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Timothy P. Palmer

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The Two-Kingdom Doctrine: A Comparative Study of Martin Luther and Abraham Kuyper



by Timothy P. Palmer

There is confusion in the Reformed world about the two-kingdom doctrine. A series of articles by a Westminster Seminary professor is arguing for a “Reformed two-kingdom doctrine”;

Dr. Timothy Palmer is Professor of Theology at the Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN), in Bukuru, Nigeria, where he has taught for twenty-four years. Specializing in Reformation Theology and African Christian Theology, Dr. Palmer has served as Academic Dean, Deputy Provost, and Acting Provost. He also wrote *The Reformed and Presbyterian Faith: A View From Nigeria*. He currently edits the TCNN Research Bulletin.

and the *Calvin Theological Journal* is printing his articles without a Reformational response. In a recent publication, this professor claims that even Abraham Kuyper holds to the two-kingdom doctrine.¹

The two-kingdom doctrine is the belief that the kingdom of God is coextensive with the institutional church and that life outside of the church does not really belong to God’s kingdom. I have already argued in these pages that such a designation is not the most appropriate term for John Calvin’s theology;² but to suggest that Abraham Kuyper holds to the two-kingdom doctrine borders on the absurd.

This essay will first consider the original statement of the two-kingdom doctrine in Martin Luther’s theology. We will then ask whether Abraham Kuyper holds to this teaching. We will argue that Kuyper’s doctrine of the kingship of Christ excludes a two-kingdom teaching.

Luther’s Two-Kingdom Doctrine

The two-kingdom doctrine, which began with Martin Luther, was developed because of confusion in his day about the roles of church and state. Both the Catholic church and the Anabaptist movement were confusing this distinction of church and state. In the Catholic church of Luther’s day, some theologians were insisting that the Roman church had temporal powers, while some political leaders were assuming ecclesiastical responsibilities. The separation between church and state was very blurred. In particular, Duke George of Saxony

forbade the printing and reading of Luther's works in his territory of ducal Saxony, and a few other German princes were taking the same line.³ This was a clear infringement on the rights of the church and the Christian believer.

Meanwhile, some of the Anabaptists were trying to set up a temporal kingdom on earth, while others were completely rejecting the temporal government, teaching that the only legitimate government in the world was that of the church.⁴

It is in this context that Luther developed the two-kingdom doctrine. Much ink has been used to describe and comment on this teaching.⁵ Although there will be a continued debate about the nuances of his teaching, the main ideas are clear. By way of summary, we will focus especially on two of Luther's works.

This teaching is first set out in some detail in 1523, in Luther's "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed."⁶ The German title is "Von weltlicher Uberkeytt." Luther's starting point is the recognition of two classes of people: "we must divide the children of Adam and all mankind into two classes, the first belonging to the kingdom of God, the second to the kingdom of the world."⁷ Corresponding to these two kingdoms are two types of government: "For this reason God has ordained two governments: the spiritual, by which the Holy Spirit produces Christians and righteous people under Christ; and the temporal, which restrains the un-Christian and wicked so that . . . they are obliged to keep still and to maintain an outward peace."⁸

The kingdom of God is thus the church. Its members are the true believers, and its king is Jesus Christ. Jesus rules by his Word, not by the sword. He rules by the Gospel, not by the law. The Sermon on the Mount typifies the ethics of this kingdom. Love and non-violence characterize this kingdom. Luther writes, "Christ is King and Lord in the kingdom of God." And, "he is king over Christians and rules by his Holy Spirit alone, without law."⁹

But the kingdom of the world, or the temporal government, is different. Since unbelievers will not listen to the Gospel or the Holy Spirit, God ordained another government, the temporal government: "All who are not Christians belong

to the kingdom of the world and are under the law."¹⁰ The Scriptural justification for the temporal government is Romans 13 and related passages. While the kingdom of God is ruled by the Word of God, the kingdom of the world is ruled by the sword. While the kingdom of God is ruled by the Gospel, the kingdom of the world is ruled by the law.

From the above, it is clear that the kingdom of the world is not the same as the kingdom of Satan. The kingdom of the world is a third kingdom between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan. It has an ambiguous status between these two kingdoms. The kingdom of the world consists of unbelievers, but its government is ordained by God and comes from God.

So who is the king over this kingdom of the world? For Luther, "Christ is King and Lord in the kingdom of God"; but "*Christ's government does not extend over all men.*"¹¹ As we shall see more clearly later, in Luther's theology Christ is not lord over the temporal world: instead, it is the prince or the emperor who is lord in this sphere.

Where does the Christian belong in this scheme? Of course, the Christian is part of the kingdom of God. The Christian person is ruled by the Gospel and the Holy Spirit. And yet the Christian is also part of this world. He or she is subject to the temporal government. Luther writes, "at one and the same time you satisfy God's kingdom inwardly and the kingdom of the world outwardly."¹²

Here we have the beginnings of the doctrine of the two persons within a Christian: the Christian person is the one who inwardly is subject to Jesus Christ; the secular or worldly person is the one who externally functions in society and is subject to the earthly king. Two persons exist within a believer: the Christian person and the worldly or secular person.

