

**On the Essence of  
Gerhard O. Forde's  
Theology of the Cross**

by

**Bradley C. Jenson**

**For the 2020 Convocation for the Theology of the Cross  
February 3–4, 2020  
Bloomington, Minnesota**

**Sponsored by the LCMC Augustana District  
Board of Theology and Ministry**

## Preface: A Unique Opportunity

Dear Fellow Theologians of the Cross:

The LCMC Augustana District has established an excellent tradition of hosting an annual theological conference and this tradition continues. As we move into 2020 and beyond, the Board of Theology and Ministry (BTM) has changed the title of the conference to **Convocation for the Theology of the Cross**. The reason for doing so is in hope of broadening the scope of participation beyond our LCMC Augustana District. The BTM will still be in charge of the theme of annual conferences as well as serving as the entity that invites the presenters. But we realize that there are pastors and others who identify with being theologians of the cross who are members of the ELCA, LCMS, other Lutheran church bodies, as well as people in LCMC who are not members of the Augustana District who may wish to attend our annual **Convocation for the Theology of the Cross**. Please make sure you invite your friends and acquaintances from beyond the district to attend!

We are also continuing to do what we began last year: encourage participants to read a common text in preparation for the upcoming February event. In late 2018, I wrote a study guide for the book, *Theology is for Proclamation*, by Gerhard Forde. (*Theology is for Proclamation* was the common text for the 2019 event.) After an introduction, I provided a one-page summary of each of the chapters. This year, the common text is a newly published book (July, 2019) made available by Lutheran Quarterly Books titled *The Essential Forde*. This new book was edited by Nicholas Hopman, Mark C. Mattes, and Steven D. Paulson. We are pleased to have Nick and Steve with us as we focus the 2020 **Convocation for the Theology of the Cross** on the essence of Gerhard Forde's theology. Once again, I'm providing a short summary of topics related to the theme of the conference, but I'm going to do it differently in order to take advantage of a unique opportunity for your congregation.

The unique opportunity ahead of you is to reflect on the themes of *The Essential Forde* in such a way that you can easily take the themes back to your congregations and implement them in an adult study course of seven sessions either in the spring or fall of 2020, should you so desire. Here is how it can work: This study guide will summarize content from Gerhard Forde's book, *Where God Meets Man: Luther's Down-to-Earth Approach to the Gospel*, and pair it with readings from the new text, *The Essential Forde*. A seven week adult education course that you can implement back in your congregation would be based on the seven chapters in the book, *Where God Meets Man*, which, though almost fifty years old, is still in print today because it has become a classic for adult education in congregations for teaching the essence of the theology of the cross.

The title of the book is important: *Where God Meets Man*. Forde explicates the theology of the cross in a straightforward way to highlight how God works in our existence. This text is excellent for use in your congregation. Forde wrote: **The fundamental theme of the book is the "down to earth" character of Luther's theology. In using this theme the intent is to point out that we have failed to understand the basic thrust or direction of Luther's theology and that this failure has caused and is still causing us grief. Modern [Luther] scholarship has demonstrated that Luther simply did not share the views of the nature of faith and salvation that subsequent generations foisted upon him and used to interpret his thinking. The book attempts to bring the results of some of that scholarship to light and make it more accessible for those who are searching for answers today.** – Gerhard O. Forde  
Thus we find the essence of Forde's (and Luther's) theology of the cross in *Where God Meets Man*, a classic text which is available for use in an adult education course in your congregation.

The new text, *The Essential Forde*, is obviously for pastors and others who have had seminary training and thus can serve as a reference book in support of *Where God Meets Man*.

*Cruc sola est nostra theologia,*  
Rev. Bradley C. Jenson, CFP®  
Member, LCMC Augustana District Board of Theology and Ministry

About the author of this study guide: Rev. Brad Jenson was a student of Dr. Forde's in the early 1980s. Regarding publications, Brad currently has two works in progress: "Christology Through the Fires of Feuerbach" is an article which is currently under review for possible publication by *LOGIA: A Journal of Lutheran Theology* in the spring of 2020. It focuses on Forde's Christology as a response to Feuerbachian atheism. Brad is also working as a coauthor on a book titled *Johann Sebastian Bach and his St. John Passion*. The anticipated publication date is June, 2022.

