

Toward a Substructural Cartography of Reformed Cultural Engagement: Key Areas in Confessional Reformed and Covenantal Thought

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Abstract

The culture discussion is ongoing and rigorous among contemporary Reformed theologians. When approached superficially, however, it tends to exasperate rather than edify. In response to this problem, the following article aims to assist future researchers in appreciating the necessary depth and complexity of the conversation. To this end, the main views presented are all considered in terms of their substructural connections. It is first shown that the Klinean and Reformed Two-Kingdom positions can be grouped due to their distinctive form of covenant theology, emphasising common grace, republication and eschatological intrusion. Also, the Kuyperian and Dooyeweerdian views can be grouped at the substructural level due to their mutual concern for historic worldview theory and philosophical monism. Finally, perspectivalism and theonomy, or Christian Reconstruction, are shown to be joined by their concern for covenantal continuity and consistency of application in both the Old and New Covenants. Subsidiary to the above cartographic goals, brief evaluative remarks are offered regarding each grouping's critical areas of strength and weakness.

1. Introduction

The Reformed tradition has certainly not been exempt from the need to wrestle with a right understanding of the church's place in the world. Indeed, debates regarding the best approach to cultural engagement are typically very heated. This is nowhere more evident than in recent exchanges between Reformed Two-Kingdom and Neo-Calvinist theologians. Unfortunately, the discussion has tended to produce more heat than light. This is partly because the differences between the various views are considered only in terms of their contemporary expressions and periphery tenets. To overcome this problem, a deepened understanding of the lay of the land is needed—a substructural cartography.

In line with the above, it should be noted that my focus in this essay is on orientation rather than evaluation, categorisation and context, rather than critique. While I will offer brief evaluative remarks on each approach, these merely seek to highlight potential areas of strength and weakness to be further addressed in future studies.¹ In this regard, what follows will present a grouping of three main approaches.

2. Common Grace and Eschatological Intrusion: The Klinean and Reformed Two-Kingdom Approaches.

Kline's *magnum opus* (2006b) was the culmination of his lecturing on Old Testament biblical theology (Kline 2017:361-362). The material was taught under a plethora of titles and at different seminaries (Kline 2017:361-362). Edgar speaks of it as Kline's "masterful, syllabi on biblical historiography" (2007:283). A biblico-systematic exposition of Genesis, *Kingdom Prologue* (2006b) provides the theological context for the founding of the kingdom of Israel. After developing the *foedus operum* in its creation context, Kline relates this to the unfolding of the *historia salutis* and is particularly concerned to show how the concepts of grace and works move together in the unfolding eschatological drama of the kingdom of God (Kline 2017:398-400; cf. Edgar 2007:283).

Kline famously articulated a framework position in regard to his interpretation of Genesis 1, and in so doing, highlighted certain ideas that are important to his greater covenantal framework. Specifically, the concepts of creature-king and creature-kingdom set a precedent for his understanding of God's covenant lordship. God is portrayed as the suzerain king in relation to man as the vassal king. God's placing of the entire planet under the dominion of his vassal should therefore be understood in terms of a covenantal arrangement, similar to the arrangements reflected in typical Ancient Near Eastern Hittite treaties (Kline 2006b:18).

With the above as a foundation, Kline further demonstrates, (a) the explicitly covenantal nature of creation, and (b) the relevance of the *imago Dei* in Adam's call to 'image' God's work-rest pattern. This work-rest covenant forms the basis of his understanding of the cultural mandate.² Kline argues that, if Adam had not failed his probationary trial-crisis, he would have moved on to populate the earth with Eve. Moreover, due to Adam's successful representation as a federal head, he would have guaranteed this emerging population its entrance into the final eschatological state. This inheritance could never be forfeited (Kline 2006b:107).

It should be stressed that for Kline, Adam's protological cultural mandate was to lead to his Sabbath reward. The long-range task of the *foedus operum* is therefore closely connected to the Sabbath day (Kline 2006b:78, 97)—the eschatological metamorphosis to which man's own physical luminosity looked forward (Kline 2006b:31,43,99). The vassal, made in God's image, is tasked to emulate the Suzerain by setting about to complete his own work-week. At the completion of this period, he would join his creator in the Sabbath realm (Kline 2006b:19).

With the above in view, it may be observed that the Sabbath serves as something of a crowning jewel in Kline's covenant system. It was a seal of promise to the first man that his work would be rewarded (Kline 2006b:78). Moreover, the imaging concept revealed the very substance of the covenant of works, or *foedus operum* (Kline 1999:199). Adam's call to Sabbath ordinance observance stood as nothing less than a sign to him of the offered kingdom and its final state upon his completed kingdom-work. Not only does this lay an important foundation for understanding Kline's federalism, but it also starts to show the importance of his theology for the Reformed Two-Kingdom doctrine.

Kline thinks of the garden as a theocracy (2006b:49). At this point, cult and culture, though distinguishable, were integrated under the *foedus operum* (Kline 2006b:49,66). Even so, this initial administration would go through a sharp change after the fall. Indeed, Kline's interpretation of the "primal parousia" (2006b:129) in Genesis 3 underscores the seriousness of man's initial covenantal failure. At the point of Adam's transgression, the end of history could have occurred. Certainly, from that point, there was no possibility of returning to a priestly probation or to the subsequent task of city-building. From this point, all that awaited Adam and Eve due to their demerit was death and judgement—the opposite side of the promised sanction (Kline 2006b:129). Within this dire context, however, the gospel was first revealed.

