

PART 1



Kingdom Reign and Rule

I

The Restoration of All Things to Proper Order: An Assessment of the “Two Kingdoms/Natural Law” Interpretation of Calvin’s Public Theology

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IN HIS DEFENSE OF the “Two Kingdoms/natural law” interpretation of Reformed social thought, it is not surprising that David VanDrunen, one of the principal proponents of this interpretation, appeals to the theology of John Calvin.¹ Although recent interpreters of Calvin’s theology have acknowledged that Calvin was not the sole fountainhead of the Reformed tradition, he arguably remains one of its most important and influential figures. Since advocates of the Two Kingdoms/natural law position insist

1. See David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 67–118; idem, “The Two Kingdoms: A Reassessment of the Transformationalist Calvin,” *CTJ* 40, 2 (2005): 248–66; idem, “The Context of Natural Law: John Calvin’s Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms,” *JCS* 46 (2004): 503–25; idem, “Medieval Natural Law and the Reformation: A Comparison of Aquinas and Calvin,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 80, 1 (2006): 77–98; and idem, “Calvin, Kuyper, and ‘Christian Culture,’” in *Always Reformed: Essays in Honor of W. Robert Godfrey*, ed. R. Scott Clark and Joel E. Kim (Escondido, CA: Westminster Seminary California, 2010), 135–53.

that this was the reigning paradigm of early Reformed orthodoxy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is not surprising that the theology of John Calvin is adduced as an important piece of evidence for this claim.² Even though the case for the Two Kingdoms/natural law perspective also includes a consideration of the relevant biblical data, which is foundational to the construction of a Reformed public theology, VanDrunen and other advocates of this perspective offer a historical case that grants special importance to Calvin's role in the development of a distinctively Reformed public theology.³ One of the most important dimensions of any assessment of the Two Kingdoms/natural law position, therefore, must be an evaluation of the historical case for this position, especially its interpretation of Calvin's public theology.

The aim of this chapter is to evaluate whether VanDrunen's Two Kingdoms/natural law interpretation of Calvin's public theology is valid. Because of the complexity of Calvin's public theology, not to mention the large body of secondary literature on the subject, my assessment of the historical case for the Two Kingdoms/natural law interpretation of this thought will be only a preliminary one. A thorough examination of Calvin's public theology requires not only an examination of his principal theological writings, which include his *Institutes*, commentaries, and sermons, but also a consideration of Calvin's practice. It is scarcely possible to draw conclusions regarding Calvin's position without some reflection on the way Calvin addressed, as the principal reformer of the church in Geneva, Switzerland, a myriad of social and cultural questions. Nor is it possible to reflect accurately on Calvin's understanding of the claims of the Christian gospel in the public square without an analysis of the way he addressed such questions throughout the course of his lengthy ministry. Nevertheless, I will attempt to assess in this chapter the principal elements of the Two Kingdoms/natural law perspective.

In order to accomplish this purpose, I will begin with a brief summary of VanDrunen's interpretation of Calvin's public theology, followed

2. Throughout the chapter, I use the expression *Two Kingdoms/natural law* as a shorthand way of referring to VanDrunen's distinction between what he terms the "natural" and the "spiritual" kingdoms, and to his claim that the conduct of human beings in the natural kingdom is governed principally by the natural law. In my use of this expression, therefore, I am not suggesting that VanDrunen equates the Two Kingdoms with the natural law.

3. For a summary of the biblical case for the Two Kingdoms/natural law view, see David VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, n.d.); and idem, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

by three features of Calvin's position that require special attention: first, Calvin's view of the "Two Kingdoms," or as I prefer to express it, the "twofold government" of Christ; second, Calvin's view of the natural law, especially in relation to the special revelation of God found in Scripture; and third, Calvin's conception of the interrelation and integration of God's works in creation and redemption. Although I will have occasion to acknowledge ambiguities in Calvin's public theology, my thesis is that the Two Kingdoms/natural law interpretation of VanDrunen does not provide a satisfactory account of Calvin's public theology. In Calvin's social thought, a far more integrated and coherent view of the lordship of Jesus Christ in every area of life is presented than that which VanDrunen proposes when he characterizes Calvin's Two Kingdoms theology. Furthermore, I will argue that VanDrunen separates too sharply between Calvin's understanding of the revelation of God's will through natural law and through the more full, clear light of Scripture. Rather than viewing redemption as a kind of overlay or addendum to creation, Calvin views redemption as the restoration of all things to proper order under God's sovereign lordship and through the office of Christ as Mediator of both creation and redemption.

A SKETCH OF VANDRUNEN'S "TWO KINGDOMS/NATURAL LAW" INTERPRETATION OF CALVIN

According to VanDrunen's interpretation of Calvin, the themes of the "Two Kingdoms" and "natural law" represent two comprehensive and foundational principles in Calvin's theology. Contrary to a common neo-Calvinist representation of Calvin's public theology, which views Calvin as the proponent of the universal, redemptive kingship of Jesus Christ in all areas of human life, VanDrunen argues that Calvin sharply distinguished between the civil or natural kingdom and the ecclesiastical kingdom. Whereas Calvin has often been co-opted by a neo-Calvinist vision that advocates the transformation of all areas of human life and culture under the redemptive lordship of Jesus Christ, VanDrunen maintains that Calvin actually drew a sharp line of separation between these two kingdoms. In the civil kingdom, Christ's kingship expresses his office as Mediator of creation and providential lordship over the non-ecclesiastical realm of human society and culture. By contrast, in the ecclesiastical kingdom, Christ's kingship expresses his office as Mediator of redemption and head of the church.

Within the framework of his Two Kingdoms theology, Calvin appeals to the natural law as the norm for human conduct within the civil kingdom, and to the Scriptures as the norm for Christian conduct within the ecclesial kingdom. Far from advocating a transformationalist view of the kingdom of Christ, Calvin advocated a common or secular approach to life within the natural kingdom, and advocated a distinctively Christian culture only within the sphere of the church.

Calvin's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms

Citing passages in Calvin's *Institutes* that draw a sharp separation between the civil and the ecclesial kingdoms, VanDrunen identifies three important attributes that distinguish them.

The three attributes of the kingdom of Christ are its redemptive character, its spiritual or heavenly identity, and its present institutional expression in the church. The three attributes of the civil kingdom are its non-redemptive character, its external or earthly identity, and its present (though not exclusive) expression in civil government.⁴

The distinction between the two kingdoms in Calvin's theology corresponds to the distinction between Christ's offices as Mediator of creation and as Mediator of redemption. Although Calvin acknowledges the universal lordship of Jesus Christ, he maintains the difference between the non-redemptive rule of the Son of God as the Mediator of creation and the saving rule of Christ as the Mediator of redemption. Within the redemptive kingdom, Christ rules in the hearts of believers in a spiritual way, and the obedience of believers is a dimension of the Christian liberty that is a fruit of the gospel of free justification.⁵ Whereas believers freely serve Christ within the spiritual jurisdiction of the church, all human beings, believers and unbelievers alike, are subject to a civil or natural jurisdiction in which Christ constrains the outward conduct by the requirements of the natural law. Furthermore, the spiritual kingdom has a heavenly identity; it addresses the concerns of the soul and the believer's redemptive relationship with the triune God. The civil or natural kingdom, by contrast, concerns the earthly and natural life of believers and nonbelievers alike, who continue to live

4. VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 73.

5. *Ibid.*

as creatures under the jurisdiction of the natural law, sustained by God's providence and enabled by the working of God's common or general grace.

