

A photograph of a cemetery in winter. The ground is covered in a layer of snow. Numerous dark, rectangular tombstones are scattered across the scene, casting long, dark shadows to the right. In the background, there are bare trees and a clear blue sky. A bright sun is visible at the top center, creating a strong lens flare effect with rays of light extending across the sky.

# Dealing with Loss

March 2013

Ordained Servant

# Ordained Servant Online

## *A Journal for Church Officers*

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### **DEALING WITH LOSS: SUICIDE, INFANTS, AND SPOUSES**

**March 2013**

#### *From the Editor*

Death is ubiquitous and inescapable. It is an omnipresent reminder that we live in a fallen world under God's wrath and curse. "This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead." (Eccl. 9:3). The gospel gives us present and ultimate comfort because death has been overcome in history by our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ.

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. (1 Thess. 4:13–14)

But, while Christians do not grieve as others do, they *do* grieve. Grief is one of the most difficult and heart-rending human experiences.

The series of articles on ministry to the dying and grieving in *Ordained Servant*, a series which began in 2010 (see "From the Archives" below), continues in this issue. Brad Winsted gives us a moving chronicle of his grief over the loss of his wife, Fawn, in "A Road of Grief, Part 1." This is the first of a three part series.

Sometimes grief is even more complicated than usual. Suicide and infant death add grief to grief. Hospice Chaplain Gordon Cook explores these types of grief in his article, "Suicide: A Complicated Grief," and his book review of Glenda Mathes's *Little One Lost: Living with Early Infant Loss*.

On another topic, David VanDrunen responds to the new book *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective*. I say responds, rather than reviews, because he is seen by the authors of the book as the chief proponent of the two kingdom perspective. I hope that our discussion of this important topic will shed more light than heat, as we each seek to live within the breadth and boundaries of our confessional commitment.

Remember, that, while I have my own point of view on debatable issues, I am always open to consider publishing well-written pieces from another perspective.

Finally, life for the Christian is an up-hill battle, and church officers in particular may become especially weary in this good fight of faith. I hope Christina Rossetti's "Up-Hill" will be an encouragement to our readers.

Blessings in the Lamb,  
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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*Ordained Servant* exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high quality editorials, articles, and book reviews we endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

# ServantWork

## Suicide: A Complicated Grief

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by Gordon H. Cook, Jr.

Jim had come to check on his father, Ken, at the apartment half a mile down the road from the big farmhouse where Jim and his family lived. His father had not been feeling well for some time, suffering from chronic lung disease. Each morning before heading off to work Jim would knock on the door to be sure his father was up. This morning Ken did not answer when Jim knocked, so Jim used his key to open the door. There he found his father, lying in a pool of blood, his hunting rifle underneath his body.

About every sixteen minutes in America a person takes his or her own life.<sup>1</sup> More than 36,000 Americans commit suicide each year, and about 465,000 people receive medical care for self-inflicted injuries. Men are more likely to kill themselves, though women attempt suicide at similar rates. Men tend to use more lethal and violent means. Suicide has become the tenth leading cause of death in the United States. While those who are committed to a church or faith community have a lower incidence of suicide attempts and suicide,<sup>2</sup> Christians are not immune from the strong temptation which comes with severe depression or the unexpected stress which life sometimes brings.

For the families and friends left behind, suicide has a stunning impact, unlike any other form of grief.

### Complicated Grief

Suicide almost always precipitates complicated grief.<sup>3</sup> This grief is intense, debilitating, and unlikely to resolve without pastoral or other professional support.

Jim helped plan the funeral for his father. Through the service and interment, Jim remained strong for his family. He reflected the solid Christian faith which his father had imparted to him. His father was well known and loved in the community, so the service was well attended and the family received a great deal of support. Jim appeared to grieve appropriately and within a few weeks returned to his work as a community leader. We saw each other regularly, and he gave every appearance of having resolved his grief quite successfully.

It was more than a year and a half later, on a day in late spring, that we were riding up through the back hills of the rural community in his pickup. Jim stopped by a stone wall

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<sup>1</sup> The 2011 statistics are from the Centers for Disease Control. In 2022, 49,476 Americans lost their lives to suicide <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/suicide.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Kanita Dervic, et al., "Religious Affiliation and Suicide Attempt," *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 161, no. 12 (Dec. 2004): 2393–98.

<sup>3</sup> See my article, "A Pastoral Response to Complicated Grief," *Ordained Servant* 20 (2011): 60–65.

and got out to admire it. He noted that his father had built that wall with stones cleared from the fields below. Suddenly he turned to look up the valley towards his farm house. Then he cried out with a haunting cry that still rings in my ears many years later. He then turned to me and for the first time ever, he hugged me, clinging as tightly as he could. I held him as he sobbed uncontrollably for what seemed like hours, but was probably only minutes. When he calmed, we prayed. Jim still struggles with his grief from time to time. It's the little things that remind him of his father and trigger intense grief. Jim is surrounded by his father's quality woodwork throughout his house.

Grieving a suicide brings with it a unique set of feelings. There is statistical evidence that those who have lost loved ones to suicide have a very difficult time handling their grief.<sup>4</sup> This is supported by the many stories and books on the subject, all of which offer common themes. Survivors speak of feelings of abandonment, rejection, and betrayal; intense anger; shame; fear; a need to assign blame; strong feelings of regret and guilt.<sup>5</sup> Two thoughts tend to dominate the thinking of those left behind. "Why?" and "If only I had . . ." But the only person who could answer either of these is no longer available to provide those answers.

The complications of grief are increased if the survivor discovered the body, or worse, witnessed the event.

## **The Stigma of Suicide**

One common experience among families who experience the suicide of a loved one is the perceived need to make up a story which will explain the death in some other way. The first funeral I ever performed as a pastor was for a young man who had been in an "automobile accident." I comforted the grieving widow, consoled family members and friends, and gently shared the gospel with the crowd which gathered at the graveside. It was years later that I learned that the authorities suspected that Bill had intentionally driven his pickup into the tree.

There is a social stigma which is associated with suicide in western societies. This stigma of suicide is found in Roman society, predating the rise of Christianity.<sup>6</sup> The early church Fathers condemned suicide, though at the same time defended voluntary martyrdom. It was Augustine's statement, "those guilty of their own death are not received after death into that better life"<sup>7</sup> which became the law of the church throughout the Middle Ages. Yet even Augustine struggled with the suicide of a godly woman, Lucretia, because she was unable to endure the horror of the foul indignity perpetrated against her.<sup>8</sup> Augustine approached the issue with due caution noting that he would not "claim to judge the secrets of the heart."

