

PART 3

In Defense of Cultural Christianity

A response to Brian Lee by Stephen Wolfe

Dr. Lee's gracious and penetrating response greatly contributes to this discussion, and I'm grateful for the time he's devoted to deciphering my view (which, I admit, is unique in its approach and a bit confusing in its language). I'm also grateful to *Modern Reformation* for granting me the space to respond. Since Dr. Lee devotes his attention to my terms, distinctions, and my "third way," I will focus here on elaboration and clarification in an attempt to assuage some of his concerns.

CLASSICAL TWO-KINGDOM THEOLOGY

First, I'd like to clarify that while my position is "third way," as Dr. Lee points out, my political theology assumes *classical* two-kingdom (C2K) theology, while being modified in its approach through selected works by T. S. Eliot, Edmund Burke, and Roger Scruton. C2K affirms that the two kingdoms are the invisible, internal, and spiritual kingdom and the visible, outward, natural kingdom. Both the ecclesiastic and civil administrations, being visible and temporal, belong to the outward kingdom. The ecclesiastical (i.e., the institutional church) is not spiritual per se, but it exclusively has the role of ministering to the spiritual. The "church," on the other hand, as Turretin wrote, is "a spiritual and internal communion," not a "visible assembly" (*ITE* 18.6.4). Calvin likewise called the church the "invisible kingdom of Christ" (see his commentary on 1 Peter 1:8). He stated, "The nature of

[Christ's] kingdom . . . is not external, but belongs to the inner man" (see his commentary on Isaiah 42:1; cf. Luke 17:20). The church is essentially spiritual and invisible; the ecclesiastical serves the spiritual and is visible. The two kingdoms then are outward (civil and ecclesiastical) and internal (spiritual), not the magistracy and the ministerium. It is *not* institutional church and state, contrary to widespread belief.

Moreover, the civil and ecclesiastical are both subject to Christ as mediator. The civil is subjected to Christ, the *incarnate* Word, not merely the eternal Word (we are not Nestorians), as the mediator of *common* grace (restoring Adamic dominion). The ecclesiastical is subjected to Christ as the mediator of *salvific* grace.

Modern two-kingdom (M2K) advocates, however, fail to distinguish between the spiritual kingdom and the ecclesiastical, effectively spiritualizing the latter and driving the visible church from its place in the outward order, leading to distorted views of Christian pilgrimage. They see little or no role for civil government in protecting and supporting true religion with civil actions even indirectly related to the procurement of spiritual good. Indeed, they often deny that the civil administration is obligated to recognize the true God, affirming a sort of political atheism. M2K denies the standard view of pagan antiquity, the medieval tradition, and the magisterial Reformation on the civil authorities' obligations vis-à-vis religion.

In C2K, however, the magistracy and the ministerium being in themselves visible administrations are twin species of the same

genus, “Christian communion,” and together constitute the *Societas Christiana*. A Christian society is constituted by the same people underlying both the ecclesiastical and civil, and each supports the other within the limits of their respective authority and power.

FORM AND CONTENT

This leads me to my second (and much needed) clarification. I use the terms “form” and “content” to allow room for distinctively Christian content in what is ultimately natural, universal, and not distinctively Christian. For example, a formal command for the family is that families “worship the true God” (that is, conduct family worship). But as formal, this command leaves open the possibility that supernatural revelation would further reveal additional elements of worship, obligating families to worship God in light of that revelation. Prior to special revelation, families were to worship God in light of natural revelation. But supernatural revelation completes the knowledge of proper worship. Hence, by worshiping God through Christ as a family, families fulfill the *natural formal command* to worship the true God as a family with *content* from natural and supernatural revelation. The ground of the obligation remains a *natural* command, despite fulfilling that obligation by following *supernatural* revelation.

An example of this relationship of form and content is when a US soldier is commanded by his superior officer to take all orders from an allied officer. This formal command does not in itself supply the full content to fulfill the order, for the necessary additional content is supplied by the allied officer. Yet the soldier obeys the allied officer only because his US officer commanded him to. He is ultimately obeying his US superior by obeying the allied officer.

