A Third-Way Reformed Approach to Christ and Culture:
Appropriating Kuyperian Neo-Calvinism and the Two Kingdoms Perspective[*]

by Ryan McIlhenny

As a pastor's kid growing up in an evangelical reformed denomination, I was raised on a steady diet of Kuyperian Neo-Calvinism, a theologically "reformational" understanding of the world that galvanized one toward social, religious, and political engagement. Members of my church, alone or with other congregations, worked to initiate moral reform in my beloved city by the bay. While scoring noticeable victories in the area of morality and constitutional rights, I often wondered whether such triumphs brought the city closer to being Christian. City legislators were quite furtive in overturning the efforts of religious conservatives, and it seemed hardly worth the effort to morally and spiritually redeem the city.

Few took notice of my church's efforts; those who did, finding our community a place of refuge from the world, recognized our witness. Over the years I have discovered that a local witness can be much more powerful as a means toward transformation than simply moral reform from the top down. Even today's thinkers have become more receptive of the idea that significant social change can occur "from below." And the reality of being a witness requires cultural activity. The world sees the good work of Christians and glorifies God the Father; the world knows us by our love. The conservative evangelical right has had its fifteen minutes, but believers are still called to be witnesses to the world. How are they to do so, especially when most of the historical examples drawn upon have been found wanting?

During the last few decades, evangelicals have been swept up in a kind of Manichean struggle against the forces of evil. Such activities are somewhat muted today, but they nonetheless continue. The battle to stop gay marriage in California, for instance, became the most expensive moral campaign in American history. Yet the numerous political campaigns have rarely paid off at least in terms of generated long-standing "redemptive" change—if, in fact, redemption is the goal—or reinforcing traditional theological doctrines. Evangelical movements in America have been strong on morality but woefully deficient in the area of doctrine.

Over a half-century ago, Henry Steele Commager commented that "during the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, religion prospered while theology went slowly bankrupt."[1] Despite the failures of evangelicalism and the conservative right in America, Christians still have an imperative to be witnesses (literally, martyrs) in the world (Acts 1:8). How Christians should engage their culture in the absence of a conservative right metanarrative is the subject of this paper.

Two differing (some would say competing) views originating from within the reformed community continue to generate fertile discussions over a distinctly confessional Christianity and its wider influence in culture. In one corner is the so-called Two Kingdoms Perspective (TKP), a position often posited (albeit falsely) by opponents as one that relegates culture and cultural activity and, in the other, Kuyperian Neo-Calvinism (KNC), a perspective that ostensibly elevates (again, falsely) such engagement to sacred piety. Both seem to fit within the mediating positions discussed by Richard Niebuhr in his still-relevant work, *Christ and Culture.* The latter falls into the Christ-transforming-culture category, along with, for example, nineteenth-century American evangelicals who believed that the moral reforming efforts of Christians would, because of their actions, usher in the millennial reign of Christ. The former falls into the ill-named Christ-and-culture-in-paradox category, wherein Christians recognize the entanglements of sin in culture, their pilgrim state on the earth, turn their focus away from transformation, live in hope that God will restore the heavens and the earth, and work faithfully and diligently to bring peace to all parts of the world. Clearly, then, the KNC and TKP discussions apply to the broader evangelical world.

Instead of offering an exhaustive view of each side, I want to present portions that I believe are valuable and uplifting for those struggling with the issue of the application of personal faith to culture. Since the two sides are not contradictory on all points, it is not outside the bounds of reason to pick and choose those portions that are appealing to me. The initial idea and subsequent argument offered here incorporates elements of both TKP and KNC. First, cultural engagement is a necessary and moral responsibility for Christians, even for ministers of word and sacraments. It is inescapable and thus worth talking about the role and influence of Christians in the broader culture. Second, the focus or *telos* of such required activity need not be transformation, but most certainly witness.

Much of the argument that follows will depend on a specific definition of culture drawn from new cultural studies.[2] (I hope the reader will

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[1] Henry Commager Steele, *The American Mind: An Interpretation of American Thought and Characters Since the 1880s* (New Haven: Yale, 1950), 165.

[2] For a postmodern definition of culture, broadly speaking, readers can start with some of the following works: Simon During, ed., *The Cultural Studies Reader,* 2d ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2001); Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures,* 1973. Theodor Adorno, (1991). *The Cultural Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (ed., with intro.),

allow me the privilege of not providing an overview of the contemporary literature on culture. Having gone through the rigors of a self-identified "postmodern" graduate program, I want to avoid punishing the reader with such mind-bending oddities.[3]) At the outset, then, I have no qualms about offering a brief preview. The definition I propose and present in the final sections of the paper is that culture is simply a language tool produced by forces both through and apart from individual human agency that generates an identity.[4] This will reorient us to culture as a sanctifying (i.e., "setting apart") not sacralizing phenomenon and, I hope, ease the tension and maintain the integrity of the two camps. A challenge or even out-right rejection of this definition, which I welcome, will only sharpen the competing viewpoints in the reformed community. I see no logical compulsion to pursue a synthesis. By saying this, I may be reacting against the rather nauseating evangelical let's-all-get-along attitude. Admittedly, this paper is a meager and humble attempt to gather portions of both positions in order to encourage those, like me, who want to engage culture from a decidedly Christian starting point.

1. Two Kingdoms

There are two essential and interrelated elements of TKP. First, natural and common laws or norms, as presented, among other places, in Romans 2:14-15, are part of the created order and inscribed on the hearts of all. Such creational laws are distinct from special revelation in God's law to his chosen people: they do not save. These natural edicts (justice, chief among them) govern society on a common basis. Following this is the second point—namely, the different functions and even foci of

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J.M. Bernstein (London: Routledge); Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford, 2002). Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notes* (International Publishers Co., 2008). Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke, 1991). Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Vintage, 1995); Vinayak Chaturvedi, editor with introduction, *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial* (London and New York: Verso, 2000). Geertz focuses particularly on culture as "systems of meaning" that human often take for granted. Anderson deals with the historical development, with particular emphasis on the material infrastructure, that generates a shared sense of national identity—hence, "nation" as an imagined concept. Other scholars refer to the idea of culture as pooled self esteem. Foucault articulates a kind of neo-Marxist and neo-Nietszchean perspective on culture production as discursive in nature, especially as it relates to subjectivity, normality, and agency. An invaluable work on current discussions on culture can be found in Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 1-5.

