Two-kingdom Worldviews: Attempting a Translation

by Renato Coletto

In the past few years Pro Rege has published several articles dealing with the nature and implications of two-kingdom approaches to society, scholarship, church doctrine, and so forth. The article that struck me most was the one by David VanDrunen, on “the Two-kingdoms and Reformed Christianity.” In South Africa, Professor Bennie van der Walt has dedicated a lifetime to promoting an integral biblical worldview and to fighting against dualist versions of Christianity. Albert Wolters has done the same in North America, and many others have contributed to spread this message worldwide. And yet Reformed individuals and communities seem to be inevitably and perennially attracted by all sorts of scholastic, pietist or para-liberal projects and positions. Can this be due, at least in part, to the fact that we often keep discussing these issues in a two-kingdom language?

Many Reformed and Reformational authors regard the biblical worldview as constituted by the threefold motif of “creation, fall and redemption.” They assume that the Reformed worldview, at least ideally, strives to be in line with the threefold biblical motif, adopts a transformative approach, and therefore is not reducible or amenable to a two-realm approach. And yet, even authors who adopt this point of view often “translate” the biblical ground motive in the nature-and-grace idiom. In Figure 1 below a couple of examples are supplied.

Figure 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>B.J. Van der Walt</th>
<th>A.M. Wolters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) “Liberal”</td>
<td>grace within nature</td>
<td>grace equals nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) “Catholic”</td>
<td>grace above nature</td>
<td>grace perfects nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) “Lutheran”</td>
<td>grace alongside nature</td>
<td>grace flanks nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) “Anabaptist”</td>
<td>grace against nature</td>
<td>grace opposes nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Biblical</td>
<td>grace transforms nature</td>
<td>grace restores nature</td>
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Probably this classification is reminiscent of Niebuhr, who labels the reformed attitude with the formula “Christ transforms culture.”

Now, this strategy is not without advantages: for example it allows comparing the biblical worldview with the most “popular” and widespread Christian worldviews. Nevertheless, it might create the impression that the Bible (and Reformed Christianity) proposes just a particular version of the nature-grace paradigm. Recently, Van der Walt, too, argued that the study of Christian worldviews should be disentangled from the nature-grace language. Would it help if we could “translate” the nature-and-grace worldviews into the language of creation, fall, and redemption? Could it help some of us to “see” better the limitations and undesired consequences of the two-kingdom perspectives?

In the following few pages I am going to try this “translation” and to supply some examples of the alterations produced by the two-kingdom approaches. In the light of these findings, in the final part of the article I will briefly re-visit some of VanDrunen’s arguments and comment on them. I apologize beforehand for the fact that some sections of this article do not present totally new arguments, but the fact that many still fail to realize that dualism is a threat to Christian life made me think that sometimes repetita juvant.

The “wedge interpretation”

In the Reformational tradition, there have been some attempts at translating the nature-grace worldviews in terms of the biblical creation-fall-redemption motif. To my knowledge, however, there are only a few fragmented discussions of this translation, and they took place many years ago. I can recall, for example, Dooyeweerd arguing that different two-kingdom worldviews “place a wedge between creation and redemption.” What does that mean? As he believes that the “factors” of the biblical ground-motive are three (creation, fall, and redemption), does the “wedge” eliminate the fall when it is placed “between creation and redemption”? Alternatively, does the wedge group together creation and fall, or fall and redemption? What can all this possibly mean in terms of understanding Christian worldviews?

Whatever it implied, the wedge-interpretation continued to flow underground and to re-emerge from time to time. For example, Strauss mentions it in an article dealing with “reformed scholasticism,” though only en passant, without addressing the questions mentioned above. The most extensive explanation, to my knowledge, is contained in an old contribution by Jim Olthuis. I would like, therefore, to “re-visit” that old text where Olthuis discusses the main Christian worldviews (he calls them “theories”).

