

Betsy DeVos and the kingdom

I share Dutch Calvinist heritage with Trump's pick for education secretary. I wonder if we see God's kingdom the same way.

By [James Calvin Schaap](#)

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I'm not particularly sure I like my people being called "a conservative Protestant sect," but lately at least the shoe seems to fit, so I'll have to wear it, despite the pinching. But then, most of those I call "my people," would say, "OK, Schaap, what would you expect from *Mother Jones*, that kind of leftie journal?"

I don't know Kristina Rizga, but she's been following the Betsy DeVos story for some time already; and it's clear she's done her homework on what on the traditional CRC, "a little-known, conservative Dutch Calvinist denomination," [she calls us in the latest issue](#). But her *Mother Jones* article on DeVos, Donald Trump's choice for secretary of education, gets an awful lot about us blushing right.

Betsy DeVos is just about my age and therefore probably carries the same stamp from our mutual CRC rearing. She went to Holland Christian and Calvin College, and, even though she and her husband aren't CRC today (they went over to a mega), like so many others she can't really wash away that stamp (Trump would say "brand").

There's are differences between us—five billion dollars worth, and that's spare change. The DeVos kingdom probably exceeds that of the the man who chose her. We don't know that to be true because he won't release his tax returns—you know that story.

I used the word *kingdom* for a reason. Kristin Rizga does too in *Mother Jones*. "Betsy DeVos wants to use America's schools to build 'God's kingdom.'" That's the title of the article, but Rizga puts "God's kingdom" in quotes. Why? Because Rizga thinks what Betsy DeVos means by God's kingdom is something akin to the U.S. of A. being

"a Christian nation." Soon enough, Rizga's warning goes, we'll all become characters in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Rizga may know different—she's not dumb; but the spin she puts on her fascinating DeVos (and CRC) profile, and especially on the word *kingdom*, is to make her billionaire subject into just another right-wing troglodyte with diamonds on the soles of her wooden shoes.

I may be wrong here, but I think Betsy DeVos means something different by the kingdom, and I'd like to believe it has nothing to do with patriotic excesses or America being a "Christian nation." I'd like to believe that because that's what we both were taught. I'm no theologian, but I have spent my life in schools that used that phrase as their bottom line, and I never, ever associated "God's kingdom" with America the beautiful. To me that phrase always meant the day the lion lies down with the lamb, the day the only thunder birds flying overhead have feathers. As some of us may be too anxious to say, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"

So I'd like to believe that Kristina Rizga is wrong about what Betsy DeVos means when she uses the word *kingdom*. I can't help but think DeVos is thinking about a sovereign God of all of life and not Old Glory.

But Kristina Rizga may be right. After all, Betsy's brother Eric Prince, of Blackwater fame, long ago left and took up the bloody Christian jihad.

For the record, here's what the CRC web page says about the word *kingdom*:

. . . Kingdom takes in all of human culture throughout the world. Unlike nations on earth, God's kingdom does not have defined borders. It is not restricted to a certain location, like a cathedral; nor can it be reduced to "religious" activity. By God's kingdom we mean God's sovereign rule, God's sphere of influence. We believe that God's Spirit is busy extending God's rule all over creation.

If you ask me, "the kingdom" means something much closer to what Navajos might call "the beauty way," than it does anything Franklin Graham or James Dobson believe about our politics.

I think I know what Betsy DeVos was taught. What I don't know is what she believes.

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