Two Kingdoms versus Two Kingdoms
Assessing Natural Law through an Analysis of David VanDrunen’s 
*A Biblical Case for Natural Law*

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ABSTRACT

Natural law theory remains an issue of perennial interest and controversy, particularly within the church. Dr. David VanDrunen’s, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, presents his understanding of natural law theory in the context of a two kingdoms understanding of God’s rule of reality. This work is critiqued with a triperspectival analysis based on the ontologic Trinity. The analysis reveals a faulty epistemology and empiricist ethic in the book which results in confusion between teleological goods and moral imperatives. Thus, the natural law position of Dr. VanDrunen fails to provide an adequate basis for biblical moral reasoning.

Introduction

“Natural law remains an issue of perennial interest and controversy. In a day when debates about moral standards continue to rage fiercely in both the church and broader society, the question of natural law is as timely as ever.” Dr. David VanDrunen begins his conclusion to his book, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, with these wise words. While I agree with his concerns, I disagree with his conclusions which advocate natural law as a solution. Natural law theory’s history in Christian thought reaches back to the Greco-Roman world; it has developed and continues to have profound influence even today. Unfortunately, no one theory or development of natural law is definitive. Dr. VanDrunen, along with the Acton Institute, a Catholic-Protestant think tank has promoted a biblically based natural law theory in the context of a two kingdoms view of God’s governance of the cosmos. This book, as well as his other work, point to the efforts he is pouring into the advocacy of these ideas. If he is correct, then there are significant implications for Christians in society, particularly this society in the United States. Pushing the ideas to their logical conclusion, Darryl Hart who sees himself as a
Christian secularist, writes, "My basic argument is that the basic teachings of Christianity are virtually useless for resolving America’s political disputes, thus significantly reducing, if not eliminating, the dilemma of how to relate Christianity and American politics." To be fair, Hart may be correct in his characterization of Christian teaching in its relationship to politics in America. That relationship is a separate topic worthy of sustained reflection and commentary; it is outside of the purview of this paper. It is the underlying idea of Hart, which is really the thrust of Dr. VanDrunen’s book, which is of concern to this paper. Hart writes, “The more profound issue is that Christianity is essentially a spiritual and eternal faith, one occupied with a world to come rather than the passing and temporal affairs of this world.” This dichotomous understanding of the relationship of the Christian faith and the world is at the core of Dr. VanDrunen’s work. This work is reflective of much Catholic and Reformed teaching on the subject of ethics and needs to be critically evaluated. At stake is a proper understanding of God, the gospel of our Lord, and its relationship to the world and Christian witness.

How does God relate to the world? How are we to carry out Jesus’ command: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:18-19)? I was recently reflecting on ethics and natural law when I chanced to see a portion of a movie, August Rush. It gave me a profound insight into music, an understanding I had been lacking but struggling to gain. What is it about music that makes it so powerful? For instance, music is prominently displayed in Scripture, particularly associated with the worship of God. In this particular scene, the young protagonist was discovering music, or rather the means to express the musical gift inside of him. The scene unfolded by correlating the sounds of the outside world which the boy was experiencing with what he was expressing in the music he was writing and producing. I realized that the power of music resides in the experience of God’s creation with the means to express it in harmonious sound. In other words, all of the created order is a symphony, arranged by God for His glory; music is an analogous expression of that symphony given to us as a gift by God. Through that gift, we appreciate God’s truth, enjoying it and him in the beauty of his holiness. To understand God’s world, our relationship to it and responsibility in it, including most importantly Christ’s command in the Great Commission, requires that we see God’s holiness as expressed in his unity and comprehensiveness. Germaine to our particular topic, Herman Bavinck writes:

In this situation, the hope is not unfounded that a synthesis is possible between Christianity and culture, however antagonistic they may presently stand over against each other. If God has truly come to us in Christ, and is, in this age too, the Preserver and Ruler of all things, such a synthesis is not only possible but also necessary and shall surely be effected in its own time.

The position argued in this paper is that the natural law theory, positioned in the two kingdoms context, as argued by Dr. VanDrunen, is inadequate to account for the
integration and unity of Christ’s reign and therefore fails to provide an adequate ethic for either Christians or non-Christians.

