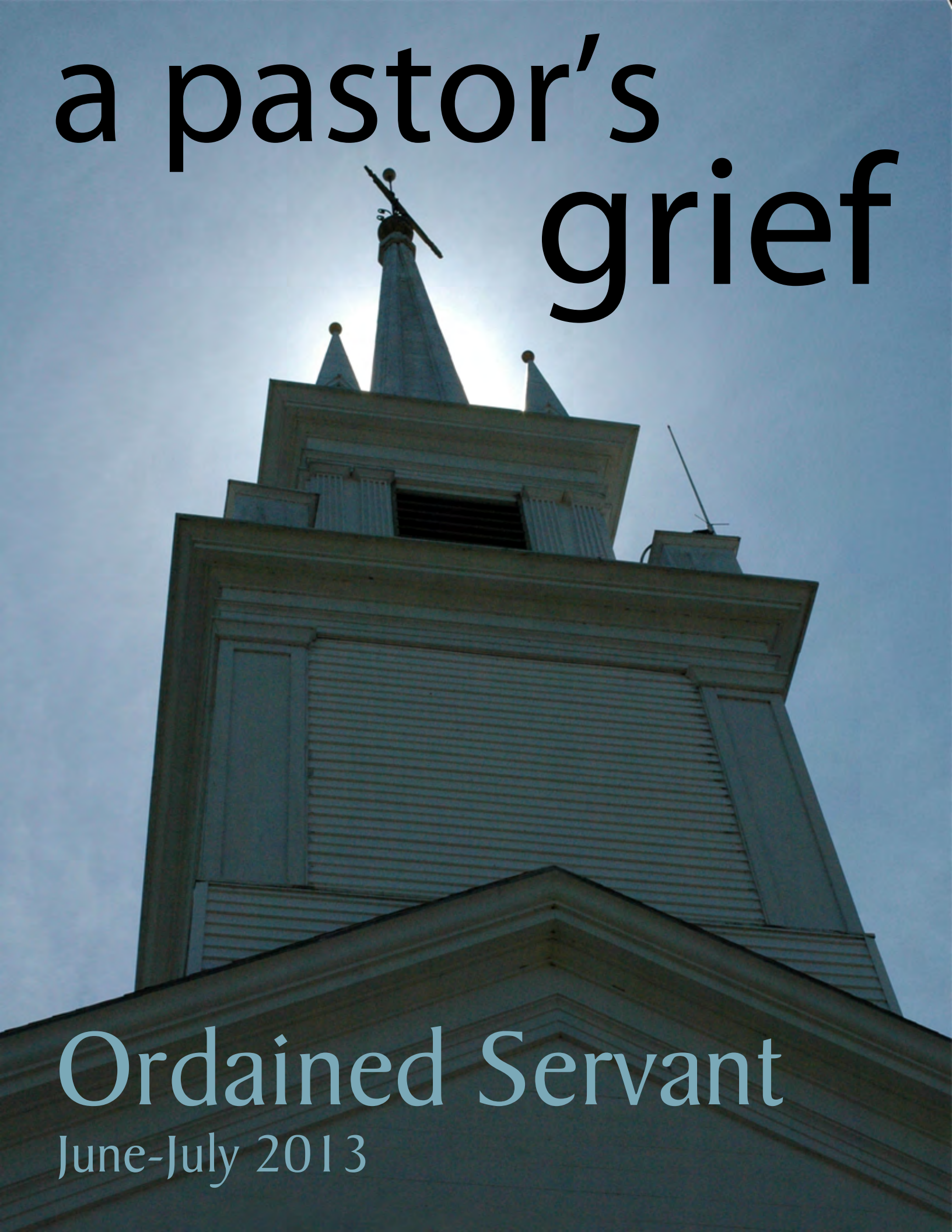
a pastor's grief



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CURRENT ISSUE: A PASTOR'S GRIEF

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From the Editor

A grief that is often overlooked is the pastor's grief. Having been through seasons of loss in our congregation, I have noticed that I was grieving right alongside those who sustained loss more directly. Empathizing with those who are grieving is a form of grieving. But pastors also feel the loss of members in a way similar to the grief experienced by the immediate family. Pastor and chaplain Gordon Cook has been a great help to me in my own grieving as a pastor and now, with the loss of my mother, as a son; and so it is a great pleasure to publish the last in a series of articles on ministry to the dying and grieving, "A Pastor's Grief, and How to Cope with It."

Along with the archive of printed issues of *Ordained* Servant below, be sure to read Gordon Cook's article "Suicide: A Complicated Grief" and his review of Glenda Mathes's *Little One Lost: Living with Early Infant Loss* in the March issue of *Ordained Servant Online*; and Brian Winsted's three part article in the March, April, and May issues.

Also in this issue is an exchange between David VanDrunen and Ryan McIlhenny in response to VanDrunen's review of McIlhenny's book (editor and contributor) on the two kingdoms. This is, I think, a model of the kind of cordial interchange among Reformed people over debatable issues that should characterize the church of our crucified Lord.

Don't miss John Muether' review of *The Church: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic,* by Richard Phillips, Philip Ryken, and Mark Dever. This is a solid book that would be excellent for adult Sunday School. In our present environment, teaching Presbyterian—that is biblical—ecclesiology is essential.

Also, David Booth reviews James Hamilton's intriguing biblical theology, entitled *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*.

Finally, George Herbert brings us a superb poem on grief. The rhyme scheme is in quatrains, but the poem has no spaces in between, perhaps to emphasize the depth of Herbert's grief, and certainly to arrest the reader's attention, by stepping slightly outside poetic convention. For a comprehensive literary biography, I recommend Joseph Summers, *George Herbert: His Religion and Art* (1954).

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

A Pastor's Grief, and How to Cope with It

by Gordon H. Cook Jr.

Pastors Grieve, Too

- My wife's unexpected diagnosis of breast cancer
- My sister's long, slow decline
- My father-in-law's succumbing to the effects of a stroke
- My mother-in-law's downward slide into dementia
- Holding Grammy's hand when the monitor flat-lined
- The loss of numerous other family members
- Supporting many dear saints as they have departed this life for glory
- Working in hospice, where death is a natural outcome in most cases

Some of you who are reading this have a longer and even more personal list of significant losses.

- Leaving a pastorate where I had served for more than fifteen years
- Watching myself descend toward old age (have you looked in a mirror recently?)
- Declining personal health and strength
- The realization that I am not going to be the next John Murray
- Watching core families depart for other parts of the country in our highly mobile society
- The loss of so much that is dear in fires or other natural disasters
- The need to exercise church discipline, even to the point of excommunication
- Seeing someone with whom you have shared both friendship and the gospel of Christ turn away, rejecting that truth which alone brings life

Some of these sources of grief are common to everyone, some are unique to a pastor. We have not always been spared the "sorrow upon sorrow" of which the Apostle spoke (Phil. 2:27). In my first article in this series[1], I suggested that at times the church and well-meaning pastors discourage believers from grieving. This is even more the case when it is pastors who are experiencing the grief.

Congregations often think very highly of their pastor. They believe that pastors are spiritually strong, closely connected with God, mature enough to see the glorious

[1] Gordon H. Cook Jr., "A Pastoral Response to Grief," *Ordained Servant* 19 (2010): 38.

purposes of God and thus be immune from the frailties of grief. Pastors are supposed to be those who provide comfort for others, not the ones needing to be comforted themselves. Regretfully, some pastors also accept these myths as if they ought to be true.

