

NICOTINE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

Dedicated to Reformed Faith and Practice

Vol. 17 No. 2

Spring 2023

The Origins of 2-K Political Theology

Since David VanDrunen published, in 2010, the first volume in what has become a series of important volumes, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought*, Emory University Studies in Law and Religion (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), there has been a certain degree of controversy in some quarters of the confessional Reformed world over the recovery of the “two kingdoms” as a way of thinking about Christ and culture and ethics. The qualifier some is important here because anyone who knows the history of Reformed theology knows that faithful, confessional theologians have been speaking of God’s “twofold government” (*duplex regimen* and *duplex regnum*) or “two kingdoms” since the 16th century. It is not a novelty but so divorced are enough contemporary Reformed Christians from

their own tradition and heritage that when this way of speaking re-surfaced in 2010 it was taken, in some quarters as a radical departure from Reformed theology.

Why The Controversy?

THAT REACTION, IN SOME quarters, is part of a pattern. Because of the sad state of confessional Reformed covenant theology in the 20th century, when Richard Muller and others in his wake began to re-appropriate the historic Reformed way of distinguishing between theology as God knows it and theology as God has given us to know it, it was denounced as Barthian by one scholar (who should have known better). When some began to try to resurrect the teaching of, e.g., Zacharias Ursinus (1534–83) and the Westminster Divines (see WCF 7.2) on the prelapsarian (pre-fall) covenant of works, it was ridiculed as a deformation of Reformed theology. Similar reactions happened when some scholars began to try to recover the historic Reformed doctrine of the pre-temporal covenant of redemption, e.g., David VanDrunen and R. Scott Clark, “The Covenant Before the Covenants,” in R. Scott Clark ed., *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2007). When some contemporary Reformed writers and historians began writing about and advocating the historic pan-Protestant (including the Reformed) distinction between law and gospel they were denounced as “antinomians” and “Lutherans.” E.g., some of the reviews and reactions to R. Scott Clark, “Letter and Spirit: Law and Gospel in Reformed Preaching,” in Clark, ed., *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry*. These are

analogous cases illustrating the decay of historic Reformed theology in the twentieth century. Doctrines which were nigh-well universally held and taught in the classical period of Reformed theology, when uncovered and dusted off in the late 20th and early 21st centuries were regarded with suspicion. For more on the project of recovery of the older Reformed theology, see R. Scott Clark, *Recovering the Reformed Confession* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2008).

What happened? Beginning in 1978, Richard Muller began publishing on classical Reformed theology. He began challenging the dominant narrative about Reformed theology, which had been in place for over a century, that Reformed orthodoxy was a corruption of the Reformation, that it put reason over theology, and that it is was spiritually harmful. At the time he began his project, very few people had actually read our writers from the classical period. Most of those authors were locked away in Latin texts and difficult to access outside the libraries of Europe and the United Kingdom. Further, there had been vigorous movements within the broader Reformed world that had the effect of moving it away from what people thought Reformed scholasticism entailed. The Barthians (so-called neo-orthodoxy) on one side and the followers of Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) on the other wanted to re-cast Reformed theology, albeit in different ways and for different reasons. There were other impulses within Reformed theology in the 20th century, too, that sought to distance it from its Reformed orthodox heritage. The revival-oriented movements with roots

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The *Nicotine Theological Journal*, sponsored by the Old Life Theological Society, will likely be published twice a year. Its aim is to recover and sustain confessional Presbyterianism.

Three months after publication in PDF, issues will be posted at nicotinetheologicaljournal.org.

Co-Editors: John R. Muether and D. G. Hart. Contributing editors, R. Scott Clark, Brad Isbell, and Brian Lee.

Send correspondence and manuscripts to 101 Budlong St., Hillsdale, Michigan, 49242.