In the midst of a terrifying "primal parousia", Genesis 3:15 revealed the promise of a serpent-bruising Messiah (Kline 2006b:129). This would unfold in the historical administration of the *foedus gratia*. However, a wider interim world order would also be required for this historical unfolding to occur. This could only be made possible in God's bestowal of *gratia communis*, or common grace (Kline 2006b:134,162). Here, Kline builds on previous thinkers, such as Kuyper (2016) and Van Til

(2015), to develop the doctrines of antithesis and *gratia communis* (Kline 2006b:134-135, 168). He argues that both of these ideas were true, and neither should be denied. The inclination of man was indeed to rebel and misuse the interim order. However, this should not be allowed to remove the essential legitimacy of something God had bestowed (2006b:169).

As already shown, for Kline, the *pre-lapsum* cultural task was a part of the *foedus operum* itself. This meant that due to the failed probation under Adam, mankind could no longer build the universal city—what Kline calls, “Megapolis” (2006b:100). Moreover, no longer was the promise of an eschatological city held out—what Kline calls, “Metapolis” (2006b:100). Even so, Kline argues that the hope of this final city would yet be offered to man in and through this promise of redemption and the work of the last Adam.

For Kline, the common grace order, is sharply juxtaposed to Eden, the ark, and the later theocratic requirements of Israel. As will be shown, except for the flood-intrusion in Genesis 6-8 and the conquest-intrusion of Israel, judicial civil justice is given to all, no matter their cultic orientation (Kline 2006a:78-79; 2006b:254-255). As the final judgement itself is suspended, so too are all clean and unclean distinctions (Gn. 9:3; cf. Ac. 10). Correspondingly, unlike the theocracy of either protological or eschatological Eden, the common grace order called only for judicial action against sins of a horizontal nature.

While Kline saw the state’s mandate as something of a reinstatement of man’s pre-fall judicial authority (cf. Gn. 1:26; Kline 2006b:253; Irons 2004:104), he also argued that the commission of Genesis 9 stood only in partial continuity with that of the commission of Genesis 1. In an important sense, Genesis 9 revealed that the cultural mandate had been offered in a new and refracted form so as to suit a post-fall world (2006b:157) properly. The main point of discontinuity represented by this refraction is that the ordinance of the Sabbath would no longer be attached to cultural work. This meant that cultural work was no longer considered a holy kingdom-building activity but rather, as common and ameliorative activity. While at a basic level, common grace subserves the purposes of redemption, it is more immediately bestowed to “provide for a pragmatic cooperation between believers and unbelievers for the achievement of certain temporal ends such as physical safety, rule of law, criminal justice, and self-defence” (Irons 2004a:105).

On the one hand, the state retains its legitimacy even though it no longer adheres to a theocratic standard. On the other hand, the state should not seek to enforce biblically correct worship or punish sins of a vertical nature (transgressions of the first four commandments). To be clear, Kline sees failure on either the horizontal or vertical plains as deeply sinful, whether during a time of theocracy or not. However, he argues that, in line with God's original commitment to delay the judgement for the purposes of redemption, a divine commitment is in Genesis 9 formalised for the preservation of humanity until its appointed time. Before the final judgement, God has allowed the enactments of penultimate and temporal judicial penalties to be executed when pertaining to horizontal sins (Kline 2006b:269). But, as was the case with Cain himself, who despite his life of vertical sin, was nevertheless a beneficiary of the *gratia communis* arrangement, humankind is after the flood again declared to receive the benefit of this arrangement regardless of its cultic orientation. God himself had put an important cultic boundary in place. Kline insists then that, no matter the zeal involved, if the state ignores this boundary, the sovereign administration of the covenant Lord has been ignored (Kline 2006b:179; Irons 2004a:101-106).

But how does this apply to the later rise of the kingdom of Israel? Was Joshua not commanded to bring judgement to idolatrous Canaan and once again institute theocratic worship? Kline responds by arguing that, as was the case with the flood, Israel's entrance into Canaan was another uniquely designed eschatological intrusion of the final theocratic order. In other words, during Israel's tenor in the land, a unique and typological exception was granted during which common grace principles within Canaan were again temporarily suspended (Kline 1997:154-164). This difference is clearly observed in contrast to the prior patriarchal arrangement. Where the Abrahamic covenant regulated matters of religious distinctiveness—but not cultural—the Mosaic covenant regulated all matters of life. Moreover, relationships with those outside of the covenant who threatened their theocratic distinctiveness was at this point, for the first time since pre-fall Eden, strictly prohibited (Kline 2006b:357-360).

With the above in place, Kline's work can certainly be said to reveal a "broad hermeneutical principle" highly relevant to the ideas that are now further advanced by Reformed Two-Kingdom theologians (Kline 2006b:226; cf. VanDrunen 2010b:43; Kline 2017:392), such as Darryl Hart (2006, 2014), David VanDrunen (2010a), Michael Horton (2000;

2002a; 2011a; 2011b), and John Fesko (2016). Building on the biblical-theological substructure articulated above, Reformed Two-Kingdom thinkers see the Klinean distinction between the holy and the common as something of particular importance. In other words, holiness must be understood as specifically related to God's kingdom-work and its promised eschatological goal. Again, Adam's protological task shows that his cultic and cultural work had a specific eschatological promise. The vertical and horizontal dimensions of his activity were regarded as holy because both were instrumental in attaining the kingdom.

