Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Symposium 2023

The Kingdom(s) and the Power and the Glory: A Biblical and Confessional Perspective on the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms

Our overarching theme, "A Symposium on the Two Kingdoms," makes a theological distinction — we will be discussing two realms of reality and authority that believers experience. We are inclined to use the phrase as if all of us are clear about what this distinction entails. And, as Americans, we tend to equate the "two kingdoms" with what we have come to know as "the separation of church and state."[1] Martin Luther never used either phrase as theological shorthand; he did not package the concept as a doctrinal category. Later theologians began to encapsulate Luther's way of talking about Christian life in this world as his "two kingdoms teaching," though, truthfully, Luther was never so neat or crisp or consistent in his articulation of what can sometimes seem to be competing structures of authority and how the believer relates to them.[2] What is clear is that Luther did not conceive of his explanations as describing autonomous or isolated spheres of influence, as if people could, in fact, live dichotomous or divided lives—as little as a believer can be part sinner and part saint. Believers are indeed *simul iustus et peccator*—at one and the same time completely sinners and completely saints.[3] That is not a matter of percentages, or a mathematics equation; it's a spiritual truth. So too believers do not and cannot divide their time between a spiritual and a secular life. While on earth, Christians live one life under two realms of influence and authority.

Perhaps one of the most succinct statements from Luther about this teaching is found in his treatise "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed." There he wrote:

> For this reason [to restrain evil and promote good] God has ordained two governments: the spiritual, by which the Holy Spirit produces Christians and righteous people under Christ; and the temporal, which restrains the un-Christian and wicked so that—no thanks to them—they are obliged to keep still and to maintain an outward peace.[4]

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1. This manner of speaking has been connected to Thomas Jefferson who wrote about a "wall of separation between church and state." The phrasing has been used subsequently in Supreme Court opinions. It intends to highlight the clauses contained in the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

2. This inconsistency is noted in the fact that Luther did not always use the same German words to refer to the kingdoms and their exercise of authority—*Reiche*, *Regimente*, *Obrigkeit*, *Gewalt* were used somewhat interchangeably. On occasion he would speak (as in his *Lectures on Genesis—LW* 1) of three created "orders": church, household, political authority. He also multiplied the kingdoms at work in this world by his use of the expression "kingdom of the devil" and explained that angels perform governing duties. See Kenneth Hagen, "Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms," in *God and Caesar Revisited* (Minneapolis, MN: Luther Academy Papers, No. 1, 1995), 15–29. See also Jarrett Carty, "Luther's Theory of Temporal Government," in *Divine Kingdom, Holy Order: The Political Writings of Martin Luther* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2012), 3–26.

3. See Erling Teigen's essay "Two Kingdoms: Simul iustus et peccator—Depoliticizing the Two Kingdoms Doctrine." *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, Vol. 54, Nos. 2–3, (2014): 157–184.

4. *LW* 45:91.

Luther perceived much of life in terms of dual distinctions—and this must not be confused with the outright separation of dualism. God speaks to humans through "law" and "gospel" (and even these terms can be used in broad and narrow senses). In their narrow, more specific, senses, the former is an expression of God's will, which can come also with threats and warnings of judgment; gospel is the expression of God's grace, which forgives and restores in mercy. Both are God's Word; both can be summed up with the word "love." Christians know that to distinguish between law and gospel in the application of God's truth to real life situations can be challenging—what Lutheran theologian C.F.W. Walther called "the most difficult and highest art."[5] While Scripture may use a general word for "righteousness," Luther correctly observed that "two kinds of righteousness" are at work in the lives of believers—the passive righteousness that justifies and is received by faith, and the active righteousness which is on display in the way they live and serve in earthly life.[6] One defines God's work and makes believers part of his kingdom; the other describes a mode and manner of behavior that orders worldly relationships by civil and ethical regulations.

Later, in the essay on "Temporal Authority" mentioned above, Luther developed the thought:

> One must carefully distinguish between these two governments. Both must be permitted to remain; the one to produce righteousness, the other to bring about external peace and prevent evil deeds. Neither one is sufficient in the world without the other. No one can become righteous in the sight of God by means of the temporal government. Christ's government does not extend over all men; rather, Christians are always the minority in the midst of non-Christians. Now where temporal government alone or law alone prevails, there sheer hypocrisy is inevitable, even though the commandments be God's very own. For without the Holy Spirit in the heart no one becomes truly righteous, no matter how fine the works he does. On the other hand, where the spiritual government alone prevails over land and people, there wickedness is given free rein and the door is open for all manner of rascality, for the world as a whole cannot receive or comprehend it.[7]

Each aspect of God's good governance has its role, and the two should not be confused or mixed—neither by authorities themselves, nor by those under authority. God's kingdom operates by what is common to believers, the freeing grace of the gospel that has released them from sin and its condemnation to live a life of service and love. The other functions by establishing order through legal regulation. To compel behavior, this world's government wields the power to punish. Two distinct principles are at work. Luther perceptively remarked that to function with only secular law would create "sheer hypocrisy" because outward obedience to a set of governing regulations—which looks good on the outside—cannot remedy the depravity of sin on the inside. On the other hand, it is a false notion to contend that this world would be a better place if secular governance operated more by love than law. That is a pious wish, but an impossible hope. "Indeed, there is no

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5. C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and* Gospel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), Thesis III.

6. Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008). Especially helpful is Chapter 5, "The Dynamic of Faith," 101–128.

7. *LW* 45:92.

one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins" (Ecclesiastes 7:20). And "sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). Secular law constrains by external threat.

Luther's "Kingdom" Theology

There is a tendency in Luther studies to spend significant time and energy placing him into his historical context so that we are able to better grasp who and what may have influenced his perspectives.[8] Clearly, Luther did not write in a vacuum; he was often addressing matters of the moment, whether wars or disputes or timely questions, for priests and princes and shopkeepers and peasants.[9] His education put him in contact with a wide variety of philosophical opinions, patterns of interpretation and ways of thinking—both ancient and medieval. But it was Scripture, by the Spirit's power, that captured his heart. Luther thought Scripturally. Even though the Bible described realities that he could not grasp completely by reason, he took them at face value as truth.[10] He returned again and again to Scripture alone. To work out his explanations of how God worked in human affairs, he understood that he was limited by what was revealed in Scripture, and that he could not venture into speculation.[11]

Regarding the "two kingdoms," Luther wrestled to articulate reality as he understood it from the Scriptural account. Genesis 1 described the truth that "God created the heavens and the earth." After he created man and woman in his image, he commanded them to "be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." The LORD God endowed the entire universe with its laws and functions, and thereby maintained also a sense of control over what he had brought forth in perfection. If life had continued in its "very good" state, the harmony of wills between God and humans would have continued. There would have been no need for discipline or punitive action—no need for the restraining role of government per se.[12]

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8. See *God and Caesar Revisited*, John R. Stephenson, ed., (Minneapolis, MN: Luther Academy Papers, No. 1, 1995)—especially germane are the essays by Ulrich Asendorf, Kenneth Hagen and John F. Johnson. Also see Jonathan Beeke, "Martin Luther's Two Kingdoms, Law And Gospel, and The Created Order: Was There A Time When The Two Kingdoms Were Not?" *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. 73 (2011): 191–214.

9. See especially Chapter 4 titled "The Two-Kingdoms Worldview: How Luther Used the Concept in Diverse Contexts," in Willliam J. Wright, *Martin Luther's Understanding of God's Two Kingdoms: A Response to the Challenge of Skepticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 113–145.

10. Wright describes Luther's two-kingdoms concept as a "worldview" in response to the medieval humanistic skepticism and doubt (see his "Introduction," 11–16). In a chapter titled "Christian Identity and Political Identity," in Tyranny and Resistance (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), David M. Whitford explains: "For Luther, the issue is one of trust. One must trust God and God's order of creation,"33.

11. Paul Althaus begins his treatment of Luther's two kingdoms by emphasizing this point. See Paul Althaus, "The Two Kingdoms and the Two Governments" in *The Ethics of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 43–82.

12. *LW* 1:104ff, "Lectures on Genesis." Also see Carty introductory essay "Luther's Theory of Temporal Government," 16–18. A useful treatment of Luther on Genesis is found in John Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis and the Formation of Evangelical Identity* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2008)—particularly Chapter Three: "The Arena of God's Play—Christian Life and Holiness in the World," 73–140.

But Satan, a fallen angel, deceived Adam and Eve; sin corrupted and cursed God's creation. Death, decay, and frustration became a new reality. Satan and the forces of evil, it appeared, had free rein in their new playground. But God's creation did not suddenly cease to be his; he was still the author and manager of what he had designed, even in its sin-polluted state. He established a way to supervise sinful society. Even within the family of Adam and Eve fierce jealousy provoked Cain to kill his brother Abel. Such unacceptable behavior was subject to punishment, and the authority to direct human affairs for the benefit of maintaining peace and order was the role of what we call "government."[13] At the same time, God worked a prophetic promise to restore humanity, which had been created in his image, to a relationship of harmony with its Creator. The "seed" of Genesis 3:15 was God's own Son, Jesus Christ, who would battle against temptation and bear the burden of humanity's sin. In grace, God restored his kingdom. Jesus intersected with our time and our place so that those who trust in his life and victory over Satan and sin and eternal punishment in hell experience life on this earth with the certainty that they will live eternally.

So, God manages this world by way of two realms of authority—sometimes called (or translated as) "two kingdoms," or "two regiments" (among other things) by Martin Luther and his colleagues.[14] Theologically, God's ruling authority has also been called the "kingdom of God's right hand" (the agency of spiritual authority) and the "kingdom of God's left hand" (the agency of secular or temporal authority), or "God's kingdom of grace" (the domain of the church) and "God's kingdom of power" (the domain of the state). The kingdoms require distinction, though there is both correspondence and tension between them. Secular authority and the spiritual kingdom are both concerned with the regulation of human behavior, but earthly government uses force, while God comes "unasked, unforced, unearned" into the hearts of believers by the power of his Word and Spirit.

We began at the beginning because there we perceive a supreme unity—of mind and spirit between God and humanity. And we note that the one, eternal, all-powerful God did not cease to be God despite the ruin of creation by sin. In his wisdom, God operated both to govern the earth and redeem it—so he continues to remain in control of all earthly affairs, whether sacred or secular, and has promised a future restoration of all things in "the new heaven and the new earth" (Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1). There are not two gods, or two equal forces, battling to win control. Everything is a good gift from God, who "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45).