The church of the Middle Ages engaged in a variety of superstitious abuses against the bodies of those who had committed suicide.<sup>9</sup> Most theologians of that period denied any possibility of salvation for one who died in such sin. Martin Luther viewed suicide as

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<sup>4</sup> William J. Worden, *Grief Counseling & Grief Therapy* (New York: Springer, 1991), 33.

<sup>5</sup> Worden, 93-95.

<sup>6</sup> The information in this section comes from Georges Minois, *History of Suicide: Voluntary Death in Western Culture* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, Book 1, Chapter 26 (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1986), 38.

<sup>8</sup> Augustine, 29.

<sup>9</sup> Minois, 34-37.

demonic in character. His assertion that suicide was a murder committed by the devil continued to perpetuate the stigma, while actually relieving victims of at least some responsibility for their deaths. Calvin and most of the Protestant Reformers simply reaffirmed Augustine's view that suicide was a violation of the Sixth Commandment and as such, serious sin, without supporting the superstitious excesses of the medieval church.<sup>10</sup>

In the struggle among English Puritans, Anglicans, and Roman Catholics, the issue of suicide became a polemical weapon. As such the rhetoric regarding suicide was escalated. There was a tendency to demonize the act, as Luther did. When prominent representatives of the various religious movements succumbed to the pressure of intense persecution and torture, they were held up as examples of the demonic character of their religious cause.<sup>11</sup> It is, in part, from this conflict that we have inherited the strongly conflicted feelings about suicide that are still shown in American society today. Suicide remains a taboo subject, rarely discussed, even more rarely acknowledged.

## Grace

Our Catechism reflects the view of Calvin, but neither the excesses of superstition nor the polemic described above. The Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 69 reads, "What is forbidden in the sixth commandment?" The answer given is that "The sixth commandment forbiddeth the taking away of our own life, or the life of our neighbor, unjustly, or whatsoever tendeth thereunto." According to Scripture and our confessional standard, suicide is a serious sin, a violation of commandment of God, and ought to be avoided. Notice that the catechism leaves room for a just taking away of our own life, perhaps with a thought to Samson, who intentionally brought the house down upon himself in order to gain victory over his enemies and to bring glory to God (Judges 16:28–30). Suicide is serious sin. Does this mean that a person who commits suicide cannot enter glory?

God's Word suggests otherwise. Jesus assures his disciples, saying, "Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven" (Matt. 12:31). Most Reformed exegetes would understand "blasphemy against the Spirit" as willfully and deliberately ascribing to Satan what belongs to the Holy Spirit.<sup>12</sup> We should not miss the grace spoken in this passage,

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<sup>10</sup> Minois, 72.

<sup>11</sup> Minois, 73–74.

<sup>12</sup> William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 529; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 318–19; D. A. Carson, *Matthew, The Expositors Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Regency, 1984), 291; C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Mark, The Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 141–42, though Cranfield allows that the text may also point to apostasy, a turning away from Christ and his teachings. William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 145, offers a slight alteration, "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit denotes the conscious and deliberate rejection of the saving power and grace of God released through Jesus' word and act." I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 517, though Marshall also allows that "the NT reflects a less strict earlier usage; here the word refers to 'the conscious and wicked rejection of the saving power and grace of God towards man.' "

promising that all other sins will be forgiven to those who trust in Christ alone for salvation.

This reminds us that the entrance to glory is through Christ alone, and not through our own works. It is the finished work of Christ on the cross that secures our redemption. His blood avails for each and every sin of those who trust in him. And his love, demonstrated in his sacrifice for us, is such that nothing, not even our sin, can separate us from that love.

One sin, one failure to resist temptation, one impulsive act, does not undo our union with Christ and the blessings which this brings. Our eternal security does not hang upon our perfect obedience at every point in life. To the contrary, our security is found in the sovereign mercy and grace of God, secured for us by Christ upon the cross and at the empty tomb. “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

This grace should not lead any to sin. Presuming upon the grace of God is forbidden in his Word (Rom. 6:1–2). Nevertheless, it is Christ’s perfect obedience and righteousness which alone secures for us eternal life and all other blessings of salvation. Even a violation of the Sixth Commandment can and will be forgiven for those who by faith are united with Christ in his death and resurrection.

As to the stigma of suicide, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’ ” (Gal. 3:13). This is our confidence when we stand before God, “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool” (Isa. 1:18).

We would all do well to heed Augustine’s caution, and not presume to judge the heart of another. That judgment belongs to God alone (Heb. 4:12; 1 Sam. 16:7).

## **A Pastoral Approach to Those Tempted by Suicide**

As pastors we meet the issue of suicide in two distinct ways. We counsel some who are depressed and who struggle with suicidal thoughts and impulses. Many of us have also faced the need to comfort families stunned by the loss of a loved one by his or her own hand.

Often suicidal people will confess their struggles to their pastor. This confession is both an expression of despair and a cry for help. Any statement that someone is contemplating suicide should be taken with the utmost seriousness.

There are risk factors which serve as warning signs<sup>13</sup> to the listening ears of a faithful shepherd.

- A family history of suicide
- A history of mistreatment as a child
- Prior suicide attempts
- A history of depression or other mental disorders
- Alcohol or substance abuse

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<sup>13</sup> Adapted from the material provided by the Centers for Disease Control website ([www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/riskprotectivefactors.html](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/riskprotectivefactors.html) ).

- Feelings of hopelessness
- Impulsive or aggressive tendencies
- Isolation from other people
- Indication that the person has recently discontinued medications or treatment relating to mental health issues
- Experience of loss (broken relationships, unemployment, significant financial loss)
- Physical illness or disability
- Easy access to lethal methods
- Uneasiness in seeking help
- A sudden peace in a person who has been deeply depressed

Active listening gives way to frank conversation. The loving pastor will warn the suicidal person against rash and sinful actions. Like Paul to the Philippian jailor, we cry out: “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here” (Acts 16:28). We call men and women to “choose life, that you and your offspring may live” (Deut. 30:19). I remember being asked by a family to talk with their father. After the death of his wife, he became depressed and often spoke of wishing to end his life. I shared the story of Ken and his son, Jim, and urged him to choose life for the sake of his family. Several months later I received a letter from his daughter thanking me, noting that his discussion with me had proven to be a turning point for him, as he affirmed life and gave up his thoughts of ending his life.

There is no aid in overcoming depression, however, like a focus on the grace of God and his abiding love for us in Christ. This is the ultimate motivation for living for the sake of others.

Pastoral support doesn’t end with one crisis, but provides ongoing care, often by guiding the suicidal person to the professional help which can effectively treat his or her depression and address the life stresses which have brought the person to this point. One helpful tool in this is the national suicidal crisis or emotional distress hotline, 1-800-273-8255 (TALK). This hotline can connect those who are suicidal with host of resources associated with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Surgeon General’s office.