Submissions should not exceed 2,000 words.

in the 18th century (the so-called First Great Awakening) and 19th century revivals (e.g., the 1814 Réveil movement in Europe) were suspicious of the Reformed orthodoxy and scholasticism of the 16th and 17th centuries. As a result, Reformed orthodoxy and especially scholasticism received what can only be described as a relentless beating in both academic literature and in the popular religious press. In the same way that the Enlightenment shamed anyone who dared show interest in medieval theology, so too anyone who manifested an interest in theology after the Reformation (but before the 19th century) was suspect and regarded as retrograde. When Karl Barth (1886–1968) quoted Reformed orthodox theologians such as Johannes Wollebius (1589–1629) and others like him, he was labeled “neo-orthodox,” which, in Europe at the time, was a way of saying, “reactionary fundamentalist.”

There were small cracks in the monolithic story about the nature of Reformed orthodoxy. At Stanford, W. Robert Godfrey, under the supervision of Lewis Spitz (1922–99), wrote his PhD dissertation on the Synod of Dort and characterized their work rather differently than the way it had been in much of the academic literature. At Duke University, under the supervision of David Steinmetz (1936–2015), Jill Raitt wrote on Theodore Beza’s doctrine of the Lord’s Supper in a careful and perceptive way. It was Muller, however, another Steinmetz student, who would revolutionize the study of Reformed scholasticism and Reformed orthodoxy. Other Steinmetz students would follow and, in time, those reading Muller and those who studied with him would change the narrative about the nature of Reformed theology, piety, and practice in the classical period.

ABOUT THE SAME TIME, A PARALLEL movement was taking place in the Netherlands under the leadership of Willem van Asselt (1946–2014). It came to be known as the “Utrecht School.” In 1999, Carl Trueman and I published *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press). In 2011, van Asselt published another collection of essays: *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011). The magisterial work in this field, however, is Muller’s 4-volume *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

The Vacuum And The New “Orthodoxies”

The work of VanDrunen *et al.* in recovering the language, categories, and thought patterns of “two kingdoms” (or, as Calvin had it, God’s “twofold kingdom” or “twofold government”) is another

part of the broader process of recovering the Reformed tradition. Just as Muller’s work on Reformed orthodoxy met some resistance from those who were invested in the earlier narrative, so VanDrunen’s work in re-appropriating the older Reformed language of “two kingdoms” has met some stiff resistance. During the 20th century, the various alternative approaches to Christian ethics had become entrenched institutionally and intellectually. There are two main sources of criticism of the renewed interest in the older Reformed language.

The first and older source of resistance has been the neo-Kuyperian movement. The prefix neo signals “new” thus meaning “the new Kuyperians.” Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) was a genius and a polymath. A theological liberal in the mainline Dutch Reformed Church, he was converted and became a stalwart of Reformed orthodoxy, founder of two newspapers (one ecclesiastical and the other political), active in a political party, a member of Parliament, Prime Minister of the Netherlands (1901–05), founder of a university, and founder of a denomination. Just one of those accomplishments would have been enough for most men but Kuyper did all of them. He was truly extraordinary. He was also deeply influenced by Reformed orthodoxy and Reformed scholasticism. He read classical Reformed theology and even edited the Latin works of Franciscus Junius (the elder; 1545–1602). Few of his followers, however, i.e., the neo-Kuyperians, followed in his footsteps in that regard. They mostly accepted the older story and became rather disconnected from classical Reformed theology, piety, and practice. Either they assumed that whatever they did and taught must have been what the earlier Reformed did and taught or they dismissed classical Reformed theology as “scholastic” by which they typically meant rationalist or controlled by human reason rather than by divine

authority and revelation.

In some cases, the neo-Kuyperian movement rejected the older Reformed view of natural law or seemed oblivious to it. After rejecting the older distinctions between nature and grace and sacred and secular, the neo-Kuyperians set about “transforming” and “redeeming” every area of life for Christ under the rubric of “worldview.” With the Reformed tradition they asserted the lordship of Christ over all of life—this truth has never been in question. When the neo-Kuyperians, however, were presented with the older Reformed way of speaking about “two kingdoms” or a “twofold kingdom” they rejected it as incompatible with Christ’s lordship. There formed a loose alliance between the neo-Kuyperian “transformationalists” and some of the Reconstructionists and theologians in opposition to the renewed interest in the older categories about which more will be said below.

