

## Everyman's Guide to Protestant Political Thought : A Crash Course in Historic Reformed Political Discourse

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### Magisterial Two Kingdoms

Popular with the Protestant Reformers, including Luther, Calvin,

#### ➤ USE BOTH NATURE & SCRIPTURE

God reveals himself in both nature and Scripture. These two forms of revelation are complementary and clarifying, and we can and do draw from both.

While the Fall does affect our reasoning abilities, it does not obliterate them. Yes, we are totally depraved, in the sense that we are dead in sin and blind to the beauty of God, and our sinfulness pervades every aspect of our existence. However, we still think and reason, and are, in principle, able to discern truth from falsehood, good from evil.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://americanreformer.org/2024/11/everymans-guide-to-protestant-political-thought/?utm\\_source=pocket\\_shared](https://americanreformer.org/2024/11/everymans-guide-to-protestant-political-thought/?utm_source=pocket_shared)

God has endowed us with a conscience, with a law written on our hearts. Truths about God and our moral duties as humans are evident in creation, even if wicked custom frequently smothers the light of this natural understanding. So when it comes to political philosophy, we consult natural law as clarified by Scripture. Rightly understood, they speak with one voice.

### ➤ **CORPORATE BODIES**

Corporate bodies, whether families, churches, nations, or states, are moral entities, and ought to acknowledge the living God and the risen Christ. Family, church, and state are distinct institutions with distinct vocations, emphases, and tools, but they ought to assist each other in directing human beings to both their earthly good and their heavenly good.

### ➤ **THE LAW OF ISRAEL - 3 DIVISIONS & BOTH TABLES**

Old Testament Israel is a model for nations, and we consult Israel's law and history as wisdom for us. We distinguish between moral, ceremonial, and civil layers to the law, with the moral law (which corresponds to the natural law) still universally binding, the ceremonial law fulfilled and abrogated in Christ, and the civil law

useful as divinely sanctioned applications of the moral law to Israel's particular circumstances.

The two tables of the law are distinct, but inseparable. Piety (our duties toward God) is the foundation of justice (our duties toward man). The second table rests on the first.

➤ **THE KINGDOM OF GRACE & KINGDOM OF POWER**

Two kingdoms in a particular sense. God governs the outer man through various authorities—parents in the family, ministers in the church, magistrates in the nation. The family, the state, and the visible church are all in the earthly kingdom, whereas the invisible church (which is known only to God) is the spiritual kingdom.

➤ **FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE & YET STILL EXTERNAL COMPULSION**

This distinction is why Protestants can champion freedom of conscience and still permit external compulsion even in certain religious matters. No earthly authority is capable of binding the conscience; you can't make people believe. But you can compel and restrict outward behavior, and thus Sabbath laws and laws

restricting blasphemy or heresy are permissible, since such public acts are harmful to the social order, which the state has jurisdiction over.

## Kuyperian Neo-Calvinism

Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch theologian and statesmen of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Other proponents are Bavinck, Dooyeweerd, Tim Keller.

Book: Our Program; In this work Kuyper lays out his philosophy of political thought, as it is distinct from the secular politics of the time and the all too common tying of church and state.

Kuyper opposed the magisterial view of politics and strongly disagreed with the Belgic Confession Article 36 - (its Constantinian language)

### ➤ **SPHERE SOVEREIGNTY**

Kuyper's fundamental contribution is the doctrine of sphere sovereignty. In Kuyper's view, each social institution (family, church, state, business) is sovereign in its own sphere and must be free from interference from other spheres. The result was a sharp division between church and state.

### ➤ **A "CHRISTIAN" STATE (A THEISTIC STATE)**

Kuyper offered a sharp distinction between general and special revelation. Natural knowledge includes...

- 1) there is a God,
- 2) This God governs the world, including the State,
- 3) he desires justice, and
- 4) sin is operative among men and requires a supernatural remedy.

Thus, corporate bodies are moral agents and accountable to God. Kuyper believed in a Christian nation, which he defined as “a nation not without God.” This double negative contrasts with a more robust notion, such as “a nation in covenant with God.”

But while upholding the idea of a Christian nation, he rejected a Christian state. The state is based on natural knowledge of God and must limit itself to the truths of general revelation. Thus, while the state should acknowledge God, it must not acknowledge Christ. Individual magistrates can influence the state by their individual faith, but they should not formally enshrine their convictions through the state.

### ➤ **NATURAL LAW**

The state lacks the competence necessary to determine truths of revealed religion and adjudicate among competing interpretations. He rejected attempts to model modern states after Israel in the Old Testament.

At the same time, Kuyper believed that the State should maintain law and order, continue to use the oath of office (which invoked God), and observe the Sabbath (since setting aside one day is a creational principle).

### ➤ **FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE & FREEDOM OF WORSHIP**

The state should not hinder the ministry of the gospel and the people's interest in worship or influencing culture.

Neither should it interfere with other religions and faiths. Kuyper insisted not only on freedom of conscience (which the classical Protestant view had done) but also on freedom of worship and freedom of expression. Blasphemers and heretics must be allowed free rein in society. He rejected religious tests for public office (even atheists can serve) and argued for

“government nonintervention in the domain of revealed religion,” or what we might call a “principled pluralism.” Kuyper’s ideal was “a free church in a free state.”

### ➤ CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

At the same time, he commended a vision of cultural transformation through individuals and private associations (churches, schools, charities) in which every sphere would be brought under the lordship of Christ. Kuyper pointed to the United States of America as a model of his vision of social order.



