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Introduction

Christianity, Culture, and the Two Kingdoms

IN PERHAPS THE MOST FAMOUS BOOK ever written on the topic of Christianity and culture, H. Richard Niebuhr stated: “It is helpful to remember that the question of Christianity and civilization is by no means a new one; that Christian perplexity in this area has been perennial, and that the problem has been an enduring one through all the Christian centuries.”¹ You have begun reading another in a long line of books that deal with this perplexing and perennial topic. I have written such a volume for two primary reasons.

First, the issue of Christianity and culture is one of immense importance and relevance. If you are a serious Christian, you probably think about the Christianity and culture question on a regular basis, whether you realize it or not. Every time you reflect upon what your faith has to do with your job, your schoolwork, your political views, the books you read, or the movies you see, you confront the problem of Christianity and culture. When you consider what

¹H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1951), 2.

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responsibilities your church might have with respect to contemporary political controversies or economic development, you again come face-to-face with the Christianity and culture issue. It is no accident that so many of the greatest minds in the history of the Christian church have wrestled with this problem and that so many books have been written about it. Just think how much time, energy, and passion topics like religion and modern science or faith and politics generate in the Christian community. Even so, this subject is about much more than simply these overtly “cultural” topics. Developing a coherent view of Christianity and culture demands wrestling with some of the most fundamental truths of the Christian faith. A faithful biblical theology of Christianity and culture depends upon a proper view of creation, providence, the image of God, sin, the work of Christ, salvation, the church, and eschatology. Therefore I write this book to address not a narrow issue but one that confronts us with the fundamentals of Christian faith and life. This project thus has a very personal dimension for me—it has been an exercise in expressing and defending many things that are most precious to me as a believer in Christ.

Second, I write this book out of a growing conviction that contemporary conversations about Christianity and culture are on the wrong track and that the perspective presented in these pages, largely overlooked today, offers a biblical corrective that can help to get discussion back on the right track. Though a multitude of voices are contributing to the contemporary conversations, many of them have a great deal in common. Some of the themes frequently emphasized in contemporary conversations are right on target and very important for a sound view of Christianity and culture. Other themes, I fear, present a distorted view of Christian cultural engagement and its relationship to the church and to the hope of the new heaven and new earth.

Let me mention a few things that the contemporary voices get right. First, many contemporary voices emphasize that God is the Creator of all things, including material and physical things. God is king of all areas of life, and human beings are accountable to him in everything they do. Many contemporary voices also help-

fully remind us that it is good for Christians to be involved in a variety of cultural pursuits. Christians should not withdraw from the broader culture but should take up cultural tasks with joy and express their Christian faith through them. Every lawful occupation is honorable. These voices also remind us that the effects of sin penetrate all aspects of life. Christians must therefore be vigilant in their cultural pursuits, perceiving and rejecting the sinful patterns in cultural life and striving after obedience to God's will in everything. Finally, many contemporary voices stress that the true Christian hope is not for a disembodied life as a soul in heaven but for the resurrection and new heaven and new earth. All of these affirmations are true and helpful.

Unfortunately, other themes popular in the contemporary conversations are problematic. For example, many contemporary voices assert that God is *redeeming* all legitimate cultural activities and institutions and that Christians are therefore called to transform them accordingly and to build the kingdom of God through this work.² Some advocates of this position claim that redemption is God's work of *restoration*, empowering human beings to pick up again the task of the first human beings, Adam and Eve, and to develop human culture as they were originally called to do. This redemptive transformation of present human culture begins a process that will culminate in the new creation—the new heaven and new earth. According to this vision of Christian cultural engagement, our cultural products will adorn the eternal city.

Many talented authors present such ideas as an exciting and inspiring vision, but are they biblically sound? I believe that they are *not* true to Scripture, and therefore I offer a biblical alternative in this book. I refer to this alternative as a “two-kingdoms” doctrine. Though many writers in recent years have ignored, mischaracterized, or slandered the idea of “two kingdoms,” it has a venerable place in the annals of Christian theology. It stands in the line of

²The terms “transform” and “transformation” have various connotations. I believe that Christians should transform culture in the sense that they seek to have a beneficial influence on this world as they perform cultural activities with excellence and interpret them rightly. In this book I am critical of the idea of transforming culture, however, insofar as it implies that Christians are to “redeem” culture and that their godly cultural products will be incorporated into the new creation.

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Christian thinking famously articulated by Augustine in *The City of God*, developed in the Lutheran and Calvinist Reformations, and brought to greater maturity in the post-Reformation Reformed tradition.³ Many writers today seem to associate a two-kingdoms doctrine with unwarranted dualisms, secularism, moral neutrality in social life, or even the denial of Christ's universal kingship. Perhaps some versions of the two-kingdoms doctrine have fit such stereotypes. My task in this book is not to defend everything that has ever gone by the name "two kingdoms," but to expound a two-kingdoms approach that is thoroughly grounded in the story of Scripture and biblical doctrine. It embraces the heritage of Augustine and the Reformation and seeks to develop and strengthen it further. I will strive to present it in an accessible and useful form to the church in the early twenty-first century.

