



BOOK REVIEW by W. G. Crampton, Th.D.

THE ESCONDIDO THEOLOGY *A Reformed Response to Two Kingdom Theology*

by
John Frame

John M. Frame is a well-known Reformed theologian who currently holds the J. D. Trimble Chair of Systematic Theology and Philosophy at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida. Earlier he served on the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and he was one of the founding faculty members of Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, California.

Dr. Frame is the author of well over a dozen books, including his highly respected *The Lordship Series*. He has also written numerous articles, essays, and book reviews. He is perhaps best known as a staunch supporter of the presuppositional approach to apologetics taught by Cornelius Van Til. The present reviewer has critiqued some of Dr. Frame's writings on other occasions,¹ but here there is much positive to be said. *The Escondido Theology*² was written by Professor Frame to overview some of the errant teachings coming forth from the California seminary at which he once taught. Being a founding faculty member at this seminary, he is well equipped to do so.

Following an Introduction by George Grant (7-14), a Foreword by Gary DeMar (15-28), a Review by Andrew Sandlin (29-33), and a Publisher's Preface by Kenneth Talbot (35-36), we have the Author's Preface (37-44) followed by eleven chapters. In his preface Professor Frame tells us what this book is about: "This book is a critical analysis of a theological movement that I call 'The Escondido Theology.'" The members of this school of thought "are representatives of the orthodox Reformed theological tradition. But they are not simply Reformed, they hold views that are quite distinctive" (37). The author then goes on to list certain distinctives of this movement, some of which are listed below:

- 1) Scripture teaches about Christ, His atonement, and our redemption from sin, but not about how to apply that salvation to our current problems.
- 2) Those who try to show the application of Scripture to the daily problems of believers are headed toward a "Christless Christianity."

¹ See, for example, W. Gary Crampton, "Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought" by John M. Frame, *The Trinity Review* (July 1996).

² John M. Frame, *The Escondido Theology* (Lakeland, Florida: Whitefield Media, 2011). The pagination found in the body of this review is from Dr. Frame's book.

- 3) Anything we say about God is at best only an analogy of the truth and is therefore at least partially false.
- 4) The “cultural mandate” of Genesis 1:28 and 9:7 is no longer in effect.
- 5) The Christian has no biblical mandate to seek changes in the social, cultural, or political order. We are to live under a “Two Kingdom Theology,” where natural law governs.
- 6) Natural law is to be determined, not by Scripture, but by human reason and conscience.
- 7) We can do nothing to advance the Kingdom of God. The coming of the Kingdom, since the ascension of Christ, is wholly future.
- 8) Preaching should narrate the history of redemption (“redemptive historical” preaching), but never appeal to Bible characters as moral or spiritual examples.
- 9) Preaching “how to” do this or that and principles for living is to misuse the Bible.
- 10) The Sabbath pertains only to worship, not to daily work. So worship should occur on the Lord’s Day, but work need not cease.

The author properly comments: “In my view these positions are not standard Reformed theology.” Ironically, he then goes on to say: “I do commend these writers for their genuine desire to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ as it is found in Reformed theology. In that regard they and I are one. But I think that their distinctive teachings detract from their exposition of Scripture and that in the end the teaching is harmful to Evangelicalism and Reformed Christianity” (39-40). The present reviewer is in full agreement with Professor Frame at this point.

In the balance of the preface Dr. Frame explains that he has chosen to overview and critique the “harmful” teachings of the Escondido group by means of book reviews. “I continue to think that long reviews are one of the best means of analyzing someone’s thoughts. Short of writing an entire book on a single thinker, the book review is the best genre for focusing on a thinker’s actual statements and arguments” (43).

Chapter 1: “What is The Escondido Theology?” (45-65). Prior to the chapters wherein the genre of book reviews is utilized, chapter one, as the title indicates, further explains “The Escondido Theology?” Here we are told that the Escondido theologians are in the Reformed camp. They hold to the doctrine of the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture and adopt the basic teachings of the Westminster Standards. Yet, even though these men are “confessionally Reformed,” they have adopted other views that are not normally considered within the Reformed camp. Having overviewed these distinct viewpoints, Dr. Frame concludes the chapter as follows: “I would summarize by listing the following characteristics of this theological movement:

- 1) A strict separation between the law and gospel;
- 2) A radicalization of the Reformed two-kingdoms view, leading to separation of church and culture, and church and state, so that it is wrong for believers to seek changes in society;
- 3) A rejection of any focus on human subjectivity;

- 4) A rejection of the social views of [Abraham] Kuyper, Old Princeton, and [Cornelius] Van Til;
- 5) A radical confessionalism;
- 6) The exclusiveness of redemptive-historical preaching;
- 7) A limitation of our worship and fellowship with God to the worship services of the church;
- 8) A prohibition of all attempts at “relevance”; and
- 9) The view that all these distinctives are tests of Reformed orthodoxy” (60-61).

Chapter 2: “Michael Horton’s Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church” (67-112). Dr. Frame begins this chapter by correctly noting that the title of the book itself is “alarming.” But the subtitle is “even more so.” Does Horton mean that the entirety of the American church is preaching an “alternative gospel,” which in the words of Paul would be “anathematized” (Galatians 1:8-9)? This kind of excessive language is found in various sections of Horton’s *Christless Christianity*. Therefore we find Michael Horton involved in a good bit of “back tracking” (67-69). One of Frame’s main concerns here is that the theology taught in “this book is becoming more influential in evangelical and Reformed circles, and I [Frame] believe there is danger in that.” Michael Horton “is not just a generic Protestant or even a generic Reformed theologian.” Many of his arguments depend “on ideas that cannot be justified by Scripture or by the classic Protestant confessions” (102).

