

Not Ashamed! The Sufficiency of Scripture for Public Theology ¹

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Last eve I passed beside a blacksmith's door
And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime;
When looking in, I saw upon the floor,
Old hammers worn with beating years of time.

"How many anvils have you had," said I,
"To wear and batter these hammers so?"
"Just one," said he; then with a twinkling eye,
"The anvil wears the hammers out, you know."

And so, I thought, the anvil of God's Word,
For ages, skeptics blows have beat upon;
Yet, though the noise of falling blows was heard,
The anvil is unharmed – the hammers gone.

John Clifford

The American comedian Jerry Seinfeld has a great routine where he muses on numerous studies which have shown that people's number one fear is... public speaking. Death is number two. He goes on, 'This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than doing the eulogy.' This oratorical fear has been given new dramatic significance in the critically acclaimed film, *The King's Speech*. Portraying both personal story and national crisis, the film focuses on the remarkable relationship between Albert, Duke of York, who would become King George VI², the noble suffering from a debilitating stammer and seen in every way to be 'unfit' for the role of Monarch, and his speech therapist, the unorthodox and 'colonial commoner' Lionel Logue.³ The film opens with a nightmarish scene as Albert prepares to give a speech before the Empire Exhibition at Wembley Stadium in 1925. The excruciating stammer with which he has been afflicted noticeably unsettles and embarrasses those present in the stadium. The film closes with Albert's three-page radio speech given upon the declaration of war with Germany in 1939. While by no means a piece of accomplished oratory, it is a speech which displays enough drama and authority to bring some comfort and re-assurance to the millions of British citizens huddled around their wirelasses on the eve of war.

Another King's speech, *the King's speech*, the Bible, appears to have suffered a reversal of fortune to that of dear old 'Bertie' with regards to its standing in public life. Picture another two scenes which may seem somewhat 'random', but to my mind are illustratively indicative. The first scene stays with the theme of royalty, indeed the very same Windsor family. Whether one is a royalist or not, or even whether one takes any of the 'pomp and circumstance' of monarchy as being at all relevant to British life and culture, surely there was still *something* encouraging and positive for the Christian believer who listened and now incredibly for the first time *watched* the coronation ceremony of Elizabeth II in June 1953. For it was with the following words from the Archbishop of Canterbury that Her Majesty received a copy of the Bible:

Our gracious Queen: to keep your Majesty ever mindful of the Law and the Gospel of God as the Rule for the whole life and government of Christian Princes, we present you with this Book, the most valuable thing that this world affords. Here is Wisdom; this is the royal Law; these are the lively Oracles of God.

While there are those in all sectors of our society who wish it were not so, one cannot deny the relevance, role, and yes, even rule, that the Bible has explicitly played in the shaping of British life and culture. This may be obvious to some, but for many, including many Christians, there are severe cases of historical myopia and amnesia which need remedying. The Bible's influence is enormous in all fields but let us take just two examples: the Bible as the basis for common law and the motivation for the origins of modern science.

It is likely that within two hundred years of Jesus' birth Britannia had heard the Christian message, but it was not until the 511 and the preaching of Patrick, Columba, Aiden, and Augustine that Christian numbers and influence increased. The earliest document written in English is the law code of Ethelbert, which was strongly influenced by biblical ideals and law. The common law system developed during the twelfth and thirteen centuries was largely shaped by Christian values. Many aspects of the British justice system that we cherish – retributive justice, legal representation, the taking of oaths, judicial investigation, and rules for evidence – all owe a debt to a Christian influence based on the biblical revelation.

In a similar vein, inscribed in Latin over the door of the physics laboratory in Cambridge is neither 'physics is fun' nor 'leave your faith before entering' but Ps 111:2: 'Great are the works of the Lord. Studied by all those who delight in them',⁴ a verse chosen by the scientist and formulator of electromagnetic theory, James Clark Maxwell. As the author P.D James summarises concerning the 'Authorised Version', 'No book has had a more profound and lasting influence on religious life, the history and the culture, the institutions and the language of the English-speaking peoples throughout the world than has the King James Bible'.⁵

Compare our coronation scene with another televisual event held at the Corn Exchange in Brighton in September 2005. Both the audience and panel hostilely received Stephen Green, the National Director of *Christian Voice*, in his one and only ignominious appearance on the BBC's *Question Time* (a long-running political panel programme in the UK). Again, while one might not support the cause and tone of his organisation nor think Green's overall presence and communication skills were the most winsome, it was the muffled but still audible groans, sighs, and titters that were induced whenever Green answered a contemporary political issue by quoting from the Bible. For the Christian watching on, this was perhaps the most painful part to bear. For we know that not a year goes by without some new survey or poll highlighting new levels of biblical illiteracy, incredulity, and disdain in our country. As Boyd Tonkin wrote last year in *The Independent*, again on the subject of the KJV,

For anyone religious or not, who cares about the continuity of culture and understanding, Gordon Campbell lets slip a remark to freeze the blood. A professor at Leicester University, he recalls that 'When the name of Moses came up at the seminar I was leading, no one had any idea whom he might have been, though a Muslim student eventually asked if he was the same person as Musa in the Qur'an (which he is)'.⁶

Chilling indeed.

Now, in matters of public life and public policy, and remembering Alistair Campbell's infamous rebuff that 'we don't do God',⁷ there is some evidence that we just *might* be witnessing the start, albeit a glacially slow start, of a thaw regarding a discussion on the place and legitimacy of 'religious

commitments' in public life. However, it still appears that for all concerned, both Christians and non-Christians, there is a moratorium on even discussing the possible role, relevance, and rule of the Bible in public life: we *definitely* 'don't do the Bible'. Let me pose a number of awkward questions: Was the pain and frankly toe-curling embarrassment that many *Christians* felt in the Stephen Green appearance as much about the massive apologetic *faux-pas* we thought he was making in his insistence in referring to and quoting from Scripture? Were we not witnessing the awful grating of two incommensurable worlds colliding, worlds that we really believe should now never come into contact with each other? The first, the sophisticated, slick, confessionally 'thin', allegedly 'neutral' *lingua franca* of modern politics of rights, equality, tolerance, and freedoms. The second, a naïve, unsophisticated, anachronistic, and so irrelevant 'thick' description of Christian particularity, certainly mentioning rights, equality, tolerance, and freedoms, but adding 'God', 'Jesus', and 'Bible' to the mix. Were we not witnessing here the breaking of an unspeakable taboo? Was not our number one fear being realised? In this public arena were we ashamed of the Bible being used in this way? Did we think that the Bible was unfit for public service? At this low point (or should it be high point?) of inappropriateness and inconceivability, were we as Christians guilty of buying into the revisionist history which determinedly airbrushes out the impact of Scripture and forgets a time when various public figures had gathered together for six years *in* Parliament itself under the authority of Scripture?

There are, of course, many historical, cultural, sociological, philosophical, and, most important (for it undergirds them all), 'theological' factors which can be cited as reasons for the decline of the Bible's relevance, role, and rule in British lives, British homes, British culture, and British public life (and we may want to add, within many British churches). In being a part of Western culture, these factors have been well-documented and analysed and so will not be dealt with here.⁸ Of course, how our British 'world' deals with the Word is not totally within our control, but thankfully within God's sovereign providence. In the time and circumstances God has placed us, we are called to be faithful. However 'being faithful' means that as Christians in this country in 2011, we do have a role and a responsibility when it comes to reflecting and then acting upon the role we give to the Bible, not just in our own lives or in our church's (what might be called a 'bottom-up' work), but in our 'public theology' (what might be called a top-down work).⁹ It is this arena that I wish to focus on in this paper. Narrowing this focus even further, and coming closer to home, I want to concentrate on how conservative evangelicals and especially those in the Reformed community view the relevance, role, and rule of the Bible in public life, for while there may be a healthy consensus when it comes to the relevance, role, and rule of the Bible in our lives and churches, when it comes to the public square no such consensus exists.

In what follows I compare and contrast two broad positions within Reformed theology:

1. The first, and at the risk of caricature, are those who both for theological and tactical reasons argue for the 'insufficiency' (or maybe less polemically 'illegitimacy') of the use of the Bible in the public realm but rather the 'sufficiency' (or probably better, 'legitimacy') of natural revelation embodied in a natural law.
2. The second argue for precisely the opposite.

