

CHAPTER 1

Working in Anticipation of Christ's Coming

Since the day of Pentecost, we are living in the final age, the age of the Holy Spirit. Christ is coming. He is en route (Rev 1:7), but he is not here yet (Rev 22:7). We live in the tension of the fulfillment of the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and his anticipated second coming. Many prophecies have been fulfilled, but more need to be realized. How are we to live and work in this tension of the already and not yet? We live in the last days (Acts 2:17; 2 Tim 3:1), but the last day has not yet come (John 6:39; 12:48)!¹

This tension of the already and not yet can serve as a tremendous stimulus for Christians to be actively involved in the life of our country. After all, Christ is king already, seated at God's right hand and he comes! There is continuity between the present and the future. Both are in Christ's sovereign control and as Christians we are in his service in this world. It is this world that will be renewed and it is on this earth that our risen king has given us a task as those anointed by his Spirit. But what exactly is our task politically and socially? What sort of guidance do we get from Scripture on this score? Do we have a task? Some would question this and deny we should get involved in the political scene and culture of our times. After all, our citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20) and we are only aliens and strangers here (1 Pet 2:11). Indeed, a theologian like Stanley Hauerwas argues that precisely for those reasons, Christians should not attempt to change secular governments or get too involved in politics and try to change society.²

Let us consider then the biblical rationale for getting involved, the norms we should follow, and the expectations we can have. We'll conclude with some closing reflections.

1. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 198; for a discussion between the tension of the already and not yet, see, e.g., Antony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, reprint, 1979 (Grand Rapids, MI / Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1994), 13–22, 68–75.

2. Stanley Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 1989). For the historic Anabaptist avoidance of involvement in government affairs and today's changing attitudes, see, e.g., Richard Kyle, "Anabaptist and Reformed Attitudes Toward Civil Government: A Factor in Political Involvement," *Direction* 14, no. 1 (1985): 27–33 and John H. Redekop, *Politics Under God*, foreword by John A. Lapp (Waterloo, ON / Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2007), 55–68.

Biblical Precedents for Getting Involved

The Letter to the Exiles

The argument that we are only pilgrims here with our real citizenship elsewhere and therefore should not get involved sounds compelling. But biblically speaking it is not. Consider Israel in Babylon. They were surely strangers in that faraway land. Their citizenship certainly was not in the first place Babylon. They were there against their will. Indeed, they were in a land which had destroyed their country and would destroy their holy city of Jerusalem. In short, they must indeed have totally felt out of place.³

Now what was their attitude to their new surroundings to be like? Inspired by God's Spirit, Jeremiah sent them a letter, probably shortly after they went into exile,⁴ with very specific instructions. We read in that letter, as recorded in Jeremiah 29:5-7

“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”⁵

In other words, they were told to participate in the culture and business of their new place of dwelling. We cannot go into all the detail here, but for our purpose we especially need to note that the letter clearly mentions seeking the peace and prosperity of the city in which they lived. The term used for peace and prosperity is *shalom*, a very comprehensive term, covering all of life. It can also be translated by “welfare”—“seek the welfare of the city” (so NASB, RSV). This advice to exiles is without parallel in the Old Testament. Indeed, it contrasts sharply with the imprecations of Psalm 137.⁶ These exiles were to seek the welfare of their captors and pray for them. They were not to hate the pagans who would destroy Jerusalem, but to work for the good of their country and their society. To seek their welfare meant getting involved, culturally and also politically. Furthermore, such involvement would be of benefit to the Judean exiles. “If it prospers, you too will prosper” (Jer 29:7). And so they were to give their best efforts for the well-being of the land of the Babylonians.

3. In the context of Jer 29, these thousands of exiles were the first to be deported (in 597). They included King Jehoiachin, members of the royal family and the leading men (2 Kings 24:14-16; Jer 29:2; 52:28-30). Donald J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 309-10.

4. Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 360.

5. Unless indicated otherwise, biblical texts are quoted or referred to in the NIV 1988.

6. F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, The New American Bible Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Homan, 1993), 253; cf. Matt 5:43-48; Rom 12:21; Titus 3:1-2; 1 Pet 2:18. The reference in Deut 23:7 [Eng 6] not to seek the peace of Ammon or Moab has been understood as “not to seek a treaty of friendship with them” (NIV).