Figures 2 and 3 below are my own simplified versions of Olthuis’ explanations (including his graphic scheme). The acronym CFR represents the threefold biblical theme of creation, fall, and redemption. In the last row of Figure 2, I have inserted a representation of the biblical worldview (not present in Olthuis’ scheme) so that a comparison with the other paradigms is made easier.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Structure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) “Liberal”</td>
<td>C &gt; f R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) “Catholic”</td>
<td>C &gt; f R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) “Lutheran”</td>
<td>c F &gt; R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) “Anabaptist”</td>
<td>c F &gt; R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Biblical</td>
<td>C F R</td>
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Olthuis discusses the four “classical” Christian worldviews, not according to their historical appearance but in systematic order. He clarifies that each position represents a group of worldviews: there are indeed sub-versions of each group (though he does not discuss them in his text). It should be noted that he does not use labels like “Lutheran” or “Liberal.” This lack of labels highlights the fact that these worldviews should not be too quickly associated with ecclesiastical or confessional communities. I will nevertheless use those labels (in quotation marks) because, even though Olthuis’ intentions should be appreciated, in the end it is clear to which “communities” or circles he refers. They are clear, for example, from the authors he quotes. It is, however, important to remember that, for example in a Roman Catholic community, we are surely going to find individuals and groups holding to a worldview that is not typically Roman Catholic.
The two “external” positions (1 and 4) constitute the two most “radical” groups. The two internal ones (2 and 3) are more “moderate.” The lower-case letters indicate the “element” of the biblical motif that is weakened in each particular worldview. The capital-bold letters indicate the element acquiring excessive “power” and thus playing the most relevant role in a worldview. In all cases, the alteration of one element has repercussions on the whole structure.

However, not everything is clear in Olthuis’ scheme. On the one hand, he says, “theories of the first type place a wedge between Creation and Fall-(Redemption), whereas theories of the second type place a wedge between (Creation)-Fall and redemption.” This is what I try to illustrate in Figure 2 above. On the other hand, in his own graphic scheme (p. 120), the wedge is always placed between (creation) fall and redemption (as in Figure 3 below). In the same scheme, in addition, a growing “distance” is inserted between the two “poles” of the worldview: this distance seems to indicate that the wedge does not always have the same “weight” or effect.

**Figure 3**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Type:</th>
<th>Structure:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) “Liberal”</td>
<td>Cf &gt; R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) “Catholic”</td>
<td>Cf &gt; R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) “Lutheran”</td>
<td>cF &gt; R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) “Anabaptist”</td>
<td>cF &gt; R</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On these two issues (the position of the wedge and the growing distance), I would say that the “translation” is not completely clear. However, I think the two schemes (Figures 2 and 3) do not necessarily conflict. What they both try to show, first of all, is that the wedge divides the biblical motif into two parts (corresponding to nature and grace). In the first two worldviews (1 and 2), the fall element is weakened while the creation element plays a relevant role. Having weakened the fall, “nature” means especially “creation” (and therefore has a rather positive connotation). The main dialectical interplay is between creation and redemption.

In the second couple of worldviews (3 and 4), creation is weakened while redemption plays a crucial role. Since the creation factor is weakened, “nature” means especially “fall” and is rather regarded as corrupted. Nature and grace are especially interpreted in terms of fall and redemption, and the main dialectical interplay is between these two factors. Once this interplay is understood, the position of the wedge is not that important. The growing distance between the two poles can be better explained by referring to the key ideas of each worldview (I will return on this topic below).

The upshot of the scheme (in Olthuis’ words) is that “it is impossible to fit three pins in two holes!” In the process, either the fall or the creation must be weakened. As I said, this weakening affects the whole structure as well.

**Some examples**

I have now created a few formulas, rather than a translation. Perhaps some readers would like to have a few more concrete examples of what these formulas mean for concrete Christian life and scholarship. Sometimes one might have the impression that two-kingdom approaches influence topics like “religion and science” or “church and state,” while it is not always clear whether they have any influence in the sphere of church and doctrine.

The following two examples concern the fact that worldviews do also impact the confessional and theological elaborations of a certain faith-community. The first example concerns Roman Catholicism and is provided by an Italian Evangelical scholar. De Chirico relates the Catholic failure to realize the corruption totalis of sinful man to the fact that the Catholic worldview weakens the fall element. The fall has wounded certain human abilities, but the human agent is still endowed with free will. There are therefore human resources to be used in the process of redemption, a view traditionally opposed by Calvinism.

A second example comes from Dooyeweerd, in relation to Luther. Unlike the Roman Catholic paradigm, the Lutheran approach allows us to return to the biblical doctrine of the radical corruption of the heart. But as argued above, the weak point of the Lutheran approach lies in the motif of creation. It is there that Luther is pressed to
oppose law and Gospel in terms of fall and redemption. Such opposition is not as sharp as it is manifested in Anabaptist circles. Luther did never advise any withdrawal from this world, and on the contrary opposed monasticism rather severely. Yet, according to Dooyeweerd,

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Under Ockham’s influence, Luther robbed the law as the creational ordinance of its value. For him the law was harsh and rigid and as such in inner contradiction to the love commandment of the gospel. He maintained that the Christian, in his life of love that flows from grace, has nothing to do with the demands of the law. The Christian stood above the law.13

