

The Doctrine Of The Two Kingdoms

(The Scriptural Distinction Between Church And State)

[Delivered at the Third World Mission Seminary Conference Tsuchiura, Japan June 8-14, 1974]

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Introduction

1. Ever since man fell into sin and brought God's temporal and eternal wrath upon himself, life here on earth is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. The end is God's saving activity in behalf of the gathering of his church through the gospel for eternal fellowship with him. Ever since man fell into sin his life span here on earth is to serve him primarily as a time of grace.
2. During this time of grace we need to distinguish between the church and human society as a whole for which the divine institution of marriage, the family, and civil authority are in effect; between that which God offers to sinful mankind through the church, and that which he purposes to maintain for mankind through human authority between God's gift of justification and sanctification in Christ, and his gift of civic righteousness. Making these distinctions on the basis of Holy Scripture means upholding the doctrine of the two kingdoms.

The Church and Salvation

3. 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.
4. The only *task or mission* 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 (*mission work*). 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, (*Christian education*). Fostering Christian sanctification with the gospel also includes fostering Christian welfare work. In Christian liberty the church may set up the machinery to administer welfare work and thus assist its members in carrying out this responsibility. When the church administers welfare work, it will, wherever possible, bring this into a close relationship with its prime responsibility of preaching the gospel to sinners for their justification and sanctification.
5. The means with which the church is to carry out its one entrusted task, or mission, of bringing sinners to salvation for time and eternity is 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 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 mission specifically assigned to it.
6. The message of the gospel is basically the message of the forgiveness of sins. All other spiritual blessings flow from Christ's blood-bought forgiveness, and are an unfolding of its riches, such as peace with God, the comfort of God's fatherly love for time and eternity, the privilege of prayer and the assurance of being heard, the strength of thankful love for godliness. Where there is forgiveness of sins there is life and salvation.
7. The gospel message is offered in the Word of God, which is the power of God unto salvation. The sacraments are the same gospel message with a seal attached to it (the visible Word). Forgiveness of sins is also the fundamental gift of the sacraments. All other blessings also of the Lord Supper are transmitted in and through this fundamental gift of forgiveness apprehended in faith and sealed by the real presence.

8. The church's proclamation of the law of God also stands in the service of its mission to preach the gospel. As far as the unregenerate are concerned, the only express purpose for which the church is to proclaim the law is that of bringing them to the knowledge of their sins and of thus preparing them for the comforting proclamation of the gospel. Yet the church cannot control the effect of its law preaching in those who are directly or indirectly exposed to its testimony. Though in some it may effect mere outward reform and civic righteousness, this is a by-product and not a part of the church's mission.
9. 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 the believers in Christian faith and life. The preaching of the law cannot, of course, effect anything positive, supply any motivation, but is necessary because of the Christian's Old Adam.

Human Authority and Civic Righteousness

10. To serve in the gathering of the church of believers among sinful depraved mankind during this time of grace the Lord has made provision through human authority which he has ordained that a measure of outward decency, peace, and order be established and maintained. God's ordinances of marriage and the family established at creation, the natural affections and emotions bound up with them, and the inscribed law pertaining to them, contribute to civic righteousness. Establishing and maintaining such outward peace and order (civic righteousness) is *the specific* task, or function, of civil authority specific beyond the home. Civic righteousness is God's gift. Man's goodness does not account for it. It is not a denial of the total depravity of natural man. God interposes with his sovereign judgments when man's natural endowments, which should effect civic righteousness, are dulled and not put to use.
11. 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.
12. The *means* that 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.
13. "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.
14. In carrying out its specific function of promoting civic righteousness government is to judge these outward deeds and the motives behind them as to their effectiveness in bringing about the peace, order, justice, and welfare that it is to maintain and in restraining other deeds which hinder it. It is not to judge these acts or the motives that effected them as to their spiritual value before God. Deeds arising out of pride, fear, hope of reward, meet the demands of civil authority and civic righteousness as well as similar deeds flowing out of faith-born love for the Savior.
15. In the faithful discharge of its real and specific task the church promotes civic righteousness among those who are exposed to its testimony. The church fosters civic righteousness among those whom it brings to Christ and whom it thus enables to render their civic righteousness as a part of their life of sanctification. The Christian will want to carry out all of his duties to society with distinctively Christian motivation and with the benefit of his richer scriptural insights. With its fervent prayers the church will affect and influence the outward conduct even of those whom it is not successful in winning for Christ and his salvation. With its

testimony and its life it will sharpen their conscience, and activate their consciousness of God and of his holy law. In doing its own assigned task faithfully the Christian church changed social patterns in the apostolic age, undermined slavery and the bondage of women, and stimulated charity and regard for human life. This is however, a by-product of the church's faithfulness in its assigned mission, not an additional mission of the church.

Church and State Relations

16. A confusion of state and church takes place when either state or church presume to perform any part of the function which God has assigned to the other.
17. Church and state are also confused when the church seeks to do its work and 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.
18. 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.
19. 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.
20. Actions and decisions in those church and state contacts and relations which are adiaphora in themselves, nevertheless, call for very cautious and discerning judgment in order that in the handling of these adiaphora the interests neither of the church nor the state may actually or eventually suffer.

Religious Freedom

1. The principle of religious freedom and that of the distinction between church and state (understood in the sense of avoiding confusion of their functions and means) are not fully identical concepts, though they certainly cover some common ground.
2. The principle of religious freedom approaches the matter from only one side, bidding the State to refrain from going beyond the scope of its God-assigned function or means and also to resist the pressures of any religious body which in its own interests wants the state to go beyond its realm.
3. The principle of religious freedom is larger in its scope of application than the principle of the distinction between church and state. It serves notice to the state also not to meddle with the affairs which lie in the realm of that religion which cannot properly be covered by the biblical concept of the church, and which has no true understanding for the real function or means of the church.
4. The principle of religious freedom is not violated when the government operates with the natural knowledge of God, the inscribed Law, and conscience for its own function of maintaining civic righteousness. E.g., governmental use of oath.

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5. While speaking of a *separation* of church and state may be understood very properly in the sense of avoiding a confusion of their functions and means) it is easily misunderstood as though church and state may under no circumstances participate in one and the same endeavor. E.g., marriage ceremony.