In order to come to a Christian ethic we will first evaluate Dr. VanDrunen’s ideas as articulated in A Biblical Case for Natural Law. Dr. VanDrunen’s work represents a cogent and vigorous defense of the natural law theory based on biblical support. His work is also important because he represents a Reformed thinker, working in conjunction with our Catholic friends at the Acton Institute, as they both work to guide our churches and society into a means for making ethical decisions and negotiating the moral landscape that confronts contemporary society. Basing our ethic on biblical principles is fundamental to pleasing God. To that end, we all should strive, and so we applaud Dr. VanDrunen in his work. Naturally, there is room for discussion and this paper represents an attempt to analyze his work in order to contribute to this important topic. We will proceed first with a presentation of Dr. VanDrunen’s argument as put forth in his book, then move onto a triperspectival presentation. Based on that presentation we will be in a position to make some helpful comments on natural law ethics and its usefulness for the church and society.

**Presentation of A Biblical Case for Natural Law.**

The work under consideration starts with a justification for discussing natural law yet again, since it has been a topic of “recurring interest in the history of Western civilization...addressed by many of the greatest philosophers, theologians, and political and legal theorists over the centuries.”\(^viii\) He wants to pursue this topic because “[t]he claim that all people, of whatever culture, historical milieu, or religion, know the basics of what is right and wrong at the core of their being is a staggering assertion.”\(^ix\) It is a claim that there can be and are “virtuous pagans.” How to understand this in light of Paul’s assertions that there are “none righteous, no, not one,” is difficult at best.\(^x\) The author is interested in combating the skepticism that has arisen over natural law, a skepticism which he sees as being without historical foundation. He believes that the church has had good biblical rationale for a natural law ethic and wants to present to us an “explicitly biblical defense for the existence and practical importance of natural law.”\(^\text{xii}\) By doing this he wants to argue that, “the reality of natural law is grounded in God’s own nature and the creation of human beings in the divine image.”\(^\text{xiii}\) He hopes to demonstrate “that appealing to natural law should not be taken as an appeal to human autonomy but ultimately to the authority of God the Creator,” and “that one can appreciate the importance of natural law while giving appropriate consideration to the Bible’s historical character.”\(^\text{xiii}\)

Having laid out his justification for this book, Dr. VanDrunen develops his argument in the next three chapters and follows that with his conclusion. Beginning in Chapter 2 “Natural Law and Human Nature,” he links our ability to know and do what is right and wrong to God’s nature as it is reflected in us as his image bearers. “In short, God is by nature a moral being—just, holy, and righteous in all that he does—and he created
human beings in his image, making them also to be moral creatures by nature, knowing God’s law and commissioned to perform it. The natural law is not autonomous human activity, but rather is grounded in God because we are his image bearers. Natural law derives its authority from Him. God is shown in the pages of Scripture to be a moral, righteous judge, a royal king who dispenses justice and who creates an orderly world which reflects Him. God’s righteousness is nowhere better represented in the world than in humanity which bears His image and likeness. “Man was created with a moral character, made righteous by nature, and by nature he possessed a mandate to fulfill, that of ruling and subduing the world.” He relates human ontology with natural law when he writes:

Human beings do not simply possess the image of God as if it were only a part of who they are. Rather, they are the image of God. Image bearing is human nature...The image of God carried along with it a natural law, a law inherent to human nature and directing human beings to fulfill their royal commission in righteousness and holiness... Natural law reflects who God is and how he has related to the world.

Dr. VanDrunen develops the case for man’s original righteousness and its restoration through Christ by good biblical exegesis. He then turns to natural law in a fallen world, noting that the Fall brings corruption to man. While acknowledging man’s need for salvation and restoration to God, he firmly believes that “Scripture itself gives many reasons to appreciate the importance—even the necessity—of using and appealing to natural law in this fallen world.” His argument that natural law continues to function adequately for all men as a means for proper social intercourse is based on scriptural demonstration that 1) the image of God in man continues even after the Fall, which 2) entails that the cultural mandate is still in force in a world meant for man’s rule. This, along with Romans 1:18-32 and 2:14-15, leads him to conclude that “all people continue to have true knowledge of moral righteousness.” He goes on to show how this works in a fallen world.

