

Fake Theology: Radical Two-Kingdom Theory, a prehistory and a review

Bret McAtee, *Saved to be Warriors: Exposing the Errors of Radical Two-Kingdom Theology* (Aalten: Pantocrator Press, 2023) 134 pages.

Before going into the review of McAtee's book, a fairly expansive historical background would be helpful. There was a considerable prehistory to the Radical Two-Kingdom (R2K) theology, and I believe this prehistory explains something of the form it has taken and the support that it has received. For this purpose material will be borrowed from the earlier review of Ruben Alvarado's *Trojan Horse*. McAtee draws a contrast to the older Reformed theology that existed before the Enlightenment and the older theology's reference to two kingdoms and the very different R2K, as well as citing theologians such as Charles Hodge who carried forward Reformed theology in the nineteenth century. But between that older theology and the appearance of the R2K a lot happened, and some of what happened was also a sort of Radical Two-Kingdom Theology, which had some of the same aims as R2K but was put together rather differently.

The Older Alternative: American Two Kingdom Theology

The idea of relation of the church to the state that was once thought to be the obvious and, in America, the almost universally accepted one among Christians, is the Two Kingdoms idea. This view was outlined and defended by J. Marcellus Kik in his 1963 book *Church & State: The Story of Two Kingdoms*. Known today for his formulation of the classic Reformed version of postmillennialism, Kik was concerned to explain and defend what he thought was the received, accepted and correct view of the church and state. Besides outlining his theory of the kingdoms, Kik provides a history of the relation of the church and state, and this history constitutes most of his book. He develops the origin of what he considers to be the bad ideas, that entered during the ancient world and the middle ages, and then how theology and practice of the kingdoms finally got onto the right track beginning with Calvin. In his view Calvin had some inconsistencies, and some important ideas needed to be added, but Kik thought that the basic outline of Calvin's thinking fit with his theory. Of course Kik's account is bad history, and the "inconsistencies" are essential to Calvin's actual views. Kik's book amounts to a sort of Whig theory of church history¹ combined with his theological outline of the two kingdoms.

Kik was also concerned with church and state issues and the impact of liberal ecumenism, which to him were really the same thing. The liberal churches and their ecumenical associations were intruding in the area of the state by advocating extensive social programs to be instituted by the state and, in the other direction, inviting the state into church affairs by state funding of church social programs.

Kik saw the struggle between church and state as central to the history of western civilization. He quotes von Ranke "The whole life and character of Western Civilization consists of the incessant action

1 The Whig theory of history was named by the Christian historian Herbert Butterfield, to describe the view of history as a natural progress to classical liberalism.

and counteraction of Church and State.” Kik’s book is mostly his history of this conflict from the days of Paul to the 1960s. For Kik “The vexing problem seemed solved on American soil with the establishment of a free Church in a free State”, which was ended, however, by a reversal of attitude seen in the “dramatic impact by the Supreme Court decision to eliminate prayer from public school life.” (p. vii) The solution he referred to was called “the American idea of religious liberty” by church historian Philip Schaff who described it as “It is a free church in a free state, or a self-supporting and self-governing Christianity in independent but friendly relation to civil government.” Kik defends it as the two kingdom idea.

After some centuries of this deadly struggle [between Church and State], the two powerful Kingdoms found in the newly independent United States of America a chance for their own independence and peaceful coexistence. The doctrine of “a free Church in a free State” was a new tenet in statecraft, as were various other ideas of the Founding Fathers: an experiment pure and simple. But the experiment proved successful; separation of Church and State became *fait accompli* in this country and has endured for nearly 200 years. Problems and tensions have arisen during the interim, of course, as one Kingdom or the other has sought to invade the domain of the other. Nonetheless, the principle of the separation of Church and State is still an actuality in our national life.

We could easily be lulled into believing that peaceful and happy coexistence will continue without any earnest and sacrificial vigilance on our part. But with increasing Roman Catholic influence in politics, and the desire of even some Protestant church leaders to dominate the State, we as Christian citizens should be ever on our guard, lest in our indifference we allow a precious heritage to slip away. (pp. 1-2)

Despite the Court ruling on prayer, in Kik’s mind the threat to the American idea was still mainly from the side of the church, with the two vectors of attack being Romanism which had never accepted the American idea of a free Church in a free State, and the ecumenical liberals, who wanted to wield power through the State by uniting Church and State in their favorite programs.

What are the two kingdoms? Clearly they are the Church and the State; but how does he describe them theologically? Kik is not helpful in the way we would expect from a theologian; we have to assemble quotations to see the contrasts that he constructs.

The sword belongs to Caesar’s kingdom and it cannot be used to advance the cause of Christ. These two Kingdoms operate in different spheres and employ different means. (p. 16)

The narrative of the Gospels gives us a preview of the history of the struggle between the two Kingdoms. When a secular kingdom is animated by Satan, it will seek to crush the spiritual Kingdom by force, even as Herod sought to crush the Christ Child. Worldly kingdoms will be employed by religious hierarchies to crucify true believers, even as Pilate was used by the Jewish authorities to crucify Christ. ... However, one must not assume that secular kingdoms are inherently evil. The State is a divine institution created by God for the purpose of upholding moral law and punishing sin. He has created it to further the welfare and happiness of mankind. But Satan often thwarts

God's benevolent purpose, so that nations have become persecutors of those who belong to Christ's Kingdom. ... But when the State keeps to its God-given jurisdiction, it can be a power for good, as indeed it was in the period of the Church's first expansion. (p. 17)

Liberty and peace, as history reveals, are the precious fruits that emanate when both the secular Kingdom and the spiritual Kingdom properly fulfill their God-given functions. (p. 18)

During the three centuries of persecution, the Church demonstrated to the State that spiritual force is more powerful and lasting than physical force. The Kingdom of Christ cannot be destroyed by material weapons. Carnal power can never vanquish moral power. (p. 37)

One Kingdom then is the Church. It is the Kingdom of Christ, its sphere spiritual, its power moral. The other Kingdom is the State, its sphere earthly and secular, its power physical coercion. Although created by God it is the Kingdom of Caesar, the Kingdom of man. On its face, this Two Kingdom theology is more radical than the more recent Radical Two-Kingdom Theology, for which at least Christ nominally is king of both kingdoms. But, importantly, Kik mentions that the state should govern by God's laws. This is a passing reference and he does not explain the use of these laws.

Arriving at the point of his history where he describes Calvin's work in Geneva, Kik sees the main outlines of the free Church in the Free state being put into place.

Calvin, therefore, drew a clear line of distinction between the civil magistrate, whose authority was confined to the secular realm, and the ruling elder, whose sphere was spiritual. He firmly maintained that the Church had no power to use the sword, to punish, nor to coerce. (p. 81)

By adhering to the principles laid down by Christ and the twelve apostles, Calvin labored to keep separate the God-given jurisdictions of Church and State and thus laid the foundation for a free Church in a free State. (p. 85)

For Kik, the significance of the Westminster Assembly is that it put a stop to Erastianism, represented by John Selden, and opposed by George Gillespie. If Kik were to say something about natural rights theories this would have been a good place to do it, because Selden was part of the Tew Circle in which Thomas Hobbes sometimes participated, and he was also engaged in modifying the theories of Grotius. Selden believed that natural rights had been created by divine command after Noah, but before the existence of political community. It was, he thought, the only way natural rights could come into existence. Civil government, however, came about by man's ability to enter into contracts, and moral obligation came from the coercive power of the State to administer punishments. As the Church did not have this coercive power, it must be under the State in order for moral obligation to exist in the Church. The power of the State was limited because of the terms of particular contracts that made up the

constitution of the state, and which the modern population had inherited.² For Kik, however, natural rights do not come into the question, and he constructs his entire theory without them.

