

The Church and Her Rivals – Notes
2009 AAPC Pastor's Conference
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(Note: These are not exactly summaries of my lectures; perhaps they can serve as supplements since in some cases I was not able to include everything I had planned to talk about, or ended up substituting different content)

Lecture #1: For the Church

We must understand the centrality of the church. We can consider the centrality of the church from three basic, complementary perspectives: [1] teleological, [2] social, and [3] historical.

Before exploring those three aspects, some clarifications are in order. In this context, we need to define what we mean by "church." Most simply the church is the people of God (or "the communion of the saints" as the Creed puts it). Of course, this does exclude an institutional element. Something has to mark this people out from the world and congeal them together. Consider an analogy: If we are defining America, we could say the nation is "the American people" or "the American citizenship." But that does not exclude states, the federal government, the military, the constitution, etc. from the definition. In the same way, while refusing to identify the church with its officers or governmental structure, our definition of the church should give place to these dimensions of the church's existence as well. The principal thing the people of God do is gather to renew covenant (that is, do the liturgy). But the church is not *limited* to these liturgical events. She gathers as God's temple, and she scatters to be God's city (to use the imagery of Rev. 21-22).

Another way to define the church for these lectures is to simply take the definitions provided in WCF 25. My discussion is principally of the "visible church," obviously, since I am discussing the place of the church in society and in history.

Let us examine these three perspectives on the church's centrality:

[1] The church is central to God's plan and purposes (Gen. 12; Eph. 1; Col. 1; etc.). God's work of creation finds its goal in the bride of Christ (cf. Edwards). The church is the alpha form of Christian civilization and the core of world history.

This is not to say the church cannot become her own rival, for there are often “false sons within her pale.” The church can become a *false* church, and often has. But this does imply a high ecclesiology – much higher than we find among most American Christians. We need to do justice to the biblical declarations of the visible people of God in the world. We need to recover a sense of biblically grounded identity.

[2] The social centrality of the church suggests that the church is the central institution in any given society. Over time, the church always exerts more power and influence over a culture than any other institution. God remakes the world through the church. Obviously, the way the church’s power works is hidden and secret, but it’s still there. When the church acts as salt and light, society is healed and transformed. When the church compromises, the world goes to hell in a handbasket.

While cultural transformation is included in the church’s mission of discipling the nations, this does not mean that cultural transformation is an easy or straightforward process. We cannot change the culture any more than we can change the weather. But we do know that prayer changes the weather (James 5:17-18)! And prayer can change the culture too!

The church has given birth to and nurtured various institutions such as the hospital and university. It is hard to imagine these institutions arising in any other way historically. And yet there is no necessity for them to stay under the umbrella of the church. Kuyperian sphere sovereignty is definitely on to something, although we should remember the church’s sphere has a kind of primacy in the kingdom of Christ. We must reject forms of Kuyperianism that flatten out the differences between the spheres. We need a “depth ecclesiology” that does justice to the complex inter-relationships between the church and other social institutions. The church is central relative to the other spheres. Even if this seems to be a crazy claim, there is no question it is true from God’s point of view (which trumps everything else!).

[3] For most of church history, the church’s self-image (or self-identity) has included a robust ecclesiocentrism. The church has understood her responsibility to remain distinct from the city of man, yet she has also understood her responsibility to seek the welfare of the city of man. She has “assumed the center.” The chief difference between historic Christians and American Christians is found here: in America, the church is viewed more as a private club than a public counter-culture. We are more American than Christian.

Test cases:

[a] The early post-apostolic period shows us the power of a faithful church. Ambrose reformed imperial policy by excommunicating Theodosius after he shed blood needlessly. The church gained the loyalty of the people by excelling in care for the poor, sick, widows, and orphans, especially in times of crisis. The church challenged idolatry (including the state) in a very confrontational, direct way.

