectories have corresponded with what we have associated with the transformation of South Africa as expressed, for example, in our Constitution.<sup>367</sup>

This is in continuity with how theology has been done in South Africa over the last forty years.

While this thesis is less optimistic about the notion of transformation understood as the (ultimate) redemption of social institutions beyond the church, it nevertheless shares a concern for transforming previously held conceptions of biblical and Reformed doctrines. Accordingly, in the final chapter of this thesis I will argue that a recovery of the Calvin of two kingdoms and natural law not only promises to transform previously held conceptions of the church in liberating ways, but also the way Christians understand their role as citizens of broader society with the potential of effecting socio-political good.

The general claims made by de Gruchy regarding transforming traditions can also be attributed to many well-known Reformed South African theologians.<sup>368</sup> Smit writes of the influence of Willie Jonker and his hermeneutical strategy: “He was appealing to tradition against tradition. He was appealing to the community against the community. He was appealing to our deepest identity in order to critique our actual identity.”<sup>369</sup> Smit himself wrote more recently,

Is there something involved in being Reformed that challenges the ways in which we have been doing and perhaps still are doing practical theology and ethics? If we had been

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Martin, "Editorial: Christianity and the Transformation of Tradition in South Africa," 3.

<sup>367</sup> John W. de Gruchy, "Transforming Traditions: Doing Theology in South Africa Today," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 139 (March 2011): 13-14.

<sup>368</sup> Such as the likes of Willie Jonker, Jaap Durand, David Bosch, Takatso Mofokeng and Lekula Ntoane, Allan Boesak, Russel Botman and Piet Naudé; see Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 260.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

*more* Reformed in our theology and ethics, would that not have been better for the church and society in South Africa? Should we not, as Reformed theologians, have done our work in a different way?<sup>370</sup>

Those committed to such a theological project of critical reclamation and retrieval affirm the indispensable value of healthy debate and dialog over the goods that constitute their tradition.<sup>371</sup>

Particularly significant for the purposes of this thesis are those voices who value the importance of maintaining (historical) *continuity* with the earlier Reformed tradition, lest Reformed churches find themselves completely severed from their historical-theological roots for the sake of innovation and so-called progression. Robert Vosloo is a theologian who lectures in church history at the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University that is concerned with keeping the tradition critically grounded in the past through responsible historical theological inquiry. He affirms Alasdair MacIntyre's notion of "living tradition"<sup>372</sup> over against a static understanding of tradition. Nevertheless, in arguing that tradition is a dynamic phenomenon, "one is challenged to give some account of how the restatements and re-embodiments of the tradition show *continuity* with past statements and embodiments of the tradition in question."<sup>373</sup> According to Vosloo, establishing continuity with the past is indispensable to the wellbeing of the Reformed tradition in South Africa as it seeks to deal with the ambiguity of its legacy. The vitality of the Reformed tradition depends on its willingness to critique its actual identity in light of its deepest identity. In other words, "solutions" offered for the "epistemological crisis" facing the Reformed tradition must be shown to be in continuity with the tradition's deepest identity. "This project of providing continuity implies the need for responsible historical theological inquiry. In a climate of historical amnesia, or one in which the notion of tradition itself has become suspect, we are robbed of the resources for this kind of creative theological work."<sup>374</sup> Vosloo suggests that the church should remember the example of

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>371</sup> The work of Alasdair MacIntyre has played a prominent role in shaping South African discourse on what constitutes tradition; see especially MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 222. See also Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 260-61.

<sup>372</sup> A living tradition is "an historically extended, socially embodied argument about the resources that constitute a tradition"; see MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 222.

<sup>373</sup> One needs to be careful of Reformed fundamentalism as well as "a faddish and uncritical move towards innovation for innovation's sake, rather seeking a responsible historical and theological engagement with the past for the sake of the present and the future"; see Robert Vosloo, "Reformed Tradition?," 22, 31.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid.: 28-29.

the early Reformers in this regard. “The influence of the Reformation theologians in part rested on their ability to communicate their ideas not as merely novel, but as in continuity with the tradition. These Reformers went to great lengths, for instance, to point out the continuity between the Reformation and the early church.”<sup>375</sup>

Regarding the future of the Reformed tradition in South Africa, Vosloo’s conviction is that

[t]he maturity and sustainability of the tradition will depend on the way in which proponents can link their views, amidst rival interpretations, to its heart. This implies a need to conduct the debates on a *theological* level. The question remains: is there a future for a theological tradition when it turns away, not only from its past, but from the belief in the value of the discipline of theology as such?<sup>376</sup>

In the spirit of transforming traditions, this thesis seeks to challenge the “heart” of what it means to be Reformed in South Africa: to offer a critique of its actual identity in light of its deeper (past) identity - and this by way of historical-theological retrieval of Calvin and the early Reformed tradition, for the good of the tradition.

Hence, I suggest that the apparent value attached to examining the earlier Reformed tradition and the willingness to engage in debate over what is found there is yet another motivating reason to return to Calvin’s social thought. Are there not perhaps trajectories in Calvin – previously overlooked and even derided – that may provide further *liberation* and *transformation* for the Reformed tradition in South Africa?

It has already been suggested that a critical reclamation of Calvin may help towards explaining and if not resolving ambiguities and tensions in Calvin himself and his legacy in South Africa – especially with respect to matters of Christianity and culture – and also contribute towards strengthening the theological foundation of the contemporary Reformed tradition. Another way in which a re-engagement of Calvin’s social thought may benefit the church in South Africa is in providing important resources for tackling the ongoing (and arguably increasing) challenges posed by Christian life in South Africa’s struggling young liberal democracy.

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid.: 30.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid.: 31.

#### 3.4.4. *Challenges for the church in a liberal democratic state*

The Reformed churches in South Africa arguably faced the greatest challenge to their witness and the well being of their tradition as the result of the theological legitimisation of apartheid by Afrikaner Calvinism. In the church struggle, members of the Reformed churches looked for theological resources to combat apartheid. The theology of Calvin was invoked in no small way in this regard. The Reformed tradition, like the broader ecumenical church, now finds itself in the midst of another significant challenge to its life and witness in the form of the secularising influence of a newly democratic and liberal state. Trying to make sense of the Reformed church's role in a modern liberal democratic South Africa is of urgent importance, especially in light of her loss of social influence and the difficult questions attending matters of Christianity and culture, such as the rapid rise of secularisation. Does the Reformed tradition in South Africa have the resources at its disposal to meet such challenges? More specifically, does the Calvin of Christ transforming culture have the resources to provide a holistic account of Christian life in a pluralistic and increasingly secularised society?

I am not sure that the portrait of Calvin harvested thus far in South Africa's church history provides adequate historical-theological categories to meet such challenges. Smit is someone concerned about the Calvinist response to the social transformation in South Africa since the 1990s, and has offered observations on what he sees as the current trends. In one article entitled "Morality and politics – secular or sacred?" he raises important questions that he does not necessarily think the Reformed tradition has adequately answered.<sup>377</sup> He observes that a number of theologians who acknowledge their debt to Calvin – such as Naudé, de Gruchy and Boesak – have made recent attempts to relate faith to the public square in a context quite radically different from that of apartheid South Africa. All affirm the basic tenets of the liberal tradition, things such as constitutional democracy, a secular society, religious pluralism, separation of church and state, and human rights. And yet, at the same time, they all appeal to something "more" – to something "sacred" – lying behind their liberal commitments: whether classical humanism (de Gruchy) or humanity and justice (Naudé) or "spirituality of the struggle" (Boesak). In their different ways, they all affirm that liberal democracies depend on presuppositions, which they themselves cannot produce or guarantee. While all appealing to a

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<sup>377</sup> Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 513-47.

form of African humanism, at the same time they all look to something in the tradition of Calvin. They all affirm the value of secular institutions and yet remain unconvinced that society can prosper without the involvement of the church and believers.<sup>378</sup>

At the end of the above-cited essay, Smit appears to sense the tension and perhaps ambiguity in the general position of those Calvinists he surveys. The fact that they can hold to the secular principles of liberalism and yet are unwilling to privatise the sacred (influence of the faith and the institutional church) seems incongruous. Smit wonders:

Does this mean that they [de Gruchy and company] are not liberal, that they do not fully appreciate the division between church and state, or do not really accept the secular nature of modern democratic societies? Do they still – in a typically Calvinist way – see the public as sacred, rather than secular? At least in South Africa these questions deserve careful answers. Most probably, it would be accurate to say that the distinction between secular and sacred is difficult to make, at least for these Reformed thinkers... Secular life – at least understood in a certain way – *is* for them sacred.<sup>379</sup>

If Smit's analysis is generally representative of the transformation of culture wing of the Reformed tradition in South Africa, it suggests that the advent of a liberal society has introduced some challenges to this paradigm. Could it be that the Reformed tradition in South Africa may need to go beyond the Calvin of the church struggle? Could it be that the new cultural realities of liberalism and attendant secularism will force Reformed churches to find a new orientation in Calvin and the broader Reformed tradition?

It seems significant that Smit finds in de Gruchy a possible exception to the “Calvinist rule” in that he appears to be willing to speak the “language of liberalism” in working toward the common good. Has de Gruchy perhaps opened the door to thinking of the public square in more “secular” and less “sacred” terms? Smit also notes that the scholars mentioned above are working with something in the tradition of Calvin as argued by the likes of John Witte Jr.<sup>380</sup> Witte is someone who has done important historical work in reviving the Calvin of two kingdoms and natural law, and in turn argues for the importance of these categories for contemporary Reformed and ecumenical social thought.

The recent socio-political challenges facing Reformed churches in South Africa have in some significant ways pushed the Calvinist transformation of culture paradigm into un-chartered

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid., 544-47.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 547.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 545-46.

territory. This contextual phenomenon alone seems to be a good reason to revisit Calvin anew. The fact that many leading Reformed theologians have come to terms with the tenets of liberalism suggests that new theological categories for relating these new social realities to faith may follow, and is perhaps already happening. Can the Reformed tradition benefit from grounding its social thought in a new orientation in Calvin and the early Reformed tradition? The likes of Witte and VanDrunen believe so.<sup>381</sup> And they have sought to bring the categories of two kingdoms and natural law to bear on challenges facing the church with far longer exposure to the social experiment of religious freedom and a liberal form of government. Can South Africa benefit from paying closer attention to this line of Reformed discourse?

### 3.5. Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have sought to capture one sub-plot within the grander narrative of Calvin's contested legacy in the Reformed tradition in South Africa. This sub-plot is the strikingly different ways in which the so-called Calvin of cultural transformation was retrieved by Afrikaner Calvinism and in turn the Reformed contribution to the church struggle. My focus has been on the church struggle and its portrait of a liberating Calvin against the oppressive Calvin of apartheid relative to church-state relations. I intended this to serve two ends. First, to outline the Calvinist vision of church-state relations informing the church struggle, which has since become the dominant contemporary Reformed approach in South Africa to addressing issues of relating Christianity and culture. And secondly, to consider what lessons might be learned from the most recent appropriation of Calvin as I seek to undertake my own historical-theological inquiry into Calvin's social thought, with an eye to his so-called doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law. The lessons that I have set forth suggest that a scholarly return to Calvin in conversation with both early and contemporary Reformed traditions may in fact unearth new angles on Calvin's contested legacy in South Africa. I argue that they may not only

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<sup>381</sup> This does not imply that these two scholars hold to the same views on relating Christianity and culture. It is not entirely clear what Witte's constructive perspective is on relating Christ and culture, seeing that most of his work has been historical. Nevertheless, it is patent from his reading of Calvin that the Reformer made substantive use of the doctrines of natural law and two kingdoms. From a recent audio interview conducted with Westminster Seminary, California, Witte is explicit that he sees great value in something like Calvin's conception of natural law for Christian participation in moral and ethical debate in a religiously plural public square; see John Witte Jr., "Natural Law and Religious Freedom," WSC, <http://wscal.edu/resource-center/resource/natural-law-and-religious-freedom> (date accessed: November 12, 2012).

bring further resolution to Calvin's split-portrait, but may also provide helpful recourses for both the institutional church and lay-Christians alike in their attempt to make sense of and meet the challenges of life in South Africa's new liberal democracy.

If there is some plausibility to the questions and claims emerging out of the church-struggle as a "site of learning" as set forth above, can Calvin discourse in South Africa perhaps entertain the possibility that the transformationist "Calvin" of the church-struggle is not the last "take"?<sup>382</sup> Might there be willingness to question previously held prejudices against doctrines such as natural law and two kingdoms? If in fact there is substantive evidence for such doctrines in Calvin's social thought, can these doctrines be freed from their negative association with a kind of natural theology and sphere sovereignty employed in Afrikaner Calvinism – the latter being less an engagement of Calvin than a capitulation to culture?

In the next chapter I will test the claim, already made by other Reformed scholars in America, that Calvin did in fact make significant combined use of doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law, with a view to their possible recovery in the South African context.

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<sup>382</sup> I am aware of other efforts to re-appropriate Calvin for contemporary Reformed Christianity and culture discourse in South Africa, such as the Calvin of "Christian humanism" and Calvin the "refugee". As to the former, see especially the recent work of de Gruchy, *John Calvin: Christian Humanist and Evangelical Reformer.*, who cites the influence of André Biéler: such as Biéler, Dommen, and Greig, *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought*. As to the latter, see, e.g., Robert Vosloo, "The Displaced Calvin: 'Refugee Reality' as a Lens to Re-Examine Calvin's Life, Theology, and Legacy," *Religion and Theology* 16, no. 1-2 (2009): 35-52.

## CHAPTER 4

### A CHURCH-HISTORICAL STUDY OF CALVIN ON CHURCH AND STATE

Before considering how Calvin related church and state in his theology and practice, space will be given to pre-Reformation influences that shaped his thought. Just as sensitivity must be given to the socio-political milieu that influenced Calvin's thought, so too should consideration be given to the patristic and medieval theological 'shoulders' upon which he stood. Special attention will be given to St. Augustine and Martin Luther as pivotal catholic figures leading up to Calvin and the establishment of a burgeoning Reformed tradition. According to Heiko Oberman, "There is no period in the history of medieval thought which could not be presented as a new phase in the appropriation of the heritage of St. Augustine."<sup>383</sup> In turn, as someone who emerged out of the medieval church, the centrality of Luther's role in the Protestant Reformation is undisputed. Assuming that Calvin has a doctrine of two kingdoms of sorts, both Augustine and Luther will be approached with an eye for themes of *antithesis* and *commonality* informing a multi-dimensional vision for the Christian life, and church-state relations in particular.

#### 4.1. Forerunners to Calvin: St. Augustine and *De civitate Dei*

##### 4.1.1. Background and context

To get a sense of the magnitude of Augustine's (354-430CE) place in the annals of Christian history Augustine scholar, Johannes van Oort, describes him as "a Father of the Church who has exerted an unparalleled influence."<sup>384</sup> He goes on to assert that "[i]n Augustine Western patristic theology, and possibly the whole patriarchal period, reaches its undisputed zenith." As

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<sup>383</sup> Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1992), 8.

<sup>384</sup> J. van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon: A Study into Augustine's City of God and the Sources of His Doctrine of the Two Cities*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae*, V. 14 (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1991), 36.

one who lived at the eve of antiquity, he brought Western Christian doctrine to a provisional close. His influence continued in the Middle Ages, through medieval scholasticism, the humanistic and Reformation traditions, and into the present.<sup>385</sup>

Augustine was born in the relatively small town of Thagaste, North Africa, which was at the same time an international symbol of civilisation.<sup>386</sup> Augustine entered the Western European world as a Roman citizen thanks to Latin-speaking parents belonging to the Roman cultural elite with ties to the catholic church. Augustine was as civilised and cultivated as a North African in the late Roman period could be. His father was a member of the city council. He was privileged to receive a classical education: completing his training in grammar, rhetoric, and dialectics in Carthage – the largest city of the Latin Western world. While well schooled, he did lack proficiency in Greek, and hence his limited knowledge of the Greek Fathers. Augustine’s pagan tutelage was also supplemented from his youth with an education in the Catholic Church tradition.<sup>387</sup>

While reared in the Church, Augustine’s spiritual journey to the New Jerusalem was a winding one that included the rough terrain of philosophical speculation and rationalism. Between 373 and 382 CE, when in his twenties, Augustine sought to quench his thirst for wisdom by converting to the rationalism and asceticism of Manichaeism; this thanks in part to reading Cicero’s ‘Hortensius’ in 373 CE.<sup>388</sup> Over time, he grew disillusioned with Manichaeism and during a trip to Milan in 384 CE Augustine discovered more satisfactory answers to his inquiring mind in the Neoplatonist writings. However, with more time and reflection, he moved away from the Platonist philosophers (while still holding them in high esteem) and embraced the incarnate Christ of the Scriptures, and subsequently became a Presbyter in Hippo in 391 CE. During his tenure there of about thirty-five years, Augustine grew in his knowledge of Scripture, church doctrine, and ecclesiastical controversies of the day. It was as a church officer in North Africa that Augustine established himself as a formidable Christian apologist and polemicist against the enemy of paganism, as evidenced by his *magnum opus*, the *City of God*.<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>386</sup> See Peter Robert Lamont Brown, *Augustine of Hippo : A Biography*, New ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 20.

<sup>387</sup> See van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 19-24.; and Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 19-28.

<sup>388</sup> See van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 31-42.

<sup>389</sup> See Ibid., 48-56.

Written from 412 to 426/427CE, the *City of God* stands as the largest systematised compendium of the *mature* Augustine's theology. It is here that his prior sermons, tracts, and correspondence funnel into their most concrete and coherent expression.<sup>390</sup> Thanks chiefly to this masterpiece on the doctrine of two cities, Augustine was vaulted – with or without warrant – into the position of Christianity's first great political thinker. The *City of God* is given attention in almost every work on Augustine's theology and ethics, and will, for the purposes of this thesis, serve as the primary text for outlining his social thought.<sup>391</sup>

Augustine wrote his most prominent work in the aftermath of the sacking of Rome in 410 CE by the Visigoths. Christians were confounded by the sudden turn of God's providence against the 'Holy' Empire. Pagans blamed the Christians for the catastrophe. While this was the occasion and seeming catalyst for penning *De civitate Dei*, the fall of Rome did not serve as its inspiration or fount of ideas. Rather, Augustine's most ambitious accomplishment was the fruition of thought flowing from years of reflection and writing now forced to the surface by a colossal socio-political as well as *church-state* crisis.<sup>392</sup>

In the prior second and third centuries, Christians lived in a world where coping with state-enforced persecution was the extent of their political ambitions. However, with the ascendancy of Constantine and the Christianisation of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, Christians had to grapple with the legitimacy and execution of their newfound social power. While the *City of God* is not a statement on political theology *per se*, Augustine provided a vision for the Christian life that challenged the reigning Constantinian paradigm of his day by seeking to recover and improve upon the earlier Christian tradition.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> See Ibid., 74, 88-89.

<sup>391</sup> See Ibid., 4.

<sup>392</sup> See Carol Harrison, *Augustine : Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity*, Christian Theology in Context (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 197. See also Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 312.

<sup>393</sup> See Greg Forster, *The Contested Public Square : The Crisis of Christianity and Politics* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2008), 63, 77.; and Henry Chadwick, *Augustine : A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions ; 38 (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 114.

#### 4.1.2. Sources for the City of God

It is the Augustine of a privileged social upbringing, classical education, and roundabout spiritual/philosophical journey that penned his classic Christian apology, the *City of God*. Van Oort catalogues and analyses the various sources of impetus for Augustine's doctrine of two cities, which include to a greater or lesser degree the likes of Manichaeism, Platonism, and the Jewish and Christian traditions.<sup>394</sup> One source that he identifies as particularly influential is the second-century *Didache* and its emphasis on the *antithesis*, which prefigures the thematic heart of the *City of God*.<sup>395</sup>

The *Didache*, along with works such as the *Epistle of Barnabas*, form part of a catechetical tradition that preceded Augustine and had already existed in Judaism. Essential elements of instruction are found in the *Didache*, which puts forth two antithetical ways and societies of good and evil.<sup>396</sup> This didactic letter opens with the words, "Two Ways there are, one of Life and one of Death, and there is a great difference between the Two Ways."<sup>397</sup> The two ways are characterised by distinct and opposing modes of living. The way of life can be summarised as love of God and one's neighbor, while the way of death in contrast is "wicked and accursed: murders, adulteries, lustful desires, fornications, thefts, idolatries... It is the way of persecutors of the good, haters of truth, lovers of falsehood..."<sup>398</sup> From this vantage point, the Christian is taught to live a radically different life from his neighbor, and exist in fundamental antithesis to those who rejected Christianity.<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, chap. 4. See also Harrison, *Augustine*, 200-02.

<sup>395</sup> van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 322-51. Among others, Harrison and VanDrunen also make this connection; see Harrison, *Augustine*, 202.; and VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 22-32.

<sup>396</sup> See van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 364. See also John Witte, *God's Joust, God's Justice : Law and Religion in the Western Tradition*, Emory University Studies in Law and Religion (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2006), 211-12.

<sup>397</sup> "The Didache," in *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, ed. Johannes and Plumpe Quasten, Joseph C. (London: Green & CO, 1957), 15.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-18.

<sup>399</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 23.

Another second-century document animated by themes found in the Augustine's *City of God* is the anonymous *Epistle to Diognetus*.<sup>400</sup> While not opposed to the *Didache*-like antithesis, this epistle foreshadows another vital theme informing Augustine's *City of God* – the notion of *commonality* between the two cities. The opening words to *Diognetus* introduce the antithesis in which Christians are described as those who trust in God, despise the world and its gods, and live a life of mutual love.<sup>401</sup> And yet this language is mitigated with words of commonality. “Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind by either country, speech, or customs; the fact is, they nowhere settle in cities of their own; they use no peculiar language; they cultivate no eccentric mode of life.” Shortly thereafter he goes on to add that Christians “conform to the customs of the country in dress, food, and mode of life in general... They share in everything as citizens... They marry like all others and beget children...”<sup>402</sup> This commonality does not mean assimilation into the world, as this would contradict the antithesis. Rather, Christians “spend their days on earth, but hold citizenship in heaven.” Their ethic intersects with the world while at the same time transcending it. The message of the *Epistle to Diognetus* adopts the baseline theme of antithesis found in the *Didache* but qualifies it with the characteristic of commonality in the midst of antithetical hostility toward the world.<sup>403</sup> VanDrunen captures the magnitude of this new angle for a Christian vision of life in this world with,

Thus comes a shift whose significance seems difficult to overestimate: the fundamentally hostile character of the world assumed in the documents such as the *Didache* and the *Epistle to Diognetus* yields to a perspective which sees the world (or at least the Roman Empire) as fundamentally allied to the church and even bringing Christianity to its fullest realization. The posture of hostility and tension – of commonality only amidst antithesis

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<sup>400</sup> See, e.g., van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 356., who makes this connection on the theme of antithesis only; while VanDrunen is an example of one who sees a connection in both themes of antithesis *and* commonality between the *Epistle* and the *City of God*; see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 22-32.

<sup>401</sup> Diognetus, "The Epistle of Diognetus," in *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, ed. Johannes and Plumpe Quasten, Joseph C. (London: Green & CO, 1957), 135.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-39.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, 139. In VanDrunen's judgment, this epistle anticipates Augustine's *City of God*; see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 23-26. It is worth noting, in further support of its use here, that contemporary thinkers still occasionally appeal to the *Epistle of Diognetus* as a model for Christian social activity. For example, prominent Roman Catholic, George Weigel, appeals to the epistle as a starting-point for his constructive paradigm for Christian involvement in political life; see George Weigel, "The Church's Political Hopes for the World; or, Diognetus Revisited," in *The Two Cities of God: The Church's Responsibility for the Earthly City*, ed. Carl E. Braaten, Robert W. Jenson, and Christopher R. Seitz (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1997), 59-77. See also, from a neo-Calvinist perspective, Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Christian Political Reflection: Diognetian or Augustinian," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 20, no. 2 (1999).

– dissipates before a fundamental friendship between Christians and the world, church and empire.<sup>404</sup>

#### 4.1.3. Resident aliens: Antithesis and commonality in *De civitate Dei*

A reading of Augustine's *City of God* appears to reveal that both the second-century themes of antithesis and commonality animate its pages. At its heart, Augustine's tale of two cities is characterised by two competing *loves* distinguishable by *objects* of ultimate satisfaction: God and man.<sup>405</sup> In other words, for Augustine, the two cities are in basic eschatological antithesis with one another: there is no overlap in loves or ultimate ends. The City of God is comprised of believers who love God, while the unbelieving City of Man is in contempt of God and glories in man. Hence the ethical divide, where "God's love" prevails "in the one, and self-love in the other"<sup>406</sup>; "[p]iety that serves the true God" in contrast to "living according to the flesh."<sup>407</sup> As to ends, the City of God consists of all true worshippers of God throughout history who are destined for heaven. To be a member of this city on earth is to be a sojourner looking for the celestial city to come. In contrast, the City of Man is analogous to the society of the wicked that has rejected God and is doomed to eternal perdition.<sup>408</sup> In the final analysis, Augustine provides no room for a middle ground. A person can only be a member of one city and one city only.<sup>409</sup>

In attributing concrete collective expression to the two cities, Augustine loosely correlates the City of God with the church, and the manifestation of the City of Man with Rome

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<sup>404</sup> VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 25.

<sup>405</sup> The last twelve books of the *City of God* deal with the origins, historical unfolding, and ends of the two cities (the first ten being dedicated to refuting paganism in the wake of the fall of Rome).

<sup>406</sup> Augustine, *Saint Augustine: The City of God*, ed. R.V.G. Tasker, trans. John Healey, II vols., vol. I&II (New York: London J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1962), 11.1, 14.13, 28. Augustine was already speaking of "two loves" and "two cities" in prior works (such as *De Genesi ad litteram*), sermons, and correspondence; see van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 87. For further discussion see also Harrison, *Augustine*, 198-99.

<sup>407</sup> Augustine, *Saint Augustine: The City of God*, 14.28.

<sup>408</sup> For the City of God there is the expectation of "fullness and perfection of all goodness" unto all eternity, "[b]ut on the other hand, they that are not of this society are destined to eternal misery..."; see *Ibid.*, 19.27-28.; cf. 5.16; 11.1; 14.1, 28; 22.3; 19.4, 6-8, 10-13, 21, 24.

<sup>409</sup> On these points and for a similar reading of this antithesis between the two cities, see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 27., and van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 92, 115-16.

and the institution of civil government.<sup>410</sup> With regard to the civil and social output of the City of Man, Augustine speaks of a relative good, as considered below. Unbelievers make judicial and ethical judgments that promote a degree of peace and order in society. Societal peace produces a kind of blessedness in this life. Friendship provides some comfort. And yet, even the best that the earthly city has to offer is wretchedly devoid of true goodness and hope compared to the City of God. Earthly justice reveals the misery of life in, for example, the frequent condemnation of the innocent. Friendships are fraught with anxiety and confusion. And worldly blessedness is really misery compared to the final felicity of God's people.<sup>411</sup>

Thus far, Augustine's perspective betrays a strong strain of antithesis found in the *Didache* and the *Epistle of Diognetus*. However, like the latter, Augustine also asserts a robust measure of *commonality* in the midst of antithetical eschatological tension between the two cities. In the words of R.A. Markus, the Augustinian picture of the here and now is one in which the two cities melt into each other; "their boundaries are invisible and cut across all visible social groupings."<sup>412</sup> The two cities cannot be discerned by their institutional expressions or by human grouping but are rather wedded together by radical ambiguity until they are severed on the Day of Judgment.<sup>413</sup> It is possible for Augustine to speak this way because while he associates the City of God with the church, even referring to the church as the City of God on pilgrimage<sup>414</sup>, he does not see the two as identical.<sup>415</sup> This in large part is due to the fact that the *ecclesia* is a mixed community containing unbelievers.<sup>416</sup> Augustine makes similar observations regarding the City of Man. While the City of Man is associated with civil society (particularly the Roman Empire itself), neither the state nor other civil institutions are identical to the City of Man. For,

<sup>410</sup> Augustine, *Saint Augustine: The City of God*, 2.21; 8.16, 24; 15.26; 16.2; 19.17.; cf. Books 1-10.

<sup>411</sup> See *Ibid.*, 19.6-8, 10-13; cf. 19.21, 24. See also VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 27-28.

<sup>412</sup> R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge [Eng.];: University Press, 1970), 62. Augustine speaks "of the two cities that in this world lie confusedly together", of "a confused mixture of both cities", and of "our commixture with Babylon"; see Augustine, *Saint Augustine: The City of God*, 11.1, 15.22, 19.26.

<sup>413</sup> See Markus, *Saeculum*, 62-63.; Augustine, *Saint Augustine: The City of God*, 18.54.

<sup>414</sup> On Augustine's doctrine of the Christian *peregrini*, see, e.g., Augustine, *Saint Augustine: The City of God*, 19.17., as a reference to the church as the City of God on pilgrimage. On this note, see van Oort's discussion of the City of God as alien in van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 131-42.

<sup>415</sup> In favor of this reading see, e.g., van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 127.; and VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 28.

<sup>416</sup> See, e.g., Augustine, *Saint Augustine: The City of God*, 18.49; 20.19. For further discussion, see van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 123-29.

members of the City of God, the church, move and work within these institutions, and a Christian may even hold the office of Emperor. In a word, what Augustine conveys here is that though the antithesis lies behind the two cities on the eschatological level, this discord is not easily perceptible at the temporal institutional level – hence a measure of concord and commingling between the two cities in the here and now.<sup>417</sup>

Markus has sought to work out this important thread in Augustine’s thought by referring to this commingling as the *saeculum*. As already noted, Markus sees Augustine positing all social institutions as radically ambiguous.<sup>418</sup> Markus observes, “Membership of the two cities is mutually exclusive, and there can be no possible overlap; but membership of either is compatible both with belonging to the Roman – or some other – state and with belonging to the church. This entails a logical loosening of the equation of Rome with the earthly city.”<sup>419</sup> According to Markus, Augustine saw the Roman Empire as hovering between the ‘earthly’ and ‘heavenly’ cities, “or more precisely, it exists in the region where the two cities overlap.”<sup>420</sup> Therefore, from Augustine’s conception of the *saeculum* emerges a secular sphere that casts Christians as members of a temporally limited society into a *positive light*. Among other social activities, Augustine makes room for politics to resume some significance, albeit penultimate in nature (*pace* the ultimate significance attributed the Platonic tradition, which he critiqued).<sup>421</sup>

Augustine gives his readers a sense of the practical outworking of his doctrine of *commonality* especially in Book 19 of the *City of God*.<sup>422</sup> When referring to the overlap and commingling of the two cities, he is always careful to point out that Christians partake of God’s

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<sup>417</sup> See Augustine, *Saint Augustine: The City of God*, Book 19. On these points, see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 28.

<sup>418</sup> Markus, *Saeculum*, Chapter 3.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-61.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>421</sup> See *Ibid.*, 102-04. Markus has not been without his critics. For example, van Oort has reservations concerning Markus’ depiction of the state, and the Roman Empire in particular, as something of a third neutral city; see van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 139, 51-53. If Markus betrays vulnerability at this point, Augustine seems to escape such criticism with his notion of commingling that is unwilling to equate the Empire with the earthly city in an absolute way – hence giving citizens of the City of God legitimate participation in the earthly city square. For further discussion on this, see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 28-29.

<sup>422</sup> Jean Elshtain, for example, calls this Augustine’s key political text; see Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, Frank M. Covey, Jr. Loyola Lectures in Political Analysis (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 19.

earthly gifts and participate in broader society as pilgrims.<sup>423</sup> Christians live earthly lives tempered by the expectation of glories to come. Citizens of the heavenly city willingly obey “laws of the temporal city as order the things pertaining to the sustenance of this mortal life, to the end that both the cities might observe a peace in things as are pertinent thereunto.” Yet, for citizens of the celestial city, commonality with the earthly city has its limits and is never a wholesale endorsement. They obey the laws of society “so long as they tend to the preservation of earthly peace, and do not oppose the adoration of the one God alone.”<sup>424</sup> Augustine writes that the Christian is to live in conformity with God’s “holy precepts”, but is not called to change his attire, “habit or manners, which are no hindrance to his religion.”<sup>425</sup> He closes Book 19 by asserting that it is in the interest of Christians that the City of Man enjoys a measure of peace in this life, for during their “commixture with Babylon” they too “make use of her peace.”<sup>426</sup>

#### 4.1.4. Analysis

It is helpful at this point to stand back and consider Augustine and his *City of God* within the flow of history and with an eye for his contribution to the development of Christian social thought. This is not an easy undertaking as scholars have recognised. For one, the *City of God* is a complex and multi-faceted book dealing with literally hundreds of topics and controversies, and therefore it is easy to elevate one aspect of Augustine’s thought at the expense of others. What is more, the historical context of antiquity is a world far removed from modern Western socio-cultural life, hence the greater danger for contemporary readers of Augustine to import invalid assumptions and implications into this fifth-century man and his work.<sup>427</sup> Keeping this in mind, I return to the earlier argument that Augustine’s *City of God* bears thematic resemblance at points to second-century documents, the *Didache* and the *Epistle to Diognetus*. Yet, such sympathies were absent in the younger Augustine.

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<sup>423</sup> See especially Augustine, *Saint Augustine: The City of God*, 19.13-14.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.17.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.19.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.26.

<sup>427</sup> Elshtain gives us reason for such pause, noting the many Augustines that exist – from the pluralist Augustine to the proto-socialist Augustine; see Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, 23-24. Along these lines, see also VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 26.

Many scholars have argued that what one finds in the early Augustine is the reigning socio-political paradigm of the fourth century as illustrated by the fourth-century historian, Eusebius, in the tenth book of his *Ecclesiastical History*<sup>428</sup>. Prior to Eusebius and Constantinianism, the earlier body of Christian social thought was one of antithetical hostility toward the world as embodied in the *Didache* and the *Epistle of Diognetus*. However, this fundamental antithesis gives way to something of a reversal with the ascendancy of Emperor Constantine and legitimisation of Christianity as *the* religion of the Roman Empire, as chronicled by Eusebius. By the fourth century, no longer is the church in hostile tension with the world, but rather filially co-coordinated with it, in such a way as to treat it as an object of Christianisation – part of the eschatological realisation of the kingdom of God. This perspective the youthful Augustine embraced, but by the time of the writing of the *City of God* in the wake of Rome's demise he had broken with his early optimism concerning Eusebian imperial theology.<sup>429</sup>

By wielding the *antithesis*, van Oort observes, the later Augustine saw a Christianisation of the emperorship as out of the question. Augustine no longer believed that the 'Christian times' had been ushered in by Constantine, and no less the "realization of the kingdom of God by means of political action."<sup>430</sup> At the same time Markus picks up on the doctrine of *commonality* in the mature Augustine in his quest to reconcile the "Christian's sense of having no abiding city here with some real political participation in and commitment to a city which was far from being an abiding one."<sup>431</sup> From my reading of *City of God* as a whole, with special attention given to the highly relevant Book 19, I conclude that Augustine puts forward what VanDrunen has coined as an elaborated Diognesian approach to Christian participation in the world.<sup>432</sup> In the words of

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<sup>428</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History II*, trans. J.E.L. Oulton, II vols., vol. II (London: Harvard University Press, 1973). Van Oort summarises the view of Eusebius as one who regarded Constantine as carrying out God's plan of salvation through his Emperorship; see van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 156.

<sup>429</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 25-26. For further discussion on this shift, see e.g., van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 154-64.; Markus, *Saeculum*, Chapter 2.; and Harrison, *Augustine*, 202-04.

<sup>430</sup> van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 160-61.

<sup>431</sup> Markus, *Saeculum*, 75.

<sup>432</sup> VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 26. Neo-Calvinist philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff affirms much less continuity in positing that Augustine's *City of God* and the *Epistle to Diognetus* in fact offer alternative approaches. Part of his argument is that Augustine has a marginal view of the state; see Wolterstorff, "Christian Political Reflection: Diognesian or Augustinian," 150-68. As will become evident, there is an element of truth to Wolterstorff's critique when Augustine is compared to later theological developments in the Protestant tradition, by the likes of Luther and Calvin, and beyond. Among surveys of interpretations of Augustine's *City of God* that range from theocrat to proto-liberal, see especially Miikka Ruokanen, *Theology of Social Life in Augustine's De Civitate*

Harrison, “Augustine stands firmly in this [commonality in the midst of antithesis] line of Christian apologetic, stretching from the New Testament onwards.”<sup>433</sup> Hence, I submit that Augustine recovered continuity with a crucial part of the Apostolic tradition that had been lost to the Christianising agenda of the fourth and fifth centuries.

#### 4.1.5. Concluding remarks

Before proceeding to consider Martin Luther as another key forerunner to Calvin, a few concluding comments are in order so as to better illumine points of continuity and discontinuity between Augustine and Calvin. A rounded impression of Augustine necessitates addressing his advocacy of civil power against schismatics, most notably the North African Christian sect, the Donatists. It is difficult, especially from the contemporary Western liberal perspective, not to interpret this instance of Augustine’s practice as a contradiction of his Diognesian theology.<sup>434</sup> Markus offers something of a partial acquittal of Augustine in this regard when he observes that religious coercion was one of the facts of life back then. He also adds that Augustine’s ‘theory’ of coercion was at its heart a ‘pastoral’ strategy. Augustine viewed the coercive help of Christian rulers and civil servants as necessary to keeping order in the church. An important nuance here is that Augustine did not view the help of the sword extended to the church as institutional in nature, but rather personal: individuals acting as agents of the state. Hence, Augustine saw such individuals as acting on behalf of the church for her wellbeing.<sup>435</sup> Another important observation is that Augustine lived at a time markedly different from the author of the *Epistle to Diognetus* and earlier Christians. Augustine had to grapple with the reality of Christians serving as civil magistrates and even as Roman emperors.<sup>436</sup> However, these remarks do not solve matters entirely. But at this juncture I will allow the tension between Augustine’s theology and practice to remain, and revisit it in connection with Luther, and especially Calvin, and their similar predicaments.

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*Dei*, *Forschungen Zur Kirchen- Und Dogmengeschichte* ; Bd. 53 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), Introduction. See also van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 123-24.

<sup>433</sup> Harrison, *Augustine*, 213.

<sup>434</sup> Among those who do, see Markus, *Saeculum*, Chapter 6., and Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, Chapter 12.

<sup>435</sup> See Markus, *Saeculum*, 140, 48-49.

<sup>436</sup> On this point, see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 30.

To summarise this subsection on Augustine, I have argued that what one finds in the *City of God* is a more sophisticated outworking of a Diognesian commonality amidst antithesis approach to the Christian life. Augustine broke with the Eusebian vision of a Christian utopia permeating the Roman Empire in favor of treating the City of Man, though ultimately corrupt and doomed, as serving limited, yet relatively good, earthly and temporal purposes for believers *and* unbelievers alike. His theology was, however, accompanied by the inescapable and seeming inconsistent fact that he found room for church-sanctioned violence.

## **4.2. Forerunners to Calvin: Martin Luther and his “Temporal Authority”**

### *4.2.1. Background and context*

Augustine and Luther (1483-1546CE) straddle both sides of the middle ages and are separated by over a millennium of Christian social thought. Yet, the chasm of time does not keep Augustine’s doctrine of two cities from being, to a considerable extent, the blueprint for Luther’s doctrine of two kingdoms. Luther takes Augustine’s concept of two cities and works out more fully the relationship between church and state through his doctrine of *two governments*, giving each their respective institutional legitimacy and authority. In introducing my argument for such a reading of Luther I provide a brief biographical sketch. Luther’s name is synonymous with the Protestant Reformation that shook the Roman church, and hence medieval society at large, to its foundations. The influence of Luther upon the subsequent development of the West is incalculable. Such are the lofty accolades for a German born of lowly peasant stock. Luther’s parents appear to have been Christians, but not devoid of medieval superstition. They afforded Luther the standard medieval education, which included Medieval Latin and church hymns. Subsequently, Luther entered the University of Erfurt and by 1505 had earned his bachelors and masters degrees in liberal arts, which consisted of tutelage in the *Trivium* and *Quadrivium* (this pattern dating back to late antiquity). During this time Luther studied, among other things, the ethical writings of Aristotle and Ockhamist philosophy. His master’s degree was then to be followed by a course of legal studies, on the advice of his father, but a spiritual crisis drove Luther into an Augustinian monastery. It was here in this religious cloister, cut off

from society at large, that Luther embarked not only on his studies in theology but upon a spiritual pilgrimage that would catapult the Protestant Reformation into full motion.<sup>437</sup>

In 1517, Luther (by now Doctor of theology) was somewhat inadvertently thrust into the public spotlight with the publication of his *95 Theses*. The next few years saw him become an increasingly polarising figure, not only as a reforming churchman but also as a spokesperson on many issues of broader socio-political concern. By the 1520s, Luther was forced to refine his theology further and make definitive statements on the relation of church and state. (Even as late as 1520 Luther still denied that the church was exempt from the temporal authority of the state in his, “To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation”.<sup>438</sup>) As Walter von Loewenich notes, pressure came from two directions. From the one direction came the pivotal event at Worms in 1521 where Luther was subject to church-sponsored condemnation and censure via the state (the Emperor). Here Luther clashed head on with the medieval confusion of church and state. In another direction came the enthusiasts and their opposition to civil authority on the grounds of religious conviction. After first making their presence felt in 1522, the fanatics threatened to overturn the progress of the Reformation with the Peasants’ War of 1525.<sup>439</sup>

Spurred on by the events of the 1520s Luther responded from the (non-papal) University of Wittenberg, and from under the protection of his elector, Frederick the Wise, with his October 1522 treatise, “Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed”.<sup>440</sup> While it is perhaps too much to expect thoroughgoing systematic consistency in it<sup>441</sup>, this treatise of Luther is nevertheless an impressive exegetical and theological framework for Christian engagement with the broader world, including the state. In this work, one finds a relatively mature expression of Luther’s doctrines of two kingdoms and two governments.<sup>442</sup> These doctrines can

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<sup>437</sup> See Walther von Loewenich and Lawrence W. Denef, *Martin Luther : The Man and His Work* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg, 1986), 37-71.

<sup>438</sup> Martin Luther, "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation," in *Luther's Works, Vol 44*, ed. Helmut T. Lehman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 115-217.

<sup>439</sup> Loewenich and Denef, *Martin Luther*, 231-32.

<sup>440</sup> See Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology : Its Historical and Systematic Development*, Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 152, 314.

<sup>441</sup> See *Ibid.*, 154-55.

<sup>442</sup> Luther himself considered his “Secular Authority” to be the classic statement of his political ideas; see “Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved” in Martin Luther, "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved," in *Luther's Works, Vol 46*, ed. Helmut T. Lehman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 87-137. Among those who see in “Temporal Authority” a relatively mature expression of Luther’s doctrine of two kingdoms are Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther's Doctrine of Two*

be considered as the corner stone of his so-called political thought.<sup>443</sup> Hence, “Temporal Authority” will serve as the main source of Luther’s reflection on the relation of church and state, and their respective authorities; one in which he draws upon ideas common to Augustine and the early Christian tradition, but also where he broke new ground.

#### 4.2.2. *Two kingdoms and two governments in “Temporal Authority”*

Luther did not invent his doctrinal formulations in “Temporal Authority” *ex nihilo*. In fact, he saw himself as recovering the Apostolic tradition as encapsulated in passages such as Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2.<sup>444</sup> With respect to pre-medieval history, Luther is conscious of his indebtedness to Augustine, who he sees as having perpetuated the canonical tradition.<sup>445</sup> The substance of Luther’s social thought is founded upon and develops from the Augustinian vision of two cities.<sup>446</sup> This is not to infer that the middle ages were without precursors to the Reformed tradition. Two significant contributions during this time, which joined the two cities idea in proving influential upon later Christian reflection on the relation of Christianity to the broader world, were the doctrine of “two swords”, finding most notable expression with Pope

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*Kingdoms*, trans. Karl H. Hertz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 12.; Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 153, 57.; and William Henry Lazareth, *Christians in Society : Luther, the Bible, and Social Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 139. John Witte, Jr. demurs slightly in arguing that by the 1520s one finds a more developed Luther on the earthly kingdom and the kingdom of the devil – the earlier Augustinian picture being replaced by a more nuanced and positive one; see Witte, *Law and Protestantism*, 92. For a helpful general defence of continuity over the years with respect to Luther’s thought on the likes of two kingdoms, secular authority, and religious freedom, see David M. Whitford, “*Cura Religionis* or Two Kingdoms: The Late Luther on Religion and State in the Lectures on Genesis,” *Church History* 73, no. 1 (2004): 41-62. In this monograph, Whitford argues particularly with James Estes who offers a reassessment of the traditional Luther of two kingdoms by pitting the earlier and more ‘mature’ Luther against each other; see James Estes, “The Role of Godly Magistrates in the Church: Melancthon as Luther’s Interpreter and Collaborator,” *Church History* 67, no. 3 (1998): 463-84. See also VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 56. The new doctrinal formulations found in “Secular Authority” began to surface in a series of sermons delivered during the course of 1522 and in Luther’s, *Exposition of the Epistle of St Peter* written around spring of 1523; see W. D. J. Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther* (Brighton, Sussex; Totowa, N.J.: Harvester Press ; Barnes & Noble Books, 1984), 37.

<sup>443</sup> See Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther*, 12.

<sup>444</sup> See *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>445</sup> See *Ibid.*, 2, 4.

<sup>446</sup> Among scholars who have defended this claim, see *Ibid.*, 4-6.; and Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 316-17.

Gelasius I in the 490s and Pope Boniface VIII in 1300, and the anti-papalist doctrine of church and state found in William of Ockham (1280-1349CE).<sup>447</sup>

The earlier doctrine of two swords of Gelasius can be found in his famous letter to Emperor Anastasius in 494<sup>448</sup> and a treatise two years later, *On the Bond of Anathema*.<sup>449</sup> Motivated by a concern to protect the church's jurisdiction from violation by the state, in this latter treatise, Gelasius draws sharp institutional distinction between civil and ecclesiastical powers, with each serving their own purpose, and each authority prohibited from encroaching upon the work of the other. Gelasius's paradigm distinguishes itself from the Augustinian vision at some important points (keeping in mind that Augustine and Gelasius had two different *foci* in propounding their concepts: eschatological and institutional respectively<sup>450</sup>). Unlike the Augustinian (and the Diognesian) perspective, Gelasius's paradigm *neither* envisions two realms or peoples coexisting in fundamental antithesis, *nor* a place of commonality between Christians and unbelievers. Instead, the Gelasian doctrine of two swords "envisions only one body of people, which has two authorities governing them (and each other) in distinct but complementary ways." In addition to positing this fundamental harmony and cooperation between church and state, Gelasius's model further distinguishes itself from Augustine in endowing the state with explicit God-given *institutional* legitimacy. Whereas in Augustine the work of the state and its

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<sup>447</sup> Cargill Thompson is an example of a scholar who identifies the same medieval figures as important precursors to Luther, with the addition of the likes of John of Paris and Marsilius; see Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther*, 8, 46, 93. See also VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 32-42.

<sup>448</sup> According to Harold Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 92. John Witte, Jr, refers to this letter as the "locus classicus for many theories of a basic separation between pope and emperor, clergy and laity, regnum and sacerdotium"; see John Witte Jr., "Facts and Fictions About the History of Separation of Church and State," *Journal of Church and State* 48, no. Winter (2006): 19. For an extensive discussion of the pre-Gelasian Christian development of the notion that power on earth is divided between church and monarchy, see Lester L. Field, *Liberty, Dominion, and the Two Swords: On the Origins of Western Political Theology (180-398)* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998). See also VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 33.

<sup>449</sup> For English translations of the letter to Anastasius and of *On the Bond of Anathema*, see Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State, 1050-1300: With Selected Documents* (Toronto ; Buffalo: Published by University of Toronto Press in association with the Medieval Academy of America, 1988), 13-15.

<sup>450</sup> "Gelasius's famous dictum transfers the duality from the level of society ('Two loves made two cities') to the level of government ('Two there are by whom this world is ruled as princes')"; see O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations*, 203.

bearing the physical sword existed under a cloud of suspicion, one finds in Gelasius a more unqualified endorsement of the same.<sup>451</sup>

The later two swords doctrine of Boniface VIII closely resembles that of Gelasius, but with at least one very important modifier. Boniface's contribution came in the midst of the already two century old Papal Revolution and the expanding jurisdiction it gave to the spiritual sword. His expression of the two swords doctrine is articulated in his notorious bull *Unam Sanctam* of 1302 (generated out of a series of power struggles with French king Philip IV). Here he recapitulates Gelasius in speaking of spiritual and temporal swords for one body of Christian people (i.e. no Augustinian antithesis or commonality between two realms or peoples). However, unlike Gelasius, who placed the two swords in the hands of the church and state respectively, Boniface insists that both belong to the church. The church delegates the material sword to the state. And unlike Gelasius, who had emperor and bishop answering to one another, Boniface made the church supreme over all things, even temporal civic functions albeit indirectly via delegation.<sup>452</sup>

Another significant precursor and illuminating figure to the social thought of Luther was Willam of Ockham.<sup>453</sup> With respect to the earlier Christian tradition, Ockham finds himself in significant continuity at many points with the older views of Gelasius, Augustine, and even the *Epistle to Diognetus*, but also represents a strong refutation of the papalist view propounded by the likes of Boniface VIII. Writing as an exile of sorts in the midst of the various Avignon controversies, Ockham forged his position in polemics against papal claims to power as evidenced in one of his significant political works, "A Short Discourse on Tyrannical Government."<sup>454</sup> In this work, Ockham is emphatic that temporal authority is not entrusted to the pope who in turn delegates it (with qualification) to the civil magistrate.<sup>455</sup> In sum,

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<sup>451</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 33-34. Relative to these points, see also Berman, *Law and Revolution*, 92-93, 279, 504-05, 21., and Witte, *God's Joust, God's Justice*, 212-13.

<sup>452</sup> See generally Berman, *Law and Revolution*., and particularly page 521 in regards to the expansion of the Papal Revolution and the expansion of the spiritual sword. See also Witte, *God's Joust, God's Justice*, 215-16., and VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 34-36.

<sup>453</sup> See Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 317.

<sup>454</sup> For discussion of Ockham's thought in the light of these historical circumstances, see, e.g., Arthur Stephen McGrade, *The Political Thought of William of Ockham: Personal and Institutional Principles*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, ([London, New York]: Cambridge University Press, 1974), ch. 1.

<sup>455</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 37-40.

Ockham's thought resembles, on the one hand, Gelasius in maintaining a robust, legitimate and divinely ordained institutional dualism.<sup>456</sup> At the same time, he moves away from Gelasius's idea of a unitary Christian empire (even one not entirely controlled by the pope). With this shift Ockham is willing to entertain the notion of things *common* to both Christians and unbelievers, including political authority, and in so doing echoes the Diognesian and Augustinian voices of antiquity.<sup>457</sup>

Among others, the two cities of Augustine, the doctrine of two swords, and the anti-papalist political thinking of Ockham provide key historical precedence to the reforming work of Luther. Luther's formulation of his doctrines of two kingdoms and two governments emerged out of the complex of his broader theological thought. W.D.J. Cargill Thompson argues that by 1521 Luther had arrived at most of the doctrines that would form the theological matrix of his anti-papalist ideas on the relations of spiritual and temporal authority, which include his doctrines of the Law and Gospel, church, ministry, and sacraments, with justification by faith forming the central pivot.<sup>458</sup>

In "Temporal Authority", Luther seeks to show how the biblical injunction for Christians to submit to coercive civil government (per Romans 13.1) is not at odds with an understanding of the Sermon on the Mount that prohibits violence in Christ's kingdom. The treatise is divided into three parts, with the first dedicated to upholding the divine origin of temporal authority, the second to defining the limits of temporal authority, and the third to the manner in which a prince should exercise his authority.

Luther begins the first part by affirming that both "civil law and sword" are "in the world by God's will and ordinance."<sup>459</sup> He argues for their existence from the beginning of the world, citing Gen 4.14-14 and 9.6, and their confirmation in the Law of Moses, John the Baptist, and Christ (even though other Biblical evidence, particularly the Sermon on the Mount, seems to

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<sup>456</sup> See John Kilcullen, "The Political Writings," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, ed. Paul Vincent Spade (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 311., and VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 40.

<sup>457</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 41., and McGrade, *The Political Thought of William of Ockham*, 103.

<sup>458</sup> Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther*, 11, 19, 34. For further discussion on the theological underpinnings of Luther's two kingdoms and two regiments, which includes reference to the various dichotomies that shaped his thought and the new place of good works in Christian ethics, see ———, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther*, 16-35.

<sup>459</sup> Martin Luther, "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed," in *Luther's Works, Vol 45*, ed. Walther I. Brandt (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1962), 85.

contradict this conclusion).<sup>460</sup> Luther then divides all descendents of Adam into two kingdoms, the kingdom of God consisting of all true believers, and the kingdom of the world. With these two kingdoms in place, he argues that God has also ordained two complementary governments. Here Luther explains that the kingdom of God needs no temporal law or sword, but is instead ruled by Christ for the purpose of producing righteous Christians by his Holy Spirit. By contrast the unrighteous require coercive civil government to “instruct, constrain, and compel them to do good.” Consequently, he notes that because the world will always be predominated by non-Christians it is futile “to attempt to rule it in a Christian and evangelical manner.” With this reasoning Luther argues for careful distinction between two governments, and yet both left to remain: “the one to produce righteousness, the other to bring about external peace and prevent evil deeds.” Contrary to the reigning thought of his day, he says, “Christ’s government does not extend over all men; rather, Christians are always a minority in the midst of non-Christians.”<sup>461</sup>

With his doctrine of two kingdoms and two governments in mind Luther returns to the Sermon on the Mount, now positing the true intent behind Christ’s words against violence. Luther sees Christ’s words as normative for *all* Christians (*pace* the sophists) and *only* Christians, thereby placing them under spiritual government that does not bear the sword. He reasons, “This is why Christ did not wield the sword or give it place in his kingdom”; instead he rules his subjects by the Holy Spirit. In contrast, non-Christians are under another government, which is the temporal authority of the sword to keep the wicked in order.<sup>462</sup>

Luther’s unique reading of the Sermon on the Mount does not, however, preclude Christians from using the sword or advocate a monastic-like retreat from society and politics. Accordingly, Luther goes on to argue that though the Christian does not need the law or sword for himself, he nevertheless concerns himself with what “is most beneficial and necessary for the whole world”. Luther reasons that if the Christian does not support and serve the temporal governing authorities, “he would be acting not as a Christian but even contrary to love”. A true Christian lives and labors for his neighbor.<sup>463</sup> For Luther it therefore follows that temporal occupations are permissible for Christians: “[I]f you see there is a lack of hangmen, constables,

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<sup>460</sup> Ibid., 85-88.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid., 85-92.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid., 92-93.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid., 94.

judges, lords, or princes, and you find that you are qualified, you should offer your services and seek the position..." Luther concludes that the two propositions of non-violence and sword bearing are brought into Christian harmony through selfless neighborly love. On the one hand, God's spiritual government is satisfied inwardly by turning the other cheek when personally wronged, while on the other, God's temporal governance is satisfied externally through the peace-enforcing sword for the sake of one's neighbor.<sup>464</sup> Luther summarises this harmonisation with the words, "No Christian shall wield or invoke the sword for himself and his cause. In behalf of another, however, he may and should wield and invoke it to restrain wickedness and defend godliness."<sup>465</sup>

In the second section of the treatise, Luther cues his readers that he has come to the main part in which he delineates the scope of temporal authority, "lest it extends too far and encroach upon God's kingdom and government." Here, the principal thrust of Luther's argument is, "The temporal government has laws which extend no further than to life and property and external affairs on earth, for God cannot and will not permit anyone but himself to rule over the soul."<sup>466</sup> In commenting on Romans 13:1 and 1 Peter 2:13, he describes temporal obedience and authority as applying "only externally to taxes, revenue, honor, and respect", and in Romans 13:1, he sees Paul as limiting governing authority to "evil works" and not including "mastery over faith or the word of God."<sup>467</sup> Luther forbids civil coercion in religious matters. With particular reference to heresy, he argues with recourse to 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 that it "can never be restrained by force" but rather "God's word must do the fighting."<sup>468</sup> Von Loewenich remarks that with these words "Luther completely rejected the medieval approach to heresy and inaugurated a new age."<sup>469</sup>

To get a sense of the far-reaching influence of the doctrines of two kingdoms and two governments in Luther's theology and practice, Cargill Thompson puts it this way:

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<sup>464</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid., 103. Luther's *Exposition of Matthew V, VI and VII* is another instance in which he argues that the Christian has dual citizenship: a place in both spiritual and temporal orders with different roles and duties corresponding to each; see ———, "Exposition of Matthew V, VI, & VII," in *Luther's Works, Vol 21*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 3-294.

<sup>466</sup> Luther, "Temporal Authority," 104-05. "The two governments are completely different in character and they exemplify the fundamental difference between the Two Kingdoms" (Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther*, 47.)

<sup>467</sup> Luther, "Temporal Authority," 110.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid., 114-15.

<sup>469</sup> Loewenich and Deneff, *Martin Luther*, 235.