This two-kingdoms doctrine strongly affirms that God has made all things, that sin corrupts all aspects of life, that Christians should be active in human culture, that all lawful cultural vocations are honorable, that all people are accountable to God in every activity, and that Christians should seek to live out the implications

³For a detailed argument in support of this historical claim, see David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), chaps. 2–6. To clarify one matter for readers who may be interested, I do not believe that Augustine's "two cities" refers to the same thing as the "two kingdoms" that I discuss in this book. Both are biblical concepts and both should be affirmed, but they do not describe identical realities. In short, Augustine, in *The City of God*, described two cities, one consisting of true believers and destined for eternal blessing, and the other consisting of unbelievers and destined for eternal condemnation. Each person is a citizen of one city, and one city only, though the two cities necessarily intermingle in this present world. The Reformed tradition, from which I write, has understood *both* of the two kingdoms as *God's*. God rules all things, but rules the affairs of this world in two fundamentally different ways. Christians are therefore citizens of two "kingdoms" but one "city." Another important biblical distinction is between "two ages"—this age and the age to come—which is a significant theme in Paul's epistles. I believe that the Pauline distinction between the two ages is also different from the two-kingdoms distinction, though they are compatible since they are both true. Whereas the two-kingdoms doctrine primarily explains the twofold way in which God governs this present world, the two-ages doctrine primarily concerns an eschatological distinction and tension between this world and the next. And whereas both of the two kingdoms are legitimate and divinely-ordained (though corrupted by sin in this world), Paul's presentation of "this age" focuses upon its evil and demonic character and its rebellion against God (e.g., see 2 Cor. 4:4; Gal.1:4; Eph. 2:2). Thus in Romans 12:2 (when he is thinking in terms of the two ages) Paul exhorts Christians not to be conformed to this age, while in Romans 13:1–7 (when he is thinking in terms of the two kingdoms) he exhorts them to be submissive to civil authorities as divinely-established officers of God.

of their faith in their daily vocations. A Christian, however, does *not* have to adopt a redemptive vision of culture in order to affirm these important truths. A biblical two-kingdoms doctrine provides another compelling way to do so. According to this doctrine, God is *not redeeming* the cultural activities and institutions of this world, but is *preserving* them through the covenant he made with all living creatures through Noah in Genesis 8:20–9:17. God himself rules this “common kingdom,” and thus it is not, as some writers describe it, the “kingdom of man.” This kingdom is in no sense a realm of moral neutrality or autonomy. God makes its institutions and activities honorable, though only for temporary and provisional purposes. Simultaneously, God *is redeeming* a people for himself, by virtue of the covenant made with Abraham and brought to glorious fulfillment in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has completed Adam’s original task once and for all. These redeemed people are citizens of the “redemptive kingdom,” whom God is gathering now in the church and will welcome into the new heaven and new earth at Christ’s glorious return. Until that day, Christians live as members of both kingdoms, discharging their proper duties in each. They rejoice to be citizens of heaven through membership in the church, but also recognize that for the time being they are *living in Babylon*, striving for justice and excellence in their cultural labors, out of love for Christ and their neighbor, as sojourners and exiles in a land that is not their lasting home.⁴

In order to introduce and explain this two-kingdoms vision more clearly, I now briefly describe some of the prominent voices in contemporary conversations about Christianity and culture. All of these voices, in various ways, defend a redemptive model of Christian cultural engagement. After I describe their views, I will turn readers’ attention back to the two-kingdoms alternative and summarize the biblical defense of the two-kingdoms doctrine that will unfold in the chapters to come.

⁴I develop the “Babylon” theme in part 2. For other recent attempts to examine the Christianity and culture question in part through the biblical motif of “Babylon,” see Richard John Neuhaus, *American Babylon: Notes of a Christian Exile* (New York: Basic, 2009) and Jason J. Stellman, *Dual Citizens: Worship and Life between the Already and the Not Yet* (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2009). Augustine long ago utilized the Babylon theme; e.g., see *City of God*, 19.26.

Contemporary Voices: The Redemptive Transformation of Culture

In the contemporary conversations about Christianity and culture, there is perhaps no voice more eloquent than what is sometimes referred to as “neo-Calvinism.” This school of thought traces back most immediately to the work of Dutch philosopher and jurist Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977), and it also *claims* to be heir of the Dutch theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) and of the Reformer John Calvin (1509–1564).⁵ “Neo-Calvinism” has been influential not only in many Reformed and evangelical churches but has provided inspiration for many Christian schools and colleges in recent generations. My own early education, in both church and school, was significantly shaped by this line of thought. A number of friends, pastors, and theologians that I respect embrace its views. It gets many things correct and presents an attractive vision for Christianity and culture in many respects. It helpfully combats forms of Christianity that are indifferent to mundane cultural activity or see the faith as only relevant on Sundays. In the end, however, it misreads some important biblical themes and offers a distorted theology of Christian cultural engagement.