And they had something to give. The heritage of godly wisdom in the Scriptures they had received was something to be shared. Indeed, had God not said to Abraham already that his descendants were to be a blessing to the nations (Gen 12:2-3)? Was Israel not to be a light to all peoples on earth? (cf. e.g., Isa 42:6; Deut 4:6; Ps 67).

It is striking that the LORD made it clear that they were to be exiles for at least three generations. He said: “Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters” (Jer 29:6). They were to be it for the long haul. At the same time, they had to realize that they would eventually return. For Jeremiah also said: “This is what the LORD says: ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place,’” i.e., Jerusalem (Jer 29:10). In other words, their staying in Babylon was ultimately to be temporary. They had to keep that in mind and therefore build not just homes but families, not as the Babylonians, but with a view to God’s sovereign plan. There is a future for the children of God and they must increase!

Now we need to step back and consider the principles involved in this part of Scripture. For there are a couple of points relevant for our situation today. As believers we are in some ways like the Judean exiles living in Babylon. We are also not of this world, though living in it. We too know that ultimately our sojourn here is temporary and we too look forward to the promised land of the new world that is coming. And so on one level, this world is a hostile place for us, a temporary place, and some would say, let’s avoid it and be separate! Let’s concentrate on our own community and take care of our own needs—they are plentiful enough. Forget about the society around us. That is a response that could have been expected from the Babylonian exiles and historically is an Anabaptist approach. However, God said otherwise. His children have an obligation towards the society in which they live, even if that society is hostile to their faith and values. That obligation toward society also involves the political sphere. After all, like the Judean exiles, we too have explicit instructions to pray for those in authority over us. As we read in 1 Timothy 2:1-2, “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.”

How can we pray for those in authority over us if we do not do what we can to get involved in the affairs of our society and nation? Those in authority over us are not our adversaries but those to whom we owe respect and obedience. They have been placed there by God himself (Rom 13:1-5). We should therefore help them in every possible way and get involved in the political process and work for the welfare and prosperity of our country and society. There are challenges enough. Christians must be the best citizens possible.

There is of course a very striking example of how children of God became involved in political life, namely, Daniel and his friends. Let’s just pause for a moment and consider how Daniel exercised his calling as a believer.

Daniel

Although they were exiles, Daniel and his friends did not object to being part of the political order of the day as long as they did not have to compromise their faith. They served the king, even though he fought their own nation and would destroy the temple and the holy city. But, they refused to eat the royal food (Dan 1) probably because, as was customary, part of it would have been offered to idols (cf. 1 Cor 10:20-31). They also refused to worship any other god but the true God, even if it meant being thrown to the lions or into a blazing furnace (Dan 3, 6). But for the rest, they participated in the affairs of state, did not hide their faith, and influenced the affairs of the empire.

Think for a moment of how Daniel addressed the mightiest ruler of the world at that time.⁷ Daniel had just interpreted the dream which the king had, including telling the king that he would be driven from his palace and live like the wild animals. He then said: (as recorded in Daniel 4:27): “Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.” Notice that Daniel is polite “be pleased to accept my advice.” He is after all speaking to Nebuchadnezzar in whose hand is the life of every one of his subjects. But he is also firm and gives direction. “Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed.” After all, God has just revealed to Nebuchadnezzar his terrible future until he acknowledges that God is king! Daniel is to the point in charging the king to repent and do right.

Now in our current multi-cultural context, this is not what you would expect. Rather you would have expected Daniel to be sensitive to postmodern political correctness and multiculturalism and say something like: “O King Nebuchadnezzar, I am a Jewish prophet, but I would not presume to impose my Jewish moral standards on your Babylonian kingdom. Ask your astronomers and your soothsayers! They will guide you in your own traditions. Then follow your own heart! It would not be my place to speak to you about right and wrong.” No, Daniel spoke the truth, politely but boldly! We need to do the same wherever God has placed us and wherever he gives us the opportunity. And, unlike the average Jewish exile, we have many opportunities in a democracy. We are even encouraged to confront government and our elected representatives and we are even blessed with organizations like ARPA, of whom we have a representative with us today. As those ultimately set in their high place by God, our leaders can expect input from God’s children!