These thoughts from Luther's 1523 document are expanded upon nine years later. In 1532 the mature Luther published his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount.¹³ At issue is the question as to how to apply Jesus' teaching in this sermon. For example, should a soldier or a policeman turn the other cheek while on duty? Should the government not resist an evil person, as Matthew 5:39 might suggest?

In response to these issues, Luther said that it is essential to distinguish the “secular and the divine realm.”¹⁴ So, when Jesus says that the poor in spirit are blessed, this statement refers to the spiritual realm, not the secular or worldly realm. The spiritual realm relates to “how to live before God, and above and beyond the external.” But, “having money, property, honor, power, land and servants belongs to the secular realm.”¹⁵

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Again, when Jesus says that the meek will inherit the earth, he is not speaking about a governmental officer, who “must be sharp and strict . . . and get angry and punish”; rather, he is dealing with a Christian in his private relations. Thus, “we have two different persons in one man”—the Christian person and the secular person.¹⁶

The command to remove an offending eye or hand again applies to the spiritual realm, not the secular one. Likewise, denying oneself and hating one’s soul “have nothing to do with the secular affairs or the imperial government.” Instead, all this is said in relation to spiritual life and spiritual affairs.¹⁷

In the context of these last sayings, Luther makes some incredible statements *excluding* Jesus Christ from the secular realm. Luther says, “Therefore we must not drag [Christ’s] words into the law books or into the secular government... *With the secular area [Christ] has nothing to do.*”¹⁸ On the issue of oaths, Luther again says that “Christ

has no intention here of interfering with the secular realm, nor of depriving the government of anything. All he is preaching about is how individual Christians should behave in their everyday life.”¹⁹

In respect to Jesus’ instruction not to resist evil, Luther says that “Christ is not tampering with the responsibility and authority of the government, but he is teaching his individual Christians how to live personally, apart from their official position and authority.”²⁰ On the same passage, Luther writes,

Do you want to know what your duty is as a prince or a judge or a lord or a lady, with people under you? You do not have to ask Christ about your duty. Ask the imperial or the territorial law.²¹

Finally, on not laying up treasures on earth, Luther says that “Christ is giving instructions to the individual or the Christian man and that a sharp distinction must be made between the Christian and the man of the world, between a Christian person and a secular person.” He continues, “Of course, a prince can be a Christian, *but he must not rule as a Christian*; and insofar as he does rule, his name is not ‘Christian’ but ‘prince.’ The person is indeed a Christian, but *his office or his principedom does not involve his Christianity.*”²²

In the same passage, Luther explains his distinction between the Christian person and the secular person. A Christian prince should say, “My status as a Christian is something between God and myself. . . . But above and beyond this I have another status or office in the world: I am a prince. The relation here is not one between God and this person, but between me and my land and people.”²³

These fairly extensive quotations show the distinctive aspects of Martin Luther’s two-kingdom doctrine. In between the kingdom of God (the church) and the kingdom of Satan exists a large area of life that is not spiritual but is temporal or “secular” (*weltlich*). Both areas belong to God, but Jesus Christ is excluded from the “secular” realm. The lordship of Jesus Christ does not extend to this area of life. Instead, the secular realm is governed by reason and natural law.

Coupled with this two-kingdom doctrine is

Luther's view of the two modes of a Christian's existence. The personal, individual Christian is under Christ; but the Christian in society is under the emperor. Christ's rule extends only to the personal, individual life of a believer.

From this brief survey, the basic contours of the two-kingdom doctrine are clear. God rules the world through two kingdoms. The kingdom of God is the church, where Jesus is king and where Jesus reigns by his Word or the Gospel. There the Sermon on the Mount or the rule of love is normative. Outside of the church is the worldly or secular kingdom. There the emperor—not Jesus—rules. The emperor—or prince—rules with justice and the sword. This is the domain of the law, not of the Gospel.

However, this theory has obvious difficulties. Is not Jesus Christ lord over the entire world, and not just the church? If all of societal life outside of the church is not under the lordship of Christ, then who is king in this “secular” realm? Does not the two-kingdom doctrine give considerable autonomy to “secular” life, putting it outside of the rule of Jesus?

This danger has been recognized by various theologians. Helmut Thielicke said that the two-kingdom doctrine of Luther “makes it dangerously easy for the world to be dissociated from the Gospel.”²⁴ Jürgen Moltmann says that “the two kingdoms doctrine gives no criteria for a specific Christian ethics.”²⁵ Moltmann prefers the idea of the lordship of Jesus Christ over the two-kingdom doctrine.