A SECOND, AND PERHAPS MOST VOCAL group of critics comes from the theocrats and theologians, which I have abbreviated as the “TheoRecons.” This movement has been influenced by neo-Kuyperianism through the writing and teaching of Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987), who was not himself a theologian or reconstructionist. The TheoRecon movement is almost universally postmillennial in its eschatology and thus anticipates a future earthly golden age before Christ’s return. It is driven by the theories and theology of the father of the Christian Reconstruction and Dominion Theology movements, R. J. Rushdoony (1916–2001). Rushdoony is most famous for his Talmudic 3-volume commentary on biblical law, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (1973–99). The Christian Reconstruction movement theorizes that Western society will collapse—Gary North (1942–2022), Rushdoony’s son-in-law, was convinced that collapse would happen in connection with the Y2K episode in 2000—and out of the collapse will arise a reconstructed

Christian society normed by God’s law, including the judicial laws. This latter theory was made most famous by Greg Bahnsen (1948–95) in his 1977 volume, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*.

Arguably, the most popular Reconstructionist theologian writing today is Douglas Wilson who seeks to establish a beachhead for the coming golden age in Moscow, Idaho. Building on the work of Norman Shepherd, this movement also developed the Federal Vision theology whereby baptized persons are said to receive provisionally the benefits of Christ (election, regeneration, justification, union with Christ, adoption) in baptism and to retain them by cooperation with grace. The Federal Vision wing of the TheoRecon movement is rebuilding a sort of medieval Christendom complete with a (future) theocratic government and a sacerdotal (priestly) ecclesiastical ministry and theology. Because the contemporary recovery of the older Reformed categories in covenant theology and ethics presents a clear alternative to the TheoRecon agenda, this group has been viscerally hostile to it.

(Ed. From Heidelberg.net, “A Word about R2K, September 30, 2022)

R. S. Clark

SC88

Presbyterianism without Reformed Worship?

Thesis: No confessional Presbyterian church will long remain confessional or presbyterian if it loses Reformed worship. First, some definitions:

Confessional: orthodox soteriology and doctrine (doctrine of God, Christology, covenant) according to the Reformed confessions

Presbyterian: government by ordained male (per scripture) elders organized in accountable, graded courts

Reformed worship: scripturally regulated (RPW), simple, ordinary means of grace worship—a Reformed bucket to carry Reformed water.

Why will unscriptural, man-centered, culturally conditioned, over-contextualized worship undermine confessional orthodoxy? Because worship by its very form (which ought to be according to spirit—uppercase and lowercase— and truth) communicates certain things about the nature of God and man, thus theology proper and anthropology can’t help but be warped by unbiblical worship. Theology proper and biblical anthropology are the foundations of soteriology, which will also be warped by unbiblical (e.g., revivalist or sacerdotal) worship.

Why will unscriptural, man-centered, culturally conditioned, over-contextualized worship undermine biblical, presbyterian church government? Because free-form, optional, variable worship forms suggest free-form, optional, variable ecclesial forms...or little form at all. And when worship is no longer led by ordained elders, government by ordained elders seems less plausible. Presbyterian order is not hierarchical, but neither is it excessively horizontal. Rolling it out too thin leads to its disintegration.

THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE OF worship suggests and bolsters a regulative principle of everything for the church. Doctrine, order, and doxology are a three-legged stool. When present and sturdy, these legs will bear great weight; when any are

missing or compromised, collapse is imminent. Calvin would seem to agree with this thesis according to his famous statement about worship and soteriology in "The Necessity of Reforming the Church" (admittedly written before presbyterian government was fully developed):

If it be inquired, then, by what things chiefly the Christian religion has a standing existence amongst us, and maintains its truth, it will be found that the following two not only occupy the principal place, but comprehend under them all the other parts, and consequently the whole substance of Christianity: that is, a knowledge, first, of the mode in which God is duly worshipped; and, secondly, of the source from which salvation is to be obtained. When these are kept out of view, though we may glory in the name of Christians, our profession is empty and vain. After these come the sacraments and the government of the church, which, as they were instituted for the preservation of these branches of doctrine, ought not to be employed for any other purpose; and, indeed, the only means of ascertaining whether they are administered purely and in due form, or otherwise, is to bring them to this test. If anyone is desirous of a clearer and more familiar illustration, I would say, that rule in the church, the pastoral office, and all other matters of order, resemble the body, whereas the doctrine which regulates the due worship of God, & points out the ground on which the consciences of men must rest their hope of salvation, is the soul which animates the body, renders it lively & active, and, in short, makes it not to be a dead and useless carcass. As to what I have yet said, there is no controversy among the pious, or among men of right and sane mind. (Note: The sacraments properly figure in both the ecclesiology/order and doxology categories.)

ULTIMATELY, WORSHIP IS JUST MORE important than we often assume it to be. Calvin was right to place it (at least once) before doctrine/soteriology.

Calvin knew that reforming worship wasn't easy or ever would be. *Semper reformanda* is not a license for innovation but implies that we always have to claw back what carnality tears away from the church:

*I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by his word. The opposite persuasion which cleaves to them, being seated, as it were, in their very bones and marrow, is, that whatever they do has in itself a sufficient sanction, provided it exhibits some kind of zeal for the honor of God. But since God not only regards as fruitless, but also plainly abominates, whatever we undertake from zeal to his worship, if at variance with his command, what do we gain by a contrary course? The words of God are clear and distinct, "Obedience is better than sacrifice." "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men," (1 Sam. 15:22; Matt. 15:9). Every addition to his word, especially in this matter, is a lie. Mere "will worship" (*ethelothreeskeia*) is vanity. This is the decision, and when once the judge has decided, it is no longer time to debate.*

(Ed. From *Presbyterian Pravda* - presbycast.substack.com, "Reformed Worship & Presbyterian Viability, December 2, 2023.)

Brad Isbell

SC88

Highbrow Pietism

After close to forty-five years of faith-based politics, some might well wonder if suffusing all of this world's affairs with meanings directly tied to God, faith, and earnest devotion is a positive development. The fruit of

Donald Trump's white evangelical voters (eighty-one percent even!!) was not the inevitable result of Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority's support for Ronald Reagan. After all, those Republican voting evangelicals should receive credit for backing sensible and seemingly virtuous candidates if they also deserve blame for rallying behind a depraved real estate developer and reality-television star. Between Reagan and Trump supposedly came instances of white evangelical courage and virtue in standing up to Bill Clinton's sexual escapades and the peak Christian right moment of George W. Bush's compassionate conservatism (masterminded by none other than *World* magazine's Marvin Olasky).

When you put the narrative between 1980 and 2020 (and what may be 2024) in the balance sheet, faith-based politics may not come out in the black. How many of those bemoaning MAGA evangelicals, especially those teaching at white evangelical colleges, were ever pleased with earnest Protestant support for "Morning in America," "Read My Lips, No New Taxes," "Contract with America," or "No Child Left Behind"? The smartest of evangelical minds, the ones benefitting from bulging enrollments full of students eager to do for academic life what evangelicals were doing with faith-based politics – integrate faith and the world – those professors were usually suspicious of the religion fueling the Republican Party not to mention the politics. For some evangelical minds, the Enlightenment ideals behind classical liberalism that yielded the rule of law, the separation of powers, religious disestablishment, and the recognition of inalienable rights looked much more attractive than Christians using the coercive powers of the world's most powerful nation-state to make planet earth a better place and – maybe even in good postmillennial fashion – usher in the kingdom of God. Trusting the GOP to be the party of faith was so Jerry Falwell.

