



THE AUGUSTANA DISTRICT  
**Chronicle**



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## ABOUT THE CHRONICLER

*The Chronicler* is a journal which chronicles the work of Christ among those whom the Holy Spirit has gathered at the Augustana District's gatherings. A video recording of this event can be found at <https://augustanadistrict.org/resources/video-channel/?playlist=1d15c1c&video=1c899ef>

## ABOUT THIS EDITION

Luther's teaching on the two kingdoms lays out the overlapping realities in which every Christian lives: the civil kingdom, where God preserves life through law and human institutions, and the spiritual kingdom, where God gives forgiveness and eternal life through the Gospel alone. Confusing these realms, whether by treating politics as ultimate or by forcing the Gospel's freedom into civil law, has repeatedly caused trouble throughout history. Luther's clarity cuts through the mix-ups: the state must not claim eternal authority, and the church must not grasp for worldly power. His vision offers both freedom and responsibility, free from justifying ourselves before God, yet called to serve our neighbors in earthly vocations, until the day when only the eternal kingdom endures.

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# INTO THE SILENCE: GOD'S WORD FOR YOU MARK 13:28-31

| *REV. AARON DEUTSCH, PREACHING* |

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you this day from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ.

Without realizing it, many of us will wake up tomorrow morning and go to bed tomorrow night without knowing it's a major Protestant Reformation anniversary. No, it might not be as flashy as October 31st (the posting of the 95 Theses) or June 25th (the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession) but May 4th is, nonetheless, important. It's the first time we meet a character in Reformation history who goes by the name of Junker Jörg. On May 4, 1521, as Luther is making his way back to Wittenberg from the Diet of Worms, the newly minted heretic is captured by guards of Frederick the Wise, posing as highway robbers, who usher him to the Wartburg Castle.

The Diet of Worms was a consequential turning point in the life of Martin Luther. He had been summoned to appear before Holy Roman Emperor Charles V to account for his writings. By this time, Luther had already been excommunicated from the Catholic Church by Pope Leo, but this encounter with Charles had high stakes of its own: recant or be named an outlaw, with no legal protection. Well, we know how this goes. Luther is unable to be persuaded that his writings and teachings are contrary to the Word of God, and ultimately decrees that he must stand his ground, and can do no other. And this leaves Charles with no choice. Martin Luther is slated as public enemy number one. Charles affords Luther a set number of days of safe travel to return home, but after that, there's a bounty on his head. The troublemaking professor can be captured or killed in the street without repercussion. It was time to put this silly evangelical movement to bed. Frederick the Wise (Luther's Elector, benefactor, and supporter) had other ideas, however. Frederick thought it might be best to take Luther out of the spotlight for a while and hide him away while the dust from the Edict of Worms settled. So, he arranged a kidnapping. As Luther is traveling through a remote valley of the Black Forest,

not far from Eisenach, where he'd attended school as a boy, masked men pulled him from the back of his wagon, settled him on horseback, threw a bag over his head, and rode him off into the dark night, with the Wartburg Castle as their final destination.

For 10 months the Wartburg would be Luther's temporary home. He'd ditch his monk's habit and grow a beard. He'd be stashed away in 2 small rooms high atop the castle, with a retractable ladder as a staircase. Luther, known to the few people around the Castle as Junker Jorg (or Knight George) could look out his window and see only trees and birds. He called the Wartburg his Patmos, like the Apostle John in exile when he wrote Revelation. And it was here, secluded, isolated, locked away in a remote fortress that Satan went to battle with Martin Luther. As Luther wrote back to his colleagues in Wittenberg, hungry for updates on how things were being held together at the hub of the Reformation movement, he was not shy about proclaiming his disdain for the arrangement. His loneliness and depression were evident to his friend Melancthon back home. Luther complained that the devil was making frequent and unwelcomed visits, throwing him into *Anfechtungen*; those trials, temptations and assaults of doubt at the hands of the evil one. For the first time in his life perhaps, Luther was completely alone. As a young boy he had been surrounded by peers at boarding school. He'd had brothers at the monastery, and faculty around him at the university. Luther's life had been traveling Mach-10, at a phenomenal pace, constant requests to preach and teach, endless visits to make to churches and academic institutions. But now, there was nothing but silence. And Satan loves silence. It's where he can do the most damage. In one letter Luther writes that the questions of the devil sounded like this: "Are you alone wise? Have so many centuries gone wrong? What if you are in error and are taking so many others with you to eternal damnation?" Yes, the silence of Wartburg was forcing Luther to reexamine everything he thought to be true, and the

lying serpent was relentless. Luther came up with a few countermeasures. He maintained that music could send Satan fleeing. Prayer, of course, is always a useful habit. Even breaking wind, he thought, could be helpful. But for Luther, if he wanted to really hit the devil where it hurt, there was only one thing that could do the job: faith in Christ. “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?” as Paul asks in Romans 10. But how are they to hear, if German peasants have to sit through a Latin mass? And how are they to believe, if the German layman cannot read Scripture for themselves? No, Luther understood that if he was going to survive his 10 months at the Wartburg, he’d have to immerse himself in the Word. As he was being snatched out of the back of the wagon, the only possessions Luther had time to grab were his Hebrew Old Testament and his Greek New Testament, both of which were useless to a Germanic people that knew neither of these languages, many of whom were illiterate anyway. 11 weeks. That’s how long it took Luther to translate the New Testament into a German vernacular the common man could read. 680 pages, 140,000 words. There had been other feeble attempts to translate the Bible into German, but they’d all fallen flat. No, this translation that united the language, was written in the mother tongue of the people. As Jim Nestingen would have called it, their heart language. The nib of his quill put to paper, day and night, the insomniac painstakingly worked his way through the Greek and Latin by candlelight in his dark chamber, for you.