What are some of the “Christless Christianity” things we find in American evangelicalism? First, Horton tells us that there is too much attention given to ourselves, which detracts from attention given to Christ. God is seen as nothing more than a “supporting character in our own life movie.” Such preaching is unbiblical; it is little different than the thinking we find in “Dr. Phil, Dr. Laura, or Oprah” (72). Dr. Horton is correct, says the author that the main focus of the gospel is to be on Christ, but that does not preclude the attention that “must” be given to the hearers of the gospel. This is not an either/or situation. As stated in 1 Corinthians 10:31, Nehemiah 8:10, and Psalm 85:6, and set forth in the Westminster Shorter Catechism (Q. 1), “man’s chief end is to glorify God, and *enjoy Him forever* (Frame’s emphasis). We must seek to have both a “God-centered view of human experience and subjectivity,” which at the same time has a “human focus that detracts not one bit from a biblical God-centeredness” (74-75). Both are necessary, and Horton is wrong.

Second, in Horton’s view, we are not to give attention to the way the gospel is communicated. Neither should we attempt to make it relevant (i.e., to apply it) to the hearers. Here biblical application to all areas of life is somewhat disparaged. The church should not attempt to influence societal issues. Says Horton: “There is no Christian politics or Christian art or Christian literature, any more than there is Christian plumbing” (362). This kind of thinking is so out of line with biblical revelation that Frame gives it short shrift. He comments: “The communication and application of Scripture are essential to the church’s ministry. It is unbelievable that Horton seems to be discouraging them” (80).

Third, there is the issue of “God’s sovereignty and human responsibility” (80). To state that man must do something is compromising the sovereignty of God. Horton is correct in that some parts of the *ordo*

salutis (“the order of salvation”) are monergistic, with God alone doing the work, such as in regeneration. But parts of the *ordo salutis* are synergistic, where man is active in the work of salvation, such as in the process of sanctification. To relegate the entirety of man’s salvation to God alone is to do disservice to God’s “order of salvation.”

Fourth, there is “the objective and the subjective issue.” According to Horton, with degrees of backtracking, we must see God’s salvific work as totally objective. It is an act external to mankind, and we should not attempt to make it subjective in any way. This error is somewhat similar to point number three above. Frame’s comment is apropos: “Salvation in the Bible is not only justification, being declared righteous for Christ’s sake, but also sanctification, being transformed from within by the Spirit of God.... Scripture does not tell us merely to receive passively the gift of sanctification. Rather, there is a race to be run and a battle to be fought” (86).

The fifth point is “the theology of the cross and the theology of glory” (i.e., a contrast made by Reformation theologians). As Frame explains, “another way Horton discourages the application of Scripture to our inner life and to our everyday life” is by criticizing “anyone who seeks happiness from God here and now.” To desire earthly blessings is to seek a “theology of glory” and is deserving of condemnation” (87, 102). Here again we see the Escondido theologian disagreeing with the teaching of the Westminster Standards, that “man’s chief end is to glorify God, and *enjoy Him forever*” (see 1 Corinthians 10:31, Nehemiah 8:10, and Psalm 85:6). Apparently to enjoy the presence of God in this life is sinful. This is simply preposterous.

Sixth, there is the separation of law and gospel. Whereas in Reformed theology law and gospel are distinguished, in Lutheranism they are separated. In the Lutheran view the purpose of the law is to tell us that we are sinners in need of a Savior and the purpose of the gospel is to tell us how we can be saved from our sin. In Reformed theology, on the other hand, the law not only reveals to the non-believer that he is a sinner in need of salvation, but, in the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith (19:6), for converted sinners it functions as “a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, [and] it directs and binds them to walk accordingly.” Horton is more Lutheran than Reformed on this point.

Seventh, is the issue of “redemption” contrasted with other matters of life. In Horton’s view redemption excludes a focus on other issues of life. Preaching must be on Christ and Him crucified alone. Using Bible stories as moral examples is improper. “The central message of Christianity,” says Horton, “is not a worldview, a way of life, or a program for personal and societal change; it is a gospel” (94). Dr. Frame correctly says: the gospel “is the most important content of Scripture, but it is by no means the only content of Scripture” (95).

Eighth, is the matter of worship and the general ministry of the Christian church. In Horton’s teaching “God gives and does not receive; the congregation receives and does not give” (102). But as the Frame points out, the biblical words used for worship (Hebrew, *abodah*, and Greek, *leitourgia*) both can be

translated “work,” and often refer to the work of the Old Testament priests. In the New Testament, of course, all of God’s people are priests (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10), and are actively involved in the worship of God.

Finally, there is the “Christless Christianity” of an over emphasis of focusing on anything other than Christ. This too is excessive reductionistic. Certainly, the main emphasis in the life of the Christian must be that of Jesus Christ. But, in accordance with 1 Corinthians 10:31 (“whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God”), every area of life is to be lived out to glorify God. To deny the importance of focusing on anything other than Him is to deny the principle involved in 1 Corinthians 10:31.

The fact is that Michael Horton’s *Christless Christianity* is a work in need of much revision. Much of what it taught therein borders on the preposterous, and as Dr. Frame has stated, to follow this teaching is potentially “dangerous.”

