

Good morning,

Why do you get out of bed in the morning? What is the overarching purpose of your life? And how does that purpose connect to the dishes in the sink, to your busy schedule, to your social activities, to the things that you are spending your money on, to the clothes you are buying, the books you are reading?

Do you think about these questions? Are you just living, or are you living deliberately? Can you explain why you do what you do?

Hopefully you have your pens and paper ready. For I am going to give you four concepts which we will concentrate on today. Image of God; Cultural mandate; Worldview; Dualism.

The first phrase comes right out of the Scriptures – image of God. Man and woman were created in the image of God. That means, they have the calling to represent God on earth – rulers under God. The second phrase is the title of our speech – Cultural mandate. It is man's calling to exercise dominion over the earth and all its creatures.¹ "Worldview" is a term used to describe the way in which someone looks at the world around them. Everybody has a world view, a set of convictions about who we are, where we came from, and what is the purpose of life. There are unscriptural world-views, and we must have a Scriptural one. Finally, there is the word "dualism." This is the idea that life can be divided into two parts – there is the realm of faith, and there is the realm of daily life in the concrete reality of this world. What you believe is something that belongs to the realm of faith, and that is your personal thing, but life in society is a matter of science and facts and objective truth.

The aim of this paper is to teach you about the cultural mandate, so that you have the correct worldview, as image bearers of God, and thus fight against the dualism that is so devastatingly pervasive in our society and fiercely attacks the church.

Overview of Genesis 1 and 2.

Genesis 1 and 2 are very important for our topic. They put everything into perspective. First of all, they make clear that God created all things. There is a Creator, and everything else is His creation. And the bible teaches that God's creation is there to

¹ J. De Jong, "Our Cultural Mandate", page 11, where he is summarising K. Schilder's view.

bring glory to Him. Think of Psalm 148 – where all the parts of creation are urged to praise God. God created all things to display His majesty and wisdom and power.

On the first day, God created light, and so made day and night. Periods of time. Days are a gift from the Almighty Creator, given to be used by mankind for His praise and glory. On the third day, God created the dry land. And what for? As a place for mankind to live, and work, and have families, and farm, and build and teach and so much more. And that workspace was filled with natural resources. Trees and shrubs and grassy plains, rivers and lakes and mountains. Clay, sand, gold, silver, iron ore, diamond, uranium. A giant workplace, filled with things to work with, all created for the glory of God. That world was filled with birds, animals and fish.

On the sixth day, God added another creature, different from the rest of the creatures. That becomes clear from the things God says about man just before He created Him. “Let Us make man in Our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

Clearly, mankind is different from the rest of creation, because he has been set over all the other creatures. He alone of all the creatures has been created in the Image of God. That means that he was created to reflect God, to represent God on earth. What is included in man’s being the image of God becomes clear from what God continues to say in our text. “Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle, over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” To have dominion means to rule. Man is to be a king who rules on earth. This task that man was given is the cultural mandate.

In verse 27 we read that God created man and woman in His image. Both of them. And then God commanded them: “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” They must spread out and fill the earth. God had created a world that needed to be subdued by man, a world full of creatures that were to be ruled by man. That is why man and woman were to be fruitful and multiply. Everywhere in all creation, God’s purpose was to have men and women who would be ruling, subduing, having dominion.

Here is the background for article 12 of the Belgic Confession, which says that God created every creature, gave to each its specific function and task, and so sustains

and governs them by His eternal providence and infinite power in order to serve man, to the end that man may serve his God. You could say that the purpose of man in creation is the opposite of slavery. Think of how much slavery there is in our modern world – slavery to drugs and alcohol, slavery to the pursuit of material goods. Man is so often ruled by the things created. But in the beginning God made clear – man was to rule, not be ruled, by the other created things.

This command of God for man to subdue and rule the earth and all creatures is made specific to Adam in his particular situation in chapter 2. There we read about the garden that God planted. And in that garden God placed Adam, with the command to tend and keep the garden.