In his book *God and Government*, Jarrett Carty concludes: "Luther's two kingdoms has been accused of counselling, or at least resulting in, an inescapable and unresolvable ethical dualism between the duties of spiritual life and the duties owed to worldly affairs. However, Luther's two kingdoms, and the political meaning derived from them, sought to *unify* human existence under

13. See "Temporal Authority," *LW* 45:86.

14. Luther was not alone in his articulation of thought about secular and spiritual authority. Other colleagues, particularly Philip Melanchthon, also wrote treatments of the topic. For a comparative study of, essentially, the consonance between Luther and Melanchthon see James Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God: Secular Authority and the church in the Thought of Luther and Melanchthon, 1518–1559* (Boston: Brill, 2005).

God's complete governance."[15] Rather than create confusion, Luther was attempting to clarify the relationship of humans to God and humans to each other as Scripture described it.

Theocracy

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. There are Christians who would advocate for such a direct model of moral governance to continue. In a manner of speaking, it does, as the Spirit gathers believers to live together in faith under God's Word—it does in the kingdom of God. But the church would be confusing the distinct roles given to the two kingdoms if it employed earthly government to enforce its code of conduct. The kingdom of the world does not operate on the principle of faith but on the principle of law that regulates human behavior.

Ancient Israel held an extraordinary position in the history of God's governance. Since they were chosen to be the people from whom the Savior would come, God supplied them with a direct set of laws to govern and direct their lives. These laws contained significant detail about moral discipline, worship instruction and civil regulation. The details were unique to Israel, and they were intended to help them maintain a sense of identity and focus until such time as the Savior would come. The laws were both spiritual and secular and had temporary significance; they occupied an exclusive place in the history of God's governing work on earth. Unless this point is understood clearly, Bible believers could take the wrong lessons from a review of God's covenant law with Israel. There is something of a "middle ground" here—a combining, rather than distinguishing, of secular and sacred governance.[16]

Both kingdoms were in operation in the Old Testament law code. Moral law spoke to hearts; the civil code patterned behavior. Keep in mind that not all Israelites were believers, so, as Jesus explained to the Pharisees, "because your hearts were hard," God allowed for such things as divorce as per the extensive civil code recorded in the books of Moses (Matthew 19:8). The civil laws maintained peace, security and social order under the threat of sword: "Anyone who shows contempt for the judge or for the priest who stands ministering there to the Lord your God is to be put to death. You must purge the evil from Israel. All the people will hear and be afraid, and will not

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15. Jarrett A. Carty, *God and Government: Martin Luther's Political Thought* (Montreal, Quebec, Canada: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2017), 164. In his introductory essay to the anthology *Divine Kingdom, Holy Order*, Carty notes that by distinguishing the roles of the kingdoms, Luther was defending the unique place and authority of secular government. He writes: "In limiting temporal government, Luther was liberating it [from the oversight and control of the medieval church]. Having jurisdiction over 'body' and 'property' alone implied that secular authority could have considerable duties and responsibilities under its control.… Its authority and sanction did not depend on the graces of clerics, the approval of bishops or the donations of popes. Its power did not arrive through the mediation of the spiritual regiment. Divine sanction for temporal government, Luther believed, came directly from God without any intermediary," 15.

16. Wright, *Martin Luther's Understanding of God's Two Kingdoms*, 120. Wright is picking up on a reference to Luther's "How Christians Should Regard Moses," in which Luther writes: "Between these two kingdoms [the temporal and the spiritual] still another has been placed in the middle, half spiritual and half temporal. It is constituted by the Jews, with commandments and outward ceremonies which prescribe their conduct toward God and men"–*LW* 35:164.

be contemptuous again" (Deuteronomy 17:12–13). Believers could see the blessings of civil obedience, and, in their gratitude to the God who kept his promises to deliver and save (in other words, in faith), they kept his law. Unbelievers among them could recognize that the code contained concepts that managed behavior for the benefit of societal peace and order.

The kingdom of Israel supplies a theological and historical touchpoint for all believers, even if their way of life and worship was unique to their historical setting. God had granted them a special place, special power and purpose. But they lost their way and became fascinated with life on this earth. They wanted to be like the other peoples around them. The more interested and involved with geo-politics they became, the further they departed from God and his ways. The history of the kings is a political history—an account of position and power, of desires and disasters. Israel became so captivated by the world's ways and of creating a kingdom of glory in the world's image, that they lost sight of faith. The psalmist reminded: "Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save" (Psalm 146:3). There is a lesson here in priority—worldly greatness ain't everything it's cracked up to be. A corollary warning may be discerned: secular success often portends spiritual disintegration.

Jesus Distinguishes Kingdoms

From the Gospel accounts, what kind of "kingdom" language did Jesus speak? That's a good question. Jesus earliest preaching focused on the theme: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matthew 3:2).[17] A quick scan of the Gospel accounts will find that Jesus spoke often of God's kingdom. Indeed, it appears that much of the misunderstanding about Jesus' teaching surrounded the concept of kingdom. After Jesus displayed the breadth of his benevolence by feeding more than five thousand people, he withdrew from the scene because he knew that the people "intended to come and make him king by force" (John 6:15). At the same time, the Jewish leaders who considered Jesus a threat to their position of power used a political argument in their indictment of Jesus before Pilate: "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king" (Luke 23:2). Even after the death of Jesus, the disciples were not entirely certain about what Jesus meant by "the kingdom." Shortly before Jesus ascended, they asked: "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

Jesus always used the term to distinguish his spiritual rule from the way power was exercised on this earth—<u>his</u> kingdom was not identified by boundaries or borders or soldiers or swords. It was not established on legal rights. But … Old Testament Israel did have armies and acreage. David was a king—a real king in the way the world understood the exercise of power. If the Messiah was going to be like David, what kind of a king would he be? What kind of a kingdom

17. Matthew's gospel contains over fifty references to "kingdom" or "king." Many of the parables concern the "kingdom of heaven." Of particular interest is the "Parable of the Weeds: (Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43). Here the wheat (members of God's kingdom) and the weeds grow together in the kingdom of the world. Jesus advises not to be rash in dealing with the problem in the field because "while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them." A clear separation between kingdoms must wait for the final judgment.

would he have? To judge by appearance, without faith in Jesus as God incarnate, kingdom talk was perplexing. The tendency was to perceive it in worldly, earthly terms.

Recall the interchange (taken from John's Gospel, chapter 18) when Jesus appeared before Pilate:

Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

"Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

"Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

"You are a king, then!" said Pilate.

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

"What is truth?" retorted Pilate.

Oh, the kingdom confusion! (Part of us wishes Jesus had countered: "You can't handle the truth.") This dialog is just a snapshot from a wider scene that involved legal jurisdiction and procedure. Not one of the mere mortals involved in the drama clearly understood the depth of what was being said by the Son of God, or what was happening in real time. Deal with him according to "your law," said the state to the church. "But we have no jurisdiction in matters of capital offense," said the church to the state. There appears to have been a sensitivity (whether altogether genuine or not) to the fact that the religious group (the church) and the Roman procurator (the state) each had its own role and purpose and power. In the midst of all the actors and arguments there is only one person who truly is a king, Jesus Christ. He admits as much, but adds, "My kingdom is not of this world." Then, later, Jesus explains, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above." Here we have all the elements: God as supreme King, secular authority, church leaders, questions about truth, government's punishing power, the law of Moses, the law of Christ, self-interest, love. The scene is not just a human drama, it was divine action played out on this world's stage. Salvation history culminated in the midst of arguments about political and spiritual authority. The God-man Jesus submitted willingly to the injustice of thoroughly confused people so that thoroughly corrupt people could be saved.

Jesus spoke directly to the matter of authority when he said: "Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."[18] Jesus was emphasizing a distinction—the political realm has its role and purpose, the divine realm of God has its own. Caesar's rules ordered and protected the outward, bodily life and property of the Empire's citizens. But his authority was limited to external, earthly matters. Caesar had no power over the eternal destiny of believers, even if he claimed that kind of authority (Roman emperors claimed divine status and the religious title *pontifex*

18. All three synoptics record this statement—Matthew 22:21, Mark 12:17, Luke 20:25

maximus).[19] Jesus was not a rebel even if his response communicated an expression of rebuke. He recognized the authority of the government; at the same time, he was clear in communicating his divine supremacy over all things.

Jesus' so-called "Sermon on the Mount," recorded in Matthew 5–7 contains a significant commentary on the concept of law. He was teaching his disciples about the scope and depth of God's moral will. Jesus exposes the sin of the heart and then instructs believers in the ways of humility and love—they might appear weak and meek, but they were blessed. Jesus also makes mention of secular authority when he explains: "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison" (Matthew 5:25). In human affairs, courts and judges and prisons have their place.

The crowds knew that Jesus spoke with authority. Someone asked him for help with the division of an inheritance (Luke 12:13–21). Here Jesus took the opportunity to distinguish between the kingdoms. He responded: "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" In other words, he was not to be confused with a government official whose role it was to make judgments in civil cases. Then, in his role as a divine authority, Jesus taught a spiritual lesson about greed: "This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."

Also consider a scene from Matthew 17. At a point when the tensions between Jesus and Jewish authorities were reaching a climax, the collectors of the temple tax took Peter aside and asked him, "Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?" Peter responded with quick "yes," but the question made him think. He had witnessed Jesus' transfiguration and had heard the heavenly voice proclaim, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" So Peter, confused about the concept of rights and authority, wanted to know more from Jesus. In his divine wisdom, Jesus responded even before Peter could ask, "From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes—from their own sons or from others"? "From others," Peter answered. "Then the children are exempt," Jesus said to him. "But so that we may not cause offense, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours." Peter could draw the application: As the Son of God, Jesus had the rights of God and the privilege of freedom from earthly law. Believers in Jesus also enjoy the benefits of his kingdom. But earthly authorities need to collect revenue to do their duties. While they could press their rights as "sons," in order to not cause offense (σκανδαλίσωμεν —that we may not be a stumbling block for others), Jesus saw to it that the tax was paid. Jesus taught Peter to live in submission to the needs and requirements of the earthly kingdom. This was a lesson for believers to follow. As earthly citizens believers need to be sensitive to the example they set—although in faith they may be free, in faith they are dutiful servants.

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19. Jesus' response was prompted by a question about paying imperial taxes. Roman coins were often minted with the likeness of the ruling Caesar surrounded by titular descriptors—including *pontifex maximus*. The reply was quite likely a word of admonition—Caesar may demand taxation, but he should not claim authority in a kingdom that is not his to command. Coins have been discovered that were minted at the time of Tiberius which have just such designations struck on the face of the coins.

Apostolic Instruction—Paul

Our images of the *Pax Romana* are often idealized by the phrase itself. In truth, the Christian church emerged in the midst of a pagan society that was extraordinarily skeptical of people associated with "The Way," worshippers of Jesus from Nazareth, who was called "the Christ." Romans did not even consider Christianity to be a religion, calling it, rather, a "superstition."[20] And Jesus was a Jew. There had been a decades-long history of antagonism between Roman officials and Jewish loyalists. Luke 13 contains a somewhat beguiling reference to such tension by way of Jesus' comment about "the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices." The apostles were well aware of this context; they lived it. Persecution—even martyrdom—often with government sanction, was a regular feature of life.