Chapter 3: “R. Scott Clark’s Recovering the Reformed Confession: Our Theology, Piety, and Practice” (113-170). As the title indicates, the subject matter addressed in Clark’s book is that of the church returning to the great Reformed confessions. This will add greatly to the restoration of the Reformed community, which has gone astray in so many ways. The present reviewer is very much a supporter of the church’s use of subordinate standards. Thus, I support Clark’s direction of thought. But when we speak of the need for the church to have and use the confessions as subordinate standards, we must make clear that they are both “subordinate” as well as “standards.” Reformed Christian churches have used such confessions for centuries expressing, in creedal, summary fashion, what they believe the Bible teaches. In this sense they are “standards.” But they also must be understood as “subordinate” to the only true standard, which is the Word of God. The church must never elevate these subordinate standards to the level of Holy Scripture. As pointed out by Dr. Frame, some of the views expressed by Professor Clark regarding these confessions are very close to “Roman Catholic traditionalism.” For example, at one point Clark comments that there is a “Reformed way” of reading the Word of God which we must not depart from. Our reading of the Scriptures must never lead us away from the Reformed confessions. And when controversies arise, we must ask, not “what does Scripture say?” but “what do the confessions say.” This reviewer agrees with Dr. Frame that it appears as if there is a preoccupation with of “the details of confessions and subscription, at the expense of the Bible itself” (149, 159, 152).

Interestingly (and paradoxically), Clark avers that such matters as “six-day creation” and “theonomy” are “alien” to Reformed theology in general (114). The reason being is that the greatest of all the confessions, The Westminster Confession of Faith, teaches both of these alleged “alien” doctrines.³

Chapter 4: “David Van Drunen’s A Biblical Case for Natural Law” (171-193). According to John Frame, the Escondido theologians, under the strong influence of Meredith Kline, having imbibed a “sharp” distinction between law and gospel, have adapted a “two kingdoms” view of the church and state. Here we find a “sharp” distinction between the sacred and the secular. Since the Fall, the “sacred” is to be guided by the law of God (special revelation) and the “secular” is to be guided by the law of nature (general revelation)⁴ (47). As the title suggests, this is the teaching found in Van Drunen’s book.

According to the Westminster Confession of Faith (1:1), “natural law,” or natural/general revelation, is “the light of nature and the works of creation and providence [which] do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable.” Yet, general revelation is “not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing: which makes the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God’s revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.”

The Westminster theologians went on to write:

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 traditions of men (1:6).

As taught in Romans 1-2, and confirmed by the Westminster Confession, as sufficient as natural/general revelation is to reveal God to all men, leaving them inexcusable, it is insufficient, “to give that knowledge of God, and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation...which makes the Holy Scripture to be most necessary.” Without the “spectacles” of special revelation, i.e., the propositional truth of God’s Word, sinful man is not able to come to a sound and saving knowledge of God.⁵ The necessity of special revelation rests on the insufficiency of general revelation.

³ Two of the major opponents of theonomy, Meredith Kline and R. Laird Harris, both contend that the Westminster Standards are theonomic in import. See Meredith G. Kline, “Comments on an Old-New Error,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, Volume 41, No. 1 (Fall, 1978), 172-189; and R. Laird Harris, “Theonomy in Christian Ethics: A Review of Greg L. Bahnsen’s Book,” *Presbyterian: Covenant Seminary Review* 5:1 (Spring, 1979), 1.

⁴ Chapter 11 below will further address the issue of the sufficiency of natural law/revelation to govern culture.

⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Volumes I & II, Library of Christian Classics, John T. McNeill, editor, translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1960), I:3-5; I:6:1.

Moreover, it is Scripture alone which reveals to us “the whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life.” As stated by Dr. Frame, since general revelation was not sufficient even before the Fall to reveal God’s will to His creatures (see Genesis 1:28-30; 2:16-17), it is inconceivable that it could reveal to post-fall man how to govern his affairs in matters of secular life.

The two kingdom viewpoint is found in contradistinction with the mainline teaching of the Reformers and the later Puritans. Both Calvin and the Westminster divines maintain that the civil magistrate is responsible to enforce the entire Decalogue and the “general equity” of the judicial law which God gave to Israel. Later theologians such as Abraham Kuyper were of the same opinion. In the words of Kuyper, “there is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, ‘This is mine.’” (47-49). Commenting on the “two kingdom” view, Andrew Sandlin writes:

For the Reformed Church to embrace the... “two kingdom” theory is to surrender a critical distinction of its faith and to compromise Jesus Christ’s authority in all dimensions of life. To argue that society, including the state, is permissibly non-Christian is necessarily to argue that it is permissibly anti-Christian. The issue is not whether each member of society must be a Christian, and certainly not whether the state should force anyone to become a Christian, ideas and practices which Calvinists abhor. Rather, the issue is whether we will continue to advocate and work of Christian civilization---biblical Christianity as the unifying principle of all of life—individual, family, church, science, arts, media, education, technology, and even the state.... J. Gresham Machen loyally carried forward this Reformed tradition when he declared: “The Christian cannot be satisfied so long as any human activity is either opposed to Christianity or out of all connection with Christianity. Christianity must pervade not merely all nations, but also all of human thought.”⁶

Dr. Frame properly comments that 1 Corinthians 10:31 calls on the Christian community to glorify God in every area of life. Thus, “my chief aversion to the Escondido theology (among all my other criticisms of it) is that it rejects the Lordship of Christ in this comprehensive sense.... In my view, the application of God’s Word to all areas of life is a clear, obvious biblical mandate” (53).