In many states, members of the clergy, along with child care workers, medical professionals, law enforcement officers, social workers, mental health professionals, and educators are considered mandatory reporters. This means, in part, that the pastor is required by law to report people who are a potential danger to themselves or others. In Maine, the pastor is encouraged to seek to persuade such people to get help, physically take them to a facility where help may be obtained, obtain a promise from them that they will not kill themselves, or if these fail, to report the matter by calling the state hotline: 1-888-568-1112. Each of you should know what reporting requirements your state places upon you as a religious professional and as a church. You should seek to comply with these requirements as fully as is possible.

## **A Pastoral Approach to the Survivors**

Our focus in this article is on the second setting, the comfort of those who have lost loved ones to suicide. Here are some suggestions which you may find helpful.

- Be the safe person with whom the survivor may talk.
- Be present with the person who is suffering. That is, be like Job's friends when they sat with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights, without speaking a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great (Job 2:13). Had they left it there, they might have avoided being condemned (Job 42:7).
- Listen with empathy and compassion, comforting others with the comfort you yourself have received from God (to paraphrase 2 Cor. 1:4).
- Encourage the church to be a safe and compassionate community, weeping with those who weep (Rom 12:15).
- Let the grieving person lead in the dance surrounding the issue of the suicide itself. They will need to talk through their experiences and feelings, but only when they are ready and feel that it is safe to do so.<sup>14</sup>

Many survivors will need the help of a trained counselor or suicide survivors support group. Both are available in urban areas, but not so readily in rural areas. You may discover that in your community there is the nucleus of such a support group. Consider getting the training needed to facilitate such a group. This training is often available through your local hospice agency.

William Worden outlines the approach that a professional grief counselor would take in caring for a grieving survivor.<sup>15</sup>

- A professional counselor would reality test the guilt and blame which are common among survivors. If there were inappropriate or sinful actions or neglect, then confession and forgiveness are available for those in Christ.
- Most professionals agree that families and friends should be encouraged to face the truth with honesty. This means avoiding the myth-making which is so common as a response to suicide. It also means avoiding the euphemisms and stating what happened in concrete and accurate terms.
- The counselor will explore the impact the suicide will have upon the survivor and how the person will cope with these expected outcomes.
- The counselor will work through the anger issues which are common, allowing the anger to be expressed while reinforcing personal controls which the survivor has over these feelings.
- The counselor will also talk through the issues of abandonment and rejection, which are also common feelings.

Heather Hays encourages survivors to write a letter to their deceased love one.<sup>16</sup> These prove to be very powerful for survivors and can be helpful in beginning the healing process.

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<sup>14</sup> I am indebted for many of these suggestions and insights to Albert Y. Hsu, *Grieving a Suicide, A Loved One's Search for Comfort, Answers & Hope* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2002). Hsu's book is perhaps the closest to a distinctively Christian response to suicide.

<sup>15</sup> This material is drawn from Worden, 96–97.

Providing pastoral support or counseling may help the survivor to cope with the pain of grief, the “sorrow upon sorrow” (Phil. 2:27). Complicated grief does not resolve quickly. It will likely take years of support. But then, this is the role of the faithful shepherd of God’s flock to provide compassionate support for as long as it is needed.

## Conclusion

Carla Fine writes of the days following her husband’s suicide.

In my mourning, I . . . wanted to be like everyone else. I wanted my family and friends to comfort me, not to question me about why Harry had killed himself. I wanted to grieve my husband’s absence, not analyze his reasons for dying. I wanted to celebrate his kindness and friendship throughout our twenty-one years of marriage, not to rage at him for abandoning me in the prime of our lives.

The suicide of a loved one irrevocably transforms us. Our world explodes, and we are never the same.<sup>17</sup>

Suicide inevitably changes those who survive. Only by God’s grace can it produce spiritual growth, “so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:7).

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<sup>16</sup> Heather Hays, *Surviving Suicide: Help to Heal Your Heart* (Dallas: Brown Books, 2005), xv.

<sup>17</sup> Carla Fine, *No Time to Say Goodbye, Surviving the Suicide of a Loved One* (New York: Broadway Books, 1997), 20. Fine’s book is not written from a distinctively Christian perspective, but is strongly endorsed by professionals working in this area, and is comprehensive while remaining readable, targeted to the grieving survivor.

# ServantLiving

## A Road of Grief, Part 1

### When Sorrow Strikes Home (December 2009)

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by Brad Winsted

The following three articles were written around the illness, death (June, 2010), and my grieving for my wife, Fawn Winsted. We were married thirty-two wonderful years and had eight children. It has been said that we grieve deeply because of our unique capacity to love deeply as humans created in the image of God. Grief is a testimony to our capacity to give a part of ourselves to another human being. When that human being is taken away permanently from us in death, a part of us dies with that person. It is a gut-wrenching, soul searching, agonizing process of adjustment that we call bereavement or grieving. Being made “one in Christ” in a Christian marriage probably makes it even more difficult in one way, yet it gives us the real hope that we will see this person again and that he or she is in a better place by far.

Every person grieves differently, because we are all so different. Our marital experiences are different, our faith is different, our relationship with Jesus is different. If we have loved deeply for a long time, then it would follow that our grief would also be deep and long. As a famous Christian hymn writer, William Cowper, once said, “Grief itself is a medicine.” A medicine of recovery, and so it is with me as I wrote these three articles (especially the last one) over a two-and-a-half-year time span, from the discovery of Fawn’s cancer to her death, and then looking back on her death.

The main characters of these articles are not perfect, but flawed. However, God took these two people—Brad and Fawn—and crafted a story of grace, forgiveness, and hope in a Christian marriage. Victor Hugo stated, that, “The supreme happiness in life is the conviction that we were loved.” Fawn loved me like no other, and I, her. I often introduced Fawn as my “dear wife,” playing off the meaning of the word “deer.” It usually brought a chuckle or two. The first article describes my reaction when the news of Fawn’s cancer struck our family. The second article is written at the time of her death, and the third article is written looking back at the first year and a half of grief.

\* \* \*

By the time most people reach sixty or so (like me), they are reasonably familiar with setbacks, personal and financial losses, the deaths of parents and elderly relatives, disappointments, and other disquieting news. This is especially so if you have a large family (I have eight children and six grandchildren) and many friends. As believers we know that man is made for trouble as sparks fly upward; that Christ has never promised

us a sorrow-free existence; that sin is pervasive in every relationship no matter how close or friendly; that Christ suffered mightily for our sins (by his stripes we are healed); and that as believers we are called to share in Christ's suffering.

