

**A Reaction to “The Kingdom(s) and the Power and the Glory:
A Biblical and Confessional Perspective on the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms”**

I like to think of each Symposium essay and what follows it as a conversation, and I envision my role as reactor accordingly. True, no natural conversation begins with one person holding forth for 75 minutes while his interlocutors listen in silence. But as I have read this essay over the last few weeks and again today, I have imagined being able to interject from time to time—to express agreement, add my perspective, ask a question, or offer an example.

If you’re willing to adopt this mental picture for a moment, please consider the following a transcript of my side of the conversation with Professor Koelpin.

Page 1, “separation of church and state”: I like how you wasted no time laying out our challenges in understanding the two kingdoms and how this shorthand phrase may contribute to them. While the separation is good and our government and churches ought to maintain it, a Christian’s daily existence cannot be divided in the same way.

Page 5, “Some present problems regarding the interrelationship of the two kingdoms occur because we have the example of God’s direct, or theocratic, rule over his covenant people of Israel in the Old Testament”: Or, rather, because some view that example as prescriptive. This is especially prevalent among Evangelical writers. I’m glad you showed why that’s a problem—and what lessons we *can* draw from Old Testament history (like the danger of infatuation with geopolitics, which, ironically, is just the lesson some of those Evangelicals need to hear).

Page 10, “Any style or system of government—be it a monarchy or an oligarchy or a democracy or a dictatorship—can serve to administer God’s order on earth”: Thanks for this reminder. Some Christians sound like evangelists for democracy or crusaders against socialism. We’re free to prefer—and argue for—a certain system of governance, but we cannot claim a divine stamp of approval for it.

In fact, I think I can say that the only system that does not serve to administer God’s order is anarchy. I don’t personally know any Christian anarchists, but some Christians do sound as if they believe less government is always better. Is that defensible biblically?

Page 23, “Defeated Satan wants to manipulate the ‘beast out of the sea’”: I’ve been thinking about this recently. This beast is “proud and blasphemous earthly authority,” as you say. What comes to mind in our country today are government policies that defy God’s will on issues like abortion, marriage, sexuality, and gender. Most of these are associated with the “left” of our politics. For a long time, we have been on the lookout for the beast from that direction. But did we become so fixated in our leftward gaze that we were blindsided by an attack from the right?

For decades there has been a marriage of convenience between the political right and a swathe of Christianity in this country: the church gets politicians willing to codify biblical morality, and the politicians get a reliable voting base. But when Christians think they can use the state for their purposes, Satan sees an opportunity to use it for his—to dilute, discredit, or destroy the gospel, as Christians confuse Scriptural and political stances, pursue righteous ends by wicked means, or direct their zeal toward political instead of spiritual goals.¹

1. This was a disturbing read: Tim Alberta, “How Politics Poisoned the Evangelical Church,” *The Atlantic*, last modified May 10, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/06/evangelical-church-pastors-political-radicalization/629631/>. I’m not worried about this happening in a WELS church, but I do worry about the poisoned blend of politics and religion our people may consume from other sources.

Perhaps remembering that the beast from the sea worked with the beast from the land (the apostate church) will help us recognize this threat today. Is that a fair application?

Page 23, *“The more attached we are to a political agenda that has some sort of spiritual underpinning, the more inclined we become to any and all theological perspectives in which that agenda has been nurtured”*: Like you said earlier, *“inheritors of Calvin’s theological theories today are usually strong proponents of ‘religious’ politics”* (20). “New Calvinists” have been influential in this country in the last couple of decades. We’ve trained ourselves to sniff out Arminian influences in worship practices. We should be sensitive to the bad theology that informs some Christian political views, too. What are some other examples you’ve seen?

Page 27, *Our social media activity “could have a negative effect on our ability to serve as gospel shepherds to God’s people”*: And not only his people! I’m thinking of 1 Timothy 3:7, “He must also have a good reputation with outsiders.” What we say, post, retweet—what signs we put on our lawns or stickers on our bumpers—all contributes to our reputation. Our unbelieving neighbors already associate us Christians with political conservatism. (I want to add, “for better or for worse,” but I’m afraid it’s mostly for worse.)² If our public political activity reinforces negative stereotypes, might that make it more difficult to be seen as “hospitable” and “not quarrelsome” (1 Tim 3:7)?

Page 28, *“neutral zone”*: This makes me think of a sunny Sunday morning over a decade ago. Wisconsin politics were ablaze over Governor Scott Walker’s Act 10. As I walked through our church parking lot to the sanctuary, I saw, side by side, two vehicles with bumper stickers reflecting opposite sides of the issue. The van belonged to a public-school teacher whose finances would take a real hit from the proposed legislation. The owner of the car was a die-hard Republican, a big Walker fan. Yet the two of them were worshipping in the same sanctuary that morning. Both were solid Christians; both were very involved in the ministry of our church. The juxtaposition made me smile. “In Christ there is no Republican or Democrat . . .”

Page 30, *“Yes, indeed, we trust and believe with all our heart, that all authority, in heaven and on earth, is under our Lord’s control”*: Yes, indeed! As Christians standing with one foot in the kingdom of grace and one in the kingdom of power (really, as you pointed out, with both feet in both), we will always face challenges, from within and without. I can’t help but think of another part of John’s apocalyptic vision: an angel, scroll in hand, standing tall, legs like fiery pillars, one foot planted on the sea and the other on land (Rev 10). Our living Lord Jesus rules over church and state and all creation for the good of his people and our mission.

I thank God for Professor Koelpin’s words to us today—words that called me to repentance and reminded me of God’s promises. He has set a solid biblical and confessional foundation for this Symposium—a strong start to the conversation, if you will. And I am grateful for the chance to chime in.

But a conversation between just two people, with so many other wise and sanctified voices in the room, would be a disappointment. Will you please join in?

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September 18, 2023

2. See, for example, *The Brand of Evangelicals* (Barna Group, 2019), 3, https://access.barna.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Barna_PerceptionsOfEvangelicals_WhitePaper_v6.pdf.