The context for understanding how natural law regulates life in a fallen sinful world is given in the “two kingdoms” idea. This notion of how Christianity and culture relate to one another “received its name and its classical expression in the Reformation, first by Luther and then, with some minor modifications, by Calvin.” God continues to rule over this fallen world and he does so in two different ways. There is one king who rules both the civil realm (Luther—God’s “left hand” kingdom; Calvin—the “civil” kingdom) and the church. God is the creator and sustainer of the civil realm, but not its redeemer. Redemption is the end of the “right-hand” or “spiritual” kingdom and is effected by Christ. As Dr. VanDrunen puts it, this “kingdom pertains to things that are of ultimate and spiritual importance, the things of Christ’s heavenly, eschatological kingdom.” Clearly, there is an important dichotomy articulated, one that Dr. VanDrunen readily admits to and embraces. He believes that this dichotomy has both Old Testament and New Testament support.
The two kingdoms doctrine begins to be seen in biblical revelation in Genesis 3. The development of the civil realm is further articulated in the Noahic covenant and is contrasted with the particularity of the Abrahamic covenant. This covenant is the foundation for God’s spiritual kingdom and represents what is known in the Reformed tradition as the “covenant of grace.” It has a religious character. The nation of Israel further demonstrates the distinction between the civil and spiritual realms: Israel had two sets of laws, those that determined all of the life lived within the community and laws that controlled their dealings with the secular world outside of the community. Furthermore, when the chosen people were forced to live within secular societies, as occurred at various times in their history, they were to live according to the custom of the dominant society without attempting to transform it according to the laws of national Israel.

In the New Testament we see an expansion of the church which is no longer limited to an ethnic people group or a geopolitical institution as with ancient Israel. Dr. VanDrunen understands the church as a people in exile, similar to Israel in Babylon or Abraham and the patriarchs in the land of Canaan. The church’s “particularity and separation from the world is defined not in cultural or social terms, but in specifically religious terms in their worship and hope of eternal salvation.” He goes on to point out that Romans 13 calls Christians to understand that the reigning civil authorities have a calling from God which is a legitimate ministry separate from the church. The two realms are separate, having different authority structures, powers, and different ends. The spiritual realm is based on Christ’s redeeming work and is spiritual in nature, while the civil realm is based on creation and is strictly temporal. Christians live in both realms and are called to “a common cultural task with the world at large, though always knowing that they have no true home in this world (Phil. 3:20; Heb 11:10, 14-16; 13:14).”

Moving from this foundation, Chapter 4, “Natural Law in the Civil Kingdom,” argues explicitly that the civil realm is a moral realm. It is concerned with temporal affairs rather than salvation and eternal life, though still under God’s authority. The civil realm has many moral responsibilities and these are demonstrated in Scripture. It relies on its own moral standards which are given to it by natural law, not Scripture. Natural law is “God’s common moral revelation given to all people of whatever religious conviction,” while the New Testament Scriptures were given specifically “to the church, the new covenant people. Thus there is a covenant reality—a redemptive reality—that grounds the moral instruction in Scripture…The point is that the moral instruction given in Scripture cannot be taken simply as the moral standard for the world at large.” Dr. VanDrunen is concerned that when the moral indicatives of Scripture are lifted from their proper context, that of the redeemed covenant people, Scripture is misused and forced “to serve purposes for which God did not give it.” He emphasizes this point by saying “Scripture does not provide a common moral standard for Christians and non-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.” Scripture illustrates and supports “this common, natural moral standard through acknowledgement of ‘things not done,’ the fear of God, and a common humanity.” All of these are found in, and used by Scripture to teach that there is a
common natural law available for all people in order “to uphold a basic level of order and respect for human life and relationships.”

Having described natural law in the civil kingdom, the author, in Chapter 5, “Natural Law in the Spiritual Kingdom,” moves to describe natural law’s function among the redeemed. The idea of natural law “often subtly underlies the way in which Scripture sets forth the moral life that God’s redeemed people are to live.” Rightly so, he points out that the redeemed continue to have the *imago Dei*, in fact, have the image renewed. Remaining consistent with his earlier points, he notes that the life of image-bearer “cannot be one that is at odds with the original created order and its natural law. Instead, Christians are reestablished as the kind of creatures that can be what God originally intended his creatures to be: creatures living according to knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the creation.” The gist of his argument in this chapter is that the Scriptures makes use of the natural law ethic common to all men in order to illustrate, and define its biblical ethic, since the Bible and natural law, or special and general revelation cannot be at odds. While it makes use of natural law in these ways, it far transcends them. He even goes onto say that Scripture’s appropriation of the cultural achievements of the civil kingdom, as it delineates the ethics of the spiritual kingdom, indicates a high view of the natural law. He says, “Surely, the cultural achievements of the broader world, even those accomplished without any dependence upon Scripture but only with the light of natural law, should not be quickly despised (but always used with discernment).” So, he concludes, that “natural law and unbelieving interpretation of natural law become an important part of biblical ethics in the spiritual kingdom.”