Although VanDrunen does not offer a comprehensive identification of what aspects of human life fall within the redemptive and nonredemptive kingdoms, he suggests that the redemptive kingdom corresponds to the institutional church and that the nonredemptive kingdom includes all other aspects of human life and culture. Although the natural or civil kingdom finds its primary institutional expression in civil government, it includes as well everything that has to do with life in the body and this present world.⁶ Any feature of human life in the created order that does not properly pertain to the calling of the institutional church belongs to the civil kingdom. The presence of the redemptive kingdom of Christ is, so far as this present age is concerned, restricted to the church. As citizens of the spiritual and ecclesiastical kingdom, believers are pilgrims who know that the eschatological fulfillment of the redemptive kingdom awaits Christ's coming at the end of the age. Believers are citizens of two kingdoms, the ecclesiastical and the civil. As such, they are under no obligation to "redeem" life in the civil kingdom. Rather, the calling of believers is to live appropriately in these two kingdoms, according to their distinctive identities and their distinctive norms.

Calvin's Doctrine of the Natural Law

In VanDrunen's estimation, Calvin's doctrine of the Two Kingdoms provides a framework for a proper understanding of the disputed question of Calvin's view of natural law. In the history of the interpretation of Calvin's theology, a great deal of discussion has taken place regarding his understanding and use of the doctrine of natural law. According to VanDrunen, the resolution of the debates about Calvin's doctrine of natural law can be found only when it is placed within the setting of his Two Kingdoms doctrine. Not only did Calvin follow closely a long tradition of Christian theology, which affirmed the natural law as an expression of God's will for his creation and human beings as his image-bearers, but he also closely linked the doctrine of natural law with the calling of human beings within the natural kingdom. For VanDrunen, "correlating Calvin's doctrine of natural law with his doctrine of the Two Kingdoms is of great help for reconciling

6. *Ibid.*, 79.

the seemingly discordant strains of his statements about natural law and thereby proves to be a key aspect of its distinctiveness in comparison to the medieval traditions.”⁷ Contrary to the neoorthodox interpretation of Calvin’s theology, which views his affirmation of a natural knowledge of God’s will and purpose through natural law as inconsistent with his insistence that God can be known properly and fully only through special revelation, Calvin clearly affirms a knowledge of God’s will through the natural law as well as a knowledge of God’s will as Redeemer through special revelation. Moreover, even though Calvin emphasizes the inability of human beings after the fall into sin to do what the natural law requires and thereby find favor with God, he nonetheless affirms that human beings are able to know and perform externally what the natural law requires within the realm of the natural kingdom.

In his treatment of Calvin’s doctrine of natural law, VanDrunen begins with a summary of Calvin’s understanding of the natural law that exhibits considerable continuity with a long-standing tenet of Christian theology. For Calvin, the natural law reveals God’s moral will to human beings who bear his image, and constitutes the basis for the capacity of human consciences to judge between what is good or evil. Consistent with his general emphasis on a natural knowledge of God as Creator, Calvin taught that God’s image-bearers know the moral will of God through the testimony of natural law and the conscience.⁸ Although the natural law provides no knowledge of God’s will and purpose as Redeemer, it does provide “a far greater amount of specific moral knowledge” that is “immediately accessible to all people” than was acknowledged by even St. Thomas Aquinas, the classic Roman Catholic proponent of a natural knowledge of God.⁹ Rooted in God’s moral character, the natural law in its moral content is reiterated in the Decalogue of Moses and discloses the moral obligations that express God’s holy will for his creatures. While Calvin follows closely the long-standing medieval emphasis on natural law, VanDrunen acknowledges that he also emphasized

7. Ibid., 95. In his article “The Context of Natural Law: John Calvin’s Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms,” VanDrunen offers an extensive defense of this claim. According to VanDrunen, Calvin’s negative assessment of the role of natural law pertains to its use in the spiritual kingdom, not the natural kingdom. Although sinful human beings are not able to obtain favor with God on the basis of their obedience to the natural law, they are able to order their lives in a relatively righteous manner within the natural kingdom by the standard of the natural law.

8. VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 100.

9. Ibid., 102.

more than his medieval predecessors the “dire effects of sin and the consequent necessity of supernatural revelation.”¹⁰ Although many interpreters of Calvin conclude from his emphasis on the inadequacy of natural law because of the corruption of human sinfulness that the natural law plays no positive role in the ordering of human life after the fall, Calvin was able to affirm a continuing role for natural law within the civil kingdom.

Calvin ascribed surprisingly positive use for natural law (in the form of various cultural achievements) in his discussion of life in the civil kingdom and consistently negative use for it (in the form of leaving all people inexcusable for their sin) in his discussion of life in the spiritual kingdom. Calvin’s different evaluations of the use of natural law were not the result of intellectual inconsistency but of his view that though natural law permits even pagans to form good laws and produce other social goods in the civil kingdom, it is completely incapable of producing true spiritual good in people for the attainment of heavenly bliss, the realm of the spiritual kingdom.¹¹

In VanDrunen’s interpretation of Calvin’s doctrine of natural law, therefore, the solution to some of the long-standing questions of interpretation regarding the consistency of Calvin’s view is readily apparent. Although Calvin denies to natural law a positive use and role within the spiritual kingdom of the church, emphasizing human sinfulness and inability to perform what the law requires as a basis for acceptance into favor with God, he does affirm the abiding usefulness and positive role of the natural law within the natural or civil kingdom. The failure on the part of many interpreters of Calvin to understand how Calvin could simultaneously affirm the natural law and its positive role, and at the same time deny that human beings as sinners can find acceptance with God on the basis of obedience to that law, stems from a failure to see this close correlation. Calvin’s doctrine of the Two Kingdoms offers a coherent explanation of Calvin’s viewpoint and provides a resolution of this apparent inconsistency in his thought.

For Calvin, the sinful human person, by use of reason and natural knowledge, can attain great things in the domain of earthly things, that is, in the civil kingdom. By use of reason and natural knowledge, in contrast,

10. *Ibid.*, 105.

11. *Ibid.*, 110–11.

the sinful person cannot even begin to approach knowledge of salvation and eternal life, that is, knowledge of the heavenly kingdom of Christ. Natural law, therefore, has a positive function to play in the life of the earthly, civil kingdom, according to Calvin. But . . . natural law has only a negative function to play in regard to spiritual things and the heavenly kingdom of Christ, where it serves merely to convict people of their sins and to strip them of all pretexts for ignorance.¹²

According to VanDrunen, Calvin's Two Kingdoms/natural law public theology represents a clear and compelling vision of the distinct callings of the church, which constitutes the redemptive realm or spiritual kingdom, and of the natural kingdom, which constitutes the common or secular realm. The rule or norm that governs the spiritual kingdom is the redemptive revelation of God in Scripture, whereas the rule or norm that governs the civil kingdom is the natural law of God that is known by all human beings who bear God's image.