The results are in God’s hand. In Daniel’s case, Nebuchadnezzar even ended up praising, exalting, and glorifying the true God (Dan 4:34-37). So too did king Darius after Daniel came out of the

7. What follows is dependent on Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 58-60.

lions den. Daniel's simple confessing his faith by praying to God in spite of a Persian law resulted in Darius extolling God (Dan 6:25-27).

New Testament Teaching

As we move on to the New Testament we also find examples of believers not shirking from confronting government or using legitimate means in confronting the state with God's demands and to advance the gospel.

Several examples come to mind.⁸ Like Daniel, John the Baptist confronted the evil ruler of the day. He had told Herod, the tetrach, that it was not lawful for him to have as wife the spouse of his brother Phillip (Matt 14:3-4). But he had also admonished him about "all the other evil things he had done" (Luke 3:19). He addressed the government policies of Herod and pointed out the evil he was doing. It cost John the Baptist his freedom and then his life, but he knew his responsibilities before Herod, also his political responsibilities.⁹

In a similar way, the apostle Paul, confronted the Roman governor Felix while he was a prisoner in Caesarea. It says in Acts 24:25 that he talked to him about "righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come." One can be sure that also dealt with the moral standards of the day and thus government policy. On an earlier occasion, the apostle Paul facilitated the acceptance of the gospel by a government official, Sergius Paulus, by liberating him from the hand of a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet (Acts 13:6-12).¹⁰

An example of using government rules to promote the gospel and its spread is seen in Paul's using his Roman citizenship to escape from the hands of the Jews and benefit from Roman justice with the opportunity to present the gospel to those who would judge his case. Indeed, in the end he even appealed to Caesar to hear his case ((Acts 22:22-30; 24-26). This last act guaranteed that the gospel would be heard in Rome in the heart of imperial power. And this is exactly what God intended (Acts 23:11; 27:24).

One could say: I'm not John the Baptist, or Paul, the apostle! I'm just a simple believer. However, the examples just given show that God's Word is relevant for government officials and that those who believe in God are not silent when the opportunity presents itself. Indeed, Scripture also indicates that we should not be shy about asserting our rights, especially if they are being denied because of our faith. God gives opportunity for us to testify to those whom he has set above us, often in most unexpected ways.

8. For what follows, see Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible*, 60–61.

9. Also see Alan Storkey, *Jesus and Politics: Confronting the Powers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 61–68.

10. For a useful account of the political aspects of the book of Acts, see J. van Eck, *Paulus en de Koningen* (Franeker: Van Wijnen, 1989).

Having seen that there is biblical precedent for getting involved in the affairs of our nation, the next question is how. How do we do work in anticipation of Christ's coming? What sort of guidance does Scripture give?¹¹

The Norms of our Involvement

There are a number of areas that could be considered when we reflecting on the manner of our involvement. For our present purpose we will focus one current and basic issue. What norm should we use? Natural law or biblical law? At the moment there is among Calvinists a debate about how Christ and his kingdom relate to our government institutions, society, and culture. We need to pause at this dispute.

On the one hand there are those who say that biblical norms need to be promoted and applied to our society. Nothing is to be excluded from Christ's lordship. As Kuyper famously said: "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over *all*, does not cry: 'Mine!'"¹² Christians therefore have the mandate to assert Christ's claims wherever this is possible. Paraphrasing Bavinck, wherever Christians function, whether in one's family, in society, in the affairs of the state, in one's occupation, in art, or in science, a renewing and sanctifying influence must radiate from their lives. "The spiritual life is meant to refashion the natural and moral life in its full depth and scope according to the laws of God."¹³ Put differently, grace restores nature.¹⁴ As we seek to refashion life in a manner pleasing to God, Satan pushes back, and we experience the antithesis. This is one view of how Christ's lordship should impact our walk as Christians. It is the view that has made possible Christian activism in such areas as education, the arts, and politics.