Because this is, ultimately, who the Scriptures are for. For you. Luther knew that the Word of God is a living and active Word, that when burst forth into the world calls the dead to life. The Protestant Reformation was never about Martin Luther, although we do so often get that wrong. Rather, this movement was all about your ears; those two floppy pieces of cartilage hanging off the side of your face. This movement was about removing every barrier that stands between God and his people, be it a priest or a language. *Sola Scriptura*, Luther knew, belonged to every generation of believers. Because every generation of believers, indeed you today, know the *Anfechtungen* Luther experienced at the Warburg. We know that Satan’s bag of tricks is pretty shallow. His tactics haven’t evolved past “did God really say?” in the Garden of Eden. And like Luther, quarantined away from the world, we are hyper aware of the damage Satan can do in the silence. You know the silence of the hospice house, with nothing but snuffles filling the empty void of sound. You know

the silence left in the room after a fight with your spouse brings the entire house to a standstill. You know the silence that surrounds you at night, as you lay in bed, replaying every cross word and stupid mistake you made that day. You know the silence left by sin, by guilt, by shame. Just ask a widow who sits in her house alone for the first time after the funeral. Ask the empty nesters who just sent their last kid off to college. Ask the prisoner on their bunk after lights out. The silence is deafening.

And it’s in the silence that Satan will boldly lie to you and say: “This is it. This is the end of the line. This is the final word.” But Luther knew – and we know – that God’s word – the true word – will never pass away. Even after heaven and earth fall into the heart of the sea and the oceans roar and foam, God’s word is eternal. God’s word is a word of forgiveness and new life, it’s a promise that your yesterdays will never be held against you, and that there’s nothing you can do tomorrow to separate you from God’s love in Christ Jesus our Lord. God’s word is a word of victory over the tomb, over Satan, over the world itself. And it’s a word that the Church has been tasked with carrying into all of creation; a word that you have been tasked with carrying into all creation, because ultimately, it’s the only word worth listening to. In a world full of other voices – voices of conspiracy, of hate, of division; voices that tear down and destroy; voices that send you on a path of transcendence, or self-help, or prosperity; God’s word – his inerrant and infallible word – is a word that centers on the cross and empty tomb of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who carried your sins to Golgotha so they could die there with him and then made the grave not something to be feared, but the gate to heaven. God’s word is for you. Amen.



## THE THIRD COMMANDMENT REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY BY KEEPING IT HOLY

*What does this mean?*

We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.

# TWO KINGDOMS: LIFE IN THE OVERLAP

| *REV. SCOTT GRORUD, PRESENTING* |

Thank you for focusing on this important topic. This essay will describe some of the convictions that comprise Martin Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms and then Pastor Brian Crocker will present some current applications of it. I am honored and humbled by this task, but I am also more than a little intimidated by it. Steven Paulson once began an article by writing, "The two most arduous teachings for any preacher are the *simul iustus et peccator*<sup>1</sup> and its identical sister, the two kingdoms. These doctrines make a preacher's job not only difficult, but precisely impossible."<sup>2</sup> So, thanks a lot to whoever roped us into doing this! On other hand, that is the perfect excuse for however I miss the mark.

One reason why dealing with the two kingdoms doctrine is so hard is that there is no one document or teaching that lays it out completely. The brochure for this convention referred to Luther's *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed*,<sup>3</sup> but the ideas are developed in many other writings. Yet none of them are entirely devoted solely to this topic. Finding, comparing and synthesizing all those references is no small task.

That is, however, generally true with Martin Luther's theology. He was a Biblical scholar, not a systematic theologian. Much of his theology was written in response to specific issues or crises, and he would drop in nuggets of profound insight almost at random. Pulling all those together keeps Lutheran theologians gainfully employed. James Nestingen once noted, "Luther did not see himself as establishing a theological system, cohesively structured, with all the implications spelled out fully and consistently, as a whole and in all of their parts, to be taken over and carried on by his followers. Rather, he thought dialectically, working out of distinctions that he found to be demanded for the relationship between the

biblical message and the particular situation in which he was implicated. As often noted, Luther was an occasional theologian<sup>4</sup>—when the occasion varied, the distinction with which he worked could produce different, even contradictory conclusions."<sup>5</sup> Luther's method makes it difficult to pin down a doctrine like the two kingdoms. Making the distinctions he did is vital, but they are often slippery or shifting. Holding on to them in order to avoid errors is a constant tension. So, no matter how I put this, many readers are likely to say, "No, that isn't quite it," and the chances are really good that they would all be right!

A teaching like the two kingdoms is also hard to define because we mere mortals struggle to think as radically as Luther did. Radical comes from the Latin word for root, *radix*. In this usage, it means getting to very bottom of an issue and grasping it fully. Sinful people naturally desire to manage, mold, improve and even perfect all of life in order to be in control of it all. So, we will take a concept like the two kingdoms and instantly boil it down to something that is simple, manageable and concrete. "There are two kingdoms? O.K. What are they? All right, let's move on."

Luther's thought, however, is always more subtle and more complex than that. Plus, again, it is always necessary to make careful distinctions. Indeed, it sometimes seems as if the chief sign that one does not quite get Luther's thinking is if one is pretty sure that he or she does! Given those characteristic challenges in reading Luther, a number of inadequate, though not entirely incorrect, views of the two kingdoms have developed. For example, the kingdoms have long been called the right-hand and left-hand kingdoms, but that does not in any way equate to the political right and left. It refers to two different ways that God rules over creation, so that the two kingdoms have sometimes been called the two *reigns* of God, instead.

