

The Creative Kingdom in the Kingdoms of Men

A Challenge to the Church

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“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32)

On the scale of what men count as history, a conference such this one is not counted as much. Reporters and members of the media are not breaking down the doors with cameras and microphones. There are no presidents, governors, or prime ministers present, no generals great armies, no movers and shakers on the world scene.

But there is a king, *the King!* “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Mt. 18:20)

We meet here as ambassadors of His kingdom, of a covenant community called within the world’s kingdoms as a redemptive alternative. We proclaim that our King is sovereign in creation and history, and are called to live a life that images that creativity and manifests that sovereignty in every sphere of thought and endeavor.

This life will be one that centers on relationships under covenant. Its goal will be that of glorifying God and enjoying Him forever through faithful adherence to His Word, rather than the advancement of one's own agenda through the use of human reason and power.

This Creative Kingdom, this “little flock,” this church, was called by Christ to live in the world, to interact with and give a contrast to the kingdoms of men (John 17:15-18; Matt. 5:13-16; 1 Cor. 5:9-10). This contrast was to be influential, not merely in the remolding of secular (or even non-Christian religious) society into its image, but in the making of disciples through the power of Christ (Matt. 28:18-20). The Church's mission is not to repair the society of the world, but rather to cause people to switch allegiance.

He is not transforming Satan's kingdoms, but reclaiming them as His own. While, historically, western society as a whole has benefited from the inclusion of Christian truth as Potiphar was blessed because Joseph was there (Gen. 39:2-5) that is but a side benefit. The mission of the church is not complete until people change their heart and accept Jesus as Messiah, and this in its fullness, as prophet, priest, *and* King.

The Two Societies.

The Bible is the story of two societies, two peoples, two cities, represented in the Apocalypse as Babylon the Great (Rev. 17:1-19:2) and the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22). While theologians are divided as to how literally the description of the final manifestation of each eschatological City is to be taken, the central motive power in each is made clear, and is the final climax of the "two peoples" thread which begins in Genesis with the lines of Cain and Seth. While both cities are adorned for beauty (compare Rev. 17:4 and Rev. 21:2), one is a harlot and the other a bride. The harlot society sells her favors for personal gain, even to the selling of body and soul (Rev. 18:11-13); the bride looks to her Husband for all good, and all is gift (Rev. 21:4-6).

Non-Christian Society as Pictured in the Scripture.

The picture of fallen, unbelieving human society which reaches its climax in the last quarter of Revelation can be traced in seed form back to the book of Genesis, where Cain's line is followed.

Creativity in the Line of Cain. It is interesting that the first mention of art and culture is in the context of a fallen and openly rebellious society. Cain is the first man stated to have built a city (Gen. 4:17). The first polygamist (who was also a murderer) had the first mentioned artist children: Jubal was "the father of all those who play the

harp and flute,” and Tubal-Cain¹ was “an instructor of every craftsman in bronze and iron” (Gen. 4:21-22). But Francis Schaeffer pointed out that the beauty of this art does not cover the depravity beneath. He remarked that:

[Gen. 4] verses 23 and 24 are a perfect description of the ungodly, humanistic culture of all generations . . . “Because a man wounded me, I paid him back. I just killed him.” . . . Here is humanistic culture without God. It is egoism and pride centered in man; this culture has lost the concept not only of God but of man as one who loves his brother.²

This is not to say, of course, that there is anything wrong with art and craftsmanship, only that to base judgment on the goodness of a society solely on its artistic and cultural achievements or its technology will give a falsely positive picture of that society. Thus, while the Aztec civilization (for example), excelled in the arts and technology, it was far from a model society. DeParrie and Pride catalog some of the achievements of this fascinating culture:

A complex hybridization program for plants existed among the Aztecs along with highly developed catalogs and records. The development of high level poetry demonstrates their intellectual and philosophic range. Intricate instructions in medical texts about the proper use of carefully listed herbs reveal the painstaking efforts of scientific minds.³

However, juxtaposed with this, one finds the most horrible cruelty of man to man:

In months when rain was sought, a band of children were drowned, or walled up in a cave, or exposed on a mountain-top; and the more they wept, the better the augury for rain. At harvest-time, victims were thrown into a fire or furnace, and their bodies pulled out with hooks before they were totally consumed so that the precious hearts could be extracted in the usual way. At the periods when growth

¹ Herbert Lockyer, in *All the Men in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), p. 332, observes that his name can mean both “production of forge work,” and “flowing forth of Cain.” Thus his name points to both his creativity and his fallenness,

² Francis Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1972), p. 114.