It is the framework for all his mature political ideas; the basis on which his theory of government, his theory of church and state, his theory of the Christian's position in society, are built. It provides the principles on which everything that he has to say about politics and man as a political animal is based. It provides a set of principles to which he returns again and again when he is dealing with the problems of obedience, with the question of the peasants, with the iniquities of the papacy, with toleration, and with the limits of the magistrates' authority.<sup>470</sup>

By 1522-23, Luther had his main theological constructs in place that would serve as the *ideal* around which problems of relating church and state would be filtered and solutions sought.<sup>471</sup>

Luther, however, did struggle towards the end of his life to put his ideals into practice, leading him to permit, for example, the civil persecution of some Anabaptists<sup>472</sup> and to assign care for external government of the church to the state. The latter may be explained by the fact that Luther considered external church government to be a temporal rather than spiritual concern, which relates to his way of relating the law-gospel and two-kingdoms distinctions.<sup>473</sup> The former may be explained by virtue of Luther being a child of his times. Accordingly, Bernhard Lohse proposes that Luther's struggle to follow through on his principles stems from his concern to maintain public order and the influence of the enduring tradition that advocated the suppression of heresy through the sword.<sup>474</sup> Cargill Thompson also notes that Luther, like pre-Newtonian astronomers, was always trying to adjust his theory to the new and changing circumstances around him. (This is not to imply that his ideals were altogether impractical, for later Protestant churchmen did enjoy a measure of success in implementing them.) In addition, Luther was too much of a realist and pragmatist to force the pace of the fledgling Reformed movement; this coupled with his refusal to see himself as the leader of a revolutionary movement. Accordingly, he believed that change should be deferred until the people are ready. Yet, Luther was also zealous, especially in the face of later opposition, to see the work of the Reformation go forward even if it meant that he turned to the princes for help against Emperor

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<sup>470</sup> Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther*, 36.

<sup>471</sup> See *Ibid.*, 119, 35.

<sup>472</sup> See Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 319., and Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther*, 134.

<sup>473</sup> On this point, see Harold Berman, *Law and Revolution, II: The Impact of the Protestant Reformations on the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2003), 40-41, 58.; Witte, *Law and Protestantism*, 110., and VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 59. This matter will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter.

<sup>474</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 319.

and Pope. (Luther's awareness of his own possible inconsistency here lead him to argue that the prince's role in the church was an emergency one, and thus temporary.<sup>475</sup>) Finally, it is also important to keep in mind that Luther did not believe in the unfettered freedom of conscience in the modern liberal democratic sense, for this would be to judge him anachronistically from a modern standpoint.<sup>476</sup>

The substance of the issues at play in the prior paragraph anticipates a more detailed discussion on the treatment of Calvin and the continuity/discontinuity between his theology and practice below. But before getting there, space will be given to a treatment of Luther's doctrine of natural law followed by an analysis of his socio-political thinking in the light of the Protestant tradition leading up to Calvin.

#### 4.2.3. *Luther's doctrine of natural law*

For the sake of scope of this thesis, it is assumed with the support of a healthy body of scholarship that Luther falls roughly within the medieval natural law tradition shaped by the likes of Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham.<sup>477</sup> (John T. McNeill sees the natural law tradition of which Luther imbibed reaching back even further to Cicero and in turn to Augustine.<sup>478</sup>) Accordingly, Cargill Thompson argues that there is in Luther's writings a strong belief in natural law, albeit assigned with a different role and place of importance compared to traditional medieval thought.<sup>479</sup> For Luther, his doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law are interlocking ideas, and mutually inform each other. Another way to put it is that his doctrine of two kingdoms is

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<sup>475</sup> See Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther*, 145-62.

<sup>476</sup> See *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>477</sup> For some general affirmations about Luther and natural law, see, e.g. Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 273-74.; Lazareth, *Christians in Society*, 15-16., and Berman, *Law and Revolution, II*, Chapter 2. For stronger affirmations of continuity between Luther and the medieval traditions despite certain differences, see, e.g., John T. McNeill, "Natural Law in the Thought of Luther," *Church History* 10 (1941): 211-27., Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther*, Chapter V., and VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 21-55. This sampling challenges scholars such as August Lang, Karl Holl, and Emil Doumerge, who claim the contrary; see ———, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 62.

<sup>478</sup> McNeill quotes Augustine as having once wrote, "The law is written in the hearts of men, which iniquity itself effaces not" (McNeill, "Natural Law in the Thought of Luther," 213, 25.)

<sup>479</sup> Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther*, 79. David Whitford provides a sense of the pervasiveness of Luther's natural law language with the words, "Luther uses the phrases, 'natural law,' 'laws of nature,' and command of God' 583 times in the American Edition of his works. Their occurrences stretch from the very early writings to the very last"; see Whitford, "*Cura Religionis* or Two Kingdoms," 57.

illuminative of his doctrine of natural law. This fact, along with Luther's continuity with the earlier medieval natural law tradition, will be illustrated by briefly considering some of the integral components of Luther's natural law thought.<sup>480</sup>

A first broad and crucial background component is that while Luther disdained reason as helpful in justification and salvation<sup>481</sup>, thereby asserting the antithesis between the two kingdoms, he does see it as crucial to the governance of a "common space" in the earthly kingdom.<sup>482</sup>

Following on the first, a second component is Luther's affirmation that natural law is the basis for civil law, a point he makes towards the end of his treatise on "Temporal Authority".<sup>483</sup> An important qualification on this point, which many writers have observed, is that Luther spoke in terms of natural law providing a "relative" or "remedial" but not a perfect system of justice, due to the refraction of the fall.<sup>484</sup> It should also be noted that Luther did not view civil government and civil law as wholly natural occurrences, as illustrated in the case he makes for God's supernatural appointment of the state and the authority of its laws in the Noahic covenant in Genesis 9.<sup>485</sup>

A third component that places Luther's doctrine of natural law in continuity with the medieval tradition is his locating the biblical basis for the doctrine in Romans 2:14-15, whereby he argued for a universal moral law engraved upon the human heart that was not germane to Christians only. Luther adopted a natural law interpretation of this text as early as 1515 in his

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<sup>480</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 62-64.

<sup>481</sup> See, e.g., Martin Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," in *Luther's Works, Vol 31*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957).

<sup>482</sup> This is evident from looking at the way in which Luther begins "Temporal Authority" by asserting the antithesis but later gives reason (under the auspices of natural law) a valid place in God's governance of the common temporal order; see Luther, "Temporal Authority," 83-85, 127-28.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*, 127-28.

<sup>484</sup> See, e.g., David Curtis Steinmetz, *Luther in Context* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 114, 23-24.; McNeill, "Natural Law in the Thought of Luther," 220., and Lazareth, *Christians in Society*, 146.

<sup>485</sup> See, e.g., Luther's discussion in Martin Luther, "Lectures on Genesis," in *Luther's Works, Vol 2*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960), 140-42. See also, VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 63.

commentary on Romans<sup>486</sup>, and would return to it repeatedly thereafter in support of the doctrine.<sup>487</sup>

A fourth traditional component of Luther's doctrine is that he considered the Decalogue to be a summation of the natural law.<sup>488</sup>

A fifth and final component of Luther's doctrine of natural law that places him within the stream of the prior medieval tradition is his explanation of the current applicability of the Mosaic Law. In short, Luther contended that while the Law of Moses is not binding *per se*, it nevertheless contains laws that are promulgated for all people through natural law.<sup>489</sup>

While evidence has been given suggesting substantive continuity between Luther and the prior medieval tradition, Luther also distinguishes himself in key ways from his predecessors. First, as is evident from the latter portion of "Temporal Authority", Luther posited a relationship of natural law and civil law in the context of his distinctive formulation of the two kingdoms doctrine.<sup>490</sup> Secondly, Luther's disdain for the ambitions of fallen autonomous human reason distanced him, in part (if not altogether), from his medieval predecessors on issues relating to natural law. Thirdly, Luther developed views on conscience at odds with medieval theologians

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<sup>486</sup> Martin Luther, "Lectures on Romans," in *Luther's Works*, Vol 25, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 186-87.

<sup>487</sup> See, e.g., ———, "Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments," in *Luther's Works*, Vol 40, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), 97. Following a similar reading, see, e.g., McNeill, "Natural Law in the Thought of Luther," 220., Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther*, 84., and VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 63. In commenting on Luther's understanding of conscience, Oberman notes that Luther saw its broader significance particularly in the realm of secular rule. "In the secular realm, Christians are able not only to make common cause with non-Christians, but are duty-bound to do so... Christians are obliged to enter into such coalition because they do not have access to any knowledge closed to non-Christians, knowledge which would allow them to rule the world according to some rationality or more reliable experience. This is conscience in professional life and in office, among one's fellows – so far as God is concerned, a conscience free to deal with dirty business"; see Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *The Reformation : Roots and Ramifications* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1994), 66.

<sup>488</sup> For evidence of this in Luther see, e.g., Luther, "Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments," 98.; and Martin Luther, "How Christians Should Regard Moses," in *Luther's Works*, Vol 35, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 172-73. In corroboration of this reading see, e.g., Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther*, 85., and VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 63.

<sup>489</sup> For further discussion on this point, see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 64. Among others who corroborate this feature of Luther's doctrine of natural law see, e.g., McNeill, "Natural Law in the Thought of Luther," 220-22., and Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther*, 85-86.

<sup>490</sup> For those finding Luther attributing natural law a key role in the earthly kingdom, see e.g., Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, 114, 23-24., Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther*, Chapter 5., and McNeill, "Natural Law in the Thought of Luther," 220. For a recent argument against a close alignment between natural law and the earthly kingdom in Luther, which is critiqued as "dualistic", see Antti Raunio, "Natural Law and Faith: The Forgotten Foundations of Ethics in Luther's Theology," in *Union with Christ : The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed. Carl E.; Jenson Braaten, Robert W. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998), 96-124.

such as Thomas and Scotus in rejecting, for example, the concept of *synderesis*. Fourthly, Luther did not, like many medieval thinkers, anchor natural law in the eternal law in any explicit way. Fifth and finally, Luther makes a novel move in frequently identifying natural law with love, *pace* medieval theologians who frequently treated love as a higher, supernatural virtue.<sup>491</sup>

#### 4.2.4. Analysis and concluding remarks

Where does Luther find himself in the flow of the first 1500 years of solving the Christian's relationship to the broader world, and more particularly the relationship between church and state? It seems quite clear that Luther betrays a strong Augustinian (and Diognesian) strain in his thinking. In the early portion of "Temporal Authority" Luther's descriptions of two kingdoms resembles strong affinity with the *antithetical* features of Augustine's two cities. Here Luther asserts that the two kingdoms are inhabited by two different kinds of people, believers and unbelievers. Echoing Augustine, these two peoples are at odds with each other on a number of levels (there is no overlap). Believers are characterised by righteousness and are governed by the Spirit; they have no need for the law or the sword. On the other hand, unbelievers are characterised by wickedness and therefore require the order and peace promoting governance of the sword. Hence two competing ethics emerge: one of non-coercive love exemplified in the Sermon on the Mount and the other of external restraint dictated by the threat of the sword. In addition to these absolute antithetical modes of governance and ethics between the two kingdoms, there is also the notion that both are on different eschatological trajectories.<sup>492</sup>

Yet, Luther's doctrine of relating the two kingdoms is more than antithesis. With his concept of two governments, Luther creates room for *commonality* amidst the hostility of the two kingdoms, which allows for both radical critique of the world and theologically-informed social ethics designed for common life in a religiously plural world. Here Luther resembles the commonality amidst antithesis evident in Augustine's *City of God* and the *Epistle to Diognetus*. In "Temporal Authority" Luther argues that sword-wielding temporal authority of the earthly kingdom brings under its auspices both believer and unbeliever alike. For Luther it therefore

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<sup>491</sup> On these points, see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 64-65., and Berman, *Law and Revolution, II*, 73-77.

<sup>492</sup> VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 59.

follows that both peoples are subject to the civil laws of the land, and both may assume public offices; even a Christian may bear the sword. This commonality however, in keeping with the Augustinian and Diognesian perspectives, is not unfettered. For one, Luther asserts that the Christian should not wield the sword for his private protection and benefit. Furthermore, while temporal authority is to be considered a realm common to all people, Luther does not treat it as amoral territory. Rather, he admonishes civil rulers to exercise the sword justly and act within the bounds of their authority.<sup>493</sup>

While Luther finds himself firmly entrenched within the Augustinian tradition, he also developed the two cities doctrine with some of his own ideas. Perhaps his contribution is best captured in terms of the added nuance of two governments to the inherited two-kingdoms template from Augustine.<sup>494</sup> It is with this added nuance of two governments that Luther is able to give the two kingdoms positive *institutional* expression. (Church and state are at best latent in Augustine's two cities.) But Luther goes even further in attributing temporal authority unqualified *God-ordained* status and legitimacy. Luther saw temporal government as God's *means* of governing the affairs of sinful man. Another crucial way in which Luther distinctly supplements the thinking of Augustine is in giving the Christian genuine *dual membership* in the two kingdoms thanks to the administrative and institutional nuance of his doctrine of two governments. With the overlay of two governments upon the Augustinian two kingdoms, Luther makes the Christian life simultaneously more complex and enriching. In arguing unequivocally for Christians as citizens of an earthly domain, he reclaims legitimate civic channels for Christian neighborly love.<sup>495</sup>

In the distinctive ways that Luther supplements and improves upon Augustine, he approximates more closely the medieval contributions of Gelasius and Ockham. Luther shares with these thinkers the God-ordained and therefore the institutional legitimacy of temporal authority, and the associated goodness of its civic activity. However, here too Luther differed

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<sup>493</sup> See *Ibid.*, 59-60.

<sup>494</sup> Among commentators exploring this dynamic, William Lazareth observes that Luther's own teaching on two kingdoms emulates Augustine's cosmic dualism, while his two governments idea complements this inaugurated eschatology with a very dialectical historical corollary; see Lazareth, *Christians in Society*, 110.

<sup>495</sup> Relative to these points on Luther's relationship to Augustine, a number of writers have reached similar conclusions; e.g., see Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, 115.; Lazareth, *Christians in Society*, 162.; Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 318-20.; Bornkamm, *Luther's Doctrine of Two Kingdoms*, 21-26., and VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 59-61.

from his predecessors in important ways. With respect to Gelasius, Luther found a place of commonality between believers and unbelievers whereas various iterations of the two swords doctrine could not. And though Luther's doctrines of two kingdoms and two governments also intersect at many places with the thoughts of Ockham, his articulation of a twofold Christian ethic, corresponding to two governments and both rooted in love but expressed in starkly different ways, is where Luther presses beyond even Ockham or any of his theological predecessors.<sup>496</sup>

Luther's doctrine of two kingdoms and two governments along with the interlocking doctrine of natural law provides a compelling paradigm for Christian involvement with the broader world in general, and the church's interaction with the state in particular. Luther's conception of a two government informed two-fold ethic avoids both the Constantinian/papal-like conflation of the two kingdoms into a unitary Christianised state and the Anabaptist-like tyrannical dichotomisation of the two kingdoms, while at the same time making church and state life for the Christian thoroughly meaningful and rich. Luther envisions an approach in which faith works through love to one's neighbor that can at once be heavenly and earthly minded at the appropriate times: submitting to Word and sacraments, and to the sword, offering supplication for the saints and seeking civic justice, turning the cheek and defending one's neighbor.<sup>497</sup>

### **4.3. John Calvin: the making of a man**

I now turn to the central concern of this chapter, and that is a historical-theological inquiry into how John Calvin (1509-1564CE) related church and state in his thought. In revisiting Calvin, I will seek to avoid fitting him into modern dogmatic programs and ideologies.

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<sup>496</sup> For comments on Luther's relation to the medieval debates, and to Ockham (and Marsilius) in particular, see Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 317. Relative to these connections in general, see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 61-62.

<sup>497</sup> This reading of Luther runs contrary to dualist and defeatist readings of the likes of Barth and Bonhoeffer, and more recently Reinhold Niebuhr outlined in Bornkamm, *Luther's Doctrine of Two Kingdoms*, iii.; and Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, 112-25. These critiques will be engaged with more fully in chapter 5 below. For a plea to church historians to engage anew the significance of the Lutheran Reformation, in light of its neglect in recent Western legal historiography, as a time where a good deal of new theology was cast in its most enduring forms, not least of which where the doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law; see generally Witte, *Law and Protestantism*., and particularly pages 28-30.

To this end, I will approach Calvin in his historical context: that is placing his work in the context of the sixteenth century. I have already given special attention to the patristic Augustine and the Reformation Luther as pivotal figures shaping a tradition that Calvin imbibed and sought to perpetuate. The degree to which Calvin's thought finds continuity with these men will be explored in more detail below. I now turn my attention to an exploration of the man and his times with particular reference to his refugee status, the unique socio-political phenomenon in Geneva, his temperament, and his ongoing theological opponents. Having placed him more squarely in his historical context, I will then test the thesis of a Calvin of two kingdoms and natural law.<sup>498</sup>

#### *4.3.1. Preparations for Geneva*

Like Augustine and Luther before him, Calvin was primed from early on for his subsequent position of iconic influence as a reforming churchman. Born July 10, 1509, Calvin grew up in the French town of Noyon dominated by the atmosphere of the church. His father was a lawyer to the Cathedral Chapter, and it was assumed from early on that Calvin would take orders. With the support of the chapter, Calvin received his early education with the children of noblemen, which helped instill in him something of a dignified demeanor, thereby preparing him for his later movements in aristocratic circles. At the age of fourteen, Calvin departed for the University of Paris, the greatest medieval theological school, where at first he was an arts student, and followed this by time at the Collège de la Marche where he studied Latin under one of the greatest French schoolmasters of the time, Mathurin Cordier.<sup>499</sup> After completing his general studies, Calvin migrated to the Collège de Montaigu, the *alma mater* of Erasmus and Rabelais, an institution designed to groom students for theological study and conservative religious orders. Calvin scholar, Willem van't Spijker, observes that much during this period of Calvin's life must be left to conjecture. What can be said, however, is that the curriculum at Collège de Montaigu did not include theology, but was rather largely defined by the mastery of

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<sup>498</sup> David Steinmetz and Richard Muller are examples of scholars who have called for more sensitivity to historical context in re-appropriating Calvin; see, e.g., David Curtis Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), and Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin : Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University, 2000).

<sup>499</sup> See T. H. L. Parker, *Portrait of Calvin* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), 12-14.

the scholastic method, with an emphasis on rhetoric and logic. It is also likely that the strictness of the school left an abiding impression on Calvin – predisposing him to the rigid form of piety he would come to expect in Geneva.<sup>500</sup>

Before Calvin was to build on his education in Paris and pursue an advanced degree toward ecclesiastical office, his father influenced him to study jurisprudence instead. Around the beginning of 1528, Calvin embarked on his legal studies at Orléans and Bourges. The latter especially captivated Calvin with the spirit of the Renaissance – of free inquiry, accurate scholarship (*ad fontes*), and good writing. During this time Calvin learned Greek and the art of laying bare ancient biblical and classic texts. He also mastered the nuances of civil law. This coupled with his other gifts and learning also helped prepare him for his future socio-political role in Geneva. Calvin’s budding appreciation of humanistic learning coupled with a newfound sense of intellectual freedom following his father’s death in May, 1531, saw him complete the last chapter of his formal education at Collège Royal in Paris. Here he specialised in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and moved in the circles of the religious humanists. In 1532, Calvin made his first contribution to humanist scholarship with his commentary on Seneca’s *De Clementia*.<sup>501</sup>

#### 4.3.2. French refugee

Parker suggests it was likely between 1528 and 1532 that Calvin converted to the teaching of the Reformation.<sup>502</sup> By the end of 1534, his newfound religious convictions had forced him out of his French homeland and into Basle for refuge. Events leading up to Calvin’s flight included his association with the controversial 1533 All Saints’ Day sermon of Nicolas Cop, which attacked the views of the Paris theologians, and being on the wrong side of the Affair of the Placards in October 1534, which attacked the Catholic doctrine of the Mass and indirectly the authority of the king. The Affair of the Placards sent Calvin along with many other Protestants fleeing for their lives from a pope-friendly and bloodthirsty King Francis I. Once in Basle, Calvin was able to resume an academic life, and during his time there he completed the

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<sup>500</sup> W. van't Spijker, *Calvin : A Brief Guide to His Life and Thought*, 1st English ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 12.

<sup>501</sup> See *Ibid.*, 12-15., and Parker, *Portrait of Calvin*, 17-18.

<sup>502</sup> See Parker, *Portrait of Calvin*, 19.

first edition of his *Institutes of Christian Religion* in 1536. Being a comparatively short book intended for catechising the masses, it reveals impressive knowledge of the church fathers and indebtedness to Augustine and Luther. During the same year (1536), Calvin made an attempt to return to Paris but was diverted, by ongoing opposition, to the French-speaking city of Geneva.<sup>503</sup>

#### 4.3.3. Calvin's first stay in Geneva (1536-1538)

The Geneva that Calvin encountered on his first visit was a city that had recently undergone something of a dramatic transformation of its own. By 1536 it had become a free republic and a center for the Reformation. It was a city with potential but also one simmering with a complex mixture of religious and political challenges. During the medieval period Geneva was under the control of the neighboring duke of Savoy indirectly through the Genevese Prince-Bishop (who was normally a member of the House of Savoy). However, over time the Genevan magistrate became concerned with the growing economic strength of and foreign influence in the church, and sought to curb its power. At this point the desires of Geneva's political leaders for independence and stability coincided with the religious concerns of the Reformation movement. In October 1534 the Genevan magistrate deposed the Bishop and deemed itself *the* authority in determining the correct relationship between church and state. By May 1535 the people of Geneva were in full support of the Reformation. Geneva had won its freedom as a republic from the double crisis of Savoyard and Episcopal rule. However, its wariness of future foreign domination continued. Noteworthy is that both neighboring expansionist powers Berne and France still shared or claimed some stake in territory that Geneva considered its own. (Geneva presented itself as something of a prized possession – existing geographically, economically, and militarily as the “linchpin” of Northern Savoy.) Seeing that Berne had proven a military ally in ousting the Bishop and was a friend of the Reformation, Geneva sought its ongoing support and protection from foreign threat (especially that of a resurgent Savoy). Yet, this relationship would prove tenuous over time as Geneva sought to solidify its alliance with Berne in every possible way, short of accepting direct control. This brief sketch of Geneva's international political relations is vital to understanding the inner

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<sup>503</sup> See van't Spijker, *Calvin*, 15-23., and Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, 9-10.

workings of its own political climate, thereby shedding important light on the kinds of challenges Calvin would face in the years to come.<sup>504</sup>

Calvin's initial impression of Geneva was a city impoverished both ecclesiastically and morally. He found himself confronted with nothing but chaos and disorder. While naturally preferring the relative peace and tranquility of Basle to Geneva, Calvin was nevertheless compelled by the hand of God through the fierce admonition of Guillaume Farel to remain in Geneva for the sake of the church.<sup>505</sup>

Under the leadership of Farel, Calvin sought to establish the young Reformation movement in the city. His written contribution began with a foundational standard of orthodoxy for the church in the form of his 1536 *Confession of Faith* (largely drawn from the *Institutes*) and his *Catechism or Instruction of the Christian Religion of the Church in Geneva* (1537). In January 1537, Calvin along with the other Genevan preachers also presented the city council with the first piece of church legislation in their *Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church*.<sup>506</sup> Calvin, however, soon found himself drawn into the factionalism and divisions so characteristic of Genevan society at the time. The first notable wave of conflict directly pertaining to Calvin centered on the oath of allegiance to the *Confession of Faith* imposed by the French clergy upon Genevan citizens. The magistrate withheld from the church the right to excommunicate those who refused to swear the oath. Berne voiced its support for the decision. Many citizens were also up in arms against the church. The second wave of opposition came in the wake of the 1538 election of an even less sympathetic city council, which saw the imposition of Bernese liturgical rites upon the Genevan church.<sup>507</sup> Outraged, Calvin and Farel dug in their heels and not only rejected the Bernese rites but also declared its right to refuse communion to the whole city. As a result, the two reformers were stripped of their office and ordered to leave the city. Calvin headed for Strasbourg.<sup>508</sup>

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<sup>504</sup> See William G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press; Distributed exclusively in the USA and Canada by St. Martin's Press, 1994), 12-21.

<sup>505</sup> See van't Spijker, *Calvin : A Brief Guide to His Life and Thought*, 42-43.

<sup>506</sup> See Gordon, *Calvin*, 70-72.

<sup>507</sup> Calvin also faced conflict of a more personal nature during this time, the most prominent being that of his encounter with Pierre Caroli who charged Calvin with denying the Trinity; see van't Spijker, *Calvin*, 46-47.

<sup>508</sup> See Gordon, *Calvin*, 78-81.

How does one interpret the opposition to Calvin in these early years? In his historical analysis of the period, William G. Naphy and his *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* (1994) provide compelling answers. To begin with, Naphy cautions against allowing Calvin's reading of his perceived opposition in Geneva to monopolise one's conclusions. Naphy observes that Calvin would have interpreted the Genevan socio-political crisis of 1538 (including the whole period of 1536-41 for that matter) as predominantly religious and moral in nature. In other words, Calvin saw his opposition as having motives driven primarily by immoral and anti-reformist impulses. This is understandable when one considers it likely that Calvin had little knowledge of the foreign and domestic complexities of Geneva's immediate history (as outlined above), and hence largely misinterpreted the general Genevan dislike of clerics and foreigners. Therefore, Calvin's reading can hardly be the complete story. Accordingly, Naphy posits that the crisis of 1538 was chiefly political in nature, centering on Geneva's struggle to preserve its freedom by maintaining a delicate relationship with Berne, and one which would lack final resolution until Calvin's so-called triumph in 1555.<sup>509</sup>

More specifically, Naphy argues that the face-off between church and magistrate over the *Confession*, far from being a crisis over morals and ecclesiology, was in reality merely the occasion for political division over Geneva's relationship to Berne to resurface. He observes that what lay behind the ecclesiastical veneer of the 1538 crisis was something like Geneva's earlier political tussles with Savoy. Accordingly, for many citizens of Geneva opposed to Calvin, his insistence upon the imposition of religious oaths, the church's right to excommunicate, and opposition to the Berne's liturgical rites, all signaled the potential loss of certain freedoms. For instance, it meant a possible return to ministerial control reminiscent of the Bishop and Savoy era. But more importantly, it potentially endangered Geneva's protective alliance with Berne, thus exposing Geneva to war and foreign domination once again. And yet, at the same time, there was another faction of society more supportive of Calvin but also for political reasons. For these citizens, Calvin's resistance to Berne's meddling in Genevan affairs, which just so happened to be ecclesiastical in nature, sent a clear message to expansionistic Berne that Geneva would not relinquish her newfound liberty as a republic, not even to its closest protective ally. In

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<sup>509</sup> Naphy, *Calvin*, 26-43.

other words, Geneva's citizens were divided over the control and direction of the fledgling republic, and Calvin was caught in the crossfire.<sup>510</sup>

After the expulsion of Calvin and Farel, the Genevan magistrate continued to pursue its goal of providing the city with internal and external stability to secure its new freedoms. This included limiting ministerial authority, to the extent of making ministers employees of the state. It also saw a further strengthening of the Genevan-Berne alliance, due in large part to the rise in power of the Articulants, political victors in 1538. (This group derived their name from the articles or treaty they drew up with Berne to further cement the relationship between the two states.) At the same time, the Guillermins, named after their support for Guillaume Farel, rejected the treaty. For a while the Articulants enjoyed the balance of civil power while Berne's financial interest in Geneva grew, as did the factional friction between the Articulants and the Guillermins. However, at some point the Genevan populace became aware of the serious financial outlay necessary to secure ongoing Bernese support, and the Articulants incurred a decisive loss to the Guillermins in the 1541 elections.<sup>511</sup>

In analysing the above events that led up to and included the 1538 Genevan political clash, Naphy distills four tendencies in society and politics formative to the shaping of the new independent and freshly protestant Republic, which were still prominent in the later 1555 conflict where Calvin finally triumphed. First, many citizens in Geneva bordered on fanaticism in preserving their newfound independence and privileges as a Republic. This is evidenced by the fact that Geneva was willing to risk war with Berne for political freedom. Second, the notion of magisterial control over church affairs enjoyed general acceptance. This is clearly evidenced in pre-Protestant Geneva by, among other moves, the deposition of the Bishop. In early Protestant Geneva, the magistrate controlled the right of excommunication as part of its program for moral coercion and control. A third tendency connected to the second, was a deep-seated fear of foreign domination. Fourth and finally, Geneva was a city in which politics and personal relationships were greatly valued due to the high level of civic involvement by its citizens. On this point, Naphy adds that political ferment could easily be heightened by personal dispute,

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<sup>510</sup> See *Ibid.*, 26-34.

<sup>511</sup> See *Ibid.*, 34-41.

especially when one considers the marginal size of Geneva, its relative openness to debate, and its penchant for factionalism.<sup>512</sup>

#### 4.3.4. *Strasbourg (1538-1541)*

In the summer of 1538, Calvin made his way to Strasbourg, a city that had joined the Reformation in 1529 and boasted one of the most significant reformers in the south-west empire, in Martin Bucer.<sup>513</sup> Bruce Gordon writes that the three years Calvin spent in Strasbourg changed him, due in large part to the influence of Bucer. Under the instruction of Bucer and Bucer's colleagues, Wolfgang Capito and Johannes Sturm, Calvin was to gain significant ground in his understanding of the nature of the Christian calling and ministry. Calvin was invited to teach at the Strasbourg academy and was also put in charge of a small group of French refugees, which eventually became his congregation. During this time Calvin also penned his 1539 edition of the *Institutes* and married Idellete de Bure.<sup>514</sup>

Strasbourg shared with Geneva similar tensions between church and state, with the Strasbourg magistrate also seeking ascendancy in socio-political affairs. For instance, while the Strasbourg government was willing to work with the church in regulating the moral affairs of the city, it too would not extend to the church the sole right of excommunication. Bucer, however, insisted on ecclesiastical independence in matters of church discipline. Accordingly, Bucer's efforts to reintroduce the New Testament practice of church discipline are evidenced chiefly in his establishment of the office of elder and his devising of a form of church order. Bucer's stand for the authority of the church only served to reinforce Calvin's prior convictions. The influence of Bucer's work on the governance of the church would reveal itself in Calvin's later reforming labors in Geneva as Calvin sought to maintain the right balances in dealing with temporal authority.<sup>515</sup>

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<sup>512</sup> Ibid., 43. For a historical inquiry into Calvin's religious development between 1523 and 1539, see Alexandre Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, trans. David Foxgrover and Wade Provo, 1st American ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 49-127.

<sup>513</sup> Gordon, *Calvin*, 85.; van't Spijker, *Calvin*, 51.

<sup>514</sup> Gordon, *Calvin*, 86-92.

<sup>515</sup> See Ibid., 86.; van't Spijker, *Calvin*, 53-54.

#### 4.3.5. Calvin's organising efforts (1541-1546)

In 1541 Calvin returned, albeit reluctantly, to Geneva. Calvin's recall was driven by a need to bring stability and health to an understaffed and ailing Genevan church, and made all the more pressing by the resignation of two of its finest ministers, Marcourt and Morand (both Articulants), who had been hired to replace Calvin and Farel. As for Genevan society at large, it had recovered from the political crisis of 1538, which meant the imperial threat from Berne was over (for the time being) and the ruling Guillermin party had forged an amicable relationship with the Articulants. This renewed sense of external stability in particular allowed Genevans to focus more on their domestic problems, which included the condition of the church.<sup>516</sup>

The situation in Geneva in 1541 was ideal for Calvin in a number of ways. The history of factionalism and division in Geneva was a trend Genevans wanted to change – the electoral Guillermins wanted order in church and society. As a result, Calvin was endowed with a fair amount of power for the task of attempting to build a more sound and well-ordered church. Shortly after his arrival, he was approached by the Petit Conseil to prepare a draft of the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*<sup>517</sup>, which would regulate the church, the Consistory, and the religious aspects of Genevan society. The draft *Ordinances* put forward a particular view of the church that was not entirely shared by the magistrate, especially with respect to the separation of church from magisterial control. The final version was more ambiguous on magisterial oversight.<sup>518</sup> Nevertheless, Calvin had succeeded in freeing the church from magisterial control in many “religious” areas.<sup>519</sup> Recognising the need for suitable colleagues, Calvin was also given freedom in hiring new ministers to the Company of Pastors and in overseeing the assignment of lay elders to the Consistory. By 1546 he had reached his goal of surrounding himself with a powerful and able Company of Pastors as well as bringing together a unified band of lay elders

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<sup>516</sup> See Naphy, *Calvin*, 42., and van't Spijker, *Calvin*, 64-65.

<sup>517</sup> The *Ordinances* bears resemblance to the 1537 *Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church*, but distinguishes itself in its “view of the offices, the necessity of discipline, the preservation of doctrine and unity, and the doctrinal and moral caliber of the ministers”; see van't Spijker, *Calvin*, 68-69. It also expresses “Calvin’s understanding of the church as developed in the 1539 *Institutes*, in his commentary on Romans, and in his experiences of working as a minister in Strasbourg”; and particularly under the influence of Bucer; see Gordon, *Calvin*, 126.

<sup>518</sup> Gordon, *Calvin*, 127.

<sup>519</sup> See William G. Naphy, “Calvin's Geneva,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 30.

in the Consistory. However, Calvin faced significant challenges in the process, and most significantly from within the ministerial ranks.<sup>520</sup>

The friction between Calvin and some of his ministerial colleagues (from the old guard) centered once again on the matter of ecclesiastical and magisterial authority. Calvin sought, on the basis of Scripture and the early church tradition, to put the administration of ecclesiastical discipline wholly in the hands of the church by freeing it from magisterial control. However, a faction of ministers resisted Calvin's efforts in this regard, especially in his establishment of an ecclesiastical court for the purposes of administering discipline, per the draft *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*.<sup>521</sup> Here again, it is profitable to consider the motives driving Calvin's detractors. Once more, Naphy cautions against relying uncritically on Calvin's interpretation of the situation, which was primarily moral in nature: Calvin saw his opponent's questionable character and immorality as giving rise to their dislike of church authority.<sup>522</sup> It is more likely that the opposing minister's feared the Petite Conseil might surrender to the church power and authority that had been given by God to the magistrate. This proposal makes even more sense when one considers the context of a city recently freed from foreign and clerical domination (as described above).<sup>523</sup>

In the end, the magistrate received the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, however, in a final form noticeably more ambiguous on church authority and discipline than its earlier draft. The fact that the magistrate was not more emphatic in spelling out its rights to control ecclesiastical discipline from the outset must at least in part be attributed to the overall Genevan desire for societal stability, which necessarily included the church; and all the more since the advent of the Consistory with its office of lay elder, which included men of public office.

Whatever struggles Calvin encountered in getting there, by 1546 he had re-made the Company of Pastors by installing well-educated and like-minded Frenchmen with close

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<sup>520</sup> See Naphy, *Calvin*, 53-54.

<sup>521</sup> See van't Spijker, *Calvin*, 73.

<sup>522</sup> See Naphy, *Calvin*, 54-56. It should be added that Calvin also, among other things, questioned the educational credentials of these ministers. Therefore, he likely construed their resistance to church authority as also derived from prideful ignorance of the importance of the doctrine of church authority. But it is also highly probable that the dissenting minister's held to a conception of church-state relations common and acceptable to other cities in the Swiss and German reformation movement; see van't Spijker, *Calvin*, 79.

<sup>523</sup> See Naphy, *Calvin*, 56.

connections to the French Reformer.<sup>524</sup> Together with his group of Consistorial elders, Calvin had brought a good deal of stability to the ecclesiastical structure of the church. With respect to the Company of Pastors, Calvin had surrounded himself with formidable ministerial allies whose acumen and ethnicity would prove a powerful platform for future showdowns with the magistrate.<sup>525</sup>

In addition to Calvin's reforming and organising efforts within the church, he was also commissioned by the city council to make a significant contribution to broader society during 1541-1546. A day after the public adoption of the *Ordinances*, and along with government representatives, Calvin was assigned the task of revising Geneva's legal code. Here Calvin drew upon his prior legal training, and in January 1543 the General Council of citizens adopted the constitution.<sup>526</sup> By 1546, Calvin had made his presence known in Geneva through both ecclesiastical and civic channels. He had become a public figure to be reckoned with. The stage was now set for even greater opposition from the Genevan public and magistrate alike.<sup>527</sup>

#### 4.3.6. Calvin's travail and triumph (1546-1555)

While the period between 1541 and 1546 signaled significant strides for Calvin in organising, uniting, and stabilising the church, this does not imply that Geneva was altogether stable during this period. Naphy argues that while underlying tensions still simmered in the city, new waves of factional dispute were kept at bay due to a number of distracting factors. These included the changing of the guard in the Company of Pastors, a shift in Guillermin leadership, the threat of conflict with Berne, and plague. However, by 1546-47, which had seen the dissipation of these prominent concerns, other internal tensions were now able to come to the fore. Genevan citizens could now resume more freely their minor disputes and petty squabbling, with the potential for major escalation. As for the church, Calvin's efforts in revamping and purifying the ecclesiastical structure now boasted an impressive group of ministers and elders working together to implement a controversial program of church discipline. The newly

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<sup>524</sup> See Gordon, *Calvin*, 130.

<sup>525</sup> See Naphy, *Calvin*, 53-79.

<sup>526</sup> See van't Spijker, *Calvin*, 74-75.

<sup>527</sup> For a summary of the period 1541-1546, see Selderhuis, *The Calvin Handbook*, 44-49.

improved French and aristocratic Company of Pastors now appeared more threatening than ever to the new magisterial heirs of the Guillermin triumph, and Genevan society at large. A new era of factionalism had dawned for Geneva, which would not find resolution until Calvin's so-called triumph in 1555.<sup>528</sup>

During 1546, Calvin and his Consistory were to experience increasing clashes with prominent Genevan citizens, including the likes of Jean Trollet, Pierre Ameaux, and the Favre clan, over matters theological and moral. Noteworthy also is the controversy over the play, 'The Acts of the Apostles', in which citizens reacted violently to ministerial censure. From Calvin's perspective, the problem with the opposition lay in their unwillingness to submit to "good order and discipline", which was evidence of immorality in Genevan society at large. But here, yet again, Naphy advises against relying on Calvin's viewpoint alone and helps fill out the context by providing another perspective. He argues that the Genevans saw things quite differently. They saw foreign ministers acting arrogantly, as if they did not know their proper place as guests in Geneva. Naphy provides evidence challenging Calvin's perception of increasing immorality in Geneva, and tending to support the contention of many Genevans that the Consistory was arrogantly intruding upon the private lives of citizens in a very public manner.<sup>529</sup> To corroborate Naphy, Gordon observes that while the sermons of the ministers give the impression that Geneva was a "cesspool of immorality", it was in fact a city no different from its French, Swiss or German counterparts.<sup>530</sup>

A crucial aspect of the Genevan context that added fuel to the fires of factionalism during the 1540s and into the 1550s, and as already alluded to, was the problem of French refugees in Geneva. The overwhelming number of immigrants that flooded into Geneva distinguished it from other "middling cities of the sixteenth century." In describing the volatility of the situation Gordon writes, "It turned a tense situation in which political factionalism was rife into a powder keg." By 1546, the swelling number of French refugees "had become the dominant political issue."<sup>531</sup> The arrival of the refugees was something of a double-edged sword to the native Genevans. On the one hand the wealthier immigrants made a significant contribution to the

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<sup>528</sup> The rise of internal tensions in Geneva was also aggravated in 1546 by the outbreak of religious war in Germany and subsequent religious persecution in France; see Naphy, *Calvin*, 84, 92-93.

<sup>529</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-111.

<sup>530</sup> Gordon, *Calvin*, 198-99.

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

economy through the purchase of bourgeois status. But on the other, many of the more aristocratic Frenchmen began to infiltrate the power structures of the city. Not only did the refugees become a threat to the balance of power in the city, but they also disturbed its social equilibrium. For instance, the average foreigner tended to be better educated and wealthier than his Genevan counterpart. Poorer immigrants also increased the threat of disease and seriously drained charitable resources. What is more, refugees refused to mix on many levels with broader Genevan society. All this saw the initial Genevan attitude of hospitality and religious sympathy toward the refugees give way to widespread fear and resentment. Over time, Calvin and his Company of Pastors began to embody everything that many Genevans loathed and despised. Here were foreigners pushing a particular religious agenda, and they had the political support of the French refugees, as well as an increasingly cohesive group of native citizens. In a word, the French ministers became the leaders of a powerful faction in Geneva that posed a serious threat to the social and political freedoms of many in the city; and the ministerial program of church discipline proved to be a continuous jarring reminder of this reality.<sup>532</sup>

In addition to the dominant complaint of ethnicity, the related grievance of arrogant ministers browbeating Genevans from the pulpit and intruding upon their private lives also warrants closer examination. In their sermons Calvin and his colleagues denounced all kinds of immorality and unethical behavior as well as leveling specific, personal attacks, and at times in the most fierce and persistent manner. It was not uncommon for Calvin to liken Genevans to ‘brute beasts’ and to heap scorn upon the magistrate, with representatives present in the pews. Calvin had no qualms about delving into political affairs from the pulpit.<sup>533</sup> Since its inception, the disciplining work of the Consistory became more and more efficient at uncovering and rooting out instances of moral/theological deviance (many times with the help of the magistrate), with punishment often being very public in nature.<sup>534</sup> One particular case worthy of mention is the direct attack by the ministers upon the traditional social and religious custom in Geneva of choosing baptismal names. Basically, the ministers sought to eradicate the use of traditional

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<sup>532</sup> See *Ibid.*, 198-200., and Naphy, *Calvin*, 121-39.

<sup>533</sup> Naphy references various portions of Calvin’s sermons from the likes of Deuteronomy, Job, and Micah; see Naphy, *Calvin*, 154-62.

<sup>534</sup> For examples, see, John Witte and Robert McCune Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family in John Calvin's Geneva* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005).

Catholic names and cleanse society of the superstition and folly associated with god-parenting.<sup>535</sup> As a result, the ministry of Calvin and his colleagues was often met with open protest, violence, and even death threats. Why the hostility? To depend on Calvin's answer alone, as has already been argued, is to miss crucial elements at work in the Genevan context. The struggle was more than an apocalyptic showdown between ministerial reform and discipline, and the forces of Genevan ungodliness. Instead, one must appreciate how the ministers were seen as a formidable threat to the liberties of Genevan citizens. For many Genevans, here were outsiders who had abused the hospitality extended to them by having the audacity to meddle in the social and political affairs of the city, and in such an authoritative and condescending way. For instance, the pulpit was perceived as a rallying point for factional political support. The long arm of the Consistory could be humiliating. In episodes like the baptismal-names controversy, Calvin was tampering with custom and tradition. In summary, Calvin's ministry was for many native Genevans a major threat to their personal identity and liberty in the newly-minted republic – therefore they could neither listen to nor receive correction from him. A sizeable constituency of the Genevan population believed that the French ministers did not know or keep their place.<sup>536</sup>

By the late 1540s, the factionalism so characteristic of Genevan society since its break with Savoy exploded to the surface once again. In addition to the frictional elements outlined above, the gradual falling out between ministers and civil leaders saw party lines solidifying. On one side were the native Genevan families who saw themselves as “defenders of city's traditional liberties”, and on the other the French, made up of the “ministers and their wealthy, often aristocratic, patrons who had come to Geneva.”<sup>537</sup> The latter had grown into a formidable opponent. There was the theological, rhetorical, and political brilliance of Calvin, a Consistory of educated and socially prominent men with significant tenure, a monopoly on the most influential channel of communication, the pulpit, and French refugee support.

The early 1550s saw Calvin embattled on a number of fronts. In addition to the unrelenting resentment of many Genevans towards the ministers and their preaching, there was the Bolsec controversy and the baptismal-names saga. This period also saw the renewal of the prior argument between ministers and magistrates over the authority of the Consistory. Many

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<sup>535</sup> See Gordon, *Calvin*, 202-04.

<sup>536</sup> See Naphy, *Calvin*, 144-62.; Gordon, *Calvin*, 202-04.

<sup>537</sup> See Gordon, *Calvin*, 202., and Naphy, *Calvin*, 139.

prominent families had suffered under the heavy hand of church discipline and wanted to even the score. In 1551, a leading syndic on the Consistory, Michel Morel, clashed openly with Calvin on the matter. In Gordon's words, "Such ill will only fuelled calls for both a limitation of the authority of the Consistory and recognition that its judgments could be appealed and overturned by the magistrates." Opposition to Calvin also manifested itself in an increasingly politicised Consistory. This was evidenced by the opposing ruling Perrinists party at the time, led by Ami Perrin, which, in 1553, revised the cross-section of lay-elders by stacking it with its own members, thereby threatening Calvin's position. At the same time, the Perrinist party sought to cripple the political aspirations of Calvin's supporters by barring many of them from elections.<sup>538</sup>

By 1553 Geneva was clearly polarised along Calvinist and Perrinist party lines. Dissension boiled. Decisive confrontation loomed. Other significant conflicts that informed the larger political struggle included the Servetus case in the Autumn of 1553, a defining moment for the debate over the handling of excommunication. Concurrent with and feeding off the Servetus ordeal was also the landmark case involving Philibert Berthelier. Excommunicated by the Consistory, Berthelier promptly appealed to the Small Council for rights to partake of the Lord's Supper. His request was granted. This signaled a loss for Calvin and the authority and independence of the church. But it would only be a temporary defeat. For, after a stalemate in the 1554 elections, the supporters of John Calvin and the French ministers narrowly ousted the Perrinists for a remarkable victory in 1555.<sup>539</sup>

#### *4.3.7. Consolidation, revolution, and beyond*

According to Gordon, Calvin's victory can be attributed in large part to the perception within Geneva that the Perrinists had failed to curb social disorder in the city.<sup>540</sup> Calvin and his colleagues, in contrast, had been preaching and practicing discipline and order for years. Hence,

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<sup>538</sup> See Gordon, *Calvin*, 211-12., and Naphy, *Calvin*, 167-99.

<sup>539</sup> See Gordon, *Calvin*, 212-13.; Naphy, *Calvin*, 167-99., and van't Spijker, *Calvin*, 84-102.

<sup>540</sup> Naphy adds to this the fact that the Perrinists were unable to convince the ruling elite that they knew what to do with the problems, social and political, posed by the French ministers and the refugees. There was also the issue of close family ties among the Perrinists, which worried some, and blocked outright the political ambitions of others; see Naphy, *Calvin*, 199.

since “fear of disorder and divine punishment was a powerful motive in the early-modern world”, Calvin’s vision of a godly society proved more attractive than Perrinist chaos or worse yet, God’s judgment. For a majority of Genevan magistrates and citizens, Calvin offered what they wanted: true religion and social stability. In the wake of their victory, the Calvinists sought to consolidate their newfound political power by admitting a large contingency of prominent Frenchmen to bourgeois status, thereby strengthening its electoral base. They also began a process of purifying Geneva’s government by elevating their supporters to key political positions. This only inflamed post-election tensions with Perrinists further, many of whom reacted violently and subsequently fled to Berne. After the official alliance with Berne expired in 1556, Geneva now found itself facing a renewed threat of invasion from its former protector. Geneva and Berne were now at odds both religiously and politically. In Calvin’s estimation, the Bernese church was the “anti-model of the Reformation, an object lesson in the consequences of permitting civil rulers, untrained in exposition of scripture, to interfere in spiritual matters. It was a false rendering to Caesar.”<sup>541</sup> Calvin and Geneva would do things differently.

Calvin’s improbable victory in 1555 and subsequent fortification of the Calvinist political position meant the struggle over authority between Genevan church and magistrate had come to an end. The heart of the problems surrounding the church had been solved and her freedom secured. She now had ultimate jurisdiction over the right to excommunicate and administer the Lord’s Supper. Calvin’s original intent in the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* concerning church discipline had been realized. Hence, the period between 1555-57 saw the consolidation of the Genevan Reformation.<sup>542</sup>

This period also marked the end of Geneva’s revolutionary period. “Under Calvin and the Calvinist magistrates Geneva was to enter into a new era in which it ceased to be a troubled city vulnerable to external pressures and began to emerge as a stable state playing a major role in European affairs.”<sup>543</sup> Under Calvin’s determined leadership, Geneva had become something of an orderly and peaceful, if not godly, society.

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<sup>541</sup> See Gordon, *Calvin*, 214-16., and Naphy, *Calvin*, 208-32.

<sup>542</sup> See Naphy, *Calvin*, 231., and van't Spijker, *Calvin*, 72-75. For a summary of the years 1546 to 1554, see also Selderhuis, *The Calvin Handbook*, 49-53.

<sup>543</sup> See Naphy, *Calvin*, 231.

In the remaining years leading up to his death, Calvin continued to establish himself as one of the leaders in the early Protestant Reformed movement. Notable achievements included his founding of the Genevan Academy, the final edition of the *Institutes* (1559), the *The Gallican Confession* (1559), and the revised *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* (1561). Until the end, the church was always central to Calvin. In 1564 Calvin died of excruciating ill health. The life he had breathed into the church, however, continued. Through the advent of the printing press, it swept through many parts of Europe and beyond.<sup>544</sup>

An important thread throughout the above sketch of Calvin's context in Geneva has been the nature of Calvin's opposition, both in the crises leading up to his dismissal in 1538 and their resolution with Calvin's triumph in 1555. With support from Naphy and Gordon I have argued that to view the struggle between the church and Genevan society, and especially the magistrate, as a battle primarily between the moral and religious forces of good and evil – which Calvin for the most part did – is to have an impoverished understanding of Calvin's historical context. Rather, in order to have fuller appreciation of the motives driving Calvin's opposition, one must pay closer attention to other factors informing mid-sixteenth-century life in Geneva. Central to these was Geneva's quest to preserve the social and political freedoms won from its break with Bishop and Savoyan control. Closely connected was the goal of social stability. Genevans disagreed as to how to achieve these ends. This became increasingly apparent throughout Calvin's church reforming efforts in Geneva, and was influenced most notably by Geneva's historic penchant for factionalism, its tenuous relationship with Berne, the threat of foreign domination, and above all, the overwhelming influx of French immigrants, who filled positions key to both church and state.

Before bringing this section on Calvin's historical context to a close, I consider two additional factors that exerted a shaping influence upon his theology and practice of church-state relations in Geneva. These are Calvin's anxiety regarding discipline and order, and two of his ongoing theological opponents: the Roman Catholics and Anabaptists.

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<sup>544</sup> See van't Spijker, *Calvin*, 104-16. For a summary of the years 1555-1568, see also Selderhuis, *The Calvin Handbook*, 53-56.

#### 4.3.8. Calvin: a man of tumultuous times

Calvin was a man particularly prone to anxiety. In his work, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (1988), William J. Bouwsma shows from Calvin's writings, especially his private correspondence and commentaries, that he struggled with a malady perennial to his time. He observes, "Whatever its private sources, nothing bound Calvin more closely to his time than his anxiety."<sup>545</sup> Calvin's sixteenth-century European world was one acutely aware of its failings and at the same time increasingly anxious. Each tendency fed on the other, and it is only fair to assume that Calvin's anxiety was also to some degree a result of this dynamic.<sup>546</sup> Calvin was acutely aware of anxiety in himself. He was anxious over the turmoil and lack of self-control he found within; but probably more so by the chaos and disorder he found without. He was anxious over the plight of others.<sup>547</sup> He was terribly concerned with restoring a spiritually and morally fractured world, of which Geneva was a microcosm, to the will of God.<sup>548</sup>

More specifically, one source of Calvin's angst would likely have been the influence of Renaissance humanism and its simultaneous sensitivity to the human plight and its ideal of civil life.<sup>549</sup> Another likely source was his experience as a refugee, exiled from the familiar surroundings of his homeland. And there was also the factious and disorderly spirit he found in Geneva. His anxiety must have been compounded even further by his chronic health problems.

Bouwsma argues that Calvin's nervous struggle to control himself and the world around him explains in part the way in which he carried out his program of church discipline and broader social control in Geneva, hence Bouwsma's observation that there was a severely moralistic and totalitarian side to Calvin, which was at odds with his more rational side. This may help to explain, among other things, the rigor with which he sought to enforce discipline, his rejection of religious freedom, and his endorsement of church-state collaboration in promoting social control.<sup>550</sup>

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<sup>545</sup> William James Bouwsma, *John Calvin : A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 32.

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>547</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-48, 191.

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-65, 86-97.

<sup>549</sup> See *Ibid.*, 113-27, 91.

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid.*, 86, 97, 211, 17, 22, 30.

#### 4.3.9. Calvin's Anabaptist and Roman Catholic opponents

Calvin's writings on church and state are to be understood in the context of his polemics against his Roman Catholic and Anabaptist opponents. In his writings, Calvin sought to further solidify the break with the Catholic Church's assumption of civil powers, as well as to protect the progress of the Reformation from Anabaptist threat, of both pacifist and revolutionary stripes. Calvin was aware of the particularly anarchic and bloody Anabaptist experience of the New Jerusalem in Münster.<sup>551</sup> He also knew of the predicament facing French followers of the Reformation movement who were being mistaken for Anabaptists. Hence, one of Calvin's chief concerns in his prefatory address to King Francis was to defend his brethren against the charge of anarchy and sedition, and thereby help alleviate their persecution.<sup>552</sup> Calvin also had to deal with Anabaptists in his own backyard in Geneva.<sup>553</sup>

Both Roman Catholic legalism and Anabaptist antinomianism were prominent concerns for Calvin as he sought to guard Christian freedom and the Christian life at large from spiritual bondage and the temptation of civil insurrection.<sup>554</sup> Calvin set forth his doctrine of two kingdoms as a corrective to the extremes of the Romanist hijacking and Anabaptist abandoning or overturning of the state.

It is with these important additional contextual factors in mind that I now turn to Calvin's theological formulation on how the church should relate to the state.

#### 4.4. Calvin on church and state: living in God's two kingdoms

Calvin's theological reflection on how the church and state should relate developed over time until it found its most mature expression in the later period of his life in his 1559 edition of

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<sup>551</sup> See Selderhuis, *The Calvin Handbook*, 146-48.

<sup>552</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1536 Edition*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (London: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1975), Dedicatory Epistle. For more on the nature and influence of the Anabaptist movement during Calvin's time, see Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, 98-99.; Biéler, Dommen, and Greig, *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought*, 66-68, 104-05.

<sup>553</sup> See Biéler, Dommen, and Greig, *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought*, 104-05.

<sup>554</sup> See Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 43.

the *Institutes of Christian Religion*. To provide a sense of its development, I will give particular attention to his commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia*, the 1536 edition of the *Institutes*, a selection of his theological treatises, as well as pertinent portions of his commentaries on Scripture.

#### 4.4.1. Calvin's commentary on *De Clementia*

Calvin's first scholarly publication was a commentary on *De Clementia* (On Clemency), a work by Seneca (4 BCE-65 CE). First published on April 4, 1532, Calvin hoped that the commentary would help establish him as a humanist scholar.<sup>555</sup> Seneca was a Roman statesman, a Stoic philosopher, and a leading spokesperson in humanist discourse on good government. The church fathers, particularly Augustine, frequently cite Seneca for support. He was also involved in the education of Nero, and through his *De Clementia* he sought to direct the Emperor towards a more equitable rule. While Calvin does not give an explanation for why he chose this work of Seneca's in particular, Wulfert de Greef suggests possibilities that include his attraction to its noble Stoicism<sup>556</sup> as well as being impressed by Seneca's ethical appeal to Emperor Nero to show clemency to the heretics in Rome.<sup>557</sup> Ford Lewis Battles expands on this latter possibility by positing that Calvin saw in a commentary on *De Clementia* an opportunity to influence Francis I on the right way to rule: an equitable balance between the extremes of licentious laxity and overbearing severity. This possibility is more plausible when considered in the light of the apologetic nature of Calvin's 1536 *Institutes*. In other words, there is a likelihood that the *Seneca Commentary* reflects something of the strong moral impulse in the young Calvin as he struggled against the absolutist claims of his native France, thus forming his first apology to

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<sup>555</sup> It is likely he started writing his commentary during his year of study at Bourges, which was the year 1530; see Jean Calvin, Ford Lewis Battles, and Andre Malan Hugo, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, Renaissance Text Series. 3 (Leiden,: E. J. Brill, 1969), Introduction, 10. For further background on circumstances immediate to and surrounding the publication of Calvin's commentary on *De Clementia*, see Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, 71-76.

<sup>556</sup> According to Battles and André Hugo, Seneca was the best known and most widely read advocate of Stoicism. Stoicism itself was the noblest of all ethical systems derived from the great thinkers of Greek and Roman antiquity; see Calvin, Battles, and Hugo, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, 49-53.

<sup>557</sup> W. de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin : An Introductory Guide*, Expanded ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 65-67.; Gordon, *Calvin*, 61.

Francis I.<sup>558</sup> What can be said with some certainty is that Calvin was attracted to the moralising bent in Seneca, so indicative of his age.<sup>559</sup>

Seneca's *De Clementia* is divided into two parts and is his attempt, through a series of reflections, to advise Nero on the best employment of a prince's power and justice, so as to avoid tyranny. In keeping with his Stoic convictions, Seneca advises Nero to rise above his passions and rule with equity. Integral to equitable reign is the virtue of clemency, which belongs to rulers alone. For only they can temper the full rigor of the law, letting mercy dictate which course of action is best in each case.<sup>560</sup>

In his commentary, while Calvin lacks explicit evangelical religious teaching<sup>561</sup>, he uses his legal, philological, and philosophical skills to provide generally favorable interaction with Seneca's thought.<sup>562</sup> It gives "testimony of the social and civic thought of an author who put order very high on his scale of values."<sup>563</sup> Through this window into Calvin's early scholarly reflections, I will pay particular attention to the general contours of his political theory – not a full analysis, but enough to give a sense of its character at this stage of his development.

Calvin affirms the legitimacy of the state and its office of ruler.<sup>564</sup> As to the origin of the state, Calvin makes the comparison between the classical and Christian notion of princes as *God's* ministers. He quotes, for instance, Plutarch as saying, "Princes are God's ministers, for the welfare and care of men", and refers to Plato who, in Calvin's words, "makes God a sort of commander of the human race, assigning to each his station and military rank." He then goes on to quote Romans 13:1.<sup>565</sup> In other words, Calvin sees the office of magistrate as ordained by God, as well as every human station in this life.