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE "TWO KINGDOMS/NATURAL LAW" INTERPRETATION OF CALVIN

In order to assess VanDrunen's Two Kingdoms/natural law interpretation of Calvin's theology, we need to consider three broad topics in Calvin's theology. The first of these topics is the distinction Calvin makes between the spiritual and natural kingdoms. VanDrunen is certainly justified in calling attention to Calvin's distinction between these kingdoms. However, it remains to be seen whether Calvin views them primarily in terms of two separate realms, and whether he makes the clear identification of the spiritual kingdom with the institutional church and the natural kingdom with the remainder of human life and culture, as VanDrunen maintains. Does Calvin use this distinction to restrict distinctively "Christian" conduct to the life and ministry of the church, in distinction from all other aspects of human conduct? The second of these topics is the strict correlation that VanDrunen posits between the natural kingdom, which is governed by Christ as Mediator of creation through the natural law, and the spiritual kingdom, which is governed by Christ as Mediator of redemption through the moral law as it is set forth in Scripture. The third topic is one that VanDrunen

12. *Ibid.*, 112–13.

inadequately acknowledges in his interpretation of Calvin's theology, namely, the relation that Calvin emphasizes between God's purpose and work as Creator and as Redeemer. How does Calvin construe the relation between God's purposes in creation and redemption? In VanDrunen's interpretation of Calvin's theology, Christ's work as Redeemer is regarded as a kind of overlay or higher stratum of spiritual renewal that has little or no direct relation to the order of creation or human life in the natural kingdom. The redemptive kingdom of Christ does not have any direct implications for the present reordering of human life and conduct within the natural kingdom. However, in Calvin's conception of the relation between creation and redemption, there is a clear affirmation of God's purpose in redemption to reverse the consequences of human sin and disobedience and to restore the whole creation to proper order.

Calvin on the "Twofold Government" of Christ

There are two passages in Calvin's *Institutes* that distinguish between the natural and spiritual kingdoms of Christ, which constitute an important basis for VanDrunen's interpretation of Calvin's public theology.¹³ The first of these passages occurs in the *Institutes*, 3.19.15, which describes the twofold benefit of Christ's saving work in the life of the believer who is joined to Christ by faith and the work of the Holy Spirit. By virtue of their union with Christ through faith, believers enjoy the grace of free justification and acceptance with God, not on the basis of works performed in obedience to the law of God but on the basis of the imputation of Christ's righteousness and the forgiveness of sins. Inseparably joined to the grace of free justification is the second benefit of union with Christ, the grace of regeneration or repentance whereby the Holy Spirit renews believers after the image of God and in obedience to the moral law of God. When believers are joined to Christ by faith, they enjoy simultaneously the "double grace" (*duplex gratia*) of free justification before God's tribunal and the sanctification of their lives by the Spirit of Christ.¹⁴

13. In addition to these key passages in Calvin's *Institutes*, VanDrunen appeals to Calvin's commentary on Rom. 13:1 and his broad distinction between "earthly" and "heavenly" things in his *Institutes*, 2.2.13. See VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 76–77.

14. For a comprehensive treatment of Calvin's understanding of the "twofold grace of God," see Cornelis P. Venema, *Accepted and Renewed in Christ: The "Twofold Grace of God" and the Interpretation of Calvin's Theology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008).

Toward the close of his extended treatment of the doctrine of free justification, Calvin takes up the subject of Christian freedom as an “appendage of justification.”¹⁵ According to Calvin, Christian freedom consists of three parts. First, Christian believers are freed from the condemnation of the law, since their acceptance with God is firmly based on the righteousness of Jesus Christ alone, which is graciously imputed to them. Second, the consciences of Christian believers are free to obey the requirements of the law, however imperfectly, “not as if constrained by the necessity of the law,” but as those who joyfully and gratefully seek to please their heavenly Father. The life of Christian believers becomes, on the basis of their free justification in Christ, a free obedience and an obedient freedom. Rather than the law’s functioning as a “yoke” that enslaves, the law, enlivened by the Spirit who writes the law on the hearts of believers, serves as a rule of Christian gratitude. And third, Christians are free in respect to matters “indifferent” (*adiaphora*) where the law of God neither requires nor forbids the use of God’s good gifts. All three parts of Christian freedom, Calvin observes, are “spiritual” in nature. The believer’s conscience is not constrained to obedience by a fearful prospect of judgment or condemnation. Rather, believers, who are freely and graciously accepted by God on the basis of Christ’s work on their behalf, joyfully and gladly obey God’s commandments from a good conscience and are enabled by the Spirit to live a life that is pleasing to him.

Calvin concludes his extensive discussion of these three parts of Christian freedom by noting that some inappropriately argue that the believer’s freedom of conscience implies that he or she has no obligation whatever to submit to any human laws or constitutions. Although Calvin acknowledges that ecclesiastical constitutions, such as those imposed by the Roman Catholic Church on the consciences of believers in respect to the worship and service of God, may not bind the consciences of believers before God, he notes that the freedom of the believer does not entail a freedom from obedience to the civil magistrate or the laws of the state. Although Calvin does not expressly identify those whose position he intends to oppose, he clearly intends to rebut the Anabaptist denial of the Christian’s obligation to obey the laws of the civil government.¹⁶ In order to rebut the “seditious”

15. *Institutes*, 3.19.1.

16. This is evident as well in Calvin’s comments on Rom. 13:1. See *Comm. Rom. 13:1, CNTC* 8.280: “There are always some restless spirits who believe that the kingdom of Christ is properly exalted only when all earthly powers are abolished, and that they can enjoy the liberty which He has given them only if they have shaken off every yoke of human slavery.” For an extended

implications of the denial of the legitimate claim of the civil magistrate on Christian obedience, Calvin offers a distinction between two kinds of jurisdiction or government, the spiritual and the civil.

Therefore, in order that none of us may stumble on that stone, let us first consider that there is a twofold government in man [*duplex est in homine regimen*]: one aspect is spiritual [*spirituale*], whereby the conscience is instructed in piety and in reverencing God; the second is political [*politicum*], whereby man is educated for the duties of humanity and citizenship that must be maintained among men. These are usually called the “spiritual” and the “temporal” jurisdiction [*iurisdictio spiritualis et temporalis*] (not improper terms) 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 [*regnum spirituale . . . regnum politicum*]. 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, so to speak, two worlds, over which different kings and different laws have authority. Through this distinction it comes about that we are not to misapply to the political order the gospel teaching on spiritual freedom, as if Christians were less subject, as concerns outward government, to human laws, because their consciences have been set free in God’s sight; as if they were released from all bodily servitude because they are free according to the spirit.¹⁷

In this extended passage on the Two Kingdoms, there are several features of Calvin’s position that need to be noted carefully. First, the principal emphasis in this passage, with its distinction between the “spiritual” and the “political” kingdoms of God, is on the *manner in which God governs* the conduct of believers. In the spiritual government of God, believers are freely and *inwardly* subject to the requirements of God’s law, not as a means

treatment of Calvin’s commentary on this passage, see Richard A. Muller, “Calvin, Beza, and the Exegetical History of Romans 13:1–7,” in *Calvin and the State*, ed. Peter De Klerk (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 1993), 139–70.

17. *Institutes*, 3.19.15 (OS 4.294).

to obtain God's favor but as an expression of grateful devotion. In the civil or political government of God, all members of the civil community are obliged to obey *outwardly* the laws of the political kingdom, which serve to maintain public order and peace. Obedience to the civil magistrate is obligatory, not by reason of conscience or as a means to obtain favor with God, but by reason of what Calvin elsewhere terms the "civil use" of the law of God.¹⁸ Second, consistent with his emphasis on two kinds of jurisdiction or government, Calvin's "Two Kingdoms" language does not so much refer to two separate realms or worlds as to a *twofold government* of God over the conduct of believers who are being renewed after his image and are subject to his rule. Although Calvin undoubtedly aims to distinguish by means of his conception of God's twofold government between the institutions of the church and the state, it is not immediately evident that this twofold jurisdiction can be neatly divided, as VanDrunen maintains, between two comprehensive realms, the institutional church on the one hand, and all other institutions and aspects of human life and culture, especially the state, on the other. Whereas VanDrunen interprets Calvin's language of "Two Kingdoms" in spatial terms, as though they were primarily two separate realms of human life and conduct, Calvin's emphasis is on the twofold way in which God governs the conduct of believers in whom these two jurisdictions coexist.¹⁹ And third, the particular interest of Calvin in drawing this distinction between the spiritual and political jurisdictions is to emphasize the legitimate obligation of believers to obey the laws of the civil magistrate. Such obedience does not compromise Christian freedom, since it is an outward obedience to the civil jurisdiction that God has ordained for the maintenance of civil order and righteousness.

