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THE LUTHERAN TWO-KINGDOMS DOCTRINE AND SUBSERVIENCE TO THE STATE IN MODERN GERMANY

Richard V. Pierard*

A debate has raged during the past few decades within German Protestant and particularly Lutheran circles over the so-called "doctrine of the two kingdoms." It has, as Heinrich Bornkamm aptly puts it, "produced an almost unmanageable quantity of literature."¹ In such a brief space it is not possible to deal with the manifold aspects of the debate,² but this essay will examine the doctrine as it was formulated in early twentieth-century Lutheranism and point out ways in which it reinforced the concept of authoritarian government. It must be emphasized that the traumatic experiences of the Third Reich forced theologians to rethink their understanding of the teaching. As a result a variety of interpretations exists today among Lutherans, but few are willing to abandon it entirely.

I. WHAT IS THE TWO-KINGDOMS DOCTRINE?

The concept of an eschatological tension between the two kingdoms or realms is found in the NT and Augustine, and some ideas about the two kingdoms (*Reiche*) and two forms of governance (*Regimente*) were expressed by Luther, but this did not constitute a central part of his theology. Since he never made a systematic exposition of the doctrine, interpreters have constructed it from a brief treatise of 1523, *On Secular Authority: To What Extent We Owe It Obedience*, and passing comments he made over a thirty-year period. Because the material that can be drawn from the Wittenberg Reformer's works is vague, confusing, and at times contradictory, any definition or exposition of the two-

*Richard Pierard is professor of history at Indiana State University in Terre Haute.

¹H. Bornkamm, *Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 3.

²The most helpful introductions to the vast literature surrounding the two-kingdoms doctrine are F. Lau, "Zwei-Reiche-Lehre," *RGK* (3d ed., 1962), 6, 1945-1949; P. Althaus and J. Heckel, "Zwei-Reiche-Lehre," *EKL* (1959), 3, 1927-1947; *Reich Gottes und Welt: Die Lehre Luthers von den zwei Reichen* (ed. H.-H. Schrey; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969); *Luther und die Obrigkeit* (ed. G. Wolf; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972); *Zur Zwei-Reiche-Lehre Luthers* (ed. G. Sauter; München: Chr. Kaiser, 1973); U. Duchrow, *Christenheit und Weltverantwortung: Traditionsgeschichte und systematische Struktur der Zweireichenlehre* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1970); W. Huber, *Kirche und Öffentlichkeit* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1973). Especially valuable are the volumes compiled by U. Duchrow and various collaborators for the *Texte zur Kirchen- und Theologiegeschichte* series published by Gerd Mohn in Gütersloh: *Die Vorstellung von Zwei Reichen und Regimenten bis Luther* (1973); *Umdeutungen der Zweireichelehre Luthers im 19. Jahrhundert* (1975); *Die Ambivalenz der Zweireichelehre in lutherischen Kirchen der 20. Jahrhunderts* (1976). The most important portions of the Duchrow anthologies have been translated into English in *Two Kingdoms and One World: A Sourcebook in Christian Social Ethics* (ed. K. H. Hertz; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976).

kingdoms doctrine is simultaneously an exercise in interpretation. The description that follows is taken largely from post-World War II writers like Heinrich Bornkamm, Ulrich Duchrow and Helmut Thielicke, who have sought to go behind the early twentieth-century accretions and get at Luther's essential understanding of it.³

Luther sees God's power in history engaged in an unrelenting struggle with the power of evil (the kingdom of the devil), one that will continue to the end of time. As God has the goal of establishing his ultimate reign of perfection (the kingdom of God), he fights against the power of evil in every dimension of existence. Human beings live in both realms, and God gives them the power of reason that will help to keep them from misusing their human capabilities. Reason means participating in what is good and true and contributing to the good of all and social stability. People are either motivated by the power of evil or they live from the good gifts of God.

One kingdom is the realm of faith based upon freedom from sin and the powers of evil, while the other—the external order—rests on law and coercion. But contrary to the claims of some commentators, Luther did not view these in terms of the kingdom of God and kingdom of Satan. Rather, God's love rules in both realms. He works to liberate people from evil and the bondage of works through the revelation in Christ and moves toward the ultimate goal of his perfect kingdom in which peace and justice will freely dwell. But in the present age he works through institutions set up by human reason—the three "estates" of ecclesiastical, political, and economic institutions—and these human agencies guide people in carrying out their responsibility to God in secular occupations by combatting the powers of evil.