God's instruction regarding the relationship of the nascent Christian church to the authority of the government is critical for our understanding of how believers today relate to the kingdoms of this world. Paul instructed the Romans:

> Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.
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> This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. (Romans 13:1–7)

That appears to be as clear an explanation as possible—enough said! Here we have direction regarding behavior and purpose and power and duty. The significant Greek verb ὑποτασσέσθω sets the stage: the present passive imperative instructs to "be subject" to the authority that has been arranged by God.[21] This applies to Πᾶσα ψυχὴ, to "every soul," which appears to provide a deeper insight than the English translation "everyone" implies. Luther comments:

> Is there some mysterious reason why he does not say "every man" but rather "every soul"? Perhaps because it must be a sincere submission and from the heart. Second, because the soul is the medium between the body and the spirit; so that he thus may show that the believer is exalted once and for all above all things and yet at the same time is subject to them, and thus, being twin-born, he has two forms within himself, just as Christ does.[22]

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20. See, for instance, Pliny the Younger, *Complete Letters*, trans. P.G. Walsh, (Oxford: University Press, 2006), 278–79. The reference is found in Book Ten, Letter 96, written by Pliny (61–112 AD) to the Roman Emperor Trajan.

21. "Governing," ὑπερεχούσαις in Greek, has the literal sense "those which are held above," or "superior."

22. *LW* 25:468.

Luther's comment may be even more curious than Paul's usage. The remark contains overtones that appear in Luther's later writing "On the Freedom of a Christian" in 1520 with the thought of the believer being both "exalted above" yet "at the same time subject." The "two forms" appear to be a reference to the "two kingdoms" (spiritual and temporal), which Luther relates to the dual nature of Christ. Regarding this peculiar analogy, Scott Murray posits that "perhaps [Luther] is emphasizing the unity and integrity of the two kingdoms within the daily life of the Christian person and even their harmony within the tension."[23]

Again, Paul wrote these divinely-inspired insights in the context of first-century Roman rule. The Julio-Claudian emperors (men like Caligula, Claudius and Nero) were no paragons of virtue, yet their authority to rule was an "arrangement of God" (τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ διαταγῇ). Rebellion (ἀντιτασσόμενος—to be lined up like an opposing army) against governing authority is rebelling against God who sanctioned it for the purpose of promoting harmony as humans relate to one another. We might wonder why Paul jumped right to rebellion as a means of protest. What about other lesser ways of impacting government action? Roman citizens had legal rights. Although Paul faced violence and persecution for Christ's sake (cf. 2 Corinthians 6; 11), he did on occasion appeal to his rights as a citizen (Acts 16; 24; 25). He made his decisions on the basis of what action would allow him to glorify God in his role as an apostle. Non-citizens may have considered that rebellion was their only avenue of political action. Not only was insurrection contrary to God's design, but history has shown that it often arouses a cycle of violence and volatility.

About the concept of authority (ἐξουσίαις — plural in this initial reference) the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, has this note in the entry: "The NT concept rests on three foundations. First, the power indicated is the power to decide. Second, this decision takes place in ordered relationships, all of which reflect God's lordship. Third, as a divinely given authority to act, *exousia*, implies freedom for the community."[24] The point is that authority promotes the ability to live in peace and safety, as opposed to fear, confusion and a profound sense of turmoil. The enforcement of authority provides God's good gift of stability (θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν σοὶ εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν). As if to reinforce the truth, Paul uses the phrase "by God" (ὑπὸ θεοῦ—in a literal sense, "under God") twice in the verse (13:1), and they complete both sides of a categorical thought—there is <u>no authority</u> that is not under God's ordering, and <u>all authorities</u> are indeed established by God's design. We might also observe that the reinforcing clause, "the authorities that exist have been established by God" (Greek: αἱ δὲ οὖσαι ὑπὸ θεοῦ τεταγμέναι εἰσίν), highlights a plural concept. In that sense it may be emphasizing that no single governing system is God-ordained. 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. Some governing systems, we may consider, serve citizens better than others, but Scripture neither mandates nor discriminates. Israel, and the ancient societies surrounding it, had monarchies. First-century Rome functioned as a dyarchy of sorts, with an emperor and the Senate sharing administrative duties, even if it was an uneven and, at times, hostile partnership. Luther lived under an imperial system that employed an odd mix of electors who exercised some measure of control. Americans have long prized their democratic institutions which serve as a "check and balance" on the exercise of power (and for which there is no exact parallel in

23. Scott Murray, "Romans 13:1–7 and the Two Kingdoms," *Logia*, 30 no 1 (Epiphany 2021): 7–14.

24. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged volume, 239.

terms of biblical history). The rights and liberties afforded to citizens might vary widely depending on the governing structure; Christians nonetheless support and respect any type of ruling arrangement.

The plural (αἱ οὖσαι) may emphasize the spectrum of "authorities" which guide and govern our lives on this earth. The "kingdom of this earth" (or God's left hand) includes more than what we call the "state."[25] Luther considered that earthly governance derived from the basic structure of parents and was directly connected to the Fourth Commandment. All of the "authorities" that God puts in place to provide protection and guidance (parents, guardians, pastors, teachers, police, community officials, military personnel) fall under the command to "honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12, Deuteronomy 5:16). These are the "masks," in Luther's inimitable way of describing things, behind which God provides structure and security for people on this earth. In his explanation to the Fourth Commandment in the Large Catechism, Luther writes: "So we have introduced three kinds of fathers in this commandment: fathers by blood, fathers of a household, and fathers of the nation. In addition, there are also spiritual fathers … who govern and guide us by the Word of God."[26] Paul directs believers to "do what is right" as a matter of "conscience" (τὴν συνείδησιν). In the obedience of faith, believers pay taxes to support the work of governing authorities—even to Roman officials who might turn around and use that revenue to carry out persecution. They respect the roles that authorities have by God's design. They honor those who are responsible for maintaining discipline and order. To honor is to keep the eighth commandment.[27]

Two additional statements of Paul should be cited. In an admonition to peace so that the gospel would have free course, Paul wrote to Timothy: "I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:1–4). He underscored the exercise of faith in prayer with a wide range of terms to describe the Christian's privileged communication with God (δεήσεις, προσευχάς, ἐντεύξεις, εὐχαριστίας). Paul condensed the same instruction he had given to the Romans when he advised Titus: "Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone" (Titus 3:1–2).

The apostle Paul was writing to instruct Christians in the obedience of faith. Notice how faith directs its attitudes and actions in an outward way. Citizens of God's kingdom are concerned

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25. That is why the concept of "the separation of church and state" is not exactly analogous to the "two kingdoms," which has a broader application of what "state" includes.

26. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* , edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), Large Catechism, 408.

27. For a concise summary of the points from Romans 13 highlighted here see Daniel M. Deutschlander, *Civil Government: God's Other Kingdom* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1998), Chapter 5, "Our Duty to the State," 59–68. Deutschlander's book is a fine primer on the issues and arguments involved in the debates about church and state authority. Regarding Roman persecution see Chapter 9, "From the Apostles to Constantine," 107–118.

about life on this earth, and they desire to do whatever they can to be respectable and responsible citizens who are a positive influence on the community that surrounds them.

Apostolic Instruction—Peter

In his first letter, Peter covered similar themes to those highlighted in Paul's writing to the Romans. Peter instructed:

> Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.
>
> Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor. (1 Peter 2:11–17) [28]

Peter, likely writing after Paul's letter to the Romans, reinforced the godly instruction that Paul gave. Remember who you are as citizens of God's kingdom, you are "foreigners and exiles" in the kingdom of this world. The phrase used to denote the government is "every human authority" (πάσῃ ἀνθρωπίνῃ κτίσει), more literally, "every human creation." It seems to be a way of indicating that, under our Lord's guidance, human ruling arrangements reflect a measure of human imagination. As we have said, the Scripture does not mandate a certain type of government. Peter's instruction offers a most practical lesson in Christian attitude and comportment especially in the face of opposition, even persecution. Do the right thing according to the law of the land! The world is watching to see how you live and behave and react. Don't give anyone reason to malign your character. Believers live in the freedom of the gospel (Galatians 5), but freedom is not a license to live as they please. Christians have an awareness that their spiritual freedom comes with a personal sense of responsibility to love—what is personally experienced by faith is to be shared with others. Believers may confront outward hostility in daily life, but they live with the confidence of spiritual peace and freedom. We want others to have the same hope and security that we have come to enjoy in the power of the gospel. Peter's instruction urges believers to understand that how they live and what they say as earthly citizens can and will make an impact on their ability to witness about their citizenship in God's kingdom.

The very fact that both Paul and Peter wrote about matters of attitude and obedience to earthly authority meant that it was an issue in the first century. Displeasure with the decrees of the government was nothing new. Human nature almost instinctively bristles when someone else demands control. The tendency of the sinful nature to be self-absorbed is why motives must always be judged. The concern here was that frustrations about obedience to government were being voiced by believers, as if they were saying: "If Jesus is our Lord, why do we need to listen to any Roman

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28. Luther's lectures on 1 Peter predate his treatise "Temporal Authority." For his treatment of these verses see *LW* 30:66–81.

emperor?" That kind of attitude needed godly counsel. As "God's slaves" (θεοῦ δοῦλοι)—those who live and serve under God's lordship—they were to respect, love, fear and honor those authorities whose role and position God had established to curb such outbreaks of discontent that could trigger violence.

Citizens of God's Kingdom

Who are we? Where do we belong? The Bible describes our status as believers who live on this earth using the language of citizenship, illustrating the dual nature of our life in two kingdoms and our responsibilities in each. Recall the memorable images and instruction from Peter's first epistle:

> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.
>
> Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. (1 Peter 2:9–12)[29]

Peter's phrasing mixes concepts together: royal (political term) and priesthood (sacred term), holy (sacred) and nation (political). But Peter is not confused or confusing; he is underscoring that believers are joined together in a "nation" (or kingdom) under God's lordship for the purpose of serving him and those around us with our lives. Christians maintain a unique position in society—"foreigners and exiles" who function as models of godly behavior when people see our love and concern for our family, friends and neighbors. In Peter's phrase the Greek alliteration (παρακαλῶ ὡς παροίκους καὶ παρεπιδήμους) calls us "to the side" to recognize that we don't "fit in" with the mainstream. The Christian sense of moral concern will be apparent and obvious, and many in the mainstream will "cancel" (καταλαλοῦσιν) believers as being out of touch with cultural norms (with terms like "narrow-minded," "intolerant," "prejudiced," or "bigoted"). But those who criticize do not speak the truth, and this will be revealed when God judges the world.