Those familiar with contemporary Reformed theology in North America will immediately recognise the derivative nature of my argument as I am piggy-backing a very 'live and kicking' discussion happening amongst Reformed theologians.¹⁰ While drawing largely from these North American theologians and this intra-Reformed North American debate, I wish to take seriously the kernel of truth that culturally and politically we are two nations divided by a common language. My aim in this paper therefore is to stimulate further theological reflection and praxis amongst Reformed believers this side of the pond, attempting to contextualise my application and conclusion within our own particular British context.

For reasons I hope to outline, and perhaps showing my hand rather early, I unashamedly embrace the stance that in our public discourse we should engage consciously and explicitly with the Bible as our ultimate authority and that by doing so we will increase *both* our opportunities for evangelism *and* the possibility for social transformation.

1. Rooting Public Engagement in God's Plan for the World

Both of these two positions on Scripture are inextricably embedded within larger theological 'visions' that differ, while employing a united 'grammar' and 'language' of confessional Reformed orthodoxy.¹¹ Before we concentrate on these respective doctrines of the use or abuse of Scripture in public theology, it is worth briefly sketching the theological tenets which both unite and divide these projects.

Let us start with the raw systematic and biblical-theological material we must fashion and which both sides take as 'Reformed' givens. First, we have the reality of God's general revelation in nature and history and God's 'worded' special revelation. A corollary here is God's moral standard or norm, his law both revealed in general revelation and special revelation. Second is the overarching world historical pattern of creation, fall, redemption, consummation, and some important 'glueing' doctrines which join them together, the concept of 'covenant' with its blessings and curses, and 'kingdom' with its rulers and realms.

Under 'creation' we must mention that all human beings are made in the image of God, made functionally to replicate God's 'speaking' and 'making' activities under God's norms and authority. In other words, human beings are by nature culture-builders. This facet of the *imago Dei* is reinforced in the cultural mandate of Gen 1:26-31; 2:18-25. Finally in terms of creation, God has ordered the world in a structurally or institutionally pluralistic way; under his supreme authority there are other subordinate authorities, each with their own unique jurisdictions, responsibilities, and sanctions (church, family, state, etc.). Under 'Fall' we must reckon anthropologically with the complimentary truths of the 'antithesis', common grace, and the image of God. The 'antithesis' is God's judicial curse sovereignly inflicted on humanity in Gen 3:15 and which from then until now puts enmity between followers of God and followers of Satan at all levels, intellectual and moral, individual and societal. The antithesis is *principally* 'the diametrical opposition between belief and unbelief and therefore between belief and any compromise of revealed truth'.¹² The Bible presents this stark contrast between belief and unbelief in many ways: light and dark, death and life, those who are blind and those who can see, covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers, those in Adam and those in Christ. I stress *principally* because as well as affirming the truth of the antithesis we must also affirm two other biblical truths. First, as believers we know in practice that a version of the antithesis still runs through our own hearts as we daily deal with our indwelling sin, sin which is a contradiction according to who we are in Christ. Second, we note an analogous inconsistency in the unbeliever.¹³

As well as the 'antithesis', we must affirm God's non-salvific common grace, his goodness showered on a sin-cursed world. In common grace God restrains his own wrath and restrains sin and its consequences in unbelievers, and he also positively blesses creation and excites the unbeliever to perform works of civic righteousness. We must also affirm that despite their rebellion epistemologically (in terms of knowledge) and ethically (in terms of morality), metaphysically (in terms of being) all men and women remain in the image of God with the dignity that this affords. In their very 'humanity' they reveal the God who is, and no matter how much they claim otherwise and try to deface this image, they can never totally succeed. The idols they necessarily fashion in creation and in the mind are distorted and perverted copies and counterfeits of the living God, whom they know but do not know. The perennial nature of the *imago Dei* includes mankind's 'culture-building' function. Does the culture built reflect worship of the living God or worship of an idol?

Under 'redemption' we have the significance of Christ's life, death, resurrection, ascension, and continuing session for *all* of creation, the Great Commission to disciple all nations, and some version of an 'inaugurated eschatology' (the now and not-yet) although shaped by one's millennial sensibilities. Finally under 'consummation' we affirm the physicality of the new heavens and the new earth.¹⁴

2. Ambitions for Public Life: A Description of Two (Reformed) Ways to Live

The above sketch should be recognisable to all those who are confessionally 'Reformed'.¹⁵ Now we witness the differences as we configure, stress, emphasise, accent, and nuance the above tenets in different ways and start to join the dots.

Theologically, one helpful way to understand these differences is viewing them as a set of interconnected relationships of continuity and discontinuity.¹⁶ What is the continuity and/or discontinuity between creation and redemption, between the cultural mandate and the gospel mandate, between the creation and new creation this side of judgment day and the new heaven and new earth the other side? Typologically and hermeneutically, what is the continuity and discontinuity between old covenant and new covenant, OT Israel and the church of Christ, OT Israel and the nations, between the Mosaic Law, the Royal Law, and the law written on the heart? More pointedly, we could boil everything down into three questions:

1. What does *God* require and demand of a society? (This is a quasi-spatial category dealing with legitimacy.)
2. What should *we* expect to see in a society in this current age? (This is a quasi-temporal category dealing with feasibility.)
3. What activities is the *church qua church* responsible for within society? (This is an ecclesiological question dealing with vocation.)

As one plots where one stands on all these questions, there will begin to appear in outline form two related but quite distinct 'visions' for public theology. Indeed, there is a strong sibling rivalry between the two. Both claim to have a rich historical pedigree (both claim to be heirs of the magisterial Reformation and the Westminster Standards), and both have their sophisticated contemporary interpreters, all who give their own variations on a theme. I can do little more here than bash out the basic melody of both before concentrating on the issue of Scripture.

2.1. A Common-Kingdom Model

The first is a common-kingdom model.¹⁷ On the 'Reformed' version of the continuity/discontinuity question, the common-kingdom model can be called a model of discontinuity and dichotomy. Its more recent advocates include Meredith Kline,¹⁸ Michael Horton,¹⁹ Daryl Hart,²⁰ Stephen Grabhill,²¹ Ken Myers,²² and especially David VanDrunen,²³ a scholar who has done more than anyone to defend and champion this vision.

A thumbnail sketch can be drawn thus:

- While God is sovereign, Jesus is Lord and King over all, and the Bible is our ultimate authority, God exercises his rule in two different ways: in two different realms, with two different norms, and with two different expectations for each realm.
 - God is Creator and Sustainer (but not Redeemer) of the common-kingdom, a civil realm that pertains to temporal, earthly, provisional matters, not matters of ultimate and spiritual importance.
 - The other realm is the 'spiritual' and 'holy' realm where God is Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer in Christ. 'This kingdom pertains to things that are of

ultimate spiritual importance, the things of Christ's heavenly, eschatological kingdom'.²⁴

- Concerning the relationship of the two, 'although necessarily existing together and having some mutual interaction in this world, these two kingdoms enjoy a great measure of independence so that each can pursue the unique work entrusted to it'.²⁵
 - From the perspective of biblical-theology (and using Kline's terminology), we can say that from the Fall, and running in parallel with redemptive history, is a God-ordained common cultural history, covenantally instituted in God's covenant with Noah, made up of both covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers and sustained by God's common grace.
 - Redemptive history and all it contains in terms of Israel, law, society, covenantal sanctions of blessings and cursings is an anomaly, a typological 'intrusion' of the eschatological kingdom to come where there will be total separation of covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers, a true theocracy.²⁶

For a common-kingdom proponent like VanDrunen, the cultural mandate given to the first Adam has been accomplished in the work of Jesus Christ, the last Adam. 'Thus redemption is not "creation regained" but "re-creation gained"'.²⁷

In defining the scope of this 're-creation', VanDrunen limits continuity between the creation now and the new creation exclusively to the resurrection of believers' bodies: 'The NT teaches that the entirety of present cultural activities and products will be brought to a radical end, along with the natural order, at the second coming of Christ'.²⁸ While believers now can and should engage in cultural pursuits joyfully and thankfully, those pursuits should always be accompanied with a 'deep sense of detachment from this world, and of longing for our true home in the world-to-come'.²⁹