Kik considers the great step forward to be the Bill of Rights in Constitution of the United States which forbade the federal establishment of religion. Or rather, it forbade Congress to interfere, as it can be read as protecting the state religious establishments from Congress. Kik does not notice this. But, he says: “*The wall of separation is legal, we repeat, not moral or spiritual.* There is no reason, under the Constitution of the United States, why the principles of Christianity cannot pervade the laws and institutions of the United States of America.” (p. 116)

Where does the idea of equality come from? “The Scriptures teach that all men are equal in the sight of God, and the understanding of this teaching eventually led men to acknowledge that all citizens are equal in the eyes of the law.” (p. 105) And finally Kik’s postmillennialism enters his theory.

We see clearly that the concept of a “Christian nation” is a biblical one. It becomes so, however, not by virtue of either Church or clergy preempting or even directing any functions peculiar to the civil government. Rather do nations become the disciples of Christ through the medium of Christian personalities. The influence of redeemed men, who deem themselves responsible to Christ for all their actions, radiates in many directions and gradually transforms the whole of society—politically, economically, and socially. ... The Great Commission indicates the objective: Christianizing all of the nations—it indicates also the means of accomplishing that objective: the preaching of repentance and remission of sins. (p. 121)

So while the world can and should be christianized, the two kingdoms of the Church and State must be kept separate, and the Church should be silent in the public area, while individual Christians can act according to their convictions. What is not clear, though, is how they are to present themselves. Are they to say that they are Christians and that their policies are chosen because they are the Christian ones?

The Fall of the American Two Kingdom Theology

Why give all this space to this older two kingdom theory? Because it was a theory that gained dominance in the 19th century, and in the 20th century up through the 1960s it was held not only by conservative members of mainline denominations, such as Kik who was a member of the Reformed Church in America, but by Presbyterians and by Evangelicals in general. Everyone I met in the churches, growing up, held to this two kingdom idea to the extent that they thought about the issue at all. It is also a perfect fit for the Spirituality of the Church idea, that was the view of the Southern Presbyterians, but also was the tacit Evangelical theology. By the time Kik published his book in 1963, however, liberal Protestants, secularists, Roman Catholics, etc. did not think in these terms, and they were the ones who controlled the institutions. By the arrival of the 1970s, however, all the Christian young people knew that this theory was dead. In the first place they thought that the teaching of the church could not ignore all the social issues of the day, and second they could see that no one who

² See the review of Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories* for the background to and discussion of Selden’s views. Contra-mundum.org/index_htm_files/Tuck_NaturalRights.pdf

mattered in the world thought in terms of the two kingdom theology anymore. Finally, they had all been educated in terms of natural rights language, which was supposed to be an endowment by the Creator, and so it appeared to be a Christian concept, so why complicate things with a theory of different kingdoms?³ Men like Kik fell silent. Church leaders of the older generation who wanted to remain “relevant” to the youth searched their Bibles for anything on social morality that they could insert into their pronouncements. They could always fall back on the claim that an endowment of natural rights had to be based on the Christian doctrine of creation and so was the fruit of Christian influence on culture.⁴

The courts and politicians spoke of natural rights, and used it as a fig leaf to advance their causes. But the real thought of the day was not natural rights theory either. The operative political theory from the 1960s on was voluntarism, the triumph of the will in the political struggle against the legacy dead historical past and the dull masses that still clung to it. As there was no God, at least not for practical purposes, the only will that mattered was that of man. But Natural Law died among non-Christians just as two kingdom theology died among liberal Christians. (In spite of what Grotius said, neither can exist without a transcendent God.) Natural law talk has only continued as a sort of pantomime, so that all the politicians don’t sound like Hitler. But for some time now politicians also have been publicly rejecting natural law. Biden denounced natural law during a Senate confirmation hearing back in the 90s.

More needs to be said about what took place when the shock of the 60s killed off the older two kingdom theology. The older generations, generally speaking, were not affected. While “relevance” was the catchword of the day these older people could not see why Christianity needed to be relevant. It sufficed that it got their souls to heaven and provided some moral rules for their daily lives. But a conviction took hold among younger people that Christianity needed to be bigger than this. Either it had to be bigger by having something decisive to say about how the world was run, or as an alternative some people might be satisfied by having the spiritual side of Christianity built up. Suddenly Evangelicals became interested in Charismatic experiences. This seems finally to have wound down to the requirement for churches to offer a “worship experience”, often in imitation of theater entertainment, with the darkened auditorium, the lighted stage with a combo band, and finally the appearance of the stand up comedian. Our interest here is the other Christian response to the shock of the 60s, the need to offer something more for life outside the Church.

3 There was also a deep suspicion of theology by these young people, to whom theories like the two kingdoms looked to be concocted, rather than biblical.

4 If natural rights were an endowment by God, then they would not arise out of a social contract or from primitive economic activity as depicted in the natural rights theories. One of the difficulties of natural rights theories is that the story of the original state of nature and of the making of the social contract sounds so silly and so contrived to us today. Thus political philosophers are disposed to amend it and make it a thought experiment about the nature of the political order rather than an historical claim, even to the point that some suggest that the original theories might be read this way. But the idea of the state of nature and a subsequent establishment of a social order was older than the natural rights theories, as can be seen, for example, in Richard Hooker’s *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1593). The natural rights theories only had to substitute a different account of the establishment of a social order onto an existing state of nature narrative, and of course introduce the natural rights concept into the account. The natural rights theories supervened on a view of early history that people thought of as the Christian view.

In the late 60s the Christian intellectuals had started to move toward accommodating non-Christian ethics. A couple of books had come out of InterVarsity press, dealing with ethical questions, and suggesting that abortion was a complex difficult issue, that did not permit a simple anti-abortion response. There are anecdotal accounts that some faculty at Westminster Seminary (Philadelphia, as Escondido did not yet exist) were moving in the same direction. Then Francis Schaeffer happened. Not only did he have a lot to say about culture, he had a covenantal view of God's judgment on apostate societies (see *Death in the City*). He was very suspicious of growing state power, he warned about the media and their fake news, and he came out strongly against abortion. By this point InterVarsity Press had sold so many Schaeffer books that they could not back out, and were effectively committed to a new trajectory for a period of years. From the beginning, though, Schaeffer attacked nature/grace and upper story/lower story dichotomies, which are the foundation of two kingdom theology. These came to be understood by a large reading Christian public as anti-Christian ideas, and the impression lasted for a long time.

Meanwhile, back at Westminster Seminary, Greg Bahnsen and his theonomic ideas had made an appearance. What made Westminster special is that Bahnsen had the support of the Westminster Confession, and of historic Presbyterian and puritan theology, though Bahnsen did not seem to make much of this aspect. These were supposed to be important at Westminster Seminary, so dismissal of Bahnsen's views was problematic. But Westminster Seminary was "special" in other ways. Along with some other seminaries, for example Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, it tried to portray itself as an intellectually elite place, mainly on the strength of visiting faculty who were brought in for a term or two, while the permanent faculty were generally of much lower quality. Also Westminster had allowed various goofballs to set themselves up as gurus and generate a cult following, notably Cornelius Van Til and Jay Adams. Van Til redefined the Trinity as three persons in one person. If you can mess with a doctrine as fundamental as the Trinity, is anything off limits? Finally, there was endemic fighting among the faculty, especially between a neocalvinist faction that promoted the philosophy of Dooyeweerd, and their opponents, who would make personal attacks on each other in their classrooms.⁵ Westminster Seminary launched an attack on Bahnsen's theonomy via an article by Meredith Kline, and at Reformed Theological Seminary, where Bahnsen taught for a time, he was removed by terminating his contract. The pattern that developed is that when theonomy comes up for discussion, it is dismissed via attacks on specific features of Bahnsen's theory, such as his standing laws, but the significance of the Confessionally mandated general equity of the law of Moses is ignored, the topic supposedly having been dealt with in the criticism of Bahnsen. Bahnsen is the excuse, but the real objective is to remove all consideration of the hated Biblical law.