On the other hand there are those who assert that there are two separate kingdoms. According to this view there is the common kingdom which God preserves according to his promises given after the

11. Bruce Winter has argued that the New Testament teaches that Christians in the first century Graeco-Roman world were to "seek the welfare of the city" by adopting and adapting the traditional Roman role of benefactor to help sustain and enhance the life of the cities in which they lived. Bruce Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens*, First Century Christians in the Graeco-Roman World (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994). His main thesis does not appear to have been widely embraced since much hinges on interpreting the "good" in Rom 13:3-4 (ESV) and 1 Pet 2:14-15 (ESV) as public benefaction which he is unable to prove conclusively. See, e.g., the review by James C. Walters in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115 (1996) 536-538. His contention that Christians did not withdraw from society is credible given injunctions such as 1 Pet 2:15 and the Lord Jesus' teaching in Matt 5:14-16 and elsewhere.

12. Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids; Carlisle: Eerdmans; Paternoster, 1998), 488, the emphasis is Kuyper's.

13. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003-8), 4:437. David VanDrunen has (unsuccessfully) attempted to use Bavinck in support of his two kingdom approach. See the discussion in David VanDrunen, "'The Kingship of Christ is Twofold': Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms in the Thought of Herman Bavinck," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45 (2010): 147-64 and Nelson D. Kloosterman, "A Response to 'The Kingdom of God is Twofold': Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms in the Thought of Herman Bavinck by David VanDrunen," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45 (2010): 165-76. Kloosterman's essay was later reprinted in Ryan C. McIlhenny, ed., *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012), 65-81.

14. It has been argued that grace restoring nature is "the fundamental defining and shaping theme of Bavinck's theology." See John Bolt's introduction in Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:23.

great flood (Gen 8:20-9:17) and the redemptive kingdom whose citizens are the redeemed whom God is gathering in the church. Anything not directly related to the rule of Christ with respect to his church is part of the common kingdom where Christians live as exiles. Important implications are drawn from this view. In general Christians are not to seek an objectively Christian way of pursuing cultural activities. The importance of Christian education is downplayed for according to this two kingdom view, it is questionable whether we can call non-theological fields of learning Christian. Since politics is a matter of the common kingdom, it can be misleading to speak of Christian political activity because Scripture speaks only in a general way of civil government and political responsibilities. As a result the two kingdom vision downplays Christian action to influence the political process.¹⁵

But there are major problems with this view. It divides God's government of all things into two parts as if he rules creation in two distinct realms. But there is no evidence of this in Scripture. God is sovereign Ruler over all history and creation. Furthermore, all human beings as created in God's image are obligated to submit to God's will as Creator and Redeemer.¹⁶ The two kingdoms view introduces an unbiblical dualism into the life of a Christian. According to this view, Christians, as citizens of the redemptive kingdom, are to live subjectively according to the Scriptures, but in the common kingdom, they are not to seek an objectively unique Christian way of pursuing cultural or political activities. It is said that natural law governs the common kingdom.¹⁷ But Christians will or should always be involved in cultural and political endeavors in ways completely different than unbelievers even though some of the outcomes can be similar. Christians will be motivated to act to God's glory and therefore according to God's law for they recognize that God's Word is relevant for all of life, both public and private, ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical. Furthermore, the basic principles of the Ten Commandments are known to all men. God has written the requirements of the law on their hearts and so they are without excuse (Rom 2:15; cf. 1:20-21). The so-called natural law is not natural in that it originates from man, but it has been given by God.¹⁸ Since natural law can only be fully and correctly known in the light of Scripture, Christians have the obligation to let the light of God's good will be known in all areas of life and to try to subject all areas of life to the criteria of God's Word (cf. 1 Cor 10:31; 2 Cor 10:5; Col 3:17;

15. A popular introduction is David VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010). For the issues mentioned, see pp. 15, 26, 168, 179-187, 198. A more scholarly treatment can be found in David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought*, Emory University Studies in Law and Religion (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). For a constructive critique and interaction, McIlhenny, *Kingdoms Apart*. Also see the previous footnote. For a brief critique of VanDrunen's confusing treatment of Kuyper, see William D. Dennison, "Review of VanDrunen's *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*," *Westminster Theological Journal* 75 (2013): 365-67.

16. See further on this topic Cornelis P. Venema, "One Kingdom or Two? An Evaluation of the 'Two Kingdoms' Doctrine as an Alternative to Neo-Calvinism," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 23 (2012): 102-3.

17. VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 166-72, 198-203.

18. Herman Ridderbos, *Aan de Romeinen*, Commentaar Op Het Nieuwe Testament (Kampen: Kok, 1959), 58-59. Also see Cornelis Van Dam, *God and Government. Biblical Principles for Today: An Introduction and Resource* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 87-89.

1 Pet 4:11). It is in the area of Christian education that the consequences of the two kingdom position are especially obvious. The two-kingdom position denies that there is such a thing as Christian scholarship in non-theological disciplines. With this view there is no incentive to build a Christian school or to bring every thought into subjection to Christ (2 Cor 10:5).¹⁹

One needs to remember that God demands that all recognize him as the Lord of all of life (cf. Ps 96, 99). At this very moment Christ rules at God's right hand (1 Pet 3:22). Christians therefore have every reason to apply the biblical norms to all of life, both in the so-called redemptive kingdom as well as in the common kingdom. Society needs to hear from believers what is proper for a correct understanding of the issues of the day, such as marriage, euthanasia, and abortion. General revelation is not sufficient here. Applying biblical norms can be very difficult and mean struggle and estrangement from mainline culture.²⁰ Christians are indeed pilgrims here and our citizenship is in heaven (1 Pet 2:11; Phil 3:20). But we have been placed in this world, not to separate ourselves from our society, but to work for Christ's glory in anticipation of his coming (John 17:15-17; 1 Cor 10:31). This entails getting positively involved in the challenges facing our contemporary culture and society's institutions, including government. It will also mean that over against the immorality of the present age, we will be profoundly countercultural (1 Pet 2:11).

Our Expectations

What expectations can Christians have as they go about this task? First of all, We need to be biblically realistic. We are after all strangers here and our sojourn is limited. We cannot expect to see immediate results and indeed we may see only marginal results or we may not even see any results at all. The Kuyperian triumphalism of the past should indeed belong to the past.²¹ For real positive change to occur in our cultural, political, and social life as a nation, the hearts and minds of our country need to be

19. See on this issue Venema, "One Kingdom or Two?" 124–27. For a defense of keeping one's faith private in the academy, based on the notion of the two kingdoms, see D. G. Hart, "Christian Scholars, Secular Universities, and the Problem of the Antithesis," *Christian Scholar's Review* 30 (2000–2001): 383–402; for a strong rebuttal, William C. Davis, "Contra Hart: Christian Scholars Should not Throw in the Towel," *Christian Scholar's Review* 34 (2004–5): 187–200.

20. On the challenge of discerning divine ordinances and applying biblical norms to current issues as evidenced in the work of Abraham Kuyper, see, e.g., Vincent E. Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 57–61.

21. Rightly cautioning against this easy Kuyperian triumphalism is, e.g., Richard J. Mouw, *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World*, Revised and Expanded ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), 159–69; also Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Rediscovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008), 189–201, 252.

changed.²² This implies that change will usually come slowly and incrementally. We live in the tension of the already and the not yet of the coming of Christ.

When our Savior lived on earth, he announced that the kingdom of God had arrived. He cast out demons and so indicated his superior power over Satan (Matt 12:28). He restored creation by healing the sick and so showed that the devil's might had been broken (Luke 13:11-16). Through the proclamation of the gospel the kingdom had come near and had been given to those who believe (Mark 2:1-12; Mark 10:15). But at the same time the kingdom had not yet arrived in fullness. Christ therefore taught his disciples to pray: "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matt 6:13). Indeed, even after Christ's coming and victory, Satan, though cast out of heaven, still rages on this earth (Rev 12:12).²³

This reality makes us realistic as to our expectation with respect to the fruits of our labor. It will be slow and difficult for we have a powerful adversary and "at present we do not see everything subject to Christ" (Heb 2:8). Socially changing the culture is a task beyond the ability of any one individual but with every testimony from Reformed individuals and families the salt and light of the kingdom seeps into society. Every life lived in holiness in an unholy world is a witness to God's work and his kingdom reality in our lives.