After the fall, however, the cultural labours of mankind could no longer be packaged together with an eschatological goal. Certainly, indeed, Israel was later made into a theocracy, where both cultic and cultural work once again merged. Yet, the rigid substructural point for all Klineans is that Israel's situation is a typological exception and an eschatological intrusion, not a paradigmatic norm for the people of God (Kline 2006a:190; 2006b:340). Unlike Adam before the fall, or Israel in the land of Canaan, the church currently shares the world with those outside the redemptive covenant (Stellman 2009:xxv). The church's paradigm for cultural engagement must therefore always be derived from the formally enacted arraignment of Genesis 9, not the uniquely typological covenant of Exodus 20 (VanDrunen 2020). Further, only those activities of the church which pertain to the advance of the kingdom should be regarded as holy. All other everyday cultural activities, even when sanctified to the Lord in a subjective devotion, should be seen as common (VanDrunen 2010a:133-142; *cf.* Horton 2002a)—they are shared activities, performed with those outside the church under the umbrella of common grace (*cf.* Kline 2006:66-67).

With the above in mind, a few evaluative remarks are in order. It may certainly be said that a strength of the Klinean and Reformed Two-Kingdom approach is that it presents a view that is biblically and theologically robust. Ridderbos' words (regarding a related matter) apply well here—this view places in bold relief “the surpassing glory of man who attends his true destiny in the Sabbath” (1957:32). Further, as Western culture drifts into pluralism, religious tension is inevitable. It is here that the current position presents its strongest appeal and potentiality (*cf.* Johnson 2013; Jooste 2013, Tuininga 2017 *et al.*). In this regard, it may well provide a model that transcends its current Reformed confines and offers significant help to the larger evangelical discussion.

Even so, some weaknesses are also apparent. First, it must be conceded that a few elements of Kline's contribution to protology are somewhat speculative. While these elements can be well-received, they do not necessarily demand as much weight as the more perspicuous elements of the Reformed Two-Kingdom argument. Further, in terms of the ability of this view to offer a Christian model of cultural engagement, Kline himself only provides the groundwork. While VanDrunen has begun to develop its potential (cf. Johnson 2013; Jooste 2013 and Tuininga 2017), the movement is young and more work is yet needed (cf. Beck 2021; Crouse 2017; Helm 2010b).

3. Philosophical and Structural Monism: The Kuyperian and Dooyeweerdian Approaches

To understand the Kuyperian-Dooyeweerdian trajectory of thought, one must go back to the progress of the enlightenment in Europe (Dennison 1999). Before the enlightenment, medieval Christianity had an eschatological hope that was very future oriented. In other words, it placed all of its hope in the world that was yet to come. During the time of the enlightenment, however, things began to change. Daily life saw great improvements in comfort. Proportionately, the basis of hope for human flourishing started to shift (Dennison 1999).

Within the above context, Kuyper emerged as an important Reformed voice that stood against enlightenment ideology (Van Drunen 2010c:276; cf. Bolt 2001). In the process, he found much help in the concept of *weltanschauung* (worldview), a few of Kantian origins (Kant 1911:255; cf. Kuyper 1931; Fesko 2019:106) first gleaned by James Orr (1893:3). Kuyper saw the concept of *weltanschauung* as a way to provide a winsome—and biblically aligned—alternative to the pervasive enlightenment focus. While Reformed Theology has always emphasized God's sovereignty, Kuyper's approach focused on this idea in such a way that responded to the post-enlightenment emphasis on "progress and perfectibility of humanity" through social establishments (Dennison 1999:271). In other words, by holding forth the reality of God's sovereignty, Kuyper provided a bold vision for the present while at the same time ensuring that the Christian's primary hope lay in a future-oriented eschatology.

Although Kuyper spoke forcefully of God's sovereignty over all of creation, he was just as clear concerning the nature of the kingdom. Akin to two-kingdom thinkers, Kuyper urged that the kingdom of God be

viewed in spiritual terms only, and the state should never be confused with it (Kuyper 1879:187–189; Bolt 2013b:16–17; *cf.* Kline 2006b:169–170). Finding this emphasis in Kuyper to be “irrefutable”³, Bolt rightly cautions against any invocation of his work in advocacy of an overly broad social or political view of the church’s mission (Bolt 2013b:18–15).

In a similar vein, though Kuyper is often regarded as the “patron saint” of theonomy (2008:414, 416), he cannot be appealed to in support of the reconstructionist contention that Scripture provides a model for civil law and politics (Bolt 2013b:18; *cf.* Kuyper 1879:1265–1269). Indeed, it is more likely that Kuyper “would have been appalled by” the theonomist’s “distortion of his meaning” (2008:416; *cf.* Fraser 2007:112; Bolt 2013b:15–17; Kuyper 1879:187–189, 1265–1269). In this regard, it is noteworthy that, although Kuyper was obviously very involved in politics, he did not appeal directly to the Bible when in the political arena (Bolt 2013b:16).

The above notwithstanding, a distinctive Kuyperian trajectory must be granted. In other words, while Kuyper himself could be argued to have stood in some sense of continuity with natural law and two-kingdom thinkers, it is also the case that he set in place a certain line of thought that called for a break with this tradition (VanDrunen 2010c:314). This is because, while on the one hand, Kuyper would oppose “Christian utopian” notions, he also clearly envisioned a civil magistrate that cooperated with the church (Bolt 2013b:16; *cf.* Kuyper 1879:188, 1265–126). For Kuyper, while church and state were each rooted “in its own principle” (Bolt 2013b:17), he insisted that both be clear in their acknowledgement of God. In this vein, Kuyper made much of the concept of active and passive reception of special revelation (*cf.* Kuyper 2016). That is, he saw special revelation as playing an important part for both church and state. However, where the church was actively founded on special revelation, the state was actively founded on natural revelation and only passively on special revelation (Bolt 2013b:17; *cf.* Kuyper 2016).