The garden was a place where there were all kinds of trees good for food. We are not told what there was outside the garden. But clearly, as the population of the world grew, it would be important that the food supply be maintained and expanded with it. Tending the garden would have included agriculture. As things expanded, man would also have had to develop different tools – rubber boots and hoe and ladders and so much more. And see then the first task man was given in the garden – to name the animals. Man's work as the image of God included organisation and categorisation. Let us say – naming the animals was the first step towards science and the university. Adam would have had to know the animals to name them.

Man was obligated to this task. For he was created for this task, and God commanded him to carry it out. Thus we can speak of man's official task, his office. Subdue the earth and have dominion over it. Tend the garden and keep it. Name the animals. Office means that one is under obligation.

We should note the difference between man and the animals. Man was created with the ability to receive information, to interpret it, and then to do something with it. A thinking, reasoning being. God could speak and man would understand, and then go to work with what God said. He could responsibly carry out the commands of the LORD.

Already in the garden of Eden, man was not free to develop the world how he wanted. He could eat of every tree except one. That meant that right from the beginning, the cultural mandate had to be carried out by considering the will of God. And man was equipped with righteousness and holiness, so that he would carry out the cultural mandate to God's glory.

In all this, God was working for His greater honour and glory. He had created a world full of creatures and other things. There was so much potential. And then at the pinnacle of creation, God had placed man as ruler. Man had to develop the world, he had to discover all the things hidden in creation, the metals and materials and plastics, and find out what could be done with them. He had to have children and grandchildren – to fill the earth with those created in the image of God – a community of rulers working together on one big project – developing and ruling the world as representatives of God. He had to exercise himself in the doing of what was good, he had to do good as society and agriculture and industry developed. How this earth would have been filled with the praise of God, as man developed this earth to the praise of God, bringing out what the LORD had put in it, bringing forth of thank offerings to the LORD with his words and deeds and all the products of his development.

This is what Schilder is doing with his lengthy definition of culture (on page 40 of *Christ and Culture*). And I would underline that for Schilder, culture is a verb. So many writers talk about culture as a thing, a product. But Schilder emphasises that culture is something that man does. And the corollary is that whatever man does, is going to be cultural. The question is – is it done in obedience to God or not? We are cultural forces, whatever we do. We have to make sure that we are striving to fulfill the mandate of the beginning.

Fall.

After the fall, man continues to have the calling to rule the earth, and subdue all things. The problem is that man is no longer able to do this. He has lost the original righteousness and holiness with which he was equipped in the beginning so that he could fulfill the cultural mandate.

What man still has is the desire to develop this world. Some speak about a cultural urge. You see that all around us. There is development. Scientists are busy developing all kinds of things, and the man on the street is interested. Such developments are in the news because they grab people's attention. Man finds better ways to grow food, better ways to listen to music, to heal diseases, better ways to build cities, faster ways of travel.

But this cultural urge is no longer used to image God. This natural gift is perverted and used in the service of man, in idolatry. Man does not develop things in

obedience to the Creator so that God can be praised for what He created, but he works and develops and discovers in honour of the glory of man, he serves the idols of self and progress and materialism. His cultural activity is done, not with a view to God's command – be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it – but with a view to himself and his own interests. Man is not ruling the earth to the glory of God, but in rebellion to God and in the service of the enemy of God. Human cloning, safe abortion techniques, drugs like ecstasy, are obvious examples.

That is not to say that fallen man only develops evil things. Unbelievers have developed many of the things that we as Christians make thankful use of – for example, the car. Schilder suggests that the ark could never have been built by Noah without the help, in one way or another, of the unbelievers around him – perhaps he bought the nails at their shops, or used their technology – remember, it was Tubal Cain who developed working with iron and bronze. And many of the “cultural” developments of fallen man benefit many people in society.