[b] In the medieval church, the church was the engine that drove the full-flowering of Christian civilization. The church sought to permeate every institution with the gospel. Of course, this was not always neat and tidy. The church and state often bickered over their respective roles, and sometimes bishops were bettered by civil rulers. But on the whole, the ministry of the church powered the formation of a vibrant and rich Trinitarian culture. The centrality of the church is seen in city architecture, art, literature, politics, etc. from this period (see, e.g., *Under the Influence* by David Schmidt).

[c] The Reformation was an ecclesiocentric movement. The primary aim of the Reformers was the reform of the church because they knew that society as a whole ultimately follow suit. Calvin and Bucer were thoroughly ecclesiocentric. Book 4 of Calvin's *Institutes* shows that the church has a role to disciple the state as she models what human life in community is supposed to look like (cf. Ronald Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva and the Reformation*; Benjamin Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*).

[d] The American civil rights movement was ecclesiocentric, rather than political, when it was at its best. It should not be overlooked that the most effective challenge to racism came from a *pastor* who used his pen and pulpit to bring an end to unjust forms of segregation. To be sure, Martin Luther King, Jr. was a man of many failings. His theology was not necessarily orthodox, he lived a libertine lifestyle at least part of the time, his political views tended in a heavily socialistic direction, and he was accused of plagiarism. But we should also note that it took a *pastor* to do what *politicians* could not. Despite King's liberal theological tendencies, his *public rhetoric* consistently invoked the Scriptures, challenging systemic racism on a biblical basis. King used biblical language and imagery, calling on his hearers to more faithfully put their (presumed) Christian faith into practice. The media today tends to blame the church and the Bible for bigotry (and everything else that's gone wrong in our nation's history), but we should

make the counterpoint that King himself did not see it that way. He believed only the Bible could save us from our prejudices. He believed the church was the chief agent of cultural change. Remember his famous lines: "There was a time when the church was very powerful -- in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society." King challenged blacks and whites to listen to the Bible, and to take their faith more seriously, not less seriously. He did *not* challenge racism in the name of secularism. Had his message been, "All truth is relative, so people should do what is right in their own eyes when it comes to the race question," nothing would have happened. Instead, King acted as a biblical absolutist (at least in public rhetoric), appealing regularly to Amos and the Sermon on the Mount. The civil rights movement was driven by a pastor who wanted to use the Bible in the public square! (Yes, that's right, King was a theonomist of sorts.) Again, none of that excuses any of King's well-documented shortcomings, but it does remind us of the church's powerful ministry in social transformation. Our nation could never have ended systemic racism apart from a pastor publicly proclaiming the Bible in the civil arena. Had King kept his faith utterly private, he could not have led the civil rights movement in the way that he did. It was thoroughly undergirded by the church and the Bible, even if imperfectly.

{King might also be an example of the negative power of the church. His libertine lifestyle, quasi-statist political views, and ambivalence towards classical Christian doctrine had a huge impact on the African-American church, and African-American culture, which persists down to this day. Would urban African-American families be in better shape today if King has been faithful to his wife? Would they be more self-sufficient and less dependent on the depersonalizing welfare state if King had followed earlier African-American leaders like Booker T. Washington in stressing personal and familial responsibility over government-forced wealth redistribution? King is a legacy of ecclesiocentrism in both transforming *and* deforming culture.]

[e] Ronald Reagan's masterful political moves are rightly credited with the toppling of communism in Eastern Europe. But an even more powerful force was at work behind the scenes. In 1989, the Holy Spirit ignited a prayer revival behind the iron curtain. Prayer meetings that were previously attended by only a dozen or so saints, were suddenly attended by hundreds. East German troops blocked autobahn exits to keep the Christians from gathering. Christian leaders were arrested and communist sympathizers tried to fill church seats so the true

Christians would not have places to sit. But the praying crowds still gathered and finally, after several weeks, all public support for the communist party was lost. The sleeping giant had awoken; the church has crushed another tyrant. A member of the communist party later confessed, "We had prepared for everything. But not for candles and prayers." The prayers of God's people brought the iron wall down. The potency of worship/prayer is simply a corollary of ecclesiocentrism. Yes, we do indeed charge the gates of hell with hymnbooks and prayerbooks in hand! (For more on this story, see Bryan Chapell, *Praying Backwards*, 116f.)