Chapter 5: “Meredith Kline’s Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview” (195-242). The author’s review of this book is the by far the kindest. He writes: “Of all the books reviewed in this volume, this one is easily the most impressive. Kline (1922-2007) was a master of the biblical text and of the literature of the Ancient Near East.” Professor Frame then goes on to tell us that *Kingdom Prologue* “is his *magnum opus*.” Yet, it is not without difficulties. The two areas of criticism addressed by Frame in this chapter are Kline’s teaching on “the covenant of works and its republication in the Mosaic covenant” and “Kline’s distinction between ‘holy, theocratic’ societies and societies characterized by ‘common grace’” (195, 198).

⁶ Andrew Sandlin, cited in Joseph Morecraft, III, “Calvin’s Doctrine of Biblical Law,” *Counsel of Chalcedon* (Issue 5, 2011), edited by Wayne Rodgers, 31.

First: Meredith Kline, in agreement with the Westminster Confession of Faith (7:2) averred that the covenant formed in the Garden of Eden with Adam was a covenant of works: “The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam and in him to his posterity, upon the condition of perfect and personal obedience.”

Dr. Frame seems to have some degree of difficulty with this. The reason being, apparently, that Kline overstresses the concept of “works.” That is, Dr. Kline believed that Adam could have “merited” his (and his posterity’s) righteous standing before God by perfectly obeying Him. Kline’s problem appears to be a lack of understanding of the grace involved in this covenant. The Westminster Confession (7:1) itself, however, with which Kline agrees, does teach that the covenant of works was graciously given: God “has been pleased to express [His] covenant” with man “by [a] voluntary condescension on His part.” Further, in Romans 5 when Paul compares Adam and Christ as two covenantal heads, he does seem to say that Adam (due to God’s “voluntary condescension” allowing him to do so) could have merited perfect righteousness for himself and his posterity. The analogy used by Paul appears to necessitate this fact.⁷

Frame also disagrees (at least somewhat) with Meredith Kline’s belief that the covenant of works was re-established in the Mosaic covenant at Mount Sinai. But the Westminster Confession (19:1-2) teaches the same thing:

God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which He bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it: and endued him with power and ability to keep it. This law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness, and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in Ten Commandments, and written in two tablets: the first four commandments containing our duty towards God; and the other six our duty to man.

Dr. Kline opined that in the Mosaic economy Israel could attain temporal blessings by means of human merit, i.e., obedience. His teaching here is not out of line with Reformed orthodoxy. Is this not the teaching found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27-28? It must be recognized however, that all blessings given to mankind are from the gracious dealings of God. The clear teaching of the Word of God is that God blesses obedience to His commandments. This is well expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith (19:6), where we read that the law of God “is likewise of use to the regenerate,” in that “the promises of it...show them God’s approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof.”

⁷ See Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 430-433.

Second: When it comes to Frame's disagreement with Meredith Kline's "distinction between 'holy, theocratic' societies and societies characterized by 'common grace,'" this reviewer is in lockstep with Dr. Frame. This is errant doctrine. As we have already noted, the Escondido doctrine, particularly as set forth by Kline, maintains that since the Fall there is a vast separation between the sacred and secular. The former is guided by special revelation and the latter by natural revelation/law. This affects all areas of life. The Sabbath is one such area. In Kline's teaching, since the Fall, "the Sabbath belongs to the covenant community exclusively," and does not affect "common cultural activity" (209). This means that Christians are still required to worship on the Lord's Day, but they are not required to rest from work, i.e., they may go about their normal work routine after the worship service. Here Dr. Kline differs with the teaching of the Westminster Standards. The Westminster Shorter Catechism (Q. 60) for example, maintains that "the Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days." Professor Frame is correct: "This theory, in my judgment, goes far beyond what is warranted in the biblical text" (210).

According to Dr. Kline, the sacred/secular dichotomy does not merely impinge on the Sabbath, it influences every area of culture. Whereas in the Reformed theological tradition "common grace" is seen as God's temporal blessings to reprobate man, in Kline's view it has to do with God's postponement of the final judgment so that His redemptive purposes will have time to be accomplished in history. Said another way, "common grace is the limitation of the common curse" given in Genesis 3:16-19 (213). This radical dichotomy between "cult and culture," i.e., the sacred and the secular, means that the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:26-28 and 9:1-7 is no longer binding in the fallen world in which we live. The Kuyperian "sphere sovereignty" dogma, seen in 1 Corinthians 10:31 and 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, is vitiated. This is a truncated and dangerous world and life view, and it is to be rejected as non-biblical.

Chapter 6: "Michael Horton's Covenant and Eschatology" (243-289). At the beginning of the chapter we read: "It may be said that there are two Michael Hortons. There is Michael Horton the popular writer, the scourge of American evangelicalism. My review of Horton's *Christless Christianity* discusses his work. The other is the scholarly Michael Horton, expert in modern academic theology. That Horton is the subject of this review." We go on to read that both of these Hortons "advocate the mix of Lutheran, Calvinistic, and Klinean themes that I [Frame] have called The Escondido Theology." But there is a difference in the style of writing that we find in the two Hortons. Whereas the popular Horton "engages in a slash-and-burn, take no prisoners kind of rhetoric, in which his opponents say nothing right and everything they say must be taken in the worst possible sense," the scholarly Horton "engages in collegial, professional discourse with other scholars, even those who are most militantly opposed to orthodox Christianity" (243). The second Horton, it would appear, is kinder toward his opponents than the first Horton is toward his opponents. In other words, he appears to show more "love" toward non-Christians than Christians.

Covenant and Eschatology is the first of a tetralogy, wherein Horton compares and contrasts his theology with other options. The tetralogy is apologetic in nature. Horton is writing as one scholar to

others, attempting to show them that his Escondido view of Protestant of theology is able to resolve matters that other theologies do not. His goal is to “call modern theologians back to the position of classic Reformed orthodoxy” (248).