But outside of Jesus Christ, none of this is done in willing obedience to the command of God, developing His world to His honour and glory, seeking the coming of His kingdom in the cultural developments. Instead, it is cultural development against God. The tower of Babel is a powerful example of the cultural development of the human race against God – they built a name for themselves rather than to the glory of God's name. And God Himself said that the potential of a united human race was tremendous, and so God confused their language and thus scattered them.

Restoration

God did not abandon His work. Already in Genesis 3:15, He promised salvation to the seed of the woman. And that has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The Son of God is our Saviour, who restores us in our office and calling.

The restoration work of Christ does not mean a return to the pre-fall state. Many things have changed, and history moves on. In the first place, in the present dispensation – the period from Christ's ascension to His return, it is the kingship of Christ that is central. As Ephesians 1 teaches, He rules not just over the Church, but over all things. He is the man, who as image of God, has received the rule over the whole creation. Hebrews 2 speaks about this – Jesus Christ has fulfilled Psalm 8 – He is the one who has been given glory and honour over all things.

Dr. De Jong, in a paper entitled “The Cultural Mandate”² points out that “we today still only have a foretaste of the restored dominion and ruling power. ... [We must] seek a heavenly kingdom, a Kingdom which is coming. The first fruits of that kingdom have already come in Christ, the principal elements, i.e. the spiritual renewal and the work of the Holy Spirit. The preaching of the gospel should lead us to a life of renewal by which we do all in our power to make the victory of Jesus Christ known in every area of life.”

To live as faithful citizens of the kingdom of heaven is to acknowledge Christ’s rule. This is something that nobody can do of their own strength. That is why it was so important that Christ die – so that He might defeat the might and power of sin and break its bondage. On account of our fall into sin, no-one is able to image God. They are enslaved to sin, and so will only serve Satan. But Jesus Christ has died to break the bondage of sin, so that people are once again able to serve God.

Christ restores us by making us share in His Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit, God’s people are restored as office-bearers. They are prophets, priests and kings – Lord’s Day 12. As prophets, they confess Christ. They proclaim and speak about His victory over sin, and so they are able to speak about how to serve God in their office again. They are kings, called to rule and fight against sin and the devil in this life. Christ has destroyed the power of sin in their life, but not completely yet the body of sin. Thus the believers experience a battle going on in their hearts against an old nature that wants to rebel against God.

The Christian restored by Christ is also a priest. He has the calling to offer himself as a living sacrifice of thankfulness. That means that he thankfully uses his time and talents and material possessions and all he has in the service of God.

The point is – we still have a task, an office, a calling, in this world. Christ does not take us out of this world when He restores us, but restores us in the midst of it. This creation is very relevant to our living as the children of God. It is striking that when the Spirit-inspired apostle Paul writes about our renewal in God’s image, that he then turns to all kinds of practical aspects of life. And he touches on marriage, and family life and work. He calls for the people of God to live in all these situations as those who have been given a new nature.

Another important point is that in the New Testament, the material creation continues to be highly valued. Paul warns in 1 Timothy 4 about heretics who will have a

² C.R.T.A Magazine, 10 (7): 1-7, 1980

wrong view of the material world, presenting it as something to be despised and abstained from. “Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.” But Paul counters: “Every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.” What this shows us is that the material world continues to have relevance and value for the Christian. What God created is good, and can be used appropriately, in accordance with God’s word – that is what it means to be sanctified by God’s word, and it should be used by giving thanks to His name.

As restored office-bearers, we continue to have a task in this creation. As prophets, priests, and kings, we are to fulfill the cultural mandate wherever we have been placed. We must prophetically confess Christ’s name, we must offer our lives and all we have in thankful service to God, and we must rule as kings, governing over whatever domain we have been given in accordance with the commandments of God – not giving in to sin, but promoting righteousness. In this way, the property of God is restored to the proper relationship to its owner. The territories over which we rule are once again brought under God’s rule in Christ.

A second fundamental difference from the pre-fall state is that we are restored as office bearers in the midst of a world of rebellion. All around us are those who continue to develop and use the world, but in a schismatic way, serving, promoting the culture of sin. Mankind does not work together on a united project in accordance with God’s laws, to His honour and glory. Instead, they develop the world in slavery to sin and the devil. The creature is served rather than the Creator.