He is the coauthor of *The Essential Bible: A Summary of the Major Stories* (1998), and *Luther and Bach on the Magnificat: For Advent and Christmas* (2015).

Brad retired from the pastoral ministry in 2002 and is a financial advisor at Lake Superior Financial Service, Inc. in Duluth, Minnesota. His professional designations are as follows: CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER (CFP®), Certified Investment Management Analyst (CIMA®), Accredited Investment Fiduciary (AIF®), and Chartered Advisor in Philanthropy (CAP®).

Contact information: e-mail [bejenson@charter.net](mailto:bejenson@charter.net) or by phone at his office at Lake Superior Financial Services/Raymond James at 218-625-2430.

## Chapter 1: Up the Down Staircase (Theme: Law and Gospel)

Gerhard Forde uses the phrase “up the down staircase” to indicate what is wrong with the usual understanding of the Christian faith: that meeting God has to do with ascending a spiritual ladder up to heaven. **“As human beings we seem bound somehow to think of the law as a kind of staircase or ladder to heaven. We more or less assume . . . that the law was given as a way to God or salvation.”** (9)\* It was this way of thinking about the law that Luther attacked. Going “up the down staircase” is a confusion of law and gospel which turns the gospel into another law so that it functions merely a repair job for the law:

**Let me explain. We begin by assuming the law is a ladder to heaven. Then we go on to say, “Of course, no one can climb the ladder, because we are all weakened by sin. We are all therefore guilty and lost.” And this is where “the gospel” is to enter the picture. What we need is someone to pay our debt to God and to climb the ladder for us. This, supposedly, is what Jesus has done. As our “substitute” he has paid off God and climbed the ladder for us. All we have to do now is “believe it.” But what have we done when we understand the gospel in this way? We have, in fact, interpreted the gospel merely as something that makes the ladder scheme work. . . . It is simply “a repair job.”** (10–11)

By contrast, for the theology of the cross, the law is not a stairway to heaven, not even one in which Jesus climbs the staircase for us. **“No, the law for Luther was understood in a much more concrete, actual, and dynamic sense. In its theological ‘use’ law should be understood as a concrete and actual ‘voice’ which ‘sounds in the heart’ and the ‘conscience,’ a real voice which afflicts man in his isolation from God and demands that he fulfill his humanity. This ‘voice,’ for Luther, can and does arise from anywhere and everywhere. . . . The law is not defined only as a specific set of demands as such, but rather in terms of what it does to you. Law is that which accuses and terrifies and in a real sense, *anything* that does this functions as law.”** (14,15–16)

**“If we look on the law in this way, we can begin to grasp also the dynamic vitality, the ‘good news’ character of the gospel. For the gospel too must be seen in terms of what it *does*. For what is the Gospel? It is the *end* of the law! . . . The ‘law’ ends when the new creation begins. The gospel is the joyful message that in Christ this new creation has already and actually broken in on us, and the promise that it will be carried to its completion. It is the story of one who came down to earth and lived ‘under the voice’ [of the law] and died under it as we all do, but yet rose triumphant and broke its power and brought it to an end.”** (16)

**“The battle therefore is between these contending voices or powers. That is why the basic question for Luther was the proper distinction between law and gospel. It is a question of how you actually hear the words, what they actually do to you.”** (17)

\*Everything in bold is a direct quote from Gerhard Forde’s *Where God Meets Man* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972).



In *The Essential Forde*, see Part 1. The Law-Gospel Distinction in Modern Lutheranism, particularly the section titled “Gospel as the End of the Law.” (59–79) The original source for this section of *The Essential Forde* is taken from Forde’s doctoral dissertation. Forde completed his doctorate at Harvard University in 1967. His dissertation was published as *The Law-Gospel Debate* in 1969 and is still in print today. The section, “Gospel as the End of the Law,” in *The Essential Forde* is chapter 11 in Forde’s dissertation.

