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## "Building the Temple": An Alternative Metaphor to the Use of "Kingdom" in the Christian University Context

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# “Building the temple”: An alternative metaphor to the use of “kingdom” in the Christian university context

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by Donald Roth

## Introduction

“The most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture.”<sup>1</sup>

From a Christian perspective, this quotation from Lakoff and Johnson’s influential work presents us with the double-edged sword of the metaphors that we use to orient our sense of calling. The authors argue that deeply entrenched cultural

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values “are consistent with the metaphorical system” of that culture, but what if we are deeply entrenched in more than one culture?<sup>2</sup> What if we struggle to cultivate a culture genuinely rooted in Christian values while simultaneously inhabiting and being deeply shaped by a culture that subverts or rejects these values? Put in terms of Reformed theology, what if the line of the antithesis runs not only between groups, as explained by Kuyper and Augustine, but through the very hearts of human beings,<sup>3</sup> as explained by Bavinck?

If we find ourselves in the midst of the Pauline<sup>4</sup> struggle to put off our old selves while putting on the righteousness and holiness of our new selves, then metaphors that cohere with both our worldly and godly culture will play an ambiguous role in our efforts to more coherently embrace our identity in Christ. On the one hand, these metaphors will serve as a bridge, connecting our lived experience with our aspirational values. On the other, a bridge allows for travel in both directions, and these same connections may help smuggle in values that, were we to confront them directly, we might reject. As a result, some of the most prominent metaphors that we use to make sense of our Christian calling may also serve to falsely sanctify sensibilities that do not find their origin in the City of God.

My purpose in writing this paper is to assert that our use of the “kingdom” metaphor is marked by just such an ambiguity. It has a deep and impor-

tant biblical anchor that makes it an essential part of the vocabulary we use to articulate our calling; however, it also has connections that, especially in an age of biblical illiteracy, link it to more worldly impulses as well. I believe that this ambiguity counsels us to greater care in how and how much we emphasize this particular concept. In what follows, I will unpack what I mean by “kingdom” as a metaphor and what shortcomings it can have. I will then offer the metaphor of “temple” as an alternative, explain its fitness as an alternative, and apply it to the Christian university context—in an effort to prove that it is, in our times, a more fitting way to articulate calling in the context of Christian scholarship.

### **Metaphor uses “felt inference” to make the abstract concrete.**

“Building the kingdom” is a foundational concept for many Reformed institutions, including Dordt University.<sup>5</sup> Yet, from the outset, it is worth addressing what I mean by calling “kingdom” a metaphor when it comes to orienting Christian vocation. This clarification is necessary because the primary definition of the term draws an analogical connection between a word and a concept to which it is not literally applicable.<sup>6</sup> However, Scripture maintains that the kingdom of heaven is real, and Christian citizenship in that kingdom is not only literally applicable to but also constitutive of our calling. As theologian Patrick Schreiner maintains in *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross*, “[t]he kingdom is the King’s power over the King’s people in the King’s place.”<sup>7</sup> He applies this point, saying that “kingship cannot be exercised in the abstract.”<sup>8</sup>

Yet, while it is not abstract, the kingdom of Christ is not visible. As Jesus maintained to Pontius Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, “kingdom” functions in a manner parallel to metaphor’s normal function—making the abstract concrete in that it helps to make the intangible more tangible. However, the cognitive mechanism behind this process requires drawing on other existing connections to generate a “felt inference” that makes up the intuitive power of a metaphor.<sup>10</sup> That is, human thought about the abstract/intangible draws on webs of meaning rooted in analogies to concrete or experienced realities in order to form

meaning.<sup>11</sup> To make this abstract description itself more concrete, “our perception provides a wealth of Lego bricks that our conscious mind can then play with to construct abstract thought and invest it with significance.”<sup>12</sup>

So where does our mind find its Lego bricks when seeking to make sense of “kingdom”? Americans must analogize from our experience of life in a contemporary democratic republic, from media representations, and from other aspects of the fabric of our social imaginary. This means that our raw materials differ in significant ways from those available to a Jew living under the dominion of the Roman Empire in the first century. Even those living in a contemporary Middle Eastern monarchy like Jordan would be inevitably impacted by a history of the concept of “nation” and “kingdom” filtered through developments of constitutional and parliamentary governance that create substantial distance from the biblical context. Of course, even in the biblical context, the distance between the Jewish conception of “kingdom” and Christ’s actual kingdom was a substantial contributing factor to His crucifixion. Jesus demonstrates the ambiguities inherent in this distance in His conversation with Pontius Pilate, mentioned above, when He suggests that a kingdom in line with the Jewish conception would have led to earthly, not just spiritual, warfare.<sup>13</sup>

### **The “felt inferences” of “kingdom” can be problematic.**

So what does “kingdom” draw upon in the contemporary Western context, and what problems can this create? For the sake of brevity, I will highlight only a few features, but, in summary, our culture’s disordered emphasis on the values of agency and prosperity means that we are inclined to view “kingdom” in a light that makes it about what *we* do, what *we* value, and what *we* want, irrespective of God.