To summarize his argument briefly, he says:

Natural law, I have argued, does not necessarily lead to an autonomous human ethic nor to a denigration of the importance of Scripture. On the contrary, Scripture itself teaches a rich theology of natural law. It grounds the reality of natural law in God’s creation of the world and especially of human beings in his own image…The natural law is a gift of God, an instrument that he uses in maintaining order and testifying to his own righteousness in a fallen world.

In presenting this work, Dr. VanDrunen has presented a coherent answer to the question of how there can be virtuous pagans in the world; how those without Christ or even knowledge of the Scriptures can act in a morally respectable manner. This is a commendable effort. We have points of agreement, such as the recognition that God is the sovereign Lord and King over all the structures of the cosmos. Also, the importance of the *imago Dei* in ethical analysis is well articulated. Having said this, there are certain points of disagreement with his analysis which need to be brought out. However, rather than going point by point through his work and arguing against it, this paper will take a different tack. While we find many points that could be argued against on the basis of a different biblical exegesis of certain passages or on the basis of logical consistency or fallacy, the best way to address this well articulated coherent work is at the level of
underlying premises. By providing a different starting point and framework, and pointing out differences as we proceed, this paper hopes to address the overall position argued by Dr. VanDrunen. This will take the form of a triperspectival analysis of normative, situational, and existential considerations. Under the existential heading, we will examine something of the image of God in man and the role special revelation plays for humanity. With the situational perspective, we will comment on the only two kingdoms that exist, specifically looking at Jesus’ comment to Pilate that “His kingdom is not of this world.” Our first perspective to examine will be the normative focus on the Trinity and Incarnation. After these presentations, we will summarize the two viewpoints and draw conclusions.

Triperspectival Analysis

**Normative Perspective: The Nature of Being**

To understand how we are to live in this world whether believer or non-believer, we have to understand God and his nature. Even to make that claim in such a fashion is to make a universal statement about the religious nature of our existence. It speaks to the unity of our existence under the Lordship of Christ, in whom we live, and move, and have our being (Acts 17:28). John Frame teaches that all of life is theology, again speaking to the unity of our existence before God. John Webster boldly states that “Christian theology is biblical reasoning, in which human intelligence responds to the intelligible divine Word spoken through the prophets and apostles.” Both make the point that the nature of God determines not only our relationship with him but his relationship with the world generally and our ability to function in it. God is Lord, Christ is the Lord; we, all of humanity, are his covenant servants. In fact, it is right to say that the entire cosmos, all objects and animate beings, all of the structures of the created order, are his servants. But more needs to be said. God, in his nature is unified, though existing in fellowship as the Trinity. He is simple and manifests aseity. Despite his unity in diversity and aseity, he reveals himself as light illuminates darkness. “… God is light and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). Webster develops the truth that God is inherently a revelatory God, one who shines his light abroad on all of his creatures. As revealer, God’s light draws one into fellowship or reveals one as lost in wickedness, a sinner, one who has turned from his or her creaturely vocation. God’s nature is to reveal and make known; nothing falls outside of his radiance. Without fellowship with him, that is to turn from that light is to turn to darkness and futility, to be exposed as one who has refused knowledge and reason.

