

### Christianizing the World? (3)

Those who promote the Christianizing of the world as the duty of the church and of the Christian present the project as the coming of the kingdom of God in the world. The Christian colleges that are on this bandwagon beat the drum of the coming of the kingdom. Not much is heard of church or covenant. Kingdom is all: seeking the kingdom; promoting the kingdom; living the life of the kingdom; and the like.

This emphasis on the kingdom, as though Christianizing the world brings about the kingdom of God and is the chief aspect of the kingdom, goes back to Abraham Kuyper, the source of the notion that the church's calling is to Christianize the culture first of one's country and then of the entire world.

In his influential *Lectures on Calvinism*, the playbook of the game of Christianizing the world, Kuyper appealed to the "Sovereignty of the Triune God over the whole Cosmos, in all its spheres and kingdoms," that is, to the kingship and kingdom of God (*Lectures on Calvinism*, Eerdmans, 1953, 79).

In a book on *Common Grace in Science and Art*, Kuyper pleaded for the Christian's cooperation with ungodly scientists and artists who by "common grace [have] been active...greatly promoting the spiritual development of the human race." In this context, Kuyper stressed the "kingdom of God": "the Kingdom of God is not in the least limited to the institutional church but rules our entire world-and-life-view" ("Common Grace in Science," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt, Eerdmans, 1998, 458, 459).

#### **The Charge of World-flight**

In keeping with their conviction that Christianizing the world represents the coming of the kingdom of God and is a noble kingdom-venture, the Reformed zealots on behalf of Christianizing the world charge the Protestant Reformed Churches and their members with a serious lack of kingdom-vision and with grave dereliction of duty concerning promoting the kingdom of God. A serious shortcoming, if true! This charge is rightly disturbing to Protestant Reformed students at these colleges.

An especially painful aspect of this charge is the accusation that Protestant Reformed churches and believers are guilty of the unbiblical, shameful evil of “world-flight.” The common grace, cultural-Calvinists consign us to the ranks of the Anabaptists of the time of the Reformation. They dismiss us as belonging to the company of Munzer, John of Leyden, and Menno Simons. We are no genuine Calvinists at all! We are no children and heirs of Luther, Calvin, and evidently of the Reformed confessions (although the cultural-Calvinists offer precious little proof for their theory of Christianizing the world and for their charge of “world-flight” from the creeds).

I write “unbiblical” evil of world-flight because our Lord forbade world-flight: “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world...I [have] sent them into the world” (John 17:15, 16).

So serious an evil is the Protestant Reformed refusal to participate in the project of Christianizing the world that, according to the proponents of the project, we make ourselves guilty of opposing and obstructing one of the two great works of God in history and, therefore, one of his two main purposes with his world: the creation of beautiful, noble, good, even godly culture, worldwide, by virtue of common grace.

Listen to the father of the cultural-Calvinists, Abraham Kuyper:

There is a particular grace which works Salvation, and also a common grace by which God...relaxes the curse which rests upon [the world], arrests its process of corruption, and thus allows the untrammelled development of our life in which to glorify Himself as Creator (*Lectures on Calvinism*, 30).

In his work on common grace, Kuyper wrote: “There is beside the great work of God in special grace also that totally other work of God in the realm of common grace.” That “totally other work” is to “consummate the world’s development” (“Common Grace,” in *Kuyper*, ed. Bratt, 176).

How wonderful a work of God the Christianizing of the world is, in the thinking of its advocates, and therefore how woefully deficient, if not sinful, those Reformed Christians are who decline to involve themselves in this work, Herman Bavinck

suggested when he exclaimed, “We have to aim at that mighty, glorious, rich ideal to Christianize the world by bringing in our Reformed confession into all areas of life” (Bavinck’s farewell address to the Kampen seminary students in 1902, in Willem J. de Wit, *On the Way to the Living God*, Free University Press, 2011, 58). It might give the contemporary cultural-Calvinists pause that Bavinck spoke of the necessity of bringing the Reformed confessions into all areas of life. From the contemporary form of the project of Christianizing the world, the Reformed creeds are noticeably missing.

But the zealots for Christianizing the world are utterly and wholly mistaken. They are mistaken with regard to their conception of the kingdom of God. They are mistaken with regard to their notion that Christianizing the world by common grace has anything to do with the kingdom of God and its coming. They are mistaken in their false accusation that the Protestant Reformed Churches are indifferent and passive with regard to the kingdom of God and its extension in this world.

### **What the Kingdom of God is**

First, the advocates of a Christianized world are mistaken regarding their conception of God’s kingdom in this world. A society, a nation, or even an entire world of mostly unbelievers that has been influenced by Christianity outwardly is no more the kingdom of God than a set of ungodly Hollywood actors dramatizing the life of Martin Luther is the Reformation of the church or an extension of the Reformation.

The kingdom of God in this world is the reign of the triune God in Jesus Christ, God’s great servant in the world. This is the kingdom whose coming Christians desire and pray for in the second petition of the model prayer, “Thy kingdom come.” It is the kingdom of God’s “dear Son” (Col. 1:13).