³ Paul DeParrie and Mary Pride, *Ancient Empires of the New Age* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1989), pp. 111-112.

and fertility were required, the commonest practice was to behead a priestess and flay her, and for a priest to insert himself in the skin and do a ritual dance.⁴

In a similar vein, E. Calvin Beisner notes that, while our modern world may find technological solutions to many of man's physical problems, leading to a longer, more comfortable life for those that benefit from them this does not guarantee the moral goodness of our society any more than it did theirs.⁵

Unthankfulness: Creativity Turned Toward Self. The biblical picture of fallen society in general is that of man choosing to be creative, but to sever this act from the Creator, to ground it in the creature: in nature or in man himself:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness [B]ecause, though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man - and birds and four footed beasts and creeping things (Ro. 1:18, 21-23).

Paul, of course, was speaking about classical idolatry. However, the picture of idolatry which forms the background of Paul's theology is that the worship of an idol is basically the worship of the "work of men's hands."⁶ This is true of the idolatry of modern secularism as of classical idolatry. Faith for salvation is put in "work of men's hands," and God is not glorified As John Murray points out:

To glorify God is not to augment God's glory or to add to it; it means simply to ascribe to God to glory that belongs to him as God, to give him in thought, affection, and devotion the place that belongs to him in virtue of the perfections

⁴ Jon Manchip White, *Cortez and the Downfall of the Aztec Empire* (New York: St. Martin's press, 1971), p. 129.

⁵ E. Calvin Beisner, *Prospects for Growth: A Biblical View of Population, Resources, and the Future* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1990), p. 100.

⁶ Dt. 4:28; 27:15; 31:19; 1 Ki. 16:7; 2 Ki. 19:8; 1 Chr. 29:5; 32:19; Ps. 115:4; 135:15; Isa. 2:8, etc.

which the visible creation itself makes known.⁷

This glorifying of God as God should manifest itself in thanksgiving in all spheres of life (Rom. 1:21, see Col. 3:17, 1 Thess 5:18); that is, every aspect of man's being and doing is to be seen from the perspective of God's sovereign gracious plan and providence.

The Inevitable Downward Spiral. Romans 1 continues to catalogue the decline of society alienated from God. It is noteworthy that the decline has nothing directly to do with that which is commonly called “culture,” or “civilization,” that is, the fruition of the arts and technology. It is the moral content of the society that suffers. The key phrase is “God gave them up” (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). McBeth notes that the punishment for sin is often more and greater sin:

God punished their sins by giving them over to more sins. They were punished by having the desire of their hearts. One of the Old Testament words for “punishment” is a word for “sin.” When Cain said, “My punishment is greater than I can bear” (Gen. 4: 13), he literally said, “My ‘sin’ is ‘greater than I can bear.’” Isaiah 1:31 teaches that the sin of the sinner will be his destruction.⁸

The biblical portrait of society without the gospel is that of a society whose excellence becomes mired in its depravity. Like a harlot, however, the depravity may be covered, even rendered attractive and alluring, by the trappings of the culture. But those trappings become part of the curse, as they provide merely more effective and more outwardly beautiful ways to fall.

Technology, the Illusion of Progress. After extensive documentation regarding

⁷ John Murray, *The Epistle of Romans*, in *The New International Commentary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), p. 41.

⁸ J. P. McBeth, *Exegetical and Practical Commentary on Romans*, (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revel Company, 1937) pp. 57-58.

the results of scientific progress in contemporary society, Beisner believes it is possible that “the vast majority of people will be comfortably wealthy in a few generations.”⁹

However, he warns that:

[W]e must not confuse increasing material prosperity with all around human progress. The “human world” into which we are passing will not, barring some special divine intervention, be any better morally or spiritually than the “natural world” we are leaving behind. After all, it was the fall of *man* that brought God's curse on the earth (Gen. 3:17) . . .

Wealth [or art, or culture] cannot ennoble the spirit. It may merely enable that fallen spirit to act out its evil intentions more effectively.¹⁰

It becomes incumbent on the Christian, then, to put technology, art, and culture in perspective. They are good, not evil, and to be enjoyed and promoted, but they are not the standard by which a society must be judged.

