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# CHINA INSIGHT

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## PART II

# THE CULTURAL MANDATE

Kuyper's theology has been called neo-calvinism. His view of the cultural mandate not only influenced his fellow-theologians Bavinck, Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd in Holland, but has spread to America. Several key theologians in modern America such as Van Til and Carl Henry were influenced by him. Charles Colson who undertakes international prison ministry constantly stresses the Christian's cultural mandate. Colson believes that since God created the world the most important factor in the development of creation has been social & cultural development – this is mankind's prime task. Man must obey God's command and fill the earth and manage it. He believes that the cultural mandate did not cease after the Fall of man. Sin then entered into God's created order but did not destroy that order. Colson also believes that the New Testament does not explicitly mention this cultural mandate. But we do not need to find this kind of explicit text because the cultural mandate given

by Guan Hui;  
translated by Tony Lambert

to Adam still applies today. Thus, “when we are saved we are not only freed from being forced to commit sin, but are restored to fulfil the original aim of creation, and to have the power to do what we must do, that is, build society and create culture – thus at the same time restoring the original order of creation.”

As we have seen, the Reformation view of the cultural mandate is founded on Genesis chapter 1 verse 28. Before the Fall, God gave mankind the mandate to govern all creation and this has not changed since. That is to say, Christ's church has been given two mandates: the Great Commission in Matthew 28: 18-20 (the Gospel commission), and the cultural mandate revealed in Genesis chapter 1. The two are in no way contradictory, but mutually supportive.

This Reformation view of the cultural mandate has spurred many Christians to bear witness to Him in different

areas of society and culture. It has altered the tradition of separatism of the Anabaptists, and caused Christian faith to shine out in every field of the world. However, when we look in more detail, the cultural mandate still has some components which cause unease. Perhaps this is because this mandate is based on a “theology of glory” and not on a “theology of the cross” [Luther’s distinction]. Brother Lu Kun says: “The theology of glory seeks to find God’s glory in the glory of this world and this life, and to find God’s authority in power, and to find the proof of God’s good pleasure in a life of prosperity.” But this does not mean Kuyper and Colson have deserted the theology of the cross. But their view of the cultural mandate easily leads some to have an over-optimistic view of this world and human culture, and to use secular dominion and power to prove God’s glory. “Dominion Theology” is one such example.

## 2. The Cultural Mandate in Dominion Theology: Domination & an Earthly Kingdom

Dominion Theology is a view of the cultural mandate which has developed out of Reformed theology. It understands the cultural mandate to mean setting up God’s Kingdom in this world, and using the Law of Moses to dominate it.

Dominionists believe that after the Fall Satan usurped the authority of mankind to rule the earth; God is calling the church to snatch back this authority to rule the earth from Satan. After people believe in Christ they should govern the world and dominate every field of society. Gary North, a typical dominionist, believes the Bible sets out a plan for dominion on a worldwide scale – God’s Kingdom. In eschatology they hold to post-millennialism believing this world will be Christianized to become the millennial kingdom – only when the entire world has been basically christianized will Christ come again. The duty of the church is to subdue the world for Christ, and cause cultures to be Christianized – to replicate the heavenly

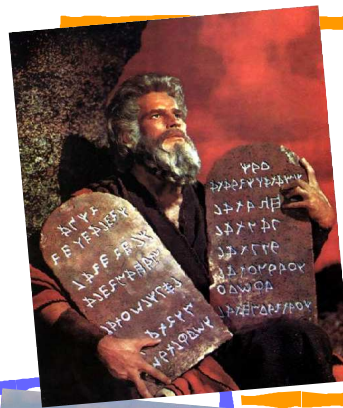
pattern on earth, and set up God’s Kingdom on earth. Because of this it is also called “Kingdom Now Theology”. The most important factor in Dominion Theology is “theonomy” [the rule by God’s Law]. They want to use the the Law of the Old Testament to dominate the world; all of society should obey the Law of Moses, including all morality and civil law.