From its early days, American culture has been noted by observers such as Alexis de Tocqueville for its individualism, its confidence that material wealth is easily compatible with moral uprightness, and the ways that it deeply enmeshes these ideas with its spiritual pursuits.<sup>14</sup>

Mixed with an aspiration to meritocracy, this means that American culture is confident in our

ability to “pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps” and inclined to see success (defined often by wealth or influence) as evidence of the righteousness of our underlying motives. Further, philosopher Charles Taylor argues that our very sense of self is filtered through modernity to emphasize our independence and pull us toward an inward focus and an emphasis on feeling and sentiment.<sup>15</sup> As social commentator Ross Douthat notes, Americans have a tendency to seek signs of the workings of God in our material well-being and our perception of emotional connection to the divine.<sup>16</sup> In sum, our current age is marked by spirits pushing us toward narcissism and consumerism, and the disordered valuations of agency and prosperity at work in these spirits can be all-too-coherent with a concept of “kingdom” filtered through American society and politics.

Against this backdrop of divergent values, Christians seeking to understand “kingdom” will reach to our current political system for guidance in fleshing out the significance of this concept. This tendency creates difficulties because of how our contemporary system conceives of agency and prosperity with respect to life in a political community. As a democracy, the American conception of participation in the life of society will naturally entail a sense of ownership and self-determinacy that would be unknown to the ancients. Aristotle considered society to be essential to the natural order such that humans could rightly be called “political animals.”<sup>17</sup> However, the scope of what the “political” might mean has evolved from the ancient sense of ordering a naturally social people to the contemporary emphasis on empowering individual choice against social pressures.

Today, Americans typically believe in popular sovereignty, especially as that concept comes from Rousseau’s *Social Contract*. This book argues that, because natural humanity is fundamentally asocial (existing as individuals), the state derives its power “from the consent of the governed”: That is, society is an imposition born for the sake of personal benefit.<sup>18</sup> Hobbes builds on this asocial assumption in his *Leviathan* to assert that, by nature, “every man has a Right to every thing.”<sup>19</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche then carries these ideas full circle, distilling politics down to the collective “will to power” and locating the good in the transcendence and freedom of sov-

ereign individuals.<sup>20</sup> Thus, when many Americans hear the words of something like the Gettysburg Address, which characterizes American government as “of the people, by the people, for the people,”<sup>21</sup> they hear this in the context of a group of individuals agreeing to a set of restraints aimed at providing maximal freedom for individuals to do whatever they want. Absent a sense of the absolute or the Divine, this belief naturally entails pursuit of a moral order where everyone “does what is right in their own eyes.”<sup>22</sup>

Of course, this tendency to view the political in the light of personal advantage is hardly new. Halbertal and Holmes ably demonstrate this in their analysis of 1 Samuel in *The Beginning of Politics*, where they argue that the biblical author shows the “double reversal of ends and means” that comes with human political power. Specifically, the acquisition of power for a good purpose ends up corrupting those who acquire it and then personalize their power in pursuit of their own ends. Along the way, genuine ends are converted and instrumentalized into means for maintaining power.<sup>23</sup> The authors demonstrate this tendency in the story of David and Bathsheba, where not only does David abuse his power, but Joab and other semi-autonomous go-betweens twist the commands of the king to serve their own goals, even undermining the king.<sup>24</sup> Thus, even in ancient times, being builders and shapers of a kingdom often meant subverting the purposes of that kingdom for personal profit. The challenge today is that the entire category of “political” is often viewed in terms of “power,” meaning that Christians drawing more heavily on culture than Scripture will be especially vulnerable to viewing the kingdom of God through that lens. They will then view themselves as intermediaries of that power, with a strong tendency to personalize and distort it.<sup>25</sup>

### **We see these problems at the edges of Reformational thought.**

Even if this is a potential for those drawing on worldly sources, do we see cause for this concern brought out in Christian thought? To consider this possibility, I will assess ways that this problematic potential creeps into even more disciplined theological reflection within the tradition that my in-

stitution, Dordt University, stands. Although much Reformed scholarship uses the “kingdom” metaphor in a Scriptural sense, it still wrestles with the potential for overemphasizing human agency, particularly in an emphasis on continuity that is dependent on the correctness of our current valuations of goodness. This is an especially marked issue with the “Reformational” strand of Reformed thought.

The explicit adjective “Reformational” was most clearly defined by Al Wolters to describe a strand of Neo-Calvinist theological thought that emphasizes Christian calling as a matter of sanctification via progressive renewal.<sup>26</sup> Wolters emphasizes that sanctification means “to make free from sin, to cleanse from moral corruption, to purify,” a process which he sees as begun on earth with regard to all aspects of Creation, then completed in the Second Coming.<sup>27</sup>

Although Wolters takes pains not to therefore make human effort the factor that ushers in the Age to Come, the danger of this interpretation can be seen even in his metaphoric phrasing of the calling of mankind, which he places in the context of D-Day, saying, “The rightful king has established a beachhead in his territory and calls on his subjects to press his claims ever farther in creation.”<sup>28</sup> Although it is likely unfair to assume that the nuance of the historical comparison was fully intentional, the fact remains that “establishing a beachhead” is far from achieving victory, and this places quite a bit of the task of reconciling all things to Christ into our hands on political terms, namely “pressing claims.” As the previous discussion suggests, this approach easily raises the danger that we come to interpret this task in a way that ends up elevating and sacralizing our personal preferences, possibly even elevating our own judgments about our well-being in a reversal of ends and means.