Of course, we could also point to negative examples of ecclesiocentrism: almost all the architects of the Enlightenment apostasy were baptized and some remained subversive churchmen. In many ways, liberalism, welfare-statism, feminism, egalitarianism, communism, and deconstructionism all have their roots in the church. Islam and the North American cults are also Christian offshoots. The church must beware, lest she use her power to make the world worse instead of better. Christian heresies are the most powerful forms of falsehoods in the world!

Lecture #2: Against the Family

The church, not the family, is the basic building block of society. While Adam and Eve are the first paradigmatic couple, they are also the first pastor and congregation. The latter point seems to be more foundational, given Paul's use of the Gen. 2 narrative in Eph. 5 and 1 Tim. 2. The church, not the family, is the body and bride of Christ. The human family is but a type and symbol of the reality, which is the marriage of Christ and his bride, the church.

Covenant-parenting must be based on baptism, not family identity. The family, *per se*, is not a redemptive institution. The family becomes a secondary means of grace when parents, in faith, build on the church's primary means of grace (word and sacrament). Paul does not tell the Lusks to count themselves dead to sin and alive to God; he tells the church to reckon herself this way.

The church/family relationship is not symmetrical. In the old covenant, the church depended on the family because she needed to bring the promised Seed into the world. But this is no longer the case now that the Seed has come. In the new covenant, the family depends upon the church, and apart from the church, withers and dies.

Many in the conservative (especially Reformed) church have *over*-reacted to feminism and egalitarianism. This has created a new kind of familism, a kind of family tribalism, or extreme patriarchy. We believe fathers are heads of their households, and have huge responsibilities that must not be diminished. But there is a neo-conservative way of doing family that may be just as bad as the disease it is trying to cure. This has become known as the patriarchy movement.

First and foremost, I think this is an issue of character, not ideology. A humble man, who knows that leadership consists in sacrificial love and service towards others, will avoid the most virulent forms of patriarchy even if he buys into the ideology. But there is a certain kind of man who sees in the patriarchy movement a theological justification for his desire to rule with a fist of iron. And that's what happens, all too often. Patriarchalism is often driven by masculine selfishness, or what Norm Wakefield calls "the spirit of control" (cf. Mrs. Fidget in C. S. Lewis' *The Four Loves*, who "lived for her family" in such a way that she smothered them with an overprotective, manipulative "love," crippling them rather than empowering and maturing them). The wrong kind of man is all too often drawn to this kind of theology. At least pastors are normally accountable to presbytery;

in a patriarchal church environment, there is often no functioning court of appeal above the father.

In other forms, patriarchalism is driven by fear – mostly, a fear of losing kids to the world, or least losing the family’s closeness. Thus, a variety of techniques and rules are conjured up with the goal of keeping the kids “safe” and closely bound to mom and dad. Of course, the real antidote to such fears is not rules but *faith* in God’s covenant promises. Formula-based approaches (e.g., “Reformed Gothardism”) to parenting always end up in exasperation and burn-out. In my experience, very few who grew up in patriarchal families want to raise their kids the same way; thus, patriarchalism ends up being a very damaging one generation experiment in social engineering. There is no silver bullet, so we need to stop looking for one and start looking to God.