Dominion Theology does not have a great influence in the world of theology, but should

not be underestimated in the realm of society and politics.

In the U.S. James Kennedy has set up a center called “Reclaiming America for Christ”. There are also hints of dominion theology in David Aikman’s *Jesus in Beijing* and Yuan

Zhiming’s “Shen Zhou”. Many Christians have not been directly influenced by it, but have very similar ideas. The concept of a Christian kingdom is that deeply rooted in people’s minds.



We recall the question asked by the disciples before Pentecost: “Lord are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6) They expected Jesus to give them divine political dominion; their hope was for the revival of Jerusalem in this world. However, Jesus did not reply as they hoped. Dominion Theology would use God’s sovereignty and God’s Law to rule this world. They want to move God’s kingdom to this earth but have forgotten the words of Jesus “My Kingdom is not of this world”. (John 18:36) To manifest God’s glory they seek to use political stratagems and power after the fashion of this world. Ultimately this must be shown up to be foolish. In contrast, after Pentecost they rely on the power of the

Holy Spirit and turn the earth upside down. But in the world they had no political power. They used methods which were weak and foolish in the eyes of men to expand God's Kingdom and manifest the glory of Christ.

### **3. The Low-Key Cultural Mandate: Witnessing to Christ and Looking for a New Heaven and a New Earth.**

Trying to understand the cultural mandate from the angle of the doctrine of creation easily leads to the optimism of building the New Jerusalem on earth. There have been many Gospel revivals and social changes for the better in human history. But history has not progressed continuously. We still live in a 'crooked and perverse generation'. I prefer to look at the cultural mandate from the angle of soteriology (the doctrine of salvation). The cultural mandate is not another mandate in addition to the Great Commission given by Christ, but is PART of the Great Commission.

When Jesus accomplished salvation through His death on the cross & after His resurrection He stated: "All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me". When He rose from the dead He took back the authority usurped by the devil. However, this does not mean that His disciples are now rulers of this world. Jesus didn't let His disciples go and control every sphere of this world but gave them the Great Commission (of evangelism). The content of the great Commission is not only to preach the Gospel to all nations but also includes making disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them all the Lord has commanded. The cultural commission is part of being a disciple. Obeying the Lord's teaching includes witnessing to God's glory in every area of personal life and every area of society and culture. Jesus said to His disciples; "You are the salt of the earth". The Christian's cultural mandate is to be salt in the world to prevent it from becoming even more corrupt; and to be light, shining in this dark world.

This view of the cultural mandate is little different from the Reformed view. It also calls on Christians to show forth the truth of Christ in society but its aim is not quite as ambitious as the Calvinists. It does not expect to restore God's creation in this world through the cultural mandate – still less to set up the Kingdom of God in this world. It looks in hope to the new heaven and new earth and to witness to Christ in every area of society. It is



not founded on common grace but built on special, saving grace, established on the cross. Jesus told His disciples that the power of the Holy Spirit would come upon them (Acts 1:8) to make them witnesses. It is similarly founded on the power of the Spirit, not on man's wisdom. To place the cultural mandate here in witnessing is neither government or dominion and may seem to dilute the Kingship of Christ. In reality, when Christ hung on the cross His kingly authority was not shaken. It was written on the cross that He was "King of the Jews".

When Constantine became Roman Emperor Christ was King. When Decius cruelly persecuted the church, Christ was King. The martyrs who held the faith in the power of the Holy Spirit under great persecution were filled with the victorious glory of God. Colson quotes Colossians 1:20 to explain that salvation involves every aspect of creation. In Romans, the promise is that all creation will escape the dominion of corruption. He states that our mandate after conversion is to restore God's

creation and bring all things under the rule of Christ. But he has not realized that whether it is all creation or our final salvation, both must await the second coming of Christ for final fulfillment. “For in this hope we were saved.

But hope that is seen is no hope at all... we wait for it patiently.” (Romans 8: 24-25)

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