

Kingdom and Church  
in “Christian”  
Reconstructionism

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*“But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14).*

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# **Part 1**

*(PRTJ, November 1998)*



# Kingdom and Church in “Christian” Reconstructionism

Ronald Hanko

## Introduction

What we might call “Kingdom Theology” has become a kind of fad in Reformed and Presbyterian circles in recent years. That theology reaches its full development and is brought to its logical conclusions in the movement known as “Christian Reconstructionism” (hereafter CR). Nevertheless, most Reformed theologians and teachers today hold views of the kingdom that are not essentially different from those of CR.

This similarity of views is a reason, we are sure, that the criticism of CR by those who have stood aside from or opposed the movement has been muted or ineffective. Holding essentially the same view of the kingdom as does CR, they cannot effectively combat its influences.

We believe that this theology is at heart a rejection of the traditional and biblical teaching concerning the church, though this may not be immediately evident in the teaching of those who are not directly involved with CR. Only in CR teaching does one see it fully developed and see, too, its consequences for the doctrine of the church.

Like Dispensationalism, CR makes a disjunction between kingdom and church that trivializes the church and contradicts the testimony of Scripture concerning it. Our purpose in this article is to provide evidence of this from CR writings and to analyze the matter further, especially in order to show that the CR view of the kingdom is un-Reformed and unbiblical.

We wish to demonstrate first of all, therefore, that CR *does* make a disjunction or separation between church and kingdom. To say, as it says, that the church is the means or instrument or “nursery” or “boot camp” of the kingdom is not just to make the kingdom something wider than the church, but to make a disjunction between the two. A means

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or instrument is never the same thing as the end to which that instrument or means is used. In this regard CR is no different from Dispensationalism, which makes the same disjunction.<sup>1</sup>

It makes this disjunction by insisting that the kingdom of God and of Christ is not the church, but is to be thought of as a Christian civilization or culture, or as an earthly dominion by the godly over all life's institutions. This is one thing that will be evident from the quotations from CR writers.

The possibility of establishing such a kingdom is found in two things: first, in the doctrine of common grace or some such similar teaching; and second, in extending Christ's work as Mediator, particularly His mediatorial rule, to the whole world. We will explore the connection between the CR view of the kingdom and common grace in an appendix. We treat the whole matter of Christ's mediatorial rule both in the body of this paper and in another appendix.

Secondly, then, we want to point out that, by its disjunction between church and kingdom, CR makes the church of little account and plainly denies that the church is the proximate goal and end of all God's works in history (the ultimate goal being, of course, His own glory in the church). CR thus denies the plain testimony of Scripture in such passages as Ephesians 1:22, 23; 2:20-22; 3:20, 21; 5:27; I Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 12:22-24; I Peter 2:5-9; Revelation 2 & 3; 4:4; 7:15; 19:6, 7; 21:3, 10, 11, 22-24 (cf. also Hag. 1:8; 2:6-9; Ezek. 40-47; Ezra 1:1-4). In this, too, it leaves the door wide open to Dispensationalism.

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1. Indeed, this is only one aspect of the likeness between CR and Dispensationalism. At almost all important points CR teaching shows itself to be simply a regurgitated Dispensationalism. Note the following similarities:

- (1) The disjunction between church and kingdom;
- (2) The trivializing of the church by making it a mere means in history;
- (3) The carnal/earthly view of the kingdom and rule of Christ;
- (4) The Judaizing of the kingdom by virtue of the imposition of OT civil law;
- (5) The rejection of Scripture's teaching concerning a persecuted end-times church;
- (6) The notion that the coming of Christ for the glorification of the church is without precursory signs;
- (7) The inconsistently literalistic interpretation of OT and NT prophecy;
- (8) The view that the fulfilment of the OT theocracy is not to be found in the church but in an earthly kingdom (and that Judaized).



This trivializing of the church is done not only by making the church a mere means toward the establishment of the kingdom, but by redefining the visible church. CR writers define the visible church primarily in terms of God's people as believers, and de-emphasize the institute church. Some writers will even say, for example, that the institute church is hardly mentioned in Scripture. We will examine this new definition of the visible church in detail in an appendix, but it will also be evident in the following quotations.

This de-emphasis on the institute church not only further trivializes the church, but allows those who hold these views to define the calling of the "church" primarily in terms of the life of believers in the world, rather than in terms of the church institute's calling to preach the gospel, administer the sacraments, and carry out Christian discipline. In this way, CR denigrates the preaching of the gospel and other work of the church institute. That emphasis, too, can be found in the following quotations.

Finally, and in response, we wish to show that the view of kingdom and church promoted by CR is unconfessional, un-Reformed, and unbiblical. In proving that, however, we will be showing that those Reformed writers who hold views of the kingdom similar to CR are also wrong. *Any* attempt to make the kingdom something broader than or other than the church is wrong. Reformed theology and Scripture make them coextensive.

Before we go on, though, we must point out that we use the name "Christian Reconstruction" very loosely. There are many differences among those who are, to a greater or lesser degree, identified with CR. Some accept the name but do not hold all its teachings. Others hold most or all of its main teachings while rejecting the name.<sup>2</sup> Some whom we quote here have since left the movement. Nevertheless, the rejection of the Reformed doctrine of the church is found across the spectrum of CR writers, even among those who are only loosely identified with the movement or who only hold its main teachings. This is one reason for

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2. It is particularly in the UK that some refuse to be identified with the movement or its name. This is due to the excesses of the movement especially in the USA, excesses which some repudiate while continuing to hold the main teachings of the movement, presuppositionalism, theonomy, post-millennialism, and the particular view of the kingdom described in this paper.

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the large number of quotations from various "CR" writers. We want to show how pervasive these views are both at the center and at the fringes of the movement.

We have other reasons for the abundance of quotations, however. We also wish to show some implications of CR teaching on the church as they become evident in the words of the CR writers themselves. And, because a few of the CR writers seem to think that footnotes are *the* marks of scholarship, respectability, and truth, we are (to use one of Gary North's silly expressions) going to "stuff their mouths with footnotes."<sup>3</sup>

### **Reconstructionist Ecclesiology**

We intend the following quotations, therefore, to demonstrate (1) the CR view of the kingdom as something broader than and disjunct from the church; (2) the CR denial of the church as the goal and end of God's dealings with mankind; (3) the consequent CR trivializing of the church, especially the church institute; and (4) the tendency to define the visible church in terms of believers apart from and at the expense of the church institute. Many more such quotations can be found throughout their writings in spite of substantial differences among individual CR writers regarding the relation of the church to the kingdom.

Reconstructionism became in some ways a movement in the '80s with the advent of 'Tyler theology,' a largely 'high-church,' ecclesiocentric vision, mistakenly claiming continuity with the reconstructionist vision.<sup>4</sup>

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Certain writers wishing to be identified as Christian reconstructionists have criticised Rushdoony and Chalcedon for maintaining an excessively low view of the institutional church. Perhaps it had not occurred

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3. "Foreword" in Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion*, ICE, 1992, p. xv.

4. Andrew Sandlin, "Recapturing the Vision of Christian Reconstructionism," *Christianity and Society*, VI, 3, p.20. Note his rejection of the "ecclesiocentric vision" of so-called "Tyler theology."

to these critics that the ecclesiastical aspect of the vision of Christian reconstructionism was something more than a naive, unreflected dismissal of the institutional church (it is not), but reflects instead a serious studied conclusion after an evaluation of Christian and church history, not to mention of the Bible itself. Indeed, they are seriously mistaken who interpret Rushdoony's ecclesiology almost solely in terms of an assailment on the institutional church. It represents, rather, a creative development of Protestant theology, a potent ecclesiastical paradigm.<sup>5</sup>

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This sentiment represents an incursion against and reversal of the reconstructionist vision, which does not perceive as obvious the opinion that 'men devote themselves most rigorously to the practice of the faith' in the institutional church. All to the contrary, Christian reconstructionism, following Rushdoony, holds that men must break away from the mediaeval, and to a lesser extent, Reformational notion that the institutional church requires a special degree of the practice of the faith.<sup>6</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

The great contribution of the ecclesiastical paradigm of Rushdoony and Christian reconstructionism is to insist that Protestants be true to their own inner principles: mainly, this denotes the simple though staggering realisation that the church in any of its expressions is not the end, but *the means to the end*, in God's purposes for the earth. That end is not the church, but *the kingdom of God and of Christ*, when the kingdom is interpreted as God's reign on earth.<sup>7</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

We equally recognise the ministry of the church outside the barriers of its institution as it presses the claims of Christ in every sphere. We believe the institutional church is one valid institution among many in the advancement of the kingdom of God, and one expression of the church among several expressions.<sup>8</sup>

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5. *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 21.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

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\* \* \* \* \*

It should be clear now that, while government is a basic concern of Scripture, church and state as we know them barely exist in Scripture. It is the Kingdom of God which is basic, and we are commanded to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33).<sup>9</sup>

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We know that the church, whether understood as the company of the redeemed, the congregation of visible saints, or the institutional expression of the covenant community, is a prime factor in the historical unfolding and advancement of the kingdom of God, which is the mediate reign of Christ on earth. But the church is only one factor or institution in the advancement of that divine reign. The church, the family, the state, and all other divinely ordained, legitimate, human institutions, must serve this one grand, irresistible end. They are co-extensive, but not identified with the kingdom.<sup>10</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

The absolutely ultimate task and calling of every Christian is not to build the church, Christianise the State, or even raise a godly family—important and essential though all of these are. *The absolutely ultimate task and calling of every Christian is to extend the reign of King Jesus in the earth in every possible sphere.*<sup>11</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

Thus the church is more than the local building and congregation. The term is closer in meaning to the Kingdom of God. It has reference to the called people of God in all their work together for the Lord.<sup>12</sup>

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9. R. J. Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, Chalcedon, 1982, p. 399-402, quoted in Sandlin, p. 23. The reference here is especially to the institute church. Note that according to Rushdoony the church in this sense is hardly to be found in Scripture.

10. Sandlin, "Recapturing the Vision of Christian Reconstructionism," p. 23.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

12. R. J. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, Ross House, 1994, vol. II, p. 670. Here Rushdoony tends to identify church and kingdom, but only after redefining the church as "called people of God in all their work together for the Lord."

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Thus, since the fall, the church has a task of redemption through Christ. Man must be restored into fellowship with God; this fellowship requires the restoration of man first of all into God's grace: salvation. The work then is the application of the aspects of God's image, righteousness, holiness, knowledge and dominion, to every area of life and thought. The church is God's armory for this purpose. The church issues God's draft or conscription call, trains the troops for action, and sends them out weekly to conquer in Christ's name.<sup>13</sup>

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The *ecclesia* is the *assembly* of those whom Christ governs and who are therefore called to govern the earth under God.<sup>14</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

The church is not primarily a building or an institution, although both can be manifestations of its life. It is a covenant people who believe and apply the law-word to all of life and who seek to bring men, nations, and all spheres of life under the dominion of Christ as Lord. Thus, while the church may be a building and an institution, and both can be important and needed aspects of its life, it is primarily a power and government at work in the world.<sup>15</sup>

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The church cannot be restricted to the place of teaching nor to the teaching ministry. It is a dominion ministry, and this dominion is to be manifested in the life and work of the members.<sup>16</sup>

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13. *Ibid.*, p. 671.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 695.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 745. Here again and in the following quotation Rushdoony practically denies the existence and importance of the institute church and defines the church almost completely in terms of believers themselves. This is the "potent ecclesiastical paradigm" that Sandlin refers to above and that Perks further develops below.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 745, 746. This quotation expresses the inevitable trivializing of the preaching of the gospel that results from the CR view of the church.

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The life of the church is not to be directed to developing an institution but to establishing God's saving power in their lives and in the lives of others, and in bringing dominion into the lives of men and institutions. Church members are the people of God, and they must further God's reign and government.<sup>17</sup>

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The battle for the rebuilding of Christian society and culture will be fought on two fronts in the next century: education and the media. These two fronts are the two fronts of the same battle field, and they are coming closer together all the time now. The battle for society will not be won in the church; most people don't go to church any more.<sup>18</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

With this in mind, it is helpful to note that Reconstructionists can be grouped in two 'camps.' One group emphasizes the importance of the local Christian day school and home schooling over the Church, and looks to education as the primary means of bringing Reconstruction to American life. The other group emphasizes the importance of the local sacramental body of the Church, and sees the Church as the nursery of the Kingdom.<sup>19</sup>

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It [the church] fails to see that the gospel and soteriology are not the end of God's plan for man, but the *means* to an end. The actual end is

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17. *Ibid.*, p. 746.

18. Stephen C. Perks, "The Implications of the Information Revolution for the future of the Christian Church," *Christianity and Society*, VI, 4, p.27. In this connection Perks also demeans and trivializes the preaching of gospel and the office of the ministry of the Word, denying that the former is the prime calling of the church today and that the latter is even a legitimate office in the church. Indeed the whole essay is a vicious assault on the Reformed doctrine of preaching (pp. 18-27; see also below).

19. James Jordan, "Christian Reconstruction: A Definition," *Journey*, November-December, 1986, p. 9.

*the subordination of all things to God through Christ by means of an earthly dominion of the godly.*<sup>20</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

God does not employ the institutional church as his sole or primary dominion agent, a conduit for the execution of the dominion commission. The church defined as his body, the sovereignly elected people of God throughout the earth (Eph. 1), is the agent through whom he will subordinate all things on earth to himself (vv. 22, 23). This implies no disrespect to the institutional dimension of the church, which maintains a crucial role in advancing the kingdom; in fact, the church is a 'hoot camp' for the dominion commission. Nevertheless, when the institutional church begins to see itself as the repository of truth and the end of all God's dealings, it becomes an impediment to the actual task of the church, the people of God. Worse, it becomes an idol, no less evil than the ungodly state that arrogates to itself the prerogatives that reside in God alone.<sup>21</sup>

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The primary function of the body of Christ on earth, therefore, is *not* focused on the Church but on the kingdom of God and thus on the Christian life, a life lived out in service to God according to his word. It is only with such a focus that the Christian works for or serves (i.e. worships) God in the totality of life and being, thereby bringing the whole of life into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). It is through this whole-life service and the effect this has on man's culture that the kingdom of God is realised in history.<sup>22</sup>

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20. Andrew Sandlin, *A Postmillennial Primer*, Chalcedon, 1997, p. 43.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 44. This is one of the most blatantly blasphemous of all these quotations in what it implies about the church and gospel, i.e., that the church is not the army, nor the preaching of the gospel the weapon in the battle to which we are called. The church is only a training-ground and the preaching of the gospel only a training exercise for kingdom. This is a complete rejection of the Reformed doctrine of the church.

22. Stephen C. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, Kuyper Foundation, 1997, p. 66. Perks' ecclesiology is critiqued in Appendix II.