Some test cases, dealing with the current patriarchal movement and patriarchal churches:

[a] Can children be taught by someone other than their parents? Those who have critiqued the ‘home-school-only’ movement have made some very powerful *reductio* arguments in favor of responsible parental delegation. A parent does not have to grow all the food, provide all the medical care, teach all the classes, etc. Thus, it should be obvious that parents do not have to do all the Bible teaching. However, I want to address a slightly different issue here. The key thing for parents to know is that when they teach their children, they are doing so as agents of the church, first and foremost. They stand *in loco ecclesium* rather than the other way around. The real basis for discipling our children is not found in the biological/blood relation, but in the sacrament of baptism. Because our children are baptized, parents are to raise them up in the Lord as fellow heirs of the gospel. God has certainly assigned parents a kind of *practical* primacy in the responsibility of discipling their children (for obvious reasons!), but this is only done properly in the environment of the church. God did not design the family to be a self-sufficient entity, but to work in conjunction with the wider body of Christ. Thus, e.g., just because a church has an age-segregated Sunday school program, or a “youth group,” does not necessarily mean it is compromised.

[b] Can parents require grown children to live at home or in close proximity? Can children ‘cleave’ but not ‘leave’? There are some in the church today who are insisting that their children stay in the vicinity of their parents. Obviously, there can be a lot of advantages to multi-generational roots and branches in one place. The generations can help one another in wonderful ways. But it is obvious

there is no biblical *necessity* for this, and parents should not demand it or even press for it. The more important thing is that children grow up and learn to serve God wherever he calls them. Gen. 2 busts apart any attempts at forcing a clan structure onto the church. Grown children are to “leave and cleave” to their spouses. There is still a connection, obviously, but there is distance.

Even unmarried grown children need to be given their freedom and proper independence. Yes, grown unmarried daughters may need protection in various forms, but they should not have their lives micromanaged, nor should they sit at home and wait for God to drop a husband into their lives from heaven above. It is possible to crush a daughter’s spirit and destroy her opportunities, all in the name of “protection.” Such daughters need just as much as protection from their own tyrannical fathers as they do from the world. As William Willimon has said, “Sometimes we have to say that Jesus came to save us *from* our families.”

I am particularly concerned for sons who are raised in a patriarchal context. If a young man does not have the goal of separating himself from his father, he is never going to mature. Sons raised in patriarchal homes have only two choices: they must either become effeminate or they must rebel.

The church should be the answer to patriarchal tyranny. The church provides a court of appeal, so to speak, that goes beyond the family. The church provides a bigger vision/mission and a more “objective” point of view.

[c] Can familio-centric families minister effectively in a culture where the family at large is already in shambles? If a church designs everything around the family, there is very little hope of fitting in people from broken or dysfunctional families. And since most non-Christians are now no longer fully intact, this is a huge issue. The church has a mission that goes far beyond nurturing healthy, viable family relationships. The church also has to minister to sick, messed up families. Our kids need to learn how to minister in such contexts as well. Biblically, the family is ultimately swallowed up in the church’s mission. The importance of the family is relativized by the church’s mission (e.g., when Jesus called his disciples, they left their fathers and followed; I wonder what some of our modern day patriarchalists would have done if they had been in Zebedee’s shoes; cf. Mk. 1:20). We need to reckon with the fact that sometimes being faithful to Jesus means turning your back on your family (cf. Matt. 10) because there are more important things than family ties.

[d] Can highly patriarchal churches include singles? Again, in my experience, the answer is “no.” When the church is viewed as a collection of families, singles are inevitably marginalized. Certainly, singles should be given a place within the families of the church (Ps. 68:6). But we also need to do justice to the integrity of the single life as such. Singles do not just have an identity insofar as they get attached to a family; they have an identity in Christ and in his church. While still encouraging the vast majority of young folks to pursue marriage (ala Debbie Maken), we also need to recognize that those who are genuinely called to singleness have a vital function to play in God’s kingdom (ala Stanley Hauerwas). The gift of singleness breaks the natural necessity of the family. The church can do what she’s called to do even in a culture that does not respect ‘family values.’

