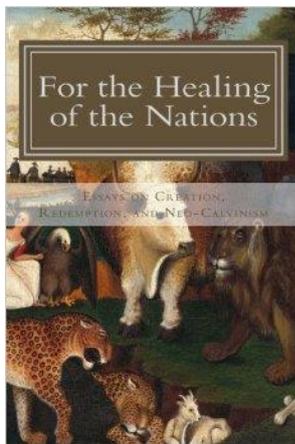


Peter Escalante and W. Bradford Littlejohn (eds.), *For the Healing of the Nations: Essays on Creation, Redemption and Neo-Calvinism* (Charleston: The Davenant Trust, 2014). ISBN 0692322183, Paperback, xvi + 281 pages.

For the Healing of the Nations brings together in one volume the proceedings of the Davenant Trust's 2014 Convivium Irenicum. The theme of the 2014 Convivium is in the book's subtitle: creation, redemption and Neo-Calvinism. As is the case with any themed colloquium or conference, the contributors can bring varying, and at times disparate, contributions. *For the Healing of the Nations* offers a wide variety of subject matter by both established and emerging scholars. Subjects range from Abraham Kuyper through to the ethics of resistance: from two kingdom theology through to infant baptism. All chapters are engaging and of a relatively equal quality. Peter Escalante's introduction winsomely draws together the different strands of the volume, outlining how these offerings do indeed, flow together thematically.



The opening chapters cover the life and thought of the father of Neo-Calvinism, Abraham Kuyper. The author, James Bratt, is the most eminent Kuyper scholar writing in English today and these chapters are no exception to his engaging work on an engaging figure. The first of Bratt's two essays in the volume will no doubt become a standard introductory text for those studying Kuyper. In it, Bratt covers Kuyper's major biographical highlights, his most influential ideas and some of his subsequent impacts on Christian thought and activism.

The second essay focuses on Kuyper's political theories. Here, Bratt provides some theoretical reflection on his own historical findings, including an examination of how Kuyper's ideas were expressed in his politically active days in the Dutch *Staaten General* as leader and organiser of the Anti-revolutionary Party. There is a particular focus on Kuyper's theory of sphere sovereignty, certainly his most enduring political idea. Theologians and ethicists will find much of use here, as will the lay reader wishing to be better informed when it comes to political issues.

The third chapter changes gear, turning to the early church for answers to questions about how Christians should, to use Augustine's phrase, "plunder the Egyptians". Can Christians utilise unbelieving cultural and artistic works? Can we use pagan goods for our own edification? Hillsdale College scholar E. J. Hutchinson examines early church sources for answers to these questions, focusing in on Jerome. "The question," writes Hutchinson, "with which Jerome wrestled is not one of merely historical interest" (77). Indeed, Christians all wrestle with the tensions between Christ and culture.

Two of the chapters address issues directly related to the contemporary debates over 'Reformed Two Kingdoms' theology (R2K). This theology is most ably represented by David VanDrunen in his work *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, and other Reformed thinkers like Michael Horton and Darryl Hart. As a good portion of this debate is over historical questions, Matthew Tuininga's essay, 'The Kingdom of Christ is Spiritual', is particularly pertinent. Tuininga offers a nuanced assessment of Calvin's view of the spiritual nature of the Kingdom of Christ. This offering is particularly valuable for its examination of the primary sources, especially Calvin's *Institutes* and commentaries. At points Tuininga seems to miss the forest for the trees in his reading of Calvin. This is most obviously the case when he is emphasising the French Reformer's view of the spirituality of the church over-against the temporality of the world.

Directly related to R2K theology is Benjamin Miller's chapter, whose title is too-clever-by-half. In 'Declining from Chalcedon', Miller begins a much-needed discussion of the exegetical basis for the R2K project. Relying primarily on David VanDrunen as evidence, Miller uncovers the links between R2K theology and the covenant theology of former Westminster Seminary professor Meredith Kline. This link between the two is uncontroversial. The real question Miller wants to answer is whether Kline's protology and eschatology is sound, and whether the R2K theologians' application of Kline's theology results in a flawed understanding of the Two Kingdoms.

Miller does an excellent job of assessing Kline's thought on covenantal progression in the Old Testament, and makes clear that VanDrunen, at least, is leaning on Kline in his expression of the Two Kingdoms. Miller also uncovers the Christological problems that follow if one adopts Kline's protology and eschatology. Indeed, a disturbing aspect of R2K theology is the division it creates in Christ's lordship; He is King over His Church and over His creation in different ways. Miller has made a good start on addressing these problems.

John Calvin's views on resistance to tyranny are discussed by Andrew Fulford in his essay 'Participating in Political Providence'. Calvin held to a strict anti-resistance theory. However, Fulford re-interprets Calvin's political ethics and shows that Calvin could have consistently reached a different conclusion from within his own theological framework. Fulford's reinterpretation develops into a more sweeping assessment of Calvinian sources, and provides a helpful overview of historical Reformed ethical reasoning on this issue.

Calvin Seminary PhD candidate Laurence O'Donnell examines the thought of K. Scott Oliphint, and his critique of Herman Bavinck's prolegomena and epistemology. This is easily the most technically challenging of the essays in this volume, mainly due to its subject matter. Yet, it is worth persisting, as O'Donnell makes headway on some wider questions to do with classical and presuppositional apologetics. Perhaps most interesting is the critical eye O'Donnell casts over the historical roots of presuppositionalism. It turns out the roots lie in Amsterdam with Herman Dooyeweerd and not in Geneva with Calvin, as some Reformed apologists would have us believe.

Brian Auten offers an historiographical overview of mainstream literature on American political history and readings of Christian Reconstructionism. In doing so Auten assesses the way in which Reconstructionist leaders like Rousas J. Rushdoony and Gary North, along with their ideas, impacted evangelicalism and evangelical political activism. The final chapter is perhaps the most surprising of all, wherein Joseph Minich examines the way theologies of nature and grace can inform our understanding of the visible and invisible church distinction. This results in a refreshing defence of the practice of infant baptism via a different understanding of how God communicates his grace to his covenant people.

For the Healing of the Nations is a fine volume, contributing thought-provoking, clearly-written pieces on a range of topics in theology, ethics, political thought, history and philosophy. While the theological bent is definitely reformed, it is a worthwhile volume for any Christian to read. Each author brings something fresh to the subject they address. Whether it helps you be inspired by the activism of Abraham Kuyper, informs you of the state of contemporary theological debates, or helps you think through the relationship between Christ and culture, this book will be a valuable addition to any library.

Simon Kennedy

is a PhD candidate at the Centre for the History of European Discourses, University of Queensland. He completed his BA at Monash University. He has been published in the Australian Journal of Politics and History and Reformed Theological Review. His research interests include early modern political philosophy, as well as political, economic and theological thought more broadly.