

Apostolic Mission: The Kingdom of God and the Cultural Mandate

by David Orton

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The West is engaged in a war to the death. But this is not a war of guns and rockets. Rather it is one of ideas. The battle lines are drawn between two opposing worldviews: *Christian Theism* and *Secular Humanism*.

The defining idea of Humanism is that of *self-determinism*. In the words of Protagoras, it is “Man as his own measure”. Despite God’s clear revelation to him, man, in the Garden, determined his own reality. By standing in judgment over the verbal communication of God he rejected God’s *revelation* for his own *reason* (Gen. 3:1-7). Both are appeals to authority. And believing that reason *only* is truly neutral, able to judge between truth and error, man became autonomous, operating independently of God. He was now his own authority.

Autonomous man, therefore, as a would-be god decrees his reality *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. But because God is *Creator* and man *creature*, he cannot, of course, create new categories. To attempt to do so is an exercise of irrationality, of futility.

Even so, presuming the right to determine his reality, he self-identifies, interpreting his own meaning and significance. This he does by sovereign fiat. I am what I am, because *I* say so. And this, in denial of God-created, God-interpreted categories; for example, *male and female*. (Gen. 1:27). As a Satanic attempt to obliterate the image of God in man, it also obliterates the Creator-creature distinction. Man is now his own creation.

Rooted in *self-determinism*, the defining issue of the West’s cultural crisis has, therefore, become one of sexual freedom and identity. As an expression of my authentic self, I must be free to pursue my sexual preferences, orientation, or gender perception. Homosexuality and gender identity have, thus, become the *shibboleths* of the new secular religion. In as little as 50 years homosexuality has come from crime to sacrament. Explaining why in the current cultural milieu it is not only acceptable but my inalienable right – protected in law – to declare my self-perception regardless of the facts.

For example, in a recent Canadian case an adult male declared that he was, in fact, a six-year-old girl, despite his legal age of forty-six years and birth-assigned male gender, not to mention his wife of twenty-three years, seven children, and job as a motor mechanic! The pièce de résistance was his adoption – in the six-year-old girl persona – into another family! (Daily Mail, report of a Canadian transgender man, 12 December 2015). And in April 2019 the Tasmanian state government became the first Australian jurisdiction to pass legislation making gender optional on birth certificates and allowing a sixteen-year-old to change their birth-assigned gender without parental permission (Daily Mail, 10 April 2019). Mandated by the state, the doctrine of gender fluidity is also invading the schools down to children as young as six, including some church schools. Meanwhile the Anglican Church in Great Britain, while still formally holding to traditional marriage, has developed official liturgy to celebrate same-sex unions, and is also ordaining homosexuals. And of course same-sex marriage has already been mandated by the state across the Western world.

Ironically, while declaring the supremacy of reason – of rationality – our culture has been consigned to irrationality. As we reject God-created categories, pursuing unbridled autonomy, we have lost the capacity to think and have fallen into a collective insanity.

With the rejection of Christianity as our societal foundation we are swiftly playing out the full logic of mankind’s primeval fall. Vehemently prosecuting our personal autonomy through the myth of neutrality – that is, the myth of ‘bias-free’ reason and its handmaiden, the ‘secular’ state – and wilfully suppressing the knowledge of God, we have been given over to our own lusts, and become as gods, capriciously decreeing our own realities. And, hence, consigned to building castles in the sky, while mental health professionals charge the rent.

As both Paul and Isaiah underscore, unbelief, as subversion of the truth, results in irrational thinking:

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools,

Romans 1:21–22

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!

Isaiah 5:20–21

Therefore, history is the battle between two opposing spirits and systems. This plays out in two antithetical societies, the *City of Man* and the *City of God*, which we will now explore.

The Cultural Mandate: Stated & Defined

Text: Gen. 1:26-28; 2:15 (NASB); 3:15; Rom. 5:17; Col. 1:13-23; Mt. 28:18-20

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.

Genesis 1:26–28; 2:15 NASB

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

Genesis 3:15

For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:17

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to **the kingdom** of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him *all things* were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—*all things* were created through him and for him. And he is before *all things*, and in him *all things* hold together. And he is the head of the body, **the church**. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself *all things*, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were *alienated and hostile in mind*, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of **the gospel** that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Colossians 1:13–23

Salvation Rooted in Creation

These texts show that the Bible’s doctrine of *Salvationis* firmly planted in its doctrine of *Creation*. This is why Theistic Evolution and denial of the historical Adam, both promoted by popular evangelical leaders (e.g., N. T. Wright, William Lane Craig), are so destructive to the Gospel.

So, “Houston, we have a problem!” Salvation severed from Creation, as an historical fact, is to be separated from the earth and

lost in space. As a result the Church and the Gospel, disconnected from God's creation purpose, have floated off into cultural oblivion. It results in a dualistic and gnostic gospel. We will consider this in a moment under the head, "The Gospel According to St. Evangelical".

Creation and Salvation are brought together in Christ, the incarnate Son of God. Man's original purpose failed through Adam, but is achieved through Christ. History therefore moves *from Creation in Adam to Re-Creation in Christ*. Romans 5, the Adam and Christ parallel, provides the epicentre of Paul's epistle to the Romans, which in turn is *the* apostolic manifesto for salvation and cultural dominion.