Yet consider the example of the great Apostle. Paul was constantly grieving. He grieved for his Jewish people who had failed to embrace Jesus as Messiah (Rom. 9:1–5). He acknowledged himself "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing," an aspect of the hardships which he had endured in his ministry (2 Cor. 6:10). His relationship with the church at Corinth was characterized by "affliction and anguish of heart and . . . many tears" (2 Cor. 2:4). The same was true of Paul's ministry throughout Asia (Acts 20:18–19). Thus, for example, Paul notes "that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears" (Acts 20:31). He also knew the grief of betrayal by those who abandoned Christ (Philippians 3:18). And, as has already been noted, in the face of the grave illness of Epaphroditus, Paul had anticipated "sorrow upon sorrow" (Philippians 2:27). Notice the variety of different causes of grief in the apostle. In all of this Paul is fully consistent with so many others who have labored in bringing us God's Word.[2]

Pastors grieve, just like every other human being. Sometimes pastors grieve about things that others would not. Though, to be sure, they ought not to grieve as those who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13).

Allowing Ourselves to Grieve

Pastors grieve. But rarely do we allow ourselves the time necessary to complete this process of grief. Our commitment to "making the best use of the time" (Eph. 5:16) often presses us under "the tyranny of the urgent." [3] We willingly sacrifice our own needs for the spiritual needs of others. Yet, as many pastors learn, grief has its own time-table and it can re-surface at the most inopportune times.

It was almost a year after the death of my grandmother that I was asked to do a funeral service for an elderly woman in the community whom I barely knew. I met with the woman's family, prepared an appropriate service, and was in the midst of delivering it, when suddenly I felt quite overwhelmed by feelings of grief. It became difficult to continue speaking, and I was very embarrassed. The family and members of the congregation comforted me, and soon I regained my composure and continued. What was this?

Therese Rando, a clinical psychologist, and one of the foremost writers in the area of grief, refers to this phenomenon as a STUG Reaction, a "subsequent temporary upsurge of grief."[4] Undoubtedly, it was triggered by the context of a funeral service, the proximity in time, and some minor similarities between this woman and my grandmother. Anyone who has experienced grief knows what STUGs are. They can and do occur even when grief has been carefully processed. They can occur many years after the event which was

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[2] Cf. Job (16:16, 20); Jacob (37:35; 42:38); Samuel (1 Sam. 15:35); David (2 Sam. 1:17; 12:21, 22; 2 Sam. 19:2; Ps. 6:6, 8; 13:2; 31:10; 39:12; 56:8); various Psalmists (42:3; 80:5; 88:9; 102:9; 116:8; 119:28, 136); Elisha (2 Kings 8:11); Isaiah 22:4; Jeremiah (8:18; 9:1, 10; 13:17); Ezekiel (21:6); John (Revelation 5:4); Peter (John 21:17; Matthew 26:75); Jesus (Isa. 53:3; Mark 3:5; Luke 19:41; John 11:35; Matt. 26:38).

[3] An expression made famous in Christian circles by Charles Hummel of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship.

[4] Therese A. Rando, *Treatment of Complicated Mourning* (Champaign, IL: Research Press, 1993), 64–77.

first grieved. Rando indicates that STUGs are even more common in cases of incomplete grief, where our grief has not been fully processed.[5] Taking time to process our own grief in order to reduce the likelihood of incomplete grief is a wise course.[6] It can enhance our ability to minister appropriately to others. It may take time now, but it will be time well spent.

Processing grief includes a) accepting the reality of loss; b) working through the pain and emotions associated with our grief; c) adjusting to the new environment in which the loss has occurred; and in due time d) emotionally relocating the one (or thing) who is now absent from us so that we can begin to move on with our lives.[7] Each of these tasks takes both time and emotional energy. They can be aided by spiritual and emotional support and by the good use of the means of grace. In the end we have not forgotten our loved one, nor even moved on without him or her. But we have allocated to them a new and special place in our life story which allows us to move on.

When members of your congregation grieve, they often turn to you for emotional and spiritual support, and rightly so. God has called you to serve as their pastor, a shepherd among the flock of God. The godly shepherd comforts and consoles God's lambs with the consolation of God's Word and Spirit. To whom do *you* turn as your pastor when you need comfort and consolation?

As Presbyterian pastors, we see ourselves as under-shepherds of the Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the Sheep. Surely none can provide greater comfort than our Savior. Such a thought urges us to make good use of the means of grace, not only as that which we minister to others, but also as that which nurtures, supports, and comforts us. It is the God of all comfort who comforts us in our affliction and thus provides us with comfort with which we may comfort others (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

In practical terms, this involves spending time with God. It means reading God's Word, not just as a preparation for the next sermon or Bible study, but with a desire to know, believe, and obey the will of God revealed in it; meditating upon that Word; and actively seeking to put it into practice in our lives.[8] It means partaking of the Lord's Supper, blessing God for the quickening and comfort we find therein, looking to God to continue that comfort in our lives, spiritually feeding upon Christ, the Bread of Life, and waiting upon God for the fruit of it in due time.[9] It means spending extra time with God in prayer, pouring our hearts out to him, recognizing our complete dependence upon him, humbly submitting ourselves to his will even in the matters which have erupted as grief within us.[10]

Within Presbyterianism we also find strength and comfort in the plurality of elders. God has established sessions, consisting of ministers and ruling elders. Our Form of Government charges ruling elders that "they should have particular concern for the

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[5] Ibid, 65.

[6] I have also found that taking more time with families in preparation for a funeral is very helpful. It allows me to get to know the person in a far deeper way. It makes for a more personal funeral. It also helps to avoid those unintentional associations with others more closely related to me.

[7] J. William Worden, *Grief Counseling & Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner* (New York: Springer, 1991).

[8] Consider Westminster Larger Catechism Q. 157.

[9] Consider WLC Q. 175

[10] Consider WLC Q. 185

doctrine and conduct of the minister of the Word and help him in his labors."[11] These elders are called and equipped to support the minister in matters of grief. A wise minister will do well to be open to this support from the session, or even to ask for support and comfort from these mature church leaders who are entrusted with our care. Further, many of us enjoy a close personal relationship with one or more presbyters. We find in such a colleague an open and listening ear, ready and willing to hear our grief, indeed to share in our grief with us. In these close relationships we can and should share on a far deeper level. Such a friend is not likely to wait for you to call and ask for support. A good friend offers this support as soon as he becomes aware of the need.

There is a danger within congregational ministry that a grieving minister may inadvertently burden a church member who is less mature with his own struggles and challenges, a practice both unwise and unwholesome within the church. Pastors ought carefully to heed the cautions Jesus offers in regard to offending "the little ones." It is not wrong for the minister to wrestle with grief, but this should be done with the support of mature church leaders who are equipped and prepared to provide that support.

Ministers who struggle with grief have found some other activities which are particularly helpful. For those whose vocation involves the written word, another opportunity to process grief may be found in the form of writing, whether letters or poetry or memorials, this writing allows us to express things which might be difficult to verbalize. I have been impressed with the letters incorporated in Heather Hays's book *Surviving Suicide, Help to Heal Your Heart*.[12] Survivors whose loved ones have chosen to take their own lives found great comfort in writing letters to that loved one. Indeed, readers of Hays's book can also find comfort there. The same was demonstrated in the correspondence between Pastor David Biebel and a close friend and associate, the Rev. John Aker, following the death of David's son, Jonathan.[13] Recently I was privileged to read a beautifully written letter by a fellow pastor regarding the passing of his mother, a letter which was clearly comforting for him and also for any who might read it. Putting these deep feelings into words on paper may be easier than saying them out loud, and can bring significant relief even in the midst of active grief.