The two kingdoms are also frequently identified as church and state. That is not totally off base, but it is

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<sup>1</sup> "Simultaneously justified and sinful," Luther's insight that Christians are forgiven and reconciled with God yet remain sinful.

<sup>2</sup> Steven D. Paulson, "The Simul and Two Kingdoms: The End of Time, Twice," *Logia*, October 28, 2016, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Luther's Works* (American Edition), [LW] 1955-86, v. 45, pp. 75-129.

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<sup>4</sup> "Occasional theologian" does not mean "from time to time," but "in response to specific issues, events or questions."

<sup>5</sup> James Arne Nestingen, "The Two Kingdoms Distinction: An Analysis with Suggestion," *Word & World*, XIX: 3, Summer, 1999, p. 269.

much too simplistic. For example, as organizations churches live in and are subject to civil law. On the other hand, government is part of God's creation and therefore subject to His will. There is no neat division between the two.

The two kingdoms are sometimes portrayed as the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the devil, which actually has a Biblical basis. In John 12:31, Jesus said, "Now is the judgment of this world, now the ruler of this world (i.e., the devil) will be driven out." A few chapters later, in John 18:36, Jesus told Pontius Pilate, "My kingdom is not from this world; ... my kingdom is not from here." Yet, John 3:16 famously declares, "God so loved the world..." and Psalm 24:1 asserts that "The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it." When Satan tempted Jesus, he promised to give him all the kingdoms on earth, but Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). Was that offer genuine or was he just blowing smoke? Again, it does not work to try to divide the two kingdoms so neatly.

The two kingdoms have also been seen as the time of this world and eternal life to come. In I Corinthians 15:22-25, St. Paul proclaims, "For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet." That sounds as if two different kingdoms follow one another consecutively. Yet, in II Corinthians 5:12, the same St. Paul writes, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new." That sounds as if the new age is already well underway. There are other examples of how the doctrine of the two kingdoms has been inadequately understood, but these help to show how subtle and complex it is. But then what does this teaching say and how can we get some handle on it?

The idea of two kingdoms or two realms has ancient roots. Jewish rabbis considered this life to be the "present evil age," but they looked forward to the "age to come," the Messianic age. They believed that this present evil age would be destroyed before the new age dawns, and it would be a hard, painful process. That is the basis for the apocalyptic signs of destruction that often appear in the Bible. In Mark 13:7-8, Jesus warned, "When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in

various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs."

This old, evil age must suffer its death throes in order for the birth of the new age to occur. That is a clear, neat scheme that is not difficult to comprehend.

But then God the Father mucked it all up by raising Jesus from the dead—mucked it up, that is, in terms of our ability to grasp the new reality that Easter created. For with the resurrection, the new age began already now. That is why, in Matthew 28:18, the risen Jesus declared, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me." That was not some kind of reward or a promotion. It was the plain consequence of his crucifixion and resurrection.

The problem, however, is that this present evil age is still going strong and it is still evil. So, rather than one kingdom following another consecutively, we have two kingdoms existing at the same time. The coming, future kingdom is present now as a proleptic reality, which means that it is now, but not yet; already real, but still to be fulfilled; the future breaking into the present, yet still in the future. The two kingdoms now co-exist at the same time as a both/and reality, not either/or.

At the same time, however, the kingdoms are totally distinct and must not be confused. This world is created good, but it is broken by sin; it will end one day. God's Kingdom is eternal, free of sin and evil, and is given solely by grace.

This two-fold reality is where Christians live. We are creatures of this world, by nature sinful and unclean, but in Holy Baptism, we were drowned, killed off and then raised again as new creatures in Christ. That is our true identity, as Paul declared in II Corinthians 5. Yet we are still very much living in this age, still subject to physical death, still awaiting the resurrection that was already worked in our baptism.

Living in this dual reality is what Lutheran scholars often call "life in the overlap." The new, future kingdom broke back into the present world on Easter. We were made citizens of that new kingdom in Holy Baptism, so that our future, eternal life overlaps with this temporal, mortal life. Christians have new and eternal life now, even as we still await our death.

That overlap where we live, however, is precisely where all the questions started. How are Christians to live as citizens of a new kingdom amidst this old one?

The earliest Christians lived under the shadow of the mighty Roman Empire. They were part of a tiny,

despised and increasingly persecuted minority. For them, it was not so much a conflict between church and state as it was the church hoping to survive the state. Yet, those early Christians also knew that the empire kept order and peace, which allowed the church to flourish. Therefore, the main goal was for Christians to keep their heads down so that they could continue to minister and evangelize. In I Timothy 2:1-2, Paul wrote, “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.”

There was more to government than just avoiding scrutiny, however; Paul also insisted that government was a good creation of God. In Romans 13:1, he advised, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed.”

