What does it mean to be Reformed?
An answer from a worldview perspective

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Abstract

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The aim of this article is to determine – from a worldview perspective – the hallmark of being Reformed. As an introduction a few current, unsatisfactory efforts at revealing the genius of the Reformed faith are mentioned.

The main section of the article provides, firstly, a typology of five basic, recurring worldviews during the past 2000 years of Christianity. Among them only the Reformational worldview is not plagued by an inherent dualism. Secondly, the differences among these worldviews are illustrated by way of their concrete, practical implications for real-life issues. In the third place, the dualistic Christian worldviews are critically evaluated in the light of the Biblical revelation of inter alia its message about the kingdom of God.

In conclusion the distinctive character of being Reformed is described, both negatively (as the rejection of dualistic worldviews), and positively (as the rediscovery of an integral, holistic worldview, inspired by the Biblical idea of the kingdom of God). Such a worldview should always be practised in humility and never lead to triumphalism, because we often do not apply it consistently and especially because our fallible human efforts may not be identified with the coming of God's kingdom.

An International *Reformed* Theological Congress with the theme "The kingdom of God" provides an excellent opportunity to reflect on the question: What exactly is the hallmark of being Reformed? In which way(s) is the Reformed faith unique amongst a variety of Christian positions?

In this article it will be attempted to answer this vital question from the perspective of a worldview. But – as an introduction – a few current ideas about the genius or essence of being Reformed to illustrate the need for this reflection.

1. Introduction: current ideas about the distinctive character of the Reformed faith

Many books have been written about the misunderstandings, myths, caricatures, as well as the distinctive characteristics of the Reformed faith. For example, to be Reformed has inter alia been labelled as: to be orthodox, to attend catechism classes, to go to church faithfully Sunday morning *and evening* (!) and to honour the Sabbath. Other definitions include the following: to be Reformed is to accept the five points of Calvinism, namely total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace and the perseverance of the saints (often referred to by the acronym TULIP), which was derived from the Canons of Dordt – 1618-1619.

Another well-known viewpoint is that Reformed people believe in *sola* gratia (through grace alone), sola *fide* (through faith alone), *sola Scriptura* (only Scripture) and *solus Christus* (Christ our only Saviour).

In spite of the value of each of the above-mentioned characteristics, I do not think any of these characteristics fully reveal the real genius of the Reformed tradition. What then is its hallmark?

I agree with Hesselink (1983:67) when he states that Reformed theology is kingdom theology. "Therefore to be Reformed is to seek to bring the whole Gospel to the whole world – not a truncated version which applies only to the individual's spiritual welfare". Its starting point is the absolute sovereignty of God over all areas of life. Christ's rule has cosmic dimensions. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords (Rev. 19:16; 17:14) whose kingdom shall have no end (Luk. 1:33).

Therefore the Reformed outlook is one of great scope and grandeur, compared to other forms of Christianity:

> In contrast to Lutheranism's quest for a gracious God, pietism's concern for the welfare of the individual soul and Wesleyanism's goal of personal holiness, the ultimate concern in the Reformed tradition transcends the individual and his salvation. It also goes beyond the church … The concern is for the realisation of the will of God also in the wider realms of the state and culture, in nature and in the cosmos (Hesselink, 1983:108-109).

To be able to achieve this lofty goal, an encompassing worldview is necessary. Therefore to Hesselink (1983:71) the hallmark of the Reformed tradition is its development of a Biblically reformed worldview. In summary:

> A life and worldview, a vision of the sovereignty of God and the lordship of Jesus Christ manifest in every sphere of life, a theology of the kingdom of God which transcends time and space – this is the grand design of Reformed theology at its best … one Leitmotif underlies them all: the glory of God … 'From Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever!' (Rom. 11:36) (Hesselink, 1983: 111, 112).

The aim of this article is to determine the uniqueness of a Reformed worldview (I would prefer the word "Reformational" to indicate that it is not static in nature) by comparing it with other Christian worldviews. The variety in worldviews becomes evident when we take a look at the different answers which Christians provide to the relationship between grace and nature.

2. A typology of the five basic positions

Like many other fundamental problems in the history of thought, the number of possible answers to the problem of the relationship between grace (redemption) and nature (creation), or the Christian and culture, are limited. Only five basic models or paradigms to describe the relationship have been employed over the past 2 000 years.