Others may find comfort in gathering photographs or other items associated with those who have died, and services (public or private) of remembering and celebration. Pastors are usually very efficient at conducting funerals and memorial services, but rarely allow themselves to benefit from those services, being focused on the spiritual needs of others. Thus, it is often necessary that the minister find a separate time and occasion for his own grief, for saying goodbye, and for entrusting a loved one to the gracious hands of God.

Ministers, just like anyone else, can experience complicated grief in some circumstances. This is a grief which does not resolve with time. This is especially common in cases of sudden death, violent death, suicide, or the death of the pastor's child. Complicated grief was addressed in the second article in this series.[14] If the minister or an elder sees any of the signs of complicated grief: violent outbursts, strong guilt feelings, suicidal thoughts, lingering inability to concentrate, self-destructive

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11 *The Book of Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, Form of Government 10.3.
12 Heather Hays, *Surviving Suicide, Help to Heal Your Heart* (Dallas: Brown, 2005).
13 David B. Biebel, *Jonathan You Left Too Soon* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 112–13.
14 Gordon. H. Cook Jr., "A Pastoral Response to Complicated Grief," *Ordained Servant* 20 (2011): 60–65.

behavior, radical changes of lifestyle, or physical symptoms which imitate those of the deceased, then professional support should be sought immediately.[15]

Leading by Grieving

We ought to give ourselves the time needed to experience and process our grief. It is dangerous to try to "get on with life" too quickly. However, most ministers do not have the luxury of lengthy sabbaticals, or even long vacations. The needs of a congregation and presbytery must be met, a responsibility which we accepted in our ordination and installation vows. So how should our grief be resolved?

In grief, as in every other aspect of life, the minister should be "an example" to the flock of God.[16] Without imposing our spiritual struggles upon those who are less mature, it is fitting for the congregation to know of and to uphold their pastor in prayer during the time of grief. The faithful pastor is a testimony to the hope that we have in Christ, a hope which is undiminished even in grief.[17] Setting a proper example as one who seeks and obtains comfort from the means of grace and from mature church leaders can be highly educational to the congregation. It should not be tucked away in a false privacy, but spoken of freely, albeit in edifying terms. At the same time, many will attest that keeping active in the labor of ministry can be very helpful as part of our effort to cope with grief. And our grief can make us far more sensitive to the spiritual hurts of others.

The pastor who adopts "stoicism" in the face of grief is not doing the congregation any exceptional favor. Rather, the pastor who demonstrates a godly and hopeful grief may open the way for others in the congregation to express their own deep feelings of loss, and find healing in the sweet communion of the saints. The church is to be a safe place in which we rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15).

A Congregation in Grief

Perhaps the most challenging situation is when the whole congregation, including the pastor, finds itself in grief together. The community of faith has suffered a loss. A prominent member has died. A core family has left the church. A beloved pastor has announced his intention to leave this pastorate. The church has sustained multiple losses in a relatively short period of time. A disaster has befallen the church facility or community.

Suddenly the signs of active grief are being exhibited by many or all of the members of the congregation. Members interact with each other with irritation or disinterest. The congregation feels fatigued. You can hear the uneasiness during the worship service. You can feel the heaviness of heart. As the pastor or one of the elders you feel that same heaviness yourself.

Grief interrupts the life of the church. The church as a congregation may move through the stages of grief not unlike an individual: shock, denial, anger, bargaining,

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[15] Ibid., 62.
[16] *The Book of Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, Form of Government, 6.2.
[17] There is wise and mature counsel on this matter in an article by Stephen Tracey, "The Danger of Excessive Grief," *Ordained Servant* 20 (2011): 65–67.

depression, and hopefully one day acceptance.[18] Often church leaders will be eager to move on, to get back to normal. But grief for churches, just like individual grief, takes time, time often measured by months and years, not days or weeks. Pastors and elders need to be sensitive to the spiritual needs and comfort of God's people as they work together through this grieving process—attending to the means of grace, providing sensitive grief counseling, encouraging open discussion of the loss which is producing grief. Some churches have formed grief support groups for members who wish to make use of them. Some provide special worship services or study groups which explore loss and grief in biblical ways. Still others bring in counselors or interim ministers to help the congregation and pastor through the hard work of grieving.

It is vitally important that the pastor and elders approach their own grief realistically and in a godly way, not avoiding their grief, nor giving up that hope which is central to our Christian faith. Simply acknowledging the grief and the need of the congregation to work together through this grief may prove to be a major step toward restoring the spiritual wellbeing of a congregation. Listening and responding compassionately to the grief of the congregation is important. But ultimately, the comfort and substantial healing that is needed comes from God by his grace (2 Cor. 1:4).

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[18] These are the stages of grief set forth by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross in her now classic text, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

ServantReading

Addressing Issues: A Cordial Response to VanDrunen

by Ryan McIlhenny

Toward the end of his rather personal response to *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective* in a recent issue of *Ordained Servant,* David VanDrunen called for a "cordial engagement" between neo-Calvinists and Two Kingdoms proponents.[1] In my eager attempt at the outset to avoid a descent into a series of puerile ripostes, I will—instead of addressing specific points in his paper—accept VanDrunen's invitation. After a few preliminary remarks regarding his description of the book, I will offer points on which neo-Calvinism and the current Two Kingdoms perspective do indeed—at least *prima facie*—diverge, concluding with a note on how to cultivate irenic discussions in the future.

The Chasm between Language and Intent

My goal as editor and contributor of *Kingdoms Apart* was to engage an important discussion within the Reformed community, not to attack any one particular person. Central to VanDrunen's criticism is that the book treats him "as the chief proponent of the two kingdoms perspective." Admittedly, I may have missed something having read the manuscript multiple times, but I do not recall even an intimation identifying him as *the* leader of the pack. Yet is VanDrunen a proponent? Well, yes, and the authors treat him as such. If VanDrunen and readers of *Kingdoms Apart* feel or have explicit evidence that we engaged in a personal attack, then I, as the book's editor, offer my sincere apologies. Language and intent often fail to converge.

Having said that, however, VanDrunen's language, it seems to me, is a bit overblown—calling at least one author's argument "tendentious," agreeing with "98%" or "in essence" (meaning?) with another, using a term like "polemical" or "theoretical" to describe the essays, or attempting to ascertain my own "deep down" thoughts on a particular question I raised about Christian scholarly practice. *Kingdoms Apart* contributors may respond separately as they see fit, but—without sounding pedantic—I humbly challenge VanDrunen's claim that the book lacked "collegiality," a word that denotes a debate among equals—in this case, academics interacting with a school of thought who are also brothers in Christ within the Reformed community. *Collegiality*

[1] David VanDrunen, "What Exactly is the Issue: A Response to *Kingdoms Apart*," *Ordained Servant* (March 2013): http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=354&cur_iss=Y. Ryan C. McIlhenny, ed., *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012).

does not mean agreement. There would be no discussion if we all agreed. To say that an academic has not acted in a collegial way may be to misunderstand the meaning of the term.

Addressing VanDrunen's main concern (the issues), let me highlight what I believe are a few discrepancies with the current Two Kingdoms position. Readers should keep in mind that much of these observations are far from—or seek to be far from—tendentious, misleading, or polemical, words used by VanDrunen to describe portions of *Kingdoms Apart.*

In Company with Compromisers

In *Living in God's Two Kingdoms,* VanDrunen places neo-Calvinists in company with those who have compromised aspects of confessional Reformed theology—the doctrine of justification, in particular. (I have addressed this in *Kingdoms Apart* so I need not spend time repeating myself; readers can consider what I have written.) To be clear, however, VanDrunen does not say that neo-Calvinism *necessarily*—in a strictly deductive sense—leads to a rejection of the doctrine of justification by faith alone; nonetheless, neo-Calvinism *is* in the camp of those who do. I remain unconvinced that it endangers justification.