This kingdom does not come by a common grace of God. Rather, it comes by God’s “Word and Spirit,” as the Heidelberg Catechism explains: “Thy kingdom come; that is, rule us so *by Thy Word and Spirit*” (Q&A 123; emphasis added).

Of this kingdom, only those are citizens who are elect believers. The citizens are those whom God “hath translated...into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:13). All other humans remain under “the power of darkness” (Col. 1:13), in the kingdom of the

prince of darkness. These unbelieving people have no interest in the kingdom of God, except to will its destruction (Psalm 2; Rev. 13).

As to its nature, the kingdom of God is heavenly, not earthly; spiritual, not carnal. This was Jesus' description of the kingdom to Pilate, on the day of Jesus' establishment of the kingdom on the foundation of the righteousness of his death: "not of this world"; "not from hence" (John 18:33–37). Correctly explaining this description of the kingdom of God, John Calvin wrote, "spiritual," "heavenly," and "separated from the world" (*Commentary on John*, vol. 2, Eerdmans, 1949, 209).

Therefore the kingdom does not come with "observation" (Luke 17:21). The kingdom of common grace, in contrast, comes with observable developments in social relations, economic advancements, and political progress, at least in the imagination of the dreamers of this kingdom.

The benefits of the kingdom of God are not earthly peace and carnal prosperity—the main goals of the kingdom of common grace—but "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17).

One thing more about the kingdom Jesus stressed to Pilate in their discussion of the kingdom: the kingdom of God is founded on "the truth": "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice" (John 18:37). This was Jesus' response to Pilate's question, "Art thou a king then?" (John 18:37) and Jesus' description of the nature of his kingship and kingdom. The truth is the gospel of Scripture as summarized in the Christian and the distinctively Reformed confessions.

Not even the most enthusiastic defender of the kingdom being promoted by the cultural Calvinists—the kingdom of common grace, in cooperation with Roman Catholics and unbelievers—will dare to contend that that kingdom is based on the truth. That kingdom can make progress and take form only by the compromising, if not the complete silencing of the truth. Roman Catholics and unbelievers reject the truth. The kingdom of common grace therefore is no kingdom of God. It is no kingdom in which any Calvinist, indeed any professing Christian, should have any interest, except to oppose it as a rival kingdom to the kingdom of the truth, that is, the kingdom of God in Jesus

Christ. (For a more complete treatment of the vitally important truth of the kingdom, see my booklet, “The Kingdom of God,” Evangelism Committee of Southwest PRC, 2002).

### **The Reign of God in the Heart**

That the kingdom of God is heavenly in origin and in nature does not imply that it is not on the earth and in the world. The kingdom is in the world, and its primary location is the heart of the elect believer. There Christ has his throne; there God reigns in Jesus Christ by his grace and Spirit.

Kuyper and his cultural-Calvinist disciples disparage the reign of grace in the hearts of the people of God. They criticize the spiritual and doctrinal Calvinists who emphasize this, as though by this emphasis we *restrict* the kingdom to the heart. A scholar of Kuyper is correct when he states as a main concern of Kuyper in his program of Christianizing the world by common grace that Reformed people “restrict the reign of Christ to the ‘spiritual,’ to the private rule over the human heart” (John Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation: Abraham Kuyper’s American Public Theology*, Eerdmans, 2001, 193).

The rule of God in the human heart is fundamental to the presence of the kingdom on earth. Apart from this rule in the heart, whatever outward conformity there may be to Christianity, the entire project of Christianizing the world is obnoxious to God and is certainly not the coming of his kingdom. God looks to the heart! God is pleased with willing service from the heart!

In fact, apart from the reign of grace in human hearts, men and women *will* not, *do* not, and *cannot* seek the kingdom of God, even outwardly. As slaves of Satan, they hate even the appearance of the kingdom of God. They exert themselves to destroy God’s kingdom. They energetically build the kingdom of antichrist.

And if Christ reigns in one’s heart, that man or woman *will* and *must* live the life of the kingdom of God—in *all spheres of human life*.

The fear of the cultural-Calvinists that believers will be passive and Anabaptistic is groundless. The fear does not reckon with the heart as the source of all the issues of life, or with the mighty, all-comprehensive lordship of Jesus in the heart.

Do not disparage or underestimate the reign of Christ in the heart! With this, the Heidelberg Catechism begins its explanation of the second petition of the model prayer: “that is, rule us so by Thy Word and Spirit, that we may submit ourselves more and more to Thee.” The meaning is: Rule us *in our hearts*.

### **Sovereignty in All Spheres of Life**

Such is the rule of Christ in the heart of the Reformed Christian that he or she submits to Jesus Christ in all spheres of earthly life. Thus, the Reformed Christian lives the life of the kingdom in all spheres. Thus, the kingdom is extended to all spheres. Thus, the believer raises the banner of the kingdom of God over every sphere: “Jesus the Christ is king and lord of all.”

Thus, altogether apart from a common grace of God and without any participation in the project of Christianizing the world, the spiritual and doctrinal Calvinist—the *genuine* Calvinist—does full justice to Kuyper’s famous, stirring declaration, “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: ‘Mine!’” (“Sphere Sovereignty,” in *Kuyper*, ed. Bratt, 488).

Demonstrating and illustrating this kingdom-life in all the spheres will be the content of the next article.