Although they function on the basis of their operative principles, they are not autonomous in the sense that these principles lie outside the pale of God's judgment. His governance through them is clear. In the Church (*ecclesia*) his method is the preaching office, the theological use of law and gospel. In the political complex (*politia*) his governance employs the civil use of the law with reason and the sword to insure cooperation, whether voluntary or coerced, in the protection of the rights of others. In the third complex—the household economy (*oeconomia*)—God utilizes reason and common sense. Since all human institutions serve God's loving will, they in effect serve one another as well. The use of compulsion and force along with the existence of social classes, occupational groupings, and princes and subjects may seem to be a negation of love, but they still remain a "strange work" of love. In God's twofold governance (spiritual and temporal) the human institutions utilized are not dualistically opposed to each other nor interdependent, but complementary and interrelated.

Through the preaching of the law and the gospel and the promotion of the gifts of the Spirit, the Church serves both God's spiritual and temporal governance. Against the powers of evil the Church witnesses to truth and right in

³Bornkamm, *Luther's Doctrine* 5–18; U. Duchrow, *Two Kingdoms—The Use and Misuse of A Lutheran Theological Concept* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1977) 3–9; H. Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*. Vol. 1: *Foundations* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 359–382. See also the perceptive discussion by J. R. Stephenson, "The Two Governments and the Two Kingdoms in Luther's Thought," *SJT* 34 (1981) 321–337.

every dimension of life. The institutions themselves, not merely the persons involved in them, are endangered constantly by sin and thus are in continual need of criticism, judgment and improvement for the sake of the "neighbor." The critical witness and action by the Church is enabled by love, which in turn is the fulfillment of the law and reason. Therefore what occurs is an historical-eschatological struggle whose goal is the establishment of the perfect kingdom of God and perfect righteousness in every sphere of creaturely life.

Luther rejected the medieval idea of the Church as the "spiritual power," maintaining that the term could only be applied to the Holy Spirit himself who creates faith, love, and hope through grace. The Church, made up of the holy people of God, embodies the most ideal form of service—the crucified Christ—and its power is expressed through the proclamation of the word and a life of righteousness. Justification by faith alone is bound up with the life of service and suffering on the part of the Church, which proclaims it. Individual believers demonstrate their faith and neighbor love in good works for others. Further, as individuals they should actively participate, and the Church as the body of Christ should bear public witness in political and economic affairs. This would redound to the benefit of neighbors and to the glory of God. Nevertheless it is not possible that the entire world could become the Church in anticipation of the perfection of the kingdom of God. It is necessary that the state use the sword to maintain peace and order and promote justice because this benefits all citizens, but employing violent means to defeat non-Christians contradicts the life of suffering in this world that Christ's body is expected to demonstrate.

The two-kingdoms teaching thus was embedded in Luther's thought, but for over two centuries it lay largely dormant. Only later would it be revived, and then it was perceived in rather different terms than the Reformer had intended.

II. APPEARANCE OF A TWO-KINGDOMS DOCTRINE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The great interest in political thought that arose in early nineteenth-century Germany impelled theologians to restudy Luther's writings on political matters, especially since some of them were seeking support for the current dualism of public and private concerns. Reacting against the disruptions of the French Revolution, confessional (conservative) theologians stressed the importance of the state as the means of keeping order in the human community. They insisted the state was an order of creation, directed Christians to take up vocations within it, and denied the Church the right to issue prophetic messages to it. Religion was regarded as the domain of the inner life, while the institutional and public belonged to the secular powers. Positing law as the exclusive province of the state led to a division of law and gospel. The outer and inner lives of the faithful followed different paths.⁴

The first theologian who actually utilized a kind of two-kingdoms argumentation to back up the conservative political order was Christian Eduard

⁴*Two Kingdoms* (ed. Hertz) 70–72.

Luthardt in *Die Ethik Luthers in ihren Grundzügen*, published in 1867. He boldly affirmed the dualism of outer and inner, which he equated with law and gospel. "The Gospel has absolutely nothing to do with outward existence but only with eternal life, not with external orders and institutions which could come into conflict with the secular orders but only with the heart and its relationship to God." He went on to say that "we stand in two spheres of life," and they differ from one another "in the same way that the sphere of redemption differs from that of creation." It is "not the vocation of Jesus Christ or of the Gospel to change the orders of secular life and establish them anew. On the contrary, Christ has nothing to do with this sphere but allows it to go its own way." He instituted the world and its life and orders at the beginning, and this justifies its independent status.⁵ Luthardt introduced a dualism on the level of God's twofold governance, which essentially restricts Christianity to the personal, inner sphere and denies the preacher any power to comment on political matters.