## Chapter 2: The “Down to Earth” God (Theme: The Electing God and the Bondage of the Will)

The “down to earth” God is an electing God. “[This truth] is one of the most difficult aspects of Luther’s theology and also what has been apparently one of the bitterest pills for modern man to swallow: the problem of divine sovereignty as it is expressed particularly in the doctrine of predestination [election]. . . . [People] usually try to avoid the issue or belittle its significance. It cannot be denied, however, that it was a matter of considerable importance to Luther and his followers. Luther always insisted that *The Bondage of the Will* was among the best and most important of his writings. . . . At stake are the basic questions of man’s thinking about God and the nature of his relationship to God.” (18–19) *The Bondage of the Will* has to do with humankind’s relationship with *God* and not freedom with respect to decisions in everyday life.

Election or predestination is a threat to us because “it implies that God has decided everything and left nothing to our freedom.” (2) Our bondage is precisely our driven attempt to reserve some freedom over against God’s electing act; freedom at least to say “yes” or “no” to God’s “offer” of salvation. God offers; we accept (or not). In our bondage, our belief in our “free will” is a false faith over against God’s grace. It is a false faith because our human will is not free.

Why not? Answer: it is under threat from the very godliness of God. “. . . [W]e hear and feel the awesome threat of the almightiness, the immutability, yes, even the predestination of God which destroys our [false sense of] freedom.” (22) “The fact is that when we, as men [and women] who are cut off from God, hear of God’s almightiness and immutability as well as talk of predestination we are *bound* to try and escape it. . . . But what does all this mean? It means that because we dread the Almighty God, because we can’t live with what appears to us to be the logic of predestination, we are literally bound to fabricate a theology based on our *own* freedom. . . . When we reach this point, we come to what Luther really meant by the ‘bondage of the will.’ As beings cut off from God we simply cannot escape reacting this way.” (24) “. . . [A]s sinners we are *bound by our own will* to do this. The bondage of the will does not stem from the fact that because God is almighty we are therefore forced to do things ‘against our will’—as though were ‘determined’ or some such nonsense. . . . *We* are the problem, not God. We are *bound* to the folly of taking our fate into our own hands.” (24)

“For Luther thought a theology based truly on the gospel must . . . begin by refusing to tamper with almighty God as he is in himself. One must begin by recognizing that God is ultimately in control in spite of the difficulties that may cause. Only then could one say that what actually does happen in his act of grace is the revelation of God’s will. It enables one to say with confidence that the death and resurrection of Christ is the revelation of his will and not an accident. It enables one to say that at every moment the question of what God might or might not have in mind for you is answered by what he actually does. Thus you can say that the will of God for you is *revealed* in the fact of your baptism, or in the fact that you hear the gospel and receive his body and in the sacrament. He *has* baptized you. That *is* his will!” (26–27)

It is the “down to earth” action of God *for you* that stills the voice which is threatened by predestination. Then the treat of election becomes pure gospel. God’s almightiness and predestination “are the promise that God is in control and that nothing can thwart his will.” (29)

†

In *The Essential Forde*, see Part III. The Bondage of the Will (111–126). The content in Part III is from sections of *The Captivation of the Will* by Gerhard O. Forde and edited by Steven Paulson (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005).