Meredith Kline developed an antidote to the classical Reformed teaching on the kingdom as well as to theonomy by a radical new theology known as two register theology. The basic idea is that in the original creation a heavenly, or heavenly connected, world and an earthly world were united in one, but with the fall, the heavenly part receded into invisibility, though it is still there, and mankind was left in

⁵ There is a book detailing some of this infighting, *Trust and Obey (Norman Shepherd and the Justification Controversy at Westminster Seminary)*, by Ian Hewitson. A disciple of Shepherd's, Hewitson is careful to omit Shepherd's role in this infighting such as his personal attacks from his lectern on Robert Knudsen.

the remaining world. This heavenly world is the upper register, and the earthly world is the lower register.⁶ The Bible is full of symbols having to do with mirroring the upper register in the lower register, such as clouds, sacred mountains and the like. There was also a time of kingdom intrusion, where upper register norms were applied to the lower register, and this is the explanation of the law of Moses, and of the divine presence in the Kingdom of Israel and its special status. This intrusion has now gone away, and along with it the relevance of its law and social arrangements. Kline's intrusionism proved problematic. For one thing, while perhaps suitable for contemplation in the privacy of the clerical study, the risibility factor made it unfit for preaching to the pews.⁷

But not only was Kline's theology the work of a crackpot, it also led to scandal. Here we must consider the case of Lee Irons.⁸ He was a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) who taught and applied Kline's two register thinking. This was originally no problem for the OPC until Irons began to draw out the implications of the theology. The problem was that he would not oppose homosexual marriage, but the problem was not so much that as the fact that surrounding Evangelical churches found out about it. This produced the impression that the OPC was becoming yet another apostate liberal denomination. With the denominational reputation at stake the OPC finally decided to do something, but what they did was to charge Irons for his non-confessional theology, which up to then had not been seen as a problem, and not charge him on his application of it to moral issues. His view was that the covenant prologue to the Ten Commandments indicated that the Commandments had only been given to Israel. This gave grounds for the Presbytery of Southern California to remove him from the ministry. Irons then went over the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) which was not so scrupulous about the Confession.⁹ The larger lesson was that Kline's theology was going to be a problem, and was not a safe platform for the anti-theonomists. Hence the increasing emphasis on the Radical Two-Kingdom theology which is not built on the two register scheme or the reputation of Meredith Kline.

Theonomic ideas, including those of Greg Bahnsen, found a home in the Christian Reconstruction movement, and our interest is in the Tyler branch of the movement. Its members were also under the spell of Kline's two register theology. James Jordan in particular was fascinated with the symbols that formed ties between the two registers, and began his own speculations on Biblical symbolism. So shocked and outraged by some of these ideas had been R. J. Rushdoony that he fired Jordan, and from this beginning the separate existence of a Tyler branch of Christian Reconstruction came about.

Ray Sutton was also influenced by Kline, but his interest took the form of searching for patterns in the Old Testament. First there was the five points of the covenant, which Sutton found everywhere, and

6 "Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony" <https://meredithkline.com/klines-works/articles-and-essays/space-and-time-in-the-genesis-cosmogony/>

7 One can ask how so much crazy stuff was allowed at the supposedly conservative and intellectually respectable Westminster Seminary. James Jordan remarked somewhere that he was told as a student at Westminster that "the covenant was up for grabs." Evidently as long as the institutional agendas were being served, other things did not much matter. The scandals have continued. For example, the highly heretodox Peter Enns was forced out of the faculty, but only after outside pressure (think money) was brought on the seminary.

8 Various writings by Lee Irons can be found at upper-register.com.

9 See the article by Nelson D. Kloosterman in *The Aquila Report* on the implications of this. <https://theaquilareport.com/jesus-not-the-law-republication-of-the-irons-case/>

which from then on became the structure for North's writings, especially the Biblical Blueprints series. But Sutton went on from there to look for other patterns in the form of liturgical "rubrics". Eventually Sutton took a different direction, turning from these Klinian elements to high church traditions. In the end he went into the Reformed Episcopal Church, taking the Tyler church with him, and a number of former followers of Tyler theology. Soon a photo was in circulation purporting to show Ray Sutton in full bishop's regalia, kneeling in prayer before an image of Mary. Then I received communications from a couple of the Reformed Episcopal people asking to withdraw their contributions to the *Contra Mundum* publication. It was not that they had changed their views, they explained, but that a gag order had come down from the bishops, who did not want the RPC associated with the likes of *Contra Mundum*. Sutton himself, though, had been paid by North for his writing, and could not have his publications through North's Institute for Christian Economics withdrawn.

James Jordan went in a different direction. Fully as interested in liturgy as Sutton, he was not attracted by high church tradition, but continued the pursuit of Klinian imagery to incorporate into worship. At its extremes it was a sort of hermeticism, which sought to alter the normal direction of "as above so below" by the manipulation of powerful symbols in the lower register.¹⁰ Then came his enthusiasm for the New Perspectives on Paul, and with N. T. Wright in particular, who Jordan tried to pass off as Reformed. (N. T. Wright claimed to be puzzled by why he was criticized for not being Reformed, as he had never claimed to be. Did he not know that he was being marketed in America as Reformed theologian when he was invited to conferences?) Along with some others, not all from Tyler, Jordan started the Federal Vision theology, particularly represented by its rejection of the Covenant of Works, and consequently of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ as the meritorious cause of justification, as well as the act of imputation as the formal cause. For some the Federal Vision became a stepping stone to Rome or to Eastern Orthodoxy.

Gary North became a defender of Norman Shepherd's departure from the Reformed theology of justification, and the insistence on works a ground of justification. Where Reformed theology had distinguished the efficient cause, the meritorious cause, the material cause, the instrumental cause, the formal cause and the final cause of justification, Shepherd amalgamated all these in his arguments in the term *ground*. As *ground* now had the range of meaning of all six causes, very slippery arguments could be constructed taking advantage of the ambiguity. The astonishing thing is that in debates at Westminster seminary his opposition did not object to this move, which surely tells us something about the state of Westminster theology. North began a campaign against Westminster Seminary accusing them of having abandoned their foundation in Cornelius Van Til and in John Murray (supposedly represented by Shepherd's theology).

North also read the Bible through the lens of libertarian ideology. Everything in the Bible about peoples and nations, except theocratic Israel, might as well not have been there, as North could not see the implications. His ideal, as explained in *Political Polytheism* (the one North book in McAtee's bibliography), is open borders as far as residency, with the right to vote and hold office open to any member of a church with a Trinitarian confession. The complete eclipse of the American people and

¹⁰ Not all of Jordan's ideas came from Kline. He also lifted concepts from the science fiction of Jerry Pournelle and Larry Niven. In particular Jordan's idea of the life cycle of the pre-fall elder comes from Niven and Pournelle's Pak Protector.

their culture that would immediately result is of no concern to North. Withholding welfare payments from everyone was, for North, a sufficient limitation on immigration.

Within my small circle of acquaintances I found people heading toward R2k churches as a refuge from the New Perspectives and from Shepherdism. They felt that where Escondido men were welcomed there was a bulwark against these errors. Of course the R2K people claimed that such errors were the natural endpoint of theonomy. One must conclude that Tyler Christian Reconstruction had a large role in boosting the acceptance of Radical Two Kingdom theology.

With this historical background in place, we can now turn to an examination of Bret McAtee's book, *Saved to Be Warriors*.