[3] I did my PhD work at a university where Jacques Derrida, the father of deconstruction, taught and in a department that prided itself on neo-Marxist and Foucaultian critical theory. I am neither a Marxist nor a deconstructionist, but, if Derrida, according to Richard Rorty, can "play" with texts, I would like to play with some of the defining elements of postmodern thought.

[4] A more academically esoteric approach to culture would be to define it as a linguistic or textual system of meaning that constructs multiple, hierarchical, and symbiotic identities within a given society.

redemptive and non-redemptive social spheres. TKP draws support from Calvin's discussion of the natural—that is to say, not anthropocentric—reasoning capacities of all humans:

> that there is one kind of understanding of earthly things; another of heavenly. I call "earthly things" those which do not pertain to God or his Kingdom, to true justice, or to the blessedness of the future life; but which have their significance and relationship with regard to the present life and are, in a sense, confined within its bounds. I call "heavenly things" the pure knowledge of God, the nature of true righteousness, and the mysteries of the Heavenly Kingdom. The first class includes government, household management, all mechanical skills, and the liberal arts. In the second are the knowledge of God and of his will, and the rule by which we conform our lives to it.

Thus, a common, non-redemptive bond between Christians and non-Christians is, writes Calvin, "some sort of desire to search out the truth" in all areas of life "through natural instinct" in order to "foster and preserve society."[5] Classical education traditionally focuses on the end-goals of truth, goodness, and beauty. Unbelievers can certainly come into contact with such realities. Likewise, the scriptures provide numerous examples of those outside the covenant of God who without the specific revelation of the law nonetheless exhibit a basic understanding of right and wrong. Consider the example of Abraham and Abimelech, where the latter, not a member of the covenant community (or at least not represented by the covenant head), confronts Abraham for his lying about his wife Sarah in Genesis 20. In no way does this mean that those without the law are exculpated for their failure to acknowledge the author of such laws. Let us be clear, then: unbelievers will be condemned for their failure to believe in the saving work of Jesus on the cross; they will equally be condemned for their rejection of God's authorship of creational laws—laws that are *not* the instructor of salvation. And under the guidance of scripture, the Canons of Dort, a summary of Christian doctrine affirmed by both camps, articulates the reality of a common realm:

> There remain, however, in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, and natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, and shows some regard for virtue and for good outward behavior. But so far is this light of nature from being sufficient to bring him to a saving knowledge of God and to true conversion that he is incapable of using it aright even in things natural and civil. By no means, further, this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted and hinders in unrighteousness, which by doing he becomes inexcusable before God.[6]

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[5] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2:2:13-15.
[6] *Canons of Dort* 3:4.

Following Calvin and the Canons, TKP proponent David VanDrunen, Robert B. Strimple Professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics at Westminster Seminary California, argues for "a distinction between the spiritual kingdom (finding institutional expression in the present age only in the church) and the civil kingdom (encompassing the various nonecclesiastical cultural endeavors, particularly the work of the state)."[7] He reiterates the same idea in *Biblical Case for Natural Law*: "The civil kingdom pertains to temporal, earthly, provisional matters not matters of ultimate and spiritual importance." The spiritual realm or kingdom, VanDrunen continues, "is also ruled by God, but he rules it not only as creator and sustainer but also as its redeemer in Christ. This kingdom pertains to things that are of ultimate and spiritual importance, the things of Christ's heavenly, eschatological kingdom."[8] Thus, while all societal spheres are under the Lordship of Christ, such spheres have different responsibilities. The job of the state, for instance, is to administer justice, not preach the gospel, and justice includes protecting a citizen's right, according to civil law, to preach the gospel.

Articulating the distinction between the ecclesial and civil realms, TKP subtly moves beyond the mere function of these spheres into other areas of human activity. Broadly speaking, justice not only includes the regulation of individuals in society, but also harmony with the natural world or fairness in the economic sector (i.e., the notion of market equilibrium would fit here). For instance, the job of a building engineer is to adhere to the norms of the physical universe and to offer a just price for his labors. His job title, which reflects what he does, has nothing to do with advancing the gospel or administering the sacraments. Indeed, all callings outside the church follow the goal of living in accordance with God's created order and exercising justice in some way.

Keep in mind that such activities are common to Christians and non-Christians alike and that being a Christian does not make, say, a carpenter better at his craft in terms of final product. A Christian musician may produce a piece that is woefully poor compared to his non-Christian counterpart. Outside the church, then, one's calling should conform to the norms of the created order—and even non-Christians, since they have the law written on their hearts, can do the same—and not to an artificial manipulation of their craft to incorporate word and sacraments. It is true that a government official, a building engineer, and an artist are free to preach the gospel in their sphere of influence, but the question is whether such freedom is derived from the civil or the ecclesiastical realm—an individual has a civil right to do so (at least ideally—we'll avoid

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[7] David VanDrunen, "Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed Natural Law and Two Kingdoms Tradition," *Calvin Theological Journal,* Vol. 41 (2007): 283-307.

[8] David VanDrunen, *Biblical Case for Natural Law*, Studies in Christian Social Ethics and Economics, ed., Anthony B. Bradley, foreword by Stephen Grabill (Grand Rapids, MI: Acton Institute, 2006), 24.

a discussion of first amendment consistency). But what the TKP needs to articulate is the place of the witness imperative of Acts 1. TKP does well preserving the duties of the ministerial office, but what about the Christian in the pew, who shares the same witness imperative as the pastor. How is a plumber to show his discipleship in what he does?