Dooyeweerd also points out that the deprecation of the creation ordinances affected more than Lutheran theology. In the long run it affected the Lutheran view of Christian life and scholarship as well. Already Luther expressed little interest in “profane science.” More recently, if we consider the possibility of “Christian scholarship, Christian political life, Christian art, Christian social action … Barth and to a lesser degree Brunner, considered them impossible.”14

Key-ideas
It is now time to identify the key idea of each worldview and to realize that different sub-versions of the same worldview are available. Olthuis recognizes that each one of the four worldviews (see Figure 4, below) is constituted by a “group” or “family” of theories. Yet neither Olthuis nor Wolters nor Van der Walt defines these sub-versions of the main paradigm. I have tried to do so in a previous article,15 and I have proposed the following labels (see Figure 4). The second and third columns contain respectively my definition of the “key idea” of each family of worldviews and of sub-versions within a certain family.

One may illustrate the meaning of the key ideas by referring, for example, to the way Christians deal with the theory of evolution. When Klapwijk16 recently gives an overview of three major Christian positions concerning the debate, he probably doesn’t have in mind worldview issues. Yet the influence of the main Christian paradigms emerges quite clearly from his overview. Creationism is a strategy of “conflict,” says Klapwijk, while intelligent design is a strategy of “synthesis.”17 According to John Paul II, the species have developed phylogenetically (including the human body), but the human soul is created directly and inserted in the human body. As a consequence, terms like “control” and “integration” can capture the specific nature of this “synthesis.” A third option is theistic evolution, which Klapwijk regards as a strategy of “compatibility” (my “parallelism”). He doesn’t need to mention the Liberal position because it is often identified with evolutionist doctrine. Summing up, we have identification synthesis, compatibility, and conflict, corresponding to the key ideas of the four two-kingdom worldviews mentioned in Figure 4 above.

Olthuis indicates that there is a “growing distance” (see Figure 3 above) between the two poles of the four worldviews. This distance is also reflected in my definitions of the four key ideas: we gradually move from identification to opposition. In addition, the key ideas should provide a hint on the particular “spirit” finding expression in each worldview.

What about the “sub-versions”?
Of course I am not proposing the scheme of Figure 4 as final: it can be criticized, modified,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type:</th>
<th>Key-idea:</th>
<th>Sub-versions:</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| 1) “Liberal” | Identification | a) Adoption  
|           |             | b) Elaboration |
| 2) “Catholic” | Integration  | a) Control  
|           |             | b) Mysticism  |
| 3) “Lutheran” | Parallelism | a) Concordance  
|           |             | b) Isolation  |
| 4) “Anabaptist” | Opposition | a) Separation  
|           |             | b) Substitution  |
and hopefully improved. It is just an attempt at (1) capturing the core idea of a certain type of worldview and (2) identifying the existing sub-versions. Concerning the sub-versions, some explanations are in order, and I will again select my examples from the context of Christian scholarship.

In Lutheranism, for example, the parallelism between creation and redemption (nature and grace) can be understood in a more or less interactive way. “Isolation” means that the respective domains (e.g. science and religion) should be distinguished according to their own nature and diversity. They must both be recognized and appreciated, but in the end they are independent, and they have little to do with each other. However, one can also regard the two realms as related in some kind of “concordance.” The Bible speaks of God’s “fiant,” and science speaks of the Big Bang. Science speaks of geological eras, and the Bible speaks of “days.” There is no possible friction between the Bible and science: there is, rather, agreement.

When it comes to Anabaptism, the key idea is conflict. The fight of grace against nature can result in “separation” (the first option), as the two are based on totally different origins and principles. It is foolish to try to integrate Christian doctrine and secular science. The Christian promotes an anti-thesis. This anti-thesis opens a second possibility: one can decide to “ aggress” sinful nature and finally to “substitute” it with grace (etymologically, the term “anti” means both “against” and “in the place of”). In relation to politics, it is then possible to imagine the institution of a “republic of the saints” (as in Münster, 1534) or the replacement of the legislation of the USA with biblical laws (as in Theonomy).

Instead of continuing with more explanations of terms,10 I would like to draw two simple lessons. First, there is a considerable variety of two-kingdom doctrines. Probably my scheme manages to identify only some of those doctrines, and new ones might be added in the future. Second, not all the versions and sub-versions of the two-kingdom worldviews are equally compatible. The distance is not so extreme, for example, between Lutheran “isolation” (independence) and Anabaptist “separation.” But other paradigms are more difficult to reconcile (for example, some Liberal and Anabaptist ones). Even within the same paradigm (for example, Catholic integration), options like mysticism and control are difficult to reconcile. Mysticism is only marginally present in the Church of Rome; it is much more typical of the Eastern Orthodox tradition, and it might even be the deep reason behind the schism that affected the two ecclesiastical bodies.