Horton’s book discusses “five methodological tools” that distinguish his theological-apologetic method from others, with which he will develop his argument.

First: “The Post-Reformation Scholastics as Conversation Partners.” In this section Horton stresses the study of the fifteenth and sixteenth century “scholastic” Lutheran and Calvinistic theologians. He commends their “exegetical character.” He does so to support his twin doctrines of “analogy” (particularly to deny the possibility of knowing the “hidden essence” of God) and “redemptive-historical” emphasis (these will be discussed below).

Second: “Redemptive-Historical/Eschatological Method.” Dr. Frame explains that “redemptive history is the history of God’s actions to deal with human sin, following the Fall” (251), and it is an important part of biblical revelation. It must be taught to the people of God. But Michael Horton emphasizes the “redemptive-historical” to the point of excluding other forms of preaching. He believes that we must not focus on the ontological aspects of Scripture, but on God’s work in history. In his view, the Bible is not a source of “timeless truths”; it is not a “cognitive-propositional” text. Rather, it must be understood by a “promise-fulfillment hermeneutic.” Redemption, says Horton, is prior to revelation (251). In the opinion of this reviewer, this is nonsense.

In his analysis, Dr. Frame points out that the Bible is full of ontological teachings. There is the ontological distinction between God as Creator and man as creature (e.g., Genesis 1-2; John 1:3; and Colossians 1:16). Frame comments: “Horton’s antithesis between ontology and history is neither biblical nor intelligible” (255). Moreover, in the words of Jesus Christ, the Bible is not only a source of “timeless truths,” it is “truth” (John 17:17). Apart from Scripture, we could not know truth (see Jeremiah 8:9; 1 Timothy 6:3-5). And to deny that the Bible is a “cognizant-propositional” text is to deny that one could ever learn anything from the Bible, because “propositions” are the only medium of truth that is available to us. Finally, to say that redemption is prior to revelation is so nonsensical that it is stymieing that anyone could come to this conclusion. How would we know what redemption is apart from God’s special revelation as given to us in the Bible? Scripture is our axiomatic starting point; not redemption.

Third: “Analogical Mode.” Horton denies that any human language is able to be applied to God in a univocal sense. All of our knowledge of God is analogous. He even says that “analogical thinking is necessarily dialectical, as analogies both are and are not their referent.” There is a “tension” that we find in divine revelation that often leaves us with “unresolved dialectics” (261-262). This is dangerous teaching. If this were true (which it is not), we would be left with irresolvable contradictions in Scripture, which would render the Word of God inaccurate (1 Timothy 6:20). As Francis Schaeffer was fond of saying, the Bible does not give us exhaustive knowledge, but it gives all we need to know:

“Thus on the basis of the Scriptures, while we do not have exhaustive knowledge, we have true and unified knowledge.”⁸ John Frame is in agreement with Schaeffer.

It should be further pointed out, as Gordon Clark has correctly taught, that although there is a quantitative difference between that which God knows and that which man knows, i.e., there is a vast difference in the degree of knowledge, there is not a difference in the knowledge itself. There is a point of contact between that which God knows and that which man knows; there is a univocal point at which God’s knowledge meets man’s knowledge. Dr. Clark wrote that “if our minds and God’s mind did not have some univocal content, we would know nothing at all. If He has all truth, we cannot know any truth except the truth God knows.”⁹ The difference between God’s knowledge and man’s knowledge, then, is one of degree. God knows more and will always know more than any creature. If all we have is an analogy of the truth, then we do not have the truth. A mere analogy of the truth, without a univocal point of understanding, is not “the truth.”¹⁰ Thus, if Gordon Clark is correct (and he is), then in Michael Horton’s “analogical mode” the knowledge of God would not be achievable at all.

Fourth: “Dramatic Model.” According to Michael Horton, “if this redemptive-historical method, with its analogical mode, is the best approach to theology, we could expect to find an adequate analogy in the realm of drama.” He is not saying that Scripture itself is like a drama; rather, he is positing that drama is a model of theology. Drama, he writes, “is a metaphor for theology.” This being so, Horton defines theology as “the church’s reflection on God’s performative action in word and deed and its own participation in the drama of redemption” (265-267). This definition, says John Frame, “like my own,¹¹ makes theology a ‘practical’ discipline” (267). In the opinion of this reviewer, theology itself is not a practical discipline. Simply stated, theology is doctrine. Christianity is doctrine; it is the teaching of the 66 books of the Bible. The Christian life, on the other hand, is the application of this doctrine. It is the Christian who “practices” theology.

Fifth: “Covenant Context.” If, as Horton has suggested, Christians are players in the drama of redemption, what role do they play? They play their parts in the covenant which God has established with them: “This redemptive-historical drama incorporates believers in such a manner that it constitutes its own cultic ‘culture.’” In this drama the gospel is meaningful only to believers, those who are covenant with God. Therefore, it is wrong to make the gospel “culturally accessible” (i.e., make it relevant) to non-believers (271). As Frame comments, this teaching flies in the face of the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, because to preach the gospel to the world of non-believers is an attempt to make it relevant to them. What could be clearer than this?

8 Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press 1970), I:219.

9 Gordon H. Clark, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Jefferson, Maryland: The Trinity Foundation, 1983), 119.

10 Gordon H. Clark, *God’s Hammer* (Jefferson, Maryland: The Trinity Foundation, 1982), 30-34, 38, 71. See also Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 95-110.