Karl Barth said that since the two-kingdom doctrine excluded Jesus Christ from the realm of the state, the German Lutherans were more apt to support Hitler's Nazi state.²⁶ Whether this theory is true or not, it is interesting to note that the Resistance in Calvinist Holland was stronger than in Lutheran Scandinavia. When the state is removed from the lordship of Jesus Christ—as in the two-kingdom doctrine—then the possibility of a Christian approach to politics is reduced.

There is thus a broad consensus as to the identity of Luther's two-kingdom doctrine, a consensus that stands in sharp contrast to the Reformed view of the lordship of Jesus Christ over all of life. The two-kingdom doctrine creates

a huge, autonomous area of life that is not under the lordship of Christ.

A Dualist View of Abraham Kuyper

When one comes to Abraham Kuyper, it is astonishing to find that David VanDrunen puts Kuyper in the two-kingdom camp. For Kuyper there is no square inch of reality that is not under the lordship of Christ. How in the world can Kuyper then be in the two-kingdom camp?

VanDrunen attempts a definition of the two-kingdom doctrine in his article on Kuyper, “Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed Natural Law and Two Kingdoms Tradition.” There he says that the two kingdoms are the spiritual kingdom, which finds “institutional expression in the present age only in the church,” and the civil kingdom, which encompasses “the various non-ecclesiastical cultural endeavors, particularly the work of the state.” VanDrunen explains that God rules the spiritual kingdom through Christ the redeemer and the civil kingdom through Christ its creator and sustainer.²⁷ This two-kingdom doctrine, to which Kuyper allegedly holds, stands in contrast to “neo-Calvinism or transformationism, in which all spheres of life are seen as subject to redemption and the claims of the redemptive kingdom of Christ in the present age.”²⁸ In the following pages, we will show the absurdity of suggesting that Kuyper holds to the two-kingdom doctrine. Is not Abraham Kuyper himself the one who taught us that all of life is subject to the kingship of Jesus Christ?

David VanDrunen is a crusader of the nature-grace dualism. In Kuyper, he assumes that the civil kingdom is grounded in Christ's work as creator and that the spiritual kingdom is rooted in Christ's work as redeemer. The former is the realm of common grace and natural law; the latter, the realm of special grace. VanDrunen assumes that for Kuyper there is a “clear distinction between the church and the rest of life, and, for both doctrines, the chief distinction lies in that the former is the place where salvation is ministered and the latter a place where it is not.”²⁹ The following pages will demonstrate that Kuyper does not fit into this nature-grace straightjacket.

It is curious that this crusader of the two-

kingdom doctrine when writing of Kuyper seldom speaks of the kingdom of God and never speaks of the kingship of Christ. It would seem that talk of kingdoms would involve talk of Jesus Christ the king, who dominates Kuyper's thinking. So what is the kingdom of God for Kuyper?

Kuyper Rejects the Two-Kingdom Doctrine

An essential source in respect to Kuyper's view of the kingdom of God is his magisterial *Pro Rege*, which means "for the King." It is noteworthy that VanDrunen's study of Kuyper's view of the kingdom of God omits this vital source. From 6 January 1907 to 8 January 1911, Kuyper wrote a series of articles in *De Heraut* under the rubric of "Pro Rege" (for the King).³⁰ These were published in 1911 and 1912 in the three-volume *Pro Rege*.³¹ The basic structure of this work already shows how foreign a two-kingdom doctrine is to Abraham Kuyper. In broad strokes, Kuyper develops the kingship of Christ over seven areas of life: Christ's subjects, the church, the family, society, the state, science, and art. All of life falls under the kingship of Christ. There is no neutral ground for him.

In his introduction to the three-volume *Pro Rege*, Kuyper combats the two-kingdom doctrine. The very first sentence reads, "*Pro Rege* intends to remove the division that exists in our minds . . . between our *church* life and our life *outside* the church."³² Dualists focus primarily on the area of the church, where Christ is seen as a Savior who removes our sins. But Christ is more than this. Christ is king over all of life. The realization of this kingship has led to the formation of "our Christian press, our Christian science, our Christian art, our Christian literature, our Christian philanthropy, our Christian politics, our Christian trade unions, and the like."³³ The rest of this massive work develops this basic principle.