2.1 Different attempts at a typology

Bavinck (cf. Veenhof, 1994) was one of the first who distinguished carefully between the five positions. In the beginning of the forties Bonhoeffer (1966:196) summarised three of the five models in the following words:

> In the scholastic scheme of things the realm of the natural is made subordinate to the realm of grace; in the pseudo-Lutheran scheme the autonomy of the orders of this world is proclaimed in opposition to the law of Christ, and in the scheme of the Enthusiasts the congregation of the Elect takes up the struggle with a hostile world for the establishment of God's kingdom on earth.

Following his pioneering work, we have the famous classic, *Christ and culture* by Niebuhr (first published in 1951 with many reprints). In 1970 Olthuis gave his own version of the five types. And more recently, Wolters (1990) applied the same basic models to explain the different attitudes of Christians to Greco-Roman culture.

2.2 The *principium divisionis*

When studying the five viewpoints, we should be aware of the fact that only one of them really rejects dualism. Even the two moderate types

among the remaining four accept dualism and merely try to avoid the extremism of the first two viewpoints.

One can apply different principles to arrange the five paradigms. On the one side thinkers emphasising the corrupting power of sin, consider the natural realm to be predominantly evil, while on the other side, theorists impressed by the goodness of creation, conceive the realm of nature to be more or less good in itself. Therefore the most common method to order them, according to the degree of appreciation each model accords to nature in contrast to grace, ranges from the most negative to the most positive.

Because dualisms (or their rejection in the fifth model) play such a foundational role in one's outlook upon life as a whole, they are more than merely methods or models for describing the relationship between nature and grace. We can therefore also use these paradigms in describing different worldviews.

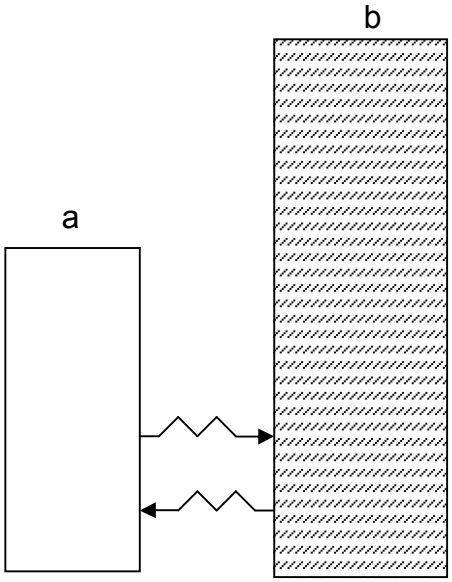
2.3 A comparison of divisions

The following comparison provides a summary of the worldview models distinguished by three of the above-mentioned authors, indicating their basic agreement:

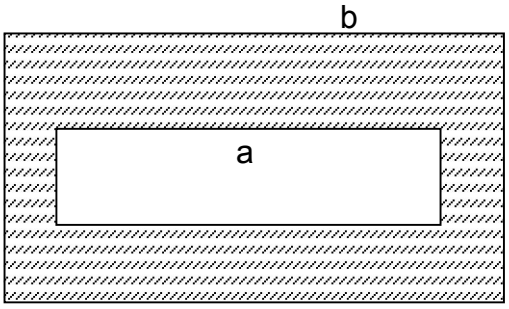
Niebuhr	**Olthuis**	**Wolters**
Christ *against* culture	Right bank extreme (Tertullian, Anabaptism, older Evangelicalism, Dialectical Theology, e.g. Karl Barth)	Grace *opposes* nature
Christ *of* culture	Left bank extreme (from Origen, Justin to modern theologians like Ritschl, Paul Tillich, Paul van Buuren and the Social Gospel Movement)	Grace *equals* nature
Christ *above* culture	Moderate, middle of the stream type – to the left (Thomism, Neo-Thomism, Catholicism)	Grace *perfects* nature
Christ *and* culture in paradox	Moderate, middle of the stream type – more to the right (old and new Lutheranism)	Grace *flanks* (stands alongside) nature
Christ *transforms* culture	The Reformational-Biblical model (Augustine, Calvin, Kuyper, Bavinck, Olthuis, Wolters – Niebuhr's position not clear)	Grace *restores* nature