But is this danger real? I believe so. One of the ways that this concept filters into Reformational thought is with its expressed certainty as to the

continuity of the current age into the Age to Come. Although not a Reformed theologian, N.T. Wright has been influential in the tradition, particularly through his book *Surprised by Hope*. While he also rejects the idea that we are building God’s kingdom through our own efforts, Wright maintains that the value of our current work is tied up in its endurance into the Age to Come, saying, “You are not planting roses in a garden that’s about to be dug up for a building site. You are—strange though it may seem, almost as hard to believe as the resurrec-

tion itself—accomplishing something that will become in due course part of God’s new world.”<sup>29</sup> This same idea is echoed by Hoekema, who maintains that “the best contributions of each nation will enrich life on the new earth, and that whatever potentialities and gifts have been of value in this present life will somehow, in some way, be retained and enriched in the life to come.”<sup>30</sup>

This assertion of continuity carries merit if we are primarily referring to the dispositions and habits of being that make up our unique expressions of identity; after all, the concept of Christ as firstborn of the New Creation suggests that we will be recognizable both in our person and personality in the Age to Come. This appears to be the primary sense for Wright, who maintains that “what you do in the present...will last into God’s future.”<sup>31</sup>

However, there are many in the Reformational tradition who see this continuity in more concrete terms. That is, not only how we do what we do but the things we do *themselves* will endure. This leads Mouw to assert that “[t]he biblical glimpses of this City give us reason to think that its contents will not be completely unfamiliar to people like us. In fact, the content of the City will be more akin to our present cultural patterns than is usually acknowledged in discussions of the afterlife.”<sup>32</sup> He follows this up with speculation that cultural artifacts, good and bad, will be part of the New

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Jerusalem, including even things like racist posters and ballistic missiles.<sup>33</sup> Crouch follows a similar vein, calling culture “the furniture of heaven” and phrasing the Christian calling in the question “Are we creating and cultivating things that have a chance of furnishing the New Jerusalem?”<sup>34</sup>

The risk here is that we have moved well beyond what can be maintained with any certainty from Scripture. Even if these theologians are correct, once “building the kingdom” shifts to sacralizing the things we happen to place cultural value on today, there is a merger of cultures taking place on terms that are easily set by the world, not Scripture. The Reformational tradition seeks to avoid this problem by its emphasis on the distinction between structure and direction.<sup>35</sup> However, the real value of this distinction still struggles to fully account for the dangers of conceiving of the “not yet” of the kingdom in terms set largely by the “already.” We can see this struggle in the difficulty that this merger creates in terms of devaluing corporate worship and professing a distinctiveness in the Christian perspective that we often struggle to articulate.

The danger of devaluing corporate worship begins when we emphasize the permanence of things and activities over people (and what makes us “us”). If we envision the Age to Come in terms of questions like “what does it mean to be a botanist in heaven?” then there is a natural pressure to see what we do as relatively more important than where we go on a Sunday. Indeed, Crouch exemplifies this danger when he argues,

the end of humanity as depicted in Revelation is more than a temple—an everlasting worship service. In fact, as we’ve seen, a temple is the one notable thing the new Jerusalem does not have (Rev. 21:22). The new Jerusalem needs no temple because every aspect of life in that city is permeated with the light and love of God. In that sense worship as we know it—a sacred time set apart to realign our hearts with the knowledge and love of God—will be obsolete.<sup>36</sup>

If what we make at our day jobs is what will endure, while Sunday services are passing away, which one should a Christian be prioritizing?

The other difficulty created by this tendency is that it makes articulating the distinctiveness or val-

ue of a “Christian perspective” frequently incoherent. If the artifacts of human culture, saved or not, will endure in the Age to Come, then why would it be important to engage in shaping them in a distinctively Christian manner? The Reformed tradition tends to criticize an over-emphasis on personal salvation in ignorance of redemption’s cosmic significance.<sup>37</sup> However, this emphasis on continuity means that personal salvation is the only real added advantage that could be paired with an otherwise general injunction to do cultural work well. Van Drunen calls this shortcoming out in the context of the “Christian plumber” problem, saying “What constitutes excellence for the Christian plumber? Whether the pipes he fixes stop leaking. . . . [W]ould we hold a non-Christian . . . plumber to the same standards?”<sup>38</sup> He concludes, “Absolutely. Activities such as . . . repairing broken pipes are general human activities, not uniquely Christian ones.”<sup>39</sup>

In sum, then, the “kingdom” metaphor presents a frame which can draw Christians into over-emphasizing the relative importance of what we do. It can drift into contextualizing what is good in light of a worldly cultural definition, rather than one drawn from Scripture, and these tendencies open the door for us to valorize what is actually drawn from our wants and desires as if they were God’s. Of course, this talk of “can” and “tendencies” should not be taken as a fundamental error of the “kingdom” metaphor. It also should not be taken as a blanket charge of error or heresy for the theologians mentioned in this section. The potential of a slippery slope is not, in and of itself, proof of error. Instead, it should be read in the context of the general biblical illiteracy of American Christians. In their annual “State of the Bible” report, Barna reports that only 24% of Christians would consider themselves engaged with or centered on the Bible, with only 5% saying that the Bible “shapes their choices.”<sup>40</sup> Hearing anecdotally from colleagues who teach theology at my institution, the literacy rate among students attending an explicitly Christian university like Dordt is not much higher. This information provides what I consider the compelling context here: If “kingdom” presents pitfalls unless considered in a thoroughly biblical context, is it the wisest metaphor to lean upon when addressing an audience that largely lacks this Biblical

context? In what I have presented so far, I believe the answer must be “no.”