In his big work on Common Grace, Kuyper makes the same point. Some dualistic Christians maintain that Christ is exclusively the Expiator of sin. (This is the two-kingdom doctrine.) But Kuyper forcefully rejects this view: "The idea that Christ has no significance but as the Lamb of God who died for our sin cannot be maintained by those who read Scripture seriously." We cannot hold that

Christ was given to us only for our justification and sanctification; we should rather follow Paul, who says that Christ is our "full *redemption*."³⁴ He continues:

To put it in a nutshell, shall we imagine that all we need is a Reconciler of our soul or continue to confess that the Christ of God is the Savior of both soul and *body* and is the Re-creator not only of things in the invisible world but also of things that are visible and before our eyes? Does Christ have significance only for the *spiritual* realm or also for the *natural and visible* domain?³⁵

*Kuyper warns against the doctrine of two kingdoms or "two distinct circles of thought: in the very circumscribed circle of your soul's salvation on the one hand, and in the spacious, life-encompassing sphere of the world on the other". . .*³⁸

Kuyper calls it "one-sidedness" to "think exclusively of the blood shed in the atonement and refuse to take account of the significance of Christ for the body, for the visible world, and for the outcome of world history." Such a posture runs "the danger of isolating Christ for your soul"³⁶:

Then the word "Christian" seems appropriate to you only when it concerns certain matters of faith or things directly connected with the faith—your church, your school, missions and the like—but all the remaining spheres of life fall for you *outside the Christ*.³⁷

Kuyper warns *against* the doctrine of two kingdoms or "two distinct circles of thought: in the very circumscribed circle of your soul's

salvation on the one hand, and in the spacious, life-encompassing sphere of the world on the other”: Such people claim that “Christ is at home in the former but not in the latter.”²³⁸

For Kuyper, then, Christ is the redeemer of all of life, contrary to the two-kingdom doctrine and VanDrunen’s perception of this. Christ is our “full redemption . . . the Savior of both soul and body.”³⁹ One can hardly make the point more clearly. There is no autonomous area of life.

There is no independent kingdom existing between Christ’s kingdom and Satan’s kingdom. Kuyper speaks of just two kingdoms: the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan: “Just as God rules over spirits and humans, over spirit and matter, including all of creation, so also Satan desires to establish his kingdom over against God.”⁴⁰ The two kingdoms are those of God and Satan: “Kingdom against kingdom, prince against prince, chief against chief, king against king!”⁴¹ There are only two kingdoms, Christ’s and Satan’s, and both lay claim on all of life. There is no intermediate kingdom.

Nature-Grace Dualism?

Since there is no two-kingdom doctrine in Kuyper, one wonders whether Kuyper subscribes to a nature-grace dualism. When VanDrunen speaks of “a two kingdoms-like dualism” in Kuyper, presumably he is referring to a nature-grace dualism.⁴² He adduces distinctions such as Christ’s offices of creator and redeemer, and the contrast between common grace and special grace, to support his view. He thinks that the realm of grace has redemptive significance while the realm of nature does not.

Although Kuyper does at times use nature-grace terminology, it should be put on record that he vigorously opposes such a dualistic scheme. In his work on common grace, after rejecting the two-kingdom doctrine, he then rejects the nature-grace dualism. He says,

For if grace exclusively concerned atonement for sin and salvation of souls, one could view grace as something located and operating outside of nature. . . . But if it is true that Christ our Savior has to do not only with our soul but also with our body . . .

then of course everything is different. We see immediately that *grace* is inseparably connected with *nature*, that grace and nature belong together.⁴³

He continues:

For if we set *nature* and *grace* against each other as two mutually exclusive concepts, we get the impression that nature now persists *apart from* all grace and that grace is and has been extended exclusively to God’s elect. This inference is *absolutely untenable*.⁴⁴

Kuyper rejects “the inaccurate antithesis between *nature* and *grace* that has come down to us from medieval theology” in favor of a more “Reformed principle.”⁴⁵ In the same work, Kuyper writes,

Therefore, common grace must have a formative impact on special grace and vice versa. All separation of the two must be vigorously opposed. Temporal and eternal life, our life in the world and our life in the church, religion and civil life, church and state, and so much more must go hand in hand. They may not be separated.⁴⁶

In the following pages, we will see that Christ the redeemer renews and redeems that which he created. Christ’s redemption is not restricted to the soul but includes the physical world. Nature and grace are not two separate realms; rather, Christ’s grace transforms the natural world. Of course there is a distinction between the physical and spiritual side of a person, but this is not a “dualism,” as VanDrunen asserts, but rather a “*distinction*,” as Kuyper calls it.⁴⁷

Instead of a nature-grace dualism, I suggest that a redemptive-historical scheme is more faithful to Kuyper. The structure of Kuyper’s theology is built around a creation-fall-redemption scheme. It was the eternal Son of God who created the world and mankind; it was the same Son who redeemed his creation.

