Citizens and Exiles: Christians, the Church, and Culture
by Scott Aniol

Conservative Christians have long been charged with being too critical of culture, too separated, and too uninvolved in cultural engagement. In contrast to what many evangelicals considered the "Christ Against Culture"[1] posture of conservative Christians, the dominant perspective that has emerged and even come to be described by Russell Moore as "evangelical consensus" is cultural transformationalism, often described as Neo-Kuyperianism or Neo-Calvinism.[2] Although this perspective has characterized different traditions and has taken a variety of forms, several key underlying theological ideas remain consistent.

First cultural transformationalism is based in the idea that God intends to redeem, not just elect individuals, but all creation, at least in part during the present age. "The Christian message," Carl Henry argued, "aims at a re-created society."[3] Transformationalism's philosophy of culture engagement is centered in soteriology, and thus language of cultural "redemption" is at its heart.

Second, transformationalism derives from the belief that God's mission and the church's mission are one and the same. The so-called *missio Dei*, the idea that God desires to redeem all creation, is the basis for understanding the church's mission in transformationalist thinking. In essence, the Great Commission is simply a continuation for the present age of what they call the "cultural mandate" of Genesis 1:28.[4] This is often framed in language of "Creation-Fall-Redemption," a description of both God's mission in history and the church's mission in culture. Christ is presently ruling all things as King, they argue, and it is part of the mission of the church to extend that rule into all spheres of society, including culture. They love to quote Abraham Kuyper's well-known statement, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: 'Mine!'"[5] in support of their view.

As such, cultural transformationalism insists that "the church *qua* church must engage the social and political structures."[6] Because evangelical transformationalists believe the church to be an initial manifestation of the kingdom, they see a distinctive social mandate as inherent in the church's mission. Furthermore, transformationalists tend to minimize any distinction between the mission of the church as a gathered, organized institution and individual Christians in society.

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[1] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (Harper & Row, 1975). While the taxonomy H. Richard Niebuhr presented in *Christ and Culture* is considerably limited in these discussions, his basic language and categories nonetheless remain helpful.

[2] Popular defenses of the transformationalist philosophy include Cornelius J. Plantinga, *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002); Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005); Michael Goheen and Craig G. Bartholemew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

[3] Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, Originally published in 1947; reprinted (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 84.

[4] See Russell Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel* (Nashiville: B&H Publishing, 2015), 84.

[5] Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 488. Emphasis original.

[6] Russell Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 139.

As a response to this, I would like to present a biblical understanding of Christian cultural engagement that reflects important conservative Christian values to this day.

The Two Kingdoms of God

At the heart of our philosophy of the church's responsibility toward culture is a proper understanding of how God rules sovereignly over all things, how he specifically rules his redeemed people—particularly now the NT church, and how his rule will culminate in the future. Another way of saying this is that central to a biblical philosophy of cultural engagement is how Scripture uses language like "rule," "reign," and "kingdom" to describe God's plan in history, and essential to this understanding is recognition that Scripture uses these kinds of "kingdom" terms to describe a couple different concepts in God's working out of his sovereign plan. I'll summarize what I mean here and then develop it. Sometimes Scripture uses "kingdom" terminology as a metaphor to describe God's universal sovereign rule over all. Other times Scripture uses "kingdom" language as a metaphor to describe his redemptive rule over his people. And other times Scripture describes a very concrete, literal kingdom on earth. Exploring these three uses of kingdom language in God's plan will help us to understand our relationship to each.

The Universal Reign of God

First, there is one clear sense in which the Bible refers to a kingdom that is eternal and universal in scope. The psalmist proclaims, "The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all" (Ps 103:19) and "Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations" (Ps 145:13). All aspects of the universe fall under this rule, including what we might commonly consider culture: social and family structures, agriculture, the arts, and so forth. God rules it all.

Within this universal reign, God has chosen humankind to serve as his vice regents on earth, ruling over every living thing. He created Adam and Eve in his image and blessed them with dominion over his kingdom: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen 1:28). This dominion blessing enables humankind to take the raw materials of God's creation and use them for his glory and their good, thus giving humankind a definite biblical basis for involvement in cultural endeavors. This blessing establishes the basis for common human institutions such as marriage, family, agriculture, horticulture, and husbandry. Important to note here is that God gives this dominion to *all* human beings, not just believers; this blessing occurs before the Fall. All humans have been blessed with dominion over creation, and thus God rules his universal kingdom through all people created in his image.

However, God intended Adam to be not only a king, but also a priest. Genesis 2:15 says that God placed Adam in the garden "to work it and keep it." Most Hebrew scholars note that when the two Hebrew words "work" and "keep" are used together in the Old Testament, they almost always refer to priestly work. In other words, God intended for a perfect union between the civil and the religious to exist in the garden—Adam was supposed to be the perfect king/priest.

However, this role as king/priest included with it certain responsibilities, among them the command to abstain from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17), a command intended to test Adam's role as king/priest of the garden. Had Adam obeyed this command, he

would have been confirmed in holiness, and mankind would have continued to perfectly rule the natural world as mediators of God's universal rule. But Adam failed to preserve the purity of the garden, thus bringing a curse upon humankind and all creation.

This curse did not end the universal rule of God, nor did it end humankind's blessing of rule over creation. God's covenant with Noah in Genesis 9 reveals this in specifically repeating the dominion blessings of Genesis 1:28—"Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." Yet now because of the presence of sin, in God's covenant with Noah he added additional measures to preserve peace in the midst of that sin, the most notable of which is the earthly institution of human government, with its God-given responsibility of capital punishment first outlined in Genesis 9:6: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image." God gave this responsibility to govern the world and its people once again to all humankind as a means through which God would sovereignly control man's sinfulness and preserve the world and its order. Romans 13:1 reiterates this point when it says that governing authorities "have been instituted by God." When governing authorities fulfill responsibilities given to them by God, verse 6 calls them "ministers of God"; when they punish wrongdoing, governing authorities are actually "carr[ying] out God's wrath on the wrongdoer" (v. 4). Even the existence of separate languages and nations spreading "over the face of all the earth" (Gen 11:9) is a God-ordained outgrowth of the dominion blessing to "fill the earth."

Therefore, God now continues to rule universally over all things through these human institutions that he himself ordained for this purpose. These human institutions encompass all people, believers and unbelievers alike, who exercise dominion over what he has made and attempt to maintain order and stability in the midst of a cursed world. The dominion blessing of Genesis 1:28 and 9:1 as well as the human institutions God established in conjunction with these blessings, are not redemptive in nature; rather, they encompass the manner through which God rules all of common humanity. This is what we might call the Universal Common Kingdom of God.

The Redemptive Rule of God

But this is not where God's plan ends. One way of viewing the storyline of Scripture is God's plan to restore man's perfect dominion over his universal kingdom. Yet this perfect dominion can be established only by a perfect king/priest who has perfectly obeyed God's law, something Adam failed to do. In Genesis 3:15, God promised that one day a seed of the woman—a Second Adam—would emerge from his confrontation with the serpent victorious, thus qualifying him as the perfect mediator between God and man, earning him the right to rule as Adam had failed to do and providing the necessary atonement for entrance into the sphere of that perfect rule. This is a different biblical idea of "kingdom," different from God's Universal Kingdom. This kingdom does not include all humankind; it includes only those who place their faith in this perfect King/Priest, "sons of the kingdom" (Mat 13:38) who have been delivered "from the domain of darkness and transferred . . . to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sin" (Col 1:13). In contrast to the Universal Rule of God, which includes all creation, we might call this the Redemptive Rule of God.

Two Kingdoms

This establishes the reality of two kingdoms: a universal kingdom, God's sovereign superintendence over all things, including creation and human institutions, cultures, and societies, and a redemptive kingdom, God's specific rule over his redeemed people. Because of Adam's failure, these two kingdoms are at this present time distinct, but God intends one day to unite them into one Kingdom. This is the third, and perhaps most prevalent and concrete way Scripture uses "kingdom" terminology: it describes the reign of a perfect King in which he will unite God's universal reign with his redemptive reign, a day when "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isa 11:9).

The basis for this is found in God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12. In this covenant, God formally established his redemptive kingdom in which he distinguished his chosen people from the rest of the human race. He promised to make of Abraham's descendants a great nation, and that through this great chosen nation, "all the nations of the earth will be blessed" (Gen 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14). In other words, God chose the nation of Israel to be a model of the union between the universal kingdom and the redemptive kingdom, and he also established Israel as the agency through which God would one day unite the two into one universal redemptive kingdom. The Mosaic Law given at Mt. Sinai united redemptive qualifications with moral and civil in which the Law governed every aspect of their society. This was an earthly picture of what the united universal redemptive kingdom would look like. But, because of Israel's continual rebellion, idolatry, and eventually indifference, God terminated that united kingdom when his Shekinah-Glory departed from the Temple in Ezekiel 11.

Future Union of the Two Kingdoms

This does not cancel God's promise that one day the two kingdoms will be perfectly united, but important for how this impacts understanding of our current situation as the NT church is the fact that this union has not yet taken place. Christ's first coming qualified him as the perfect King/Priest and accomplished the means of redeeming a people who would comprise the citizenship of the Universal redemptive Kingdom, but Christ's first coming never brings with it the same union of the civil and redemptive that existed in Israel's kingdom. Christ preached this kingdom while he is on earth, and he promised that it will come. But this concrete, literal kingdom that unites the Universal common kingdom with the Redemptive kingdom, according to Christ in John 18:36 "is not of this world"—that union is not a present reality. It will happen only after Jesus comes again, when "the kingdom of the world"—that is, the common kingdom—"will becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" (Rev 11:15).

In other words, since the united universal redemptive kingdom will not again be established on earth until after the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the union of socio-cultural spheres and the redemptive sphere will not take place until that future kingdom. Presently, the two kingdoms exist separately from one another; one day in the future, these two kingdoms will be united into one kingdom. When that kingdom comes, God will fully redeem his people, the Second Adam with take his place as the perfect King/Priest over all creation, he will fully unite the Universal kingdom with the Redemptive kingdom, and in fact he will restore all of creation (Isa 65:17, 21–25). Michael Vlach summarizes the future union of the two kingdoms well: "When the ultimate Mediator, Jesus, successfully reigns over the earth, the mediatorial kingdom will be

brought into conformity with God's universal kingdom (see 1 Cor 15:24, 28). And God's will on earth will be done as it is in heaven (see Matt 6:10)."[7]

It is important to note at this juncture that, although the particular way I have described this theology of the two kingdoms may reflect my own dispensational understanding of the future millennial kingdom, this theology of the two kingdoms is not limited to dispensationalism. What I have been describing here is very similar to Augustine's City of God and City of Man, Martin Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms, John Calvin's teaching of the two governments of God, and even Abraham Kuyper's theology of sphere sovereignty. Likewise, although in the minority within evangelicalism, this theology continues to be taught today in some Reformed circles, mostly within the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Westminster Seminary in California and the writings of men like David VanDrunen, Michael Horton, D. G. Hart, and Carl Trueman. Traditional dispensational thought is one form of two kingdom theology, but it is not the only form. This is why, by the way, early fundamentalists were a union of dispensational premillennialists and Two Kingdom Covenantal Amillennialists. The biggest difference between these two versions of two kingdom theology is that the dispensational version sees the establishment of the united kingdom to take place in a literal 1,000 year reign of Christ on this earth with national Israel having a central role, while the Reformed version sees it as taking place in the New Heavens and Earth. Both, however, hold that these two kingdoms will not be united until Jesus comes again.

This view stands in stark contrast to what Moore correctly called the "evangelical consensus." That view, sometimes called cultural transformationalism, Neo-Kuyperianism, or Neo-Calvinism, emphasizes an "already/not yet" inaugurated eschatology, which understands the NT church to be "an initial manifestation" of the united kingdom, thus giving the church a present mandate participate in God's plan to redeem all things.

Thus, the first important tenet of a biblical philosophy of cultural engagement is recognition that God works differently in sovereignly ruling over all things through human institutions on the one hand, and in his redemptive rule over his chosen people during this present age. No union between the two will exist until Jesus comes again.

Dual Citizens

What does this mean, then, for people of God living in this present age, i.e., Christians? Even more specifically, what does this mean for local New Testament churches? Once again, carefully considering how the New Testament describes churches and individual Christians as they relate to the world around them and categories we might call "culture" will help present an accurate picture of how we should conduct ourselves in this age in which there is a distinction between the two kingdoms.

Exiles

First, as believers in Jesus Christ, Christians are subjects in the redemptive rule of God (Phil 3:20). We are "citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph 2:19), and as such, we are set apart from the unbelieving people of this world. Christians are "not of the

[7] Michael J. Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God* (Silverton, OR: Lampion Press, 2017), 56.

world" just as Jesus is "not of the world" (John 15:19; 17:14, 16). Jesus said that this world hates him, because he "testif[ies] about it that its works are evil" (Jn 7:7). Galatians 1:4 calls this world the "present evil age." Second Corinthians 4:4 identifies the "god of this world" as one who has "blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ," this one who Ephesians 2:2 calls "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience."

This is why Peter describes our current situation as "the time of your exile" (1 Pet 1:17), and specifically calls us "sojourners and exiles" (1 Pet 2:11). John commands Christians, "Do not love the world or the things in the world" (1 Jn 2:15), and Paul insists that Christians "do not be conformed to this world" (Rom 12:2).

This recognition should engender within Christians a healthy distrust in the beliefs, values, and cultural pursuits of the unbelieving world around them. Since culture—that is, systems of behavior that characterize a particular society—necessarily result from the dominant worldview, beliefs, and values of that society, it should not be surprising that much of the cultural activity of a thoroughly pagan society would be expressions of those sinful values.

Christians in the first through third centuries recognized this. They couldn't help but recognize their status as exiles because they were increasingly persecuted for their faith. Yet something happened in the fourth century that led God's people to forget that they were sojourners and exiles. In 313, the Roman emperor Constantine legalized Christianity. Now, of course, that was a good thing. We Christians should never desire persecution. But then in 392, emperor Theodosius declared Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman empire and outlawed all other religions. In essence, the church and state eventually united, forming what many call "Christendom," and church leaders literally wanted to turn the empire into a theocracy like Israel, climaxing in the Holy Roman Empire. This was an attempt to "redeem culture," to unite the common kingdom with the redemptive kingdom into one unified kingdom.

The problem is that God never intended for this kind of union for the present age. Now, many good things came as a result of that union—much of the cultural production that came out of Christendom, for example, the art and literature and music, contain values and morals that are noble and good. Nevertheless, this union of the church with the broader culture not only created a lot of nominal Christianity, it also lulled true Christians into forgetting that they were exiles.

The Reformers, especially Luther and Calvin, argued against the church/state union by articulating a two kingdom theology, but they were unable to completely disentangle themselves from socio-political ties during their lives. The Church of England especially, as their name indicates, maintained a close union between Church and state. It really wasn't until the early Baptists in England, and a few groups prior to Baptists, that we find a clear articulation of the need to recover a separation between church and state—a Baptist distinctive. This emphasis of the separation of church and state influenced the founding of the United States of America as well, but nevertheless, the effects of Christendom can still be observed today, for good and for ill. How many Christians today consider themselves sojourners and exiles? How many Christians recognize that their citizenship is in another kingdom and that they are currently living in world hostile to them and their way of life? How many Christians consider themselves distinct from the unbelieving people around them?

Residents

Yet this is not the complete picture of the Christian situation. The presence of sin in the world does not entirely destroy the image of God in unbelieving people, and the promises God made to Noah that he would continue to preserve order through the institutions he established are still in effect. Even though Satan is the "god of this world," God is still on the throne of his Universal Kingdom, and he is still preserving his creation through human governments and other God-ordained human institutions. Thus even unbelievers, when they act consistent with that order, can do what God has blessed them to do—they can preserve order and justice in the world, they devise successful political systems, they can produce worthy art, and they can teach things that are true.

And so, in these kinds of activities, God's people can stand alongside unbelieving people, participating in and contributing to society as citizens of the Universal common kingdom of God. A perfect illustration of this is what the prophet Jeremiah says to Israel in Babylonian exile, a situation for Israel analogous to the church's situation in this age:

> Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: [5] Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. [6] Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. [7] But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jeremiah 29:4-7)

Israel in exile experienced a stark antithesis between their religion and the religion of their captors—they sat down and wept as their captors mocked them when they gathered by waters of Babylon to worship, and yet they were able to share commonality with their captors as well. Some of the accounts of Israel in exile demonstrate this; for example, Daniel would not eat meat associated with pagan worship, refused to stop praying to Yahweh, and would not pray to the king, and yet he willingly allowed himself to be educated in the literature and language of Babylon and even served in political leadership, as did others of the people of Israel. Despite the absolute religious antithesis as members of God's redeemed people, there was much commonality between the everyday lives of the Hebrews and the everyday lives of the Babylonians with respect to the common kingdom—building houses, planting gardens, family, governing, literature, and education.

The same is true for the church. Jesus was clear: Render to Caesar that which is Caesar's. Why? Because the welfare of the city is also our welfare. A healthy government that protects the innocent and punishes injustice is part of God's universal reign, even if that government is pagan. In the context of teaching Christians how to live as sojourners and exiles, Peter specifically says that Christians should submit to earthly authorities and even honor them (1 Pet 2:13–18). Why? Because the welfare of the city is also our welfare. Government was instituted by God himself, and inasmuch as governing officials rule with equity and justice, they are doing exactly what God intends for them to do. Like Jeremiah, Paul commands that "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions" (1 Tim 2:1–2). Why? So that "we may lead a peaceful and quite life, godly and dignified in every way," exactly why God established human government in Genesis 9.

Resident Aliens

There is a real sense in which Christians, analogous to Israel in exile, are dual citizens—resident aliens. Christians are first and foremost citizens of the redemptive kingdom, but they are also citizens of God's Universal common Kingdom along with every other human being. And thus, Christians contribute to society, submit to and pray for governmental authorities, and participate in various aspects of cultural endeavors, as long as they reflect and remain consistent with God's law.

Yet an individual Christian's role in society is not connected directly in any way to God's plan to establish his united kingdom on earth and restore all things. When a Christian acts in society, it is not out of a motivation to "redeem culture." Only the "Last Adam" can perfectly fill the role God intended as King/Priest who exercises perfect dominion over all, and this will occur when he comes again.

The common evangelical view that ignores the biblical distinction between the Universal Kingdom and the Redemptive Kingdom has led to errant thinking about individual Christian work in society, and this usually takes one of two forms. First, for some, the only way to really serve the purposes and plans of God is what is sometimes referred to as "full time Christian service," that is, being a pastor or missionary. Other vocations are of lesser value. The other form is actually growing in influence within evangelicalism, and that is to find value in cultural activity by insisting that it is "work for the kingdom," which supposedly legitimizes what would otherwise be considered "secular" work.

Vocation

A proper understanding of the two kingdoms and individual Christians' relationship to each kingdom contradicts both forms this errant thinking takes. Since God is the one who ordained human institutions, common vocations are valuable means through which God is ruling and preserving the universal common kingdom. And since Christians are citizens of this common kingdom alongside every other human being, all legitimate human vocations are worthy and valuable in and of themselves without any need to "redeem" them or motivate them through some tenuous connection to the redemptive kingdom.

This is why the New Testament very directly teaches Christians how they should view their various vocations. For example, Ephesians 5 and 6 present specific instructions for how Christians should act in various callings such as wives, husbands, parents, children, masters, and servants. Colossians 3 has similar instructions and says that with each of these vocations, "You are serving the Lord Christ." Husbands, wives, children, parents, business owners, and workers are serving the Lord through their everyday, common vocations as part of the way God is preserving his world. Perhaps most remarkable of all is that in verse 22 Paul addresses *bondservants*. A bondservant in the time Paul wrote this was one of the worst stations of life in which someone could find himself. Bondservants usually owed some kind of debt to their masters, had to do the dirtiest most menial kinds of work, and were often paid very poorly. And yet, Paul looks at these individuals whose jobs include some of the most mundane, earthly, secular work, and he says to them, in your job as a bondservant, you are serving the Lord Christ. Paul is intentionally choosing the lowliest of all professions and calling it service to Christ as a way of saying that all legitimate human vocations in life are service to the Lord Christ. There is no legitimate profession that is somehow inferior in its ability to serve Christ than another. In other words,

being a pastor or a missionary is no more glorifying to God than being an accountant, a garbage man, or third chair second violin in the Fort Worth Symphony; they are just vocations in service of God's rule over the common kingdom rather than his rule over his redemptive kingdom. All legitimate vocations can be full time service for God, not in the sense of somehow working to actualize the Messianic reign on earth, but rather in the sense of mediating the Universal sovereign rule of God over the created order.

Here again, the sixteenth century Reformers articulated some of the most helpful explanations of this biblical theology of vocation. Martin Luther was particularly brilliant in arguing that God works through every legitimate profession. He used Psalm 147:13, for example, to prove this. The verse reads, "For God strengthens the bars of your gates;" How does God strengthen the bars, Luther askes? By city planners and architects; by politicians who pass good laws to protect the city. The psalm continues, "God blesses your children within you." How does he bless our children, Luther askes? Through the work of teachers and pediatricians. The psalm continues, "God makes peace in your borders." How? by means of good lawyers and policemen. "God fills you with the finest of the wheat." How? By farmers and factory workers and grocers. Luther went on to say this: "When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we ask God to 'give us this day our daily bread.' And he does give us our daily bread. He does it by means of the farmer who planted and harvested the grain, the baker who made the flour into bread, the person who prepared our meal." God answers our prayer for daily bread through each of these vocations. Our legitimate professions, Luther said, are like the "masks" God wears in caring for the world. They are God's work as part of the Universal sovereign reign of God.

Because of this reality, the New Testament tells Christians how they should act in each of these vocations, and none of it is triumphalistic eschatological language. Colossians 3 says to "work heartily, as for the Lord and not for man." Christian bakers should bake the best bread possible. Christian bankers should invest their clients' money with the highest integrity. Christian auto mechanics should fix cars to the best of their abilities. And Christian musicians should make music that best reflects and expresses the glory, beauty, and splendor of God. They must do so in a way that is holy (e.g. 1 Peter 1:15), considering how their beliefs and relationship with God necessarily affect all aspects of human life in society, and they should "do good unto all men" (Gal 6:10), loving their neighbors as themselves (Mark 12:31) simply as fellow members of the human race. This good work is valuable in its own right without the need for some sort of eschatological or redemptive motivation, but simply because in so doing, they are serving the Lord Christ. They are acting as members of God's Universal Kingdom alongside other members of that kingdom.

The Mission of the Church

Thus far, I have attempted to establish a biblical basis for individual Christian cultural activity, but when Christians gather together as local churches, the picture narrows to a certain degree. This is due to the fact that not everything Scripture commands of Christians as individuals applies in the same way to local churches as institutions. To cite an obvious example that Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert use in their very helpful book on the subject, *What is the Mission of the Church?*, Christ's command for a Christian husband to love his wife as his own body does not extend to a church as a whole. DeYoung and Gilbert rightly point out that there is a difference between "the church organic," that is, Christians living life together within the community, and "the church institutional," the local gathering of believers who covenant together to fulfill

very specific responsibilities given by Christ to local churches. These responsibilities have been given to churches "when you come together" (1 Cor 11); they are responsibilities not given to individual Christians when they are alone or even to groups of Christians who are not gathered together formally as a local church.

The Great Commission

Churches as formal, local institutions have been given a very specific, singular mission in this age, best articulated in the Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20). "Make disciples" is the mandate Christ gave to his church—nothing more and nothing less. Churches make disciples by faithfully proclaiming the gospel, by "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," and by "teaching them to observe all that" Christ has commanded. Nowhere does the New Testament command churches to transform or "redeem" culture.

Yes, God intends to restore all things, he intends to unite his redemptive reign with his universal reign, but this is not happening during the present age, and the church has no direct role in such restoration. Instead, the New Testament promises that this age will continue to grow increasingly wicked (2 Ti 3:13), and thus, although individual cultural pursuits are worthy as part of the common kingdom, Scripture never commands churches or even individual Christians to seek for complete societal transformation. Yet this pessimism about the trajectory of the world's systems in this age is balanced with an optimism in the power of the gospel to change lives and the reality of Christ's coming again to set up his kingdom on earth. Only he can accomplish societal transformation.

As an institution, the church's mission is not cultural or societal transformation. The church's mission is exclusively redemptive: make disciples.

The Church and Christian Cultural Involvement

Nevertheless, because members of churches may certainly be involved in various cultural endeavors as citizens of the common kingdom, the church does have a secondary role in cultural engagement: churches should instruct believers in what it means to live Christianly in their various spheres. Part of what it means to fulfill the Great Commission is to teach Christians how to live out the implications of their relationship with God and how to obey the Great Commandments through being holy, active citizens in the society for the good of their fellow man. Churches should also speak to relevant moral issues under attack in society as part of discipling Christians to know how they should live in that society.

However, churches must not speak beyond Scripture, may not require of their people what Scripture does not require, should motivate Christian views of education, the arts, politics, or social matters in terms of sanctification rather that cultural redemption or eschatology, and should not in any official capacity meddle in civil affairs. Instead of motivating Christians to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in their roles within the Universal Kingdom of God in soteriological or eschatological terms like "cultural redemption," "cultural transformation," or "kingdom work," Christian social responsibility is rooted in Christian sanctification.

Restraint

Finally, churches may indeed have an effect upon culture due to the fact that the Holy Spirit of God is active in the world through the church in a manner unique to this present age. Paul teaches in 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7 that the Holy Spirit is currently restraining "the lawless one" through his indwelling ministry in the church. This also relates to Christ's description of his follower as "the salt of the earth," those who, through living in "peace with one another" can serve to preserve righteousness in the world (Matt 5:13; Mark 9:50). With this perspective, the church may have a restraining or preserving influence on broader culture to one degree or another, but this is through what James Davison Hunter calls "faithful presence" within the world. Rather than this being a particular political strategy or set of cultural programs, this kind of restraint or preservation is accomplished by churches discipling believers to live Spirit-controlled lives, and through Christians submitting to the sanctifying work of the Spirit in every aspect of life, simply living in unity together as separated Christians in society. In this way, Christians are salt and light, helping through example and act to restrain human depravity in the surrounding culture. They are participating as citizens in the human institutions created by God in Genesis 9 for the purpose of ordering the natural world and providing restraints upon human sinfulness, not accomplishing "redemptive kingdom work."

Conclusion

This, I suggest, is a brief sketch of a conservative Christian posture toward culture more faithful to Scripture than much of what constitutes the prevailing evangelical perspective. Despite caricatures by opponents, and extreme abuses by some, this philosophy provides a basis for a rather robust philosophy of cultural engagement, which could be summarized as follows:

1. God has established two kingdoms. The first is his sovereign rule over all things mediated through human institutions that he has ordained. The second is a redemptive kingdom of his people ruled by means of his Word. A union of these two kingdoms will not take place until the Messianic King comes again.
2. Christians are citizens of both of these kingdoms. As citizens of the universal kingdom, they should live holy lives, demonstrate kindness toward all people, and apply what it means to be a Christian in whatever cultural sphere God has called them. As citizens of the redemptive kingdom, Christians should proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, working toward gathering more into that citizenship.
3. Churches have a unique and focused spiritual mission of making disciples, which includes equipping them to live Christianly in their roles as citizens of this world. But churches as churches should not directly involve themselves formally in social, cultural, or political affairs and should not frame any discussion of cultural engagement in eschatological or soteriological terms.

This philosophy, I believe, is more faithful to Scripture in that it protects the unique mission of the church to make disciples and avoid triumphalistic "kingdom" motivation so characteristic of evangelical discussions of Christianity and culture today. Expanding the Great Commission to include more than simply making disciples almost always results in failure to fulfill the mission Christ gave to his church. Furthermore, most permutations of evangelical desire to

"transform culture" are little more than claims that cultural forms are mostly neutral and adaptation of the world's cultural forms, resulting in worldiness. As Andy Crouch has astutely observed, "The rise of interest in cultural transformation has been accompanied by a rise in cultural transformation of a different sort—the transformation of the church into the culture's image."[8]

Therefore, I would propose that the better philosophy of cultural engagement is what I described in *By the Waters of Babylon* as a "Sanctificationist" view of Christianity and culture, that is, a philosophy of culture firmly planted in the doctrine of sanctification rather than the millennial kingdom and in the church's mission to make disciples rather than redeeming culture.[9] In other words, a biblical philosophy of culture does not understand a church's role toward culture to be in terms of cultural redemption, the *missio Dei*, "work for the kingdom," the "cultural mandate," or any missiological or eschatological motivation. Rather, we should view the church's exclusive mission as one of evangelization and discipling Christians to live sanctified lives in whatever cultural sphere God has called them. This is the extent of the church's so-called "responsibility" toward culture, and anything more than this threatens to sideline the church's central mission.

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[8] Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 189.

[9] Scott Aniol, *By the Waters of Babylon: Worship in a Post-Christian Culture* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Ministry, 2015), 115–16.