Thus God’s children are antithetically opposed to the rest of mankind. Our cultural striving is in a completely different direction. We cannot expect that our serving God will always be appreciated, and sometimes it might very well be forbidden. It has happened that Christians are a leading force in society, but rarely. Often they are limited in their domain and field because of the hostility of those who rebel against God. For the most part, it is not faithful Christians who hold the seats of government in our democracy, nor are they faithful Christians who are the judges of the Supreme Court, or who are running the educational system or heading universities and media groups.

In considering our cultural mandate, we must also consider the church. It is clear from Scripture that we are being progressively restored in the image of God. Our renovation is not yet complete. It is an ongoing process. And it is through the preaching

that God's people are conformed more and more unto the image of Christ, which is the image of God, and thus equipped the more to carry out their calling in this world.

This antithesis, this opposition, will continue to work itself out. The sin and rebellion of man will continue to develop. The ascended Lord Jesus Christ continues to let this develop, as He gathers in His church. But the day will come when His work will be finished, the day when He will also bring to an end the culture of sin, ripened through centuries of rebellion. On which day He will also bring to earth the New Jerusalem, the city to which we look forward.

Thus we live and work with our eyes on the New Jerusalem which is coming down out of heaven. But we live and work towards that city in this world, in this creation. Wherever we have been placed, we are to show the victory of Christ over sin and the devil by living Christian lives, faithfully looking after and developing whatever parts of creation have been entrusted into our care. That is the calling of God – He created us and through Christ recreated us to be His image bearers, so that in this creation, we might bring forth praise to Him, something we through the Spirit do in part already today, and on the new earth, will do so perfectly forevermore.

Cultural mandate and worldview.

A few words about dualism. In her book, *Total Truth*, Nancy Pearcey shows how most people in our western society operate with a two storey view of the world. There is the upper storey of faith, and there is the lower storey of scientific fact. The faith level is based on what religion you belong to, and it is something that belongs to your private life. Different people operate with different value systems, and the post-modern teaching is that everybody is entitled to their particular system. And then the lower level has to do with physical life, civil government, the economy, our society, our daily work. That is the level that has to do with concrete facts, where scientific knowledge controls what happens. Thus you can believe what you want, but what you believe is not relevant to the way you do your job, to the design of your house, to the course you take at university. Faith belongs to the private sphere – studying mathematics at university is all about facts, and your faith has nothing to do with it. This is the dualism we need to guard against.

Pearcey gives a striking example. A Christian lawyer, who was an active deacon in the church, but whose daily work was helping big corporations find legal ways to

break contracts, when it was no longer in their interest to maintain that contract.³ Not that he was a hypocrite – just that he did not see his faith as relevant to his daily work. To give a more common example – maybe you have addressed someone about their casual church attire, and been told – it is what is in my heart that matters, not how I dress to church. That is to say that my faith has nothing to do with what I wear. That is two tier thinking. It has separated the faith from our physical life in this world.

But your faith has everything to do with every aspect of your life in this world. Every time you confess your faith with the Apostles' Creed, you are saying that it does. I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. With that confession I am making a statement about my car, about my house and property and material possessions, I am making a confession about the pile of dishes on the sink, and the things my husband is working with in his daily job. And that is this – it is all part of God's creation, and to be used for His honour and glory. Two tier thinking should not be there for those who believe the Apostles' Creed.

And then we need to ask – how should creation be used to the honour and glory of God? Then we need to go back to what God has told us about it – fill the earth and subdue it, have dominion. Look after, develop it, bring out what I have put in it. The cultural mandate is part of what we believe – it is from the Bible, but it is applicable to our physical, daily life. There cannot be a divide between faith and life.

When you understand this, then you can develop a Christian world view. Then you can write down clearly the answers to the following questions: “Who am I, where did I come from, and what on earth am I doing here – what is the purpose of my existence?”