The biblical standard by which to judge a society is rather how the people in it keep Christ's first and second Great Commands: love for God, and love of neighbor as self (Luke 10:27). By this standard, all society falls short, not because the goal is not reached, but because it is not even attempted. It is excluded up front by the societal paradigm that puts the creature first.

God's Called Out People.

In contrast to the downward and inward spiral of the societies of the nations, the Bible pictures a culture called out by God (chosen by grace) to be a contrast, thus in the Old Testament God called Israel:

What distinguished ancient Israel from her pagan neighbor nations in the Near East was her knowledge of the revealed will of Yahweh and her commitment to live responsibly in view of his divine commandments. In contrast with Hittite, Egyptian, Babylonian, Canaanite, and Philistine cultures, there arose in consequence, as Eric Voegelin remarks, “a new society, set off from the

⁹ Beisner, *Prospects for Growth*, p. 130.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

civilizations of the age” and “living toward a goal beyond history.”¹¹

This separation to God's word and difference in goal is carried on into New Testament by the teaching of Christ (John 17:14-18), only now it is no longer merely national, but international and missional.

The Calling of the Great Commission. Just before he ascended to Heaven, Christ commissioned the church with the task of making disciples throughout the nations. The concept of discipleship in biblical times (both Greek and Hebrew) is a very personal one. The Greek word had an emphasis not “on formal relationship but on inner fellowship.”¹² Apprenticeship was often in view.¹³ This is especially true in the New Testament: “A unique aspect of NT discipleship is that it is commitment to the person of Jesus. His teaching has force only when there is first commitment to his person.”¹⁴ The Christian community witnesses in its words and works to the person Jesus, who is God and therefore King.

In the great commission Jesus claims “all authority” (Mt. 28:19), and promises to be with his disciples until the end of the $\alpha\iota\omega\nu$ (Mt. 28:20). If the community loses this focus and centers on agendas and causes (even good ones such as correct doctrine), it loses its first love and ceases to be a lampstand (see Rev. 2:1-5).

The Power of the Spirit Given For Testimony. A pivotal passage in the understanding of the mission of the church is in the first chapter of Acts.

¹¹ Carl H. F. Henry, *Christian Countermoves in a Decadent Culture* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1986), pp. 13-14)

¹² Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited and abridged by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), p. 556.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 560.

Just before Christ's ascension, the disciples question Him about the coming of the expected political kingdom (Acts 1:6). F. F. Bruce points out that it is the “hope of an earthly and national kingdom.”¹⁵ The Old Testament Messianic hope was for this kingdom to extend over all the earth: “[T]he kingdom concept has three inseparable aspects: (1) the King, the sovereign God; (2) the domain, God's entire creation, including mankind; and (3) the throne, or God's actual exercise of authority and power over his domain.”¹⁶

This hope was solidly grounded in Scripture, a supreme example being Nebuchadnezzaer's vision in Daniel 2. Christ does not deny the legitimacy of this messianic kingdom expectation, however he sets its consummation aside for an unrevealed future time (Acts 1:7). Christ then makes the assertion that God's Spirit will empower them for testimony (Acts 1:8). The geographical progression in this verse (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, end of the earth) forms the structural outline of the Book of Acts.

It follows that the narrative of Acts will elaborate on this structure. And what one sees throughout the book is not societally converted nations, but vibrant, though imperfect) communities, called out of the surrounding world and calling people into themselves.

In Two Worlds: The Church Living in the World

The Book of Acts is, in a sense, continuing today. The Church continues its

¹⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951), p. 70.

¹⁶ Gerard Van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), p. 62.

struggle toward the end of the earth, founding churches and calling out people in the contexts of hostile culture. How is she to measure her victory, and how is she to interact with the patterns, conventions, and mores of the surrounding cultures?

The Church's Victory

The success of an endeavor must be measured by the parameters of what it was meant to achieve. The Church living in the world is successful to the extent that it meets the biblical directives that define its mission. It is common today to be pessimistic about the missionary endeavor of the Church. Thus one finds statements like the following:

Nor have all those nations blessed with Western missionaries embraced the cross of Christ. One after another they have fallen to either renescent paganism, communism, Islam, or voracious Hollywood materialism. The tribes where our missionaries witnessed are at each other's throats. . . .