As the promised "seed of the woman", Christ crushes the serpents head. The "last Adam" not only deals a death blow to Satan and to sin but also perfects humanity as the "second man" (1 Cor. 15:45, 47; Heb. 2:10; 5:9). He is the terminal point of the old creation and the beginning of the new. He dies as the last Adam once-for-all to pay the penalty of sin. But lives as the new man, on our behalf, bodily, and yet eternally, in the presence of the Father. The Father thereby transfers us from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son.

The "Much More" of the Christ Society

This transfer from Adam into Christ not only occurs through regeneration by the Spirit but also through a relocation from one corporate order to another, from the Adam society into the Christ society (Rom. 5:12-21). These are two antithetical and visible societies. Both Adam and Christ serve as covenant heads of a solidarity. Not only is Adam's disobedience and death imputed to every man but also Christ's obedience and life imputed to all those who believe. Moreover, not only what was lost in Adam is restored but also "much more": "For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, *much more* will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5: 17; also vv. 15, 20).

That is to say, while the reign of Adam's sin prevailed universally for many ages of history, more so, the reign of Christ's righteousness over sin. That is, Christ's reign, like Adam's, is also *in* history, in this time-space world; but unlike Adam's, will supersede and surpass Adam's in its historical expanse and power. In other words, an extensive period of Christian dominance in history still awaits us. But more than that, the dominion of the world for ages to come belongs to Christ and his Church.

As just stated, Christ's reign is manifest through a visible society. Rushdoony, commenting on Romans 5:17, highlights, "The word reign is *basileuo*, from *king*, *basileus*. It is a word which modern man has cheapened and spiritualized away. It was a dangerous word in the Roman Empire because it meant a rival power, another ruler than the emperor" (Rushdoony, *Romans and Galatians*, p. 80). The new humanity – as a visible society – is restored to the dominion of Genesis 1:26. What was lost in Adam is regained in Christ, and more. And this, proved through an *a fortiori* argument (from the weaker to the stronger)—if the dominion of death over the former, how "much more", dominion in life for the latter! Through the "free gift of righteousness" in Christ, not only is justification made certain for redeemed humanity, but also dominion in this life. Their victory over death – and, therefore, all the enemies of God – is grounded in the solidary relationship of the new humanity with its covenant head, Christ, implicitly demonstrating the reality of imputation. But not-only-so, this imputation of righteousness – and, hence, renewed covenant status (justification) – also guarantees the victory of God's people in history. Soteriology – imputation and justification – is the ground of Paul's dominion eschatology.

While Romans 5 logically emerges from Romans 1-4, reaffirming justification as the basis for salvation and expounding its total certainty, Romans 5-8, nonetheless, is a literary whole. This is evidenced by the apostle's bookending of them by two mirrored passages – 5:1-11 and 8:18-39 – that affirm, in the face of tribulation (inflicted by apostate Jewry and the pagan power-state), the present victory of Christ and his Church. This is a message for those who live in time-space history. Contra to the popular truncated gospel focussed on getting to heaven – the believer is given more than the hope of eternal life through justification, he is also given the larger hope of creation (the time-space order) restored to the glory of God; that is to say, of God's *shekinah* glory dwelling in and governing the nations—God's will being done "on *earth* as it is in heaven" (Mt. 6:10).

This is not to deny the consummation and the age to come, and hence, a legitimate "now but not yet" tension; rather, it is to say that we have too conveniently deferred elements of the "now" to the "not yet", denying history – and, hence, the First Advent – its full eschatological significance. Justification, properly understood as a covenant category, provides the foundation for an eschatology of victory; a biblical philosophy of history that sees God's purpose for the cosmos fulfilled this side of the Second Advent (Eph. 1:9-10); that is to say, *in* history—that sees man restored to God's original creation purpose and, hence, as his

image-bearer and vice-regent over the earth, restoring it as God's cosmic temple (Gen. 1:26-28; Ps. 8).

As the climactic fulfilment of the promise, it was Christ's *First* Advent that crushed Satan's head, destroying sin and death, and raising him victoriously to the right hand of the Majesty, from where he presently Judges and Rules the nations (Heb. 1:3-4; Ps. 2; 110). It is, thus, God's saving act in history. Sadly, this victory over his enemies has been, too conveniently, postponed by various eschatological schemes to the *Second* Advent and a post-historical millennium. Romans 5:12-21 – the Adam/Christ parallel – is thus pivotal to Paul's eschatology, which is then explicated more fully in Romans 8 with creation liberated and history fulfilled in the ingathering of the Gentiles and the regrafting of the Jews in Romans 9-11—that is, the harvest of the world. God's original covenant purpose for man in Adam to extend the Edenic temple to the whole earth is restored in Christ. Justification and salvation *in* history lead to glorification *in* history—this is Pauline eschatology. Man is reinstated as a covenant-keeper, and as God's vice-regent extends God's reign – and hence God's glory – throughout the creation.

So, in light of Romans 5:12-21, my so-called "over-realized" eschatology is merely someone else's "under-realized" soteriology. Through Paul's Gospel of Christ's victory over his enemies – sin and death – the Kingdom of God is not only inaugurated in history but also realized in history. Death is merely "the *last* enemy" to be defeated at the consummation (1 Cor. 15:25-26; Ps. 110), signifying that throughout history Christ is progressively "destroying every rule and every authority and power" so that at the end he can "deliver the kingdom to God the Father" (1 Cor. 15:24). But how is this wrought?—Through Christ's justifying work that reinstates the believer, and ultimately the nations, to covenant status and to a life of covenant obedience (Rom. 1:6 16:26; Isa. 2:1-4). In Christ, the believer now fulfils God's original Creation Mandate given to man: having received renewed covenant status by grace through faith, he can now obey and live in the covenant, and hence the covenant blessing of dominion; thereby, extending the Edenic paradise – the culture of heaven – to the whole cosmos (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:9, 15-17; Lev. 18:5; Luke 10:28; Matt. 19:17; 28:18-20). In this way, the Gospel "is the power of God for salvation" (1:16), not only for the eternal salvation of man but also for the whole created order, progressively restoring it as the temple of the Lord, until the "*last* enemy" – death – is climactically defeated in the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:26) with our glorious entry of "the new heavens and the new earth".