God sends believers into the world to be his active ambassadors for truth (2 Corinthians 5:20). As we interact with the world, our witness of faith shines so that others might "glorify our Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Our role is to "shine like stars" as we testify to the "word of life" (Philippians 2:15–16). The time of grace believers have in this world are days of activity, purpose and fulfillment—expressions of confident faith. St. Paul was a vigorously dynamic missionary (and part-time tentmaker). His far-reaching travels put him in contact with a wide range of cultural and political contexts, and his status as a citizen of the Roman empire was an advantage. But the expression of his eternal identity was paramount: "Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious

29. For Luther's treatment of these verses, see *LW* 30:62–72.

body" (Philippians 3:20–21). "Citizenship" is πολίτευμα in Greek—for believers the principal "polis" (from which the term "politics" derives) is the heavenly kingdom.

The primary identity, then, of Christians is with the kingdom of God (the spiritual kingdom of his grace). In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructed his disciples: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33). After a clear description of how all people, both Jews and Gentiles, were reconciled to God and each other through the cross of Christ, Paul explains to the congregation in Ephesus: "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:19–20).[30]

While we "live and move and have our being" as humans who live our daily lives as members of earthly communities, we are always conscious of the dual citizenship that we hold. A common faith unites us in a borderless community of believers that stretches across time and space and race and language and ethnicity and gender and vocation. As faith, hope and love predominate, Christians are sensitive to God's will and attentive to the needs of others. They are not, as the wisecrack goes, "so heavenly minded that they're no earthly good." That is a caricature.[31] Instead, as citizens in kingdoms of this world, Christians look for opportunities to serve, and so "fulfill the law of love" (Romans 13). Christians are gospel-centered and gospel-motivated.

We do not, however, live in a perfect Christian environment here on earth. So law and government, threats and warnings, penalties and punishment, are necessary as a way to keep order so that believers and unbelievers can live together. Paul explained to Timothy:

> We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me. (1 Timothy 1:8–11)

Regarding this section of Scripture, Luther wrote in "Temporal Authority":

> Now since no one is by nature Christian or righteous, but altogether sinful and wicked, God through the law puts them all under restraint so they dare not willfully implement their wickedness in actual deeds. In addition, Paul ascribes to the law another function in Romans 7 and Galatians 2, that of teaching men to recognize sin in order that it may make them humble unto grace and unto faith in Christ.[32]

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30. Note how "foreigners and strangers" in this context applies to people who were not formerly citizens of God's kingdom. Ironically, their citizenship in God's kingdom as believers has reclassified them as "foreigners" in the kingdom of this world.

31. As one pastor, who read an early draft of this paper, commented: "Note how many universities, hospitals and charity organizations have been founded and supported by Christian churches and organizations."

32. "Temporal Authority," *LW* 45:90.

Luther describes two uses of law, as a restraint (sometimes called a curb in theological terms, or the first use of the law) and as a teaching to "recognize sin" (the mirror function, or the second use of the law). The sword (the ability to punish) is the agent of enforcement for the state; the church operates with the "the sword of the Spirit" which "penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Believers, who have an increased sensitivity to God's will, recognize what a blessing secular authority and power can be. It serves to check the unrestrained and impulsive behaviors of the sinful nature and to allow for an environment in which the gospel can be proclaimed.

Conscience and Obedience

The concept of conscience is important as we consider the matter of obedience before the law. Regarding the intersection of law and conscience, the classic Scriptural statement is found in Paul's letter to the Romans:

> Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them. (Romans 1:14–15)

Conscience stands as the judge over the sense of right and wrong, which, in our sin-spoiled state, is neither perfect nor infallible. Satan is incessant in his attempts to sow the seeds of deception and confusion among citizens of both kingdoms (John 8:43–44; 2 Thessalonians 2). A conscience may become so dulled to any godly standard that its ability to function cannot be trusted. We may think of Paul's counsel to Timothy about the tough task of shepherding God's people across the rough terrain of a hostile secular environment. He advised Timothy to hold on to "faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith" (1 Timothy 1:19). While sin and unbelief "suppress the truth" (Romans 1:18) and damage the conscience, faith in Christ sharpens the sense of what is good and godly. But even a sharp conscience may be misguided. It may fire too quickly about a matter that is not necessarily wrong. This is what Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians 8 when he takes up the issue of a "weak conscience" (one that is too sensitive) and the matter of offense, causing someone to sin by following behavior that, to them, seems wrong.

Even though conscience is an imperfect judge, it does bear witness to some sense of what Paul called God's inscribed "requirements of the law" that are shared by all people. The law codes of ancient Near Eastern kingdoms, whose cultures often intersected with God's Old Testament people, are a fascinating window into the operation of social logic and cultural conscience. They contain laws that punished murder and theft; they penalized damage to body and property and reputation. These law codes bear striking similarities to the Mosaic law code, but they are not identical.[33] Such ancient witnesses reinforce the idea that public regulations can and should, as much as possible, reflect a sense of natural law. The "natural," and mutual, level of discourse among believers and

33. For a comparison of ancient law codes see John Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), especially Chapter 3, "Legal Codes," 69–93.

unbelievers is also augmented by sensory observation and rational argument (Romans 1 and 2). As a case in point (Satan's attempts at confusion notwithstanding), it should be discernibly obvious that certain natural laws govern sexual biology. Or, consider the historical evidence that reveals how lax enforcement of legal regulation leads to an increase in crime. People might wish that instead of meting out what often seem like unsympathetic penalties, "we should be looking for the good in everyone," but, as a basic governing principle, that does not and will not work. Statistical evidence can prove that point.

The question might be asked: Could the apostolic instruction lead to passive and uncritical obedience to secular law? This has been the contention of some who find fault with the Lutheran perspective of the two kingdoms.[34] Among other things, Luther has been blamed for cultivating an attitude of docile compliance among the Germans that, centuries later, set the stage for Hitler's dictatorship. But Scripture places a clear limit on earthly authority. Government oversteps its authority when it forces Christians to believe or act contrary to the Word of God. The government is not free to forbid what God commands, nor is it free to command what God forbids. Peter and the apostles defended their open defiance of the Sanhedrin's command not to speak or teach about the death and resurrection of Jesus with the statement: "We must obey God rather than human beings!" (Acts 5:29).[35] That simple statement forces us to grapple with a tension between the two kingdoms. It was a matter of necessity (δεῖ), and it was a matter of obedience to God (Πειθαρχεῖν θεῷ) when the apostles opposed the strict orders of the Sanhedrin. Here we have a powerful exemption to the apostolic command that Christians ought to be subject to the governing authorities for the sake of God and conscience. We can understand why. To forbid the expression of the gospel's saving truth is to deny God at the highest level. It is truly a matter of life or death (in eternal terms). God's truth cannot be bridled. In the earlier interchange of Acts 4, Peter and John said: "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." They could not keep (οὐ δυνάμεθα) the truth to themselves; they were exploding with excitement to share the news. To remain silent would be unthinkable and, honestly, a sin. Luther could appreciate this situation on a personal level. When he refused to "recant" at Worms in 1521, he defended his actions in the name of conscience and said, "Here I stand."[36] A couple of years later, his treatise "Temporal Authority" was written, in part, to defend his opposition to the legal command that his translation of the Bible should not be distributed in certain sections of Saxony. In each instance, government authority was forbidding the truth of the Word to be proclaimed. "We must obey God rather than human beings" applied.

Do we need to obey a bad, even evil, government? Luther would remind us that we need to distinguish between the role of the government, which has God-given authority over external temporal affairs, and the people who may be functioning in specific positions, who may indeed be "scoundrels."[37] This is a complex issue. At a basic level, both Paul and Peter instructed "yes," obey the governing authorities. It might be helpful to think in the negative, that is, what if there were no

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34. For perspectives and criticisms of Luther's teaching see especially Wright's chapter titled "Interpretations of Luther's Idea of the Two Kingdoms during the Last Two Centuries," 17–43.

35. Acts 5:29 essentially reiterates what was already expressed in the Acts 4:18–20

36. For the details of the transcript at Worms see "Luther at the Diet of Worms," *LW* 32:101–131.

37. *LW* 45:113–117. Luther does not excuse tyrannical behavior but chastises the princes for their "wicked use of force."

governing authority managing human affairs?[38] Public disorder would result. Neither widespread rioting nor private vigilante justice promotes true social order. Even pagan rulers—as for instance the Roman emperors at the time of the apostles—provide a measure of stability.

Disobedience (opposition or resistance) is, of course, distinguished from rebellion.[39] The midwives in Egypt, "feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live," but they did not conspire to take pharaoh down (Exodus 1:17). The "three men" and Daniel all disobeyed edicts to follow pagan worship practices; they did not actively undermine Babylonian or Persian authority with some type of insurrection. Recall also that Jeremiah, who lived at roughly the same time as Daniel and who, from his place in Jerusalem, had witnessed Jewish exiles taken captive to Babylon prophesied: "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper" (Jeremiah 29:7).

The directive of Acts 5:29 has become a wide justification for disobedience on religious terms. We must be certain that what we are being commanded to do or say is indeed sinful. Is the government demanding that we must not preach the truth of the Word? Is secular authority forcing Christians to participate in immoral behavior? What is the rationale behind the enforcement of a government regulation? Are we faced with an "either-or" decision or are we left with some choices? We must also ask what kind of message a stance of disobedience will send to our fellow believers and to our neighbors, many of whom are not Christians. Is the disobedience justified by a clear Word of God or only by personal opinion? What law is guiding the judgment of conscience?

We must and will defy any order that directly conflicts with God's will and requires us to sin. If we disobey, as Peter and the apostles did by resisting the command that forbid them to share the gospel, we will also bear the consequences of that decision. Here the instruction given in Matthew 5 and Romans 12 against taking personal revenge finds direct application.[40]

Because of our democratic system of government, we may use political avenues to voice disapproval. Perhaps a government policy, rather than restraining evil, promotes an agenda that a Christian would call immoral. In their roles as "salt and light," Christians may actively address political leaders with arguments that promote the health and welfare of society. Because the rationale will need to appeal to the wider world, Christians will use the logic of what is generally

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38. Luther picks up on this same line of thinking in "Temporal Authority," 90–91. He likens the function of earthly law to "chains and ropes" that bind a "savage wild beast" so that it "cannot bite and tear." Without worldly government, Luther says, "The world would be reduced to chaos."