The second passage in Calvin's *Institutes* that offers a broad definition of the Two Kingdoms is in the last chapter of book 4, which addresses the topic of the civil government. This comes at the close of Calvin's extensive treatment of the doctrine of the church. In this passage, Calvin alludes to

18. See *Institutes*, 2.7.10–11 (OS 3.335–36), where Calvin distinguishes the "civil" use of the law from its first or "pedagogical" use and its third or "principal" use as a rule of gratitude for believers. According to Calvin, in its "second function" [*secundum officium*] the law restrains "certain men who are untouched by any care for what is just and right unless compelled by hearing the dire threats of the law."

19. It is significant that Calvin primarily uses the terms *regimen* and *iurisdictio* in this passage, and only secondarily speaks of the *regnum* that corresponds to them. It is more accurate, therefore, to speak of Calvin's doctrine of a "twofold government" or "jurisdiction" rather than primarily of two separate "realms" or "kingdoms."

his earlier distinction between the spiritual and civil jurisdictions, which he introduced in the context of the doctrine of Christian freedom but now calls to mind before treating more extensively the divine institution and calling of the civil government.

First, before we enter into the matter itself, we must keep in mind that distinction which we previously laid down so that we do not (as commonly happens) unwisely mingle these two, which have a completely different nature. For certain men, when they hear that the gospel promises a freedom that acknowledges no king and no magistrate among men, but looks to Christ alone, think that they cannot benefit by their freedom so long as they see any power set up over them. They therefore think that nothing will be safe unless the whole world is reshaped to a new form, where there are neither courts, nor laws, nor magistrates, nor anything which in their opinion restricts their freedom. But whoever knows how to distinguish between body and soul, between this present fleeting life and that future eternal life, will without difficulty know that Christ's spiritual Kingdom and the civil jurisdiction are things completely distinct [*spirituale Christi regnum et civilem ordinationem res esse plurimum*]. Since, then, it is a Jewish vanity to seek and enclose Christ's Kingdom within the elements of this world, let us rather ponder that what Scripture clearly teaches is a spiritual fruit, which we gather from Christ's grace; and let us remember to keep within its own limits all that freedom which is promised and offered to us in him. For why is it that the same apostle who bids us stand and not submit to the "yoke of bondage" [Gal. 5:1] elsewhere forbids slaves to be anxious about their state [1 Cor. 7:21], unless it be that spiritual freedom can perfectly well exist along with civil bondage? These statements of his must also be taken in the same sense: In the Kingdom of God "there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female, neither slave nor free" [Gal. 3:28, Vulgate; order changed]. And again, "there is not Jew nor Greek, uncircumcised and circumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman; but Christ is all in all" [Col. 3:11]. By these statements he means that it makes no difference what your condition among men may be or under what nation's laws you live, since the Kingdom of Christ does not at all consist in these things.²⁰

In this passage, Calvin reiterates the main emphases of his earlier distinction between God's twofold jurisdictions, but now within the context of

20. *Institutes*, 4.20.1 (OS 5.472).

an exposition of the role and calling of the civil government. Contrary to the Anabaptist claim that believers are subject only to a spiritual jurisdiction, and radically at liberty from any obligations to civil authority, Calvin reaffirms his positive view of the continued usefulness and necessity of civil government.

Immediately after reaffirming the distinction between God's spiritual and civil governments, Calvin goes on to observe that the civil kingdom, although it is "distinct" from the spiritual kingdom of Christ, is in no wise "at variance" with it. While the "spiritual Kingdom of Christ" is already

Initiating in us upon earth certain beginnings of the Heavenly Kingdom . . . yet civil government has as its appointed end, so long as we live among men, to cherish and protect the outward worship of God, to defend sound doctrine of piety and the position of the church, to adjust our life to the society of men, to form our social behavior to civil righteousness, to reconcile us with one another, and to promote general peace and tranquility.²¹

For Calvin, the spiritual and the civil government of God do not stand independently alongside each other. The civil government or jurisdiction, although it is not to usurp the distinct spiritual government that Christ exercises through his Spirit and Word, has the task within God's design to secure the kind of public order and tranquility that is indispensable to the prosecution of the church's calling. In this way, the civil jurisdiction serves the redemptive purposes of God by protecting the church and ensuring its freedom to pursue its unique calling under Christ. Furthermore,

21. It is interesting to observe that article 39 of the Gallican Confession of 1560 reflects Calvin's view, when it declares that God "has put the sword into the hands of magistrates to suppress crimes against the first as well as the second table of the Commandments of God" (Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds* [1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985], 382). The same is true of the original text of article 36 of the Belgic Confession. Although Calvin's view on the calling of the civil magistrate may fit uncomfortably with a modern view of the separation of church and state, it reflects Calvin's conception of the comprehensive lordship of Christ in both the civil and spiritual jurisdictions. Because this emphasis in Calvin seems inconsistent with his interpretation of his Two Kingdoms conception, VanDrunen accounts for it by suggesting that Calvin was either "inconsistent" in the application of his principles or simply a "man of his time" who was unable to see the implications of his Two Kingdoms theology for the separation of church and state in a religiously pluralistic society. See, e.g., VanDrunen, "The Two Kingdoms: A Reassessment of the Transformationalist Calvin," 260–66; and idem, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 82–86.

as servants of God, civil magistrates have the task of ensuring that both tables of the law—the first table dealing with the service and worship of God, the second table addressing the mutual service of all human beings to each other—are honored and obeyed. Although the civil magistrate is not authorized to usurp the distinctive prerogatives of the spiritual kingdom, namely, the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word in renewing human life in free obedience to God’s law, it does serve to advance the redemptive purpose of the spiritual kingdom by requiring an outward conformity to the requirements of God’s moral law.²²

Although it would be premature to draw any far-reaching conclusions from these two passages in the *Institutes* regarding Calvin’s comprehensive public theology, it should be apparent that Calvin’s Two Kingdoms conception focuses primarily on the legitimacy of the Christian believer’s continued subjection to the civil magistrate. Christian freedom, which includes freedom from the condemnation of the law and for grateful, Spirit-authored obedience to the law as a rule of gratitude, does not exempt believers from an obligation to obey the civil magistrate. Christ governs believers inwardly and spiritually by his Spirit and Word; but he also governs believers outwardly by the institution and positive laws of the civil magistrate. Christ’s government is comprehensive of both a spiritual and a political jurisdiction.