The Review: The Errors of Radical Two-Kingdom Theology

The purpose of McAtee's book is to show that Radical Two-Kingdom theology is not Reformed. It is, he says, "produced now by nearly every brick and mortar 'Reformed' Seminary in America." (p. 1) The situation is analogous to when J. Grasham Machen confronted a liberalism that was entrenched in the seminaries, and set out to show that Christianity and liberalism were different religions. McAtee's charge against the R2K is:

The radicals in Radical Two-Kingdom land have birthed a theology that completely attacks the roots of traditional and historic Reformed theology. In this reformulation the R2K advocates have completely rejected temperance and moderation in their push to redefine the Reformed faith. In attacking the roots of the Reformed faith, the consequence is that the whole tree of the Reformed faith is changed into something that it has never been. (p. 2)

McAtee says that the R2K advocates pursue their agenda through a double maneuver. They simultaneously claim that they represent the historical faith while proclaiming themselves to be innovators. To manage this they must represent their own theory in different ways, using what McAtee calls the Motte and Baily argument technique.

R2K makes some outlandish claims that reveals their out of bounds theology (the Bailey). However, when they are called out on the transparently ridiculous claims, they move to safer ground (the Motte) insisting that they were merely advancing traditional historic 2K arguments. If the Bailey is more controversial territory, the Motte is a modest and easily defensible position. It all becomes very convenient as it becomes a device whereby legitimate charges of heresy can be easily snuffed out by insisting "all I was saying was" From there the R2K advocates can claim that their original transparently ridiculous claims have not been refuted. Failing that, the R2K proponents will feign grievance because the R2K critic has been unreasonable for attacking an imagined Bailey when all they were championing was a long-accepted Motte. (pp. 2-3)

What McAtee describes here is the inverse of what we noticed about the theonomy debate. There the argument was negative. Some particular features of Bahnsen's theory were attacked, such as the standing laws. "The Bahnsen formulas were not found in the classical Reformed writers. The theory was not Reformed." Having argued this to their satisfaction, any appeal to the law, even the general

equity affirmed in the Westminster Confession was dismissed. “Don’t you know that theonomy has been exposed as non-Reformed?” Theonomy was redefined on the fly between being the strictest Bahnsenian theory to simple Confessionalism or Puritanism. Now the technique is used positively to advance a theory: Two-Kingdom theology defended as a distinction between church and civil authority becomes the dismissal of the legitimacy of Christian authority outside the church, “because that is already proved to be the Reformed position.”

This technique works because the parties making the argument control the institutions. In this case the institutions are the seminaries, denominations and big-steeple churches. One might include the church colleges as well, though that is harder to track.

McAtee identifies R2K theology in contrast to “traditional 2K theology”, mainly what Calvin had to say about two kingdoms. He has a couple of quotations from Calvin, which are rather less clear than they could have been due to Calvin’s usual bombast. In essence: “[Referring to the Anabaptist contrast of the Kingdom of God with the “profane matters” of courts and tribunals.] But as we lately taught that that kind of government is distinct from the spiritual and internal kingdom of Christ, so we ought to know that they are not adverse to each other. The former, in some measure, begins the heavenly kingdom in us, even now upon earth ... while to the latter it is assigned, so long as we live among men, to foster and maintain the external worship of God, to defend sound doctrine and the condition of the Church, to adapt our conduct to human society, to form our manners to civil justice, to conciliate us to each other, to cherish common peace and tranquility.” (p. 4) So for Calvin one kingdom was spiritual and internal, and the other kingdom was concerned with externals such as church worship, doctrine, and molding character. In the last items on his list Calvin seems to see the role of laws and courts as rather in the role of parent.

In contrast to this, McAtee characterizes R2K theology as making the division of the two kingdoms between the grace realm (institutional church, ruled by God’s special revelation) and the common realm (everything else that does not pertain to the church, ruled by natural law). He has a formal definition of it.

R2K is that expression of Christianity that replaces the totalistic expression of Reformed Christianity as God’s explicit Word for all of life, with an expression of Reformed Christianity wherein God’s explicit Word governs only the church realm (realm of grace). The common realm (or natural realm) is to be ruled derivatively by God’s “left hand”. What this means is that for the common realm (the realm wherein all of life is lived, save for our church lives and our personal and individual ethics) the Christian man as well as the non-Christian man is dependent upon natural law to answer the question, “How shall we then live?” (p. 9)

The effect of this, says McAtee, is “to mute the prophetic voice of the pulpit.” The minister must be silent about everything in the “common realm” according to R2K, and so cannot preach “against the moral meltdown of our broader culture.” In fact, McAtee points out, in many presbyteries someone who believes what Calvin believed could not be ordained.

McAtee has a list of leading figures teaching the R2K theology, which he repeats throughout the book: David VanDrunen, R. Scott Clark, Michael Horton and J. V. Fesko. Sometimes he adds others such as Matthew Tuninga, T. David Gordon, Carl Trueman and D. G. Hart.

Knowing the Natural Law

McAtee has thirteen chapters wherein he takes up a succession of problem areas of the R2K. The first of these is how anyone is to know what the natural law is. He quotes David VanDrunen's definition of natural law.

The moral order inscribed in the world and especially in human nature, an order that is known to all people through their natural faculties (especially reason and/or conscience) even apart from supernatural divine revelation that binds morally the whole human race. (p. 9)

The Puritans used to speak of the "informed conscience", that is the conscience whose promptings express the Christian instruction that person has received, either through his own Biblical study or the teachings of the church. As Romans 3:20 says, "through the law comes knowledge of sin." Romans 2:15, says the conscience bears witness to the work of the law written people's hearts. It is peculiar, therefore, to see VanDrunen characterize conscience as the source of knowledge, rather than the Puritan view that it is a faculty that makes use of knowledge. Also the Romans 2 passage makes a basic distinction between those who have the law, meaning God's revealed law, and those who merely have the law that is in their natures. They are to be judged very differently, and this can only mean that the knowledge that they can obtain from that working of the natural law is very much less that had by those who know the revealed law.

If you are going to have a theology of natural law, such that you teach that the natural law provides the content sufficient for the ordering of life, including especially the civil law by which the courts make their judgments, you must actually have the law. That is, you must come up with the content of the law, and in such a way that it is evident that this is what natural law teaches, and not just our own opinions. Without that body of natural law, there is just idle chatter.

What, though, is the R2K's actual claim about the existence of such a body of natural law? McAtee in an appendix quotes from an R2K spokesman, Todd Bordow, pastor of an Orthodox Presbyterian congregation in Rio Rancho, New Mexico.

I don't want the state punishing people for practicing homosexuality. Other Christians disagree. Fine. That's allowed. Another example – bestiality [*sic*] is a grotesque sin. But ... I would see problems with the state trying to enforce it; not wanting the state involved at all in such personal practices; I'm content to let the Lord judge it when he returns. A fellow church member might advocate for bestiality [*sic*] laws. Neither would be in sin whatever the side of the debate. (p. 123)

If there *is* natural law sufficient to guide civil government, why could Christians be on either side of the debate on laws against homosexuality and bestiality? They would have to be informed by the natural law and act accordingly. In fact, what does the Bible say in one of those few passages that takes

up the natural law, Romans 1:24ff? “God gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves...” etc. To the extent that we know of the content of natural law from what the Bible says about it, it condemns just these things that Bordow leaves as an open question in the civil sphere. Therefore it is evident that *some* R2Kers, Bordow for example, *do not* believe in natural law. Does Bordow represent the real R2K? Is natural law in R2K theology just a red herring?