When it comes to this point of view, there have been serious misunderstandings. It is important to clear up an essential one. The term *common,* for instance, does not mean neutral, as if the social spheres outside the church are devoid of guiding or interpretive presuppositions. Furthermore, the TKP does not intimate that God's sovereignty is restricted solely to the ecclesiastical realm. God's normative creational laws are over the secular realm. VanDrunen's colleague at Westminster, R. Scott Clark, Professor of Church History and Historical Theology, likewise affirms the sovereignty of God over all areas of life: "Yes, Christ is Lord over all things." Nothing in the NKP would seem to offset Kuyper's oft-quoted aphorism: "No single piece of our mental world is to be sealed off from the rest and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'" VanDrunen has even made the case that Kuyper himself adopted the basic doctrines, though not the terminology, of the traditional Two Kingdoms perspective.[9] The difference comes in how God's sovereignty is administered. What is the specific "function" of each social sphere? "His revelation," Clark concludes, "speaks *to* everything but not in the same way."[10]

2. Kuyperian Neo-Calvinism

TKP is going through somewhat of a revival today, not as widely recognized as its older contemporary counterpart. Perhaps (and I say this tongue-in-cheek) its resurgence is part of the "postmodern condition" that intimates an attitude toward the totalizing Kuyperian view, motivated to battle the rise of modern secularism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as something that needs to be sent to the metanarrative dustbin. Maybe the desire to restore the TKP from obscurity reflects an incredulous mood among post-evangelical-right Christians. But I'm not willing, since no reason demands it, to jettison every part of the KNC perspective.

KNC offers four critical features in what is often referred to as the grace-restores-nature scheme: the cultural mandate, sphere sovereignty,

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[9] David VanDrunen, "Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed Natural Law and Two Kingdoms Tradition," *Calvin Theological Journal* 41 (2007): 283-307.

[10] R. Scott Clark, blog entry, February 6, 2009. http://heidelblog.wordpress.com/2009/02/06/world-and-life-view-license-to-baptize/. In a more recent post, Clark admits, "Abraham Kuyper was absolutely correct to say, 'There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, "This is mine! This belongs to me!"'" April 18, 2009. http://heidelblog.wordpress.com/2009/04/18/common-is-not-neutral/.

common grace, and the antithesis.[11] Each is worth discussing in its own right, but this article values the latter two as it interacts with TKP. The idea of antithesis, explicated by Dutch statesman and university founder Abraham Kuyper, says that the world is divided between two diametrically opposed belief (or, to use Kuyper's language, "world") systems that inform and interpret every aspect of life. In his famous Stone Lectures at Princeton in 1898, Kuyper argued that there needs to be an acknowledgement of "two kinds of human consciousness: that of the regenerate and the unregenerate; and these two cannot be identical" and further "two kinds of people occasions of necessity the fact of two kinds of human life and consciousness of life." Kuyper offers something compelling here: when it comes to ultimate cognitively-assenting issues, no common ground exists between Christians and non-Christians. These two opposing viewpoints develop "logically and systematically the whole complex of ruling ideas and conceptions that go to make up our life and world-view." He encouraged Christians to oppose the antithetical worldview of modernism and to "successfully defend" their own sanctuary "by placing in opposition...a life and worldview" of their own.[12] The idea of Christians defending their sanctuary echoes James Bratt's articulation of the double meaning of sphere sovereignty: "'Souvereiniteit in Eigen Kring' can mean sovereignty in *its* circle, referring to the pluralistic ontology Kuyper unfolds in the text [or] sovereignty in *our* circles, spelling out a pluralistic sociology and epistemology which Kuyper also argues for but which does not have ontological warrant."[13] A number of contemporary scholars have successfully heeded Kuyper's call, philosophically and politically.

Reformed thinkers after Kuyper, notably Herman Dooyeweerd, further explored the deep-seated tenets of the antithesis. Dooyeweerd, a reformed philosopher whose erudition (in my humble opinion) is second only to Immanuel Kant, sharpened Kuyper by not only articulating the "*mutual irreducibility, inner connection,* and *inseparable coherence* of all aspects of reality," touching on "sphere sovereignty," but also by stressing the religious "ground motive" of all worldviews.[14] All knowledge claims either derive from a reliance on something in the created order

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[11] In their latest book, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview,* Michael Goheen and Craig Bartholomew identify the major themes of Neo-Calvinism: [1] "In and through God's redemption in Christ, grace restores nature. Grace is like medicine that restores helth to a sick body. Christ's work of salvation is aimed at the creation as a whole in order to renew it to the goal that God always had in mind for it. [2] God is sovereign and orders all of reality by his law and word. [3] The cultural mandate given in Gensis 1:26-28 (to exercise royal stewardship over the creation) has ongoing relevance: God calls humankind to develop his creation through history, to his glory" (16).

[12] Abraham Kuyper, "Lectures on Calvinism: The Stone Lectures of 1898, Calvinism and Science" Princeton, 137. Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, intro. Benjamin B. Warfield, trans. J. Hendrik De Vries (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 154, 189-90.

[13] James D. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 461-462.

[14] James Skillen and Rockne McCarthy, ed.., *Political Order and the Plural Structure of Society,* Emory University Studies in Law and Religion (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 281.

which is not independent itself, or from a resting on the creator, who is by nature independent and self-sufficient.[15]

Dooyeweerd's student at the Free University, H. Evan Runner, who later helped organize what would become the Institute for Christian Studies, likewise emphasized the faith-center of all knowledge claims. Every person has a faith commitment, beliefs situated at the core of his or her being. Humans, therefore, are inescapably religious. As Runner wrote in *Scriptural Religion and the Political Task*, "our whole life is religion. And that not only for Christian believers (true religion), but also for unbelievers. For unbelief is not described in Scripture as absence of belief, but as mis-directed [sic] belief. Religion…is man's ineradicable situation: he has been created 'before God'…and must render an account." As a religious presupposition, unbelief shapes the way in which one looks at the world: "apostate man appropriates to his own heathen pistical phantasy [sic] the role that the Word of God really has, and thus from the beginning places himself in a world where the relations are (imagined) other than they really are. Human analysis always takes place within the context of the Lie or the Truth."[16] Like knowledge claims, cultural activity, therefore, reveals the presuppositions of those who submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ over every area of life, contrasting with those who suppress that reality in unrighteousness. In the sphere of culture making and culture transforming, according to Al Wolters, a towering figure in the KNC pantheon, the religious ground-motive determines the direction in which human activity moves against the unmovable structure of God's created order.