God, in his desire to reveal, thus to bring to fellowship his rebellious creation, revealed himself supremely in his incarnate word, Jesus Christ, our Lord. In him, the *logos ensarkos*, general and special revelation come together. He is fully manifested as our light and life (John 1:4-9). While we are the *imago Dei*, and thus revelations of God in creation, Christ is the full revelation of God in the world. By his human words, he shows the unity of the spiritual life with the physical. Consider: marriage is a sacred, spiritual union manifest in the couple’s flesh. Murder is committed in the mind and heart even
apart from any bloodshed. There is a presupposition of unity of spirit and flesh that cannot be broken and is only ignored to our eternal peril. So we see in Jesus’ teaching on the Sermon on the Mount the elimination of any possible dichotomous relationship of spiritual and material. In the divine presence, then, we find that the Incarnation is more than a prerequisite for the cross. Jesus Christ is the perfect mediator because he brings together the natural and the divine, man and God in such a way as to effect the healing of the sin-dominated cosmos. Adam is the *microcosmos* and *microtheos*; as the second Adam, Christ takes this totality into himself and so makes it new again and acceptable to the Father.\textsuperscript{xlv} His mediation makes sense of our world. It is through him and his Incarnation that the Lordship of God orders our world. Through him, the lordship attributes of control, authority, and presence manifest themselves in the created reality as situational, normative, and existential perspectives on our lives lived before God. He sustains all things, even our thinking, and therefore our social organization, structures and institutions (Col 1:15-18). Therefore, they must bear the same spiritual and material unity that he radiates. Thus there can be no moral determinations, no structures that take their obligation apart from him. In other words, our ethical obligations, for believer and non-believer alike, have not only one source but one form and structure, Christ. There are not two types or sets of ethical obligations, one for the Christian and another for the non-Christian.

Bavinck points this out in his essay, “Christian Principles and Social Relationships.” Christ did not address himself to sinful institutions of his day; he addressed himself to sin, knowing that the transformative power of his gospel would overcome sin wherever it is destroying his creation.

It [the gospel] considers everything from a moral point of view, from the angle in which all those circumstances and relationships are connected with the moral principles that God has instituted for all of life. Precisely because the gospel only opposes sin, it opposes it always and everywhere in the heart and the head, in the eye and in the hand, in family and society, in science and art, in government and subjects, in rich and poor, for all sin is unrighteousness, trespassing of God’s law, and corruption of nature. But by liberating all social circumstances and relationships from sin, the gospel tries to restore them all according to the will of God and make them fulfill their own nature.\textsuperscript{xlvii}

The gospel is for all people, for all times, for all aspects of humanity’s existence. It is Christ, through his gospel, who directs and commands all of life.

**Situational Perspective: Our Natural Setting**

Christ continues his transformation of the earth, establishing the “new creation,” by his continued presence on earth in his church through his Spirit. It is the “church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15) and so takes its being from Christ. It is an ontological reality, not incidentally or accidentally related to Christ. His Spirit is present (Rev 1:17-20), quickening the church (John 15:4-7). Because of its metaphysical reality, the church is given epistemological responsibilities in the Great
Commission: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:18-20). Christ remains with his church by his Holy Spirit who has become the Spirit of Christ, enlivening the church and directing its activities as the head directs the body (Eph. 5:23). So the church, with Christ at its head, continues to bring the gospel to a world in darkness. As in the days of his sojourn in the flesh on earth, so Christ calls out to the world of darkness. Now, however, he has been exalted as King and so his unchanging message is recognized for what it is—the proclamation of the King of kings as he rules over all of life (Matt 28:18-20). These last days, therefore, remain as a time of hope and salvation, which is a summons to obey the Lord, to “kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you perish in the way (Psalm 2:12).”

Thus we see the true nature of reality in relation to Christ. There are two kingdoms: the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of the beloved Son (Col 1:13). Scripture admits of no other kingdoms. Christ taught that the two will coexist, mingle till the end (Matt 13:24-30). This is the situation in which the church finds itself. Yet the church is not cut off from the world, nor remains in isolated indifference. It is the nature of light to shine out, just as it is the nature of Christ, who is light and life, to exercise Lordship. For this reason, before Pilate Jesus declares that his "kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36). Dr. VanDrunen, along with many others, takes this exchange between Jesus and Pilate to mean that Christ’s kingdom is spiritual, not material, and hence focused on spiritual matters. In his exegesis of this important pericope, D. A. Carson strongly concludes that this is not saying that Christ’s kingdom is not active in this world. Jesus is declaring its source; meaning and modus operandi are not according to the principles of this world. ¹ In this pericope, Christ talks to Pilate about truth, indicating that his Kingdom is characterized by truthfulness because he is the truth who has become incarnated. The Kingdom’s weapon is his word of truth, what he says, his gospel and not the sword. This is not Christ’s warrant for a Lutheran two kingdoms view. Thus Christ’s truth is the expression of his kingdom, and like leaven, is free to permeate throughout life. Where truth is found, there is Christ’s kingdom, though not necessarily the church.