The fact remains that after spending billions (maybe trillions) of dollars and millions of man-years, western missionaries have not produced anywhere near the effect you see in the book of Acts.¹⁷

Current statistics, however, call this picture into doubt. If looked at from the perspective of the *ratio* of evangelical Christians to general population, the picture is startlingly optimistic. The Lausanne Statistics Task Force¹⁸ reports that in 100 A.D. there were approximately 360 unbelievers for every Christian (assuming a world population of about 181 million and .5 million Christians). 1992 statistics, however, showed a world population of approximately 5.5 billion, with an evangelical Christian population of 540 million; a ratio of roughly only ten unbelievers for every believer¹⁹. By the year 2000, it

¹⁷ Mary Pride, *All the Way Home* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1989), p.p. 204-205).

¹⁸ Headed by David Barrett, Ph.D., author of the World Christian Encyclopedia. The Task Force was part of the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelism.

¹⁹ "The Diminishing Task," in *Mission Frontiers* (Vol. 14, No. 3-4, March-April, 1992), pp. 4-5). This study only counted broadly *Evangelical* believers. If Christians of all stripes are counted, the ratio is even smaller.

had fallen to one in seven.²⁰ Broken down by congregations, there are more than 600 evangelical congregations for every unreached people group²¹, a far from impossible task of missions and evangelism. In the words of Ralph D. Winter, “Never before have we been so close to the end of the remaining *specifically missionary* task.”²²

Christ’s Victory in the Eschatological Transformation. It must be remembered that the total victory of the church is not to be found in this age. As the success of the church depends primarily on the Head, so the church looks for its final vindication in the Second Coming of Christ (Rev. 19). Until then, the church will always seem to some to be somewhat Quixotic, for the world will not acknowledge the Source of its strength.

God’s Ministry to the World Through His People.

Until the time of the final victory, the church must strive not to enhance that Quixotic image. She must faithfully show the world that she does not tilt at windmills. Too often the church has indeed mimicked Cervantes's shabby knight, picking fights in areas which concern only the church itself, and not interacting in a meaningful way with the world outside.

Groothuis points out that the church has three options as it encounters any specific manifestation of the culture of the surrounding world: separation, transformation, and conservation.²³

Separation. Consistent with its mission as a called out people, the church has always emphasized separation. There is biblical warrant for this stance in both the Old

²⁰ Ralph Winter, “World Evangelization—A.D. 2000 and Beyond,” internet article (http://www.adopt-a-people.org/articles/world_evangelism.pdf).

²¹ “Diminishing Task,” p. 4.

²² Ibid., p. 5. Emphasis in original.

²³ Douglas Groothuis, *Confronting the New Age* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1988), p.p. 49-58.

and New Testaments, with a key New Testament passage being 2 Corinthians 6:12-18). The very word "saint," used of all believers, means to be set apart.²⁴

The separation must not become an end in itself. It has both a negative and a positive aspect, Too often, however, the church is known and stereotyped according to its negative separation:

Too many conservative Christians accentuate the negative. . . . "I don't drink, don't smoke, don't chew, or run with those who do."

To be sure, there is a strong negative side to the doctrine. *We are* to be separated or set apart from evil. First Thessalonians 4:3 speaks of progressive sanctification as having to do with turning away from immorality—so rampant in today's culture, as it was in the days when the NT was written.

However, we should not merely become set apart *from evil*, but we should be positively set apart and dedicated *to God*.²⁵

Separation, then is not to be looked at merely as an ascetic fleeing from temptation, but rather a calling to a life with a positive and supernatural difference grounded in God and His revelation.

The temptation to become inbred must be guarded against, lest the church become guilty of the same charge that Calvin laid at the foot of the monasteries of his time. He accused them of separation from the world "as if in hatred of people" (Institutes, 4.13.16-21). This indictment can only be avoided if the church remembers that she has a divine calling to minister and reach those without. She is not to hide, but to openly present an attractive alternative.

1. Positive separation highlights the inadequacies of existing Structures. In order

²⁴ This is true of both the Greek word ἅγιος and its cognates and the Hebrew words stemming from the root קִדַּשׁ. See A. L. Farstad, "Sanctification," in *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Vol. 5, No. 2, 1992), P. 5.