This is not a matter of taking one orthodox belief and turning it into heresy, but of two different beliefs with no *a priori* causal relationship. I hold strongly to Dooyeweerd's concept of the heart, for instance, as the "concentration and consummation of being." In what sense does that lead to a denial of another belief? Admittedly, there are individuals in the Reformed community who, while appropriating elements of neo-Calvinism (viz., a problematic "transformationalist" perspective), hold to a weak (at best) view of justification by faith alone; and there are also those both within and outside of the Reformed tradition who have (at worst) fully compromised the doctrine itself. VanDrunen writes, "All of us who share a commitment to the Reformed doctrine of justification should appreciate the attractiveness of my suggested paradigm." I, for one, need more convincing, to which I am open. And not to be petty, but one could make a similar argument in light of a recent "conversion." At least one Two Kingdoms representative, Jason Stellman, has turned to Rome, egregiously compromising a central tenet of Reformed theology in doing so. Yet it would be absurd to say that anyone committed to justification should not find Two Kingdoms attractive.

Related to the alleged undermining of justification is the charge that neo-Calvinists are linked to the moralistic (not Christian) political agenda of the evangelical right. This is an association made by staunch Two Kingdoms advocate Darryl Hart, who, unlike VanDrunen and Michael Horton, seems to be intransigently opposed to even a tincture of neo-Calvinism. In *Secular Faith,* Hart makes a subtle—but again, like VanDrunen, unnecessary—connection between evangelical right-wing political activism and the theology of neo-Calvinism, failing to take into consideration the many neo-Calvinists in North America who distanced themselves from the culture wars.[2] Just because the popularity of neo-Calvinism coincided with the emergence of the modern culture wars or even supported it, does not mean the two cannot be separated. Yet even Hart is right

[2] Darryl Hart, *A Secular Faith: Why Christianity Favors the Separation of Church and State* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 2006), 227–29.

when he calls out neo-Calvinists to reevaluate their social commitments in light of changing historical circumstances. "I am waiting to see," Hart writes, "the neo-Calvinist critique of culture war militancy."[3] I would echo such a challenge, and encourage neo-Calvinists to reevaluate their commitments beyond the culture wars.

But along with the evangelical political right, neo-Calvinism, for Hart, spills over into Rushdoony-Bahnsen theonomy. Hart makes the very bold claim that "the neo-Calvinist insistence on biblical politics," referring specifically to the work of James Skillen, "*paves the way* for theonomy."[4] Again, necessarily? I would say no (so would Skillen, by the way). Neo-Calvinist discussions of a "biblical" state or "Christian anything" outside the sphere of the church does not lead to theonomy. For Kuyper, the adjective "Christian" means the "betokening" influence of Christianity, not a theonomic state. Even VanDrunen refuses to make this connection: "Kuyper . . . avoided perennial tensions . . . by removing enforcement of true religion from the hands of the magistrate."[5]

Sphere Sovereignty and Two Kingdoms: Compatibility or Redundancy?

VanDrunen admits that Kuyper's sphere sovereignty places "him broadly within the Reformed two kingdoms tradition."[6] Indeed, the revival of the Two Kingdoms in its new context is a welcome corrective to those, including those pesky fundamentalist culture warriors, who have confused spheres. If I am closer to the Two Kingdoms position as VanDrunen suggests, it is because I am a proponent of Kuyper's sphere sovereignty. What is the difference, indeed, besides the later formulations, as VanDrunen argues, after Dooyeweerd? When placed together, Kuyper's sphere sovereignty and VanDrunen's Two Kingdoms seem similar. Is this compatibility or redundancy?[7] If VanDrunen agrees (at least with Kuyper), then he is a partial neo-Calvinist. Even Hart seems to be a more consistent neo-Calvinist when he criticizes, for instance, "denominational colleges" for their failure "to meet neo-Calvinist criteria of sphere sovereignty." At the Reformed college that I attended as an undergraduate, chapel attendance was required, meaning students would be punished for not going. Sounds like an unwarranted binding of the conscience and a clear example of a confusion of spheres, particularly for an academic institution.

A problem arises, however, when there is neglect not only of the overlap and interaction of spheres, but, at a higher level, of their coherence. This leads to a false tension between the church and spheres outside the church. While VanDrunen (and Hart) are perhaps better at maintaining the boundaries between spheres than some neo-Calvinists, they say very little about "sphere universality."[8] In his discussion of Kuyper's sphere sovereignty, VanDrunen acknowledges the "richness and diversity of human life,"

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[3] http://oldlife.org/2012/10/not-so-fast/ D.G. Hart's commentary on Mike Horton's effort to highlight agreements between the Two Kingdoms and neo-Calvinism at Covenant College.
[4] Ibid.
[5] David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2010), 307.
[6] Ibid., 290.
[7] While agreeing in essence with Kuyper, VanDrunen makes the case that Dooyeweerd and his followers stray from the Reformed tradition of natural law and the Two Kingdoms. See VanDrunen *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms,* 362.
[8] VanDrunen mentions "sphere universality" in *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms,* 356.

what Dooyeweerd, following Kuyper, would refer to as the irreducibility of the various spheres in human experience.[9] "Human society is complex," VanDrunen continues, but "not uniform." Yet along with important delineations, there is a fundamental coherence among spheres—hence, universality. Kalsbeek defines sphere universality as "the principle that all the modalities are intimately connected with each other in an unbreakable coherence. Just as sphere sovereignty stresses the unique distinctiveness and irreducibility of the modal [ways of being] aspects, so sphere universality emphasizes that every one depends for its meaning on all the others."[10] The coherence of spheres, at root, rests on God as creator and Christ as redeemer. I am not saying this because VanDrunen rejects universality, but to ask him and other Two Kingdoms advocates to clarify the distinction between "sphere sovereignty" and "sphere universality"—functional distinctions yet coherence in and through Christ. In Christ, all things—things that remain part of his good creation, which does not include pornography, war, or any one of Green Day's songs (which will most definitely be part of the cultural immolation)—are made, upheld, and groan for his redemption. My point here is that an understanding of universality may help us to avoid the tendency of seeing spheres as completely separate from one another.

Morality and Practical Reason

Another issue that needs further exploration on the Two Kingdoms end is whether a biblical and Christ-centered perspective has an advantage in understanding human morality and reason (generally speaking). Is a reliance on natural law to delineate morality and knowledge sufficient without Scripture? In the area of morality, I continue to grapple with the issue, so allow me to distance myself a bit on whether we can develop a view of morality that sufficiently rests on a purely natural and universal moral law inscribed on the hearts of all men. There are neo-Calvinists, however, who argue that unbelievers cannot know God's natural law solely from the natural kingdom. This is the thrust of Gene Haas's chapter in *Kingdoms Apart:*

> Apart from Christ, sinners do not have a *full* knowledge of the law in general . . . but they become forgetful when it applies to their own actions . . . In drawing the distinction in Calvin between the spiritual and civil kingdoms, VanDrunen rightly notes that in the former "Scripture [is] the sole standard for the doctrine and government of the church." But in his attempt to distinguish the civil kingdom from the spiritual one, VanDrunen goes too far in portraying Calvin as viewing natural law as the primary, and thus adequate, "standard for life in the civil kingdom." A close reading of Calvin's comments on natural law will simply not support this position . . . natural law is much less likely [apart from the Golden Rule] to give a clear apprehension of right and wrong, good and evil, when it is applied to the specific decisions of human life.[11]

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[9] Herman Dooyeweerd, *Encyclopedia of the Science of Law*, vol. 1, trans., Robert Knudsen and ed., Alan M.Cameron (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2002), 123.
[10] L. Kalsbeek, *Contours of a Christian Philosophy: An Introduction to Herman Dooyeweerd's Thought* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing, 1975), 314.
[11] Haas's quote in *Kingdoms Apart,* 45, 47, emphasis added.