[e] What about fathers taking the elements and serving communion to their family members? Can fathers withhold the elements if they believe a family member is worthy of discipline? If *lex orandi, lex credendi* is true, this is a brewing disaster since it is sure to press churches towards the most extreme forms of patriarchy. What seems to drive this idea is the notion that fathers are mediators who stand between God and the rest of the family. But of course, this is just a reversion to worst forms of late medieval piety. A wife does not have to go through her husband to have a relationship with God or to get communion (e.g., what if her husband fell into sin and got cut off from the table?). This confuses a father’s legitimate headship with pastoral office in the church. When we gather, God breaks our families down so he can put them back together. But in the service there is, properly speaking, only one family, “the household of God” (1 Tim. 2), with the pastor acting as the representative of the Father.

[f] Can patriarchalism do justice to the gifts and abilities of women? Frankly, the various forms of patriarchy I have seen are quite chauvinistic. Women are generally viewed as nothing more than “baby-making machines.” The education of girls doesn’t really matter that much. Women are not allowed to work outside the home, no matter the circumstances. A single woman has no real identity until she gets married. Etc. The Bible certainly calls a married woman to be *centered* in the family, but it does call her to be *confined* to the family. The home must be her priority, but it not her only place of possible service. The ways in which women use their gifts outside of the home economy will vary, and we must beware of being overly influenced by our culture’s anti-family bias. But our calling is to follow the Word of God, not upset egalitarians, and the Bible carves a good bit freedom for families in this area.

[g] Can patriarchalists handle it when family members are disciplined? If the family is made ultimate, then what happens when one member apostatizes? This is where the need to view the church as Superfamily, a family that transcends the natural family, is crucial. Without such a distinction, church discipline becomes impossible. It is crucial that everyone in the church know that water is thicker than blood (e.g., the bonds of baptism are stronger than mere blood ties). Kinship within the church is the greatest kind of kinship; indeed, the church is the “communion of the saints.”

Patriarchalists are especially dangerous when they get into church leadership. Inevitably such churches become issues-driven and ingrown. They compromise the “missional” character of the biblical church, move away from the church’s catholic center, and instead foster legalistic subcultures. Such churches are bound to be ‘fringe’ and to be culturally irrelevant when it comes to discipling the nation.

Helpful counsel for dealing with patriarchalists can be found here:

<http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/2001/march/01/insulate-your-children-within/>

and

<http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/2008/august/13/cloistered-homeschool-syndrome/>

and

<http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/2008/october/14/patriarchal-dysfunctional-families-part-2/>

and

<http://www.patriarchy.org/index.html>

and the article “The Family: Biblical and Theological Perspectives” by David and Diana Garland in the book *Incarnational Ministry*.

Christians should be very suspicious of the ‘family values’ agenda that is so popular with American conservatives. ‘Values’ is an ambiguous, subjective term. Christians are not pro-family in a generic way. To wit: Adolf Hitler was incredibly pro-family in Nazi Germany, but we could not buy into his agenda. Hitler supported stay at home moms, opposed homosexuality, and tried to increase household job opportunities and wealth. But none of those things constitute a Christian agenda for the family. We have a very specific conception of what we want for the family, rooted in Scripture. We believe the Christian family is truly created by faith and baptism. The Christian family exists for the

sake of the church, to build up the church and help her fulfill her mission to the nations.

All this to say: The family (like the nation) finds its ultimate fulfillment in the church. The purposes for which God ordained the family will find their eschatological realization in the eternal ecclesial family. The church's mission ultimately takes precedence over family comforts and agendas. The family must have a purpose that goes beyond its mere survival and well-being, and that purpose is found in the kingdom of God. Instead of focusing on building up a clan or tribe around a central patriarch, Christian families should look to build up God's house and kingdom.

Patriarchalism may be a passing fad, but dealing with it brings out a number of important points about the church/family relationship. While those who are taking responsibility for their families should be commended, we should beware of falling off the horse on the other side like a drunken rider (as Luther put it).