One fascinating thing about the current scene is that many other prominent Christian voices sound so similar to neo-Calvinism. When neo-Calvinists speak about Platonic and dualistic tendencies in the contemporary church, the redemptive transformation of culture, and the connection of cultural work to the kingdom of God and the new creation, they have a lot of company. I could cite many examples, but I focus on two that have gained considerable attention in the Christian world in recent years: the New Perspective on Paul (as exemplified by N. T. Wright) and the emerging (or emergent) church (as exemplified by Brian McLaren). Though advocates of neo-Calvinism, the New Perspective on Paul, and the emerging church certainly do not hold identical views on all issues, they show

⁵See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, chaps. 7 and 9. In these chapters I discuss neo-Calvinism in more scholarly detail than I can treat it here.

mutual respect for each other's work⁶ and, most significantly, they share a common vision that the redemptive transformation of culture is central to the Christian life.

Contemporary Neo-Calvinism

Neo-Calvinism is a diverse movement in certain respects, but its proponents are united by many common themes. Two contemporary advocates of the neo-Calvinist vision have summarized "neo-Calvinism" in three points: first, grace restores nature through redemption in Christ; second, God is sovereign and orders all of reality; and third, the original cultural mandate of Genesis 1 has ongoing relevance.⁷ This is a concise and accurate summary, but it may be helpful to unpack the tenets of neo-Calvinism at a little more length. To do so, I refer especially to two books that present a neo-Calvinist perspective: Albert Wolters's *Creation Regained* and Cornelius Plantinga's *Engaging God's World*.⁸ These writers do not necessarily agree with each other on every specific issue, but their general vision of Christianity and culture is the same. Their books are accessible and winsomely written, and they have been influential in many Christian schools and colleges.

Perhaps the most important thing to know initially about neo-Calvinism is that it presents the story of Scripture as the story of *creation, fall, and redemption*. Recognizing this pattern forms the heart of a Christian worldview, according to neo-Calvinism. What this means is that "all has been created good, including the full range of human cultures that emerge when humans act according

⁶Note, for example, the debt to Wright expressed in Brian D. McLaren, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), chap. 15. Several recent books by neo-Calvinist authors also express debt to Wright: e.g., Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 127; Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 13, 21, 197, 199; and Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 4, 107, 144.

⁷Bartholomew and Goheen, *Living at the Crossroads*, 16.

⁸Subsequent citations from Wolters's book will come from the first edition: Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985). Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

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to God's design. But all has been corrupted by evil, including not only culture but also the natural world. So all—the whole cosmos—must be redeemed by Jesus Christ the Lord.⁹ Wolters and Plantinga share a general conviction that God created this world and that the whole world was his kingdom and thus was good and blessed. God gave the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:26–28) to the human race, which meant that human beings were to use their abilities to care for the world and to develop human culture, thereby releasing the vast potential latent in creation. Their goal in this labor was eternal and eschatological: the new earth. As Plantinga puts it, “we may think of the holy city as the garden of Eden plus the fullness of the centuries.”¹⁰

The fall into sin threatened to destroy this entire project. The fall produced the corruption of every human faculty, all human action, and the created order itself. God, however, not only preserved the world from immediate collapse but also undertook a plan of salvation to ensure that his original purposes for this world are fulfilled. For neo-Calvinism the salvation or redemption brought by Christ is essentially *restoration* or *re-creation*. God does not start over new, but accomplishes his original plan. According to Wolters, our first parents “botched” their original mandate, but God has now given us a “second chance” and has “reinstated” us as his managers on earth.¹¹ This does not mean that God, through Christ, simply puts us back into the garden of Eden to pick up where Adam left off before he fell. God originally gave Adam the long-term task of unlocking the potentialities of creation through human culture, and despite his sin the human race subsequently has been engaging in that task, though in corrupted form. Redemption in Christ restores and renews human beings in this ongoing task, purging them of their sinful perversion of culture and redirecting them in ways that are obedient to God and beneficial to one another and the whole of creation.¹²

⁹Plantinga, *Engaging God's World*, xv. He arranges his chapters around the themes of creation, fall, and redemption. See also Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 10–11, as well as his chapter divisions.

¹⁰Plantinga, *Engaging God's World*, 33. On this point see also Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 37–41.

¹¹Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 11, 57–60.

¹²See *ibid.*, 63–64.

As all of creation and human culture was God's kingdom before the fall, so now the renewal and redemption of all creation in Christ constitute the renewal and redemption of that kingdom. All cultural labor is kingdom work.¹³ All cultural labor aims to advance the full realization of that kingdom in the new creation. Our ordinary activity in this world is "kingdom service," which produces "the building materials for that new earth."¹⁴ As Plantinga writes, "What we do now in the name of Christ—striving for healing, for justice, for intellectual light in darkness, striving simply to produce something helpful for sustaining the lives of other human beings—shall be preserved across into the next life."¹⁵