From this we could say that the lack of common ground is distinct from a common realm. The former refers to the fundamental orientation of the heart as affected by the fall and redemption; the latter refers to the creational structures given to Christians and non-Christians alike. Thus, as there is no common ground in terms of *weltanschauung,* there is common ground in how such worldviews are constructed. Christians and non-Christians have the same creational "stuff" to work from. Christians worshipfully affirm the Creator; while non-Christians, although knowing the Creator, suppress him in unrighteousness.

As a non-theological scholar and professor at a Christian college, I have found Dooyeweerd's and Runner's reworking of Kuyper immensely

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[15] Neo-Calvinist and Dooyeweerd scholar, Roy Clouser, author of *The Myth of Religious Neutrality,* has offered a power argument defending the idea that all knowledge, even at the basic surface level (e.g., 1 + 1 = 2), reveals foundational religious motives behind them and thus affirms a Christian view of everything. "Is there a Christian View of Everything from Soup to Nuts" *Pro Rege* (June 2003). Clouser makes a distinction between reducibility and irreducibility in the direction of humanity's perspective on the world. The unbelieving mind reduces knowledge to a creation starting point, a foundation derived from a creational thing (e.g., matter for the Marxist). But this is impossible, for matter is dependent on other created things. Thought derived from a Christian root, however, with an irreducible reality, namely, the Triune God, whose being cannot be dependent on anything in the created order.

[16] H. Evan Runner, *Scriptural Religion and the Political Task* (Toronto: Wedge, 1974), 15.

helpful. Their work on the religious nature of worldviews has given meaning and drive to my own scholarship. Let me offer a practical example. Christian institutions of higher learning regularly utilize the term *integration* to discuss the coupling of faith and learning. Privately, I have always wondered about the term "integration," which suggests that faith and learning are somehow naturally separated and must be pulled together—a reality, I assume, of the professionalization of academia that began in the late nineteenth century and not of the various disciplines in themselves. Indeed, the disentangling of faith from learning, a project inaugurated by Enlightenment thinking and unfortunately widely accepted by many evangelical colleges, is a much more difficult task to execute. Integration presupposes a modernist duality. Faith is already involved in learning. KNC Robert Sweetman, who holds the H. Evan Runner chair in the history of philosophy at the Institute for Christian Studies, suggests substituting "integration" with "integral," wherein one's faith commitments can never be evicted from an investigation of the world.[17] The religious root of all worldviews and how such ground motives or concentrations of being shape our understanding of the world is something that even the TKP cannot escape.

3. Points of Disagreement

3.1. Cultural Involvement

The point of disagreement between TKP and KNC comes in the area of the Christian's and, more directly, the church's relationship to and involvement in culture. This brings us back to the functionality of the church. (Can there be such things as Christian schools, music, political parties, labor unions, etc.? Whether there can be explicitly Christian institutions outside the church is the subject of another paper.) Excited about the work of redemption in the broader culture, KNC advocates have often fallen into the habit of relegating the institutional church or, at best, severing gospel mission with the institutional function of word and sacraments. I would assume that some find their cultural activity as equally pious as traditional corporate worship; that is, seeing every aspect of life as sacred worship can lead to the devaluing of the body of Christ. Even Wolters warns against the elevation of cultural redemption over that of true spiritual piety: "Generally speaking, Neo-Calvinists are more noted for their intellectual ability and culture-transforming zeal than for their personal godliness or their living relationship with Jesus Christ. This is of course not to suggest that there is some kind of inherent tension between intellectuality and spirituality, but only that the

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[17] The distinction between "integration" and "integral" can be found in Robert Sweetman's "Christian Scholarship: Two Reformed Perspectives," *Perspectives: A Journal of Reformed Thought* 16, no. 6 (2001): 14-19. The reader should be aware that I am not borrowing from Sweetman. When it comes to faith and learning, I have always found the term "integration" a bit of a misnomer, but I am not sure Sweetman's "integral" is the appropriate term.

Neo-Calvinist polemic against a pietistic otherworldliness can have the unfortunate effect of throwing out the godly baby with the pietistic bath-water."[18]

KNC disputes the idea that the goal of redemption is limited to the task of a particular sphere or institution (viz., the church). It is not simply the fact that the whole creation groans and awaits redemption from the fall: creation's waiting for redemption does not contradict its need for it. But KNC means something more. Christians are to actively engage cultural in order to further along its spiritual liberation: "no area of life is neutral and all areas need to be redeemed."[19] Discussing the hostility of the unbelieving mind in *Creation Regained,* Wolters suggests that "distortion must be opposed *everywhere*—in the kitchen and the bedroom, in city councils and corporate boardrooms, on the stage and on the air, in the classroom and in the workshop." Every sphere must be exposed to the light the gospel. Furthermore, when it comes to the

> biblical accounts of sin and redemption…it is still *humanity* that plays the pivotal role. Just as the fall of man (Adam) was the ruin of the whole earthly realm, so the atoning death of a man (Jesus Christ, the second Adam) is the salvation of the whole world…The Adamic human race perverts the cosmos; the Christian human race renews it. If Christ is the reconciler of all things, and if we have been entrusted with 'the ministry of reconciliation' on his behalf (2 Cor. 5:18), then we have a redemptive task wherever our vocation places us in his world.[20]

Drawing from the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28, KNC promotes the idea that Christians have a responsibility to renew a fallen world through cultural activity.