Lecture #3: Against America

America has not always been a rival to the church. Indeed, for much of her history, she was at least an uneasy ally. (On America's greatness, see: <http://www.andrewsandlin.net/?p=681>). Even today, with the residual influence of Christendom still deeply permeating our social institutions, we do not necessarily look for a directly adversarial relationship between America and the church. There may still be pockets where a kind of partnership still exists at some level. America is certainly not perfect, but she has had a concern for justice unmatched by any other empire in history. It's been rightly said, "The USA is the only nation in history that could have conquered the world, *but chose not to.*"

More importantly, while America moves towards secularism in the public square, there is still no better place to live as a Christian in terms of freedom and opportunities for mission and influence. Virtually all of the problems we face as the church in America are squarely of our own making, and that includes the problems inherent in American civil religion.

That being said, we do need to deal with theological problem Americanism poses for the church. We find ourselves in an odd swirl of Christian jargon, mixed with modernist individualism and postmodern pluralism.

So what can we say about this distinctively American civil religion?

American civil religion contains a subtle tendency to idolatry. Is the God of presidential prayer breakfasts the Triune God of the Bible? Is the slogan on our money, "in God we trust" directed to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? If we substituted the words "one nation under *Jesus*" in the Pledge, what would happen? American pluralism will not allow our national god to be defined. Instead, every American is free to pour his own theological content into the term, provided he keeps that content to himself and does not try to impose it on others. Our civil religion keeps god in the same position as the bald eagle – as a kind of mascot that can only affirm us in whatever we chose to do, but can never speak to us from the outside with an authoritative rebuke or challenge. The American god has written no Bible, has no creed, makes no moral demands, and never brings judgment. He/she/it is whatever we want he/she/it to be.

The Western shift to pluralism is, at root, a political power play (think about the postmodern claim: "It's all about power now!"). Pluralism allows civil rulers to aggrandize power, while minimizing offense to both religious and secular social

groups. The religious folks are appeased by the vague god-talk, and the secularists are ok with it because they know no one means anything by it. This is not the first time in history pluralism has been used to consolidate power in such a fashion. Nebuchadnezzar attempts the same thing in Daniel 3. He has conquered many lands, each with own religion and god. How can he cement these different people groups together? Easy. He creates a civil religion – a religion of the empire, based on tolerance – in the form of a golden image. People are still “free” to worship their own gods, provided they do so in private. By privatizing religious faith, and creating a vague, imperial (nationalistic) civic deity, Nebuchadnezzar becomes a proto-Enlightenment ruler. After all, European rulers began using the same strategy after the Truce of Westphalia in 1648. Nebuchadnezzar was simply implementing the principle Pannenberg identified as the key presupposition in the making of modern nationalism: “religious passion destroys social peace,” therefore specific religious content must be kept out of the public square.

Of course, Nebuchadnezzar learns over the course of Daniel 3-4 that the true God is not satisfied with such marginalization. He demands homage from all, even emperors. God will not allow specific theological claims drawn from his Word to be supplanted with supposedly value-free, universally known ethical and rational principles. As we are beginning to see in our society, pluralism is not really all that pluralistic, and it is certainly not a stable stopping point. Pluralism is just another attack on the gospel and those who claim to be pluralists will not be satisfied until biblical/Christian faith has been driven completely into hiding.

Our public schools can help us understand how pluralism really works. It is most certainly not about a level playing field between worldviews, but rather silencing dissident voices. Dabney and Hodge got it right 100+ years ago: the schools have driven out prayers, Bibles, and catechisms, and now their stated aim is to produce “good citizens” who can “serve the welfare of the state” (that is to say, children who have been disciplined in idolatry).

Christmastime is another case in point. Christmas trees, manger scenes, greetings, etc., come under fierce attack. But Christmas *in the nature of the case* cannot be made into a private family celebration, or it isn't Christmas anymore. Christmas celebrates the birth of the King! It's a totally public event. The star shined in public. The angels sang in public. And later when Jesus was crucified, it was because government officials declared him guilty and drove nails through his extremities. When he died, a Roman soldier was standing right there, taking it all in. And when he rose from the dead, it was not done in a corner, but

involved many trustworthy witnesses. The whole gospel narrative is public, historical Truth, and must be given its rightful, central place in society.