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The Christian faith is not centred primarily on the Church but on the kingdom of God and thus on the Christian life. And the kingdom of God is necessarily wider than the Church. The animating spirit of Christian service is outward: to go into all the world and preach the gospel, by word and deed. The building of the kingdom of God on earth is the primary focus of Christian service.<sup>23</sup>

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The primary emphasis of the New Testament is on the kingdom of God, not the institutional Church. Indeed, the gospels hardly speak directly and specifically of the institutional church at all and with the exception of Mt. 18:15-20 Jesus in his ministry on earth did not give detailed teaching on this aspect of the Christian life.<sup>24</sup>

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The role of the Church as an institution is ancillary to what was the primary focus of Jesus' teaching: the kingdom of God in the widest sense. His emphasis was on the kingdom and thus on the life of faith and obedience to God's word, by which the kingdom of God is manifested in history.<sup>25</sup>

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But I have argued in this paper that the institutional Church, that aspect of the CHURCH'S life and calling whose function is the maintenance and practice of the Christian public religious cultus, has come to dominate the life and actions of the body of Christ, and has produced a doctrine of the CHURCH that is distorted and clergy-centred. As a consequence the wider concern of bringing in the kingdom of God across the whole spectrum of man's personal, cultural and societal life has been neglected.... The kingdom of God cannot be reduced to the institutional Church. It is much broader and all encompassing.<sup>26</sup>

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23. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 75, 76. Perks distinguishes between CHURCH and Church, defining the former in terms of the body of believers in general apart from any institutional connections. This, according to Perks, is the primary meaning of



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Finally, the function of the Church has been considered. Here we saw that the function of the Church is fivefold: (i) to teach the word of God, (ii) to administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, (iii) to engage in corporate public worship and prayer, (iv) to care for those in need (the diaconal function), and (v) to maintain discipline in terms of doctrine and morals. All these functions, however, have as their primary purpose the equipping of the saints, the body of Christ, for their wider service in the world, i.e., the cultural mandate and the Great Commission—in the broadest sense what I have called Christian Reconstruction.<sup>27</sup>

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The task of teaching in the institutional Church is a function of the ordained ministry. It is not the central activity or focus of the CHURCH'S calling, and neither is any other activity that may take place in the church.... It [the Church] has sought primarily its own increase and in so doing has failed Christ by failing to fulfil its vitally important, but limited, role of equipping the saints for service and dominion in the world.<sup>28</sup>

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The kingdom of God (which includes the institutional church, but is broader than the institutional church) must rise, having 'incorrupted' the satanic dough of the kingdom of Satan with the gospel of life, including the life-giving reconstruction of all the institutions of culture.<sup>29</sup>

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For example, the Westminster Confession, which to us Reformed catholics is arguably the greatest confession of faith ever written,

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the word *ecclesia* in Scripture. "Church," that is, the institutional church, hardly exists in Scripture, according to him, and has a very "limited role" in relation to the kingdom.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 82, 83.

29. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, Dominion Press, 1987, p. 505.

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nonetheless equates the institutional church with the kingdom of God. We Reformed catholics believe this direct identity or linkage of the kingdom of God with the institutional church undermines true catholicity. The institutional church is indeed a valid dimension of the kingdom of God. But the identity of the two subverts catholicity. Nor can it do justice to the wideness of the biblical concept of the kingdom of God and of Christ. Limiting the kingdom to the church—and especially to the church’s institutional expression—consolidates the principal work of God into a single sphere and forms a potential for ecclesiastical authoritarianism.<sup>30</sup>

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Ray R. Sutton notes that the institutional church, as the Bible sets out, is supposed to operate as a government, with rulers, courts, trials, and judgments. The church in America has often declined to be a mere preaching point, but as important as preaching is, the church needs to recover its self-image as a true government on earth. Men trained to pass judgments in church courts will be able to step into civil office competently.<sup>31</sup>

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When, however, the state fails to represent adequately the Kingdom of Christ, the church is left as the sole representative of the government of heaven. She must use her local organizations to model for and train up a Christian state.<sup>32</sup>

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30. Sandlin, “The Catholic Church: Reformed or Roman?” *Christianity and Society*, VI, 1, p. 26.

31. Gary North, “Editor’s Introduction,” *Christianity and Civilization III: Tactics of Christian Resistance*, Geneva Divinity School, 1983, p. xlv. This and the following quotations illustrate another aspect of the CR view of the church. Insofar as CR does speak of the church, it does not only make the church the instrument of the kingdom, but in the process politicizes the church as well, though not all would do so as blatantly as Sutton does.

32. Ray R. Sutton, “The Church as a Shadow Government,” *Christianity and Civilization III: Tactics of Christian Resistance*, Geneva Divinity School, 1983, p.322.

Second, God's rule and realm extend to the world. Some try to equate Kingdom and church. Scripture, however, applies the kingdom to three spheres—the kingdoms of the world (Rev. 11:15), the individual (Lk. 17:21), and the church (Rev. 1:9). Since the fall of Satan at the Cross, God's dominion and domain cover the earth.<sup>33</sup>

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This theology provides a rationale for perceiving the *world* as God's *Kingdom*. Thus, the operations of the world are to be viewed according to the inner workings of Christ's Kingdom. Governments that have not come to Christ are not to be seen as outside God's domain. Rather, they are to be *claimed* for Christ. When civil abdication occurs in a previously Christian society, the state is not to be given up to the Devil. Instead, it must be *recaptured* as that which belongs to God. The church's role, in this regard, is to function as a shadow government.<sup>34</sup>

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As we have noted, if the state weakens, one entire sphere necessary to the expansion and preservation of God's Kingdom disappears. When the civil means of governing the world fails, the others must stand in the gap. This situation leaves the church with special opportunity. Using the means God has given her, she unlocks the gates of hell, captures the Satanic city, and eventually reestablishes a Christian government.<sup>35</sup>

### Analysis

We could make many more citations from these and other writers, but these are sufficient to prove that such views of the church are characteristic of CR teaching, and trace their origins, as Sandlin points out,<sup>36</sup> to the "father" of this lie, R.J. Rushdoony. They represent not a Reformed, but an essentially dispensational ecclesiology.

Such views are *not* a mere aberration in CR teaching. They are implicit and necessary, as necessary as the distinction between Israel

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33. *Ibid.*, p. 325.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 325.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 329.

36. See footnotes 5-7 above.

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(kingdom) and church is to all forms of Dispensationalism. They follow necessarily from the CR view of the kingdom as a Christianized society or civilization and *that* the central purpose of God in history.

We do not, of course, disagree with everything the CR writers say in these quotations. Nor are we interested in answering the much muddled thinking found in them, or in responding to their caricaturing of other positions. Our purpose is simply to focus on the CR view of church and kingdom and point out its errors.

We must say, however, that the CR disjunction between kingdom and church and consequent trivializing of the church explain much. It explains the movement's lack of interest in church reformation, i.e., in reformation of doctrine, worship, or government. It explains the willingness of individuals to remain in churches that are largely apostate, as well as the defection of a number of them to Greek Orthodoxy or Anglicanism. Certainly it is the explanation of the CR willingness to compromise not only with the Charismatic movement, but even with Rome.<sup>37</sup> When the church is only the means to an end, church membership, church reformation, and church purity matter little.

It is also, as we have suggested, nothing short of blasphemy. Nor do we say that lightly. To speak as CR does of the church is to slander the body of Christ, and to speak thus of Christ's body is to blaspheme Christ Himself and to make oneself worthy of the full ecclesiastical and civil sanctions (if they still apply) against blasphemy.

### **Church and Kingdom in the Confessions**

The CR disjunction between church and kingdom is foreign to the Reformed confessions. They, without exception, identify the two, and make that church the goal and purpose of all God's works in time.

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37. Documented in John Robbins, "The Reconstructionist Road to Rome," *Trinity Review*, 87, 88; Kevin Reed, *The Antinomian Streak in the Reconstructionist Movement*, Presbyterian Heritage, 1988; Thomas M. Chmelovski, "Reconstructionists Embrace Charismatics," *Christian News*, Jan. 4, 1988, p. 6; Bruce Barron, *Heaven on earth? The Social and Political Agendas of Dominion Theology*, Zondervan, 1992; Michael G. Moriarity, "The Dominion Pursuit: Will the Church Christianize the World?" *The New Charismatics*, Zondervan, 1992; as well as in various quotations in Appendix I of this paper.

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The *Westminster Confession of Faith* mentions the kingdom in two places, and in both identifies it with the church, particularly the visible church. In the first, Chapter XXV, Article 2, the *Confession* states baldly that “the visible church . . . is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ,” a statement that Sandlin simply dismisses as erroneous (footnote 30, page 8, above). It is interesting, too, that the *Confession* quotes Matthew 13:47 as proof of its statement, repudiating the usual CR exegesis of that parable and (by implication) their interpretation of the kingdom parables among which it is found.

That visible church is further defined as made up of the particular churches (XXV, 4). They are its “members.” To it Christ has given the “ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God” and that for the “perfecting of the saints” (XXV, 3). The *Confession* knows nothing of a visible church defined almost exclusively in terms of believers and their life in the world. Instead, the *Confession* defines the visible church in terms of the church institute.

The *Confession* upholds this view of the kingdom in Chapter XXX, Article 2-4, where the keys of the kingdom are identified as the “Word” or “ministry of the gospel” and “censures.” There, the function of these keys in shutting and opening the *kingdom* is described as excommunication from or admission to the *institute church*.

Furthermore, the *Confession* identifies the church as the object of all God’s work in time: “As the providence of God doth, in general, reach to all creatures; so, after a most special manner, it taketh care of His Church, and disposeth all things to the good thereof” (V, 7, cf. also the *Larger Catechism*, 63). It is not merely a means to other ends, but the end to which all other things are the means.

The *Larger Catechism*, 191, is sometimes referred to by CR as evidence for their views of the kingdom. But this is to set the creeds against each other—the *Confession* teaching one thing and the *Catechism* another. Nor is it the teaching of the *Catechism* that Christ’s kingdom is a Christianized society in distinction from the church. In the first place, the kingdom as it is prayed for in the second petition of the Lord’s prayer is identified with the church. The prayer for the kingdom is, according to the *Catechism*, a prayer for the propagation of the gospel, the salvation of and bringing in of Jews and Gentiles, the ordinances and offices of the church, and the work of grace in the hearts of believers.

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The *Catechism* mentions the civil magistrate in this connection. Nevertheless, according to the *Catechism*, the prayer for the kingdom is only a prayer that he may countenance and maintain the *church*. In that connection, it makes the traditional Reformed distinction between the rule or kingdom of Christ's power and grace in the last phrase of its answer. Yet insofar as this prayer regards the kingdom of Christ's power it is only the prayer that He will exercise *that kingdom* "to these ends," that is, to the gathering, preservation, deliverance, and blessing of His *church*. The ecclesiology of Westminster is very different from that of CR.<sup>38</sup>

The *Three Forms of Unity* follow the *Westminster Confession and Catechisms* at this point. Questions and Answers 83-85 of the *Heidelberg Catechism* also identify kingdom and church. There, having named the keys of the kingdom to be "the preaching of the holy gospel, and Christian discipline, or excommunication" (83), the *Catechism* defines the function of those keys of the kingdom as admission to or exclusion *from the Christian church*.

Question and Answer 128 is the *Catechism's* explanation of the second petition of the Lord's Prayer. It defines the coming of the kingdom solely in terms of the work of grace in the hearts of believers and the preservation and increase of the church. It also describes the final glory of the kingdom as *heavenly* glory when it identifies the "full perfection of [the] kingdom" as that time when God will be all in all (1 Cor. 15:15, 28). In the context in 1 Cor. 15 the clear reference is to the end of all things and the general resurrection.

This interpretation of Question and Answer 128 is confirmed in the explanation of Ursinus (the principal author of the *Catechism*) in his *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*:

From this definition we may infer and specify these particular parts of the kingdom of God: 1. The sending of the Son, our Mediator, into the world. 2. The institution and preservation of the ministry by him. 3. The gathering of the church from the whole human race, by the preaching of the gospel, and by the power of the Holy Ghost working true faith and repentance in the elect. 4. The perpetual government of the church. 5.

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38. Notice also *The Directory for Public Worship*, "Of Public Prayer before the Sermon," paragraph 8, which is, very obviously, an application of the second petition of the Lord's Prayer.

The preservation of it in this life, notwithstanding all the fierce assaults of the enemies. 6. The casting of all enemies of the church into everlasting punishment. 7. The raising of the church to everlasting life. 8. The glorification of the church in eternal life, when God will be all in all. Of this kingdom it is said: 'I have set my King upon the holy hill of Zion.' 'Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.' 'My kingdom is not of this world.' (Ps. 2:6; 110:2; John 18:36).<sup>39</sup>

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The citizens of this Kingdom include, 1. The angels, who are confirmed in holiness. 2. The saints in heaven composing what is called the church triumphant. 3. The godly, or those who are converted and still living in the world, having as yet many cares and remains of corruption, composing what is called the church militant. 4. Hypocrites, who are members merely of the visible church, without being truly converted. These are merely apparent citizens, being members of the kingdom of Christ only in name. They are called citizens of this kingdom, as the Jews were called by Christ the children of the kingdom. (Matt. 8:12).<sup>40</sup>

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This kingdom comes to us in four ways: 1. *By the preaching of the gospel*, which reveals to us a knowledge of the true and heavenly doctrine. 2. By conversion, when some are converted to God, who grants unto them faith and repentance. 3. By increase and development. When the godly make progress in holiness, or when the gifts peculiar to the faithful are continually being increased in those who are converted. 'He that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy let him be holy still. (Rev. 22:11.) 4. By the perfection and glorification of the church at the second coming of Christ. 'Even so come Lord Jesus.' (Rev. 22:20.)<sup>41</sup>

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39. Presbyterian and Reformed, no date, p. 633.

40. Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, p. 634.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 636. We quote at length from Ursinus because of claims that this answer of the *Catechism* supports the particular view of the kingdom favored by CR (G.I. Williamson, *The Heidelberg Catechism: A Study Guide*, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1993, pp. 217-219).

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The *Belgic Confession* in Article XXXVI likewise refuses to identify the kingdom of Christ with society or civilization in general, or even with civil government. There it insists that it is the duty of the civil magistrate to promote the kingdom of Christ and to do this by protecting “the sacred ministry,” by countenancing “the preaching of the Word of the gospel everywhere, that God may be honored and worshipped by every one, as he commands in his Word.” In other words, the kingdom is identified with “the sacred ministry.” This is not the CR view of the kingdom, though they carelessly appeal to this article.

The *Belgic Confession* again identifies kingdom and church in Article XXVII, where the members of the church and they alone are identified as the subjects in Christ’s kingdom. We read there: “This Church hath been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof; which is evident from this, that Christ is an eternal King, which without subjects cannot be.”