The relationship of the church to the world is now clearly seen. Christ’s kingdom is spiritual, to be sure, and so his power transcends all earthly structures (Matt 13:33). It is found where his truth is found, but comes about by the agency of his Spirit, not man’s agency. It thus extends beyond the institution of the church while remaining organically connected to it through the Spirit. A clear demarcation exists, though it takes faith to understand these things. The natural mind cannot comprehend them. The gospel is Christ’s word that ties the church, Christ’s body, to his kingdom wherever truth is found. There is no separate rule, no separate ethic for church and world because there is one gospel truth.

Though it may seem that this is similar to what Dr. VanDrunen has argued, unlike his position, it takes into account the ontological reality of the church, situating the church in
the Trinity and thus deriving her function and message in the nature of reality, rather
than resting it on epistemological foundations and activity. To be fair, Dr. VanDrunen
would claim that through the \textit{imago Dei} reality of man this is what he has done.
However, the ontological foundation in this articulation is moved from man to Christ,
thus exposing all epistemological considerations to the light of the gospel and centering
that analysis on Christ as well. We will turn to the nature of the image of God in man
shortly, but it needs to be said at this point that there is a qualitative difference between
the church and culture, which is not articulated with Dr. VanDrunen’s two kingdoms
approach. In his formulation, they are both on the same footing in relation to Christ.
Instead, the church is ontologically related to Christ. In contradistinction, all cultural
institutions are only epistemologically grounded and subject to rule either by Christ or by
the kingdom of darkness. So, like Dr. VanDrunen, we can say several things: culture is
in fact a common possession of the church and the sons of Adam; it derives from
common grace; cultural institutions are subject to Christ’s rule as well.

All of these affirmations must be seen as gifts of God to man, rather than developments
of man that originate in his ontology. Christ upholds man and all things; by secondary
causes he gives cultural institutions as gifts to man. Human cultural institutions
represent several things. First, they are God’s means by which he protects man from
the pain and destructive effects of his own depravity. For instance, the cultural mandate
given in Genesis 1:28, and the institution of the death penalty in Genesis 9:6, both of
which Dr. VanDrunen makes much of, have to be seen as being received from God by
direct special revelation. God graciously instructed man on his duties and
responsibilities. Interestingly, prior to Genesis 9:6 and after the fall of Genesis 3:15, we
see the results of man’s natural inclination. “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man
was great on the earth and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil
continually” (Gen. 6:5). A second gift of God’s common grace through culture is that by
restraining evil God affords man the opportunity to lessen his guilt in that he does not
act as wickedly as he could. Finally, all of this disposes to God’s glory by showing him in
general revelation and revealing to man His wisdom, justice and mercy. In this time of
patience, which is no longer a time of ignorance since the gospel has been revealed
(Acts 17:30), he provides salvation. Paul’s address on the Areopagus is made in the
context of the cultures and nations in which men live. With the invasion of the gospel in
time and space, Paul can declare that men are to repent. In this context, we see that
God’s use of culture is a manifestation of his grace and now becomes a tool of the
gospel and displays his glory.