Confusion about civil religion on the political left is mainly driven by the desire for human autonomy. The god of the left is totally malleable. God-talk is still used, but it does not carry any ethical or theological freight. To participate in democracy, religious believers are required to translate their views into language that satisfies the rest of the populace. Human autonomy is cloaked in the language of religious neutrality.

Confusion about civic religion on the right usually centers on the belief that America somehow has a special relationship with God and a special role to play in history. As I said above, America deserves accolades from Christians. We have much to be thankful for, past and present. Jeremiah Wright-type screeds are not the need of the hour. But there are two problems with this view of America coming from the right. First, to say America is God's special agent in history is to supplant the place of the church. The problem with our civic religion in its conservative form is that we have had a low ecclesiology, and the nation has rushed into the fill vacuum. Courthouses and capitol buildings have displaced steeples. If we recover a proper understanding of the church (cf. my first lecture), we can put America back in her rightful place. Second, we should not even *want* America to be God's special people. If we are in a special covenant with God, we are in deep crap!! America is in high handed rebellion against God and if we are going to be judged accordingly, we are in huge trouble. I do believe that God judges nations, of course, though this secondary to his judgment of the church. Further, I believe that nations can bind themselves to the Triune God in a national covenant ala "The Solemn League and Covenant" of Scotland. *But no nation can ever take the place of the church in the purposes of God.* The church is holy nation, and there can be no other.

The conservative religious right confuses the Christian "we" with the American "we." The result is that conservative Christians spend more time judging the world than their own (cf. 1 Cor. 5:12). So, for example, rampant infidelity in the church is not disciplined, but Disney gets boycotted. The religious right ends up missing the need of the hour because the church is politically invisible to American conservatives. As C. S. Lewis said, our main concern should not be the de-Christianization of the culture, but the de-Christianization of the church. We have far less at stake in the culture wars than we think.

Biblical politics comes neither from the left, nor from the right, but from above, because Jesus said, “my kingdom is not of the world.” The only way to secure freedom for all people and minimize unnecessary violence is to ground our social order on the gospel. We can speak of two kingdoms (church and state), provided we remember who is king of that *other* kingdom (e.g., even if we say there are two kingdoms, there is only one King, the Lord Jesus).

Because we have refused to honor Mother Church, we have gotten the nanny state. There are now only two things that can happen to the welfare state: either she eventually goes bankrupt and our civilization dies (perhaps with some help from an outside conqueror), or the church sacrificially takes on the burden of caring for the poor and begins to disciple our culture once again. We must learn to speak truth to the powers once again, and we must learn to embody the gospel message in deeds of kindness to the marginalized and broken. Of course, none of this can happen unless the fractured church reunites in a deep and broad way.

What is the church’s calling in the present situation? We should focus on two texts, Jer. 29 and 1 Pt. 2. (Bruce Winter explores the connections and parallels between these passages in his book *Seek the Welfare of the City*.)

We are to seek the peace of the nation/city we find ourselves in (Jer. 29). In other words, we need to ask: How can we be a blessing to our city and nation? How we be benefactors of the community where God has placed us? Christians have always believed we have a dual citizenship (cf. the Hebrew and Babylonian names for Daniel and his friends in the book of Daniel; Phil. 1; etc.). But as we participate in the earthly state as citizens we do so in a way that manifests the heavenly kingdom to which we ultimately belong.

We are to live as God’s holy nation (1 Pt. 2), understanding that the church has an intrinsically political character. If the church tries to become apolitical, the state will become sacred. But recovering a high ecclesiology means more than just *talking* about the church in glowing terms. It means *being* and *doing* church in a more rigorously faithful way, e.g., worshipping, preaching, disciplining, praying, serving, etc. as Scripture commands. It means training Christians to live out the implications of the gospel in the world in their daily callings. It means making the church the place where the collision between Christ and the world takes place, over and over again, until Christ has finally subdued his enemies.