At the same time, Paul knew that the empire’s power was not ultimate. There was a conflicting claim as to whether Caesar or Christ was Lord, but the Roman Emperor ruled in this world only, not eternally. That limitation transformed the Christians’ obedience to Rome, making it conditional, not absolute. Peter Oakes makes a fascinating observation, “When Paul evokes Rome in (Philippians and I Thessalonians), Christianity does conflict with Rome... However, Paul does not seem to be wishing, as such, for Rome’s overthrow. He is not writing anti-Roman polemic... Instead, he is redrawing the map of the universe. The marginalized Christians are brought near to the center. The center itself is occupied by Jesus, whose crucifixion had marginalized him as far as it was possible to do. In this reorganizing space, and consequently the outcome of time, Paul decenters Rome... Philippians 3:20-21<sup>6</sup> (is) where the climactic statement of remapping is made.”<sup>7</sup>

By placing Christians between Christ at the center and Rome on the margin, this “re-mapping of the universe” put them squarely in the overlap, subject to both authorities, but in different ways.”

That scenario changed sharply after A.D. 313, when Christianity was legalized in the Roman Empire and,

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<sup>6</sup> “But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.”

not long after, became its official religion. Now, the Church increasingly became a worldly power. How did its new authority relate to the state?

According to Hans Schwarz, “A Christocentric understanding of the state (became) prevalent. The dominion of Christ was to be realized through human dominion.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, the papacy claimed to have authority over kings and nations. Being loyal to the Pope and the Church would build God’s kingdom on earth. This present age and the new age were collapsed into one and, as a result, popes were often scarcely distinguishable from earthly kings.

Martin Luther rejected those papal pretensions to kingdom-building. He insisted that papal authority functioned only in this world and was not divine. But then a new issue arose due to his translating the Bible into German. As people read Christ’s words for themselves and not just what the Church taught about the faith, they recognized conflicts inherent in life in the overlap, in particular that Jesus’ words often set impossible standards for faithful living.

The question was especially acute for Lutheran princes and rulers. Their job was to wield the sword, to enforce laws, to punish and to wage war. They rightly demanded honor, loyalty and obedience. But in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile... Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven: (Matthew 5:39-41, 44-45a). How could a Christian prince reconcile that call with the duties of his office?

In 1522, Luther preached a series of six sermons in Weimar, Germany.<sup>9</sup> John the Steadfast, the nephew and eventually the successor to Frederick the Wise, was in attendance. The fourth of those sermons especially addressed the issue of temporal authority, the rule of the state. Afterward, John and several others urged Luther to publish that sermon, but he had spoken extemporaneously and had no manuscript. Just two months later, though, Luther finished *Temporal*

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Oakes, *Empire, Economics, and the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020, pp, 154-155.

<sup>8</sup> Hans Schwarz, *True Faith in the True God: An Introduction to Luther’s Life and Thought* (Revised and Expanded Edition), Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015, p. 124.

<sup>9</sup> See LW, 45, p. 79.

*Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed*, which reconstructed and expanded on the sermon he had preached. The treatise sets out the basic foundation for the two kingdoms doctrine, but much of it also deals with a very specific issue. German rulers who opposed Luther had outlawed his books and reforms. Should or could faithful Christians bow to such orders or not? If they did, how could the Gospel be preserved and proclaimed?

Luther's main insight is that there are, in fact, two kingdoms, not one. The main struggle is not between church and state or God and the devil for control of this one world in which we live. This is the chief and easiest error for people to make. The state and/or unbelievers try to force the Church to heed worldly authority. The Church and/or believers try to make the world into God's Kingdom on earth. But Luther recognized that the world is *not* a unity with two forces battling for supremacy over it. Instead, there are two totally distinct kingdoms, albeit intertwined. One is visible, the other is invisible. One is experienced concretely in life, other is beheld only in faith. One is limited in time and scope, the other endures for eternity.

Moreover, both of these kingdoms are ruled by God, but in different ways. The kingdom at God's left hand is the temporal kingdom, and temporal is the key word there. It shares the same linguistic root as time. This kingdom is time-limited; it is going to end; it is not eternal. This is life as we know it through our minds and our five senses.

The kingdom at God's right-hand is the new age that broke in on Easter. It is eternal and free from sin, death and corruption. It is founded and sustained only by God's Word. It is received, recognized and experienced only by faith.

God rules the kingdom on the left through human agency. He is still very much involved, but as the unpreached God, i.e., as a divine force in the universe, but not revealed in Jesus Christ. In this kingdom, God uses the law, nature and various institutions to pursue His will. Discussion of the two kingdoms often suggests that the only institution involved is the government, but in his *Commentary on Zechariah*, Luther clarified, "By the sword ... I understand all that pertains to the secular rule, all secular rights and laws, customs and habits, actions, stations, various offices, persons, clothes, etc."<sup>10</sup> He specifically identified three key institutions: government, marriage and family, and the church (as an organization, not as the Body or Bride of

Christ). All people belong to the left-hand kingdom by virtue of creation.

God rules the kingdom on the right directly through the means of grace. Here God is preached and revealed in Jesus Christ for faith. In this kingdom, God operates by the Holy Spirit alone, not by any law. Christians belong to this kingdom solely by virtue of their baptism.

But just as it is vital to distinguish these two kingdoms, it is also crucial to hold them in unity. As noted earlier, Christian churches are a key example. They are where the Gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered. They are specifically where God has promised to justify and forgive sinners. They are the locus of the right-hand kingdom in this temporal world. Yet, churches *per se* are institutions that operate under the law. It is why they have officers, adopt constitutions and hold annual meetings. It is why they have to buy insurance and pay workers' compensation for their employees.

This illustrates why the two kingdoms cannot simply be equated to Church and state. Rather, churches are *in* the world, while not being merely *of* the world. The same can be said of individual Christians. The Church and Christians live in the overlap, in the both-and of the two kingdoms.