Strangely, Haas's "interpretation of Calvin," VanDrunen writes, "is practically identical" with his own. Yet in Haas's reading of Calvin, knowledge of morality along with the practice of it is *insufficient* or *incomplete* without Christ. Natural law is *not* satisfactory for common or universal morality. Thus, if Haas is correct, Christians *should* think about ways to employ a biblical Christ-centered perspective on morality.

Reason likewise is deficient apart from Christ, according to fellow *Kingdoms Apart* contributor Jason Lief:

> Calvin affirms the role of reason and conscience in the temporal realm, while at the same time he expresses doubt concerning the ability of reason to know truth with any certainty . . . [Calvin] refers to the "sluggishness of mind," . . . and says the natural gifts [of reason] have been corrupted as the mind is "plunged into deep darkness." Even when he affirms the remnants of "human understanding" that exist after the fall, he goes on to say, "Yet this longing for truth, such as it is, languishes before it enters upon its race because it soon falls into vanity. Indeed, man's mind, because of its dullness, cannot hold to the right path, but wanders through various errors and stumbles repeatedly, as if it were groping in darkness, until it strays away and finally disappears. *Thus it betrays how incapable it is of seeking and finding truth.*"[12]

Does this suggest that redemption is necessary for a higher or better understanding of the created order? Neo-Calvinists would agree that Christians and non-Christians share truths equally, but on a surface or common (creational, natural law) level only. Anyone digging deeper into a particular area of study will be confronted with anomalies, irony, or just plain mystery that can never be critically and creatively worked out apart from a theoretical interpretive grid rooted in one's religious ground motive.[13] It is the religious heart that reveals the competing understandings of the common. As I mentioned in the book, the neo-Calvinist distinction between structure and direction is helpful on this point. Thus, in both morality and reason, an explicitly biblical approach is better or more advanced, again in theory, than one that rejects or simply ignores the importance of Christ.

Of course, we need to be careful on this point. Although a Christian perspective places a learner on a more advantageous level, he or she may not take the advantage. Developing a Christian perspective vis-à-vis a specific subject or scholarly endeavor is not easy; it is not something pre-packaged and hastily attached to what is studied. An integral Christian perspective requires conformity to biblical wisdom; it must incorporate key attributes of wisdom: humility, patience, and submission to authority (to God, first and foremost). Even if there is no empirical difference in appearance (which is questionable, as I argue in *Kingdoms Apart*), there is no reason to reject the integrally biblical motivation behind teaching.

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[12] Lief's quote in *Kingdoms Apart,* 233–34.

[13] Many Two Kingdoms advocates claim that Christian schools are "good." But what makes them good? Does the Two Kingdom position offer a defense for Christian education? Two Kingdom supporters do not see the need for the Christian modifier when it comes to knowledge. Why "Christian" education then? If a liberal arts education, for instance, is reduced to the now-hackneyed plumber paradigm, which it regularly is, then there is no need for Christian schools of any kind. This is an issue that needs further discussion.

Cultural Mandate, Cultural Contingencies

A clear difference between neo-Calvinists and Two Kingdoms supporters centers on an understanding of the cultural mandate. VanDrunen expressed disappointment that the cultural mandate was mentioned "only twice" in *Kingdoms Apart.* I am also disappointed and, as editor, greatly chagrined. The reason for this has to do with the contingencies of an edited work, which rarely if ever ends up the way an editor/author originally wants it to be. I am willing to accept as "incomplete" my representation of his view on the cultural mandate—I have more questions on his position than anything else—but to say that I am "misleading" readers goes too far, since "misleading" can connote an attempt on my part to deceive. At any rate, I had scheduled a well-recognized author to write a chapter specifically on the issue, but the author was unable to complete the work because of his own commitments. He pulled out of the project after the contract with the publisher was formalized, leaving me in a difficult position. I tried to find someone else; I was unable. Even so, *Kingdoms Apart* was not a comprehensive examination of Two Kingdoms or neo-Calvinism. The conversation is still young and still important.

VanDrunen presents a nuanced view that, for me at this point, lacks cogency. Nonetheless, his position needs consideration. The cultural mandate is part of the created common or natural order not only as it is "refracted through the covenant with Noah," as VanDrunen writes, but also as it was given to man before the Fall. As it relates to the shared realm, humanity has a higher obligation before God to rule over and subdue all of creation, doing so, it seems to me, in a way that conforms to how God designed the world. And while I agree that Christ has completed the work of redemption as the better Adam and reject the eschatological burden that often accompanies cultural engagement, Christians are nonetheless tasked by Scripture to bring "every thought captive" (2 Cor. 10:5) to Christ, to bring word and sacraments through the institutional church, and, for laymen and women, to walk in a Godly manner within the common realm in order to "win our neighbors for Christ" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 32, Q&A 86). Such directives are the ultimate form of ruling and subduing. We can do all this without reviving a tragically anachronistic theonomic state, compromising justification, becoming part of the emergent church movement, or being swept up in the "status anxiety" that undergirds the wayward "mission" of the evangelical right.

There is one last issue related to cultural renewal that needs clarification—namely, reconciling competing readings of 2 Peter 3. For VanDrunen, the present world, including current cultural products, will be "burned up and dissolved." But, as Wolters writes in *Creation Regained* "all but one of the oldest and most reliable Greek manuscripts do not have the final words 'will be burned up' but instead 'will be found,'" which does not mean "annihilation or complete destruction."[14] Wolters connects the conflagration imagery in this passage to that of the flood in Genesis 6–8; the earth was both destroyed and preserved. When it comes to the common realm vis-à-vis God's kingship, VanDrunen separates creation from redemption; God's sovereignty over "every square inch" is that of creator, not redeemer. This challenges the neo-Calvinist insistence on the inextricable relationship between creation and redemption. If VanDrunen's reading of 2 Peter 3 is correct, then creation will *not* be redeemed—end of discussion.

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[14] Wolters's quote in *Kingdoms Apart,* xxiv.

But if, on the other hand, God's good creation continues, especially in light of Romans 8:19–23, then there must be a connection to redemption.

Saying that our cultural works will not be annihilated, however, does not mean we know exactly what our earthly items will look like in the new heavens and new earth. This is a point on which, as I have tried to make clear, a handful of neo-Calvinists and other evangelical writers overextend themselves.[15]

A Caveat to Bandwagoners

In writing this I want readers to understand that I am not attacking VanDrunen. I have been supremely edified by his work, and I trust he will continue to challenge me—and the Reformed community—to always engage culture from a biblically robust perspective. Let me also state that I am weary of the factions that so often emerge as a result of these debates. I will steer clear of labeling VanDrunen the chief proponent of the Two Kingdoms position. Concurrently, I refuse to lump him in the camp of those strongly opposed to neo-Calvinism. VanDrunen rejects certain strands of post-Kuyperian formulations of Calvinism (e.g., Dooyeweerd and his followers, especially). In this way, then, he is a neo-Calvinist *partialist* (I am still working on the Latin), but that would describe the overwhelming majority of neo-Calvinists, including those critical of Kuyper (e.g., Klaas Schilder). What neo-Calvinist accepts everything Kuyper or Dooyeweerd have taught (the latter's position on natural law is not the only problematic issue in his theological repertoire)?[16] And taking into consideration my own disagreements with certain *applications* of neo-Calvinism, which are laid out in the book, I too am a neo-Calvinist *partialist*. The current Two Kingdoms position does well challenging the sloppiness of neo-Calvinism, but this does not require a full-scale assault against it.