\textbf{Existential Perspective: The Nature of the Image of God in Man}

To understand that man needs grace to create culture, that moral activity is not inherent
in him requires examination of the \textit{imago Dei} concept. This is foundational for Dr.
VanDrunen’s argument as he develops it in his book. Both he and I affirm that the
image of God is present in all men, regardless of their relationship to God in Christ. The
Bible affirms that the image remains after the Fall and after the flood (Gen. 1:27, 5:1-3,
9:6; James 3:9). In saying this, it follows that members of either kingdom are called to
obedience though both are radically depraved.
Dr. VanDrunen sees the image of God in man as “badly damaged,” and “a dim shadow of what it was meant to be.” It is unclear exactly what he means by this. Several understandings of the *imago Dei* and its functioning in man are available to us in our examination. Given his affinity for natural law theory and thus natural theology, one would assume a view akin to that of Roman Catholicism or Lutheranism. Even within the Reformed tradition, as with an evidentialist apologetic, natural theology is embraced and the *imago Dei* is understood as a point of contact with unregenerate man. What these views all share is a confidence that man, in his natural abilities, has the capability to know God’s moral demands and act accordingly. Set over against this, the traditional Reformed view of the *imago Dei* denies that ability. Bavinck notes that “the first man, however highly placed, did not yet possess the highest humanity.” The Reformers rejected the Scholastic thesis: “While the supernatural qualities are lost, the natural ones still remain whole.” Dr. VanDrunen would seem to agree with this Scholastic thesis, based on the thrust of his book as outlined above. After affirming the devastation wrought by the Fall (14-15), he notes that “[w]ith the corruption of the image comes corruption of man’s natural knowledge of God and morality” (15). He limits special revelation only to that of revealing the way of salvation, rejecting a broader definition that includes all of God’s spoken revelation to us. Corruption is not loss and so man still knows natural law and can use it positively (16). A more consistent Reformed view sees a broader and narrower sense of the image of God. Man lost the primary content of the image of God (i.e. knowledge, righteousness, and holiness) and only regains these qualities in Christ (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). This is a complex formulation, which is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say, the Reformed doctrine thus presented is contrary to that of Dr. VanDrunen. The distinction shapes the two divergent understandings of man’s abilities in the Fall. This divergence extends to an understanding of what happens to man in regeneration. The difference sheds light on the two views. Bavinck claims that man is not restored to what Adam was before the fall, rather in the re-creation becomes, through Christ, what Adam was intended to be. Dr. VanDrunen, however, sees it as a repristination of qualities still present in man.

God, in his sovereign relationship with his creatures, has ordained that our knowledge of him is contingent on his grace at all times. Webster says “knowledge of God, understanding God’s work rather than simply feeling its force, does not lie within creaturely capacity.” Human knowledge of God is contingent on his activity through Christ and the Holy Spirit. In our fallen state, reason is defiled and spurns its true vocation of knowing God. “It becomes ‘pure’ reason, reason on its own: and precisely this is its corruption.” Reason, as divinely given in the image of God in man at the creation, has its life and end in Christ; apart from that life it attributes to itself, in its depravity, powers that it has forfeited. Natural man, having turned from God’s revealing light and life, cannot access and follow God’s moral demands, no matter where they are revealed.

Assessment
By starting with God as revealer and situating all of revelation in the nature of God, we come to see that we end with a radically different view of man from that posited in the natural law tradition. In this tradition, which fails to account for God's nature in its formulations, fallen man retains a measure of ability which leads to a faulty epistemology. Thus, Dr. VanDrunen falters in relying on two ambiguities, shown in his monograph. He attributes the essence of the image in man to nature, rather than God (12) and so ultimately fails to differentiate between teleological oughts and moral oughts. The optimistic view of fallen man's natural abilities leads to a naturalistic fallacy when he tries to formulate our moral obligations. For example, when we see a glass vase thrown over a cliff, or we see someone fall from a tremendous height to the ground, we note the results and conclude “We ought not do that.” This is self-preservation and is akin to what Calvin calls knowledge. By calling it “ought” we end up with a “practical” ought. It is a teleological ought. The falling off the cliff example is obvious, but the same thing happens when we make decisions based on empirical data, as in sociological studies, or when we look to nature for guidance. That nature includes our own knowledge, our internal knowledge. We call these oughts and accept them as ethical, moral goods and obligations because they have beneficial results; they can contribute to our well-being. This has some merit because God is a good and gracious God. His truth is woven in the fabric of the universe, and he is consistent. So, teleological goods can reflect the truth and goodness of moral goods by concurrence. However, the moral ought only derives from God’s revealed Word; we have no access to this knowledge without his speaking, as we developed the thought above. In this example, we ought not jump off a cliff because God has commanded us to value life in the sixth commandment. This commandment is the locus of the ethical norm; nature corresponds to this truth because of the nature of God. Special revelation makes clear and unambiguous the truths contained in general revelation. As noted above, this clarity and direction of action will necessarily lead to the greatest beneficence because it conforms to God’s ordering of reality. Again, God’s nature is the foundation for the good we experience in this world.

Finally, we experience cognitive rest in ethics when we proceed from God’s nature, rather than from natural theology. The recognition of God’s lordship, expressed as his sovereign presence in blessing or judgment, orders our thinking. We come to see the path toward our *summum bonum* because ethically we have the direction we need to attain God’s glory. His goal is the defeat of sin and evil wherever this is found. This is best accomplished when men acknowledge his rule and live in obedience. Even unregenerate men partake in blessing when they live in accord with God’s created order.