39. Here Luther's writings that relate to the disturbances in Wittenberg (1522) and the German Peasants Revolt (1525) apply. In "A Sincere Admonition by Martin Luther To All Christians to Guard Against Insurrection and Rebellion" (*LW* 45:52–74), Luther wrote: "Insurrection cannot help but make matters worse, because it is contrary to God; God is not on the side of insurrection" (63). Luther wrote to instruct both sides as the peasant unrest unfolded—he instructed the princes about their unjust practices; he chastised the peasants for fomenting revolt. Three treatises (all contained in *LW* 46) are instructive—"Admonition to Peace, A Reply to the Twelve Articles of the Peasants in Swabia" (3–43); "Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants" (45–55); and "An Open Letter on the Harsh Book Against the Peasants" (57–85).

40. Matthew 5:39—"But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also." Romans 12:19—" Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay."

common among people. Leaders may (or may not) be influenced by arguments from history, which, truthfully, often provide effective evidence from the field of human experience. Arguments may appeal to a general sense of moral propriety or the need to consider the impact of legislation on wider society rather than the desires of smaller interest groups. In our American context, Christians may lean on certain constitutional rights that safeguard liberties such as the "free exercise" of religion.

We pray these petitions often, "Father … your kingdom come … your will be done here on earth as it is in heaven … lead us not into temptation … deliver us from evil." There is no contradiction between our prayer to God that he oppose the forces of evil at work in the world and God's command that we not rebel against the authorities he has placed over us, especially when secular authorities adopt policies that seem biased against Christian moral virtue.[41] Indeed, when we pray we are obeying God's directive to call on him "in the day of trouble" (Psalm 50:15) and engaging his supreme power to frustrate the forces of evil. Prof. Brug has summarized this way: "Keep both facets of the biblical view of government in mind. Government is a good institution of God, but it has been perverted by sin. If we remember this, we will avoid both sinful extremes, that of making government a god which we trust and obey without question, and that of making government a devil which we hate and despise."[42]

We may long for the days when, in our American setting, it appeared that the church and the state had some respect for each other's roles. Increasingly, each has tended to disparage the other. We must caution against becoming so contemptuous of all government that we summarily scorn its God-given role and question its authority. Some very difficult issues may arise about which Christians have a difference of opinion regarding the legitimacy of a government regulation and its application to the church. Christians may also disagree about which course of action to take to combat some type of legal injustice. Regardless of what path is taken, there will be consequences to face—both short and long term. All of these must be taken into account: Scripture's revelation of God's will, concern for conscience, the matter of offense, the theological implications of our decisions. Where there is genuine unclarity about how Scriptural principles should be applied in complex human circumstances, a stance of resistance to government laws ought not to become a litmus test of faithfulness or orthodox practice. When multiple factors are involved, some situations may not allow us to make a pure or flawless decision on the basis of the Word and sanctified judgment. We must resist the urge to be judgmental in either case and seek forgiveness when we have erred.

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41. We recall the explanation to the Third Petition in the Small Catechism—"God breaks and hinders every evil scheme and will—as are present in the will of the devil, the world, and our flesh—that would not allow us to hallow God's name and would prevent the coming of his kingdom …" (Kolb-Wengert, 357). Believers are instructed by Jesus to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). Certainly, we desire that all people repent. We also pray earnestly that God would use his power to hinder evil designs that seek persistently, obstinately, and relentlessly to undermine his will—see such imprecatory psalms as 69, 109, 139.

42. John Brug, "The Lutheran Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms," In *Our Great Heritage, Vol. 2*, ed. Lyle W. Lange (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991), 382.

Lutheran Confessional Statements

Confessional statements generally have a presenting cause; Article XVI of the Augsburg Confession is no different. It speaks directly to the extreme position, held by the Anabaptists, that truly sanctified Christians must avoid participation in civil affairs. The only way to be "in the world but not of it" was to separate from it. Instead of appreciating the Christian obligation to serve God and neighbor as requiring involvement in both kingdoms, the Anabaptists made withdrawal from activity in government affairs a matter of conscience.

Article XVI reads as follows:

> Concerning civic affairs they teach that lawful civil ordinances are good works of God and that Christians are permitted to hold civil office, to work in law courts, to decide matters by the imperial and other existing laws, to impose just punishments, to wage just war, to serve as soldiers, to make legal contracts, to hold property, to take an oath when required by the magistrates, to take a wife, to be given in marriage.
>
> They condemn the Anabaptists who prohibit Christians from assuming such civil responsibilities.
>
> Because the gospel transmits an eternal righteousness of the heart, they also condemn those who locate evangelical perfection not in the fear of God and in faith but in abandoning civil responsibilities. In the meantime the gospel does not undermine government or family but completely requires both their preservation as ordinances of God and the exercise of love in these ordinances. Consequently, Christians owe obedience to their magistrates and laws except when commanded to sin. For then they owe greater obedience to God rather than human beings (Acts 5[:29]).[43]

The article stresses the value of God's design for order in the role that government has. It encourages participation by Christians in service to the secular state—that this service should be recognized as an act of faith and love. It concludes with the important caveat about obedience to government: Christians will disobey if the government requires them to sin.

The Apology, the subsequent defense of and expansion on the articles of the Augsburg Confession, explores further the distinction between the two kingdoms. There is an obvious intention to emphasize that the "gospel" of Christ creates an attitude. It does not seek to threaten earthly order, but to support it. The article contains several historical references (not printed in the excerpt below) that demonstrate how the gospel does not seek to undermine secular law with laws of its own, but to assist in the management of earthly affairs. A portion of Apology Article XVI reads:

> We confessed that legitimate civil ordinances are good creations of God and divine ordinances in which a Christian may safely take part. This entire topic on the distinction between Christ's kingdom and the civil realm has been helpfully explained in the writings of our theologians. Christ's kingdom is spiritual, that is, it is the heart's knowledge of God, fear of God, faith in God, and the beginning of eternal righteousness and eternal life. At the same

43. Kolb-Wengert, 49. Article XII of the "Formula of Concord" (Concerning Other Factions and Sects That Never Subscribed to the Augsburg Confession) also treats issues that related to confusions of the two kingdoms (see especially Kolb-Wengert, 657–58).

> time, it permits us to make outward use of legitimate political ordinances of whatever nation in which we live, just as it permits us to make use of medicine or architecture or food, drink, and air. Neither does the gospel introduce new laws for the civil realm. Instead, it commands us to obey the present laws, whether they have been formulated by pagans or by others, and urges us to practice love through this obedience.… For the gospel does not destroy the state or the household but rather approves them, and it orders us to obey them as divine ordinances not only on account of punishment but also "because of conscience" [Rom. 13:5].… The gospel forbids private redress [retribution], and Christ stresses this frequently in order that the apostles would not think that they ought to usurp the governing authority from those who hold it (as in the Jewish dream of a messianic kingdom) but instead would understand that they ought to teach about the spiritual kingdom and not change the civil realm.… Accordingly, we have repeated these things so that even outsiders may understand that our teaching does not weaken but rather strengthens the authority of magistrates and the value of civil ordinances in general.[44]

Article XXVIII of the Augsburg Confession deals with aspects of the other misleading view of the relationship between the two kingdoms—not avoidance, but the complications caused by the improper mixing of spiritual and secular authority. This was chiefly directed at the confusing way Roman Catholic church leaders, especially its bishops, maintained authority in both the church and the state. Many Roman Catholic church officials not only exercised judicial and punitive authority, they also demanded that the government be ordered by ecclesiastical ethics established by the church. In short, the church ran the state. When that occurs, the gospel of forgiving grace suffers since most of the activity of the church is directed toward the function of law. As an aside, John Calvin, the sixteenth-century reformer who opposed the dogma and decrees of Roman Catholicism, ironically ended up in a similar place as Catholicism in his view of the two kingdoms. He conflated secular and spiritual authority. For Calvin, the key to understanding God was found in God's sovereign authority—God was a divine decision-maker. Where one stood in terms of God's decisions was not always clear or certain, so Calvin employed the external propping (and prompting and power) of the state to reinforce the security of faith. His reform efforts in Geneva, Switzerland, resulted in a form of governmental theocracy. To extend the thought, inheritors of Calvin's theological theories today are usually strong proponents of "religious" politics since a theocratic environment demands a personal sense of moral compliance that, it is hoped, will provide an awareness and assurance that they are indeed living as God's elect should live. Lutheran dogmatician, Francis Pieper, warned about the effects of manipulating spiritual obedience with earthly law: "Seeking to build the Church by the use of the powers of the State leads to work-righteousness because the powers of the State, even with rigorous enforcement, never transmit the grace of God in Christ, faith, and the Holy Spirit, but at best achieve an outward piety that does not rise above the province of the Law and externalism.[45]

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44. Kolb-Wengert, 231–33. Curiously, the confessional statements contain occasional statements, as does this article, that state, "this topic … has been helpfully explained in the writings of our theologians." The articles take for granted the reader is familiar with and has access to additional explanations not contained in the treatment as presented. In this case, writings such as Luther's "Temporal Authority" are being referenced.

45. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics, Vol. III* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 182.

Following that excursus on both the Roman Catholic and Calvinistic approaches to the mingling of the church's purpose with the government's power, we offer a final confessional excerpt from the rather extensive treatment found in Article XXVIII of the Augsburg Confession:

> Therefore, since this power of the church bestows eternal things and is exercised only through the ministry of the Word, it interferes with civil government as little as the art of singing interferes with it. For civil government is concerned with things other than the gospel. For the magistrate protects not minds but bodies and goods from manifest harm and constrains people with the sword and physical penalties. The gospel protects minds from ungodly ideas, the devil, and eternal death.
>
> Consequently, the powers of church and civil government must not be mixed. The power of the church possesses its own command to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments. It should not usurp the other's duty, transfer earthly kingdoms, abrogate the laws of magistrates, abolish lawful obedience, interfere with judgments concerning any civil ordinances or contracts, prescribe to magistrates laws concerning the form of government that should be established.… In this way our people distinguish the duties of the two powers, and they command that both be held in honor and acknowledged as a gift and blessing of God.[46]

This lengthy concluding article of the Augsburg Confession moves from the complications caused by church officials who claimed political authority to the way Catholic church officials attempted to manage the church itself. They burdened consciences and imposed "traditions" contrary to the gospel—as if the coercion of law were necessary as a means of compelling obedience among the church's members. "It is not lawful," the article declares, "for bishops to institute such acts of worship [feast days, holy days, food ordinances, etc.] and require them as necessary, because ordinances that are instituted as necessary or with the intention of meriting justification conflict with the gospel."[47]

Anxieties

"When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?" Those words from Psalm 11 are on the lips of many sincere Christians today.[48] Scripturally sensitive people are anxious about the present, and they fear for the next generation. A "warped and crooked" environment can easily lead people astray with its entertainment culture and moral ambiguity, its promises of freedom and the right of each individual to discover identity. When moral confusion becomes commonplace, there is less and less resistance to its influence and effect. The anxiety is not entirely unwarranted. Scripture and history are the teachers. God has spoken clear words of judgment against decadent societies. Sodom and Gomorrah were morally depraved civilizations; they were destroyed by God

46. Kolb-Wengert, 93

47. Kolb-Wengert, 99

48. Psalm 82 speaks in similar tones as Asaph writes about the issues of corrupt leadership and social injustice. Luther wrote and extensive commentary (1530) about how Psalm 82 provides a rebuke to negligent secular rulers. Luther's comments relate to the application of Scripture to how the two kingdoms operate on earth— *LW* 13:42–72.