As a result of the above, Kuyperian thinkers began to focus on changing and redeeming a present and political domain. At best, this had the effect of shifting the future-oriented posture of the church to a more present orientation, thus lessening the ‘pilgrimage’ aspect of the Christian life (Dennison 1999: 272–273). However, more extreme versions of the Kuyperian trajectory began to frame redemption almost entirely in the present tense and as a direct result of the church’s social efforts (Dennison

1999:277–278). Further, this perspective sometimes presents the covenant motif in terms of culture rather than soteriology and, in so doing, presents some antipathy towards those who distinguish between the essence of current spirituality and the full blessings of a future physical consummation (Young 1973:55; 1974:156). Of course, this shift in focus also creates more pressure to hold to a hard-and-fast continuationist position in regard to the culture mandate. Indeed, this position has come to stand as something of a “shibboleth” for various Neo-Calvinist groups (Young 1973:59).

Perhaps the most important trajectory of Kuyperian thought has been mediated through Dooyeweerd. As Kuyper’s “most influential intellectual successor” (Chaplin 2016:1), he has had an even greater role than Kuyper in the development of Neo-Calvinism (VanDrunen 2010c:368). That which remains in this section is therefore focused on his particular contribution.

Dooyeweerd’s *magnum opus* is entitled *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*. Clouser speaks of it as “the most original contribution to philosophy since Kant . . . and closer to the intentions of Aristotle than anyone since Descartes” (Clouser 2010:1). Dooyeweerd developed his transcendental critique to show the importance of an adequate foundation point when attempting to provide a reliable epistemology (Dooyeweerd 2012b:40; cf. VanDrunen 2010c:351). He spoke of this foundation in terms of the “supra-rational” principle and “ground-motive” of a belief system (Dooyeweerd 2012b:5,27,32). For Dooyeweerd, a principle such as this could be discovered beneath every worldview. He believed that this pre-theoretical or “naïve” thought was the ultimate driving force in the determination of an epistemology (Dooyeweerd 2012b:12–13, 14; cf. VanDrunen 2010c:353).

For Dooyeweerd, the clear identification of different “starting-points” made it possible to engage in critical analysis of comparative worldviews (2012b:39; cf. 1979:5,15). This was especially the case when there was dialogue concerning the validity of the Christian approach. He contended that only a worldview derived from Christian theism could withstand examination (cf. Clouser 2010). However, a comparative approach provided the perfect opportunity to display the root difference between Christianity and other perspectives (Dooyeweerd 2012b:39).

Dooyeweerd was also concerned to identify how various ground motives had formed the shaping forces of history (1979:9). Interacting with the

important voices of philosophy, he sought to identify all the basic non-Christian ground-motives in Western history. In this regard, he saw dualism to be the essential problem lying beneath them all. In other words, he believed they did not allow for proper integration and synthesis between the temporal and the eternal (1979:11-12). For Dooyeweerd, this problem resulted in the “posture of life” being torn into polar and irreconcilable opposites (1979:11-12).

Dooyeweerd argued that underlying all Greco-Roman thought was a dualism between form and matter (1979:21). He also believed this was important to understanding early and medieval Christianity. Though a foundational place was given to God in early Christianity, the reductionistic principle of Greco-Roman thought was left unchecked. As a result, Christianity developed into a dualistic synthesis with Greek thought. The concepts of nature and grace were new ways to speak of the Greek concepts of form and matter (Dooyeweerd 1979:21; *cf.* Clouser 2020).

Dooyeweerd also thought these concepts were closely interwoven with the matter of church and state (1979:28). For example, he highlights that the Greco-Roman tendency was toward totalitarianism (Dooyeweerd 1979:28). It is therefore unsurprising that this was carried through to the church under Constantine in the caesaropapacy (1979:28). Due to its evolving dualistic emphasis on nature and grace, the later medieval version of this synthesis resulted in the twin concepts of “imperium” and “magisterium” and the emergence of a two-sword, or two-kingdom paradigm (Dooyeweerd 1979:15,29,129). Dooyeweerd therefore believed this paradigm to be deeply compromised. It arose from a dualistic ground motive and was thus to be rejected (1979:9-14).

At the Reformation, and particularly in the work of Calvin, Dooyeweerd believed that there was an important breach in the medieval synthesis. However, in his view, these efforts were quickly overturned by Reformed scholasticism, which had, once again, embraced the former dualistic ground-motive (1979:91; *cf.* VanDrunen 2010c:354). For Dooyeweerd, the true Christian ground motive should never succumb to dualistic ideas of any sort. The only ground motive that contained no seeds of polarity could be spoken of in terms of creation, fall and redemption (1979:12,37). In creation, all parts of human existence were presented in relation to the creator himself. At the fall, every part of this creation was impacted (Dooyeweerd 1979:31). In redemption, every part of life is reached. For

this reason, creation, fall and redemption are “unbreakably connected” (Dooyeweerd 1979:35; *cf.* VanDrunen 2010c:353-354).

Dooyeweerd’s Christian philosophy, presented upon the above basis, gave rise to his focus on the antithesis (1979:8). In other words, as the ground motive of Christianity was compared with the ground motives of Western history, he brought to the fore the fundamental difference between them (VanDrunen 2010c:353). For Dooyeweerd, this difference amounted to idolatry itself (Dooyeweerd 1979:12,109).

As Clouser explains, in Dooyeweerd’s view, all reductionist theories, even when in synthesized Christian form—as was the case in the thought of Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas—are guilty of this idolatry (Clouser 2020). Ultimately, they ascribe a supra-rational principle to the creation, where it belongs only to the creator (Dooyeweerd 1979:12). For Dooyeweerd, this idolatrous starting point always has the effect of watering down the monistic nature of the true Christian ground motive (1979:14-15).