Whether Neo-Calvinists liked it or not, the Moral Majority was one example of evangelicals learning the every-square-inch lesson that ran from Francis Schaeffer to George W. Bush's speech writer and Wheaton College grad, Michael Gerson. The Lordship of Christ over every sector of human experience can be a difficult genie to contain in the one bottle of undergraduate education. And even then, the political aspects of a Falwellian or Schaefferian Neo-Calvinism has yet to produce reservations about the wisdom of injecting faith, divine revelation, and the higher reaches of philosophical theology into all attempts to know and govern the world.

ONE OF THE EVANGELICAL ACADEMICS at the forefront of integrating faith and learning thanks to his 1997 book, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (imagine the outrageous idea of Christian nationalism), was George Marsden who labored in Neo-Calvinist sectors at Calvin College before taking his learning to Duke University and the University of Notre Dame. One of his many books, arguably the most successful, was his biography of Jonathan Edwards which in 2004 won the prestigious Bancroft Prize. For non-Dutch white evangelical Americans intimidated by Abraham Kuyper and his oddly named successors, Cornelius Van Til, Geerhardus Vos, Herman Dooyeweerd, and Alvin Plantinga, Edwards became the most congenially Anglo-American path to the life of the faith-based mind. Kuyper may have supplied the theory for many evangelical faculty, but Edwards was the celebrity theologian whose reputation as the greatest American theologian – ever – became the name insecure evangelical academics could use to prove that conservative Protestants could be smart.

The overlap between Kuyper and Edwards has continued to guide Marsden even as the ideals of faith-based scholarship should inspire suspicion about the intellectual turn

responsible for rejecting both faith-based politics and faith-based science in to American life. His latest book, *An Infinite Fountain of Light* proposes exactly what its subtitle states, *Jonathan Edwards for the Twenty-First Century*. James Bratt's review of the book captures the Kuyperian antithesis that runs through the book and – Bratt doesn't say so – through Marsden's entire career. The world of learning can proceed either through an outlook with God at the center or one that inevitably denies God and then crashes and burns.

In the intellectual rivalry of colonial America between Edwards and Benjamin Franklin, the pastor lost but the world that Franklin bequeathed was and remains uncongenial to Christians. According to Bratt, if both men were alive today, "Edwards would be a complete alien, alternately puzzled and shocked; Franklin would be bemused but chatty and comfortable." Our world "is the fruit of [Franklin's] attitudes and inventions. It is materialist, at once nationalist and cosmopolitan, and sexually relaxed. It prizes technological invention, not least in cutting-edge communications. It is devoted to liberty, equality, and opportunity under the sovereignty of market capitalism. Religiously, it adheres under many labels to a moralistic therapeutic deism that serves its real god, the self-made person."

MARSDEN LIKELY FRAMED THE book with a contrast between Edwards and Franklin because the current post-liberal turn, from Roman Catholic integralists to Protestant Christian nationalists, clears room for critiques of Franklin's Enlightened liberalism. In Marsden's own words, "our civilization today is much more like the future that Franklin imagined than it is like that which Edwards predicted and hoped for." From the seeds that Franklin planted – here

Marsden echoes Francis Schaeffer – blossomed the mixed fruit of "ever-increasing technology; aggressive market capitalism; celebrations of the self; trying to balance liberty and equality, materialism, permissive sensuality, nationalism, and transnational consciousness." Into this world of mayhem, the product of Franklin and John Locke, Marsden proposes that contemporary Christians return to Edwards. Eighteenth-century speculative theology apparently has the resources for "renewal."