2.4 The typology in diagrammatic form

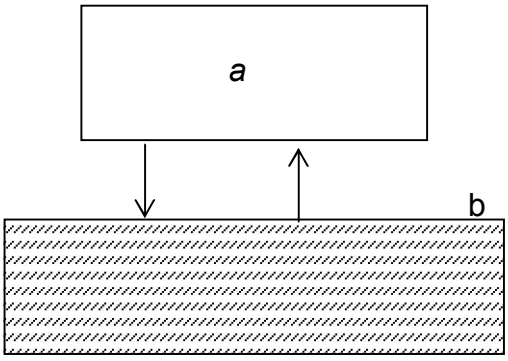
This typology can be visualised in the following diagram (Van der Walt, 1994:102 and 1999:133):



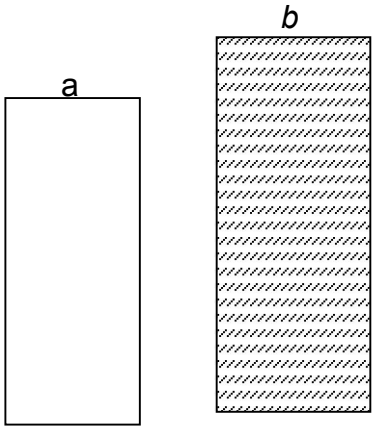
(1) Grace (a) opposes nature (b)



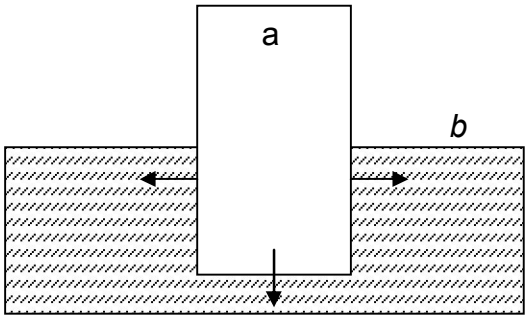
(2) Grace (a) *equals* nature (b)



(3) Grace (a) perfects nature (b)



(4) Grace (a) *flanks* nature (b)



(5) Grace (a) *restores* nature (b)

3. Practical consequences

The difference between the five basic paradigms or worldviews becomes even clearer when their practical results in everyday life are considered.

3.1 General examples

Numerous general examples of dualism can be mentioned, like the following: (1) Sunday is regarded as the Lord's day, but the rest of the week does not belong to Him. (2) Tithe money is considered to be decicated to God, but with the rest we can do as we please. (3) Certain activities in life (like Holy Communion) are regarded as holy, while others (ordinary eating and drinking) are not. (4) Evangelism is more saintly than social work. (5) Theology is more honourable than philosophy. (6) Some callings are holier than others. This last example will be elaborated in the following paragraphs.

Many Christians today still evaluate different professions using a hierarchical scale, according to which some are closer and more acceptable to God and others not. Missionaries, ministers of religion, missionary doctors and nurses are at the top of the scale, while the "ordinary" professions, like business people, politicians, lawyers, artists, etcetera are at the bottom. Only the first group is in full-time service of the Lord. Many in the lower rank therefore feel uncomfortable and either leave their professions or try to give at least one year of their life to God by, for instance, joining a missionary campaign.

There is, however, no such thing as part-time and full-time Christians. As a Christian one is either God's servant full-time or one is not a Christian. A so-called part-time Christian, serving two masters, is a contradiction in itself. We are only permitted to serve one Master (Matt. 6:24; Luke 16:13). In spite of the fact that not everyone of us is called to be a missionary, all of us – without exception – are called to His full-time service, to offer ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God (Rom. 12:1).

This is the reason why the Bible never asks us to leave our different professions. When tax collectors – a hated profession even today – became converted and asked John the Baptist what they should do, he did not demand that they *leave* their work, but that they *change* the way in which they behaved *in* their profession: "collect no more money than you are required to do" (Luke 3:12, 13). The same advice was given to the not very highly estimated work of being a soldier: "don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely, be content with your pay" (Luke 3:14). From Paul we hear the same message: "Each one should retain the place in life that the Lord has assigned to him/her and to which God has

called him/her" (1 Cor. 7:17, 21, 24). This he even applied to slaves – if they could not gain their freedom (1 Cor. 7:21-23). Therefore he sent Onesimus back to his master Philemon. Paul respected the social customs of his day, but at the same time he challenged Philemon to abandon slavery by calling Onesimus *his brother in Christ*!