### **“Temple” is an alternative metaphor for “kingdom.”**

If using “kingdom” as an organizing metaphor has the vulnerabilities that I mention, is there a viable alternative? I believe so. I first encountered this alternative when reading through Abraham Kuyper’s *Wisdom and Wonder* with my honors students. In that book, Kuyper describes science (by which he means all knowledge) as a temple to God emerging from the uncoordinated works of scholars from all fields.<sup>41</sup> In their reflections on the book, many of the students returned to this metaphor, and it became clear to me that it carried fertile possibilities.

In what follows, I will demonstrate the idea that “temple” provides an alternative metaphor for “kingdom” and carries very similar biblical significance, both in terms of prominence and semantic range, while avoiding many of the cultural complications that plague “kingdom.” While I emphatically support the biblical and practical warrant for using “kingdom,” I believe that “temple” offers a metaphor that can be adopted by students in a sense more closely connected to its biblical intention, especially given their relative biblical illiteracy. As a result, “building the temple” provides a superior way of phrasing our aspiration to Christian scholarship.

### **“Temple” has biblical significance similar to that of “kingdom.”**

As a metaphor, “kingdom” functions to both describe the current reality of Christ’s Lordship and the coming reconciliation of all things under Christ in the Age to Come. Thus, it speaks to Christian identity, calling, and the cosmic *telos*. However, this is not the only biblical motif that speaks to these elements. In *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, biblical theologian G.K. Beale argues for the centrality of the “temple” motif in Scripture.

He traces a movement from the Garden of Eden as a temple within Creation to the new heavens and earth, where the entire Creation is a temple.<sup>42</sup> By highlighting features of Beale’s argument, I will demonstrate that “temple” speaks to Christian identity, calling, and the cosmic *telos* with a largely synonymous semantic import to “kingdom,” a fact that then recommends it as an alternative metaphor.

Understanding Beale’s argument requires first establishing that both Eden and the New Jerusalem are rightly viewed as temples. With regard to Eden, Beale notes that the creation of a divine temple cared for by priest-kings was a common theme in both Mesopotamian and Egyptian culture.<sup>43</sup> Further, Adam’s charge in Eden is to “cultivate and keep” it, a phrase connected linguistically to the charge given to the Levites in protecting the Tabernacle.<sup>44</sup> The entire Creation account, then, is a

settling of the cosmic order, something which was followed up in Ancient Near Eastern myths by the creation of an earthly temple meant to bring to pass on earth what had been accomplished in the heavens.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, Beale argues that not only did the temple practices of pagan societies provide a context for Israel’s interpretation of Genesis, but they also demonstrate “a refracted and marred understanding of the true conception of the temple that was present from the very beginning of human history.”<sup>46</sup>

This familiarity with temple practices means that the original audience of Moses’ book would likely have read the Creation account in Genesis in terms of “temple.” This possibility is made even clearer in the ways in which the religious rites of the Israelites pointed back to Eden. The first call that God issues to His people at Mount Sinai identifies them as a nation of priests.<sup>47</sup> The Tabernacle, for which God dictates the design, is structured and ornamented to remind the people of Eden. The outer court speaks to where the people dwelt; the inside of the temple was explicitly linked to the earth by

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a bronze sea and an altar of uncut stone. The inner court represented the cosmos and their lights, with a lampstand representing the sun, moon, and five other visible planets and cosmic imagery woven into the curtains. The holy of holies stood for the invisible realm, the dwelling place of God, and it was guarded by cherubim, as was the entrance to Eden, making the high priest's annual trek beyond the curtain on the day of atonement into a fearful visitation past the gates of Eden.<sup>48</sup> This interpretation of Eden as temple in the Israelite *cultus* can be further confirmed by affirmations of this interpretation by Philo, Josephus, and the book of *Jubilees*.<sup>49</sup>

On the other end of the spectrum, the vision of the New Jerusalem should also be thought of in terms of "temple." Beale's primary thesis is that the new creation pictured in Revelation 21-22 is not a zooming in from new earth to new city but a multi-perspectival account of a cosmos so thoroughly suffused by the presence of God that the whole of it is a temple. This image can be seen in the description of the New Jerusalem, its stones like those of Solomon's temple and its square dimensions reminiscent of the holy of holies.<sup>50</sup> Further, the "new heavens and new earth" itself is a phrase drawn from Isaiah 65:17-18, which functions as a metonym for Jerusalem.<sup>51</sup> That is, much as we might say "Washington" when referring to the government of the United States, the description in Revelation 21 should be read as a parallel, not progressing, perspective.

In light of this interpretation, then, "temple" speaks to Christian identity, calling, and the cosmic *telos* in a way that mirrors the "kingdom" motif. With regard to "temple," Adam was situated as a priest-king of Eden, charged with cultivating the Garden and guarding ("keeping") it from unclean things.<sup>52</sup> In the Fall, Adam instead became unclean himself, leading to his expulsion from God's presence and the "keeping" function falling to the cherubim. Instead of bringing the image of God to the ends of the earth, Ezekiel 31 uses the example of Assyria to show how mankind instead spread an idolatrous dominion.<sup>53</sup> Out of this fallen world, God called a priestly people to Himself, and He confirmed their expansionist goal by leading them into Canaan in a tabernacle modeled on an Egyptian war tent.<sup>54</sup> In the Ancient Near Eastern creation myths,

the gods would overcome opposition and then create a divine temple as an establishment of their rest. In a Divine commentary on these myths, Yahweh conquered the idolatrous dominion of Egypt and Canaan, then established a temple of His rest when the Davidic dynasty was established with the succession of Solomon.<sup>55</sup> Of course, Israel was no better than Adam, and the Old Testament at the time of Christ ended with 2 Chronicles 36:23 and Cyrus' decree that God had given him authority to build God's house once more in Jerusalem, calling "whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him. Let him go up."