11 Dr. Frame’s definition of theology is “the application of God’s Word by persons to all areas of life” (270). See also John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2008), 9.

In his section on “covenant context,” Horton, like Meredith Kline, distinguishes between conditional and unconditional covenants found within the Bible. For example, the Mosaic covenant is conditional but the Abrahamic covenant is not (274). Such thinking is out of line with the overall teaching of Reformed theology. John Calvin, for example, wrote that “all the promises which He [God] makes are conditional.”¹² Jonathan Edwards also believed that the various covenants of Holy Scripture are conditional.¹³ This is also the position of the Westminster Confession of Faith (7:3):

Man, by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant [of works], the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, *requiring of them* faith in Him that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe

According to the Westminster theologians, faith is the requirement to enter into a covenant relationship with God.

Chapter 7: “Darryl G. Hart’s A Secular Faith” (291-318). This book has to do with the application of the two kingdom theology of Escondido theologians to the relationship between church and state. Reformed theology in general maintains that both the church and the civil magistrate, as God-ordained institutions, are separate as to function, but not as to authority. Both are subject to the law of God. The church is to follow the dictates of Scripture in matters of ecclesiology and the state is to follow biblical dictates in matters of the civil government. Darryl Hart, on the other hand, calls for a separation of church and state in both function and authority. He says: “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” (292). Hart favors the separation of church and state to the point of opposing individual Christians arguing for biblical authority for their particular political viewpoints. His is a “secular faith,” which maintains that “the basic teachings of Christianity are virtually useless for resolving America’s disputes.” “Christianity does not require a certain form of government, a specific kind of cultural expression, or a distinct way of arranging society, its adherents may legitimately live hyphenated lives that are secular and Christian” (295-296). These are very inaccurate statements. As we have seen, they are in contradistinction to the teachings of Calvin and the Westminster theologians who taught that the civil magistrate is responsible to enforce the entire Decalogue as well as the “general equity” of the judicial law which God gave to Israel. Samuel Rutherford asserts the same thing in his *Lex Rex*. Whereas the Apostle Paul tells us that God’s infallibly inspired Word thoroughly equips us for every good work, to include the work of civil magistracy (2 Timothy 3:16-17), Hart would seem to disagree. Why?; because if this “secular faith” were true (which it is not) it would render Paul’s claim vacuous.

¹² John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), *Sermon* on Deuteronomy 7:11-15.

¹³ Carl W. Bogue, *Jonathan Edwards and the Covenant of Grace* (Cherry Hill, New Jersey: Mack Publishing Company, 1975), Chapter 15.

In support of his “secular faith” Hart adduces John 18:36, where Jesus responds to Pontius Pilate’s question “Are You the king of the Jews?,” by saying “My kingdom is not of this world.” But as Professor Frame states, Hart is misapplying what Jesus said. The Lord’s statement has to do with the origin of His kingdom. The kingdom of God is not from an earthly source. It originates in heaven, and it has come to earth in the Person and work of the Son of God. Moreover, from the perspective of this reviewer, Psalm 2 could hardly make the matter clearer. All of the kingdoms of this world are subject to the Father’s “Anointed,” Jesus Christ. Dr. Frame is correct when he writes that the “comprehensive Lordship of the triune God over all creation and all areas of human life,” as seen in the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28 and 9:1-7, as well as in many other passages, “is a biblical datum we must deal with in this context [the civil magistrate] and all others. It is, indeed, the fundamental message of Scripture.” The Lord Jesus Christ “is nothing less than King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 17:14; 19:16), who has been given ‘all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:20)’” (301, 303).

John Frame, in agreement with the Westminster Confession of Faith (20:4; 23:3; and 31:2; 1647 version), believes “that in a general sense [civil] government should be theocratic. That is, it should acknowledge God as the ultimate ruler and Jesus Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords” (309). This is confirmed by the Apostle Paul in Romans 13:1-7, where three times we read that the civil magistrate is to be a “minister” or “servant” of God in carrying out its function.

Chapter 8: “Above the Battle? Three Books on Worship” (319-326). As the title indicates, in this chapter the author reviews three books having to do with worship. The books are *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down* by Marva Dawn (he also cites her *A Royal “Waste” of Time*), *A Better Way* by Michael Horton, and *With Reverence and Awe* by (jointly) Darryl Hart and John Muether. These three volumes concern the “worship wars” which exist in the Christian church in an (alleged) attempt to transcend “partisan arguments” and find “common criteria” (rising “above the battle”) that should aid in bringing Christians into greater agreement regarding worship. Frame is “not persuaded” that these books rise “above the battle” of the current worship wars. It should be noted, however, that Dr. Frame’s view of worship, as found in his *Worship in Spirit and Truth*,¹⁴ differs (by his own admission) at least to some degree with the traditional Reformed view, as found in the Westminster Standards.

Dawn’s book, Frame comments, despite her disclaimers, is “a partisan tract for a traditional approach to worship” (319). Michael Horton’s *A Better Way* is of the same mold. Horton “tries to rise above the stereotyped arguments,” but he ends up claiming that there is a “distinctively Christian view of worship” which is to be followed (320-321). Finally, *With Reverence and Awe* appeals even “more broadly to the general theology of the Reformed confessions and tradition.” According to Hart and Muether, the “connection between theology and worship is so vital that it is impossible to change the form (worship practice) without altering the content (theological conviction)” (323). The present reviewer agrees that one’s theology and worship are inextricably tied together, but to say that it is impossible to change the

¹⁴ John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 1996).

form of worship without altering the theological content is a bit forced. There are many Reformed churches throughout this land that hold to the basic teachings of the Westminster Standards when it comes to the doctrine of proper worship. But there are likely few that hold to the “same” worship practice.