However, it is not evident that Calvin employs this distinction in the way VanDrunen interprets it, namely, as a means to divide all of human life and conduct into two hermetically separated domains or realms. Nor is it evident that Calvin identifies the spiritual kingdom of Christ *simpliciter* with the institutional church, and consigns the remainder of human conduct and culture to the natural kingdom. Calvin’s Two Kingdoms conception is principally addressed to the distinct way in which Christ governs the conduct of believers, whether spiritually by the Spirit in the renewal/sanctification of believers or outwardly by the institution of the civil magistracy. The pri-

22. Calvin’s view of the respective callings of church and state is a complicated one. Although Calvin struggled in Geneva to achieve freedom for the church to administer discipline, particularly excommunication, without the interference of the civil magistracy, he maintained the idea of a Christian commonwealth in which the civil authorities were obliged to uphold the standards of the Word of God in the public sphere. For accounts of Calvin’s struggle to distinguish the jurisdictions of church and state, especially in his reformatory work in Geneva, see T. H. L. Parker, *John Calvin: A Biography*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 108–45; Josef Bohatec, *Calvins Lehre von Staat und Kirche* (Aalen: Scientia, 1961); and John T. McNeill, “John Calvin on Civil Government,” in *Calvinism and the Political Order*, ed. George L. Hunt (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 23–45.

mary emphasis in Calvin's Two Kingdoms construction falls on the manner of God's governance in the spiritual and natural kingdoms; the former is an inward, spiritual government, the latter an outward, political government. Moreover, in his description of the calling of the civil magistrate, Calvin insists that the civil government must fulfill its calling under Christ's authority in a way that serves and advances the interests of his spiritual government in the lives of believers. Although VanDrunen correctly calls attention to Calvin's distinction between these two forms of divine government, it is not evident that his neat bifurcation of all of human life in terms of two realms, the one spiritual and the other natural, is consistent with Calvin's public theology as a whole. At least in a preliminary way, it seems that VanDrunen overstates the contrast between these Two Kingdoms and tends to downplay Calvin's clear emphasis on the way they are interrelated.

Calvin on the Relation between "Natural Law" and Special Revelation

As I noted in my summary of his Two Kingdoms/natural law interpretation of Calvin's public theology, VanDrunen maintains that Calvin correlated his distinction between the spiritual and the civil kingdoms with a distinction between the natural law and the revelation of God's will through special revelation. Whereas human conduct within the natural kingdom is primarily, although not exclusively, regulated by the natural law of God, Christian conduct within the spiritual kingdom is exclusively regulated by special revelation in Scripture.²³

Although VanDrunen's interpretation of Calvin's doctrine of the Two Kingdoms tends to exaggerate the distinction between the twofold ways in which Christ governs the conduct of believers, and considerably enlarges the scope of what belongs to the civil kingdom, his interpretation of Calvin's view of the respective roles of the natural law and Scripture in the twofold government of believers is especially flawed. In Calvin's theology, there is a much closer relation between the natural and special revelation of God than VanDrunen's interpretation implies. Calvin's conception of the

23. VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 113, does acknowledge that Calvin appealed to Scripture in developing his view of human conduct in the civil kingdom, but maintains that the natural law retains a kind of primacy in regulating this kingdom: "Of course, Calvin did not think Scripture irrelevant for civil law in the other kingdom, as his practice of applying the example of Old Testament kings and events to contemporary civil issues illustrates. But Calvin did not believe that the civil kingdom can be governed solely or primarily by the teaching of Scripture."

relation between natural and special revelation grants a priority to special revelation as a more clear and full disclosure of God's will as Creator and Redeemer for human conduct in every area of life. Whereas natural revelation, including the moral content of the natural law, can disclose only a rudimentary knowledge of God and his will as Creator, special revelation is a more comprehensive revelation, which discloses the knowledge of God's will as *Creator and Redeemer*. Special revelation is more rich in its scope, more full and complete in terms of what it reveals of God's moral will, and far more clear and distinct than the revelation of God in the natural law. Calvin's metaphor for the Scriptures as "spectacles" through which the revelation of God as Creator is clearly discerned, for example, represents an especially important feature of his doctrine of revelation that VanDrunen's Two Kingdoms/natural law interpretation tends to diminish. When believers seek to fulfill their distinctive vocations in every area of human society and culture, whether in marriage and family, social relations, economic endeavors, or the arts and sciences, Calvin does not shy away from appealing directly to Scripture as a more clear and comprehensive disclosure of God's will for the conduct of those whom he is restoring after the image of Christ through the sanctifying, regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

The subject of Calvin's doctrine of natural law is undoubtedly a complicated one, especially because of the influence of a neoorthodox interpretation of Calvin's theology that radically rejects the whole idea of natural revelation and natural law. Contrary to the neoorthodox claim that the doctrine of natural law in Calvin's theology represents an incidental and inconsistent feature of his theology, VanDrunen properly argues that Calvin clearly affirmed a doctrine of natural law. Although Calvin's treatment of the natural law is often "imprecise and unsystematic," there can be no doubt that he taught a revelation through natural law of God's moral will for the conduct of human beings whom he created in his image.²⁴ In two

24. The language "imprecise and unsystematic" is used by Susan Schreiner in her comprehensive study *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1991), 77. For general treatments of Calvin's understanding of natural law, see J. Bohatec, *Calvin und das Recht* (Feudigen in Westfalen: Buchdruckerei G.m.b.H., 1934); Arthur C. Cochrane, "Natural Law in Calvin," in *Church-State Relations in Ecumenical Perspective*, ed. E. A. Smith (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1966), 176–217; John T. McNeill, "Natural Law in the Teaching of the Reformers," *JR* 26 (1946): 168–82; Mary Lane Potter, "The 'Whole Office of the Law' in the Theology of John Calvin," *Journal of Law and Religion* 3 (1985): 117–39; Paul Helm, "Calvin and Natural Law," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 2 (1984): 5–22; *idem*, "Equity, Natural Law, and Common Grace," in *John*

extensive passages on the topic of the natural law, one in Calvin's commentary on Romans 2:14–15, the other in book 2 of the *Institutes*, where Calvin is treating the knowledge of man as God created him, Calvin argues that all human beings have a natural awareness of God's moral will and the distinction between vice and virtue:

Since, therefore, all nations are disposed to make laws for themselves of their own accord, and without being instructed to do so, it is beyond all doubt that they have certain ideas of justice and rectitude, which the Greeks refer to as *prolēpseis*, and which are implanted by nature in the hearts of men. Therefore they have a law, without the law; for although they do not have the written law of Moses, they are by no means completely lacking in the knowledge of right and justice. They could not otherwise distinguish between vice and virtue, the former of which they restrain by punishing it, while commending the latter, and showing their approval of it, and honouring it with rewards. Paul contrasts nature with the written law, meaning that the Gentiles had the natural light of righteousness, which supplied the place of the law by which the Jews are taught, so that they were *a law unto themselves*.²⁵

Now that inward law, which we have above described as written, even engraved, upon the hearts of all, in a sense asserts the very same things that are to be learned from the two Tables. For our conscience does not allow us to sleep a perpetual insensible sleep without being an inner witness and monitor of what we owe God, without holding before us the difference between good and evil and thus accusing us when we fail in our duty. But man is so shrouded in the darkness of errors that he hardly begins to grasp through this natural law what worship is acceptable to God. Surely he is very far removed from a true estimate of it. Besides this, he is so puffed up with haughtiness and ambition, and so blinded by self love, that he is as yet unable to look upon himself and, as it were, to descend within himself, that he may humble and abase himself and confess his own miserable condition. Accordingly (because it is necessary both for our dullness and for our arrogance), the Lord has provided us with a written law to give us a clearer witness of what was too obscure in the natural law, shake off our listlessness, and strike more vigorously our mind and memory.²⁶

Calvin's Ideas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 347–88; and Susan E. Schreiner, "Calvin's Use of Natural Law," in *A Preserving Grace: Protestants, Catholics and Natural Law*, ed. Michael Cromartie (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 51–76.

25. *Comm. Rom. 2:14–15, CNTC 8.48 (CO 49.37–38)*.

26. *Institutes*, 2.8.1 (OS 3.334).