But there is more. Bordow says “beastiality is a grotesque sin and obviously if a professing member engages in it he is subject to church discipline.” So we do have a law/gospel dynamic here, only it turns out that it is the Christian who is under the law. But then, how does Bordow know that it is a grotesque sin for the Christian? It is not mentioned in the New Testament. Either the Old Testament law still applies to the Christian, or the Christian is under natural law and guided by it, even though this natural law is not sufficient to guide the common sphere as the official R2K theology claims that it is but Bordow finds it isn’t. But does not the Christian live in the common sphere, and is not beastiality a sin of the common sphere? The Christian, then, must be under law in the common sphere in a way that the non-Christian is not. The grace vs common sphere distinction breaks down when examined closely.

A final note on Bordow is that the days which such teachings were too scandalous for the OPC and Lee Irons was ejected from office are long past. The OPC has rotted out.

McAtee’s concern in this chapter, though, is to point out the ineffectiveness of natural law, according to Reformed theology and to contrast that with the R2K. He quotes from the Canons of Dordt

That he [fallen man] is incapable of using it [God’s natural light] aright even in things natural and civil. Nay, further, this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted and holds it in unrighteousness, by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God.

At this point McAtee goes into the Cornelius Van Til routine which confuses epistemology with man’s attitude of moral self-sufficiency and rebellion. We hear about autonomous man, presuppositions, and of how there are no brute facts. There are several references to reading natural law. We don’t get an idea of what this “reading” consists of. Just as Van Til never gives an explanation of how knowledge acquisition actually works, reading natural law remains a mere phrase.

Dualism

The next accusation against R2K is dualism. Where the Anabaptist had contrasted the church with the world, viewing the world as the realm of evil, R2K replaces “evil” with common, but retains the dualist scheme. McAtee’s first evidence is that one R2Ker, the historian D. G. Hart, sees humanity as complex, with only of facet of the complexity being Christianity, and outside that many other areas where people are engaged in living outside the Christian category. His next example is VanDrunen and marriage. He quotes VanDrunen

Traditional marriage is part of the created order that God sustains through his common grace, not a uniquely Christian institution, and society as a whole suffers when it is not honored. (p. 17)

McAtee comments that the “careful reader here will easily spot the dualism in VanDrunen’s words. Traditional marriage exists in the common realm and not in the realm of grace.” What VanDrunen actually said is that it exists in the realm of common grace. This is one of several reference to common grace that McAtee lets go by. But if it is grace, then there is no dualism between the grace realm and the common realm. Of course, what we have here is Abraham Kuyper’s common grace, which isn’t grace. This invites analysis. Is part of the R2K theory, and a part that makes it seem more plausible to the adherents, this common grace notion and language? Frederick Nymeyer exploded these Kuyperian slogans sixty-five years ago. Kuyper’s three terms 1) Common grace, 2) Antithesis, and 3) Sphere sovereignty needed to be replaced by the actually clear and meaningful ideas of 1) Natural laws and the providence of God, 2) Obedience to the law of God, and 3) Freedom and responsibility of the individual in group action. Notice that *common grace* functions in the place to two different ideas, a) natural laws and b) the providence of God, which adds to its obscurantist effect.¹¹

McAtee raises several objections to VanDrunen mainly, 1) The idea of “traditional”. “It simply is the case that in order to get to traditional marriage you need Christian categories to begin with.” I was recently reading an account of medieval history, where the problem of traditional marriage illustrated the very slow and incomplete Christianization of Europe in the Middle ages. The kings clung to traditional marriage, where they could set aside their wives at will, and resisted Christian ideas of marriage. But now the *traditional* is supposed to be the Christian view, but it is always a question of since when and for how long. 2) VanDrunen says that “marriage is not a uniquely Christian thing, but a human thing.” But, McAtee asks, “apart from Scripture how do we know what it means to be human? In point of fact, I would contend that those outside of Christ are doing all they can to put off genuine humanness in favor of putting on beastliness.” (p. 17) While VanDrunen goes on to say “all people have an interest in getting marriage policy correct.” McAtee points out that people are actively moving away from correct marriage policy. So what is “interest”? Is it what actually is good for them, or is it what their ideologies indicate? The final problem is 3) that the R2Ks do not want the Christian in his official church teaching to say what sort of marriage is good for people. It turns out that they don’t really think marriage is common. There is one sort that is right for Christians, but that does not apply to all people. He quotes VanDrunen again:

Since membership in the civil kingdom is not limited to believers, the imperatives of Scripture do not bind members of that kingdom. These imperatives are not directly applicable to non-Christians ... Scripture is not given as a common moral standard that provides ethical imperatives to all people regardless of their religious standing. (p. 19)

McAtee then goes on to wonder whether R2K theology is scholastic. By this he perhaps means this would account for the dominance of the nature-grace dualism. The problem is that all the major Reformers belonged to the *via antiqua*, and Reformed theology itself was for a long time scholastic.

11 *Progressive Calvinism*, Vol. II, No. 10, October 1956, pp. 301-305.

And yet they did not at all fall into the R2K scheme. I suggest a different explanation. It was the Enlightenment writers – not the atheists or Deists but the ones who thought they were some sort of Christian – who had a very small and restricted idea of the area of religion within life as a whole. That is what provided the R2K concepts. The nature-grace thing is just a device that could be seized and used to give a “theological” cover for the Enlightenment idea of the scope and role of religion. Here is Joseph Priestley:

It is, indeed, impossible to name any two things, about which men are concerned, so remote in their nature, but that they have some connections and mutual influences; but were I asked what two things I should think to be in the *least danger* of being confounded, and which even the ingenuity of man could find the *least pretence* for involving together, I should say the things that relate to *this life*, and those that relate to the *life to come*. Defining the object of civil government, in the most extensive sense, to be the making provision for the secure and comfortable enjoyment of this life, by preventing one man from injuring another in his person or property; I should think that office of the civil magistrate to be in no great danger of being inchoached upon, by the methods that men might think proper to take, to provide for the happiness after death. (*Political Writings*, p. 53)¹²

Scope of Salvation

In his chapter on soteriology McAtee concedes that

When it comes to soteriology R2K has its *ordo salutis* [the order of salvation] down just fine. It properly speaks of the necessity to proclaim God as holy, man a sinful, and Christ as the only solution for man’s problem of a wrathful God. When it speaks of the salvation of an individual man or woman it is orthodox.

But it goes beyond that. Most of the more prominent theologians have not been orthodox on soteriology in the area of individuals. The R2K people stood up to them and fought for the orthodox soteriology. The R2K when further and said it was because of their other ideas, on the law of God, and on the full scope of salvation, that the theologians went bad on soteriology. But McAtee argues that “To separate the salvation that is in the atonement from the dominion mandate is to give man a man-centered meaning to his life, and also to the atonement, and this is precisely what R2K does.” (p. 23)

For R2K, the individual *soul* is saved but salvation has no visible effect on society or culture. Instead R2K soteriology results in the saved “believer” retreating to a position outside society, like a monk, waiting for the destruction of the social order. R2K yields a *gnostic salvation of the soul*. (p. 25)

I don’t know why McAtee says that R2K has people retreating outside society, when his complaint in the previous chapter was that R2K says Christianity affects only a segment of life, and otherwise they participate in the world like everyone else. Further a gnostic salvation of the soul means that the divine spark within man is enlightened and realizes it is a bit of God trapped in a body, and by this knowledge it is freed from the prison of matter and is able to return to its divine origin and unite with

12 For a longer treatment of Joseph Priestley’s view see “Joseph Priestley and the Birth of the Politics of Community”, contra-mundum.org/index_htm_files/Priestley_Political.pdf

God. This is not what R2K teaches. From this McAtee glides into what apparently is his real point that the R2K denies the covenantal categories within which God works. He mentions “R2K’s insistence that families cannot be Christian since family life lies in the common realm and not in the grace realm.” (p. 25) Also “while Reformed theology has typically taught that God’s salvation is cosmic, so that as salvation comes to peoples and nations so it comes to their institutions, cultures, and civilizations, R2K denies all this, insisting that salvation is only personal, individual, and private.” (p. 26)

Dispensationalizing the Covenants

VanDrunen has, McAtee says, as a central theme in his theology that the Noahic covenant has zero redemptive significance, and must therefore be common and universal. It is made with “all mankind as mankind – considered as neither regenerate or unregenerate.” The significance of this is that

This appeal to the Noahic covenant as a common (non-redemptive) covenant gives him room to establish a common (nature) realm that is dualistically distinct from his church (grace) realm. Because of the way he interprets the Noahic covenant, it gives him the space to create a realm that is not ruled by God’s revealed law but by natural law.