As the American social ethicist Karl Hertz points out, while confessional theologians centered their concerns on matters of authority and order, liberal thinkers were interested in the autonomy of social institutions and the natural order. Many of these theologians embraced laissez-faire theory and the Social Darwinistic conception of international power politics, and they withdrew major questions of social change from the moral scrutiny of a critical Christian social and political ethic. By viewing the secular forces of modern times as absolute and determined by fixed laws of divine origin they did not allow for the secular and the spiritual to engage in mutual interaction, and the result was that theology merely legitimated authority. Scientific knowledge was also seen as autonomous, and the Christian faith was relegated merely to the private life with its only task being the cultivation of spiritual virtues.

An important exponent of this view was Rudolf Sohm. He wrote in 1894: "The nature of the church is spiritual, the nature of the law secular. The church wishes to be guided and directed by the governing of the divine spirit; the law can only produce human government, [one that] is earthly, fallible, and subject to the flux of time." He added that the inner nature of the law is opposed to that of the Church. "Just as the legal order is in harmony with the essence of the state, so the legal order is in contradiction to the innermost essence of the church." In 1895 Sohm said that the gospel frees us from this world but also from all the questions of public life and the social question. "Christianity has no answer to these problems."⁶ The individual Christian possesses freedom, but at the cost of abandoning the Church as an institution to the authorities governing the society and state.

Another liberal, Wilhelm Herrmann, wrote in a widely-read treatise on ethics in 1904 that once a Christian understood the moral significance of the state he would regard obedience to the authorities as his primary responsibility. "The continuance of the state, resting as it does upon the authority of its government, is more important than the elimination of any individual defects it

⁵Text in *ibid.*, pp. 83–85.

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 86–87.

might have." If a Christian because of moral scruples is unable to carry out the command of the government, he should not preach revolution but willingly suffer the penalty for his disobedience. It is better for the inwardly free person that the state maintain its historical continuity than that he obtain justice for himself. The Christian will exert influence on the government of his nation to carry out its duties, but the form in which this is done "cannot be derived from Christian moral sentiment alone but must be sought on the basis of the special historical relationships." And the Christian must seek to promote patriotism among his fellows.⁷

This meant liberals were doing as much to pave the way for authoritarian government as the confessionalists were. Both groups were interpreting Luther in such ways that the Christian *qua* Christian was excluded from public life. Ernst Troeltsch rightly faulted the confessionalists for sanctifying the status quo but misunderstood that his fellow liberals were doing essentially the same thing. He insisted that "Luther regarded secular institutions and natural possessions as appointed and ordained by God. Nature and the life of the senses, a humanity almost entirely dependent upon mutual help and organization, government and property, law and oath, war and violence—all is willed by God." The individual Christian in the realm of personal piety and relationships is obligated to try to obey the higher law, but in the secular order of nature and reason that has been "directly instituted by God" and "indirectly permitted to exist by him" the believer is bound to submit to it. Troeltsch in effect accused Luther of setting up a dualistic Christian ethic. Undoubtedly he misread Luther—but his contemporaries were doing likewise, and their viewing the state as the authoritarian guardian of the public order or as an autonomous institution of national power would have ominous implications for the next generation in Germany.⁸

III. THE FLOWERING OF TWO-KINGDOMS THOUGHT AFTER WORLD WAR I

By the time of World War I both confessional Lutheranism and liberal theology had come to accept the separation of the spiritual and secular, the order of the kingdom of God and the order of nature, faith and politics. They easily justified participation in the conflict as a matter of state necessity. In 1917 Karl Holl, the person most closely identified with the "Luther Renaissance" of the early twentieth century (an important force in the articulation of the new two-kingdoms doctrine), wrote that the Reformer

distinguished clearly between the order of God's kingdom—which is based upon love—and the order of the state—which is based upon justice. The former derives its laws from the Gospel of God's Word and applies to Christians. The latter applies to the natural man, to believers and nonbelievers alike, and obtains its standards from natural reason and judicial procedure alone. Luther insists

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 91; Duchrow, *Umdeutungen* 45–46.

⁸*Two Kingdoms* (ed. Hertz) 74; E. Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (New York: Harper, 1960 [1911]), 2. 499.

strongly that the two not be confused. The Gospel offers no prescription for economic and political affairs but is concerned only about souls.

Holl went on to say that the inner relationship between the two separated spheres is based upon love and the recognition that secular activity ultimately serves the purposes of God's kingdom. They are "God's order of creation," and he allows some people to expand and others to decline. He distributes his gifts to individuals or peoples in various ways, enabling some to overcome difficulties that cause others to destroy themselves.