History is, therefore, the antithesis between *two spirits*, Satan and God, and *two societies*, the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. Each seed, by virtue of God's created order, will inevitably build culture: one satanic, the other godly.

Biblical World-and-Life-View

According to Paul, in our Colossians passage, this is the stuff of the Gospel, the Kingdom, and the Church—the reconciliation of *all things*, whether in heaven or on earth, in the Son, the firstborn of creation, and by whom *all things* were created and are held together. *All things* embraces the totality of human existence—man's culture. God in Christ not only created the universe, and *all things* in it, but has also reconciled it to himself as its ultimate reference point. Everything now coheres in Christ as Lord. Very simply, *if he is not Lord of all, he is not Lord at all*.

This spells a comprehensive world-and-life-view that sees all aspects of creation reconciled in him: "the restoration of all things". Indeed, it spells a *Cultural Mandate*.

In the Preface to his 1959 book, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, Henry Van Til defines what culture is and where it comes from:

The term "culture" has meant many things to many people. In this book I use the term to designate that activity of man, the image-bearer of God, by which he fulfills the creation mandate to cultivate the earth, to have dominion over it and to subdue it. The term is also applied to the result of such activity, namely, the secondary environment which has been superimposed upon nature by man's creative effort. Culture, then, is not a peripheral concern, but of the very essence of life. It is an expression of man's essential being as created in the image of God, and since man is essentially a religious being, it is expressive of his relationship to God, that is, of his religion.

That man as a covenantal creature is called to culture cannot be stressed too much. For the Lord God, who called him into being, also gave him the cultural mandate to replenish the earth and to have dominion over it.

To say that culture is man's calling in the covenant is only another way of saying that culture is religiously determined. (Preface)

...culture...is religion externalized. (ibid, p. 200)

For a people's religion comes to expression in its culture, and Christians can be satisfied with nothing less than a Christian organization of society. (ibid, p. 245)

Religion is the inescapable covenantal relationship between God as Lord and his image-bearer, man. This relation follows from that other basic one of Creator and creature, and rests upon the faithfulness of God to the covenant which he ordained as constituting the religious relationship. This relationship extends to the whole of life; it is all-permeating; it radiates from its center in the heart out to every area on the periphery of man's existence. And religion is a universal phenomenon; no people has ever been found without religion. Through sin man fell away from God and his religion became apostate, but through Christ man is restored to true religion. (ibid, p. 37)

Religion is then to be distinguished from but not separated from culture. Just so it is with *cultus*, in which man's religious aspirations come to expression in acts of worship, prayer, and praise. Culture and *cultus* are the two streams that proceed out of man's religious experience; they together constitute his activity under the sun. ... To restrict religion either to acts of worship, or to deeds of service, is to break asunder what God hath joined together; for God, the Lord, demands both worship and work; religion consists of *cultus* and culture. (ibid, p. 40)

Apostate religion is the result of fear (anxiety) which characterizes the life of apostate man. ... Thus the whole of the realm of the sacred becomes functional and is brought under the category of the cultic, under sacerdotal jurisdiction. Thus the distinction between religion and culture is obliterated, since every activity of life assumes cultic proportions and significance. ...

Since the church, or some form of organized religion, usually has charge of all cultic practices, the dire result in history has been that all of life falls under the hierarchical aegis. ...

The medieval church exercised such control over the whole life of its members through the priesthood, and it took the Protestant Reformation to break the stranglehold of the hierarchy in the Western world.

On the other hand, the danger of secularism, the denial that religion is significant for the whole of life, separating certain areas to which religion has no access, is equally false and pernicious. It constitutes a threat to modern culture and is essentially a false religion. ...

The radical, totalitarian character of religion is such, then, that it determines both man's *cultus* and his culture. That is to say, the conscious or unconscious relationship to God in a man's heart determines all of his activities, whether theoretical or practical. This is true of philosophy, which is based upon a non-theoretical, religious presupposition. Thus man's morality and economics, his jurisprudence and his aesthetics, are all religiously oriented and determined. This is why apostasy produces, not only a false religion, but also a false culture, namely a culture which does not seek God and serve him as the highest good. ...

This, then, is the problem for God's people in our day. Every pagan religion has its own cultural expression; medieval Christianity developed its own culture, albeit controlled by the church under sacerdotal tutelage. Ever since the advent of the Copernican, Darwinian, and Kantian revolutions, Humanism has introduced a new paganism, so that Christianity no longer controls the media of culture, and it is no longer the motivating power in the cultural urge of the West. Today the West faces a cultural crisis of the first magnitude. Our culture has been uprooted, because for most men God is dead. And the gods which men have made for themselves (like the idols of Micah in Judges 17-18) have failed, and what else is there left? This is the tragic cry not only of the Existentialist philosophers, poets, and playwrights, but of the mass-man of our day. (ibid, pp. 41-43)

Culture is therefore inescapable. Whether Christian or non-Christian, whether intentionally or not, by virtue of God's creation order, man builds a religious culture. It is what he does. The only decision, therefore, is whether we will build a godly or an evil one.