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<sup>558</sup> See Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1536 Edition*, xxi-xxii.

<sup>559</sup> See Calvin, Battles, and Hugo, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, Introduction, 38.

<sup>560</sup> See Gordon, *Calvin*, 23-24.

<sup>561</sup> See Calvin, Battles, and Hugo, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, Introduction, 113.

<sup>562</sup> See Gordon, *Calvin*, 24-27., and Biéler, Dommen, and Greig, *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought*, 65.

<sup>563</sup> See Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, 74.

<sup>564</sup> Among other things, Calvin affirms the ruler's exalted office and his indispensability to the state, the institutions of Emperor and magistrate, and the army; see, e.g., Calvin, Battles, and Hugo, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, 6.23,34; 9.30; 28.22-24; 30.13; 37; 55.7-9; 93f; 125.4. For listing of references to Calvin's political and moral wisdom/commentary, and his treatment of Roman institutions, see ———, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, 113-17, 26.

<sup>565</sup> Calvin, Battles, and Hugo, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, 6.23f.

Calvin defines the state, with recourse to Aristotle's *Politics* via Cicero, as "a council or assembly of men associated by law," which is the only society that "lives by upright morals and fair laws".<sup>566</sup> The members of society and the state, according to the Stoic tradition, are "social animals" who are born into this world for the "public good". And here Calvin leverages the central thesis of Seneca's treatise by noting that: "clemency is a sort of bond of human society and kingship."<sup>567</sup> The virtue of clemency – gentle dealing and compassion – is "truly humaneness" and vital to the moral fabric of society, and especially so for the discharge of equitable rule.<sup>568</sup> Thus, Princes are to rule with clemency – the middle way between the extremes of severity and pity – as "fathers of their country", as "a sort of public guardians (sic)".<sup>569</sup> And in doing so the ruler has the right to coerce: it is his "duty to warn off with arms the violence that is imposed upon his subjects, using arms only for the protection of the peace."<sup>570</sup>

What then is the source of this law that the ruler must temper to the norm of equity in order to be a good governor of the state? According to Calvin, and basically put, it is natural law. Here he picks up on the idea borrowed by the Romans from Greek, and particularly Stoic philosophy, and eventually commonplace in Roman legal theory and Christian thought, of one law of divine origin underlying all legislation.<sup>571</sup> Even though he saw in Roman culture the signs of flawed humanity, like corruption and tyranny, Calvin could still affirm that at the foundation of the Roman legal system and its institutions was the presence of natural law: the basis for justice, clemency, and good governance. Instead of grounding Roman rule in Christian revelation, Calvin emphasised, "the order of law embedded in creation that makes all human laws possible."<sup>572</sup> A pertinent example of this is Calvin's comments on chapter XIX of *De*

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<sup>566</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>567</sup> Ibid., 28.22f.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid., 29-30; 37. See also ———, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, Introduction, 129.

<sup>569</sup> Calvin, Battles, and Hugo, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, 37; 146.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>571</sup> See Irena Backus, "Calvin's Concept of Natural and Roman Law," *Calvin Theological Journal* 38, no. 1 (2003): 8, 15-26., and Susan Elizabeth Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory : Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Durham, N.C.: Labyrinth Press, 1991), 73-74.

<sup>572</sup> See Gordon, *Calvin*, 27. According to Battles and Hugo, the commentary gives ample evidence of Calvin's assumption of a "broad common ground of human knowledge and experience and feeling between the Christian and pagan"; see Calvin, Battles, and Hugo, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, Introduction, 59.

*Clementia* where Seneca argues, “power need not be harmful if it is adjusted to Nature’s law.” Seneca then goes on to illustrate how bees and other creatures teach the idea of clement kingship. In commenting on this section, Calvin notes, “in bees nature has provided him [the king] with a pattern to which he should conform”, and calls the reader to heed the Stoics “who bid us follow nature as the best guide.”<sup>573</sup>

Calvin also affirms the witness of conscience as a testimony to this natural law: in helping rulers and subjects alike discern good from evil, clemency from severity. An instance of this is Calvin’s comments on chapter XV where Seneca contends that for the wise man it is sufficient that his own conscience approves that what he does is right. Here Calvin concurs with a quote from Cicero, but adds, with recourse to Augustine, that conscience must be joined by concern for the reputation of one’s neighbor.<sup>574</sup> Calvin also affirms the proverb, “conscience is a thousand witnesses.”<sup>575</sup> In addition, he quotes Cicero’s words, “Great is the power of conscience, great for bliss or for bane; it makes the innocent fearless, while it haunts the sinner with the ever-present vision of retribution.” Following this quote, Calvin adds that Seneca has “more in the same vein.”<sup>576</sup>

This abbreviated consideration of Calvin’s natural law thought in *De Clementia* serves to show that the concept is there in the early Calvin. The doctrine will receive more detailed and nuanced treatment as I trace the development of his broader thought on church-state relations. Suffice it to say, at this juncture in Calvin’s career he differentiates himself from medieval theories of natural law by establishing a “direct link among God, human conscience, and natural law.”<sup>577</sup>

In closing this treatment of Calvin’s commentary on *De Clementia*, it is worth noting that Calvin’s use of legal materials in particular reveals a deep concern for the public good, for

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<sup>573</sup> Calvin, Battles, and Hugo, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, 112-15; see also, e.g., 38; 41; 50. Gordon notes that with respect to legal content of the commentary, it is evident that Calvin’s specialised legal training comes through. What is more, his concern for the Roman legal concept of equity places him in line with the major jurists of his day. Among other things, Calvin also shows thoughtful appreciation of Seneca’s three uses of the law (see ———, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, 125.), the source of his later three-fold use of church discipline; see Gordon, *Calvin*, 26-27.

<sup>574</sup> Calvin, Battles, and Hugo, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, 103; cf. 29.; see ———, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, Introduction, 60-61.

<sup>575</sup> Calvin, Battles, and Hugo, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, 93.36f.

<sup>576</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.14-16.

<sup>577</sup> See Backus, "Calvin's Concept of Natural and Roman Law," 25.

individuals and the state. As Battles and Hugo put it, “Throughout the Commentary he is grappling with moral questions... and seeking after forms of social organisation and legal practice which insure a life of peace and virtue for the citizenry.” This was to be one of Calvin’s lifelong concerns, as evidenced in his prefatory letter to Francis I and final chapter of the *Institutes*, where he gives similar attention to the “nature of the kingly office and the rule of law.”<sup>578</sup> In substantive ways outlined above, such as Calvin’s affirmation of the God-ordained legitimacy of the state, natural law, and conscience (towards the end of equitable rule and the public good) his first scholarly contribution anticipates his later political thought in both the early and final editions of his *magnum opus*, the first edition, to which I now turn.

#### 4.4.2. The 1536 edition of the *Institutes*

During Calvin’s sojourn in Basle he completed his first edition of the *Institutes*, which featured a prefatory address to king Francis I dated August 23, 1535. This represents Calvin’s first major theological work as someone self-consciously supportive of the Reformed movement. It served a dual purpose. But initially it had only one, as Calvin explains in the first paragraph to the king, which was to “transmit certain rudiments by which those who are touched with any zeal for religion might be shaped to true godliness.”<sup>579</sup> In other words, Calvin’s initial intention was to meet the catechetical needs of his Christian brethren. However, once Calvin became aware of French evangelicals being labeled as anarchist Anabaptist rebels and being persecuted as a result, his work took on the role of apologetic defense to the king as well – so that he “may learn the nature of the doctrine against which those madmen burn with rage who today disturb your realm with sword and fire.”<sup>580</sup> Gordon reminds the reader that the 1536 edition should not be viewed as a comprehensive treatment of Christian religion, for this would be to confuse it with its later revised and expanded editions, but rather as a basic manual of sorts for Christian instruction.<sup>581</sup> The work betrays the telling influence of Melancthon, Bucer, and Zwingli, among others.<sup>582</sup>

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<sup>578</sup> Calvin, Battles, and Hugo, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, Introduction, 139.

<sup>579</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1536 Edition*, 1.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid. See also de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin*, 182-83.

<sup>581</sup> See Gordon, *Calvin*, 58.

<sup>582</sup> See Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, 137-68.

This earliest edition of Calvin's *Institutes* bears a close structural resemblance to Luther's Small Catechism of 1529, especially in its first four chapters. In these chapters Calvin covers the customary explanation of the law, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the sacraments.<sup>583</sup> He opens with a summation of the "whole of sacred doctrine", which consists of two parts: "knowledge of God and of ourselves."<sup>584</sup>

The apologetic thrust of the book can be found in the introductory letter to Francis and in the last two chapters: the penultimate on the five (false) sacraments and the last on Christian freedom, ecclesiastical power, and civil government. In his opening address to the king, Calvin is respectful of the monarchy and avoids assigning Francis guilt for the disturbing events in the kingdom. Nevertheless, Calvin pleads with the king to stop the persecutions of evangelicals. Gordon suggests that here Calvin has assumed the role of Seneca and Francis has become his Nero.<sup>585</sup>

Before dedicating the bulk of my attention to Chapter 6, I want to highlight comments Calvin makes in Chapter 2 regarding religious toleration. Calvin's remarks are found in the fourth part of this his chapter on faith, and under the heading of the church, and in the context of the practice of excommunication. According to Calvin, those who have been stripped of the rights and benefits of church membership through excommunication should not be ignored and forgotten, but rather the church "ought nevertheless to strive by whatever means we can, whether by exhortation and teaching or by mercy and gentleness, or by our own prayers to God, that they may turn to a more virtuous life and may return to the society and unity of the church." He then goes on to prescribe similar to treatment to nonbelievers.

And not only those are to be so treated, but also Turks and Saracens, and other enemies of religion. Far be it from us to approve those methods by which many until now have tried to force them to our faith, then they forbid the use of fire and water and the common elements, when they deny them all offices of humanity, when they pursue them with sword and arms.<sup>586</sup>

Like the early Luther, the early Calvin appears to expressly reject the use of force and violence in persuading delinquent Christians to repent as well as converting nonbelievers. By so doing,

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<sup>583</sup> See de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin*, 185.

<sup>584</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1536 Edition*, 1.1.

<sup>585</sup> See Gordon, *Calvin*, 58., and John Witte Jr., "Moderate Religious Liberty in the Theology of John Calvin," *Calvin Theological Journal* 31 (1996): 372, fn 66.

<sup>586</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1536 Edition*, 2.28.

Calvin shows respect for the liberty of conscience of unbelievers, and for the distinction between the two kingdoms to which I now turn.

It is with both catechetical and apologetic purpose that Calvin seeks to outline the authority and jurisdiction of church and civil powers in Chapter 6.<sup>587</sup> However, he begins the chapter by addressing the foundational doctrine of Christian freedom, and with the extremes of both Anabaptist liberalism and Roman Catholic legalism in mind. According to Calvin, it consists of three parts: a conscience assured of justification before God *without* regard for the law<sup>588</sup>, voluntary obedience to the law by a conscience free from the yoke of the law, and a freedom to use or not use those things external which are morally indifferent. He notes that Christian freedom is in every respect a “spiritual thing”.<sup>589</sup> Calvin goes on to argue that a proper understanding of Christian freedom does not permit licentious behavior or disregard for earthly authority. With respect to the occasion for the latter problem, he writes, “For immediately a word is uttered concerning the abrogating of human constitutions, huge troubles are stirred up, partly by the seditious, partly by slanderers – as if all human obedience were at the same time removed and cast down.”<sup>590</sup> And so as to avoid misunderstanding, and so that “none of us may stumble on the stone” of Christian liberty by misusing it, Calvin turns immediately to the notion of the “twofold government in man”. He goes on to explain:

[O]ne aspect is *spiritual*, whereby the conscience is instructed in piety and in reverencing God; the second is *political*, whereby man is educated for the duties of humanity and civil life that must be maintained among men. These are usually called the “*spiritual*” and “*temporal*” jurisdiction (not improper terms) by which is meant that the former sort of government pertains to the *life of the soul*, while the latter has to do with the concerns of the *present life* – not only with food and clothing but with laying down laws whereby man may live his life among other men honorably, and temperately. For the former resides in the *mind* within, while the latter regulates only *outward* behavior. The one we may call the *spiritual kingdom*, the other, the *political kingdom*. Now these two, as we have divided them, must be examined separately; and while one is being treated, we must

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<sup>587</sup> Calvin makes other remarks on ecclesiology in chapters two and three.

<sup>588</sup> Calvin’s reference here to “law” is that engraved on the heart and conscience of all men, rewritten on the pages of Scripture, and summarised in the Ten Commandments. It sets forth God’s requirements of moral obedience from man, the demands of which no mortal sinner can keep, and to which his conscience amply testifies. However, through grace, God sets the terrified conscience free from the curses and condemnation of the law and gives the sinner (Christian) freedom in his spiritual kingdom; see Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1536 Edition*, 1.4, 7, 33; 6.2-3.

<sup>589</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.1-5.

<sup>590</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.12.

call away and turn aside the mind from thinking about the other. There are in man, so to speak, *two worlds*, over which *different kings* and *different laws* have authority.<sup>591</sup>

It is with this Luther-like two kingdoms framework<sup>592</sup> in mind that Calvin now turns to his treatment of ecclesiastical power and civil government.

In his opening words under the heading of “ecclesiastical power”, Calvin explicitly coordinates Christian freedom with the spiritual kingdom *only*. Accordingly, the governance of the spiritual kingdom is of a different kind to that of the civil kingdom. Hence, the Christian should have “no contention against the political order of laws and lawgivers”. Here Calvin relates the earthly kingdom with the state, which promulgates laws to govern another kind of liberty, of which Christians are also partakers.<sup>593</sup> In contrast to the civil kingdom, with its multi-institutional expression, Calvin gives institutional expression to the spiritual kingdom in the church alone – “the church is Christ’s Kingdom.”<sup>594</sup> Christ governs the church by his revealed Word. All ecclesiastical power and authority is derived from God’s Word. This Word ministered through Christ’s appointed church officers is the legal ground for Christian freedom. Therefore, Calvin argues that nothing – no human tradition, power, or invention – may bind the conscience of the believer with respect to faith and spiritual conduct but Scripture alone. The church may devise laws, however, though they do not bind the conscience with respect to salvation, for order in worship and public decency.<sup>595</sup>

Calvin then proceeds to the doctrine of civil government, but not before reminding the reader of the established idea of the “twofold government” of man. Having already dealt with the governance of the inner man in things pertaining to eternal life, he now turns to the other, pertaining “only to the establishment of civil justice and outward morality.” According to Calvin, the two should not be unwisely commingled, for they are of a “completely different nature.” He reasons, “whoever knows how to distinguish between body and soul, between this present fleeting life and that future eternal life, will without difficulty know that Christ’s spiritual Kingdom and the civil jurisdiction are things completely distinct.” Hence, Christian freedom

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<sup>591</sup> Ibid., 6.13., emphasis added.

<sup>592</sup> See also Ibid., 6.14, 35.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid., 6.14.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid., 6.20.

<sup>595</sup> Ibid., 6.14-34. See also ———, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1536 Edition*, 1.5-6.

should know its limits. The Christian is a member of two kingdoms, which are distinct but not at variance: “spiritual freedom can perfectly well exist along with civil bondage.” The spiritual kingdom is an eschatological one initiated in the Christian upon this earth. In contrast, civil government exists for this life only, “to form our social behavior to civic righteousness, to reconcile us with one another, and to promote and foster general peace and tranquility.” While the Christian is on a spiritual pilgrimage in this life, he nevertheless makes use of the benefits of the civil kingdom on his way.<sup>596</sup>

Calvin then goes on to speak of the function of civil government in general. He notes that its function goes well beyond ensuring that “men breathe, eat, drink, and are kept warm.” It also “prevents idolatry, sacrilege against God’s name, blasphemies against his truth, and other public offenses against religion from arising and spreading among the people; it prevents the public peace from being disturbed; it provides that each man may keep his property safe and intact; that men may carry on blameless intercourse among themselves. In short, it provides that a public manifestation of religion may exist among Christians, and that humanity be maintained among men.”<sup>597</sup> For Calvin to attribute to the civil kingdom responsibility thus far reserved for the spiritual kingdom is a point of tension and reason for pause. I will, however, allow this tension to remain for now and return to it later.

Calvin is not, however, content with generalities, so in the remainder of the section on civil government he breaks it down into its separate parts. For the sake of clarity, he asserts that there are three: the magistrate, the laws by which he governs, and the people who are governed by the laws and who render obedience to the magistrate. As to the office of magistrate, Calvin argues it is ordained by God and imbued with divine authority. Not only has God ordained the individual ruler, but he has also ordained the various forms of government found in the various kingdoms on earth. The nature of the office is described in the Word of God, and is concerned with the execution of justice: “commonwealths are maintained by reward and punishment.” The power of the office includes the wielding of the sword, as mandated by the Word of God, and is therefore not at odds with Christian calling. The prince is also lawful in gathering tributes and taxes from the people.<sup>598</sup>

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<sup>596</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1536 Edition*, 6.35-36.

<sup>597</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.37.

<sup>598</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.38-46.

The second part of civil government are the laws by which a “Christian state ought to be governed.” Calvin dismisses the system of Mosaic ceremonial and judicial laws as formative for the Christian commonwealth, since they were fulfilled in the coming of Christ. However, the underlying perpetual rule of love and equity animating these OT legal forms still remains, which is still God’s law. This law, which Calvin associates with the moral law, “is nothing else than a testimony of natural law and of that conscience which God has engraved upon men’s hearts.”<sup>599</sup> Thus, equity alone, because it is recorded in the natural law, “must be the goal and rule and limit of all laws.” Hence, every nation is free to institute laws profitable for it, as long as they are in keeping with this perpetual rule of love.<sup>600</sup> Thus, Calvin argues for civil laws based on the natural law underlying biblical injunctions to love God and one’s neighbor, but not on biblical laws per se.

The third part of civil government is the people, who are governed by the magistrate and render obedience to his laws. Calvin asserts, with recourse to Romans 13:4 and 1 Timothy 2:2, that the magistrate is a minister of God for the good of the people, so that Christians, protected from the injury of evil men, may live a quiet and peaceable life. The magistrate is a “holy gift of God.” And though Christians are called to endure slander and abuse at the hands of wicked men, this does not preclude them from “using the magistrate in preserving their own possessions, while maintaining friendliness toward their enemies; or zealous for public welfare, from demanding the punishment of a guilty and pestilent man, who, they know, can be changed only by death.” Love, again, must be the ultimate guide. When it comes to the duty of the people towards their magistrate, they should honor and revere him as God’s representative. Obedience to the ruler should be seen as obedience to God (cf. Romans 13:1-2). Calvin reasons, “the magistrate cannot be resisted without God being resisted”, even an evil one, who has been raised up by God “to punish the wickedness of the people” (he cites Nebuchadnezzar as an example). While Calvin seems to find no ground for a private individual to revolt against a despotic ruler, he does entertain the possibility of an inferior magistrate doing so. He ends his section on civil

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<sup>599</sup> Elsewhere, Calvin speaks of the witness of the natural law upon the human heart and conscience, which publishes God’s righteous demands upon the sinner, and renders him guilty; see *Ibid.*, 1.4.

<sup>600</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.47-49.

government, and the *Institutes*, with the qualifier: regardless of Christian station in this life, the authority of the magistrate must not go unheeded when it violates the Word of God.<sup>601</sup>

#### 4.4.3. *The Genevan Confession*

Calvin followed his first edition of the *Institutes* with his first publication in Geneva, *The Genevan Confession*. It is likely that he co-authored it with Farel, and the two men presented it to the Genevan magistrate on November 10, 1536. The document is a brief formula of doctrine intended for use by the church in Geneva, recently freed from Roman Catholic rule. It echoes the *Institutes* on ecclesiastical and civil authority. With respect to pastors discharging the ministry of the Word, the head of doctrine twenty of the *Confession* states: “we accord no other power or authority but to conduct, rule, and govern the people of God committed to them by the same Word, in which they have power to command, defend, promise, and warn, and without which they neither can nor ought to attempt anything.” As to magistrates, in head of doctrine twenty-one, the *Confession* affirms the goodness and God-ordained legitimacy of the office, as well as it being a “Christian vocation.” The magistrate has the authority and power to defend “the afflicted and innocent”, and correct and punish “the malice of the perverse”; in other words: “to promote welfare, peace and public good.” Its subjects cannot resist the ruler without resisting God. However, obedience should never contravene the Word of God.<sup>602</sup>

#### 4.4.4. *The Catechism of 1538*

To complete this subsection, which gives one a sense of Calvin’s early thought on church and state, I now briefly consider his first *Catechism* of 1538. Under head of doctrine thirty, Calvin outlines the spiritual nature and power of the pastors of the church. Their chief task is the public and private ministry of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments, which has eternal ramifications: either redemption or condemnation. The power entrusted to ministers is “wholly bounded by the ministry of the Word”, and includes the right of excommunication (see

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<sup>601</sup> Ibid., 6.50-56.

<sup>602</sup> “The Genevan Confession,” in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, ed. John T. McNeill John Ballie, Henry P. van Dusen (London: SCM Press LTD, 1954), 25-33.

head of doctrine thirty two). In making bold use of God’s Word, ministers “may compel all worldly power, glory, wisdom, and loftiness to fall down and worship his majesty. They are to build up Christ’s household and cast down Satan’s kingdom...” As for the office of magistrate, per head of doctrine thirty-three, it is a gift from God for the good of the people. The power of the magistracy is an ordination of God. As “ministers of God”, magistrates are to take great care “to keep the public form of religion uncorrupted, to form the people’s life by the best of laws, and publicly and privately to look after the welfare and tranquility of their realm.” And this can only be achieved by “justice and judgment.” The duty of subjects is to honor and obey their leader, even an evil one. To do otherwise is to resist God. However, there is one exception: “such obedience is never to lead us away from obedience to him, to whose decrees the commands of all kings ought to yield.”<sup>603</sup>

#### 4.4.5. *God’s two kingdoms in the 1559 edition of the Institutes*

John Calvin wrote for the benefit of the church throughout his life. This is evidenced by the five (Latin) editions of the *Institutes*, which culminated with his last and most mature edition in 1559. In his letter to the reader in the opening of the two-volume work, Calvin reflects on his accomplishment: “Although I did not regret the labor spent, I was never satisfied until the work had been arranged in the order now set forth. Now I trust that I have provided something that all of you will approve.”<sup>604</sup> In the light of Calvin’s own endorsement as well as the significance attributed by secondary sources, I now turn to the final edition of the *Institutes* as the most important compendium of his theological thought.<sup>605</sup> If Calvin had enduring doctrines of two

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<sup>603</sup> I. John Hesselink and Jean Calvin, *Calvin’s First Catechism : A Commentary : Featuring Ford Lewis Battles’ Translation of the 1538 Catechism*, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 35-38.

<sup>604</sup> Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Two vols., The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 2006), John Calvin to the Reader, 3.

<sup>605</sup> While I think that a comparison of the first and last Latin editions of the *Institutes* provide an adequate sense of Calvin’s theological development, it is worth mentioning Calvin’s 1541 French edition, which is also in English translation. Based on the 1539 Latin edition, this early French edition is, according to Elsie Anne McKee, unique in its pastoral and ‘homely’ address as he sought to encourage his fellow countrymen; see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1541 French Edition (the First English Version)*, trans. Elsie Anne McKee (2009), iii-vii. Like the 1536 and 1539 editions, this French edition shares substantive continuity with the later 1559 edition with respect to the subject of church-state relations. For instance, at the end of the section on Christian liberty, Calvin includes his summary of God’s two governments and two kingdoms. One also finds the two kingdoms further defined and juxtaposed in, among other places, the latter chapters on the power of the church and civil government. The fact that

kingdoms and natural law, informing how the church should relate to the state, I expect to find them here. In covering pertinent sections of the *Institutes*, I will note important points of continuity and discontinuity with the 1536 edition. In addition, I will draw attention to any points of internal theological inconsistency. And throughout, and when appropriate, I will make reference to Calvin's commentaries to corroborate my findings.

The final edition of the *Institutes* retains the dual purpose of the first edition. However, the purpose of instruction is now more specifically for preparing "candidates in sacred theology."<sup>606</sup> Calvin's prefatory address to King Francis I of France as a plea on behalf of his persecuted French brethren remains almost unchanged. The *Institutes* served as both instruction in and a defense of true religion.

In the *Institutes* Calvin addresses key elements of the two kingdoms most conspicuously in Books 2 through 4. In Book 2, Calvin describes the nature of the spiritual kingdom in his treatment of Christ's three-fold office as redeemer. In Book 3, Calvin takes up the spiritual kingdom of Christ again, but now in contrast to the civil kingdom, and in his treatment of Christian freedom. And finally, in Book 4, Calvin gives both kingdoms more detailed attention.

Calvin's treatment of Christian freedom in Book 3 seems a good launching point into his discussion of the two kingdoms. From there, I will toggle back and forth between Books 2 and 4. Like prior editions, Calvin sets up his discussion on ecclesiastical and civil government with the doctrine of Christian freedom, and in the final edition, in Book 3, chapter 19. He asserts that this doctrine is crucial to understanding the gospel and "is especially an appendage of justification."<sup>607</sup> He then breaks Christian freedom down into its three component parts. Having done so, he proceeds to show how Christian freedom relates to civil government. He argues that in salvation Christ has freed the Christian conscience from all human laws and powers. But this does not imply that human obedience is done away with, as some of his licentious (Anabaptist) opponents would like to think.<sup>608</sup>

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Calvin ends this French edition with a chapter on the Christian life, which is included earlier in the final 1559 edition, is indicative of the development of the *Institutes*, and the significance attributed to ecclesiastical and civil government; see Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1541 French Edition (the First English Version)*.

<sup>606</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, John Calvin to the reader, 4.

<sup>607</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.19.1.

<sup>608</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.19.2-14.

It is at this point, in *Institutes* 3.19.15, that Calvin turns to the idea of the “twofold government of man” to explain himself. In the important first paragraph of this section, Calvin uses the same words as the 1536 edition.<sup>609</sup> I extract three general sets of contrasting characteristics that Calvin refers to in order to help the reader understand how God governs man in two different ways in his two kingdoms. First, God’s governance of man is at once both “spiritual” and “political”, or *redemptive and non-redemptive*.<sup>610</sup> In the case of the former, “the conscience is instructed in piety and reverencing of God”, which includes the vital knowledge of freedom from the law for salvation. With respect to the latter, “man is educated for the duties of humanity and citizenship that must be maintained among men”, which entails obedience to civil laws. Hence, Calvin can speak of God’s governance of man extending over two jurisdictions: “spiritual” and “temporal” or two kingdoms: “spiritual” and “political”. A second set of contrasting characteristics that Calvin distinguishes under the two-fold government of man is the *spiritual* and *heavenly* nature of Christ’s kingdom and the *external* and *earthly* nature of the civil kingdom. “Spiritual government pertains to the life of the soul”, while temporal government “has to do with the concerns of the present life – not only with food and clothing but with laying down laws whereby a man may live his life among other men holily, honorably, and temperately.” The third set of characteristics is inferred, and will become more apparent with support from Book 4 in particular, and that is the institutional expression of the spiritual and civil kingdoms: the *church* in the case of the former and the *state* (though not exclusively) in the latter.<sup>611</sup>

Having divided the two kingdoms, Calvin goes on to distinguish them further. He insists that the two “must always be examined separately; and while one is being considered, we must call away and turn aside the mind from thinking about the other. There are in man, so to speak, two worlds, over which kings and different laws have authority.” With this distinction in mind, Calvin then addresses how Christian freedom ought to relate to civil government. He clarifies matters further with the words, “we are not to misapply to the political order the gospel teaching on spiritual freedom, as if Christians were less subject, as concerns outward government, to

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<sup>609</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.19.15.

<sup>610</sup> See the distinction between God the creator and God the redeemer in *Ibid.*, Books 1-2.

<sup>611</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.19.15. I have followed VanDrunen’s lead in deducing this three-fold set of contrasting characteristics from Calvin, although I use *Institutes* 3.19.15 as my main starting point. VanDrunen sees this as one place to start; see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 73-82.

human laws, because their consciences have been set free in God's sight; as if they were released from all bodily servitude because they are free according to the spirit." It is at this point that Calvin cues the reader that fuller treatment of spiritual and civil government lies ahead in Book 4.<sup>612</sup> I will now examine pertinent sections of Books 2 and 4 of the *Institutes*. In doing so, I will use the above three contrasting sets of characteristics deduced from *Institutes* 3.19.15 as an organising framework for elucidating Calvin's thinking on the doctrine of two kingdoms.

To begin with, I consider the redemptive character of the spiritual kingdom and non-redemptive character of the civil kingdom in more detail. In *Institutes* 3.19, especially section 15, Calvin has argued that Christian liberty belongs to life in the spiritual kingdom only. Calvin restates and elaborates on this argument in *Institutes* 4.10-11, and now in the context of Roman Catholic abuses.<sup>613</sup> When it comes to life in this kingdom – salvation in Christ and the due worship of God – the Christian conscience has been set free from the power of all human authority. The Word of God alone binds the conscience. Scripture governs the church and its members, and hence ministers may prescribe for worship only that which the Word prescribes, and not their own opinions. Calvin, however, adds the caveat that some human laws are necessary, where Scripture is silent, for the right ordering of church government and worship, but are not necessary for salvation.<sup>614</sup> But as Calvin has already established, Christian freedom has its limits. While it insists on liberty from human laws in the salvation of the soul, it does not obliterate obedience to civil authority in the political kingdom. For to do so would be to, in Calvin's words from *Institutes* 3.19.15, "misapply to the political order the gospel teaching on spiritual freedom."<sup>615</sup>

Calvin picks up this argument again in *Institutes* 4.20.1. He opens this section with reference to having already established that humankind is under a contrasting twofold government. He reminds the reader of the one kind of government that "resides in the soul or inner man and pertains to eternal life", and the other, "which pertains only to the establishment of civil justice and outward morality." He now deals with the latter in more detail under the heading "civil government", and in a way almost unchanged from the 1536 edition. Before

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<sup>612</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.19.15.

<sup>613</sup> See also *Ibid.*, 4.3-9.

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.10.27-32. See also VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 74.

<sup>615</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.19.15.

entering into the treatment of civil government proper, Calvin reiterates that the two kingdoms are of a “completely different nature”; they are “completely distinct”: like the “body” is to the “soul”, and “the present fleeting life” to “future eternal life.”<sup>616</sup> But this does not mean that the civil kingdom is out of bounds for the Christian. The two kingdoms are different, but not antithetical to one another.

In summary, the first set of contrasting (kingdom) characteristics portrays God as governing the Christian in two different but not antithetical ways. God’s governance of the Christian’s life in the spiritual kingdom, which Calvin coordinates with the church (see below), is dictated by Scripture and is concerned with things spiritual, inward, and eternal, and is made possible through the liberating redemption of Christ. God’s governance of the Christian life also, however, extends over the different but not antithetical civil kingdom, which is ruled by human laws and is concerned with things external and earthly, and made possible through the non-redemptive work of civil government. In other words, God governs his two kingdoms in two distinct ways: the one as redeemer, and the other as creator and providential sustainer but not redeemer.<sup>617</sup>

As to God’s governance of the spiritual kingdom as redeemer through his Son, Calvin gives further warrant in Book 2, and particularly in his treatment of Christ’s execution of his kingly office. After explaining God’s revelation of Christ in the law and the gospel, and the nature and office of Christ as mediator, Calvin enters into his discussion of Christ’s kingship in *Institutes* 2.15.3-5, with the opening words, “I come now to kingship. It would be pointless to speak of this without first warning my readers that it is spiritual in nature.”<sup>618</sup> For, through Christ’s kingship he “enriches his people with all things necessary for the eternal salvation of souls and fortifies them with courage to stand unconquerable against all the assaults of spiritual enemies...” “Such is the nature of his rule, that he shares with us all that he has received from the Father.”<sup>619</sup> “The Father has given all power to the Son that he may by the Son’s hand govern, nourish, and sustain us, keep us in his care, and help us.” And why did the Son “take the person of the mediator? He descended from the bosom of the Father and from incomprehensible

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<sup>616</sup> Ibid., 4.20.1.

<sup>617</sup> Compare this with Calvin’s distinction in the first two Books of the *Institutes*, where he delineates man’s knowledge of God the creator and maintainer of the world, and God the redeemer in Christ.

<sup>618</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.15.3.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid., 2.15.4.

glory that he might draw near to us.”<sup>620</sup> Such words help further confirm Calvin’s notion that God rules his spiritual kingdom, the church, as redeemer through the incarnate mediatorship of his Son, Jesus Christ.

How, then, does Calvin’s Christology account for God’s rule over the civil kingdom as creator and sustainer, which I have just argued for above? In short, God accomplishes this through his Eternal Son (*Logos*). Such a reading draws support, for one, from Calvin’s understanding of Christ’s role in creation. God created man in his image through his Son, the pre-incarnate Word, and put him under the law.<sup>621</sup> Had man obeyed God’s law, he would have earned life in the heavenly kingdom, and without the need of redemption through an incarnate Mediator.<sup>622</sup> However, even after man’s fall into sin and Christ’s incarnate condescension, Calvin does not restrict Christ’s work in the world to his incarnate nature as *redeemer*. In not doing so, Calvin repudiates the Lutheran doctrine of ubiquity in teaching that Christ’s divine nature can be omnipresent, while his body remains localised in heaven.<sup>623</sup> Such Christological categories enable Calvin to speak in terms of Christ’s rule over one kingdom as redemptive, and the other as non-redemptive. John Bolt, in engaging Calvin’s social thought, explains: “As mediator, the divine *Logos* is not limited to his incarnate form even after the incarnation. He was mediator of creation prior to his incarnation and as mediator continues to *sustain* creation independently of his mediatorial work as *reconciler* of creation in the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth.”<sup>624</sup> With this kind of Christology in view, I believe that such an interpretation of Calvin’s doctrine of two kingdoms avoids the charge of

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<sup>620</sup> Ibid., 2.15.5.

<sup>621</sup> See, e.g., Ibid., 1.13.7; 2.12.6.

<sup>622</sup> See, e.g., Calvin’s *Commentary* on Genesis 2:16-17 in John Calvin, "Commentary on Genesis, Vol. 1," Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.viii.i.html>.

<sup>623</sup> See, e.g., Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.16.4; 2.13.7; 4.14.17.

<sup>624</sup> John Bolt, "Church and World: A Trinitarian Perspective," *Calvin Theological Journal* 18, no. 1 (1983): 30. See also, VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 74-76. Similar points are developed in Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation*, Chapter 10. For a broader accounting of Calvin’s so-called *extra Calvinisticum*, see E. David Willis, *Calvin’s Catholic Christology: The Function of the So-Called Extra Calvinisticum in Calvin’s Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 1966). According to VanDrunen, Calvin laid the groundwork for the two mediatorships of the Son of God, over creation and redemption respectively, which became crucial to later Reformed formulations of the doctrine of two kingdoms – for example, in the age of orthodoxy, in the works Rutherford, Gillespie, and Turretin; see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 76, 176-82.

groundless “dualism” and “bifurcation”<sup>625</sup>, and instead provides a unified account of life, and a holistic rendering of God’s superintendence of the world.<sup>626</sup>

The second set of characteristics that I derive from Calvin’s description of the two kingdoms in *Institutes* 3.19.15 is the spiritual and heavenly character of Christ’s kingdom, in contrast to the external and earthly character of the civil kingdom. Yet again, Calvin’s distinction – between the “life of the soul” and matters concerning the “present life” – finds precedence in Book 2. In *Institutes* 2.2, where Calvin addresses the depraved plight of man, he sets forth “a distinction” between “earthly things” and “heavenly things.” With respect to the former, sinful man may to some degree flourish and progress, but not in the latter. Relevant to this portion of my thesis is Calvin’s argument that “earthly things” “do not pertain to God or his kingdom, to true justice, or to the blessedness of the future life,” but “to the present life and are, in a sense, confined within its bounds.” In other words, Calvin associates “earthly things” with the civil kingdom, which “includes government, household management, all mechanical skills, and the liberal arts.” While, in contrast, the “heavenly things” are concerned with “the pure knowledge of God, the nature of true righteousness, and the mysteries of the Heavenly Kingdom.” Here, Calvin associates “heavenly things” with the kingdom of Christ.<sup>627</sup> Calvin works out this distinction further in subsequent sections of the *Institutes*.

Calvin provides arguably the most vivid portrayal of the heavenly nature of Christ’s kingdom under the heading of Christ’s kingship towards the end of Book 2. He begins this section by affirming the spiritual nature of Christ’s kingship, and from this infers “its efficacy and benefit for us, as well as its whole force and eternity.” He then proceeds to expound the heavenly character of Christ’s kingdom in a series of faith-inspiring passages. In doing so, and while raising the eyes of the reader heavenward, Calvin works with the underlying metaphor of the Christian’s “pilgrim” status<sup>628</sup> in this present world. As to the heavenward gaze of the

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<sup>625</sup> An example of the “dualist” critique of such a reading of Calvin by a neo-Calvinist is Gordon J. Spykman, “Sphere-Sovereignty in Calvin and the Calvinist Tradition,” in *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. David E. Holwerda (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 189-94. I will engage other neo-Calvinists and their critiques more thoroughly in Chapter 6.

<sup>626</sup> Relative to the points in this paragraph, see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 75-76.

<sup>627</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.13.

<sup>628</sup> See *Ibid.*, 2.16.14; 3.2.4; 3.7.3; 3.10.1; 3.25.1-2; 4.20.2. Calvin describes this Christian life is an earthly pilgrimage, in an exile of pain and suffering, sustained by the hope of the resurrection, which will bring this wretched existence to an end; see ———, *Institutes*, 3.25.1-2., and Calvin’s *Commentary* on Matt. 25:34 in John Calvin, “Commentary on the Harmony of the Gospels, Vol. 3,” Christian Classics Ethereal Library,

Christian in the midst of this mortal life, Calvin writes: “For we see that whatever is earthly is of the world and of time, and is indeed fleeting. Therefore Christ, to lift our hope to heaven, declares that his “kingdom is not of this world” [John 18:36]. In short, when any one of us hears that Christ’s kingship is spiritual, aroused by this word let him attain to the hope of a better life; and since it is now protected by Christ’s hand, let him await the full fruit of this grace in the age to come.”<sup>629</sup> In *Institutes* 2.15.4, Calvin sharpens the heavenly nature of Christ’s kingdom by juxtaposing its pleasures with the pain of this present “pilgrim” life, with the words:

[It] is clear enough from the fact that, while we must fight throughout life under the cross, our condition is harsh and wretched. What, then, would it profit us to be gathered under the reign of the Heavenly King, unless beyond this earthly life we were certain of enjoying its benefits? For this reason we ought to know that the happiness promised to us in Christ does not consist in outward advantages – such as leading a joyous and peaceful life, having rich possessions, being safe from all harm, and abounding with delights such as flesh commonly longs after. No, our happiness belongs to the heavenly life! ... These words briefly teach us what Christ’s Kingdom confers upon us. For since it is not earthly or carnal and hence subject to corruption, but spiritual, it lifts us up even to eternal life.<sup>630</sup>

Calvin provides a summary of sorts with the words, “Christ’s kingdom lies in the Spirit, not in earthly pleasures or pomp. Hence we must forsake the world if we are to share in the Kingdom.”<sup>631</sup> The kingdom of Christ is otherworldly, and therefore has nothing to do with the civil realm, with its earthly laws and human conditions. Calvin affirms as much in *Institutes* 4.20.1, where he states, “it is a Jewish vanity to seek and enclose Christ’s Kingdom within the elements of this world”, and with recourse to the Apostle Paul, “it makes no difference what your condition among men may be or under what nation’s laws you live, since the Kingdom of Christ does not at all consist in these things.”<sup>632</sup>

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<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom33.ii.xxiii.html>. See also Calvin’s *Commentary* on Acts 3:21 in ———, “Commentary on Acts, Vol. 1,” Christian Classics Ethereal Library,

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom36.x.iii.html>. Calvin speaks of suffering as a defining mark of the Christian experience; see esp. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.8.1. See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 77.

<sup>629</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.15.3. On the spiritual nature of Christ’s kingdom, see also John Calvin, “Brief Instruction,” in *Treatises against the Anabaptists and against Libertines* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 86.; Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.7.3; 3.8.7; 3.9.1.; and Calvin’s *Commentary* on Titus 2:11-14 in John Calvin, “Commentary on Timothy, Titus, Philemon,” Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom43.v.iv.iii.html>.

<sup>630</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.15.4.

<sup>631</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.15.5.

<sup>632</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.20.1. See also ———, *Institutes*, 1.15.2; 3.9.1; 3.9.5; 3.6-10. For similar renderings of Calvin on the heavenly nature of Christ’s Kingdom, also at odds with much contemporary Reformed thought, see John Bolt, *Christian and Reformed Today* (Jordan Station, Ontario: Paideia, 1984), 135-41., and David E. Holwerda,

I now turn briefly to the earthly and external nature of the civil kingdom, which, to this point, has been described by way of negation in Calvin's treatment of Christ's heavenly kingdom. Calvin's remarks in *Institutes* 4.20 include, perhaps, his most clear and concise remarks on the subject. Here I highlight those things that Calvin believes the civil kingdom, especially as expressed in the institution of the state, should be concerned with. Generally speaking, civil kingdom is to care for "the establishment of civil justice and outward morality," "the body" and the "present fleeting life."<sup>633</sup> More specifically, the state should be concerned: "to adjust our life to the society of men, to form our social behavior to civil righteousness, to reconcile us with one another, and to promote general peace and tranquility"<sup>634</sup>; "that men breathe, eat, drink, and are kept warm... that honesty and modesty be preserved among men"<sup>635</sup>; "to provide for the common safety and peace of all."<sup>636</sup>

I now come to the third and final set of characteristics that, according to Calvin, defines the nature of the two kingdoms. They are the institutional expression of the kingdom of Christ in the church and the civil kingdom in the state (though, not exclusively). I said earlier that this is latent in Calvin's words concerning God's two governments and two kingdoms in *Institutes* 3.19.15. I now provide more explicit support from Books 2 and 4.

In *Institutes* 2.15, in the section on Christ's kingship, Calvin associates Christ's kingdom solely with the church.<sup>637</sup> In highlighting the Messianic nature of Psalm 89, Calvin remarks, "God surely promises here that through the hand of his Son he will be the eternal protector and defender of his church." In commenting on Isaiah 53, he writes, "whenever we hear of Christ as armed with eternal power, let us remember that the perpetuity of the church is secure in his protection." On Psalm 110:1, he concludes that "the devil, with all the resources of the world,

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"Eschatology and History: A Look at Calvin's Eschatological Vision," in *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. David E. Holwerda (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976). See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 76-78.

<sup>633</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.1.

<sup>634</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.20.2.

<sup>635</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.20.3.

<sup>636</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.20.9.

<sup>637</sup> Klaas Runia is an example of a neo-Calvinist reading that extends Calvin's conception of Christ's kingdom beyond the church. He writes, for instance, "The Kingdom of Christ (which is the present form of the kingdom of God) is much wider than the church. From the Word that is being preached in the church it extends to and penetrates into family life and into all aspects of society at large." See Klaas Runia, "The Kingdom of God in the Bible, in History, and Today," *European Journal of Theology* 1, no. 1 (1992): 40. See also VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 79.

can never destroy the church, founded as it is on the eternal throne of Christ.”<sup>638</sup> With reference to the New Testament, and Paul’s words in Philippians 2:9-11, Calvin observes, “In these words Paul also commends the order in the Kingdom of Christ as necessary for our present weakness. Thus Paul rightly infers: God will then of himself become the sole head of the church, since the duties of Christ in defending the church will have been accomplished.”<sup>639</sup> And elsewhere, and most emphatically, he sums up the church’s foundation upon the Word of God with, “the church is Christ’s Kingdom, and he reigns by his Word alone.”<sup>640</sup> Hence, while Calvin argues for the otherworldly nature of Christ’s kingdom and its independence from the civil realm, he does not gut it of institutional expression in this life. For, having coordinated the kingdom of Christ with the church, Calvin asserts that the *church* “is already initiating in us upon earth certain beginnings of the Heavenly Kingdom, and in this mortal and fleeting life affords certain forecast of an immortal and incorruptible blessedness.”<sup>641</sup> In other words, Christians participate partially in Christ’s kingdom as pilgrims on earth through the ministry of the institutional church, while they await its future consummate heavenly reality.

Until that final day, the Christian life intersects two different kingdoms. In contrast to the kingdom of Christ, Calvin attributes to the present expression of the civil kingdom a wider range of (non-ecclesiastical) institutions and activities. In his distinction between “earthly things” – pertaining to “the present life” and “confined within its bounds” – and “heavenly things”, he attributes to the former such things as “government, household management, all mechanical skills, and liberal arts.”<sup>642</sup> In Book 4 of the *Institutes*, following his treatment of the church, Calvin gives special attention to civil government – due to its influential and controversial nature – as one of the institutional expressions of the civil kingdom. In this book, Calvin uses the civil government as the main point of contrast with the church, and thereby an instrumental means of illuminating the distinctions between the two kingdoms. I now focus my attention on Calvin’s assignment of *jurisdiction and power* to each respective institution, and thereby shed further light on how he thinks they ought to relate to one another.

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<sup>638</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.15.3; cf. 2.15.4-5.

<sup>639</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.15.5.

<sup>640</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.2.4. See also Calvin’s *Commentary* on Micah 4:1-2, 6-7 in John Calvin, "Commentary on Jonah, Micah, Nahum," Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom28.iv.4.i.html>.

<sup>641</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.2.

<sup>642</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.2.13.

In his discussion of the church in *Institutes* 4.11, Calvin considers its jurisdiction, and in the context of Roman Catholic abuses. He writes: “the whole jurisdiction of the church pertains to the discipline of morals.” This “spiritual rule” over the church has been entrusted to pastors who exercise the “keys” to the kingdom of heaven.<sup>643</sup> Early in the chapter Calvin contrasts ecclesiastical and civil jurisdiction in no uncertain terms, noting, “how great a difference and unlikeness there is between ecclesiastical and civil power.” One defining difference is that “the church does not have the right of the sword to punish or compel, not the authority of force; not imprisonment, nor the other punishments which the magistrate commonly inflicts.”<sup>644</sup> The “spiritual power” of the church “must be completely separated from the right of the sword.”<sup>645</sup> “The church does not assume what is proper to the magistrate; nor can the magistrate execute what is carried out by the church.”<sup>646</sup> With reference to Matthew 18 and church discipline, Calvin asserts that it is not “fitting” for the “permanent order” of the church “to accuse to” the “temporary order” of the “magistrate those who do not obey our admonitions.”<sup>647</sup> In other words, the church has the power to punish through excommunication, but no right of civil coercion.<sup>648</sup> The church’s goal is repentance, not civil justice. Hence, for Calvin, the minister, who exercises ecclesiastical power derived from the authority of God’s Word, cannot exercise civil rule at the same time. So divergent are the respective jurisdictions of church and state, that one man cannot hold office in both.<sup>649</sup> And even if a Christian should become magistrate, Calvin still insists upon protecting the independence of ecclesiastical government and jurisdiction from civil government.<sup>650</sup> And yet, even though there be sharp disjunction between the two jurisdictions, Calvin still expects respectful submission of one to the other. For example, he writes concerning those emperors who became Christians and against the Roman Catholic

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<sup>643</sup> Ibid., 4.11.1.

<sup>644</sup> Ibid., 4.11.3.

<sup>645</sup> Ibid., 4.11.5.

<sup>646</sup> Ibid., 4.11.3.

<sup>647</sup> Ibid., 4.11.4.

<sup>648</sup> Ibid., 4.11.5.

<sup>649</sup> Ibid., 4.11.8-9.

<sup>650</sup> Ibid., 4.11.4.

practice of civil immunity, “For the magistrate, if he is godly, will not want to exempt himself from the common subjection of God’s children.”<sup>651</sup>

Calvin deals explicitly with the authority and power of civil government in *Institutes* 4.20. From the outset he is quick to point out the differences between the two forms of government, spiritual and civil, thereby reinforcing what he has said in prior chapters.<sup>652</sup> Seeing that this chapter in the 1559 edition enjoys a great deal of continuity with the 1536 edition, the latter having already been sketched above, I now highlight and elaborate on those aspects of Calvin’s thought most applicable to the interests of this thesis.

With respect to the office of magistrate, and over against his Anabaptist opponents in particular, Calvin is emphatic that it “is approved by and acceptable” to the Lord. It has come about by “divine providence and holy ordinance.” In the same section, he understands Paul to be saying “that power is an ordinance of God [Rom. 13:2], and that there are no powers except those ordained by God [Rom. 13:1]. Further, that princes are ministers of God, for those doing good unto praise; for those doing evil, avengers unto wrath [Rom. 13:3-4].”<sup>653</sup> It is with this divine calling in view, Calvin reasons, that civil magistrates should be faithful to their subjects. “[I]f they remember that they are vicars of God, they should watch with all care, earnestness, and diligence, to represent in themselves to men some image of divine providence, protection, goodness, benevolence, and justice.”<sup>654</sup> Calvin argues that whatever form government takes, it should protect the people from tyranny and anarchy by promoting its freedom. “[N]o kind of government is more happy than one where freedom is regulated with becoming moderation and is properly established on a durable basis... magistrates ought to apply themselves with the highest diligence to present the freedom (whose guardians they have been appointed) from being

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<sup>651</sup> Ibid.; cf. 4.11.15

<sup>652</sup> Ibid., 4.20.1-2.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid., 4.20.4. Here Calvin writes explicitly against his Anabaptist opponents who reject kings and civil authorities, and implicitly against Roman Catholic incursions into the civil sphere. For other references to the God-ordained legitimacy of the state, see, e.g., Calvin’s *Commentary* on Romans 13:1-6 in John Calvin, “Commentary on Romans,” Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom38.xvii.html>, and Calvin’s *Commentary* on 1 Timothy 2:1-2 in Calvin, “Commentary on Timothy, Titus, Philemon,” Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom43.iii.iv.i.html>. For a summary of Calvin’s view on the legitimacy of civil government, see Jeannine E. Olson, “Calvin and Social-Ethical Issues,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 173-74.

<sup>654</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.6.

in any respect diminished, far less violated.”<sup>655</sup> To this end, the magistrate has been entrusted with the sword to govern its jurisdiction with force. In justifying the coercive nature of civil government, Calvin finds warrant from the likes of Romans 13, and in so doing affirms the propriety of Christian calling to the office of magistrate.<sup>656</sup> To his opponents who would deny the Christian the right of civil force, particularly the right to wage war, because there is no New Testament “testimony or example”, Calvin argues that “there is no reason that bars magistrates from defending their subjects.” What is more, and in reasoning according to his doctrine of two kingdoms, Calvin asserts: “an express declaration of this matter is not to be sought in the writings of the apostles; for their purpose is not to fashion a civil government, but to establish the spiritual Kingdom of Christ.”<sup>657</sup> Hence emerges yet another contrast between the two kingdoms: coercion and non-coercion. What also becomes more apparent is that Calvin demands biblical warrant for everything that the church does, but does not impose such a demand on civil government.

Having addressed the office of the magistrate, its divine ordinance, nature, and extent of power, Calvin turns to those laws by which a civil government ought to be governed.<sup>658</sup> Here one finds his natural law thinking at work. To do justice to this important aspect of Calvin’s thought, which both reinforces and further elucidates his doctrine of two kingdoms, I dedicate a separate section below.

In the last section of his treatment of civil government and the *Institutes* as a whole, Calvin addresses the matter of Christian obedience to the magistrate, which is rooted in the doctrine of God’s providential care towards man. Calvin speaks of the duty of subjects in lofty terms. The Christian is to “think most honorably of” the magistrate’s “office, which they recognise as a jurisdiction bestowed by God, and on that account to esteem and reverence them as ministers and representatives of God.”<sup>659</sup> That Christians owe their obedience to God finds clear warrant from Scripture, quoting the likes of Rom. 13:1-2, Titus 3:1, and 1 Peter 2:13-14.

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<sup>655</sup> Ibid., 4.20.8.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid., 4.20.10; cf. 4.20.23. See also Calvin’s *Commentaries* on Romans 13:1-6; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; Titus 3:1; and 1 Peter 2:13-14 at the Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/commentaries.i.html>.

<sup>657</sup> Ibid., 4.20.12.; cf. 4.11.3.

<sup>658</sup> Ibid., 4.20.14-21.

<sup>659</sup> Ibid., 4.20.22.

From such passages, Calvin deduces that “the magistrate cannot be resisted without God being resisted at the same time.” As to this obedience, Calvin includes:

[T]he restraint which private citizens ought to bid themselves keep in public, that they may not deliberately intrude in public affairs, or pointlessly invade the magistrates office, or undertake anything at all politically. If anything in public ordinance requires amendment, let them not raise a tumult, or put their hands to the task – all of them ought to keep their hands bound in this respect – but let them commit the matter to the judgment of the magistrate, whose hand alone is free. I mean, let them not venture anything without a command. For then the ruler gives his command, private citizens receive public authority.<sup>660</sup>

Such is the kind of obedience that Calvin expects from Christians towards faithful magistrates. But, as Calvin argues in his next section, the same applies to unjust rulers.

Calvin acknowledges that in God’s providence there are occasions when the magistrate is patently not a “guardian of peace, protector of righteousness, and avenger of innocence”, and where there is no discernable “appearance of the image of God.”<sup>661</sup> Even in the case of such a disgraceful ruler, he is to be obeyed because he too derives his authority from God. For according to Calvin, good rulers are tokens of God’s “beneficence”, and wicked ones “have been raised up by him to punish the wickedness of the people”; and thus, all rulers – good and bad – “have been endowed with that holy majesty with which he [God] has invested lawful power.”<sup>662</sup> Magistrates, both righteous and wicked have been put into office by the providential hand of God, for his sovereign purpose and design.<sup>663</sup> It can be inferred from Calvin’s writings on divine providence elsewhere that hardship suffered by Christians, including life under wicked rule, fall within the purview of God’s plan: “either to instruct his people in patience, or to correct their wicked affections and tame their lust, or to subjugate them to self-denial, or to arouse them from

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<sup>660</sup> Ibid., 4.20.23. See also Calvin’s *Commentaries* on Romans 13:1,3 and 1 Peter 2:13 at the Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/commentaries.i.html>.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid., 4.20.24.

<sup>662</sup> Ibid., 4.20.25.

<sup>663</sup> See Ibid., 1.16-17. In reference to God even using the works of ungodly men, Calvin argues that that is so by divine “decree” and “command”; see ———, *Institutes*, 1.18.1. See also, Calvin’s *Commentaries* on Pss. 115:3 and 135:6 in John Calvin, “Commentary on the Psalms, Vols. 4-5,” Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/commentaries.i.html>.

sluggishness; again, to bring low the proud, to shatter the cunning of the impious and to overthrow their devices.”<sup>664</sup>

As regarding the responsibility of obedience to bad kings, Calvin goes on to provide Scriptural justification. Of the Old Testament passages he cites, Calvin pays special attention to the case of Nebuchadnezzar. Commenting on the words of Jeremiah in Jeremiah 27:5-8, 17, Calvin writes, “We see how much obedience the Lord willed to be paid to that abominable and cruel tyrant for no other reason than that he possessed the kingship. But it was by heavenly decree that he had been set upon the throne of the kingdom and assumed into kingly majesty, which it would be unlawful to violate.”<sup>665</sup> Calvin then makes direct application to his readers with the words, “Let us not doubt that we ought to serve him to whom it is evident that the kingdom has been given.” Having done so, he gives further instruction for Christian behavior under unjust rule from the prophet Jeremiah, who ministered to the people of Israel under Babylonian captivity.

In Jeremiah the prophet, there is also another command of the Lord by which he enjoins his people to seek the peace of Babylon, where they have been sent as captives, and to pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its peace will be their peace [Jer. 29:7]. Behold, the Israelites, divested of all their possessions, driven from their homes, led away into exile, and cast into pitiable bondage, are commanded to pray for the prosperity of their conqueror – not as we are commanded in other passages to pray for our persecutors [cf. Matt. 5:44], but in order that his kingdom may be preserved safe and peaceful, that under him they too may prosper.<sup>666</sup>

This is the kind of obedience and submission that Calvin expects from Christian pilgrims living in two kingdoms and between two ages.

For Christians “cruelly tormented under a savage prince”, Calvin encourages patience and warns against taking matters into one’s own hands. He writes, “Let us then also call this thought to mind, that it is not for us to remedy such evils; that only this remains, to implore the Lord’s help, in whose hand are the hearts of kings, and the changing of kingdoms [Proverbs.

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<sup>664</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.17.1. On this thread in Calvin’s thought, and in relation to unjust rule, William Stevenson observes, “While predestination can energise believers to live out what they understand to be God’s call in history, it can tempt them to do so in a posture almost headlong. But providence as nourishing care provided by and *through* existing institutions and circumstances (be they comfortable and uncomfortable) works to restrain fanatical manifestations of belief by reminding believers that God knows them better than they know themselves, and that he often hems them in by certain social, political, and cultural institutions, in order to restrain them for their own good”; see Olson, “Calvin and Social-Ethical Issues,” 181.

<sup>665</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.26-27.

<sup>666</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.20.28.