When Christians disagree or merely question a position, partisanship often follows. (My articulation of the discursiveness of culture in *Kingdoms Apart* is proving itself to be true.) This is not directed toward the handful of contemporary Two Kingdom or neo-Calvinist proponents who have worked hard to lay out their position, but to the bandwagoners out there. I have interacted with a number of individuals who have no clue how to define neo-Calvinism or Two Kingdoms, but those who associate with a particular side seem dogmatically convinced that when it comes to Christ and his kingdom it is strictly one or the other. Choosing sides in ignorance is irresponsible; partisanship stifles debate. I concur with VanDrunen that a "cordial engagement" is needed—especially, let me add, for brethren and citizens of Christ's kingdom who are also witnesses of that kingdom to a fallen world.

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[15] See Mouw's quote in *Kingdoms Apart*, xxvi.

[16] I must admit that among the sixty plus neo-Calvinists on the website "All of Life Redeemed," VanDrunen deals with a small handful in *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms;* he's even more sweeping in *Living in God's Two Kingdoms.*

ServantReading

A Response to a Response to a Response

by David VanDrunen

I thank Ryan McIlhenny for his response to my review of *Kingdoms Apart*. His response is indeed cordial, thought-provoking, and helpful for promoting constructive, Reformed conversation about these issues. I regret that my contribution here must be very abbreviated, due to space constraints.

Since McIlhenny's response is not primarily focused upon the strengths and weaknesses of *Kingdoms Apart* but on a variety of issues related to Two Kingdoms/neo-Calvinism debates, it is appropriate (and agreeable) for me to address the latter rather than to rehash the former. But I do note that I was puzzled by McIlhenny's statement that "central to VanDrunen's criticism is that the book [*Kingdoms Apart*] treats him 'as the chief proponent of the two kingdoms perspective.' " This is not the case, and I am not sure why McIlhenny has this impression. I noted that I was (implicitly) treated as the two kingdoms perspective's chief proponent only to explain why my review speaks so much in the first-person singular and to alert readers that I am very much an interested party in these discussions. I was honored by the attention to my work. But I did fault *Kingdoms Apart* for its frequent misrepresentation of my views and arguments. In my judgment, the book lacked "collegiality" not because it disagreed with me but because of these misrepresentations. Having clarified this, I am now eager to engage the substantive matters McIlhenny raises.

Unity and Continuity

I wish first to address two topics that McIlhenny discusses separately, but which I think he'd agree are aspects of a larger issue. His questions to me regarding "sphere universality" and the interpretation of 2 Peter 3 seem to express concern that, though two kingdoms proponents have helpfully reminded the Reformed community about the need to make proper distinctions among institutions and activities and to distinguish this age from the age to come, they have not given proper due to the overarching unity of God's work and the elements of continuity between this world and the next. A forthcoming book of mine discusses these issues in some detail,[1] but here are a few thoughts for the present.

I think it proper to say that the new creation is the consummation of this present creation. From the beginning, before the fall, God designed the present world not to

[1] David VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming 2014), especially chapters 1 and 9.

remain in its initial form forever but to be consummated in an eschatological new creation. Scripture doesn't teach exactly what this means in detail, but it means at least that the new creation was not to be another creation *ex nihilo*; the new creation was to be the consummation of *this present world*. That remains true after the fall. The story of salvation in Christ ends with the same eschatological new creation that was the first creation's original destiny. The present creation, however, is surely not brought to consummation in its entirety, without loss. The destiny of damned angels and humans in hell proves that when Scripture speaks of *all* things being renewed or reconciled in Christ it does not mean that every individual thing that has participated in God's original creation will be incorporated into the new creation. Such biblical statements point instead to the idea that the new creation is the consummation of the original creation as a whole, in general.

Some reviewers have read page 66 of my book *Living in God's Two Kingdoms* as asserting that every material thing in this present creation except human bodies will be annihilated at Christ's return.[2] That was not my intent, though I understand why they have this impression, and I now wish I had stated some things differently. What I wished to defend, over against certain popular neo-Calvinist writers (from whom McIlhenny also seems to dissociate himself), is that Scripture gives no reason to hope that *any particular thing* in this world—whether natural or the product of human culture—is going to adorn the new creation. To say that this beautiful mountain, this pristine river, this lovely sculpture, etc., will adorn the new creation is extra-biblical speculation. The only *particular thing* in this creation that Scripture teaches will keep its present identity through the coming fire of judgment is the resurrected human body. It is not that other particular things will be annihilated, but that I cannot expect to enjoy *this* mountain, *this* river, or *this* work of art in the new creation. This claim is consistent with Romans 8 and doesn't depend upon how one resolves the textual question in 2 Peter 3:10.

How do these considerations bear upon common institutions such as family or state? How do common institutions relate to the church now and to the new creation to come? Common and special grace are aspects of a unified plan of God for human history, and this helps us to appreciate how God uses the family, for example, to bring covenant children into the church and how he uses the state to provide physical protection for the church (or how he uses economic life to provide financial means to support the church's ministry, etc.). These common institutions do not exist *only* to serve the church; I agree with Abraham Kuyper that we also ought to acknowledge independent purposes of common grace. But God's putting common institutions/activities to the use of his church seems to be one important way for us to recognize sphere universality.[3]

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[2] E.g., Keith Mathison in his review of *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*; see http://www.ligonier.org/blog/2k-or-not-2k-question-review-david-vandrunens-living-gods-two-kingdoms/.

[3] Some writers seem to assume that I do not see God's common grace or common institutions as (at least in part) serving redemptive purposes, which in turn fuels accusations about the bogeyman "dualism" and about a failure among two kingdoms proponents to appreciate the holistic character of God's work in this world. Cornelis Venema, for example, sees my appeal to the Noahic covenant, as the formal establishment of the common kingdom, as "an interesting illustration of the lack of integration in its conception of the relation between creation and redemption." Though acknowledging with me that the Noahic covenant was "a covenant of preservation," Venema seeks to counter me by claiming that "it is not a covenant that is wholly unrelated to the covenant of grace and God's purposes in redemption," for it "serves the purposes of redemption by maintaining the creation order, and also by sustaining the nucleus of the new humanity

Yet, in the context of sphere universality, McIlhenny writes that all things remaining part of God's good creation groan for redemption. Does he mean by this that all such things are redeemed? If so, I must strongly disagree. Take marriage as an example. God instituted marriage at creation and upholds it for the entire human race through his common grace. It remains part of his good creation. But marriage relationships end at death, and there will be no new marriage ceremonies in heaven. Marriage will not exist in the new creation—this is why Scripture never speaks of marriage as an institution of the redemptive kingdom of Christ. If this is the case, we should not speak about marriage being *redeemed*. Redemption is an improper category to apply to marriage. We hope that redeemed people will carry out their responsibilities as husbands and wives better than the unredeemed, but the institution of marriage itself is not being redeemed—only preserved. And similar things must be said about the state and other common institutions. I think this is one of the great benefits of the two kingdoms doctrine: it provides a way to say, with Scripture, that common institutions such as marriage are good and honorable, but also temporary—designed for *this world*.