The *Three Forms of Unity* also emphasize the importance of the church. The *Heidelberg Catechism* insists that Christ “is ascended into heaven for this end, that he might appear as head of his church, by whom the Father governs all things” (50). The *Canons of Dort* suggest that the focus of God’s purpose and Christ’s work is the church: “This purpose proceeding from everlasting love towards the elect, has from the beginning of the world to this day been powerfully accomplished, notwithstanding all the ineffectual opposition of the gates of hell, so that the elect in due time may be gathered together in one, and that there may never be wanting a church composed of believers, the foundation of which is laid in the blood of Christ, which may steadfastly love, and faithfully serve him as their Savior, who as a bridegroom for his bride, laid down his life for them upon the cross, and which may celebrate his praises here and through all eternity” (II, 9).

Nor do these creeds stand alone. Some interesting quotations are found in other creeds as well. The *Augsburg Confession*, for example, explicitly rejects the notions of the CR movement: “They condemn others also, who now scatter Jewish opinions, that, before the resurrection of the dead, the godly shall occupy the kingdom of the world, the wicked being everywhere suppressed [the saints alone, the pious, shall have a worldly kingdom, and shall exterminate all the godless]” (Part First, Article 17).

Along the same lines *Augsburg* says (Part Second, Article 7): “Wherefore the ecclesiastical and civil powers are not to be con-



founded. The ecclesiastical power hath its own commandment to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments. Let it not by force enter into the office of another; let it not transfer worldly kingdoms; let it not abrogate magistrates' laws; let it not withdraw from them lawful obedience; let it not hinder judgments touching any civil ordinances or contracts; let it not prescribe laws to the magistrate touching the form of the republic; as Christ saith, 'My kingdom is not of this world (John xviii. 36). Again, 'Who made me a judge or a divider over you?' (Luke xii. 14). And Paul saith, 'Our conversation (citizenship) is in heaven' (Phil. iii. 20). 'The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God, casting down imaginations.' etc. (2 Cor. x. 4)."

The *Confession of England* (1562) affirms: "that this Church is the Kingdom, the Body, and the spouse of Christ: that Christ alone is the Prince of this Kingdom; that Christ alone is the Head of this Body; and that Christ alone is the Bridegroom of this Spouse" (Article 4).

The *Confession of Saxony* states: "God will have us to understand, that mankind is not born by chance, but is created of God: and created, not to eternal destruction, but that out of mankind he might gather unto himself a Church, to the which in all eternity he might communicate his wisdom, goodness, and joy. And he will have his Son to be seen, for whom, and through whom, by his unspeakable wisdom, and infinite mercy, he hath repaired this miserable nature of men. Therefore, amongst men he would at all times have a company, whereunto he delivered the doctrine concerning his Son, and wherein the Son himself did institute and preserve a ministry to keep and spread abroad that doctrine.... Now what the Church is, the Son of God sheweth, saying, 'My kingdom is not of this world.' John xviii. 36" (Art. 11).

The *Confession of Sueveland* says: "Furthermore, seeing this congregation (the Christian Church) is the very kingdom of God, wherein all things ought to be appointed in the best order, she hath all kinds of offices and ministers. For she is the body of Christ himself, compacted of many members, whereof every one hath its proper work" (Art. 15). Clearly, then, and by all accounts, the CR view of church and kingdom is unconfessional.

### **Church and Kingdom in Reformed Theology**

The confessions exemplify the Reformed teaching concerning church and kingdom, but let us confirm the teaching of the confessions

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by citations from Reformed theologians.<sup>42</sup> We have already quoted from Ursinus and so here we turn first to Calvin and then to several others. Notice throughout the quotations from Calvin that he assumes that church and kingdom are synonymous, though he also identifies the kingdom with the inward work of grace in believers. This is characteristic of his writings on the subject. The following quotations show, however, not only that Reformed teaching identifies church and kingdom, but also that Reformed theology knows nothing of a kingdom that consists in a “Christian civilization” or “Christian culture” or future world dominion by the saints.

We see that God, who might perfect his people in a moment, chooses not to bring them to manhood in any other way than by the education of the Church. We see the mode of doing it expressed; the preaching of celestial doctrine is committed to pastors. We see that all without exception are brought into the same order, that they may with meek and docile spirit allow themselves to be governed by teachers appointed for this purpose. Isaiah had long before given this as the characteristic of the kingdom of Christ. ‘My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words that I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.’<sup>43</sup>

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That the strength and utility of the kingdom of Christ cannot, as we have said, be fully perceived, without recognising it as spiritual, is sufficiently apparent, even from this, that having during the whole

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42. We do not deny, as we have said, that many modern writers, including the Reformed (A. Kuyper, Jr., Ridderbos, Zorn, Bright, Ladd, Berkhof, C. Hodge, etc.), often speak of the kingdom in a wider sense than the church, but they are out of line with the earlier Reformed theologians and the creeds. They do not make the sharp disjunction that CR does between church and kingdom and do not see the church simply as a means to the kingdom, yet even their view of the kingdom as something broader and more inclusive than the church more often than not has in it something of the CR “vision” of a Christianized society, and is inevitably founded on the unbiblical doctrine of common grace, whether that of Dr. A. Kuyper, Sr., or the more modern version of the same (see Appendix I).

43. Calvin, *Institutes*, James Clarke, 1953, IV, i, 5, vol. II, p. 284.

course of our lives to war under the cross, our condition here is bitter and wretched. What then would it avail us to be ranged under the government of a heavenly King, if its benefits were not realised beyond the present earthly life? We must, therefore, know that the happiness which is promised to us in Christ does not consist in external advantages—such as leading a joyful and tranquil life, abounding in wealth, being secure against all injury, and having an affluence of delights, such as the flesh is wont to long for—but properly belongs to the heavenly life.<sup>44</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

Christ, indeed, gives his followers no dubious proofs of present power, but as his kingdom in the world is in a manner veiled by the humiliation of a carnal condition, faith is most properly invited to meditate on the visible presence which he will exhibit on the last day.<sup>45</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

By announcing the kingdom of God, he called for faith, since by the kingdom of God which he declared to be at hand, he meant forgiveness of sins, salvation, life, and every other blessing which we obtain in Christ.<sup>46</sup>

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Although a definition of this kingdom has already been given, I now briefly repeat that God reigns when men, in denial of themselves, and contempt of the world and this earthly life, devote themselves to righteousness and aspire to heaven. Thus this kingdom consists of two parts: the first is, when God by the agency of His Spirit corrects all the depraved lusts of the flesh, which in bands war against Him; and second, when he brings all our thoughts into obedience to his authority.... We must next descend to the wicked, who perversely and with desperate

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44. *Ibid.*, II, xv, 4, vol. I, p. 428. This quotation and the following show that Calvin saw the fulfilment of the kingdom promises beyond this present life and consequently identified the realization of the kingdom with the glorification of the church.

45. *Ibid.*, II, xvi, 17, vol. I, p. 450.

46. *Ibid.*, III, iii, 19, vol. I, p. 525. Here we see that Calvin identifies the kingdom first of all with the rule of grace in the hearts and lives of believers, not with a "Christianized" society. This matter is discussed in more detail below.

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madness resist his authority. God, therefore, sets up his kingdom, by humbling the whole world, though in different ways, taming the wantonness of some, and breaking the ungovernable pride of others. We should desire this to be done every day, in order that God may gather churches to himself from all quarters of the world, may extend and increase their numbers, enrich them with his gifts, establish due order among them; on the other hand, beat down all the enemies of pure doctrine and religion, dissipate their counsels, defeat their attempts. Hence it appears that there is good ground for the precept which enjoins daily progress, for human affairs are never so prosperous as when the impurities of vice are purged away, and integrity flourishes in full vigour. The completion, however, is deferred to the final advent of Christ, when, as Paul declares, 'God will be all in all' (1 Cor. xv. 28).<sup>47</sup>

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21. The kingship of Christ is his power to dispense and administer all things pertaining to the salvation of man with force and authority, Ps. 2:6, Dan. 2:44, Luke 4:36.

22. The properties of this kingship are, first, its universality. It covers all ages, Matt. 22:43-45. It is relevant to all kinds of men, Dan. 7:14; Rev. 17:14; and it applies to all creatures so far as they in some way further or enhance the salvation of men, Eph. 1:21, 22.

23. Second, it holds sway in the very souls and consciences of men, Rom. 14:17.

24. Third, it dispenses everlasting life and death, Rev. 1:18.

25. Fourth, it is eternal, Dan. 2:44; 7:14.

26. Fifth, it brings the greatest peace and most perfect joy to those who are its heirs, Is. 9:6; Eph. 2:16; Heb. 7:2.

27. Therefore, this kingship is called throughout the Scriptures the kingdom of *God*, the kingdom of *Peace and Glory* (see the places above cited). It is also called the kingdom of *Light and glory*, the kingdom of *Heaven*, and *The world to come*, Heb. 2:5.<sup>48</sup>

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8. Faith looks to Christ and through Christ to God; likewise the

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47. *Ibid.*, III, xx, 42, vol. II, pp. 189-190—cf. also Calvin on Matthew 6:10. This quotation is particularly interesting in that Calvin speaks of the "humbling the whole world, though in different ways, taming the wantonness of some, and breaking the ungovernable pride of others," but understands it in terms of their salvation, not a reconstruction of society.

48. William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, Baker, 1997, pp. 133-134.

church which exists by faith looks to Christ as its head and through Christ to God. Therefore the church is called the *Body of Christ*, Col. 1:24; the *Church of God*, 1 Cor. 10:32; the *Kingdom of Christ*, Col. 1:13; and the *Kingdom of God*, Rom. 14:17.<sup>49</sup>

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*Sixteenth Question: The Kingdom of Christ.* Whether the economical kingdom of Christ is temporal and earthly or spiritual and heavenly. The former we deny; we assert the latter against the Jews. I. The third part of the mediatorial office is his kingdom (to wit, that dignity and authority with which he governs the church by his word and Spirit and defends and preserves it against all enemies).<sup>50</sup>

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V. As the constitution of the kingdom is resolved into two parts—eternal destination and calling, and inauguration in time—so its administration and exercise consist principally in four things: (1) in the calling and gathering of the church; (2) the conservation and government of the same; (3) the protection and defense of it against all its enemies; (4) the full and perfect glorification of it, to be made on the last day. The first three pertain to this life through grace; the fourth to the future life in glory.<sup>51</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

VIII. Second, the kingdom of Christ was adumbrated by various temporal kingdoms. Now corporeal and earthly things are not types of things both corporeal and worldly homogenous with them, but of better and more excellent (namely, of spiritual things). The figure must be inferior to the things figured by it; the shadow to the substance. Since the government of the Old Testament (adumbrating the kingdom of Christ) was corporeal, the kingdom of Christ must be spiritual.<sup>52</sup>

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XII. Sixth, the kingdom of Christ is not of this world (John 18:36)... It is not of this world as to origin because it is not constituted by the world

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49. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

50. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994, XIV, 16, vol. II, p. 486. This whole section needs to be read by those who hold a CR view of the kingdom.

51. *Ibid.*, XIV, 16, vol. II, p. 487.

52. *Ibid.*, XIV, 16, vol. II, p. 488.

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and by men living in the world like the kingdoms of this world. Rather it has God as its sole and immediate founder, by whose authority it was erected and by whose power it is strengthened. It is not of this world as to mode because the kingdoms of this world consist of and are defended by a multitude of subjects, number of provinces, crowds of cities, abundance of riches, bristling forts, armed garrisons and other external means, without which they would necessarily fall. But the kingdom of Christ . . . is conducted in a spiritual manner, recognizes no other honors and resources than righteousness, holiness, peace of conscience, salvation, and eternal life; no other arms than the Word and Spirit; no other fortifications than the protection of God. Pilate had this understanding of it; he clearly perceived that no prejudice could be created from it against the empire of Caesar; otherwise he would not only have agreed with the accusation of the Jews charging Christ with rebellion against Caesar, but would have been the first to think of taking him out of the way. However since, having dismissed this accusation of the Jews and Christ's own confession concerning his kingly office, he pronounces him just and innocent and desires him to be cleared from condemnation (for he knew that for envy they had delivered him, Mt. 27:18), he sufficiently demonstrates that he did not believe it was a temporal kingdom opposed to the sway of Caesar which Christ ascribed to himself.<sup>53</sup>

We find no support in all of this for the CR notions concerning church and kingdom. Rather, these Reformed authors, along with the Reformed creeds, explicitly disown their teachings.

### **Kingdom and Church in Scripture**

In studying the word kingdom in Scripture, one thing especially becomes obvious. First, there is no New Testament passage which shows that the kingdom of Christ is a "Christianized" world, in which men are either converted or subdued to the dominion of the godly. To come to that conclusion, one must first draw certain conclusions from the OT and then read them into those NT passages that speak of the kingdom. And, indeed, this is exactly what CR does. Its adherents take a passage such as I Timothy 4:8 or Matthew 6:33 and simply read into it their preconceived notions. We insist that this is the wrong way of doing exegesis. In light of the fact that the NT is the fulfilment of the

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53. *Ibid.*, XIV, 16, vol. II, p. 489.

OT, it is always true that the OT must be interpreted in light of the New. On the basis of the NT alone it would be impossible to support or even conceive of the CR view of the kingdom.

In the NT that kingdom is presented as belonging only to the elect (Lk. 12:32, Matt. 25:34). For that reason regeneration (Jn. 3:5), calling (I Thess. 2:12), faith (James 2:5), justification (Matt. 5:20), conversion (Matt. 18:3), sanctification (Matt. 7:21; II Pet. 1:10, 11), and finally glorification (Matt. 25:34) are necessary in order to have *any* part or inheritance in that kingdom. One must be "translated" into it (Col. 1:13). So, too, the ungodly are excluded entirely from that kingdom (I Cor. 6:9, 10; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5). It comes nigh them through the preaching of the gospel and its accompanying signs (Lk. 10:9, 11), but they have no part in it. They cannot even see it (Jn. 3:3) or know its mysteries (Matt. 13:11; Lk. 8:10).

The inability of the ungodly to see or know anything of that kingdom follows from the nature of that kingdom. It is the kingdom of truth (Jn. 18:36, 37), of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Rom. 14:17), so that where these are found the kingdom is there and where these are not found the kingdom does not exist. That kingdom itself and all that belongs to it, then, are spiritual and invisible in nature: its keys (Matt. 16:19), its weapons (II Cor. 10:4, 5), its armies (Jn. 18:36, 37), its character as a city and country (Heb. 11:1, 10, 13-16), its power and rule, which are the power and rule of grace in the hearts and lives of God's own (Luke 17:20, 21), and so also its victory (Col. 2:14). That victory has nothing to do with establishing a world dominion of the godly, but is the victory over sin and death accomplished by Christ in His dying and applied by the Spirit to His people.