One implication of this for R2K is that the church and the kingdom are identified as exact synonyms. There is nothing outside the church realm as existing in the public square that is an expression of the Kingdom of God. Everything outside the church realm as existing in the public square is a common realm reality relating back to the common Noahic covenant. (p. 30)

There are a number of problems with this, both with what VanDrunen says and what McAtee says. First the idea of *universal* should have been explained better. For many people there is a contrast between what is particular to Abraham and his seed, and what is for all the nations. So they tend to see Noah as the precursor to Abraham, and the promises to him as coming to Abraham in contrast to the seventy nations of the following chapters in Genesis. Universal in contrast to this points to the fact that even in Abraham all the nations of the earth will be blessed, and all these covenants have a world-wide scope in view. But at the time of Noah, he and his family were all there was, and any covenant with him would have been universal in a literal sense. Another sense of universal is a really weird and derivative one, and that is what is in view here. The order is the opposite of what McAtee lays out in the quotation above. On the assumption that there is a basic distinction between a common realm and a grace realm, the Noahic covenant is interpreted in those terms, as involving one or the other, not in terms of whom it was originally made with, but in terms of what aspect of life it concerned. If the covenant is about common realm matters, then it is inferred to be universal in the sense that it involves those who are never part of the grace realm (as well as those who are, in their status as human beings). This meaning is only possible once the theological dualism are constructed and applied to the text. Only because the common (nature) versus church (grace) dualism is first made the framework of interpretation is it possible to come up with this sense of universal and then ascribe it to the scope of the covenant.

Another problem is this distinction between regenerate or unregenerate. Deuteronomy 28 describes the curses coming on unregenerate covenant members. Paul says that not all of Israel is Israel. All the outward administrations of covenants involve people who are not regenerate as well as those who are actually God's elect people. So regenerate vs. unregenerate is not the way to explain these distinctions. It is not clear whether this is VanDrunen's language or just McAtee's way of explaining VanDrunen.

Also McAtee refers to the Kingdom of God saying that everything outside the church realm is for VanDrunen outside of the Kingdom. Here he forgets that it is *two-kingdom* theology he is dealing with, and matters are either in the one kingdom or the other.

That being said, the crucial point is that for R2K there is a basic covenant that is restricted to the common realm. About this McAtee says "I emphasize that the whole R2K project fails if the Noahic covenant is a redemptive covenant and not a covenant that is generic for all creation and mankind." But, he objects, "the Noahic covenant is in point of fact highly redemptive, both in looking back to creation and looking forward to Christ." (p. 30) Without arguing the point here, I will mention that not only is McAtee's point here one that can't be reasonably argued against, is it the emphasis of the early chapters of Genesis which develop the rest/Sabbath theme, which reaches a crescendo in the Noah account (for example his name means "Rest" and he steps out of the ark on exactly the first day of the seventh, sabbath, century of his life where he enters a new creation and receives a new a better covenant). Israel reenacts this when it passes through a flood (the Red Sea passage) which also destroys the wicked, and goes to Canaan, the land of rest. All this has a messianic fulfillment in Christ.¹³ Do the R2K theologians not know this? Of course they do. They suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

McAtee then takes up the R2K idea that the Mosaic covenant was at the same time a covenant of grace and a covenant of works. Of course the point of teaching such as dualistic covenant is that the parts you don't like can be said to be the "works" part, which are not permanent. Here he goes into a discussion of the arbitrary treatment of covenants in general and the teachings of Meredith Kline. "The point here is that if we are going to be arbitrary by establishing that the Mosaic covenant was both one of grace (upper register) and one of works (lower register), than what disallows us from doing the same with any of the other covenants that make up the covenant of grace?" (pp. 32-33)

In Appendix 1, McAtee goes further on this idea of the Mosaic covenant being both grace and works. The terminology used is the republication of the covenant or works, or just Republication. "What the Republication of the Mosaic covenant theory offers R2K is the ability to disregard the Mosaic covenant law in any of its concrete expressions, while still retaining the Mosaic law as somehow abstracted from the Mosaic covenant." (p. 112)

Kline's two register theology was actually something different than the R2K system, and the two registers were much more than a distinction between grace and works. They were two worlds, both

13 Of course, the ultimate fulfillment is that all who are united with Christ in his resurrection are a new creation. (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15.) It is people who must be made new. It is this kingdom, inaugurated in Christ, that is the fulfillment of the Sabbath. Eschatology is about how this will be completed. The new creation theme is more fundamental than the covenant theme in the Bible. The new creation brings with it a new covenant, and the covenant is the arrangements for life in the new creation which makes the covenant possible.

simultaneously present, with the upper invisible to the lower. For some reason, and this not a logical consequence of the register distinction, law and works remain permanently valid in the upper register (which is present right now, you just can't see it) but not in the lower. It would have been worth explaining the two register theology, because it is just so weird, and shows how far Westminster faculty will go to get rid of the authority of the law, and it opens the way to other important questions. How many of the R2K theologians still hold to some of the two register ideas, and which ones? What was the history of the transition from two register to radical two kingdom theology? Is it the same people, or did some young Turks come along with their own ideas? Why does Westminster hire such anti-confessional faculty?

McAtee then goes into some of the consequences of grace vs works covenant confusion and of “not distinguishing properly between law and gospel.”

Think about it: If you're living under the Mosaic covenant how could you determine if your obedience to God's law is motivated by earning congruent merit in order to stay in the land as opposed to obedience that is motivated by gratitude for God delivering you from your enemies and putting you in the land? (p. 33)

This especially interested me in that it brought to mind one of Norman Shepherd's more peculiar teachings. According to Shepherd good works were necessary for justification, but if someone did those good works in order to receive the justification for which they were necessary, rather than out of gratitude to God, then those works would damn instead of justifying. The R2K is shifting Shepherdism back into the old covenants.

McAtee's next point is the incongruity of expecting fallen mankind to go back under a covenant of works under the Mosaic covenant. He asks if “it was a very different covenant of works than that which Adam was under in the Garden where merely *one* violation was all that was required to be cast out.” The question has been faced, in the Federal Vision theology, but with extensive consequences. For the FV the Mosaic covenant contained all the apparatus of sacrifices and baptisms for cleansing because keeping the covenant included making use of these means of removing sin. The FV still had to explain the concept of covenant breaking, when you could keep the covenant by sinning and then sacrificing. They came up with two levels of sin, ordinary sin and “high handed” covenant breaking sin. But then the law and grace distinction had to undergo a change to the extent that the distinction between a covenant of works and a covenant of grace was not possible, and all covenants, even before the fall, were covenants of grace. Since R2K stands proud in its opposition to all that is Federal Vision, this sort of solution is not open to them, but it seems implicit anyway in the combination of a covenant of works and of grace in a single covenant.

The Non-Religious Magistrate and State

The next chapter starts off with several more quotations, mostly from VanDrunen. One of them especially interests us.