21:1 p.].<sup>667</sup> According to Calvin, Christians are expressly prohibited from despising and violating “the authority of magistrates.” “For, if the correction of unbridled despotism is the Lord’s to avenge, let us not at once think that is entrusted to us, to whom no command has been given except to obey and suffer. I am speaking all the while of private individuals.” Yet, while Calvin does not condone resistance from private persons, he does entertain the possibility of lesser magistrates “appointed” by the people “to restrain the willfulness of kings.” Here he cites examples of inferior magistrates among the ancient Spartans, Romans, and Athenians, elected for the express purpose of keeping superiors in check. Calvin reasons that “perhaps” the same course of action could apply “as things now are.” On this possible narrow exception to the general rule, he continues, “I am so far from forbidding them to withstand, in accordance with their duty, the fierce licentiousness of kings, that, if they wink at kings who violently fall upon and assault the lowly common folk, I declare that their dissimulation involves nefarious perfidy, because they dishonestly betray the freedom of the people, of which they know that they have been appointed protectors by God’s ordinance.”<sup>668</sup>

And yet, Calvin closes his *Institutes* on this subject with some concrete relief from oppression in the form of an important qualification. While Christians are constrained to obey the rulers that God has put in office over them, even wicked ones, “such obedience is never to lead us away from obedience to him.”<sup>669</sup> But again, this does not lead Calvin to condone insurrection or civil unrest, even when ultimate obedience to God leads to persecution and even exile. By the example of his own dedicatory epistle to King Francis on behalf of his persecuted brethren, Calvin seems to imply that respectful petition is one line of peaceful defence against a tyrannical government.<sup>670</sup>

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<sup>667</sup> Ibid., 4.20.29.

<sup>668</sup> Ibid., 4.20.31. Calvin’s reference to “open avengers” in the immediately preceding section may seem to be odds with his discussion on “lesser magistrates” here. But I think this tension is relieved when one considers that Calvin appears to reserve this form of resistance for scriptural figures only, hence his emphasis on Moses. Note also that Calvin specifies that these men were “sent by God’s lawful calling to carry out such acts” and “armed from heaven”; see ———, *Institutes*, 4.20.30. See also Olson, “Calvin and Social-Ethical Issues,” 185.

<sup>669</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.32. See also Calvin’s dedicatory address to “the inhabitants of France” in John Calvin, “Commentary on Daniel, Vol. 1,” Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom24.iv.html>. For a brief summation of Calvin’s view of political obedience and resistance, see Olson, “Calvin and Social-Ethical Issues,” 181-86.

<sup>670</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, Prefatory Epistle.

Overall, Calvin's stance on civil obedience and resistance is strikingly conservative. His closing lines in particular are in keeping with his prefatory address to King Francis where he seeks to vindicate himself and his evangelical brethren from the charge of civil insurrection: "We are, I suppose, contriving the overthrow of kingdoms – we, from whom not one seditious word was ever heard; we whose life when we lived under you was always acknowledged to be quiet and simple."<sup>671</sup> In sum, the sense I get from Calvin's words on civil disobedience is that he is quite plainly against Christians rebelling against ungodly institutions. But, if necessary, when conscience demands, ungodly rulers may be disobeyed through established legal and institutional channels.

With Calvin's final word from the final edition of his *Institutes of Christian Religion*, I come to the end of my attempt to determine Calvin's doctrine of two kingdoms thought through the three-fold set of contrasting characteristics derived from his concise summary of God's two governments in *Institutes* 3.19.15. Calvin shows a great deal of consistency in sharply distinguishing between the two kingdoms. And yet, as I have argued, Calvin's dualism does not lead to an unwarranted fracturing of Christ's Lordship or a splintering of the Christian life. He avoids these pitfalls by the doctrine of God's dual Kingly reign in Christ, in which he rules as both creator (and sustainer) and redeemer through his Son. In doing so, Calvin provides a robust account of life in two kingdoms ordained and overseen by God, wherein Christians may justifiably execute responsibilities in both.

However, Calvin's rendition of the two kingdoms is not entirely free from the accusation of internal theological tension and even inconsistency, as hinted above. Calvin seems most susceptible in this regard in his handling of the institutional expression of the two kingdoms – i.e. church and state. While Calvin is adamant in so many places to maintain the sharp independence of ecclesiastical government and jurisdiction from the state, there are nevertheless places in Calvin's writings where he appears to go beyond relating the two institutions on the level of mutual submission and respect alone (according to their respective competencies.)

Such apparent tension and possible inconsistency requires further examination. However, I postpone this analysis until after a closer inspection of how Calvin's theology of two kingdoms worked itself out in practice in Geneva. Any inconsistencies discovered here will help in either accentuating or mitigating any tensions at the internal theological level. What is more,

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<sup>671</sup> Ibid., Prefatory address, 8.

before looking at how Calvin related church and state in Geneva, I now dedicate space to a compressed overview of Calvin's thinking on natural law, as a source of further illumination of Calvin's thoughts on church and state and the promise of his two kingdoms doctrine.

#### 4.5. Calvin and natural law

Natural law is an important aspect of Calvin's social thought and helps in understanding his vision for church-state relations in general and two kingdoms in particular. More pointedly, Calvin's natural law thought serves to reinforce his doctrine of two kingdoms, and in fact, makes little sense without it. The limits of this thesis, however, prohibit an in-depth examination and analysis of Calvin in this regard. I therefore restrict myself to locating Calvin's natural law thought in the broader medieval and Reformation traditions, and to set forth its general theological contours. Accordingly, I arrive at three conclusions that are relevant to the purposes of this thesis. First, Calvin's natural law thinking places him in continuity with his medieval and Reformation predecessors, most notably Luther. Secondly, natural law was an important part of Calvin's legal and political thought. And third, Calvin's doctrine of two kingdoms is a significant hermeneutical key to harmonising Calvin's seemingly discordant remarks at times regarding natural law.

Compared with the relatively lean amount of scholarship dedicated to his two kingdoms thought, Calvin's treatment of natural law has generated considerably more attention in the last century.<sup>672</sup> William Klempa has observed the divide in the past twentieth century among Calvin scholars and their interpretation of Calvin's appeal to natural law.<sup>673</sup> Stephen Grabill notes that

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<sup>672</sup> See William Klempa, "John Calvin on Natural Law," in *John Calvin and the Church: A Prism of Reform*, ed. Timothy George (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), 72-76. See also Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law*, Introduction, Chapter 1.

<sup>673</sup> Klempa, "John Calvin on Natural Law," 72-76. See also, I. John Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Allison Park, Pa.: Pickwick Publications, 1992), 57-60. Other recent important contributions to the understanding of Calvin and natural law include, Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*.; Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law*.; Guenther H. Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics*, Editions Sr (Waterloo, Ont., Canada: Published for the Canadian Corp. for Studies in Religion by Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997).; Paul Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), ch.12.; Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law*, Chapter 3.; Backus, "Calvin's Concept of Natural and Roman Law," 7-26.; VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 93-118. See also Günther Haas, "Ethics and Church Discipline," in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. H. J. Selderhuis (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 335-40., and Susan E. Schreiner, "Creation and Providence," in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. H. J. Selderhuis (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 267-75.

much of the recent concern over Calvin's natural knowledge of God has been a footnote to the 1934 debate between Karl Barth and Emil Brunner over natural theology.<sup>674</sup> On the one side of the divide are those who have considered Calvin's use of natural law as peripheral and unimportant, and if not inconsistent<sup>675</sup> with his broader theology. Advocates of this reading typically argue for discontinuity between Calvin and the natural law thinking of both his medieval (particularly Thomistic) predecessors and Reformed scholastic successors.<sup>676</sup> On the other side are those who see natural law as integral to Calvin's legal and socio-political ideas, and who find continuity between medieval, Reformation and Protestant scholastic natural law thought.<sup>677</sup>

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<sup>674</sup> Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law*, 21.

<sup>675</sup> A conspicuous neo-orthodox example of this reading of Calvin is James Torrance, who believed that Barth followed through more consistently on Calvin's foundational insight that all theology, and all knowledge of God, must come through Christ, and thereby rightly rid Reformed theology of natural law; see James Torrance, "Interpreting the Word by the Light of Christ or the Light of Nature? Calvin, Calvinism, and Barth," in *Calviniana: Ideas and Influence of Jean Calvin*, ed. Robert V. Schnucker (Kirksville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1988), 256-57.; and Karl Barth, "'No'," in *Natural Theology* (London: Geoffrey Bliss: Centenary, 1946), 99-103. David VanDrunen, "The Context of Natural Law: John Calvin's Doctrine of Two Kingdoms," *Journal of Church and State* 46, no. 3 (Sum 2004): 509-10, fn.18., notes that recent scholarship has generally discredited the neo-orthodox reading of Calvin, as well as its readiness to dismiss Calvin's natural law thought more specifically; see, e.g., Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, vii-viii and throughout.; Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 78.

<sup>676</sup> See Klempa, "John Calvin on Natural Law," 72-76.; Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law*, 1-20.; and VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 94. Arguably the most prominent promoter of such views is Karl Barth; see Barth, "'No'," 67-128. Before Barth, German scholar August Lang made a similar case in August Lang, "The Reformation and Natural Law," in *Calvin and the Reformation: Four Studies* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1909), 56-98. Barth's interpretation had been followed more recently by Torrance, "Interpreting the Word by the Light of Christ or the Light of Nature? Calvin, Calvinism, and Barth," 256-57. See also, T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction to His Thought*, 1st American ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), Part 1.; Edward A. Dowey, "The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology" (Thesis, Columbia University Press, Zürich., 1952). For further discussion on Barth and his displacement of natural law in contemporary protestant theology in general, see Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law*, Chapter 1.

<sup>677</sup> See Klempa, "John Calvin on Natural Law," 72-76.; Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law*, 1-20.; and VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 94-95. Among prominent proponents holding to such views, see Emil Brunner, "Nature and Grace," in *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace"* (London: G. Bles: The Centenary Press, 1946), 15-64. Shortly after Brunner's essay, John T. McNeill argued relentlessly in support of continuity between Calvin and his medieval predecessors on natural law in John T. McNeill, "Natural Law in the Teaching of the Reformers," *Journal of Religion* 26 (1946): 168-82. For those generally supportive of McNeill's claims, even if more cautiously, see Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, 39.; Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 2-3, 77.; Susan E. Schreiner, "Calvin's Use of Natural Law," in *A Preserving Grace: Protestants, Catholics, and Natural Law*, ed. Michael Cromartie (Washington, D.C.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Ethics and Public Policy Center; W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1997), 54-55, 73.; Paul Helm, "Calvin and Natural Law," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 2 (1984): 9-12.; Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, ch.12.; Backus, "Calvin's Concept of Natural and Roman Law," 11-12.; Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law*, Chapter 3.; and C. Scott Pryor, "God's Bridle: John Calvin's Application of Natural Law," *Journal of Law and Religion* 22, no. 1 (2006-2007): 225-54. See also Schreiner, "Creation and Providence," 267-75.; Gordon, *Calvin*, 118.; and Christoph Strohm, "The Law and Canon Law," in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. H. J. Selderhuis (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 404-07. Among those

To a degree, the sharp divergence of opinion seems perfectly understandable when one considers how Calvin can at once speak of the promise and impotence of the natural knowledge of God. There are important places in Calvin's writings where he speaks very positively about the uses of natural law; as being responsible for many laudable social and cultural accomplishments, not least of which are the promotion of a degree of law and order in society. Nevertheless, there are other places when he is emphatic that the natural knowledge of God is impotent because of the corruptive effects of sin. For Calvin, natural law taken on its own is an agent of condemnation; hence, the necessity of the addition of special revelation for salvation and for good works to be acceptable to God. In light of these seemingly discordant strands in Calvin regarding natural law, it is little wonder then that there is historical division among his interpreters: some siding with Calvin's comments on its impotence, and others its promise.<sup>678</sup>

Contrary to claims on one side of the divide, namely twentieth-century neo-orthodoxy, there is strong evidence suggesting that Calvin assimilated major tenets of the natural law tradition bequeathed by the middle ages and Martin Luther.<sup>679</sup> I make some of these more important connections in my treatment of Calvin below. Not only was Calvin influenced by a prior tradition, but he also joined other Reformers, like Luther, in shaping the natural law legacy

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scholars who have offered mediating views on the debate, such as Klempa, "John Calvin on Natural Law." See also R.S. Clark, "Calvin and the *Lex Naturalis*," *Stulos* 6, no. May-November (1998): 1-22.

<sup>678</sup> On this point in general, see Klempa, "John Calvin on Natural Law," 84.

<sup>679</sup> This assumes the generally accepted idea that the Thomist tradition was favorable to natural law. In making the case for locating Calvin in the historic natural law tradition, see McNeill, "Natural Law in the Teaching of the Reformers," 168-82.; Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law*, Chapters 1-3.; VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 93-99.; and ———, "The Context of Natural Law," 506-08. Some scholars hostile to a favorable natural law reading of Calvin have argued that he belonged to the *via moderna* (associated with nominalism and voluntarism) school of medieval theology. VanDrunen, however, disputes classifying the nominalist tradition as hostile to natural law by pointing out that leading nominalist figures, including William of Ockham, acknowledged the existence of natural law and even assigned it a positive role in ethics and civil law. What is more, VanDrunen also observes the extreme difficulty in connecting Calvin with one of the medieval *viae*: Calvin's training under nominalist, John Major, remains unproven; he lacked extensive training in medieval scholastic thought as a young student; and the sources of his later exposure medieval to scholastic theology are unclear; see ———, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 21-66, 96-97. In support of these assertions, VanDrunen cites, e.g., Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography*, trans. M. Wallace McDonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 20.; Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, 60-61, 133, ch.16.; Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, 12-13, 41, 44-45. See also Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law*, 72. For further bibliographic material in support of these conclusions, see VanDrunen, "The Context of Natural Law," 506-07, fn.8-10.

of Reformed orthodoxy. One also finds in a study of Calvin's contemporaries evidence of robust natural law thinking.<sup>680</sup>

Having located him generally within the stream of the natural law tradition, I now turn to a more detailed exploration of Calvin and natural law. While Calvin never wrote a systematic treatise on natural law, there is a good deal of evidence for the conclusion that he did indeed dedicate a healthy amount of thought to natural law and recognised its historic theological pedigree. In many respects, natural law thinking was part of the fabric of his intellectual development. He would have encountered it as standard catholic orthodoxy in the various schools of medieval thought that he was exposed to. In addition, and more pointedly, Calvin's training as a lawyer would have afforded intimate interaction with natural law thinking. And this was heightened by the fact that Calvin studied under two of the leading legal scholars of his day, and in the atmosphere of the Renaissance and Humanist interest in exploring the sources of the Roman law tradition, which included natural law.<sup>681</sup> As for his broader context, Calvin received his legal training against the backdrop of the European *ius commune* (common law system), which was laced with natural law ideas.<sup>682</sup>

The fact that Calvin imbibed sources of natural thinking embedded in the context of his intellectual development is also evidenced by the fruit of his labors throughout his life.<sup>683</sup> For instance, Calvin's first book, a commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia*, reveals extensive interaction with legal themes, including references to natural law (see above).<sup>684</sup> From the first

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<sup>680</sup> See Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics*, 1-20, 70-191.; and VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, chap. 3-5. For a discussion on the recent renewed interest in the natural law tradition, see Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law*, 6-11.

<sup>681</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 97. For historical material on Calvin's legal studies, see Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography*, 20-23.; Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 58-62.; Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, ch.3. On the various important ways in which Calvin's legal studies influenced the development of his thought, see Backus, "Calvin's Concept of Natural and Roman Law."; Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics*, Chapter 1.; Calvin, Battles, and Hugo, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, "Introduction".

<sup>682</sup> See generally Kenneth Pennington, *The Prince and the Law, 1200-1600: Sovereignty and Rights in the Western Legal Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). On these points, see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 97-98.

<sup>683</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 97-98.

<sup>684</sup> Calvin, Battles, and Hugo, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*.

to the last edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin was consistent in grounding civil law in natural law.<sup>685</sup> In his biblical commentaries, arising out of his weekly preaching labors, Calvin makes copious use of the language of natural law.<sup>686</sup> Added to this and Calvin's other ministerial output, was his close involvement in drafting the civil constitutions for Geneva, all of which helped concretise natural law thinking in the life of the city.<sup>687</sup> Another strand of evidence worth mention is that while Calvin did at times speak polemically concerning natural law it was always in defense of the concept, and not against it.<sup>688</sup>

The above evidence lends itself strongly to the conclusion that Calvin was in fact shaped by a substantive natural law tradition, which bore significant fruit in both his theology and the contours of practical Genevan civil life. I now turn to a treatment of the main features of Calvin's natural law theology. What follows not only reinforces the argument that natural law was an integral part of Calvin's theology and practice, but also fortifies the claim that Calvin drew upon long-standing ideas about natural law, albeit with his own Reformed 'accent' on a catholic doctrine.

Foundational to Calvin's thinking about natural law is that he treated it as a species of the natural versus saving knowledge of God. To begin the *Institutes*, Calvin concerns himself with the knowledge of God as creator and how the knowledge of God and man are connected. Here Calvin distinguishes between the two-fold knowledge of God as creator and redeemer. With respect to the former, God has revealed much about himself in Scripture and nature. However, Calvin asserts that such knowledge, though accessible to all men, does not include saving

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<sup>685</sup> See Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1536 Edition*, 6.49.; ———, *Institutes*, 4.20.16. Irena Backus claims that Calvin's belief in natural law as the basis for civil law remained stable throughout his life; see Backus, "Calvin's Concept of Natural and Roman Law," 521.

<sup>686</sup> See Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law*, 52. See also Harro Höpfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 179-80., who argues that Calvin's recourse to natural law was neither occasional nor peripheral. Examples from the myriad of natural law references in Calvin's commentaries include, Calvin's *Commentaries* on Genesis 21:20, Exodus 20:12, Deut 5:17, 1 Cor 7:36-38, and Romans 2:14-16 in the Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/commentaries.i.html>.

<sup>687</sup> For further remarks on Calvin's role in shaping the civil life of Geneva with his natural law thinking, see comments by Don S. Browning, "Foreward," in *Sex, Marriage, and Family in John Calvin's Geneva*, ed. John Witte and Robert McCune Kingdon (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), xxii.

<sup>688</sup> The fact that Calvin did not polemicise against the natural law positions of Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and the magisterial Reformers is indicative of his general approbation and development of their views. For an example of Calvin's defence of natural law, see Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.15-16., where he defends natural law as the foundation for civil law over against those who sought to make the judicial system of Moses permanently binding.

knowledge of God as redeemer in Jesus Christ.<sup>689</sup> Nevertheless, for Calvin the natural world is still nothing less than a revelatory ‘theater’ of God’s glory.<sup>690</sup> In addition to the glories of the cosmos, Calvin was also enthralled with the insignia of Creator God upon the human person, in which he saw a world in miniature.<sup>691</sup>

Working with the baseline correlation between the natural knowledge of God and natural law, Calvin spoke like many of his theological predecessors, such as Luther, of God’s law written on the human heart by turning to Scripture, and especially Romans 2.<sup>692</sup> In his commentary on Romans 2:14-15, Calvin speaks of the natural “implanting” and “imprinting” of God’s law upon the human heart.<sup>693</sup> Calvin wrote in a similar vein in many places in the *Institutes*.<sup>694</sup> As to its contents, Calvin described this “inward law” “written, even engraved, upon the hearts of all” as consisting of and teaching the commands of the Decalogue.<sup>695</sup> In something of a summary statement of what has been said so far, Calvin writes, “the law of God which we call the moral law is nothing else than a testimony of the natural law and of that conscience which God has engraved on the minds of men.”<sup>696</sup>

The above quote introduces a further element that sheds light upon Calvin’s natural law thinking, which is the intimately related idea of conscience. Calvin brings the two ideas together in his commentary on Romans 2:14-15, where he defines conscience as those reasons that come to mind “by which we defend what is rightly done” and “those which accuse and reprove our

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<sup>689</sup> Ibid., 1.2.1. Calvin begins his treatment of the knowledge of God the redeemer in ———, *Institutes*, 2.6.

<sup>690</sup> See Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.1-3; 1.14.20; 1.15.3. See also Calvin’s *Commentary on Romans* 1:20-21 in ———, “Commentary on Romans.”

<sup>691</sup> Calvin located the image of God in both the soul and the body; see Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.1-2.; and Calvin’s *Commentary on Genesis* 1:26 in ———, “Commentary on Genesis, Vol. 1.” For Calvin’s view of the human person as a “microcosm”, see, e.g., Bouwsma, *John Calvin*, 78-80. For further comments on Calvin’s correlation between natural law and natural knowledge of God, see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 99.

<sup>692</sup> See McNeill, “Natural Law in the Teaching of the Reformers,” 168.; and Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas*, 371-72.

<sup>693</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on Romans* 2:14-15.

<sup>694</sup> Calvin writes, for instance, of “the sense of deity inscribed on the hearts of all”, “fixed deep within, as it were in the very marrow”; universal “reason and understanding” being “by nature implanted in men”; and the righteousness of the law being “engraved” upon the mind of man; see Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.3.1; 1.3.3; 1.4.4; 2.2.14; 2.2.22; 2.8.1; 4.20.16.

<sup>695</sup> Ibid., 2.8.1.

<sup>696</sup> Ibid., 4.20.16.

vices.”<sup>697</sup> Calvin covers similar ground in *Institutes* 2.2, where, with reference to Romans 2:14-15, he argues: “The purpose of the natural law, therefore, is to render man inexcusable.” Then in the next breath, he adds: “natural law is that apprehension of the conscience which distinguishes sufficiently between just and unjust, and which deprives men of the excuse of ignorance, while it proves them guilty by their own testimony.”<sup>698</sup> In other words and in summary, Calvin believed that conscience is that faculty engraved upon the human mind that apprehends the natural law imprinted upon the human heart and mind. In apprehending God’s law, summed up in the Decalogue, conscience distinguishes between right and wrong, and places man continually before the judgment seat of God.<sup>699</sup> For Calvin, natural law “served to define human moral nature.”<sup>700</sup>

Calvin’s conviction that God had engraved the natural law upon the hearts of all people, per Romans 2:14-15, placed him in general continuity with his theological predecessors.<sup>701</sup> Yet, Calvin’s views on the relationship between natural law and conscience distinguished him from his medieval inheritance.<sup>702</sup> For one, Calvin, in resembling Luther before him, spoke of conscience as having an immediate awareness of natural law and God’s judgment.<sup>703</sup> In connection with this insight, Calvin had no place for a hierarchy of natural law knowledge among the wise and unlearned.<sup>704</sup> He emphasises that even the most untutored folk cannot escape the wisdom of God disclosed in the universe and in the human body.<sup>705</sup> As to natural

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<sup>697</sup> Calvin’s *Commentary* on Romans 2:14-15 in ———, “Commentary on Romans.,” Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom38.vi.iv.html>.

<sup>698</sup> ———, *Institutes*, 2.2.22. See also ———, *Institutes*, 2.8.1; 4.20.16.

<sup>699</sup> Randall C. Zachman, *The Assurance of Faith: Conscience in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 99-101.

<sup>700</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 102.

<sup>701</sup> See Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, 371-72.

<sup>702</sup> See McNeill, “Natural Law in the Teaching of the Reformers,” 180.

<sup>703</sup> Thomas on the other hand, as illustrative of the medieval tradition (even those of the later nominalist persuasion), made the connection between natural law and conscience indirect: conscience moves from premises to conclusions. “The precepts of the Decalogue themselves are known only after (slight) reflection and other principles are known only by the wise after careful reflection”; see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 101. See also Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law*, 92-96.

<sup>704</sup> In contrast, Thomas believed that “when it comes to concrete moral decisions in life, the learned and the wise understand better than the ordinary person what is right and wrong”; see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 101.

<sup>705</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.2.

moral knowledge, Calvin stresses the leveling effect of natural law upon every human heart in holding all mankind responsible to God's judgment.<sup>706</sup> Calvin believed that all men are held accountable to specific moral obligations taught by natural law.<sup>707</sup>

Another point of continuity and discontinuity between Calvin and the past, particularly the Thomistic strands of the medieval tradition, centers on the relationship between natural law and God's own nature, which in turn serves to further illumine Calvin's thinking on natural law. Calvin shared with the Thomistic realist tradition, in many important respects, the concern to locate the substantive source of natural law in God's nature.<sup>708</sup> Yet, at the same time, Calvin differed from Thomas in being unwilling to use the concept of eternal law to explain this truth. But this should not overshadow the fact that both Calvin and Thomas affirmed God's providence in terms of his "disposing and directing everything to its proper end by incomprehensible wisdom."<sup>709</sup>

So far, I have sought to make the case for Calvin's positive affirmation of natural law. In part this serves as a critique of the thesis that Calvin was ignorant of the implications of, and if not hostile to, natural law. Calvin, nevertheless, did place limits upon the promise of natural law, depending on the context in which it was being used. Like Thomas and other medieval figures, Calvin believed that sin had seriously impoverished human use of reason, and hence the knowledge of God in nature needed the addition of supernatural revelation. However, Calvin went beyond medieval formulations and followed Luther's lead in stressing the Reformed conviction of the corruptive effects of sin and hence the necessity of supernatural revelation.<sup>710</sup>

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<sup>706</sup> Ibid., 2.8.1.

<sup>707</sup> Höpfl provides a strikingly detailed list of these obligations in Höpfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 179-80. VanDrunen observes that Calvin spoke of a far greater amount of specific moral knowledge accessible to all people compared to Thomas, the recognised champion of natural law; and this, ironically, by the Calvin of so-called hostility to natural law; see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 102.

<sup>708</sup> While Calvin can sound voluntarist at times in exalting God's will, he is nevertheless careful to coordinate it closely with God's general moral character. Calvin did not want to unhinge the divine will from the divine character. Like Thomas, Calvin believed that "natural law was in no way a reflection of the arbitrary will of God, but was instead rooted in the perfection of God's own mind and character"; see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 103-04.; and Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.23.2. See also, ———, *Institutes*, 1.17.2; 2.8.50-51. Among others interpreting Calvin in similar ways, see Helm, "Calvin and Natural Law," 10-11.; ———, *John Calvin's Ideas*, Chapters 11-12.; Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 33-35, 78.; and Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, ch.3.

<sup>709</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 104-05.

<sup>710</sup> Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law*, 69. See also VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 105.

As for the effects of man's fall into sin, Calvin speaks generally of the perversion of the "whole order of nature in heaven and on earth."<sup>711</sup> Calvin also makes abundant references to how sin has corrupted human nature: marring the image of God and distorting the quest for knowledge through reason.<sup>712</sup> As a result, Calvin insists that the natural knowledge of God is insufficient in leading man to true moral understanding and salvation. This is why God has revealed himself in his Word, containing his written law, which directs the way of piety and reconciliation.<sup>713</sup> With particular reference to natural law, Calvin writes: "man is so shrouded in the darkness of errors that he hardly begins to grasp through this natural law what worship is acceptable to God... Accordingly (because it is necessary both for our dullness and for our arrogance), the Lord has provided us with a written law to give us a clearer witness of what was too obscure in the natural law, [to] shake off our listlessness, and strike more vigorously our mind and memory."<sup>714</sup> In other words, special revelation is needed to bring clarity and understanding to the moral content of the natural law. But this does not mean that natural law has no independent positive *use* for Calvin, as is evident below.

It is with the above general characteristics of Calvin's natural law thinking in mind that I now turn to a more practical question very relevant to this thesis: How did Calvin relate natural law to laws prescribed by the state? To answer this question, I turn to *Institutes* 4.20.14-16 in particular, where Calvin is concerned with the laws by which the magistrate governs (the second part of his discussion on the subject of civil government).

In his examination of the constitution of civil laws, Calvin is concerned with the foundation of equity upon which it rests. He reasons that the concept of equity<sup>715</sup>, rooted in the

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<sup>711</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.1.5.

<sup>712</sup> Examples from the copious amount of primary material in Calvin on this subject in general, include *Ibid.*, 1.4.1-4; 1.5.11-15; 2.1-3.; Calvin's *Commentaries* on Romans 1:21-22, and 1 Corinthians 1:20-21 in the Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/commentaries.i.html>. With respect to man's condition before and after the fall, see ———, *Institutes*, 1.15.1; 1.15.8; 2.1.1; 2.1.6. And as for the marring of the image of God, see ———, *Institutes*, 1.15.4.

<sup>713</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.14; 1.6.1-4; 1.8.1.

<sup>714</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.8.1. It is also important to note that Calvin like Luther, but unlike Thomas, saw supernatural revelation in terms of ethical and not ontological necessity. In other words, the ethical problem of human sin rather than the limits of human nature (under the Thomistic nature-grace schema) is why supernatural revelation is necessary, and natural knowledge and natural law are insufficient; see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 106-07. See also Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, 371-73.

<sup>715</sup> Equity simply defined is that "perpetual rule of love" "from which all legal and moral obligations derive and to which they all point"; see Klempa, "John Calvin on Natural Law," 86.; and Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.15.

law of nature, “ought to apply to all laws, whatever their object.” In turn, behind and informing this scheme of equity is the moral law, which is “nothing else than the testimony of natural law.” Hence Calvin concludes that equity, and therefore natural law, “alone must be the goal and rule and limit of all laws.”<sup>716</sup> In other words, Calvin found in natural law the standard for contemporary civil law, and with this conviction found himself in the company of Luther as well as medieval figures such as Thomas, Scotus, and Ockham.<sup>717</sup>

Calvin is also in similar company in his assertion that civil law is a flexible derivation of natural law, depending on the discretion of human legislators.<sup>718</sup> In Calvin’s words: “Equity, because it is natural, cannot but be the same for all, and therefore, this same purpose ought to apply to all laws, whatever their object. Constitutions have certain circumstances upon which they in part depend. It therefore does not matter that they are different, provided all equally press toward the same goal of equity.” Calvin then goes on to give further approbation of this notion of diversity: “Whatever laws shall be framed to that rule, directed to that goal, bound by that limit, there is no reason why we should disapprove of them, howsoever they may differ from the Jewish law, or among themselves.”<sup>719</sup> Following these general remarks, Calvin gives concrete examples of how a diversity of legal sanctions may rightfully be imposed on the same crime, and how divergent circumstances necessitate different laws or punishments. He also considers “utterly vain” the idea that the judicial law of Moses is dishonored when it is replaced by other laws. Calvin explains: “For others are not preferred to it when they are more approved, not by simple comparison, but with regard to the condition of times, place, and nation; or when that law is abrogated which was never enacted for us.”<sup>720</sup>

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<sup>716</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.16. For further corroboration, albeit less explicit, of this notion of the justice of human civil law being grounded in the law of nature, see Calvin’s *Commentary on Romans 2:14-15* in ———, “Commentary on Romans,” Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom38.vi.iv.html>, where he speaks of those seeds of knowledge, justice, and rectitude implanted in man finding expression in laws devised by unbelievers against the likes of adultery, theft, and murder. On the close connection between equity and natural law in Calvin’s thought, see Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics*, 68-71.; Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, 363-67.; and Höpfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 179.

<sup>717</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 108.

<sup>718</sup> See *Ibid.*

<sup>719</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.16.

<sup>720</sup> *Ibid.*

On this note of Mosaic law, it is beneficial to make a few observations concerning how Calvin related it to natural law. Here, yet again, Calvin sounds very similar to his Reformation and medieval predecessors.<sup>721</sup> For one, Calvin supports the notion that the Mosaic law is comprised of moral, ceremonial, and judicial laws.<sup>722</sup> With respect to the moral law, he calls it that “true and eternal rule of righteousness, prescribed for men of all nations and times”, which is shortly thereafter equated with “nothing else than a testimony of natural law.”<sup>723</sup> And elsewhere in the *Institutes*, Calvin makes it clear that he believed the contents of the moral or natural law to be summarised in the Decalogue, and because they are engraved upon the hearts of all, also permanently binding.<sup>724</sup> In short, Calvin affirmed the substantive identity of the natural law, moral law, and the Decalogue, and each having ongoing binding significance.

As for the Mosaic judicial law, Calvin sounds much like Luther and others before him with respect to its role and nature.<sup>725</sup> Calvin saw in the judicial law, given to Israel for civil government, as imparting “certain formulas of equity and justice, by which they might live together blamelessly and peaceably.”<sup>726</sup> However, unlike the natural and moral law, Calvin did not believe that Old Testament judicial laws are either binding or obligatory for contemporary civil law. In one place where Calvin did polemicise about natural law, he defends the rule of it (“the common laws of nations”) against those arguing for a commonwealth constitution on the basis of the “political system of Moses”, which he considered “perilous and seditious” and “false and foolish.” Rather, as has been noted above, Calvin assigned each nation freedom in promulgating laws, as far as they deemed profitable for themselves and yet in keeping with the rule of love and equity. For the Lord “through the hand of Moses did not give that [Old Testament] law to be proclaimed among all nations and to be in force everywhere.”<sup>727</sup>

The final task that remains in this subsection is to defend my prior assertion that the contextual backdrop of Calvin’s two kingdoms doctrine provides the hermeneutical key in

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<sup>721</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 109.

<sup>722</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.15.

<sup>723</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.20.15-16.

<sup>724</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.8.1.

<sup>725</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 109.

<sup>726</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.15.

<sup>727</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.20.14-16.

bringing critical coherency to his so-called incongruent reflection on natural law.<sup>728</sup> Without the practical grounding of the two kingdoms doctrine, Calvin's natural law thought tends to float amidst abstract moral-epistemological problems: such as how can someone who affirms the dire condition of human sinfulness apart from redemption in Christ still attribute natural law positive uses for civil life even for pagans?<sup>729</sup> The contextual mooring of the two kingdoms doctrine enables one to see that Calvin had very practical purposes for natural law. Calvin assigned a significantly different role to natural law depending on which kingdom he had in view. He saw its positive and practical use in the civil kingdom as informing many laudable cultural accomplishments. In contrast and with respect to the spiritual kingdom, Calvin viewed natural law negatively in uncovering sin and rendering all mankind inexcusable before God. Thus, instead of being the product of intellectual inconsistency, Calvin's twofold evaluation of natural law enabled him to speak of it at once enabling pagans to produce good laws and other social goods in the civil kingdom, and yet impotent to produce any spiritual good in people toward the attainment of eternal life in the spiritual kingdom.<sup>730</sup>

One way in which Calvin's natural law thought is brought into sharper relief by means of the backdrop of his two kingdoms doctrine is in his treatment of how sinful people handle things "earthly" and "heavenly" in *Institutes* Book Two Chapter Two. Early on in this chapter, Calvin argues against the "philosophers" who would trust in the power of human reason for all things, including self-governance.<sup>731</sup> Yet, he follows this negative evaluation of fallen human reason with a positive appraisal of some of the great gifts and accomplishments displayed by many pagans. Calvin then proceeds to bring some resolution to his seeming ambivalence towards the promise of fallen human reason. He does so by agreeing with Augustine that while sin has stripped man of supernatural gifts altogether, it has not completely corrupted his natural endowments. With respect to the former, man is unable "to attain to heavenly life and eternal

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<sup>728</sup> This claim has already been made and defended recently by VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 110-14. In an earlier article, VanDrunen argues that Calvin's doctrine of two kingdoms is an overlooked category in Calvin scholarship, and should be engaged in making sense of Calvin's natural law thought; see ———, "The Context of Natural Law," 505, fn.7. Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, 380-82., is an example of someone else who sees the value of bringing Calvin's natural law thinking into conversation with his notion of two kingdoms – though he does not work out this connection to the same degree as VanDrunen.

<sup>729</sup> See VanDrunen, "The Context of Natural Law: John Calvin's Doctrine of Two Kingdoms," 519.

<sup>730</sup> See ———, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 110-11.

<sup>731</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.3-4.

bliss”, and is “banished from the Kingdom of God.” While in the case of the latter, man is not so wholly corrupted so as to be no different from a brute beast: “something of understanding and judgment remains as a residue along with the will.” Hence, Calvin comes to the conclusion, and in keeping with his positive statements regarding natural law, that reason “by which man distinguishes between good and evil, and by which he understands and judges” still remains to some degree intact.<sup>732</sup>

This illuminating juxtaposition of natural law and two kingdoms becomes more explicit and concrete when Calvin, shortly thereafter, introduces the distinction between those things “heavenly” and “earthly” (or superior and inferior).<sup>733</sup> With these categories, Calvin makes sharp distinctions similar, albeit from a slightly different angle, to those regarding the two kingdoms made in other places in the *Institutes* (see above). According to Calvin, “heavenly things” are concerned with the “pure knowledge of God, the nature of true righteousness, and the mysteries of the Heavenly Kingdom.” “Earthly things”, on the other hand, have nothing to do with this realm. They are concerned with the “present life and are, in a sense, confined within its bounds”; things such as “government, household management, all mechanical skills, and the liberal arts.” With respect to this latter civil kingdom, Calvin reasons according to the precepts of natural law:

[S]ince man is a by nature a social animal, he tends through natural instinct to foster and preserve society. Consequently, we observe that there exist in all men’s minds universal impressions of a certain civic fair dealing and order. Hence no man is to be found who does not understand that every sort of human organization must be regulated by laws, and who does not comprehend the principles of those laws. Hence, arises that unvarying consent of all nations and of individual mortals with regard to laws. For their seeds have, without teacher or lawgiver, been implanted in all men.<sup>734</sup>

Shortly thereafter, Calvin correlates his discussion with the concept of equity, and ends the section with, “Yet the fact remains that some seed of political order has been implanted in all

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<sup>732</sup> Ibid., 2.2.12. Later in the chapter, who Calvin speaks of natural human knowledge failing with respect to the First Table of the Decalogue, and yet men may “have somewhat more understanding of the precepts of the Second Table [Ex. 20:12.] because they are more closely concerned with the preservation of civil society among them”; see ———, *Institutes*, 2.2.24.

<sup>733</sup> See Klempa, “John Calvin on Natural Law,” 85., draws attention to the importance of Calvin’s distinction between earthly and heavenly things for understanding his natural law thought. VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 110-14., takes things further by making the connection between natural law, things earthly and heavenly, and two kingdoms.

<sup>734</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.13.

men.”<sup>735</sup> In subsequent sections, Calvin continues to laud the accomplishments of man with respect to “earthly things” – such as art and science – in the civil kingdom and according to the operations of natural law. At one point, he poses the rhetorical question: “Shall we deny that the truth shone upon the ancient jurists who established civic order and discipline with such great equity?” And in a concluding summary statement on the diverse workings of God’s spirit “for the common good of mankind”, Calvin remarks: “Still, we see in this diversity some remaining traces of the image of God, which distinguish the entire human race from other creatures.”<sup>736</sup>

While Calvin affirms that sinful human beings may attain great things on the basis of reason and natural knowledge, these accomplishments are limited to the domain of earthly things and the civil kingdom. For when it comes to knowledge of salvation and eternal life, concerning heavenly things and the kingdom of Christ, fallen man is “utterly blind and stupid.”<sup>737</sup> Accordingly, Calvin attributes natural law a positive role with respect to life in the earthly, civil kingdom, and a negative role in the spiritual kingdom, in convicting people of sin and leaving them without excuse.<sup>738</sup> Hence, for Calvin, the possibilities for human advancement and achievement could not differ more, depending on which domain or kingdom reason or natural law/knowledge is at work: earthly or heavenly, the civil kingdom or the kingdom of Christ. In a word, the distinction between things earthly and heavenly, echoing the two kingdoms, provides the practical context in which Calvin worked out his natural law thought.<sup>739</sup>

In addition to the two-kingdoms-like distinction between things “heavenly” and “earthly”, another contextual trigger that brings his natural law and two kingdoms doctrines into intimate relation is the way in which Calvin identified natural law as the basis for civil law in the earthly kingdom, as I have demonstrated in a previous subsection. Here again, one sees the practical import of Calvin’s natural law thinking in that he did not see natural law as an abstract

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<sup>735</sup> Ibid.

<sup>736</sup> Ibid., 2.2.14-17.

<sup>737</sup> Ibid., 2.2.18-20.

<sup>738</sup> Ibid., 2.2.22.

<sup>739</sup> On this connection, see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 113. Another place where the interplay between Calvin’s doctrines of natural law and two kingdoms is evident is in *Institutes* 4.20 in his treatment of natural law and civil government. What is clear here as well, is that Calvin did not believe that the civil kingdom can be governed solely or primarily on the basis of Scripture. While Calvin did use Old Testament examples of kings and events as instructive for contemporary civil law, he nevertheless acknowledged that behind all civil laws, including the Mosaic judicial laws found in Scripture, lay the natural law; see Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.

moral code, but found its traction in the laws of the civil kingdom. With his flexible correlation of natural law with civil law, Calvin excluded Scripture, the law of the spiritual kingdom, as the sole basis for legislation in the civil realm. He believed that no body of civil law, even the judicial system divinely revealed under Moses, could be permanent. What is permanent, however, is the love and equity found in the natural law, which is to be applied differently depending on the circumstances: finding concrete embodiment in individual lives and binding together communities.<sup>740</sup>

One final point relative to Calvin's doctrine of two kingdoms as a help in bringing coherency and plausibility to his natural law thinking, is his previously discussed distinction between the civil and spiritual kingdoms in terms of God's distinct two-fold reign in his Son. Add to this the already established fact that Calvin associated the implanting of natural law upon the human heart and its role in informing the ongoing testimony of conscience with God's creating and sustaining work. And the conclusion seems to follow quite seamlessly for Calvin that the standard for civil life found in the natural law is part of the creating, and *not* redeeming, work of God. In other words, because God governs the civil kingdom according to precepts of natural law, the mode of his rule cannot be redemptive, but creating and preserving only.<sup>741</sup>

With these words, I bring this subsection on Calvin and natural law to a close. In the preceding paragraphs, I have made the case for Calvin's substantive continuity with and development upon the medieval and Reformation natural law tradition, especially Luther.<sup>742</sup> I have shown from Calvin's life and work that he incorporated natural law into his legal and political thinking in significantly positive and consistently constructive ways, not least of which was his assigning it the basis for contemporary civil law. I also argued for the value of bringing Calvin's two kingdoms thought into conversation with his natural law reflections. Such a move provides critical help in showing that Calvin's negative remarks regarding natural law are only half the story. In arguing for a thoroughgoing Calvin of natural law, including room for both its

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<sup>740</sup> On this theme in Calvin, see VanDrunen, "The Context of Natural Law," 521-25.

<sup>741</sup> See ———, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 113. See also Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law*, 85-86.

<sup>742</sup> This subsection has made the cursory case for reading Calvin in close continuity with the medieval realist natural law tradition, though not via direct influence. For a fuller treatment and arguing for varied strengths of this connection, see Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, 367-78.; Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law*, Chapter 3.; VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 93-115.

positive *and* negative use, this subsection has also challenged those, like Barth and his neo-orthodox disciples, who claimed the contrary.

Having completed this important point of theology informing his social thought, I now turn to how Calvin's theology of church-state relations was worked out in practice, with particular attention given to his doctrine of two kingdoms.

#### **4.6. Calvin's theology and practice of church and state relations**

My concern in this subsection is to provide a sense of how consistently Calvin worked out his theology of two kingdoms in relating church and state practically as a minister in Geneva. In order to accomplish this, I will focus on three areas of inquiry that focus on Calvin's involvement in Geneva's social life. First, how did Calvin handle matters of church polity in relation to the state? Second, how did the Consistory deal with cases of church discipline in relation to the state? And third, how did Calvin communicate his doctrine of church-state relations from the pulpit and with the pen? I will then relate my findings to the matter of internal coherency in Calvin's theological rendering of the two kingdoms.

There have been many who have suspected Calvin of at least some degree of inconsistency as he moved from theology to practice, if not inconsistency at the foundational theological level. Philip Benedict expresses the suspicion of many in finding "tension" here.<sup>743</sup> I undertake my own investigation and analysis, but not before making two important qualifications. First, the conclusions I suggest below, relative to Calvin's practice, are tempered by my lack of training as a social historian. Secondly, it is important to keep in mind how different the social circumstances surrounding Calvin's Geneva differ from ours today. Calvin lived in a historical context in which the medieval legacy of Christendom still prevailed: where church and state were distinguished and yet viewed as separate parts of one unified Christian society. The Reformation city of Geneva shared the common conviction throughout Europe that only one church and one religion could be recognised in a given state. In other words, Calvin

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<sup>743</sup> See Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 89.

would have been unaware of any concrete models evidencing functioning, well-ordered, religiously plural societies found in parts of the West today.<sup>744</sup>

Calvin's efforts at organising the church in Geneva took place in the context of already established governmental structures. The government that remained after the expulsion of the Savoyan controlled prince-bishop, his court and officials, comprised of a hierarchy of councils exercising authority over a number of committees.<sup>745</sup> At the base of the hierarchy and with the largest constituency, was the General Council. Only adult male residents of citizen and bourgeois status were active participants at this level. It met twice a year, and among other things elected members of the smaller Councils. Above the General Council was the Council of Two Hundred, a smaller body, and above it the Council of Sixty, an older institution. These latter two Councils dealt with business handed down by the executive branch of the government called the Small Council. The Small Council was represented by twenty-five citizens; simple bourgeois could not be members of this body. It met three times a week, and its presiding officers were four men called syndics. Among its tasks was the oversight of the criminal justice system. Calvin had a hand in drafting the *Ordinances on Offices and Officers* of 1543, which defined the tasks of this Council.<sup>746</sup> In it one finds apparent evidence of church-state collusion. For instance, the oath to be taken by Lord Syndics upon their election includes the following: "We promise and swear before God, in the presence of the Council, to elect and name to the office of the syndicate those we think proper and fit both to maintain the honor of God and the Christian religion in this city and to lead and govern the people in good order and preserve the liberty of the city..."<sup>747</sup> As to the undertakings and jurisdiction of the Council, it included concern that "no one blaspheme God, under penalty of solemnly asking mercy and being put in prison, and if he does it several times, of being deposed and punished with a more rigorous penalty."<sup>748</sup> The system of governing councils appears to have been set up as a semi-religious institution.

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<sup>744</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 83.

<sup>745</sup> Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 63.

<sup>746</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-64.

<sup>747</sup> "Ordinances on Offices and Officers (1543)," in *Sex, Marriage, and Family in John Calvin's Geneva*, ed. John Witte and Robert McCune Kingdon (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), 80.

<sup>748</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

In light of this general sketch of the governing structures of the state, I now turn to observations relating to Calvin's efforts in organising the church as set forth in the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* of 1541. Here Calvin delineates the four offices of ecclesiastical government: pastor, doctor, elder, and deacon. While the magistrate modified Calvin's initial draft at certain points, the document nevertheless betrays a strong element of church-state interpenetration. This is apparent, for example, from the process of electing individuals to ecclesiastical office. For instance, a pastoral candidate, once selected by the ministers, was thereafter to be presented to the Council for approval. Once elected, the candidate was to swear an oath in front of the civil authorities.<sup>749</sup> In another instance and concerning the office of elder, Calvin specifies that elders be elected from the pool of Council members. He writes, "it would be good to elect two of the Little Council, four of the Council of Sixty, and six of the Council of Two Hundred... These should be so selected that there be some in every quarter of the city, to keep an eye on everybody." He then goes on to suggest that the best way of electing these men is through civic channels: via nomination by the Small Council, which in turn commended them to the Council of Two Hundred for approval.<sup>750</sup> Such stipulations give one a sense of the politicised nature of appointing both ministers and elders to office, which formed the Consistory in Geneva.

Once constituted, both the Consistory and diaconate (committees) also had *reporting* obligations to the Small Council. With respect to the Consistory, Calvin assigned it weekly meetings for deliberation. In dealing with matters of church discipline, he attributed to the body no coercive jurisdiction. Instead, it only had the authority to rebuke, admonish, and if necessary ban an individual from the Lord's Supper through excommunication.<sup>751</sup> Nevertheless, the intertwining relationship between church and state is revealed, beyond the appointed officers, in at least two additional ways; and these from the chief ecclesiastical organising document for Geneva, the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*. For one, the concerns of the Consistory extended over a range of activities and institutions, including sex, marriage, and family, and general education and medical care.<sup>752</sup> In addition, authority in these matters extended to every individual in

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<sup>749</sup> "Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances 1541," in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, ed. John T. McNeill John Ballie, Henry P. van Dusen (London: SCM Press LTD, 1954), 59-60.

<sup>750</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-64.

<sup>751</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-71. See also ———, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 67-71.

<sup>752</sup> See "Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances 1541."; and Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 71. See also VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 84.

Geneva, not just church members in good standing.<sup>753</sup> Hence, things were set up in such a way that church concerns tended to intersect with those of the state. Secondly, the *Ordinances* are explicit regarding civil involvement in church discipline cases. For example, in the case of anyone “who dogmatizes against the received doctrine” of the church, and the individual remains obstinate, the Consistory was to issue both ecclesiastical *and* civil sanctions: exclusion from the Lord’s Supper and reporting to the magistrate. In the case of an irregular churchgoer or someone showing contempt for church order, such individuals, if unrepentant, were to be “separated from the Church and reported [to the magistrate].”<sup>754</sup> Hence, the state was to be concerned with disciplinary cases originating from the church. To sum up, Witte and Kingdon describe this arrangement as a “creative new alliance” between church and state.<sup>755</sup>

This leads me to my second point of inquiry for this section: did Calvin’s intimations at church-state collusion betrayed in the likes of the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* find evidence in the handling of concrete Consistory cases? To answer this question, I draw upon the work of Witte and Kingdon in their volume, *Sex, Marriage, and Family in John Calvin’s Geneva* (1995), as part of a series on *Religion, Family, and Marriage*. With respect to the range of Consistory concerns, they observe that in later years the Consistory went beyond sex, marriage, and family to include rooting out shady “business practices and disrespect for the leaders of government and church.”<sup>756</sup> As things turned out, Consistory and Council often went back and forth on cases: Consistory would refer cases to the Council when civil sanctions were necessary, and made further recommendations when cases were referred back to them.<sup>757</sup> While the Consistory had no official legal power, it nevertheless often “acted as a kind of preliminary hearings court, something like a Grand Jury in Anglo-Saxon practice” (as well “as a compulsory counseling service, and as an educational institution”).<sup>758</sup> In providing evidence of this, Witte and Kingdon show from cases handled on sex, marriage, and family over three sample years – 1546, 1552, and

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<sup>753</sup> This seems to be implied in "Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances 1541."; and Kingdon confirms that this was actual practice in Robert McCune Kingdon, *Adultery and Divorce in Calvin's Geneva* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 4.

<sup>754</sup> "Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances 1541," 70. See also Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 65-66.

<sup>755</sup> Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 1-79. For other competent and detailed recounting of institutional structures in Geneva, see, e.g., Olson, "Calvin and Social-Ethical Issues," 153-72.

<sup>756</sup> Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 71.

<sup>757</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-71.

<sup>758</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.; Kingdon, *Adultery and Divorce in Calvin's Geneva*, 4.

1557 – that roughly half of them received spiritual discipline, and the remainder were sent to the Council for civil sanctions.<sup>759</sup> The execution of heretic Servetus is perhaps the most notorious and severe case of co-operative church-state intervention in Calvin’s Geneva.

On another point at which church and state bled into one another, recent writers have also observed the civil consequences suffered by those receiving the sentence of excommunication. Often such individuals were banished from the city altogether. Or they ended up leaving of their own accord if they did not like the lifestyle imposed upon them or the presence or pressure of the Consistory.<sup>760</sup> The Consistory proved to be “a remarkably intrusive” and an “effective institution.” “The combination of scoldings, public reparations, bans, excommunications, and referrals to the legal system seems to have worked.”<sup>761</sup>

In summary, the new institution created by the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* of 1541 tended to look like something of a “hybrid of spiritual and civil authority.” The Consistory and Council helped each other, through a division of labor, to enforce both spiritual and civil sanctions in ordering the life of Geneva.<sup>762</sup>

It now remains to pose the third and final question on Calvin’s practice: how did Calvin relate church and state from the pulpit and with the pen? In answering this question, I start with the reasonable assumption that Calvin’s preaching affirmed many aspects of his doctrine of two kingdoms as described above. I therefore limit my focus to those instances where Calvin appeared to be comfortable with the jurisdictions of church and state overlapping. Considering the symbiotic way in which Calvin related church and state in his organising efforts and in the practice of the Consistory as described above, it is not surprising then to find corroborating evidence of this in his sermons and personal correspondence.

There are instances in Calvin’s sermons in which he permits a degree of civil involvement in religious affairs. For example, in his sermon on 1 Timothy 2:1, and in

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<sup>759</sup> Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 75-76. For examples of specific cases in which the Consistory sought recourse with the city Council, see ———, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, Docs. 4-12, 24; 5-10, 13; 7-15, 17; 8-19; 12-7. For other scholarly contributions providing insight into the practical outworking of legal arrangements in Geneva, especially marriage and family, see, e.g., Kingdon, *Adultery and Divorce in Calvin's Geneva.*; and Naphy, *Calvin*.

<sup>760</sup> See Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 68, 71.; Kingdon, *Adultery and Divorce in Calvin's Geneva*, 4.

<sup>761</sup> See Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 70-71.

<sup>762</sup> See *Ibid.*, 77.

commenting on Isaiah 60:16, Calvin exclaims that Princes must be the protectors of Christianity.<sup>763</sup> Later in the sermon he assigns to the magistrate the chief task of seeing to it that true religion be maintained and caused to prosper, and the service of God be esteemed above all things.<sup>764</sup> And towards the end, Calvin stresses that the magistrate should take pains to see that religion may be duly and rightly observed.<sup>765</sup> Another example from elsewhere is Calvin's sermon on Deuteronomy 5:16 and the fifth commandment. Here one also finds Calvin attributing a religious role to civil government: those in authority must "first of all... procure homage for God" and see to it "that people serve him and become subject to him."<sup>766</sup>

Naphy catalogues instances in Calvin's sermons where Calvin, a representative of the church, feels at liberty to delve into civil affairs – where he not only criticises the civil authorities in Geneva, and sometimes by name, but also tells them how to do their job.<sup>767</sup> In a series of sermons on Micah, preached between December 1550 and January 1551, Calvin levels attacks on the "perceived failings" of the magistrates in Geneva and sets forth his "ideal understanding of their duties."<sup>768</sup> In a sermon on Micah 3:9, Calvin preached that the "salvation of the city, of the countryside and of the people" required that the magistrates "maintain the honor of God" and that "they use the sword given to them in such a way that God is honored and served."<sup>769</sup> In another instance in which Calvin was free in offering civil critique, he says:

We don't have to decipher things a little at a time to understand the situation. Men see clearly enough. Are we so stupid that we are not grieved to see God so ill obeyed among us? Not only is God dishonoured by whorings, by dissolute living, by blasphemy, theft, and the like – which rule everywhere and aren't punished as they deserve – but also, even when retribution is ordered men devise in their hearts to mock God and His Justice. I'm talking about what I saw yesterday with my own eyes. When a whore is jailed (on bread and water) she must be supplied with sweets to feast upon. She is locked up for a show but meanwhile she is provided with great gateaux. I ask you, what sort of Justice is this?<sup>770</sup>

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<sup>763</sup> John Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistles to Timothy and Titus*, trans. H. Middleton (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1983), 137.

<sup>764</sup> *Ibid.*, 140-41.

<sup>765</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>766</sup> ———, *John Calvin's Sermons on the Ten Commandments*, trans. Benjamin Wirt Farley (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 144.

<sup>767</sup> Naphy, *Calvin*, 154-62.

<sup>768</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>769</sup> Calvin quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>770</sup> Calvin's words from a sermon on Job 20:1-7 quoted in *Ibid.*, 158.

Calvin evidently felt that the church had a right to meddle with the competencies of the state, or lack thereof. Yet, it was not uncommon for Calvin and his fellow ministers to be censured for such rhetoric, by the popular masses and even by the magistrate itself. Indicative of this was an incidence in 1545, where a Senator was charged for public rioting after being enraged at one of Calvin's sermons, in which Calvin called for the "hanging of 700 to 800" of his (Calvin's) political opponents.<sup>771</sup>

Instances of similar church-state aid and interchange can be found in Calvin's personal correspondence. For example, in two letters to Farel in July 1555, Calvin writes concerning the spiritual disgrace of the Libertines. Regarding the sentence of capital punishment enforced by the state upon them, Calvin voices no disapproval, if not implicit approval.<sup>772</sup> In another example, Calvin wrote a letter to the King of Navarre, dated 14 December, 1557, where he encourages the king to put on public display his "knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ", and "point out the way to many others." And a few paragraphs later he lays upon the monarch the burden "that in discussing what concerns the public administration, the article of religion will not be forgotten."<sup>773</sup> In another place, Calvin writes to the Queen of Navarre, on 20 January, 1563: "For all who have any dominion are also enjoined to purge their territories of every kind of idolatry and corruption, by which the purity of religion is defiled." He goes on to defend the responsibility of princes to compel their subjects to live in a Christian manner. And in closing the letter he states that this kind of behavior is of the "highest advantage to Christendom."<sup>774</sup> Yet, at the same time, Calvin's letters are not devoid of two kingdoms distinctions.<sup>775</sup>

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<sup>771</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>772</sup> Jean Calvin and Jules Bonnet, *Letters of John Calvin*, 4 vols., vol. 1 (New York, N.Y.: B. Franklin, 1972), 204-06.

<sup>773</sup> Ibid., 386-87.

<sup>774</sup> ———, *Letters of John Calvin*, 4 vols., vol. 4 (New York, N.Y.: B. Franklin, 1972), 290-94. See also, e.g., Calvin and Bonnet, *Letters of John Calvin*, 15-17, 161-62, 247-52.

<sup>775</sup> For example, in Calvin's letter to Oswald Myconius, dated 14 March, 1542, he makes a sharp divide between spiritual and civil jurisdictions; see Jean Calvin and Jules Bonnet, *Letters of John Calvin*, 4 vols., vol. 3 (New York, N.Y.: B. Franklin, 1972), 312-20. In another letter to the Pastors and Doctors of the church of Zurich, dated 26 November, 1553, Calvin writes concerning the jurisdictions of the Consistory: "The Consistory was instituted, and charged with the regulations of morals. It possessed no civil jurisdiction, but simply the administration of rebuke from the word of God; its ultimate punishment was excommunication"; see ———, *Letters of John Calvin*, 4 vols., vol. 2 (New York, N.Y.: B. Franklin, 1972), 442-46.