The Kingship of Christ over All of Life

For Kuyper the kingdom or kingship of Christ is derived from the sovereignty of the Triune

God. The original power and sovereignty rest in the Triune God.⁴⁸ Kuyper emphasizes the fact that the kingdom of God includes all of reality: “This kingdom of God embraces all things, visible and invisible.” This king—God—has power over people, the land and nature: “In short, *everything* is his. *His kingdom is over everything* . . . His kingdom is a kingdom of all ages, of all spheres, of all creatures.”⁴⁹

For Kuyper there are three stages of the kingdom of God: “The kingdom of heaven is a tangible reality which was present on earth in paradise, which was banished from this earth through sin and the curse, and which, returning with Christ from heaven and begun at his manger and the cross, has actually come to power again on earth.”⁵⁰

In the period of the Old Testament, Jehovah was reigning. But the Old Testament constantly looked forward to the reign of the Messiah. The kingdom of heaven, in a real sense, began with the

*Jesus brought regeneration to the soul and physical healing to the body; he impacted all dimensions of society, including the family, the workplace, the government and the poor; and he confronted the evil spirits.*⁵⁴

first coming of Jesus. It was John the Baptist who said, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Matt. 3:2).⁵¹ The kingdom of Christ, according to Kuyper, began with the first coming of Christ.

Kuyper says of this kingdom: “it can never be said that this kingdom bears a purely *spiritual* character.”⁵² This is evident from the three years of Jesus’ ministry: “In the few years that the king of the kingdom of God stayed on earth, he revealed

the majesty of this kingdom of his in every area of human life.”⁵³ Jesus brought regeneration to the soul and physical healing to the body; he impacted all dimensions of society, including the family, the workplace, the government and the poor; and he confronted the evil spirits.⁵⁴ Kuyper states, “The idea that the action of Jesus in his kingdom was exclusively *spiritual* in nature seems . . . ever more untenable.”⁵⁵ There is no nature-grace dualism here.

In his three-volume *Pro Rege*, Kuyper lists seven representative areas of Christ’s kingly rule. The first area is the lives of individual believers. The heart of Christ’s kingdom is the true believers. The believers are those who respond willingly to the reign of Christ. Using language from earthly kingdoms, Kuyper calls the believers Christ’s “subjects.”⁵⁶ He enumerates various duties of these subjects: they are to confess their king, be witnesses to their king, take up their cross, be soldiers for their king, and deny themselves for their king.⁵⁷ It is Christ’s subjects who will serve their king in the world.

These subjects form the mystical body of Christ. There is a bond of love that binds Christ to his subjects. Not only is there a master-servant relationship, but there is also a relationship of friendship. We are Christ’s friends.⁵⁸

Kuyper says that Christians are not “new people” who are newly created but rather people from the created world who are “renewed.” Christians are new people only in the sense that they are renewed. That is the meaning of “rebirth.”⁵⁹ For Kuyper there is continuity between creation and redemption in the life of a believer.

The second area of Christ’s rule is the church. Although the mystical body of Christ is the invisible church, “Christ also desired and established here on earth an external, visible, perceptible manifestation of that body, and in this manifestation the body of Christ entered into the world as *the church of Christ*.”⁶⁰ This is what is often called the visible church.

This church was established by Christ when he called the apostles and gave them the keys of the kingdom. Christ established the structure of this church by ordaining its sacraments, offices, and discipline. The preaching of the Word is a central

part of this church.⁶¹

Although Jesus' kingdom is found in all of life, "the congregation (*Gemeente*) . . . forms the living center of that kingdom, through which Christ allows the power of the Spirit to go out among the children of men in all the world and in all of history. The congregation forms the essential chief ingredient of his kingdom, and it is only in the congregation that his royal honor and majesty not only work but are also recognized and honored."⁶²

The third area of Christ's rule is the family. A Christian family is one that is rooted in creation. It conforms to the creational norms. But sin interfered. Therefore, "Christ is redeemer also for the family life."⁶³ A Christian family will "not lose its original ordinances but rather will be brought back to the purity of these original ordinances." This is "not the bringing in of something new but the restoration of the old which was spoiled."⁶⁴ There is thus no nature-grace dualism here. Christ is the creator *and* the redeemer of the family.

The Christian family is guided by creational norms. But how do we know what these norms are? Kuyper finds them in Scripture. The fifth commandment of the Law of Moses tells children how to behave. Paul expands upon this command in Ephesians. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul explains the creational hierarchy.⁶⁵ Thus there is no conflict between creational and scriptural norms. Both govern the Christian family; both come from Christ the creator and redeemer.

Finally, a Christian family will have a family altar. Kuyper says that "a family is not Christian only because a family altar is established, but a Christian family is not conceivable where the family altar is absent."⁶⁶

The fourth area of Christ's rule is society. Society is a separate sphere between the family and the state. Kuyper begins this section by describing the cosmic struggle between the spirit of Christ and the spirit of the world. The "spirit of the world restlessly renews its attack on the kingdom of Christ," and "this will persist until the spirit of the world has exhausted its last strength." In the end, the power of Christ our king will defeat the spirit of the world: "But if this is the nature of Christ's kingship, how is it possible for this

kingship to be restricted to his church, the family and the state and not to society?" Kuyper reminds the reader that the statements of Scripture about Christ's kingship are all-embracing: "To him is given *all power* on earth and in heaven. *All things* are subject to him. Nothing is excluded." So how can one neglect "this broad terrain of our social life"?⁶⁷

Many Christians feel the claim of Christ over their personal lives but not "over the broad terrain of life where the scepter of Jesus' kingship extends." The result is "that the kingship of Christ does not *live* for them." For them Christ is there exclusively for the salvation of their souls but not for the life outside of the church.⁶⁸

These pietistic Christians are like house sparrows: "The big society with its richly developed life does not exist for them. And even if they do read a newspaper, they are only attracted to the obituaries and the advertisements. The rest does not interest them." But, even house sparrows fly around on occasion, while these people do not!⁶⁹ Such provincial Christians are practical examples of the two-kingdom doctrine.