But to build a godly culture, we must first address a false gospel that robs God's people of their destiny in God's world.

Whose Gospel: The Gospel of God or 'The Gospel According to St. Evangelical'?

One is exclusively personal, the other is cosmic. Rooted in the Neo-Platonism of the Early Church Fathers, "The Gospel According to St. Evangelical" is a dualistic – two-tiered – gospel, placing the realm of *spirit* on a higher level than *matter*. The realm of matter is inherently evil, so the goal is to escape the gravitational pull of the world and get into the realm of the spirit. This then relegates 'worldly' affairs, *the world of culture and politics*, to autonomous man but *the world of the spirit* to God. Our job then is to populate heaven, not the earth. And to keep Christians out of the world, except, of course to evangelise. This is a gospel of *personal salvation* but never *cultural dominion*.

As already mentioned, it is a *truncated gospel*, addressing only one aspect of reality, man's eternal salvation, but ignoring the rest of God's multifaceted creation. It is thus a *neutered gospel*, resulting only in cultural impotence; it lacks power to change history and to renovate the world. But it does give rise to pietistic Christians. Those who are sincerely committed to encountering God, to personal holiness, to spiritual disciplines, to evangelism and church growth. But they remain blithely ignorant to the Bible's blueprints for society, even believing that social deterioration might hasten the Second Coming. As one noted preacher quipped, "Why polish the brass on a sinking ship!"

At best, out of Christian compassion they will seek to ameliorate human suffering through practical ministries of mercy. But, nevertheless, this gospel absolves them from building a Christian culture and hence from the Church's responsibility to teach nations to obey *all* that Christ *commanded* in *all* aspects of life—that is, to obey God's *covenant-law* which he has *not abrogated* (cf. Matt. 28:18-20; 5:17-19). It is, therefore, not only a *truncated* and *neutered* gospel but also an *antinomian* gospel—a gospel that wilfully misreads Paul by declaring "We are not under law but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). As a result, there is no comprehensive *world-and-life view*, no *blueprints* for politics, education, economics, sexuality, and so forth.

As a false gospel, it creates the *secular/sacred* divide, placing personal salvation and the church into the *sacred* and all else into the *secular*. When, in reality, God, at the creation, declared the world of matter as "good", as sacred, claiming it as his cosmic temple. As a result of the secular/sacred divide, the Gospel, the Kingdom, and the Church are cut off from the world. Apart from "good works", these are hermetically sealed off from changing anything in the secular zone, as if it were a religiously 'neutral' one, where Christians and non-Christians can get along. In fact, the 'Gospel according to St. Evangelical' says that, in that neutral zone of the secular, law and ethics can be arrived at through natural law and reason. In other words, Christianity does not provide concrete answers for the world.

And so, the Secularists and the Cultural Marxists have thanked us very much, and highjacked the sacred/secular and Church/State separation as a weapon against Christians. Using these categories, they aggressively force Christianity out of the public square and prosecute their 'bias free' agenda of 'inclusivity' across the whole of society. Whether it wants it or not. Such is Secularism. This has been achieved through Cultural Marxism's long march through the institutions, advancing their revolutionist agenda through guilt manipulation, posturing immorality as "social justice". Through the political, judicial, and media elites, they abuse the institutions of the parliament, the courts, and the free press to strike down laws grounded in the Christian precedents of English common law and reinterpret national constitutions conceived by the founding fathers in the womb of a Christian consensus, assuming its continuance. Those who seek to understand Western constitutions in light of what the framers actually meant are derisively called "originalists" and those who don't are lauded as "progressives". It has been well said, that "When a culture changes its god, it changes its laws".

The Church's myopic preoccupation with its own management and growth is, hence, christened as "Kingdom". This then replaces the Gospel of the Kingdom, and the Church's mandate to prosecute the "crown rights" of Christ the King in the world—in the cultural, in the civil, and in the political. It reduces the Kingdom to merely an interior one.

The Myth of Neutrality

Henry Van Til defines 'culture' as "religion externalized". Let us consider how this works. The word 'culture' is derived from Middle English, denoting a cultivated piece of land, and is originally from the Latin *colere*, 'to inhabit, care for, till, worship', and *cultus*, 'A cult, especially a religious one.'

Cultus (worship) produces *culture* (work). The direction of a nation's worship – that is, its ultimate reference point – whether the true and living God or a false god, determines the shape of the culture. And, because man is a covenant creature (i.e., religious), every culture moves in one of two antithetical directions to worship: either toward the *Creator* or toward the

creature. Toward the true religion or an apostate religion. Adam and Eve, as the first human society, adumbrate this choice: the choice between *covenant-keeping* or *covenant-breaking*. The choice of standing in judgement over God's word or standing in humility under its judgement. The latter gives thanks to the Creator, and thereby honours the Creator/creature distinction, while the former destroys it, with the creature becoming as god (Gen. 3:5). And so, man becomes autonomous, his own ultimate reference point.