This means that, when it comes to two-kingdom doctrines, one has to choose a particular version among many, and whatever option one may choose, it will be to some extent in conflict with the others. The idea that it might be possible to “ combine” the different options together and maybe to adopt all of them (instead of excluding some) should be considered not only unrealistic but also misguided.

Worldviews, paradigms or...?

Up to now, I have used words like approach, paradigm, worldview (and so forth) as synonyms. But what are we dealing with, when we speak of “two-kingdoms”? Apparently, these are “ themes” of such a fundamental nature that they shape entire confessional traditions. Not only do these themes shape church and theology, but they also affect scholarship and life in general, educational and political views, and daily work and family priorities, and they do so through the centuries!

These themes are not “doctrines,” and even the term “worldview” is insufficient to capture their nature. They are versions of what Dooyeweerd called a “religious ground motive”: not just important ideas of a Christian tradition but its fundamental basis for faith and life—in a word, for culture. If there is some truth in this statement, it also implies that such motifs are of a spiritual nature. As a consequence, when a confessional tradition accepts (Dooyeweerd would say: “is in the grip of”) one of these fundamental motifs, the latter will shape its cultural achievements in all fields, church and theology included.

Although we usually call these motifs “Christian” (because they are adopted by many Christian traditions), they cannot be called biblical, and in fact they have hardly anything to do with the Bible. Of course those who are in their grip will “read” them into the Bible, but they in-
evitably divide and distort the integral motif of the Word of God. Here I could only point out a few examples of such deformations, but the interested reader has ample material to read on the topic.19 With these considerations in mind, let us go back to some of VanDrunen’s arguments.

Back to VanDrunen

In his Pro Rege article, VanDrunen always refers to the two-kingdom “doctrine” in the singular: he would like to promote “the” two-kingdom approach. At the same time, he attributes to this motif a sort of balance, completeness, and moderation. I trust it is by now clear that there is no such thing as “the” two-kingdom doctrine. There are several versions of the doctrine, and not all of them are “moderate” or balanced. In fact, VanDrunen himself rejects two paradigms that he regards as too radical or inadequate: Anabaptism and “theocratic tendencies.” And yet (limiting ourselves to present-day examples) Pentecostalism and Theonomism, too, adopt two-kingdom approaches.20 The fact is that VanDrunen’s dual approach is incompatible not only with the threefold biblical motif but also with several other two-kingdom worldviews.

Perhaps, when referring to “the” two-kingdom doctrine, VanDrunen means the one that he finds in the Bible, the one he adopts and calls “the reformed two-kingdom doctrine.” Concerning the “biblical” nature of this motif, I have already expressed my reservations. Concerning its Reformed character, what is the particular version of the two-kingdom motif adopted by VanDrunen? I would say it is the one I have labelled as “parallelism.” If this is correct, this “doctrine” originated in Lutheran, not in Calvinist, circles. But even supposing that I might be wrong about Van Druenen’s worldview, whatever option we might regard as reformed in the two-realm arsenal will be an option that, historically, has already been recognized as the pulsing heart of either Anabaptism, Roman Catholicism, Liberalism, Pentecostalism, or Neo-orthodoxy and so forth. None of these versions originally developed within Calvinism or was ever regarded as its DNA.

VanDrunen insists that a two-kingdom doctrine can be comfortably detected in the works of Calvin, Bavinck, and Kuyper. Well, I would grant that traces of the same motif might be present even in Dooyeweerd and other Reformational authors.21 Historically, make no mistake: one will always find traces of this motif in some or another Reformed “father,” influential writer, or leader. Yet it will be impossible to retrieve from history what VanDrunen calls “the reformed two-kingdom doctrine.” Instead, one will always find only “borrowings” from other confessions. Turrettini borrowed from the Roman tradition, and Rushdoony from an Anabaptist motif. Others borrow(ed) from Lutheranism or Liberalism. Far from constituting a biblical or Reformed paradigm, such borrowings generated a collage of disparate and often conflicting approaches within reformed circles.

