

Notes for special lecture in ST 343, The Doctrine of the Church
The Kingdom of God and the Church--And "Two Kingdoms"
Vern S. Poythress, spring, 2019

I. Kingdom of God--senses

0. See Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 372-402 in 1975 edition; and Vos, *The Kingdom of God and the Church*.

A. Universal providential rule, Ps. 103:19.

B. Redemptive rule, over a kingdom of priests, Ex. 19:6.

C. Eschatological redemptive rule

1. Dan. 2:44:

And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.

2. Dan. 7:22: "and the time came when the saints possess the kingdom."

3. Dan. 7:27:

And the kingdom and the dominion

and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven

shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High;

his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom,

and all dominions shall serve and obey him.

4. Isa. 52:7, "Your God reigns." Targum Jonathan: "The kingdom of your God has been revealed."

D. Aspects

1. Two phrases to the eschatological kingdom: already and not-yet (yet-to-come).

2. Centering on God and man's relation to God

3. Beginning with God's act, with response of faith and repentance, indicating the inclusion of human beings from the inside out.

4. Comprehensive in goal.

II. Thinking about the kingdom of God and the church

0. See Vos, closing section of *Biblical Theology*.

A. Close relation

B. God's action as defining kingdom. Church as being formed by God's power, righteousness, and blessing.

C. Picture of kingdom

1. Ps. 103:19

2. Eph. 1:20-23, the kingdom of Christ

3. As God-man

a. God: filling all, v. 23; power of God, v. 19.

b. man: adamic mandate, v. 22.

4. Comprehensive, v. 21

5. Confirmed by Eph. 4:8-10; 1 Cor. 15:23-28.

D. Sense of two kingdoms, Col. 1:13-14; 1 John 5:19.

III. Difficulties with regard to spheres

A. Christ's rule is comprehensive, but human delegated rule is limited. Rom. 13:1-2; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; Matt. 16:17-19. 20:25-28.

B. Sometimes "two kingdoms" historically used for church and state. But the state is not the kingdom of darkness: Rom 13:1-2. Moreover, church and state are not the only human authorities. Family, Eph. 6:1-4; employer, 6:5-10; husband in marriage, 5:22-33.

C. Dangers of usurping or overstepping a limited authority.

D. Difficulty of the uniqueness of OT Israel, as holy nation. Parallel to other nations in some respects, parallel to the NT church as well in some respects.

E. Fights over control of turf dissipate if there is a larger social and religious influence of Christianity.

F. Ideologies

1. Individualism and collectivism (priority of the many and the one).

Deepest archetype: three-in-one in the Trinity.

2. Hierarchy (might makes right) and egalitarianism (all exercise of power over another is wrong). Deepest archetype: monarchy (first person in order) of the Father and equality of the persons.

3. Perennial danger of politicizing or social-movement-izing Christianity.

"Our citizenship is in heaven," Phil 3:20-21.

IV. Sphere differentiation in theory

A. Augustine: city of God and city of man; kingdom of light and of darkness

B. Augustine: heavenly city and earthly city (but does nothing earthly matter to believers?)

C. Augustine: eternal vs. temporal

D. Reformation: ecclesiastical vs. civil

E. American: spiritual vs. bodily

crusades: antislavery, League of Nations as path to international peace, prohibition

F. Abraham Kuyper: sphere sovereignty

1. Herman Dooyeweerd, E. Hebdgen Taylor

Philosophically oriented, intuitively discerning spheres and their norms.

2. Van Til

G. Biblical theological

1. Meredith Kline: holy vs. common

Difficulty: 1 Cor 7:14; 1 Pet 1:15.

2. Vos: age-to-come vs. this age

the work of the power of the resurrection, "the powers of the age to come," Heb 6:5.

3. The Bible vs. "natural law"

V. "Natural law"

A. Biblical support

People have a sense of right and wrong and a conscience. They "know" the moral law. Rom 1:32; 2:14-15 (though disputed); Amos 1:3-2:3 and other indictments of OT nations.

B. Difficulties with the term

1. The term "natural law" is not ideal. It can suggest a law embedded in nature, rather than a law whose origin is in God. And it can even suggest a law *originating* from nature rather than from God.

2. The term has a history. It can suggest not merely a dim version of the moral law given in Scripture (which would be OK), but something that might go *beyond* Scripture. And then one runs the danger of undermining the sufficiency of Scripture for ethics (see Ps 119:1) and bringing people into bondage by extra-scriptural additions that are claimed to be inherent in the created order. E.g., according to RC teaching, only certain forms of contraception are "natural" (this is different from merely forbidding abortifacients that destroy babies already conceived). One might conceivably argue that it is "unnatural" to chop down a tree. The idea of man's dominion *over* nature may be undermined.

3. Problem with overestimating the moral and epistemic abilities of fallen human nature.

C. Use

1. The idea of appealing *only* to natural law and *not* to the Bible needs challenging.

2. Tactics versus long-run purposes.

VI. My own analysis (see *Redeeming Sociology*, chapters 25-27; *Shadow of Christ*, Part II)

A. Multiple spheres (Kuyper)

B. Biblical instruction, not philosophy, as the primary guide

C. The church officers, as officers, are responsible for "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). The phrase has extra nuances in the immediate context. But the thrust is that we are responsible for the contents of Scripture. No more and also no less.

E. The civil authorities are responsible for justice:

an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer (Rom 13:4).

¹³ Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. (1 Pet 2:13-14)

Horizontal justice, bringing retribution for crimes (damage to other human beings), but not all sins.

VII. Sphere differentiation in operation

A. "Spirituality" of the church

1. Say nothing about abortion as a political issue?

- 2. Endorse the candidate who is prolife?
- B. Penology (criminal justice)
- C. Christian education
 - 1. Only in Sunday school (narrowly, teaching Bible content and doctrine)
 - 2. Christian day schools with humanistic excellence
 - 3. Christian day schools with distinctively Christian approaches to mathematics and chemistry and cooking.
- D. Help for the poor
 - 1. Leave it to "neutral" agencies
 - 2. Endorse a government plan for welfare
- E. How to run a business
 - 1. Generic ethics only? "Be a good worker; be kind."
 - 2. Holy businesses? Church runs a business?

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