**Conclusion**

By setting Dr. VanDrunen’s work against a more robust concept of God’s revelation, the church and the self, all of which have their origin and being from the ontologic Trinity,
we find his position wanting at several points. An incorrect view of the effects of the Fall resulted in a view of human nature which is at odds with a traditional Reformed and biblical view. It attributes to man’s nature inherent powers which rather are given by God. This results in a truncated epistemology that fails to understand the nature of reality as radically contingent on God. The resulting empiricist based ethic confuses teleological goods with moral imperatives. The empiricist effort provides man with incomplete information. He thinks that in this knowledge he has apprehended God. Rather, he needs to be apprehended by God in order to both know and do what is ethically commanded. Due to our sin, our natural reason is depraved and we are incapable of comprehension. Thus, the natural law position of Dr. VanDrunen fails to provide an adequate basis for biblical moral reasoning.

Bibliography


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Ibid, 12.

In addition to these authors and the Acton Institute, such important thinkers as J. Budziszewski and others embrace these ideas. Reformed thinkers like John Calvin and Herman Bavinck are interpreted in these terms, over against Abraham Kuyper. There seems to be opposition to Kuyperian transformational Neo-Calvinism as a real threat to the purity of the Gospel.


This truth is interestingly affirmed and supported by considering “cytoacoustics.” This is the converting of the natural frequency of the electrical activity of living cells into audible sound. Life sings!


Romans 3:10.


Ibid, 4.

Ibid.

Ibid, 7.

Ibid.

Ibid, 8-12.

Ibid, 12.
In this section, Dr. VanDrunen directs us to a footnote where he says that natural law does not provide exhaustive [his italics] moral guidance. He says it gives a framework in which the moral life should be lived. Actions are to depend on context.

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Ibid, 22.

Ibid, 23.


Ibid, 29.

Ibid, 29-32.

Ibid, 33.

Ibid, 33-34.

Ibid, 37.

Ibid.

Ibid, 38, 39.

Ibid, 39.

Ibid, 40.

Ibid, 41-42.

Ibid, 41.

Ibid, 55.

Ibid, 56.

Ibid, 57.

Ibid, 63.

Ibid, 65.

Ibid, 67.

Ibid, 69.

Ibid, 16.

Ibid, 21.

Ibid, 23.

Ibid, 29.

Ibid, 29-32.

Ibid, 33.

Ibid, 33-34.

Ibid, 37.

Ibid.

Ibid, 38, 39.

Ibid, 39.

Ibid, 40.

Ibid, 41-42.

Ibid, 41.

Ibid, 55.

Ibid, 56.

Ibid, 57.

Ibid, 63.

Ibid, 65.

Ibid, 67.

Ibid, 69.

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John Webster, “On the Clarity of Scripture,” in *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics, II*, (London: T & T Clark International, 2005). He writes, “It is the presence of God the revealer. To speak of the light of God is to speak of a personal action and mode of relation, the free self-disposing of the Lord of all things existing towards and with his creatures...In sum: to say that God is light is to confess the effective, illuminating presence of God the revealer.”


Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4.234, “In later apostolic instruction he was increasingly presented as the One who establishes and maintains communion between Christ and his church, and who brings Christ himself to live and work in the church.”
In a private conversation with Professor Mike Glodo, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, FL on May 12, 2009.


\[xlii\] VanDrunen, *Biblical Case*, 56.


\[xlvi\] Ibid, 2.248.

\[xlvii\] Parenthetical numbers refer to page numbers in VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*.


\[xlix\] See VanDrunen, Chapter 2, “Natural Law and Human Nature,” in *Biblical Case*, pp 7-22, as well as p 56 already noted.


\[lxi\] Ibid, 2.548-588.

\[lxii\] Ibid, 2.273.

\[lxiii\] VanDrunen, *Biblical Case*, 56. Compare with his discussion on pages 12-16. While it is true that he describes redemption as 'new creation (56)' and other similar terms, he cannot escape the force of the conviction that the image of God in man, defined as knowledge, holiness and righteousness, has to remain in some fashion if man is to continue to be the image of God after the fall. The key here is understanding what that image consists of and what happened at the fall. Clearly, his conception and Bavinck's are opposed.

\[lxiv\] Webster, “Biblical Reasoning,” 738.

\[lxv\] Ibid, 739.

\[lxvi\] Ibid, 745.

\[lxvii\] Ibid, 746.