The spiritual nature of this kingdom is further evident from the fact that the way of entrance into the kingdom (as for Christ Himself) is not earthly dominion and victory, but tribulation and suffering both for the church and for the individual child of God (Acts 14:22; II Thess. 1:4, 5). Indeed, in the latter passage persecution and tribulation are the "manifest token of the righteous judgment of God" that believers are "counted worthy of the kingdom of God." A kingdom in which believers do not suffer persecution is a kingdom in which they are not so counted worthy. Romans 8:35-37 is confirmation. There the Word assures us that *in* tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword—in being "killed all the day long" and "accounted as sheep

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for the slaughter” the citizens of the kingdom are *more than* conquerors. That this kingdom has nothing to do with earthly dominion by the godly over all of culture and civilization is similarly evident from the fact that the kingdom is everlasting (Lk. 1:33; II Pet. 1:11) and cannot be moved (Heb. 12:28). We see this, too, in the many references that call this kingdom the kingdom of heaven. Nor does that only mean that it comes from and is revealed from heaven (Matt. 12:28; Rev. 21:1ff.). It also has its termination, fulfillment, completion in heaven. This is so much the case that very often the kingdom is simply identified with heavenly glory (Matt. 25:34; 26:29; 13:43; Lk. 22:29, 30; I Cor. 15:50; II Tim. 4:1, 18). Nor is there the least suggestion in the NT that a period of earthly prosperity and ease precedes this completion of the kingdom for God’s people.

In this light the many OT references to the kingdom must be interpreted. And, to be sure, the OT itself, when read in this light, gives the same clear testimony as the NT concerning the kingdom. The Psalms are a good example. There we read that it is only the just (Ps. 118:20), the sanctified (Ps. 24:3-6) who enter the kingdom, insofar as that kingdom in the OT was anything more than an earthly type and picture. That kingdom is presented in the Psalms as a kingdom of salvation (Ps. 20:6-9; 21:5; 53:6; 72:13; 130:7, 8) and that of the souls of God’s people (Ps. 34:22; 41:4; 72:14; 121:7; 124:7); a kingdom in which they pray not for earthly peace and deliverance, but for salvation from sin and death. It is a kingdom of true peace (Ps. 29:11; 122:6-8) and, therefore, of light and truth (Ps. 43:3) and righteousness (Ps. 45:7). It involves not the subjugation but the complete destruction of those who are its enemies (Ps. 2:9; 21:8-11; 45:5). It is a kingdom in which the inheritance and glory and victory of the citizens are not temporary but everlasting (Ps. 37:18), but do not spare them persecution and suffering in this present age (Ps. 44:22; 141:7). Thus, insofar as that kingdom is also a nation it is the nation of the elect, not any earthly nation, political entity, or temporal civilization (Ps. 33:12). It is a city in which God is the God of His people (Ps. 48:14; 144:11-15), in which He dwells with them and is their God forever (Ps. 68:16; 132:14). It is the place of His covenant (Ps. 89:3ff.; 132:12).

That the church is the goal and end of all God’s dealings with the human race is also clear from Scripture. We have already cited I Timothy 3:15, which calls the church “the pillar and ground of the truth”



and identifies it as the "house of God" and the "church of the living God." Both the double reference to the church as God's, and the fact that it is God's house, establish its importance. Add the truth that Christ is set as its chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20; I Pet. 2:6), and there can be no doubt that the church is the end of God's purposes with men.

Ephesians 3:20, 21 explains why this is so. The glory of God's exceeding abundant power is revealed *in the church* by Jesus Christ through all ages, world without end, and so God Himself is glorified in the church. I Peter 2:5-9 presents essentially the same picture. The church, not a Christian civilization, is the spiritual house and place in which God reveals His glory.

Ephesians 1:22, 23 is, if anything, even stronger in that it calls the church "the fulness (completion) of him that filleth all in all." Reverently speaking, there is no *Christ* without His body, no more than there is any body without the Head. Indeed, the identification of the church as Christ's body ought to teach us that the church is central to all God's purposes.

From a slightly different point of view, Ephesians 5:27 sees the goal of all Christ's work (also as king) in the presentation of the church to Himself in holiness. Likewise, the letters in Revelation 2 & 3 and all the rest of the book are addressed to the church in view of Christ's coming for her. He will come to take her unto Himself (chap. 19:6-9) as the Bridegroom taking His bride. That marriage between Christ and His church is the goal and consummation of all history.

Revelation also shows the importance of the church by picturing it seated in the first circle around the throne (4:4) and serving Him there (7:15). So, too, the book closes its visions with the grand revelation of the church in her final glory (chaps. 21, 22). Thus is the church revealed as the goal of all the visions of the book of Revelation and of all Scripture. From the creation account in Genesis 1, through the whole history of the nation of Israel, and in the account of Christ's own ministry both personally and through His apostles, Scripture looks to this city and to her glory, for her glory is the glory of God Himself in Christ.

This kingdom always has the victory. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world (I Jn. 5:4). The moment believers are given the gift of faith and thereby brought into the fellowship of the church, at that moment they have the complete victory over all their enemies. They

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have that victory by virtue of the fact that the dominion of sin is completely overthrown in their hearts (Rom. 6:8-18). They have the victory by virtue of the fact that they are in Christ by faith and are in principle exalted and glorified with Him (Eph. 2:4-6). They have the victory because they have eternal life abiding in them and because the powers of darkness cannot snatch them out of God's hand (I Jn. 2:24, 25; Jn. 10:28), not in the way of earthly dominion. And so the church as the company and covenant community of these victors is also victorious and stands throughout all history "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners" (Cant. 6:10), though only faith can discern its victory.

### **A Definition of the Kingdom**

What then is the kingdom of God and of Christ? It is here that careful definition is necessary in order to avoid the errors we have been describing. Such a careful definition must take into account the fact that Scripture does distinguish kingdom and church, at least to the extent of using these two different terms. Indeed, we cannot simply substitute the word "church" for the word "kingdom" in the majority of NT passages that speak of the kingdom. Nor may we simply ignore the fact that Luke 17:21 places the kingdom within every believer.

It seems to us, therefore, that the best way to define the kingdom is in terms of "the domain or rule of saving grace." We speak of *saving* grace, not because we believe there is any other kind, but in order to avoid confusion with the teaching of those who believe in common grace and who are willing to define the kingdom in terms of a rule of grace, as long as that grace is also seen as common.

To identify the kingdom as the rule of saving grace avoids, too, the danger of extending Christ's work as mediator beyond the elect, as well as the tendency to see His kingdom as something broader than the church. It also takes into account the statement of Jesus concerning the kingdom in Luke 17:21 and the difference between the words "kingdom" and "church."

That rule of saving grace, therefore, which is the kingdom, is

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54. We reject the "exegesis" of Luke 17:21 that interprets Jesus' words as meaning "among" you. The Greek word *entos* used in Luke 17:10 and translated "within" is used elsewhere only in Matthew 23:26 where the word very definitely means "inside" in contrast to "outside."

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established first of all in the hearts of God's elect. In this sense the kingdom is "within" them.<sup>54</sup> And, we would emphasize, the whole of that kingdom is established there—its laws, obedience, customs, language, worship, warfare, spiritual "culture," and victory. In this sense, too, the kingdom is victorious in that the rule of grace completely overthrows and destroys the dominion of sin (Rom. 6:11-23).

At this point "kingdom" is very nearly synonymous with salvation, the coming of the kingdom synonymous with the gift of salvation, and entering the kingdom very much the same thing as "entering" salvation (cf. Jn. 3:5). That is not to say there is not still a different emphasis, and that Scripture does not have good reason for speaking in some passages of entering the kingdom rather than entering salvation. Nevertheless, essentially they are the same (Matt. 19:23).

The gospel as the "power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16), therefore, is also the gospel of the kingdom (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14). Regeneration (Jn. 3:5), calling (I Thess. 2:12), faith (James 2:5), justification (Matt. 5:20), conversion (Matt. 18:3), sanctification (Matt. 7:21; II Pet. 1:10, 11), and finally glorification (Matt. 25:34) are all necessary in order to enter that kingdom.

That rule of grace, however, as it is first established through regeneration in the heart, is not individualistic, but brings each believer into saving fellowship with Christ and thus also with His body, the church. Thus, the kingdom is also spoken of in Scripture as the whole company of the elect, what is sometimes referred to as the invisible church (Matt. 13:38; Heb. 12:22-28). Hebrews 12:22-28 is especially important. In order to receive a kingdom which cannot be moved (v. 28) we must "come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God ... to the general assembly and church of the firstborn" (vv. 22, 23).

In this sense only is the kingdom broader than the visible church. The kingdom, understood from this perspective, includes all the elect, both those who are already in glory and even those who have not yet been born or called. It is here that the coming of the kingdom is seen in Scripture primarily in terms of the gathering of the whole body of the elect into heaven—the glorification of the church—and entrance into the kingdom in terms of entering heavenly glory. Indeed Scripture very often simply identifies the final heavenly glory of the church and the ultimate victory of grace with the kingdom (Matt. 13:43; 16:28; 25:34; 26:29; I Cor. 15:24; II Pet. 1:11).

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It is at this point that we must attempt to distinguish church and kingdom and the use of the terms in Scripture. "Kingdom," we believe, looks at what is essentially the same thing as "church," but more from the viewpoint of Christ Himself and His work, than from the viewpoint of the citizens. "Church" sees things from the viewpoint of God's people themselves and their salvation. As the very word "church" reminds us, they are the "called out"—called out of the world, that is, and into the fellowship and body of Christ.

The concept "kingdom" really follows upon that and describes that same salvation from the viewpoint of the sovereignty of grace, and of the rule of Christ as it is established in and with the elect when they are brought in. "Kingdom" is used in Scripture, therefore, to emphasize the fact that grace *reigns*, i.e., that saving grace has an ordering and regulating function first in the lives of believers and then, by virtue of their connection to the body of Christ, also in the church, so that all is brought into willing obedience to Christ.

As far as the inner rule of grace in the heart is concerned, the word "kingdom" emphasizes several things, then. It teaches, first, that every aspect of the whole life of believers is brought under the dominion of Christ. Grace *reigns* and brings every thought and word and action into obedience to Christ (I Cor. 10:4, 5). The concept "kingdom" leaves no room for "carnal Christian" teaching, for a denial of "Lordship salvation," or for Sunday-go-to-meeting Christianity.

Second, and in close connection, kingdom reminds us that grace does not just rule at the inception of salvation, but throughout. It is a whole *kingdom* which is established by grace in the hearts of believers, with all that that implies. They are made citizens and trained and used and blessed as such. Grace not only saves them, but continues to dominate every aspect of their life and bring it all in obedience to Christ. This, of course, is the answer to those who think of salvation primarily in terms of some initial conversion "experience."

Third, "kingdom" also emphasizes the *ordering* effect of God's saving grace. Our whole life is "disordered" by sin, and disordered because we are alienated from God Himself. Saving grace sets all to rights once again and makes of the believer a kind of "kingdom in miniature" in which there is a place for everything and everything in its place—in which his personality, his "gifts," his place and calling in life, and all the circumstances of his life are once more brought back into a proper relationship to God.

Thus, too, the concept “kingdom” describes the believer’s life as it is ordered in the body of Christ and among other believers. It is the rule of grace that gives him his “citizenship” in the kingdom of heaven and that regulates his life in that kingdom, providing him with necessary gifts, enabling and teaching him to use those gifts in the particular place and calling God has given him, and all with a view to the final glory of the church as the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.

Here again we see the close connection between kingdom and church. To have a place and function in the kingdom is not essentially different from having a place and function in the church. Nevertheless, when we speak in that connection of “church” we are emphasizing more the organic connection between Christ and His members and the fact that they are alive together. When we speak of “kingdom” we are emphasizing more the total domination of grace in the individual and corporate lives of believers. Grace rules them individually and all together and forms them into a kingdom under Christ.

It is that ordering effect of grace that is implied in the word “kingdom” and that leads to a further identification of the kingdom with the institute church.<sup>55</sup> It is there especially that the ordering and ruling effects of grace are seen and become visible in the world. It is there that all things can be, ought to be, and are done decently and in good order. There everyone has a function with the particular gifts God gives and is able to use them for the advantage and salvation of the other members (Matt. 19:12; I Cor. 7:32, 34). There the keys of the kingdom are used (Matt. 16:19), and there the great means for the gathering of the kingdom is found, the preaching of the gospel (Matt. 4:23; 9:35).

Thus, too, Paul describes himself and his helpers in the gospel as “workers into the kingdom of God” (Col. 4:11). Their apostolic work

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55. We reject, therefore, the disjunction that is made (Perks, Rushdoony, *et al.*) between the visible church as institute and as body of believers. While there are passages that use the word “church” in reference to believers as believers, even then they are not viewed as believers apart from their connection to the institute church and through it to the body of Christ. In other words, believers do not exist and function except as members of the institute church (*Belgic Confession*, Article 28; *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXV, 2). There exists no “church” that is simply believers as believers in the world apart from any connection to the institute church, nor is that the primary meaning of the word “church” in Scripture. See Appendix II for more on this point.

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was a work that he himself describes as having its purpose (“into”) in the kingdom of God. Paul’s work, by his own admission, was preaching the gospel, that is, preaching Christ crucified, for the salvation of God’s elect and the gathering of the church (1 Cor. 1 & 2). There was nothing in his work of the aims of CR.

In all this, then, the *domain* of the kingdom extends no further than the rule of saving grace. But that is not to say that the kingdom of God does not come into contact with the kingdoms of this world. The very fact that both the individual believer and the church are ruled by the grace of God in Christ Jesus and that they are present in the world implies that they must inevitably come into conflict. And that, too, is according to the purpose of God, for that is the way His kingdom is gathered and the kingdoms of this world “fill up their iniquity” (Gen. 15:16). Nevertheless, Christ’s kingdom extends no further than the rule of grace.

Whether or not the godly shall exercise earthly dominion, whether or not it is possible to set up a Christian state, is really beside the point. The kingdom is the rule of grace, and that kingdom *is* established and stands victorious now and forever in the salvation of believers and in the existence of the church. The number of people saved, the effect of Christians’ presence in the world, even the kind of work the Christian does, politics or sweeping streets, economics or picking up trash, make essentially no difference.

Whether the church is a majority in the world or a very small minority makes no difference. Grace reigns in either case and is completely victorious, not only as far as the individual members of the church are concerned, but also as far as the church itself is concerned. No power on earth or in hell can destroy either. Whether Christians are able to influence the legislation and other life of the countries in which they live really does not matter as far as that victory is concerned. Grace reigns and accomplishes its whole purpose, first in their own salvation and then in the gathering and preservation of the church. That the Christian, whether changing tires or doing politics, lives consistently as a Christian in the place God has given him *is* the *whole victory* of grace.

