

Christianizing the World? (4)

In this installment in the series examining the crusade in Reformed and evangelical circles in North America to Christianize the world, I present the kingdom alternative of genuine Calvinism. Rejection of the project of common grace to influence the culture of the world does not imply rejection of the calling of the Christian to live the life of the kingdom of God in all spheres of earthly life. The Protestant Reformed Christian, although rejecting Abraham Kuyper's and the Christian Reformed Church's theory of common grace, lives and must live in such a way as to honor Kuyper's stirring claim on behalf of Christ, "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 *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt, Eerdmans, 1988, 488).

In every sphere of our life, earthly as well as spiritual, in government, education, science, and labor, as well as in prayer and at church, we live the life of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. In every sphere of life, our behavior and speech witness that Jesus the Christ is king. Thus, over whatever sphere of life we enter, we raise the banner, "Jesus Christ is king."

The Kingdom of Jesus

However—and this to us is of fundamental importance—the Christ on whose behalf we raise the banner is the man who was crucified, raised from the dead, and now sits at the right hand of God in heaven.

For Kuyper and his disciples, the Christ who is sovereign over all and whose kingship they suppose they honor is only the second person of the Trinity, not the man Jesus who loved us and gave himself for us. If there were a kingdom of the second person of the Trinity, it would be the kingdom of the absolute power of God triune (not alone of the second person). This kingdom of the triune God exists in perfection apart from any and all efforts of the church on earth to extend it. This kingdom does not *come*,

but *is*. It certainly is not promoted by common grace, or for that matter, by particular grace. It is a reality by virtue of the Godhead of God with regard to his creation.

The kingdom that has the heart of Protestant Reformed Christians, as also of all Christians throughout all ages until the time of the speculations of Abraham Kuyper, is the “kingdom of [God’s] dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13–14).

The cultural-Calvinists may go on honoring the second person of the Trinity, evidently to the exclusion of the first and third persons. Protestant Reformed Calvinists honor the crucified, risen, and exalted Lord Jesus and in him, the triune God.

Let this be understood: for us, the sovereignty and kingdom of Christ are the sovereignty and kingdom of *Jesus*.

This Jesus reigns in our hearts by his word and Spirit, as the Reformed faith confesses in the Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 123.

Reigning in our hearts, Jesus Christ reigns also in all the spheres of life into which we enter. Thus the kingdom extends to every sphere, and thus the banner of the kingdom flies over every sphere.

The Sphere of the Church

First and foremost is the sphere of the institute of the true church. The citizen of the kingdom of God will be a lively member of a true church, worshiping the triune God in spirit and in truth diligently every Sabbath.

This aspect of living the life of the kingdom in all the spheres is minimized and even ignored by many of the vocal advocates of Christianizing the world. Not only do they not stress this, but also they usually say nothing about this at all in their treatises on the kingdom. This caution on their part is understandable: If you are creating a kingdom with atheists, Muslims, unbelievers, and Roman Catholics, you had best say nothing about church membership.

But minimizing or ignoring church membership is inexcusable. The reign of Jesus Christ in and over the church is the second explanation of the second petition of the model prayer by the Heidelberg Catechism: “preserve and increase Thy church” (Q&A 123). The church is the institutional form of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. The

Westminster Confession of Faith declares: “The visible church...is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus” (25.2). The Belgic Confession teaches the same when in its treatment of the church it states, “which is evident from this, that Christ is an eternal King” (Art. 27). Christ is king of the church, and the church is his kingdom.

The New Testament church is God’s “holy nation”—the reality of Old Testament Israel (1 Pet. 2:9). This is a basic truth that the proponents of the Christianizing of the world have a hard time keeping in mind. As they dream their dreams of Christianizing first their own nation and then the world, they invariably identify their own nation with the kingdom of God. Kuyper thought that the Netherlands was God’s holy nation, the New Testament reality of the nation of Israel. Jonathan Edwards supposed the same regarding America, especially the New England part of America. Many evangelicals today, in their preaching of the call to make America once again a Christian nation, show that they think that the United States was once a Christian, holy nation.

The Netherlands was never a holy nation. Neither was the United States. No earthly nation, regardless how Christianized it might become, can be God’s holy nation. The true church in the world is the kingdom and holy nation of God, the New Testament *reality* (not: replacement) of Israel in the Old Testament.

This is a reason that we doctrinal, ecclesiastical, and spiritual Calvinists so highly regard the true church and prize membership in her. She is God’s kingdom, God’s New Testament Zion.

In the church on the Lord’s Day occurs the chief cultural activity of any human: the public worship of God.