# Theonomic Reconstruction

Reconstructionists include Rousas Rushdoony, Greg Bahnsen, and Gary North.

## ➤ SPECIAL REVELATION (NO NATURAL LAW)

While the Recons certainly acknowledged the existence of general revelation, following Van Til, they regarded it as effectively useless apart from Scripture, due to man's radical depravity. Because of man's truth-suppressing rebellion, there's no use consulting natural revelation and natural law; instead we ought to consult Scripture.

## ➤ "CIVIL" LAW AND THE CONTINUITY OF SCRIPTURE

Theonomists were often skeptical of moral, ceremonial, and civil divisions of the law. Their hermeneutic was to assume continuity and the ongoing force of the law unless specifically abrogated by the NT. As Bahnsen wrote, "Our attitude must be that all Old Testament laws are presently our obligation unless further revelation from the Lawgiver shows that some change has been made.... We must assume continuity with the Old Testament rather than discontinuity"

The Old Testament civil laws, *including its punishments*, continue to be relevant and binding as God's ideal way of governing societies. In fact, this is why God has given us the Old Testament law—it shows us the ideal way that societies should be ordered.

➤ **SPHERE SOVEREIGNTY, BUT NO NEUTRAL STATE**

Theonomists appreciate the idea of sphere sovereignty, however they reject the notion of a neutral state. There is no neutrality in anything. So all institutions need to be grounded in the lordship of Christ.

➤ **ENFORCE OT PUNISHMENTS & FIRST TABLE?**

➤ **SUMMARY**

## Radical Two Kingdoms (Reformed & Lutheran)

R2K should be seen as a reaction to the previous two camps. R2K theology is largely rooted in Westminster Seminary in California and has been propounded by David VanDrunen, Michael Horton, R. Scott Clark.

### ➤ COMMONS KINGDOM & REDEMPTIVE KINGDOM

R2K emphasizes the distinction between natural law and Scripture, arguing for a common kingdom (governed according to natural law) and a redemptive kingdom (governed by Scripture). In the church age, these two kingdoms correspond roughly to the church and the state.

R2k places considerable weight on the covenant with Noah as the establishment of the common kingdom, in contrast to the redemptive covenant with Abraham.

### ➤ REJECTS KUYPERIAN TRANSFORMATIONALISM

Whereas the Kuyperians built a semi-neutral public square via sphere sovereignty, R2K accomplished something similar with the common vs. redemptive kingdom distinction, but without the Kuyperian

transformationalism in education, arts, business, and culture. Thus, R2K and Kuyperians are at odds over whether there is a Christian way to pursue one's vocation, but are aligned when it comes to a neutral state.

➤ **ENFORCE THE SECOND TABLE OF THE LAW ONLY**

R2K advocates therefore argue that human governments can punish crimes as defined by the second table of the law (horizontal justice), but not the first. The state should not seek to promote obedience to the first table of the law, or punish disobedience to it as a matter of theological principle; it's not authorized or competent to do so. This follows from their emphasis on the Noahic covenant as the foundation and model for governments in the church age, as opposed to Israel.

➤ **ISRAEL IS UNIQUE AND UNREPEATABLE**

➤ **ISRAEL'S OT JUDICIAL LAWS ARE ABOLISHED**

Israel was unique and unrepeatable, and thus, modern nations should not seek to emulate Israel's political structures and laws.

To put it another way, like the Kuyperians, R2K creates a secular and neutral space, but using a different means (the Noahic covenant) which avoids the Kuyperian transformationalism that they also rejected.

# Baptists

Since the 17th century, Baptists have been dissenters and separatists within Christendom. At various times, Baptists were persecuted by other Christians as disruptors of the peace and a threat to social order.

Jonathan Leeman and Paul Miller.

## ➤ A PURE CHURCH / PURE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

The hallmarks of Baptist political thought are regenerate church membership. Baptists believe the new covenant requires that only true believers be a member. There is no “mixture of regenerate and unregenerate” in the New Covenant Church. Jeremiah spoke of a day when “they will all know me.”

This subsequently leads to a belief in...

## ➤ FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE / SECULAR STATE

There can not be a christian state because it is not a pure membership. There is a sharpe distinction between the church and state because of this view of a pure church. Many Baptists argue that you can't call any

institution Christian except the church, because no other institution is made up solely of regenerate Christians. So, no Christian nations or states (though they sometimes make exceptions for Christian schools and Christian families).

As a result, the state must promote freedom of conscience when it comes to the people and their faith. The state must be basically secular to allow all faiths the liberty to act according to their conscience.

BUT...

➤ **SOLA SCRIPTURA & CHRIST'S LORDSHIP**

BAPTISTS tend to put a heavy emphasis on Scripture over against natural law. For example, Baptists will frequently highlight the need for explicit biblical authorization for the family, the church, or the state to do something. Without that explicit biblical authorization, that institution is prohibited from engaging in certain activities.

➤ **ISRAEL IS NOT A MODEL FOR NATIONS**

for Baptists, we do not look to Israel as a model for modern nations; instead theocratic Israel is fulfilled in the church, with excommunication replacing capital punishment.

### ➤ A GENERIC THEISTIC STATE

Acknowledge God to some degree, embrace the idea of Kuyper's view of transformationalism. Sincere and conscientious Christians who seek to influence society, but who refuse to formally establish their religious views in law and policy.