One of the most fundamental Biblical perspectives – which was re-emphasised throughout the Reformational tradition – is that ordinary "jobs" are divine callings. Instead of divided allegiance we can serve God with singlemindedness *in* any work!

Many similar *general* consequences of dualistic Christian worldviews could be mentioned. We want to focus now on what *specific* difference the above five worldviews will have in practice. From the many possibilities (cf. Van der Walt, 1999:133-138) two examples are discussed.

3.2 The Christian and politics

The implications of the five worldviews will in this case be the following:

1. The Christian should be *against* any political involvement, because political life as such is dirty and evil and a contradiction to the Christian faith.

2. *Very little if any difference* exists between ordinary (secular) politics and political involvement in the case of a Christian. Good politics is also Christian politics! Christians should sanction secular politics.

3. The Christian is by nature, in a *superior* relationship to secular politics, which has to be perfected by "baptising" or "Christianising" it from above. This may be done by, for instance, the opening of a political meeting by a priest with Scripture reading and prayer or in fabricating a theological perspective on politics. All such activities, however, remain *external* or *extrinsic* to political life, unable to change it *internally*.

4. The Christian should take a position *alongside* political life. Being a Christian and a practising politician are two totally different callings, in no way related to each other. A Christian may, therefore, *also* be a politician, but his Christian faith could and should have no influence on his political activities, because then he will confuse entities which should clearly be separated and kept apart.

5. This viewpoint differs from all the preceding ones in that it teaches that a Christian should be *directly involved in* politics, *renewing* and *transforming* it in order to respond in obedience to God's norms for

justice. This Christian witness should be *political* in nature in order to reform political life from *within*. It should, therefore, not bear an ecclesiastical character as when, for instance, a minister of religion delivers a "sermon" in parliament!

3.3 The easy ways are not the correct road!

From this one example it is already clear that the fifth, Reformational model is the most difficult of all to apply in real life. The temptation to simplify matters – as in the other four models – will therefore be strong. It will be much easier and simpler to *reject* politics (position 1), or to *accept* it uncritically (position 2), or else to distinguish neatly between "neutral" politics and religion which either *transcends* it (position 3) or *flanks* it (position 4). Over against all of these, the fifth model forces us into a continuous struggle to discern exactly between that which is creationally valid and that which is sinfully distorted or even perverse. The Reformational paradigm confronts us with a never-ending task which not only requires spiritual discernment, but also competence in a specific area like, in this case, politics.

Limited space does not allow to elaborate on the concrete strategies to be followed in order to change and renew society. In other publications (e.g. Van der Walt, 1994: 295-335) I have, however, described the Reformational strategy in comparison to others. One of the features of this strategy is that it will not limit the Christian presence to the "private sphere" of the individual and the church. In our secular society a Reformational strategy will fight for the right of Christian organisations and institutions in the "public sphere" which should transcend our narrow denominational divisions to enable Christians from different churches to collaborate in the fulfilment of their calling in God's kingdom.

3.4 The Christian and a rock concert

This is a less serious example, but because young people usually understand – and enjoy – it, I do want to mention it here. The response of the five viewpoints to the question of whether a young Christian should attend a rock concert, will be more or less the following:

1. Stay away – it is from the devil!
2. If it is a good performance, no problem – go for it, enjoy yourself!
3. You may attend – but remember to pray prior to or after attending the concert to confess your sin!
4. Please go – but I want to see you in church tomorrow (Sunday)!
5. Be careful! First ask yourself whether it will be possible to serve God – not *before* or *after* the event, but *in* your attendance.

3.5 The easy ways cannot offer a solution

It is evident, also from this example, that the Reformational viewpoint does not provide easy, clear-cut, simple answers. People therefore often regard it as being too vague on specifics, too imprecise and even fuzzy. The reason is that also in this case of the rock concert it is difficult in our sinful world to define exactly what is creationally valid and what is sinfully distorted. How should we understand Christ's parable of the weeds among the wheat (Matt. 13:24-30)?

But the difficult, complicated Reformational way is the only correct way. The reason is that, when we follow any one of the three other orthodox roads (1, 3 or 4 above), we have only two options: we either legalise what is sinful or we fight against wrong enemies.

On the one hand, we can simply accept the *status quo* because it has a right of existence of its own.