The evidence concerning Calvin's practice of church-state relations in Geneva strongly suggests tension and even inconsistency between Calvin's theology and practice of two kingdoms. The strength and pervasiveness of such evidence seems to beg the question: Is there perhaps inconsistency in Calvin at the base theological level and/or is there possibly more nuance to Calvin's doctrine of two kingdoms than has been set forth above? The best way to answer this question seems to be to examine whether one finds in Calvin's theological writings any general or specific support for his practice of commingling the jurisdictions of church and state.

To begin with, it is telling that Calvin gives to Book 4, in which he treats both the institutions of the church and state, the title: "The External Means or Aims by Which God Invites Us Into the Society of Christ and Holds Us Therein."

One place in which Calvin provides a general defence of combining ecclesiastical and civil authorities in handling apparently civil affairs is in *Institutes* 4.11.3. In this section Calvin discusses civil and ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and begins by noting the great difference between the two powers. Nevertheless, Calvin appears to condone the pooling of church and state powers in specific practical cases. For instance, in the case of handling the likes of fornicators and drunkards, Calvin asserts that both church and state should coordinate their powers to impose sanctions: such as imprisonment and excommunication respectively. The church "ought to help the magistrate in order that not so many may sin." The "functions" of both church and state "ought to be so joined that each serves to help, not hinder, the other."<sup>776</sup>

There is also clear warrant from Calvin for civil involvement in seemingly religious affairs. A conspicuous example of this is from *Institutes* 4.20, where Calvin argues that it is one of the appointed ends of civil government to "protect the outward worship of God, to defend sound doctrine of piety and the position of the church."<sup>777</sup> Accordingly, he reasons that one of the chief burdens of civil government is to prevent "idolatry, sacrilege against God's name, blasphemies against his truth, and other public offenses against religion from arising and spreading among the people." "In short," it is the burden of civil government to provide that "a public manifestation of religion may exist among Christians, and that humanity may be

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<sup>776</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.11.3.

<sup>777</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.20.2.

maintained among men.”<sup>778</sup> Calvin is perhaps most explicit in lending religious authority to civil government when he posits that it should be concerned with enforcing both tables of the Decalogue. He reasons:

If Scripture did not teach that it extends to both Tables of the Law, we could learn this from secular writers: for no one has discussed the office of magistrates, the making of laws, and public welfare, without beginning at religion and divine worship. And thus all confessed that no government can be happily established unless piety is the first concern; and that those laws are preposterous which neglect God’s right and provide only for men.<sup>779</sup>

Calvin is even willing to go as far as permitting civil coercion in the enforcement of the first table of the Decalogue for maintaining church unity. In Calvin’s commentary on the harmony of the gospels he cites with approval Augustine’s use of Luke 14:23 “to prove that godly princes may lawfully issue edicts, for compelling obstinate and rebellious persons to worship the true God, and to maintain the unity of the faith.” Though Calvin recognises that faith is voluntary, he nevertheless writes, “yet we see that such methods are useful for subduing the obstinacy of those who will not yield until they are compelled.”<sup>780</sup> On this note of religious intolerance, it is interesting that Calvin omitted from the 1559 edition of the *Institutes* comments in favor of religious tolerance found in the 1536 edition.<sup>781</sup>

That there is tension in Calvin’s theological rendition of church-state relations is difficult to dismiss. Calvin clearly gives theological approbation for his practice of relating church and state in a mutually supportive manner. Yet, even Calvin senses the tension here; that he may be inconsistent. In a revealing passage from *Institutes* 4.20.3, after speaking to the chief tasks and burdens of civil government, which include preventing “idolatry, sacrilege against God’s name, blasphemies against his truth, and other public offenses against religion”, Calvin appears to pause as if to consider the potential objection of inconsistency:

Let no man be disturbed that I now commit to civil government the duty of rightly establishing religion, which I seem to have put outside of human decision. For when I

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<sup>778</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.20.3.; see also ———, *Institutes*, 4.11.16.

<sup>779</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.9. Another place where Calvin endorses state involvement in religious affairs can be found in his Prefatory Address to King Francis in ———, *Institutes*.

<sup>780</sup> See Calvin’s *Commentary* on Luke 14:23 in John Calvin, "Commentary on the Harmony of the Gospels, Vol. 2," Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom32.ii.xxxii.html>.

<sup>781</sup> Compare Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.8. with ———, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1536 Edition*, 2.28. Calvin did, however, reintroduce the language again in the 1560 French edition; see Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 47, fn 30.

approve of civil administration that aims to prevent the true religion which is contained in God's law from being openly and with public sacrilege violated and defiled with impunity, I do not here, any more than before, allow men to make laws according to their own decision concerning religion and the worship of God.<sup>782</sup>

Calvin paused, considered the possibility of theological inconsistency, and moved on.

The seeming disconnect between Calvin's theology of two kingdoms and his practice of co-mingling the jurisdictions of church and state raises important questions regarding consistency and coherence in his theology. In other words, tensions uncovered by a closer consideration of Calvin's practice demand a closer analysis of his consistency at the deeper theological level. But such tensions also force one to consider more closely the meaning of Calvin's doctrine of two kingdoms as formative upon church-state relations in Geneva. To this analysis I now turn in the coming chapter, and with the purpose of placing him in the tradition of early Christian social thought and determining his usefulness for ongoing church-state debates today.

#### **4.7. Concluding remarks**

In this chapter I have given special attention to Augustine and Luther as important precursors to Calvin's social thought, noting points of continuity and discontinuity. With respect to Calvin, my inquiry has focused particularly on whether he had substantive doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law informing his thinking on how church and state should relate. My general conclusions are that Calvin did in fact have considerable doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law informing his theology and practice of church-state relations, which find significant continuity with and development upon the insights of Augustine and Luther. However, this chapter has concluded with lingering tensions and questions regarding the theological consistency and meaning of Calvin's two kingdoms thought, which invites further analysis.

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<sup>782</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.3.

## CHAPTER 5

### ANALYSIS: CALVIN ON CHURCH AND STATE

The previous chapter ended on a note of theological tension relative to Calvin's doctrine of two kingdoms as exposed by ways in which he related church and state in Geneva. With the assumption that these tensions do not simply lead to blatant and inexplicable inconsistencies, I now attempt to bring some resolution to them as part of my broader analysis of how Calvin related church and state in terms of two kingdoms and natural law. Accordingly, in the first part of this chapter I suggest some predominantly theological ways in which two-kingdoms-related theological tensions may be eased in Calvin. Because I conclude that these tensions do in fact give way to theological inconsistencies in Calvin, I then attempt to explain this difficulty in terms of Calvin's general sixteenth-century context, his Genevan experience, and his passion for order. I do so with the hope that Calvin may not be too hastily dismissed or his insights on two kingdoms lost to the modern reader. In the second part of this chapter, I locate Calvin's place within the flow of early Christian social thought, with a particular eye to his precursors Augustine and Luther, and in so doing offer a more nuanced reading of Calvin and the two kingdoms. In the final part of the chapter, I consider Calvin's influence upon the development of the early Reformed social thought as further evidence of his theology of two kingdoms and natural law and his ongoing relevance for discourse on church-state relations.

#### **5.1. Salvaging the Calvin of Two Kingdoms**

##### *5.1.1. Toward easing some theological tensions*

As I argued in the previous chapter, theological tension in Calvin's social thought stems from his tendency in many places to assert sharp two-kingdoms-like distinctions between the respective jurisdictions of church and state, and yet at the same time appear to blur the lines of separation by being willing to condone their mutual aid and commingling. To begin with, I suggest a few points in defence of Calvin's consistency with his two kingdoms theology.

How may Calvin's two kingdoms thought be reconciled with his willingness to involve the church in seemingly civil affairs? For one, Calvin frequently reminded the church, when assigning it such affairs, that it neither had the power to coerce through the sword nor the civil jurisdiction that goes along with it.<sup>783</sup> With respect to those civil affairs that Calvin did hold the Consistory accountable, it is helpful to point out that most of them can be said to have had a spiritual dimension to them. For example, it is difficult to argue that matters involving sex, marriage and family do not touch on a person's spiritual condition, and hence are the rightful concern of pastors and elders.<sup>784</sup> It seems a fair assumption that broadly speaking people may fall into sin in any area of life, and hence no area of life is exclusively civil or spiritual.<sup>785</sup>

While these suggestions may bring some relief, the charge of inconsistency still lingers because of ways in which Calvin saw the church's involvement in civil affairs. A few observations relative to the operations of the Consistory in Geneva serve to illustrate this. For instance, in light of Calvin's clear two-kingdoms distinctions between the respective authorities and jurisdictions of church and state, it is difficult to explain the nomination and appointment of church officers by the civil government. Do civil officials have the competency to elect officers in the spiritual kingdom?<sup>786</sup> Equally troubling is the indiscriminate moral and spiritual authority that the church exercised over all citizens of Geneva, regardless of church membership. Obedience to the church was deemed both a spiritual and civic duty.<sup>787</sup> What is more, questions may legitimately be raised concerning the Consistory's role as an agent of the Small Council in effectively serving as a preliminary trial court in the Genevan judicial system. With respect to the disciplinary codes enforced by the Consistory, Witte observes that by the end of his life Calvin had "resurrected a good deal of the traditional Catholic canon law and restored to the church consistory courts a good deal of the traditional authority that Calvin and other early Protestants had so hotly criticized three decades before."<sup>788</sup> One wonders whether Calvin, in the

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<sup>783</sup> See, e.g., *Ibid.*, 4.11.3. See also VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 87.

<sup>784</sup> See Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*.

<sup>785</sup> On this point, see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 87. Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 73-74., however, thinks that Calvin is guilty of double jeopardy here.

<sup>786</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 87.

<sup>787</sup> See Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 58. See also VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 87.

<sup>788</sup> Witte cites as an example a 1560 amendment to the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, which Calvin endorsed; see Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 72-73. See also VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 87.

above respects, is closer to a Gelasian vision of a unitary society ruled by two swords than the Lutheran conception of two kingdoms.<sup>789</sup>

Tension in the other direction of state involvement in the church is difficult to dismiss as well. How is Calvin's two kingdoms thought to be reconciled with his support of the state's interference in seemingly spiritual affairs? Here too Calvin may be defended to a certain extent. One place where one finds Calvin making some important caveats and imposing some key restraints upon the jurisdiction of civil government is in *Institutes* 4.20. First, and in a place where Calvin senses the potential objection against his entrusting religious concerns to the magistracy, he reminds his readers, "I do not here, any more than before, allow men to make laws according to their own decision concerning religion and the worship of God."<sup>790</sup> In other words, magistrates *only* have the power to execute God's law regarding religion and worship, especially as set forth in the First Table of the Decalogue, and thus no power to legislate at will.<sup>791</sup> Secondly, and in keeping with other places in his writings, Calvin emphasised that civil government is limited to protecting "the outward worship of God" and "the public manifestation of religion."<sup>792</sup> On this point, VanDrunen argues for giving some plausibility to characterising the magistrates activities even here as civil rather than spiritual, given Calvin's contrast of the two kingdoms in terms of the external and internal.<sup>793</sup> A third and final way in which Calvin may be defended against the charge of inconsistency is that he did not necessarily need Scripture, the law of the spiritual kingdom, to support the magistrate's interest in enforcing the First Table of the Decalogue. Instead, Calvin, as argued above, found recourse in the natural law *underlying* the Decalogue as the basis for civil law in the earthly kingdom.<sup>794</sup>

However, while some tensions may be relieved with these suggestions, it is my judgment that here again Calvin struggles to escape the charge of inconsistency altogether. Calvin is perhaps most vulnerable in that while he did affirm the peace, order and safety-keeping role of

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<sup>789</sup> VanDrunen raises a similar question in VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 87.

<sup>790</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.3.

<sup>791</sup> This principle goes against the Lutherans and Anglicans who at the time empowered the magistrate to legislate all manner of civil laws respecting worship, liturgies, prayers, and other cultic activities; see Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 65. See also VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 88.

<sup>792</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.2-3.

<sup>793</sup> VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 88. See also, e.g., Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.19.15; 4.20.2.

<sup>794</sup> See Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.14-21. See also VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 88.

civil government – in keeping with his two kingdoms distinctions elsewhere – he nevertheless did on several occasions add the duty of religion-protection in the same breath, thereby conflating the two kingdoms.<sup>795</sup> It is difficult to dismiss the sense that Calvin considered civil coercion in religious matters necessary and if not highly desirable. This seems to be Calvin’s clear purpose, where in one place he says, “For since the church does not have the power to coerce, and ought not to seek it (I am speaking of civil coercion), it is the duty of godly kings and princes to sustain religion by laws, edicts, and judgments.”<sup>796</sup> In other words, because the church may not wield the sword in maintaining its cause, the state should do so on its behalf. Here too, one is left wondering, as with Calvin’s expansion of ecclesiastical jurisdiction into the civil realm, why Calvin condoned the shedding of blood by the civil magistrate for the sake of religion?<sup>797</sup> There is nothing in his doctrine of natural law, for instance, that necessitated imposing civil sanctions for every infraction of the natural law, such as in the case of “external” acts of idolatry and blasphemy.<sup>798</sup>

In the preceding paragraphs I have tested the charge against Calvin that his theology of church and state in general, and two kingdoms in particular, elicits tension and if not inconsistency. I have considered Calvin’s thought regarding church involvement in seeming civil affairs and state involvement in seeming religious affairs. Either way Calvin seemed to be content with a theology of two kingdoms that had room for theological affirmation of a sharp divide between church and state jurisdictions, *as well as* apparent theological grounds for approving of Genevan social practices that commingled the authorities and competencies of the two institutions.

Perhaps at this point it is helpful to question the wisdom of one way in which Calvin distinguished the two kingdoms: in terms of things “internal” and “external” or concerning soul

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<sup>795</sup> See especially Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.2-3. See also Calvin’s *Commentary* on 1 Timothy 2:2 in ———, “Commentary on Timothy, Titus, Philemon.,” Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom43.iii.iv.i.html>.

<sup>796</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.11.16. See also VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 90.

<sup>797</sup> One of Calvin’s critics, Sebastian Castellio, asked a similar question. He took particular issue with the execution of Servetus, seeing it as an improper encroachment of the state upon religious affairs. Castellio wondered how the magistrate had the competency to adjudicate whether a given doctrinal teaching was blasphemous, idolatrous, or heretical. Castellio questioned what the sword had to do with doctrine?; see Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 69-70., who, among others sources, quotes from Sebastian Castellio, *Concerning Heretics*, ed. Roland H. Bainton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935). See also VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 90.

<sup>798</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 88.

and body. With this distinction, it seems reasonable to ask whether Calvin does justice to the thrust of his intentions regarding the institutions of church and state? Is the spiritual kingdom only concerned with those things immaterial? Not according to Calvin's clear affirmations elsewhere that the church is to be concerned with physicality of diaconal relief and administering the sacraments. Hence, considering that Calvin's doctrine of two kingdoms was in part a theory of institutions, one wonders if Calvin's lack of linguistic precision on this distinguishing characteristic of the two kingdoms hindered full consistency as Calvin moved from theology to practice, and thereby also opened himself up to the charge of deeper theological inconsistency.<sup>799</sup>

In bringing this subsection to a close, I conclude that while a certain degree of tension may be alleviated in Calvin, one is hard-pressed to eradicate from his theology those instances where the respective jurisdictions of church and state appear to move in directions opposite to his sharp two kingdoms distinctions. With the lack of New Testament warrant in support of Calvin's evident proclivity for commingling the jurisdictions of the church and state, one is left looking for reasons elsewhere. In the next subsection I argue that plausible reasons may be found in a closer examination of the man and his times.

### *5.1.2. Calvin: a sixteenth-century man with a passion for order*

Why (from the modern liberal democratic vantage point) did Calvin have difficulty following through consistently on his two kingdoms insights? In this respect, I make suggestions that draw upon certain characteristics unique to the man and his times. My purpose in this subsection is in keeping with an overarching concern of this chapter, which is to protect Calvin's two kingdoms thought from being too hastily dismissed or lost on account of his theological inconsistency. In my judgment, a better understanding of Calvin and his context may render his inconsistencies less jarring, if not understandable, and the substance of his two kingdoms thought salvageable and if not portable for the modern Western context. What is to follow will also help in working towards a more nuanced definition of Calvin's vision of church-state relations, and how his two kingdoms theology factored in to it.

It is perhaps best to begin by mentioning a crucial sixteenth century reality already touched upon, which is the legacy of the all-embracing political, social, and religious

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<sup>799</sup> On this insightful point, see *Ibid.*, 91.

phenomenon of Christendom in which Calvin's two kingdoms thought developed.<sup>800</sup> In Calvin's case, the only model for church-state relations imaginable and readily available was a single unified Christian society, in which the state helped the church in promoting a community of single faith and a single set of values.<sup>801</sup> Such were Calvin's times that executions for heresy were hardly a novelty.<sup>802</sup> The modern notion of religious pluralism would have been completely foreign to him. Hence, it is unreasonable to expect of Calvin the modern conception of separation of church and state, although one does find in him seeds for such thought.

Not only is it important to understand how the sixteenth-century world influenced the theological content of Calvin's church-state relations, but also something of the inseparable form in which he expressed his ideas. Witte draws attention to the importance of engaging Calvin with the understanding that he wrote with "strong rhetorical flourish, and in unguarded moments or on particularly heated subjects, he partook of the bombast and hyperbole that typified sixteenth-century humanist literature." This at least explains in part why critics of Calvin have found evidence to call him, among other things, a "rigid and unbending theocrat."<sup>803</sup>

In narrowing the context, I now draw attention to some aspects of the complex interplay between Calvin and his Genevan context, which shaped his theology and practice of church-state relations, and that may help further explain the inconsistencies in his social thought. To begin with, one does well to remember that Calvin's primary calling in Geneva was that of theologian and pastor, and not political theorist or jurist. While Calvin received training in law and the

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<sup>800</sup> An explicit instance which illustrates that Calvin was working with the general presuppositions of Christendom, even towards the end of his life, can be found in a letter to the Queen of Navarre, 20 January, 1563, where in one place he writes: "If you are pleased, Madame, also put in execution what you have deliberated about, viz: to send the princes of Germany to beg and exhort them to continue to countenance to the cause of the Lord, that will be an act worthy of your majesty, and one of the highest advantage of Christendom"; see Calvin and Bonnet, *Letters of John Calvin*, 290-94.

<sup>801</sup> See Hans Joachim Hillerbrand, *The Division of Christendom : Christianity in the Sixteenth Century*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 11. In noting the influence of the medieval notion of Christendom upon the Reformation, Hillerbrand writes: "Politics and religion were so intimately connected in the Reformation that religious aspirations were seldom free of mundane entanglement. This was a consequence of the long shadow of the medieval notion of the *corpus christianum*, of Christendom, that fell over the sixteenth-century, and the subsequent two centuries as well. It was the conviction that church and society were but two sides of the same reality: that membership in the body politic meant membership in the church, and that the foremost task of a ruler was the support of the Christian religion. This was why the history of the Christian churches in the sixteenth century became part of the political history of the time"; see Hillerbrand, *The Division of Christendom*, 381. See also Berman, *Law and Revolution*, 2, 85-119, 521, 29-31.

<sup>802</sup> See Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 68.

<sup>803</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

political classics, and he frequently addressed political and legal questions as a member of the Consistory, he never wrote a summa on political theory, or a systematic work on religious liberty, or a civil code on church-state relations, or a letter on religious toleration. “His writings were principally theological in character, addressed to the cardinal Christian topics of God and man, sin and salvation.”<sup>804</sup> In other words, it seems fair not to expect more precision and coherency from Calvin’s social, legal, and political theory than a busy pastor in Geneva could afford.

In addition to Calvin’s status as a busy leading minister in Geneva, arguably more significant were the unique challenges he faced during a volatile period in the history of the city and its surrounding regions. As I discuss in the prior chapter, Calvin was always to some degree unsettled during his tenure in Geneva by virtue of being a French refugee. He was in turn exiled from Geneva for a time, and even upon his return likely never felt quite at home in the city. What is more, he served a growing population of French refugees who must have presented special needs that accompany social and geographic dislocation. In addition, Calvin ministered through the devastation of the plague.<sup>805</sup>

Calvin also found himself up against a plethora of ecclesiastical and civil challenges in Geneva. Calvin found disorder and opposition from those within the church (which naturally included the majority of Genevan citizens) at almost every turn. Early on, he was forced to root out factions and opposition even from within the Company of Pastors. Once a unified Consistory had been formed, Calvin and his colleagues dealt with ongoing cases of theological heterodoxy and immorality. Adding fuel to the fire was the backlash from parishioners against what was perceived as an overly controlling, arrogant and intrusive Calvin and his cadre of ministers. Many Genevan citizens believed that certain civil liberties were being violated, as was the case, for example, in the imposition of religious oaths and the baptismal names controversy. Making matters worse was the fact that many believed Calvin and his colleagues, with their political clout, were endangering Geneva’s newfound freedoms as a Republic, by, for instance, endangering Geneva’s protective alliance with Berne. Integral to the threat that Calvin and his Company posed to certain social and political freedoms was their status as foreigners. The issue

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<sup>804</sup> See *Ibid.*, 40-41.

<sup>805</sup> See Calvin’s letter to Farel, September, 1545, on the ravages of plague in Calvin and Bonnet, *Letters of John Calvin*, 22-23.

of a surging French refugee population proved to be a key factor in the eventual political showdown that saw the French ministers lead a faction to victory in 1555.

Calvin also encountered opposition for the majority of his life in Geneva from the civil magistrate. Calvin waged an ongoing battle with the state for the independence of the church, especially in the area of excommunication. He also had to deal with those civil officials and prominent Genevan citizens who, like many of their ordinary compatriots, saw the Calvinists as a threat to the power structures of the city and the civil liberties of its inhabitants.

Calvin was a polarising figure in a city often teetering on the brink of anarchy and chaos as various factions vied for control over the direction of the new Genevan republic. What likely exacerbated Calvin's perception of the various waves of discord and disorder in the city was his ignorance regarding the foreign and domestic complexities of Geneva's immediate history. This led to a misinterpretation of the Genevan dislike of clerics and foreigners as generally reducible to a matter of religion and morals. Calvin was to an extent unaware of his entanglement in something bigger than the church and morality. Hence, he at times inadvertently antagonised many and stoked the fires of faction, which in turn meant opposition to him.

The brief summation of aspects of a more lengthy discussion of Calvin's Genevan context above serves to highlight the disorderly climate in which Calvin sought to work out his theology and practice of church-state relations. In my judgment it seems plausible that the unique and immense challenges Calvin encountered in Geneva, coupled with his Christendom presuppositions, may in large part explain why he chose to collaborate the efforts of church and state the way he did; and this especially in light of Calvin's passion for order, which deserves a closer examination.<sup>806</sup>

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<sup>806</sup> VanDrunen makes similar observations in VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 86-93. Witte is someone who has sought to explain the evolution of Calvin's social thought in terms of his applying law and order in the context of the tumultuous ecclesio-political experiment in Geneva. He argues that what one finds in the earlier Calvin (1530s) is concern for the spiritual liberty of the individual defined in terms of limitations of church and state power. However, as Calvin's thinking matured (1540s and beyond) in the face of the brutal realities of Genevan ecclesiastical and political life, he altered his position considerably. Witte argues that in his later years Calvin's emphasis had shifted away from individual liberty to the respective jurisdictions and duties of church and state. Over time and as Calvin focused on carving out the responsibilities and relationships of church and state, individual liberty was contracted and institutional freedom expanded in such a way that jurisdictional lines between the earthly and spiritual kingdoms, church and state, were blurred, as was most notably demonstrated in the case of Michael Servetus; see Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*; Witte Jr., "Moderate Religious Liberty in the Theology of John Calvin," 359-403. While I agree with Witte's general analysis here, I think that he perhaps overstates the "narrowing" of Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine as the *Institutes* progressed from the first to the last editions.

According to VanDrunen, some scholars have judged Calvin's drive for order as akin to neurosis.<sup>807</sup> Others have profitably explored the implications of his passion for order without the psychological speculation.<sup>808</sup> Calvin's theological writings reveal that he was acutely aware of the dangers of this present life, and yet was struck with wonder at the way in which God alone upholds the cosmic and social realms by his providence, in keeping them from disorder and chaos.<sup>809</sup> Susan Schreiner observes: "his discussions of society, natural law, and the state reflected his desire for unity, harmony, and order as well as his fear of disorder... the motivating principle of this quest for order is to be discerned in Calvin's view of providence. Calvin sensed that the foundations of the late "medieval" world had crumbled. The portals of change had been opened and threatened to sweep everything away."<sup>810</sup>

Calvin saw both church and state as agents of ensuring social order, and often spoke of their responsibilities being executed in terms of two kingdoms distinctions. In regard to the civil kingdom, Calvin considered as foremost among the concerns of the civil magistrate the maintenance of the "common safety and peace of all."<sup>811</sup> And in regard to the spiritual kingdom, Calvin affirmed the importance of the order-keeping ministry of the church, and the central role of discipline in achieving this end.<sup>812</sup> Calvin believed that church discipline depended "for the

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<sup>807</sup> VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 89. See especially Bouwsma, *John Calvin*.

<sup>808</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 89. On this point, see especially Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, who explores the implications of Calvin's penchant for order upon various facets of this thought, and which are closely connected with many concerns of this and the prior chapter. See also ———, "Creation and Providence," 267-75.; and Ralph C. Hancock, *Calvin and the Foundation of Modern Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), ch.8.

<sup>809</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 89., who cites, e.g., Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.4.11; 1.14.20-22; 1.16.3-4; 2.3.3; 3.8.11. and Calvin's *Commentary on Romans* 1:18 in ———, "Commentary on Romans.," Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom38.v.vi.html>. On Calvin's interest in astronomy and opposition to the views of Copernicus, see Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography*, 285-86.; and compare with McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, xiv. See Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, Introduction, Chapter 1., on God's providence as a bridle on the chaos of the cosmos.

<sup>810</sup> Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 3. de Gruchy has sought to explain Calvin's pathos for order or "imperial" impulse, in which he attempted to control the lives of Genevan citizens in excessive ways, in terms of the need to prove the reality of one's election and indwelling grace by works, and can also be traced to his third use of the law. He argues that this negative side of Calvin was more prominent in his later life. See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 18-20, 140-50.

<sup>811</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.9. Among other numerous examples, see ———, *Institutes*, 2.8.46; 3.10.6; 3.19.1; 4.1.3; 4.20.2-3; 4.20.11; 4.20.23. Relevant to these issues, see also helpful discussions in Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law*, 242-43.; Höpfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 48, 67.

<sup>812</sup> In Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.3.1., Calvin begins the chapter on "The Doctors and Ministers of the Church, Their Election and Office", with the words: "Now we must speak of the order by which the Lord willed his church to be governed." Throughout the first nineteen chapters of Book 4, Calvin is concerned with how the church's unity,

most part upon the power of the keys and upon spiritual jurisdiction.” He likened it to the “sinews” by which the “members of the body hold together.” Without it, he envisioned the eventual undoing of the church: “Therefore, all who desire to remove discipline or to hinder its restoration – whether they do this deliberately or out of ignorance – are surely contributing to the ultimate dissolution of the church.”<sup>813</sup>

With this sense of Calvin’s passion for order, perhaps a fuller and more pointed explanation for his inconsistencies on relating church and state is as follows: while Calvin’s concern for order included theological sensitivity to how it might be achieved according to the respective jurisdictions and competencies of the two kingdoms, an inordinate side of this same concern also led Calvin to give theological warrant for commingling church and state so that in practice two separate jurisdictions tended to become one.

In this subsection, I have attempted to cushion some of the jarring that accompanies a modern reading of Calvin when it comes to his inconsistencies in relating church and state in theology and practice. It seems that a fair reading of Calvin involves the understanding that he did not have the boundary markers that come with modern assumptions of separation of church and state to reign in his passion for order, which was no doubt tested by the social disorder he found in Geneva. Perhaps most notably, he worked within the “possibilities” of Christendom, which did not include the “risk” of religious freedom. While Calvin made remarkable strides compared to his medieval predecessors, the necessities as he saw it of peace, safety and particularly order, still demanded that some uniformity in religious practice be maintained. For Calvin, this involved the church extending its spiritual reach into the civil affairs of Genevan citizens, even to the extent of swaying political opinion from the pulpit, and the state intervening in spiritual affairs even to the extent of bearing the sword on behalf of the church. In other words, at some point Calvin concluded that Luther’s two kingdoms doctrine became, at times, unworkable in producing the kind of well-ordered society he was striving for. He obviously

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purity, and prosperity, was to be protected from internal and external threat through proper ecclesiastical means and authority; see ———, *Institutes*, 4.1-19. The opening lines to the Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances includes: “Hence if we will have a church well ordered and maintained we ought to observe this form of government.”; see "Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances 1541," 58. According to Benjamin Charles Milner, Jr., the idea of order governed Calvin’s ecclesiology; see Jr. Benjamin Charles Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 190. See also Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 3.

<sup>813</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.12.1.

thought his accommodated version of Luther's two kingdoms doctrine was free from inconsistency, but some modern readers including myself have concluded otherwise.

Another way to approach the whole matter of inconsistency in Calvin, and which touches on an important theme in this thesis, is perhaps in terms of his "ideology" or worldview. Calvin had a particular agenda for Geneva that is subject to critique, especially from the standpoint of his modern receptors. As has been illustrated above, Calvin had an ideology of sorts, informed in no small way by the legacy of Christendom and his pursuit of order. This, I have suggested, explains the direction in which he took Luther's two kingdoms thought and in turn the inconsistencies he left for future generations. Framing the matter in this way helps in two ways. First, it serves as a sobering reminder to those looking to retrieve the theological traditions of the past, to do so with a critical eye towards the nature of one's own ideological blind spots. Secondly, identifying the husk of Calvin's ideology is critical in salvaging the kernel of his two kingdoms theology, which since the period of Reformed orthodoxy has been developed and continues to be refined by contemporary Reformed theologians to help settle crucial questions relative to church and state relations.

## **5.2. Development: Calvin on two kingdoms *and* natural law**

Having suggested some ways of mitigating tensions and even inconsistencies in Calvin's rendition of the two kingdoms doctrine, I now utilise my analysis thus far in an attempt to provide a more nuanced rendering of his social thought. I do so by locating Calvin's two kingdoms theology within the broader stream of the early Christian tradition, especially in relation to Luther and Augustine, and with special attention given to a defining feature, namely, natural law.

### *5.2.1. Calvin's version of two kingdoms*

In positioning Calvin within the broader flow of early Christian social thought, I limit my discussion to those figures engaged in the prior chapter and with a particular view to the general themes of *antithesis* and *commonality* introduced in the previous chapter. As has already been noted above, Calvin's theology of two kingdoms exhibits substantive continuity with Luther's

theology of two kingdoms and two governments, as set forth in his “Temporal Authority.” Calvin, like Luther and the ancient Diognesian and Augustinian perspectives, recognised the fundamental antithesis that exists between believers and unbelievers as they cohabitate in this world.

Calvin’s acknowledgment of a realm of commonality, as one finds in the likes of Luther, is less straightforward due, in no small part, to the problem of his inconsistency on two kingdoms. In helping bring some clarity, I begin by noting that one way in which Calvin echoed Luther (but less so Augustine) was in affirming the institutional legitimacy of the state. As to its origin, Calvin, like Luther, resembled more Gelasius’s account in propounding that the state is directly ordained by God, and not, like Boniface, through the mediation of the church.<sup>814</sup>

And yet there were ways in which Calvin differed from Luther. One pertinent example centers on the matter of coercion with respect to religion. While both Calvin and Luther believed that the sword should not be entrusted to the church, Calvin did advocate the civil use of force in promoting religious uniformity, while Luther did not (although he was not always consistent in this respect, especially in his later life.) Another point of difference between the two Reformers concerns their handling of the law-gospel distinction relative to the doctrine of two kingdoms.<sup>815</sup> It was Luther’s conviction that the law governs the earthly kingdom and the gospel the heavenly kingdom.<sup>816</sup> Calvin also saw the importance of distinguishing law from gospel.<sup>817</sup> But, unlike Luther, this did not lead him to view the law as having powers of execution in the earthly kingdom only. Calvin believed that the church, the present manifestation of the kingdom of heaven, should also have its own government and system of discipline.<sup>818</sup> Thus, as things played out practically:

[W]hile Luther and the Lutherans tended to associate the visible, institutional aspects of the church’s life with the earthly kingdom (and hence entrusted these to the civil magistrate), Calvin defended mightily the independence and jurisdiction of the church in these matters. Thus it might be said that Calvin identified ecclesiastical affairs as a whole

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<sup>814</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 91-92.

<sup>815</sup> On this point, see *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>816</sup> See Berman, *Law and Revolution, II*, 40-41, 58. See also Witte, *Law and Protestantism*, 110.

<sup>817</sup> For a discussion on this point, see Michael Horton, "Calvin and the Law-Gospel Hermeneutic," *Pro Ecclesia* 6, no. Winter (1997): 27-42.

<sup>818</sup> As is evident, e.g., in Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.11.1. See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 92.

with the spiritual kingdom, and not just its work of ministering the gospel, as was the tendency within Lutheranism.<sup>819</sup>

Another way in which Calvin differed from Luther was in his willingness to assign the church a role in the administration of civil justice. Here, like his willingness to extend to the state the right of coercion in religious matters, is where the notion of a common realm in Calvin becomes contested and the problem of inconsistency comes to the fore once again.<sup>820</sup> How is one to reconcile the many places where Calvin, consistent with Luther-like two kingdoms distinctions, holds out the possibility of commonality in the civil realm but at the same time insists on commingling the jurisdictions of church and state for the sake of social order and justice in Geneva? Perhaps Witte provides the most satisfying answer to this question. He proposes that the mature Calvin in effect superimposed on the Lutheran two kingdoms theory his own variant of the two swords model.<sup>821</sup> Witte contends that Calvin did not contemplate following through on the two kingdoms theory to a “secular society” with a plurality of absolutely separated religious and political officials within them. Nor did he contemplate the notion of a neutral state.<sup>822</sup> Hence, while Luther’s two kingdoms theology, following Augustinian and Diognesian lines, anticipates better the common/secular/neutral realm found in the modern notion of separation of church and state, Calvin could not ultimately go beyond the unified world of Christendom. Rather, in following Gelasius, Calvin envisioned God governing society through the mutually submissive powers of church and state: each according to their own competencies and towards the end of a well-ordered and disciplined godly community.<sup>823</sup>

In building upon Witte’s insights, I submit that VanDrunen is correct in observing that in Calvin’s marriage of Luther-like two kingdoms theology and Gelasius-like two swords theory, the point of tension is indeed the matter of commonality. In other words: is the civil realm ultimately characterised by commonality or Christianity? Based on my research, I concur with

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<sup>819</sup> VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 92. See also Berman, *Law and Revolution, II*, 40-41, 58.; and Witte, *Law and Protestantism*, 110.

<sup>820</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 92-93.

<sup>821</sup> Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 58.

<sup>822</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>823</sup> See *Ibid.* On these connections, see also VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 93.

VanDrunen in asserting that although Calvin provides theological grounds, per his doctrine of two kingdoms for the former, in practice the latter prevailed.<sup>824</sup>

### 5.2.2. *Two kingdoms reinforced: Calvin's natural law thinking*

I have already made the case that Calvin's natural law thinking fits coherently within his broader theology. More specifically, I have argued that Calvin's natural law theology only makes sense within the context of his two kingdoms doctrine. In light of this intimate connection, it seems only appropriate to highlight once again the importance of natural law to Calvin's social thought. I make two observations that are relevant to the purposes of this chapter.

First, assuming that Calvin intended two kingdoms and natural law to work together in his social thought, it seems only fair to say that they reinforce and help explicate one another. I have argued in the previous chapter that Calvin's natural law thought makes little sense without the hermeneutical lens of two kingdoms. In other words, the presence of two kingdoms theology helps prove and validate the case for natural law in Calvin. It also seems reasonable to argue the same in the other direction: the existence of natural law theology helps prove and validate the case for substantive two kingdoms thinking in Calvin.

Secondly, and following on the paragraph above, it is my judgment that the compatible and mutually reinforcing presence of two kingdoms and natural law in Calvin is another way in which Calvin finds affinity with Luther and differentiates himself from his medieval heritage. More specifically, Calvin distinguishes himself from his medieval predecessors in setting natural law in the context of the two kingdoms, and especially in attributing it a positive use in the civil kingdom. Following the lead of Luther, Calvin developed a distinctive doctrine of two kingdoms, which was designed to "house" his distinctive doctrine of natural law.<sup>825</sup>

I now turn to take a closer look at the significance of Calvin's distinctive contribution to the development of Reformed thought in general and church-state relations in particular.

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<sup>824</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 93.; Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 76.

<sup>825</sup> Relative to this point, see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 114-15.

### 5.3. Calvin and the tradition of two kingdoms and natural law

So far I have analysed Calvin's thinking on church-state relations in terms of continuities and discontinuities with the early Christian tradition. Accordingly, a chief methodological assumption underlying my historical retrieval of Calvin and two kingdoms is that he should be engaged as one who developed upon the theological insights of his predecessors. Based on my research, I have arrived at the following conclusions pertinent to this thesis. First, Calvin's social thinking developed upon the theological insights of, among others, Augustine and Luther. Secondly, Calvin shows substantive theological use of the categories of two kingdoms and natural law in relating church and state. And thirdly, despite some of the ways in which Calvin related church and state in practice, his distinctive two kingdoms contribution is still salvageable and relevant for today.

My analysis of the Reformation Calvin, however, would be incomplete if I did not also consider the significance of his influence upon the subsequent Reformed tradition. In other words, what does the history of Calvin retrieval in the subsequent Reformed tradition say about my claims in this chapter thus far? In the remainder of this chapter, I provide evidence, especially from the early Reformed tradition, that Calvin was appropriated and developed in such a way that generally corroborates the conclusions I have reached regarding Calvin and two kingdoms.

When it comes to considering Calvin's contribution to the early Reformed tradition, I proceed with the assumption that while Calvin was an influential figure in shaping its theological contours, he should not be treated as its chief codifier.<sup>826</sup> Accordingly, he should neither be taken as the final word on any head of doctrine nor treated as the sole standard for assessing later Reformed thought, and not least with respect to the doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law.<sup>827</sup> In other words, just as Calvin and other Reformers critically retrieved and developed

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<sup>826</sup> See Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics : The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, Ca. 1520 to Ca. 1725*, 2nd ed., 4 vols., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academics, 2003), 1.33-37. On this point and relative to Calvin and natural law, see also Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law*, 3, 5-6.; and relative to natural and two kingdoms, see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, Chapters 3 and 5. In contrast, and indicative of many South African Reformed theologians, de Gruchy (de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 65.) claims that Calvin was the "generating source" of the Reformed movement, though he left behind no definitive Reformed theology.

<sup>827</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1.38, 45.

upon the many figures within the early Christian tradition, so too have many early Reformed proponents critically retrieved and developed the insights of Calvin (and other Reformers) on two kingdoms and natural law in helping solidify the tradition. Hence, I seek to provide a sense of Calvin's influence upon the subsequent Reformed tradition in terms of those theologians who stood in continuity with and also critically developed his two kingdoms thinking. First I consider the foundation-laying period for the Reformed tradition during the period of Reformed orthodoxy, and then cross the Atlantic to briefly examine the Reformed tradition's first extended encounter with religious freedom in the early North American experience.

Evidence of Calvin's influence upon the early Reformed tradition is found in the period spanning the latter half of the sixteenth-century through the early eighteenth-century known as the age of Protestant orthodoxy.<sup>828</sup> This assertion rests on a body of scholarship emerging in recent years that has challenged the John Calvin versus the "Calvinists" of subsequent generations thesis.<sup>829</sup> Critics of the Calvin vs. the Calvinist thesis have identified fundamental continuity between Reformation and post-Reformation theologies, while not overlooking development and therefore differences between Calvin and later Reformed theologians. This has led to the affirmation of a variegated yet single Reformed theological tradition.<sup>830</sup>

During the age of Protestant orthodoxy a number of theologians refined and developed upon Calvin's theological insights. David VanDrunen has argued so much in his recent study on

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<sup>828</sup> See Richard Muller, a scholar of Reformed orthodoxy, has identified a rough timeline divided into two periods: the years of "early" orthodoxy spanning 1565-1640 and the years of "high" orthodoxy spanning 1640-1725; see *Ibid.*, 1.30-32.

<sup>829</sup> Among influential works generally in favor of a Calvin vs. the Calvinists approach are Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).; and R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979). Sympathetic to this position is de Gruchy who argues that, though Calvin himself had a rational theologian-philosopher tendency, Protestant Orthodoxy was a betrayal of the liberating-evangelical-humanist spirit of Calvin and the Reformation. With its so-called static dogmas and fixation with the past, it signified a step back for the prophetic dynamism of the earlier Reformed movement and strengthened a troubling element in the tradition that found expression in, among other instances, the imperialism and legalism of Afrikaner Calvinism. See de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 61-67. Among those competent scholars who have found this position wanting, see generally Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*.; W. J. van Asselt and E. Dekker, *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise*, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2001).; Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark, *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999).; and Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982).

<sup>830</sup> For differences between these two schools of thought and in the context of his treatment of the development of two kingdoms and natural law in Reformed social thought, see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 149-51.

the development of Reformed social thought.<sup>831</sup> His representative sampling of “Reformed orthodoxy” includes the likes of Johannes Althusius, Samuel Rutherford, and Francis Turretin and the *Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms* (1646-47).<sup>832</sup> Of special relevance to the purposes of this thesis is VanDrunen’s observation that articulations of two kingdoms and natural law by these figures and documents both affirmed and developed the idea that social and political life is grounded in God’s work of creation and providence rather than in his work of redemption.<sup>833</sup> With respect to the two kingdoms, one important way in which the likes of Turretin and Rutherford developed upon Calvin was in their incorporating the doctrine into larger questions of Christology. In utilising Calvin’s so-called *extra Calvinisticum* Christology, they had the theological categories to speak of the Son of God ruling the temporal kingdom as an eternal member of the Divine Trinity but not in his capacity of as incarnate mediator or redeemer. In doing so, they linked God’s two-fold reign in Son more explicitly with the doctrine of two kingdoms.<sup>834</sup>

With respect to natural law, VanDrunen observes points of continuity between the Reformed orthodox and Calvin and the earlier Christian tradition as well as important instances of development: such as grounding natural law in the covenant of works, and appreciating its significance in relation to valuable Reformed doctrines like the Sabbath, Christian liberty, and ordering of worship and church government. In other words, natural law was integral to the Reformed orthodox theology and ethics and could not be dismissed without ramifications for the system as a whole.<sup>835</sup> Worthy of mention in this regard is the recent work of Stephen J. Grabill who has in general reached similar conclusions regarding Calvin, Protestant orthodoxy and natural law.<sup>836</sup>

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<sup>831</sup> Ibid., Ch.5.

<sup>832</sup> Witte has argued for continuity between Althusius and many of the core political and legal teachings of Calvin, which include, among others, the notion that church and state are separate in form but conjoined in function; see Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, Chapter 3.

<sup>833</sup> VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 151.

<sup>834</sup> Ibid., 173-82.

<sup>835</sup> Ibid., 153-73.

<sup>836</sup> See Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law*, especially Chapters 3-6., where with respect to the Protestant orthodox, he gives special attention to Peter Martyr Vermigli, Johannes Althusius and Francis Turretin. With respect to Althusius and his development of a natural law theory in the Calvinist vein, see also Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, Chapter 3.

When it came to relating two kingdoms and natural law, VanDrunen notes that, like Calvin, Reformed orthodox writers relied upon the former in order to explain the uses of the latter among unbelievers.<sup>837</sup>

Another point of continuity between Reformed orthodox and Calvin was their sharing in Christendom assumptions, which lived on into the seventeenth century. As a result Reformed orthodox writers tended to run into similar tensions and even theological inconsistencies when seeking to relate church and state in practice. For instance, while advocating doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law, Reformed orthodox were also at the same time comfortable with entrusting the magistrate with a coercive role in religious affairs. In so doing, their vision for church-state relations also resembled the intersection of a Luther's two kingdoms theology with a Gelasius's two swords theory: one in which the civil realm, in practice, was ultimately characterised by Christianity.<sup>838</sup> Nevertheless, the Reformed orthodox set forth doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law which were foundational to later Reformed social thought and that would eventually outlive the complicating social phenomenon called Christendom.

Indicative of this is Reformed Christianity's first extended encounter with religious freedom in the North American experience. Here, I continue with VanDrunen's study in the development of Reformed social thought in providing a brief overview of this period. Following the English Puritan experiment in New England, in which historic Reformed two kingdoms and natural law thinking was present but reined in by theocratic and Erastian ideals<sup>839</sup>, new convictions on religious freedom emerged among Virginia Presbyterians in the wake of the Revolutionary War.<sup>840</sup> In the decade after the Declaration of Independence, the latter played a

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<sup>837</sup> VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 208-10.

<sup>838</sup> *Ibid.*, 192-207.

<sup>839</sup> *Ibid.*, 214-34. For a treatment of the evolution of law, religion, and human rights in the Calvinist tradition in the early modern North American story, particularly, Puritan New England, see Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, Chapter 5.

<sup>840</sup> In offering this reading, VanDrunen leverages, with nuanced qualifications, the provocative claim set forth by the prominent mid-nineteenth century Kentucky Presbyterian pastor and theologian (1814-1881), Stuart Robinson, who argued that two traditions of church-state relations existed in early America, namely the New England and Virginia models. The former flourished in the early years of the Republic, and comprised a theocratic, Erastian vision in which religious matters and state's affairs are intertwined and church is viewed as an arm of the state. In the years following the Declaration of Independence, the latter became the inspiration for the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, freed the church from state control and granted liberty to all citizens. In revealing reference to Robinson's observations relative to earlier Christian traditions, VanDrunen continues: "[W]hile the New England model reflects an originally pagan view of religion and state that has corrupted Christianity since at least the days of Constantine, the Virginia model reflects the original vision of the Scottish Reformation as expressed

crucial role in the promotion of religious disestablishment and in the passage of the Statute of Religious Freedom, which was championed especially by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison and served as a model for the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. Virginia Presbyterians came to support a social vision greatly different from that of the New England Puritans. In the end, Presbyterians across America came to embrace, although somewhat hesitantly, the notion that civil government should stay out of church affairs. Despite this advance for the cause of religious freedom, early American Presbyterianism still lacked any strong convictions that the church should refrain from offering its wisdom to the state on its handling of civil affairs.<sup>841</sup> However, this was soon to change with a challenge from within Presbyterian circles.

This challenge came during the Civil War era of the nineteenth century through the doctrines of spirituality of the church and related idea of *jure divino* Presbyterianism,<sup>842</sup> espoused by the likes of eminent mid-nineteenth American Presbyterian theologians Stuart Robinson, Charles Hodge and James Henley Thornwell. Seeing in these doctrines applications of historic Reformed categories, these men avoided several of the common inconsistencies that hampered their Reformed forbearers in the handling of the two kingdoms doctrine. Accordingly, they “attempted to complete the re-thinking of the application of the Reformed two kingdoms doctrine begun by their eighteenth-century American Presbyterian predecessors, not only by removing the state more thoroughly from affairs of the church but also by removing the church from the affairs of the state and other civil organisations.”<sup>843</sup> In affirming the doctrine of the spirituality of the church, these men echoed a doctrine that Calvin had already articulated (that the church as the kingdom of Christ is spiritual). And in arguing that the state but *not* the church should involve itself in civil and temporal matters, they followed the theological (if not always

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in the Second Book of Discipline..., but which the Scottish reformers and other Reformed people had never been able to put into practice consistently as they continued to fuse the roles of church and state”; VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 212-13. See also, ———, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 214-75; esp. 74-75. Robinson’s analysis here bears remarkable similarity to the suggestions in this and the prior chapter, where I have argued that the early Reformed tradition’s practice of entrusting the state with a role in religious affairs cannot be easily reconciled to its clear distinction between the two kingdoms.

<sup>841</sup> Among other noteworthy events during this period was the 1788 revision of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* on several points pertaining to the civil magistrate; see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 234-47.

<sup>842</sup> “A concise summary might be to say that these doctrines ascribed to the church authority to exist and act according to Scripture only and to address itself to spiritual matters only”; see *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>843</sup> *Ibid.*, 247-48.

practical) precedent established by numerous early Reformed theologians as well as patristic and medieval figures such as Gelasius and Ockham. Also following Calvin and Reformed orthodox writers before him, Robinson serves as an example of a Presbyterian theologian during this time who sought to ground social and political life in the work of God as creator, not in the work of Christ as redeemer. Yet, Robinson also distinguished himself from his Reformed predecessors by harkening back to the Diognesian and Augustinian theme of *commonality*: by treating the civil kingdom as a universal realm common to believers and unbelievers alike, distinct from the exclusive character of the spiritual kingdom. Evidence suggests that the natural law tradition was alive during this period as well.<sup>844</sup>

In short, as Reformed theologians encountered the challenges presented by modern ideas about politics and social life, they continued to deal with them in terms of the categories of two kingdoms and natural law, and developed them in ways arguably more coherent than their predecessors, although not without some lingering difficulties of their own. I have shown briefly how this was the case among those within the ranks of nineteenth-century Presbyterianism, who built upon the “radical” moves in Virginia in the eighteenth-century.<sup>845</sup> But development was also taking place on the other side of the Atlantic as well, most notably through the twentieth-century contribution of Abraham Kuyper in the Netherlands.

However, this growth and development would not continue like it once did, on either side of the Atlantic for that matter. With the exception of Kuyper, the twentieth century signaled in large part the abandonment and even rejection of two kingdoms and natural law doctrines.<sup>846</sup>

#### 5.4. Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have undertaken an analysis of Calvin’s theology of church-state relations, motivated in no small part by tensions inherent in his doctrine of two kingdoms. While I conclude that these tensions do give way to inconsistencies for the modern reader, I nevertheless argue that Calvin’s two kingdoms theology is still salvageable and relevant for today. In further support of this claim, I have provided evidence from the early Reformed

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<sup>844</sup> Ibid., 247-75.

<sup>845</sup> Ibid.

<sup>846</sup> Ibid., chap. 7-10.

tradition, which reveals lively use and development of Calvin's categories of two kingdoms and natural law in meeting various challenges arising from changing socio-political contexts.

This chapter has ended on another point of tension, which centers on Calvin's contested legacy on two kingdoms and natural law as revealed by their relative demise in the modern Reformed tradition. In the next chapter, I examine this phenomenon more closely with the purpose of bringing some resolution in the direction of the two kingdoms position. In turn, and in an attempt to give evidence for the theological and practical promise of affirming such a solution, I set forth a developed Calvin-informed two kingdoms and natural law paradigm proposed by David VanDrunen for Christian engagement of culture in South Africa's new liberal democracy.

## CHAPTER 6

### TWO KINGDOMS FOR SOUTH AFRICA TODAY?

A recurring theme in this thesis has been ambiguity in the legacy of Reformed social thought, which stretches back to the early Reformers. I have argued that Calvin himself betrayed inconsistency as he went from theology to practice, as well as in his theology of two kingdoms itself. Nevertheless, as the early Reformed tradition developed, and as the social phenomenon of Christendom fell away, the doctrines of natural law and two kingdoms were worked out more coherently and consistently in various socio-political contexts – most notably North America. However, by the twentieth-century their fortunes had changed, thereby introducing fresh ambiguity into the tradition. Illustrative of this is the tale of the Reformed tradition in South Africa. During the rise of apartheid, Afrikaner Calvinism harnessed certain oppressive aspects of Calvin's later practise in Geneva to help legitimise its quest for social and political transformation along racial lines. It also found support in a distorted form of Kuyper's (not unambiguous) doctrines of divine ordinances and sphere sovereignty. Thus, this neo-Calvinist and neo-Kuyperian combination helped the Dutch Reformed family of churches find theological justification for supporting the Nationalist government in pushing its ideology of apartheid for the benefit of the *volk*.

Yet further ambiguity was introduced into the South African Reformed tradition as anti-apartheid church struggle theologians appealed to a more liberating reading of Calvin over against the oppressive Calvin of apartheid, while continuing to insist on the Calvin of social transformation – just the *right* kind of transformation this time around. This reading of Calvin was largely influenced by Barth and to a lesser degree by a re-appropriation of Kuyper. Hence, it seems fair to say that the dominant portrait of Calvin that lives on in the new South Africa – whether of a Barthian or Kuyperian veneer – is one of Christ transforming culture (see Chapter 2). It is this reading of Calvin that largely informs contemporary Reformed discourse – both in South Africa and abroad – that I would like to challenge and offer a constructive alternative to in this chapter.

To this end, I begin by considering the subtle and more overt ways in which Kuyper and Barth deviated from the classic Reformed categories of natural law and two kingdoms (as outlined in Chapters 4 and 5), thereby introducing fresh ambiguity and discontinuity into the tradition. I then consider instances of theological tension in contemporary Reformed social thought, arguably due to the abandonment of such categories. In response, I suggest that the solution to this historical discontinuity and ambiguity surrounding Calvin and the Reformed tradition in South Africa lies in the engagement of the recent recovery of the Calvinistic and early Reformed two kingdoms by a strand of the Reformed tradition in North America. More specifically, I commend the critically developed two kingdoms and natural law paradigm of David VanDrunen. Accordingly, and for the remainder of the chapter, I set forth VanDrunen's approach as normative paradigm for South Africa. In doing so, I hope to accomplish two main objectives. The first is to provide a sense of the persuasiveness of his biblical and theological arguments, many of which find resonance with Calvin and the early Reformed tradition (as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5). The second is to set forth some of the liberating implications of VanDrunen's paradigm for Christians living in South Africa's young challenged democracy.

### **6.1. A tradition in flux: Abraham Kuyper on two kingdoms**

According to VanDrunen, when it comes to the doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law, Kuyper was a man who ambiguously straddled two eras: simultaneously standing in basic continuity with the early Reformed tradition while also providing impetus for subsequent discontinuity. While Kuyper did not make explicit use of the categories of natural law and two kingdoms in his social thought, he nevertheless emulated much of their content with his organising constructs of divine ordinances, his dialectic of common and special grace, and sphere sovereignty. Like his Reformed predecessors, this theological foundation enabled him, in large part, to ground cultural and political life in the created order as sustained in a sinful world rather than in the redemptive, eschatological order.<sup>847</sup>

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<sup>847</sup> VanDrunen provides in-depth evidence of Kuyper's basic continuity with the early Reformed tradition's doctrines of natural law and two kingdoms. He corroborates this fundamental reading with reference to the likes of Jeremy Begbie and S.U. Zuidema. See *Ibid.*, 276-310. See also Jeremy Begbie, "Creation, Christ, and Culture in Dutch Neo-Calvinism," in *Christ in Our Place: The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the Word*, ed. Trevor Hart and Daniel Thimell (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1989).; S.U. Zuidema, "Common Grace and Christian Action in Abraham Kuyper," in *Communication and Confrontation* (Toronto: Wedge, 1972).; and

And yet, like Calvin and others in the early Reformed tradition, Kuyper also displayed tension in this theology and practice of two kingdoms. VanDrunen provides evidence of such inconsistency, which put Kuyper at odds with his forebears. A first piece of evidence is the disturbing rhetoric that Kuyper employed in rallying Christians for his political cause. It was not uncommon for him to invoke divine threat against those Christians who chose to vote for parties other than his own. Hence, Kuyper's confidence in a political platform that bound the conscience of Christians before God is difficult to square with his also equally vocal conviction that public policy should be based upon a flexible, prudential application of biblical principles in general and natural law (divine ordinances) in particular. Is casting one's political vote a function of Christian liberty by virtue of it being a human activity in the common grace realm or a distinctly Christian activity prescribed (in detail) by the parameters of Scripture?<sup>848</sup>

A second piece of evidence that suggests tension centers on the emphasis, if not priority, that Kuyper attached to a cultural-political agenda. Perhaps this point is best captured in terms of the ramifications of his theological distinction between the institutional and organic church, and the priority that he assigned to the latter. One initial difficulty is how Kuyper can claim that the organic church has the self-sustaining spiritual resources to permeate every sphere of life with a Christian influence – and even provide underlying substance and value to the institutional church – when (by Kuyper's own admission) the institutional church alone possesses the means of grace<sup>849</sup>. Another difficulty is how Kuyper can so emphasise the organic church, which supposedly seeks to improve the workings of common grace for this life only, while also asserting that the institutional church alone bestows salvation and anticipates the eschaton through special grace. One also wonders how this seeming priority comports with his two-kingdoms-like insistence elsewhere that the Christian's present life is a pilgrimage, ultimately constrained by the hope of the world to come. No doubt, Kuyper's ambiguity at times on the relationship between common and special grace helps explain the confusion here.<sup>850</sup>

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Cornelius van der Kooi, "A Theology of Culture: A Critical Appraisal of Kuyper's Doctrine of Common Grace," in *Kuyper Reconsidered: Aspects of His Life and Word*, ed. Cornelius van der Kooi (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1999).

<sup>848</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 310-11.

<sup>849</sup> The preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments.

<sup>850</sup> Also of importance, albeit more secondary, is Kuyper's personal choice to demit the pastoral office for a political one; see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 311-12.