It is good to remember that God's kingdom is "like yeast that a woman took and mixed [lit. hid] into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough" (Matt 13:33). Children of God are to be like a holy leaven in today's culture and society. The worldly culture and society is huge. It is a large amount of flour. The yeast, the citizens of God's kingdom, is, as it were, hidden in this large mass. In the eyes of the world, the kingdom of heaven is as nothing. It is virtually invisible. But like leaven it works, slowly but surely and the fermentation will continue until the whole batch has risen. The citizens of the kingdom demand that every sphere of life be subject to the Lord of the universe, Jesus Christ. God's Word does not promise that all of life will be obedient to Christ before his return (2 Thess 1:7-10; 2:8). But the citizens of God's kingdom know and believe the promise that in God's time this will be the case (Rom 14:11; Phil 2:10-11). The leaven of God's kingdom works slowly and it is almost invisible. But by God's grace some of its effects slowly become obvious. Indeed, it could be argued that much of what we enjoy, such as democracy, the rule of law, and the many freedoms we cherish can be traced to historic biblical influences on our society. With our society turning away from the biblical moorings that have

22. A point also made by Storkey when he writes: "In the end, people changing their hearts, minds, and attitudes is *the only feasible political method*." Storkey, *Jesus and Politics*, 116 (italics in the original). In an interview of Canada's Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, broadcast on CBC on January 17, 2011, the Prime Minister stated that "if you want to diminish the number of abortions, you've got to change hearts and not laws." Harper however used this fact to justify refusing to consider legislation on this issue and so shirked government's responsibility as God's servant to give moral leadership. See <http://www.cbc.ca/news/interview-with-stephen-harper-1.1007264> (accessed December 9, 2014).

23. For an excellent study on this topic, see Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, ed. Raymond O. Zorn, trans. H. de Jongste (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962). For a popular study of Rev 12, D. A. Carson, "This Present Evil Age," in *These Last Days: A Christian View of History*, eds. Richard D. Phillips and Gabriel Fluhrer, N. E. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011).

benefitted our culture, it is a real challenge to make the leaven of the kingdom effective. However, every Christian who lives his faith inside and outside the home is a cultural force.²⁴

The image of the slow working of leaven reminds us that when it comes to politics and passing laws we may need to seek change incrementally. It will not always be possible to get everything one desires in one step. We may need to exercise some tolerance and compromise for the less than ideal in the short term while keeping the desired goal in focus.²⁵ In all our activity to seek social, cultural, and political change, we also need to be biblically realistic and realize that ultimately Christ's kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). Christ resisted any attempt to make him an earthly king (John 6:15). His kingdom will come in all perfection one day on this earth, but in the meantime he gives us our duty here. For even if we cannot effect the kind of meaningful social and political change that we would like, nevertheless Christ has given his people a task and calling in this world. We are to be witnesses to God's claim on his creation and his will for a world lost in sin.

Scripture and history are very sober on this point of being a witness. Many have given their lives while testifying to God and his kingdom. The two witnesses in Revelation 11 also end up being killed. But they were where they had to be, out in the public square, on the streets of the great city figuratively called Sodom giving their prophetic testimony. And God is sovereign. Satan could only kill these witnesses after they had finished their testimony (Rev 11:3-10). This is in a nutshell a picture of the believers, the community of faith, in the last days before the final coming of the kingdom of God in fullness and perfection. Christians give their testimony in public and their testimony is rejected rendering the world of sin guilty and ready for the final judgment. In Revelation 11 the beast, the forces of evil, kills them but God restores his witnesses, his church, to life! (Rev 11:11-19).²⁶ This emphasizes the continuum we are on. This present world will transition to the renewed creation.²⁷ The victory is Christ's! We need to keep this glorious end in mind in order to maintain a proper perspective. God is sovereign and his kingdom will triumph.

At the same time suffering comes with the identity of being a Christian. Preaching the good news, Paul and Barnabas also said: "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). It is good to keep in mind that Scripture regards suffering for the cause of Christ a

24. For the above, see William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 567–68; Van Dam, *God and Government*, 3–17; K. Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, trans. from Dutch (Winnipeg: Premier, 1977), 81–86.

25. Van Dam, *God and Government*, 246–51, cf. 66-76 and, e.g., Mark Penninga, "Saving Some is *Not* a Compromise: The Case for Advancing Abortion Legislation in Canada One Step at a Time," *Reformed Perspective* 30, no. 12 (October 2011): 10–18.