Some applications.

Does your life sometimes seem meaningless? This is why it so important to understand your cultural mandate. When you do not see your daily work as part of that cultural mandate, then it becomes a job that must be done, and the sooner it is done with, the better. Being a housewife is often presented as dreary, perhaps boring, a job to be done with as soon as possible so that you can do what you enjoy. And if this is your thinking, then much of what you are busy with is meaningless – an endless, repetitive

³ *Total Truth*, page 97.

drudgery. But understanding that we are called to serve the LORD in creation, to look after it, to tend and keep it, to rule and subdue it, wherever we have been placed, that shows us that life makes sense.

Knowing that you have a task in creation becomes the guiding principle in your work. Then you will work hard, not just to survive and keep your head above water, but to fulfill your task. Which is very important when you find that there is more free time on your hands because children are growing up and so on. Then you do not use the extra time to simply indulge yourself – I have done my bit and can sit back and enjoy life now, but you continue to work with the cultural mandate – what kinds of opportunities does my increased time allow me to fulfill my task to image God in this world?

It is clear from Genesis 1 that both man and woman were created in the image of God. That means you are all image-bearers of God, as ladies, as single women, as wives, as mothers, as daughters, as sisters and aunts and omas. You all have the calling to fulfill the cultural mandate in your own situation.

Depending on who you are will affect how you fulfill the cultural mandate. When you are married, then you have the calling to assist your husband. You cannot separate your task from that, but that is the context in which it must be worked out. Being a wife, then with your husband you will have a task of looking after the household of which your husband is the head. That is a domain that you must rule and have dominion over. If you are working in a place outside of a household, even part time, then that is part of the domain you have been given to rule and look after as God's image. That is where you, as one created in His image, have to represent the rule of the Creator.

In the New Testament context, this means that in every territory, Christ's kingship must be acknowledged. Every territory must be looked after in submission to Christ.

Your household will include all kinds of territories. We can think of the physical territory of your residence. You have the calling to look after that property, to have dominion over it, to rule it and subdue it. Weeds and dust come to mind. Making it beautiful. It should be visible from the way you look after your property and your house that you understand your cultural mandate.

God commanded that we rule and have dominion and subdue. We must not just let things happen, but very consciously direct development in a household. Think of the atmosphere in the home. This is an extremely important one for a Christian wife and mother, for the culture of the home will have a big influence on our children. That is

where they will spend a lot of time. We have to rule and develop that environment in such a way that it is an environment which itself is a good place to train our children, so that they grow up equipped to fulfill the cultural mandate. Let me mention some examples.

A home library with lots of books, fiction and non-fiction, is a good way to develop a culture in a home. Reading lots to your children, opening their minds to many different worlds. Teaching them to enjoy reading. For them to carry out the cultural mandate, they must be able to one day read and process information. Computer games and dvds take a lot less work to get children interested in, and are sometimes used to keep children out of the way when we want some undisturbed time, but developing their minds to be interested in books has a far longer term benefit.

Music. The potential to make music is one of the things that God has put in creation. It has potential for lots of development. A beautiful tool with which to praise God and give thanks to Him. Will we stimulate our children to develop an appreciation of and aptitude for music? Singing psalms together. Listening to music, playing an instrument. Many teenagers like rock music. There are reasons for that. But rock music hardly deserves the name music. Completely overlooking the element of the lyrics, the music itself is very basic and coarse. It takes little to become a rock musician. Just think about it – at the age that the average classical singer or musician is just starting to reach their prime, a rock musician will be getting together with former fellow band members, for a nostalgic regrouping tour. Developing this world and its potentials to the glory of God is hardly something that rock music does. We should rule and govern the atmosphere in our homes in such a way that our children develop interests here too. So that they learn to rule and have dominion over their voice and music.

The home culture must also be developed with respect to clothing. We should promote styles of dress that are modest, decent, neat. The teenage clothing market is saturated with sensuality. Are we as church community developing this part of daily life, producing clothing styles and fashions which we and our daughters can wear which honour God?