In addition, the church gives the believer the directions and spiritual energy to live the life of the kingdom in all the other spheres of human life. The dynamo of the kingdom of God is not the Christian college, and certainly not the Christian college that thinks to equip the kingdom-builders with some feeble power of a common grace. The dynamo of the kingdom is the true church, and the power with which she equips the citizens of the kingdom is the mighty, resurrection grace and Spirit of the Lord Jesus.

The Sphere of the Family

The second sphere of human life in which most citizens of the kingdom submit to King Jesus and fly his banner is marriage and the family.

Common sense realizes the fundamental importance of this sphere for all of societal life and for the welfare of an earthly nation. That the political leaders of the West are unseeing, indeed actively at work to destroy marriage and the home, is due not only to the natural darkness of their depraved understanding because of unbelief, but also to God's blinding of them in his judicial wrath. Common sense has become senseless in the United States with regard to the basic structure of human life in society.

Scripture insists on the importance of the sphere of the family, and gives thorough instruction concerning the will of King Jesus for life in this sphere. The Creator married one man and one woman in an intimate union of one flesh for life, and blessed the marriage with fruitfulness in bringing forth children, whom the married couple, their parents, must rear (Gen. 1, 2). King Jesus took this ordinance over into his kingdom and made his will concerning our life in marriage and the family known in Ephesians 5 and 6, 1 Corinthians 7, and many other places in Scripture.

The Reformation restored this sphere to its place of honor and importance after Rome had degraded it by monasticism and by the decree that the clergy may not marry, as though single life were a higher, more spiritual state than marriage, to say nothing of the tolerance by Rome of sexual promiscuity.

There is much talk today by the cultural-Calvinists about Christianizing our American society. These same people and their churches tolerate rampant divorce and remarriage in their own churches. There is even open promotion of sodomy in the denominational paper of the Christian Reformed Church and in their flagship college. Their unconcern for marriage and the family is proof that they are not serious about the coming of the kingdom of God. They are not serious about influencing the culture of Grand Rapids and the United States. Marriage and the family are the urgent social issues in North America. The great evils disrupting and destroying the country are divorce, remarriage, and sexual promiscuity, including perversity. Genuine concern for the culture, to say nothing of the kingdom of God, could not possibly remain quiet about these evils.

The man who lives faithfully with his wife, the wife who keeps her vow to her husband, the parents who together raise their children in the fear of the Lord, the children and young people who honor their parents and heed their godly instruction—these are living the life of the kingdom. These are extending the kingship of the Lord Jesus into the fundamentally important sphere of the family. These are flying the banner of King Jesus over the home for all to see. These are also the beneficial citizens of any earthly nation.

The Sphere of Education

A third significant sphere of human life is the education of children, as both Scripture and nature teach us. Citizens of the kingdom of God submit to the reign of Jesus Christ in the sphere of education. Thus the kingdom extends into the sphere of education. Over the sphere of education, we raise the banner, “Not once square inch about which Jesus Christ does not say, ‘Mine!’”

We give our children a godly upbringing at home, including the example of our own lives of submission to King Jesus, and including discipline of the children. We see to it that the children receive thorough instruction in the history and doctrines of the Bible in the solid catechism program of a true, Reformed church. In addition, with like-minded Reformed believers we provide for our children good Christian schools in which trained, competent Calvinist teachers prepare the children to live and work ably in 21st century America as subjects of King Jesus. On behalf of the parents, these teachers instruct the children in all the branches of knowledge in light of the word of God, as most parents lack both time and ability to do.

By this Christian education is brought into subjection to King Jesus the mind of the children.

Here, in a special way, our zeal for the kingdom is evident to all: We pay for these schools ourselves! The state, that is, the other tax-paying citizens, do not support our schools. We support our schools in addition to funding the state schools—an obvious injustice that the government does not redress and that apparently does not trouble the other citizens of the country.

The result of this rearing is that our sons and daughters become good citizens of the United States—the best citizens of the nation: capable, responsible, hard-working, law-abiding, and tax-paying.

But our motive in our rearing of our children is not primarily to influence the United States and the world. Rather, our motive is the kingdom of God. Our children are from birth citizens of the kingdom. They belong to King Jesus, and therefore must be educated in the truths and ways of the kingdom of God: “Suffer little [infant] children to come unto me...for of such [infant children] is the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:16).

Heart, church, family, and education do not exhaust the important spheres in which spiritual and doctrinal Calvinists live the life of the kingdom. Some of the other spheres we will consider in the next installment.

Let no one persuade you that by rejecting the Christianizing of the world you neglect the kingdom of God or come short in living its distinctive life in all the spheres of human life.