### Chapter 3: The Glory Road or the Way of the Cross? (Theme: Christology and Atonement)

Luther's "down-to-earth" approach to the gospel is a theology of the cross. "Luther made a sharp distinction between a theology of the cross and what he called 'a theology of glory.'" (33) Put another way, Luther "made a distinction between a theology of the cross and a theology about the cross." (33)

A theology *about* the cross is an aspect of a theology of glory. "It is the kind of theology [akin to the "ladder" understanding of the law] that tries to extend its own understanding up to heaven, to speculate about what God must be like 'in himself.' That is why, incidentally it was called a theology of *glory*. It is an attempt to penetrate the glory which belongs to God alone." (34)

"When applied to the event of the cross itself, this kind of thinking leads back to the theology of the ladder. The law is the way of salvation, a ladder to heaven. Because we have failed and are too weak to climb it, Jesus becomes our substitute. By his perfect life he climbs the ladder and by his death he pays for our failure. In terms of dogmatic theology, Jesus 'vicariously satisfied' the demands of the law. He paid the bill, so to speak, which we couldn't pay. Such theology is a spectator theology. It is the result of an attempt to fit the cross into a system of meaning which one already has and which remains standing as an eternal scheme indicating what would have to be done to placate God. As spectators we will then have to decide whether it is convincing enough for us to accept." (34) There are two other major atonement theories which share the characteristics of a theology of glory as does this aforementioned vicarious satisfaction theory (also known as the "objective" theory of atonement). There is also a subjective theory of atonement: "Instead of seeing [Jesus' death] as a payment of some sort, [it is] suggested that [Jesus' death] be understood as an *example*. Jesus' death is an *example* of dedication to the cause of God which ought to inspire us to work harder [i.e., climb the ladder] for God's kingdom." (35) The third major theology of glory motif for atonement is the victory motif. In this theory, Christ wins a cosmic battle between the devil and God. Human beings are merely spectators of this cosmic drama.

There is a sense in which Luther's Christology is "none of the above" because his Christology is not a *theory* of atonement at all. Rather, Luther's Christology drives toward *actual* atonement. Atonement is actualized through the proclamation of law and gospel when the Old Adam in us dies and a new being is raised up in faith: "What this means is that the cross and resurrection must be so understood and so preached that they bring about in us as well a death and a new life." (38) "For in a theology of the cross, the cross and resurrection *is* the way. The law is not the way, the *cross* is. Jesus, we might say, is his own 'system.' As he put it himself: 'I am the way, the truth and the life.' . . . Most theologies are little more than detours *around* the cross. A theology of the cross insists that one must go through it, for the cross and the resurrection *is* the way." (38) "The Old Adam cannot be cured; he has 'the sickness unto death.' The cross *is* his death. *That* is the way God gets through to us; that is the radical nature of his action. . . . Then something absolutely new begins: the life of *faith*, the life of trusting God." (39)

"The death and resurrection of Christ leads not merely to a doctrine *about* atonement, but to an actual *accomplishment* of atonement. Looked at in this way, it is apparent that there is no real difference between the so called 'different pictures' or 'theories' of the atonement. Jesus 'satisfied the wrath of God,' or 'bears the curse of the law,' or 'suffers the punishment' at the same time as he 'wins the victory' over the demons and death. It is all of a piece. Indeed, since his life, death and resurrection are ours, it is quite possible also to speak of him as our 'example.' All views come together and the language is virtually interchangeable as long as we are talking about a theology of the cross not merely about the cross. What is ruled out is only that kind of thinking that detracts from the real down to earth death of Jesus by translating it into a theory about something that took place in heaven." (44)

†

In *The Essential Forde*, one does not find a section dedicated to Christology and Atonement. However, Steven Paulson has a section in his essay "Forde Lives!" in *The Essential Forde* titled "Preaching's Atonement Doctrine" (22-25). For Forde's major treatment of Christology and Atonement see "The Work of Christ" in *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 2, Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 5-99. See also Chapter 3, "The Preacher," in Forde's *Theology is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 57-85.

**Chapter 4: A Man for This Earth**  
(Theme: Christological Anthropology or “On Becoming a Creature”)

This chapter, as Forde wrote, has to do with an “**understanding of man**” (45) or “**doctrine of man.**” (47) It answers the question “how is humankind understood from the perspective of Luther’s theology of the cross?” It has to do with the general category of theological anthropology. Since Luther’s theology is thoroughly christological, it is best that we speak of *christological* anthropology. Such anthropology has to do with how one *becomes* a creature—for the first time.