(Genesis 19). The power and pride of ancient Near Eastern kingdoms—among them, Assyria and Babylon and Persia and Phoenicia and Egypt—all collapsed under the weight of their profligate ways. God's own people of Israel were warned about craving and coveting the pagan cultures of the peoples around them. Their kingdom too was destroyed and the people exiled. The Old Testament prophets—especially Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—contain long sections of diatribe against crass idolatry, pagan revelry, gross sensuality, arrogant greed, and the abuse of power that existed in the world. How telling and timely is Isaiah's comment in his list of prophetic woes against those who turn God's world upside down: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight" (Isaiah 5:20–21).

The Bible has been undermined as a book of divine instruction and revelation—it is considered an ordinary human document of archaic literature. Long-held traditions are dismissed as outdated. Society has accepted science as the arbiter of truth. And governing authorities today are swayed significantly by the trends of public opinion and the collective pressure of special interest advocates. Culture has become increasingly libertine (a licentious form of "free") and more concerned with individual rights than the dictates of reason or conscience. Even many churches are confused especially about the definition of such theological concepts as "law" and "love." God's law is perceived as a vague and general directive to love, while the specific formulations of God's immutable moral will are perceived as obsolete expressions. Love has become a legal command to demonstrate "acceptance" or "toleration." The only sin, then, is to be "unloving." Or, to put it another way, anything which would restrict the free expression of love is considered wrong.

Who can stem the tide of propaganda? What are we going to do when the waves of progressive permissiveness are crashing all around us, to the point that we feel like we're drowning in a sea of immorality and lawlessness? Is this just an expression of resignation, or are we being realistic? We are being forced to turn to the Word for perspective and strength and comfort.[49] And we must not give up. That is why we pray earnestly for endurance and the LORD's deliverance. We must be careful not to become so focused on the ills of society (and the apparent alliance with government support) that we fail to see the deep-seated sins inside the church—especially indifference to the Word, lukewarm support for the work of the church, aspects of greed that lead to discontent. We must always be conscious of our own sin and live in an attitude of repentance.

We cannot withdraw from our roles as citizens on earth, nor can we imagine that, by our own power, we can suddenly sanctify the world. Despite his posture of passive resistance, Daniel, even in his prominent governmental role, could not change Babylonian culture. Too often we want "big action" (as did Elijah) when we should be content with the "gentle whisper" of the gospel. Elijah felt like he was "the only one left" (1 Kings 19), but the LORD assured him that he "reserved seven thousand in Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal" (cf. Romans 11). Then the LORD directed him to be about his business as a prophet in the specific duties God commanded him to perform.

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49. The laments recorded in Jeremiah and Lamentations become more meaningful—honest expressions of human angst intermixed with the reassurance of the LORD's enduring comfort: "Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:21–23).

Scripture assumes that the church will exist under persecution and the cross (Matthew 10). If Jesus was treated with scorn and derision by an unbelieving world, the world will hate us too (John 15). It may simply be that we are becoming more aware of this truth. Peter's instructions apply:

> For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. (1 Peter 2:19–21)[50]

Faithful Christians must bear the cross even as they pray that God would deliver them from evil. They recognize their role as models of decency and sanctified judgment in this world, but they are not naïve to the struggle this world represents.[51] Sometimes God allows the devil, the "prince of this world," to have a long leash.[52] Spiritual warfare is real. Paul's conclusion to his letter to the Ephesians is as current and crucial today as it was in the first century:

> Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. (Ephesians 6:11–13)

Yes, there is a conspiracy at work. Scripture reveals that the forces of Satan have been, and will continue to be, agitating to influence earthly authority and generate disorder. God explained to Daniel that the archangel Michael was contending with demonic forces that were interfering with the kingdom of Persia. The prophet saw what the diabolical warfare looked like (Daniel 10). God gave Daniel an apocalyptic preview of what life would be like until the end of time. It was as realistic as it was reassuring: "Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered" (12:1). Great distress … certain deliverance! In the same way, John's "Revelation" visions illustrate the combat between God and Satan. The "Seals" of Revelation 6 reveal that calamity by way of death and economic inequality and famine and persecution would inflict suffering on this earth, but the powers of injustice would cower at the "wrath of the Lamb." Defeated Satan wants to manipulate the "beast out of the sea"—proud and blasphemous earthy authority—to threaten the earth with instability. Surely he is a "roaring lion" who seeks out his prey on earth. We may be tempted to become impatient, angry, disillusioned, and maybe even apathetic. None of these are evidence of a

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50. Also note how Paul describes the "last days" in 2 Timothy 3.

51. We may think of Luther's devotional pattern: *Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio*. Prayer and meditation on the Word will result in an attack by Satan that will take us back to prayer and the Word. This triad occurs in the "Preface" to his German Writings in reference to Psalm 119. *LW* 34:285.

52. John records three times when Jesus used the phrase "prince of this world" to refer to Satan (12:31, 14:30 and 16:11). In his first epistle John also wrote: "We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them. We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (1 John 5:18–19).

godly attitude or productive faith. That is why Paul counsels believers to "put on the full armor of God"—the full protection and power of the gospel. Satan is done and defeated. We may think of the line from Luther's hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God": "He's judged; the deed is done; one little word can fell him." Despite present raging and warfare, Christians know that Jesus has already won the victory—"the kingdom's ours forever." As citizens of God's kingdom, we live with the security of faith as our basic operating principle. Psalm 2 is true:

Why do the nations conspire
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord and against his anointed, saying,
"Let us break their chains
and throw off their shackles."

The One enthroned in heaven laughs;
the Lord scoffs at them.
He rebukes them in his anger
and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,
"I have installed my king
on Zion, my holy mountain."[53]

So where does that leave us? Exactly where God wants us to be—living life under the cross; exercising our faith in a life of service to God and neighbor. John concluded his vision of the "beast out of the sea" with an expression of determined resolve: "This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people" (Revelation 13:10). Believers live in a certain tension between the experience of earthly imperfection and the confidence of heavenly glory. As we follow Jesus and carry our crosses, we live in the shadow of Calvary's victorious cross.

We would like our American laws to reflect, as much as possible, our Christian moral values. But a democratic system operates by majority opinion. If the majority of voters and decision-makers do not share our Christian sensitivity to God's will, legislation will not either. As disquieting as that can be, we are willing to tolerate the defects of a process that also espouses essential protections. In their section on the challenges of living as a Christian in the kingdom of this world, Robert Kolb and Charles Arand included this comment:

> We have to make compromises to deal with an imperfect world.… For example, Christians must reject any and every ideology or theology that tries to find peace with God apart from Christ. But Christians may support the government's policy of religious freedom, which allows and encourages people to attend the church, synagogue, or mosque of their choice. Christians recognize that a society of religious people rather than religion-less people better serves public morality. Christians reject homosexuality as sin before God while supporting laws that provide civil rights and protect homosexuals from violence.[54]

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53. Psalm 2:1–6. Luther wrote an extensive commentary on Psalm 2—*LW* 12:4–41.

54. Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 118.

On Politics[55]

Our American attraction to politics is due, in part, to our ability (even responsibility) to affect the process of decision-making, whether by voting for legislators or deciding on a referendum or by efforts to lobby policy makers. This may also reinforce the idea that the force of law is the most effective tool to change behavior. Politics is not as clear-cut as our presently partisan system deludes us into thinking it is, nor is it as tidy as the simple phrase "separation of church and state" might imply. The political activities of faithful Christians are often well-intentioned and sensitive to God's enduring will, but politics has also been described as a "messy business."

As a reflection of inner attitude, tone and disposition matter. Believers want to reflect faith—to be "Christs" to those around us—because we have a genuine desire to save souls. In the upper room on Maundy Thursday, Jesus taught his disciples a lesson on attitude with a two-kingdoms illustration. He disrupted their argument about stature and status: "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves" (Luke 22:24–30). Jesus cut to the heart of the matter. In the kingdom of the world, power was exercised by "lording it over them" (κυριεύουσιν). Officials acted the part—demanding, severe, pompous, insensitive, boastful, proud. They often bore a title ("Benefactors") but did little to be genuinely helpful. "But you are not to be like that." Jesus put them in their place. In all of life's interactions, your attitude and manner are to be an extension of the gospel—show love as I have shown love to you.

There are reasons why many members of our church body feel connected to a conservative political position—in general, it appeals to a sense of law and order that is rooted in a Judeo-Christian ethic. But there are also many members of our church body who are more politically liberal—the platform seems more humane, more honest, more helpful to others. Neither of the two main parties in our political system promote a Christian platform as such—the promotion of the gospel, through Word and sacrament, is not the state's role.[56] Truthfully, there is enough sin on both sides of our essentially two-party system that neither represents a purely Christian point of view. As Cal Thomas, a conservative political commentator, bluntly observed in an editorial he wrote a number of years ago: "Politicians who struggle with imposing a moral code on themselves are

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55. The terms politics and government are used often somewhat interchangeably, but there should be some distinction between the role of government and participation in political activity. Government involves decision-making and the enforcement of law. Some government structures (dictatorial or oligarchic systems) allow very limited participation in the decision-making process, if at all. Democratic governments permit more participation, but even this may be rather limited. When some "grassroots" activity is allowed, politics comes into play. Political action seeks to influence the decision-making process.

56. Christians ought to be convinced that a specific political party's platform is the wisest approach to governing. This will include a wide range of policies: from economic principles to foreign policy to labor laws to commerce regulations to energy initiatives to health and human service guidelines to trade protocols. A quick scan of a congressional website, delineated over thirty different policy areas. The point is that political platforms are wide-ranging, and there are, generally speaking, aspects with which we may personally agree and others with which we would dispute.

unlikely to succeed in their attempts to impose it on others."[57] Should we rely on political leverage and persuasion to lay the groundwork for a more moral society? How has that worked in the past? While law may change outward behavior, political pressure does not change the heart. When we think of Christianity as a means to an earthly end, we may lose sight of how the message of Christ has the power to transform. Only the gospel forgives and saves and changes hearts. When Christianity is used primarily as a code for biblically moral law, it reinforces the stereotype that Christianity functions essentially as a system of thought to encourage its version of ethical life.