On the other hand, we could engage in the futile business of fighting against imaginary "enemies". For example, we fight against our bodily needs, but in our hearts the devil reigns. We fight against so-called dirty politics, but we do not recognise sinful practices of the church. We distance ourselves from married life, not realising that the temptations of immorality follow us into the solitude of the monastery. We fight against philosophy, while our theology is infiltrated by all kinds of unbiblical ideas.

In both cases (acceptance of what exists or fighting it) dualistic Christians are condemned to powerlessness. To *fight* against the world and even to *destroy* it (position 1), to *churchify* it (position 3) or to *accept* it (position 4) does not really *change* it in any *fundamental* way!

4. Two-realm dualisms in a Biblical perspective

When dualism is an inherent part of our Christian worldview it is very, very difficult indeed to get rid of it. Bonhoeffer (1966: 203) realised this when he wrote:

> It is hard to abandon a picture which one has grown accustomed to using for the ordering of one's ideas and concepts. And yet we must leave behind us the picture of the two spheres, and the question now is whether we can replace it with another picture which is equally simple and obvious.

There is – as we have already discovered – no *simple* "picture" to replace simplistic dualism. But there is an equally *obvious* "picture" – a radical Christian worldview inspired by the Word of God.

In the following section I will critique two-realm theories, concentrating on how the Bible can help us to rid ourselves of worldviewish dualisms.

4.1 Be on the lookout for unbiblical terminology which may reveal a dualistic approach

As a starting point one should become more critical of polar concepts, which are not derived from the Scriptures, but which are read into them. Whenever you encounter certain contrasts like the following, be careful – they may be the result of one or the other form of dualist thinking: nature – grace; nature – supernature; natural – spiritual; creation – redemption; kingdom(s) of the world – kingdom of God; secular – religious; autonomous man – sovereign God; autonomy – theonomy; the god of the philosophers – the God of the Bible; God the Creator – God the Redeemer; earth – heaven; visible world – invisible world; flesh – spirit; body – soul; outer life – inner life; lay person – clergy; world – church; state – church; emperor – pope; politician – priest; marriage – celibacy; natural (general) revelation – supernatural (special) revelation; reason – faith; understanding – believing; natural theology – supernatural theology; academy – church; university – seminary; class room – chapel; natural law – divine law; horizontal – vertical; temporal – eternal; natural virtues – Christian virtues; research – prayer; human – Christian; love for the world – love for God; physics – metaphysics; natural history – redemptive history; general grace – special grace; historical – trans-historical; worldly – spiritual; citizen – Christian; science – religion; this world – the next world; secular – holy; profane – sacred; worldly – heavenly; immanence – transcendance; material – spiritual; etcetera.

4.2 A new interpretation to replace traditional dualistic exegesis

Even God's Word is sometimes powerless to liberate us, because we simply read it – again and again – through the spectacles of our dualistic worldviews.

We will therefore have to allow God's Word to correct our dualistically-distorted worldviews. Instead of reading them *into* the Bible (eisegesis), we should permit the Scripture *to speak to us* again (exegesis).

I will mention examples of how Christians in the past have tried to prove their dualistic approaches from the Scriptures and then indicate how one can understand Scripture in a totally different way when one removes the glasses of a dualistic worldview.

- **Is the Old Testament dualistic?**

Before we discuss specific texts from the New Testament, first one remark in general about the Old Testament. To prove their dualistic worldview, proponents of a dualistic worldview like to refer to the Old Testament's distinction between the "profane", the holy and the most holy in the construction of the tabernacle and the temple of Israel.

However, the fact is that the holy and most holy parts of the tabernacle did not remind Israel of a separate holy sphere above creation, but about the garden of Eden – the beginning of creation! The Old Testament concept of holiness (cf. Lev. 19) is not about a supernatural existence, but about obedience to God on this earth, like respect for one's parents, compassion with the poor, honesty in juridical and business affairs, etcetera. While in the Old Testament religious intermediaries (priests and prophets) still played an important role, in the New Testament every believer is priest, prophet and king, living in the immediate presence of God! (This does not imply that God's holiness did not result in great distance between Israel and Himself. In His presence Moses had to take off his shoes! At Sinai Moses had to mediate between the Holy God and Israel.)

- **Is the New Testament dualistic*?***

Let us now turn to some New Testament texts misinterpreted by dualistic thinkers. They quote, for instance, Christ Himself, saying that His followers should not – like pagans – be concerned about earthly things like food, drink and clothes, but should be concerned above everything else with the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 6:25-34). They should not store up riches for themselves here on earth, but in heaven (Matt. 6:19-21). Christ also explicitly says that His kingdom does not belong to this world (John 18:36). And in line with this Paul reminds the Colossians (3:1-2) to put their hearts on the things that are in heaven and not to fix them on things here on earth.