In light of this grand vision, neo-Calvinism often warns against various "dualistic" views that compromise the holistic character of God's kingdom in this world. Wolters, for example, is very critical of so-called "two-realms" theories that he sees as a perennial danger for Christianity.¹⁶ Wolters rejects any division of life into a "sacred" realm on the one hand, in which people do "kingdom" work, and a "secular" or "profane" realm on the other hand. He fears that Christians holding such a view will depreciate the latter realm or look upon it as inherently inferior. He claims that this view falls prey to a "deep-seated Gnostic tendency." It "restricts the scope of Christ's lordship." Wolters and other neo-Calvinist writers use terms such as "secular" and "profane" to denote things that are inherently evil or at least compromised for the Christian.¹⁷ By rejecting dualistic views, furthermore, neo-Calvinist writers aim to steer Christians away from "vertical" views of salvation that involve "escape" from this world into "heaven," which is the view of Plato rather than Scripture.¹⁸

¹³See Plantinga, *Engaging God's World*, 109–13.

¹⁴Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 287.

¹⁵Plantinga, *Engaging God's World*, 137–38.

¹⁶Though "two realms" could simply be a synonym for "two kingdoms," and Wolters may have something like this in mind, readers should note that Wolters never specifically addresses a two-kingdoms view such as the one defended in this book.

¹⁷E.g., see Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 10–11, 53–58, 65, 74; Plantinga, *Engaging God's World*, 96, 123; and Bartholomew and Goheen, *Living at the Crossroads*, 64–65, 135.

¹⁸E.g., see Bartholomew and Goheen, *Living at the Crossroads*, 52.

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N. T. Wright and the New Perspective on Paul

Though neo-Calvinism has been influential in many Reformed and evangelical circles in recent generations, it is far from being the only voice in current discussions about Christianity and culture. As noted, however, many of today's significant voices in the broader Christian world emphasize themes that resemble neo-Calvinist teaching, such as the importance of redemptive cultural transformation and the problem of Platonic and dualistic tendencies in the church. Though there are many theologians and movements that I could mention, I will focus briefly upon two that may be familiar to many readers: the New Perspective on Paul (as represented by N. T. Wright) and the emerging church (as represented by Brian McLaren). As I describe these two, readers should recognize many of the neo-Calvinist themes identified in the previous section.

First I consider the so-called New Perspective on Paul. In the past few decades, this new perspective has sparked discussions about the character of Judaism in Paul's day, Paul's view of Jew-Gentile relations in the early church, his understanding of justification, and his attitude toward the Old Testament law. Proponents of the New Perspective have challenged traditional Protestant readings of Paul that focus upon the universal sinfulness of humanity and God's saving answer to human sin through Christ's atonement, justification, and sanctification. Many recent books address these subjects.¹⁹ Of interest here is what the New Perspective might have to say about Christianity and culture. There is no single set of beliefs that constitute the official New Perspective view on such things. What may be useful is to focus upon the most well-known theologian associated with the New Perspective, Anglican bishop N. T. Wright. One of his recent books, *Surprised by Hope*, has much to

¹⁹Among significant works by New Perspective sympathizers, see N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); and N. T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005). Among significant works critiquing the New Perspective, see Guy Prentiss Waters, *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul: A Review and Response* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004); and Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

say about Christianity and culture issues. It is remarkable to see how similar his concerns are to those of neo-Calvinist writers such as Wolters and Plantinga.

It is no coincidence that Wright both finds the traditional Reformation view of justification inadequate and also embraces the redemptive transformation of human culture. Before we consider *Surprised by Hope*, let me briefly state a bold claim that I will defend in subsequent chapters. Those who hold a traditional Protestant view of justification *consistently* should not find a redemptive transformationist perspective attractive. As some of the Reformers grasped, a two-kingdoms doctrine is a proper companion to a Protestant doctrine of justification.²⁰

Wright is clear about the major theme of *Surprised by Hope*. He sets out to defend the physical resurrection and the physical new heaven and new earth as the great Christian eschatological hope, over against popular misconceptions of Christian hope as “going to heaven” after death, and aims to prove that this hope provides motivation for Christians to transform the present world in anticipation of what is to come.²¹ In order to establish and develop this claim, Wright spends considerable time critiquing what he believes is the predominant perspective of the Western church in recent centuries. This perspective emphasizes individual salvation, which consists of our immortal souls being rescued from the present evil world and entering into heaven, a nonmaterial realm that will survive when the present world is completely destroyed at the end of history.²² According to Wright, such a perspective sounds much more like Plato or Gnosticism than like biblical Christianity.²³ In contrast to this perspective, Wright highlights the resurrection of the dead, which establishes a deep continuity between this present world and the eternal state (though he acknowledges that there is

²⁰E.g., see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.19. Also see discussion in David VanDrunen, “The Two Kingdoms and the *Ordo Salutis*: Life beyond Judgment and the Question of a Dual Ethic,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 70 (Fall 2008): 207–24.

²¹See N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 5.

²²E.g., see *ibid.*, 15, 17, 19, 80, 91, 104–5, 148, 194.

²³E.g., see *ibid.*, 18, 80, 88–91, 104.