Autonomy and the absolutization of man are thus the *religious* ground motive of Secular Humanism. As a result, the myth of Secularism is exposed—there is no neutrality. No neutral zone where reason disinterestedly determines what is right and true. As our Lord said, “Whoever is not with me is against me...” (Mt. 12:30). A demilitarised zone where Christians and non-Christians can agree does not exist. Secularism is as religiously committed, to its presuppositions, as Islam or Hari Krishna. The only choice is ever between true or apostate religion. It is noteworthy that the Greek lexicon (nor mind) had no category for an “idol” as *a false god*; this notion was peculiarly Hebrew. According to Thayer, *eidolon* (idol), “In Greek writings from Homer down, [refers to] an image, likeness, i.e. whatever represents the form of an object, either real or imaginary; used of the shades of the departed (in Homer), of apparitions, spectres, phantoms of the mind, etc.”. Why was this? Because the Greco-Roman culture was *itself* an idol. Without the revelation of Scripture and the operation of the Spirit, man, individually or corporately, cannot acknowledge this, having suppressed the truth of God in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18).

So, according to Protagoras, “Man is the measure of all things”. This ultimate commitment is the presupposition behind every false religion and belief-system. Autonomous man replaces the Son of God, becoming the ultimate standard by whom *all things* are measured and in whom *all things* cohere. Man is now his own Lord and Saviour, a pseudo-Christ. So, when a nation changes its God, it not only changes its culture but also its laws. The choice is, thus, not only between two antithetical religions but also between two antithetical law-systems: *theonomy* (God's law-word) or *autonomy* (man's law-word).

The Pagan Power-State and Modern Lawmakers

This autonomous law-system then finds its corporate expression in the state. But to appreciate the satanic spirit animating statist law, we must first appreciate the nature of the *pagan power-state*. The ancient world, as pointed out by Henry Van Til, conflated cultus (worship) and culture (work) through fear—fear of the visible and the invisible.

Pagan societies were thus sacral societies; all aspects of life were interwoven with and subjugated by its religion; there was no differentiation between religion and society. To belong to society was to belong to the religion, and vice versa. Because the Creator/creature distinction is destroyed through man's rebellion, the two categories collapse in on one another. Man and God coalesce. Hence religion and society likewise. Instead of the *Twoism* of the Creator and creature distinction, this then creates Monism – a *Oneism*—where man, the gods, and nature all fuse into one cosmic essence. With this *continuity of being* between *all things*, the universe becomes god. And man is trapped in a completely *immanentistic* world. This worldview then provides the substructure to all pagan belief and culture, extending from the ancient civilisations of Mesopotamia, Persia, India, and China to the post-Christian West, giving rise to the modern secular-state and its aspirations toward a one-world order.

So, this is where the notion of ancient kingship comes in to play. In a broken cosmos, the king functioned not only as god-king but also as priest-king, as an intermediary reconnecting heaven and earth. He was the personification of the new god. This explains why Israel's demand for a king like the other nations, in 1 Samuel 8, was so treasonous. In the ancient world it was he who mediated the powers of the cosmos to the people in their ascent through the *chain of being* to pure being, reabsorption into the divine. As the god-man he was the lightning-rod between heaven and earth, in whom all things cohered. The domain of the god-king was thus one universal and cosmic social order. Membership in which was mediated through compliance to the king's absolute authority. While there was no actual doctrine of the state to distinguish it from the rest of the social order, the pagan power-state, nevertheless, came into being. Human autonomy results in human tyranny, in absolute state power—beyond which there is no appeal.

For example, Augustus Caesar, in addition to the title of *Caesar* also carried the title of *Pontifex Maximus*; he was not only the head of State but also High Priest of the state cult. Caesar was thus heralded as Lord and Saviour. Virgil wrote of Augustus: “This is the man, the one who has been promised again and again” and “The turning-point of the ages has come.” At his ‘Advent’ in 17 BC it was proclaimed: “Salvation is to be found in none other save Augustus, and there is no other name given to men in which they can be saved”. Peter's appropriation of these very words for Christ the Saviour in Acts 4:12 was therefore a declaration of war against the messianic claims of Rome. In fact, this proclamation of Augustus was called the *euangélion*, and was thus the word appropriated under inspiration for the Christian Gospel—the *Gospel of God* set in antithesis

to the *Gospel of Man*, and his false claims to sovereignty and salvation. The first question confronting the early Christians was who was Lord: Christ or Caesar? Christ's lordship, by the very nature of the case, is therefore political, whatever our position on Christianity and politics. Christianity thus injected into human history its only source of true liberty. "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (Jn. 8:36).

A king rules through his law. So man's false claim to sovereignty is exercised through law-making. In rebellion against God and his law-word, man's law-word is now absolute. Once sovereignty is claimed the source of law is settled. And so, man's sovereignty devolves to the king, and from the king to the apparatus of state. They are the exclusive source of law. This then becomes the law of the Medes and Persians. Absolute and inescapable, against which there is no appeal. By contrast biblical law is transcendent, coming from above. Man is then *interpreter* not *originator* of the law. As *God's* law, man is not therefore absolute. It is not a tyranny of man over man. Consequently all claims to law-making, from the ancient pagan state to the modern state, are false claims to sovereignty and godhood.

This explains the West's current orgy of law-making. Tacitus well said, "The more corrupt the state, the more numerous the laws". For example, Tony Blair's socialist Labour government of the United Kingdom created more than 3,000 new criminal offences during its nine-year tenure (1997-2007), one for almost every day it was in power. Suffering cultural amnesia, the West has lost any notion of transcendent law in the God of the Bible. Despite Secularism's pretensions as non-religious, it is a recrudescence of the ancient Near Eastern god-king, ruling by decree. The twentieth century's statist experiments – Marxist and Fascist – are the result. Moreover, the messianic claims of the contemporary Secular-Humanist elite, in the name of "social justice", of "diversity and inclusivity", is more of the same ad nauseum, dictating to the masses the elite's *fiat* reality.