Other parts of Scripture, however, warn us to be careful not to deduce from the above texts a dualism of earthly as against heavenly things. In Genesis 2:15 God already gave Adam and Eve the mandate to cultivate *the earth*. And in Matthew 5:13-14 Christ entrusted his followers with the task to be the salt and light of *the world*. He also prays that the Father should not take us out of the world but keep us safe from evil (John 17:15).

As Van Wyk (1993:38) correctly explains Christ's kingdom is certainly not *from* (out of) this world, but it is very clearly intended *for* this world and directed *towards* this world. We have to find the "treasures in heaven"

here on earth, in our daily, often difficult labour (cf. Matt. 13:44). This treasure is the same as God's kingdom, where we obey God's commandments – *here and now*. Paul's expression "the things that are in heaven" should also not be contrasted with "the things of the earth", but with *sinful things* (cf. Col. 3:5, 8, 9). The "things of heaven" are gifts which the Holy Spirit gives to people *on earth* (Col. 3:12-17). The expression "kingdom *of heaven*" (used by Matthew because his Gospel was written for Jewish people who avoided using the name of God) does not indicate that His kingdom has nothing to do with this earth. It simply indicates that its *origin* is with God in heaven.

It is of the utmost importance to be aware of the fact that the word *world* is used in the New Testament in at least two different meanings, the first positive or neutral and the second negative.

Examples of the first are: "God so loved the world that He gave his only son …" (John 3:16a; cf. 1 John 4:9). Christ is the Saviour of the world (John 4:42; 12;47; 1 John 4:14). The world has to be reconciled to God through Christ (2 Cor. 5:19). Thus "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord" (Rev. 11:15). "Everything created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected" (1 Tim. 4:4). God not only created the world, but he loves it and cares for it, despite its sin and rebellion. In this sense we too are to be concerned about it, care for it and become involved in its betterment.

In the majority of New Testament references to the *world* its meaning, however, is negative, particularly in the writings of John and Paul. In this case *world* indicates a sphere at enmity with God and man. The whole world is in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19). The devil is the ruler of the world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). The world hated Jesus and will hate his followers (John 7:7; 15:18-10; 17:14; 1 John 3:13). According to James (4:4) one has to keep oneself unstained from the (sinful) world.

The first (positive) meaning concerns the *structure* of this world. The second (negative) meaning indicates the wrong religious *direction* of the fallen world. We do not have to retreat from or avoid the world in the first sense, but from the world in its second meaning, namely the worldly (sinful) things of this world (1 John 2:15). Christ's high priestly prayer is very clear on this point. He prays that his heavenly Father should not take his disciples "out of the world". True, they are not "of the (sinful) world", but Jesus sends them "into the world" (John 17:15-17). Christians are to remain unstained by the sinful world, but at the same time they have to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13, 14).

- **Only one legitimate kingdom**

It is true that the Bible speaks of two kingdoms – the kingdom of God and that of Satan. The point is that only one of them has a legitimate existence. The kingdom of the devil is to be defeated and destroyed. However, all the dualistic worldviews firstly interpret these two *kingdoms* as two *realms* (or ontological distinctions in creation) and secondly, in spite of the fact that they are usually not regarded as of equal value, both of them are at least accorded a relative right of existence. Consequently, man is placed under two opposing norms – the unity of God's law is broken!

- **The real Biblical antithesis**

God's Word assists us in replacing the false antithesis in dualism (that between nature and grace) with the real antithesis. Because grace is an attitude of God which intends to *renew* (rather than stands opposite, above or alongside) nature, the nature-grace antithesis is wrong. The grace of God is not even the opposite of *sin* – the work of man – but it is the opposite of *God's wrath* against sin. The real Biblical antithesis is between man's obedience to God's will (a result of God's grace) and man's disobedience (earning God's wrath).

- **The limitation of all-encompassing Biblical concepts**

Most Christians will agree with the following core confession of their faith: "God the Father redeemed His creation, which had fallen into sin, through the death of His Son and is renewing it through His Spirit to become the kingdom of God". They do not, however, agree on the all-encompassing meaning of the core concepts (creation, fall, redemption and kingdom) in this confession, but limit them in one way or another.