In passages such as these, Calvin does emphasize the way God as Creator continues by his providence and the revelation of the natural law to preserve order and a relative righteousness in human society and government. Accordingly, in his exposition of the calling of the civil government, Calvin acknowledges a legitimate appeal to the “general equity” of the natural law in order to discern God’s will for the civil government. For Calvin, the different forms that the civil government may assume in different times and places, as well as the “positive laws” that magistrates may promulgate in the discharge of their duties under God, may be inferred from a consideration of the “general equity” of the natural law rather than simply appealing to biblical civil and case laws.²⁷ In his representation of Calvin’s public theology, therefore, VanDrunen correctly argues that Calvin appeals to the natural law and a natural apprehension of God’s moral will to account in part for the preservation and ordering of human life and society. In spite of the pervasive corruption of human sinfulness, God as Creator maintains order and preserves human society among unbelievers and believers alike by his all-embracing providence, which includes the revelation of his will through natural law to all human beings as his image-bearers and through the restraining effect of a nonredemptive “general grace of God” (*generalem Dei gratiam*), which curtails the full expression of human disobedience in many areas of human life and culture.²⁸

While VanDrunen’s interpretation of Calvin’s public theology rightly calls attention to these features of Calvin’s view of the natural law, there are three important respects in which his interpretation of Calvin’s doctrine of natural law inadequately represents Calvin’s position.

First, although Calvin affirms the reality and benefit of natural law to disclose God’s will for human conduct in society and culture, and although Calvin acknowledges the relative excellence and value of human endeavors in what he terms “earthly” and “natural” things, he emphasizes far more than his medieval predecessors, including Thomas Aquinas, the destructive effects of human sin and disobedience in these dimensions of human life as well as in dimensions of human life that are more obviously spiritual in

27. *Institutes*, 4.20.16 (OS 5.487–88). For treatments of Calvin’s doctrine of the “general equity” taught in the natural law, which he terms “the goal and rule and limit of all [civil] laws,” see Guenther H. Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin’s Ethics* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997); and Paul Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 347–88.

28. *Institutes*, 2.2.17 (OS 3.259). For a treatment of Calvin’s doctrine of “general” or “common” grace, see Herman Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Smitten Book Co., 1928).

nature. Commenting on Calvin's affirmation of the natural law, coupled with his insistence that human sinfulness significantly corrupts the ability to apprehend correctly what the natural requires, Paul Helm observes that

there is one crucial difference [between Aquinas and Calvin]. When we turn to the extent to which the natural law is naturally known Aquinas is much more sanguine than is Calvin about whether human reason unaided by special grace can identify it, and the degree to which it recognizes its obligatoriness. The natural law [for Aquinas] allows men and women to have the knowledge of good and evil. For Aquinas the natural law is natural both in the sense that it is a divine law for human nature given at creation, and in the sense that it may now be successfully apprehended as a set of precepts, by unaided fallen reason alone.²⁹

When VanDrunen argues that Calvin ascribed a considerable role to natural law in governing the civil or natural kingdom, he represents a feature of Calvin's public theology, which does include a positive use of the natural law in the preservation of human society and the ordering of human life. However, VanDrunen posits a more positive and robust assessment of the apprehension of the natural law than Calvin's position and actual practice warrant. Although Calvin affirms the reality of natural law and a corresponding universal apprehension of the distinction between vice and virtue on the part of unbelievers and believers alike, he also emphasizes the insufficiency under the conditions of sin of natural law to obtaining a full apprehension of God's will for human conduct, not only in the spiritual but also in the natural kingdom. Even in the passages that we have cited as examples of Calvin's affirmation of the natural law, Calvin emphasizes the debilitating effect of human sinfulness on the ability of human beings to apprehend God's will rightly without the aid of special revelation.

Second, consistent with his emphasis on the corrupting effects of human sinfulness on the ability of human beings to apprehend the natural law, Calvin grants, both in theory and in practice, an indispensable and foundational role to special revelation in the discernment of God's moral will for human conduct in all areas of human society and culture. Although it is often inadequately appreciated, Calvin's treatment of the doctrine of Scripture in the *Institutes* occurs in book 1 in the context of a general

29. Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, 372.

exposition of the knowledge of God as *Creator*.³⁰ Because of human sin and disobedience, Calvin insists that the knowledge of God as Creator, insofar as it depends on natural revelation alone, “is either smothered or corrupted, partly by ignorance, partly by malice.”³¹ Indeed, the knowledge of God available through the created order is unable to supply a true knowledge of God even as Creator, since “we have not the eyes to see this unless they be illumined by the inner revelation of God through faith.”³² In Calvin’s estimation, the knowledge of God as Creator serves primarily to deprive human beings as sinners of any excuse for their willful disobedience. The natural knowledge of God does not provide positively for a knowledge of God’s will as Creator that is a sufficient guide for human conduct even in the natural order. Consequently, Calvin maintains that a special revelation of God, also as Creator and not only as Redeemer, has become necessary. For Calvin, it is “needful that another and better help be added to direct us aright to the very Creator of the universe. It was not in vain, then, that he added the light of the Word by which to become known unto salvation.”³³ Because of the obscurity and sinful suppression of the knowledge of God as Creator that is disclosed through natural revelation, Calvin’s discussion of the knowledge of God the Creator through Scripture consists of two parts, the first dealing with Scripture in its function of clarifying the obscured knowledge given in creation, and the second dealing with Scripture in its function of complementing this knowledge. Within the first part, Calvin employs his important and much-discussed image of Scripture as “spectacles” (*specillis*) by which we may “begin to read [the book of creation] distinctly” (*distincte legere*).³⁴ In this way, Scripture communicates a knowledge of God as Creator that cannot be derived from natural revelation alone because of the effects of sin.³⁵

Finally, Calvin’s doctrine of sanctification does not support the kind of sharp distinction that VanDrunen posits between the role of the natural law in the natural kingdom, and the role of the scriptural revelation of

30. For an extensive treatment of Calvin’s understanding of the relation of special revelation to general (or natural) revelation, including the way special revelation clarifies and supplements the knowledge of God as Creator, see Edward A. Dowey Jr., *The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 86–147.

31. *Institutes*, 1.4.1–4 (OS 3.40–44).

32. *Institutes*, 1.5.14 (OS 3.59). See also *Institutes*, 1.5.4–15 (OS 3.47–60).

33. *Institutes*, 1.4.1 (OS 3.60).

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Institutes*, 1.4.4 (OS 3.64).

God's moral law in the spiritual kingdom. Consistent with his emphasis on the superiority of scriptural revelation, which enables believers to rightly discern the natural law in its moral content and supplements it with a more full revelation of God's moral will, Calvin's doctrine of sanctification emphasizes that believers are subject to the life-embracing requirements of the moral law of God revealed in Scripture. Furthermore, since Calvin's doctrine of sanctification amounts to an extended description of the spiritual government of Christ in the lives of believers who are being restored to new obedience through the work of his Spirit, the spiritual kingdom of Christ is as broad and life-embracing as the claims of the moral law of God are on the believer's conduct in relation to God and to all human beings who bear his image. Therefore, it is not possible to maintain, as VanDrunen claims, that Calvin primarily identifies the spiritual kingdom of Christ with the calling of believers in the setting of the official ministry and life of the institutional church. In Christ's gracious work of sanctification, the Holy Spirit subdues the hearts of believers to new obedience to all the requirements of God's holy law, which in its two tables calls for perfect love toward God and selfless devotion to the well-being of others.