²⁵ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

to do so, the church community must be open to inspection, not closed behind walls. The church must follow the example of Christ. “Although Jesus socialized with outcasts and open sinners, he did not adopt their sinful ways. He was passionately involved, but without succumbing to cultural sin of any stripe.”²⁶

2. Positive separation involves finding creative alternatives. It is not enough to separate from and expose negative practice. The church as God’s people must present to the world positive replacements to its debased institutions and practices. It is not enough, for instance, to say that promiscuity is immoral and invalid. The church must think through the implications of biblical revelation and live its model of monogamous marriage in such a way as to be clearly seen as the better choice. The same holds true in every sphere of life.

Transformation. A second theme which helps keep the theme of separation in balance is that of cultural transformation. Transformation accepts the fact that, despite the fall, men live their cultural lives in suppressed memory of God, whose image (though marred) they still are.

1. God has allowed or planted proto-redemptive images in cultural patterns. Missionary and anthropologist Don Richardson, in his book *Eternity in their Hearts*, has extensively documented proto-evangelical religious and social traditions and patterns among the cultures and people groups in all areas of the world. One startling example is the creation myth of the *Karen* people of Burma, a story (it must be emphasized) not *planted* by missionaries, but *discovered* when Adoniram Judson and his colleagues arrived in the late 1800s. Note even the linguistic parallel to Yahweh's Old Testament

²⁶ Grooithus, *New Age*, p. 50.

name:

Y'wa formed the world originally. He appointed food and drink.
He appointed the "fruit of trial."
He gave detailed orders. Mu-Kaw-lee deceived two persons.
He caused them to eat of the fruit of the tree of trial.
They obeyed not. They believed not Y'wa .
When they ate of the fruit of trial,
They became subject to sickness, aging and death.²⁷

The church must search out these themes in culture and transform them; that is, present the truth in the cultural item in question (be it art, music, celebration, religious tradition, or scientific discovery) in a positive relation to the Christian worldview. It is important to do this, however, while maintaining the integrity of the item being transformed. Thus, for instance, Moussorgsky's "Night on Bald Mountain" glorifies God in its creativity, however, its theme, a witches' Sabbath, must also be shown for what is, namely idolatrous activity.

2. Discernment is needed in interpreting cultural patterns. It is because no cultural pattern is untainted by sin (Isa, 64:6), that careful judgment must be used as to what elements of a culture can carry Christian truth in a positive manner and which must be objects of separation.

Conservation. Many items in a culture are not evil in themselves, needing only a God-directed heart to bring Him glory. The Christian working in a specific culture does well, not only to allow these items to continue, but to involve himself or herself with them.

1. All Truth is God's Truth. Common grace and the fingerprint of God on creation

²⁷ M. Wiley, *The Gospel in Burma*, pp. 52-54, Quoted in Don Richardson, *Eternity in their Hearts*, 3rd Edition (Ventura: Regal Books, 2005), pp. 69-70. Many more examples are given.

has assured that certain aspects of God's truth are manifest to all people worldwide. While this is not enough to save them (in fact, Romans 1:18-20 says it leaves them without excuse), it does mean that there will be items in each culture which believers can endorse.

2. Believers can rejoice in diversity, keeping neutral cultural forms. One of the criticisms of much missionary work is that, besides the proclamation of the Gospel, Western culture is being pushed, so that the churches use Western dress, sing translated Western hymns, etc. It is important that the church in each society be allowed and encouraged to develop its worship and practice using indigenous forms, as long as these forms do not conflict with revealed truth. This is the force behind Paul's "all things to all men" passage in 1 Cor. 9: 19-23. Pedro Guzmán Reyna observes what happens when this does not occur:

Foreign missions planted an Anglo Saxon culture in Mexican territory. . . . In music, for example, they brought the use of pianos and organs in the churches, songs were translated that already existed in the English language. Maybe it was due to this that there were not more Mexican Evangelical composers of renown, nor theologians, nor reformers.²⁸

Here, as in separation and transformation, discernment must be used. The Christian's responsibility is to God's revelation first, and the culture second. Decisions on response to the norms and patterns of the surrounding culture can only be made effectively after careful biblical and exegetical study. However, the study will yield fruit. History has shown that application of a biblical cultural paradigm will not only reach people for the Creative Kingdom and its King, but have a positive effect on the

²⁸ Pedro Guzmán Reyna, *Rasgos Históricos Del Protestantismo en México: Desde las Leyes de Reforma, 1857, hasta el Plan de Cincinati, 1914* (Coyoacán: Publicaciones El Faro, 2010), p. 140. Trans. T. Whitehouse

unredeemed surrounding society as well.

Two Historical Examples of Successful Christian Penetration.