For Dooyeweerd, Christ provided the only true possibility of an Archimedean point between the creation and the creator and thus the only adequate ground motive (Dooyeweerd 1984, Vol. 1:8, 60-61, 99) from which all of the different aspects of creation could be said to arise (Fesko 168:2019). Therefore, he wanted to present a philosophy of redemption that was solely built upon this idea (*cf.* Dooyeweerd 1984, Vol. 1: 99)—he argued that redemption could only be achieved when reliance was placed upon Christ as “transcendental root of the cosmos” (Fesko 2019:169).

In line with the above, more than offering individual salvation, Christ provides the new religious root principle for the unity of varying spheres of society (Dooyeweerd 1979:47). Because of the fall, man’s direction is in a state of non-conformity to the creation norm. However, a renewed nature is possible due to Christ’s salvific work. When this renewal occurs, the direction is fundamentally reorientated (Baus 2012). As a result of Christ’s accomplishment, humanity can continue with the task given to Adam. This gives rise to a continuationist understanding of the cultural mandate. Not only is there the possibility of realignment to structural norms, but there is also the possibility of a return to the original task of developing these norms to their full creation potential (VanDrunen 2010c:365).⁴

Dooyeweerd's Christocentric concept of *gratia communis* provided grounding for his project. He argued that the kingdom of God has its "supratemporal root" in the reborn community of mankind (Dooyeweerd 1979:130). This means that every part of creation stands in relation to God, not only generally, but by specific means of this new creation root (1979:38). Once again, structural monism is vital in this formulation. There is only one kingdom, and this kingdom has total unity in Christ (Dooyeweerd 1979:130). While sin continues to resist this reality, Christ's victory over sin ensures that the creation structure as a unified whole is completely redeemed (Dooyeweerd 2012a:143-144).

To be sure, Dooyeweerd held to a doctrine of *gratia communis*. He sees this as God's means of curbing the noetic implications of the fall and thus allowing for the ongoing presence of truth, beauty and goodness (Dooyeweerd 1979:37). Dooyeweerd also believed that non-Christian thought retained some value, despite its fundamental root error (VanDrunen 2010c:366). However, his understanding of *gratia communis* was revised to subserve his one-kingdom paradigm. He saw Jesus as the "religious root" of both the kingdom and common grace. In other words, he argued that *gratia communis* finds its principle in the same place that the redemption principle is: Jesus, the Word and Redeemer (Dooyeweerd 1979:37-39). In his view, this is the only way that Jesus can properly be said to be king over the integrated domain of creation (*cf.* VanDrunen 2010c:359). The reason that God grants *gratia communis* is precisely due to the integrity of the creation order that is "rooted in the Redeemer of the world" (Dooyeweerd 1979:38). This, in turn, led him to reprobate the concept of a common grace realm that is "independent" from redemption (Dooyeweerd 2012a:143). Such a view, he believed, divided the Christian ground motive between creation and redemption so as to once again reintroduce dualistic thought (Dooyeweerd 1979:38).

The above Christocentric underlay is important for Neo-Calvinists who argue that there is only one kingdom (Dooyeweerd 1979:130). While sin resists the reality of this one kingdom, redemption of all creation has yet occurred at a structural level (Dooyeweerd 2012a:143-144). While Dooyeweerdian thinkers accept common grace, this is only to make possible a temporal co-belligerency with unbelievers, while allowing the church to commence with the task of redeeming society (Smith 2012b:158; 2015:145; *cf.* Schaeffer 1982, Vol. 4:30).

In light of the above, it may be concluded that there is significant overlap between Kuyper and Dooyeweerd. Further, when taken as a whole, a clear positive of this greater approach is that it offers a robust philosophical view of reality and a strong challenge to overly dualistic approaches. This same attribute further shows the sense of cohesion that only Christianity can offer, as well as the strong viability of this cohesion in the marketplace of ideas. Finally, on more practical grounds, it holds forth a position that calls all Christians to meaningful and distinctly kingdom-oriented work (*cf.* Frame 2005a:6-7).

Negatively, Dooyeweerd's deep concern for creation's structural integrity has a strong potential to be overworked. Specifically, his philosophical drive to disallow all forms of duality tends to prioritize abstract reasoning over exegesis (Kline 2006b:171). As an implication of this issue, Smith voices yet another concern for his own tradition, namely, the possibility that a "draconian, almost fascist agenda" might emerge if not held in place by further checks and balances (2012b:146).⁵ Perhaps, it is at this very point that Kuyper's original position further commends itself as the safer and more ecumenical⁶ side of Neo-Calvinism. If nothing else, it should be highlighted that Kuyper's view certainly provides an interesting opportunity for further dialogue between Reformed Two-Kingdom and Neo-Calvinist theologians (*cf.* Tuininga 2012; Beck 2021).

4. Covenantal Consistency and Continuity: The Perspectival and Theonomist Approaches

Frame's undergirding perspectival method has led him to approach the matter of culture in a way that is quite different to that of the Neo-Calvinists.⁷ This method has come to be referred to as 'tri-perspectivalism' or the 'lordship principle' (Frame 2012b). The lordship principle is so named because God's lordship, the central motif of Frame's theology, is the principle from which he has derived his distinctive method (Miller 2017:3680). In other words, Frame's method could be seen as an attempt to work out the implications of God's lordship over all areas of life (*cf.* Miller 2017:4771-4772,4555-4556).