Christ, who was executed for charges including claims of His ability to rebuild the temple in three days,<sup>56</sup> answers that call by becoming the chief cornerstone of a new temple and claiming for Himself "all authority on heaven and earth" before sending His disciples out through the whole world, in Matthew 28. Ephesians 2:19-22 clarifies this "temple" imagery in a way that merges it with the concept of kingdom citizenship, saying,

[Y]ou are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

There is much more that could be said, but this groundwork gives us enough to see that "temple," with its emphasis on God's presence and His glory, mirrors the "kingdom" motif in its most significant senses. This evidence provides us with a sufficient basis to compare the two metaphors and explore ways in which "temple" avoids some of the pitfalls of "kingdom."

### **"Temple" avoids many of the problematic associations of "kingdom."**

The metaphor of "temple" avoids the problems identified earlier primarily by the fact that it places clearer emphasis on the centrality of the Divine and integrates the already/not yet tension in a way that more clearly articulates the scope and distinctiveness of Christian calling.

While the cultural context may allow for a conception of “kingdom” that still ultimately revolves around us, the same is not true for “temple.” By its very nature, “temple” will always raise the question “to whom?” This means that the *solī deo gloria* orientation of the Christian’s calling and identity will be woven into the very nature of the metaphor used. Because the concept of “temple” calls to mind both worship and Divine presence, this metaphor will call to mind the priesthood of all believers in a way that naturally flows into what the Reformed tradition has typically identified as the human *telos*: “to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever.”<sup>57</sup>

“Temple” also proposes a different integration of the already/not yet aspects of the kingdom because it does not naturally require answering speculative questions about the continuity of the two ages. Instead of seeing continuity in terms of cultural artifacts, the natural sense of “temple” sees continuity in terms of worship.

This “temple” metaphor also captures the proper motion of eschaton. As N.T. Wright notes, the thrust of an inaugurated eschatology is that there is a kingdom of heaven, “which according to Jesus was and is breaking *in* to the present world, to earth.”<sup>58</sup> An emphasis on continuity of cultural artifacts reverses this motion in certain ways, creating a process of progressive change whereby things of this age break *out* into the next. “Temple” clarifies that one of the key features that will be more fully realized is the presence of God. Creation already testifies to the glory of God, but the kingdom breaks in through the ways that we come to realize and testify to this glory.<sup>59</sup> That is, the kingdom doesn’t break in when we build a smart phone so well that it testifies to the glory of God; instead, it breaks in when we testify to the fact that technology always has. If the Age to Come will include cul-

tural artifacts, then the “temple” metaphor highlights that the Christian calling isn’t so much about assembling the “furniture of heaven” (although we may be doing that, too) as it is about making sure that that furniture faces toward the throne of glory.

This integration of calling is where the “temple” metaphor offers a more coherent response to the “Christian plumber” problem. I will speak more to this issue, using “building the temple” to frame the task of Christian scholarship, but for now, the idea that a Christian plumber is a priest, even a priest-

king of the living God, suggests something of what is different about “Christian plumbing.” A focus on the cultural artifact asks what is unique about the method of the Christian plumber, and, clearly, there often will be nothing. However, “Christian plumbing” is a calling, and it entails more than method; it entails operating in the vocation of plumbing in such a way that the plumber points to the glory of God, including being able to articulate this orientation if asked. It rejects a division of the identity of “Christian” from the service rendered in Christ’s name. VanDrunen rightly highlights that there is merit

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in even temporary service, but he considers the adjective “Christian” unhelpful for three reasons: (1) because the norms of Christian attitude and motivation are common across professions, (2) because they obscure Christian liberty and discernment in applying Scripture to their own lives, and (3) because concrete normative commands in Scripture are typically common to believer and unbeliever alike.<sup>60</sup>

By shifting the focus from structure to direction, the “temple” metaphor suggests that the uniqueness of the calling to be a Christian plumber is the ability to articulate how everything about the task of plumbing points to the glory of God and to find joy in that service. Understanding the mechan-

ics of fixing a leaking pipe is common to all plumbers; being a just and righteous person is common to all Christians. But Christian plumbers know—not just theoretically but in an embodied, experienced way—what God meant by using the uncleanness of human waste to help explain the uncleanness of sin, or how a small sin, left unaddressed, can grow into a catastrophic failure. The Christian plumber has been habituated into a certain kind of service. Some of it is about being Christian; some of it is about being a plumber; but the nexus of the two has uniquely equipped that person to serve as a priest-king in the New Jerusalem, whatever may be said about the pipes he or she has repaired. To ask about Christian plumbing is to ask how these vocations find a coherent unity of expression in the Christian plumber; either dividing them in a way that suggests limited inter-relation or merging them as if there were a unique method to “Christian plumbing” would obscure this holistic truth.