A common-kingdom approach sees a looser connection than some between culture and cult, between the shape of a society and the religious presuppositions underlying that society. There is no distinctively Christian culture or Christian civilisation, and while the 'secularist' state is an enemy of the civil realm, the 'secular' state is a definition of the 'civil realm', one of the triumphs of the West. In a common-kingdom approach, and crucially for the focus of this essay, evangelical public theology concerns this mixed common cultural history, the 'civil realm' which has its own norm and moral basis. A common-kingdom approach appreciates and appropriates a version of natural law given in general revelation (Rom 1:18–32), the law written on the heart (Rom 2:14–15), common to all humanity and the moral basis for civic morality, and the common good: 'Natural law is God's *common* moral revelation given to all people of whatever religious conviction... Natural law morally obligates human beings insofar as they are created and sustained by God'.³⁰

The common-kingdom model argues that Scripture at this point is an 'insufficient' basis in the civil realm. This does not deny the doctrines of scriptural sufficiency and necessity, but it qualifies in a more minimalistic direction. For example, T. David Gordon, in a provocative edition of *Modern Reformation*³¹ and popularising his more scholarly critique of theonomy,³² argues that the phrase 'faith and life' in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* 1:6³³ must be taken in its 'religious' sense and is restricted to the covenant community: 'The Bible is sufficient to guide the human-as-covenanter, but *not* sufficient to guide the human-as-mechanic, the human-as-physician, the human-as-businessman, the human-as-parent, the human-as-husband, the human-as-wife, or the human-as-legislator'.³⁴

For VanDrunen, although Scripture does give some guidance to Christians in how they are to live faithfully in the common kingdom,³⁵ the main problem for Scripture serving as a moral *standard* for

the civil kingdom is that biblical morality is patterned on an indicative-imperative structure meant only for God's redeemed covenant people:

Scripture does not provide a common moral standard for Christians and non-Christians in the way that natural law does. Natural law is the only moral standard for which there is a common (though implied) indicative that grounds common imperatives: All people are created in God's image and have this law written upon their hearts; therefore, they should conduct themselves according to the pattern of that image and the demands of the law.³⁶

Finally, while Christians are not to be indifferent culturally, economically, and socially, the common kingdom model 'demands limited and sober expectations. This perspective gives no reason to expect the attainment of paradise on earth. The civil kingdom, regulated by natural law, is severely limited in what it can attain, but Scripture gives us no reason to expect more from it'.³⁷ It has a relative importance in the maintenance of order and restraining of evil. So as Christians we live 'hyphenated lives'³⁸ as citizens of both kingdoms, but as aliens and pilgrims and exiles, our true longing is for our spiritual home. The common-kingdom model appears to exclude both theologically and psychologically any version of a postmillennial hope.

2.2. A Confessional-Kingdom Model

The second model is what I call the confessional-kingdom model.³⁹ On the Reformed version of the continuity/discontinuity question, this model can be called a model of continuity and unity. Reformed advocates here are a far more disparate group, including those 'neo-Calvinists' associated with Kuyperianism and/or Dooyewerdianism⁴⁰ and various disciples of Cornelius Van Til: Vern Poythress,⁴¹ Peter Leithart,⁴² and especially John Frame.⁴³ For this sketch, I concern myself with the Van Tillian family.

Here God is sovereign, Jesus is Lord and King over all, the Bible is our ultimate authority, and God commands that everyone acknowledge this in every sphere of life. While still upholding structural and institutional pluralism (i.e., not confusing or conflating church, state, and family), confessional-kingdom models join together aspects they believe common-kingdom proponents falsely dichotomise: earthly and heavenly, physical and spiritual, judicial-covenantal and material, individual and cosmic, civil and religious, God's law in one realm of life and his law in another.

From the broadest perspective, redemption restores creation in all its many spheres: 'Redemption is not an ontological transformation, but an ethical reorientation and redirection'.⁴⁴ Because Christ's work is *the* significant event in history as the transition from wrath to grace, the confessional-kingdom model places less stress on the discontinuity between the earth now and the new heaven and new earth because the new creation, inaugurated by Christ's resurrection and its firstfruits, has begun in history. Therefore, rather than thinking of ourselves as 'resident aliens', might it be more accurate to think of ourselves as 'alienated residents'?⁴⁵ And when one's framework encompasses the movement from paradise lost to paradise regained and when one recognises the physicality and continuity between the now and not-yet, this motivates them to start working as soon as they are converted.

Another way of looking at this is the 'conceptual congruence' between cultural mandate and the Great Commission.

The Great Commission is the republication of the cultural mandate for the semi-eschatological age. Unlike the original cultural mandate, it presupposes the existence of sin and the accomplishment of redemption. It recognizes that if the world is to be filled with worshippers of God, subduing the earth as his vassal kings, they must first be converted to Christ through the preaching of the gospel.⁴⁶

In this vision, *if* cultural transformation is a desired end, this should not and will not come about by imposed morality but by men and women being converted and willingly submitting themselves to the King of Kings and his rule.

Like a common-kingdom approach, the confessional-kingdom approach regards the 'secularist' state as an enemy to be opposed. Unlike the common-kingdom approach, the 'secular' state is not to be prescribed but rather seen to be a 'myth', a confused, compromised, and unstable state of affairs, and a fruit of the Enlightenment rather than the Reformation.⁴⁷ The confessional-kingdom model can incorporate the concept of Christendom, and a confessionally Christian state is by no means anathema because the gospel has inevitable public and political implications.

Concerning revelation, confessional-kingdom models are far less happy to separate general revelation and special revelation, natural law and biblical law. Both are needed and always have been needed to interpret the other. Confessional-kingdom models recognise the personal knowledge of God that all unbelievers have by virtue of their being made in God's image, and yet they tend to stress more the antithesis between the believer and unbeliever and the inextricable link between cult (the worship of the living God or the worship of idols) and culture (the externalisation of that worship). That is, the noetic effects of the Fall are so damaging and debilitating that general revelation, without the clarity and regenerating power of special revelation, is severely limited and certainly is not a stable ground for moral consensus. The Bible is both sufficient and necessary to equip the Christian for *every* good work, which includes the cultural and political spheres. The confessional-kingdom model affirms common grace as a *description* of God's goodness in causing the sinner to be inconsistent in his thinking and acting, not as a *prescription* of what culture should look like in its movement from Garden to Garden-City.

For example, and in contrast to Gordon, John Frame speaks in more maximalist terms of the 'comprehensiveness' of Scripture, the way in which Christ rules our lives in a totalitarian way for our good and the good of others:

When people are converted to believe in Christ, they bring their new faith and love into their daily work. They ask how Christ bears upon their work as historians, scientists, musicians, how this new passion of theirs affects art, entertainment, medicine, the care of the poor and sick, the justice of courts, the punishment of convicts, relations between nations.⁴⁸

How then is the comprehensiveness of Scripture related to its sufficiency? Here Frame gives his own interpretation of 'faith and life' in *WCF* 1:6:

Christians sometimes say that Scripture is sufficient for religion, for preaching, or theology, but not for auto-repairs, plumbing, animal husbandry, and dentistry. And of course, many argue that it is not sufficient for science, philosophy and even ethics. That is to miss an important point. Certainly, Scripture contains more specific information relevant to theology than to dentistry. But sufficiency in the present context is not sufficiency of specific information but sufficiency of divine words. Scripture contains divine words sufficient for all of life. It has all the divine words the plumber needs, and all the divine words that the theologian needs. So it is just as sufficient for plumbing as it is for theology. And in that sense it is sufficient for science and ethics as well.⁴⁹

Both 'the light of nature' and 'Christian prudence' mentioned in the *WCF* are necessary to give us guidance, not by adding to Scripture but by applying the 'general rules of the Word'. They are 'a means of determining how the sufficient word of Scripture should be applied to a specific situation'.⁵⁰

Finally, what are the expectations of confessional-kingdom proponents? Here, as elsewhere one's eschatological commitments play a large part in answering this question. I believe one can construct versions of transformation which cover a range of Reformed eschatological views. Whatever our short-term or long-term expectations, whatever transformation we see or don't see, we are called to be faithful.