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discontinuity too).²⁴ One significant thing is that believing in the resurrection gives Christians a compelling reason to seek justice and peace in the present world. In contrast, believing in salvation as “going to heaven” to escape this world tends to cause disinterest or indifference to social and cultural affairs.²⁵

In order to defend these claims, Wright identifies three grand themes in Scripture: the goodness of God’s *creation*, the *evil* in this world due to human rebellion, and God’s *redemption* of the world, which consists in God’s “liberating” and “remaking” of creation in order to accomplish his original plans for it.²⁶ Wright’s view of the kingdom of God reflects this view of redemption. For Wright, the kingdom has to do not with a future immaterial heaven, but with the present earth as it will be fully renewed in the new creation.²⁷ Though the coming of the kingdom is ultimately God’s work, God enlists the efforts of human beings in bringing the kingdom to final fulfillment. Social transformation in the present is an anticipation of the resurrection and cosmic renewal on the last day.²⁸ Human beings are “part of the means” by which God brings ultimate salvation, and they are “rescuing stewards over creation.” This is the “inner dynamic” of the kingdom of God.²⁹ At several points Wright refers readers to 1 Corinthians 15:58, with its promise that our work in the Lord is not in vain. From this verse he claims that what we do now is “building for God’s kingdom” and “will last into God’s future.”³⁰ Though Wright confesses that he has no idea what this will actually look like, he assures Christians: “You are . . . accomplishing something that will become in due course part of God’s new world.”³¹ In light of all this, one of Wright’s chief concerns is to reshape his readers’ conception of the mission of the church. The church’s mission,

²⁴E.g., see *ibid.*, 26.

²⁵E.g., see *ibid.*, 26–27, 90, 192.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 93–97.

²⁷E.g., see *ibid.*, 18.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 46.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 200, 202.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 193.

³¹*Ibid.*, 208–9.

he says, should consist not only in evangelism but also in working for justice, peace, and beauty in this present world.³²

Wright's chief concerns, therefore, closely resemble those of contemporary neo-Calvinism. Over against perceived Platonic tendencies in modern Christianity that despise physical things and devalue cultural activity, both Wright and neo-Calvinists present a creation-fall-redemption perspective that emphasizes the centrality of Christian cultural work as a means of building the kingdom of God and anticipating the new creation.

The Emerging Church

Another contemporary voice that has gained popularity in recent years is that of the “emergent” or “emerging” church.³³ Those involved in the emerging church movement like to emphasize that they are involved in a “conversation” about a new kind of Christianity. They say that this conversation is still ongoing, and so it is hard to predict what exactly this new kind of Christianity will turn out to be. Proponents are critical of traditional forms of Christianity (particularly Reformed and evangelical varieties, from which many of them have come), and have special dislike for rigid doctrine. They are also critical of recent megachurch types of Christianity, in search of something more fresh and authentic. Though it is often unclear what emergent Christianity stands for positively, one thing certainly stands out: its emphasis upon the redemptive transformation of culture as being at the heart of Christian faith. A recent book by leading emergent spokesman Brian McLaren, *Everything Must Change*, provides a good case in point. Though some neo-Calvinists would find McLaren's theology too extreme and might disagree with his left-wing political views, McLaren echoes a great many of their central and standard themes.

This can be seen, first of all, in the forms of Christianity that McLaren combats. McLaren wants to abandon the type of Chris-

³²E.g., see *ibid.*, 193, 212–30.

³³For two critical descriptions and engagements with emerging Christianity, see David Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); and Kevin De Young and Ted Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent: By Two Guys Who Should Be* (Chicago: Moody, 2008).

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tianity that proclaims that this sinful world is going to be destroyed and that salvation consists in rescuing “souls” who “escape” from this world and from eternal punishment and are taken to “heaven.”³⁴ Likewise, he opposes “dualistic” Christianity that contrasts the “spiritual” and the “secular” and thus has little interest in social engagement or the current global crisis.³⁵ In its place, he wants a this-worldly Christianity. He calls for Christians to develop an effective “framing story” (something like a worldview), and the framing story that he defines has nothing to do with Christ’s atonement or the forgiveness of sins but everything to do with social “transformation.”³⁶ His framing story affirms that Jesus came to “retrain and restore humanity to its original vocation and potential. This renewed humanity can return to its role as caretakers of creation and one another so the planet and all it contains can be restored to the healthy and fruitful harmony that God desires.”³⁷ Thus Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God not in terms of escaping from this world but “in terms of God’s dream coming true for this earth, of God’s justice and peace replacing earth’s injustice and disharmony.”³⁸ Not unexpectedly, McLaren sees the vision of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 as providing “hope within history,” which means that this vision “seeks to inspire our imaginations with hope about what our world can actually become.” It shows “a new way of living that is possible within this universe, a new societal system that is coming as surely as God is just and faithful.”³⁹ The gospel of the kingdom of God, therefore, is about our work of transforming the world toward peace and justice, and the New Jerusalem is the result of this process.