But what about those passages in scripture (esp. Jeremiah 29; Acts 16, I Peter 1, et. al.) where members of the covenant community are encouraged to wait patiently and in the meantime work diligently? Nowhere does Jeremiah, for instance, compel the exiles to transform Babylon, let alone work toward developing a coordinated and coherent cultural consciousness through various institutions. Nor does Peter compel the scattered exiles in the New Testament to transform or actively renew the cultural developments around them. But this should not lead us to reject cultural involvement, nor does it contradict the Christian imperative to live as ministers of reconciliation. This issue rests on whom or what we are reconciling. As exiles, God's people in Babylon and now throughout the world are set apart; this is (or should be) their cultural marker. The

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[18] Al Wolters, "What is to be done…toward a Neo-Calvinist agenda?" in *Comment* 24, no. 1(October 2005), 8.

[19] An excellent web source to study more about neo-Calvinism can be found at http://www.freewebs.com/reformationalphilosophy/

[20] Al Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* with a postscript by Michael Goheen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 73.

very idea of being "aliens," "sojourners," and "exiles" is a cultural descriptor. Christians are always already within a culture and must live redemption each day. I fail to see biblical grounds for affirming that cultural transformation is in any way superior to that of simply cultural witness.

3.2. Reclaiming Sacred and Secular

Another sticky point of contention needs to be addressed before moving on. According to the KNC position, limiting the function of redemption through a particular institution smacks of a sacred-secular dichotomy. Since the emergence of the evangelical right decades ago, the term *secular* has denoted all that is atheistic, humanistic, and materialistic. Indeed, we can avoid an etymological fallacy by paying close attention to the variations on a word. But we need not adopt the historical baggage within the last century and a half that appears to have taken dominion over such a word. The word s*ecular,* Darryl Hart writes in *A Secular Faith,* "is derived from the Latin *seclorum*" and is "similar to the English words 'era' or 'period.' As such the word accurately signifies a somewhat definite period of time and especially its provisional or temporal quality. A *seclorum* technically represents a period that is likely impermanent, or a stage in history that is passing."[21] Appropriately, then, *secular* can fit neatly within a TKP framework since the functioning of spheres outside the church deal with issues not eternal, but passing. Concurrently, TKP proponents need to be vigilant as to how *secular* is used, which has, at times, revealed the antithesis.

It is important to maintain, however, that the things related to the eternal and temporal, generating a conceptual distinction between sacred and secular, are, in fact, intertwined—at least in this life. The sacred and secular are not two oppositional forces battling it out for the minds of men: this is the mindset of the conservative right and modernists before them. As descriptive terms, they overlap to the degree that it is impossible to identify a salient line of separation. We can, nonetheless, cognitively intuit—not arbitrarily, of course—a distinction of function. On the one hand, sacred and secular, even in the limits strictly defined by TKP, are not in tension with one another. In the *Institutes,* Calvin differentiates the institutional duties of church and state, the former concerned with eternal things and the latter temporal. Yet in Book III he articulates in an Augustinian way the functionality of two kingdoms that are intertwined in the undivided human person:

> [L]et us consider that there is a twofold government *in* man: one aspect is spiritual, whereby the conscience is instructed in piety and in reverencing God; the second is political, whereby man is educated for the duties

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[21] Darryl Hart, *A Secular Faith: Why Christianity Favors the Separation of Church and State* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), 242.

> of humanity and citizenship that must be maintained among men. These are usually called the "spiritual" and the "temporal" jurisdiction…by which is meant that the former sort of government pertains to the life of the soul, while the latter has to do with the concerns of the present life— not only with food and clothing but with laying down laws whereby a man may live his life among other men holily, honorably, and temperately. For the former resides *in* the inner mind, while the latter regulates only outward behavior. The one we may call the spiritual kingdom, the other, the political kingdom. Now these two, as we have divided them, must always be examined separately; and while one is being considered, we must call away and turn aside the mind from thinking about the other. There are *in* man, two worlds, over which different kings and different laws have authority.[22]

Observe the initial and final phrasing of the quotation. The "twofold government" with "two worlds," "different kings," and "different laws" are housed within a single person; they cannot be ontologically separated. Christians, who are redeemed as a whole (i.e., body and soul) have, if you will, a two-kingdom function, doing things related to the temporal and eternal. Furthermore, the spirit that is changed through the working of the Holy Spirit has a necessary effect on the temporal.

The contact between the temporal and eternal touch social spheres as well. As an example, the failure to recognize this has irritated American culture for decades. Commenting on the truly problematic American dilemma of separating church and state in their recent book, *Religious Freedom and the Constitution,* authors Christopher Eisgruber and Lawrence Sager argue that "the separation of church and state" is much too narrow in creating the vibrant conditions for religious liberty. "The notion of literally separating the modern state and the modern church is implausible in the extreme [since] churches buy and sell property, build buildings, run schools, [and] maintain staffs of paid employees." In the end, they argue that church and state "cannot possibly be separate."[23] This would seem to accord with the current discussion between KNC and TKP. In a temporal sense, there exists a relationship between church and state, sacred and secular. The church militant in the world cannot do its job (i.e., function properly) without negotiating the secular. The reformed and Presbyterian Westminster Confession of Faith even affirms that "there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature."[24] Some circumstances of worship, then, are secular.

