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Editor's Note: This article is Dr. Keith Sewell's rejoinder to an ongoing, friendly debate between himself and Dr. Matthew Tuininga, a debate that began with Sewell's review of Tuininga's book, *Calvin's Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church: Christ's Two Kingdoms* (Cambridge U Press, 2017) in *Pro Rege* 46.3 (March 2018).

A Cordial Reply to Matthew Tuininga



by Keith Sewell

In the long dark nights of the northern winter, or even the short warm nights of the southern summer, the book reviewer long-distant from the upper mid-west might be tempted to wonder if his reviews are ever read. It is gratifying that Matthew Tuininga's response to my review has alleviated that occasional apprehension. As to his actual comments on my review, I offer the following responses. In suggesting that Tuininga exhibits a certain indebtedness towards VanDrunen, it was not my intention to suggest that at all points their thinking is identical. I accept Tuininga's criticism of my reference to his p. 376, although I still believe that "two kingdoms" approaches tend to militate against distinctively Christian communal endeavours of a non-institutional church variety. Historically, and notwithstand-

ing any original best intentions, "two kingdoms" language—as used by Andrew Melville (1545-1622), for example—has opened the way to a secular state and the secularization of culture and society. As it is, the notion that we Christians who are today living in western liberal democracies share common cultural ground with the rest of society is becoming increasingly untenable as the latter manifests an increasingly strident and intolerant neo-paganism.

My concern upon reading Tuininga was the dissonance between his repeated utilization of "two kingdoms" terminology and Calvin's own language and usage. To introduce into this discussion the undeniable fact that the Scriptures never use *explicitly* triune language is, I fear, to insert something of a red herring into the discussion. The early church found itself confronted with One God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and developed its Trinitarian language in response. In the matters between Tuininga and myself, however, I would prefer to turn to the writings of John Calvin himself—always a wholesome and instructive exercise. Does Calvin distinguish between the church as an institution and the civil magistrate, between its present institutional expressions and as the body of Christ, or in the present and the world to come? Yes, of course, he does all of these things, and none of us would seriously dispute that. But, and here we get to the heart of things, my difficulty with Tuininga is that his "two kingdoms" notion functions as the "warp and woof," the *leitmotif*, of his presentation of Calvin's thought and teaching, and in a manner that I do not believe is reflective of the overall

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tenor of Calvin's writings. I fear that Tuininga offers us a Calvin overly fashioned and coiffeured to fit his theory.

Of course, some folks may say, "well then, that's just *your* interpretation." Fair enough, and I am not about to deny the creaturely limitations of my viewpoint, but let me invite my readers to engage in a painless experiment. The point is to be able, as much as possible, to confront, and be confronted by, the actual John Calvin, distinct from subsequent appropriations, utilizations, or systematizations of his work and thought. Let

the willing experimenter select, using Tuininga's own footnotes, three or four reasonably extended passages from Calvin's writings. Let these be duly noted, and then let the writings of Calvin, Tuininga, and other past and present "two kingdom" writers be set aside, say for forty days and forty nights. Then let the Calvin passages be read in their own context, full and fresh. I submit that Calvin full and fresh will not be as suffused with "two kingdoms" thinking as the Calvin that is presented to us via Tuininga's book. That is my point. I rest my case.