Nevertheless, when sorrow truly hits unexpectedly (not the passing away of a beloved elderly parent after a long disease), shock, followed by discouragement, can often set in. Hard times often come in waves or groups and the overall effects can be devastating.

About two weeks ago, I found out that my wife has cancer. Sadly, it is an aggressive type that required the doctors to go immediately to strong chemotherapy rather than operating. Our little family world was suddenly turned upside down almost overnight, as the effects of harsh chemotherapy became evident daily. Our children's faith is being tested as never before, amidst the sorrow of this discovery in their mother's body. Friends are stunned, and I am understandably rattled and perplexed. Although I have seen similar tragedies in others, I naively thought that it would never personally happen to me.

Most of our lives are spent trying to make things more comfortable for those we love, including ourselves. Most Christians (like myself) work hard to establish nice homes, secure jobs, good health, solid education, loving relationships (especially with our spouses and children), and minister in their local churches (I've been a ruling elder in six congregations). We see God's gracious providence provide for and sustain us daily and give him the glory for it. We see him work out difficult things in a manner that takes our breath away, understanding that God can indeed work "all things . . . together for good for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Then . . . bang it happens. Suddenly it's not some abstract, far-off event, but personal disaster that can't easily be explained away. God's timing, ways, and plans are not always our plans and ways.

So far, I've taken some solace in that great book of Job. Here is a righteous man who is hit with everything at once. His children were not suffering from some disease, they were taken suddenly—every one of them killed in a horrible maelstrom of circumstances. His response is surprising, telling, and comforting for a father. "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). And after his health is gone and his wife has told him to curse God and die, he responds, "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not accept evil?" (Job 2:10), demonstrating that God is clearly in charge and ordains all things (not just the sunshine, but also the devastating storms).

Job, of course, goes through much doubting, not helped by his misguided and arrogant counselors (presuming to know God's will and judging Job). Job knows that he serves a righteous God and is clearly baffled as to why such a sorrow has been perpetrated against him. He, who has striven to live a godly life. Job says again in Job 13:15, "Though he slay me, I will hope in him." Yet, Job insists on defending himself before the Almighty. When Job finally gets his day in court with Jehovah, he is never really given a reason for his particular sorrows and struggles, only that God knows what he is doing and that Job must trust him.

Job summarized God's response by saying, "I know that you (God) can do all things; and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. . . . Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me which I did not know" (Job 42:2–3). Then God responded, "Hear and I will speak, I will question you, and you make it known to me. I

had heard you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:4–6).

Job had sinned by questioning God’s sovereignty, grace, and justice. I sin by saying, “If God is in control, how could he allow this to happen?” My wife and I are locked into time and space, unable to see beyond this day. We are hardly able to discern our own feelings and motives, let alone those of others. We are unable to see how God can use even cancer to further his perfect will in this imperfect world. The ultimate questions always before my wife and me in a time of trial are: “Will we trust God with our lives and future? Does God really (in an eternal perspective) have our best interest and care in mind?”

The Psalmist struggles with these eternal questions as I do. But the answer is always the same—yes! God will be glorified and he will provide for his children. “The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? . . . For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock” (Ps. 27:1, 5). There are many similar Psalms. I’m given comfort in the daily reading of the Psalms. I’m given even more comfort in Christ’s personally dying for me, protecting me and praying for me (John 17).

As finite and ultimately weak humans, doubts sweep over us (sometimes daily) as we face with our family this disease of cancer. Thankfully my family, church, and friends are truly comforting and praying for me and my children (not like the false counselors of Job). I will write more as this story unfolds. Please pray for me and my family during this time of testing and sorrow, as we watch someone we love suffer. Pray that my wife will recover and that she will be able to handle the difficulties in treating this dreaded disease. The answer to every struggle and doubt is Jesus Christ, the God-man who lived, suffered, and died for my wife and me. May we see that reality daily.

**Brad Winsted** *is the director of Children’s Ministry International in Tucker, GA. He has been a ruling elder in six OPC churches. Currently, he is Coordinator for Children’s Ministries at Midway Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Powder Springs, GA.*

# ServantReading

## Little One Lost

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by Gordon H. Cook, Jr.

*Little One Lost, Living with Early Infant Loss*, by Glenda Mathes. Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 2012, 139 pages, \$10.00, paper.

Infertility, miscarriage, still birth, infant death—these are issues which are rarely discussed within the church. Yet they are a reality for some of the members of your congregation. Are you prepared to support those in your congregation who experience these personal tragedies?

A friend of mine, a pastor in a different denomination, learned of the miscarriage of a prominent young couple in his congregation. Their first pregnancy was widely known in the church and the community. They had already picked a name for their little one. So the pastor suggested that they have a funeral. The couple was uncomfortable with this, but agreed to a brief memorial following a regular worship service. The young woman suggested that they open the service up to anyone who wanted to share a similar experience. It was agreed and announced to the congregation. That next Sunday there were more than the usual faces in the congregation. After the worship service concluded, they took a few minutes for coffee and a snack, and then reconvened for the memorial. Most remained. This memorial began with the appropriate formalities and a focus on the love of God for this young couple. Then it was opened to others to share. More than three hours later the pastor felt compelled to bring the service to a close. Dozens of women, young and old, had shared their stories. Some were sharing information which had never been heard by anyone except their doctors and their immediate families.

Glenda Mathes shares the stories of eight couples whose experiences cover the broad range of loss surrounding childbirth. Their stories are poignant and come with the ring of authenticity, drawing you in so that you share in their turmoil. Mrs. Mathes has done a wonderful job interviewing these couples and then bringing us their stories in an engaging way. One warning, have a box of tissues nearby, there will be no dry eyes for those who read these stories with an open heart.

Overwhelming sadness, guilt, shock, fear, questioning, tears, frustration, anger, moral struggle, emotional confusion, coming to the brink of despair, disbelief, a mind-numbing fog, shattered dreams, life and death struggles, questioning God's love, spiritual distress, overwhelming helplessness, emptiness, deep and desperate longing, isolation, financial burdens, and sometimes a very dark hour—this is the emotional rollercoaster of those who face the loss of their littlest ones. The openness of these couples in sharing their struggles and their deepest emotions is striking and most commendable, providing a

service to any couple going through similar experiences and to pastors who would rightly shepherd all of the flock of God.

Glenda Mathes writes from a distinctly Reformed perspective. This is evident from the early chapters which affirm her strong pro-life stance, to the chapters on covenantal and confessional comfort. There is much comfort from God's Word offered here, and it is carefully presented by one who has wrestled as much with the Scriptures as with the issue of miscarriage and infertility. The covenantal character of her theology permeates the entire book and is shared by all the couples whom she has interviewed. It is rare to find a book on healthcare issues of any kind which is so thoroughly Reformed in its perspective.