Why Marsden's (and the common-grace wing of Neo-Calvinists more generally) affirmation of pluralism does not kick in when contrasting Edwards and Franklin is a mystery. In his book on 1950s America, *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment* (2014), Marsden was sure-footed in observing that Kuyper's Netherlands accommodated diversity – room for Roman Catholics, confessional Protestants, and secular liberals – much better than America's two-party system that pitted right-thinking WASP Republicans against Christian sectarians (Roman Catholic and fundamentalist) and non-believers. Even beyond the dynamics of a nation's cultural politics, disparaging Franklin for not having correct beliefs or the proper theory to give his genuine scientific accomplishments coherence is at least impolite if not misguided. Non-believers (though Franklin was a theist) are often smarter than Christians. All of it owes to the good gifts of God who endows people with certain capacities and then providentially orders their lives so that through hard work, much study, and serendipity they make discoveries that are both true and beneficial for the rest of the human beings who inhabit God's green earth. To write as if Edwards has the answers to our time's predicaments, as if a theologian of considerable ability but did not even live in the United States, is to give Christians (as so much of Neo-Calvinism does) a sense that believers

have the right answers and that non-Christians are to blame for [insert your social ill here]. Back in the 1970s, Marsden was critical of Schaeffer in part for employing Kuyper in a highly partisan and political way. But his most recent book, even with the help of Edwards' Anglo-American inflection, reveals the sort of intellectual pride that bedevils and fuels Neo-Calvinism's appeal. So many evangelical minds seem to think that if only the world would listen to smart Christians everyone would be better off.

Such intellectual superiority does not find support in the historical record. Thirty years ago at least, the leading advocates of the evangelical mind under the banner of the integration of faith and learning disregarded the confessionalists who appealed both to theology and biblical exegesis to oppose women's ordination in the Christian Reformed Church. This is not to say that the proponents of ordaining women had no theological or biblical arguments. But the pro-ordinationist position was also adapting doctrine and the church to currents in American society that were not exactly faith-based unless you put on your common-grace eye glasses and squinted really hard. To discredit this updating of the church as modernist was perhaps unfair even if such adaptation parallels the actual strategy modernists used during the Progressive Era (amply and sympathetically documents in William R. Hutchison's *Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism*). Aside from affinities to liberal Protestantism, the egalitarian proponents of the evangelical mind were and still are in the odd position of wanting theology to lead us to a better world. But please, they impliedly add, not so much theology that we affirm God's eternal decree or restrict our pious daughters from office. Reformed Protestants in the evangelical camp, consequently, are more likely to go to Edwards than to the Three Forms of Unity. And now they contrast Edwards with Franklin to vindicate a faith-based outlook on every square inch).

The one option that does not seem to be available is the separationist (as opposed to integrationist) logic of what for the lack of a better phrase is the two-kingdom or spirituality-of-the-church position. Splitting revelation between general and special, people between the regenerate and unregenerate, authority between civil and ecclesiastical, knowledge between the sciences/humanities and theology – keeping parts of human existence in separate spheres is what the Christian tradition in the West has done and what Reformed Protestantism did for at least four hundred years after the Reformation. These distinctions make it difficult for any one to come along and integrate all aspects of knowledge or human association. The modern world thrives on a form of fragmentation that allows all kinds of human endeavor to cohere under some kind of invisible hand or spontaneous order. Christians believe that God in his providence brings all of those moving parts into coherence notwithstanding human sinfulness and finitude.

IF EDWARDS HAS A VIGOROUS doctrine of providence to help Christians recognize, accede to, and marvel at the diversity of creation in its human and non-human aspects, great. If he did, he would not sniff at Ben Franklin who stood in awe of God's creation and the workings of human society much more readily than Christians who think they can theologize everything into captivity for Christ.

DGH

SC88

39 Alexander Hall

Why Does Jesus Sound So Much Like John?

Every seminarian studying New Testament Greek is overwhelmingly thankful that the apostle John takes up so much space in the post-resurrection canon. John's syntax is so simple, his sentences are so short, his word choices are sometimes so repetitious that if a professor assigns a passage from the gospel, epistles, or Revelation (a bit tricky) for translation, a seminary student sighs with relief that he does not have to struggle with Paul's epistles or the Letter to the Hebrews.