3. Authorities in Public Discourse: A Critique of the Normativity of Natural Law

The previous section sketches the contours of two Reformed 'projects' or 'visions' (one might say micro-worldviews) which are built upon and between the dynamic and configuration of many Reformed doctrinal *loci*. I hope I am not exaggerating if I were to speculate that, if from this moment on, British Reformed Christians were self-consciously to embrace either 'project', that over time this would lead to very different praxes with regards our engagement with British culture and public life.

Because of their complex and comprehensive nature, discerning the legitimacy of one 'vision' over the other is a large project, way beyond the remit of this essay. However, the question of 'authority' in public discourse is a crucial one and brings into sharp focus these visions' respective treatments of revelation, both 'natural' and 'scriptural'. This question is relevant to us here and crucial to determine which 'vision' one eventually adopts.

With this in mind and utilising the work of Frame and Leithart, I wish to look in a little more detail at the role of natural law and Scripture in both common-kingdom and confessional-kingdom arguments. At the level of theology, history, and apologetics, the common-kingdom use of natural law is flawed and 'insufficient,' and this calls into question its approach as a whole.

3.1. Theological Insufficiencies of the Common-Kingdom Model

In a recent chapter against soteriological inclusivism, I argue in some depth both exegetically and systematically that though natural revelation is in its own distinctive ways and for its own distinctive purposes necessary, authoritative, sufficient, and perspicuous,⁵¹ it is *not* sufficient for salvation; what is needed is both the light and sight that only the gospel can bring through God's Word (normatively through the human messenger in this life).⁵² My contention here is that similar arguments can be used in critiquing those who argue for the 'sufficiency' of natural law (and the 'insufficiency' of Scripture), for establishing a public theology, public policy, and more generally a moral consensus. Although I refer the reader back to that chapter for the details, it is worth briefly summarising the contours of the argument I make there and applying them here to the arena of the public sphere.

3.1.1. The Insufficiency of General Revelation

First, using Psalm 19 as an example, I argue that general revelation reveals God's works and that, as a mode or instrument of God 'speaking,' works by themselves are hermeneutically ambiguous. They need further revelatory supplementation to make them clear. This is not to drive a wedge between general and special revelation or to denigrate God's general revelation but simply to note that God's purpose in general revelation has never been for it to function independently of his 'worded' special revelation. God's 'words' are necessary to interpret and supplement his 'works'.⁵³ General revelation lacks the specificity of special revelation. God's words have always been needed to interpret, supplement, and therefore complement God's works. These two modes of revelation were never meant to be separated from one another or to work independently of each other. To make such a separation as natural-law advocates do seems artificial and lacking biblical warrant.

At this point I would note a similar unnatural decoupling that can be seen in attempts to separate 'moral' norms from 'religious' norms, for example in the claim that the second table of the Decalogue enshrines natural law and can be discovered and known *apart* from special revelation.⁵⁴

This again is to misunderstand the unity of the Decalogue and its specially revealed and 'thick' religious exclusivism for Yahweh and against idolatry.

This is not all, though, for second, this objective epistemological insufficiency of general revelation becomes intensely more acute after the Fall. According to the seminal passage in Rom 1:18-32, the knowledge of God is hideously 'suppressed' and 'exchanged', hence the antithetical language of the Bible between regenerate and unregenerate at the level of both epistemology and ethics.⁵⁵ However, it must always be noted that this 'natural' knowledge is not static information but dynamic, personal, and relational in character; man 'is a knower who does not know, a perceiver who does not perceive'.⁵⁶

3.1.2. Implications

What are the implications of this understanding of revelation for those who advocate natural law as being the prescriptive norm for public life?

First, anthropologically, Leithart notes a paradox in natural-law thinking at this point:

The problem with natural law is not that it claims too *much* for natural knowledge, but that it claims too *little*. Speaking Christianly to an unbeliever is not like speaking Swahili to a Swede; it is like speaking Swedish to an American of Swedish descent who has almost, but not quite, forgotten his native tongue. On the other hand, natural law claims too much for the ability of those who are outside Christ to embrace and put into practice what they know. The fact that men know the moral law does not, for Paul, lead to the conclusion that natural morality is sufficient as far as it goes. On the contrary, because the natural man suppresses and distorts the knowledge he cannot escape, natural morality is ultimately foolish and darkness.⁵⁷

Second, with regards the doctrine of Scripture itself, promoting natural law to the role of rule and standard in public life means relegating Scripture and so potentially jeopardising its sufficiency and *sola Scriptura*. God's revelation of himself comes to us through various media (nature, history, word, person), all of which are authoritative and consistent, all of which are interdependent on the others. However, 'the Bible has a unique role in the organism of revelation'⁵⁸ since both a verbal and written revelation are necessary for all 'faith and life' to correct our bleary vision (to use Calvin's language).

Methodologically, we are called to interpret the world through the Word, for in God's light do we see light (Psalm 36:10). Given Scripture's epistemological primacy, 'principles that cannot be established from Scripture cannot be established by natural-law argument either. When people try to add to God's word by natural-law arguments, they violate the sufficiency of Scripture'.⁵⁹ Sufficiency does not mean that the Bible speaks with a uniform specificity in all matters of faith and life but that it contains the divine words necessary for all faith and life. Given the explicitly 'moral', 'ethical', and increasingly 'religious' questions generated by the public and civil sphere, Scripture has many divine words to say on these matters, both complementing and supplementing the 'light of nature' and 'Christian prudence'.

Without acknowledging these divine words and their ultimate authority, we are left with simply more instability and confusion. Take, for example, Rowan Williams' infamous lecture on *Sharia* law in February 2008.⁶⁰ It roused many a nominal Christian in the United Kingdom and had radio phone-in bosses rubbing their hands in glee. A close look at Williams' lecture recognises an intelligent reflection that raises a number of important questions concerning the thorny issue of supplementary jurisdictions and the foundations on which we can build a legal arrangement for the whole of society. His own answer comes midway through when he speaks of 'the establishing of a space

accessible to everyone in which it is possible to affirm and defend a commitment to *human dignity as such*, independent of membership in any specific human community or tradition’.

My question here would be whether Williams’ ultimate ground of ‘human dignity as such’ is a satisfactory answer for a Christian to give. First, it appears to ‘confess’ *human dignity as such* as more ultimate than Jesus’ Lordship. But is this not tantamount to an idolatrous configuration in that it demonstrates an inverted loyalty? Second, and practically, what does ‘human dignity as such’ mean and who ultimately decides what it means? Is it so self-evident that all sectors of our pluralistic society can be united? While it may look like solid ground, it is not ground that will be stable enough to support the social cohesion that we all want.

Third, what of VanDrunen’s claim that while there is a basic moral law that binds all people, Scripture itself is an inappropriate ethical source for the common kingdom since its ethics are characterised by an indicative-imperative structure and so appropriate only for those who have been redeemed? First, while this structure may ground Christian ethical motivation, it is not the only grounds for ethics. As Frame notes, the ultimate ground is the holy character of God, in whose image we are made. Then there are universal creation ordinances given to Adam and Eve. In terms of ethical motivation, God’s commands in Scripture to do something should be grounds enough.⁶¹

Second, there are numerous examples (the prophetic literature being a pointed example) of the nations outside Israel being condemned and called to repent not simply of moral natural-law sins but ‘religious’ sins especially idolatry. Idolatry, not simply immorality, can well be described as the universally applicable ‘primal’ sin, seen clearly in Adam’s and Eve’s ‘false faith’⁶² in the Garden when they followed Satan in believing lies about God. Whether one calls it ‘natural’ or ‘biblical’, the worship of any god other than the transcendently unique Yahweh, is idolatrous and accountable.

3.2. Historical Insufficiencies of the Common-Kingdom Model

In my chapter on the insufficiency of general revelation for salvation, I argue that while the separation and distinction between general and special revelation is absolutely necessary, there is a sense in which it is somewhat abstract and artificial, both theologically and historically. Our theological categorisation of revelation as the hermetically-sealed compartments of general and special revelation are rather inadequate, for in which category does ‘redemptive history’ go? Frame demonstrates this in his re-categorisation of God’s revelation from general and special categories into three: the word that comes through nature and history, the word that comes through persons, and the word written.⁶³

If Frame is correct here, a complementary *historical* point can be made. In understanding the theology of other religions, I have noted in a recent work the importance of acknowledging phenomenologically the way religions, in their myths, doctrines, rituals, etc., have idolatrously taken and distorted not simply ‘natural’ revelation, but redemptive-historical ‘special’ revelation.⁶⁴ As cultures are religions externalised and ‘lived worldviews’,⁶⁵ we can see this perverted ‘special revelation’ influence, culture-wide. Such an influence pertains not only to epistemology but to ethics as well.