A mirrored argument can be made about government or family. God established, blesses and works through such institutions, but they do *not* have ultimate authority; they are temporal. Gerhard Ebeling notes an inherent contradiction in the left-hand kingdom.<sup>11</sup> It is created by God and thus answerable to His authority, yet it naturally seeks to have ultimate authority, to be an autocracy.<sup>12</sup> This is an expression of original sin, rebellion against God. The only solution to that contradiction is for God to forgive the left-hand kingdom's sin of denying its creaturehood in order to restore it *as creature* and not as its own god. Such forgiveness does not serve to make the temporal kingdom eternal but returns it to being a true creature so that it can serve its intended purpose.

To return to the earlier, key question, how are Christians to live in the overlap between these two kingdoms? The key is to remember that God rules over both kingdoms, but in different ways.

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<sup>11</sup> Gerhard Ebeling, "The Necessity of the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms," *Word and Faith*, London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1963, p. 398.

<sup>12</sup> Here, autocracy refers to the literal meaning of the word, to have unlimited power over oneself, and not to the specific form of tyrannical government called an autocracy.

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<sup>10</sup> LW, 20, p. 172.

As creatures, God's left-hand kingdom, the world, is where we dwell. Here God preserves life and sustains the world because He loves it. As creatures, we are given dominion over the world and called to be good stewards of it. That responsibility is not limited to Christian believers. All people are capable of pursuing civil righteousness in this world and unbelievers sometimes do it better than Christians do. Such righteousness, however, is only civil; it is limited to the left-hand kingdom. God also sustains the world in order to hold it ready to hear the saving Word of the Gospel. That saving purpose calls Christians to care for our churches and to engage in evangelism.

As Christians, our true citizenship lies in God's right-hand kingdom. That keeps us from treating this world as having ultimate importance. Living in the overlap, we are still sinners, of course, still *simul iustus et peccator*. That is the "identical sister" of living in the overlap. But the *simul* itself is also temporal. The Old Adam will not survive death; the Old Eve has an expiration date.

So, Christians live in the forgiveness of sin and the hope of a certain future. That perspective relativizes this life so that it remains highly important, but never ultimate. We know that we cannot build God's Kingdom on earth, because it is not of this world. As creatures made in God's image, we are called only to care for a temporal kingdom that will one day end.

On the other hand, since we are forgiven and free in Christ, Christians have no worry about our future. There is no need nor any possibility of earning credit for our behavior or impressing God with our piety. Instead, God sends us back into the world as "living sacrifices." (Romans 12:1) We are free to use ourselves up in service to our neighbors. Since our lives in this temporal world are superseded by a new creation, we have no need to justify them nor any motivation to preserve them. Instead, we care for our bodies and the world around us, in order to use them up, to sacrifice them in service to and suffering for others.

That sacrificial service occurs largely through our vocations. Today, the word vocation is mostly used to refer to jobs and professions for which people get paid, but it includes all of our callings in life, and they can involve blessing and suffering. Whether it is doing a job you love, or caring for an aging parent or spouse, or being up at 3:00 a.m. cleaning up the vomit that your child spewed all over like a Jackson Pollock painting, we are called to serve and suffer with the world around us, and are free to do so.

Living in this overlap, as citizens of a new kingdom

while very much still belonging to an old one, gives Christians a different perspective on the issues of this life. It is, at once, an attitude of total freedom and total responsibility, as Martin Luther famously described it in *The Freedom of a Christian*, "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."<sup>13</sup>

Life in the overlap also allows Christians to say no to this world's desire for autocracy, whether it is the temporal kingdom's drive to be eternal or the Church's urge to establish God's eternal kingdom within the structures of this temporal world. Being freed from such false and futile ambitions, Christians are free instead to serve their neighbors while they proclaim the constant in-breaking of God's new, eternal kingdom in the electing word of the Gospel addressed to sinners.

<sup>13</sup> LW, 31, p. 344.



I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.

**LUTHER'S EXPLANATION TO THE 2<sup>ND</sup> ARTICLE OF THE APOSTLES' CREED**

# LIFE IN THE OVERLAP: THE TWO KINGDOMS IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

| *REV. BRIAN CROCKER, PRESENTING* |

To begin, my thanks to Pastor Aaron Deutsch and the Board of Theology & Ministry for the invitation to explore with all of you what life in the overlap between the two kingdoms looks like in our 21<sup>st</sup> century context.

My thanks also to Pastor Scott Grorud for his presentation on the complex historical development of this concept; this framework that still retains a significant degree of fluidity to it, to the chagrin of us sinners who want hard and fast, black and white doctrines and instructions for living. As a certified and long-standing member of that club of sinners, I know I'd much rather have a comprehensive list of ready-made decisions and opinions for every conceivable dilemma, rather than have to engage in time-consuming, brain-twisting, heart-squeezing moral deliberation. But what that desire betrays is the sinner's captivity to the belief that the law can bring us to a utopian paradise; or, in terms of our topic, that the kingdom on God's left hand (civil society) can become or be made into the kingdom of God's right hand, the new Eden (the heavenly society).

Now, knowing that the terms "left" and "right" have pretty much always been loaded with ideological meanings that can evoke strong emotions, I'd like to instead couch my presentation of the two kingdoms into the civil kingdom (society, mortal life, culture, politics, and the like, which is limited and passing) and the spiritual kingdom (the eternal reign of God's life-giving Word).