The uniqueness of John's literary style indicates, as many scholars acknowledge, that he did not use sources the way the other gospel writers did. But John's singular manner becomes curious when he quotes lengthy instruction (Upper Room Discourse) and prayer (High Priestly Prayer) and Jesus sounds almost exactly like John. That's when the distinction between the red and black ink evaporates in certain editions of the Bible.

Consider the following:

John 15 (Jesus)

18 *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*

1 John 2 (John)

15 *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16*

For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life[c]—is not from the Father but is from the world. 17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

John 15 (Jesus)

12 “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you.

1 John 3 (John)

16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 17 But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

DA. Carson acknowledges this aspect of John's writings but does not see a problem. He writes (*The Gospel According to John*, 1990), “one of the features of John's Gospel on which all sides agree is that stylistically it is cut from one cloth.” This leads to “the difficulty” that “John's comments and Jesus' speeches can sound so much the same.” As much as such stylistic unity between John and Jesus supplies “concrete evidence against this or that source theory,” it does raise questions about where John's writing ends and Jesus' words begin.

One possible solution is to chalk up John's style to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who is the same person as Jesus' Spirit. As Carson puts it, “because the Spirit who helps the disciples of Jesus bear witness to him after the resurrection is none other than the Spirit of Jesus, some conclude that for the Evangelist the teaching he conveys from the Spirit is so much of a piece with the teaching of Jesus that

questions of anachronism do not worry him.” This gives John license “to use the same language and style” either when writing for himself or recording Jesus' words as an eyewitness.

Could a better explanation be how close John and Jesus were (akin to David and Jonathan in 1 Samuel)? Make what you will of John's dropping Jesus name by referring to himself five times as “the one whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 21:20), if Jesus and John spent a lot of time together, they may have picked up similar vocabularies and verbal mannerisms.

This is not as spiritual an account as attributing the similarities to the infallible work of the Holy Spirit. But on the human side of concursus – the idea explained by B. B. Warfield that the providential and supernatural parts of Scripture cohere to make the words of men the Word of God – the close relationship of Jesus and John may be an important factor in the gratitude that seminarians experience when their New Testament Greek professors choose for an exam a passage not written by Paul, Luke, or Matthew.

Worship in the Beauty of the Elementary School Cafeteria

People are not merely prone but congenitally disposed to make parts of human experience special by elevating, dignifying, or honoring such occasions. A Thanksgiving meal calls for the good china. The wedding service calls for flowers, gowns, and suits of clothes that neither the groom nor the bride's family can afford to use regularly, even for meals or parties that go beyond the junior high kids gathering for a birthday celebration or a dinner with college friends in town for a

brief visit. Retirement parties also call for a better grade of snacks and drinks than the treats assembled after a week of work. The Super Bowl clearly overdoes specialness; it takes a championship game and tries to make it the Oscars and political party convention all in one.

Witold Rybczinski describes the human effort to reach beyond the ordinary for special occasions by dividing architecture into high- and low-church designs. A common notion about architects is that a building is different from a piece of architecture – a bicycle shed over against a cathedral. According to this view, architecture is different from an everyday building because it aims at a building with aesthetic appeal. Rybczinski is not satisfied with this distinction because a bicycle shed can have ornamental elements – a painted roof, trim attached to a gable, carving added to brackets. Even building a shed with symmetry in mind and making sure wood work is well planed and jointed indicates that aesthetics informs ordinary structures. Rybczinski concedes some architecture – temples or court houses – is monumental. He also counters that some of the best architects have historically worked on small chapels and outdoor pavilions. Simply because a building is functional – not merely an object of art – does not mean it is any less architectural.

Such a defense of architecture in its ordinary aspects could help justify a congregation worshiping God in a public school cafeteria. It might also mean that worshipers need to be aware of engineering and HVAC systems in order to have their sights lifted beyond a mundane setting. In which case, the problem of how to embody ascending God's holy hill persists. Do believers lift up their hearts to God merely spiritually? Is it wrong to ask for added lift from physical settings in which Christians meet? Of course, any ordinary criminal can worship God in a

prison. But few church officers recommend holding weekly Sunday services in a prison. What would visitors think?