... what sort of religious commitment, if any, should be promoted or required within the social order? The answer suggested by Genesis 9 is none. God made the Noahic covenant

with “you [Noah and his sons] and your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you” (9: 9-10). The whole human race is God’s partner. The text makes no distinction between believers and unbelievers, but God promises to preserve them in their common social life. (p. 35)

According to the Genesis text (as it is, not as read by VanDrunen) was the whole human race God’s partner? Not exclusively. It included “every living creature.” Did the text make a distinction between believers and unbelievers? No. It included the believers, that is all the people then in existence, and also the non-believers, the animals. The covenant was with creation, and in that sense universal, and the sign of the covenant was cosmic, the rainbow. But as seen in the previous section the whole direction was redemptive, because the whole creation was cursed along with man at the fall, and the whole creation is involved in redemption and restoration. The common social life cannot be separated from God’s redemptive program and that is where the R2K goes wrong. The R2K is the attempt to separate what God has joined together.

The other quotations from VanDrunen are more in line with the upcoming topic, such as “Scripture is not given as a common moral standard that provides ethical imperatives to all people regardless of their religious standing.” What does “religious standing” mean? Here we have to think a while.

1. Paul said that the peoples without Scripture would be judged differently from those with Scripture. If we call this a religious standing, than that would mean knowledge, or maybe the ability to make use of Scripture as the available knowledge.
2. John Knox and the Covenanters who followed him believed that nations should Covenant with God, and that thereafter they were under special obligation nationally to the Covenant. Scotland was a covenanted nation. Others that had been reformed, but had not made a national covenant were a more difficult case. Knox thought that England had gone far enough to be covenanted. A covenanted nation could be a religious standing.
3. What about a nation whose laws correspond with the moral equity of God’s law, and then someone points out that they are in fact the moral standard of Scripture? Does that invalidate the law? Joseph Priestly put the case this way. Suppose that a Mohammedan ruler converted to Christianity, and noticing the command of Christ against polygamy the ruler made polygamy illegal. “I answer, that, whatever regulations the civil magistrate may adopt, yet, in his adopting of them, and enforcing them by civil penalties makes them, confessedly, to be of a civil nature, he is not intitled to obedience with respect to them, so far as they are of a religious nature.” (p. *Political Writings*, 72) So whereas in his general theory of state power Priestley thought the state had a right to legislate without regard to any transcendent norm, but only with a view to the good of the community, here the magistrate’s law is void, just in case the magistrate passed it with a religious intention! Here the R2K again seems to align with the Enlightenment, more than with anything else.

VanDrunen claims that he desires this non-religious state “because he wanted minorities (in this case, non-believers) to not be mistreated.” (p. 36) But if natural law lines up with the ethics of

Scripture, why is it mistreatment to require everyone to live by the standards of the natural law? If natural law = Scriptural general equity = justice, why does God require the denial of justice in the common sphere? McAtee explains it this way: for the R2K “if Christian princes were ruling, non-Christians wouldn’t get what non-Christians consider to be justice.” If that is the case the matter becomes one of subjective perception (by definition of the example, a false perception) of justice, and of the motivation for establishing the standard.

Religious standing turns out to be someone’s *attitude* toward the law. Even if a law is also the natural law, if it is perceived to accord with Scripture it is wrong to enforce it on someone who is against Scripture. In the kingdom of the common realm, it is the non-Christian’s attitude of rebellion that has the last say in what law may bind him. McAtee in fact goes on to argue for several pages that this is a religious stance, and that therefor the R2K is not pushing for a religiously neutral area, but an establishment of a non-Christian, even anti-Christian one. Quoting Richard Vines he traces the R2K ideas back to Socinianism. Well, for that matter, Joseph Preistley was a Socinian as well as an Enlightenment thinker. Then McAtee reviews the contrast to historic Presbyterian support for Christian magistrates running Christian governments.

Militant Amillennialism

As a name amillennialism is only about a hundred years old. Before that it was called postmillennialism, and the issue was what sort of millennium would Christ’s second advent follow? Would it be a transformed world, or is the millennium a name for Christ’s rule in an inward spiritual kingdom? A new name was necessary because of postmillennium’s appropriation by modernists and their social programs, and because of the pressure from premillennialists who had come to dominate orthodoxy (as defined by the fundamentals). A new name made the distinction from both clear.

Perhaps the most simple concept of amillennialism ever formulated was Klaas Schilder’s notion that history is the extension of time necessary for the full number of elect and reprobate to be born. Of course, amillennialism gets far more complicated in that just because the Bible is full of statements about the Kingdom of God and Reformed theology, including the Confessions, is full of positions about the role of entities in the world, any millennialism desiring to be Biblical and Reformed has to incorporate all of this. R2K being a rereading according to their new system of what the whole Bible teaches produces a corresponding type of amillennialism. Of course it will differ from older forms of amillennialism. McAtee is concerned to draw out the contrast in view of “the insistence by many strains of amillennialism that cultural advance is to be made in terms of Christianizing nations.” Besides quoting Geerhardus Vos as a representative of the older view he points to a large number of texts showing “wherein the Adamic cultural mandate ... becomes part and parcel of the redemptive history ... given to subsequent covenant contracts.” (p. 47) Finally he notes how the R2K theologians, in dispensationalist fashion, mischaracterize postmillennialism.

There follows a chapter featuring outrageous statements cited from R2K writers. The first group concerns theonomy, and McAtee says “Theonomy is the ‘error’ that R2K is seeking to slay. If it were not for theonomy, R2K would not have come into existence. Theonomy is R2K’s *raison d’être*.” (p. 40)

This is already covered in the historical introduction to this review. McAtee works his way toward the claim that “R2K is in all actuality the theological foundation for libertarian politics.” (p. 53) It is not quite clear what he means by libertarian politics, especially as he will eventually claim that R2K opens the way for cultural Marxism to take over the church. The next set of outrageous quotes relates to the R2K rejection of theocratic elements in the Confessions: French Confession, Second Helvetic Confession, Westminster Confession, and Belgic Confession.

I have a suggestion for how to test the real stance of the R2K with respect to the state. Marcellus Kik had identified one of the vectors of attack on his two kingdom resolution, under the American system, as coming from the ecumenical liberals, who wanted to wield power through the state by uniting Church and State efforts in their favorite social programs. Does R2K accept these social programs? Or do the R2K theologians stand against this as part of their “principled” stand against mixing to two kingdoms? Where are the R2K attacks on, say, the Catholic Conference of Bishops taking federal money to bring immigrants into America? Or on government money for Christian schools? I do not in fact know the R2K record on this, but if they really believe in their two kingdom theory there has to be such a principled stand. If they do not stand against this mixing of the realms of church and the common, does R2K really represent the theology of libertarianism as McAtee thinks? Perhaps it is a theology of statism, as he also seems to think. A review of R2K publications ought to show whether when it comes to real politics they are ready to sacrifice their two kingdom scheme. Is it deployed equally against the left as it is against actual Christian ideas of society? If not it is a pretext for a leftist agenda, only to be produced when it is time to silence the church.

The Family

The chapter on the family begins with a quotation from Herman Bavinck that the family is not a fourth sphere beside the spheres of church, of state, and of culture, but is the model for them. “All three life spheres lie embedded within the family in a complex way, and each is connected to the family. Since the Kingdom of God consists of the totality of all goods, here on earth one finds its purist image and most faithful representation in the household family.” This is interesting not least because people today, who call themselves Kuyperians, believe in three sovereign spheres which they think of as covenantally established, which are church, state and family. Kuyper, himself, outlined six areas of sphere sovereignty.¹⁴ McAtee’s purpose, though is to contrast this foundational role that Bavinck gives to the family to R2K’s denigration of the family. One could also think of the Calvin’s tendency, noted above, to think of the function of the state in terms of the family. The Heidelberg Catechism, takes matters in that order as well, deriving from the commandment *Honor thy father and thy mother* the duty to honor, love and obey “all those in authority over me.”