That kingdom is represented in the world, then, both by the presence of the church and by the presence of believers. They carry that kingdom with them into the world. Nevertheless, that kingdom is in the world, not for the purpose of improving the world, or for the purpose of

bringing the world under the dominion of the church. That cannot be the goal of believers, for it is not God's purpose (Eph. 1:3-12). They live out of Christ as members of His body and *for* it as well. All their life centers in and focuses on the church, *just as does God's purpose and work*. That alone gives real, abiding purpose and value to the life of each Christian as he fulfils his calling, whatever it may be, here in the world.

Since the kingdom is the domain and rule of saving grace the ungodly are not included in that domain or "under" that rule. Even if they can be and are brought under the earthly dominion of the godly, that extends the kingdom of Christ not one whit. They remain, apart from the rule of grace, enemies of the kingdom, and the only thing to be done with them is to destroy them.

We would emphasize, too, that it is *grace* that reigns, not law. The law is the servant of God's people under the rule of grace (Gal. 3:24-4:4), but it is grace that rules—only grace that can rule in this sinful world. The CR idea that the kingdom is to be identified with the rule of law is a confusion, a principle denial of the whole work of Christ, and the foundation for a new legalism both within and outside of the church.

What is the kingdom, then? It is (1) the rule and work of grace in the hearts and lives of God's people; (2) the society or church into which all such are gathered as a direct fruit of that work and rule of grace, i.e., the church as the body of Christ and company of the elect as it lives in Him and has Him as its Head; and (3) *that same church* as it takes on a certain visible form in the world under Christ's rule and through the ordinances He has given. All which is to say that the word "kingdom," while looking at the church from a different viewpoint than the word "church," nevertheless is used in exactly the same way, to denote first what makes us members of the church, then the whole company of that elect church, and finally also that company as it is found in this present world and organized under God's rule in an institutional form.

### **Rule of Power and Rule of Grace**

We do not deny, of course, that Christ presently rules over the ungodly and over their kingdoms. That is not the issue, though CR does all in its power to present the matter so. We believe in Christ's absolute and present power over all the kingdoms of this world. We are even willing to speak of them loosely as Christ's kingdom (cf. Ames, above),

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but then *in a different sense* than the church is His kingdom. Properly speaking, however, only the church is Christ's kingdom, and His mediatorial rule extends only to the elect. We distinguish here, therefore, between the rule of Christ's grace and the rule of His power and insist that His rule over the ungodly is of an entirely different sort than His rule over His church. The differences are five. The differences regard the purpose, exercise, result, source, and ultimacy of Christ's rule.

(1) *Purpose.* Christ rules over the ungodly, first for the purpose of using them for the gathering, preservation, and salvation of His church. They are the chaff in relation to the wheat. Then, too, He rules them for the purpose of destroying them and all their works.

This is an aspect of Christ's rule inevitably overlooked by the CR. When they cite Daniel 2 as support for their view of the kingdom, for example, they never mention the fact that Christ's kingdom, portrayed by the stone that grows and fills the whole earth, attains its glory in the way of the complete destruction of the kingdoms represented by Nebuchadnezzar's image, not just in their subjugation. The same is true of their use of such passages as Psalm 2. The Psalm speaks of the heathen being broken with a rod of iron and dashed in pieces like a potter's vessel, not brought under dominion, either His or that of the godly. Indeed, it continues to be this way for all eternity, in that Christ continues to rule over them in hell, but solely for the purpose of executing on them the judgment given.

(2) *Exercise.* This rule as it is exercised over the ungodly is exercised through His providence. That is not to say that His mediatorial work as Priest (sacrificing and interceding), as prophet (in the preaching of the gospel), and as King (in ruling and judging) does not touch them. The fact that some of them in history come into contact with His mediatorial work "assists" them in filling up their iniquity, and in bringing upon them the fulness of the wrath and judgment of God. Nevertheless, they are not His "kingdom," nor is He "Mediator" over them. Indeed, He rules over all and executes His rule even where His name and glory as Mediator have not been published through the preaching of the gospel.

This is a critical point. If Christ can be said, properly speaking, to exercise mediatorial rule over the ungodly, i.e., that He is in some sense their mediatorial King, then the whole doctrine of mediation has



been undermined and with it the particular character of all Christ's work and of God's work and purposes through Him. Mediation has to do with Christ's mission and the purpose of all His work and of His offices. Mediation is, as Turretin says (*Institutes*, XIV, 5, vol. II, p. 391), "his mission and calling towards an offended God and offending men, reconciling and again uniting them to each other." Likewise Polanus:

The Mediator of reconciliation between God and fallen men is the *persona* who intervenes midway between a God angry at their sins and men the sinners, in order that by his own merit and satisfaction he may obtain from God for men and effectively bestow on them grace, remission of sins and all things necessary for salvation and also eternal salvation itself.<sup>56</sup>

(3) *Result*. That many of the ungodly do come into contact with Christ's mediatorial rule is obvious. The gospel is preached to them. They do crucify Christ, originally or anew. Christ does intercede against them. He does speak to them in His wrath. Nonetheless, even insofar as His mediatorial rule touches them, its result is wholly negative. The gospel is the best example of this. It does not subdue and "Christianize" them but hardens them, something entirely overlooked by CR. Indeed, one cannot have a gospel that hardens the ungodly in their rebellion and at the same time accomplishes their subjugation and the "Christianization" of society in general.

(4) *Source*. The fourth difference (following from the previous) is that this rule is a matter of sheer power or authority. Christ's rule over the ungodly is in no sense of the word *gracious* (the distinction is not between the rule of His power and of His authority, but between the rule of His power or authority and the rule of His *grace*). It is here that CR takes issue especially with the PRC. The PRC denial of common grace, also in the preaching of the gospel, rules out *a priori* any possibility of the ungodly being subdued to the mediatorial rule of Christ; any possibility that the gospel has any other fruit with them than that of hardening, increasing rebellion, judgment, and destruction; any possi-

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56. Quoted in Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Baker, 1978, p. 448. This is one of the crucial issues in the debate, in that CR insists on a universal *mediatorial* rule of Christ. For a further discussion of this point see Appendix II.

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bility that the culture, institutions, and citizens of this world can be “Christianized”; any possibility that He is their mediatorial King.

This, too, is crucial. The CR position with its insistence that the church and the gospel are the means to the kingdom, that is, to a Christianized society, is a fundamental denial of all the PRC believe concerning the gospel and the grace of God. One ends with a gospel which has a positive, though temporary, fruit as far as the kingdoms of this world and its citizens are concerned, a grace which is no longer particular, and ultimately and inevitably a cross which is for all. Regarding the latter, we would emphasize once more that it is impossible to separate Christ’s priestly and prophetic offices from His kingly office. If the one extends in some sense (usually very ill-defined) to the whole of civilization and culture and to all persons without exception, then so do the others.

(5) *Ultimacy*. Finally, the rule of Christ over the ungodly and their kingdoms is not parallel to and “equally ultimate” to His rule over the church. In every way and instance, His rule over the ungodly is for the purpose of the gathering, salvation, preservation, and glorification of His church. This is the very opposite of the CR teaching that the church is the nursery or means of the kingdom.

This view of the rule of Christ is the teaching of the early Reformed theologians and stands in flat contradiction to the cant of CR. For the sake of those unfamiliar with this distinction between Christ’s rule of power and of grace we offer the following quotations from Reformed theologians. CR, making no such distinction, simply assumes that any passage that speaks of Christ’s rule is supportive of their dominion dreams.

Of course the power of Christ does not extend merely to the community of believers, but also to their enemies, in fact, to all creatures generally in heaven and on earth, since Christ makes them serviceable to himself for the benefit of his kingdom. But the *regnum Christi* (kingdom of Christ) itself is only the kingdom of grace, the Church, and comprises (1) the *gubernatio* (government) and (2) the *defensio* (defense) of it.<sup>57</sup>

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57. Heppie, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 481. Notice too in these quotations that Christ’s mediatorial work, including His mediatorial kingship, is limited to the church.

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The kingly office is to govern and preserve the Church. The divisions of it are the government of the Church and the defeat of its enemies.<sup>58</sup>

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Christ's kingly office is the power and authority of the mediator, by which being constituted king and head of the Church he flourishes with supreme power in heaven and on earth and governs all things concerned with the Church with full rights and rules and perfects it both by the word and by the interior power of his Spirit; and guards it against the assaults and power of all sorts of enemies; and will at last crown it victor in heaven for ever, perfect in body and mind.<sup>59</sup>

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Hence it is not right, when it is said that according to Reformed doctrine the kingship of Christ also extends over the extra-Church sphere (of nature). Of course Christ has power over this also, but only for the purpose of exercising his mediating Kingship over the Church.<sup>60</sup>

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All things are subdued to this kingship and all creatures are its servants ... not because all men properly belong to that Kingdom, but because it could not be administered without that infinite power.<sup>61</sup>

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II. Before all things we must distinguish the twofold kingdom, belonging to Christ: one natural or essential; the other mediatorial and economical. Christ possesses the former over all creatures with glory and majesty equal to that of the Father and Holy Spirit. The latter (according to the economy of grace) he administers in a peculiar manner as God-man (*theanthropos*). The former extends equally over all creatures; the latter is terminated specially on the church. That is founded on the decree of providence, this on the decree of election. That is exercised by Christ inasmuch as he is God (*Theos*) and the Logos (*Logos*); this inasmuch as he is God-man (*theanthropos*). Hence it is called his 'mediatorial and economical kingdom' because it is a dominion peculiar to the Mediator and as it were his own according to the

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58. Wollébius, quoted in Heppé, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 482.

59. Burmann, quoted in Heppé, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 482.

60. Heppé, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 482.

61. Burmann, quoted in Heppé, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 482

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dispensation of grace. The other belongs to him by nature and is on that account called 'natural. The mediatorial belongs to him from the free institution of God because he constituted him King over the church (Ps. 2:6).<sup>62</sup>

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XIV. Although temporal kingdoms are subjected to Christ, his kingdom ought not on that account be temporal. They are not subjected to and administered by him temporally and in an earthly manner, but spiritually and divinely; even as the earth is under heaven and is ruled by him, it is not therefore done in an earthly but in a heavenly way. Indeed he reigns differently in the pious and the wicked: in the former by the sweet and healthful influence of the Spirit, as head; in the latter, by his own powerful virtue as Lord: but over both he extends a spiritual, not an earthly sway.<sup>63</sup>

### Conclusions

To make the kingdom wider than the church, as some later Reformed writers do, is possible only on the basis of a perceived "common grace," and is done in the interest of a kind of "social gospel"<sup>64</sup> and of building a bridge to the world at the expense of the antithesis. To separate kingdom and church, making the church something secondary, and to denigrate the church institute and the preaching of the gospel, as does CR, is blasphemous and ought to be dealt with as such. Modern "kingdom theology" is unconfessional, un-Reformed, and unbiblical. The ecclesiology of CR which brings that "kingdom theology" to its ultimate and logical conclusions is also gross sin.

Nor ought those who so denigrate the church and her calling be tolerated in any church. Indeed, the church that tolerates such teaching in its midst guarantees its own demise. They cannot be a blessing to

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62. Turretin, *Institutes*, XIV, 16, vol. II, p. 486.

63. *Ibid.*, XIV, 16, vol. II, pp. 489, 490.

64. See Appendix I for quotations illustrating the place of common grace in dominion theology and in the theology of all those who see the kingdom as broader than the church. On the basis of a perceived "common grace" they all believe the church has some sort of social and cultural mandate with respect to human society and civilization.

God's church who desire to use it only as a means to their own ends. They are like the man who marries in order to have someone to cook and clean for him but keeps his mistress (decked out in all her gold and glitter) on the side. Neither God the Father in His eternal decree, nor God the Son in His suffering, nor God the Holy Spirit in His presence, so view or use the church.

It must be emphasized, therefore, that CR is *not* just an eschatological position or a different millennial view. Like Dispensationalism, it is a system of belief, which at crucial points is directly contrary to the Reformed faith and to Scripture and cannot be tolerated in the church. The fact that CR *is* tolerated in many churches is an evidence of the weakness of those churches and the dishonesty of CR, which, with its view of the church, is nevertheless content to use it for its own ends. It must be eradicated, root and branch, from the churches if they are to prosper. There can be no neutrality!

### **The Danger of Reconstructionism**

We have often expressed our fears that CR, and even, to a lesser degree, postmillennialism, are dangerous in that they leave the church and the people of God exposed to the deceptions of Antichrist. We are convinced that the only earthly, social and political, "Christianized," religious kingdom of which Scripture speaks is that of Antichrist, and have warned of the possibility that those who follow CR teaching will find themselves working for *that* kingdom and deceived by it (II Thess. 2:10; Matt. 24:24). We recognize that CR mocks these fears, but we do not believe that we are merely "starting at shadows." The references in footnote 37, page 42, and the quotation from Francis Nigel Lee in Appendix I show clearly that CR is not only in danger of this, but is already cooperating with the antichrists of this world.

To add just another example, we recently received a copy of *Crosswinds* (vol. 1, no. 2, Fall 1992), a magazine published by Coalition on Revival, a "network of evangelical leaders from every major denominational and theological perspective who share a commitment to revival, renewal and reformation of the Church and society in America" (Masthead, p. 5). This Coalition was not a CR organization, though it included a number of prominent CR men. It did, however, share the CR view of church and kingdom. In this issue the Coalition published "25 Articles on the Kingdom of God," among them the following (p. 103):

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## 2. Definition of the Kingdom.

WE AFFIRM that the term Kingdom of God has several applications and may denote (a) the universal rule of Christ over all things, both redeemed and unredeemed; (b) the special, saving rule of Christ over His people; (c) the life, wisdom, holiness, power, and authority that Christ grants to His people; or (d) the permeating influence of the Word and Spirit in the world.

WE DENY (a) that the term Kingdom of God refers only to the providential rule of the Triune God, and (b) that Christ's rule and realm are limited to the Church.

In line with the view of the kingdom promoted by this organization and CR this issue of the magazine includes the following: (1) an article on the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, which suggests that joining the "European movement" is "an act of faith and commitment" (pp. 8-14); (2) a defense of the purely humanistic organization, the Boy Scouts of America (pp. 25-27); (3) an article on "The Prayer Revolution," that mentions uncritically "marching for Jesus," "intercession for the unborn," fasting as a "martial art," "Concerts of Prayer," and which reports with approval on a prayer meeting in Kansas City to which both "evangelical, pentecostal, and liturgical church leaders" and "five Native American Indian Chiefs" were invited (pp. 32-34); (4) an article carrying the title "Fresh Breezes," which is nothing more than an attack on the institute church and a plea for ecumenism (pp. 35-37); (4) a report on a "Prayer Summit" at which "an episcopal minister shared his burden for some Roman Catholic leaders who were unable to attend"—"We prayed," he says, "that they would be with us next time" (pp. 38, 39); (5) a proposal for reconstructing Hollywood by crusading for a "Motion Picture and Television Code" whose contents have no relation to the Christian faith whatsoever (pp. 85-87). All this is published, as the Editor says, in the interest of "Christians uniting to advance a Biblical worldview."