Questions Regarding Natural Law

McIlhenny asks some questions about natural law and its relation to a Christ-centered perspective. To try to answer them briefly I believe it is crucial to make a basic distinction between, on the one hand, natural law itself as an aspect of God's objective natural revelation and, on the other hand, the subjective response to natural law on the part of sinful human beings. As objective revelation, natural law is sufficient for the purposes for which God gives it. The same is true for all divine revelation: whether special or natural, God's revelation is sufficient for the purposes for which he gave it and insufficient for other purposes. One purpose of natural law, I think we'd all agree, is to hold all people accountable before God's judgment for their violations of his moral law. This is explicit in Romans 1 and implicit in many other biblical texts, such as Amos 1. This means that the substance of the moral law is revealed in natural law; otherwise, many people could stand before God's judgment and legitimately claim excuse for their sins. Therefore, natural law must objectively reveal sufficient moral knowledge for a human being to live a blameless life in the present world. But immediately one must add that, subjectively speaking, no sinner could possibly respond to this revelation blamelessly. Natural law reveals God's perfect law but does not convey the ability to respond without sin. Fallen sinners distort the truths that they *know* through natural revelation, as Romans 1 also teaches. So in response to McIlhenny's questions regarding an advantage for Christians: Christians do not have, objectively, an information-advantage with respect to the moral law; Scripture reveals the same substance of the

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redeemed through Christ." See "One Kingdom or Two? An Evaluation of the 'two Kingdoms' Doctrine as an Alternative to Neo-Calvinism," *Mid America Journal of Theology* 23 (2012): 116–17. But where have I ever denied that? Of course the Noahic covenant serves the purposes of redemption in these ways. To say that the Noahic covenant is not a redemptive covenant (which I have said and continue to affirm) is not equivalent to saying that God does not use the Noahic covenant to serve redemptive purposes, in fulfillment of his larger plan for world history. God puts all sorts of common things to use as he builds his church through the covenant of grace.

moral law that natural law reveals.[4] But Christians may be said to have a moral advantage in that Scripture clarifies many aspects of natural revelation for our dull minds and in that Christians' sanctified hearts should be less prone to distort natural revelation.[5]

Two Kingdoms and Partial Neo-Calvinism

McIlhenny also raises a number of interesting issues concerning the identity of neo-Calvinism, its relationship to the two kingdoms, and the similarity of some of their characteristic ideas. With the very little space remaining I offer a few thoughts.

One question he asks is whether I am a "partial neo-Calvinist." The suggestion has a certain logic to it: If Kuyper is regarded as a neo-Calvinist, and if I express considerable appreciation for Kuyper's thought, then it seems I'm a partial neo-Calvinist. The more expansively a term is used, however, the less useful it becomes as an identity marker. If "neo-Calvinist" can describe nearly everybody in the broader Reformed community then it may not serve a helpful purpose. As I'm sure McIlhenny would agree, it's ultimately not terms that matter, and it's unfortunate when terminological confusion causes unnecessary disagreement. At the same time, it's also difficult to proceed efficiently in academic discussion without having terms to identify views and schools of thought, and so it's understandable that we speak of "neo-Calvinists" and "two kingdoms proponents" and hope these will be useful shorthand for capturing certain convictions.

What is most important to me is that the Reformed community reaffirm the basic distinction between God's two kingdoms—his common providential rule and his special redemptive rule—whether or not one agrees with all the ways I personally apply this distinction in exploring the Christianity-and-culture issues. This distinction is biblical and has very deep roots in the Reformed tradition. I would deem it a great blessing from God

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[4] As Francis Turretin puts it, the natural law and moral law are the same as to "substance" and "principles" but differ in "mode of delivery." See *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 2, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 6. These sorts of statements do of course require further nuances in order to be most helpful and accurate. For example, careful distinctions need to be made among different covenantal contexts within which the moral law is revealed and at times differently applied.

[5] In some other recent pieces evaluating my writing on the two kingdoms there is a lot of speculation, presented as fact, about what my constructive view of natural law is, particularly with regard to its relationship to special revelation, its function governing the common kingdom, and unbelievers' response to it. I have actually published very little on these subjects; *Living in God's Two Kingdoms* does not discuss natural law at all and *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms* is a historical work and does not present my own constructive views in any detail. Yet Jeffrey Waddington and Cornelis Venema, for example, think they know a lot about my views and offer bold critical comments; see Waddington, "Duplex in Homine Regimen: A Response to David VanDrunen's 'The Reformed Two Kingdoms Doctrine: An Explanation and Defense,' " *The Confessional Presbyterian* 8 (2012): 192–93; and Venema, "One Kingdom or Two?" 106–11. I'll mention just one issue among several they raise: the unbeliever's ability to profit from natural law. Waddington (193) states: "Clearly Dr. VanDrunen's understanding of the efficacy of natural law/natural revelation is significantly different from the clear and unambiguous statement made in the Canons of Dort [3/4.4]." Similarly, Venema (108-9) also implies that I am at variance with Canons of Dort 3/3.4 and writes: "in the two kingdoms paradigm, non-believers are almost as apt as believers to profit from their discernment of the natural law." Neither of them cite a single example from my writings to prove these claims; nor could they, I am quite sure. I agree entirely with the statement in Canons of Dort 3/4.4 and have never argued against it. And I cannot think of where I have said anything along the lines of Venema's charge.

were the Reformed community as a whole to re-embrace it, and I see my efforts to defend the distinction as something I can do to serve the Reformed churches I love. The thing is, I struggle to think of any contemporary figure I have read or spoken to who either calls himself a neo-Calvinist or is commonly identified by others as a neo-Calvinist who does not speak of God's kingdom in the singular. Possibly my own experience is just quirky, but ever since I began thinking seriously about this I have understood a one-kingdom view to be of the essence of what "neo-Calvinism" is. Thus I do not consider myself a neo-Calvinist. To me, the thought of a "two kingdoms neo-Calvinist" is like the thought of a "libertarian socialist." It's paradoxical, even contradictory.

But that doesn't mean there aren't other features of neo-Calvinism that are consistent with maintaining a two kingdoms distinction, at least potentially. I can think of many (and have identified some in previous writing). McIlhenny suggests that the familiar neo-Calvinist idea of sphere sovereignty is similar to the two kingdoms idea. I appreciate his raising this issue, and I am sympathetic to his thoughts. The ideas of two kingdoms and sphere sovereignty are indeed both concerned with making proper distinctions among institutions and activities in this world. Yet I see the two kingdoms distinction as addressing a foundational biblical issue, while I see the idea of sphere sovereignty as working out a more detailed social theory (which requires intellectual labor beyond theology and biblical exegesis). A theory of sphere sovereignty is indeed very useful, I believe, as long as it is anchored in a two kingdoms doctrine.[6]

Conclusion

Again, I thank McIlhenny for his cordial and thoughtful response. I hope that this exchange will be of some small use to the Reformed community and be a positive stimulus for productive discussion in the future.

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[6] This is an issue on which I'm hoping to do a lot more research and writing in the years to come. I am eager to hear more constructive thoughts on this issue from McIlhenny and others with interest in the topic.

ServantReading

The Church

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by John A. Muether

The Church: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic, by Richard D. Phillips, Philip G. Ryken, and Mark E. Dever. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004, xi +146 pages, $9.99, paper.