Although this is not the place to offer a comprehensive account of Calvin's doctrine of sanctification, several features of Calvin's view are of particular importance to an evaluation of VanDrunen's interpretation of Calvin's public theology. In Calvin's understanding of the gospel of Christ's saving mediation, the sanctification of believers is one of the two principal benefits of Christ's work as Mediator. Through union with Christ, which Calvin understands to be worked by the Holy Spirit through the gospel Word, all believers partake of the "double grace" of free justification and regeneration or repentance, which are Calvin's preferred terms for what later theologians call "sanctification." In free justification, believers are granted a status of acceptance with God on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ. In regeneration or repentance, believers are graciously enabled to fulfill the calling of human beings who bear God's image, namely, to glorify God with body and soul in every legitimate area of human conduct and society. Although Calvin insists that justification is by faith alone, exclusive of the righteousness of works, he also emphasizes that justified believers are simultaneously sanctified by the ministry of the Spirit, who "enlivens" the moral law of God by writing it on their hearts. Christian freedom is a freedom for a glad-hearted and grateful obedience to all the require-

ments of God's moral law as they are clearly and fully revealed through special revelation. Sanctification or repentance, as the second benefit of the believer's union with Christ, constitutes Calvin's comprehensive category for understanding the redirection and alteration of the lives of those who are indwelt by Christ through the Spirit.

For Christ imparts the Spirit of regeneration to us in order that he may renew us within, and that a new life may then follow the renewal of mind and heart. For if the function of giving repentance belongs to Christ, it follows that it is not something that has been put in the power of man. And since it is truly something of a wonderful reformation, which makes us new creatures, restores the image of God in us, transfers us from the slavery of sin to the obedience of righteousness, men will no more convert themselves than to create themselves.³⁶

Although it would be tempting at this point to provide specific examples in Calvin's writings of the comprehensive lordship of Jesus Christ over the conduct of believers in every area of life, this brief summary of Calvin's doctrine of sanctification is enough to illustrate the implications of Calvin's position for an interpretation of his public theology. Whether in the natural or the spiritual government of Christ, believers are called to honor the requirements of God's ordering of human life and conduct. Whether in the natural or the spiritual government of Christ, the determination of God's will for the conduct of believers is never based merely on the rudimentary revelation of the natural law. Rather, believers discern the will of God for their proper obedience to Christ by attending to the more clear and full disclosure of his will in Scripture, acknowledging that Scripture clarifies and supplements the knowledge of God as Creator and provides a rich disclosure of God's moral law in its life-encompassing claim on human conduct in every legitimate vocation or task. Furthermore, the sanctification of believers, which expresses the spiritual government of Christ by his Spirit and Word in the hearts and lives of believers who are being renewed after the image of God, is not narrowly confined to the ministry of the institutional church. Christian believers under the lordship of Jesus Christ are called to obey God, instructed and enlightened by the light of his special revelation, to pursue their vocation, order their marriage and family, conduct their social and

36. *Comm.* Acts 5:31 (CO 48.111).

economic enterprises, educate themselves and their children, obey the civil magistrate, and pursue the arts and sciences. Although the language is not Calvin's, the words of Abraham Kuyper faithfully echo Calvin's doctrine of sanctification in its wider implications: "No single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: 'Mine!'"³⁷

The Relation between Creation and Redemption in Calvin's Theology

One of the important questions that VanDrunen's Two Kingdoms/natural law interpretation of Calvin's theology raises is that of Calvin's conception of the relation between creation and redemption. VanDrunen's interpretation of Calvin's theology is explicitly *dualistic*. The natural kingdom is sharply distinguished from the spiritual or ecclesiastical kingdom, and the present and future realization of God's redemptive purpose does not entail the redemption, renovation, or perfection of the creation as a whole, including human life and culture within the natural kingdom. Although Christ as Mediator of creation continues to preserve and order human life in the natural kingdom, Christ as Mediator of redemption only renews and reorders the life and culture of the church. For VanDrunen, the demarcation between the natural and the spiritual kingdoms means that Calvin's public theology does not encourage, at least when it is consistently followed, a transformative or redemptive purpose for human life and culture beyond the boundaries of the institutional church. In this interpretation of Calvin's public theology, redemption is viewed as a kind of second-story overlay on the order of creation. God's redemptive purpose in relation to the created order is not integrally related to God's original design and purpose for creation. Nor does the future fullness of the redemptive kingdom entail the renewal and perfection of the present order of creation, or the enrichment of the final state by the fruits and artifacts of the believer's present service to God in society and culture.³⁸

37. Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty" (1880), in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 488.

38. See, e.g., VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 78–82; and idem, "The Two Kingdoms: A Reassessment of the Transformationalist Calvin," 263. VanDrunen concludes from Calvin's language, which distinguishes "earthly" from "heavenly" things, that all nonecclesiastical accomplishments, including the artifacts and fruits of human culture in general, belong strictly to the nonredemptive kingdom of this world that is passing away. For a different interpretation

The problem with VanDrunen's dualistic interpretation of Calvin's public theology, however, is that it fails to do justice to the way Calvin explicitly emphasizes the *positive* and *integral* relation between creation and redemption. One of the principal motifs of Calvin's theology is his insistence that Christ's work of redemption involves the *comprehensive reordering and renewing of the entire created order*. Although Calvin distinguishes between the knowledge of God as Creator and as Redeemer, he does so in order to underscore the way God's purpose of redemption entails no less than the restoration of the whole creation to a state of glorified perfection. Among some recent students of Calvin's theology, reference is sometimes made to what is termed the "extra dimension" of Calvin's theology.³⁹ This language means to call attention to the way Calvin distinguishes and correlates Christ's work as Mediator of creation and as Mediator of redemption. The presupposition for Calvin's treatment of redemption in Christ is the biblical doctrine of the creation and ordering of all things by the Word and Spirit of God. According to Calvin, the knowledge of God as Redeemer can be understood only within the framework of the doctrine of creation. The eternal Son through whom all things were made is the One through whom all things are being redeemed. Redemption, accordingly, amounts to nothing less than the restoration of all things to proper order through the mediation of Christ and the work of his Spirit.

Because Christ is the Mediator of creation and redemption, Calvin views the first advent of Christ as a decisive moment in the realization of God's redemptive purposes. With Christ's coming, the promises of the old covenant are being fulfilled and the purpose of God to renew all things has advanced. In describing the significance of Christ's coming and his saving work, Calvin is fond of speaking of the comprehensive purpose of God as a "restoration" of all things to "proper order."⁴⁰ In his commentary

of Calvin at this point, and one with which I tend to concur, see Paul Helm, *Calvin: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 134–35.

39. See Heiko A. Oberman, "The 'Extra' Dimension in the Theology of Calvin," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 21 (1970): 43–64. By the "extra" dimension of Calvin's theology, Oberman refers to the "mutuality" and "discontinuity" (48) between the created order and redemption in the work and purposes of God. See also E. David Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology: The Function of the So-Called Extra-Calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 1966).