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. Every moral platform has a standard of behavior (whether willing to acknowledge the Bible as truth or not) that regulates its policies. Some display a much greater respect for God and his Word (and the concept of natural law); others are more humanistic and espouse the evolutionary principle of development and progress. Even the concept of kingdom can become blurred, as it would, for instance, if we are led to advocate the views of millennialism, which spends its energy awaiting and preparing for the time when Christ will come in glory to rule a kingdom on this earth. Anytime the kingdom of God is clouded or confused, the biblical truth of Christ's gospel is as well.

Vocations

In its widest application the two kingdoms distinction is a way of expressing how Christians, under the guidance of God's Word and will, also serve in various roles in earthly life, under the regulations that control this world. The multiple vocations of a Christian's life—as spouses, parents, citizens, board members, government officials, farmers, businessmen, medical professionals, technicians, mechanics, church workers, among many, many others—all operate in two kingdoms. Sometimes the intersection of faith life and daily life can present extremely challenging situations. Christians who work in the field of the performing arts, for example, are very likely confronted with serious moral conflicts. They are appalled by the overt social agendas, yet they want to participate so that their Christian voice and view is heard. They weigh issues of public perception with opportunities to serve as a Christian witness. Those who function in some government positions may find that they are put in uncomfortable situations. Secular society reflects the environment; believers will find themselves in the minority. They may face difficult decisions of conscience about whether they are able continue to engage with salutary effect or should separate from the organization they serve. We may think especially of Old Testament examples like Daniel or Nehemiah in this regard. Naaman's pangs of conscience can be instructive. He said to Elisha:

> "Your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the Lord. But may the Lord forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I have to bow there also—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the Lord forgive your servant for this." Elisha assured him, "Go in peace" (2 Kings 5:17–19).

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57. Written in late 2008. Specific provenance uncertain—this editorial was clipped from a newspaper and stuck in a book referenced for this paper.

Serving in our country's military is honorable work. It is an extension of the secular kingdom in its role to provide security and defense. Soldiers may face the challenge of combat situations. In an essay titled "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved," Luther directed:

> As far as the body and property are concerned, they [Christians] are subject to worldly rulers and owe them obedience. If worldly rulers call upon them to fight, then they ought to and must fight and be obedient subjects. Christians therefore do not fight as individuals or for their own benefit, but as obedient servants of the authorities under whom they live. This is what St. Paul wrote to Titus when he said that Christians should obey the authorities [Titus 3:1].[58]

Luther's views were rooted in Scripture's teaching about the beneficial role of military service and submission to the authority of the government. He allowed, however, that authorities could be engaged in an unjust conflict. In that regard, Luther wrote, "If you know for sure that [the governing authority] is wrong, then you should fear God rather than men, … and you should neither fight nor serve, for you cannot have a good conscience before God."[59]

Called workers of the church serve primarily in a role as leaders in God's kingdom. While they live as active individual citizens of states, it may be the better part of wisdom for called workers to refrain from public political activity. Private work as a concerned and engaged citizen (writing letters or speaking directly to decision-makers) can be profitable. The public/private distinction has been altered by the role and reach of cellphones and social networks. We may want our "posts" to reflect our private opinions, but they have a way of "going viral" and that could have a negative effect on our ability to serve as gospel shepherds to God's people.

There may be a time when, under the guarantees of the First Amendment of our American Constitution, church officials feel the need to contribute perspective about government policy. In his essay, "Two Kingdoms: Simul iustus et peccator—Depoliticizing the Two Kingdoms Doctrine," Reverend Professor Erling Teigen wrote:

> Given this distinction [between roles in both the secular and spiritual kingdoms], it is proper for churches and church leaders to address the state on clear matters of conscience, when proposed legislation would violate natural law and burden consciences on matters such as life issues, marriage and family, racial discrimination, education, freedom of religion and freedom of conscience.[60]

As servants of the gospel, we always have our eyes on the kingdom of God and the mission of the church. Overt political activism may mix and confuse the kingdoms. Reverend Paul Prange drew a pertinent conclusion that relates to called worker involvement in a political action committee. In an essay titled "Lutheranism and the Religious Right"—written when he "had a foot in both kingdoms" as the president of Michigan Lutheran Seminary—Prange had this to say:

> I make my decisions in the freedom of the New Testament not as a "loose constructionist," arguing that since the Bible does not ban my behavior, neither may any man. Instead, as a

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58. *LW* 46:99, "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved."

59. *LW* 46:130.

60. Teigen, "Two Kingdoms: Simul iustus et peccator," 181.

> "strict constructionist," I know that everything is permissible for me, but in the light of God's Word, some things are not beneficial, some things are not constructive (edifying), and I will not be mastered by anything (1 Corinthians 6:12, 10:23). I believe that Lutheranism should view association with the Religious Right in just that way.[61]

The insight applies to being associated with any political affiliation that may affect our Christian witness. It is better to direct our passions toward what is enduring than toward that which is transient, toward changing hearts than changing policies, toward gospel outreach than a political crusade.

What To Do

American society encompasses a wide spectrum of political perspectives; our churches do too. Even after we have reviewed and agreed on the biblical principles involved, we will not have unanimity among us in regard to public policy. Confessional Lutheranism must be able to unite people in a common faith despite differences of opinion on political approaches. The church does not represent a monolithic political culture.

What does it say to anyone who enters a church parking lot and sees political banners of any stripe? It says, "Politics spoken here," regardless of persuasion. It is far better for church property to be a neutral zone so that the church can operate within its widest parameters to speak God's truth to as many souls as possible. Make church a place where we talk about what is common to us and what it is that unites us—a place where the law of God convicts, and the gospel of Christ's forgiving love frees us to serve. Politics is about competition; church is about cooperation. Politics is about debate and compromise and enforcement. The church is about maintaining "the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" where there is "one body and one Spirit, … one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:3–6).

Let church be a place where our citizenship in God's kingdom is nurtured and edified—this will naturally flow to a life of fruitful citizenship in our stations here on earth. Let it be a place where there is an expression of unity that centers on Christ as the one in whom "all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). There should be no reason to focus on public policy differences, no demand that everyone speak the same political language or support the same candidate (… or even cheer for the same sports teams).

We want to avoid the extremes: 1) of dividing or compartmentalizing life into two spheres—secular and sacred, and 2) of mixing the two together in such a way that the distinctions of mode, manner and means become confused. The Christian citizen does not live with two separate identities, one Christian and the other as citizen. Christians first and foremost identify as Christians; faith has made them "new creations." They bring the character of believers to everything that they do. Christians are models for the culture around them of how one serves God and neighbor. How you live may be your greatest act of citizenship, in both kingdoms.

As citizens of two kingdoms, Kolb and Arand encourage active engagement with the world:

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61. *The Christian, the church, and the government: a symposium*. Martin Luther College, 1999. The collection (binder) of essays is available in the MLC Library holdings.

> Luther's concept of the two kinds of righteousness deprives Christians of the option of living in one or the other world. Christians cannot regard one realm of existence as inferior to the other; both belong to God.… To retreat from the world as it lies under bondage to sin and evil is to surrender to sin and to abandon the world as God's creation. On the contrary, Luther realized that like Christ, Christians are sent into the world to become deeply involved in daily life.[62]

What to do …

- Live in daily, humble, personal repentance. It is unwise to practice "comparative morality." Be honest about sin; be charitable in the expression forgiveness. When life's posture is penitent, the attitude and activity of the gospel radiate. (Matthew 5:3–10; Acts 20:18–32; 2 Peter 3)
- Give thanks to God for the blessings we enjoy as citizens of the United States of America, especially our First Amendment freedoms and rights. (1 Timothy 2:1–4; 1 Peter 2:13–17)
- Let church be church—where God's power and authority are active in Word and sacrament. It is the duty of church to deal with spiritual matters. And church is the place where God's instruction inculcates the attitudes and convictions of faith. (Revelation 2 and 3; 1 Peter 1:3–12)
- Live by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:1–7). Sight sees sin and its effects. What are the activities of faith? Glorifying God, obedience to those in authority, prayer, love for a hurting world, charity—even to those who may oppose us.[63]
- Educate. Christian education is essential. Churches and schools must not waver in their commitment to teaching faithfully the Word of God—that is the primary concern of Lutheran education. (Deuteronomy 11:18–20; 1 Timothy 4)
- Pray without ceasing. The more you meditate on the truths of the Lord's Prayer, the more you come to realize that it is, in every way, a "two kingdoms" prayer.[64]
- Participate—be the voice of reason—who better to serve as a civil servant than a Christian! How good to have believers in Naaman's role, or that of Daniel, or Nehemiah, or Cornelius. Perhaps the truth that applied to Esther could be said of one of our church members: "And who knows but that you have come to your royal [government] position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14)
- Engage. Community service shows that you care about others. (Matthew 22:37–40; Galatians 6:7–10)

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62. Kolb-Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology*, 110

63. Romans 12:9–16—"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited."

64. The Prayer of the Church in Christian Worship, Service Setting Two, is a fine two kingdoms prayer, 182.

- Weigh and assess the complexities involved in making decisions as a Christian citizen in the kingdom of this world—this requires prudent judgment, balance and caution.[65]

When we pray the Lord's Prayer in corporate worship, it has become our custom to conclude with the doxology: "For the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours."[66] Are yours, God! Yes, indeed, we trust and believe with all our heart, that all authority, in heaven and on earth, is under our Lord's control. Now and forever. This is the expression and conviction of faith. "All things hold together in Christ." What supreme confidence! Our times are in your hands, Lord! E'en so, come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

65. See especially pertinent sections of Solomon's wisdom in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

66. The conclusion to the Lord's Prayer, though familiar to us, is not found in the earliest manuscript evidence of either Matthew's or Luke's gospel record of Jesus' teaching on prayer. Nonetheless, with roots in ancient historic usage, it has formed a fine and fitting note of concluding praise as we glorify God for the breadth and perfection of his creative and guiding and protecting power. The doxology sounds the overtones of David's prayer at the gathering of offerings for the building of the Temple in 1 Chronicles 29 (especially verse 11).

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Appendix A

Theses On Church and State[67]

The annual meetings of the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum are attended by the Presidents and Vice-Presidents of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and by official representation of these synods from their doctrinal committees and their departments of education and missions. This forum was established in the interest of helping these two Lutheran synods to preserve their doctrinal unity, to confirm their bond of confessional fellowship, and to aid and encourage each other in their educational and missionary endeavors.

An important feature of the annual Forum meetings has been the plenary discussion of a set of theses on some timely doctrinal subject. The 1970 sessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum were held at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, October 26–27. The doctrinal discussion was devoted to a set of 16 theses on Church and State. We are offering our readers the text of these theses in the wording in which they were accepted by those in attendance.

Introduction

1. Ever since man fell into sin and brought God's temporal and eternal wrath upon himself, life here on earth is to serve as a time of grace. In providing a time of grace for man, God uses both the church and the state, yet each in its own way.