In a stimulating essay, Peter Leithart makes a plausible case that moral consensus between Christians and non-Christians does not originate in general revelation, as is often assumed, but rather originates in a mixture of general and special revelation.⁶⁶ What is often taken as evidence of general revelation, natural law, and common grace in our Western culture may actually be rather the historical influence of special revelation, biblical law, and the gospel. He calls this ‘middle grace’:

I hope to make a plausible case that much of what has been identified as a moral consensus based on natural revelation is more accurately seen as a product of general and special

revelation. Pagans hold to certain moral principles that are compatible with Christian morality not only because they are inescapably confronted with God's revelation in creation, but also because they have been directly or indirectly exposed to and influenced by the Spirit operating through special revelation and the other means of grace. Whatever moral consensus exists is thus not a product of pure 'common grace' (devoid of all contact with revelation), nor of 'special grace' (saving knowledge of God through Christ and his word), but what I call... 'middle grace' (non-saving knowledge of God and his will derived from both general and special revelation). To put it another way, because of the cultural influence of the Bible, unbelievers in America are more Christian than unbelievers in Irian Jaya. To put it another way, there is and has never existed a pure 'common grace' cultural situation.⁶⁷

Given the role that Scripture has played in the history and culture of the United Kingdom, isn't she a classic example of 'middle grace' living now off the borrowed capital of a distinctively Christian worldview? Is not it a plausible narrative that this 'Christian' worldview that was once cherished gradually became 'assumed' and that the seeds of its subsequent demise were in that 'assumption'? Hasn't this demise been due in large part to marginalising the Christian written rule and norm – Scripture? Isn't this a significant factor as to the state we are in? Don't we exacerbate this marginalisation, encourage the *status quo*, and stifle deep-rooted recovery in our suggestion that it is natural law rather than the Bible that should be the 'norm' to speak into our public life and culture?

Interestingly, William Wilberforce appears to have made exactly this point two hundred years ago in his best-seller, *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes in This Country Contrasted with Real Christianity*:

The fatal habit of considering Christian morals as distinct from Christian doctrines insensibly gained strength. Thus the peculiar doctrines of Christianity went more and more out of sight and as might naturally have been expected, the moral system itself also began to wither and decay, being robbed of that which should have supplied it with life and nutriment.⁶⁸

3.3. Apologetic Insufficiencies of the Common-Kingdom Model

In our particular context, when it comes to matters of public theology, public debate and public policy, one might level the criticism that appeals to Scripture are not only theologically misguided but apologetically idealistic, naïve, and do not deal with '*real politik*'. Even if one's aspirations are limited to that of cultural preservation rather than cultural transformation, Ken Myers deems that natural-law argument will be more persuasive than those based on Scripture:

Telling a late-20th century pagan that he has disobeyed God's word is likely to have little rhetorical power. Telling him that he has, in C. S. Lewis' terms, gone 'against the grain of the universe' might well pack a bit more rhetorical punch, especially if the inevitability of cosmic splinters is spelled out. In a culture that tends to regard all rules and all religion as merely conventional, biblical law language is horribly easy to ignore.⁶⁹

Four comments can be made here, taking into account the theological and historical points I have already outlined.

First, unsupported natural-law arguments *can* be susceptible to the charge of confusing description with prescription. Thus, they commit a number of common logical fallacies, especially a version of the naturalistic fallacy (getting 'ought' from 'is')⁷⁰ and sociological fallacy (moral evaluation comes from social consensus).⁷¹

Second, and maybe pointing to a difference between the United States and United Kingdom, is there the moral consensus on some of the ethical issues that natural-law advocates point to? In 1970, A. N. Triton (a pseudonym) defended a 'creation ethic' similar to natural law: 'It is, for instance, almost universally regarded as obvious that marital faithfulness is something to be preserved as of great importance and that breaches of the moral bond are wrong'.⁷² Looking back, forty years on, such a statement now seems tragically 'of its time'.⁷³

Returning to my previous historical point, if a society like ours *has* preserved the sanctity of marriage, could this not be because of the influence of the gospel and scriptural teaching, rather than a non-supplemented natural revelation? Given the sinful suppression and exchange of truth, a 'naked' natural law would seem no basis on which to build a society. As Leithart speculates, 'Can one discern from rational reflection on history and experience that man is *imago Dei*? Will he not perhaps conclude that man instead is *imago diaboli*?'⁷⁴ Isn't it those 'peculiar Christian doctrines' that we should be referencing and promoting? To put it another way, while *theologically* it may never be legitimate, *practically* arguing from natural law maybe more possible in a more 'Christianised' culture where there is a higher degree of latent moral, ethical, and even spiritual consensus. It becomes less possible as this Christian consensus crumbles and collapses. At this point I tentatively and, I realize provocatively, suggest that our 'collapse' in the United Kingdom is further along than the United States context in which the advocates of natural law find themselves. Would common-kingdom supporters advocate natural law as strongly as they do if they were living and ministering this side of the Atlantic?

Third, while some natural-law language is so vague that it is of little substantive use (e.g., 'human dignity as such'), some natural-law language is simply 'too theological to pass itself off as a common language for believer and unbeliever'.⁷⁵ In other words, is appealing to scriptural authority any less persuasive than arguing that we are made in the image of God? This is Leithart's critique of J. Budziszewski, who is arguably the most sophisticated (and certainly the most prolific) conservative defender of natural law.⁷⁶ Concerning Budziszewski's *The Line Through the Heart: Natural Law as Fact, Theory, and Sign of Contradiction*, Leithart notes that the persuasiveness of the language that Budziszewski employs (e.g., the image of God) requires a 'conversion' just as much as 'The Bible says' language: 'At its best, this book is a book of apologetics and evangelism; not *proto-evangelism*, but evangelism *per se*'.⁷⁷ This may be a simplistic way of putting it, but if natural-law arguments are going to be seen as offensive and 'theological' as arguments which derive from Scripture, given both the epistemological priority of the latter over the former, together with gospel contained in the latter and not in the former, wouldn't it make more apologetic sense to try to get to the Bible as soon as possible?

Fourth, and related to the previous point, we continue on the epistemological ultimacy of Scripture. In his own appreciative yet critical take on Budziszewski's work, Frame notes that the philosopher has a high view of Scripture and that he admits in several places that natural law can be vindicated and grounded only in the Word of God:

If one presents a natural law argument to someone who doesn't believe in natural law, who keeps challenging the authority on which the law is based, ultimately the argument must have recourse to Scripture. So natural-law arguments ultimately depend on arguments from Scripture... Natural-law arguments are, in fact, natural law arguments warranted by the Bible. That doesn't mean that every natural law argument must be accompanied by Bible texts; rather, when an argument attempts to trace natural law back to its ultimate foundation, that foundation must be located in Scripture.⁷⁸

4. Some Caveats and Clarifications on the Sufficiency of Scripture for Public Theology

Where does this critique of natural-law arguments leave us? Before I come to a conclusion, it might be helpful to note what I am and am not saying.

I am saying that our overall trajectory and ambition, however long-term or far-off or seemingly unreachable now, should be towards distinctive Christian confession and thinking in every area of life including the public and political realm. Thus, we need explicitly biblical engagement. This is Frame's vision for the United States, and it should equally be ours for the United Kingdom:

We should never investigate nature without the spectacles of Scripture. And that same conclusion follows from the very nature of politics according to Scripture. The ultimate goal of political apologetics is nothing less than to present Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The political goal of biblical Christianity is a civil state that acknowledges him for who he is. For every institution of human culture, as well as every individual human being, is called to do homage to King Jesus. We may not reach that goal in the course of modern political debate, but that is where the debate should point, and we may well find occasion to tell unbelievers, in all honesty, that this is the direction in which we would urge society to move. And if the Lord tarries, it should not be unthinkable that one day our society could become predominantly Christian, so that the people will be, not only tolerant of biblical arguments, but eager to hear them. When and if this happens, we should certainly not refuse to bring the Bible into the public square.⁷⁹

What does explicitly biblical engagement mean? Here a number of clarifications are in order.