A third issue concerns Kuyper's advocacy of the "Christianisation" of culture. To appreciate this point, one must keep in mind that Kuyper used the adjective "Christian" in different ways depending on the context. Of particular relevance here is his notion of "Christian" societies or nations as referring to the realm of common grace permeated and purified, but not saved or re-created, by special grace. According to him, societies and nations could be deemed "Christian" as long as Christianity had exerted formative influence upon their culture, even if actual resident Christians were few. The point of tension here is that broader cultural life is considered at once both "common" and "Christian". The potencies of original creation are developed but *not* saved through a non-redemptive "Christian" influence. While Kuyper is careful not to conflate the redemptive agency of the church with the non-redemptive and preserving agency of human activities in the broader world, his willingness to assign the label "Christian" to both is at best confusing.<sup>851</sup>

According to VanDrunen, such evidence of Kuyper's imprecision, and perhaps inconsistency, relative to traditional two kingdoms thought created the "knife's edge upon which much of subsequent Reformed social thought would be determined." Out of a desire to generate a more consistent vision of a Christianised culture, the subsequent Reformed tradition for the most part rejected the two kingdoms perspective. Over time, Kuyper's legacy of grounding social and political issues in the created order was replaced with two dominant alternatives: the soteriological Christology of Barth and the eschatology of neo-Calvinists.<sup>852</sup>

## 6.2. A tradition eclipsed: Karl Barth's Christological critique

In this subsection, I briefly consider Barth's radical Christological recasting of the theological foundation of early Reformed social thought and his associated critique of the historic doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law.

VanDrunen observes that one of the fundamental ways in which Barth departed from the earlier Reformed tradition was in his rejection of the dual mediatorial reign of the Son of God. While Barth distinguished between God's work of creation and his work of redemption, he nevertheless insisted that they are both Christological in such a way that they can never be

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<sup>851</sup> See *Ibid.*, 312-13.

<sup>852</sup> See *Ibid.*, 314.

separated. Contrary to the earlier Reformed affirmations of two mediatorships of the Son of God, he argued that the orders of creation and redemption have a higher unity in Christ. To know God as creator is also to know him as redeemer. In keeping with his dismissal of the dual mediatorial role of the Son of God, Barth also rejected other intertwining doctrines. For instance, he rejected the doctrine of the covenant of works at creation, where the law was given without the gospel. Closely related was his rejection of any independent status given to the created order. Hence, he repudiated any witness to God in the created order – such as a creation-based notion of natural law – apart from the redemptive grace of God. In so doing, he also separated himself from the traditional understanding of creation being “Christological” and theology being “christocentric”.<sup>853</sup>

Barth’s rejection of the traditional Reformed idea of an original non-redemptively-Christological creation order governed by law and not gospel, was in turn matched by a rejection of the early Reformed post-fall two kingdoms distinction between a non-redemptive, providentially sustained civil kingdom and a redemptive, Christ-secured spiritual kingdom. Instead, while the church and the secular world, or the church and the state, could be distinguished, they nevertheless share a higher unity by virtue of their mutual participation in (though neither constituted) the kingdom of God and their common christological grounding. Barth affirmed with the early Reformed tradition that both Christians and non-Christians can speak truth, but denied that the latter did so by God’s non-redemptive action and (general) revelation. Instead, whenever anyone speaks truth, it is by God’s witness to himself in the Word of God, Jesus Christ. Hence, what the early Reformed tradition preferred to define anthropologically, Barth defined christologically. He envisioned God as always dealing with *all* people as *both* creator and redeemer.<sup>854</sup> What is more, Barth often relativised the early Reformed affirmation of an epistemological antithesis (amidst residual commonness) between Christians and non-Christians, by insisting upon their shared Christological existence. Thus, he was unwilling to privilege Christian thought in the political realm, for example. In short, while the early Reformed tradition explained the presence of truth and goodness in Christians and non-

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<sup>853</sup> A revealing section where Barth brings these themes together in his critique of classic Reformed theology is Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, IV/1, the Doctrine of Reconciliation*, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, trans. G.W. Bromiley (New York: T&T Clark, 1956). See also VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 344-45.

<sup>854</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 345-46., and George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth : The Shape of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 234-35.

Christians alike in terms of their mutual human existence as creatures of God, Barth identified this commonness with their mutual existence under the redemptive reign of Christ.<sup>855</sup>

Whatever tensions might have attended Kuyper's version of a "Christian" culture, Barth resolved by moving decisively away from the traditional Reformed categories of two kingdoms and natural law, and their theological underpinnings. Barth signaled perhaps most boldly the changing of the guard in twentieth-century Reformed social thought. With what he perceived to be a more consistently Christocentric rendering of culture, he helped usher in a new era where early Reformed doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law would for the most part disappear from constructive discourse.<sup>856</sup> But has the contemporary Reformed abandonment of the earlier two kingdoms and natural law paradigm in favor of so-called more thoroughgoing Christological or eschatological alternatives resulted in more theological consistency and greater fidelity to the biblical witness?

### **6.3. Theological tensions in contemporary Reformed social thought**

In Chapter 2, I provided a taxonomy of contemporary Reformed and broader ecumenical social thought. I concluded that the transformation of culture paradigm is the most dominant perspective animating Christianity and culture, church and state, discourse today – in South Africa and abroad. I argued that the respective legacies of both Kuyper and Barth have played formative roles in shaping the contours of contemporary Reformed social thought, which has in turn influenced or at least bears strong resemblance to contemporary critics of liberalism and other ecumenical voices like N.T. Wright and Desmond Tutu. But not everyone within contemporary Reformed social discourse is persuaded of the transformation of culture paradigm. One such critic is theologian and ethicist, David VanDrunen, who, in addition to questioning its claim of being Reformed, contends that this paradigm betrays significant theological tension and even inconsistency.

VanDrunen argues that while current Reformed social thought may be a leader on the cutting edge of Christian socio-political engagement, closer scrutiny suggests significant internal theological tension. This, he contends, is evident when one considers the cleavage between

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<sup>855</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 346.

<sup>856</sup> See *Ibid.*, 346-47.

contemporary Reformed social thought and some of its broader ecumenical affiliates. More specifically, he observes that retrievers of the radical reformation, like Stanley Hauerwas, have tended to be more consistent than Reformed transformationalists in their sharp critiques of modern society and in their efforts to bring the Kingdom of Christ to bear upon every aspect of social life. This is particularly evident with respect to their critique of the coercive state; a critique that stems from an attempt to apply Scripture as teaching the kingdom of Christ as a non-violent and peaceful kingdom that does not wield coercive force. By incorporating this teaching into their doctrine of social transformation, they endeavor to witness to Christ's kingdom and bring it to expression in the world in non-violent ways. In other words, the retrievers of the radical reformation offer a non-violent Christian *alternative* (versus complement) to the state.<sup>857</sup>

Assuming that the peace tradition founded upon the radical reformation has correctly appropriated Christ's teaching on the non-coercive nature of Christ's kingdom, then what does one make of the contemporary Reformed claim that the state is one of those social institutions that falls within the redemptive purview of Christ's kingdom? According to VanDrunen, here lies no seemingly small *inconsistency*. At this point, the peace tradition *challenges* the contemporary Reformed tradition's association of the kingdom of Christ with the sword-bearing state as being contrary to Christ's words in the Sermon on the Mount. However, should the mainstream present-day Reformed tradition adopt the Hauerwasean paradigm of a peaceful alternative to the state, they would signal a significant break with Calvin and the magisterial Reformation. This move would in effect call into question the early Reformer's diatribe against the Anabaptists and other constituents of the radical reformation. What is more, such a shift would be at odds with a systematic reading of Calvin on the legitimacy of the civil magistrate (written explicitly with Anabaptist claims in mind) as a God-ordained institution to which Christians are to submit and in which they are to participate. As of today, contemporary Reformed writers have not conceded the legitimacy of the state to the likes of Hauerwas and his tradition of non-violent political transformation. Therefore, Reformed transformationists

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<sup>857</sup> See *Ibid.*, 5-11. Among the many works of Hauerwas, see, e.g., Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*.

continue to encounter serious difficulty from a theological perspective, which is co-coordinating the peaceful kingdom of Christ with the violent state.<sup>858</sup>

In VanDrunen's estimation, the two kingdoms and natural law paradigm of Calvin and the early Reformed tradition provides the necessary theological resources to overcome the inherent theological tensions and inconsistencies besetting contemporary Reformed social thought. The potential of the classic Reformed two kingdoms paradigm is that it enables one to affirm Hauerwas's contention that Christ's non-violent kingdom should not be equated with the state, while also affirming the God-ordained legitimacy of the state as a realm of Christian participation. In turn, the two kingdoms view is critical of attempts to create an alternative Christian culture or state, which privatises faith, while also rejecting public attempts by Christians to impose Christ's redemptive kingdom on every institution including the state. Instead, Christians should live by faith in all areas of life, but with the understanding that life in this world is subject to different authorities, limitations and hopes depending on which kingdom is in view – whether church or state, church or broader culture – which illicit different expressions of faith. In other words, two kingdoms proponents like VanDrunen are not against the moral and ethical transformation of society per se, but rather critical of a kind of transformation that seeks to conform broader civil society to the ultimate ideals of the kingdom of God.

I now consider the biblical and theological basis for such a vision of Christianity and culture as articulated by VanDrunen as a normative and liberating paradigm for the Reformed and broader ecumenical church in South Africa today.

#### **6.4. A tradition recovered and renewed: two kingdoms for South Africa today**

In Chapter 4, I set forth Calvin's theological articulation of the doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law, which in large part echoed Luther and developed the earlier insights of Augustine. In Chapter 5, I gave evidence for the development and refinement of these doctrines through the period of Protestant orthodoxy and the early Reformed tradition in North America. I have pointed out that North America is one context in which this paradigm is being

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<sup>858</sup> In VanDrunen's opinion, Calvin and the early Reformed tradition did not encounter such problems, at least not on a theoretical/theological level (see Chapter 5); see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 10-12.

recovered after neglect and even outright rejection in twentieth-century Western Christianity. VanDrunen is one theologian who has been at the forefront of this fledgling renaissance. He is someone who stands self-consciously within the Calvinist and Reformed two kingdoms and natural law tradition, and is seeking to offer a more sophisticated version of these doctrines for ongoing Reformed and ecumenical discourse.

Following his predominantly historical work tracing the development of Reformed natural law and two kingdoms thought, *Natural Law and Two Kingdoms* (2010), VanDrunen produced a more popular volume, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (2010), in which he provides a biblical and theological defense of the two kingdoms doctrine.<sup>859</sup> In the balance of this chapter, I distill the major contours of VanDrunen's two kingdoms paradigm, with emphasis placed on the aforementioned popular title. While natural law is also an important aspect of VanDrunen's social thought, space only permits a compressed consideration of it here. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I highlight some of the liberating implications of this paradigm for Christianity and culture discourse in South Africa.

During the church struggle days, many Reformed theologians were willing to listen to voices beyond the shores of South Africa, like those of Barth and Bonhoeffer. Now that South African society is beyond the civil religion of apartheid days, and faces the uncharted territory of a liberal constitution, can the Reformed tradition and the broader ecumenical church benefit from engaging the two kingdoms paradigm of VanDrunen? If VanDrunen's reception in the North American context to date is any indication, his scholarship has arguably earned the right to be heard in other parts of the world, like South Africa. While he has received resistance from quarters within the Dutch Reformed tradition in North America for his critique of neo-Calvinist transformationism, he has at the same time received recognition for his work from others within the Reformed and Presbyterian fold, as well as broader ecumenical circles.<sup>860</sup>

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<sup>859</sup> See ———, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*.

<sup>860</sup> Evidence of VanDrunen's noteworthy reception in the Reformed tradition in America is publication of his work and its engagement in a number of articles and reviews in the *Calvin Theological Journal*. More recently, see, e.g., James K. A. Smith, "Reforming Public Theology: Two Kingdoms or Two Cities," *Calvin Theological Journal* 47 (2012). Also indicative of his Reformed pedigree is his forthcoming volume on natural law, which included peer review by the likes of John Witte, Jr., and Nicolas Wolterstorff. See David VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*. Indicative of broader ecumenical recognition, see, e.g., the favourable review of Eastland, "Cities of God: Christianity Meets Culture." One might also do a "google" search on "VanDrunen" and "two kingdoms" to get a sense of the (at times controversial) debate his work has generated.

## 6.5. The two Adams, justification and cultural activity

Crucial background to VanDrunen's articulation of the two kingdoms doctrine is the biblical story of two Adams that overshadows all of human history. He argues that Christians must understand their responsibilities in human culture within the context of this overarching narrative, which begins with the first Adam in the Garden of Eden.<sup>861</sup> At the dawn of history God gave Adam, the original sinless human person, and Eve a *cultural* task. As his image-bearers they were commissioned to be fruitful and multiply and to exercise dominion over the earth. Adam was to image God in his *doing* as well as his *being*. He was to work as God worked in creation as God's royal under-lord, towards an end. Like God he was to *finish* his work and then rest. This rest that God set before Adam was an eschatological goal and reward: participation in God's seventh-day rest. If he rendered faithful obedience to the stipulations of the cultural mandate, by working and guarding the holy garden, God would reward him with a new creation (the new heaven and new earth), far surpassing the original one.<sup>862</sup>

In keeping with the historic Reformed tradition, VanDrunen interprets God's dealings with Adam in the original creation account as a divine "covenant of works" (or covenant of creation or covenant of life) in which Adam was treated as the federal representative of the human race.<sup>863</sup> In this discussion, I would like to highlight the attention VanDrunen gives to the presence of the *lex talionis* as a defining principle informing the covenant of works at creation. Not only does this principle help elucidate the significance of the doctrine of justification as it comes to bear upon human cultural activity, but it also sheds important light upon the workings of natural law within the post-fall Noahic covenant (see below), as a republication of the cultural mandate at creation.

At this point, I offer VanDrunen's definition of the *lex talionis*. In arriving at a similar conclusion to many biblical scholars, anthropologists and sociologists, he deems the *lex talionis*

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<sup>861</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 36.

<sup>862</sup> See *Ibid.*, 27-28, 34-43.

<sup>863</sup> VanDrunen cites biblical and theological defense of this doctrine from the likes of J.V. Fesko, *Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 108-22., and Bryan D. Estelle, "The Covenant of Works in Moses and Paul," in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry: Essays by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California*, ed. R. Scott Clark (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 89-135.

to be a rather precise application of the general principle of justice: understood as something like “giving to each his due”. More specifically, the *lex talionis* is that aspect of private law that attempts to define retribution or compensation that is perfectly proportional to the harm caused (i.e. an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth). While *lex talionis* principle has informed the promulgation of legal codes throughout human history, its literal application, however, has died out over time. For example, in our modern legal systems the proportionate measure of justice for bodily injury is normally meted out in terms of monetary compensation rather than limb for limb.<sup>864</sup> In the section on natural law below, I discuss VanDrunen’s the notion of non-literal application in terms of God’s forbearance disclosed in the Noahic covenant.

In what sense then does the talionic principle emerge in God’s dealings with humankind in the original creation account? According to VanDrunen, while not every aspect of God’s initial relationship with Adam was legal, the law given in the covenant as creation nevertheless placed undeniable demands upon Adam: to render to God *everything* he had – his whole person – through *entire* obedience<sup>865</sup>. According to the terms of the covenant, one sinful infraction of the law would bring down God’s curse. Thus, following the precise pattern suggestive in the *lex talionis*, God demanded *all* of Adam as compensation for just *one* act of disobedience. God threatened to enact perfect and proportional retribution for violating the covenant of works. The talionic nature of the final judgment portrayed in Scripture confirms the fulfillment of this threat.<sup>866</sup>

In VanDrunen’s reading of the creation story, while Adam could have earned eschatological life by his cultural labors, he nevertheless failed his probationary test in Eden by falling into sin and plunged the present world into a state of sin and misery. As federal head of the human race, he abdicated his kingship and despised his priesthood over creation by handing

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<sup>864</sup> See David VanDrunen, "Natural Law, the *Lex Talionis*, and the Power of the Sword," *Liberty University Law Review* 2 (2008): 948-49. Another commentator, William Ian Miller, writes: “Let’s just say that the eye/tooth statement perfectly captures the rule of equivalence, balance, and precision in a stunning way. It holds before us the possibility of getting the measure of value right”; see William Ian Miller, *Eye for an Eye* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 30.

<sup>865</sup> Adam’s responsibility can be summed up in the law later given by Jesus: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37).

<sup>866</sup> See, e.g., Revelation 18:6-7a regarding God’s eschatological judgment of Babylon: “Pay her back as she herself has paid back others, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed. As she glorified herself and lived in luxury, so give her a like measure of torment and mourning.” See also 2 Peter 2:13; Revelation 11:18; 16:6.

it over and allowing it to be defiled by the intruder, Satan. The result meant that Adam would find his original destiny impossible to fulfill (Genesis 3). Though cultural endeavors would continue after the fall, producing relative good, none of them can earn God's final approval due to corruption. In other words, fallen human culture *cannot* attain the new creation. Instead, fallen human beings are destined to eternal punishment along with their diabolical king.<sup>867</sup>

And yet, despite the wretched failure of the first Adam, God sent a second and last Adam into the world, the Lord Jesus Christ. He perfectly executed Adam's original legal covenantal obligations as righteous priest and king in this world. What is more Jesus paid the penalty for Adam's sin in his atoning sacrifice, wherein God satisfied the demands of the *lex talionis*.<sup>868</sup> As a result the resurrected Jesus justified himself before the Father and ascended to his right hand. In doing so, the incarnate Son attained the original eschatological goal held out to Adam by conquering sin, death and Satan.<sup>869</sup> Therefore, in VanDrunen's estimation, "redemption is not about regaining the original creation but gaining the new creation by the work of Christ alone."<sup>870</sup> The implications of the second Adam's accomplishment on behalf of Christians for life in this world are profound.

Because, as VanDrunen argues, Christ fulfilled the original creation mandate, God does not impose it again on Christians. Instead, by resting entirely upon the work of Jesus Christ, believers are declared righteous and forgiven, counted as though they themselves perfectly completed Adam's work – in other words, *justified*. What is more, through Christ believers have attained the original destiny of Adam. Even though Christians still live in this world fraught with suffering, their true identity even now is heavenly citizenship, with the certainty that they will share in resurrection life. They have free access to the world-to-come through prayer and worship, and should live as though they belong to it. Therefore, in view of the benefits won by Christ, the *ethical pattern* of a believer should be radically different from that which the first Adam was to follow. Christians are not restored to Adam's original task of pursuing obedience in this world in order to enter the world-to-come. Rather the world-to-come is theirs by grace through faith already, and as a *consequence* they are to live obedient lives in this transient world

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<sup>867</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 44-47.

<sup>868</sup> See ———, "Natural Law," 952.

<sup>869</sup> ———, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 21, 49-56.

<sup>870</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

out of gratitude. In this life, Christians are to seek to glorify God in their cultural activity, but with the knowledge that our cultural labors will not usher in the new creation.<sup>871</sup>

According to VanDrunen, the only particular thing that Scripture speaks of as continuous between this creation and the new creation are the resurrection bodies of believers. This is not to imply that he believes the rest of creation will be annihilated. But rather that on the last day, the natural order and human culture will come to an end, *as we know it*. In other words, while VanDrunen does not argue for the new creation as *ex nihilo*, he is critical of the notion that any specific cultural products beyond the resurrection bodies of believers will be taken up and transformed into the new creation.<sup>872</sup> The biblical and theological grounds for such claims will be considered in more detail below in the sections on the Noahic covenant and natural law.

In VanDrunen's opinion, the above understanding of the biblical theme of the two Adams and its corresponding doctrine of justification is crucial to understanding the Christian life in this world. In fact, he contends that it is impossible to hold to a (*consistent*<sup>873</sup>) biblical vision of Christianity and culture without these doctrines – and hence their foundational place in his articulation of the two kingdoms paradigm. Accordingly, VanDrunen's concern centers on the implications of seeing Adam's original cultural mandate as the model with Christian cultural mandate today. The tendency among neo-Calvinists and other mono-kingdom perspectives is to treat the cultural labours of believers as causally connected to attainment of the new creation. This is not to say that advocates of such a position necessarily believe that the cultural deeds of Christians *merit* the new creation, but rather that they somehow produce the material that will adorn the new creation. The danger of such a perspective is that it, however unwittingly,

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<sup>871</sup> See *Ibid.*, 28. On the relationship of priority of justification in the *ordo salutis* to the doctrine of two kingdoms, and how this informs the ethic of the Christian life, see also David VanDrunen, "The Two Kingdoms and the Ordo Salutis: Life Beyond Judgment and the Question of a Dual Ethic," *Westminster Theological Journal* 70, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 207-24., and ———, "Natural Law," 964-67.

<sup>872</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 64-70. See also David VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law* (Forthcoming), Chapters 1 and 9.

<sup>873</sup> While VanDrunen omits the word "consistent" in the citation below, his basic argument in the book (as is in other places in his writings) is that it is *difficult* to hold to a consistently biblical view of Christianity and culture without affirming the federal representation of the two Adams and the corresponding doctrine of forensic justification. Throughout the aforementioned title, VanDrunen seeks to show how a biblical theology of Christian engagement of culture necessarily depends on classic covenantal categories. His concern is to help people make this important connection, but would no doubt affirm that some Christians have better instincts about broader cultural responsibility than their underlying covenant theology convictions might suggest. See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 34. See, e.g., generally ———, "The Two Kingdoms and the Ordo Salutis," 207-24.

threatens the justification of sinners in Christ alone, by compromising the sufficiency of his active and passive obedience.<sup>874</sup>

In my reading of contemporary Reformed social discourse in South Africa, there are no models of relating Christianity and culture that are beyond this critique. As I have argued in Chapter 2, the predominant Reformed perspective is clearly some variation of Christ transforming culture: one in which God's work of redemption extends to every cultural institution, including the state. Whether of a more Kuypertian or Barthian persuasion, the consensus is that Christians are somehow helping bring about and expanding the kingdom of Christ through their cultural labors in the common civil realm. By speaking in terms of transforming all of life after the one ultimate kingdom of God ideal, by seeing all cultural labor as helping bring into existence Christ's redemptive kingdom, such advocates are at least implying that the model for cultural activity is the first Adam under the original cultural mandate (the covenant of works), rather than gratitude as new creatures in Christ under the freedom of the covenant of grace. For instance, on the Kuypertian end of the spectrum there is the likes of BJ Van der Walt, who, in citing Albert Wolters, argues that since creation belongs to God it should be regained for him through our cultural labours in all fields of life, which requires the right worldview orientation.<sup>875</sup> On the more Barthian end of the spectrum, de Gruchy argues – with recourse to Calvin – for the notion of Christian humanism, which he considers the fulfillment and renewal of humanity through the gospel. Because he argues that the renewal of church life and public life are intrinsically related, he sees it as the Christian's responsibility to restore human dignity according the ultimate biblical ideal. In other words, I read de Gruchy's Christian humanism as a call to participate in the realisation of Christ's kingdom through the promotion of 'human flourishing'.<sup>876</sup>

Can contemporary Reformed discourse in South Africa benefit from thinking through more carefully the theological implications of a redemptive transformationist approach, which makes the first Adam the model for cultural activity in this world?

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<sup>874</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 33-34, 50-51.

<sup>875</sup> See van der Walt, *At Home in God's World*, 5.

<sup>876</sup> See de Gruchy, *John Calvin*, 230-31. See also John de Gruchy, *Being Human: Confessions of a Christian Humanist* (London: SCM Press, 2006).

## 6.6. Lessons from Old Testament sojourners living in God's two kingdoms

Having argued that the Christian's engagement of culture is best understood in the context of the biblical and theological typology of the two Adams and the corresponding doctrine of forensic justification, VanDrunen proceeds to provide a more detailed account of the Christian's cultural life between the fall of Adam and the second coming of Christ. How do Christians live as citizens of heaven and yet still as residents of this world? In short, VanDrunen answers this question by tracing the development of the rubric of two kingdoms from Genesis to Revelation. The biblical account of two kingdoms finds formal expression in the administration of two covenants – the covenant of grace and the Noahic covenant – which casts Christians as sojourners and exiles in this world and yet still as active and meaningful participants in its culture.

### 6.6.1. *Antithesis and commonality*

VanDrunen argues that the origin of the two kingdoms is found early in the Genesis account with the emergence of the dual reality of antithesis and cultural commonality between believers and unbelievers, thereby providing important insights into the early cultural life of humanity. The former was manifested immediately after the fall when God placed enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent: resulting in deep-seated and enduring conflict between those loyal to the Savior and those loyal to Satan. Hence, a fundamental antithesis exists between believers and unbelievers in their attitude toward God, morality, and eternity. No middle ground or zone of moral neutrality exists between them. Depending on where one's allegiances lie has profound implications for how one thinks and acts in this world. An early example of this was the story of Cain and Abel. But alongside this antithesis God also willed a measure of overlap or commonality between believers and unbelievers in this world. Genesis 3 portrays all humankind as subject to the common curse *as well as* common earthly blessings. An early example of this is the promise of justice and order God extends to fugitive

Cain, an unbeliever, in Genesis 4.<sup>877</sup> This means that though they disagree as to things of ultimate importance, believers and unbelievers may nevertheless still share many things in common and work together in many areas of cultural life. Unbelievers may even surpass believers in their cultural accomplishments. God ordained that Christians live in a world in which cultural commonality would exist alongside the spiritual antithesis.<sup>878</sup>

### 6.6.2. *Two covenants and two kingdoms*

In VanDrunen's reading of the early Genesis account, he finds that God also establishes two covenants, which correspond with the antithesis and commonality realities in this world, and wherein the two kingdoms find formal establishment and expression. In his covenant with Noah (Genesis 8-9)<sup>879</sup>, God issues a cultural mandate similar to that given to Adam in the original creation account.<sup>880</sup> In this post-fall context, God entered into a covenant with all of humankind (as well as all creation), wherein he promised to preserve its cultural activities by promising a stable natural order until the end of the world. This saw the formal establishment of the *common kingdom* under the lordship of the triune God. Several important features characterise it: namely the concern for *ordinary* cultural activities<sup>881</sup>, embracing the human race *in common*<sup>882</sup>, ensuring the *preservation* of the natural and social order<sup>883</sup>, and its *temporary* administration. The Noahic

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<sup>877</sup> This is the first evidence of one important aspect of human cultural life: the maintenance of justice. Other cultural activities are mentioned shortly thereafter in the pioneering cultural endeavors of Jabal, Jubal and Tubal-Cain, descendents of unbelieving Cain.

<sup>878</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 28-29, 73-78.

<sup>879</sup> VanDrunen argues that the covenant made with Noah in Genesis 8-9 should be seen as distinct from the prediluvian covenant made with Noah in Genesis 6:18. Simply put, a closer examination of the parties and the purposes of these two covenants reveal that the latter offered redemption, while the former preservation only. See David VanDrunen, "Natural Law in Noahic Accent: A Covenantal Conception of Natural Law Drawn from Genesis 9," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 30, no. 2 (2010): 136. See also Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 230-62.

<sup>880</sup> There are at the same time important differences between the Noahic covenant and the creation covenant. For one, the former contains no conditional statements or imposition of probation. Furthermore, the Noahic covenant promises no consummation of the re-formed creation; see VanDrunen, "Natural Law in Noahic Accent," 135. See also Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 251.

<sup>881</sup> Echoing the original cultural mandate, he was called to fill the earth and exercise dominion over it, as well as take judicial action against those committing great wrongs in it. However, there are no commands of a religious nature – such as people acting like priests – and no promise of life in the world-to-come through obedience.

<sup>882</sup> In addition to incorporating all of creation as well, the Noahic covenant does not identify a holy people as distinguished from the rest of the human race.

<sup>883</sup> Not redemption: there is no assurance of salvation or the forgiveness of sins.

covenant does not disclose the spiritual antithesis, but as the Old Testament story unfolds it becomes evident that evil is at work in the common kingdom as evidenced in the account of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). Believers must appreciate that the common kingdom has both divine origins and demonic proclivities.<sup>884</sup>

According to VanDrunen, few chapters following the Babel account, God established another, contrasting, covenant with Abraham thereby formally instituting the *redemptive kingdom*. Scripture depicts Abraham as living a two kingdoms life. Compared to life under the Noahic covenant, life under the Abrahamic covenant bears four opposing features: namely, it embraces *religious faith and worship* (as opposed to ordinary cultural activities), it embraces a *holy people that is distinguished* from the rest of the human race, it *grants the benefits of salvation* to this holy people (rather than offering preservation of the natural and social order), and it is established *forever and ever*. In this covenant one finds the spiritual antithesis at work. The faith, practice and eternal destiny of its recipients radically distinguish them from their unbelieving neighbors. These four features of the Abrahamic covenant point to its enduring character beyond the days of Abraham, unfolding and progressing through the Davidic and Mosaic covenants, and into the New Covenant, until its completion in the new heaven and new earth. A term sometimes used to describe this phenomenon is the “covenant of grace”.<sup>885</sup>

### 6.6.3. Abraham and exilic Israel: prototypical two kingdoms living

In addition to his prominent role in the initial administration of the covenant of grace, VanDrunen argues that Abraham’s life in God’s two kingdoms is also instructive to Christians today. Although Abraham lived at a different time and encountered different experiences, Abraham is prototypical of what dual citizenship looks like: at once living radically different from the world in religious faith and worship while also engaging his unbelieving neighbors in a

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<sup>884</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 29, 78-82. For some examples of Reformed theologians who have interpreted the Noahic covenant as a covenant of *common grace*, see, e.g., Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity*, trans. William Crookshank, 2 vols. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1990), 2.239.; A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1945), 11-100.; and Herman Bavinck, John Bolt, and John Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3: *Sin and Salvation in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 218-19. Many Reformed theologians have simply understood the Noahic covenant as an administration of the one covenant of grace expressed in later administrations in the Abrahamic, Mosaic and new covenants. See also VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 413-14.

<sup>885</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 29, 82-85.

broad range of cultural activities. Among others, Abraham entered into commercial transactions, moral and judicial disputes, and covenants with his ancient near eastern pagan neighbors. What is more, and of key importance, Abraham did so as a sojourner and stranger in the world (cf. 1 Peter 2:11).<sup>886</sup>

Another period in redemptive history which, in VanDrunen's opinion, in many ways parallels Abraham's experience (not also unlike that of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph) and which provides further insights into the two kingdoms way of life was Israel's exile in Babylon. However, an important interlude separates these two epochs in God's unfolding plan of redemption, namely the Mosaic covenant. Under this covenant, Israel revealed many features of the redemptive kingdom. She foreshadowed the coming Kingdom of the New Testament through the likes of its priesthood, the temple and her homeland. However, in addition to the temporary nature of the Mosaic economy, Israel's theocratic experience inside Canaan did not exemplify life under the two kingdoms. The cultural commonality ordained under the Noahic covenant was suspended inside the borders of the Promised Land, while it nevertheless continued outside of it when Israel engaged its pagan neighbors.<sup>887</sup>

As VanDruen sees it, Israel, however, soon lost possession of the Promised Land and found herself living as exiles under Babylonian captivity. God had made his people sojourners once again. Here one finds the two kingdoms way of life resuming in similar ways to that of Abraham. The prophet Jeremiah gave the Israelites the most explicit directives for life in Babylon in Jeremiah 29. Instead of calling them to rebel and fight, Jeremiah calls them to live peaceable lives and pursue ordinary cultural activities in this foreign land. What is more, Israel was even called to *seek the welfare* of this pagan nation that had pillaged the Holy Land and to *pray for it* – a far cry from the Mosaic Law and its severity towards pagan nations. The Israelites were no doubt called upon to maintain the radical antithesis as children of Abraham living among unbelieving Babylonians. But they also participated in the common kingdom alongside the Babylonians. The book of Daniel provides some helpful insights into how the Israelites conducted themselves in exile. For one, they never attempted to turn Babylon into something other than Babylon. It was a city that could at best ensure some measure of justice by virtue of the Noahic covenant, but never administer salvation. Daniel and his friends served God by

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<sup>886</sup> Ibid., 85-88.

<sup>887</sup> See Ibid., 88-91.

serving Babylon in many commonly human ways, but not in trying to *transform* it into the New Jerusalem, even in part. At the same time, they were uncompromising in their allegiance to God and held firm to the hope they possessed as citizens of the redemptive kingdom – even at the risk of a fiery death or a lion’s den.<sup>888</sup>

To close this section on how VanDrunen discusses the two kingdoms motif emerges from God’s covenantal dealings with his Old Testament people, I would like to suggest some ways in which VanDrunen’s claims might benefit the discourse in South Africa. Perhaps most importantly is VanDrunen’s contention that the Noahic covenant is a temporary and a non-salvific covenant in which God rules over the common civil kingdom in Christ as creator and sustainer, but not redeemer (relative to these points, see also the discussion of the Noahic covenant and natural law below). This affirmation provides the basis for a natural theology that avoids giving theological grounds to an abhorrent form of cultural Christianity like apartheid. By keeping the covenant of grace and the Noahic covenant distinct, there is less theological room for speaking in terms of re-creation being determined or structured by (orders of) creation.

What is more, by affirming the non-redemptive nature of the Noahic covenant, it is arguably easier to discern the unique character of God’s administration of the covenant of grace in the Mosaic covenant. If indeed, Israel’s theocratic living in Canaan is neither normative for God’s people living prior to the giving of the law at Mt Sinai nor for Christian life under the New Covenant, the error of the civil religion endorsed by Afrikaner Calvinism is all the more glaring. But it also calls into question a kind of liberation theology and prophetic witness that seeks to equate in any way the experience of the church today with theocratic Israel.

To see the church today as in parallel with Abraham’s wilderness experience and also that of Israel in Babylonian exile tends to foster a more humble disposition than what the church has often embodied during apartheid days and the subsequent church struggle. Can the Reformed tradition perhaps lead the way in casting the church more in terms of a community of pilgrims and foreigners rather than world changers? Not only will this help in recovering the counter-cultural nature of the gospel message, but it also helps Christians make better sense of life under a liberal democracy and its accommodation to the stubborn reality of religious pluralism.

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<sup>888</sup> See *Ibid.*, 92-96.

## 6.7. New Testament pilgrims living in God's two kingdoms

According to VanDrunen, God's dealings with his Old Testament people in two intertwined kingdoms under the administration of two covenants forms the critical backdrop for understanding the life of the believer in New Testament times. Accordingly, the purpose of this subsection is to explore how the Old Testament rubric of two-kingdoms-living is developed in the New Testament, in light of the coming of Christ. Of particular concern is VanDrunen's claim that the redemptive kingdom and the Abrahamic covenant find penultimate fulfillment and institutional expression in the church only, while the common kingdom and Noahic covenant continue to find temporary expression in various civil institutions, including the state. By considering the New Testament's witness to the distinct nature and task of church and state – as sharpened around questions of conflict and justice – important light is shed on Christian participation in these institutions. Having considered how the New Testament casts believers as simultaneously members of the common cultural realm and the countercultural institution of the church, I then provide a brief outline of VanDrunen's conception of the interlocking doctrine of natural law, as that moral standard for the civil kingdom. Only after considering VanDrunen's biblical and theological grounding of Christian life in God's two kingdoms and natural law, do I then consider some of the practical implications and liberating trajectories for Christian engagement of culture from this perspective.

To begin with, and in terms of the big picture, VanDrunen sees the New Testament as picking up on the Old Testament imagery of “sojourners” and “exiles”<sup>889</sup> to describe the church's present identity in the world. Unlike theocratic Israel, she has no earthly Promised Land to claim as her own. Similar to the experience of Abraham and the Israelites in Babylon they do not live in separation from the world in their own homeland, but participate in a culture to which they do not ultimately belong. Like these Old Testament forebears, Christians must navigate earthly life in which both the spiritual antithesis and cultural commonality still apply. Christians are resident aliens in this world, living on the doorstep and in eager anticipation of their eternal homeland.<sup>890</sup>

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<sup>889</sup> ... in the *diaspora* (James 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1, 17; 2:11).

<sup>890</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 97.

While New Testament believers share much in common with the experience of Abraham and the Israelites in Babylonian exile, theirs is also at the same time very different – and in fact – much better. Compared to Old Testament believers, New Testament saints are closer to and experience more fully the attendant blessings of the world-to-come, thanks to the arrival of Jesus Christ and the coming of his kingdom. One of the blessings of the last days is that believers are now members of the New Testament church<sup>891</sup>, providing them with access to heaven itself.<sup>892</sup>

### *6.7.1. The redemptive kingdom and Christ's church*

One of the defining features of the two kingdoms paradigm, in contrast to many redemptive transformationist models dominant in contemporary Christianity and culture discourse, is its high view of the church. According to VanDrunen, this conviction flows chiefly from the understanding that the church is the *only* institution that can be identified with the redemptive kingdom. In what follows, I will consider his claim that with the arrival of Christ and his heavenly kingdom, the Abrahamic covenant as well as the redemptive kingdom is brought to penultimate fulfillment in the church. Evidence of the church being the only institution that makes manifest the kingdom of heaven on earth is its distinct ethic.

In VanDrunen's understanding of the unfolding of God's covenant of grace in salvation history, he sees its ultimate fulfillment in the new heaven and new earth and its penultimate fulfillment in the work of Christ and his church. He finds warrant for the notion that the church is the only institutional community where salvation and eternal life are bestowed from the likes of Galatians 3 and Ephesians 2-3. In the instance of the former, it is clear from early on in the book that when it comes to the enjoyment of the salvation benefits of Christ, only the church is being addressed (Gal. 1.2). And the benefits won by Christ – forgiveness of sins and deliverance from this present evil age – correspond precisely with the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant. According to VanDrunen's reading of Chapter 3, not only does Paul explain that the New Testament church is no longer under the covenant with Moses, but also affirms that Christians are participants in the earlier covenant with Abraham through Jesus Christ, as marked out through baptism. In Ephesians 2 and 3, Paul elaborates on the continuity between the New

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<sup>891</sup> There is a sense in which "the church" existed in the Old Testament, albeit under age.

<sup>892</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 99-102.

Covenant church and the Old Testament promises through the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant in Christ. Here, Paul describes how Gentiles, once separated from the covenant of promise, now enjoy its salvation benefits through Christ (Eph. 2:12-18), as members of his church (Eph. 2:19-3:10). In other words, for Paul, the church is the only contemporary institution or community that can lay claim to the promises of the Abrahamic covenant.<sup>893</sup>

Having established this connection between the Abrahamic covenant and the church, through Christ, VanDrunen makes a further claim on the basis of the assumption (already defended above) that the redemptive kingdom found formal establishment in the Abrahamic covenant. Accordingly, he reasons that if the Abrahamic covenant finds present expression and fulfillment in the church, then so must the redemptive kingdom.<sup>894</sup> As to more specifics, VanDrunen develops his case from the gospel of Matthew in general and the Sermon on the Mount in particular.

#### *6.7.2. The Sermon on the Mount*

In VanDrunen's reading of Matthew in general, he finds plenty of rich evidence for the notion that Christ's new heavenly kingdom has broken into this world. After John the Baptist has prepared the way for Messiah and he is arrested, the era of Moses and the Old Testament prophets is over and Jesus commences his ministry by announcing that the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matthew 1-4). Throughout his life Jesus testified to the in-breaking of the coming kingdom through many signs and wonders.<sup>895</sup>

Of particular significance to VanDrunen are Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. Here VanDrunen argues that one finds a wonderful illustration of how Christ's heavenly kingdom has surpassed the redemptive kingdom of the Old Testament and brought it to fulfillment. Amidst the evidence for this is Matthew 5:17-18<sup>896</sup>, where Jesus implicitly reveals himself as one even greater than Moses: not because he came to abolish Moses and the Old

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<sup>893</sup> See *Ibid.*, 103-06.

<sup>894</sup> See ———, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 106.

<sup>895</sup> See ———, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 106-07.

<sup>896</sup> "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (Matt. 5:17-18).

Testament, but because he came to fulfill them. The rest of Matthew 5 gives evidence to support the claim that Jesus is neither reiterating nor abolishing the Mosaic law.<sup>897</sup>

For VanDrunen, the testimony of the Beatitudes suggests that the life of the kingdom which Jesus inaugurates at the beginning of the gospel of Matthew is new and, in certain respects, different from the life of the redemptive kingdom under Moses. This becomes especially patent with regard to questions of conflict and justice. The Mosaic covenant was distinct from the Abrahamic covenant in that it prescribed detailed legal and political requirements for the governance of God's people. Informing the administration of the redemptive kingdom under the Mosaic law, and harkening back to the pre-fall covenant of works, was the talionic principle of strict and proportionate justice: eye for an eye, tooth for tooth (cf. Matt. 5:48). According the Mosaic law, Israel was to love God and neighbour (Lev. 19:18; Deut. 6:5), but only in a way compatible with executing justice against the wrongdoer.<sup>898</sup>

In contrast, according to VanDrunen, life in the kingdom of heaven is distinctively different. Unlike life under the Mosaic covenant, Christ's kingdom is a realm in which the demands of justice are strangely transcended. Instead of proportionate retaliation, Jesus describes his kingdom as one of forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration (Matt. 5:23, 39, 44). Because the Sermon on the Mount is first and foremost about Jesus, and not ethics, it should be read as a testimony to Christ's *fulfillment* (and not *abolishment*) of the Law and the Prophets. As the *faithful* last Adam, Jesus attained through his righteousness obedience what was held out to the first Adam under the covenant of works and typified to theocratic Israel in Canaan under the Mosaic law: the redemptive kingdom. The kingdom of heaven that Jesus brought with him and

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<sup>897</sup> With this interpretation of Matthew 5, VanDrunen demurs from the likes of John Calvin and Herman Ridderbos, who read Jesus as primarily clarifying the demands of the Mosaic law in the context of Jewish distortions of it. See John Calvin, "Commentary on the Harmony of the Gospels, Vol. 1," Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom31.toc.html>, and Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1962), chap. 7. For a more detailed exegesis of parts of Matthew 5 referenced here, as well as other pertinent sections, see David VanDrunen, "Bearing Sword in the State, Turning the Cheek in the Church: A Reformed Two-Kingdoms Interpretation of Matthew 5:38-42," *Themelios* 34, no. 3 (2009): 322-34. See also VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 107-09.

<sup>898</sup> See Exodus 21:22-25; Leviticus 24:18-21; and Deuteronomy 19:21. VanDrunen observes that while the *lex talionis* principle was not always implemented literally, it nevertheless did impose the important legal standard of proportionate justice. See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 109-10. For more on the nature of the *lex talionis* principle and how it informs God's dealings with humanity in a fallen world, see the section on natural law below.

established is therefore the kingdom of the world-to-come, the redemptive kingdom come to fulfillment.<sup>899</sup>

According to VanDrunen, such observations suggest that the commands found in the Sermon on the Mount are not a universal human ethic, but rather intended for those who have *already been made citizens* of the kingdom of heaven. The Beatitudes set forth a strangely counter-cultural and non-retributive ethic, applicable only to those who enjoy the reality of God's justice already satisfied in Messiah.<sup>900</sup> Because Jesus absorbed the strict and proportionate retaliatory justice of God the Father on account of humankind's sin, the *lex talionis* finds no place in the church.<sup>901</sup> Hence, Jesus can call Christians who suffer at the hands of evildoers to turn the other cheek, instead of walking away (Matt. 5:39). Why? Because in doing so they exhibit the gospel in which God did not mete out proportionate retaliation toward them on account of their sin, but instead turned the other cheek by incurring the second evil of allowing them to crucify his Son – the reciprocal action of the *lex talionis*. When Christians act in this non-retaliatory gospel way, they are not *abolishing* the law and its claims of justice, but reflecting their *fulfillment* in the work of Christ, just as Jesus proclaimed in Matthew 5:17.<sup>902</sup>

In light of such observations on the Sermon on the Mount, how then exactly are Christians supposed to live out such an ethic? Some theologians have suggested that Jesus' words present an impossible ideal.<sup>903</sup> At the other end of the extreme are those who believe that a literal reading of Jesus' words should lead Christians to embrace nonviolence and perhaps fully-fledged pacifism.<sup>904</sup> In contrast to both of these positions, VanDrunen proposes a different

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<sup>899</sup> See *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>900</sup> The *talionic* and retributive nature of the Mosaic law reminded the Israelites of the unfulfilled covenant of works imposed upon Adam, and therefore justice unsatisfied. Nevertheless, through the successful probation of Jesus, justice has been fulfilled and the citizens of his kingdom freed from its claims. See *Ibid.*, 111. See also ———, "The Two Kingdoms and the Ordo Salutis," 207-24.

<sup>901</sup> See VanDrunen, "Natural Law," 962. For more on the *lex talionis*, the gospel and the ethic of the church, see ———, "Natural Law," 964-67.

<sup>902</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 110-11.

<sup>903</sup> See, e.g., Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, Third edition. ed., Publications on the Rauschenbusch Lectureship Foundation (New York: Harper & brothers, 1935), Chapter 2.

<sup>904</sup> Many advocates of this position see their non-violence not as a way to withdraw from broader society but as a way to transform it. See, e.g., John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich. Carlisle, UK: Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1994)., and Glen Harold Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 132-40.

perspective based on two basic guidelines extracted from the biblical witness. First, Jesus intended his words – his commands – to be lived out in this world of sin and conflict.<sup>905</sup> Second, he set forth an ethic not primarily for the individual (though it includes this dimension<sup>906</sup>), but for a community, the *church*. In this age before Christians have entered the New Jerusalem, God has seen fit to enable them to experience and participate in it proleptically, through that institution entrusted with the keys to heaven (Matt. 16:18-19). In the pattern of church discipline outlined in Matthew 18, Jesus makes it clear that the ethic of the church is the ethic of the kingdom of heaven. Instead of seeking strict justice against the straying sinner, the church is to follow its Lord's example of reconciliation and restoration (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Cor: 5-11). Matthew also indicates that the kingdom of heaven should not be equated with any social-political communities of the broader world. In all the gospels, the kingdom of heaven is always equated with the church.<sup>907</sup>

In this subsection, I have set forth VanDrunen's claim that the New Testament, particularly the gospel of Matthew and the Sermon on the Mount, develops the Old Testament teaching that the redemptive kingdom grows out of the Abrahamic covenant and found temporary administration under the Mosaic law. With the coming of Christ and his heavenly kingdom, the redemptive kingdom finds penultimate fulfillment and expression in the church alone. While the church is not identical with the covenant of grace or the kingdom of heaven, it is nevertheless the only place where the coming age is made manifest institutionally on earth (while also experienced individually in a number of different ways and in different settings).<sup>908</sup> How, then, should Christians understand the nature and task of other institutions that comprise the common kingdom, like the state?

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<sup>905</sup> See Matt. 5:19; 7:21, 24.

<sup>906</sup> No doubt, Christians have to exercise wisdom in how to live the implications of the Sermon on the Mount in the civil kingdom. For example, how might a Christian respond to the threat of a violent thief in the middle of the night compared to possibility of physical harm on account of witnessing to the gospel? For more discussion on the individual ethical implications of the Sermon of the Mount, see VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, Chapter 9.

<sup>907</sup> See ———, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 112-16. Relative to these points, see also ———, "Natural Law," 961-62.

<sup>908</sup> For the remainder of this chapter, the church is assumed to be that visible worshipping community or institution, filled with believers and their children marked out by baptism, and instructed, governed and served by ministers, elders and deacons appointed for those tasks. What is more, the work and life of *the church* should be distinguished from the work and life of *individual believers* (or groups of believers). Individual believers and groups of believers do not act in the capacity of "the church" in all they do. Accordingly, VanDrunen does not find biblical warrant for Abraham Kuyper's distinction between church as "institution" and church as "organism"; VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 116-17.

### 6.7.3. *The common kingdom and the state*

Having defined the nature of the church in terms of its relationship to the foundational realities of the covenant of grace and the kingdom of heaven, I now turn to VanDrunen's treatment of the state as one among many institutions set forth in Scripture. Like every institution or community, he is emphatic that Christ rules over the state (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:21). And yet, it is the church alone that can claim the benefits and privileges of the covenant of grace and the redemptive kingdom (Rev. 11:15). How, then, does Christ rule the state and the many other institutions and communities in this world? In short, in VanDrunen's reading of the New Testament, Christ rules them through the Noahic covenant as party to the ongoing common kingdom, and according to the basic principles and purposes as before Messiah's coming. The difference now is that God governs them through the mediatorship of the incarnate Lord Jesus, who has already entered the world to come, and will bring this current world to an end at his second coming. It is important to emphasise here that while God rules the civil kingdom through the mediatorial reign of the incarnate Christ, he does not do so as redeemer but rather as sustainer according to the temporal terms of the ongoing Noahic covenant.<sup>909</sup>

Until Christ's second coming, VanDrunen see the New Testament giving special attention to the family and the state as those institutions carrying out the promises of the Noahic covenant: namely, the preservation of the natural and human social order. In the case of the latter, its justice and order protecting origins reach back even further to Genesis 4:15. Throughout the Old Testament, pagan kings are acknowledged as having legitimate authority. The New Testament continues to uphold the notion of the state: acknowledging the authority of civil government and the magistrates who hold office, and according them proper respect (Matt. 22:15-22; Rom. 13:1-7; see also 1 Tim. 2:1-2; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). Like the family, the state and its civil magistrates are legitimate regardless of their faith preferences; they are not uniquely Christian.<sup>910</sup> What it more, VanDrunen believes it crucial to note that nowhere does the New Testament mandate that the civil authorities have the responsibility to make the social or

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<sup>909</sup> In support of the ongoing nature of the Noahic covenant is the fact that God promised its continuation "while the earth remains" (Gen. 8:22). Furthermore, there is nothing in the Gospels to suggest that Christ intended the institutions and communities of this world to come to an end at his first coming. See *Ibid.*, 117-19.

<sup>910</sup> No one could have mistaken the Roman government and its magistrates as being "Christian"!

political order conform to the redemptive kingdom of heaven. What Christians are to expect from the state is relative justice – the best the common kingdom can offer – so that they may lead a “peaceful and quiet life” (1 Tim. 2:2; see Rom. 13:3-4).<sup>911</sup>

In view of the claim above that the church’s ethic is one of reconciliation and non-violence, it therefore follows for VanDrunen that the sword-wielding state cannot be part of the redemptive kingdom, but does find a place in the common kingdom under the Noahic covenant. Hence, the two kingdoms vision for Christian life as members of both church and state allows one to take both the Sermon on the Mount and Romans 13 seriously – in ways that, according to VanDrunen (as argued early in this chapter), a mono-kingdom theology simply cannot.<sup>912</sup>

At this point, it is perhaps helpful to consider briefly the tension that the mono-kingdom theology of transformationism has created in the South African context. In the case of the church’s theological legitimisation of institutionalised apartheid and its general collusion with the state, as well as in the church’s critique of the state in the struggle against apartheid, the Reformed tradition has seen fit to relate the church to the state as if both belong to the redemptive kingdom of Christ; and therefore as if both are subject to the ethic of the Sermon on the Mount. But if VanDrunen’s reading of the Beatitudes is correct, how does such logic hold up under the scrutiny of Scripture? How can someone like de Gruchy argue that the peaceful and conciliatory ethic of the Sermon on the Mount should guide Christians in all of life without qualification; that Jesus’ words constitute what it means to be truly human in general, and not uniquely Christian?<sup>913</sup> Is he not giving ground to the Anabaptist tradition by questioning the legitimacy of the state and its retributive nature? Is he not downplaying the distinct way of life within the church?

Perhaps it is helpful to stress at this point that VanDrunen does see the ethic of the Sermon on the Mount as applying to various aspects of Christian life. Christians are to show the unique love of Christ in all of life, but not in ways that compromise civil institutions or detract from their proper work. For civil institutions have not been commissioned by Jesus to follow the ethic of the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>914</sup>

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<sup>911</sup>See VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 119-23.

<sup>912</sup>See ———, “Natural Law,” 962-64.

<sup>913</sup>See de Gruchy, *Being Human*, 51, 144-46.

<sup>914</sup>See VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, Chapter 9.

#### 6.7.4. *A Christian outlook on the common kingdom*

With the distinct nature of the common kingdom and its multi-institutional expression in view, I now consider briefly VanDrunen's description of the Christian's general outlook on the common kingdom. A more detailed account of the implications of a two kingdom's approach to Christian's engagement of both church and state will be explored below.

In terms of the big picture, VanDrunen notes that while Christians should affirm with Ecclesiastes the God-ordained goodness of cultural life (creation), this affirmation must be tempered with the perspective of the New Testament, which can be summarised in three points. First, Christians should pursue their cultural activities in the broader world with a spirit of love and service, rather than triumph and conquest over one's neighbor (Matt. 5:43-44; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:13-14).<sup>915</sup> Secondly, and in keeping with the spiritual antithesis in the midst of commonality, Christians should also engage critically with the surrounding human culture – ever on guard and perceptive about the many ways in which sin has corrupted human culture in this fallen world (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor.10:5; Col. 2:8). In doing so, the weapons used are not earthly or fleshly, such as military power, political tactics or media propaganda (2 Cor. 10:3-4<sup>916</sup>). Thirdly and finally, the New Testament calls Christians to undertake their cultural activities with a deep sense of detachment from this world<sup>917</sup> and with a longing for the life to come (Col. 3:2-3; Phil. 3:19-20; Heb. 13:13-14; Titus 2:12-13). Like Abraham and Daniel of old, this kind of attitude is befitting for sojourners and exiles (Heb. 11:11-16; 13:14).<sup>918</sup>

In the preceding subsection, I have set forth VanDrunen's biblical and theological vision for Christian life in God's two kingdoms. He argues that both the redemptive and the common kingdoms are ordained by God and that both fall under his moral government. Accordingly, Christians offer loving service to God and neighbor in both. Nevertheless, God rules each

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<sup>915</sup> ... and with a spirit of gentleness, meekness, patience and humility (e.g., Matt. 5:5; Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 4:2).

<sup>916</sup> See also Ephesians 6.

<sup>917</sup> What are the fleeting pleasures and pains of Christian cultural labors in comparison to the treasures of heaven (Matt. 6:20; Rom. 8:18; 1 Tim. 6:19)? Social position is not crucial for one's standing before Christ (1 Cor. 7:17-24). Even cultural activities as honorable as marriage and commerce are modest in comparison to eternity (1 Cor. 7:29-31).

<sup>918</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 123-28.

kingdom differently and according to different purposes and ends. Only the church can lay claim to the benefits of Christ's redemptive kingdom as that penultimate realisation of the kingdom of heaven on earth. Therefore, Christian participation in each kingdom will take on different ethical contours depending on which kingdom is in view. Questions of conflict and justice have helped sharpen the distinctly different natures of the church and state, the former being a community marked by forgiveness and the latter being governed by the sword.

What then are some of the more specific implications of this theological vision for the Christian's conduct in this world? Particularly, how does this vision inform practical Christian conduct as members of both church and state?

Before answering such questions from a two kingdoms perspective – which promises liberating and transformative trajectories for Christian life in a liberal society like South Africa – I briefly consider VanDrunen's articulation of the doctrine of natural law. In doing so, I hope to shed further light on his conception of the nature of the civil kingdom, and more specifically its moral standard, and thereby provide further wisdom for Christians living in it.

## 6.8. Natural law

One doctrine that is not dealt with explicitly by VanDrunen in his *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, but is nevertheless important to a biblical and theological accounting of Christian life in God's two kingdoms is natural law. Like Calvin before him<sup>919</sup>, VanDrunen considers natural law a concept interlocking with the doctrine of two kingdoms, which helps explain the latter. In fact, he contends that natural law does not make sense without the context of two kingdoms.<sup>920</sup> Hence, in order to further explicate the biblical-theological case for two kingdoms as well as suggest its usefulness for Christians trying to make sense of life inside and outside the church, I provide a brief outline of VanDrunen's account of natural law, with particular attention given to his work, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law* (2006).<sup>921</sup>

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<sup>919</sup> VanDrunen argues so much in ———, "The Context of Natural Law."

<sup>920</sup> See David VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, Chapter 3.

<sup>921</sup> See *Ibid.* VanDrunen is currently working on producing the first full-scale biblical theology of natural law; the draft of which, as of April 2012, is receiving critical feedback from a symposium of theologians and ethicists including John Witte, Jr, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Russell Hittinger and Stephen Grabill. According to him, the most extensive attempt at a similar project to date is Matthew Levering, *Biblical Natural Law : A Theocentric and*

It should be clear from the outset that while VanDrunen is concerned to provide a theological account of natural law, he is not making a case for natural law as a “Christian” ethic. Because he seeks to ground natural law in the Noahic covenant, which he defends as a universal covenant and law, he does not see natural law as distinctively Christian.

According to VanDrunen, one way to define natural law is: that term which “generally refers to the moral order inscribed in the world and especially in human nature, an order that is known to all people through natural faculties (especially reason and/or conscience) even apart from supernatural divine revelation that binds morally the whole of the human race.”<sup>922</sup> Such a definition of natural law boasts staggering claims, central among them being that “all people, of whatever culture, historical milieu, or religion, know the basic claims of what is right and wrong at the core of their being.”<sup>923</sup> With assertions like this one, it is not surprising that natural law theory has featured significantly in both Christian and non-Christian thinking alike in Western history, and not always favorably. However, what is of particular concern for VanDrunen is the twentieth-century skepticism toward and at times even outright rejection of a concept that had previously been a standard part of Christian doctrine in Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions. Reasons for such skepticism in much of contemporary Protestantism, including Reformed communities, include the argument that natural law detracts from the authority and priority of Scripture. Another argument is that the appeal to natural law makes human nature and not God’s nature our moral authority, thereby producing an ethics based on human autonomy. Furthermore, natural law is accused of not taking seriously enough the fact of human sin and its perversion of human reasoning.<sup>924</sup> Hence, VanDrunen’s burden is to provide a theological (though not specifically Christian) and universally applicable account of natural law. In so doing he sees himself as largely echoing the insights of the earlier Protestant and Reformed traditions<sup>925</sup>, including Calvin (many of VanDrunen’s claims resonate with those of Calvin outlined in Chapter 4.)

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*Teleological Approach* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). See also VanDrunen, "Natural Law in Noahic Accent," 132.

<sup>922</sup> See VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, 1.

<sup>923</sup> See *Ibid.*

<sup>924</sup> Natural law has also been met with skepticism because is supposedly “presents a monolithic moral standard that cannot account for the historical development of biblical teaching on ethics”; see *Ibid.*, 2-4.