The Church

2. The church *is* the spiritual body of all those whom the Holy Spirit through the Gospel has brought to faith in Christ as their Savior. The *marks* by which the presence of the church is recognized are the means of grace, the Gospel in word and sacraments. In a wider sense the designation of church is therefore applied to those who profess Christian faith by being gathered about the Gospel word and the holy sacraments. Only in this way can we deal with the church here on earth as distinguished from the state.

3. The only *task*, or *function* specifically entrusted to the church is that of proclaiming the Gospel, the whole counsel of God in Christ, to men for their salvation. To the unregenerate the church is to proclaim the Gospel, the whole counsel of God in Christ, in order to make disciples of them, i.e., that through its testimony the Holy Spirit may bring more and more sinners to saving faith in Christ. To those who have already come to faith, the church is to continue to proclaim the Gospel, the whole counsel of God in Christ, that they may be built up in Christian faith, joy, comfort, understanding, hope, and a sanctified life.

4. The *means* with which the church is to carry out its one entrusted task, or function, of bringing sinners to salvation for time and eternity are the Gospel, and together with it the entire word of God, the Holy Scriptures. In proclaiming any part of God's word to men the

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67. "Theses on Church and State." *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 68:1 (January 1971), 62–64.

church is to keep it in close relation to the central message of pardon and salvation in Christ. Only in this way will the testimony of the church remain a part of the one task, or function, assigned to it.

5. As far as the *unregenerate* are concerned, the only express purpose for which the church is to proclaim the Law to them is that of bringing them to the knowledge of their sins and of thus preparing them for the comforting proclamation of the Gospel. Though in some the church's preaching of the Law may effect mere outward reform and civic righteousness, this is a by-product and not a part of the church's mission.

6. To those who have already come to faith in Christ the church is to preach the Law as a mirror, curb, and guide, yet only in the interest of the edification of *believers* in Christian faith and life. The preachment of the Law cannot, of course, effect anything positive; yet it is necessary because of the Christian's Old Adam.

The State

7. To serve in the gathering of the church of believers among sinful, depraved mankind during this time of grace the Lord has made provision that a measure of outward decency, peace, and order be established and maintained. Establishing and maintaining such outward peace and order (civic righteousness) is the specific *task*, or *function*, of human government.

8. The *state*, as designating all human governmental structure and authority beyond the home, is a *divine institution*. No specific kind of government is prescribed by God, nor any specific manner of establishing it. We owe obedience to the government that is actually in control over us and whose benefits we are enjoying. With threats of punishment the state, or government, is to check and restrain the evil desires of the wicked, so as to prevent crime and violence. On the other hand, government is to protect the law abiding, that they may be benefited. To that end it is also empowered to make the regulations in purely earthly and secular affairs which it deems necessary and beneficial.

9. The *means* which God has given to human government for carrying out its specific function of maintaining civic righteousness are summed up by our Lutheran Confessions as "human reason." This embraces the full scope of the abilities and endowments which according to Scripture belong to natural man and which are sufficient for maintaining a measure of civic righteousness.

10. "*Human reason*" includes the inscribed Law, conscience, and also the natural knowledge of God gained from the things created. When government, therefore, enlists these forces as means for promoting and maintaining civic righteousness in its legislative, executive, judicial, and educational functions, it is still within its realm and using its God-entrusted means.

11. In carrying out its specific functions government is not to be interested in *motives* as to their spiritual value before God, but merely as to their *effectiveness* in promoting certain outward deeds which foster civic righteousness and in restraining others which hinder it.

Church and State Relations

12. A confusion of state and church takes place when either state or church presumes to perform any part of the function which God has assigned to the other.

13. Church and state are also confused when the church seeks to do its work, perform its function, through the *means* of the state; or when the state DIRECTLY undertakes to do its work through the means which the Lord has assigned to the church.

14. The individual *Christian* has been placed both in the realm of the *church* and of the *state*. In carrying out his responsibility in either realm he will do so in accordance with its distinctive functions and means. As he participates in the functions of the state he will, however, do so with Christian motivation and with his additional Scriptural insights concerning God's holy will.

15. A *confusion* of state and church does not *necessarily* take place when both participate in one and the same endeavor, but each participates in this endeavor only in the sphere of its own function and restricts itself to its own *means*.

16. Actions and decisions in those church and state contacts and relations which are *adiaphora* in themselves, call for very *cautious* and *discerning judgment* in order that in the handling of these adiaphora neither the interest of the church nor the state may actually or eventually suffer.

Appendix B

Confusion

How do unbelievers who live shoulder-to-shoulder with us in the kingdom of this world perceive the church? Many consider it to be a bastion of hypocrisy—where everyone talks the talk but doesn't walk the walk. A club for those who think they're better than everyone else. If there is a positive opinion, it is that the church exists to support the cause for peace and harmony in this world, or that the church serves best in a humanitarian role. All of the above could, in truth, be said of every church, but those descriptors fail to include the church's primary role of saving and preserving souls. The church is a spiritual kingdom; its King is a Savior. The kingdoms become confused if the church is identified, as a body or institution, with political action. Individual members of the church may function as citizens in political roles, but to sanction protest or stage rallies or become a policy forum on behalf of political causes as a legally recognized church can cause considerable confusion.

History contains many lessons of times when the state has crossed into a political role reserved for the church, some of which are extremely egregious. The following example reveals how even well-intentioned expression can cause confusion. The illustration comes from postwar (1940s) Germany and captures the essence of how politics tends to grab for religious principles without grasping the fullness of how the two kingdoms interact. After World War II, Germans were searching for peace and stability. Hitler's Nazi policies were based on a certain moral hubris that promised to return Germany to its former glory. Instead, Hitler's vision entangled the Germans in wars that produced catastrophe for the nation and its people. Needing to recover from the disasters of two world wars and their attendant social upheavals, a veteran politician, Konrad Adenauer, rose to the occasion. There is much to admire about Adenauer and the way he led what became West Germany after World War II. He had wide experience in German politics, and his strong moral (Roman Catholic) convictions set a standard by which West Germany could regain its tarnished image and its standing in the world. Adenauer contended:

> Western Christianity denies the dominance of the state, and insists on the dignity and liberty of the individual. Only this traditional Christian principle could now help us to show the German people a new political life. This conviction would give our party the strength to raise Germany from the depths. Hence the new party had to be a Christian party, and one that would embrace all denominations. Protestant and Catholic Germans, indeed all who knew and valued the importance of Christianity in Europe, should be able to join—and it goes without saying that this also applied to our Jewish fellow-citizens.[68]

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68. *Sources of European History Since 1900*, 290. A couple of other related thoughts here: Thomas Jefferson had no problem promoting his version of the Bible titled "The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth." He did not believe that Jesus, the God-man, died for sin and rose from the dead. Or, more recently: Did the coronation of Charles III in London clarify his role or not? More likely than not, for both church and state, the procedures of tradition confused the issue. Does Charles have authority over religious matters or not? One gets the impression that he is very uncomfortable in that role.

Under Adenauer's influence the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) became a dominant influence in German politics. Even today the "Christian" party (a coalition of two parties with "Christian" in their name, the CDU/CSU) has the second largest representation in the German *Bundestag* (federal assembly). On the surface, Adenauer's thinking made some sense. Nonetheless, a "Christian" political party has nothing to do with the gospel as such—with Jesus as Savior. The concept implied that there was one specific political party that represented the truly Christian perspective on public policy. Adenauer envisioned a return to time-honored Judeo-Christian values. Christ's teaching that "set you free" was a critical counter-balance to what he perceived was the overt burden of obedience demanded by the state. Adenauer's opinions reinforced the idea that Christianity (the teaching of Jesus) was chiefly a moral theology. We might also reflect on how the Christian church fared in Germany under the influence of what became a highly secularized culture during the short generations after Adenauer's comment—many large cathedrals and churches, often supported by state funding, are mostly empty shells on Sunday mornings. The very concept of a "state church"—a longstanding European tradition—inextricably mixes the gospel with law in such a way that the church's true mission is lost.

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Appendix C

Some Personal Reflections

I consider that my father (Prof. Arnold Koelpin) was a very wise man—a man whose faith was the most natural expression of who he was, a man of considerable learning, a theologian, a Luther scholar, a very effective teacher, well-traveled … and not one to speak much about politics. It is true that he was asked to serve as the mayor of the city of New Ulm as he retired from active service as a professor, but that was an appointment made because the gentleman who held the position had died in office. He never ran for an elected government position. I'll never forget what he said to me when I reached voting age. Almost as a side comment he said: "I've never been completely partial to a specific party—they're too inconsistent. My best advice is, as much as possible, to vote for the character of the person you think will serve the people with honor." My father left a legacy of service—to the church and to the community. He served on boards and commissions and got to know the leaders of businesses and institutions and governing agencies. I consider that he taught Luther's "two kingdoms" in an almost organic sort of way.

I am by temperament both a concerned and cautious person when it comes to things that matter to me—especially, in this instance, matters of the church and its connection to politics. I began my parish ministry experience in Maryland, midway between Washington D.C. and Baltimore. Many of the congregation members worked either directly for the government, or for companies that did government work. I realized in short order that using the terms "liberal" and "conservative" to denote theological perspectives was not a good idea. Since these terms were so charged with political overtones the mention of "conservative," for example, automatically took their minds to something associated with the so-called "Religious Right"[69] and not only its political agenda but the theological implications that came along with it. Liberal, of course, meant a connection to liberal politics, and everything that could be associated with causes of the political left. I tended to speak in terms of "confessional Lutheranism," though even that phrase, some of my more astute members reminded me, was subject to interpretation.

While serving in Maryland, I had some interaction with a minister of another Lutheran denomination who was not serving as a parish pastor, but in a more administrative role overseeing a social service agency. We had some personal conversations, and he sent me his newsletter as a way of staying in contact. What I noticed was a tendency to become involved in rhetoric that was less religious and more political—even in "devotional" thoughts included in his newsletter. The tone was, honestly, less theologically Lutheran and more Arminian in its phrasing and style. I recall that, in the course of conversation, I had enough nerve to ask this veteran pastor why the newsletter sounded less Lutheran than I had thought it would or should. He said (paraphrasing): "The longer you're out here in this very political environment, the more you'll relate with those who share your

69. "Right" as a political label used here does not denote or connote the moral correctness of its position. The terms "right" and "left" as political labels are a historical relic from the time of the French Revolution, when more conservative members of the assembly sat to the right of the speaker in the horseshoe arrangement of the seating, and the more politically liberal members sat to the left side.

moral values. You'll realize that you talk the same language." He had "become Right." Gradually, and maybe even unconsciously, he had adapted and adopted the perspectives (including theological ones) that tended to mix the kingdoms.