26. For a brief and fuller exposition of Rev 11, see respectively William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*, reprint, reprint, 1940 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 129–32 and Beale, *Revelation*, 572–620.

27. See on this topic, Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 715–20; in relation to the two kingdom idea, Venema, "One Kingdom or Two?" 114–21.

blessing and a privilege. Christ said: “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:10). As Christians we live and work here in holy communion with Christ. That includes sharing in his suffering (1 Pet 4:12-13) so that we may share in his glory (Rom 8:17).²⁸ After the apostles were flogged by the Sanhedrin, we read that they left “rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name” (Acts 5:41). This suffering is in the context of the close communion Christians have with Christ. When Saul persecuted the believers, Christ asked “Why are you persecuting *me*?” (Acts 9:4).

Our relationship as Christians to Christ is so close that we also share his anointing. Also here there is the continuity between this age and the one to come; between this world of sin and the glory to be revealed on a new earth. In our sharing in Christ’s anointing we may exercise our calling as prophets, to confess his name, as priests to present themselves as living sacrifices, and as kings and queens to fight with a free and conscience against sin and the devil in this life and hereafter to reign with him eternally over all creatures. You will recognize in this the words of Lord’s Day 12 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Our calling is closely connected to Christ and it involves all of life and anticipates the coming of that great day.²⁹

Indeed, as we also confess in the Heidelberg Catechism, we make in this life a beginning of the new obedience (QA 114) and experience now already the beginning of the eternal joy (QA 58). This continuity of our present life with the future glory is also evident in our being transformed into Christ’s likeness with every-increasing glory (2 Cor 3:18).

So, in spite of a fitting sober realism there is also the joy of the faith. And that joy also allows us to be optimistic in a biblical sense. We can work hard for change in our society, nation, and our government with the knowledge that as we witness to Christ and the biblical norms we are planting seeds. Christ said that “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches” (Matt 13:31-32). In other words, the coming of the kingdom in all its glory has very small beginnings, insignificant in the eyes of the world, but in the end the kingdom of heaven will surpass all others!³⁰ As Christians we can plant that seed in our families and homes, a critical institution for God’s work! That seed of the kingdom is also planted through the preaching of the Word, through Christian education, and through a Christian walk and talk as we oppose the culture of narcissistic self-interest, of abortion, and euthanasia. Through it all

28. This sharing has nothing to do with contributing to Christ’s suffering for our redemption. Rather, it is a suffering with Christ because of our close identity with him. It is a suffering for his sake (cf. Gal 6:17). See further Ridderbos, *Aan de Romeinen*, 183–84; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1936), 527–28.

29. In this context, see also Venema, “One Kingdom or Two?” 122–24.

30. Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, 144–45; Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 565–67.

the church has the indispensable duty to preach the pure gospel and in this way equip faithful confessors of Christ for all of life.³¹

We do need to exercise much patience but we are engaged on a project that is ultimately guaranteed to succeed in a glorious completion. And so as Christians we may joyfully and with godly zeal be involved in the cultural, social, and political affairs of our country. We do have something to give—the true light in a world of darkness (Matt 5:13-16; Eph 5:8)!! And we have the promise that our labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor 15:58). We even have the promise that those who die in the Lord “will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them” (Rev 14:13). What we do as Christians in this life has significance for the renewed world to come. “There is continuity, in other words, between what is done for Christ now and what we shall enjoy in the hereafter—a continuity expressed in the New Testament in terms of reward or joy (cf. 1 Cor 3:14; Matt 25:21, 23).”³²

Yes we can work expectantly in great anticipation of Christ’s coming, for already he rules at the Father’s right hand and it is this world that will be renewed. And remember: “no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9).

31. For the task of the church and its relationship to the state, see Van Dam, *God and Government*, 47–77 and Cornelis Van Dam, “The Church and Public Policy,” *Clarion* 58 (2009): 274–76.

32. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 74. The rest from our labors should however not be conceived of as inactivity. We will function as prophets, priests, and kings on earth forever (Rev 5:10; 22:5). See Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:727–28.

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