“Temple” also provides an integrative resolution that better avoids the potential for “kingdom” to either draw emphasis away from corporate worship or segregate worship from ordinary life. Viewed rightly, corporate worship should be the nexus of the Christian life. Smith sees this nexus in terms of the formative impact of the liturgy of worship, which he argues should shape Christian desires in a way that emphasizes God’s agency, rather than ours.<sup>61</sup> Horton makes a similar argument, seeing the church as the primary venue for accomplishing the Great Commission.<sup>62</sup> However, although both are arguing for an emphasis on church, Horton critiques the “church as beachhead” concept by separating Sunday further from ordinary life, saying, “Loving and serving our neighbors in our common callings is not ‘kingdom work.’”<sup>63</sup> Thus, work done by kingdom citizens to the honor and glory of God is segregated from the kingdom of heaven. Horton continues by saying, “When we fix a roof or mop a floor or argue a case before the Supreme Court, we are not ushering in the kingdom of God but are fulfilling our divine calling in the world as fellow citizens.” From this argument, someone without another organizing metaphor might conclude that a Christian’s “kingdom service” occurs only on Sunday and exists virtually wholly detached from the majority of our lives.

However, the “temple” metaphor orients us toward the presence of God and the ways that we point toward His glory. In line with the biblical theology outlined above, a Christian who thinks of calling in terms of “temple” would see that the breaking in of the Age to Come means more clearly pointing to Christ and God’s glory while experiencing His presence in such an all-encompassing way that the whole earth is His temple. This makes corporate worship a central focus of the week, a time where God’s presence is promised<sup>64</sup> and where the God that we are to point to is revealed to us in clearer form. The Christian is thus renewed in his or her calling to live the rest of the week as a “living sacrifice” to God, one that orients all of the work that we do toward our King in a way that is integrated with, not segregated from, our corporate worship.

### **“Building the Temple” is a superior metaphor for the task of Christian scholarship.**

If I have succeeded in my efforts to present a persuasive case for adopting the “temple” metaphor, I should not neglect to apply this metaphor in the arena where most of my ordinary work takes place. In fact, this is both the context where I first encountered this metaphor and where I think it particularly helpful in framing our Christian calling. In this concluding section, therefore, I will argue that we adopt the metaphor of “building the temple” as an important part of the way that we talk about the task of Christian scholarship, particularly in the context of a Christian university.

For Abraham Kuyper, the entire task of the Christian university could be considered “building a temple of science,” with true science consisting of unearthing the ways that the entire cosmos points to its Author. To do this, Kuyper first isolates science as the emergent human understanding of the work of the Divine Logos:

Science is not the personally acquired possession of each person, but gradually increased in significance and stability only as the fruit of the work of many people among many nations, in the course of centuries.... Working separately from one another, without any mutual agreement and without the least bit of direction from other people, with everybody milling about, everyone going their own way, each person constructs science as he

thinks right. Through that endless confusion...a temple emerges.... At this point it will not do to suggest that this most beautiful result emerged by accident, without plan, all by itself. Rather we must confess that God himself developed his own divine plan for this construction.... Seen this way, however, science is then also an invention of God, which he called into being, causing it to travel its paths of development in the manner he himself had ordained for it. What does this mean except to say and to confess with gratitude that God himself called Science into being as his creature, and accordingly that Science occupies its own independent place in our human life.<sup>65</sup>

Kuyper begins from the foundational assumption that the entire created order proceeds from God's thoughts.<sup>66</sup> These thoughts are thus embedded into Creation like veins of precious metal shot through the earth. In creating mankind with the capacity for understanding, Kuyper therefore sees a calling for human knowledge (science) to pursue knowledge of the Creator by unearthing these thoughts.<sup>67</sup> In fact, Kuyper sees this flourishing of knowledge to be part of the priestly charge that Adam possessed in the Garden, something that fits quite naturally with the sense of "temple" developed up to this point.<sup>68</sup>

This sense of science is closely connected to the second sense in which Kuyper emphasized the doctrine of common grace. That is, common grace is not just about how God, in a show of unmerited favor, sends "rain on the just and on the unjust" alike.<sup>69</sup> It is, more deeply, about how God restrains human evil and works through His creation such that He continues to reveal Himself through it. This is the preparatory function of common grace, something available to all, but only revealed to those who perceive the truth by virtue of special grace.<sup>70</sup> We see something of this same concept in the way Bavinck describes the doctrines of general

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and special revelation. Both are revelations of not just *something* but *someone*, with general revelation providing a basis of common perception, which is clarified and directed toward its proper object via special revelation.<sup>71</sup>

Of course, human perception of truth is distorted, and not all humans recognize or wish to point to their Creator. Further, Kuyper attributes "science" to the organic whole of humanity, as a full grasp of the truth is beyond individual capacity.<sup>72</sup> This is where, for Kuyper, a collective effort

to point towards God is required, and the calling of the Christian university emerges:

God's honor requires the human spirit to probe the entire complexity of what has been created, in order to discover God's majesty and wisdom and to express those in human thought with human language. Since the unbelieving world can do nothing but obscure God's majesty and wisdom, Christian thinkers are called to put their shoulders to that

grand task that they alone can perform even if it were to bear no benefit for their own lives.<sup>73</sup>

This mandate for the Christian university is profound. It provides us with a clear orientation toward what the integration of faith and learning looks like, and it provides a basis for what common engagement with the broader world might look like. In the remainder of this essay, I will demonstrate how thinking about the text quoted above in light of "temple" shows each of these things.

First, the "temple" metaphor provides a solid basis for the integration of faith and learning. My institution is based on a foundational vision of "an education that is Christian not merely in the sense that devotional exercises are appended to the ordinary work of the college, but in the larger and deeper sense that all the class work, all of the students' intellectual, emotional, and imaginative activities shall be permeated with the spirit and teaching of

Christianity.”<sup>74</sup> However, where the emphasis is on “kingdom,” particularly in the sense of cultural artifacts, going beyond merely adding on devotional exercises can be quite difficult, especially in highly technical disciplines like a topic I taught in my first few years, taxation.