First, I am not denying natural revelation or even an appeal to natural-law arguments, for God does reveal himself through nature, history, experience, etc. We need natural revelation to apply the 'divine words' of Scripture to any given situation. Natural-law arguments may have their place in certain cultural situations and can be deployed. They may be persuasive on occasion. What I question, however, especially in *our* current cultural context, is the stability and prescriptive power of natural law as a *basis* for public theology and moral consensus and the apologetic appeal and persuasive power of a 'naked' natural law *apart* from the ultimate supplementation of Scripture. 'A complete ethical argument must appeal to the ultimate source of moral authority. And for Protestant Christians that is Scripture and Scripture alone'.⁸⁰ Therefore, we should not be surprised but rather be prepared when our appeal to natural revelation, or our appeal to language like 'dignity' or 'the image of God', is questioned, so moving us back down the epistemological truth chain and appeals to scriptural authority.

Second, in affirming the sufficiency of Scripture for public theology, I am not advocating quotations of chapter and verse from big floppy Bibles in every conversation within every sphere of society. We will want to contextualise biblical teaching in a way that is appropriate and persuasive to our audience. This was perhaps Stephen Green's biggest mistake. We will want to be subtle, strategic, and subversive, which may mean different levels of discourse for the pastor and the politician. However, into whatever vocation we have been called, first, our arguments will be shaped by Scripture, and when appropriate our ultimate authority can and should be named. We are *Christians* who should be arguing *Christianly*, worried not so much what others think of us but what the Lord Jesus thinks.

Given our culture's current trajectory, I would expect epistemological uncovering to be happening more and more as the 'borrowed capital' of past Christian influence dwindles more and more. In a situation where we often feel increasingly threatened, we are actually being presented with a tremendous apologetic opportunity. If we have been guilty of a crisis of confidence in the public role

of the Bible in recent years, this must be set against a wider and more desperate crisis of confidence in society itself, which has led to obvious gaps and ‘fissures’. In the language of Jeremiah, we see more and more the tragedy and futility of trying to get water from broken cisterns, be they personal, public, or political. Our job, using God’s Word, is not only to expose this futility but to point to the fount of living water, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Third, I have said very little regarding the content of the Bible’s teaching on the wealth of cultural, political, economic, and ethical issues involved in a public theology and the hermeneutical models (e.g., regarding the place of the law) that presuppose and undergird differing conclusions regarding what the Bible teaches. In a similar way that a constitution is to be distinguished from legislation, my aim in this paper has been to discuss the base or ground for public theology rather than its content. Suffice it to say that there are a number of Reformed models currently available with differing levels of specificity when it comes to the sufficient ‘divine words’ on these subjects.⁸¹ Such internal discussion needs to continue and with some urgency so that we have the semblance of a constructive answer when we are asked on any piece of public policy, ‘So, what would you do then?’ If this is to happen, we will need different Christians in all their vocations and callings to be working together and supporting one another: public theologians reflecting practically, public servants reflecting theologically, and pastors preaching, teaching, and discipling relevantly.

Fourth, there are those who fear that speaking of the Bible’s role in the public sphere might distract from our evangelistic task. Conversely, others fear that bringing the Bible into matters of public life might actually marginalise our voice and so thwart social transformation (or even social preservation for that matter). To both of these groups, I make two observations:

First, I suggest that what I am proposing should encourage more evangelism and enable social transformation to take place if God should allow.⁸² Our cultural analysis has been greatly helped in recent years by recovering and deploying the pervasive biblical category of idolatry.⁸³ In Isaiah’s cutting satirical exposé of idolatry in Isaiah 44, the prophet makes a profound comment regarding the idolater’s activity: ‘no one stops to think’ (Isaiah 44:19). Part of our apologetic and evangelistic task is ‘offensive’ to make all people, whoever they are and whatever they do, stop and think about their ultimate commitments (what the Bible calls their idols), what they are, what they promise, and what they deliver. We hope that this in turn will lead to an opportunity to describe our ultimate commitment to Jesus Christ and what he offers.

At this point we are way beyond reasoning from natural law but reasoning from Scripture. Of course, this is nothing more than a presuppositional apologetic method applied more broadly to societal engagement and public theology. Such a method has a transcendental thrust which demonstrates the solidity and true ‘rationality’ of Christian commitment by exposing the weak and irrational commitments of every other worldview.

Within the more mainstream academic discourse on public theology, such a method might not be as unappetising (or better, and using Rorty’s phrase, ‘conversation stopping’⁸⁴) as it first appears. For example, Gavin D’Costa remarks that a scholar like Jeffrey Stout has noted the importance of the ‘religious’ and ‘non-religious’ being able to ‘argue’ for basic commitments:

In his critical discussion of Rorty, Jeffrey Stout makes a very pertinent point about religion being a conversation-stopper by helpfully distinguishing between two aspects of religion in such public discourse:

We need to distinguish between discursive problems that arise because religious premises are not widely shared and those that arise because the people who avow such premises are not prepared to argue for them.

The latter is certainly not the preserve of religions, for Stout adds, 'Everyone holds some beliefs on nonreligious topics without claiming to know that they are true' (2004, 87). But the distinction is helpful in clarifying where the problem lies: certainly in religious and non-religious people not being able to 'argue' in support of their basic commitments and claims.⁸⁵

If Stout is correct, then with some confidence the Christian can participate in public discourse. In Proverbs 1:20 we read of the activities of Lady Wisdom, a personification of the living God:

Wisdom cries aloud in the street,
In the markets she raises her voice;
At the head of the noisy streets she cries out;
At the entrance of the city gates she speaks:

Given our ambassadorial role, are not Christians in our busy and congested public square not simply to speak up but rather prophetically to cry out over the 'noise' of contemporary idol-worship, a modernistic secular liberalism (with its totalitarian 'neutralising' of particularity), a postmodern secular pragmatism (with its exchange of the universal for the particular and its impotency in offering anything other than 'irresolvable conflict of cultures and discourses, without any possibility of mediation'⁸⁶), and a radical Islamic worldview? With discernment and wisdom, we will be looking for opportunities to speak in the 'thick' language of Christian particularity rather than a 'thin' discourse because we want to give a reason for the hope we have in the gospel, hope not just for individuals but for families and communities and nations. We will be looking for opportunities to speak of Jesus Christ, one greater than Solomon and the true embodiment of 'wisdom'. And when we are anxious that speaking 'Christianly' will threaten our place in the public square and our contribution to social transformation, we need to remember that real social transformation comes about only through conversion through encountering Jesus in the Word of God and by the regenerating and illuminating power of the Spirit. In summary, given our current context: our public theology *is* public apologetics and *is* public evangelism.

Second, and concerning the 'who does what' question, I reiterate the need to affirm structural and institutional pluralism distinguishing between the God-given roles and responsibilities of 'church' and 'Church', between what Kuyper calls the church as 'institute' and the church as 'organism',⁸⁷ or between what Carson calls the 'church as a church in the world' and 'Christians in the world'.⁸⁸ Some careful and joined-up thinking between these domains is imperative and in my opinion will lead to complementary strategies which mandate societal involvement and influence from both the bottom up (with its bubble-up effect) and from the top down (with its trickle-down effect).⁸⁹ Similarly, such thinking may make possible a harmonisation between what sociologist Robert Putnam calls 'church-centred *bonding*' (or exclusive) social capital, as opposed to 'community centred *bridging*' (or inclusive) social capital.⁹⁰

5. Concluding with a Public Challenge

2011 could well be labelled 'the year of the Bible'. Within the church in the UK, a major initiative *Biblefresh* has been launched with the aim of encouraging a greater confidence and passion for Scripture across the Church.⁹¹ Internationally, *Biblemesh* is a new online resource to encourage biblical literacy in churches all over the world.⁹² As welcome as these initiatives are, they are aimed primarily at Christians, preaching to the converted as it were. What about those outside the church?