This is a book which you can share with couples, confident that they will be comforted by the grace of Christ conveyed in God's Word. But this is not the wise counsel she brings to pastors and elders. In a chapter entitled "Compassionate Care" (129–32), which should be required reading for every pastor and elder who seeks to comfort others in times of suffering, she allows the couples to tell us what is really helpful in a pastoral visit. She cautions that it is not always necessary to say something, describing one visit from "a man who didn't say much, . . . but simply sat with me and cried." They share another visit where an elder simply prayed with the couple. She cautions about the wrong things to say, and then encourages visitors to become compassionate listeners, affirming the loss, affirming the suffering, being available to the couple, allowing them to share the amount of information they want to reveal, giving them the freedom to express their true feelings, letting them know that you will be available to them when they are ready to talk. Your compassionate presence can be a gentle reminder of God's love. Without saying a word, you remind those who are struggling that "God is in control of every minute detail of . . . life." (Nowhere in the chapter does she suggest giving the couple a book to read. It may be helpful to do so with the suggestion that it be read at a later time, when the couple is ready.)

If this review doesn't prompt you to add this short book to your library and read it so that it helps shape your pastor's heart, then go online and read the fine review by the Rev. John W. Mahaffy.<sup>1</sup> His one concern, regarding a counselor quoted in the book on the subject of dealing with anger toward God, should not in any way deter you from benefitting from such a fine book about a subject which is so rarely addressed.

Many who endure suffering experience feelings of anger toward God. You may have experienced these difficult feelings yourself, if you are willing to admit it. The couples interviewed for this book were no exceptions. They felt the broad range of emotions, including anger and doubt; yet God brought each through their struggle to a new and, I dare say, more mature faith in him and in his sovereign grace. One of the women, Stephanie, initially "questioned God's love," saying "We had prayed for a healthy baby, why [has] God chosen to answer us with a dead baby" (45). Near the conclusion of the book, Stephanie brings perhaps the greatest comfort for hurting couples: "God is with you in this tremendous pain, you are not alone. Rest in the sovereignty of God and His love and care for His own. He will restore your soul and fill the void in your life with Himself." (132) How she had grown!

Many couples in your congregation never experience the pain and suffering described in this book. They conceive and bear covenant children who are then baptized and grow

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<sup>1</sup> John W. Mahaffy, "Living with Early Infant Loss," *New Horizons*, 34, no. 3 (Mar. 2013): 12–13.

up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. But a few couples know the distress which is so ably described by Glenda Mathes. Pastoral care for these couples will require the sensitivity and compassion which Glenda and the couples she interviewed provide us in these pages.

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# ServantReading

## What Exactly Is the Issue?

### A Response to *Kingdoms Apart*

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by David VanDrunen

*Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective*, edited by Ryan C. McIlhenny. Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012, xl + 284 pages, \$24.99, paper.

*Kingdoms Apart* is a collection of eleven essays from ten contributors. The book's subtitle indicates that it will engage the "two kingdoms perspective" and the introductory essay by editor Ryan McIlhenny promises that it will do so "collegially" as it seeks "to defend . . . the continued relevance of neo-Calvinism" (xvii). I should note up front that this review has an unusual first-person character. *Kingdoms Apart* treats me as the chief proponent of the two kingdoms perspective, citing me in every chapter and, in many chapters, interacting with my work at length. It references a few other authors as representatives of the two kingdoms, but only occasionally. So my review is more of a response.

Following an Introduction by the editor, *Kingdoms Apart* consists of three parts. Part 1, "Kingdom Reign and Rule," includes two essays on John Calvin, by Cornel Venema and Gene Haas, and an essay on Herman Bavinck by Nelson Kloosterman. In Part 2, "Kingdom Citizenship," readers first find two addresses by the late Dutch theologian S. G. de Graaf (introduced and translated by Kloosterman) and then essays on various topics by Timothy Scheuers, John Halsey Wood Jr., and Branson Parler. The book concludes with Part 3, "Kingdom Living," consisting of chapters by Scott Swanson, Jason Lief, and McIlhenny. I believe it will be most helpful to consider first the chapters that are primarily historical in focus and then those that are primarily theoretical or constructive.

### The Historical Essays

The first two history-focused chapters in *Kingdoms Apart* concern John Calvin, though they differ in tone and substance. Venema's piece, unlike Haas's, is very polemical and tendentious. Venema's chief purpose is to argue that my interpretation of natural law and the two kingdoms in Calvin does not provide a satisfactory account of Calvin's "public theology." Meanwhile, Haas's interpretation of Calvin on these same subjects agrees with my own interpretation about 98%, I estimate, though Haas himself does not say this and offers a few points of criticism of my work.

After providing an initial "sketch" of my interpretation of Calvin, Venema devotes the rest of his essay to critiquing it at three main points. First, he argues that "Calvin's Two Kingdoms conception focuses primarily on the legitimacy of the Christian believer's continued subjection to the civil magistrate" and concludes that I have erred by

interpreting it “as a means to divide all of human life and conduct into two hermetically separated domains or realms” and by identifying “the spiritual kingdom of Christ *simpliciter* with the institutional church” and consigning “the remainder of human conduct and culture to the natural kingdom” (17). Second, Venema faults me for assigning Calvin too optimistic a view of natural law, for not recognizing the indispensable role for special revelation in all areas of human life for Calvin, and for making a distinction between the roles of natural law and biblical revelation that is inconsistent with Calvin’s doctrine of sanctification. Finally, Venema asserts that my interpretation of Calvin on the relationship of creation and redemption is “explicitly *dualistic*.”

It would take another essay to respond to all of Venema’s charges, but I offer a few remarks here. For one thing, Venema misdescribes my views on a number of issues, and oddly imputes a number of things to my interpretation of Calvin that simply aren’t there.<sup>1</sup> With respect to his first point, I am open to hearing criticism that on specific occasions I have overdrawn the line of distinction between the two kingdoms in Calvin (though in the next chapter Haas himself says that Calvin drew a “sharp distinction between the jurisdictions of the Two Kingdoms” (58). But Venema’s claim that, in my interpretation, all of human life and conduct are divided into “two hermetically separated domains or realms” (17), resulting in a “neat bifurcation” (18), is certainly not how I put it and hardly seems consistent with my explicit statement, for example, that for Calvin “no area of life can be completely slotted as civil and not at all as spiritual.”<sup>2</sup> Venema is also concerned here that I identify Calvin’s spiritual kingdom “*simpliciter*” with the institutional church. I do not make this claim,<sup>3</sup> but I do stand by my conclusions about how closely Calvin ties the two kingdoms to the institutional work of church and state, over against Venema’s minimizing of this connection. Haas (see 53, 58, 60) appreciates this point and seems to agree with my interpretation rather than Venema’s.