Societal life is grounded in creation. In the Garden of Eden, there was a social relation between Adam and Eve. Sin distorted this relationship, but Christ came to restore society and establish a Christian society.⁷⁰ "Christian" here "does not mean a new discovery and a new creation but a return to the original creation." In the Christian society, the original creational ordinances are honored.⁷¹ Thus, "the royal rule of Christ over societal life is bound to these ordinances."⁷²

In Kuyper there is no conflict between creational ordinances and the Word of God. Both express the will of God. Kuyper writes, "For on almost every point in the social question, God's Word gives us the most positive direction."⁷³ Kuyper lists the family, marriage, colonialization, work, and state intervention as areas that God's Word addresses.

So how does Christ rule in society? Kuyper identifies at least four means of Christ's rule: the Christian church, the Christian school, the Christian organization, and the Christian press (public opinion).⁷⁴ Again, Kuyper rejects the two-kingdom doctrine: "The inaccurate and superficial

idea that Christ is only our savior and redeemer and not also our king and judge is completely rejected precisely through the Christian school.”⁷⁵

The need for Christian organizations is partly grounded in Paul’s complaint about Christians taking brothers to court before unbelievers. But the rationale is deeper. There is a danger when Christians participate in a mixed organization. For then, “unconsciously they will exchange the principle of the Christian life for the impure principle of the worldly society.”⁷⁶ Therefore, Kuyper recommends separate Christian organizations.

The fifth area of Christ’s kingship is the state or the political arena. The state was not present in creation; instead, the state is a product of God’s common grace that was revealed in the history of mankind, especially after the flood and the tower of Babel. Here too the reign of Christ extends.

Kuyper identifies three main ways in which Christ rules the state. First, Christ influences and directs political leaders, both pagan and Christian. Examples of the former are Joseph’s Pharaoh, Cyrus, and Nebuchadnezzar. But Christ also governs Christian rulers like Constantine, Charlemagne, and the house of Orange. Some of these rulers applied Christian principles in their kingdoms.⁷⁷

Christ also rules the state through the law. Kuyper speaks of a “mystical law,” which is valid for all peoples and all lands. This divine law can be found both in our conscience and in Scripture. There is no opposition between the two since both came from Christ the creator and redeemer. There is only one law of God. Of course, we cannot apply the Mosaic law directly to our contemporary life. But the Mosaic law, like the New Testament, contains principles that are relevant for our contemporary nations. A Christian government should bring its laws into conformity with the principles of Christ.⁷⁸

Christ also rules the state through Christian political parties. In the Europe of Kuyper’s day, there were parties that were advocating anti-Christian principles. The Christian forces must fight against such principles. This is why Groen van Prinsterer advocated “the party of the living God” to combat such ideas. Christians who for

many years have honored Christ as the savior of his church must now begin to honor Christ as the king over the state.⁷⁹

The sixth area of Christ’s reign is the realm of science or scholarship (*wetenschap*). “Kingship is power,” says Kuyper, opening this section. When we talk of Jesus’ power, we are talking of Jesus as king. Scripture has at least ten references to the power of Christ over all things. But the church of Christ has often put his kingship in the shadow, despite the testimony of Scripture “that *all things*, except God the Father, have been given to him and placed under his feet. How then can science . . . be removed from the power of Christ?”⁸⁰ Science too must be brought under the lordship of Christ.

Jesus Christ is the truth. Thus, “True science, both of visible and invisible things, in the end boils down to a science of Christ, because in him are hidden all treasures of knowledge and wisdom.”⁸¹

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treasures of knowledge and
wisdom.”⁸¹*

Christ’s majesty requires one to research visible things, to understand the science that is in Christ, and “to bring the knowledge of the visible and the invisible things together in the harmony of one’s faith consciousness.” We cannot separate the knowledge of the visible and invisible things. Nature is the greatest theater of God’s glory.⁸²

The final area of Christ’s kingship in this study is the area of art. Art (*kunst*) is an ability (*kunnen*) from God. It is a gift from God that can be used properly or misused. Art is both an instrument and an inspiration. As an instrument or means of

influence, art is completely neutral. But the spirit of art determines whether the art is Christian or not. If the spirit of the art is godly, then the art will point us to God; but if the spirit of art is demonic, then the art too will point us away from God.⁸³