This perspective presupposes that human beings, *prior* to an encounter with God’s Word, are *not* creatures. It has to do with a theology of the cross understanding of original sin, of human beings having succumbed to temptation: “. . . Luther seeks to follow the Bible. According to the biblical picture the temptation is not for man to *lower* himself, but rather just the opposite. The temptation is to become *like God*. Man’s temptation is to reach for something that does not belong to him: that heavenly perfection that beckons him to leave the earth for some spiritual paradise. The temptation is for man to refuse to take care of the earth and to become a God. . . . Sin is not located primarily in the body, but rather precisely in our spiritual pretensions and ambitions. It is our god-like aspirations that destroy our life and seduce us to make life miserable for our fellow men.” (53)

“The ‘image of God,’ Luther says, so far as we can now reconstruct it, consisted not in some secret spiritual faculty now lost, but rather in the fact that man, like God, lived in *peace* in his kingdom. In other words, when man lives by faith and trust in God, when he takes care of his ‘kingdom’ as he is supposed to (has dominion over it) he is at peace. And this very peace *images* God . . . . In that way he lives in the image of God—at peace with his maker, with himself and with the world. He lives ‘down to earth.’” (54)

“As a creature man is to live, therefore, solely by faith. He is to trust God for the final outcome of things. He lives day by day, awaiting each day the new revelation of God’s will, not knowing necessarily how it will all end. He simply trusts God perfectly. That is his *righteousness*. He *lives* by faith, without fear, without anxiety. Luther surmised that had man remained in this state of ‘perfect righteousness and faith’ God would at the end, have translated him to a new and perhaps immortal state. In other words, Adam did not possess inherently some kind of automatic immortality but would rather have had to await a further and final act of divine goodness. Man was to live by faith alone. The fall of man is therefore a fall from faith. What happens is that man succumbs to the temptation to over-reach himself, to mess about in those things which are ‘above’ him. He loses his trust in God and tries to take his fate in his own hands. He denies his creaturehood and his humanity and attempts to take up the mantle of God.” (55)

“Against this background we can begin to see more fully the significance of the theology of the cross. The purpose of the cross is not to pay a debt which man owes for not making it to heaven, not to assist man in his aspiration toward some kind of religious perfectionism. The purpose of the cross is to create that faith which man has lost, that faith which enables him to live once again as a creature *on this earth*. The cross and resurrection therefore is that power which makes new creatures; it makes anew the kind of person intended for this earth. Christ dies not to make us gods, but new *creatures*. He does this by putting an end to—putting to death—the old Adam, the man who is not content to be man. In his place, the new man, the man of faith, is raised up.” (55–56)

The proclamation of law and gospel and the administration of the sacraments establish and renew an anthropological “dualism of the self,” established christologically: “The point is that we have to do not with one continuous Adam, one ‘you,’ but with the mystery of the two Adams, the mystery of the two ‘you’s.’ These two ‘you’s’ speak an entirely different kind of language. The old says, ‘I am the master of my fate; I do what I choose.’ The new says, ‘I repent, thou alone art God and Lord.’ And there is really no compromise between those two kinds of language. Between them stands not a ‘choice’ but a death and a resurrection. To be raised is to speak the new language, to begin to rejoice and be glad in the newness of life and of all creation!” (63)



In *The Essential Forde*, one does not find a section dedicated to theological anthropology. One could make the argument that Forde’s best treatment of the important topic of theological anthropology is none other than this chapter: Chapter 4 “A Man for This Earth,” in *Where God Meets Man*. An excellent place for further study is Forde’s section titled “Christian Life,” in *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 2, Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 395–469; particularly the sub-section titled “The Self as God’s Creature” (452–455).