In his second point of critique, Venema makes a vague accusation that I assign to Calvin too optimistic a view of natural law, but he never offers a single citation from my work to provide concrete evidence. I agree with most of what Venema says about the relationship of natural and special revelation in Calvin. With his third point Venema discusses some issues related to the relationship between creation and redemption that indeed I do not consider in my book. It is helpful to note these themes, though Venema’s labeling my interpretation as “dualistic” is again vague and serves more like an epithet than a specified charge of error.

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<sup>1</sup> To mention several things from just the first few pages (see 4–6) of his chapter that do not correspond to my treatment of Calvin in *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, Venema says that I grant special importance to Calvin in the development of Reformed public theology (in fact, I discuss Calvin in less than one full chapter out of ten in *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms* and warn against an over-emphasis on Calvin’s importance), he repeatedly speaks of my handling of Calvin’s “public theology” (a term I never use), states that I see the two kingdoms and natural law as “two comprehensive . . . principles in Calvin’s theology” (I am quite sure I never made such a sweepingly odd claim), describes me as speaking of the “*natural kingdom*” and “*ecclesiastical kingdom*” in Calvin’s thought (I do not use either of these adjectives to modify “kingdom”), and claims that I describe Calvin as advocating a “secular” approach to life in the “*natural kingdom*” (I never use the term *secular* to describe Calvin’s view of anything).

<sup>2</sup> David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 87; see also p. 82 and elsewhere.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g., *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 77–78.

Haas's chapter provides a clear, straightforward, and helpful summary of Calvin's views on natural law, the state, and the two kingdoms. Haas's interpretation of Calvin is practically identical to mine, though he never indicates this. Instead, he offers mild critique of my work at several points, but this seems to be a hunt for differences that really don't exist.

Kloosterman's chapter on Bavinck republishes a journal article that was originally a response to a conference lecture of mine.<sup>4</sup> Kloosterman states his desire to reflect on the life and labors of Bavinck and to respond "in particular, to the Two Kingdoms claim that there exists a fundamental inconsistency in Bavinck's thought when it comes to natural law and the kingdom of God" (65). Most of the essay consists of Kloosterman's interpretation of Bavinck on natural law and the two kingdoms, and he concludes with two brief appendices polemicizing against me. Though this essay is purportedly a response to me, it has almost nothing to do with my article on Bavinck. Readers gain no information about my article's claims, and Kloosterman never indicates where my substantive arguments are correct or incorrect. Besides a general citation providing bibliographical information, Kloosterman ends up citing my article only twice, once to a single sentence and a footnote, the other time to another footnote. His "response" to my article seems to rest on his strong disagreement

with respect to the thesis that forms a thread, if not the backbone, of VanDrunen's understanding of Bavinck. He is suggesting that the alleged existence of 'two Bavincks' has left us with a theology that is inconsistent and incoherent. (66)

This is bizarre. My article's thesis has nothing to do with the existence of "two Bavincks" or his (their?) inconsistency or incoherence. In fact, part of my thesis is that natural law and the two kingdoms are integral aspects of Bavinck's broader theology. The only time I mention the "two Bavincks" thesis discussed by many prominent Bavinck scholars is in a footnote. I did state my judgment that Bavinck has not left us "with an entirely coherent portrait of Christians' basic relationship to this world,"<sup>5</sup> but that is much different from saying that it is simply "incoherent." And Kloosterman himself admits that "one can identify various 'tensions' in the thought of Herman Bavinck" (80).

Kloosterman also introduces the two addresses by S. G. de Graaf—with more sharp polemics against me. At one point he quotes me, labels my words "destructive," and remarks:

Separating 'x' as a moral issue from 'x' as a concrete political policy issue constitutes precisely the kind of surreal religious secularizing dualism that permitted numerous German and Dutch citizens to cooperate with German National Socialism" [i.e., the Nazis]. (93)

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<sup>4</sup> David VanDrunen, " 'The Kingship of Christ is Twofold': Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms in the Thought of Herman Bavinck," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45 (April 2010): 147–64.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

Presumably this was not what the editor had in mind when he spoke of *Kingdoms Apart*'s "cordial" engagement with the "two kingdoms perspective."<sup>6</sup>

The final historically-focused essay is Wood's discussion of church and state in Abraham Kuyper's thought. Wood presents Kuyper explicitly as a two kingdoms theologian with respect to the distinction between common and particular grace, the light of nature, and twofold kingship of the Son. Wood's interpretation of Kuyper on these issues is nearly indistinguishable from my own, though Wood never indicates this. Wood helpfully describes the opposition to Kuyper's views on church and state by his compatriot Philip Hoedemaker, who "wanted to preserve the Dutch as a unified nation under a single Reformed church" (169). Perhaps Wood is correct, but I am not sure that Kuyper saw social structures as religiously neutral, as Wood claims (171); in any case, Wood rightly denies that such structures can be neutral (168, 171). A significant part of Wood's claim concerns the innovative character of Kuyper on church-state relations. In his Dutch context this is probably true, though Kuyper's basic ideas on the two kingdoms and the twofold kingship of Christ were standard doctrinal fare in earlier Reformed orthodoxy. Furthermore, American Presbyterians had embraced the idea of non-state churches for over a century before Kuyper advocated them.

I conclude this section with two broader reflections on the historical essays. First, these essays' scope is very narrow. Two essays deal with Calvin and the others deal with early twentieth-century Dutch theologians. There is nothing wrong with the figures selected, though the fact that *Kingdoms Apart* considers such a narrow slice of Reformed history obscures the extent to which the two kingdoms doctrine was a crucial aspect of Presbyterian faith and life,<sup>7</sup> not to mention so much of the continental Reformed tradition of earlier years.<sup>8</sup>

Second, *Kingdoms Apart* does not resolve a question that would seem to be absolutely crucial to its purposes: is the two kingdoms doctrine part of our Reformed heritage? Since *Kingdoms Apart* aims to engage the "two kingdoms perspective" critically, one might think that the book would answer no. One of the endorsers (Charles Dunahoo) indeed states that *Kingdoms Apart* "compares and contrasts the one-kingdom view and the Two Kingdoms view." But who actually holds a "one-kingdom view?" Venema and Haas clearly affirm that Calvin taught a two kingdoms doctrine, Wood explicitly presents Kuyper as a two kingdoms theologian (confirmed by Parler in a later chapter), and even Kloosterman admits that Bavinck "recognized the twofold kingship of Christ" and "the

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<sup>6</sup> Someday Kloosterman might consider writing an essay on the many Dutch neo-Calvinists that winked at Hitler and the many South African neo-Calvinists that provided the intellectual foundations for apartheid. My cautions about the church embracing specific political agendas might not seem so "destructive" in comparison.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g., George Gillespie, *Aaron's Rod Blossoming* (London, 1646; reprinted Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1985), 90–96; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (reprinted Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 599–609; Robert L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (reprinted Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985), 550–51; and Stuart Robinson, *The Church of God as an Essential Element of the Gospel* (reprinted Willow Grove, PA: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2009), 65–66 (Part III, Section 5).