The Two-Kingdoms Alternative

A person can learn some very important things about Christianity and the Christian’s cultural responsibilities by reading neo-Calvinist,

³⁴ McLaren, *Everything Must Change*, 3–4, 18–19, 77–80, and elsewhere.

³⁵ E.g., see *ibid.*, 81–83.

³⁶ E.g., see *ibid.*, chap. 9 generally (and 72–73 especially). Talk of “transformation” occurs repeatedly throughout this book.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 129.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 296.

New Perspective, and emerging authors. The physical created world is God's good creation, sin is a horrible and distorting thing, God has not given up on his original goal for creation, cultural vocations are honorable and beneficial, Christians should think critically about sin's effects upon cultural life, and the resurrection and the new heaven and new earth are the great Christian hope. The problem is, I believe, that these authors quite confidently give the impression that their visions of cultural transformation, the kingdom of God, and the new creation are the only way to affirm these things. They suggest that the only people who would oppose their vision are those who are indifferent to the broader culture, reject the resurrection, and hope only to escape to heaven where they will float around as happy spirits. This is a terribly distorted and misleading suggestion. Great Christian leaders such as Augustine, Luther, and Calvin—to name but a few—respected earthly vocations and affirmed the resurrection of the dead. But they also made very clear that the Christian's cultural activities have to be carefully distinguished from the coming of the kingdom and the hope of the new creation. Such distinctions, they believed, were crucial to Christian faith and life.⁴⁰

This book, in developing a contemporary and biblically-based two-kingdoms doctrine, follows this Augustinian and Reformation trajectory. Though I present an approach to Christianity and culture that is different from the transformationist visions exemplified by neo-Calvinism, Wright, and McLaren, readers should expect to find a defense of classic Christian doctrines such as creation, the fall, and the resurrection within these pages. Likewise, readers should not expect to find any hostility or indifference toward the broader world of human culture. I confess to loving many cultural activities. I am a proficient pianist and organist, read novels and *The Wall Street Journal* nearly every day, love college football, am an attorney (though currently on inactive status, so please don't call for legal advice), and play golf to a low handicap (you certainly may call if

⁴⁰See the discussion in VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, chaps. 2–3. Among important primary sources discussed there, see book 19 of Augustine's *City of God*, Luther's famous treatise, "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed," and sections 3.19.15–16 and 4.20.1 of Calvin's *Institutes*.

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you are a member of a nice club and wish to invite me for a round). What readers can expect to find in this book is a positive view of cultural activity—though a positive view that is also reserved. It is reserved because it seeks to follow Scripture’s teaching that the affairs of human culture are temporary, provisional, and bound to pass away. The kingdom of God proclaimed by the Lord Jesus Christ is *not* built through politics, commerce, music, or sports. Redemption does not consist in restoring people to fulfill Adam’s original task, but consists in the Lord Jesus Christ himself fulfilling Adam’s original task once and for all, on our behalf. Thus redemption is not “creation regained” but “re-creation gained.” What readers can expect to find in this book most of all, therefore, is a high view of the Lord Jesus Christ, his perfect redeeming work, and his eternal kingdom—a kingdom advancing now through the ministry and life of the church and one day to be revealed in consummate glory apart from any work of our own human culture. This kingdom, proclaimed by Christ, deserves a defense in the present day, and this book, however humbly, seeks to provide one.

In short, Scripture requires a high view of creation and of cultural activity, but it also requires a distinction between the holy things of Christ’s heavenly kingdom and the common things of the present world. It requires a distinction between God’s providential sustaining of human culture for the whole of the human race and his glorious redemption of a chosen people that he has gathered into a church now and will gather into the new creation for eternity. Some people indeed fall into unwarranted “dualisms,” but dualism-phobia must not override our ability to make clear and necessary *distinctions*. Some people indeed are guilty of promoting a godless and amoral “secular” realm, but the fear of a godless secularism should not eliminate our ability to speak of a *divinely-ordained common* kingdom that is legitimate but not holy.⁴¹ The two-kingdoms doctrine

⁴¹It could be appropriate to use the word “secular” to describe the common kingdom. “Secular” does not have to be a bad word. The Latin word *saeculum* simply means “an age,” and many writers—including Christian writers—use the term “secular” to refer to the affairs of this present world (in comparison to the affairs of the world to come following Christ’s return). In this sense I think a limited use of the word “secular” can be helpful, though I avoid using the term in this book due to possible misunderstanding.

enables us to affirm the goodness of creation and culture without losing sight of crucial distinctions. The two-kingdoms doctrine helps us to account for the whole biblical story.

In presenting this two-kingdoms vision, I hope to provide encouragement to ordinary Christians—to ordinary Christians who work, study, vote, raise families, help the poor, run businesses, make music, watch movies, ride bikes, and engage in all sorts of other cultural activities, and who wish to live thoughtful and God-pleasing lives in doing so. I hope that this book will be an encouragement for many readers to take up their many cultural activities with renewed vigor, being convinced that such activities are good and pleasing to God. For many readers I also hope that this book will be liberating, freeing you from well-meaning but nonbiblical pressure from other Christians to “transform” your workplace or to find uniquely “Christian” ways of doing ordinary tasks. For all readers I hope that this book will serve to focus your hearts on things that are far more important than a promotion at work or the most recent Supreme Court decision: the sufficiency of the work of Christ, the missionary task of the church, and the hope of the new heaven and new earth.