This kind of ecumenism, we would emphasize once more, follows from the CR view of church and kingdom and is the inevitable result of making the church merely a means or instrument of the kingdom. Nor can such a kingdom ever be the kingdom of Christ. Those who seek such a kingdom are already deceived and in danger of greater deception. ●

## **Part 2**

*(PRTJ, April 1999)*

## APPENDIX I

# Christian Reconstructionism, the Kingdom and Common Grace

**Rev. Ron Hanko**

The doctrine of common grace is essential to Christian Reconstructionism (CR) and dominion theology because there is no other explanation and possibility of the desired “Christianization” of society and culture — no other, that is, unless one posits a kind of end-times universalism according to which all men without exception are actually saved as part of this “Christianizing” process. We give here a number of quotations from the CR writers and a few from those more recent Reformed writers who all found their doctrine of the kingdom on the erroneous doctrine of common grace. Both, in suggesting that the kingdom is broader than the church, appeal to common grace.

There is no agreement among the following writers on the nature of this “common grace.” Some identify it especially with the preaching of the gospel. For them the grace that subdues all things to the dominion of the godly comes especially through and in connection with the gospel. Others, like Abraham Kuyper, identify it especially with natural gifts and find in these a mitigation of the curse and restraining of man’s depravity that is sufficient to promise future earthly dominion. Most of the CR writers tend to identify common grace or blessing with law. Law, then, is the way of future prosperity, earthly dominion, and the fulfilling of the “cultural mandate.” In every case, however, common grace is foundational.

Notice in that connection that there is explicitly or implicitly in a number of these quotations a denial of the particular character of Christ’s work. As we point out in another appendix, one cannot have a universal mediatorial rule of Christ without denying the particular character of that mediatorial work. Nor can one have a universal



mediatorial rule without also a universal priesthood, with all that that entails.

This emphasis on a universal mediatorial rule of Christ is closely connected with the doctrine of common grace. Always one must explain how “grace” or blessing can be shown to the ungodly, and ultimately that answer can be found only in the cross and the mediatorial work of Christ. Thus CR and those who follow its teaching are “forced” to speak of Christ as a universal mediator in some sense.

Notice, finally, that this same doctrine of common grace is also, for some, the justification for cooperation with Charismatics, Romans Catholics, and even the heathen. This, too, follows from the CR view of the kingdom. Since it is the kingdom that is the ultimate goal of history, and since the church is only a means to that end, differences between churches, even between believer and unbeliever, are of relatively lesser importance, and common grace then justifies a certain amount of cooperation not only with other Christians, but even with the ungodly.

In the Noahic covenantal episode, we also witness the objectivity of God’s relationship with man: the world was judged in history for its sin. The rainbow, which signifies God’s covenant mercy, is established with Noah and all that are with him, and with their seed (Gen. 9:12). This indicates that the world will be protected from God’s curse through the instrumentality of the Church (the people of God). This covenant is only made indirectly with unbelievers, who benefit from God’s protection only as they are not opposed to God’s people. Because of God’s love for His people, He preserves the orderly universe (Gen. 8:20-22). His enemies serve His people: common grace (Gen. 9:10b).<sup>1</sup>

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10. Opposed as international Christians are to *all* departures from God’s most holy will, we do recognize that the various non-Christian movements are not all equally bad and that there are areas in which, by

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1. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion*, Tyler, TX, p. 188. Notice Gentry’s emphasis: the world is to “be protected from God’s curse through the instrumentality of the Church”; the covenant is made, though indirectly, with unbelievers, and they benefit from God’s protection; it is even possible that they not be opposed to God’s church. This is all common grace according to Gentry and the explanation of how “He (and the church with Him) shall have dominion” in history and over society in general.

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God's common grace, we may cooperate with non-Christians in seeking to realize our Christian objectives. Hence we will gladly cooperate with orthodox Jews and Moslems against all shades of atheism, and with Catholics against all those who are avowedly anti-Christian. At the same time, we will not compromise our own distinctively Christian views in any areas. If in following the commandments of our God, e.g., in moving against communism and/or pornography, we are offered the support of concerned Jews, Moslems, and Catholics, we will willingly welcome and utilize such support.<sup>2</sup>

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Everybody's going to benefit. Whether they're Protestant Christians or Catholic Christians or Jews or whatever they be, everyone will benefit from having a Christian culture. Where Christian principles reign supreme, where people in places of leadership recognize the supremacy of God, there will be more freedom, more prosperity, more security for every law-abiding American.<sup>3</sup>

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A restructuring of Van Til's interpretation of common grace was basic to the development of the Christian Reconstructionist perspective. Unlike Van Til, this version of Van Til's philosophy is eschatologically optimistic (Van Til was an amillennialist, RH).<sup>4</sup>

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Slavery, then, is a byproduct of the rebellion of man, but in proper form and administered by covenantally faithful people, it is a means for restraining and even rolling back the efforts of the Fall and of the curse, by 'common grace' discipline and by 'special grace' evangelism.<sup>5</sup>

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2. Francis Nigel Lee, "The Christian Manifesto of 1984," *Christianity and Civilization III: Tactics of Christian Resistance*, Geneva Divinity School, 1983, p. 10. Here and in the following quotation the doctrine of common grace justifies cooperation with anyone who will further CR aims.

3. Joe Morecraft, "God and Politics: On Earth as It Is in Heaven," P.B.S., Dec. 23, 1987, quoted in Kevin Reed, *The Antinomian Streak in the Reconstructionist Movement*, Presbyterian Heritage, 1988, p. 7.

4. Gary North and David Chilton, "Apologetics and Strategy," *Christianity and Civilization III: Tactics of Christian Resistance*, Geneva Divinity School, 1983, pp.114, 115.

5. James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant*, ICE, 1984, p. 88. We make no comment on this ludicrous quotation (though Jordan is by no means the only one who teaches this), other than to point out its assumption that common grace is a fundamental premise of dominion theology.

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Law is a means of grace: common grace to those who are perishing, special grace to those who are elect.... But if the effects of the law are common in cursing, then the effects of the law are also common in grace. This is why we need a doctrine of common grace. This doctrine gives meaning to the doctrine of common curse, and vice versa. The law of God restrains men in their evil ways, whether regenerate or unregenerate. The law of God restrains 'the old man' or old sin nature in Christians. Law's restraint is a true blessing for all men. In fact, it is even a temporary blessing for Satan and his demons.... The laws of God offer a source of order, power, and dominion. Some men use this common grace to their ultimate destruction, while others use it to their eternal benefit. It is nonetheless common, despite its differing effects on the eternal state of men.<sup>6</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

Special grace leads to a commitment to the law; the commitment to God's law permits God to reduce the common curse element of natural law, leaving proportionately more common grace — the reign of *beneficent common law*. The curse of nature can be steadily reduced, but only if men conform themselves to revealed law or to the works of the law in their hearts. The blessing comes in the form of a more productive, less scarcity-dominated nature.<sup>7</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

*God's law is the main form of common grace.* It is written in the hearts of believers, we read in Hebrews, chapters eight and ten, but the work of the law is written in the heart of every man. Thus the work of the law is universal — common. This access to God's law is the foundation of the fulfilling of the dominion covenant to subdue the earth

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6. Gary North, "Common Grace, Eschatology, and Biblical Law," Appendix C in David Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, Dominion Press, 1987, pp. 629, 630. The essay referred to here is really only a reworking of chapter 6 of North's book, *Dominion and Common Grace*, from which we also quote below. That chapter of his book is entitled "Sustaining Common Grace." In both the book and essay North defines "common grace" as "crumbs from the table" or "crumbs for the dogs." North's views are interesting in that, having repudiated the common grace views both of Van Til and of the Christian Reformed Church (its notorious "three points"), he nevertheless pleads his own version of common grace as foundational to his views of the kingdom. Like Kant's god, he throws it out the front door only to bring it in again by the back door.

7. North, "Common Grace, Eschatology, and Biblical Law," p. 642.

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(Gen. 1:28)... God's promises of external blessings are conditional to man's fulfilment of external laws. The reason why men can gain the blessings is because the knowledge of the work of the law is common. This is why there can be outward cooperation between Christians and non-Christians for certain earthly ends.<sup>8</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

Once again, we see that history has meaning. God has a purpose. He grants favors to rebels, but not because he is favorable to them. He respects His Son, and His Son died for the whole world (John 3:15) (sic). He died to save the world, meaning to give it time, life, and external blessings. He did not die to offer a hypothetical promise of regeneration to 'vessels of wrath' (Romans 9:22), but He died to become a savior in the same sense as that described in the first part of I Timothy 4:10 — not a special savior, but a sustaining, restraining savior.<sup>9</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

This is why a theology that is orthodox must include a doctrine of common grace that is intimately related to biblical law. Law does not save men's souls, but partial obedience to it does save their bodies and their culture. Christ is the saviour of all, especially those who are the elect (I Tim. 4:10).<sup>10</sup>

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To say that the penal sanctions of the Old Testament are 'too severe' for a period of 'common grace' is to overlook at least two important points: (1) Israel of old enjoyed God's common grace (at least as defined in Gen. 8:22), and was *still* required to enforce his law, and (2) God's political laws serve to *preserve* the outward order and justice of a civilization, and thus are a sign of God's 'common grace' rather than detracting from common grace.<sup>11</sup>

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As we grow in grace, we become a blessing to the world around us,

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8. North, "Common Grace, Eschatology, and Biblical Law," p. 647.

9. North, "Common Grace, Eschatology, and Biblical Law," p. 632. A good example here of how the doctrine of common grace and a universal mediatorial rule undermine the doctrine of particular atonement.

10. North, *Dominion and Common Grace*, Dominion Press, 1987, p. 173. The subtitle of this book, "The Biblical Basis for Progress" shows clearly the necessity of common grace in North's theology.

11. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard*, ICE, 1991, p. 334. Bahnsen is saying that political laws are the *common grace* that preserves order and justice in a civilization.

and the world, in terms of its relations to us, is blessed or cursed.<sup>12</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

The Church in her individual members must address herself to the task of maximizing the gifts of common grace as far as possible, in order to serve the kingdom of God and fulfil every purpose of God for her. In so doing, the church will, firstly, manifest the kingdom of God on earth.... This is simply to say that the church, besides being a manifestation of the kingdom herself, is also to manifest it in every part of the society in which she moves.... Secondly, by maximizing the gifts of common grace, the church through her individual members will already be bringing to fruition that task which it will be her occupation to discharge for all eternity, namely, to bring all into the sphere of her sovereign Lord's dominion.<sup>13</sup>

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It is an error of American Protestantism, ever since the days of the Puritans, to limit religion to faith. Faith finds its light in the Bible while the other areas of human life are guided by the light "common to all."<sup>14</sup>

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No church is an end in itself. It is God's medium for proclaiming grace for all of life.<sup>15</sup>

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12. R. J. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, Ross House, CA, 1994, vol. II, p. 814. Like North, Rushdoony rejects common grace, but brings it back in by speaking of a general blessing of God for all, and what he calls "earlier grace." He rejects only the name, therefore, not the concept.

13. Raymond O. Zorn, *Christ Triumphant*, Banner of Truth, 1997, p. 211. Zorn is not CR, and is, in fact, very critical of theonomy. Nevertheless, he is one of those who sees the kingdom of God as something broader than the church, and roots his consequent views of the church's calling with respect to that kingdom in common grace.

14. Bernard Zylstra, *Challenge and Response*, CLA, 1960, p. 13. Zylstra is also not CR. He was connected with the old AACS (Association for the Advancement of Christian Studies, now the ICS, Institute of Christian Studies in Toronto, Canada) movement in the USA and Canada, a movement whose philosophy was uncannily like that of CR. In fact, not only the philosophy, but the language of the two movements is so similar one wonders if there has not been some borrowing on one side or the other.

15. Zylstra, *Challenge and Response*, pp. 14, 15. Note the emphasis on the fact that the church is only a means, and just as in CR, a means to a kingdom that is much broader than the church. He says, for example, that "the body of Christ has the responsibility of putting the *principles of the Kingdom* into practice" (p. 15), a kingdom which is defined in the "Foreword" as the "all-embracing cosmic Rule which is directed to the consummation of the Father's works" (p. 2).

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Now Calvinism has been the first movement of which we can say with some historical justification that it has seen the universal implications of the gospel ... we may say that in the so-called Kuyperian tradition (the reference here is to Kuyper's common grace, RH) the recreative power of Christ has made a major breakthrough in western civilization with respect to understanding man's cultural mandate.<sup>16</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

And for our relation *to the world*: the recognition that in the whole world the curse is restrained by grace, that the life of the world is to be honored in its independence, and that we must, in every domain, discover the treasures and develop the potencies hidden by God in nature and in human life.<sup>17</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

It was now clearly seen (in the light of common grace, RH), that the history of mankind is not so much an aphoristic spectacle of cruel passions, as a coherent process with the Cross at its centre; a process in which every nation has its special task, and the knowledge of which may be a fountain of blessing for every people.<sup>18</sup>

Common grace in some form or other is one of the foundation stones, therefore, not only of CR but of all those who make the same disjunction between church and kingdom, who define the kingdom in

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16. Hendrick Hart, *The Challenge of Our Age*: quoted in Herman Hanko, *The Christian's Social Calling and the Second Coming of Christ*, South Holland PRC, 1970, pp. 12, 13. Hart was also an AACS man and he has the same view of church and kingdom as does CR. He says, for example:

Learning to live biblically in a secular world means learning to give full and active support to christian education, christian political action, christian labor activity, christian everything; and learning to understand the church institute as the organization which is called upon to promote each support concretely and authoritatively in the name of Christ (Hanko, p. 6).

17. Abraham Kuyper, Sr., *Calvinism*, Revell, p. 3. Here, of course, we come to the "father" of common grace theory. While Kuyper was far from CR at many points, one can, nevertheless, see in his writings on common grace some of the seeds of CR.

18. Kuyper, *Calvinism*, p. 165.

terms of civilization and culture, and who see the calling of the church as bent in that direction. For this reason also we repudiate the notions of CR.

## APPENDIX II

# The Nature of the Visible Church

We have mentioned several times in this paper the new definition given by CR of the visible church. It distinguishes between the visible church in the sense of institute and the visible church as the “community of faith.” This distinction is developed in most detail in R. J. Rushdoony’s *Systematic Theology*<sup>19</sup> and in Stephen Perks’ recent book *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*.