## Chapter 5: Treasure in Earthen Vessels (Theme: The Sacraments)

The sacraments are *events*. “In Luther’s view a sacrament is an earthly sign accompanied by a divine promise. The two go together to make up the event called a sacrament, an event in which God breaks through to us in a particular and concrete manner. . . . Only where there is a definite promise made in connection with a sign could one be sure of a real break-through, an instance in which God really binds himself to be there for us. . . . Only where God promises to be present in a saving way in, with, and under the earthly sign can one really be sure.” (68—69) “The sacrament doesn’t add anything to [the] Word [of promise]—as though something were lacking—it rather makes unmistakable to us the concrete nature and intent of that Word. It brings home the down-to-earth nature of the Word. It is an action in which God’s Word reaches its goal.” (73)

### *Baptism*

“Baptism is the sacrament of initiation. It is the action by which God first takes us and makes us his own. In Luther’s view, through the Sacrament of Baptism we are made completely pure and innocent in God’s eyes. The guilt of sin is washed away and we are made totally new creatures. To be sure, the so-called facts of the case do not bear this out. The old Adam is still there and we still sin. But God’s act in Baptism overrides that. It is the first and most important thing. Thinking about that, renewing it day by day, puts the old Adam to death and makes the new creature.” (77) “First God acts and his action makes us what we are. The very ‘first-ness’ of it destroys the man who seeks to put himself first—the old Adam. That is the theological reason for keeping infant baptism. Being acted upon by God even before you know what is going on emphasizes the first-ness of God. This was always with the understanding that the infant would be brought up in the Christian community where the fact of his Baptism would be taught and proclaimed.” (78)

“Faith is not a precondition for Baptism, either in infants or adults. The faith Luther was talking about was the faith *created* by Baptism and which as such *received* Baptism.” (79)

“The God who takes man to himself through Baptism does not wait or depend on the decision of the old Adam. He moves into our lives to destroy him so that we come to see through our Baptism that the God of incomprehensible love and mercy is the first thing, the foundation of our lives and we *can* be made new. Thus we can see why Luther appealed to his Baptism when he was tempted by the devil to believe he was not among the elect. Baptism is the act of God here on earth in which God’s concrete will for us is revealed.” (79)

### *The Lord’s Supper*

“Distinctive in Luther’s view is the insistence on the real presence of Christ in the Supper. Luther adamantly held to the idea that in the Supper we really receive what the words declare: the body and blood of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. Again the point is that God really comes down to earth to us; we do not ascend to him in heaven. The kind of forgiveness one gets from God is not a mere announcement from heaven or a lecture about forgiveness which we then have to work up the ability to believe, but a forgiveness which is actually *worked* in us by the very descent of God into things humble and lowly, into earthen vessels. That is why he made the ‘is’ in ‘This *is* my body,’ ‘This *is* my blood,’ into a virtual watchword of the Lutheran Reformation.” (80) “To paraphrase Luther, the Supper is a place where God literally lays himself open to us and says, ‘Here you have me.’ To grasp that; to take the bread and drink the wine—that is faith!” (85–86)

“Luther’s understanding of the Lord’s Supper is one of the clearest instances of his view of God’s gracious action. By his action, God puts to death the old Adam, that is, he demolishes the man who seeks God in a spiritual heaven and raises up a new man content to live as God’s creature with his feet on the ground.” (86)

“. . . [T]he Lord’s Supper is the sacrament from which we live in this world waiting for all things to be made new. The sacrament gives us life—actually and literally. . . . It gives life and salvation because it is the forgiveness of sins. It is God’s coming all the way to where we are. That is forgiveness. And where there is forgiveness, as Luther said, there is life and salvation.” (87)



In *The Essential Forde*, see Part VII, The Ministry (245–275); particularly “Something to Believe: A Theological Perspective on Infant Baptism” (257–270) and “The Lord’s Supper as the Testament of Jesus” (271–275). See also “Preaching the Sacraments” (89–115) in *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament* by Gerhard O. Forde, Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007).