As I just mentioned, we sinners are easily and regularly caught up in the desire to make the civil kingdom ultimate and eternal: as though our north star in civil life is Handel's glorious musical rendition of Revelation 11:15 – "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever" – forgetting that John's vision was not that this passing world would finally be purified and restored to its original splendor, but that the new heavens and the new earth will be the eternal realm of Christ's reign. And our error as sinners in this regard is expressed on all sides of whatever political divides exist. The cries that "America is a Christian

nation" on the one hand, and a presidential candidate inviting a Christian audience in South Carolina to consider him "an instrument of God" and to help him "create a kingdom right here on earth" on the other, rhetorical promises to make the passing civil kingdom eternal and ultimate; promises that simply cannot be kept.

Similar errors occur when sinners who have been brought into the spiritual kingdom by the proclamation of the forgiveness of their sins want to force the reign of this kingdom into the civil kingdom. Unsatisfied with only easing terrified consciences with the Gospel, we who in the flesh are still sinners in this kingdom seek to remove the just civil punishments for criminal activity in an attempt to "heal society."

I can still remember as though it were yesterday, making a presentation in a class at Luther Seminary on the function and necessity of the law in mortal life. In my presentation, I used the clip from the film "A Few Good Men" of Colonel Nathan Jessup's angry reply to a demand for the truth, in which he said (in part): "Son, we live in a world that has walls, and those walls have to be guarded by men with guns." And then speaking as a stern human embodiment of the law, he continued, "my existence, while grotesque and incomprehensible to you, *saves lives*. You don't want the truth, because deep down in places you don't talk about at parties, you *want* me on that wall; you *need* me on that wall." When the clip was over, a classmate chimed up immediately, "Well, we should strive to live in a world that doesn't have walls." You know how sometimes you have a perfect reply, but the problem is you discover it a year or two later? If I had been more quick-witted, I'd have replied, "Can you please let me know when you find that utopia, because I want to live there, too."

This is an illustration of the error of forcing the spiritual kingdom into the civil kingdom: the wild and rabid dog of sin in the civil kingdom will not be restrained (or healed or tamed) by removing punishments. In the civil kingdom filled with sinners, the leash and the rod or sword of the law are all that

will be effective in restraining sin and punishing evil, with the goal being the protection of the neighbor, which is an integral part of loving one another.

But again: there are not hard and fast, simple, plain black and white answers to every situation. With the general framework of these two kingdoms in which we dwell simultaneously as simultaneously sinners and saints, and how there is an overlap, or an interplay that is not fixed, but fluid, we can (and must) use our powers of thoughtful observation to interpret what's happening in the interplay, and what the best course of action or speech ought to be. This is not to suggest that we lapse into making decisions based merely on what is expedient or easy in any given situation, or without consideration of the pre-existing moral imperatives of the law: there remains a framework that can be tremendously helpful in guiding our decisions.

It brings to mind something I learned recently in my recreational reading. I learned that dogsleds built of split birch cannot be bolted, screwed, or nailed together because if they are, the joints won't withstand the inevitable twisting and jolting of the trail. Instead, rawhide lashing is soaked and then tied in place wet, tightening as it dries, yet still allowing the sled to twist and bend without splitting the wood at stress points as it bounces and sways over rough trails.

So, along the trails of our mortal pilgrimage through this passing world, there are plenty of rough, uneven, bumpy, dangerous stretches involving the overlap and interplay of these two kingdoms; but I believe we can trust the framework to hold, and to help us pass along them with some degree not only of safety, but also of fidelity to our confessions.

I think what I'd like to do is to offer some examples of treacherous stretches, where the misuse of the civil kingdom by sinners has resulted in over-reach into – or in some cases, attempts to rid themselves of – the spiritual kingdom; as well as instances of the misuse of the spiritual kingdom by sinners leading to over-reaching attempts to rule the civil kingdom, or perhaps to create a new and separate civil kingdom; all with the aim of helping us consider and contemplate how, using the framework of God's two kingdoms, we might navigate such stretches as faithfully as we can.

The first instance is a treacherous one indeed, involving life and death: the use or abolishment of the death penalty in criminal cases. The civil kingdom, unaffected in any degree by the spiritual kingdom, would probably operate along the lines of what we read in Deuteronomy 19, “. . . on the evidence of two or

three witnesses shall a charge be established. . . if a false witness has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So, you shall purge the evil from your midst. And the rest shall hear, and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you. Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life. . .”

Now, to begin, history has shown that the evil is *not* completely purged from your midst if murderers are put to death. At the same time, history would also show that the incidence of murder where murderers *are* put to death has been measurably, even significantly, lower than when or where they are *not* put to death. To go back briefly to that passage from Deuteronomy, there's a phrase that reads, “. . . the judges shall inquire diligently. . .” Of course, in our system of justice, “the judges” would mean not only the person or persons who sit on the bench, but would also include the jury, and further still, the investigating officers and the defense and prosecuting attorneys. Where factual certainties about the case could not be established, or perhaps where diligence has not been fully applied, people who have not murdered have been convicted and executed for murder. And while the number of such incidences as a percentage of all murder cases would be quite small indeed, if you or a loved one are in that small percentage, that's no consolation.

So how has the spiritual kingdom pushed itself into the civil kingdom in this matter? It's certainly not the case that full and complete forgiveness of the evil of murder including full and complete civil freedom is something that is granted, but there has certainly been a strong push for clemency, with 23 of our 50 states having removed the death penalty altogether (even in cases of multiple, serial, or mass murders), and the other 27 states carrying this penalty out in a percentage probably as small (or even smaller than) those cases where a person has been wrongly executed. But in none of our 50 states has the evil been purged from our midst. Because of that hard reality, there are arguments made that the death penalty is no deterrent: because in those states that still have that penalty as a possibility, there are still murders. But this argument has difficulties: the first being the belief that the threat of a death penalty for murder would end *all* murder that, yes, by use of the law, the evil *would* be purged from our midst. And the second is this: while anyone can count the murders that *do* occur in a state that has the death penalty as a possibility, no one can count the murders that *didn't* occur because the potential murderer didn't want to face the possibility of getting caught and executed for murdering.