Similarly, the natural formal command that civil communities “recognize the true God” does not in itself exhaust the possible content of recognizing God properly—a content that can be completed with both natural law *and*

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supernatural law. God revealed as Creator issued the formal command whose content is completed by the revelation of God as Redeemer. Thus if the natural law dictates that the civil government ought to “protect true religion,” then civil governments today ought to protect true religion as fully revealed (that is, Christianity). None of this, however, immanentizes heaven on earth: the ground of the civil action remains natural, despite the command being fulfilled by following supernatural revelation.

In a *Societas Christiana*, the cultural practices of the people are going to be colored with Christianity. The manners, greetings, civic rituals, centers of solidarity, and so on are “Christianized” in the sense that while the formal principles are natural (and therefore not distinctively Christian), their content will be distinctively Christian. For example, the principle of manners as a necessary part of civility does not in itself dictate any particular set of manners, yet in a Christian society manners would be Christian in content. Festivals would be Christian festivals. Civil ceremonies would include Christian invocations. Christianity is adjectival vis-à-vis civil community. Such Christianization, while not abrogating natural principles, perfects outward order.

ADORNMENT

This leads to the third and final clarification. Dr. Lee questions my use of the words *adornment* and *accidental*, calling them “disparaging” of Christ’s kingdom. But this assumes a certain hierarchy between accident and essence, privileging essence over accident. By “accidental,” I simply mean that the Christianized cultural practices of a Christian society are nonessential for civil order, for the principles of civil order originate from creation. The Christianization of civil society, stemming from the full revelation of God, strengthens, perfects, and adorns civil order but does not constitute it.

My use of the words *accidental*, *perfecting*, and *adorning* follows Francis Turretin, who in his comments on theological anthropology wrote (*ITE* 5.11.11):

It is one thing to speak of the essence of man; another of his integrity and perfection. At the taking away of a part or of some essential property, there follows in truth the destruction of the thing, but not forthwith at the privation of that which contributes to the integrity and perfecting of nature (as such as original righteousness was).

Turretin states here that man’s “original righteousness” was accidental vis-à-vis man’s essential nature, yet it is still the crowning feature of man—the quality of prelapsarian man that ensured complete, heaven-directed worship of God. That which made man holy was not essential to man as man. Turretin wasn’t disparaging the principal part of righteous man by calling it nonessential; he later calls it “adorning and perfecting.” This adorning quality—while pointing to man’s ultimate, heavenly end—does not destroy or abrogate man’s essential, earthly properties.

Another helpful analogy might be this: Christianization as perfective of civil society is similar to the way righteousness perfects man. Christian cultural practices perfect and adorn, but do not constitute, civil society. Just as Burke

says that the “decent drapery of life” elevates man from a sort of nakedness to dignity, so Christian culture—being rooted in true revelation—elevates a society to true social dignity. It would be fair to call my view a Burkean variant of C2K.

Further, Christian adornment is not mere bauble. Man lives on the surface of things. His principal realm of being is a sort of life-world transcending bare nature, constructed by his drive to elevate himself through distinctive practices or “secular liturgies.” Is man as man a devourer of food, or an orderly and attentive diner? The latter is true human being, while the former is mere animality. Humans *qua* animals gobble food, but *qua* humans they keep their knife edge facing in and their forks on the left. Humans exist, as Roger Scruton argues, on the “surface of the world.” We rightfully dwell in the decorous. If the gospel is to transform anything in civil society, then it ought to transform the realm in which man dwells—the cultural adornment that elevates him above beasts.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Since this culture is not spiritual per se but simply fulfills a natural principle, its protection does not require spiritual weapons, only natural ones. Whatever is justly used to preserve culture can be used to preserve Christian culture. That is, if one agrees that people have a right to cultural preservation, then the fact that some culture is Christian does not exclude the right of cultural preservation. To say otherwise betrays a categorical confusion and confounds the two kingdoms by attributing a spiritual status to what is natural.

This view of two-kingdom theology ensures that the spiritual and the civil kingdoms are in their proper places. The principal accomplishment of Christ—the securing of a spiritual kingdom for the elect—remains in heaven, while the natural order, following its own principles, is completed by adorning itself with symbols of that accomplishment. Cultural Christianity is the completion of civil society. ■