None of this is to say that we preach the gospel merely because it will be good for society. Rather, because the gospel is true – *objectively true* – when we preach

it, society is blessed. Recovering the gospel as public truth – and its corollary of the church as a public institution – is the need of the moment. In the same way, we do good works in the public arena, not merely to be *seen* by men, but because we *love* men and want them to come to know God. We should not spend our days on earth withdrawing into a self-serving enclave; rather we must aim at being civic benefactors (and this task is not limited only to wealthy Christians, who would have been accustomed to playing the role of benefactor).

Why should Christians care for a temporal city? Because God does! And because plans to make the kingdoms of men the kingdom of his Son, even as he plans to make their cities his city. Like God, we are to care for both the ‘physical’ and ‘spiritual’ welfare of the city. Furthermore, as Peter’s focus on social ethics shows us, good works can make the gospel attractive to outsiders. Very often, our good works bear more eloquent testimony to the gospel than our words. Works and words together comprise the Christian mission.

Language of “the common good” has been hugely abused as a cloak for tyranny and socialism (as the Harry Potter saga reminds us), but it has its place. It is traditional Reformed (and catholic) language. Christians are to seek the common good of their community, living sacrificially in the midst of a selfish, decaying culture. As an alternative *polis*, serving the good of the earthly *polis*, we model life as God intended it to be lived, in faith, hope, and love.

There is hope for a revival of Christendom (Jer. 31). What would a Christian state (e.g., a Christian America) look like? A Christian nation would not usurp the titles or role of the church, but recognize the church as God’s unique people in history. (This is a vital point. Some of America’s founding fathers opposed tax exemption for churches because it would require the state to judge which entities are in fact ‘churches.’ But, yes, the state has to make such a judgment, even as Constantine did so many centuries ago.) A Christian nation would play its role as a minister of the sword, but in some kind of partnership with the church (the wisdom of full-fledged establishment is a separate question, and probably varies from one situation to another). A Christian nation would seek to shadow God’s perfect judgment in the civil sphere, applying God’s Word as it address such questions (no doubt, with hermeneutical help from pastors and Bible experts ala Daniel’s role in the empires of his day). A Christian nation will recognize Christ as King of kings, and will recognize the church as his body and bride in both its domestic and foreign policies.

In today's church, there is nothing more common than bashing Christendom. (Funny, those bashing Christendom the most don't seem to be lining to go live in places that never had a Christendom! Maybe Christendom wasn't so bad after all...) But, as Oliver O'Donovan has shown, Christendom is rightly understood as the successful outcome of the church's mission. Christendom is exactly what prophets promised and exactly what we were commanded to build by Jesus. Christendom fits with the story arc of the Bible. For example, God told Abraham kings would come from his line; Christian monarchs have to be seen as an aspect of the fulfillment of this promise. Joseph converted Pharaoh and was exalted to his right hand after a period of faithful suffering. He managed the largest empire in the world at that time. David commanded kings to pay homage to the Lord's Messiah in their kingly office and predicted the nations as such would bow before the Lord. The king of Ninevah repented and used the public square as a platform for calling on the entire city to do the same (talk about civil religion!). Daniel and his friends followed the same pattern as Joseph, first getting an anti-blasphemy law passed (Dan. 3), and ultimately turning Babylon into a theocracy (Dan. 4). Daniel's faithfulness in public office also resulted in the transformation of Darius' regime into a proto-Christendom theocracy (Dan. 6). Jesus commanded the church to make Israel out of every nation on earth, baptizing them and teaching them, just as God had done with the Hebrews. The whole trajectory of Acts points to Paul bearing witness before Caesar, an odd goal if something like Christendom is not your view. Why bother with preaching before kings if we don't want to see them converted? Paul is overjoyed that some in Caesar's household already believe the gospel. Also, his tactic of taking the gospel first to cities was the exact opposite of the Anabaptist strategy of withdrawing from society. Again, it was a very odd move by Paul if he had no interest in the Christianization of culture. Etc. It is safe to say that those who bash Christendom are misreading almost the entirety of the Bible.