Has the spiritual kingdom encroached too far into the realm of the civic kingdom in this treacherous stretch of mortal life? Some will say yes, that the punishment is not fitting the crime: that life in prison, unpleasant as it may be, still includes 3 meals a day, shelter, clothing, phone, internet, library, and more; all of which is at the expense of law-abiding, tax-paying citizens, including the surviving families of the victims. Or what may be worse, a shortened prison term and subsequent release of someone clearly guilty of murder: is that justice?

Others will say no, that we cannot take the risk of ending a person's life if there is the slightest uncertainty about whether that person is actually guilty of murder; better to err on the side of mercy than to multiply the evil by killing someone who might be innocent.

And what should we think about the cases where a surviving relative or family pronounces forgiveness to the person who killed their loved one? Should that forgiveness, if it is genuine, mean a complete erasure of the conviction and penalty? Would that relative or family agree to that?

I think I can hear the creaking and straining of the wooden sled against the rawhide lashing, a bumpy and crooked and twisting stretch of trail indeed.

And let me assure you, I wish just as strongly as you that there were clearer and easier answers to this and other instances of life in the overlap, such as. . . hmm, what nasty stretch of trail shall I take you on next?

How about the involvement of the state in family and religious life? ("State" of course meaning the particular governing organizations beneath which we live.)

Let me start the journey with a quote from a ruling in a child custody case: "Though nature gives to parents the right to custody of their own children, and such right is scarcely less sacred than the right to life and liberty. . . the necessity of government has forced the recognition of the rule that the perpetuity of the state is of first consideration, and parental authority itself is subordinate to this supreme power."

This case was from the Supreme Court of the State of Colorado in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ten. "The supreme power of the perpetuity of the state." I can imagine God's reaction: "What did he just say?"

So, that bit about the family. What of religious life? Well, the Supreme Court of the United States just began hearing oral arguments on March 31st in a case that came to it from Wisconsin. In 2016, the

Wisconsin Labor and Industry Review Commission ruled that the Catholic Charities Bureau was ineligible for an unemployment tax exemption because, when it ministers to the poor, the elderly, and the infirm, the work is secular because its activities resemble those of secular charities. The Commission and the Wisconsin Supreme Court conceded that the Bureau's activities had "religious motives," but that these motives are "incidental to their primarily charitable functions." Most Catholics and Christians generally would, I believe, consider charity toward the poor as not merely motivated by religion, but as obligatory for religious belief, pointing out that "charity" properly speaking was the unique creation of the Christian faith. (Keep your ears open for a decision.)

A few months ago, I read a very brief article about the two pillars of church and family, and two very different understandings of them. The author wrote that, for philosophers like Rousseau, Mill, and Marx, the man in the middle is the individual, who will never be truly free until he crumbles the constraining pillars of church and family and breaks their shackles. He then mentioned a different understanding which he saw in an article (by Douglas Farrow) titled, "The Audacity of the State". Farrow thinks the man in the middle represents the state, whose tyrannical tendencies are restrained by church and family, which serve as the twin pillars of our freedom because they do not concede to the audacious and immodest state the total authority it craves, then quoting Psalm 2, verses 2 and 3: "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.'"

That article dipped into the overlap of the kingdoms; particularly the civic kingdom's over-reach into the spiritual kingdom, or possibly even its push to become both kingdoms itself. As a glaring example, he mentions how a relatively recent presidential candidate invited a Christian audience in South Carolina to see him as "an instrument of God," and to help him "create a kingdom right here on earth."

Farrow wisely wrote, "Separation of church and state was predicated on the eschatological reserve on which Christianity insisted, a reserve that required a doctrine of 'the two,' and refused to combine the kingly with the priestly in a single office or person. To combine these offices belonged to Christ alone, and any other claimant to both was *ipso facto* a kind of Anti-Christ. This same reserve. . . repudiated all utopianism. . . It sought no return to a Golden Age, nor did it trumpet 'change you can believe in.'"

“The savior state” is not only a term of dystopian fiction, but an increasing presence in today’s world. It has made strides toward its goal of becoming both kingdoms thanks in part to a philosophical product of the enlightenment and libertarianism that placed liberty ahead of truth. This arises from John Stuart Mill’s exciting suggestion that liberty (freedom) will lead you into the truth; a direct contradiction of Jesus’ statement, “the truth will set you free.” For Mill and others like him, there is no freedom higher than the freedom of choice; but that fails to reckon with the fact that in the absence of an overarching common good, someone or something has to become the judge of all the countless competing “goods” of free individuals. Enter the savior state.

And that state is no fool; on the contrary, it is crafty. It knows how to hide its intentions behind flowery and convincing language with which it is hard to disagree. In a 1996 report by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century, Jacques Delors wrote, “We must be guided by the Utopian aim of steering the world toward greater mutual understanding, a greater sense of responsibility and greater solidarity, through acceptance of our spiritual and cultural differences.” What’s wrong with that?

What this actually means is increased state intervention in arenas historically and constitutionally reserved for familial and religious communities. Accepting differences is one thing; allowing the state to determine which differences are acceptable and which aren’t is quite another.