Contrary to the much-repeated rhetoric of many of its modern detractors, the church, as imperfect as it has been, is historically the major contributor to the flourishing of culture. The scope of this paper can not even scratch the surface, but a summary mention of two areas will be given as an example.

Children's Rights. The spirit of Molech was rampant in the ancient world. The Greco-Roman culture in which the early Church thrived, like the Canaanite milieu in which Judaism struggled, was a dangerous place for small children,²⁹ especially those deemed less than perfect.

Michael Gorman extensively documents the practice of infant exposure and abortion, especially during the early period of the Roman Republic, under the influence of *patria potestas*:

The father, or *paterfamilias*, at first had nearly absolute power, all rights being his alone. His slaves, wife, and children were all "taken in hand," *mancipia*, to him, and he had the power of life and death, *jus vitae necisque*, over them all. The *paterfamilias* could kill, mutilate and sell people like possessions.³⁰

As an example: "The Twelve Tablets (ca. 450 B.C.), permitted a father to expose any female infant he wished and any deformed baby of either sex."³¹ Though this practice was spoken against during the Empire at the time of Christ (Caesar Augustus, realizing that strong families were a benefit to a strong state, spoke out against infanticide by

²⁹ Merrill F. Unger, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954), p. 279.

³⁰ Michael J. Gorman, *Abortion in the Early Church: Christian, Jewish, and Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1982), P. 25.

³¹ *Ibid.*

exposure, along with celibacy and childlessness³²), it only meant the increase of the less visible, though more dangerous, practice of abortion.³³ When abortion was spoken against it was usually from the perspective of the father's rights to the child, not the right of the child. Gorman points out that even the Latin poet Ovid, who was no tower of virtue, found abortion against nature, but not because of the fetus, but because of the father's wishes³⁴. Children were considered an extension of the father's hand. This is in sharp contrast to the picture of Christ exalting the status of the child *as a child*, and not merely in relation to the benefit that would accrue to the parents when he grew up (Matt. 19:13-14 and parallels). It is chilling to see that, as the church retreats from the public square in postmodern western society, the old Roman ways are returning. Only now the rights of the father are not taken into account, only the mother who wants to rid herself of the child has a voice.

Creation and the Origin of Modern Science. Francis Schaeffer points out that philosophers Whitehead and Oppenheimer (neither of whom were Christian) argued cogently that modern science is a product of Christian roots:

Whitehead and Oppenheimer said modern science could not have been born except in the milieu of Christianity. Why? In the area of biblical Christianity, Galileo, Copernicus, Kepler, Francis Bacon - all these men, up to Newton and Faraday understood that there was a universe there because God had made it. And they believed, as Whitehead has so beautifully said, that because God was a reasonable God one could discover the truth of the universe by reason. . . . The Greeks had almost all the facts that the early scientists had, but it never turned into a science like modern science.³⁵

Hugh Ross has pointed out that most of these early scientists were devout

³² Will Durant, *Caesar and Christ* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), p. 222.

³³ Gorman, *Abortion*, p. 27.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 28.

³⁵ Francis Schaeffer, *He is There and He is not Silent* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1972), p. 67.

Christian men³⁶. That the official (Roman Catholic) church opposed them cannot be denied, however *Ross* traces the roots of the medieval anti-scientific attitude not to Christ and Scripture, but to Plato and Aristotle through Augustine, Maimonides, Aquinas, and others.³⁷ The Reformation, with its return to a more biblical emphasis, provided the soil in which true science could grow: “In fact, the scientific and theological communities were so at peace by the middle of the 17th century (at least in Protestant circles) that it was common for men to hold dual appointments in astronomy and theology.”³⁸

Neither classic pantheism nor modern naturalism could have provided the soil for modern science. In classical pantheism (such as Hinduism and its modern “New Age” western offshoots) the material universe is *maya*, an illusion to be transcended. In naturalism the universe is the product of time plus chance. Man's very thoughts can, by definition, be nothing more than the result of the random coalescence of a pattern of atoms in the brain. Thought is an accident that could theoretically be broken down into mere physics. It can no longer be *about* something.³⁹

All cultures develop technology (what is commonly called applied science). The Greeks, Hindus, and everyone else, even to the most primitive tribes, develops a technology to help them simplify the problems of living, and sometimes the technology can be wonderful and amazing (the pyramids of Egypt or Tehotihuacán). Science for the sake of discovery alone, however, must be maintained to have its roots in the Christian, and more specifically, the Reformed, doctrines of God, creation, and revelation.