According to Scripture *creation* includes everything that God made; the *fall* corrupted the entire creation; *redemption* is intended for the whole of creation and the concept *kingdom* points to the fact that God is King of everything He has created.

In the history of Christianity the fall into sin has often not been viewed as a radical or total disruptive, life-destroying power, penetrating and corrupting everything. Its effects have been minimised because it was regarded as the mere loss of something good (grace). Or else it has been localised as an area of creation which would be less good or even bad as such. In the same way redemption was viewed as something extra, added to creation or – even worse – as a special power in man to be actualised, instead of total and integral renewal. In a similar way the kingdom of God was seen as a separate part of creation – or even as something separate from creation.

When we do not understand these core Biblical concepts in their holistic meaning, the result will therefore inevitably be one or other kind of dualism.

Another example is the dualistic perspective of God's original cultural mandate (Gen. 1:26-28) and Christ's missionary command (Matt. 28:19). While the cultural mandate is our primary, all-encompassing religious calling, it is often viewed as a secondary, more or less "secular" task over against the primary importance of missions and evangelism. Christ's so-called mission command is, however, in many respects a reminder of God's very first command to subdue and take care of the earth that belongs to Him!

4.3 Confusion between kingdom and church and the identification of God's kingdom with the church

In Christian dualisms the church is regarded as belonging to the supernatural realm of grace. In principle it can therefore have no real connection to or influence on the world. The further limitation of the encompassing kingdom of God – as wide as creation itself – to the area of grace (understood as cultic life in the church) which also characterises two-realm theories, excludes in principle the very possibility that God's kingdom can embrace the whole world. Having first tied the Bible and religion to the church, one cannot possibly present a genuine Biblical witness in the many other non-ecclesiastical areas of life. Then, at every turn, one is faced with false dilemmas and pseudo-choices.

The church is but one "room" in the kingdom and should not be identified with the whole "building" of God's reign. The Bible clearly teaches that the kingdom has cosmic dimensions (cf. Ps. 24:1, Ps. 103:19 and many more texts).

The church reveals the kingdom, but it is not its only expression. The church as an institution can never exhaust the richness and variety of God's reign. Membership of the church only, does not fulfil our responsibilities as citizens of the kingdom. Belonging to a church is important, but still it is only one way in which a Christian should be present in the world.

A clear distinction between the institutional church and God's kingdom does not imply a devaluation of the church. It rather relieves the church of an impossible burden, viz. to make its own witness the *total* Biblical witness in society. At the same time it enables the church to concentrate on its specific calling: the nurturing of faith through the preaching of the Word during communal worship.

Every section of life has to reveal the kingdom of God in a *different* way. Because Christians must be present in the world in *various* ways, the form of their witness will differ as the structural make-up of the different sectors of life differs. The witness will also not have the character of something ecclesiastical from *outside* – it will be a witness *within* and *relevant to* the specific sphere of life. In this way Christians will be able to speak *concretely* about day-to-day affairs of the world!

We today can understand this basic distinction between church and kingdom, already present in the Bible, even better, because we live in a much more diversified society with different societal relationships and organisations responsible for a variety of tasks. At its inception the church took upon itself many of the wider, non-ecclesiastical kingdom responsibilities. It was not simply a gathering for prayer and preaching of the faithful. In Acts 2:42 it is, for instance, narrated that the first Christians shared the same roof, pooled their finances, were a separate social community, etcetera.

4.4 The distinction between religion and faith

Another way of explaining the difference between kingdom and church is the distinction between religion and faith, generally used by exponents of Reformational Philosophy.

Religion is not an *addition* to life, but its *essence*; it is not a *complement* to existence, but its *character*; it is not *higher* than "ordinary" life, but its *central thrust*. Religion or spirituality is as broad as life itself. It is a way of life that people engage in with their full existence at all times. It is not – as many believe – a carefully limited enterprise for the nurturing of the soul at special times and in special settings. No, service – or disservice – of God is what life is about. Life is religion!

Faith, however, is only one of the modes or ways of being religious in which the intrinsic spirituality of all of life is expressed. Faith, although the most important, is one kind of function belonging to the created order next to many other human functions, like sensitivity (the psychical), justice (the juridical), clarity (the logical), beauty (the aesthetic), morality (the ethical), etcetera. In each one of these different ways of human behaviour, one's deepest religious commitment is expressed in a unique or *sui generis* way. In the particular way of faith the central *dynamis* of religion is expressed in a focused and very explicit way in, for instance, personal devotions, prayers and worship in the church. Faith, therefore, is both distinct from religion and expressive of religion.