Awash as we are with books that (1) claim the church today is in crisis and (2) prescribe the means for its reinvention, it is easy to overlook this modest collection of essays. Based on addresses delivered at a 2003 meeting of the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology, this review of the attributes of the church, as confessed in the Nicene Creed, is well suited for a short adult Sunday school series.

The authors concede that the contemporary church, by schisms rent asunder and by heresies distressed, rarely shines in its unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. But Philip Ryken reminds us that to confess that "we *believe* in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church" is to acknowledge that the church and her attributes are articles of faith. Often defying empirical evidence, unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity are at once gifts with which the Spirit of Christ has endowed the church and goals to which we are called to aspire.

Ordained Servant readers might be tempted to dismiss the treatment on the catholicity of the church, because it comes from a Baptist contributor, Mark Dever who pastors Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC. But they should resist that temptation. Dever is that rare breed of "high church" Baptist (in the best sense of that term), and many Presbyterians would be better Presbyterians if they read more from his pen. Here he demonstrates that catholicity is a rich and robust term; "universal" does not serve as an adequate synonym. (Which suggests that "catholic church" should replace "global church" in our vocabulary.) Dever writes that catholicity means that "each Christian has concern for all other Christians elsewhere." This claim has more significance than we realize. Concern for other Christians extends to *reforming* them, and so commending the Reformed faith is an act of catholicity. Proclaiming the doctrines of sovereign grace from our pulpits, honoring the sanctity of the Lord's Day, catechizing our children in the Reformed faith—in these and other practices we are witnessing both to a watching world and to other Christians. This is not sectarian isolationism; it is Reformed catholicity.

A book of this size will inevitably frustrate a reader who wants to see themes further developed. I wished for greater reflection on the value of church discipline in reinforcing the attributes of the church. And Phillips's plea for an "evangelical unity" based on unspecified "essentials" seems to diminish the function of confessions in defining our unity. Still the authors write with clarity and succinctness, as, for example, in drawing helpful distinctions between catholic and *Roman* Catholic (the latter literally being a contradiction in terms) and in explaining why apostolicity demands neither apostolic

succession nor the continuation of apostolic gifts. This refresher course serves to remind us of why we can and should continue to recite the Nicene Creed in public worship.

In the framing of the book, the four attributes receive a chapter apiece, sandwiched between an introduction and a conclusion. This is fitting as it allows Christ to have the first and last word in this discussion of the church. In the introduction, Phillips ties Christ's "great promise" ("I will build my church") to the "great principle" of the church that immediately follows in Matthew 16: "From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (v. 21). Here is an insight that is universally absent in new recipes for the church: the path for the church is the way of the cross. In its weakness it proclaims the power of God unto salvation, and in its suffering the church maintains its one, holy, catholic, and apostolic witness.

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ServantReading

God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment

by James Hamilton

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by David A. Booth

God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment, by James M. Hamilton Jr. Wheaton: Crossway, 2010, 640 pages, $40.00.

The desire to see the Bible as a unified whole where Scripture is taken on its own terms has produced a flowering of biblical theology over the past century. Regretfully, many of these theologies should carry warning labels regarding how they subvert particular biblical truths, ignore the history of theological reflection, or require formal theological education in order for the reader to profit from engaging them. What is needed is a biblical theology that is reliable, robust, committed to the absolute authority of God's word, and accessible to non-specialists. James M. Hamilton Jr., associate professor of biblical theology at the Southern Baptist Seminary, has given us just such a book.

The conviction that God is the author of both history and Scripture naturally leads us to search out the Bible's plot line. As Professor Hamilton puts it, "If the Bible tells a coherent story, it is valid to explore what that story's main point is" (39). So what is the Bible's main point? This apparently simple question has received a bewildering variety of proposed answers, each of which has generally been found wanting. The failure of so many proposals to attain broad acceptance has led some scholars to suggest that we search for a cluster of central themes in Scripture rather than a solitary unifying center. Nevertheless, James Hamilton is unwilling to give up the quest. *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment* is Hamilton's attempt to both identify the central plot line of the Bible and to demonstrate how this central point unifies the message of God's Word.

The Bible-believing, Reformed tradition has placed great emphasis on both the glory of God and, particularly over the last generation, understanding Scripture in terms of the history of redemption. Orthodox Presbyterians will therefore naturally appreciate how Professor Hamilton combines these two emphases in crafting his proposed center, which is also the title of the book, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*. Yet, how can we know whether this is a central theme or *the* central theme of God's word? Professor Hamilton reasonably suggests "that all the Bible's themes flow from, exposit, and feed back into the center of biblical theology" (53). He then skillfully walks the reader through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation demonstrating "that God's glory in salvation through judgment is the *heart* of the Bible, the idea being that it is the muscle that pumps

life-giving blood to the whole body" (556). Among this engaging book's many strengths are its clarity, sober exegesis, cogent reasoning, helpful use of tables, and thoughtful application of the truths it is expounding to the life of the local church. The book concludes with two short but valuable chapters. The second to last chapter involves an interaction with objections to the book's thesis raised by I. Howard Marshall and Ben Witherington. The final chapter addresses how the book's thesis impacts ministry in the local church. Hopefully future works of theology will follow this example.

Professor Hamilton's stated aim was "to allow the biblical text to set the agenda for the contents of this book" (553). I believe that he has largely succeeded in this quest, but I do have a few reservations. If "the biblical text set the agenda for the contents of the book" why does it spend as much time discussing 1 Peter as it does discussing Job, Ezra, and Nehemiah combined even though the latter books are approximately fifteen times larger? In a similar vein, given that the primary content of our Lord's own preaching was the "kingdom of God," Hamilton gives this theme less attention than it seems to merit. Perhaps the book's thesis could be improved by balancing its emphasis on God glorifying himself through acts of judgment and rescue with God glorifying himself through the consequences of these acts. Such an approach might more fully explain the amount of Scripture dedicated to wisdom, moral law, sanctification, and the church as God's family. Professor Hamilton recognizes that this book is not the final word on biblical theology (558). Those who wish to appropriate and extend his proposal should find it fruitful to integrate Hamilton's insights with those of Meredith Kline and Greg Beale.

We should not allow this book's failure to provide the definitive grand theory of biblical theology to blind us to its many admirable qualities. Most Christians who pick up this work simply want help understanding the Bible better. *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment* is an excellent tool to help with that quest. This is far and away the best organized and clearest of all the biblical theologies that I have read. While lacking the profundity of Greg Beale's massive *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, this book is dramatically more accessible to those who lack seminary training. Early in the book Professor Hamilton tells us what he hopes this work will accomplish: "The goal is not a return to an imaginary golden age but to help people know God" (38). Professor Hamilton is entirely successful in achieving this lofty goal. The admirable clarity and robust orthodoxy of this book makes it my top choice in biblical theologies for thoughtful laypeople and for those beginning formal training in biblical studies. Highly recommended.

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George Herbert (1593-1633)

Grief

O Who will give me tears? Come, all ye springs,
Dwell in my head and eyes; come, clouds
and rain;
My grief hath need of all the watery things
That nature hath produced: let every vein
Suck up a river to supply mine eyes,
My weary weeping eyes, too dry for me,
Unless they get new conduits, new supplies,
To bear them out, and with my state agree.
What are two shallow fords, two little spouts
Of a less world? the greater is but small,
A narrow cupboard for my griefs and doubts,
Which want provision in the midst of all.
Verses, ye are too fine a thing, too wise
For my rough sorrows; cease, be dumb and mute,
Give up your feet and running to mine eyes,
And keep your measures for some lover's lute,
Whose grief allows him music and a rhyme;
For mine excludes both measure, tune, and time:
Alas, my God!