³⁶ Hugh Ross, *The Fingerprint of God*, 2nd edition (n.p.: Promise Publishing Company, 1991), p. 22.

³⁷ Ibid. pp. 14-19.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 22.

³⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: MacMillan, 1947), chapter 3.

Here, however, a warning must be issued. The robust science the western world has enjoyed over the past 400 years exists solely because it breathed the air of truth expressed by Christian Reformed theology. However, much of the scientific establishment today does not like that air. To quote Harvard biologist Richard Lewontin:

Our willingness to accept scientific claims that are against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real struggle between science and the supernatural. We take the side of science *in spite* of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, *in spite* of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, *in spite* of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our *a priori* adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door⁴⁰

Unless believers become heavily involved, using their God-given creative gifts at science's front lines, that air will be replaced by a heady but toxic atmosphere of Nietzschean will-to-power and postmodern deconstruction, and science will slip back into mere technology.

The Challenge

It was pointed out above that the specifically missionary work of the church could very well be nearing its end. While there is still major work to be done, this is the first generation in which it can be said that the very ends of the earth are truly reachable.

Indeed, Wycliffe Bible Translators hopes to have at least a portion of Scripture translated

⁴⁰ Richard Lewontin, "Billions and Billions of Demons," a review of Carl Sagan's book, *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a candle in the Dark*, in *The New York review of Books*, January 9, 1997, p. 31. Emphasis author's. The review is available online at www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1997/jan/09/billions-and-billions-of-demons.

into the language of every people group by 2025.⁴¹

But missions and evangelism in the traditional sense is only the first step in the Great Commission. It is but the planting of the flag. The church is called to make disciples of all nations. Those who have come to embrace the call of Christ as sovereign Lord and King must now be directed and taught to use their gifts and callings gladly in His service so that the claim of His Kingship can be felt in every sphere of the kingdoms of men. In art, music, science, education all must have the opportunity to “taste and see that the LORD is good.” C. S. Lewis makes it practical:

We must attack the enemy’s line of communication. What we want is not more little books about Christianity, but more . . . books by Christians on other subjects—with their Christianity latent.

It is not books on Christianity that will really trouble [the unbeliever]. But he would be troubled if, whenever he wanted a cheap popular introduction to some science, the best work on the market was always by a Christian.⁴²

The King has made a "new creation" and "given us the ministry of reconciliation" for which "we are ambassadors" (2 Cor. 5: 17-20). All of this fails if the ambassadors of God’s creative kingdom do not make an impact on the surrounding culture. If the church hides behind its walls and does not confront the surrounding community with its message of contrast and challenge, it will have failed, no matter how well its own community is run.

The church must regain the vision of its role as the alternate society, the New Jerusalem over against Babylon the Great, the bride outshining the harlot. Donald Guthrie points out that, for all her flashiness, the harlot can never be more than a twisted shadow

⁴¹ <http://www.lastlanguagescampaign.org/LLC.aspx>

⁴² C. S. Lewis, “Christian Apologetics,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994 p. 93.

of the bride:

We are introduced at the end of the book to a gorgeously dressed woman who has become intoxicated with the blood of the saints (Rev. 17: 1-6). . . . A greater contrast of the Bride arrayed in fine pure linen could hardly be imagined. The purpose is to show what paradoxes evil agencies produce in human affairs. Externally “Babylon” is splendid, but inwardly she is rotten to the core. It seems best to regard the Harlot as symbolic of mankind opposed to God, just as the Bride stands for mankind redeemed by God and committed to His mission The worst the dragon can do is to conjure up a pale imitation of God’s plan but lacking in all moral strength and doomed to destruction.⁴³

In contrast to the flashiness of the Harlot stands the regal splendor of the Bride, the New Jerusalem, bought by her Lord from among the nations and yet including them. The gates of the New Jerusalem stand always open and shall receive the glory and honor of the nations, but only that which has been cleansed by Christ shall enter in (Rev. 21:24-27). The Creative Kingdom must present an attractive alternative which calls people to leave the kingdom of darkness and come in. She must stand with her Lord and against the world and proclaim:

*The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!”
And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires let him take of the water of life freely
(Revelation 22:17).*

⁴³ Donald Guthrie, *The Relevance of John’s Apocalypse* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), p. 107-108.