

Christianizing the World? (5)

Rejection of the (impossible) project of Christianizing the world by a (fictitious) common grace of God in no wise implies an Anabaptistic flight from the world. The Reformed Christian who heeds God's call in Scripture, rather than Abraham Kuyper's in *Lectures on Calvinism*, lives a kingdom-life by the grace and Spirit of Jesus Christ in all the spheres of human life in God's world.

Already in this series I have affirmed the reign of King Jesus in the heart of the elect, Reformed believer and described the extension of the kingdom into the spheres of the church, the family, and the education of kingdom children.

The Sphere of Labor

Another sphere of earthly life in which we hold aloft the banner of King Jesus is labor. Calvinist businessmen and financiers run their enterprises honestly; provide fairly, even liberally, for their employees; and with their well-gotten wealth "do good...[and are] rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate [that is, give to the needy]," in obedience to the charge of the apostle of Christ in 1 Timothy 6:18. This is their kingdom-behavior, not because some labor union, in disobedience to the fifth commandment and to the New Testament precept that employees be subject to their employers, forces them to do so, or because a civil government, influenced by Karl Marx, usurps the authority to redistribute the wealth of the citizenry. But this is the behavior in the sphere of labor of Reformed businessmen because they know that, although they did build their companies by their own creativity and hard work, they are not lords of their companies. Jesus Christ is lord in business and finance.

In the sphere of labor, the Reformed workingman is diligent and reliable, submitting to the authority even of a "froward" employer, for God's sake (1 Pet. 2:18–25). He repudiates the revolution and violence of the labor unions, even though this may mean financial loss and suffering. The explanation is that King Jesus reigns in his heart and therefore over all his life, including his behavior at work.

I instance the example of my own father in the matter of the kingdom-life of the Reformed workingman. He worked diligently and reliably for more than forty years in the Keeler Brass factory in Grand Rapids. Wages were not the highest in this non-union plant. Many of his fellow workers were constantly grumbling, always critical of the owners of the factory. Again and again they tried to get a labor union into the shop. Every time my father was a leader in keeping the union out. At his retirement, his fellow workers, who respected him even though they disagreed with his Reformed principles (which were the basic truths of the kingdom of God), gave him a farewell party. Unexpectedly, Mr. Keeler, the owner of the company, appeared in the gathering. My father began his prepared farewell remarks this way: “I thank Mr. Keeler for work, so that I could support my family, support the Protestant Reformed Church, and send my children to the Christian schools.”

This was the confession of King Jesus in the sphere of labor. That conduct on the job and that speech flew the banner of the kingdom of Jesus Christ in the realm of labor.

The Sphere of Government

On the sphere of politics and government the cultural-Calvinists put heavy emphasis. Abraham Kuyper did. A prominent feature of his project to Christianize the Netherlands was the forming of a political party that would propel him into the office of prime minister of the nation. This achievement of political power by that extraordinary man fascinates his disciples today. They are impressed with that kind of showy accomplishment by a uniquely gifted Calvinist. This attainment of earthly power and earthly glory is what they are really after, when they proclaim the coming of the kingdom and the Christianizing of the world.

But this is clean contrary to the message of the gospel of the kingdom in New Testament Scripture. Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, not many Abraham Kuypers, has Jesus Christ called into his kingdom. Rather, he has chosen the foolish, the weak, the base, and the nobodies, “that no flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Cor. 1:26–29). Accordingly, the kingdom is extended into every sphere of life, for the most part in very ordinary, unnoticed, obscure ways. There are no

trumpets blaring, no balloons dropping from the ceiling, no television cameras recording the action.

This is true particularly of the kingdom-life of Calvinists in the sphere of government. It consists of simply submitting to the rulers and paying one's taxes, because the Christian recognizes the civil powers as ordained of God (Rom. 13:1–7).

At such simple, ordinary behavior the cultural-Calvinists jeer. They want influential political parties. They want illustrious men and women in high office. Many advocate, and some take part in high-profile, glamorous revolution. Traipsing off to South Africa to stir up revolution is acclaimed by the proponents of Christianizing the world as a glorious expression of the life of the kingdom of common grace. Distinguishing oneself as a revolutionary, especially on behalf of blacks or women, is a badge of honor in the common grace kingdom. That in the kingdom of God, King Jesus forbids revolution against the civil authorities is of no concern to the cultural-Calvinists (Rom. 13:1–7; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13–17).

Scripture bestows its badge of honor upon the simple, ordinary conduct in the sphere of government of the vast majority of Christians in all ages and among all nations of submitting and paying taxes.

In his inimitable way, Martin Luther affirmed the ordinary behavior of the lowly and no-account as the characteristic life of the kingdom of God:

A faithful servant girl does more good, accomplishes more, and is far more dependable—even if she only takes a sack from the back of an ass—than all the priests and monks who sing themselves to death day and night while making bloody martyrs of themselves (quoted in William H. Lazareth, *Luther on the Christian Home: An Application of the Social Ethics of the Reformation*, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960, 159).

The Sphere of Leisure

The Bible hardly recognizes a sphere of leisure among the important spheres of human life. But so prominent has leisure become among the nations of the West that any treatment of distinctively Christian behavior must take account of it.