Around 1910, Kuyper was negative towards modern painting and music. He felt that there was a real danger of idolatry. The artist and his or her art were often idolized, and the art itself easily became self-autonomous.⁸⁴ Huge crowds would go to the art galleries, and the artist would be worshiped, but the art was bad. He writes, “If it is more naked, it is better; if it is more filthy and coarse, it is more expensive.” Modern music was not much better. Kuyper feared that modern art and music were becoming another Sodom and Gomorrah.⁸⁵

For Kuyper, a “special relation exists between art and Christ.” This is easily missed by those two-kingdom people, who see Christ only as the savior of our souls. The question must be asked “whether art itself as such lies within the government of the king of God’s kingdom.”⁸⁶ The answer is positive since Christ’s creation also belongs to his kingdom. There is continuity between his creation and redemption. The new earth of Revelation 21 will not be a “newly created world, but a *recreated* one; it will not be a different world, but the same one.”⁸⁷

Kuyper says, “Of course the Redeemer and Savior has significance for the world of beauty since sin and the curse brought disturbance, desecration and corruption also in this world of beauty.” Sin is “a deviation from the original state of affairs,” and thus “the reconciliation (*Verzoening*) brings about nothing else than purification in the world of this distorted beauty.”⁸⁸

Art belongs both to the world of creation and redemption: “Not only *Christian* art, but art *in itself*, no matter how misused and polluted, belongs to Christ’s kingly territory . . . The only proper appreciation of the world of beauty depends on a confession of the divinity of Christ.”⁸⁹

The kingship of Christ over all of life is powerfully stated in Kuyper’s three-volume *Pro Rege*. But Kuyper laments the fact that this kingship of Christ is constantly rejected in his day.

In 1910 he put Islam at the top of the list. Islam does not recognize the kingship of Christ. But in “Christian” Europe there is also a “darkening” of Christ’s kingship. Scientific and technological developments reduce our dependence on God. Modernism—as seen in the world cities, the growth of capital, and modern art—glorifies man instead of Christ.⁹⁰ But within the church there is also an undermining of Christ’s kingship. When Christ’s kingship is limited to the visible church—in the two-kingdom dualistic fashion—then his royal power is limited. Bad theology leads to an undermining of Christ’s kingship. Kuyper criticizes the “sentimental longing for heaven” of the pietists and other dualists. When they pray “Thy kingdom come,” they are only thinking about escape from this world and a personal flight of their souls to heaven: “In the realm of sentimentality there is an enthusiasm for a sort of spirit life, a desire to have it good for oneself and to spend eternity with other passionate souls.”⁹¹ This theology is essentially selfish.

The Reformed longing for heaven is totally different. It is focused on God’s glory and God’s kingdom, and it has to do with all of life. Your God is “not a holy, heavenly emergency help who only exists to pour out his blessings on this earthly kingdom, and then to disappear out of your thoughts. Your God is in heaven as the one and only center who draws everything to himself.”⁹²

This pietistic dualism also exists within the Reformed churches. However, in Islam, religion relates “to every area of life.” Kuyper laments “how seldom in Christendom the broad scope of the kingship of Christ is felt.”⁹³ Even our Heidelberg Catechism is weak on this point. The answer to question 31 about the kingship of Christ speaks about personal salvation “but is silent about the broader significance, and precisely this silence has led to a one-sided view of the kingship over the believers.”⁹⁴

Conclusion

Since Abraham Kuyper has such a strong belief in the kingship of Christ over all of life, it is clear that it is inappropriate to speak of a two-kingdom doctrine in Kuyper. The kingdom of

God in his theology is not only the institutional church but is found in all of life. As he puts it, “the Kingdom of God is not in the least limited to the institutional church but rules our entire world-and-life view.”⁹⁵

Since Kuyper does not hold to a two-kingdom doctrine, we must call into question the persistent and ill-advised use of “Reformed two-kingdom doctrine” by VanDrunen. Our dualist delights in pointing to an alleged two-kingdom doctrine throughout the Reformed tradition. But if Kuyper does not teach a two-kingdom doctrine, then it is questionable to what extent other Reformed theologians hold to this same teaching.

The theology of Kuyper in the tradition of Calvin stresses the lordship of Christ over all of life. This is a radical difference from Luther’s two-kingdom doctrine. If indeed “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!’”⁹⁶ then Christ’s kingdom is broader than the institutional church. His kingdom impacts all of life.