Chapter 6: This World and the Next  
(Theme: Doctrine of Two Kingdoms)

“One might get the impression from the interpretation thus far that Luther was against the idea of a transcendent God, a God somehow ‘beyond’ or ‘outside’ our world, or that [he] was against the idea of another world, beyond or outside this world. Nothing, of course, could be farther from the truth. . . . He was firmly convinced of the reality of a world beyond this one. It was from the promise of this world that he drew sustenance for his faith and hope.” (89) “The idea of a world ‘to come’ implies that it is something absolutely new, something that like all future events rests solely in the hands of God.” (93)

“. . . [H]ope in the world to come does not lead us to *divide* our allegiance between this world and the next. There is no *competition* between them. On the contrary, since that world is God’s entirely free gift, since it comes by his will alone, we are freed to give ourselves entirely to *this* world, to set about seeing to it that his will is done ‘*on earth* as it is in heaven.’” (97) “[It was Luther’s] belief that everyone should enter into his worldly vocation in the confidence that it is pleasing to God, and look on it as a commission from God.” (98)

That being said, there is “a real and concrete battle that goes on about us and within us to establish the proper kind of attitude towards this world. It is not something that can be taken for granted. We are tempted either to succumb to the world and its enticements or in religious indignation to forsake it. There is a fateful pull in us to do either one or other of these things. In the language of Luther, we are under the sway of the devil, ‘The Prince of this World.’ Note that he is not the *king*; he is for the time being only the prince who has usurped the rule through sin. It is against him that the battle must be waged.” (100)

“Modern Protestantism has rejected all talk of the devil and has fostered the myth that the earthly or political realm is one that is more or less neutral and must be left alone to run itself. Luther had much too healthy and realistic a fear of the devil and his wiles to commit that mistake! The devil and his kingdom was always a third factor that had to be taken into account. This means that the relationship between God’s two kingdoms was never a matter of static indifference. Believing, hoping in the kingdom of grace means entering the battle against Satan in this world. It is a case of dynamic interaction.” (103)

The doctrine of two kingdoms is not a matter of “separating what are called religious and spiritual concerns” (103–104) from secular issues. How, then, is the doctrine of two kingdoms related to the “separation of church and state”? “The doctrine of the two kingdoms distinguishes basically between this world and the next; the separation of church and state is a political arrangement separating institutions *in this world* to provide religious freedom in a society with more than one kind of religion. Although . . . the two are no doubt related, they are by no means the same thing. A doctrine of two kingdoms does indeed assert that the church has no right to claim political authority for itself but that is not to say that the church is to have no concern for the conduct of political affairs. As an institution in this world the church is most certainly concerned with the battle against the devil. Indeed, the church ought to be the specialist in discerning his presence wherever he appears—especially in the political realm.” (104) But the political realm is usually not the primary problem.

“. . . [W]e must be quite clear that the main threat to a true understanding and proper exercise of the two kingdoms doctrine comes from our own religious and quasi religious dreams. We inevitably already have our own ideals, our own lusts for something better, our own devious plans for getting to our own special heaven. . . . We will get nowhere unless we see that this is the area where the real battle must be fought.” (106)

“It is nonsense to say that [Luther] did not allow the church to speak on political matters. After all it was he who tried to fix the relationship in the first place. Limits were set not merely to ecclesiastical power, but *also* to political power. . . . The Lutheran confessions abound in articles on ecclesiastical and civil power concerned with this very problem. For Luther the church on earth can be looked on as the ally of the state in the battle against Satan. This means in the first place that it must see itself as the messenger of the gospel. It preaches both law and gospel, to be sure, but it does this so the gospel may be heard. It is the custodian of the distinction between law and gospel.” (113)

Regarding the law, “. . . Luther did not speak of law as something static and unchangeable. Laws will and must change in their form as the times demand. Luther, for instance, refused to grant eternal status even to the laws of Moses. . . . Men on this earth simply don’t have access to eternal laws. But men do have the gift of reason and the accumulated wisdom of the ages as well as the Bible.” (111–112)



In *The Essential Forde*, one does not find a section dedicated to “this world and the next” including the doctrine of two kingdoms. One could make the argument that Forde’s best treatment of this important topic is none other than this

chapter: Chapter 6 "This World and the Next" in *Where God Meets Man*. See also Forde's "The Revolt and the Wedding: An Essay on Social Ethics in the Perspective of Luther's Theology," in *The Reformation and the Revolution* (Sioux Falls, SD: Augustana College Press, 1970) 79-88.