The Plan of This Book

In order to give readers an initial taste of what this two-kingdoms doctrine is, how it fits into the grand sweep of biblical history, and why it is so eminently practical for daily Christian life, I now briefly describe the argument of this book and how it unfolds in the following chapters. Whenever we begin to examine an unfamiliar idea, it is helpful to get a sense of the big picture. Hence, in part 1, I set the camera lens at its widest possible angle, looking at the question of human culture by means of Paul’s description of the two Adams that stride across all of history. The first Adam is of course the original human person described in the early chapters of Genesis, and I focus upon him in chapter 2. God created Adam and Eve in his image and gave them a task to accomplish: to be fruitful and multiply and to exercise dominion over the earth. At the dawn of history, therefore, God gave a *cultural* task to the human race. What is more, God set a goal and reward before the first Adam. If he completed his cultural

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task through faithful obedience to God's commands, God would have brought Adam into a new creation (what the New Testament calls the "world to come" or "the new heaven and new earth") far surpassing the delightful and sinless world into which Adam was originally created. By a divine covenant, Adam's righteous cultural labors would have earned him a share in the eschatological world-to-come. Instead, Adam fell into sin and plunged the present world into a state of sin and misery.

The first Adam failed terribly, but God sent a second and last Adam into the world, the Lord Jesus Christ. Chapter 3 tells the main points of this wonderful biblical story. Christ the last Adam not only took upon himself the penalty of the first Adam's sin, but also took upon himself the responsibility of fulfilling Adam's original task. Christ offered perfect obedience in this world to his Father, and was exalted to his right hand as a result. The Lord Jesus, as a human being—as the last Adam—has attained the original goal held out for Adam: a glorified life ruling the world-to-come. Because Jesus has fulfilled the first Adam's commission, those who belong to Christ by faith are no longer given that commission. Christians already possess eternal life and claim an everlasting inheritance. God does not call them to engage in cultural labors so as to earn their place in the world-to-come. We are not little Adams. Instead, God gives us a share in the world-to-come as a gift of free grace in Christ and then calls us to live obediently in this world as a grateful response. Our cultural activities do not in any sense usher in the new creation. The new creation has been earned and attained once and for all by Christ, the last Adam. Cultural activity remains important for Christians, but it will come to an abrupt end, along with this present world as a whole, when Christ returns and cataclysmically ushers in the new heaven and new earth.

After part 1 provides this big-picture view of human culture in the biblical story, part 2 examines the same topic but with a more detailed examination of the experience of God's people between the fall of Adam and the second coming of Christ. In chapter 4 I trace this story through the Old Testament. Immediately after the fall into sin, God placed enmity between the seed of the woman and

the seed of Satan. Not only did God promise a Savior who would overturn the effects of the fall, but he also decreed that there would be a deep-seated conflict between those who belong to him by faith and those who remain enslaved to Satan. A fundamental *antithesis* exists between believer and unbeliever in their basic perspective and attitude toward God, morality, and eternity, and this antithesis manifested itself clearly in the story of Cain and Abel. But alongside this antithesis God also ordained an element of *commonality* in the world. The antithesis between belief and unbelief would often not be evident to the naked eye. Believers and unbelievers would share many things in common and work together in many areas of cultural life (despite their fundamental disagreements about the most important things). Unbelievers would even surpass believers in many cultural pursuits. In this dual reality of antithesis and commonality lies the origin of the two kingdoms. Early in Genesis God established two covenants, by which the two kingdoms were formally established. In his covenant with Noah God entered covenantal relationship with the entire human race (and with the entire creation), promising to preserve its cultural activities such as procreating and securing justice. This was the formal establishment of the “common kingdom.” In his covenant with Abraham, in contrast, God entered covenantal relationship with a chosen people, upon whom he bestows eternal salvation by faith, thereby distinguishing them from the rest of the human race. This was the formal establishment of the “redemptive kingdom.” God’s people are thus called to live under both covenants—that is, in two kingdoms. On the one hand, they respect the terms of the Noahic covenant as they pursue a variety of cultural activities in common with unbelievers. On the other hand, they embrace the terms of the Abrahamic covenant of grace as they cling to the promises of salvation and eternal life in a new creation and as they gather in worshiping communities distinguished from the unbelieving world. The experiences of Abraham and of the Israelite exiles in Babylon (though not of Israel in the Promised Land) especially exemplify the two-kingdoms way of life in the Old Testament.