In my introduction, I note the monumental rise and fall of the Bible in British public life. Even within this arena, however, 2011 presents us with a remarkable and rare window of opportunity given the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible. While *The Telegraph's* Christopher Howse may be guilty of

overstatement when we writes, 'Britain is going Bible bananas,'⁹³ there has certainly been a level of media exposure not usually accorded the Word of God. Although one might baulk at the way in which the Queen and the Archbishop of Canterbury chose to mark this anniversary in their respective Christmas Day and New Year's day addresses,⁹⁴ to have the Bible front and centre in the public consciousness certainly did no harm and may have done some good.

If there is any momentum gathering for British society, just for a few months, to give a hearing to the Bible and its place in British culture and history, won't those who sit under the Word, who truly believe it to be the King's speech and the most valuable thing this world affords, do all they can to capitalise on this exposure? Confidently, courageously, prayerfully, and unashamedly, let us take every opportunity that God gives us, formally and informally, to point to Scripture, the Lord Jesus we encounter in it, and its comprehensive sufficiency for all 'faith and life'.

¹ This article is a revised version of a paper originally presented and discussed at the Affinity Theological Conference in England in February 2011. A slightly edited version has been published in *Themelios* Vol. 36/2 July 2011 (available at http://thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/not_ashamed_the_sufficiency_of_scripture_for_public_theology). I wish to thank Andrew Marsh and Timothy Edwards for their insightful comments and criticisms on an earlier draft of this paper.

² Played by Colin Firth.

³ Played by Geoffrey Rush.

⁴ 'Magna opera Domini exquisita in omnes voluntates ejus'.

⁵ Cited in Susan Elkin, 'Restoring Holy Order', *The Independent* (October 17, 2010), <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/restoring-holy-order-is-the-king-james-bible-the-only-version-we-should-celebrate-2105869.html>.

⁶ Boyd Tonkin, 'Battles of a Book', *The Independent* (December 31, 2010), <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/battles-of-a-book-the-king-james-bibles-history-of-dissent-and-inspiration-2171902.html>.

⁷ Campbell was Tony Blair's combative 'spin doctor' who interjected when a journalist deigned to ask the then Prime Minister about his faith.

⁸ E.g., the works of Francis Schaeffer, David Wells, Os Guinness, Herbert Schlossberg, and most recently, James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Nancy Pearcey, *Saving Leonardo: A Call to Resist the Secular Assault on Mind, Morals, and Meaning* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010).

⁹ Let us use John Bolt's definition of public theology ('North American Evangelical Public Theology Today' [public lecture, 2008; transcript given to the author]): "by 'public theology' I have in mind the careful, theological thinking about why and how Christians should bear witness in the public square. Included here are questions about how a believer personally relates to public institutions, how Christians thinks about the best way public order should be constituted, how and to what extent a Christian should strive to influence public policy... It is useful to use the term "public theology" to indicate those aspects of theological reflection that are intentionally directed to the interface between the Christian faith and public life, understood now as the equally intentional efforts of life in the public civic community, a community shared by many who do not share our faith'.

¹⁰ Indeed sometimes it seems between Westminster campuses and alumni.

¹¹ While I will demonstrate that there are significant differences between these two positions, I do not want to lose perspective and minimise the broader theological commonality which unites them both. This is an internal 'family' dispute within Reformed theology.

¹² John Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed), 188.

¹³ 'The natural man, "sins against" his own essentially Satanic principle. As the Christian has the incubus of his "old man" weighing him down and therefore keeping him from realizing the "life of Christ" within him, so the

natural man has the incubus of the sense of Deity weighing him down and keeping him from realizing the life of Satan within him' (Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1974], 27).

¹⁴ For a general introduction, see Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1979).

¹⁵ More broadly, I would want to argue that these 'Reformed' givens are faithful to the non-negotiable biblical theological plot-line and turning points as articulated by D. A. Carson in *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008).

¹⁶ In a larger theological context and compared to, say, dispensationalism, Reformed theology is itself a model of continuity.

¹⁷ I have decided to use the title common-kingdom over the more usual 'two kingdoms' title (remembering that the 'common' kingdom is one of these 'two' kingdoms). The phrase 'two kingdoms' is classically associated with Lutheranism, what Niebuhr well describes as 'Christ and culture in paradox' (H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* [enlarged ed.; San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2001]). As the Augsburg Confession of Faith states, 'Christ's kingdom is spiritual; it is knowledge of God in the heart, the fear of God and faith, the beginning of eternal righteousness and eternal life. At the same time it lets us make outward use of the legitimate political ordinances of the nation in which we live, just as it lets us make use of medicine or architecture, food or drink or air. The gospel does not introduce any new laws about the civil estate, but commands us to obey existing laws, whether they were formulated by heathens or by others, and in obedience to practice love'. Recent Reformed writers have baptized 'two-kingdoms' as the title for their own position on the relationship between Christ and culture.

¹⁸ E.g., Meredith Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000).

¹⁹ E.g., Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008)

²⁰ E.g., Daryl Hart, *A Secular Faith: Why Christianity Favors the Separation of Church and State* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 2006), 250–51.

²¹ Stephen Grabhill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006).

²² Ken Myers, 'Christianity, Culture and Common Grace', at <http://www.marshillaudio.org/resources/pdf/ComGrace.pdf>.

²³ See David VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, 2006); idem, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); idem, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010).

²⁴ VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, 24.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁶ As Meredith Kline notes, 'Apropos of the fifth word [commandment], it is in this New Testament age not a legitimate function of a civil government to endorse and support religious establishments. This principle applies equally to the Christian church; for though its invisible government is theocratic with Christ sitting on David's throne in the heavens and ruling over it, yet its visible organization, in particular as it is related to civil powers, is so designed that it takes a place of only common privilege along with other religious institutions within the framework of common grace' (*The Structure of Biblical Authority* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972], 167).

²⁷ VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 26. It should be noted though that human beings continue to live and be obligated under the cultural mandate as refracted through the Noahic covenant (78–81).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

³⁰ VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, 38.

³¹ This is a term given to the original article by the *Modern Reformation* editors themselves in their joint ‘response’ with Gordon in a subsequent edition of the magazine, a response brought about by several critical responses to the original paper ‘Response from T. David Gordon’ *Modern Reformation* 11/3 (May-June), 46.

³² T. David Gordon, ‘Critique of Theonomy: A Taxonomy’, *WTJ* 56 (1994): 23–43.

³³ ‘The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or the traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge... that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and the government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed’ (*WCF* 1:6).

³⁴ T. David Gordon, ‘The Insufficiency of Scripture’, *Modern Reformation* 11:1 (January–February 2002): 19.

³⁵ Chapter 7 of *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms* looks at the topics of education, vocation, and politics.

³⁶ VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, 40. VanDrunen cites several biblical instances of ‘pagans’ demonstrating natural law: Abimelech’s recognition in Gen 20 that Abraham had done ‘things that should not be done’; Abimelech’s ‘fear of God’ in Gen 20:11; and ‘a common humanity’ illustrated by Job (taken here to have been bereft of special revelation) in his reflection of his past conduct in Job 31:13–15.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 40–41.

³⁸ Hart, *A Secular Faith*, 256.

³⁹ I am intentionally using the term confessional rather than a term like transformational because in my experience the latter can be unhelpfully misleading and distracting.

⁴⁰ E.g., Al Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformation Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986). I should note that there are versions of Dooyeweridian sphere sovereignty that can resemble a common kingdom position and thus susceptible to the same critique. See Frame, *Doctrine of the Word of God*, 392–421.

⁴¹ Vern S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1991).

⁴² E.g., Peter J. Leithart, *Against Christianity* (Moscow: Canon Press, 2003); *idem*, *Defending Constantine* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2010)

⁴³ E.g., John M. Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2008).

⁴⁴ Michael Williams, ‘A Restorational Alternative to Augustinian Verticalist Eschatology’, *Pro Rege* (June 1992): 15.

⁴⁵ David Bruce Hegeman, *Plowing in Hope: Toward a Biblical Theology of Culture* (Moscow: Canon Press), 88.

⁴⁶ Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 310.

⁴⁷ I.e., the ‘secular’ state is in reality itself a ‘confessional’ state.

⁴⁸ John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed), 218. Key verses he cites are 1 Cor 10:31; Col. 3:17; Rom 14:23.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 224.