The problem is to determine whether the nature-grace motif belongs in Calvinism, or whether it is a leftover of the Roman Catholic heritage (the first to appear on the scene and the “genitor” of the other dualistic approaches). It would be unhistorical to suppose that a movement reforming its own ways might do so immediately (or even in a short time) and completely. As a consequence,

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Concluding remarks
This article has provided a “translation” of several two-kingdom motifs into the biblical “language” of creation, fall, and redemption. Perhaps some will say, using Habermas’ words about the Enlightenment, that Calvinism is still “an incomplete project.” How should it be “completed” then? By borrowing one of the approaches already adopted and articulated by other Christian traditions? This would amount to granting that Calvinism doesn’t have a specific identity and is at bottom just a variety of Lutheranism or Catholicism. In addition, it would amount to re-shaping Calvinism along Roman Catholic or Lutheran lines. Some might not be unhappy with the latter solution. But they should realize that, after such re-shaping, it might not be possible to save some of their most cherished church doctrines while leaving open questions concerning a “Christian standard for being a good accountant or physician.” Would it not be better to listen to Kuyper, who said that Calvinism is a distinct life-view?

Endnotes

2. The historical examples are too numerous to even start pointing out a few of them. Nevertheless, one may think for example of recent movements like the Radical Orthodoxy.


6. Several terms can be used to indicate the two-kingdom approach, for example worldview (Wolters), paradigm and doctrine (VanDrunen), ground motive (Dooyeweerd), theory (Olthuis) and so on. For the moment, I am using them all as synonyms, due to the fact that I haven’t discussed the nature of such “paradigms” yet. Later on, however, I will indicate which definition is in my opinion preferable.

7. See, for example, Herman Dooyeweerd, Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular and Christian options (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1979), 28,113,139,147.


10. Not only is Olthuis’ graphic scheme (120) more complex, but his text discusses, for example, how worldviews impact on Christian missionary work, on the understanding of God’s grace and human responsibility, on anthropological views, and so forth.

11. James Olthuis, “Must the Church...” p. 120.

12. Leonardo De Chirico, Evangelical Theological Perspectives on post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), 237 ff.

13. Herman Dooyeweerd, Roots of Western Culture, 140.

14. Herman Dooyeweerd, Roots of Western Culture, 146-147. Even though Barth was a Reformed pastor, Dooyeweerd regards him and other exponents of dialectical theology as adopting a “Lutheran” type of worldview. This seems to me more appropriate than Olthuis’ decision to place him in the fourth (i.e. the “Anabaptist”) group. (Cf. Olthuis, “Must the Church...” p. 121, with footnote 19).

online. http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/koers.v77i1.33


18. For a more complete exposition, see my “Christian attitudes in scholarship,” http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/koers.v77i1.33

19. Strauss’ article (quoted above) is still a good text for this purpose; it is now available at http://www.alloffreedemed.co.uk/Strauss/DFMS-Scholasticism.pdf. I would add Dooyeweerd’s recently translated volume on “Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy,” edited by Paideia Press/ Reformational Publishing Project.

20. VanDrunen rejects these two paradigms in “The Two-kingdoms,”37. I have argued that they too are two-kingdom doctrines in “Christian Attitudes in Scholarship,”5-6. VanDrunen’s arguments give the impression that it is possible to maintain a proper differentiation between Christian involvement in church and state, only by adopting a two-kingdom framework, opposed by neo-Calvinism. The neo-Calvinist movement, however, has never promoted an un-differentiated view of the Christian service in these two spheres, as if Christians should act in a parliament as they act in church. On the contrary, it has argued that the spheres are many more than two and that it is necessary to differentiate properly (even in the “civil realm”) between family, school, orchestra, union, business and so forth. Only this differentiation can lead to effective Christian involvement within these social spheres. But it is a differentiation that does not fit well the two-kingdom worldviews.

21. Concerning Dooyeweerd, see for example Harry Fernhout, “Man, Faith and Religion in Bavinck, Kuyper and Dooyeweerd, Part 3,” *Tydskrif vir Christelike Wetenskap* 15(1979/3-4): 119-140. More recently Tol has explored the beginnings of the career of both Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven and has pointed out their involvement with the tradition of critical realism, the Logos-speculation, and other themes pointing towards the Catholic tradition. (See Anthony Tol, “Reformational Philosophy in the Making,” *Philosophia Reformata* 76(201/2): 187-215.

22. Lief has already argued that inquiring into these issues requires moving beyond the quotation of a few sentences presumably representing the fundamental approach of Calvin, Kuyper, or whoever else is taken into consideration. Jason Lief, “The Two-kingdoms Perspective and Theological Method: Why I still Disagree with David Van Drunen,” *Pro Rege* 41(2012/1): 6.