When one regards religion as the nature of life in its totality, that totality of life is a spiritual response to God, while one facet of this all-encompassing response is the response of faith.. Two of the most important benefits resulting from this distinction are the following:

In the first place, it prevents the downgrading of any other human mode of functioning as second-rate or "natural" or even the locus of evil and sin. Our eating, sleeping, sexuality, emotions and politics are as spiritual as our thoughts, morals and beliefs. The Bible therefore teaches that "whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

In the second place, such a view avoids reducing religion to one sphere of life alongside that of art, science, politics, business, etcetera with the always present danger of acting as if God is locked up in the church and is only a concern on Sundays. Faith is only one of the many modes of religion!

4.5 A confusion of structure and direction

Since the fall there have been two directions present in the one creation: both obedience to the will of God and disobedience, service of the true God or an idol in His place. Obedience to God brings forth the good while the result of disobedience is what is bad or sinful. Good and bad occur in every facet of creation and should not be limited to a specific thing or a clearly delimited area. Because we live in between the time of Christ's first and His final coming, everywhere – even deep in our own hearts – we experience a mixed situation and should be careful to make a clean-cut separation between light and darkness. The tension between the two is the cause of a *religious* antithesis and not the result of *ontological* opposition. The basic mistake of all the dualistic worldviews we have discussed is that they misinterpret the religious antithesis as something spatial or ontological. In Spykman's (1992:67) words:

> Dualism gives the spiritual antithesis ontological status by defining some parts, aspects, sectors, activities or realms of life (the ministries of the church) as good and others (politics) as less good or even evil. Dualism grants sin a built-in ontological status … At bottom, therefore, dualism may be defined as a confusion between structure and direction … the antithesis is read back ontologically into the very structure of creation.

The consequence of this, according to Spykman, is that dualism fails to see that life as a whole is sacred – in the sense of being dedicated to God – and that it should be lived to the honour of God in our daily down-to-earth activities. Dualism considers some parts of our lives as in-

herently, innately evil or at least have a lesser status than other parts. It draws a line through the world and tries to walk with uneven pace on both sides. Consequently, some life activities and structures are regarded as redeemable and others at best only remotely redeemable. Spykman therefore regards dualism as a deceptive attempt to partly accept life and partly reject it. It leads to a dual normativity, the legitimisation of sin, disruption of the unity of creation and the limitation of the cosmic impact of the Biblical message of redemption.

The variety of two-realm theories is the result of different viewpoints about the following: (1) the place in creation where sin is localised; (2) how serious or not the effects of sin are regarded, and consequently, (3) how great or little the need for redemption will be.

5. Conclusion: the ideal and reality of being Reformed

In his contribution on the essence of being Reformed, Zuidema (1951:157, 158, 160, 165) emphasises again and again that for a Reformed person religion is not something additional and added to life, an "after dinner" or simply a consolation prize for the disappointed. No, life in its totality is religion – or it is not worth living. Therefore Reformed believers will never be able to sit idle, without work to be done. They will rather have more than they can do and always be in need of more workers and more money for the great variety of work in God's kingdom.

In humility an honesty we will, however, have to admit that, in many instances, this description of the Reformational worldview remains an ideal to be accomplished. Contemporary Reformed Christianity has lost a great deal of its saltiness. One of the major reasons is the unnoticed infiltration of dualism into a worldview that ought to be integral and holistic. What we badly need in South Africa, in Africa and in the entire world, is a genuine Reformational worldview to inspire Christians again to be fully present in a suffering and groaning world. We urgently need a salty Christianity which is again capable of healing a wounded world and preventing its increasing decay.

We should, of course, always be keenly aware of the fact that our efforts and even our small achievements in the socio-economic-political world can never be *identified* with the kingdom of God. At the same time they are not entirely *unrelated* to His kingdom. As signs they point beyond themselves to a kingdom which is still coming. We are not allowed ever to fall into triumphalism. Our task is not to *seize* power, but to *transform* the powers of this world. Therefore, however provisional, partial and sinful our socio-cultural involvement as Reformed Christians may be, we have a place in the powerful kingdom of God to which the future belongs.

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