<sup>925</sup> See *Ibid.*, 2.

In what follows I highlight three features of VanDrunen's biblical case for natural law as that universal God-given standard mediated through a fallen world. First, natural law is founded upon God's own righteous nature and the creation of human beings in his image. Secondly, natural law is part of God's covenantal dealings with humankind as creator and sustainer as exemplified under the terms of the Noahic covenant. And thirdly, natural law plays differing roles in the life of the Christian depending on which kingdom is in view.

### *6.8.1. Natural law and the Divine and human natures*

According to VanDrunen, the biblical teaching on natural law is best introduced through the idea of the image of God. The foundational premise is that God is a moral being who always acts in justice, holiness and righteousness. Central to God's acts in history is the creation of human beings in his image, which means they are also moral beings by nature. As a result, they know God's moral law and are under obligation to perform it.<sup>926</sup> I now consider briefly the biblical warrant for each of these assertions.

In his Scriptural defense of God as a moral being, VanDrunen pays special attention to God's moral attribute of righteousness or justice with its attendant forensic and legal connotations, which carry particular relevance for a discussion on natural law. God is a righteous judge who rules with justice over all of his creation according to the laws his moral character has established. One of the ways in which God's righteousness is portrayed in Scripture is the imagery of God inhabiting the office of king enthroned in judgment over the world. In defending this claim, VanDrunen pays special attention to Genesis 1:2 and Genesis 1:26 in the creation account, which provide an early portrayal of God as royal judge who executes righteousness among his angelic host (cf. Ps 99:1, 4; Ps 89:5-7; Is 6; Revelation 4-5). Such aspects of God's identity in turn show up in His creative work. For instance, in addition to creating and naming, God exacted obligations from his creatures by issuing them commands (Genesis 1:22, 28). He also judged his creation as "(very) good" (1:4, 9, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31).<sup>927</sup>

How then does God's nature as righteous judge and king have bearing upon the idea of natural law? According to VanDrunen, the answer begins with the fact that God has created man

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<sup>926</sup> See *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>927</sup> See *Ibid.*, 8-12.

in his own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). This means that like God, human beings by nature possess holiness, righteousness and moral knowledge (Paul alludes to these aspects of original human image-bearing when speaking of re-creation in Christ in Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10). In other words, human beings have been imbued with moral character and know the moral standard to which they are bound. In addition to imaging God in who they *are* (it is not simply an aspect of human nature), humankind also by nature images God in what they *do*: as seen in God's original creation mandate to imitate him by ruling over the world. Like God, in their finite way human beings were to execute the office of king by fulfilling the moral commission of ruling and subduing the earth, by working for six days and resting on the seventh (Genesis 1:26, 28; 2:19-20; 2:3; cf. Ex. 20:11). In other words, human beings were to imitate God by working toward rest (as later confirmed with the giving of the Fourth Commandment and its appeal to the image of God.) In short, the image of God carries along with it a natural law, a law inherent to human nature and directing human beings to work towards fulfilling their royal commission in righteousness and holiness to gain the reward of eschatological rest.<sup>928</sup>

In VanDrunen's estimation, this human pattern of imaging God in work and rest constitutes the basic obligation of the covenant of works: "work during a time of probation followed by a reward of rest." Thus, one can say that by virtue of being created in the image of God, Adam knew by nature the basic obligations of the covenant of works.<sup>929</sup> This in turn suggests that the *lex talionis* principle operative in the covenant of creation was also known to Adam by nature.<sup>930</sup> Observing that the image of God is also a judicial reality further strengthens this latter claim. In the first two chapters of Genesis, God is portrayed as a royal-judicial figure, who, following the creation of the world, subjects it to various responsibilities, pronounces initial judgment on it and threatens judgment for failure to carry out its responsibilities. Likewise, Adam was to fill a royal-judicial office in his calling to rule over creation, name the animals and expel the evil intruder from the holy Garden. What is more, even after the fall, two of the first

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<sup>928</sup> See *Ibid.*, 12-14.

<sup>929</sup> For an elaboration of this view summarised here, including supporting bibliographic material, see David VanDrunen, "Natural Law and the Works Principle under Adam and Moses," in *The Law Is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant*, ed. John V. Fesko & David VanDrunen Bryan D. Estelle (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2009).

<sup>930</sup> See VanDrunen, "The Two Kingdoms and the Ordo Salutis," 950-53.

references to the image of God concern human judicial capacities.<sup>931</sup> Hence, VanDrunen contends that *both* the obligation and judgment entailed in the law were apparently known to humankind by nature through the *imago dei*. And thus, “[s]ince the *lex talionis* was the law imposed and acted upon by the divine judge, it seems compelling to conclude... that the law resident in the heart of the human, as the image-bearing judge, was also the *lex talionis*.”<sup>932</sup> The notion that the natural law teaches the *lex talionis* and that both are known by nature, by virtue of humankind’s divine image-bearing, gains further biblical and theological warrant in the post-fall covenant between God and Noah discussed below.

At this point it is worth noting that, contrary to the claims of its critics, natural law cannot be construed as a vain attempt at an autonomous human ethic. Instead, natural law reflects who God is and how he has chosen to relate to the world.<sup>933</sup>

Thus far I have considered humankind’s image-bearing of God prior to the fall. How then does sin affect the operations of natural law upon fallen human nature? The Reformed tradition has historically emphasised the radical wickedness that now permeates human nature on account of sin (cf. Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9; Eph. 2:1). This sinful corruption extends to the image of God (Eph. 4.24; Col. 3:10) thereby perverting man’s natural knowledge of God and morality (Romans 1:18-32). Should one then conclude that natural law has been stripped of its efficacy in a fallen world? Not according to VanDrunen. He argues that while natural law is insufficient for salvation, it nevertheless retains a measure of positive usefulness today. In defending this claim, he makes three arguments from Scripture. First, while corrupted by sin, human beings nevertheless continue to be the image of God according to the likes of Genesis 9:1, 6-7<sup>934</sup> and James 3:9 (cf. Proverbs 14:31; 17:5). Second, the ongoing reality of human beings as image-bearers in turn suggests that there is still a natural law in this fallen world and that humankind

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<sup>931</sup> See *Genesis* 3:22; 9:6.

<sup>932</sup> While sensitive to the suspicion of vigilante justice, VanDrunen nevertheless affirms the *lex talionis* as natural in a good sense when one considers that each individual bears the image of God, and therefore each one of us is by nature of great worth and by nature a judge. He continues: “When someone injures us, there is something righteous about understanding that the act is unjust and desiring that the act of injustice be rectified. If an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is an expression of exact, proportionate justice, then image-bearers of God rightly desire to see that justice is achieved. The concept of the image of God, as a judicial reality, helps us to understand why certain natural affinities toward the *lex talionis* may be driven by what is good within us, even when that good is corrupted by the selfishness and violence that sin engenders.” See VanDrunen, “Natural Law,” 953-54.

<sup>933</sup> See ———, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, 14.

<sup>934</sup> These texts presuppose the ongoing existence of a post-fall image of God as the basis for civil justice and the re-issuing of the creation mandate.

still has some knowledge of it. In Romans 1:18-32, for instance, Paul teaches that all people by nature have practically a comprehensive knowledge of God's moral law and know that violating it deserves divine judgment. Third, the natural law is God's law that is proclaimed through the instrumentality of the human heart and conscience as has traditionally been argued from Romans 2:14-15.<sup>935</sup>

In this subsection it has been argued that natural law continues to exist in the fallen world, which means that all people have true knowledge of moral righteousness. Next, I consider VanDrunen's case for how this plays out practically and concretely in the world through the interlocking doctrine of God's two kingdoms. But before doing so, a few words are in order concerning the Noahic covenant as the post-fall covenantal lens through which natural law can be understood.

#### *6.8.2. Natural law and the Noahic Covenant*

According to VanDrunen, the Noahic covenant grounds natural law in God the creator and sustainer, and therefore not in autonomous human reason.<sup>936</sup> By considering some of the human responsibilities entailed in the Noahic covenant, one may learn more about what natural law is. The above reflections on natural law and the *lex talionis* based on the early chapters of *Genesis* find confirmation in *Genesis* chapter nine, where one gains crucial insight into civil life in a fallen world.<sup>937</sup>

As already observed from VanDrunen above, the Noahic covenant – stretching from Genesis 8:20 to 9:17 – possesses characteristics distinct from the redemptive Abrahamic covenant, namely: its temporary administration (until the end of the world); embracing all human beings and the whole of creation within its scope; ensuring preservation of the world through a continuing human social order, through reproduction and the administration of a legal system; and a concern for ordinary cultural activities.<sup>938</sup>

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<sup>935</sup> VanDrunen concedes that there may be alternative interpretations of this text, while nevertheless maintaining the substance of his argument from other biblical texts. See VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, 14-22.

<sup>936</sup> See ———, "Natural Law in Noahic Accent," 132-33.

<sup>937</sup> See ———, "Natural Law, the *Lex Talionis*," 954.

<sup>938</sup> See ———, "Natural Law in Noahic Accent," 133-37.

With these distinctive features in mind, I now turn to consider some of the specific human moral obligations inherent to the Noahic covenant. To begin with, VanDrunen highlights the similarities of the moral content of Genesis 9:1-7 to that of the original dominion mandate given in Genesis 1:26-29, albeit in modified terms due to the fall. One important point of correspondence is the common theme of the image of God. VanDrunen draws particular attention to Genesis 9:6, which states: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.” He contends that here one finds emphasis on the prescriptive royal-judicial commission given to man at creation to exercise dominion and subdue the earth, albeit now refracted on account of sin. More specifically, human beings have by virtue of their image-bearing a duty to exercise judicial authority towards those who violate justice. Human beings have the capability, and are even called, to right the wrongs that disorder society by wielding the sword.<sup>939</sup> In other words, in harkening back to the creation covenant, Genesis 9:6 brings together the image of God and the *lex talionis*, thereby obligating humankind to act in a certain way. The talionic principle of blood for blood, that is, life for life, sets forth the normative statement for civil justice in the post-diluvian world. VanDrunen explains:

What the Mosaic law (and many other legal systems) would later express as “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” (Ex. 21:23-25; Lev. 24:18-21; and Deut 19:21) is here expressed as, we might say, “blood for blood.” The *lex talionis*, regardless of whether it is applied literally, expresses the idea of a perfect and proportionate justice. The administration of proportionate justice by those who bear God’s image is thus to be central for life under the Noahic covenant.<sup>940</sup>

In short, according to VanDrunen, the substance of the Noahic covenant is a republication of the original dominion mandate, but modified to accommodate the natural and social disorder introduced by the fall. While the image-of-God and natural law principle of the *lex talionis* is common to both creation and Noahic covenants, it was embedded within a legal covenant of works between God and man in the case of the former, and accommodated to circumstances of intra-human justice in the latter. In the latter, it is not *whole self* for *whole self*, but rather, tooth for tooth, blood for blood. In the Noahic covenant, not only does one find the *lex talionis*

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<sup>939</sup> While VanDrunen acknowledges that the image of God imparts an inviolable human dignity, he nevertheless argues that this particular text has more to do with human duties than human rights. Given the judicially-charged nature of the image God (as discussed above), the concern here is to explain why it is *by man* that the murderer’s blood should be shed. See Ibid.: 138-39., and ———, “Natural Law,” 955.

<sup>940</sup> See VanDrunen, “Natural Law in Noahic Accent,” 138-39., and ———, “Natural Law,” 954-55. See also Miller, *Eye for an Eye*.

principle contracted in a flexible manner, but also tempered by the disclosure of God's forbearance toward all of humankind (see below). Just like the covenant at creation proclaimed the law, with judgment to follow, so too does the social arrangement under the Noahic covenant proclaim the law, with judgment to follow. Furthermore, the Noahic covenant assumes no ultimate completion of the dominion mandate, but only its partial and imperfect fulfillment for the sake of sustaining human existence.<sup>941</sup>

This conception of the Noahic covenant, VanDrunen argues, provides the foundation for a theology of natural law because it deals generally with the natural order (Genesis 8:20-9:17) and specifically with human beings (Genesis 9:1-7) according to their nature. "Its obligations are not arbitrary but accord with the nature of human beings as they image God in a fallen but preserved world."<sup>942</sup> He suggests a number of points of connection between the Noahic covenant and natural law arising from the biblical text.

For one, the moral obligations – to be fruitful and exercise dominion – imposed upon humanity in the post-fall world in Genesis 9:1-7 are in continuity with God's original creation of mankind in his image. Such obligations are both legal and accord with nature as evidenced perhaps most decisively in Genesis 9:6. Both the legal<sup>943</sup> and proverbial<sup>944</sup> overtones in this verse support the claim that murder should be punished *because* God made human beings in his image. Hence, one may conclude that the Noahic covenant provides the foundation for affirming the existence and operations of natural law in the world today.<sup>945</sup>

If it is true that the Noahic covenant reveals the image of God as grounding human obligations, then a reasonable corollary seems to be that the character of God's actions is somehow determinative of human moral conduct. For one, Genesis 8:1-20 and Genesis 9:1-7

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<sup>941</sup> See VanDrunen, "Natural Law in Noahic Accent," 139-40., and ———, "Natural Law," 955-56.

<sup>942</sup> See VanDrunen, "Natural Law in Noahic Accent," 140.

<sup>943</sup> The motive clause found here is a peculiar Old Testament grammatical construction for promulgating *law*. What is more, the very *talionic* principle expressed in this text is overtly legal. In other words, there are compelling reasons for reading Genesis 9:6 as a statement of law.

<sup>944</sup> The proverbial aspect of Genesis 9:6 suggests that the author is trying to convey something genuinely natural. While this verse should be read prescriptively, it is descriptive of the way of life under the Noahic covenant: proverbial statements and social customs are windows into human nature. In this instance, the *lex talionis* principle (which has found expression in extrabiblical legal codes of many societies, some of which predated Moses) manifests the human conception of the pursuit of impartial and proportionate justice, and accordingly how human beings should conduct themselves in order to maintain an orderly society.

<sup>945</sup> See VanDrunen, "Natural Law in Noahic Accent," 140-42.

point to the creativity, fruitfulness and generosity of God (echoing the original creation). What is more, against the backdrop of strict divine justice in Genesis 6-7, and following his indictment of wicked humanity in Genesis 8:21, God nevertheless promises all mankind in Genesis 8:21-9:17 that he will stay his hand of judgment (for a time). Hence, while the Noahic covenant does not reveal God as merciful and forgiving (like in the Abrahamic covenant), it does reveal him as forbearing: that characteristic which tempers his strict justice.<sup>946</sup>

In VanDrunen's estimation, if natural law constrains human beings to express the divine image, as revealed by God in the context of covenant, then it follows that the Noahic natural law dictates a God-like creative fruitfulness and generosity accompanied by the execution of justice tempered by forbearance. While the former claim is easier to defend (from Genesis 8:1-19), the latter requires further explanation, especially in view of the taolinic principle of strict and proportionate justice promulgated in Genesis 9:6. For one, if human justice is to reflect the image of God insofar as God relates to the world through the Noahic covenant, then unrelenting strict justice cannot be the order of the day, for this would be at odds with God's forbearance towards the world after the flood (cf. Acts 14:17). Furthermore, the strict enforcement of the *lex talionis* is at basic cross-purposes with God's will to preserve society thoroughly ravished by sin.<sup>947</sup> Hence, the Noahic covenant imposes the general human obligation to seek justice while forbearing many lesser evils, without prescribing the exact balance of equity. In other words, this covenant imposes a system of human justice for the ordering of society based on natural law that is imprecise: thereby allowing room for much flexibility and adaptation when it comes to concrete application in ever-changing and challenging social contexts.<sup>948</sup>

In this subsection, I have provided a sense of VanDrunen's case for natural law and the embedded principle of the *lex talionis* from the Noahic covenant as determinative of the system of justice found in the post-fall and post-diluvian world. He argues that widespread evidence suggestive of this interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis can be found in ancient human legal systems. One example of the presence of the *lex talionis*, and therefore the workings of natural law, can be found in the ancient legal Code of Hammurabi, originating from Babylon

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<sup>946</sup> See Ibid.: 142-43.

<sup>947</sup> It is interesting to note that Genesis 9:6 is concerned with strict *talionic* redress only for the most heinous crime against humanity, murder, thereby perhaps implying that strict justice should be pursued selectively.

<sup>948</sup> See VanDrunen, "Natural Law in Noahic Accent," 143-44.

before the law of Moses. Another, and a few centuries later, is Roman law. Once one gets to the second millennium C.E., further evidence of a cross-cultural, trans-historical legal practice that resonates with something in human nature includes the Anglo-Saxon, Old Norse and Icelandic legal cultures.<sup>949</sup>

What is more, according to VanDrunen, more weighty and decisive evidence – for those convinced of the authority of Scripture – can be found in the three statements of the *lex talionis* in the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament. In addition to this principle, one also finds the law of Moses incorporating many of the legal rules of other ancient Near Eastern cultures, albeit with modification to serve Israel's identity as a theocratic nation. As an essential aspect to the public law in *Deuteronomy*<sup>950</sup> and the Mosaic covenant, the *lex talionis* uniquely shaped Israel's identity as a nation constituted at Sinai. God's governance of his covenant people under the (at times flexible) rule of *lex talionis* lends further witness to the claim that there is something fundamentally just about this naturally (as well as supernaturally) revealed principle.<sup>951</sup>

Having considered VanDrunen's biblical and theological case for natural law as revealed in the human and divine natures, and the creation and Noahic covenants, I now turn to consider VanDrunen's additional theological warrants for and further explanation of natural law in terms of the interlocking doctrine of two kingdoms.

### 6.8.3. *Natural law and the two kingdoms*

In conversation with Calvin and the early Reformed tradition, VanDrunen develops the idea of the two kingdoms as the proper background for defending the necessity and limitations of natural law in the present day.<sup>952</sup> As VanDrunen's arguments set forth above attest, the doctrine of two kingdoms teaches the existence of a common realm in which all human beings, irrespective of their religious preferences, participate together in various cultural endeavors for

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<sup>949</sup> See ———, "Natural Law," 956-57.

<sup>950</sup> The *lex talionis* was otherwise generally a matter of private law in other cultures and in the books of *Exodus* and *Leviticus*.

<sup>951</sup> It is important to note that, for VanDrunen, the Mosaic covenant – unlike the Abrahamic or the New Covenant – was concerned with enforcing civil order. In this sense, the Mosaic covenant echoed the covenant of works at creation: prescribing law with judgment to follow. See VanDrunen, "Natural Law," 957-58.

<sup>952</sup> See ———, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, 23.

the common good. At this point, it is necessary to state more explicitly that the civil realm is a *moral* realm. While not being religious, the civil realm and its inhabitants nevertheless exist under the authority of God, its creator and sustainer King. Accordingly, God imposes certain moral obligations upon humanity. All human beings share in a common life in the civil kingdom in which justice is administered and the creation mandate pursued. Accordingly, all humanity is under an obligation to labor after moral goods such as peace and prosperity.<sup>953</sup>

#### *6.8.3.1. Natural law as the moral standard for the common kingdom*

Assuming then that the civil kingdom is a moral realm, it therefore follows for VanDrunen that this kingdom must have an appropriate corresponding moral standard: natural law. To defend this claim, he begins by making some general theological observations concerning natural and special revelation before considering authority derived from specific biblical texts. For starters, a civil realm comprising all of humanity under moral obligation (to God the creator and sustainer) naturally implies governance by a moral standard revealed to all of humanity (by God the creator and sustainer).<sup>954</sup>

The appropriateness of natural law being the moral standard for the civil kingdom becomes all the more important when one considers the fact that, in a certain sense, Scripture cannot fill this role. Such a claim requires some qualification and further explanation. Scripture contains much relevant teaching about how God's people should view the world and how they should behave in it (see discussion below). In addition, Scripture affirms the existence of natural law and corrects Christian misunderstandings of it. Likewise, Scripture also provides crucial insight into the nature of the civil kingdom and how it should relate to the spiritual kingdom. Thus, Scripture provides invaluable guidance for Christians entering into the civil kingdom to pursue their responsibilities in it, without which they would flounder.<sup>955</sup>

Nevertheless, VanDrunen contends that there are good reasons to suggest that Scripture should not – strictly speaking – be treated as the moral standard for the civil kingdom. One may begin by considering that the moral instruction found in Scripture is given to those who are

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<sup>953</sup> See *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>954</sup> See *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>955</sup> See *Ibid.*

redeemed and is given as a *consequence* of their redemption (cf. Col. 3:1-17; Eph. 4:1-3). The imperatives governing biblical morality are always grounded (explicitly or implicitly) in and are preceded by the indicatives of God's saving acts: chief among which is God making the recipients of Scripture his covenant people – members of the covenant of grace (see, e.g., the prologue to the Ten Commandments). In other words, biblical moral instruction is not for the world but for the church; it only makes sense and only applies in light of the gospel. Hence, to impose the ethical mandates of Scripture upon the world is to lift them from the context of God's saving acts and use Scripture in ways that God did not intend. Rather Scripture should be understood as proclaiming the way of salvation to the world and then in turn setting forth the way of life appropriate to those who believe in Christ and are part of the church. The inseparable nature of the biblical imperatives and indicatives precludes the Scriptures from being treated as a *common moral standard* for Christians and non-Christians in the way that natural law does.

Natural law is the only moral standard for which there is a common (though implied) indicative that grounds common imperatives: all people are created in God's image and have his law written upon their hearts; therefore, they should conduct themselves according to the pattern of that image and the demands of that law.<sup>956</sup>

Natural law, however, should not be burdened with unrealistic expectations.

VanDrunen is quick to emphasise that looking at natural law as the common moral standard in the civil kingdom demands limited and sober expectations. This is because sinful human beings constantly twist and reject the testimony of natural law. What is more, Christians struggle to employ natural law wisely and effectively. In other words, while the cultural task of the human race moves forward on the basis of natural law, the results are often frustrating and far from ideal. This fact, however, should not surprise Christians who are called to a life of suffering in this world in anticipation of a better one to come (cf. Rom. 8:17-18; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 4:12-13).<sup>957</sup>

Thus far, I have set forth some theological reasons given by VanDrunen suggestive of natural law being the common moral standard for the civil kingdom. I now consider what VanDrunen argues is some more specific biblical evidence. He focuses primarily on the Old Testament in providing three general ideas that illustrate the existence of this common, natural

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<sup>956</sup> See *Ibid.*, 39-40.

<sup>957</sup> See *Ibid.*, 40-41.

standard. These are: the acknowledgment of “things that should not to be done”, the fear of God and a common humanity. These suggest that natural law – and not special revelation – was the basis for appeal in moral interaction among believers and unbelievers.<sup>958</sup>

One biblical example, which VanDrunen cites, illustrating the first (as well as the second) idea comes from a dialogue between Abimelech and Abraham – a pagan and a believer – in Genesis 20. The point to emphasise here is that Abimelech (like Abraham) knew by virtue of access to a kind of common moral knowledge that passing off a wife for a sister and the polyandry that it produces are *things that should not to be done*. Similar observations may be made from Shechem’s rape of Dinah in Genesis 34. In both cases, a common, natural moral standard that cuts across religious and political boundaries – one that is universal in scope – is assumed.<sup>959</sup>

The second idea that suggests a common (universal), natural standard to which Christians may appeal in their dealings with non-Christians is the *fear of God*. One example that VanDrunen gives of this idea at work is in Genesis 20 where it connotes some sort of decency and propriety among the people of the land (Gerar), which kept them from killing a man on account of his beautiful wife. The notion of the fear of God suggests that people have some sense of accountability to a greater being (the reference in this context does not presume any redemptive relationship with God<sup>960</sup>), which restrained their wicked behavior. In other words, even adherents of a pagan religion have a sense of the Deity that acts to curb evil in the civil realm.<sup>961</sup> In addition to this incident, VanDrunen cites two other examples where relevant appeals to the fear of God seem to be at work, but are more contested due to difficult exegetical questions accompanying them. These are the fear of God exhibited by the “Hebrew” (but were

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<sup>958</sup> See Ibid., 41. VanDrunen acknowledges deriving help in formulating his arguments on these ideas from John Barton, "Natural Law and Poetic Justice in the Old Testament," *Journal of Theological Studies* N.S. 30 (April 1979).; Markus N. A. Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches : Halakhah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000).; and David Novak, *Natural Law in Judaism* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), chap. 2.

<sup>959</sup> This is in contrast to the *local* wrong of marrying off a younger daughter before an older described in Genesis 29. Unlike the context-specific prohibition of marrying off a younger daughter first, the likes of rape and polyandry are wrong because that is just how things are; see VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, 42-45. For a helpful discussion relative to this last point, see Novak, *Natural Law in Judaism*, 50-52.

<sup>960</sup> This notion of the fear of God should not be confused with what Scripture describes elsewhere as the heart of true religion: sincere and genuine piety (frequently denoted by invoking God’s special covenant name, “the fear of the LORD”).

<sup>961</sup> See VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, 45-46.

more likely Egyptian) midwives in Exodus 1, which kept them from committing infanticide, and the outsider, Jethro, in his advice to Moses, which helped promote judicial wisdom in Exodus 18.<sup>962</sup>

Thus one may conclude that the concept of the fear of God is an important complement to the notion of things that should not be done. VanDrunen writes:

Both describe standards of morality that are common to believer and pagan alike. In fact, it seems to be the case that the fear of God concept broadens and explains the reality of things that should not be done. It broadens it in the sense that while the latter pertains primarily to issues of marriage and sexual relations, the former also gets at issues of respect for human life and judicial office. It explains it in the sense that those who fear God are precisely the people who may be expected to avoid those things that should not be done.<sup>963</sup>

If it is true that the idea of the fear of God helps explicate the notion of things that should not be done, then here is further evidence that the latter extends beyond local custom to universal moral truths grounded in the nature of things. In other words, certain things should not be done because God, and not simply human kings or communities, holds mankind morally accountable. Hence, when God's people engage with others in the civil kingdom, "they may appeal to such truths as an appropriate, common moral standard applicable to all human beings made in the image of God."<sup>964</sup>

Theologically interwoven with the ideas of things that should not be done and the fear of God is a third idea that VanDrunen derives from Scripture, the notion of *common humanity*, which, taken together with the other two, provides a compelling case for the existence of a common moral standard for the civil kingdom. VanDrunen argues from several passages that the "acknowledgement of and respect for others as fellow human beings serve as important standards for civility and justice across religious and national lines in the civil kingdom." This idea flows logically from the fear of God – a connection informed by the fact that the fear of God is complemented by a sense of God's image in human beings. Hence, one can say that fearing God entails respectful behavior toward his image-bearers, all of humankind. In turn, both the

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<sup>962</sup> See Ibid., 47-48.

<sup>963</sup> See Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>964</sup> See Ibid., 49.

fear of God and a common humanity underpin the understanding that certain things should not be done.<sup>965</sup>

In VanDrunen's reading, one example that suggests the importance of the idea of a common humanity as a natural moral standard for the civil kingdom is Job's humane attitude toward his servants in Job 31. Job, a worshipper of the true God, is of particular relevance because he was a man who lived in the common civil kingdom under the terms of the Noahic covenant.<sup>966</sup> In Job 31:13-15,<sup>967</sup> one finds an interesting corollary between the fear of God and the recognition of a common humanity (not unlike the accounts in Genesis 20 and Exodus 1 and 18 mentioned above). Because Job feared God, he realised that he was morally accountable to his heavenly Judge for his actions towards others. However, this fear of God only took shape through Job's acknowledgement that he, the master, shared with his servants a common human nature, which motivated his just and humane treatment of them. Hence, the underlying assumption driving Job's conduct is a fundamental equality among all human beings, regardless of their social standing, to which he appealed on the basis of the nature of things (rather than special revelation or the tenets of a common religious faith).<sup>968</sup> In addition to this example, VanDrunen also provides a second from the early chapters of Amos where God's theocratic people made moral evaluation of foreign nations not on the basis of specially revealed covenantal law, but rather the natural law idea of a common humanity. In a third example from Genesis 4, God deemed Cain guilty of the sin of murder on the basis that Cain should have (naturally) known better, for he shared with Abel a common humanity.<sup>969</sup>

In this subsection I have set forth VanDrunen's claim that natural law, rather than special revelation, provides the common moral standard that governs life in the civil kingdom. Instead of being grounded in God's redemptive covenant, natural law is rooted in the reality of creation in God's image and the natural order that God sustains through the Noahic covenant. Various

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<sup>965</sup> See Ibid.

<sup>966</sup> There is no record that Job received any special revelation from God (until chapters 38-41) and he lived at a time before the establishment of theocratic Israel.

<sup>967</sup> "If I have rejected the cause of my manservant or my maidservant, when they brought a complaint against me, what then shall I do when God rises up? When he makes inquiry, what shall I answer him? Did not he who made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb?" (ESV.)

<sup>968</sup> See VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, 49-51.

<sup>969</sup> See Ibid., 51-53. In addition to the range of moral evils prohibited by natural law in this subsection, VanDrunen argues that one could easily expand the list with the reference to the likes of Romans 1 and its moral proscriptions.

biblical examples, cited by VanDrunen, suggesting the workings of natural law in the context of two kingdoms settings have been offered to support such claims. One may therefore conclude that in natural law, Christians and non-Christians have a common moral standard from which civil laws may be derived for building a relatively civil and well-ordered society.<sup>970</sup>

While space does not permit considering it in any length here, VanDrunen's biblical case for natural law also includes its importance in the spiritual kingdom. He contends that in many places Scripture sets forth its own distinctive moral teachings with recourse to natural law principles<sup>971</sup> and the moral accomplishments of the broader world<sup>972</sup>. In short, the biblical ethics of the civil kingdom draws in part significantly upon natural law and the unbelieving interpretation of natural law. Hence, the Scriptural witness suggests that natural law should be an ethical standard informing the lives of Christians living in both kingdoms. Therefore, when critically appropriated, the cultural achievements of the world may be appreciated for ethical discourse in both the church and the broader world.<sup>973</sup>

Before bringing this section on VanDrunen's biblical and theological case for natural law to a close, I would like to make some comments on its promise for the South African context. It has been discussed at quite some length already in previous chapters the suspicion shared by many in the contemporary Reformed tradition towards any kind of natural theology because of its association with the theological legitimisation of apartheid. Certainly, neither VanDrunen nor myself would endorse the version of creation ordinances that Afrikaner Calvinism used to support apartheid. In fact, it would not be possible within VanDrunen's natural law and two kingdoms paradigm to argue for the idea of a so-called divine principle of segregation embedded in creation that determines re-creation. This is because, according to the two kingdoms

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<sup>970</sup> See *Ibid.*, 53-54.

<sup>971</sup> Scripture often provides moral instruction by appealing to the workings of the natural world, such as in the book of Proverbs.

<sup>972</sup> One possible example is the laws of Hammurabi (an ancient Mesopotamian monarch), to which scholars have attributed at least indirect, if not direct, influence upon the covenant code of the Mosaic Law (see Exodus 20:23-23:19). F.A. Hayek has argued that Hammurabi represents other ancient law givers in that he was not trying to make new law, but rather to codify that which was already customary law at the time; see Friedrich A. von Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty* vol. 1, *Rules and Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 81. VanDrunen notes that this idea suggests that the law of Hammurabi reflects common understandings of proper moral conduct throughout the ancient Near East, which in turn makes it all the more probable that the biblical author could have been acquainted with the material in a variety of ways.

<sup>973</sup> See VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, 55-67.

perspective, those institutions and demographic markers outside of the church are not being redeemed by Christ, but rather being upheld for a time by God through the Noahic covenant.

In Chapter 2, I engaged the work of Ernst Conradie in the recent volume that he edited called *Creation and Salvation* (2011). Here I noted his call to the contemporary Reformed tradition in South Africa to construct some kind of natural theology in order to do better justice to God's creation. Conradie's contention is that the Reformed community in South Africa needs to get beyond the impasse between Barth and Kuyper on natural theology. Conradie sees the potential value of re-engaging Kuyper through the lens of Bavinck and Van Ruler, with a special eye to his doctrines of special and common grace. At the same time he is aware of the value of other options and routes for further inquiry.<sup>974</sup> Might VanDrunen<sup>975</sup> be the kind of dialogue partner that Conradie and other South African Reformed theologians are looking for?

In Chapter 2, I also highlighted the work of theologian and ethicist J.M. Vorster who finds in the early Reformed tradition (especially Calvin's) a legacy of natural law thinking, which he believes has constructive value for Christians in the human rights debates today.<sup>976</sup> Nevertheless, Vorster still retains the broader Kuyperian and transformationist worldview in relating Christianity and culture.<sup>977</sup> Here too, I wonder whether VanDrunen's development of the early Reformed doctrine of two kingdoms will actually help the corresponding doctrine of natural law make more theological sense to the likes of Vorster, and in turn prove more practically effective for Christian engagement of a liberal society today.

## 6.9. Two kingdoms and natural law: liberating trajectories for the Christian life

In this chapter so far, I have sought to distill the major biblical and theological contours of VanDrunen's development of the Calvinistic and early Reformed two kingdoms and natural law position. In setting forth the nature and purpose of God's two kingdoms as well as the

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<sup>974</sup> See Conradie, "Abraham Kuyper's Legacy," 3-145.

<sup>975</sup> Considering Conradie's interest in Bavinck, it is perhaps helpful to point out that VanDrunen has argued for Bavinck being a proponent of the historic Reformed orthodox doctrines of natural law and two kingdoms in David VanDrunen, "'The Kingship of Christ Is Twofold': Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms in the Thought of Herman Bavinck," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45 (2010): 147-64.

<sup>976</sup> See generally Vorster, "Calvin and Human Dignity," 197-213., and ———, *Ethical Perspectives*.

<sup>977</sup> See generally J.M. Vorster, *An Introduction to Reformed Church Polity* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom Theological Publications, 2003).

nature and purpose of the interlocking doctrine of natural law, I have already given a general sense of what Christian participation in the church and in broader society might look like. In the remainder of this chapter, I expand on some of these insights in offering a number of practical and liberating implications of VanDrunen's two kingdoms outlook, which promise to transform previously held conceptions of what it means to live the Christian life inside and outside the church – particularly in the South African context.

### *6.9.1. The central importance of the church*

VanDrunen laments the fact that many books about Christianity and culture dedicate a great deal of space to cultural activities such as education, vocation and politics while saying very little about the church. No doubt these authors consider the church important. But they seem to deem it of secondary importance compared to those activities and responsibilities of broader culture – where, supposedly, Christianity is *really* lived. In contrast to this position, VanDrunen contends that the church is the center of action in the Christian life because it is where worship and fellowship take place, the most important activities in this world, which are also ends in themselves.<sup>978</sup> He develops this claim along three lines.<sup>979</sup>

First, and recalling a major earlier theme, VanDrunen argues that the church is of central importance because it is the only earthly institution that can be identified with the redemptive kingdom. To have fellowship with the church is to have fellowship with the kingdom of heaven. Hence, if the life-to-come really and truly defines who Christians are, then the earthly community that opens the gates to heaven should take precedence over all other institutions in this world. Second, the church should take center stage because it alone is the community that renders worship to God, thereby sharing in *the* activity of heaven (Rev. 15:1-4; 22:3). Worship is a corporate activity of the redemptive kingdom alone, through the official ministry of the Word and congregational response. Some Christians claim that not only should Christians glorify God in all they do, but all of life is worship as well. This, however, makes worship

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<sup>978</sup> Going to church is not first and foremost about the Christian but about God, with no doubt very important secondary benefits to the Christian.

<sup>979</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 129-33.

something shared with unbelievers in the common kingdom.<sup>980</sup> While individuals of faith and Christian families are obliged to worship God privately, Scripture's special concern is with public and corporate worship. In addition to heavenly worship being corporate, earthly worship is the time when public gatherings of Christians receive the means of grace that build them up unto everlasting life.<sup>981</sup>

Third, Sunday Lord's Day observance also highlights the centrality of the church in the Christian life. While a widely neglected practice in the church today, VanDrunen claims Scriptural warrant for resisting this tendency. Accordingly, he asserts that Lord's Day observance is a powerful counter-cultural witness to the world and its claim to all-consuming importance. When Christians put aside their common (Monday through Saturday) cultural activities for a day, they testify to the far greater importance of another kingdom, of which the Lord's Day is a foretaste. In doing so, they share in the Sabbath rest of Jesus who perfectly imaged God in following his pattern of working towards blessed rest, something the first Adam (before the fall) and Israel (in the typological New Jerusalem<sup>982</sup>) failed to do. Jesus lay dead in the tomb on the last Old Testament Sabbath, the last day of the week. A day later he rose from the dead, signaling the end of the old covenant and the successful completion of the task of the first Adam. Hence came true and ultimate liberty for God's people: freedom from the obligation to work toward rest. Thus Christians observe the New Testament Sabbath on the first day of the week: enjoying rest followed by works of gratitude. As Sabbath-keepers after the image of the pattern of the last Adam, Christians proclaim the doctrine of salvation in living action. In addition to reinforcing the importance of the church as the earthly – worshipping and fellowshiping – expression of the redemptive kingdom, this conception of the Lord's Day provides an alternative to a legalism that so easily enshrouds it.<sup>983</sup>

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<sup>980</sup> The Old and New Testaments, nevertheless, distinguish God's people from the rest of the world in their faith and worship; see, e.g., Gen. 12:7-8; Deut. 3:1-30; 1 Peter 2:4-11. Only Christians call God "our Father" (e.g., Rom. 8:1-17).

<sup>981</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 134-36.

<sup>982</sup> One of the key purposes of the Old Testament Sabbath was to remind Israel of God's original creative work and the basic human obligation to image God in working obediently in this world toward the end of attaining God's blessing – something Israel could not do, as evidenced in the breaking of the Mosaic covenant. They were therefore pressed to look forward to someone who could.

<sup>983</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 136-41.

In short, while cultural life is honorable, Christians should not allow it to eclipse the primary importance of corporate worship and the celebration of the Lord's Day. If the church and its significance is marginalised, this is bound to skew the Christian's view of life in the common kingdom.

When it comes to my perception of the attitude towards the church or ecclesiology within the Reformed family of churches in South Africa, I find reasons to be both encouraged and concerned. I am encouraged by those voices within the DRC and the DRMC that want to maintain aspects of Reformed church polity – such as confessional subscription, liturgy and an educated ministry – over against the undermining “low-church” influences of independent charismatic and evangelical traditions.<sup>984</sup> At the same time, I am concerned about how the importance of the church has been heavily weighted in terms of its social and political relevance and influence. As is evident from the earlier chapters of this thesis, Reformed identity for the majority in the tradition, even since the days of apartheid, has been more or less a matter of how church *and* society can be transformed and reformed according to the Word of God.

The critique that the two kingdoms paradigm has of this perspective is that at best the ministry of the Word *to* the church is marginalised. If the church is preoccupied with critiquing and trying to transform the social and political injustices of broader society, what message does this convey about the central importance of God's covenantal nurture through the means of grace?

VanDrunen's claims in this section challenge the Reformed tradition in South Africa – like it has in North America – to reconsider the church's importance in more ecclesial and eschatological terms, and hence Reformed identity more in terms of reformation of doctrine, liturgy and church polity, rather than the reformation or transformation of broader society. This should not at all diminish the importance of Christians, as citizens of the common kingdom, seeking to transform and reform society by faith and according to the terms and moral law of the temporary Noahic covenant.

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<sup>984</sup> An example of a South African theologian who has made similar points in many places is Dirk J. Smit. See, e.g., generally Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*.

### 6.9.2. *The church's distinct ethical life*

If the church is at the center of the Christian life, then it follows that special attention should be given to her distinct ethic. VanDrunen considers three noteworthy aspects. The first draws upon a biblical and theological theme already introduced above, which is “forgiveness that transcends justice”. Instead of an ethic of proportionate justice enforced by the state, the church’s is one of forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration. These are the goals of church discipline. The church is a haven of forgiveness that stands in sharp contrast to the just and often permanent judgments of this world. Second, church life embodies “generosity that transcends scarcity.” While worldly economics is helpful in guiding the commerce of the common kingdom, it makes little sense of the liberality of the church’s seemingly irresponsible giving and receiving. What is more, while the “bottom line” is the guiding principle in the world, generous giving in the church does not result in less but rather in more (spiritual returns). The church defies the constraints of the common kingdom’s justice as well as its economics, which is one important reason why the gospel is good news for the poor.<sup>985</sup>

A third important characteristic that highlights the distinctive ethic of the church is its “evangelism that spurns violence”. At its core, the church is a missionary body, which is another way in which its ethic is distinguished from common kingdom institutions. In other words, the church’s ethos is non-violent and against social revolution.<sup>986</sup>

Here, again, the two kingdoms perspective provides a source of critical reflection for the Reformed community in South Africa. As has already been argued above, the redemptive transformationist position betrays significant tension by virtue of the fact that it deems the sword-bearing state to be part of the peaceful kingdom of Christ. This tension and ambiguity stretches back to the days of Afrikaner Calvinism and continues to live on in the contemporary Reformed quest for a more just and equitable South Africa according to the ultimate kingdom of Christ ideal. In fact, the conflation of the church’s unique ethic with the way of life in broader culture, seems more pronounced in recent times than ever in the history of the Reformed tradition in South Africa. Biblical concepts of peace, justice and reconciliation are frequently

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<sup>985</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 141-44.

<sup>986</sup> These characteristics also differentiate Christianity from the non-proselytising religion of Judaism and the coercive and culturally imperial nature of Islam. See *Ibid.*, 144-46.

invoked as if they apply in similar ways to both church and state. Examples of recent Reformed endorsement of this perspective can be found in the work of Allan Boesak, for example his *Radical Reconciliation* (2012),<sup>987</sup> and that of John de Gruchy, for example his *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (2002).<sup>988</sup> In both of the aforementioned titles, the authors lend qualified support for the biblical symbolism in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission headed up by minister-politician Desmond Tutu in the 1990s.<sup>989</sup>

Although other Reformed theologians in South Africa might contest this claim, it is my view that the Reformed tradition cannot have it both ways as it considers its redemptive transformational role in the building of a new democratic South Africa. Either the state must be called to relinquish its retributive character and conform to the peaceful ethic of the church, or the church must conform to the temporary ethic of justice promulgated by the state. I am aware of no contemporary South African Reformed theologian who would support either of these avenues. Hence, my suggestion is that the two kingdoms paradigm of VanDrunen provides resolution to this tension. Here both the church and broader social institutions retain their distinct ethical characteristics in accordance with the covenant of grace and the Noahic covenant, the Sermon on the Mount and passages like Romans 13. Might this approach to Christianity and culture help recover biblical symbols like reconciliation from their “common” use in the public square?

### 6.9.3. *The spirituality and ministerial authority of the church*

In addition to those set forth above, VanDrunen argues that two other claims can be made about the character of the church as informative for the Christian life, namely her *spirituality* and *ministerial authority*. Both of these interrelated traits significantly help in further portraying the distinctive culture and ethos of the church, as well as key components of the two kingdoms doctrine.

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<sup>987</sup> See Boesak, *Radical Reconciliation*.

<sup>988</sup> See de Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice*.

<sup>989</sup> Dirk J. Smit, while appreciative of the precious contribution of the TRC, nevertheless contends that reconciliation did not go far enough, in the biblical sense, as confessed in *Belhar*; see Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 365-71.

When speaking of the spirituality of the church, VanDrunen is careful that the doctrine not be misconstrued as rendering the church antiphysical or antimaterial, or anything along those lines. The church is a visible community engaged in a public, embodied and tangible ministry – such as corporate worship, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, hospitality and the diaconate – and is looking forward to the resurrection of the body in the world-to-come. Properly understood, the spirituality of the church refers to a community created by Christ and the Holy Spirit, and therefore not defined by or identified with any institution or community in the common kingdom. Accordingly, the church does not usurp the functions of the common kingdom but focuses on discharging its “spiritual” functions as directed by the Lord Jesus in Scripture. This doctrine makes little sense without the biblical doctrine of two-kingdoms.<sup>990</sup>

In contrast to the institutions of the common kingdom, which are *natural* creations of God and are governed by the Noahic covenant, VanDrunen regards the church as a new and *supernatural* creation of God through Christ and the Holy Spirit.<sup>991</sup> Hence, what is heavenly in origin and destination cannot be equated with that which is earthly and bound to perish. The church respects and acknowledges the institutions and communities of the common kingdom, including those identity markers that differentiate its members – such as ethnic background, familial, political allegiance and socio-economic status. She does not try to banish these distinctions from the common kingdom. However, as for life in the church, these distinctions are of no account<sup>992</sup> – for all Christians are united to Christ through faith in one baptism, the only identity that counts.<sup>993</sup>

Despite the church’s spiritual calling, she has nevertheless succumbed time and time again throughout her history to the temptation to identify with nation-states, ethnic groups and political factions.<sup>994</sup> I argued in Chapters 4 and 5 that Calvin and his Genevan social experiment was no exception. A poignant example is that Calvin was willing to solicit the coercive help of the state to ensure religious uniformity. The conclusion of this thesis is that Calvin betrayed his

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<sup>990</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 146-47.

<sup>991</sup> This brought the heavenly promise of the covenant of grace with Abraham to blessed fulfillment; see Matt. 16:17-18

<sup>992</sup> One exception, with respect to the family, is that children of believers are considered holy and therefore members of the church.

<sup>993</sup> See 1 Cor. 7:25-28; Col. 3:11; 1 Cor. 7:20-24; Gal. 3:25-29; 1 Cor. 12:13; and VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 147-48.

<sup>994</sup> See *Ibid.*, 148-49.

own doctrine of the spirituality of the church at times by giving both theological and practical support to central ideological tenets of Christendom. It should nevertheless be kept in mind that Calvin was a man of his times, and therefore his inconsistency arguably more excusable than theologians in more recent liberal and democratic times who have sought to attach the church to various common cultural agendas.

Later in the South African context, the Reformed tradition – with heavy dependence on Calvin – was to make similar, yet even bolder, moves in aligning the church with a broader cultural agenda. In other words, the ambiguity in Calvin relative to relating Christianity and culture was exploited in a direction away from the spirituality of the church in the various figures, movements and events surrounding the rise and demise of apartheid. From around the 1930s, the church increasingly found so-called Calvinist and Reformed precedence for aligning the church with the political ideology of apartheid. In turn, beginning in the 1960s, a contingency within the Reformed and broader ecumenical church was also culpable of transgressing the spiritual nature of the church in identifying with and participating in the socio-political struggle against apartheid. While the church played a significant role in helping bring an “end” to the apartheid government – an outcome that can hardly be critiqued on moral grounds alone – one wonders about the loss to its nature and witness in the process?

The history of the North American church-state experiment is little different. It has also been a place where the Reformed church has found itself entangled and identified with the fleeting institutions and communities of this world.

In other words, history provides ample examples of the church losing critical distance from the institutions of broader civil society, like the state, due to some higher cultural aim or good. In my estimation, the church struggle against apartheid is a prime example. Here Reformed advocates arguably allowed their honorable desire to see a more racially integrated society blind them to the church’s servitude to a broader cultural agenda. On this point, Abraham van de Beek, Extraordinary Professor of Theology at Stellenbosch, argues that just like the oppressive regime of apartheid, the counter-liberation-movement of the church struggle employed the same hermeneutic of identifying church power and authority with a broader cultural ideology. As in the American fight for independence in the nineteenth-century, the Dutch struggle for independence, and the emancipation movement of Abraham Kuyper, the Reformed church struggle allowed what should have remained an ecclesiastical battle for unity

within the body of Christ to become a civil ideological quest that conflated church and state, and therefore sacrificed the spirituality of church in the process.<sup>995</sup>

What then should one make of the stance of critical-solidarity that the Reformed churches have generally adopted in the current dispensation of liberal democracy? Here too, I think that van de Beek provides telling insight with the following words: “During the apartheid regime theologians supported the administration with theological arguments in favor of apartheid. Presently, many theologians support the new ‘Rainbow nation’ also with theological arguments. They again make religion servant to state ideology.”<sup>996</sup>

I am persuaded that in the South African context, just like many other places (such as North America), church officers have assumed authority and claimed expertise in political affairs for which – according to the two kingdoms doctrine – they neither have biblical warrant nor the necessary skills. Again, one can understand the temptation for the church to delve into broader social, political and economic affairs, especially considering the rampant injustices that plague current-day South Africa. But has the Reformed tradition adequately reflected on the cost of such broader civil engagement to the church’s spiritual identity and the clarity of her gospel message?

On a more positive and constructive note again, VanDrunen believes that more may be said regarding the church’s teachings and activities in relation to the common kingdom, which can be captured through the closely connected idea of the church’s *ministerial* authority. This idea can be fairly simply defined as: the officers of the church have authority only to minister what the Word of God teaches and nothing else (and therefore not their own doctrines for living or rules for living, no matter how wise or compelling they might seem to be). In contrast to the legislative authority of the likes of the state, which has the discretionary power to make laws, the church only has the power to *declare* what already appears in Scripture.<sup>997</sup> Despite sounding constricting, the effect and driving motivation is to protect Christian liberty. How? If church

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<sup>995</sup> See van de Beek, "To Be Free," 224-25.

<sup>996</sup> See *Ibid.*, 225, fn. 18.

<sup>997</sup> The authority structures of civil institutions have been in existence for a long time (founded on creational covenants) and emerge from natural relationships and have a very general character. Scripture confirms their authority but does not create it. In contrast, the church is a supernatural institution created by Christ. It was through the inspired words of Christ and his apostles that the ecclesiastical authority structures of pastor, elder and deacon, and their attendant qualifications and responsibilities, were established. Church officers do not have authority beyond what Scripture authorises, thereby protecting the liberty of Christians on those matters that Scripture does not address. See *Belgic Confession of Faith*, Articles 30-32.

officers cannot teach anything beyond what Scripture teaches, then the church cannot bind the conscience of its members beyond how Scripture already binds it. Beyond that which Scripture instructs and binds, Christians are free to exercise their own wisdom in how to live (within the bounds of respecting other legitimate authority structures in society, like the state). Not only should this notion be liberating for lay Christians, but for pastors as well. They are not expected to be a jack-of-all-trades in their ministry, but rather experts in wisely exegeting and applying the Word of God.<sup>998</sup> This doctrine has tremendous implications for the character of the church and the Christian's conduct in the broader cultural world.<sup>999</sup>

It is worth considering briefly some of the vast implications for the life and ministry of the church. For one, Scripture provides general moral directives for the Christian life but is silent as to many of its particulars. For instance, the church may instruct Christians to be submissive to the civil authorities because Scripture says so, but she may not command strategies for voting or reforming public policy.<sup>1000</sup> A second implication of the ministerial authority of the church is that Scripture alone regulates the worship of the church (otherwise known as the regulative principle of worship). This means no one may be excluded from worship on the basis of race, as was the case under apartheid South Africa. A third and final possible implication of the church's ministerial authority is that Scripture should also regulate diaconal or benevolence work. The New Testament instructs the church to give material assistance to the needy of the church, but never those outside of it. It therefore follows that social programs like community economic development, aids orphanages and soup kitchens are outside the bounds of the ministerial authority of the institutional church. This does not mean, however, that Christians should not love and generously care for their neighbors, whether believers or not. There are other common avenues through which such love can be channeled, which do not compromise the ministerial authority of the church. Christians have the liberty to join forces with families, business and states in aiding the poor in a number of meaningful and beneficial ways. Christians may use their time, money and professional skill in helping the poor around them. The individual layperson is freed in these matters where the church is not. The church should neither

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<sup>998</sup> This is not to imply that ministers, in order to shepherd faithfully and effectively, should not have some basic knowledge of aspects of the human condition and the broader world to which Scripture does not specifically speak.

<sup>999</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 151-53.

<sup>1000</sup> At least not beyond offering non-binding pastoral counsel to help congregants grow in wisdom.

take up cultural tasks not entrusted to it nor assume responsibilities for which it does not necessarily have the expertise to execute.<sup>1001</sup>

The ministerial authority of the church according to the two kingdoms paradigm as articulated by VanDrunen seems particularly liberating for Christians in the South African context, where oftentimes clergy and laity have assumed burdens beyond the necessity of Scripture. On the one hand, VanDrunen's perspective liberates the minister from having to assume responsibility for effecting (oftentimes unrealistic) social change beyond the jurisdiction of the church, despite the heavy pressure to the contrary in the contemporary Reformed tradition – thanks in large part to the church struggle legacy, and the considerable social and political injustices afflicting South Africa today. On the other hand, one also finds liberation for the layperson from church-imposed expectations not found in Scripture, and in turn encouragement to explore the variety of common (non-redemptive) channels for effecting social good and human flourishing. This I think is especially important in a context where many people have been led to believe that it is the church's job to take care of the poor and rectify social injustice. I elaborate more on this point below.

#### *6.9.4. Christianity and culture*

So far I have explored some practical and liberating implications of VanDrunen's development of the two kingdoms doctrine for the Christian life in the redemptive kingdom as it finds particular earthly expression in the church. In so doing, I have considered what VanDrunen deems to be some of the defining characteristics of the church and its ministry, which have at times been obscured and even eclipsed by the church's captivation by a broader cultural ideology, as in the case of the Reformed tradition in South Africa. I now come to considering the Christian life in broader society and amidst its various cultural activities and challenges. Here too, I think that the two kingdoms perspective is very helpful and liberating. For the purposes of this thesis, I limit the scope of this vast and complex subject to a consideration of the Christian's, and also necessarily the church's, relationship to the state. But before considering this particular cultural institution, I consider the nature of Christian faith in relation to the common cultural kingdom in general. Here, again, VanDrunen offers a number of

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<sup>1001</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 155-59.

valuable insights and critiques from the historic Reformed two kingdoms perspective for consideration in South African discourse.

According to VanDrunen, the two kingdoms perspective avoids two extremes that typically frame popular discourse on Christianity and culture. On the one hand, there is the assertion that activities such as education, work and politics can be treated simply as “Christian” and “non-Christian”. However, to do so fails to recognise these activities as *common* to all people irrespective of faith. On the other hand is the tendency to treat such activities as if the Christian faith has nothing to do with them. This extreme fails to recognise the *fundamental religious antithesis* that affects every area of life. An alternative to these extremes is found in the rich two kingdoms tradition that has been developed above. According to this paradigm, Christians should bring their faith to bear on all of life, but this does not mean that the cultural endeavors of believers should necessarily be described as “Christian”. As has already been alluded to, Scripture indeed has many significant things to say about Christian cultural endeavors in this world, but most often they are from a big-picture perspective only and do not descend into the particulars. Scripture does not provide specific instructions on how the likes of politics and humanitarian causes are to be pursued with excellence and for the common social good. Rather, in keeping with Christian liberty, these specifics are to be left to the wisdom and discretion of individual Christians as they engage the common kingdom. Hence, the outworking of these specifics may look different from one Christian to the next. Therefore, believers should be modest in claiming that their decisions and views on a particular cultural undertaking represent the “Christian” view. Such a perspective on general Christian engagement of culture is liberating for the believer. For he or she is freed from the extrabiblical imposition by ministers and other Christians to adhere to the so-called “Christian” way of running a business, voting for a political candidate or developing community social policy.<sup>1002</sup>

Again, here lies liberating potential for Christians perhaps weary and wary of the responsibilities that come with a Reformed legacy in which the reformation of the church and broader society have been interchangeable. Not only does the two kingdoms paradigm offer freedom for Christians from the imposition of rules and laws driving various cultural transformation efforts, but also empowerment to make wise use of common kingdom institutions in pursuit of real – albeit limited and temporal – social and political transformation.

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<sup>1002</sup> See *Ibid.*, 161-63.

In addition to providing a liberating alternative to the “Christian” and “non-Christian” conception of Christian life in broader culture, VanDrunen also makes other claims from his understanding of the two kingdoms paradigm as outlined above. For one, he argues that foundational to a proper perspective on cultural activity in the common kingdom is that Christians should not see themselves as new Adams being given a second chance at fulfilling Adam’s original cultural mandate. This burden does not belong to the Christian (see the discussion above on justification, the two Adams and cultural activity.) A second general characteristic that should inform the Christian’s pursuit of cultural activities in the common kingdom is a genuine sense of joy and satisfaction, in light of the fact that cultural activities are God-ordained gifts, and therefore good and honorable. And yet, such joy and satisfaction should be tempered by the New Testament’s emphasis on the temporary and relative importance of cultural life in comparison to the perfect work of Christ, the flourishing of the church and the hope of heaven. In short, joy and satisfaction in cultural engagement should be qualified by detachment befitting of pilgrims and exiles looking for a better country.<sup>1003</sup> The two-kingdoms paradigm protects Christians from an over-realised eschatology, and therefore the disappointment that so often attends Christian attempts to redeem society. This is especially relevant in a place like South Africa, where despite the prevalence of Christian profession and the invocation of biblical ideals by ministers and politicians alike in the public square, the country sinks deeper into the morass of corruption and injustice.

A third and final consideration informing a two kingdoms perspective on Christian engagement of culture in general is the issue of whether or in what way the cultural activities of believers are indeed “Christian”. Or put another way, what is and what is not unique about the Christian’s work in the common kingdom? In tackling this potentially contentious matter, VanDrunen provides some helpful suggestions. To begin with, he contends that the two kingdoms doctrine distinguishes what is uniquely “Christian” from what is simply “human”.<sup>1004</sup> Accordingly and generally speaking, to be “human” here and now means living in the common kingdom under the Noahic covenant. To be human is to participate in the cultural life and activities of the common kingdom, something not uniquely Christian. However, what does

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<sup>1003</sup> See *Ibid.*, 165-66.