*Chapter 9: “John J. Stellman’s Dual Citizens: Worship and Life between the Already and the Not Yet” (327-358).*¹⁵ On the one hand, Dr. Frame commends the author of this book for being a “gifted communicator.” He also applauds Stellman’s “originality” in two particular areas. First, whereas the Escondido theologians “excoriate anyone who thinks that there is any kind of glory for the believer in this life,” Stellman demurs. He believes that Luther excessively separated the “theology of the Cross” and the “theology of Glory.” Stellman contends that “the cross and the glory are not enemies at all, but friends; the latter is the natural outgrowth of the former” (328). And second, there is the difference between Stellman and the others is his view of the Sabbath. He disagrees with the Klinean view that the Sabbath observance pertains to the Lord’s Day service alone. Stellman’s belief is more in line with the Reformed tradition taught by the Westminster Standards, that the whole day is to be devoted to the worship of the Lord. Sadly, however, Stellman demeans private worship. This is contrary to the Westminster Standards, and far worse, it contradicts the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Not only did Christ Himself participate in private worship (Mark 1:35; Isaiah 50:4-9), but He commanded His disciples to do the same (see Matthew 6:9-13, where the Lord commands us to pray daily in verse 11). It appears patently clear to this reviewer that a person who does not practice private worship is unfit to practice public worship.

But, alas, there are still elements of the Escondido group found in Stellman’s doctrine. First, there is the two kingdom doctrine theory, which Stellman applies to worship and daily life. As to worship, he criticizes Frame for saying that “there is no real difference between worship and the rest of life” (330). Even though this quote comes from an article that Frame had written many years earlier, and expresses a more immature view than what he holds to now, it still does not correctly reflect his position. Rather, Frame (even in the earlier article) correctly distinguishes between worship in the “narrow sense” and worship in the “broad sense.” Whereas the former has to do with corporate worship on the Lord’s Day, the latter, as stated in Romans 12:1 (“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship”), has to do with “general worship,” “in which all of human life is worship of God” (330). Remarkably, Stellman sees Romans 12:1 as speaking of corporate worship and applies it as such. As to the balance of his two kingdom teaching, it is much in line with the Escondido school of thought which has been critiqued above.

Second, there is Stellman’s doctrine of worship, which (for the most part) is in agreement with the Escondido group. He writes: “So contrary to the ‘learning about God and singing about God’ model of

¹⁵ Dr. Frame points out that Jason Stellman is a pastor, not a seminary professor. So his book “is somewhat different from the other books I have considered in this volume” (327).

public worship that dominates the current evangelical scene, Scripture teaches that corporate worship is primarily a meeting of Christians with their covenant God for the purpose of reenacting and renewing the gracious covenant He has made with us.” Again, Dr. Frame’s response is on target: “I must ask, where does Scripture say this?” (337). As already noted Stellan has a low view of personal, private worship. He comments that we are not to giving attention to our “spiritual temperature,” but rather looking outward, to be “extraspective rather than introspective.” One’s “devotional life” is no “litmus test” of his spiritual state. Rather, corporate worship is where one’s true piety is seen (346-347). This is sheer nonsense. To state it again, a person who does not worship privately is not fit to worship corporately. As stated in the Westminster Confession of Faith (21:5), “God is to be worshipped everywhere, in Spirit and truth; as in private families daily, and in secret everyone by himself; so more solemnly, in the public assemblies.” If Jesus Christ thought that one’s devotional life was to be a daily occurrence (Matthew 6:9-13), to claim the opposite is to deny the Word of Christ Himself.

Finally, when it comes to Jason Stellan “on the Christian life” we see his theology at its worst. He expresses a form of antinomianism similar to what we would expect from Dispensational circles. John Frame aptly summarizes Stellan’s teaching as follows (354): First, Stellan denies that the law of God is the standard of life in the New Testament era. This teaching disagrees with that of the Westminster Confession (19:6), where we read that “the law” of God is “of great use” to Christians, “as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, [and] it directs and binds them to walk accordingly.” It also necessarily means that (at least implicitly) he denies that the Shorter Catechism (Q. 14) is correct when it states that “sin is any lack of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God,” which cites 1 John 3:4 (“Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness”) as its proof text.

Second, as surprising as it may seem, Stellan “confuses law and gospel by making gospel rather than law the standard of human conduct.” And thirdly, he denies that there are “any threats or curses attached to disobedience in the New Testament.” “To the contrary,” says Frame see Acts 5:1-11; 8:20-24; 13:4-12; 19:11-20; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:5; 1 Timothy 5:8; 6:2-10; 2 Timothy 3:1-9; Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:26-31; James 2:14-26; and 2 Peter 2:1-22.”

Chapter 10: “In Defense of Christian Activism” (359-368). John Frame defines Christian activism as “simply any Christian attempt to improve society,” and defends it against certain men (e.g., Jerry Falwell and Cal Thomas) and groups (e.g., the Moral Majority) He cites 1 Corinthians 10:31 as a key verse in his defense. Dr. Frame then takes aim at the certain Escondido theologians (especially Michael Horton), claiming that some of the statements that come from this group in their militancy against Christian activism in society are “unbiblical and foolish” (363). He concludes as follows:

In the general society as well as in the church, Christians should settle for nothing less than the comprehensive Lordship of Jesus Christ. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. To say this is not to advocate violent revolution in Jesus’ name. He has forbidden us to take that course. But by His Word and Spirit, by His love, and by wise use of the means

available to us, we seek to exalt Him, not only in the church, but also in the whole world (358).