Sadly, many families and religious communities have surrendered much that once kept them strong and together. The normalization of divorce combined with ever-more-vigorous welfare programs separate children from their natural family units; the unthinking encouragement (even by some churches) to material success tells both parents that they “have to” work so that children are left to the whims of a daycare center which has no concern for familial or religious sensibilities; believing there is no option other than to send their children into an educational system controlled not by local citizens and parents, but by faceless, far off bureaucracies which indoctrinate the young that the state will protect them and provide for them, all the while fighting to insulate itself against the interference of parents and religious communities who they hope will surrender the protection and provision they had for centuries provided.

Oh, dear. Maybe I’ve gone too far and painted too bleak a picture. There surely are many, many families and religious communities who have not surrendered

their rights or abdicated their responsibilities to their progeny and, honestly, I think there has been of late something of a resurgence of the insistence upon those rights and the taking up of those responsibilities, regardless of the cost, whether financial, legal, occupational, or otherwise. What I believe to be the Holy Spirit-led desire to make sacrifices for the well-being and the future not only of one’s own, but of one’s various communities, is a joy to behold.

Well, that was a little longer stretch of trail than I thought at first; and yet, I’m sure there’s still a lot more of it that could be traversed.

There is one shorter stretch of this interplay between the two kingdoms that, even though short, is traveled by the vast majority of us on a daily basis: and that is the family unit.

Parents have the holy task – and how I wish I could convince my pre-marriage counselees how holy it is – of bringing up their children in faith and in citizenship; not merely for the sake of the children or the parents, but of the extended family and the numerous communities and societies into which those children will grow and to which they will contribute, whether to the betterment or the detriment of each of them.

The interplay and overlap between the two kingdoms is a daily drama within the family; but thanks be to God – and I tell my counselees this as well – it is a blessing worth every ounce of effort it takes. I daresay there is a greater amount of clemency within the family than within general civil society, particularly when the children are still young. But there cannot be a loss of the gospel’s rightful place, and clemency’s rightful place, in that daily drama, for the outcome of that can be clearly viewed when one examines carefully the familial situations of so many of those who go on to commit unthinkable crimes, not just in adulthood, but some of them before they have gotten a driver’s license. And conversely, there cannot be a loss of the law’s rightful place in that drama either, for much the same reason; remembering, as John wrote in the first of his three letters, “sin is lawlessness.” A lawless upbringing will lead to a lawless and sinful adulthood, just as a loveless upbringing will lead to a loveless and an either brutal and violent adulthood, or a self-loathing, self-harming adulthood.

Well – to move forward on the trail. . . When I was thinking about instances where the spiritual kingdom might over-reach into the civil kingdom, one phrase I’ve heard numerous times from pastors or zealous laypeople kept coming to mind: “we want to win the city for Christ.”

Now I don't want to speak ill of these pastors and laypeople, in part because I understand where that desire comes from: I think it's good-hearted; but I also think it's not well-thought-out. If the whole creation is the Lord's - and would anyone confess otherwise - isn't the city already his? But I suppose it's easy to think it's *not* when you look at all the sin in the city, any city of any size. (And sorry, rural and small-town folks, this does not mean there's no sin to be found in your area.)

The phrase is an expression, I suppose, of those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, which is a good thing, but where I think it goes wrong is the hunger and thirst is for righteousness in others that matches mine. I think this desire could be tempered by a good reading of the Old Testament, with a focus on the people of Israel's understanding of calamity and corruption and rampant sin and even invasions by pagan neighboring nations as the work of the only God, who works all things according to the purpose of His will, punishing Israel for her sins; the remedy for which was a confession of their sins, not a crusade by the presumptuously-righteous moral majority to rid all those "others" of their sins.

I think the over-reach can take the form of trying to get like-minded believers into as many positions of civil authority as possible with the intention - whether they say it or not, or honestly, whether they even understand it or not, to make (to go back to Handel) the kingdom of the world the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. Dissatisfied with dispensing the forgiveness of sins in the name of Christ, baptizing and making disciples among all nations, their desire is like unto the sons of thunder, James and John, asking to sit in the seats of power; only not wanting to wait for the coming kingdom, they want those seats in the here and now.

In this vein, I thought briefly about proposing at this year's convention the development of an Augustana District Office of Public Policy in Washington, D.C.

I mean, I could understand how someone would think if there's a city that needs to be won for Christ, it's Washington D.C. - but no! It's already his, and maybe we should consider what we see and bemoan there as God's just punishment for the sins of our country, in which each of us is complicit.

Well, I hope I haven't disappointed you deeply by not offering easy, black and white answers or guidelines, but let me at least offer you this: as citizens of the spiritual kingdom of our Lord and Christ, as well as citizens of the civil kingdom of our Lord and Christ, we are called to serve this dying world with the love

and the strength we have while we continue our pilgrimage through it. This service is rendered in all of our various vocations, all of which are calls to take up our cross daily and follow Jesus' lead, loving others as he first loved us. And yes, this service will come at a cost as all true service does and the dying world often will not thank us or even like us for it. But it is rendered in Jesus' name, by his power, for the good of our neighbors, and in the freedom of faith that tells us we are on our way home, our true and eternal and perfect and peaceful home, and that we needn't earn our way there, or turn this dying world into the kingdom of heaven.

The one, true, only God has worked and will work all things according to the purpose of His will - His kingdom comes with or without our prayer, but we pray that it would also come to us.



## THE SECOND PETITION THY KINGDOM COME

*What does this mean?*

The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also.

*How does God's kingdom come?*

God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity.