

John Leonetti - Radical Two Kingdom Theology

Introduction

Historically, the church has held to a concept of their being two kingdoms, one being the domain of God via the church, and the other being the state. The issue of debate is *how* these two realms interact. Recently, there has arisen a view from Westminster Seminary in Escondido, California that has been labeled Radical Two Kingdom (hereafter R2K). R2K has also been called Natural Law Two Kingdom Theology and John Frame who taught at Westminster has called it “Escondido Theology.” Some chief proponents of R2K are David VanDrunen and Michael Horton both faculty at Escondido.

Beliefs

Bret McCatee sums up R2K as an, “Expression of Christianity that replaces the totalistic expression of Reformed Christianity wherein God’s explicit Word governs only the church realm (realm of grace). The common realm (or natural realm) is to be ruled by God’s ‘left hand.’ What this means is that for the common realm (where all of life is lived save for our church lives), the Christian and non-Christian is depending on natural law to answer the question, ‘How should we then live?’” In other words, there is the redemptive kingdom and the secular kingdom and for R2K adherents, the realms do not overlap.

History

R2K adherents focus on the historic use of two kingdom theology trying to coopt Augustine’s *The City of God* and Martin Luther’s views in his work *On the Secular State*. However, even R2K proponent Darryl Hart conceded that, “Luther and Calvin still labored in the context of Christendom and were a long way from the religious disestablishments of the eighteenth century.” In other words, Luther and Calvin unlike R2K proponents cared about the Christian influence on secular society. After Calvin and Luther, the *Canons of Dordt* (1618-19) noted, “But this light of nature is far from enabling humans to come to a saving knowledge of God and conversion to him—so far, in fact, that they do not use it rightly even in matters of nature and society.” R2K ignores these statements and has a low view of the noetic effects of sin on the mind of man even though they claim to be Reformed.

Criticism

According to critics of R2K, it is a rejection of the teachings of Abraham Kuyper, Francis Schaeffer and Cornelius Van Til who advocated for the Christian life being able to transform culture. According to John Wind, “VanDrunen’s basic argument is that Scripture reveals God as ruling all creation as king, but that his rule is administered by means of two *distinct* covenants that establish two different kingdoms.” According to R2K adherents, the common kingdom consists of regenerate and unregenerate people was put into place via the Noahic covenant. However, the second kingdom exists only of believers in Jesus. When Christians participate in cultural topics within the context of the state, they should refrain from using Scripture since the public rejects it and it is only applicable in the realm of the church. As Mattson observed in his criticism of R2K, “Since culture is a kingdom phenomenon, it is illegitimate to speak of

redeeming it. The language of grace, the vocabulary of the Gospel, simply does not transfer or relate to the common order of creation.”

For R2K everything hinges on how one understands the Noahic Covenant. VanDrunen et al. argue that this covenant only shows the homogeneity of culture and so therefore there is nothing “Christian” about cultural pursuits. VanDrunen in a podcast admitted, “I am doing something with this (Noahic Covenant) that I don’t know of any other previous Reformed theologian who has done exactly what I’m doing.” Critics of R2K see the Noahic Covenant as a redemptive rescue which according to McCattee is “proleptic and typological event that portrays the final and ultimate redemption found in Christ. The history of humanity after the flood is *not* one of cultural homogeneity. It is a history of cultures in conflict. R2K sees nothing redemptive to the Noahic covenant. Genesis chapter 9 is viewed as *descriptive* by R2K rather than *prescriptive*.

John Frame notes some particulars of R2K as, “It is wrong to make the gospel relevant to its hearers. Those who try to show the application of Scripture to the daily problems of believers are headed toward a Christless Christianity...The Christian has no biblical mandate to seek changes in the social, cultural or political order.”

Christian critics of R2K argue for the benefits of both the corporate church and individual believers taking seriously the concept of social activism. The benefits of this activism (*which does not equate to the church being a political action caucus*) helped to foster things such as Frame put it, “help for the poor, the abolition of slavery...political freedom, economic freedom, the sanctity of life etc.”

Conclusion

While it is true that the New Testament does not have as a main goal the improvement of society, Jesus did teach His followers to minister to all in the parable of the Good Samaritan. God created a world that requires the necessity of government and if there are Christians involved in public office, things tend to go better for societies. Furthermore, Christians are called (Matt 5:13) to be salt and light. Believers are called to bring their faith to bear in all spheres of life.

Bibliography

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