For McAtee VanDrunen has a “lack of belief in the reality of the Christian family that allows him to warn against those who warn of the demise of the Christian family.” (p. 59) Part of VanDrunen’s

14 Abraham Kuyper listed 1) the Family, 2) the Church, 3) Science and Art, 4) Economic life, 5) all social organizations, 6) the State. There is an ambiguity between these being the sovereign spheres, as contemporary Kuyperians think about them, or at least the ones they still believe in, vs. their being the areas where spheres are formed or types of spheres. For example, there is not an abstraction The Family, that has a sovereign sphere, but individual actual families that operate with their sphere sovereignty.

concern seems to be that giving importance to the family competes with concern for the institutional church, which he thinks is more important. As McAtee sees it, VanDrunen gives a central place to the institutional church that in Reformed thought ought to belong to “the centrality of God in the totality of our Christian lives.” (p. 60) He mentions VanDrunen’s “insistence that there is no such thing as a Christian family. In fact, he goes so far as to suggest that family life, unlike church life, is *not* part of the kingdom of God.” (p. 61)¹⁵ This chapter, though, is weak on supporting quotations. The best part of it is McAtee alternative vision.

One needs to note here that the family is where catechism is supposed to happen (Deut. 6). The family is where children first learn about covenantal government. The family is where children begin to form an idea of God via God’s parental covenant representatives. The home is the child’s first notion of heaven.

He also notes that “no one doubts the passages that VanDrunen cites as teaching that loyalty to the Lord Christ is above loyalty to the family; but what he glosses over in those passages is that they are not teaching loyalty to the visible church as being equal to loyalty to the Lord Christ.” It begins to look like one problem with R2K resembles that of Tyler Christian Reconstruction after all: exaggerating the institutional church.

Theocraphobia

This chapter harks back to the horrible dictums chapter. Here the argument shifts from the R2K being anti-confessional in their stance, and against Reformed theology in general, to incoherence of the R2K position itself. Every establishment of government is a theocracy in that implicit in it is an ultimate authority. Law involve a God, god or god concept. Here he cites R. J. Rushdoony, and there are a mountain of Reconstructionist books that argue this point.¹⁶ McAtee’s foil here is R. Scott Clark, and he goes on to argue that Clark has a defective understanding of history.

This is followed by a chapter on the misinterpretation by R2K of Biblical texts.

Cultural Transformation

As the R2K denies that there is Christian culture, the Christian transformation of culture cannot occur either. McAtee assembles a variety of examples against his R2K opponent which in this case is also R. Scott Clark. It appears that Clark is merely being obtuse. Anyway McAtee assembles a lot of well known stuff in rebuttal. If I could make my own suggestion it would be to view the third episode of the Maigret detective series, “Maigret Goes to School” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0H_DwY2FOLc) and notice how it describes how the whole life of a village and the people’s treatment of each other reflects their papist, that is non-Christian, values, and how the entire situation would be altered if they were Christianized.

15 This is another lapse from two-kingdom talk into one Kingdom of God talk. McAtee has trouble sustaining thinking in two-kingdom terms even to describe R2K ideas.

16 For a succinct argument I can recommend “‘Lex’ (Law) as another Word for ‘Religion’: A Lesson from the Middle Ages”, by Thomas Schirrmacher. contra-mundum.org/index_htm_files/Schir_law_religion.pdf

Genealogy of R2K

We have seen that the motivation for R2K is opposition to theonomy. But what are its theological sources? McAtee lists five, non exclusive, possibilities. 1) Lutheranism 2) Dispensationalism 3) Anabaptism 4) Classical liberalism 5) Marxism.

The R2K resembles Lutheranism by putting justification at the center of theology rather than the glory of God as does Reformed theology. The Reformed emphasis on the glory of God brought the whole of life and creation into the purpose of theology. Like the Anabaptists the R2K does not allow the church as the church to be concerned with the common realm, but it differs in that this alternate realm to the church, that is the world, is common, rather than evil as in the case of the Anabaptists. Both insist that it cannot be Christian. But this ideal of a state separated from the influence of Christianity is what Communists have aimed for in their policy. McAtee has a couple of quotations from Lenin about how religion must be a private affair. But then, liberalism aimed at the same result.

There is a more detailed similarity to the R2K in the case of dispensationalism. The similarities start with Kline's theology. To quote a source different source from what McAtee uses, Walter Kaiser noted:

Kline's intrusionism does not appear to differ much from distinctive dispensationalist approaches to the law. Both positions would affirm the termination of the law and the presence of types in the OT. Their only difference would be in deciding on individual values for the types and what constituted legitimate antitypes. We are still left without an explanation as to how these legal texts function for the contemporary Christian. Especially in the wake of *Roe v. Wade* and the abortion fiasco that has come upon America since 1973, an answer that these texts had a different meaning in the pre-Christian era than they do today is not acceptable. Furthermore the details of the text usually are swallowed up in a widesweeping generalization about the history of salvation being fulfilled in Christ. "God's Promise Plan and his Gracious Law". *JETS* 33/3 (September 1990) 289-302.¹⁷

McAtee begins his discussion of Dispensationalism with a quote from R. Scott Clark. "Read on its own terms, the teaching of the New Testament about the Kingdom of God is remarkably silent about the pressing social concerns of the day." (p. 93) This agrees with Kaiser up to the point that the moral instruction has to come from the Old Testament, if it is to address the pressing social concerns of the day. (If, as he says, they are "pressing", how does Clark think that these social, i.e. common, issues will be addressed?) From here on McAtee compares R2K and Dispensationalism on the law not applying to non-Christians, and thus both being in agreement. But actually his Dispensationalist source says that the law was only given to Israel, meaning (in Dispensationalist terms) that it does not apply to Christians, and that is Kline's idea as well. The R2K position of allowing it to apply to Christians, though not to non-Christians, is really a retreat from Kline and forms a half-way position between Reformed and Dispensationalist views.

This is in fact the big problem for the R2K. Kline at least on that point was consistent. But the R2K thinks the Christians have the Biblical law, and the non-Christians have the natural law, which morally teach the same thing, so effectively they are under the same law. At the same time Christians are not

¹⁷ Online at contra-mundum.org/index_htm_files/Kai_Gracious.pdf

allowed to promote those values in the common realm. This shows that the R2K doesn't actually believe in natural law after all, in spite of its claim to do so.

There is a chapter on the love of the world and the proper way to think about the world that talks about it in terms of structures, but does not contribute much to the argument of the book. In his conclusion, McAtee recaps what has been said so far and then considers the whole effect and purpose of the R2K. As its effect is to empty the church of a prophetic word, the result is that this empty space will be filled by the dominant thought of the day, which is cultural Marxism. "R2K guarantees that the church will eventually tack to the hard left." (p. 109) He wonders whether this has been the purpose all along. Taken with the fact that many R2K people "tilt to the left in their thinking and speaking" is "R2K just providing cover for the cultural Marxists?" I suggested above (on page 20) a test for this.

The purpose of McAtee in his book is to establish that the R2K is a different religion from the Reformed religion. I am reminded of the days when I used to read the newsletters coming out of North's Institute for Christian Economics and notice that many things they said, particularly about the church, were not Reformed. But I would, think, "They know better than this. They can't mean it and must just be expressing themselves carelessly." Came the point where I had to admit that they did mean it. In the same way many may have read opinions from the R2K promoters and thought that they can't really mean it. McAtee shows that they really do mean these radical things, and that they are central to the R2K agenda.