Endnotes

1. Cf. David VanDrunen, “The Two Kingdoms: A Reassessment of the Transformationist Calvin,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 40 (Nov. 2005); David VanDrunen, “Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed Natural Law and Two Kingdoms Traditions,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 42 (Nov. 2007): 283-307.
2. Timothy Palmer, “Calvin the Transformationist and the Kingship of Christ,” *Pro Rege* 35 (2007): 32-39.
3. Steven Ozment, *Protestants: The Birth of a Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 122-24.
4. *Ibid.*, . 126-27.
5. For summaries and bibliographies, see: Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, trans. R. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972); and Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, trans. R. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999).
6. Martin Luther, “Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed,” trans. J. Schindel and W. Brandt, in *Luther’s Works (LW)* 45 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1962): 81-129.
7. Luther, “Temporal Authority,” LW 45: 88.
8. Luther, “Temporal Authority,” LW 45: 91.
9. Luther, “Temporal Authority,” LW 45: 88, 93.
10. Luther, “Temporal Authority,” LW 45: 90.
11. Luther, “Temporal Authority,” LW 45: 88, 92; italics added.
12. Luther, “Temporal Authority,” LW 45: 96.
13. Martin Luther, “Sermon on the Mount,” trans. J. Pelikan, in *Luther’s Works* 21 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956): 1-294.
14. Luther, “Sermon on the Mount,” LW 21: 5.
15. Luther, “Sermon on the Mount,” LW 21: 12.
16. Luther, “Sermon on the Mount,” LW 21: 23.
17. Luther, “Sermon on the Mount,” LW 21: 90.
18. Luther, “Sermon on the Mount,” LW 21: 90; italics added.
19. Luther, “Sermon on the Mount,” LW 21: 99.
20. Luther, “Sermon on the Mount,” LW 21: 106.
21. Luther, “Sermon on the Mount,” LW 21: 110.
22. Luther, “Sermon on the Mount,” LW 21: 170; italics added.
23. Luther, “Sermon on the Mount,” LW 21: 170.
24. Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, vol. 1, *Foundations*, ed. Wm. Lazareth (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 369.
25. Jürgen Moltmann, *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics*, trans. M. D. Meeks (London: SCM Press, 1984), 76.
26. See Thielicke, pp. 368-69 and Moltmann, 61.
27. VanDrunen, “Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed Natural Law and Two Kingdoms Tradition,” 283-84.
28. *Ibid.*, 284.
29. *Ibid.*, 300.
30. J.C. Rullmann, *Kuyper-Bibliografie*, vol. 3 (Kok: Kampen, 1940), 378.
31. Abraham Kuyper, *Pro Rege of het Koningschap van Christus*, 3 vols. (Kok: Kampen, 1911-1912). Quotations from this work are my own translation.
32. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, I: v.
33. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, I: vi-vii.
34. Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 171.
35. Kuyper, “Common Grace,” 171.
36. Kuyper, “Common Grace,” 172.
37. Kuyper, “Common Grace,” 172.

38. Kuyper, "Common Grace," 172.
39. Kuyper, "Common Grace," 171.
40. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, I: 505.
41. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, I: 508.
42. VanDrunen, "Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed Natural Law and Two Kingdoms Tradition," p. 303.
43. Kuyper, "Common Grace," 173.
44. Kuyper, "Common Grace," 173.
45. Kuyper, "Common Grace," 174.
46. Kuyper, "Common Grace," 185-86.
47. VanDrunen, "Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed Natural Law and Two Kingdoms Tradition," 303; Kuyper, "Common Grace," 186.
48. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, I: 307.
49. Kuyper, *E Voto Dordraceno. Toelichting op den Heidelbergischen Catechismus*, (Kampen: Kok, [1895]), 4: 465-66. Quotations from this work are my own translation.
50. Kuyper, *E Voto Dordraceno*, IV: 470.
51. See Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, I: 384-91, 405-408.
52. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, I: 412.
53. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, I: 471.
54. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, I: 472-74.
55. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, I: 475.
56. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, II: 1.
57. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, II: 22-74.
58. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, II: 12-21.
59. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, II: 126.
60. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, II: 131.
61. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, II: 139-234.
62. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, I: 340.
63. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, II: 362; see also p. 369.
64. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, II: 356.
65. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, II: 379-85, 437-44.
66. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, II: 465.
67. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 8-9.
68. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 10-11.
69. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 26.
70. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 15-23.
71. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 23.
72. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 22.
73. Kuyper, *Christianity and the Class Struggle*, trans. D. Jellema (Grand Rapids: Piet Hein, 1950), 55.
74. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 164-204.
75. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 183.
76. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 189.
77. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 272-82.
78. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 282-93.
79. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 302, 304.
80. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 354-55.
81. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 464.
82. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 466-67.
83. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 531-33.
84. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 526-29.
85. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 530.
86. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 534-35.
87. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 537.
88. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 544-45.
89. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 545.
90. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, I: 1-112.
91. Kuyper, *E Voto Dordraceno*, IV: 476.
92. Kuyper, *E Voto Dordraceno*, IV: 477-78.
93. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 580.
94. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III: 583.
95. Kuyper, "Common Grace in Science," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, 458.
96. Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, 488.

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