⁵¹ To use Cornelius Van Til’s categories in ‘Nature and Scripture’, in *The Infallible Word: A Symposium* (ed. N. B. Stonehouse and Paul Woolley; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1967).

⁵² Daniel Strange, ‘Is General Revelation Sufficient?’ in *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism* (ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson; Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 40–77.

⁵³ This important insight was made by Vos in his category of ‘pre-redemptive special revelation’, and Van Til elaborated on it.

⁵⁴ As Leithart (*Natural Law*, 26) notes, 'If by "natural law" one means simply "moral truth" then the Decalogue is a summary of natural law. If by natural law one means law that everyone is obligated to obey, then the Decalogue is natural law. If by natural law one means law that is rooted in the very nature of things, in the character of God and the nature of the world He has made, then again the Decalogue is natural law. But if by natural law one refers to moral principles that man is capable of discovering apart from special revelation, then the Decalogue is not natural law'.

⁵⁵ This 'suppression' and 'exchange' is variegated according to God's sovereign restraint through common grace.

⁵⁶ Paul J. Visser, *Heart for the Gospel, Heart for the World: The Life and Thought of a Reformed Pioneer Missiologist Johan Herman Bavinck (1895–1964)* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 144. Visser is quoting J. H. Bavinck, *Religieus besef en christelijk geloof* (Religious Consciousness and Christian Faith; Kampen: Kok, 1949), still not translated into English.

⁵⁷ Leithart, *Natural Law*, 19–20.

⁵⁸ Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 141.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 248.

⁶⁰ Williams' lecture 'Civil and Religious Law in England: A Religious Perspective' (<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1137/archbishops-lecture-civil-and-religious-law-in-england-a-religious-perspective>) was given at the Royal Courts of Justice. This example and analysis was originally brought to my attention by David Field.

⁶¹ Frame writes, 'Are any of these grounds or motivations available to unbelievers? Yes and no. Unbelievers as well as believers *ought* to appeal to the character of God and to the creation ordinances, because they are human beings. Unbelievers have no right, as unbelievers, to appeal to God's redemptive acts and presence; but they ought to become believers, so that they can make this appeal. Given that condition, unbelievers as well as believers should make their ethical decisions based on God's redemptive acts, his commands, and his presence. The whole Bible, in other words, is God's standard for all people, believers and unbelievers alike. God has not ordained separate ethics for believers and unbelievers. All human beings are subject to the same standard and ought to be motivated in the same way' (review of David VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, http://www.frame-poythress.org/frame_articles/2010VanDrunen.htm).

⁶² Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (ed. J. T. Dennison; trans. G. M. Giger; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992), Topic 9. Q. 6. IX.

⁶³ Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 136.

⁶⁴ Gavin D'Costa, Paul Knitter & Daniel Strange. *Only One Way? Three Christian Responses to the Uniqueness of Christ in a Pluralistic World* (London: SCM, 2011), 120.

⁶⁵ Kevin Vanhoozer, 'What is Everyday Theology?' in *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends* (ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 27.

⁶⁶ This is by no means a novel idea but rather an ancient one seen in traditions like the *prisca theologia*, revived and reformed by scholars such as Jonathan Edwards. See Gerald McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁶⁷ Peter J. Leithart, *Did Plato Read Moses? Middle Grace and Moral Consensus* (Biblical Horizons Occasional Paper 23; Niceville, FL: Biblical Horizons, 1995), 4–5.

⁶⁸ Quoted in John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), 25.

⁶⁹ Ken Myers, 'Natural Law without Shame', *Tabletalk* 18:5 (April 1994): 61.

⁷⁰ Frame (*Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 247, 954) argues that Budziszewski does this regarding his argument against contraception.

⁷¹ This is the criticism of Kloosterman in his review of VanDrunen's *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*. See Kloosterman's review with a robust response by VanDrunen in the December 2007 edition of *Ordained Servant Online* (http://www.opc.org/os.html?issue_id=26).

⁷² A. N. Triton, *Whose World?* (London: IVP, 1970), 84.

⁷³ As Julian Rivers pointed out in 2004, 'It may be that a culture deviates in some respect from the law of God to such an extent that some moral positions seem defensible to Scripture alone. We may rapidly be reaching that point in the Western world as regards sexual ethics' ('Public Reason', *Whitefield Briefing* 9:1 [May 2004]: 4). One thinks here of a country like Switzerland currently discussing the decriminalization of consensual incest and the U.S. case of David Epstein, charged with having a three-year affair with his adult daughter. Epstein's lawyer said to ABCNews, 'Academically, we are obviously all morally opposed to incest and rightfully so. At the same time, there is an argument to be made in the Swiss case to let go what goes on privately in bedrooms. It's OK for homosexuals to do whatever they want in their own home... How is this so different? We have to figure out why some behavior is tolerated and some is not' (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/12/15/david-epsteins-lawyer-we-_n_797138.html).

⁷⁴ Leithart, *Natural Law*, 27.

⁷⁵ Found in Peter Leithart's short review of J. Budziszewski, *The Line through the Heart: Natural Law as Fact, Theory, and Sign of Contradiction* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2009), <http://www.leithart.com/2010/05/14/natural-law/>.

⁷⁶ Budziszewski was an evangelical who became a Roman Catholic in 2003. Although his defence of natural law is now within a Catholic context, his arguments are very similar to those who defend natural law from a Reformed common-kingdom perspective.

⁷⁷ Leithart, review of Budziszewski, <http://www.leithart.com/2010/05/14/natural-law/>.

⁷⁸ Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 245.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 249–50.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 956.

⁸¹ E.g., Frame, Poythress, and Bahnsen. I would also include Chris Wright's 'paradigmatic' approach, which is a biblical foundation for the work of the Jubilee Centre. See his *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Nottingham: IVP, 2004).

⁸² It is important that we distinguish the different roles and responsibilities that we have in our individual vocations and between the 'church as church' contrasted with 'Christians in the world'.

⁸³ Deployed most popularly by Tim Keller. See his *Counterfeit Gods* (London: Hodder, 2009).

⁸⁴ Richard Rorty, 'Religions as a Conversation-Stopper', in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 166–67.

⁸⁵ Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 119.

⁸⁶ D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 117.

⁸⁷ On Kuyper's teaching here, see Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation*, 427–28.

⁸⁸ D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Nottingham: IVP, 2008), 197. I have dealt with this in a little more detail in my 'Evangelical Public Theology: What on Earth? Why on Earth? How on Earth?' in *A Higher Throne: Evangelicals and Public Theology* (ed. Chris Green; Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 58–61. As I mention there, Tuit's statement is very helpful: 'The Kuyperian statement that every square inch of life belongs to Christ cannot be applied only to the institutional Church. Consequently, the leadership of the pastor is a special kind of leadership in close connection with the idea of office and the Word. The believer is accountable to God for the Christian leadership he gives in society as a citizen of the Kingdom guided by the Word preached and taught by the "church" leader, the pastor. One could say therefore that the life of the believer is mission, within the context of the cultural and the mission mandate, rather than that the church is mission' (Pieter C. Tuit, 'The Relationship between the Great Commission and World Transformation: Outline for a Reformed

Missiology', in *For God So Loved the World: Missiological Reflections in Honor of Roger S. Greenway* (ed. Arie C. Leder; Belleville, Ontario: Essence, 2006), 137n56.

⁸⁹ Here, and on the subject of cultural change, Hunter's *To Change the World* is particularly stimulating.

⁹⁰ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 13, quoted in Coffee, 'The State and Social Transformation', 100. In my opinion the work and ministry of Tim Keller is a leading example of such a harmonization. See his recent book *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes us Just* (London: Hodder, 2010).

⁹¹ <http://www.biblefresh.com>.

⁹² <http://www.biblemesh.com>.

⁹³ Christopher Howse, 'The Global Phenomenon that will never be lost in translation,' *The Daily Telegraph* (November 23, 2010), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/religion/8151865/The-global-phenomenon-that-will-never-be-lost-in-translation.html>.

⁹⁴ Noting the 'co-operative endeavour' shown in the translation of the KJV, the Queen speaks of building communities and creating harmony through sport and games. Less tangentially, Rowan Williams speaks of the KJV capturing people's imagination by making sense of life and putting their individual stories into one big story, the story of the whole universe.