A similar qualification can be made when examining the role of a Christian's vocational calling. TKP backers frequently argue that jobs

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[22] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* 3:19:15. Emphasis mine.
[23] Christopher Eisgruber and Lawrence Sager*, Religious Freedom and the Constitution* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2007), 6-7.
[24] *Westminster Confession of Faith,* 1:6.

outside the church are functionally secular. Would this extend to an ec-clesiastical-related institution like a seminary? TKP seems to neglect even the possibility that a secularly focused occupation can be related to the sacred and eternal. I find this *prima facie* untenable, for even the most sacred of duties can be abstractly construed as secular. Consider the role of a professional scholar teaching at a confessionally reformed seminary. Would we consider his job sacred or secular, concerned with temporal and/or eternal things? Since *secular* does not necessarily con-tradict the meaning of sacred, it is not simply plausible but appropriate to think about his job as both sacred and secular. He can read in the same way as an unbeliever; he has been trained in the same universities and thus given the same methodological tools of the trade as his unbe-lieving colleagues. The unbelieving scholar can read the same ancient text, understand the same structure of the Bible, and even know the con-tent of traditional theology. To ask it another way, is the act of reading the words in the Bible, going so far as the original languages, inherently a sacred activity? (I am not here challenging the inerrancy of scripture, but focusing on the epistemological-function, the cognitive reception of the one reading the text.) The language used in the Bible is common to all and belongs to the temporal realm. The common elements used by the seminary professor—the methodological and conceptual tools, including language, inherited from his or her scholarly training—are indeed secu-lar, but, as we know, such things are the means to communicate a higher sacred reality. The common, however, reveals the antithesis. For example, John Dominic Crossan and I can read the same New Testament gospel, but such shared ability will expose two diametrically opposed attitudes of the heart. Furthermore, such a manifestation of worldviews has little bearing on who can physically read better, yet it *does* relate to who has the better understanding (not necessarily ability), which can only come through the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

What about vocational callings outside the church or church-related institution? Can there be such a thing as a "Christian plumber"? Or can there be a Christian perspective on plumbing? Notice the difference be-tween the two questions. The former deals with the ontology of a particu-lar job; the other considers the epistemology of it (i.e., the ground motive of the heart). But how do the two relate? We cannot separate ontology from epistemology. I have faced the same issue in my own scholarship. As a professional historian who specializes in radical reform and religious intolerance in the early republic, is my work of temporal concern? TKP would answer in the affirmative; KNC in the negative. Both can be right if the terminology is elucidated. As a Christian historian, what I teach and write cannot be done without concern for ultimate issues such as a bibli-cal view of human nature or the idea of providence (against chance). Even if I am unable to articulate the mind of God related to the ontology of history, which, indeed, I cannot (or have not been able to do so yet), it does not follow that my historical work has no attachment with the

metaphysical. And if, like the seminary professor, the temporal words used refer to ultimate issues (i.e., the words are mere tools to point us higher, if you will), can we then call such activity sacred? It is undeniably true that I have a point of contact, a common ground, with the unbeliever when interacting with the raw material of history (i.e., dates, names, places, etc.). But that is not all that history is. History, derived from the Greek term for inquiry or investigation, is primarily thought: the cognitive activity of putting such materials together in a cohesive and coherent way. My core religious beliefs organize the stuff of history. On a common level, I have agreements with materialist history, but, given my own conceptual framework, I cannot fully accept the idea that history is nothing more than the jumbled processes of the mode of production. Thus in the case of professional history there seems to be an extricable relationship between temporal and ultimate or eternal issues, and, of course, the latter springs from a religious ground motive. Even if we grant that some vocations are, strictly speaking, secular (like plumbing), does it follow that *all* vocations are?

4. Defining Culture (Again)

Critical to this discussion is the definition of culture, a protean term as difficult to identify as the concept "nature," according to Terry Eagleton.[25] Too often Christians either offer a hazy explanation or simply avoid providing one all together. Even the few offered, in my estimation, are ultimately unsatisfying. Perhaps such difficulties reflect the very essence of culture, a perennially unstable dialogue between socioeconomic forces at multiple levels. This paper invites Christians to accept the unstable nature of such a concept without compromising confessional doctrine.[26]

In his latest work, *Culture Making,* Christian author Andy Crouch defines culture as "*what we make of the world.* Culture is, first of all, the name for our relentless, restless human effort to take the world as it's given to us and make something else...Culture is all these things: paintings (whether finger painting or the Sistine Chapel), omelets, chairs, snow angels. It is what human beings make of the world. It always bears the stamp of our creativity, our God-given desire to make something more than we were given." Crouch's tightly presented definition is arguably one of the clearest that has come out of the evangelical community, incorporating modern and postmodern features such as a shared public community, process and change, subjectivity and agency, and even the place of power (i.e., hegemony) at multiple levels of identity formation.

Cultural products bear "the stamp of our creativity," Crouch suggests. That stamp reflects the nature of those making culture, namely, humans as image-bearers of God. The image of God, however, is common to all and is therefore unable to delineate cultural distinctions in an ul-

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[25] Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 1-5.
[26] Admittedly, I am working within the so-called linguistic turn.

timate sense. The fact that culture-making reflects the picture of God tells us at best, it seems to me, the structures put in place by the creator. But cultural production (i.e., humanity's mimicking the creator by being, analogously, creators themselves) has been done by those who suppress God in unrighteousness. Even wayward activity retains the impression of humanity's God-given creativity. Philosopher-theologian Cornelius Van Til, a proponent of an apologetic methodology known as "presuppositionalism," believed that non-Christians presuppose the Creator as they suppress him. Thus a crucial question is whether the image of God, common to believers and unbelievers alike, *makes* Christian or, better, *makes* redeemed.

Divine creational structures in and through the work of Christ can remain in a Christ-*less* cultural artifact. Even while suppressing God in unrighteousness and regularly working against the created order, which only leads to frustration, fallen humanity still presupposes the structures put in place by the very creator they suppress. Drawing from Romans 1, all humans know God. Sin does not remove the faculty of God-knowing; it simply fills it with something else. Likewise, the fall did not destroy the goodness, truth, and beauty of creation; it did, however, pervert and subject creation to death. But even in the fallen world, there is a reflection of God's magnificent orchestration. The image of God, therefore, is not sufficient to distinguish Christian from non-Christian culture making.