From the “temple” perspective, though, the task becomes clearer. To return to the example of taxation, the “temple” metaphor suggests that the goal is not to focus on thinking about how someone can do “Christian taxes.” Instead, the goal is to show how taxation *itself* might point to God’s ordering of Creation, where we find that our welfare is dependent on more than our own efforts, and we might owe a debt to the people and structures that protect and provide for our common welfare. That is, taxation can be rooted in and, ideally, reaffirming of realities about who we are and how we stand before God, our ultimate sovereign. However, this point goes beyond philosophical foundations: teaching taxation at a Christian university also offers opportunities to explore how incentives can be used to restrain evil and promote the common good. And, on a more personal level, it provides an arena for exploring how the formative practices and loves of someone like a tax accountant might be equipping those people for their embodied service in the Age to Come. For instance, a love of order and a desire for a full and proper accounting are not just personality traits of a good accountant; rather, they are a particular way that humans resonate with God’s Justice, and we see this resonance played out in the eschaton itself.<sup>75</sup> In this way, teaching taxation includes not just the common elements of tax policy or just the general Christian principles of Scripture. Teaching taxation helps students unpack and articulate how Christ provides a lynchpin to their entire identity and how even something as mundane as taxation can highlight the glory of God.

Second, the “temple” metaphor provides a basis for common engagement, although this might not be as immediately apparent. While Kuyper provided a clear mandate for the Christian university, he blunted the force of his own metaphor through his insistence that the antithesis, the fundamental opposition of Christ and the world, resulted in “two kinds of science.”<sup>76</sup> Thus, his basis for creating Christian universities was an “us v. them” distinction

that divided Christian scholars from the rest of the academy. However, as mentioned at the beginning, not all theologians viewed the antithesis primarily through the lens of creating two different types of people—as if we could always easily distinguish the two. Instead, Bavinck provides the crucial corrective that the antithesis runs through the very heart of believers as well,<sup>77</sup> and this corrective allows for a better basis for both distinction and engagement.

A starting point for seeing this basis is the first block quotation in this section. Kuyper describes science as something that emerges by God’s providence, since humans are often at cross-purposes with one another. In this sense, then, there are not “two kinds of science”; instead, all that represents an apprehension of real truth is science, whether first expounded by a believer or a nonbeliever. Thus, there is no reason why Christian scholars cannot learn from the work of nonbelievers or why they cannot engage in common scholarly activities with the broader academy, a view that differs from that of “kingdom,” where it is often incumbent on Christians to state Christ’s cultural claim in order for it to be effectuated. There, the agency in “temple” is secondary. It emerges often in spite of us, even though Christians might labor diligently to aid this process intentionally.

Of course, the Christian university is unique in its dedication to rightly ordering the scholarly enterprise toward the revelation of God’s glory. Through common grace, all true science builds up understanding and, in many cases, points to the existence of a creator, but only the Christian, guided by the insight of special revelation, realizes that everything coheres in *the* Creator and feels a desire to make that connection explicit. To draw explicitly on the “temple” metaphor, Christians can cheerfully engage with the scholarly process, confident that a temple is emerging. However, we must remain aware that our own understanding is also affected by sin. This fact drives us to humbly realize that whatever enduring truth emerges does not originate in our genius but results from God’s active work and cultivating call to all humans.

However, the Christian scholar is uniquely capable of proving/revealing that this “temple of science” is to be a temple to the living God. That is, that the presence of God is faithfully revealed

throughout the whole of His creation. Thus, on the one hand, we seek to avoid confusing that calling by elevating our own intention to a certainty that we're getting it right: the temple emerges by God's providence alone. On the other hand, we avoid unduly separating what is rooted in common grace from what is shaped by special revelation: if a temple is emerging, then the people of God, a royal priesthood,<sup>78</sup> bear the responsibility of taking every thought captive to the Author of knowledge.<sup>79</sup>

### Conclusion

We live in an era marked by pervasive biblical illiteracy and beset by pressures to align every aspect of our lives with partisan political interests. Further, American society is captivated by a sense of self that elevates our agency and prosperity into a narcissistic evaluation of the good through the lens of our preferences. In this environment, "kingdom" is subject to a particular likelihood for both misunderstanding and misuse. It easily becomes a division between two "us and them" kingdoms, where justice is about reconciling our tribe's list of grievances. Ultimately, the "already" ends up breaking into the "not yet," rather than the other way around.

"Temple" offers an alternative metaphoric orientation that avoids some of these tendencies. Although it has a biblical import that is largely synonymous with "kingdom," it fixes our eyes more clearly on whom Creation is a temple to. It clarifies Christian calling in a way that integrates our whole lived experience into the ways that we know and testify to the providence and glory of God—not just in intellect or method, but in lived, bone-deep knowledge. Finally, it provides a special calling to Christian universities to aid the broader body of Christ in developing a grammar for articulating that knowledge.

Of course, this does not make "kingdom" unbiblical, and I am not urging us to remove that word from our vocabulary. Rather, I am arguing that we add "temple" to the way that we articulate our calling, and, further, that we give it a more central role. To place a particular emphasis on a descriptor used by Beale above, I argue that we think of ourselves as priest-kings, not king-priests. Perhaps this will help to equip and orient us toward a life lived *pro rege* and *soli deo gloria*.