The following analysis of Perks’ book illustrates what we are talking about.<sup>20</sup> He begins, as we have already noted, by distinguishing two aspects of the visible church. To the visible church, according to him, belong both the institutional church, and what he calls “the body of Christ, the company of the regenerate,”<sup>21</sup> or, with reference to the Westminster Confession of Faith (XXV, 2), “all those throughout the world who profess faith in Christ.”<sup>22</sup>

Throughout the book Perks identifies these two aspects of the visible church as “Church” and “CHURCH,” the former referring to the institutional church and the latter to the body of believers. The latter, as is evident from the fact that it is written with capital letters, is the visible church in the highest sense of the word, and the primary meaning of the word *ecclesia*<sup>23</sup> in Scripture.

This all sounds right and good until one realises what Perks is actually saying. Indeed, it is easy to miss Perks’ point if one does not

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19. Cf. R.J. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology* (Ross House, 1994), pp. 669-784.

20. What follows is the substance of a book review published in the *British Reformed Journal*, issue 24, October-December, 1998.

21. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 24.

22. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 25.

23. The Greek word translated “church” in the English New Testament.

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have some knowledge of CR teaching and aims or does not read him critically and carefully, especially because he claims that his definition of the CHURCH is simply that of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Perks does not deny that Church and CHURCH are “the same ... but viewed from different perspectives.”<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, he makes a sharp disjunction between them. In redefining the visible church primarily in terms of believers themselves, Perks considers them to be the CHURCH apart from their institutional connections. The CHURCH, in other words, does not necessarily exist in and through and in connection with the institutional church.

The CHURCH may certainly be conceived of apart from the institutional organisation precisely because Christ so conceived of it. (John) Murray’s definition — i.e., the strict identification of the body of Christ as coterminous in every respect with the institutional Church— severely limits the body of Christ in its mission and function in the world. Indeed, it cuts the body of Christ off almost totally from the cultural mandate.<sup>25</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

Thus the CHURCH visible and militant is the body of Christians wherever they are and in whatever they are doing: the Christian teacher, business man, house-wife, mother, parent, barmaid, butcher, baker, candlestick maker, at work, at play, at prayer, at home, etc.<sup>26</sup>

This body of believers, as CHURCH, has an entirely different function from the institutional church:

We have seen that the CHURCH’S service in the world, its calling as Christ’s body on earth, proclaiming and working to establish his kingdom, is to be outward-oriented, positive, comprehensive (involving all spheres of life and culture both personally and nationally), and thoroughly biblical in orientation and practice. Yet we have also seen that this biblical function of the CHURCH has been distorted and overturned by a clergy-centred, inward-looking perspective that puts the institutional Church at the centre of the Christian life instead of the kingdom of God. The calling and function of the body of Christ on earth has thus been neglected.<sup>27</sup>

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24. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 12.

25. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 33.

26. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, pp. 28, 29.

27. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 81.



In fulfilling that function the *CHURCH* is involved in every area of social and political life. Thus, for example, believers involved in politics are the *CHURCH* involved in politics:

It would be wrong for the Church as an institution to seek to do the work of the magistrate. There is a biblical separation of powers here. Some members of the body of Christ, however, are called to be magistrates and they must exercise their vocation as Christians and as ambassadors of Christ.... The members of the body of Christ who are not magistrates will also exercise political influence via their votes at elections and via any other form of political action they may take. The body of Christ (that is, the *CHURCH*, RH) will thus be involved — as a group of responsible citizens in areas where the institutional Church may not go.<sup>28</sup>

This, of course, is sheer confusion. Believers, living and working in the world, do not cease to be *members* of the church, representing it and working for it also in politics. But it cannot be said that they, in that capacity, *are* the *CHURCH* — no more than all the American expatriates living and working in various places around the world *are* *AMERICA*, even though they do not cease to be Americans and to represent their country no matter where they live and what they do.

It is here, too, that Perks is out of step with the Westminster Confession of Faith, though he quotes from it, for while the Confession does define the visible church as composed of “all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children” (XXV, 2), the Confession makes it clear that this “body of believers” does not exist apart from the institutional church.

It is unto that “catholic visible Church” that Christ has given “the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God” (XXV, 3). It is, in the world, identified with the institutional church, which has the calling to fulfill that ministry and to administer the ordinances. And, what is even more significant, that visible, catholic church, according to the Confession is made up of “particular Churches.” They, not believers, are the “members thereof” (XXV, 4).

That same connection is made in the Belgic Confession, which insists that membership in the institutional church is necessary for

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28. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, pp. 34, 35.

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salvation, that is, for membership in the body of Christ. The body of Christ does not exist and is not found in the world apart from the institutional church. In fact, as far as our calling is concerned, the Belgic Confession identifies the two (Art. XXVIII).

That Perks does not want the confessional view of the church is clear from his rejection of John Murray's description of the church. Murray, cited by Perks, says:

It is all-important to bear in mind that the church of God is an institution. It may *never* be conceived of apart from the *organization* of the people of God visibly expressed and in discharge of the *ordinances* instituted by Christ.<sup>29</sup>

Perks calls this unfortunate, inconsistent, reductionist, and unbiblical, and denies that Jesus ever spoke of His CHURCH in this "constricted sense."<sup>30</sup> And so, in the interest of his CR presuppositions, he goes on with his rejection of Murray's views:

By identifying the body of Christ as strictly coterminous with the institutional Church Murray leaves the CHURCH — i.e., the body of Christ — helpless to affect and preserve the culture in which it lives by a "hands on" encounter with and in that culture, thereby denying to the community of faith the means of bringing the whole of society into conformity with the whole counsel of God's word. It is as if the CHURCH and society were the crews of two different ships. The most that the CHURCH can do is to bellow from its own ship to the ship of culture information about how the ship of culture should steer away from the rocks that threaten to destroy it. But the CHURCH can never get into the ship of culture and do the steering.<sup>31</sup>

It is in this connection that Perks de-emphasises the institute church. In fact, he finds it "hardly mentioned in Scripture":

The primary emphasis of the New Testament is on the kingdom of God, not the institutional Church. Indeed, the gospels hardly speak

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29. John Murray, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, p. 237ff., cited in Perks, p. 30.

30. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 30.

31. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 34.

directly and specifically of the institutional Church at all and with the exception of Mt. 18:15-20 Jesus in his ministry on earth did not give detailed teaching on this aspect of the Christian life, leaving it to the apostles to work out later; and even the apostles, at least in Scripture, did not go into any great detail, giving only general principles, and thus much freedom, for the Church to build upon.... The institutional Church simply was not the focus of Jesus' teaching during his earthly ministry, nor is it the primary focus of the Bible generally.<sup>32</sup>

Strangely enough, though, Perks admits that the majority of references to the church in the New Testament are to the institutional church: "Of the 112 occurrences of *ekklhsia* (*ecclesia*, RH) in the New Testament the vast majority refer to a particular assembly or local congregation of believers (the visible institutional Church)." Nevertheless, these references are simply "narrative, descriptive, and vocative uses of the term that have little bearing on the development of a detailed ecclesiology."<sup>33</sup>

Perks is saying that even though most of the references in Scripture are to the institutional church, we can learn little or nothing from them about the nature of the church. It would seem to us, however, that the sheer number of references to the institutional church says something at least about its importance, and that it is far more important than Perks makes out.

Having redefined the visible church, Perks also redefines its calling and function. While admitting that the calling of the institutional church has to do especially with "the maintenance and practise of the Christian public religious cultus,"<sup>34</sup> i.e., with preaching, sacraments, discipline, and worship, he insists that calling is limited and relatively unimportant and that it is not the calling of the visible CHURCH in its most important manifestation:

The task of teaching in the institutional Church is a function of the ordained ministry. It is not the central activity or focus of the CHURCH'S calling, and neither is any other activity that may take place in the

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32. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 73.

33. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, footnote 52, p. 73.

34. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 12.

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Church.... It [the Church] has sought primarily its own increase and in so doing has failed Christ by failing to fulfil its vitally important, but limited, role of equipping the saints for service and dominion in the world.<sup>35</sup>

That institutional "Church," of course, is not the CHURCH in the highest and broadest sense, nor its calling the calling of the CHURCH in Perks' mind. The calling of the CHURCH is defined in terms of the calling of individual believers, rather than in terms of the institutional church's calling to preach the gospel, administer sacraments and conduct public worship. So Perks says, anyway:

The Church as an institution is limited in its field of operation, God-ordained and essential though that field is. The body of Christ, the CHURCH considered as the people of God, the community of faith, has a much wider brief, however. Its calling is to take dominion over the whole earth in the name of Christ, to possess his inheritance (Ps. 2:7-12; Rev. 11:15), which is the CHURCH'S inheritance also by adoption into the household and family of God through union with Christ.<sup>36</sup>

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It is vitally important that the CHURCH should not be reduced to the institutional Church, therefore, if the body of Christ is to claim the world for Christ and bring all things into conformity with God's word.<sup>37</sup>

The most important aspect of the church, then, in relation to the kingdom is not the institutional church. According to Perks, the CHURCH as the body of believers living their lives in the world is far more important, though even it is only one means among others for the coming of the kingdom. In relation to that CHURCH and its calling to take dominion in every area of life and establish the kingdom of God, the institutional church has its only role, the very limited role of training believers for their service in the world and preparing them for fulfilling their dominion mandate:

The institutional Church is not the kingdom of God, it is merely one element of the kingdom, though a vitally important one, namely, the

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35. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 83.

36. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, pp. 35, 36.

37. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 37

training and equipping arm of the kingdom. It is there to prepare and fully equip the CHURCH for its task in the world.<sup>38</sup>

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But the Church (again, the institutional Church; RH), through its ministry, must equip the saints — i.e., the CHURCH in the widest sense as the body of Christ — for action and service in the political realm by teaching the biblical principles of civil government and civic responsibility set down in God's word.<sup>39</sup>

Perks refers to the belief that the church is the goal of God's work in history as "ecclesiomania" and idolatry. The idea that the institutional church and its work of preaching of the gospel and administering the ordinances are important in themselves produces what he calls "ghetto churches, impotent and irrelevant," or "Protestant monasteries, little enclaves of spirituality retreating from the battlefront."<sup>40</sup>

Until the institutional church realises that it is only a training ground, and until the CHURCH sees that its real calling is to take dominion over the earth, "it will be boredom, irrelevance and stupidity in the Church 'mummy factory' as usual."<sup>41</sup> Thus he arrogantly writes off the ordinary work, life, fellowship, ordinances, and worship of the institutional church, and the whole institutional life of those churches that are not interested in his plan for earthly dominion.

His view of the church also allows him and all those who hold these views to ignore denominational boundaries and distinctives in their seeking of the kingdom and to cooperate with other "Christians" over a very wide spectrum in seeking to establish this kingdom. Denominational differences, differences of doctrine, government, and worship, mean little, since the visible CHURCH is not to be defined first of all in terms of congregations or denominations, but in terms of believers and their calling in the world.

Because Perks redefines the nature and calling of the church, it is not surprising that he also goes wrong in what he says about church government. In his opinion the kind of church government a congrega-

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38. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 84.

39. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 63.

40. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, pp. 67, 68, 83.

41. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 84.

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tion has makes little difference as long as it is godly (p. 40). Indeed, as Perks himself says;

... the principles of Church government set forth in this essay, however, can be applied, in the main, to Episcopal, Congregational, and Presbyterian Churches (p. 40).

This follows inevitably from Perks' devaluation of the institutional church. If the institutional church has but a very limited role in history and is but the means to an end, surely the whole subject of church government matters little.

All this, obviously, is built on CR presuppositions, i.e., (1) that the kingdom is something other than the church; (2) that it is a transformed culture;<sup>42</sup> and (3) that the church is only a means, a training ground, for the establishment of such a kingdom. Starting from these presuppositions Perks, and others with him, of necessity: (1) trivialize the institutional church, whose calling is centered in the preaching of the gospel; (2) redefine the visible church in terms of the body of believers as they live their lives in the world; and (3) see the calling of that "church" primarily in terms of fulfilling the cultural mandate. This is not Reformed.

We do not dispute the fact that the body of believers can be and is called "church" in Scripture. But it is the *body* of believers that is the church, and then that body as it is organized under the authority of Christ its head, an authority that is established in and through the offices. That body, so organized, is given the particular responsibility for preaching the gospel and so gathering of the church as the body of Christ. An individual believer carrying out his calling in the world, in politics or elsewhere, is not the church, though he represents it and is himself a member of it. He, apart from the institutional church, is no more the church than an American living and working in the UK *is* America.

We dispute, therefore, the CR assumption that the institutional church is of relatively minor importance in Scripture. Not only do most

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42. Perks puts it very bluntly. He says: "We must seek to be positive and affect our culture for good, claim it for Christ and transform it by his word into 'heaven on earth'— i.e., into a culture in which God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven" (*The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 69).

of the references to the church in the NT, as Perks himself admits, have to do with the institute church, but each of Paul's major Epistles is addressed to a local congregation, a part of the institute church. One of them, Philippians, specifically mentions the "bishops and deacons" of the church (1:1), the offices that among other things give "institutional form" to the church.

We dispute also the idea that the body of believers manifests itself apart from the institutional church. Reformed theology has always insisted that the two are so joined together in this world that it is (under all ordinary circumstances) impossible to be a member of the body of Christ without being a member of the church institute (cf. Acts 2:47 and Heb. 10:25).

Especially we dispute the assertion that believers as members of the church have a "wider brief" than that of the church as institution. We are convinced that the "brief" of believers, as they live their lives in the world and fulfill their God-given calling, concerns the church especially. This is not to deny that Christians must be in the world and must live there as Christians. No Reformed man has ever denied this. We do not believe in world-flight.

Nevertheless, Christians live in the world as members of the church, not only representing both the body of Christ and the local institution, but also at the same time living *for* it. Their goal and purpose in all they do must be the gathering, preservation, and glorification of the church. Their purpose may not be any different than that of God Himself, who has set the church at the very center of all His purpose and good pleasure, and who has made the church the body of His Son.

Perhaps no passage emphasizes this so strongly as I Timothy 3:15. In spite of Sandlin's explicit statement to the contrary, I Timothy 3:15 says that the institutional church, the church in which we are called to behave ourselves properly, is the "repository of truth and the end of God's dealings."<sup>43</sup> If it is the end of God's dealings, it must be also of ours.

This, we might add, is essential for maintaining a proper Reformed world and life view. If the kingdom is something other than the church, and the church only one means among many for the coming of

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43. Sandlin, *A Postmillennial Primer*, pp. 43, 44.

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that kingdom, then it is difficult to see that the ordinary work of the vast majority of believers has much relevance for the coming of the kingdom. What do sweeping streets, emptying rubbish, and changing tires have to do, after all, with the Christianizing of culture? Must one work out a Christian philosophy of tires?

On CR grounds one is forced into the position of saying (as Rushdoony says) that economics is a barometer of a sound eschatology<sup>44</sup> and that political action is necessary.<sup>45</sup> Thus one adopts, in spite of a lot of pious talk to the contrary, what is essentially a Romish world and life view — that some callings are more holy and necessary than others, and that one can serve God and His kingdom better in certain callings and not so well in others.