Yet before TKP declares victory at this point, one caveat must be made. Just because the image of God reflected in cultural activity is common to both Christians and non-Christians does not negate the conscientious "Christ-centeredness" (or direction) of the Christian in culture making. To say it slightly differently, there is no removing the impact of the perspective simply because the product of that perspective may turn out to be common to both believer and unbeliever. TKP Christians tend to be inconsistent here. They are willing to reject materialism or naturalism in the social sciences (e.g., Marxist history) because they derive from faulty conceptual starting points (ideologies), but there are plenty of points of agreement that we can have with a materialist or a naturalist without accepting their final product wholesale. We quickly highlight how such perspectives ruin the whole barrel, but could care less about the motivating Christian perspective in the creation of a particular work. Cultural activity can be done by and through a Christian agent: the cultural manifestation, therefore, can be derived from a Christian. It is even possible that a superior cultural expression can be shaped by a Christian cognizant of his or her cultural activity. Consider Niebuhr's monumental work. Are we to consider his Christian perspective irrelevant in the actual production of *Christ and Culture?*

I have digressed a bit; let us get back to culture. There seems to be a problem with the assumption that culture is a product. Crouch assumes a traditional definition: culture *as* beliefs, habits, and human artifacts. But this is to confuse categories. My cultural identity as an American

does not make me the essence of America, whatever that means, since others share in the American culture. How does my identity along with the fact that I am a Christian redeem the cultural marker American, since the sign, America, is different from who I am as an image-bearer? The sign certainly has a close relational sense to that which is redeemed, but this does not entail the redemption of the sign. In like manner, culture is not only shared but is never the essence of what it is associated with. "Christian" is an associative term, an identity marker that reveals my association to the Messiah. Yet the name *Christian*—whether applied to an individual, community, or nation—does not necessarily make the holder of it saved by grace through faith alone. My belief that God exists shapes my cultural identity. Still, if we recognize our terminology and the distinction between sign and signifier it is fine to use the identifier "Christian" in a philosophically pragmatic sense.

Definitional troubles include the assumption that culture is always unidirectional, in that it follows the intent of the doer. This is true in many cases, but culture can also manifest identities that escape the immediate notice of culture producers. Such production is done in two ways: by the individual or group conscious of what they are creating and by outside social forces that impose and thus create an identity. In establishing an institution of higher learning, I am aware of what I want to produce and the type of student that will reflect the values of the institution. Sometimes humans are conscious of the identity that manifests itself from a specific activity. Other times, they are not. Humans are born, for instance, into a context not of their own choosing, under circumstances not of their own control. The moment we come into this world an identity is thrust upon us (think "blue" for boy and "pink" for girl). This is an example of culture making, but making not of the intent of the one carrying it, or, to refer back to the above paragraph, there is nothing inherently manly in the cultural marker "blue" and thus the culture does not retain the essence of the thing it refers to. As Terry Eagleton put it, "the very word 'culture' contains a tension between making and being made."[27]

Equally, there seems to be a time allotment (or phases of time) for cultural markers. Part of the changing aspect of culture is that certain cultures can be cast off, which makes it quite difficult to redeem. My son's association with blue, as a cultural identifier, is not the essence of his maleness. Placing him in pink may have compromised his cultural status, but not his real meaning as made in the image of God. Yet there are some identifiers that are necessary. The blue blanket swaddling my newborn son identifies him as a boy, not as my son. Like the blanket, the wristband he received after birth does not make him my son either, but it identifies him as my son. In fact, that cultural identifier can be thrown away eventually; it is a culture that needs not to be redeemed (even

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[27] Terry Eagleton, *Idea,* 5.

though his grandfather loves to save that stuff). But at the moment of his birth, such a band (as a text) is necessary to set his identity apart from other kids. As he grows, furthermore, he will always be reminded that he carries his cultural name, McIlhenny, wherever he goes. But more importantly, he carries *Christian* wherever he goes. My daughter may change her earthly (temporal or secular) name and thus her culture, but she *must never* change her heavenly (eternal or sacred) name.

As is apparent from the above discussion, it would seem to be more helpful to think of culture as a language instrument that communicates an identity. Culture is a tool that articulates. In its mandate to spread the gospel, the church has a duty to translate the scriptures into common language. This is a cultural activity. And the focus should be on sending faithful message, not redeeming the language that is used. One uses a hammer to build a house, but the hammer is not the house. In a similar way, culture is used as a tool by preachers to send out a message, extending the kingdom. This is not to say that culture is not a part of the message. To say that it is not would be a false dichotomy. But the tool is not the focal point. The nails that hold up a house, which we presupposed were put there using either a hammer or nail gun, are a necessary part of the house, but they should not be the focus of attention unless they are put in improperly. So, if the tools to build the house are skewed, the integrity of the building will be threatened. We need then to refocus on the peripherals. Clarity is of the utmost importance in these discussions.

Culture historically evolves at such a slow pace and from so many different directions that humans are often unaware of its coming into being. As my advisor once said to me, culture represents all the things we take for granted. I have come to see this in my own scholarly endeavors. Trained as a new cultural historian, I have examined the history of race in America as a cultural, not biological, phenomenon. Most people assume race as part of one's physical makeup, his or her essence. But race, contemporary scholars agree, is the "favored idiom" of the social consequences of an economic system: racial identity springs from social interaction. In the seventeenth century, for instance, the sugar revolution that stimulated the economic development of the West Indies created a rising demand for cheap labor. The cheapest form of exploited human labor came from the west coast of Africa, which concurrently pushed out all non-African labor out of West Indian slavery. Over time western Africans became associated "culturally" with slave labor and thus became a disparaged cultural subject. The emergence of the modern slave identity was a kind of "tipping-point," to borrow from Malcolm Gladwell—an historical shift of trends in a particular direction that went unnoticed by those participating in slavery. Slaves underwent a cultural identity transformation from "African" (ethnic origin) to "nigger" (an identity marker). Did Africans choose this cultural identity? (You may be a narrow-minded bigot if you answer in the affirmative.) No. Instead, it was imposed upon

them by a web of external forces: cultural constructions that come from systems of meaning.