40. For a more extensive treatment of this theme in Calvin's theology, see Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, chap. 5, "Creation Set Free," 97–114. The opening sentence of Schreiner's chapter captures well Calvin's view: "Throughout his polemics against the Anabaptists, Calvin

on John 13:31, for example, Calvin offers a broad view of the purpose of Christ’s advent and crucifixion:

For in the cross of Christ, as in a splendid theatre, the incomparable goodness of God is set before the whole world. The glory of God shines, indeed, in all creatures on high and below, but never more brightly than in the cross, in which there was a wonderful change of things—the condemnation of all men was manifested, sin blotted out, salvation restored to men; in short, the whole world was renewed and all things restored to order.⁴¹

Calvin uses similar language in his comments on John 12:31:

The word *judgment* is taken as “reformation” by some and “condemnation” by others. I agree rather with the former, who expound it that the world must be restored to due order [*legitimum ordinem*]. For the Hebrew word *mishpat* which is translated as *judgment* means a well-ordered constitution. Now we know that outside Christ there is nothing but confusion in the world. And although Christ had already begun to set up the kingdom of God, it was His death that was the true beginning of a properly-ordered state [*status rite compositi*] and the complete restoration of the world.⁴²

In these and similar statements, Calvin views the work of Christ as issuing in nothing less than the renovation of the whole creation, a reversal of the consequence of human sin and disobedience. In his threefold office as Prophet, Priest, and King, Christ reveals the fullness of the Word of God, reconciles a new humanity to God, and by means of the “scepter of his kingdom,” the Word of God, subdues all things to new obedience. Calvin’s conception of the person and work of Christ, therefore, includes a compelling eschatological vision in which the whole course of history is brought to its appointed end—the renewal of the fallen creation in service to the triune God. Contrary to VanDrunen’s dualistic and incoherent portrait of

eschewed all views that would see the church as an oasis isolated from a lost creation or salvation as the rescuing of the elect from a demonic world” (97).

41. *Comm.* John 13:31, *CNTC* 5.68 (CO 47.317).

42. *Comm.* John 12:31, *CNTC* 5.42 (CO 47.293). See also *Comm.* Isa. 65:25, *Calvin’s Commentaries* (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 8.405–6 (CO 37.434): “But since it is the office of Christ to bring everything back to its condition and order, that is the reason why he declares that the confusion or ruin that now exists in human affairs shall be removed by the coming of Christ; because at that time, corruptions having been taken away, the world shall return to its first origin [*primam originem*]”; *Comm.* 2 Thess. 1:5, *CNTC* 8.388–90 (CO 52.188–89).

Calvin's understanding of Christ's distinct offices as Mediator of creation and of redemption, Calvin views Christ's work of redemption as one that reorders and renews the creation, which has been disordered and broken through human sin and the judgment of God.

There are two particularly important illustrations of the coherence and interrelation between creation and redemption in Calvin's theology. The first is Calvin's view of the consummation of the redemption of believers through union with Christ, which entails the resurrection of the body. The second is Calvin's teaching that Christ's work of redemption will retain and perfect all that originally belonged to the substance of God's good creation.

In his conception of the resurrection of the body of believers in union with Christ, Calvin rejects the error of those who teach that the bodies of the saints will be altogether new, and not a glorified form of their present bodies. According to Calvin, this error is similar to the ancient error of the Manicheans who disparaged the body and earthly existence. The resurrection of the body does not entail the bestowal of another body, but rather the renewal and glorification of the present bodies of believers. In an important statement, which provides a general principle regarding the relation between creation and redemption, Calvin notes that "if death, which takes its origin from the fall of man, is accidental, the restoration which Christ has brought belongs to that self-same body which began to be mortal."⁴³ The corruption and weakness of the flesh is an adventitious or accidental quality that does not belong intrinsically to the body as God first created it. Therefore, Calvin, utilizing an Aristotelian distinction between "substance" and "accidents," maintains that "as to substance" believers "shall be raised again in the same flesh we now bear, but . . . the quality will be different."⁴⁴ Christ's redemptive work in the lives of believers will ultimately restore the fullness of human life in the body as God originally created it, although in a state of greater glory in union with Christ. Redemption restores what sin has corrupted and deformed; but it does not displace what God created good. Consequently, Calvin insists that there is a substantial continuity between the present body and the resurrected body, although he simultaneously observes that the glory of the believer's resurrected body will surpass that of the original state of Adam before the fall into sin.

43. *Institutes*, 3.25.7 (OS 4.447).

44. *Institutes*, 3.25.8 (OS 4.449).

Calvin employs similar language to describe the way Christ's redemptive office will renovate the entire created order. The present and future consummation of Christ's work of redemption will not annihilate or discard the substance of the created order. Rather, it will remove all the "accidental" features of disorder and corruption that are a result of the introduction of human sin and God's curse on the whole creation. Just as the accidental features of sin that adversely affect human life in the body will be removed through Christ's work of redemption, so the accidental features of sin that adversely affect the creation will be removed when the creation itself is restored while its "substance" remains: "I will say just one thing about the elements of the world, that they will be consumed only in order to receive a new quality while their substance remains the same."⁴⁵ The restoration of the creation will involve a work of redemptive "purification," but it will not involve the complete destruction of what belongs properly and substantially to God's creation in its original integrity or its renewed glory at the final consummation. Commenting on Romans 8:20, which speaks of the creation itself groaning in anticipation of the redemption of God's people, Calvin observes that the whole creation has been subjected to corruption and stands in need of renewal: "There is no element and no part of the world which, touched with the knowledge of its present misery, is not intent on the hope of the resurrection."⁴⁶ According to Calvin, then, there is a close parallel or correlation between the redemption of human life in its entirety, including life in the body, and the redemption of the whole creation. Even as the body of believers will finally put on "incorruption," so the creation itself will be renovated and perfected in the incorruptible state of glory.

The whole machinery of the world would fall out of gear at almost every moment and all its parts fail in the sorrowful confusion which followed the fall of Adam, were they not borne up from elsewhere by some hidden support. . . . However much, therefore, created things may be inclined by nature to some other course, yet since it has been God's pleasure to make them subject to vanity, they obey His command, and because He has given them a hope of a better condition, they sustain themselves with this, and postpone their longing until the incorruption which has been promised them is revealed.⁴⁷

45. *Comm.* 2 Peter 3:10; *CNTC* 12.365 (CO 55.476).

46. *Comm.* Rom. 8:19; *CNTC* 8.172 (CO 49.152).

47. *Comm.* Rom. 8:20; *CNTC* 8.173 (CO 49.152–53).

The implications of Calvin's view of the relation between creation and redemption for an interpretation of his public theology are not difficult to ascertain. While Calvin suffered no illusions regarding the renovation of human life and the restoration of all things to proper order prior to the consummation of all things at Christ's second advent, he vigorously addressed the life-embracing implications of the gospel throughout his writings, sermons, and reformatory endeavors. In her fine study of Calvin's view of nature and the natural order, Susan Schreiner offers a remarkable summary of these implications with which we will conclude this section:

In his reclaiming of creation, Calvin's God makes use of the societal and ecclesiastical activities of Christians. While Calvin charged the Anabaptists with Donatism, his own ecclesiology and spirituality was the reverse of isolationism. . . . The Reformer's "activist" piety must be seen in terms of his theology of creation as a whole. The renovation of creation renews all of life. Therefore, after submitting their knowledge and will to Christ, the elect are encouraged to turn outward for the common upbuilding of the church and the good of their neighbors. Such ordered outward activity, Calvin assumed, contributed to the sanctifying or reordering of the world. Instead of positing a church that stood in isolation from a threatening world, Calvin saw the church as the organ that led the renewal of both the cosmos and society.⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

While acknowledging the preliminary character of my assessment of VanDrunen's interpretation of Calvin's public theology, I have identified three key features of his interpretation that are problematic.

First, when Calvin speaks of "Two Kingdoms," he means primarily to identify the twofold way in which Christ governs the life and conduct of believers. Although the obedience of believers to the law of God is a free obedience, which is born of the Spirit's working in them, subduing their hearts to new obedience, believers remain subject to the laws and constitutions of the civil magistrate. Rather than representing two separate realms,

48. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 114. VanDrunen appeals to Schreiner's study in making his legitimate case for a clear doctrine of natural law in Calvin's theology. However, he does not adequately address the kind of evidence that Schreiner adduces for a robust doctrine of ecclesiastical and societal renewal (transformation) in Calvin's public theology.