Consequently, the Western world has been plunged into an Orwellian dystopia where: against all scientific rationality, non-biological gender preference is enforced by law, even to the point of "gender free" birth certificates and public toilets; primary age school children are subjected to queer theory, psychologically abusing them in the name of "safe-schools"; in defiance of birth-assigned biological sex and of binary male-female categories, pansexuality is the new norm where the individual is no longer hampered by biological facts (nor even new gender-fluid categories), humankind having now evolved to a category-free level beyond good and evil, where romantic love is all-inclusive; marriage as a creation ordinance between a man and a woman is struck down by the courts and legislature; and the death policies of assisted-suicide, euthanasia, and abortion are perversely enshrined in law as "human rights" and acts of "compassion". And because the binary nature of truth and error has not only been subverted in the academy but also in the popular culture, the courts and legislature have decreed that to preach biblical absolutes in the face of this new morality (i.e., the same old immorality) is "hate speech"; which then comes under the criminal code in some jurisdictions, with serious jail terms attached.

The *Gospel of Man*, prevailing in the body politic, through force of law, deconstructs creation categories and, hence, reality as a life-sustaining structure, proving to be a gospel of self-destruction, of de-creation and death—indeed, of self-murder.

Under God's covenant dealings, the West has been handed over to her own devices (see Rom. 18-32; 11:22). Human autonomy results in human tyranny.

An Apostolic Response

So, where does this leave us? So goes the church, so goes the culture. Because the church has forsaken the devotion of her youth, seeking after worthless things, she has herself become worthless (Jer. 2). Called as "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15 KJV), through her own defection, she has stolen "the truth" from society. Therefore, any attempt at repentance will entail a return to the God of the Bible, and thus to the Apostles' Doctrine (Acts 2:42), and to the historic Creeds of the Church, as articulations of that doctrine. No prophecy is of private interpretation (2 Pet. 1:20). Humility demands that we submit ourselves to historic orthodoxy and to the Church as the *interpretive community*. Otherwise we succumb to the arrogance of the contemporary. The Nicene, Chalcedonian, and Athanasian Creeds, in particular, laid the foundation not only of the Church universally but also of Western liberty.

Our response therefore is to appropriate the full significance of the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20. God's plan of history moves *from Creation to De-Creation to Re-Creation*. He has purposed to restore the created order not only to its original functioning order but beyond. The biblical law of restitution extends to sevenfold. As the prophet declares, the glory of the latter house shall be greater than the former. The earth will be restored as God's cosmic temple. As our Lord taught us to pray, "Your Kingdom come *on earth* as it is in heaven". God's purpose is an *earth-purpose*.

The Great Commission is exactly that. It is a restatement and renewal of the original Creation Mandate to *cultivate* the earth (Gen. 2:15), as it were, the Re-Creation Mandate:

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18–20

As we have seen, the etymology of the word 'culture' is significant. From the Latin *colere* 'tend, cultivate'; and thus, we have such words such as 'agriculture' and 'viticulture'. And from this, arose 'cultivation of the mind, of faculties, of manners'; that is, human culture, from the high culture of the arts and learning to economics, social ethics, law, politics, and so forth.

Grounded in its original meaning of land cultivation, of adding value to raw elements (seed and soil) by making a superior product (bread and wine), the Creation or Cultural Mandate entails stewarding God's gifts to *increase* benefit to mankind, to produce (i.e., multiply) and perfect (i.e., mature) the gifts that God has given. However, with man's rebellion the ground was cursed, according to the covenant, and his ability to cultivate it was affected (Gen. 3:17-19). However, the “last Adam” became that curse for us (Gal. 3:13), terminating sin's effect on creation (Rom. 8), so that a redeemed humanity may fulfil its dominion task.

It was whole nations that Jesus received as his inheritance at the Ascension (Ps. 2). And so, the Great Commission is the reiteration of God's original purpose for humankind: the Cultural Mandate of Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15. But more than that, under a better administration, it operates through the Son after the power of an endless life, renewing and filling the earth with his manifest glory.

So, Christ's mandate to his Church is threefold: Governmental, Sacramental, and Educational. She is to discipline, baptise, and teach the nations (Mt. 28:18-20). Although seated as fellow-heir with Christ, the King-Priest, she is sent to the nations as emissary and vice-regent. Carrying his royal mandate, she prosecutes his “crown rights” in the earth; and this she does through her priestly ministry of Word and Sacrament. However, this is her corporate ministry to the world, not to herself. The nations are to be immersed in the Word of God; they are to be washed – that is, sanctified – by the water of the Word. But which word, only the NT? Paul declares that, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). Not just some of it. This means that *all* the OT is profitable for teaching, including *the Law*. And if I may say so, especially the law. Because the modern church has rejected the law of God, man's law has filled the vacuum. The nations have rushed headlong after humanistic and positivist law, law as a social construct, only because the Church has forsaken God's commands and statutes. We have preached a *lawless* Gospel and produced a *lawless* result. In fact, a Gospel without Law is no gospel at all! It is a gutless gospel. The Law of God is the very intestinal strength of the Gospel; without its binding force there is no need for Christ's propitiatory death, nor for eternal judgement. If the Law is not still in force, he died in vain, and so theologians must invent, for example, the “moral example” and “Christus victor” theories of the atonement to explain the cross. This then produces a gospel of human potential only—of psychological pep talks that we might be “our best selves”!