<sup>8</sup> See e.g., Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992–97), 2.486–90; 3.3.278–81; and Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, vol. 1, trans. Bartel Elshout, ed. Joel R. Beeke (originally published in Dutch in 1700; Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 1999), 561–66.

so-called two kingdoms” (72). For all of the negative comments against me in these chapters (Wood’s excluded), it seems as though all of these contributors to *Kingdoms Apart* agree with my basic thesis that the earlier Reformed tradition—including *Kuyper and Bavinck*—affirmed the two kingdoms.<sup>9</sup> But what then of neo-Calvinism? My historical claim is that contemporary neo-Calvinism (post Kuyper and Bavinck) is different from the earlier Reformed tradition in ignoring and even denying the two kingdoms doctrine in favor of a one-kingdom perspective. If the contributors to *Kingdoms Apart* believe this is wrong (yet agree that Calvin, Kuyper and Bavinck affirmed two kingdoms categories), then presumably they believe that neo-Calvinism itself adheres to a two kingdoms doctrine. This would be quite a remarkable claim. But even McIlhenny’s Introduction (which seeks to define neo-Calvinism) doesn’t make this claim or clarify the issue.

## The Theoretical Essays

I now describe and evaluate several of the remaining essays in *Kingdoms Apart*. They are quite diverse and no clear common theme holds them together.

Parler’s chapter is perhaps the most interesting essay in the book to me, for it gets at some really important issues that I believe any future “engagement” among interested parties should take seriously. Like Wood, Parler interprets Kuyper as a two kingdoms theologian, and he often associates “Kuyper and VanDrunen” together, over against Augustine and twentieth-century Dutch theologian Klaas Schilder—an intriguing tag team match-up. Parler portrays Kuyper and me as understanding the civil kingdom (or common kingdom, or arena of common grace) as having certain independent and penultimate ends that can be attained to some degree among believers and unbelievers together, in distinction from the ultimate ends of the redemptive kingdom. On the other hand, relying especially on English theologian John Milbank’s interpretation of Augustine, Parler portrays Augustine’s Two Cities idea as incompatible with the Kuyper-VanDrunen two kingdoms idea: the character of all human societies is determined by their allegiance to ultimate ends, and thus cannot be assessed simply on the basis of penultimate ends.

There are a number of points at which Parler’s description of my view is not quite accurate. The most important is the most general. My claim is that Augustine’s Two Cities and the Reformed Two Kingdoms ideas are compatible, not that they are identical. They are harmonious, but get at different aspects of the truth: Augustine’s Two Cities describe two eschatological peoples, one marked by love of the Creator above all and one marked by love of the creation above all; in this world the Two Cities mingle, but they can’t be identified with any particular earthly society or institution; there is stark antithesis between these Two Cities, and each person is a member of one city and one city only. The Reformed Two Kingdoms, on the other hand, pertain to the twofold way in which God rules this present world, primarily (for early Reformed theologians) through church and state. This means that Christians are actually citizens of both kingdoms. Christians, in other words, are citizens of two kingdoms, but of one city. As citizens of the city of God they stand in eschatological conflict with unbelievers; as participants in

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<sup>9</sup> I explain and defend this thesis in detail in *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*.

the common kingdom, they are called to co-exist in peace with unbelievers as far as possible.

To return to Parler: much of his critique of me (185–88) wrongly assumes that I claim that the Two Cities and Two Kingdoms are the same category. Now, Parler's dependence upon Milbank's interpretation of Augustine does make it more difficult to appreciate the claim I do make. But Milbank's appropriation of Augustine is hardly uncontroversial, and I doubt that most of the other contributors to *Kingdoms Apart* would want to embrace that appropriation, in light of Milbank's Radical Orthodox theological program that underlies it.<sup>10</sup> In any case, I am glad to be placed on Kuyper's team on this issue, for I think his defense of the independent purposes of common grace was helpful and necessary. Of course all human societies can and should be evaluated from an ultimate perspective, and found drastically wanting. But since God has ordained through his common grace to preserve human societies for the purpose of allowing a number of important penultimate ends to be fulfilled *to some degree*, it is crucial that we be able to evaluate these societies not *only* on the basis of their failure to achieve what is ultimately important, but also on their *relative* success in achieving what is penultimately important. That was my earlier claim,<sup>11</sup> and I hope to develop these ideas at some length in the future. May Kuyper smile over my shoulder.

Lief expresses theological difficulties with both the “two kingdoms perspective” and neo-Calvinism, proposing something of a third way. He seeks to rescue neo-Calvinism by reading certain neo-Calvinist figures (such as Herman Dooyeweerd) in a way shaped by contemporary theologians Wolfhart Pannenberg, Jürgen Moltmann, and Ted Peters, as well as contemporary philosopher Charles Taylor. Lief is especially concerned to promote a dynamic “eschatological interpretation of creation” in which creation's original destiny was the resurrection of Christ; this is over against the ideas, present even in much of neo-Calvinism, that the created order is a “given” and human identity is “static.” In brief, I do not think that the likes of Pannenberg and Moltmann offer a helpful way forward in our present Reformed debates, and most other contributors to *Kingdoms Apart* would probably agree. I do, however, agree with Lief that how we interpret the opening chapters of Genesis is extremely important for our approach to issues such as the two kingdoms (228). I have actually provided an eschatological interpretation of creation in a recent work,<sup>12</sup> but I approach this through the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works (an idea Lief never mentions, nor would it seem to fit well into his proposal).

*Kingdoms Apart* closes with an essay by editor McIlhenny. In the first part he seeks to define the slippery term “culture,” in interaction with contemporary cultural studies. Then he makes a case not for Christians “redeeming culture” (a common neo-Calvinist way of putting things of which McIlhenny is skeptical) but for “redeemed culture”: everything Christians do communicates a redeemed identity to the world, and hence, in the words

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<sup>10</sup> See especially John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> See “The Importance of the Penultimate: Reformed Social Thought and the Contemporary Critiques of the Liberal Society,” *Journal of Markets and Morality* 9 (Fall 2006): 219–49. It would have been helpful, incidentally, if Parler had defined the sense in which I speak favorably of “liberalism” on page 178 of his essay, since I am not remotely a theological or political liberal in the ways “liberal” is typically used today.