And given the divisions within culture making—individual and social, conscious and unconscious, directive and discursive—working in an historically dialectical manner, we can affirm the fact that culture does change, and in some cases it *must* change. I think it is more than appropriate in certain cases to oppose cultural impositions and to do so via cultural activity. If we accept race as a social construction, would it be appropriate for Christians to deconstruct it? Is the nineteenth-century gender image of domesticity something Christians can reject if they so choose? Should evangelicals assume that their suburban lifestyles or their "American" identity, as cultural identities, are redeemed, redeemable, or somehow derivative from confessional orthodoxy? As a cultural producer, I am either working within or against my cultural context. Part of a being a Christian is to deny one's self; this includes one's own culture. Keep in mind, however, that doing so *is* a cultural activity. Separating culture, say, for instance, a person's class or racial identity, from his or her identity as a Christian is a cultural activity.

5. Cultural Witness, Not Transformation

Given the features of our definition, we can ask an important question. Is culture something that can be redeemed? Given its instability, it is difficult to say "yes." Culture can no more be redeemed than English (or, dare I say it, Hebrew or Greek) can be, or that my identity as an American and the fact that I am a Christian somehow redeems the cultural marker American, since the sign is different from the actual person. The sign has only a relational sense to that which is redeemed. It is not, to use a Kantian phrase, a thing-in-itself. Yet this should not force us to adopt an extreme position. Some TKP Christians—and I've heard this largely from ruling and teaching elders—conclude from this that they have no responsibility to be culturally engaged or to support so-called Christian institutions outside the church. This is mistaken, since a distinction exists between transforming culture and engaging culture. To say that our primary focus is on the advancement of the gospel is not to neglect the use of culture.

No one can separate gospel preaching from cultural activity, since it is already a cultural activity that shapes an identity. Author Michael Horton, another TKP advocate and the J. Gresham Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary California, once wrote over a decade ago that "Christianity is not a culture [but] a system of truth-claims. The gospel has succeeded in a variety of cultures and has thrived among groups, maintaining vastly different values and

mores."[28] While appreciating Horton's emphasis on the fact that our identity is not tied to our political or moral allegiances, challenging the American assumption that if evangelicals did away with abortions and outlawed, say, gay marriages then they would truly have a "Christian Nation," but to the person and work of Christ, it seems to me that he makes an unnecessary and potentially misleading dichotomy. It is self-contradictory to say that Christianity is not a culture. Consider the similarity in language between Christianity as "a system of truth-claims," according to Horton, and the contemporary definition of culture as "systems of meaning." The system of doctrine that Christians affirm immediately presents an identity to the world. When non-Christians inquire about my religious affiliation, which has been a frequent question in the public university, I respond by saying, "I am confessional Protestant member of The Way." Such a response immediately delimits a cultural identity that is not only distinct from non-Christian faiths but also that of a nebulous evangelicalism. Christian culture has changed over the years, making it insurmountably difficult to transform it; nonetheless, what that culture refers to is tied to an eternal and unchangeable person.

Cultural activity should, then, shift away from transformation or even reformation to simply witness. The world recognizes our culture—our textual identity, our agency, if you will. As created beings, the use of language is hardwired into our system, and we cannot help but use it. Since this is the case, language, in any textual form, is unavoidable. As ambassadors of Christ, our responsibility is to use language, the central element of culture, to advance the message of the gospel. The Christian's engagement in culture is a moral responsibility, an imperative, not an option. The issue is not whether Christians should be engaged in culture; they are always already engaged in it. Translating the scriptures is a cultural activity and must be done regularly. Learning the original languages of the scriptures is a cultural activity. An English, Korean, or Spanish preacher is acting within a cultural context. And the gospel preacher is a leading cultural activist.

One last point of clarification is needed. In no way can a specifically Christian cultural witness be severed from transformation. In the providence of God, my cultural engagement, which is both an encountering and countering of the world, *will* transform (not in a redemptive sense) culture. As culture imposes itself on me, I cannot help but to shape the direction of culture as well. True, the goal of the preacher, as J. Gresham Machen argues toward the end of *Christianity and Liberalism*, is not to change culture. Even so, the preaching of the gospel will greatly influence culture. What is meant here is that the Christian witness, in and through the presentation of the gospel, the administration of the sacra-

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[28] Michael Horton, *Modern Reformation* (May/June 1993) reprinted in *Modern Reformation* 17, no. 5 (September/October, 2008).

ments, or works of charity, may be used by God to convert the sinner, whose identity (read culture) will, if God pleases, be changed, associating the temporal secular sign with the ultimate sacred signifier. Even if God does not enact an inner change, the witness will not be severed from the goal of redemption. The person listening to the gospel may react in hostility, suppressing the truth. Paul tells us in I Corinthians 3:6, "I [Paul] planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow." This brings us back to the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:26. Cultural identity is changed in so far as God's spirit alone transforms the sinner, not through just any social activity or institution, but through the preaching of the gospel. There is only one of two worldview responses to the hearing of the word.

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul emphasizes the specific hope that saves: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. *For in this hope we were saved*."[29] It is this hope that secures our salvation, a hope born from a "now" redemption in and through Christ, but the hope is also not yet. In this life, Christians wait patiently but actively live hope-filled lives as ambassadors for Christ. This is what motivates Christians, writes Nicholas Woltersdorff, "to act faithfully...without giving up hope."[30] Indeed, this is the basis for Christian cultural engagement. As Calvin says in his commentary on Acts 3:21, "Christ hath already restored all things by his death; but the effect doth not yet fully appear; because that restoring is yet in the course" (i.e., in the course of the future).[31] While we groan—a groaning that longs for consummation—we serve in culture because of our redemption. Let me conclude, then, by restating a few crucial points: (1) cultural activity is a necessary part of human life; (2) Christians, because they are created by God and analogously mimic their creator, are not just cultural activists but cultural creators; (3) Christians are required to be witnesses to a lost and dying world; (4) being a witness is a cultural activity. Are Christians, therefore, required to be culturally engaged? (That is rhetorical.)

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[29] Romans 8:22-24.
[30] Nicholas Woltersdorff, "In Reply," *Perspectives: A Journal of Reformed Thought* (February 2008), 18-19.
[31] John Calvin, *Commentary on Acts Vol. 1,* translated by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 153.