To this the present reviewer says Amen and Amen.

Chapter 11: "Is Natural Revelation Sufficient to Govern Culture?" (369-376). Professor Frame begins this chapter by saying: "The titular question seems to me to be central in the current discussion in the Reformed camp between Kuiperians and Klineans. Kuiperians argue that Scripture governs all aspects of human life, including culture and [civil] government. Klineans believe that politics and general culture are governed by natural revelation and common grace." In the balance of this chapter the author shows us why the Klinean "position is wrong" (369).

One: "Natural revelation was not sufficient before the Fall of Adam." According to Genesis 1:28-30 and 2:16-17 God did not leave it to Adam and Eve to determine His divine purposes for them by scrutinizing general revelation. Rather, He gave them special revelation to govern their lives.

Two: "Natural revelation is not sufficient after the Fall." If special revelation was necessary before the Fall, how much more so is it necessary after the Fall? Paul tells us in Romans 1 that fallen man "suppresses the truth" of special revelation and exchanges it for a lie. Natural revelation, then, apart from special revelation, leads only to more sin.

Three: "Natural revelation is not sufficient for salvation." As sufficient as general revelation is to give man knowledge of God that leaves him without excuse, it is not necessary to tell him how he can have his sins forgiven "in Christ."

Four: "Natural revelation is not sufficient for pleasing God in any sphere." Since natural revelation does not lead persons to salvation, "it cannot prevent its own distortion in the human heart."

Five: "The only remedy for the distortion of natural revelation is God's grace." In Romans 3:23-24, the Apostle Paul tells us all persons have sinned and come short of God's glory. They are in need of Jesus Christ.

Six: "God's grace comes to us through God's special revelation, the gospel of Scripture." In Romans 10:14-17 Paul says that the message of saving faith in Christ is found only in God's Word.

Seven: "So we cannot understand natural revelation without distortion, unless we view it biblically." John Calvin taught that the Word of God functions as "spectacles" to bring general revelation into sharp focus. Special revelation is necessary to interpret properly natural revelation.

Eight: “God has never authorized any social institutions or activities to govern themselves without the use of His spoken and written words.” There is not even a hint in Scripture that God has authorized any nation to govern itself apart from His Word.

Nine: “Natural revelation is not sufficient for our public dialogue with non-Christians.” Apart from special revelation the Christian would not know how to respond correctly to those outside of the church. The way to come to God through Christ as well as the standards for proper living found in the law of God are found only in Scripture.

Ten: “Jesus Christ rules all spheres of human life (Matthew 28:18), including politics.” Jesus Christ is the “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Revelation 17:14; 19:16), who rules sovereignly over heaven and earth. Psalm 2 could hardly be clearer that all kings and nations are to bow their knees to Him as their Sovereign. His law is to dictate all nations on earth.

Eleven: “The Gospel will transform the whole creation.” According to Colossians 1:20, Christ has “already” reconciled all things to Himself “positionally” through His cross work. The “not yet” aspect of this work of reconciliation awaits the second coming and the final state. In the meantime, it is God’s special revelation which is to be used in governing, not only the institutional church, but all areas of life.

Twelve: “Christians should seek the glory of God in all areas of life (1 Corinthians 10:31).” Since the Gospel of Christ transforms all things, we should seek to “glorify God” in all that we do. God would have His church seek to bring “every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Thirteen: “So natural revelation is insufficient in our witness to the Lordship of Christ.” As we dialogue with the world on cultural matters, we must be true to the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, exalting Christ before all humanity. As taught in the Great Commission itself, this can only be accomplished through the proclamation of the Word of God: making “disciples of all the nations, [and] baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe *all things* that I [Jesus Christ] have commanded you.” “All things,” including the governing of culture, are to be founded on the teaching of the Holy Scripture.

Conclusion: In the “Author’s Preface” and chapter 1 Dr. Frame set forth an overview of the teachings of “The Escondido Theology,” explaining that some of these teachings are dangerous. The following chapters present us with a necessary corrective to this errant theology. In summary, says Frame, “were I to set forth an alternative to the Escondido theology, it would look like this:

- 1) God is Lord of everything in creation, including man;
- 2) He appointed man to take dominion over the earth, and that command has never been rescinded;

- 3) Man's fall corrupted everything human, his worship and his culture, but did not separate culture from worship as Kline imagines;
- 4) Worship is the focal point of culture, and culture is the external expression of worship;
- 5) The law is both a declaration of God's wrath, demanding that we flee to Christ, and the gracious way of life for the children of God;
- 6) The gospel is both God's command to repent and His promise of salvation through Christ with the command to repent implying a command to live by God's law;
- 7) God calls believers to bring His standards to bear on all areas of their lives, including our inner subjectivity;
- 8) Preaching should include both the fundamentals of the gospel and the applications of the gospel to all of life;
- 9) Church services play a special role in the Christian life (Hebrews 10:24-25), but we can pray and hear God's Word anytime, anywhere, and He blesses, comforts, and challenges us in all situations; and
- 10) We should use all the gifts God has given us to reach non-Christians for Christ, attracting them by the beauty of the gospel itself, expressed in terms they can understand. And in doing so, we should teach them everything Jesus has taught us, enlisting them in the work of bringing every thought and activity captive to Christ" (61-62).

Dr. Frame has done the church a great service by writing this book and getting into print. He has analyzed the teachings of the Escondido group and found them "wanting." False theology must be exposed to those within the church so that others do not fall into the same error. Thank you, Professor Frame for your very fine work.