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Chapter 5 continues to chart this story as it unfolds in the New Testament. Through the coming of Christ and his life, death, resurrection, and ascension, the promises of God came to fulfillment. The last Adam took away the sins of his people, fulfilled God's law in their place (as the first Adam should have done), and entered into the world-to-come, attaining the original human destiny. He announced the coming of his kingdom during his earthly ministry and is now gathering his people into a worldwide church to enjoy the fellowship of that kingdom in the present age. The New Testament thus presents God's people as standing on the very brink of eternity, at the cusp of the new creation. But it also speaks of the present time as one of suffering and uses terms such as "exile," "alien," and "sojourner" to describe Christians, thus recollecting the days of Abraham and the Babylonian captivity. Christians live under two kingdoms, governed respectively by the Noahic covenant and the Abrahamic covenant. Civil governments, families, economic associations, and many other cultural institutions continue to exist under the covenant with Noah, and Christians and non-Christians alike participate in them and, in many respects, cooperate in their activities. At Christ's return these institutions and activities will come to a sudden and radical end. Yet Christians belong especially to the church, the New Testament manifestation of the special covenant community created in Abraham. Through the church they are citizens of heaven even now. This church—God's redemptive kingdom in the present age—has a distinct membership, faith, worship, and ethic. Its way of life displays a counterculture to the cultures of this world. The church awaits the coming of Christ as a day of glorious consummation, when the bride will see her bridegroom face-to-face as she is ushered into the wedding banquet of the Lamb.

Finally, in part 3 I turn to some concrete, practical issues that explore the implications of living the Christian life in two kingdoms. First, chapter 6 addresses the church as the present manifestation of the redemptive kingdom. Here I defend the claim that the life and ministry of the church—rather than the cultural life and activities of the common kingdom—stand at the heart of the Christian life. Especially through its worship and celebration of the Lord's

Day, the church experiences a foretaste of the new creation in the present world. In all sorts of ways the church has a culture distinct from the cultures of the common kingdom. Unlike the institutions of the common kingdom, the church lives by an ethic of forgiveness that transcends the claims of justice, by an ethic of generosity that defies the scarcity of economic resources, and by a missionary evangelism that shuns coercion. The church attends to the business of the redemptive kingdom and does not trample on the authority of common kingdom institutions. Unlike these other institutions, its authority derives from the Scriptures *alone*.

The final chapter, chapter 7, continues this discussion of the practical implications of the two-kingdoms doctrine for the Christian life. I reflect upon three important and controversial areas of culture: education, work, and politics. Scripture speaks about all of these activities and thus provides Christians with a proper perspective on them and clear boundaries for participating in them. But Scripture addresses these issues only in a broad and general way. Christians are always obligated to follow Scripture's instructions about these activities, but where Scripture is silent Christians must exercise their own wisdom to make godly decisions in concrete circumstances. Furthermore, though education, work, and politics are distinct activities that require their own separate analysis, they all involve the life of the common kingdom under the Noahic covenant and require Christians, to some degree or another, to work alongside unbelievers in pursuing them. Learning, working, and voting are not uniquely Christian tasks, but common tasks. Christians should always be distinguished from unbelievers *subjectively*: they do all things by faith in Christ and for his glory. But as an *objective* matter, the standards of morality and excellence in the common kingdom are ordinarily the same for believers and unbelievers: they share these standards in common under God's authority in the covenant with Noah.

That, in summary, is the plan of this book. May God be honored in this account of his ways of dealing with this world. May his people be encouraged, as they pursue their cultural tasks with wisdom and excellence, ever more to trust in Christ's all-sufficient work,

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to revel in the church as a foretaste of the kingdom of heaven in an evil age, and to look forward with eager hearts to the dawn of a new age, when Christ returns and the new heaven and new earth are revealed in all their glory.

A Note about the Term “Culture”

Terminology can be tricky. I have already, in footnotes, discussed loaded terms such as “transformation” and “secular” that have a variety of connotations and are used in different ways. As far as possible I want this book to be about substantive ideas rather than about terminology, and thus it is important to clarify my use of certain terms that may provoke misunderstanding. Two such terms that I use throughout this book are “culture” and “cultural.”

In a broad sense, culture refers to all of the various human activities and their products, as well as the way in which we interpret them and the language we use to describe them. Interpretation and language, as well as the products themselves, are crucial parts of culture because the same product can serve very different functions in different contexts.⁴² In this broad sense of culture, practically everything we do is “cultural,” whether activities of high culture or popular culture, or mundane tasks like brushing our teeth. Not only nation-states but also neighborhoods, universities, athletic leagues, families, churches, and all sorts of other things have their own cultures, which are often overlapping. In a book such as this, I do not use the term “culture” in an overly precise or technical way. I use it primarily to refer to the broad range of activities—scientific, artistic, economic, etc.—in which human beings engage. The popular expression, “Christianity and culture,” which appears in the subtitle of this book, simply refers to the variety of questions that emerge when we consider how Christians and the church are to relate to these broad activities of human culture and how Christian faith affects our interpretation of them.

⁴²For helpful thoughts on what “culture” is, in the context of two-kingdoms and neo-Calvinist paradigms relevant to this book, see Ryan McIlhenny, “A Third-Way Reformed Approach to Christ and Culture: Appropriating Kuyperian Neocalvinism and the Two Kingdoms Perspective,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 20 (2009): 75–94