Slavery is to just go with the flow. To throw up our hands in despair at how immoral the clothing styles of the world are, but then not do anything about it. We need to talk with each other and encourage each other in developing a Christian culture in our homes.

We can also think of home decorating –we should do this in a way that honours Him, which reveals that life makes sense, which exudes harmony and peace, which does not undermine his created order – for example, with pictures, words on the wall that mock the headship of the husband.

Another territory to develop and rule and subdue is social relationships. That of husband and wife, of parent and child, of brothers and sisters in the communion of saints. Do not just let them happen, but work on them, develop them to the honour and glory of God. In each, fulfill the commands of God. Be it the way you submit to and respect your husband. Be it the way you train and discipline your children.

It is in social relationships that we see the glorious restoration work that Christ does. In Him, it is possible to develop and build good marriage relationships, for marriage is restored in him. In Him, it is possible to build good relationships with our children, with brothers and sisters in the communion of saints. As authority structures are more and more overturned in our world, it is important that the Christian honour them and so show forth the glory of God.

The cultural mandate also affects our work place. Whatever our tasks and responsibilities there, we must develop and look after that context in a way that God's rule is shown. Respectful attitudes to superiors, kindness to those under you, that all flows out of this. As you are able to be involved with influencing the direction of a company, then it must be done in such a way that God's rule is represented. It might be tempting to make a quick dollar, and leave all kinds of scars on the environment. The cultural mandate means that we have to look after the creation. That does not mean – worship it – as the green movement sometimes does – mother earth – but it means certainly using it responsibly.

Another territory is our neighbourhood – for which we share responsibility with other citizens. Another is the roads on which we drive – we share the roads – they are another shared territory. With these shared territories we must, as far as it is in our power, rule and look after them.

Another aspect is the development of this world. It is good and God glorifying when Christians use the opportunities that they have to be involved with the further development of this world. We think of science and technology, agricultural development. It is no surprise that those who are slaves to the evil one so often develop these things for evil ends. As he is able, the Christian should be involved to point things

in the right direction, and to use them to further the glory of God. As we said earlier, the Christian might be less and less welcomed in influential places. For example, just to question Darwinian evolution can make life difficult for you in an academic institution. But as long as we have the opportunities, we should use them.

It is important that we work with what we confess about the Church. God's calling is that mankind work together in serving as His image. A community working together ruling and developing this world to His honour and glory. That community no longer includes all the inhabitants of the earth. Since the fall into sin, there has been schism, a schismatic work that continues to the present. But in the Church it is different. There people are united in the one faith. They love each other and want to help each other. Thus it is only fitting that God's people help and assist each other in their task as image bearers. The unity of the Church should lead to unity in cultural activity. Reformed education is one example. School societies are God's people working together to educate their children to serve the LORD with their talents in this world, in this creation. Other examples are organisations like Fair Haven, and Eucalypt, and ARPA. They are not run by the Church, but they are organizations in which the members of the Church work together to promote His honour and glory in different aspects of life.

There is another side to this. Being a communion of saints means that we should also support each other in fulfilling the cultural mandate. This means that we should be genuinely interested in how the other members are fulfilling the cultural mandate in their daily work. So that a Christian scientist knows that he has the support of his brothers and sisters as he works against the onslaught of evolutionary thinking in his field. So that a Christian musician does not feel isolated by having others say to him – it is fine for you to be interested in music, but that is not my thing. Rather, we should support him or her as they develop the possibilities that God has put in creation.

Many more examples could be given. But these are things to work out in our discussing and study and daily life. The key point is – God created this world, and He created man with a special place in this world – to image Him, to rule as His representatives. The world is the LORD's and everything in it, and His honour and glory must shine forth in every place. As Christians, we must rule every territory that has been entrusted to us to His honour and glory. We must rule and live in such a way to show forth Christ's victory over sin and rebellion. That is our cultural calling today.