Rather, Christ commands us to teach the nations “to observe *all* that I have *commanded* you”. As our Lord himself made patently clear, he did not come to *abrogate the law*, and warns against those who teach that some commandments are inconsequential, promising that the person who does so will be likewise in the Kingdom of God (Mt. 5:17-19). Marcionism, promoting radical discontinuity between Law and Gospel, between OT and NT, was anathematised by the Church in AD 144. And yet, the caricature that Marcion first postulated of the OT angry God and the NT loving God is still alive and well.

God's purpose for creation is now consummated in the new creation. For God has purposed, in the new epoch:

... that ***through the church*** the manifold wisdom of God might ***now*** be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 3:10

This multi-faceted wisdom of God is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:30), who is the consummation and embodiment of God's holy law as the radiance of his glory. God's word, *incarnate* and *inscripturate*, is the wisdom of God for all spheres of creation, indeed, for the governance of the nations:

See, **I have taught you statutes and rules**, as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. **Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples**, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?

Deuteronomy 4:5-8 (see also Isa. 2:2-4)

The implications of this are revolutionary: Israel, as a covenant society, is God's prototype not only for the Church but also the nations—in Paul's words, she is "a light to those who are in darkness" (Rom. 2:19).

This is the crux of Paul's whole theological vision in his epistle to the Romans: the victory of Christ in history through the Gospel (i.e., before the Second Coming), comprehensively applied (i.e., to the totality of life); it is the wisdom of God displayed *now* through a new humanity, the New Covenant *ecclesia*. This is the Kingdom of God here and now, *in* the New Covenant age. The *corporate* Christ is destined to be both the *demonstration* and *proclamation* of God's wisdom to the world—as a new society transformed through individual regeneration and justification, ultimately leavening civil society and its laws. The Church is thus the agent of the Kingdom of God coming to earth, the rectification of the broken cosmos.

Sphere Sovereignty

We are building here on the foundation of Abraham Kuyper, theologian, prime minister of the Netherlands and founder of the Free University of Amsterdam. Rooted in Calvin's emphasis on the sovereignty of God, Kuyper developed the notion of Sphere Sovereignty; that the Triune God as Creator and Redeemer, is sovereign over all spheres of human existence, and that each sphere is in turn sovereign under God, meaning that no sphere may usurp that of another, as this would then constitute a tyranny.

Biblical Pluralism: Four Covenantal Institutions

The paragraphs below explain how these insights have been supplemented by new scholarship, historical and theological, on the issue of covenant. Of strategic note is the work of Ray Sutton in his book, *That You May Prosper: Dominion Through Covenant*, in which he shows the four institutions with which God makes covenant: the Individual, Family, Church, and State. He then argues that covenantal obedience in each sphere will bring gradual cultural dominion, fulfilling the Creation Mandate and bringing prosperity to society. Every other sphere of human activity arcs from one or more of the four: for example, biblical economics arcs out primarily from the individual, the family, and in measure the church (but interestingly not the state, apart from no-confiscatory taxation).

There is also a principle of Kingdom *increase* associated with these spheres (Isa. 9:7). This is a principle of *internal integrity leading to external integration*. That is to say, an individual with internal integrity, spiritual and mental health, will integrate externally with the next sphere in God's created order, the family, and so it goes progressively from family, to church, to state. It is the coming of the Kingdom in "first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear" (Mk. 4:28).

In this way it guarantees that the Kingdom of God comes to the state and the nation through regeneration, not revolution. This is why Jesus said, "My kingdom is not *of* this world. If my kingdom were *of* this world, my servants would have been fighting..." (Jn. 18:36). The word "of" serves as a preposition of origin, signifying that the Kingdom of God originates from above not below, from God not men, and therefore has authority over men. Our Lord is stating precisely the opposite of what many wrongly claim for this verse; that he is teaching that the Kingdom has no bearing upon culture and politics. Rather, his point is that the Kingdom comes from above, not below, and thus has authority over men who are below. And hence, the Kingdom has no need of human force; it comes supernaturally through Word and Spirit working in the hearts of men. This is also why he taught us to pray, "Your kingdom come on earth ...as it is in heaven" (Mt. 6:10). So, while the Kingdom is not political in origin, it does come to bear upon it.

Charles Spurgeon, the great Victorian evangelical hero, was no Marcion nor Antinomian, declaring squarely that the law of God still applies, and especially to politics:

I long for the day when the precepts of the Christian religion shall be the rule among all classes of men and all transactions. I often hear it said, 'do not bring religion into politics.' This is precisely where it ought to be brought and set there in the face of all men as on a candlestick. I would have the cabinet and members of Parliament do the work of the nation as before the Lord. ...

Prompted by the *Education Bill* of 1870, Spurgeon published his Christian political manifesto in which he poses, "are not all mankind under law to God, and where and when did the king of all the earth announce that nations were to be free from His control, and free from all recognition of His existence and authority." Spurgeon was a believer in the sovereignty of God over *all* of life and that to *not* honour his laws in the civil and political spheres was a *de facto* establishment of religious atheism.