Frame sees three particular attributes of God's lordship (2002:17). These are (1) God's sovereign providence and control over all things, (2) God's authority and requirement of complete obedience, and (3) the love, intimacy and presence of God through the covenantal means that

he has made available to his creation (Frame 2008). Frame argues that these attributes arise as a “necessary consequence” of biblical information concerning God’s lordship (Miller 2017:3713). As the lordship principle focuses on Christ, Frame sees a relationship between the lordship attributes and Christ’s threefold office of prophet, priest and king (Frame 2002:634, 2008). As the prophet, Jesus is authoritative. As priest, he is present. As king, he is in control (Miller 2017:4675). Finally, Frame observes that the Ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaties a creaturely replica of the lordship principle. The relationship between vassal and suzerain kings thus offers historical confirmation of the lordship attributes of control, authority and presence (Frame 2002:350-352; 2002:3-6, *cf.* Miller 2017:4578).

Frame makes use of the above as a tri-perspectival method through which to develop and expand both on his philosophy and his theology (Barber 2014:10). While he believes that there is a deep relatedness between these disciplines, for the sake of clarity, only the perspectival application to relevant theological doctrines will here be considered (*cf.* Frame 2002:743-745; 2013:32,1101; 2015:14).

For Frame, theology is application (Frame 2013:1101). His perspectivalism is a tool that serves this end (Barber 2014:12). Moving from the conviction that theology should be applied to “all areas of life”, Frame correlates the normative, situational, and subjective perspectives to the main tenets of Reformed doctrine (Frame 2013:1101).

Frame’s views of the kingdom of God, human vocation and the cultural mandate are all moulded by his perspectival method. In this regard, he is adamant that these mandates be understood in “unitary, rather than dualistic” terms (Frame 2008:302) and insists that the Christian life “is not a monastic existence, but human life as a whole, directed to God’s glory” (Frame 2008:302).

When applied to the matter of covenant theology, Frame allows his perspectival method to serve as a “hermeneutical filter” (Kline 1986). Rather than seeing biblical history defined by the specifics of each historical covenant, he sees a set of timeless norms that are regularly reintroduced and applied as historical and situational specifics might call for the need for fresh application. In other words, what was first published in the Adamic covenant is simply reapplied to Abraham and then later at Sinai (2011:188; 2017). While the Mosaic Covenant resulted in new

revelation, its main purpose was to reapply the timeless norms in light of the historical situation that had emerged—Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. Where Israel’s obedience was called for in order to obtain a temporal blessing, so it is true—to one extent or another— “of all divine blessings in all covenants” (Frame 2011:188). This is because when “people turn away from God”, they also turn away from “God’s blessings” (p. 188).

As indicated above, Frame’s application of perspectivalism leaves no room for a sacred-secular division of any sort (Frame 2010:157; 2011:169-164; cf. Barber 2014:176). In view of this point, Frame critiques the Kuyperian concept of “radically distinct spheres” (Frame 2008:616). Naturally, he is also one of the main critics of the Reformed Two-Kingdom theology (Frame 2011; cf. Barber 2014:175). While Frame’s positive view of covenant and kingdom is presented “in varied didactic discourses” throughout his works (Barber 2014:174), Barber offers the following as a helpful abridgement of this view. Frame believes that there is “one kingdom, ruled over by one Lord, who governs the affairs of all people by a single rule of faith and practice, and everything is related perspectively” (Barber 2014:8).

The starting point for Frame’s thinking is that God controls every particle of human life and that all things and all spheres are for him (Barber 2014:176). Church and state are united under God (Barber 2014:182). As Frame says, the “church and the earthly nations” occupy “the same territory”, and both serve the kingdom of God (Frame 2008:610). No longer restricted to Canaan, the covenant has now widened to include the whole earth as its realm (Frame 2008:600).

As expected, Frame also adopts a continuationist view of the cultural mandate: Adam’s task in the *foedus operum* is republished for the church in the commission of Matthew 28:18-20. Adam’s mandate continues as a redemptive mandate under the *foedus gratia*. Frame thus holds to an essentially Neo-Calvinist view of Christ and culture (Barber 2014:177). The “congruence” of the cultural mandate and the great commission is “a logical entailment in Frame of the binding nature of the kingdom in all ages and on all people” (Barber 2014:193). The great commission of Matthew 28:18-20 then, if viewed from the church’s task to preach, must present to the world “a way of life that transforms everything, including politics” (Frame 2008:616). While stopping just short of the conclusions of theonomy (Barber 2014:208), Frame emphatically asserts that all cultural

institutions are called “to pay homage to King Jesus” (Frame 2008:249).

The above leads naturally⁸ to a consideration of theonomy and Christian Reconstructionism. While the aforementioned are closely united in terms of their cultural-religious hypotheses, they can be distinguished by virtue of the breadth and specificity of their construction. In other words, where Christian Reconstruction has all of America in view, theonomy would move beyond this to see all nations conform to its vision. Added to this difference of breadth, is the call of theonomy to adhere to the Sinaitic civil code rather than merely to a Judeo-Christian ethic, as is the preference of Christian Reconstructionists (Gordon 1994:23).

North and De Mar see Christian Reconstructionism in terms of five distinctives (1991:81-82). First, it stems from a soteriology and worldview that is Calvinistic. Second, it advocates an eschatology that is postmillennial. Third, it employs the use of presuppositional apologetics in its interaction with unbelievers. Fourth, it argues for a decentralized civil government. Fifth, it calls for the application of Mosaic law in contemporary politics and civil law (North and De Mar 1991:81-82).

While Bahnsen advocates all of these points in his various published works (cf. 2002, 2010, 2015), he is clear that the Christian Reconstruction and theonomy movements are not monolithic (Bahnsen 2002:xxix). For example, he is careful to note that he does not hold to all of Rushdoony’s views on dietary laws, North’s views on economics, or Jordan’s views on ecclesiology (Bahnsen 2002:xxix).