<sup>1004</sup> There is a sense in which to be a Christian is to be truly human: in so far as through Christ Christians attain the original destiny of the human race. But it is precisely in that Christians are citizens of the world-to-come that they should not be equated with that which is simply “human”.

distinguish Christians from the rest of humanity is their identification with the redemptive kingdom, which, among other things, makes Christians new creatures with an eternal destiny. Hence, VanDrunen speaks of “Christian” in a way not “to describe everything that should characterise human beings in this world, but to describe what differentiates Christians from the rest of humanity and thus makes them unique.”<sup>1005</sup>

With this distinction in mind, VanDrunen suggests that there are many unique things about Christians’ cultural activities, and yet a variety of factors should encourage modesty in applying the label “Christian” to those things that believers do and accomplish in the common kingdom. One way in which the cultural activities of believers are always uniquely Christian is that they ought always to be consistent with Christian identity. Christians are not only called to live in accordance with God’s law at all times, but also to act in faith and for the glory of God at all times.<sup>1006</sup> Unbelievers, however, while they may exhibit outward conformity to God’s law, are never driven by the foundational motivation of faith in Christ or the goal of bringing glory to God. Hence, the cultural activities of believers should always be interpreted differently from that of unbelievers in so far as the former betrays a uniquely Christian inner motivation and *subjective* attitude.<sup>1007</sup>

However, more difficulty arises and more nuance is needed when considering the cultural activity of Christians beyond the church as an *objective* matter. VanDrunen contends that, generally speaking, believers should not be seeking an objectively *unique* Christian way of pursuing common cultural activities. He makes this claim for three interrelated reasons. First, the *normative* standards for cultural activities – the moral requirements and standards of excellence – are generally not *distinctively* Christian. Virtues such as honesty, justice, respect and diligence are moral obligations that are universal in scope. This is because all human beings continue to bear the image of God (albeit imperfectly) and are therefore morally obligated to him. They continue to know the basic moral law of God by virtue of natural law written on the conscience, even without the aid of Scripture (see Rom. 1:18-32; 2:14-15). Through the Noahic covenant God holds all people morally accountable for cultural activities in the common

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<sup>1005</sup> VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 166-67.

<sup>1006</sup> See Rom. 14:23; Heb. 11:6; 1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:23.

<sup>1007</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 167-68.

kingdom.<sup>1008</sup> Secondly, and to elaborate on the first, the standards of excellence for believers and unbelievers are the same. Take for instance plumbing and bridge building in which the standard of excellence is no leaks and safe traffic flow. There is nothing uniquely Christian about the objective technical aspects of such cultural labors.<sup>1009</sup> This is because they, like all cultural activities, fall within the purview of the common kingdom, where God upholds the natural order and sustains all human beings as his image-bearers through the Noahic covenant.<sup>1010</sup>

Hence, VanDrunen argues that it is unhelpful to describe the activities of Christians in the common kingdom in terms of “transformation” and inaccurate to describe them in terms of “redemption”. While it is true that Christians should always be thinking critically (via the lens of Scripture) about the claims and activities of the common kingdom due to the perverting influence of sin, no consequent “transformation” of it – no matter how significant and good – can make the common kingdom anything other than the common kingdom: this worldly and fleeting. Christians should labor honestly for the common good in the common kingdom and should rejoice in seeing their contribution further its justice and prosperity, but believers are not called to “redeem” it, as if God promises to save the common kingdom instead of only preserving it. These realities should engender in Christians a profound modesty and humility in their cultural endeavors. Their expectations concerning what they can accomplish in the temporary and fleeting common kingdom should be modest. At the same time, the way of describing Christian cultural activity should be construed in more humble terms than “transformation” and “redemption”.<sup>1011</sup>

A third and final reason why seeking an objectively unique “Christian” way of pursuing cultural activities is potentially hazardous is in light of the fact that there are usually many possible alternatives available to the Christian. As has already been mentioned, Scripture speaks at a broad and general level about all cultural activities, but has little or nothing to say about

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<sup>1008</sup> This is distinct from those moral obligations that are binding on Christians only, such as the Lord’s Supper and “turning the other cheek”, which are revealed through Scripture and not through nature to all people; see *Ibid.*, 168-69.

<sup>1009</sup> The realities of Christ’s resurrection, ascension and establishment of the church have not changed the truths of calculus or the way water flows. The fact that a plumber is converted to Christianity does not change his objective obligations as a plumber (even though the his subjective motivations and attitude have).

<sup>1010</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 169-70.

<sup>1011</sup> See *Ibid.*, 170-72.

specifics. Christians are therefore free to disagree with one another about how the concrete details of a given cultural activity, such as voting, are to be worked out.<sup>1012</sup>

#### *6.9.5. Relating church and the state*

At this point in the thesis, it seems that sufficient theological groundwork has been laid in order to bring VanDrunen's two kingdoms doctrine to bear upon the Christian's relationship to the state. In view of the tremendous socio-political challenges facing South Africans today, there is perhaps no social institution that wields greater influence upon broader society and evokes more ambivalence among Christians than that of the state.

According to VanDrunen, the state, like other institutions in the common kingdom, has been ordained by God and is therefore legitimate and profitable. The state is instrumental in promoting a measure of justice, peace and prosperity in society, but it is nevertheless temporary, provisional and passing in nature.<sup>1013</sup> In the context of South Africa, however, and especially in Reformed circles, there seems to be widespread disagreement and confusion surrounding matters of Christian engagement with the state. This reality has no doubt been fueled by the legacy of apartheid and the uncharted territory of South Africa's new liberal constitution.<sup>1014</sup> At the one extreme are those Christians who, in a quietist or pietist fashion, deny the importance of politics altogether – perhaps as a reaction to the bad memory of a kind of civil religion promoted by Afrikaner Calvinism. At the other extreme are those who regard politics as a means of ushering in the redemptive kingdom of heaven – perhaps spurred on by the “success” of the church struggle against apartheid. As has been the contention throughout this chapter, the two kingdoms approach suggests theological resources to avoid both extremes, as well as guidance for the bewildered and confused.

For starters, it is a good thing for Christians to desire that civil government promote justice in society. However, as argued by VanDrunen above, whatever justice the state achieves is temporary and belongs to the common and not the redemptive kingdom. In accordance with the Noahic covenant, God decreed that the justice executed by civil government extends to all

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<sup>1012</sup> See *Ibid.*, 170-71.

<sup>1013</sup> See *Ibid.*, 194-95.

<sup>1014</sup> See discussion in the latter sections of Chapter 3.

people and in accordance with the principle of just proportionality; and the New Testament confirms this (see, most notably Rom. 13:1-7). In contrast, the ethical character of Christ's kingdom is radically distinct in a number of ways, as evidenced by its governing principles of non-violence and forgiveness (see Matt. 5:38-42). Therefore, to impose this eschatological ethic upon the state seems clearly incongruous, and bound to skew the temporary and provisional nature of politics. Rather, the Christian is to seek to contribute to the proper functioning of the state, but with the understanding that their task is common to and does not transcend that of the unbeliever. The notion of redemptively transforming the state does not appear to be a viable option.<sup>1015</sup>

If the contemporary Calvinistic transformationist position is subject to valid biblical critique coming from the two kingdoms tradition, what then are some truths that define a Christian view of government and politics? VanDrunen lists five truths that churches are bound to teach and by which Christians should conduct their political lives. First, civil magistrates have been established by God and wield divine authority (Rom. 13:1-2). Secondly, their primary task is to keep order and enforce justice in broader society (Rom. 13:3-4) – the standard of justice being strict and proportionate (Gen. 9:6). Believers should expect the civil magistrate to promote a measure of “civil welfare” (Jer. 29:7) and thus provide them with the opportunity to “lead a peaceful and quiet life...” (1 Tim. 2:2). Thirdly, Scripture calls believers to live in submission to these magistrates as they govern by God's appointment: rendering them honor, paying their taxes and praying for them.<sup>1016</sup> The clear exception to this rule is when magistrates command believers to do that which is contrary to God's will. Fourthly, Christians may hold office within the state as a legitimate and God-pleasing vocation – even when the government they serve is less than ideal.<sup>1017</sup> Fifth and finally, the state's authority is limited and should not overstep its God-ordained bounds. Since the state is under God's authority it does not have the right to operate contrary to God's moral law.<sup>1018</sup> What is more, God has ordained other common

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<sup>1015</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 195-96.

<sup>1016</sup> See Jer. 29:7; Matt. 22:15-21; Rom. 13:1-2, 5-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-2; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17.

<sup>1017</sup> God's instructions to the Babylonian exiles serves as the basic model for New Testament Christian conduct. There is also the account of Daniel and how he and his three friends honorably served several pagan kings. In the New Testament, one notes that neither Jesus nor his apostles insisted that employees of the Roman government give up their positions when they professed faith in Christ; see Matt. 8:10; Acts 10:1-11:18.

<sup>1018</sup> With this said, the state cannot and should not attempt to punish every infraction of God's moral law with civil penalties.

kingdom institutions like the family to put serious restraints on the authority of civil magistrates.<sup>1019</sup>

Beyond the biblical boundaries argued in the above summary of VanDrunen's two kingdoms perspective, it seems both unhelpful and misleading to speak of the "Christian" view of the state or politics. For one, it is misleading because both believers and nonbelievers engage in politics in the common kingdom. All mankind is subject to the authority of the Noahic covenant, and even unbelievers know the basic demands of justice on account of natural revelation. Hence, objectively speaking, political activity is a common task and not a uniquely Christian undertaking.<sup>1020</sup>

Another reason why speaking of "Christian" political activity can be misleading, according to VanDrunen, is because Scripture only speaks at the macro level about civil government and political responsibilities. Beyond the five points listed above, Scripture does not provide a charter for Christians with respect to the specifics of the likes of voting, party affiliation, details of public policy or political strategy. Where Scripture is silent, the particular political decision becomes a matter of wisdom. Allowance should therefore be made for liberty of conscience, which dictates there is no single Christian position. To claim that Christians may have the freedom to disagree on matters of public policy is uncontroversial in regard to many more mundane matters.<sup>1021</sup>

However, difficulties arise when believers are confronted with public policy questions involving moral issues that *are* addressed in Scripture. In the contemporary South African context, questions surrounding corrective rape, the dignity of human life and widespread corruption regularly feature among the most contested political issues. Scripture has many things to say on these moral issues; so how much room is there for Christian liberty as a matter of political debate? To what extent are there "Christian" positions in resolving such controversies, such that the church might promote them and one Christian can expect another Christian to hold them?<sup>1022</sup> In VanDrunen's judgment:

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<sup>1019</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 197-98.

<sup>1020</sup> See *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>1021</sup> Such as the decision-making process that goes into whether the municipality should build a two- or four-lane highway through a certain part of town.

<sup>1022</sup> See VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 199.

[T]he general rule is that the church must teach – and Christians may hold one another accountable for believing – all that Scripture says about such topics as *moral issues* but should be silent about such topics as *concrete political or public policy issues*. The biblical teaching on these topics clearly has political ramifications. In nearly every case when a moral issue becomes a concrete political or public policy issue, however, believers must make discretionary judgments in order to decide how to apply the clear biblical teaching to the particular situation. And whenever the application of biblical teaching is a matter of discretion and not specified by Scripture itself, the church must be silent and Christians may not impose their own discretionary judgments upon the consciences of other Christians.<sup>1023</sup>

There are no doubt endless particular scenarios to which this general rule can be applied.<sup>1024</sup>

#### 6.9.6. A two kingdoms evaluation of liberalism

To close this section, it is perhaps helpful to step back and consider briefly how one might evaluate a liberal society from a natural law and two kingdoms perspective, like the one espoused by VanDrunen. For starters, and in keeping with his Calvin-informed articulation of the common and temporary nature of the civil kingdom, VanDrunen argues that like society in general and like its attendant particularities of ethical debate, the socio-political construction of liberalism should be evaluated from a *penultimate* (though not amoral) perspective. This is in contradistinction to redemption of culture types who critique liberalism according to religious presuppositions and worldviews based on the *ultimate* eschatological perspective of the kingdom of God (see Chapter 2). In other words, VanDrunen finds in natural law that temporal and prudential standard according to which the merits of liberalism may be evaluated: To what degree does liberalism secure penultimate social goods like a measure of law and order and general cultural achievement? The flip side of this affirmation is that no socio-political construction based on natural law – however remarkable its moral accomplishments – can lay claim to an ultimately exhaustive, all-embracing interpretation of life and the universe (like that of the eschatological kingdom of God or some non-Christian alternative). The value of the natural law and two kingdoms paradigm is its ability, on the one hand, to provide biblical and theological grounds for both the critique of liberalism’s shortcomings (for instance, capitalism

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<sup>1023</sup> See Ibid., 199-200.

<sup>1024</sup> For some helpful examples on how this general rule may be put into practice, see Ibid., 200-03.

will never satisfy the ethic of generosity found in Christ's kingdom) by exercising the spiritual antithesis. And on the other, to be able to appreciate the temporary solutions that liberalism provides to penultimate challenges like religious pluralism, freedom of speech, maintaining law and order and supplying the physical needs of all people, by employing the notion of cultural commonality in the civil kingdom.<sup>1025</sup>

If Scripture does not provide an eschatological blueprint for contemporary society, what then are some more specific observations that can be made of liberalism as judged by the standards of the natural moral order? To begin with and contrary to many of its critics, VanDrunen considers liberalism's foundational characteristic of religious and metaphysical pluralism to be its most fundamental strength. The inescapable fact of Western society today, stretching back a few centuries, is religious and metaphysical diversity. This should, however, come as no surprise to Christians as Scripture suggests that one should expect this reality during this inchoate time between the two comings of Christ. In keeping with the doctrine of two kingdoms, God has ordained the civil kingdom to be a mixed realm in which both believers and unbelievers labor side-by-side – albeit imperfectly – towards common cultural ends, despite the clash of their ultimate commitments. In short, liberalism, whether or not consciously reflecting the theological foundation of natural law and two kingdoms, is a laudable attempt to accommodate a social system to the stubborn realities of modern Western society, thereby enabling a measure of social harmony and prosperity.<sup>1026</sup>

Assuming the context of religious and metaphysical pluralism that it seeks to accommodate, VanDrunen sees liberalism in turn comprising of the fundamental and inseparable axioms of the rule of law and the free market economy. With respect to the idea of the rule of

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<sup>1025</sup> See ———, "The Importance of the Penultimate," 230-34.

<sup>1026</sup> In making such claims, VanDrunen counters critics like MacIntyre and Hauerwas who argue that religious and metaphysical pluralism inherent in liberalism signals the death of tradition and the impossibility of any genuine discourse and consensus on matters of morality and justice. For one, and following the thinking of Jeffery Stout, he argues that a liberal democracy is itself a tradition, which can inculcate a common morality without a common metaphysics. Furthermore, he appeals to the tradition of common-law as a significant precursor to liberalism with its system of justice based on general principles of justice gleaned from practical cases coming before courts, rather than grand religious or metaphysical theories. It is important to note that this legal tradition continued to function despite the religious upheavals of the English Middle Ages and Reformation eras. With this said, there may nevertheless be those times when rivalry among the ultimate commitments of members of society also creates irreconcilable differences with respect to penultimate concerns. In such instances, Christians may have no other option than to witness to their ultimate commitments and pray. See *Ibid.*: 235-37. See also Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004)., and James R. Jr. Stoner, *Common-Law Liberty: Rethinking American Constitutionalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003).

law, he believes that law rather than human beings should govern society; law discovered largely independently of the creative actions of governing officials (in keeping with the common law tradition) should dictate social conduct. As a corollary of the rule of law and within the bounds of general rules of just conduct that it produces, a market economy should free members of society to produce, buy and sell, as they will. Hence, for VanDrunen these interconnected axioms unite around the fundamental notion that there is no overarching social vision setting the agenda for law and public policy. Furthermore and while not an essential aspect, “some version of democratic government usually, and not without some degree of plausibility, accompanies an otherwise liberal society.”<sup>1027</sup>

As for concrete benefits of liberalism judged from a penultimate perspective, VanDrunen finds evidence for many. In those places where liberalism has thrived, things like government tyranny has been drastically reduced; slavery has been abolished; poverty in anything other than a relative sense has been eliminated; and life expectancy has risen dramatically. This is not to say, however, that liberalism is without critique and ambiguity when it comes to the ideals of human flourishing. For example, the corrosive effects of unfettered capitalism on the family and long-term relationships should be taken seriously. Nevertheless, mitigating factors like this should not be surprising if liberalism is evaluated from a penultimate perspective. For no perfect solutions should be expected to any problem in this life.<sup>1028</sup>

Hence, in VanDrunen’s estimation, liberalism has not only encouraged but has so far been able to “house” the ever-growing social complexity and technological advance that has accompanied modern life. Here again, from a penultimate perspective, liberalism should be given high marks. Insofar as the penultimate ends defined by Scripture go, liberalism delivers quite well. In keeping with the contours of life under the common Noahic covenant established in Genesis 9 and the exigencies of human depravity, liberalism provides the backdrop of relative justice and order for creative cultural enterprise to develop and flourish in unpredictable ways for the common good, but does not boast an overarching vision for constructing the ideal society.<sup>1029</sup> Put in an even richer way, liberalism provides the space for humankind to image God in their cultural creativity in new and astounding ways. It is arguably unparalleled as a social system in

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<sup>1027</sup> See VanDrunen, "The Importance of the Penultimate," 238.

<sup>1028</sup> See *Ibid.*: 239-40.

<sup>1029</sup> See *Ibid.*: 240-41.

providing the opportunity for creative human capabilities to be given such free reign.<sup>1030</sup> And yet, despite all of the unprecedented ways in which it encourages human flourishing, from an ultimate perspective, liberalism must be judged a failure. For the human race will never attain to the spiritual kingdom of Christ by means of its cultural labors.<sup>1031</sup>

Seeing that throughout this chapter I have sought to provide a sense of the liberating relevance of VanDrunen's two kingdoms paradigm for the South African context, I close this section and this chapter by making one final point relative to a Reformed evaluation of liberalism. In Chapter 3, I engaged an article of Dirk J. Smit's where he surveys the general contemporary Reformed attitude toward morality and politics. Of those Reformed theologians he examined, he concluded that with the exception of John de Gruchy, they all consider the public square to be in some way a sacred space (which I read as that realm subject to the redemptive kingdom of Christ and governed by ultimate biblical and redemptive norms). In the case of de Gruchy, Smit finds someone who is comfortable speaking the language of liberalism without striving for something "more".<sup>1032</sup> This seems to me to be another hopeful sign for the potential promise of the two kingdoms and natural law paradigm in the contemporary Reformed Christianity and culture discourse in South Africa.

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<sup>1030</sup> See Ibid.: 241.

<sup>1031</sup> See Ibid.: 241-42.

<sup>1032</sup> See Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed*, 513-49.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

The overriding objective of this thesis has been to determine whether Calvin's social thought included substantive doctrines of natural law and two kingdoms. And if so, whether such categories can help bring some resolution to his contested legacy as well as provide guidance to Christians living in South Africa's challenging new democracy.

It seems only appropriate that any new historical inquiry into Calvin's social thought in the South African context should give special attention to his appropriation in the church struggle against apartheid. The church struggle brought to a head in dramatic fashion the highly disputed nature of Calvin's legacy. While holding to the majority contemporary Reformed reading of Calvin as a redeemer of culture (see Chapter 2), the Reformed family of churches in South Africa has at the same time been sharply divided over which Calvin should transform culture. Is it the so-called oppressive Calvin of the later Genevan social experiment? Or is it rather the so-called prophetic and liberating earlier Calvin: the Calvin of neo-Kuyperianism or the Calvin of Barth and Bonhoeffer? The former helped give theological legitimisation to apartheid aspirations of Afrikaner nationalism, while the latter claimed theological grounds for the church participating in the struggle for a new dispensation of human liberation, equality and brotherhood under a new liberal constitution.

#### **7.1. A renewed portrait: the Calvin of natural law and two kingdoms**

Viewed as something of a necessary rite of passage back to the sixteenth-century Reformer, this thesis sought (in Chapter 3) to learn a number of lessons from the recovery effort during the 1970s and 1980s, which produced the Calvin of the church struggle against apartheid – the portrait of Calvin that more or less continues to dominate in Reformed churches today. The net result of these lessons, coupled with a measure of ongoing ambivalence within the Reformed family of churches towards questions of Christian engagement of culture, plus signs of sympathy toward a possible new Calvinist and Reformed paradigm for Christian life under South Africa's

new liberal constitution, suggest that a fresh historical-theological re-visitation of Calvin's social thought is a valuable undertaking.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I attempted such an inquiry with the specific aim of determining if Calvin gives evidence of substantive doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law, and whether such categories are retrievable for today. With respect to the doctrine of two kingdoms, this thesis reached a similar conclusion to that of David VanDrunen and John Witte, Jr in affirming that Calvin did in fact make substantial theological use of the idea – thereby placing him in significant continuity with Luther and other precursors in the earlier Christian tradition. This is not to say, however, that Calvin was always theologically consistent in working out his two kingdoms insights, which becomes especially apparent when studying his social practices in Geneva. I sought to explain this ambiguity and even suggested that it is understandable primarily in terms of Calvin's Christendom context. With respect to natural law, I argued that Calvin echoed a significant chorus of early and medieval Christian voices by incorporating the principle into his social thought. Natural law for Calvin could only breathe and make sense within the atmosphere of God's two kingdoms. The two doctrines helped illumine one another.

In Chapter 5, I concluded that despite the inconsistencies in Calvin's social thought and the fact that his theology was developed in the sixteenth-century context, his categories of two kingdoms and natural law are still recoverable and relevant for today. Support for this claim comes from the pervasive use and development of these doctrines in the early Reformed tradition, particularly in the North American context. At the same time, any recovery of this Calvin-informed and early Reformed perspective has to engage the reality of its significant demise within the twentieth-century – something I do in Chapters 5 and 6.

For a number of reasons, not least of which have been ambiguities surrounding Abraham Kuyper's doctrine of common grace and the influence of Karl Barth, the notion of a Calvin of two kingdoms and natural law has not featured favorably in Reformed discourse in the recent past. Since the beginning of the twentieth-century, these doctrines have suffered a slow death of sorts. Signs of life nevertheless remain, particularly in the North American context. To such an extent that one could say that the last decade or so has witnessed something of a fledgling renaissance of interest in the Calvin-informed two kingdoms and natural law paradigm. This thesis has been deliberate from the outset in taking note of such scholarly developments in a

corner of the Reformed tradition that not only boasts a robust legacy of two kingdoms and natural law thought, but also in a context with a lengthy experiment in liberal democracy.

The historical portion of this thesis attempts to add to a growing corpus of Reformed scholarship that claims undeniable evidence for the doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law being a standard part of historic Reformed orthodoxy, despite their loss of popularity in the last century or so. It also wishes to add to a growing number of voices suggesting the value of recovering these doctrines for practical use today. This thesis focuses particularly on the promise of developing these theological categories for the church in South Africa.

## **7.2. Transforming traditions: two kingdoms for South Africa today?**

In this thesis, the purpose of revisiting Calvin's social thought through the pedagogical lens of his reception in the Reformed church struggle movements, has been to help bring resolution to his contested legacy, and thereby offer liberating trajectories for Christian living in the new democratic South Africa. Since my historical findings strongly suggest that Calvin made substantive use of the doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law, in ways that are still relevant for Christians today, I submit that this perspective has the promise of transforming Christianity and culture discourse in South Africa for the better. Hence, in Chapter 6 I set forth David VanDrunen's developed Calvin-informed and early Reformed two kingdoms and natural law paradigm as indicative of the ongoing promise of this perspective.

VanDrunen's recovery and renewal of these classic doctrines is an attempt to regain continuity with what he argues was the dominating impulse of early Reformed social thought<sup>1033</sup>, which has been progressively eclipsed since the twentieth-century. His approach to relating Christianity and culture is an attempt to provide a more theologically consistent and holistic account of the Christian life under God's rule than the dominant transformationist paradigm in contemporary Reformed discourse. By employing classic Reformed covenantal categories, he portrays Christians as citizens of God's two kingdoms. On the one hand there is the kingdom of Christ and on the other the common civil kingdom, both of which God rules in his Son in two distinctively different ways. God's redemptive and common kingdoms emerge from and correspond to his eternal covenant of grace and his temporary covenant with Noah. In the case

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<sup>1033</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*.

of the former, Christ rules as redeemer over Christians as members of the institutional church only. In the latter Christ rules over all of humankind inhabiting various God-ordained civil institutions, like the state, as creator and sustainer. In Christ's redemptive kingdom, life is characterised by the revelation of forgiveness and peace found in Scripture. While life in Christ's common kingdom is characterised by the ordering principles of retributive justice revealed in God's universal moral standard called natural law. At the same time, life in the common kingdom is about more than retributive justice, and includes the joys and satisfaction of participating in the likes family, commerce, eating, sporting, etc. Nevertheless, while Christians rightfully participate with non-believers in many rewarding cultural endeavors in the common kingdom under the oversight of the state, they are nevertheless pilgrims and exiles in this world. This is because their ultimate identity and home is found in the already-but-not-yet of Christ's heavenly kingdom.

One way to distill the major defining contours of VanDrunen's approach to relating Christianity and culture is in terms of its liberating promise for the South African context. This helps capture the overall purpose of Chapter 6. Hence, I sum up VanDrunen's biblical and theological case for a developed two kingdoms and natural law paradigm around six major themes as they emerge from the previous chapter. These themes cluster around three implications of VanDrunen's two kingdoms paradigm for the Christian life. First, it helps Christians maintain that necessary but difficult balance between active engagement in their various cultural vocations and a Christ-centered heavenly-mindedness. Secondly, it provides believers with very helpful assistance in understanding the legitimacy of both church and state and their significant distinctions. And thirdly, the doctrine helps one appreciate and understand both the *antithesis* and *commonality* that should characterise the various cultural pursuits of Christians in this world.<sup>1034</sup>

VanDrunen's first theme is that the ethical pattern for Christian engagement of culture should be gratitude for God's kingdom already attained through Christ's faithful obedience to the cultural mandate, as well as the entire law of God. The two kingdoms perspective affirms the good news of the gospel of justification by faith alone in Christ alone, who has already attained the new creation in his ascension. Therefore, Christians are freed from the burden of gaining the

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<sup>1034</sup> See David VanDrunen, "The Reformed Two Kingdoms Doctrine: An Explanation and Defense," *The Confessional Presbyterian* (Forthcoming).

kingdom God through obedience to the cultural mandate (or through any works of the law for that matter). Hence, VanDrunen's call to reflect theologically on Christian engagement of culture in terms of the two Adams and the associated doctrine of justification, promises to reform the contemporary Reformed transformationist tradition in South Africa with the liberating core of the gospel. Might those who hold to an orthodox view of justification come to better appreciate the implications of making the first Adam the pattern for Christian engagement of culture? Might VanDrunen's two kingdoms claims spur theologians to reconsider for ongoing Christianity and culture discourse the importance of classic Reformed covenant theology related doctrines: like the covenant of works (pre- and post-fall) and its embedded talionic principle, the law-gospel distinction, the two Adams rubric and the forensic understanding of justification?

A second theme informing VanDrunen's two kingdoms paradigm, which is closely related to the first, is the distinctly different ethic of the church compared to broader cultural institutions, as exemplified particularly by the state. VanDrunen takes pains to show that on the one hand, the church is the only earthly institution that is governed by the gospel ethic of forgiveness and reconciliation, because it is the only institution that gives (penultimate) expression to the redemptive kingdom of Christ and the covenant of grace. In other words, biblical notions of justification, reconciliation and peace describe the way of life taught by the church and practised among its members only. On the other hand, VanDrunen argues that the ethic of those institutions belonging to the common kingdom, under the governance of God's temporary covenant with Noah, is distinctly different at crucial points. For example, while the criminal is forgiven of his guilt before God in the church, that same person must suffer the appropriate penalties of justice enforced by the state. While members of the church are party to an ethic in which forgiveness transcends justice, generosity transcends scarcity, and evangelism spurns violence, they are at the same time subject to the common natural law ethic as they participate in the various cultural institutions outside the church.

With these two kingdoms distinctions, VanDrunen safeguards the liberating message of the gospel and its unique ethic from being equated with the temporary justice and ordering ethic of the broader civil institutions of this world. In doing so, he appropriately distinguishes gospel from law, church from state, this age from the age to come. Here I believe one finds the theological potential to transform a legacy of Christianity and culture discourse in South Africa: one which has tended to include within the purview of the kingdom of Christ every civil

institution, including the sword-bearing state. In view of the church's extensive history of finding recourse to biblical language for ethical discourse in the public square, might the contemporary Reformed tradition reconsider the theological consistency of applying peaceful rhetoric such as forgiveness and reconciliation to broader cultural institutions, especially in view of the coercive nature of the state? Can Christianity and culture discourse in South African benefit from engaging the implications of VanDrunen's connections between the covenant of grace and the Noahic covenant, and the redemptive and common kingdoms respectively?

What is more, might the discourse also profit from his interpretation of the peaceful Sermon on the Mount as a distinct gospel-informed Christian ethic, compared to the common retributive ethic of the state?

A third theme that emerges from VanDrunen's recovery and development of the two kingdoms doctrine, is that of the interlocking doctrine of natural law. This idea is appropriately sandwiched in the middle of this list because it only makes sense against the theological backdrop of God's two kingdoms. VanDrunen is careful from the outset to disabuse his readers of the pervasive notion that natural law is an attempt at constructing an autonomous human ethic. Instead, he builds his case for natural law from the biblical witness as that law rooted in God's nature and inscribed on the human heart in accordance with the *imago dei*. In the post-fall and post-diluvian world, VanDrunen sees natural law disclosed formally in the Noahic covenant as the moral standard for civil life in God's common kingdom. While the Noahic covenant does not reveal God as merciful and forgiving, it does nevertheless reveal him as forbearing as he upholds and sustains creation through the operations (albeit imperfect) of natural law. Therefore, because natural law discloses to all of humankind their moral obligations before God, Christians find in it the biblical grounds for engaging non-Christians in moral and ethical debate, as well as reason to work side-by-side with them for the common good of society.

Hence, VanDrunen's articulation of natural law provides the church with a powerful theological construct that empowers Christians with a universal God-given language by which to engage in a myriad of cultural activities for the cause of furthering social, economic and political justice: in a word, human flourishing. Natural law furnishes Christians with a "prophetic voice" that does not confuse the liberty of the gospel with civil rights, or the kingdom of Christ with the temporal peace and order of the common kingdom. Natural law, understood in the context of

two kingdoms, enables Christians to participate in and appreciate the tenets of a liberal democracy.

While God's natural law guides the objective conduct of Christians in the civil realm, VanDrunen is nevertheless quick to point out that Christians are to always act in faith and unto the glory of God.

In my estimation, VanDrunen's articulation of natural law promises to help reform the contemporary Reformed conception of what it means for Christians to live as citizens of the common kingdom in South Africa. It is important to note that VanDrunen's conception of natural law exists within a theological ecosystem incapable of producing the kind of natural theology that gave legitimisation to apartheid. This is because the operations of natural law in the common kingdom are temporary in nature and therefore not subject to redemptive grace. The common workings of natural law are built upon ideas of impartial justice among human beings who share the image of God (Genesis 9:6).<sup>1035</sup> Can the Christianity and culture discourse in South Africa move beyond the Barthian critique of natural theology by conceiving of a theological standard for common public ethical discourse that is rooted in God's creation and his non-redemptive covenant with Noah? Could such a move perhaps help safeguard the sufficiency of Christ's redemptive work for the sinner, the unique ethic of his church and unity of the body of Christ?

The fourth theme animating VanDrunen's development of the two kingdoms doctrine, which gets to the chief burden of his paradigm, is the central importance of the church in terms of its worship and fellowship as God's covenant community. The church should take center stage in the life of the Christian because it is the only institution that makes manifest the kingdom of Christ and his message of mercy and forgiveness for sinners. The church is that lone counter-cultural outpost of heaven on earth, whose doctrine and life is governed by the Word of God. With this conception of the church, VanDrunen seeks to protect and promote the liberating and justifying grace of Christ for sinners, which God has seen fit to convey through his ordained office-bearers. In other words, for VanDrunen, the church is important not because of the

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<sup>1035</sup> This is contrary to the Afrikaner Calvinist mono-kingdom approach, which argued that redemptive (special grace) leavens or renews divine ordinances embedded in creation (common grace), thereby offering theological legitimisation to the notion that the principle of racial segregation in creation should order re-creation: broader cultural life determines church life.

change that it can make to broader society, but rather as God's means of convincing and converting sinners and building up saints in holiness and comfort, by faith, unto salvation.<sup>1036</sup>

Herein lies the potential for transforming a tradition of relating Christianity and culture in South Africa that has at times given the impression that the center of the Christian life is located (in "church" activity) outside the church. During apartheid, the church's ministry and importance was very much entangled in promoting a broader cultural ideology of racial segregation. In the anti-apartheid church struggle, the church was all too easily identified with a social and political reform movement for human rights and free democracy.

Might VanDrunen's two kingdoms insights relative to the importance of the church be a catalyst for reformation in the Reformed family of churches in South Africa? Could his claims motivate the church to a renewed emphasis upon and interest in confessional Reformed distinctives such as the centrality of the Word and sacrament ministry of the church, the regulative principle of worship, an educated ordained ministry and observance of the Lord's Day?

The fifth theme that characterises VanDrunen's two kingdoms paradigm is the idea of the church's spiritual and ministerial authority. Unlike other institutions in this world, the church is a supernatural creation of God's Word through his Spirit. As God's covenant community, the church engages in spiritual acts such as worship, heavenly fellowship, participation in the Lord's Supper and hospitality – albeit as a public, embodied and tangible manifestation of the kingdom of Christ on earth. Through one baptism and one faith, the church is unlike the cultural institutions of broader culture that are differentiated by ethnicity, family heritage, political allegiance and socio-economic status, as well as bound by the limitations of time. Having been endowed with a spiritual nature by God's Word, it follows that that same Word should also govern the church's authority. In this regard, VanDrunen argues that the church, in her official capacity, only has the authority to minister that which the Word of God teaches and nothing more. In short, the church has neither the authority to encroach on the jurisdiction of the state, which has its own God-given authority, distinct ethic and moral standard, nor the mandate to make ministerial declarations about those civil matters, such as specific public policy, to which Scripture does not speak.

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<sup>1036</sup> See Westminster Shorter Catechism Q/A 86.

According to VanDrunen, the liberating trajectories associated with these doctrines for the church and its members are many. Chief among them are for one, the church's freedom from being identified with any cultural ideology or social justice cause, no matter how laudable. This is not because socio-economic and political challenges are unimportant, but because the church has not been given the mandate to engage them. Rather, lay Christians have been empowered with the time, gifts and resources to pursue social transformation as an expression of love for one's neighbour. Hence, not only does this perspective safeguard the church's resources for focusing on the most important acts surrounding public worship and fellowship, but it also liberates Christians to make use of the many broader cultural avenues for promoting the common good of society. In terms of the church's ministerial authority, this doctrine, on the one hand, frees the minister to proclaim only what is found in Scripture for the spiritual well-being of his congregation. On the other, Christians are given the liberty to differ on particular social, economic and political matters to which Scripture does not specifically speak. In other words, the conscience of the believer is liberated from binding declarations by the church on those issues, like public policy, for which there is no Scriptural warrant.

VanDrunen's articulation of the spirituality and ministerial authority of the church seems especially worth engaging within the contemporary Reformed Christianity and culture discourse in South Africa, considering the church's legacy of usurping the authority of the state and identifying with broader cultural agendas on both sides of the apartheid debate. As the Reformed churches consider their role in the ongoing socio-economic and political reconstruction of South Africa, might she re-think the implications of identifying the church with a broader cultural agenda for the sake of preserving the church's unique nature and message, and protecting the consciences of its people? In a word, might a two kingdoms perspective help safeguard the church from supporting political causes that would tempt her to compromise her independence for a non-ecclesiastical agenda?

The sixth theme that I would like to highlight is VanDrunen's explanation of how Christians should evaluate broader cultural institutions and activities according to the two kingdoms perspective. Contrary to the claims of much of contemporary Reformed Christianity and culture discourse, he asserts that activities such as education, work and politics cannot be flagged simply as either "Christian" or "non-Christian" – as if Christians do not inhabit a world in which both religious antithesis and cultural commonality are simultaneously at play.

Illustrative of this is the Christian evaluation of and participation in South Africa's new liberal constitution. According to a two kingdoms perspective, VanDrunen is clear that Christians are to interpret all of life and pursue all their activities in this world in faith unto God's glory. From a subjective standpoint, believers must always act in accordance with their new identity in Christ. Hence, Christians should seek God's honor as they contribute to the better ordering and justice of South Africa's liberal society. They should do so, however, with the understanding that such cultural activity is not changing the common civil realm into the redemptive kingdom of Christ.

Thus, while Christians are to do all things in faith and unto the glory of God as they participate within the various cultural institutions of broader society, this does not mean that such activities or institutions should be deemed "Christian". This is because, for one, the likes of a liberal constitution will never conform to the ultimate standards of the kingdom of Christ as set forth in Scripture. What is more, while Scripture speaks to civil government in general terms, it does not set forth the particulars as to the best form it should take for the common good. Accordingly, Christians liberty should dictate that no form of government – or any cultural undertaking for that matter – be deemed as representing *the* "Christian" way. So, if neither South Africa's liberal constitution nor any cultural activity governed by it can be judged as "Christian" in the objective sense, then how might Christians evaluate the tenets of liberalism?

According to VanDrunen, while a liberal society will never conform to the kingdom of Christ, it may nevertheless be judged a relative success in many ways according to the terms of the Noahic covenant and its disclosure of a common human ethic governed by God's natural law. In the instance of South Africa, the transition to democracy has meant significant strides for society at large in terms of human rights: not least of which has been the promotion of human dignity and the right to religious freedom.

With these contours of VanDrunen's Calvin-informed two kingdoms paradigm and their liberating potential in view, I ask: Can it transform the Reformed tradition and its legacy of relating Christian and culture as it tries to make sense of its new marginalised place in South Africa's new and secularised liberal democracy? Might it even help transform what the contemporary Reformed tradition understands to be the core of its identity?

### 7.3. *Semper reformanda*: two kingdoms and the development of Christianity and culture discourse

In many respects, David VanDrunen has led the way in putting the two kingdoms and natural law paradigm back on the theological map within the North American Reformed tradition in the twenty-first century. In the space that remains, I consider some of the ways in which the paradigm can be refined and further developed.

In order to frame this discussion, and because this thesis has been primarily an investigation into historical theology, a few comments seem in order regarding developments in scholarship on the nature of Calvinism and the significance of the Reformation by those sympathetic to the kingdoms paradigm. In his historical-theological work, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms* (2010), VanDrunen's evidence for the pervasive presence of two kingdoms thinking in early Reformed social thought leads one to conclude that Calvin and the early Reformation movement should be understood primarily in terms of initiating ecclesiastical reform of doctrine, liturgy and church polity, rather than an attempt to reform broader society.<sup>1037</sup> Giving further focused evidence for such a reading of the development of Reformed social thought is the work of church historian, Darryl Hart. In his forthcoming volume, *Calvinism: A History* (2013), Hart seeks to address what he perceives to be a need in the ongoing study of Calvinism to connect the dots between the church reforms of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe to the demographic, political, economic, and religious developments of later periods that were responsible for transplanting Reformed Protestantism around the world: from California to South Africa. His contention is that the church today needs to hear less about Calvinism's role in the forces of globalisation and more the narrative of how Calvinism became a global faith.<sup>1038</sup> Hart's concern is that for the better part of two hundred years, the temptation

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<sup>1037</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*. On a related note, VanDrunen's, (Chapter 5) critique of the "Calvin vs the Calvinist" paradigm (as it served his interests in showing the continuity between Calvin and the Reformed orthodox on two kingdoms and natural law) is bolstered by the recent publication of Richard Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: The Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012). In keeping with his previous scholarship in this area, Muller issues a renewed clarion call to church historians to do better historiography despite what might be at stake in dispensing with previously held narratives of Calvin and the Reformed orthodox.

<sup>1038</sup> See Hart, *Calvinism: A History*. Hart's reading of the history of Calvinism finds resonance with the now decade-old work by Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed*. In a recent review of the volume, Hart wrote the following:

has been to regard Reformed Protestantism's importance in cultural and political terms. This is to a degree understandable considering how the rise of Reformed Protestantism was so bound up with European politics. Nevertheless, Hart questions the contemporary assessment of Calvinism as less a churchly movement than a religiously-based source for social transformation, which has been mightily reinforced in the last century by the romantic nationalist ideals of Abraham Kuyper. But were the *early* Reformers primarily concerned with remaking Europe or reforming the church? Hart claims that the reforms introduced by the original Protestants were overwhelmingly ecclesial in nature. It was "[o]nly because the church was part of the established political order did church reform translate into broader social and political developments. The Reformation was first and foremost a religious effort and only secondarily did it affect politics and culture." In Hart's estimation the story of Reformed Protestantism has not been adequately disentangled from its marriage to politics.<sup>1039</sup>

If Hart's forthcoming volume has credibility and if there is truth to his diagnosis of recent Calvinist and Reformation studies in general, then it seems that more work needs to be done on engaging the claim that early Reformed Protestantism was not primarily about changing the world, but about reforming the church.

In terms of refining the historical portrait of Calvin as an advocate of two kingdoms and natural law, I highlight briefly the proposal by Matthew J. Tuininga, a doctoral candidate in Ethics and Society at Emory University under the supervision of John Witte, Jr. Central to his dissertation proposal entitled "Christ's Two Kingdoms: Calvin's Political Theology and the

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The social aspects of Benedict's history allow the economic and political dynamics of Calvinism's development to receive valuable attention. But the author does not reduce the Reformed faith to race, class, gender, or political rivalry. In fact, what makes Benedict's book remarkable is his ability to treat Calvinism as first and foremost a religious phenomenon, an expression of Western Christianity that had its greatest impact upon church life and the ministry of pastors and the lives of church members. Because the church was part of the warp and woof of Western Europe, reforms in theology, ministry, and devotion would inevitably spill over into every arena of European society. Even so, Benedict shows that the Calvinism of the sixteenth century was not the neo-Calvinism of the twentieth century: Reformed Christians did not set out to apply their faith to every area of life because of a Calvinist world-and-life-view; instead, their intention was to reform the church, and that agenda had a direct bearing on economics, politics, and education. Still, the intention was first and foremost religious – cultural transformation was merely a by-product of church reform. (See Darryl Hart, "'Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism" By Philip Benedict," *Modern Reformation* 2009, 29-30.)

<sup>1039</sup> See Darryl Hart, "Is the OPC the Church Calvinists Have Been Waiting For?," [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=269&issue\\_id=67](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=269&issue_id=67) (date accessed: November 21, 2012). Representative of new scholarship on Calvin is a recent volume that includes an essay by John Hesselink on the revelation of God in creation and Scripture, as well as one by two kingdoms advocate, Michael Horton, entitled *Calvin's Theology and Its Reception: Disputes, Developments and New Possibilities*, ed. John Hesselink and Todd Billings (Louisville: WJKP, 2012).

Public Engagement of the Church”, is his argument that the substance of Calvin’s two kingdoms thought is best understood as grounded in the eschatological rubric of the two ages: the future age of the kingdom of God as expressed in the ministry of the church, and the present evil age as presided over by civil government. From this perspective, Tuininga believes that the overlap of the two kingdoms in Calvin’s theology becomes less a matter of inconsistency and more like the already-and-not-yet reality dynamic of the Christian faith.<sup>1040</sup> In other words, distinctions that Calvin employed, like spiritual-temporal, heavenly-earthly, soul-body, inward-outward, should be understood less in terms of two (impenetrable) realms and more in terms of the two ages.<sup>1041</sup> Tuininga’s reading of Calvin’s two kingdoms theology in more of an eschatological key promises to shore up an emphasis that has perhaps been lacking in Calvin scholarship to this point.<sup>1042</sup>

With these historical observations in mind, I now turn to some of the theological challenges facing the two kingdoms paradigm, which call for further critical reflection, refinement and development. Because VanDrunen is arguably the leader in the recent fledgling renaissance of two kingdoms and natural law thinking, I focus on the some of the major areas of critique leveled at his two most recent (2010) volumes, *Natural Law and Two Kingdoms* and *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*.

One common area of concern among critics of the two kingdoms paradigm is that its advocates portray God’s two kingdoms as two “hermetically sealed” separate realms or spheres,

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<sup>1040</sup> See Matthew J. Tuininga, "Christ’s Two Kingdoms: Calvin’s Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church" (Emory University, 2013).

<sup>1041</sup> See ———, "The Two Kingdoms Doctrine, Part Two: John Calvin," *Reformation 21 Online Magazine*, <http://www.reformation21.org/articles/the-two-kingdoms-doctrine-part-two-john-calvin.php> (accessed November 22, 2012).

<sup>1042</sup> This is perhaps a good place to remark on a recent critical publication by Smith, "Reforming Public Theology: Two Kingdoms or Two Cities," 122-37., in which he contends that VanDrunen’s so-called Lutheran rendition of the two kingdoms is incompatible with the political theology of Augustine. Smith, however, fails to take note of the fact that VanDrunen clearly distinguishes between the Lutheran and Reformed versions of the two kingdoms. What is more, VanDrunen emphasises the point that Augustine’s two cities doctrine and the Reformed two kingdoms doctrine are not competitors, but rather complement each other. The Reformers were not rejecting or modifying the Augustinian vision articulated by Smith or VanDrunen, but rather seeking to address, with their two kingdoms doctrine, how God exercises his rule in the world. See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, Chapters 2-3., and ———, "The Reformed Two Kingdoms Doctrine: An Explanation and Defense." In my opinion, while Smith’s handling of Augustine is solid and generally consonant with VanDrunen’s reading, he does not offer any critique or constructive suggestions that would alter the trajectory of two kingdoms discourse in any substantive way.

as if they do not overlap: thus creating an unwarranted dualism in the Christian life.<sup>1043</sup> While VanDrunen has been careful to argue for the unity of the Christian life under the dual mediatorial reign of Christ, this recurring critique suggests that more work can be done in showing that while there are necessary distinctions between the two kingdoms, there is also very real overlap for Christians who live all of life by faith unto the glory of God.<sup>1044</sup> Perhaps here is where Tuininga's added emphasis on the two ages might help?<sup>1045</sup>

A second, closely connected, area that could benefit from further clarification and development has to do with the use of the modifier "Christian" when applied to the cultural activities of believers in the common kingdom. In Chapter 6, I tried to show how VanDrunen handles the tension between the label "Christian" in its relation to culture. He does this by speaking on the one hand of the subjective motivation of believers toward all of life, which is always informed by one's identity in Christ and participation in his coming kingdom. On the other, he speaks of the common kingdom cultural work of believers as not uniquely Christian in the objective sense; in so far as it shares in the common universal standards of excellence dictated by natural law. I think that VanDrunen's distinctions here are very helpful.

However, I wonder if perhaps his use of the adjective "Christian" can be widened further in view of suggestions made in a recent essay by Ryan C. McIlhenny entitled, "*Christian Witness As Redeemed Culture*." Here McIlhenny defends a model of Christian engagement of culture that is not so much about transforming culture as it is about Christian witness as redeemed culture. As an alternative to a transformational activism that seeks to be "externally sacralizing" by "redeeming culture," as if culture "were a thing to which redemption needs to come," he argues for the setting apart of "Christian activity" as "redeemed culture": for transformed witness over transformed conquest. While in substantive continuity with the basic two kingdoms

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<sup>1043</sup> For a most recent example, see Cornel Venema, "The Restoration of All Things to Proper Order: An Assessment of The "Two Kingdoms/Natural Law" Interpretation of Calvin's Public Theology," in *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective*, ed. Ryan C. McIlhenny (Philipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2012), 3-32. For similar a critique by a number of theologians of Kuyperian and Barthian sympathies, see also Chapter 2 of this thesis.

<sup>1044</sup> Perhaps Darryl Hart has been more susceptible to this accusation in his more polemical moments, especially when making more informal posts on various Christianity and culture related issues on his personal blog; see [www.oldlife.org](http://www.oldlife.org). See also, e.g., generally Hart, *A Secular Faith*.

<sup>1045</sup> See Matthew J. Tuininga, "The Two Kingdoms Doctrine, Part Three: The Teaching of Scripture," <http://www.reformation21.org/articles/the-two-kingdoms-doctrine-part-three-the-teaching-of-scripture.php> (date accessed: November 22, 2012).

paradigm, he nevertheless wants to go beyond *subjective* motivation as the distinguishing characteristic separating the cultural works of Christians from non-Christians. Hence his notion of Christian witness as redeemed culture. This idea requires, in McIlhenny's opinion, a revised understanding of culture. For him, culture is not a thing or object delivered without meaning, but rather what humankind makes of the stuff of this world. Accordingly, McIlhenny argues that in the case of Christians, and because of their new identity in Christ, they are always communicating eschatological or redemptive meaning to even the most mundane cultural tasks carried out in the common kingdom. This helps one make sense of, for example, Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 32 (Q&A 82), which speaks of the godly deeds of Christians (while common in the abstract) as effectively used by God to win people over to the kingdom of Christ. In my opinion, McIlhenny's offers valuable insights for further reflection as two kingdoms advocates seek to do justice to the tension of the Christian's already-and-not-yet existence in God's two kingdoms, which correspond to the two ages.<sup>1046</sup>

A third area of consideration, which has raised questions for critics of the two kingdoms position, has to do with the discontinuity that VanDrunen sees between creation and re-creation, this age and the age to come – leading some to even accuse him of approaching an annihilationist position.<sup>1047</sup> Perhaps VanDrunen could have dedicated more space to this matter in his *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, especially in light of its increasingly contested nature in contemporary Christianity and culture discourse. Suffice it to say, VanDrunen attempts to clear up any unnecessary misunderstanding and confusion surrounding his position in at least two forthcoming publications that I am aware of. In his forthcoming article for *The Confessional Presbyterian* entitled "The Reformed Two Kingdoms Doctrine: An Explanation and Defense," VanDrunen provides some clarification relative to his claim that the "life" promised to Adam for obedience (to the creation covenant) was an eschatological life and not just ongoing life in the original creation. Instead of supporting the notion that God would have annihilated the first

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<sup>1046</sup> See McIlhenny, "Christian Witness as Redeemed Culture," 251-75. I am indebted to Matthew Tuininga for allowing me to see a draft copy of a review of the aforementioned title, which not only provided a good summary of McIlhenny's thought but also made helpful connections with the two kingdoms position. If Tuininga's draft is anything to go by, he believes McIlhenny's contribution is a step forward in the right direction for two kingdoms discourse.

<sup>1047</sup> See, e.g., Keith Mathison, "2k or Not 2k? That Is the Question: A Review of David Vandrunen's Living in God's Two Kingdoms," Ligonier Ministries, <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/2k-or-not-2k-question-review-david-vandrunens-living-gods-two-kingdoms/> (date accessed: November 23, 2012).

creation and made a new creation *ex nihilo*, he argues that God would “bring the protological first creation to consummation in an eschatological new creation.” In other words, God intended from the beginning for human beings to rule the eschatological new creation. And despite Adam’s failure to attain this goal through his disobedience, Christ has nevertheless secured the original destiny of humankind for those of faith. As to the continuity between this world and the age to come in terms of culture-making, I have noted in Chapter 6 VanDrunen’s critique of the notion that cultural artifacts themselves will adorn the new creation. At the same time he affirms the bodily resurrection of believers. What can be added to this aspect of continuity is the idea that many of the *effects* of present Christian cultural labors will continue to be felt in the age to come. Among other things, not only will God acknowledge the good works of Christians at the final judgment, but even the most mundane of cultural labors will surely have bearing, in some way, upon the interpersonal relationships of God’s people in glory.<sup>1048</sup> VanDrunen does more to develop these lines of thought in his forthcoming, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law*. These anticipated clarifications and refinements, and others like it, will no doubt help clarify the relationship between creation and recreation, as well as counter the notion that two kingdoms advocates demarcate the two ages too sharply.

A fourth area of concern has to do with VanDrunen’s extensive reliance on the Noachic covenant as a non-redemptive covenant in his articulation of the two kingdoms paradigm. While this reading of the Noachic covenant was common among the likes of Abraham Kuyper and Meredith Kline, nevertheless the widespread salvific readings of the Genesis 9 covenant within the Reformed tradition, suggests that two kingdoms advocates will need to address ongoing objections and questions that arise in this regard. Related to this is the disputed notion of common grace. Here again, those wishing to develop further a two kingdoms theology in conjunction with Reformed covenant theology, will need to address this important topic as well.<sup>1049</sup>

A fifth area that may raise questions in the minds of critics has to do with whether anything has changed about the state and its authority and legitimacy with the death and resurrection of Christ. Has VanDrunen been correct in assigning post-resurrection civil

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<sup>1048</sup> See VanDrunen, "The Reformed Two Kingdoms Doctrine."

<sup>1049</sup> See ———, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 430. A helpful contribution in this regard is ———, "Natural Law in Noachic Accent," 131-49.

governments the same standing as ancient Canaanite, Egyptian and Babylonian governments under God's common rule (see Chapter 6)? One contemporary moral theologian, Oliver O'Donovan, while in many ways sympathetic to the basic two kingdoms perspective, is an example of someone who argues that the terms on which political authorities function today are not the same as they were prior to Christ's ascension.<sup>1050</sup> While I believe that VanDrunen's grounding of the common kingdom in God's non-redemptive rule through the Noahic covenant makes a compelling case for seeing continuity between the Testaments in this regard, two kingdoms advocates are likely to continue wrestling with this issue.

A sixth area worthy of consideration is perhaps re-thinking the descriptors applied to God's two kingdoms. As has been argued in Chapter 4, Calvin made use of the terms "civil" and "spiritual" respectively. However, the idea of Christ's kingdom only being concerned with that which is "spiritual" has unfortunately exposed two kingdoms advocates to the charge of unwarranted "dualism," thereby soliciting repeated calls for clarification of what precisely a "spiritual" matter is.<sup>1051</sup> In VanDrunen's articulation of the doctrine, he speaks in terms of God's "common" and "redemptive" kingdoms and in so doing seeks to distance himself from the notion that "spiritual" implies non-physical and non-material. Nevertheless, one wonders if the fortunes of the two kingdoms perspective might benefit further from using terminology already there in the early Reformed tradition to help lend additional credence to the claim that the doctrine has historic Reformed precedence. Accordingly, VanDrunen suggests perhaps using the categories of the "kingdom of power" and the "kingdom of grace," which were employed by the likes of the late seventeenth-century Dutch Second Reformation figure, Wilhelmus à Brakel.<sup>1052</sup>

A seventh and final area that I would like to draw attention to concerns the doctrine of natural law. Perhaps the biggest challenge facing its retrieval and development by two kingdoms proponents has to do with the post-Christendom, post-Enlightenment and religiously plural nature of society today. In certain respects natural law is a powerful and appropriate standard for moral and ethical discourse in a religiously diverse public square, when considering the fact that the Scriptures cannot be invoked in civil settings like it once was. However, in other respects

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<sup>1050</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 430-31., where he engages in more detail the work of O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations*.

<sup>1051</sup> See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 431-32.

<sup>1052</sup> See ———, "The Reformed Two Kingdoms Doctrine."

natural law seems outdated and irrelevant. This is due, on the one hand, to the fact that basic presuppositions about the world and human nature cannot be assumed of inhabitants of a modern religiously plural society like one once could in a pre-modern world. What is more, “the Enlightenment emphasis upon historical consciousness and the postmodern emphasis upon relativity have generated much greater skepticism than in the pre-modern world toward appeals to universal morality derived from human nature.” In view of such concerns, proponents of revitalising natural law will have to wrestle with how to make good concrete and constructive appeals to natural law arguments in a religiously and metaphysically mixed public square, with theological integrity and a degree of persuasiveness.<sup>1053</sup> VanDrunen’s forthcoming book on natural law promises to address questions like these<sup>1054</sup>, as well as providing a more comprehensive biblical and theological case for natural law as that universally accessible moral standard for life in God’s common kingdom.

#### **7.4. Final remarks**

I bring this thesis to a close by asking once again: Can the contemporary Reformed Christianity and culture discourse in South African benefit from engaging the renaissance of Calvin-informed two kingdoms and natural law thinking in North America, particularly that of David VanDrunen?

Since Calvin has featured so prominently within the Reformed tradition in South Africa and continues to be a source of arbitration in theological debate, ongoing contemporary discourse will at least have to give compelling historical and theological reasons why Calvin’s substantive doctrines of two kingdoms and natural law should not be considered today. No doubt, any retrieval of these doctrines in the South African context will have to work at disentangling such categories from their negative association with a brand of Afrikaner Calvinism that gave rise to the theological legitimisation of apartheid – something I have tried to do to some extent in this thesis.

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<sup>1053</sup> See ———, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 432-33.

<sup>1054</sup> The way the VanDrunen uses natural law within the context of two kingdoms naturally raises a host of questions around whether or not Scripture is sufficient for all of life.

Based on my observations of contemporary Reformed discourse in South Africa, I am optimistic about the potential for a two kingdoms comeback in this context. Indicators such as the general concern for maintaining a distinctly Reformed witness to the church (by the likes of Smit and Naudé), the desire to preserve substantive continuity with the past (by the likes of Vosloo), the recognition of the need for some kind of natural theology despite the Barthian critique (by the likes of Conradie), an appreciation for the tenets of liberalism from a penultimate perspective and the notion of common humanity (by the likes of de Gruchy), and a general openness to transforming traditions in the spirit of *semper reformanda*, all seem to bode well for the future of a two kingdoms voice at the roundtable of ongoing debate in the Reformed tradition in South Africa.

Whether or not the two kingdoms paradigm ever gains the kind of hearing and practical traction it has enjoyed so far in North America, my hope is that this thesis might at least help bring some resolution to Calvin's contested legacy in the South African context, and in turn help recast the church's importance in more ecclesial terms.

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