<sup>12</sup> *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), chap. 2. I expand this discussion considerably in a forthcoming book, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law*, chap. 1.

that end the book, “Christians *are* redeemed culture” (275). This chapter is something of a mystery to me. It is a revision of an earlier article in which he purported to set out a “Third-Way” alongside neo-Calvinism and the two kingdoms, but he claims now to “have further entrenched” himself in “the neo-Calvinist position” (251 n.1). It’s not clear what this entails, especially since he expresses the desire to “bridge the aisle” (253) shortly thereafter. Although he refers to his definition of “culture” as favorable to neo-Calvinism (253), I find his discussion here helpful, especially in its emphasis upon culture not simply as a thing that humans create but as at root language, which involves community practices and interpretations. And though he makes some critical comments directed toward advocates of the two kingdoms in the second part of the chapter, it is still not clear whether his broad proposal is really so at odds with the two kingdoms idea, at least how I understand it.

One of McIlhenny’s burdens in this part of the chapter seems to be defending the distinctive “Christian” character of Christian schools and scholarly work. A key point is that he as a historian has common ground with unbelievers when interacting with the raw material of history, but because of his “own conceptual framework . . . cannot fully accept the idea that history is nothing more than the jumbled processes of the mode of production,” as held by materialist historians (269–70). At this point he states: “Interestingly, VanDrunen seems to agree with this” (270). Indeed, but why does he find this surprising? Does McIlhenny believe, deep down, that no two kingdoms proponent *really* thinks that no aspect of life is religiously/morally neutral or that the antithesis rears its head in all human activity, no matter how often some of us affirm such things? At the end of the day, McIlhenny’s interest in a redeemed cultural ethos seems to approach the subject at a different angle from me, but I hold out hope that our approaches may not be ultimately incompatible.

I offer two final thoughts on these theoretical essays. First, these chapters have very little biblical exegesis. With the exception of Swanson’s contribution (which is largely removed from direct discussions of neo-Calvinism and the “two kingdoms perspective”), there is practically no detailed exegesis at all. In itself this is no reason to fault the book, but it leads to a second observation. *Kingdoms Apart* purports to be a defense of neo-Calvinism through engagement with the “two kingdoms perspective” of which I am apparently chief representative, and I have offered four chapters of a biblical-theological defense of a two kingdoms paradigm in *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms (LGTK)*, noting specifically where I think differences exist with representative neo-Calvinist paradigms. Thus it would seem that a defense of neo-Calvinism over against my own work would have considerable interest in addressing my biblical claims, since we all affirm Scripture as our ultimate standard. A key aspect of my biblical-theological case for the two kingdoms is my interpretation of the continuing applicability of the cultural mandate in light of Paul’s Two Adams paradigm and the Noahic covenant. Though *Kingdoms Apart* frequently cites *LGTK*, I believe it mentions my claims about the cultural mandate and the Two Adams only twice (ii; 129 n.9)—both times incompletely and thus misleadingly—and notes once, in passing, my view of the Noahic covenant (178–79).

My basic case in chapters 2–5 of *LGTK* is this: God gave the original cultural mandate to Adam as representative of the human race in an unfallen world, demanding perfect obedience and promising the attainment of an eschatological new creation as a reward for obedience. Adam failed and plunged the human race into a state of curse rather than eschatological blessing. But God sent his Son as the Last Adam, to fulfill God’s task for humanity perfectly and thereby to attain the new creation for himself and

his people. Popular recent neo-Calvinist works speak of redeemed Christians being called to take up again Adam's original cultural task (not to go back to Eden, but to fulfill Adam's responsibility to fill the earth, have dominion, etc.). In response, I have argued that this cannot be the correct biblical paradigm for the Christian's present responsibilities in this world. If Christ is the *Last Adam*, then none of us are called to be new Adams. It is not as if Christians have no cultural mandate (as *Kingdoms Apart* suggests I claim), but that the cultural mandate comes to the human race only as refracted through the covenant with Noah after the flood. It comes thereby to the human race as a whole (not to Christians uniquely) and is geared for life in a fallen world and holds out no eschatological hope of reward. Thus in order to understand our calling to participate in the life of politics or commerce, for example, we should understand these responsibilities as rooted in the Noahic covenant and as work to pursue in collaboration with unbelievers, as far as possible (without forgetting the different attitude, motivation, goals, etc. with which Christians take up these tasks). I also suggested that all of us who share a commitment to the Reformed doctrine of justification should appreciate the attractiveness of my suggested paradigm, built as it is upon traditional understandings of the covenant of works, the Two Adams, and the sufficiency of the obedience of Christ. This is an invitation to soteriologically orthodox neo-Calvinists to embrace a view of Christianity-and-culture that is more consistent with doctrines at the core of the gospel they love.

## Conclusion

I have expressed a number of disappointments with the attempt of *Kingdoms Apart* to offer cordial engagement with the "two kingdoms perspective." Yet for the well-being of our confessional Reformed churches, I hope there will be cordial engagement in the future among us who may disagree. And in many small ways I see evidence of this already, though not always evident in print or (especially) on the Internet. In light of the questions that two kingdoms proponents have raised in recent years, it would be interesting to see a robust response in defense of neo-Calvinism. To be productive, I think such a response would have to address specifically the questions I've raised above about history and Scripture.

It might also be interesting for a valiant defender of neo-Calvinism to address the following observation: most ordinary Reformed believers already live what might be called a two kingdoms way of life. When they follow the regulative principle of worship, uphold the church's jurisdiction over its own discipline, and respect the Christian liberty of fellow believers in matters of faith and worship that are "beside" God's Word (see Westminster Confession of Faith 20.2), they embrace aspects of Reformed practice historically inseparable from the two kingdoms doctrine. And when they live peaceably with their unbelieving neighbors—working, buying, selling, driving, flying, playing, and voting alongside them—are they not giving implicit witness to the reality of God's distinctive common grace government over the world through the covenant with Noah? And if this is the case, then I suggest that the two kingdoms idea serves a clarifying function: it helps Reformed Christians understand in a more theologically clear way the Christian faith and life they are in so many respects already practicing.

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# ServantPoetry

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Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)

## Up-Hill

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?

Yes, to the very end.

Will the day's journey take the whole long day?

From morn to night, my friend.

But is there for the night a resting-place?

A roof for when the slow dark hours begin.

May not the darkness hide it from my face?

You cannot miss that inn.

Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?

Those who have gone before.

Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?

They will not keep you standing at that door.

Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?

Of labour you shall find the sum.

Will there be beds for me and all who seek?

Yea, beds for all who come.