For Bahnsen, the issue of theonomy is more focused. He sees three core tenets in the movement. First, theonomy argues that the Word of God is authoritative in every aspect of life (Bahnsen 1988a:21; Zorn 1997:180). Second, it presumes complete continuity between the Old and New Testament (Bahnsen 1988a:21; Zorn 1997:180). Third, it argues that the Mosaic law offers a framework and pattern for socio-political reconstruction (Bahnsen 1988a:21; Zorn 1997:180; cf. Bahnsen 1994:1; 1996:118).

The theonomist’s plea for an application of the Mosaic law in the New Covenant is underpinned by a particular understanding of the relationship between law and gospel. While Bahnsen is amenable to speaking of law and grace as “convenient tags” that identify the Mosaic covenant and New

Covenant, respectively, he does not accept that there are fundamental differences in the administration of these covenants (1996:96).

Much like Frame (2012a), Bahnsen is unwilling to allow a “preconceived antithesis” between law and gospel. He insists that the Sinai revelation was an expression of promise and “not of legalism” (Bahnsen 1996:96-97). Because Bahnsen believes that the Mosaic covenant is in complete continuity with the gospel, he argues that it should be understood entirely in terms of the *foedus gratia* (1995:76). In his view, the idea that Mosaic law opposes the grace of the New Covenant is a “misguided” concept that arises from classic dispensationalism (Bahnsen 1996:97).

For Bahnsen, just as surely as the New Covenant is administered in continuity with the Mosaic Covenant, the same is true regarding the continuity between the Abrahamic and Sinai covenants (1996:98-99). This means that, for theonomists, there is a single administration of the *foedus gratia* that runs through Scripture. Moreover, there is no difference in “substance” concerning “God’s saving relationship” throughout this administration (Bahnsen 1996:97). Bahnsen was persuaded by Fuller’s critique of a law-gospel antithesis (Bahnsen 1996:26-27; *cf.* Fuller 1980:xi) and eventually also came to accept Shepherd’s monocovenantalism (Bahnsen 2002:184-185, 201-202, 235; Bahnsen 2008).

North also bases his theonomy upon a monocovenantal understanding of redemptive history. He argues that God enacted a “dominion” covenant with Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses (North 1994:208; Bahnsen 2002:184-185, 201-202, 235). North argues that upon obedience to God’s commandments and conformity to his mandate, each of the covenant as mentioned earlier recipients was promised a resultant blessing. However, these arrangements were no different from Adam’s. This is because, for North, all covenants call for mutual commitment. If any of the covenant mentioned above recipients had failed to respond appropriately, they would also have been consigned to the covenant curse (North 1994:208). Notably, North argues that this same dynamic extends to the church under the New Covenant (1994:208).

Similarly to the above, Bahnsen argues that Christians should not simply assume discontinuity between the covenants (1994:2). Where classic dispensationalism teaches that Old Testament laws are abrogated unless they are commanded again in the New Covenant, the opposite is true of

theonomy (Bahnsen 1994:2). Christians should indeed presume that the Mosaic law is binding unless “rescinded or modified by further revelation” (Bahnsen 1994:2; 1996:114). Christ taught that he had not come to abolish the law, even in its smallest component (Bahnsen 1996:114; *cf.* 1991:221; *cf.* Matthew 5:17-19).

Bahnsen sees a rejection of the Mosaic law based on the provision of a Noahic covenant as both inconsistent and selective (1991:220). He argues that all distinctions between the Noahic covenant and the Mosaic covenant in terms of their application to civil law should thus be dismissed as artificial. Further, he asserts that these distinctions were invented “to suit preconceived conclusions” and invite “mischievous theological inferences” (Bahnsen 1991:220).

Avoiding such inferences, Bahnsen argued that Matthew 22:21 and Romans 13:4 give clear authority to the state to be an avenger of ongoing Mosaic law and justice (Bahnsen 1988b:25). Civil magistrates should therefore not be limited to the use of a Noahic penal code. The state should be brought under God’s legal authority (Bahnsen 1988b:25), with the magistrate viewed as God’s minister of the sword (1991:221).

In line with the above understanding, Bahnsen also rejects any dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. He speaks of Kline’s distinction between the holy and the common as a systematic conception of the Bible that has “infected the Reformed community” (Bahnsen 1996:117). In particular, Kline’s robust argument against applying the Mosaic code to contemporary political order is seen by Bahnsen as an “unwarranted and dangerous curtailing” of the Bible’s authority (Bahnsen 1988a:24; 1996:117).

For Bahnsen, all who have sought to protect pluralism and its policies on religious freedom have taken a stand with secularism (1988a:26). Moreover, he argues that pluralism is a transgression of the first commandment and thus the very opposite of a legitimate political option (Bahnsen 1988a:26). For this reason, he concludes that the “Messianic kingdom of God” ethically requires all governments to accept the lordship of Christ “and perform their public tasks in obedience to his will” (Bahnsen 1988b:24). Correspondent to this, Bahnsen rejects both medieval and protestant conceptions of natural law (1996:100). He argues that these proposals amount to the embracing of a standard that ebbs and flows at

the dictates of an ever-changing cultural standard (p. 100). If not guilty of outright cultural relativism, he sees it as, at least, a double standard—one standard for Israel and another for the world (Bahnsen 1996:110).

More positively, as Bahnsen's cultural vision is set forth, he repudiates any state-sanction means of coercion in the application of his theonomic view. Instead, he advocates making use of all lawful processes that might bring about political and civil reconstruction (Bahnsen 1988b:28). In this regard, while Bahnsen certainly has a high view of the role of the politician, he also urges that the task not be left to politicians alone. At the very minimum, he argues, every Christian must make use of their civil privileges to support theonomic political candidates (Bahnsen 1988b:28).