If honor, dignity, style, and class come naturally to humans in the presence of something unusually good or notable, why do so many conservative Presbyterians gather for Lord's Day worship in buildings and spaces that are functional at best? One obvious answer is that many congregations do not have the means to design or build facilities that add a lift of awe or mystery to the ordinary. If the budget is limited and a group of families and single adults needs a church plant, a overseeing communion is hardly going to insist on hiring an architect and engineering firm before these believers can qualify as a church plant. Almost as important, though hardly part of home missions planning, are socio-economic and demographic trends. How many attractive city churches and parishes, which have all the marks of good architecture and smart design (minus Second-Commandment violations), are now empty or re-purposed as condominiums or restaurants because the neighborhood, once home to a body of professing Christians, has changed and the new residents no longer need a church? In the wider scheme of Paul's instruction to Timothy about the importance of preaching the Word and all the benefits that flow from it, the color of walls, the arrangement of windows, the acoustics of ceilings and walls, and even the comfort of seats all come in second to the sacred assembly of believers with the Lord God of the universe. Still, if the Greeks could design and build all of those marvelous temples and shrines to non-existent gods, why can't Christians – especially serious Presbyterians – give more attention to the spaces in which they worship?

PERHAPS ONE WAY TO MAKE THE case for Presbyterians who need a biblical warrant is to appeal to the Old Testament tabernacle or temple. Yes, Christians do not have any detail in the

New Testament on what their worship spaces should include. We have nothing like God's instructions to Moses in Exodus, for instance:

Let every skillful craftsman among you come and make all that the Lord has commanded: the tabernacle, its tent and its covering, its hooks and its frames, its bars, its pillars, and its bases; the ark with its poles, the mercy seat, and the veil of the screen; the table with its poles and all its utensils, and the bread of the Presence. . .

With the magic of general equity though, a notion that some Presbyterians use to appropriate ancient Israel's civil legislation for modern nation-states, can't we use the beauty prescribed in the OT as leverage for an expanded line in the congregation's budget not just for building maintenance but for interior design? The reason is not to signal a congregation's high brow taste. It is instead to create a space that underscores the unique experience that constitutes corporate worship.

What it will look like to connote, in the words of Hebrews 12, coming to "to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant. . ." – how to capture that in a building is anyone's guess. But surely it seems like a question worth considering. Instead, disregard for the aesthetics of the worship environment invites laughs and guffaws from the assembly of believers when they hear that they have come to the heavenly Jerusalem and see banners that progressive public school principles installed to encourage diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The spiritual zeal of the gathered saints may be strong enough to overcome the interiors of spaces where they worship. But what about the Christians that need help? What if some arches, banners, lights that both brighten and point upward, reminded worshipers that they are doing something that is different from going to a PTA meeting? Surely, that can't be a violation of the regulative principle.

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Second Hand Smoke

Christopher Beha is an American writer. He was the editor-in-chief of Harper's Magazine from October 2019 to October 2023. His third novel, The Index of Self-Destructive Acts, was long-listed for the 2020 National Book Award in Fiction. The novel is the study of a family that bridges the worlds of finance and professional baseball and the pain that accompanies the fall of the world of the older generation. Part of that older order included smoking cigarettes.

Her father had been a heavy smoker – it had helped to kill him in his late fifties – and he had taken great pleasure in the habit, as he did all his habits. Now people huddled outside of bars or office buildings to get their fix; it looked no more pleasant than taking medicine. Everything about her father's world was gone. If someone had told him that this would happen, he would hardly have believed it. Things in his time had had the feel of permanence. Kit understood as a matter of course that her world would soon disappear. The cigarette lasted her three or four blocks, and when she finished it she tossed the rest of the pack along with her butt. Perhaps some homeless scavenger would find it.

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