Scripture does not encourage leisure. Scripture calls humans to work in the short time of the life of all of us. Two truths ought to govern our sparing enjoyment of leisure. First, regarding our earthly vocation, we are called to work six days and to rest one day the rest of God. This is the force of the fourth commandment of the law: “six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God” (Ex. 20:9–10). The rest of the Sabbath is not the same as North American leisure. It is a rest involving, indeed requiring, spiritual labor. Diligently we attend the church of God. We work at preaching and hearing the word of God. The remainder of the Sabbath is spent, not in “sacking out,” or in amusing ourselves by watching NFL Sunday, but in good reading, instructing our families in the word of God, and meditating on the things of God. This is work. But this rest affords peace to the soul that mere leisure cannot give.

Second, with regard to our work in and on behalf of the kingdom of God, we ought to be diligent in working “while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4).

Our main calling is to work. Leisure, in the small place it has in our lives, must serve our working and not become an end in itself. The Reformed Christian therefore must keep leisure in its place. As much as the everyday duties of his or her life permit, the Reformed man or woman ought to seek or accept activities that promote the kingdom of God: for men, membership in the consistory and school boards; for both men and women, help of the needy, whether poor, or sick, or otherwise distressed; involvement in various projects of church and school; and diligent study of the word of God, so as to develop in the life of the kingdom.

With regard to the entertainments that jostle to dominate our leisure, the very first rule of the kingdom of God is that we refuse those entertainments that are unfitting for a citizen of the kingdom of God: the dance; movies that entice with sensuality or amuse with violence; gambling.

Dancing

The tendency of the theory of common grace to make its adherents worldly, rather than to Christianize the world, is evident in the inability of the proponents of common grace to condemn and repudiate even the worst of the world’s organizations and most

corrupt productions. Whereas once the Christian Reformed Church and its colleges condemned dancing as worldly (which it is—a prelude to fornication), now they embrace it, extol it as an art form, and practice it. They have “redeemed” it. But its “redeemed” form differs in no respect from its unredeemed form. It remains lascivious movements of males cheek to jowl (and not only these body parts) with females to whom they are not married, to the accompaniment of arousing music. To speak of the redemption of dancing is to demean the glorious Christian concept of redemption. To encourage dancing among college students is to pour gas on the flame of lust.

Movie Attendance

As I write this article, the Winter 2012 issue of *The Calvin Spark* arrives in my mailbox. This is the magazine for the alumni of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Prominent in the magazine is a full-page, favorable review of a book by a professor at the college—William Romanowski—titled *Reforming Hollywood* (15).

The first reaction of a spiritual and doctrinal Calvinist is incredulity. Is there another human in the world besides the author who thinks that reforming Hollywood is a possibility? Indeed, does the author himself really think so?

The second reaction is more substantial: Christianity does not think or write of *reforming* the moral cesspool that is the Hollywood of the filth, violence, and sheer ungodliness of the movies, of the immoral, if not amoral actors and actresses, and of the antichristian producers. Christianity thinks and writes of as well as prays for the utter *destruction* of that opening of hell into the earth called Hollywood.

In the review of the Calvin professor’s book, the *Calvin Spark* notes approvingly the author’s evident agreement with the liberal James Wall’s commendation of the movie *The Graduate* as having “moral and religious significance, as well as artistic merit.” I distinctly recall (the names Dustin Hoffman and Anne Bancroft unfortunately stick in my memory) that the reviews and graphic advertisement of this movie in the public press promoted the movie as featuring fornication and adultery as an acceptable, indeed desirable way of life for moderns.

I let the patron saint of the cultural-Calvinists at Calvin College rebuke their advocacy of Hollywood and its movies. In his *Lectures on Calvinism*, Abraham Kuyper wrote this against theater-going.

Not *every* intimate intercourse with the unconverted world is deemed lawful by Calvinism, for it placed a barrier against the too unhallowed influence of this world by putting a distinct “veto” upon...theatres...That which offended our ancestors was...the *moral sacrifice* which as a rule was demanded of actors and actresses for the amusement of the public. A theatrical troop [today, the set of actors and actresses—DJE]...stood, morally, rather low [today, ridiculous understatement—DJE]. This low moral standard resulted partly from the fact that the constant and ever-changing presentation of the character of another person finally hampers the moulding of your personal character; and partly because our modern Theaters...have introduced the presence of women on the stage, the prosperity of the Theater being too often gauged by the measure in which a woman jeopardizes the most sacred treasures God entrusts to her, her stainless name, and irreproachable conduct...The actual fact remains that, taking all the world over, the prosperity of a Theater often increases in proportion to the moral degradation of the actors. Too often therefore...the prosperity of Theaters is purchased at the cost of manly character, and of female purity. And the purchase of delight for the ear and the eye at the price of such a moral hecatomb, the Calvinist, who honored whatever was human in man for the sake of God, could not but condemn (*Lectures on Calvinism*, Eerdmans, 1953, 73-75).

Kuyper concluded that attending the movies is a “*Rubicon* which no true Calvinist could cross without sacrificing his earnestness to dangerous mirth, and the fear of the Lord to often far from spotless pleasures” (75, 76).

The cultural-Calvinists have long since crossed this Rubicon.

And Kuyper himself with his doctrine of a common grace of God and his call to Christianize the world by this common grace is to blame.

Once the monster of conformity to this present world is unleashed in the church, on the advice of the church's theologians and by official church decree (as was the decision of the Christian Reformed Church in its adoption of the theory of common grace in 1924), there is no stopping the monster until it has devoured all the life of the members of the church, beginning usually with the young people.