The Reformed view, which sees the church as central to all, gives meaning and purpose to every calling. Living as a Christian in his own place and calling, whatever it may be, each Christian seeks and is used for the gathering, preservation, and final glory of the church. CR derides this as “mere salvationism,” but it is salvation, after all, which is the ultimate purpose of God in predestination, the reason for Christ’s coming into the world, and the goal of the Spirit’s work when He is poured out.

*Soli Deo gloria in ecclesia* (Eph. 3:21).

## APPENDIX III

# Related Issues

### Gradualism

CR speaks often of the fact that the kingdom comes gradually or progressively in history.<sup>46</sup> This gradualism is, to our minds, simply an excuse for the fact that CR has *nothing* to show regarding dominion and an earthly kingdom for the past 2000 years of church history.<sup>47</sup> All talk

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44. R. J. Rushdoony, *God's Plan for Victory: The Meaning of Postmillennialism*, Chalcedon, 1997, p. 34.

45. Rushdoony, *God's Plan for Victory*, p. 30. Cf. also Perks.

46. Sandlin, *A Post-millennial Primer*, pp. 87, 88.

47. It is intriguing (though perhaps impossible of proof as far as a connection is concerned) that modern post-millennialism with its “gradual-



of a progressive realization of the kingdom and the kingdom promises in that context is empty rhetoric.

Indeed, if the CR principle of gradualism is applied to the OT and the history of Israel, the original theocracy of which the expected millennial kingdom is supposed to be the realization, one sees over the sweep of OT history the loss of territory and sovereignty. What God gave them they always and inevitably squandered and lost.

What is more, the principle of “gradualism” when viewed against the background of the history of the CR movement is nothing more than an enormous joke. The story of the gradual development of the “kingdom” in the history of the CR movement is the story of divided and ruined churches, disenchanting members, closed schools, political failure and impotency, in-fighting and division, defection and apostasy, heresy (cf. most recently Chilton’s hyper-preterism) and tyranny.<sup>48</sup>

Also, in spite of all their talk, the fact of the matter is that CR itself does not believe in such a progressive fulfilment of the promise of the kingdom and dominion. Thus their constant harping on the unfaithfulness of the church and *the failure of God’s people to inherit because they have not fulfilled their dominion mandate*. The overwhelming message of the movement is that God’s people have not had dominion, have not inherited, have not been victorious, and all because they have not been faithful. Possession in principle is *not* dominion as far as the actualities of CR are concerned. In fact, if possession in principle is enough, then they have *no quarrel at all* with the amillennialists and with all the churches they slander.

And when we speak of them slandering the church, we mean exactly that. They say without hesitation that the church has been a

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ism,” and “optimistic progressivism,” has its roots in the same era as Darwinian evolutionism, with its gradualism and optimism, and is connected with men who were weak on the biblical doctrine of creation (Warfield, Charles Hodge, Chalmers, etc.). Perhaps, in light of gradualism’s failure to produce any results, this is the reason why CR, like evolutionism, has in part adopted a kind of “hopeful monster” or catastrophic explanation of the coming of the kingdom. North, for example, prophesied the collapse of Western civilization first in connection with the AIDS epidemic (*Remnant Review*, XIV, 6, March 20, 1987) and lately (since that egg did not hatch) in connection with the Y2K computer bug.

48. E.g., Diane Winston, “Followers Exodus Drains Tyler Church,” *Dallas Times Herald*, December 23, 1987.

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failure, has surrendered to the devil, is schizophrenic, hopeless, Phari-  
saical, etc. insofar as it only preaches the gospel, promotes holiness, etc.

We would add that to say that God's people and the church have  
failed is to say that Christ as King has failed. If He reigns, then He reigns  
also in and through the church and always has. Anything less is an  
admission that Christ is "the loser in history."<sup>49</sup>

### **Christ's Universal Mediatorial Kingship**

Another important issue is that of Christ's supposedly universal  
*mediatorial* kingship. In CR this universal mediatorial kingship is  
fundamental to the Christian civilization that is the fulfillment of the  
kingdom of Christ in history. Indeed, if this kingdom involves the  
*salvation* of civilizations and nations and the "Christianizing" of every  
area of human society, then it must relate to Christ's mediatorial work.

This is, however, as we have seen, a denial of what Scripture  
teaches about mediation. That Christ is Mediator means, according to  
Turretin, that "he exercises the office of Mediator to establish a union  
between God and men, separated from each other on account of sin."  
This is also the teaching of Scripture in I Timothy 2:5, 6 and Hebrews  
9:15. Mediation results in salvation, not in dominion and the Christian-  
izing of society!

Also, insofar as Christ's mediatorial office includes not only His  
kingly function but also His priestly function, it is impossible to say that  
Christ is universal mediatorial king without also saying that in some  
sense He is a universal mediatorial priest. His kingly mediatorial  
function rests on the priestly function. He is king because He is also  
priest. He rules in God's name over those for whom He died, as His  
superscription testifies. If, then, He is the mediatorial priest of all in  
some sense, there are only two alternatives, the Arminian denial of  
limited atonement, or the "low Calvinist" half-way house that insists on  
a particular atonement side by side with a cross that is nevertheless  
intended for all and has blessings for all.<sup>50</sup> If He rules as Mediator over

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49. Cf. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*,  
ICE, 1988, p. 167

50. That there is in CR an inevitable tendency to deny a strictly particular  
atonement can be seen in the quotation from Gary North on page 28, where he  
says: "He died to save the world, meaning to give it time, life, and external

the kingdoms of this world, He rules them as priest-king. Then His priestly work has application to them as well, that is, there is broader reference to the atonement of Christ than just to the elect.

Also, if His kingship has application to this present world and to the Christianizing of society, so does His prophetic office, for it is through the prophetic office that He makes Himself known as king and establishes His rule. But then one no longer has a gospel that is strictly particular. It is, in that case, a gospel that is for all society, the instrument for saving and delivering civilization in general and its institutions.

In speaking of Christ's victory, CR teaches "there are institutions and nations in the sphere of society that can be 'saved' by the efficacious power of Christ the King." But this is wrong. The only nation that is saved is the church. The only institution that is saved is the church. "The earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (II Pet. 3:10). The victory of the gospel in the non-elect is in their hardening and condemnation. To teach otherwise is to deny the particularity of the cross and of grace.

We believe in a universal *providential* rule of Christ over all things. This is simply part of the standard Reformed distinction between Christ's rule of power and His rule of grace. We also believe that His mediatorial work (in every respect) touches the ungodly. That is, they come into contact with it. We even believe that this must be so for God's purpose to be accomplished. We do not, cannot, believe that Christ rules *as Mediator* over all. As Turretin says:

First, the church is the primary work of the Holy Trinity, the object of Christ's mediation and the subject of the application of his benefits. For he came into the world and performed the mediatorial office for no other reason than to acquire a church for himself and call it (when acquired) into a participation of his grace and glory.<sup>51</sup>

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blessings. He did not die to offer a hypothetical promise of regeneration to 'vessels of wrath' (Romans 9:22), but He died to become a savior in the same sense as that described in the first part of I Timothy 4:10 — not a special savior, but a sustaining, restraining savior."

51. Turretin, *Institutes*, XVIII, 1, vol. III, p. 1. Two things are noteworthy here: (1) the emphasis on the primacy of the church, and (2) the fact that the church alone is considered to be the object of Christ's *mediation*.

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## Kingdom and Theocracy

Another issue that comes up in the debate with CR is the whole matter of the OT theocracy. The CR view, of course, is that the Jewish theocracy is fulfilled in the NT in a Christian nation or civilization. This is not only a concession to Dispensationalism but *is* implicit Dispensationalism (and a kind of Israelitism, "British" or otherwise). The Reformed view (over against Dispensationalism) is that not only Israel as the church, but also Israel as a theocratic kingdom is completely fulfilled in the church of the NT. Even if a Christian nation or civilization were established, therefore, it would not be the fulfillment of the OT theocracy. The church and it alone would remain that fulfillment.

This is the plain teaching of the Word. I Peter 2:9 identifies the church, built on the cornerstone Jesus Christ, as that holy nation of God: so does Revelation 7 with its vision of the church ordered and sealed according to tribes. Philippians 3:20 speaks of our "commonwealth"<sup>52</sup> and says that it is "in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." Philippians 1:27 says that *our* "polity"<sup>53</sup> must be as becometh the gospel. Not only that, but all the passages that speak of the church in terms of a city or country (on earth or glorified) imply that the church is the complete fulfillment and realization of the OT theocracy (Acts 15:14-17; Eph. 2:19-22; Heb. 11:10, 14-16; I Pet. 2:4-8; Rev. 21, 22).

Here again we have the support of the older Reformed theologians:

1. The forensic or judicial law concerning the civil government of the people of God under the Old Testament and contained in a body of precepts concerning the form of that political rule. There were various ends of it. (1) The good order (*eutaxia*) and legitimate constitution of the Jewish polity, which should be a true theocracy (*theokratia*), as Josephus calls it. (2) The distinguishing of that state and nation from all other people and states and that that polity might be the seat of the church and the place for the manifestation of God. (3) The vindication of the moral and ceremonial law from contempt, and so the enforcer of respect

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52. This is probably the closest word we have in English to express the sense of the Greek work *politeuma*.

53. A verb form of the same word used in Philippians 3:20.

and obligation towards both. (4) The adumbration of the spiritual kingdom of Christ.<sup>54</sup>

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The first difference (between the OT and NT) then is, that though, in old time, the Lord was pleased to direct the thoughts of his people, and raise their minds to the heavenly inheritance, yet, that their hope of it might be the better maintained, he held it forth, and, in a manner, gave a foretaste of it under earthly blessings, whereas the gift of future life, now more clearly and lucidly revealed by the gospel, leads our minds directly to meditate upon it, the inferior mode of exercise formerly employed in regard to the Jews now being laid aside.... We maintain that, in the earthly possession which the Israelites enjoyed, they beheld, as in a mirror, the future inheritance which they believed to be reserved for them in heaven.<sup>55</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

In this way are to be understood the many passages in Job (Job xviii. 17) and Isaiah, to the effect, That the righteous shall inherit the earth, that the wicked shall be driven out of it, that Jerusalem will abound in all kinds of riches, and Sion overflow with every species of abundance. In strict propriety, all these things obviously apply not to the land of our pilgrimage, nor to the earthly Jerusalem, but to the true country, the heavenly city of believers, in which the Lord hath commanded blessing and life for evermore (Ps. cxxxiii. 3).<sup>56</sup>

Even Abraham Kuyper, Sr., for all his notions of common grace, says:

All this, however, is no *theocracy*. A theocracy was only found in Israel, because in Israel, God intervened immediately. For both by *Urim* and *Thummim* and by *Prophecy*; both by His saving miracles and by His chastising judgments, He held in His own hand the jurisdiction and the leadership of the people.<sup>57</sup>

This quotation is important not only because it repudiates the CR notions of a NT theocracy, but because it shows clearly the true nature of a theocracy and the fact there is not even the possibility of such in the

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54. Turretin, *Institutes*, XI, 26, vol. II, pp. 165, 166.

55. Calvin, *Institutes*, II, xix, 1, vol. I, p. 388.

56. Calvin, *Institutes*, II, xix, 2, vol. I, p. 389.

57. Kuyper, *Calvinism*, pp. 107, 108.

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NT. A theocracy involves *direct* divine intervention and rule, and is not just a matter of bringing civilization under the rule of biblical law.

### **The Kingdom and Heaven**

We have noticed in our study a tendency in CR to deny the heavenly hope of believers altogether. This, too, we believe, follows directly from their teachings on the kingdom.

For example, one prominent CR author, David Chilton, has recently advocated a kind of hyper-preterism,<sup>58</sup> according to which he sees not only the prophecies of Matthew 24 and the book of Revelation as having been fulfilled already, but also the prophecies of the final resurrection. He has been teaching, in other words, that “the resurrection is past already” (II Tim. 2:17, 18). In connection with that verse his heresy is also referred to as the Hymenaeian heresy.

Others do not go as far, but nevertheless head in that direction by denying that heaven is the final home of the saints. Perks is a good illustration. He openly denies that heaven is the eternal dwelling of believers.<sup>59</sup> It is not entirely clear what he means, but he repudiates the desire to “go to heaven” and talk of “life in heaven” as an unbiblical and pagan idea of the afterlife (this in spite of Matt. 5:12; 7:21; Jn. 14:2, 3; II Cor. 5:1; Heb. 10:34; I Pet. 1:4 and a host of other passages).

Though it does not seem that he actually denies the existence of heaven, he says:

From the way some Christians talk it seems they expect to inherit ‘heaven.’ They will be sorely disappointed. It’s all going to be down here in the nitty-gritty of physical life. So you had better get used to it down here where for mankind life is lived.<sup>60</sup>

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The Christian’s inheritance is usually seen, if it is considered at all, as some kind of nebulous ethereal place where the believer goes when

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58. Preterism is the belief that the NT prophecies of Matthew 24 and Revelation have for the most part been completely fulfilled already in the destruction of Jerusalem and other historical events relating to the time of the apostles and the early church.

59. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, footnote 28, pp. 27 and 28, and pp. 69 and 70.

60. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 69.

he dies ("heaven," the "Christian" version of the pagan concept of the Elysian Fields). Not so! The believer's inheritance is the earth. It is the kingdoms of this world that are to become the kingdoms of God and over which Christ will rule forever (Rev. 11:15).<sup>61</sup>

Obviously, it is not a large step from Perks' notions of "heaven on earth"<sup>62</sup> to a denial of any heavenly inheritance for believers. Indeed, though Perks himself does not deny it, it is not a large step from his denial of a heavenly inheritance, to a denial of the final resurrection, as in the teaching of David Chilton. In CR the kingdom of heaven is really not the kingdom *of heaven* at all! Though they will admit that it comes from heaven, it is this present world, Christianized, delivered at least in part from the curse, and brought under dominion to the saints. ●

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61. Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 70.

62. See page 16, footnote 42.

## **Useful Websites:**

[www.cprc.co.uk](http://www.cprc.co.uk)

[www.reformedwitnesshour.org](http://www.reformedwitnesshour.org)

[www.prca.org](http://www.prca.org)

[www.standardbearer.rfpa.org](http://www.standardbearer.rfpa.org)

[www.prca.org/prtj](http://www.prca.org/prtj)

[www.rfpa.org](http://www.rfpa.org)

[www.britishreformed.org](http://www.britishreformed.org)

[www.limerickreformed.com](http://www.limerickreformed.com)

[www.prcaphilippinesaudio.wordpress.com](http://www.prcaphilippinesaudio.wordpress.com)

[www.cerc.org.sg](http://www.cerc.org.sg)

[www.epc.org.au](http://www.epc.org.au)