### Endnotes

1. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 22.
2. The authors use the example of "more is better" being coherent with an association between "more" and "up" but not "more" and "down" because Western culture tends to utilize a metaphorical structure where "up" and "down" correspond to "good" and "bad," respectively. Lakoff and Johnson, 22-23.
3. For discussion of this distinction, see Jacob Klapwijk, "Antithesis and Common Grace," in *On Kuyper: A Collection of Readings on the Life, Work, & Legacy of Abraham Kuyper*, ed. Steve Bishop and John Kok (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2013), 295-96.
4. Ephesians 4:22-24 (ESV).
5. See, e.g., Dordt University, *The Educational Framework of Dordt University* (Sioux Center: Dordt University, 2020), 1.
6. "metaphor, n.1". *OED Online*. December 2020. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/117328> (accessed January 05, 2021).
7. Patrick Schreiner, *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 18.
8. Schreiner, 19. (citing I. Howard Marshall, "Church," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. J.B. Green and S. McKnight (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 123.
9. John 18:36 (ESV).
10. George Lakoff, "Mapping the brain's metaphor circuitry: metaphorical thought in everyday reason," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 8:958(2014) 1-14, 14.
11. Stephen Pinker, *The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 235-78.
12. Donald Roth. "Narrative Metaphor: Integrating Insights in Cognitive Science into a Toolset for Intentionally Shaping Vocational Pursuits." *International Journal of Christianity & Education* 23, no. 1 (March 2019): 69-80, 73.
13. John 18:36 (ESV).
14. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, ed. Olivier Zunz

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15. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 112-3 and 302.
  16. Ross Douthat, *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 182-241.
  17. Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett (Kitchener, ON: Batoche Books, 1999), 5.
  18. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. G.D.H. Cole (Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1923), 14-17.
  19. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), 99.
  20. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power: An Attempted Transvaluation of All Values*, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici, Book III (Edinburgh: T.N. Foulus, 1913) 215-17.
  21. Abraham Lincoln, "The Gettysburg Address," Abraham Lincoln Online, <http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/speeches/gettysburg.htm> (accessed 7 January 2020).
  22. See Judges 21:25 (ESV).
  23. Moshe Halbertal and Stephen Holmes, *The Beginning of Politics: Power in the Biblical Book of Samuel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 167-68.
  24. Halbertal and Holmes, 90-91.
  25. For works that follow a similar line of argument with regard to Christianity in America, see Stephen Nichols, *Jesus Made in America: A Cultural History from the Puritans to the Passion of the Christ* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Academic, 2008) and, from a different political perspective, Kristen Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright, 2020).
  26. Al Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 89-95.
  27. Wolters, 89.
  28. Wolters, 74.
  29. N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 207-208.
  30. Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 94-95.
  31. Wright, 193.
  32. Richard Mouw, *When Kings Come Marching In* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 20.
  33. Mouw, 40-41.
  34. Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering our Creative Calling* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 170.
  35. Wolters, 95-100.
  36. Crouch, 173.
  37. For a discussion of how to resolve the tension between the personal and cosmic significance of the gospel, see Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 91-114.
  38. David VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 169.
  39. Ibid.
  40. "Bible engaged" is defined as "Interact with the Bible frequently. It is transforming in their relationship with God and others" while "Bible Centered" adds "and shaping their choices" to this. "State of the Bible 2019: Trends in Engagement." Barna Group, April 18, 2019. <https://www.barna.com/research/state-of-the-bible-2019/>.
  41. Abraham Kuyper, *Wisdom and Wonder: Common Grace in Science and Art*, trans. Nelson Kloosterman, ed. Jordan Ballor and Stephen Grabill (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 2011), 45.
  42. G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downer's Grove: Intervarsity, 2004), 23-29.
  43. Beale, 91-92.
  44. Beale, 68-69.
  45. Beale, 51.
  46. Beale, 29.
  47. Exodus 19 (ESV).
  48. Beale, 32.
  49. Beale, 49 and 77.
  50. Beale 23.
  51. Beale 24-25.

52. Beale, 68-69.
53. Beale, 81 and 126-7.
54. Beale 62-65.
55. Ibid.
56. Matthew 26:57-68.
57. *The Westminster Larger Catechism* (1648), Q&A 1. Available at <https://ligonier.org/learn/articles/westminster-larger-catechism/>
58. Emphasis added. Wright, 201.
59. Psalm 66 (ESV).
60. VanDrunen, 192-93.
61. James K.A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 77.
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63. Horton, 241.
64. Matthew 18:20 (ESV).
65. Kuyper, 45-46.
66. Kuyper, 39.
67. Kuyper, 42.
68. Kuyper, 58-59.
69. Matthew 5:45 (ESV).
70. Tim McConnel, "Common Grace or the Antithesis? Towards a Consistent Understanding of Kuyper's 'Sphere Sovereignty'" in *On Kuyper: A Collection of Readings on the Life, Work, & Legacy of Abraham Kuyper*, ed. Steve Bishop and John Kok (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2013), 314.
71. Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Glenside: Westminster Seminary Press, 2019), 16-56.
72. Kuyper, 42-43.
73. Kuyper, 93.
74. Dordt University, *Founders' Vision Statement* (1937). *Dordt Foundational Document*. 6 [https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/foundational\\_documents/6](https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/foundational_documents/6).
75. See Matthew 25: 31-46 (ESV).
76. Kuyper, 101.
77. Klapwijk, 295-96.
78. 1 Peter 2:9 (ESV).
79. 2 Corinthians 10:5 (ESV).