Advocating Bahnsen's cultural vision, Sandlin emphasizes that, through the means of theonomy, God will one day restore the creation that man lost at the fall (Sandlin 2019:17). In this regard, theonomists are strong advocates for a continuationist view of the cultural mandate (Sandlin 2015:6). Sandlin urges that the church be viewed as "a people who will exercise dominion" in Christ's name (2015:6). This is achieved by bringing the nations into line with the Mosaic law (Sandlin 2015:6). He summarizes the positive vision of theonomy in this way: where Adam and Israel have failed, the church will succeed (2015:6). Christ's bride, therefore, has a vital place in ushering in the eschaton (Sandlin 2019:17). To "put it bluntly", Sandlin says, this "is the goal of the Gospel" (2015:6).

While space does not permit a full critical analysis of all stated above, drawing this section to a close a few succinct remarks are in order. On the one hand, perspectivalism certainly presents a powerful force for irenicism and catholicity. In that respect, it stands as the polar opposite of theonomy. Even so, the above indicates an interesting relationship between the two positions. On the one hand, Frame's perspectivalism keeps him from wholeheartedly joining the theonomist agenda. On the other hand, this same perspectivalism brings him so close to their position.

Positively, both of the positions in this grouping take the issue of cultural engagement very seriously. In this, they provide similar calls for Christians to work towards the improvement of society. Negatively, however, as surely as theonomy falls upon the extremes and tests the very limits of confessional orthodoxy (*cf.* Barker and Godfrey 1994), perspectivalism presents problems an internal and structural nature. For example, it has

been argued that, when applied to itself, perspectivalism collapses under its own weight and thus disqualifies itself as an acceptable approach (Smet 2020). In this regard, while Frame often complains that few have grasped the finer points of his argument, it does indeed seem that his ideas are somewhat unavoidably prone to this sort of confusion (Clark 2009; cf. Miller 2017:637; cf. Field 1992:80).

5. Conclusion

With the increasing relevance of the conversation, the culture debate shows no signs of slowing down. Even so, discussions are often overly simplistic. In this essay, I have attempted to make a step towards addressing this problem by offering a substructural cartography of the main views. In summary, I have suggested that, rather than thinking of the discussion only in terms of the Reformed Two-Kingdoms or Neo-Calvinist options (as is often the case), when the undergirding substructural loci are considered, it can be seen that there are at least three groupings of views that make up the Reformed, covenantal and confessional side of the conversation. These are (1) views that focus on common grace and eschatological intrusion, (2) views that focus on philosophical and structural monism and (3) views that focus on covenantal consistency and continuity.

6. Notes

1. Further, it should be noted that one hesitation in attempting to provide such a map is that all the positions involved are very detailed and complex. However, even if such an attempt serves as nothing more than a stepping stone towards the facilitation of a more satisfying theological dialogue, the endeavour is indeed worthwhile.

2. Adam's distinct priestly and kingly duties are shown to lay the groundwork for Kline's later distinction regarding the holy and the common (cf. Miller 2014).

3. In connection to the above, Kuyper also developed his concepts of common grace and sphere sovereignty (cf. Kuyper 1902–1904). In fact, VanDrunen argues that Kuyper should be viewed as someone who was more closely aligned with natural law and two-kingdom thought than with later Neo-Calvinist thought (VanDrunen 2007:284–285,306). In response to this idea, Palmer (2009) has compared Luther's two-kingdom thought to that of Kuyper's and in so doing, has challenged the legitimacy of VanDrunen's perception of a two-kingdom paradigm in Kuyper. Even so,

it is hard to deny the full force of VanDrunen's argument when many in the Neo-Calvinist camp itself have viewed Kuyper with suspicion precisely on the grounds that he allowed too much dualism into their system (Douma, Mouw and Schilder 2016). It is also significant that Bolt (2001), who is "perhaps the foremost contemporary Kuyper scholar in North America", agrees with VanDrunen on this score (Fraser 2007:112).

4. This is a key concept in understanding what drove Dooyeweerd's cosmonomic philosophy (1979:2-3). He believed that the Christian thinker was able to "undertake properly the arduous task of investigating the creational laws and thereby discovering concrete paths for cultural development" (VanDrunen 2010c:365). Although the task was formidable, Dooyeweerd believed that it rightly fell to the Christian philosopher (1979:2-3). If properly given to this work, Christian thinkers would be able to discern the principles that were needed for a truly Christian—and truly comprehensive—worldview (Dooyeweerd 1979:2-3).

5. He acknowledges examples of this issue in South African apartheid and American Christian Reconstructionism (Smith 2012b:146).

6. Van Drunen highlights that while Dooyeweerd provides the grounds for most of the current Neo-Calvinist consensus, those differing from this consensus along the lines of a more Klinean and Two-Kingdom approach, might well find unexpected assistance in the writings of Kuyper (VanDrunen 2002:429).

7. In terms of the Reformed culture discussion, John Frame has certainly been one of the most outspoken voices (cf. 2011). In this, he shows himself to be aligned with much of the Kuyperian and Neo-Calvinist positions. Even so, he has been reticent to embrace the Neo-Calvinist label (Barber 2014:177) and has also negatively critiqued Dooyeweerd's philosophy (cf. Frame 2005).

8. Kline and Bahnsen themselves have observed that Frame's attempts to provide a *via media* between their positions have only revealed another, milder form of Christian reconstruction (Frame 1985; 2008:601; Bahnsen 1991:291, 293; DeMar 2011; Sandlin 2011). However, to be clear, while Frame himself never advocates a full-blown theonomy, his perspectivalism does indeed bring him to share in many of their concerns.

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