So, it is within the Church's sovereign sphere to teach each of the spheres, including the political, their biblically delimited role under God. This is where the whole Word of God (Law and Gospel) applies to the whole of life. Therefore, Christ, as the word of God, rules each sphere through the Church's ministry of teaching. Put simply, *Christ is Lord of all, or not at all.*

Kingdom through Covenant

The discovery of the fivefold covenant structure of Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) suzerainty treaties has provided a ground-breaking insight, confirming the Bible's own pattern of the biblical covenants. Meredith G. Kline, following on the heels of the archaeological publications of Mendenhall (1955), Wiseman (1948), and Baltzer (1960), demonstrated in *The Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* (1963) how the suzerainty treaty structure is evident in the Pentateuch and the book of Deuteronomy, in particular. He shows how Deuteronomy was, in effect, a legal document between Yahweh and Israel. This fivefold ANE treaty structure shows the victorious suzerain forming a treaty with his vassal king, so as to establish: 1) his supremacy; 2) his authority; 3) his laws; 4) his punishments and rewards; and 5) his succession.

How might this work in God's relationship to man? With Christ as our victorious King and we his vassals, the covenant arrangement is clear: 1) he has sovereignly and graciously established covenant relationship with us, the Creator with the creature; 2) he has established his authority in his Word and delegated it through his servants, ministers of the Gospel and ministers of the State; 3) he has given his law as the standard of covenant obedience and justice; including, 4) penal sanctions, blessings and curses for obedience and disobedience; and finally, 5) provided for the continuity of his reign through the promulgation of the Gospel and through godly families, churches, and culture.

Others have built on the initial ANE breakthrough scholarship. As mentioned already, most importantly Ray Sutton's, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant* (1987), provided another breakthrough, comprehensively applying the fivefold covenant structure to each of the four biblical covenant institutions: the Individual, the Family, the Church, and the State; demonstrating, in fulfilment of the Dominion Mandate of Genesis 1:26-28, how covenant obedience works as God's way for man's dominion over creation.

Contra to the assumption of liberal criticism that the biblical covenants imitate the ANE suzerainty treaty, clearly the shoe fits on the other foot—the ANE treaty is, rather, an adumbration of God's primeval arrangement with man through Adam and later renewed through Noah. It depends on whether one starts with the presupposition of naturalism or of supernaturalism, of belief or unbelief. The presupposition of biblical supernaturalism views the creation order as normative for man, hence, the imprint of God's arrangement in Adam will be reflected in all human relationships.

This covenant structure is integral to the *Gospel of the Kingdom of God* (Matt. 4:23; Luke 16:16). But how do we understand God's "Kingdom"? Because most modern nations are no longer ruled by kings it may be helpful to, instead, use the synonym, *government*. The next question is, *How do modern governments function?* And here is my point. Those human governments that respect the rule of law, that limit state power, and that protect individual rights and freedoms are what we call *constitutional* governments. History has demonstrated that *constitutionalism*, unique to the Western tradition, has produced nations that promote human dignity and material prosperity. The Kingdom of God, or synonymously, the *government* of God, likewise, is a *constitutional* government. It too has a legal document upon which its government functions. God has given mankind this in the Bible. *It is* the constitution of the government of God. And that constitution is in the form of a *covenant*,

which is why the Bible is comprised of what is called the Old and New Testament, or ‘Covenant’. Covenant is, hence, the warp and woof of the Bible, of God’s dealings with man in redemptive history.

However, there is one crucial distinction between human and divine covenants: God’s covenant is completely *unilateral*. He has not entered into bilateral talks with an equal so as to negotiate mutually acceptable terms. Rather, as the sovereign Creator-God, he has condescended to the human estate, the Creator to the creature. God the Almighty, crudely stated, is, in fact, a *benevolent despot*. He is the “LORD God” (Gen. 2:4, 5, 7, 9, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22; 3:1, 8, 9, 13, 14, 21, 22, 23). In terms of the ANE treaty, God is the Sovereign King, victorious but beneficent, graciously granting mercy and dictating favourable terms for the relationship. It is not a meeting of equals; but, rather, the initiative of a superior toward an inferior or subordinate. The ANE vassal treaty, unlike, modern bilateral covenants and contracts, reflects this unilateral nature of God’s covenant with man.

Consequently, the Bible is the law-word of the King. As sovereign Creator, he rules over the whole of life, over the totality of human existence. His word is, therefore, all-encompassing, providing a comprehensive world-and-life view. God in Christ, as the *Logos*, the Word, inaugurates a new order, the New Creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Through regeneration his reign begins in self-government with a ripple-effect through all spheres of life: family, church, and culture—the entire cosmos. As the Creator-Redeemer God, he declares that the world of matter is *good* and therefore matters (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). And so, he is redeeming it through the Gospel as the ‘New Heavens and New Earth’—in fact, as ‘Paradise Restored’. This, Romans, in particular, proclaims: it is *the apostolic manifesto of salvation and cultural dominion*.

The Role of Apostles

In closing, a word must be said concerning the role of apostles as stewards of the “faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Christ sends apostles to the nations with the mandate and prime responsibility for not only the expansion but also the continuity of Christ’s Kingdom on earth. This is pre-eminently a teaching mandate and ministry (Mt. 28:18-20). A revelation of God and his purpose was given universally to the first apostles and inscripturated, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as sacred text. God’s purpose is cosmic in scope, to “restore all things” in his Son, providing biblical blueprints for every sphere of life.

It, therefore, behoves Christian ministers, as teachers, to perpetuate the *whole* Gospel from the *whole* Word for the *whole* of Creation. Christianity has content, a body of truth, which is to be conveyed to each generation (2 Tim. 2:2). This is the true meaning of “apostolic succession”. It is not the succession of apostolic office, but of the apostolic faith. *This* is our stewardship!

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