**Chapter 7: The Church and the Charter of Freedom**  
(Theme: The doctrine of the church and doctrine in the church)

"For a long time now, the church together with its doctrine has been under attack. Many 'modern' men find that the church, especially because of its insistence on its doctrine, is too heavy a burden. . . . What we can do, however, is to look at the basic point of view which Luther took on the question of the church and its doctrine. If we do this, perhaps we will discover his position can help us in our own approaches to the problem." (116-117).

"For Luther the work of the church is to be the bearer of good news. Where the gospel is preached and the sacraments rightly administered, there the church gives evidence of its presence. These are the 'marks' of the true church, the means through which it makes the presence known. Apart from such marks, he said, the true church remains 'hidden.'" (117)

"The only reason for maintaining the hiddenness of the true church is to prevent tyranny. It is to prevent any earthly institution, including the church on earth, from claiming legal authority over man's spirit. The empirical church, the institutions we can see in this world have no authority as institutions to preside over the ultimate outcome of a man's life, the question whether he is a member of the true church, God's kingdom to come. This true church is 'hidden.' God alone presides over it and knows who belongs in it." (117-118)

". . . [E]ven though the true church is hidden, it is not 'invisible.' . . . It can be seen. It leaves its 'marks'; it is revealed in a certain way. But the point is that the true church is revealed precisely in acts of liberation, in things that set men free, not acts of tyranny. That is why [the reformers] said that where the good news is preached and the sacraments are rightly administered—there is the church." (118)

"This means that the purpose of the doctrine of the church cannot be to tyrannize man's spirit, to prescribe what he must do or think to be saved. Rather, the only purpose the doctrine can have is to preserve and protect the message of freedom, to help keep the possibility of faith and hope alive. For that message to be heard in our world, it must take on the form of our language. It must be passed on as doctrine, as a teaching. . . . Its purpose is to point beyond itself to the freedom that comes from God." (120-121)

"Yet that is why, in Luther's view, the doctrine is important. . . . It is a mistake, however, for this church to begin imposing this doctrine with the legalistic stringency that it often has employed. The only purpose of the doctrine is to preserve the gospel of freedom, not to preserve the doctrine to the point of extinguishing freedom. In other words, one holds the doctrine because one *wants* to, not because one has to. For the doctrine preserves precisely that story of freedom that we have been trying to set forth. Without the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and all they imply about his relationship to God and his coming kingdom, without all that, there is no freedom. The doctrine protects the story from being watered down and lost." (121) "It is a charter of freedom! . . . You would protect your charter of freedom not because you had to but because you wanted to." (122)

"[Luther] would not allow the message of freedom to be lost. That is also why, for him, the most important doctrinal point was knowing the difference between law and gospel—between seeing doctrine itself as law or as a charter of freedom. Perhaps that is why he never really attempted to make out a complete list of doctrines that had to be believed." (122)

"Luther saw the importance of a visible institution in this world to care for the public proclamation of the good news and administration of the sacraments. It was important that there be an institution which preserved the doctrine of the church—without it there would be no preaching of the gospel." (123)

"Institutional forms in this world cannot be made absolute, they cannot become instruments of tyranny." (124)

"[The church] is a public institution, ordained by God, placed alongside the state, business, and the family, given the task of publically proclaiming and bearing witness in its deeds to the true end of human life in God's kingdom to come." (128) †

In *The Essential Forde*, see "The Meaning of *Satis Est*." (167-177) See also Chapter XIII, "Conclusion and Prospect: The Church as the Locus of Concern for Law and Gospel" in Forde's *The Law-Gospel Debate* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969), 216-233.