Even war takes on an appearance of inevitability. It is unjust to expect a dying people to inhabit an extensive territory while a fresh and vigorous folk must languish within narrow frontiers. . . . It should not be imagined that the outcome of a war should be taken as a divine judgment, as though the people enjoying moral superiority always are victorious in the end. Victory demonstrates only that at this time God sees fit to grant this particular people more room to live out their lives.⁹

In other words, the natural or creation order of God provided a framework in which the World War could be seen as an understandable happening.

By far the most important statement was that of Hermann Jordan, a Church historian at Erlangen. In a study of the Reformer's views on the state and politics Jordan advanced the view of the autonomy of the state (*Eigengesetzlichkeit des staatlichen Lebens*). He argued that the independence of political life from faith is the fruit of Luther's distinction between the two kingdoms. As he put it, Luther "picked up and universalized the idea of the two spheres—the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of the state—as entities to be distinguished, the one from the other, as each follows its own autonomous laws." Further, the state's freedom to do so "follows inevitably from his understanding of the gospel." Jordan held up Bismarck as a good example of the notion that religious and political life must operate according to their own autonomous laws. The Iron Chancellor shaped the national state on the basis of power, by war when necessary, but yet he continued to function as a believing Christian. This is nothing else than the continuation of Luther's line of thinking. Jordan added:

By nearly divorcing the natural life from the Christian life, Luther maintained the pristine purity of both, preserved the gospel from confusion with secular interests and protected the state from the hypocritical application of evangelical motives in what is really its own proper sphere. Inasmuch as Luther did not subordinate one sphere to the other, but instead placed them side by side, he described in simple terms the two worlds in which we live, thus making it possible for the Christian to exist simultaneously in both worlds with a clear conscience.

Further, the state can function only "as it obeys laws that are particularly tailored to its own nature." Luther made a sharp distinction between personal and political ethics, those of the individual and of the state. "Thus it became a fundamental axiom for the political development of every state which had some contact with Lutheranism . . . that neither the gospel nor the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount can stand in the way of measures which the state considers to be in its own best interest." And "from the separation of the gospel

⁹*Two Kingdoms* (ed. Hertz) 167–169.

and politics Lutheranism gained two things—the possibility of the pure execution of state interests and the preservation of the purity and inwardness of the gospel. State politics and the gospel remain untouched by means and goals that are foreign to their respective natures.”¹⁰

Jordan's doctrine became in many respects, although not completely, the standard for the political stance of German Lutheranism in the 1920s. Georg Wünsch described the situation well: “As inner man the Christian acts within the kingdom of God wholly intent upon fulfilling the morality of the divine goodness, but as secular man he follows in his office the autonomy of the world in pursuing a morality of force and power.” Luther views the totality of all existence “in terms of an absolute dualistic separation” between this world and that which is to come and sees each sharply separated from the other with its own unique laws. The present world is that of the devil and has been entirely lost for divine purposes. The Christian awaits his redemption in eternity and until then must endure patiently what essentially is the devil's world. Thus contemporary Lutheranism “provides a means for holding the influence of Christianity far away from the world and its social life while preventing the Christian from exercising his principles in this world.” In the most critical questions confronting the state and society, Christianity had nothing to say. Lutheranism had related to the spirit of the age—but at the cost of being untrue to the spirit of the gospel.¹¹

Karl Barth also called attention to this situation in the controversy with Paul Althaus over “religious socialism” in 1921–22. Althaus insisted that the extent to which Christian and moral principles can be involved in economic life is extremely limited because the kingdom of God and the secular orders are and remain two different entities. Barth replied in what generally is considered to be the first formal reference to the two-kingdoms doctrine per se by charging that Althaus had not overcome the dualism between the world and God's kingdom that was characteristic of Lutheran social thought.¹²

It should be pointed out, however, that even at this time there was no established, clearly defined, unambiguous doctrine of the two kingdoms. Ernst Wolf's survey of the state of German Lutheran social ethics in 1932 reveals that the dualistic understanding of Luther was widespread but that theologians were inconsistent in how they worked this out.¹³ In fact, one interesting offshoot of the theory of the autonomous orders was the *Volksnomos* idea. Wilhelm Stapel and others developed the notion that each people (*Volk*) has a divinely prescribed, natural constitution in the customs, organic laws, and values that distinguish one people from another, and this is the source of morality for the society. The gospel does not transform or stand opposed to the law rooted in

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 165–167; H. Jordan, *Luthers Staatsauffassung: Ein Beitrag zu der Frage des Verhältnisses von Religion und Politik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968 [1917]) 191–194, 196.

¹¹G. Wünsch, *Die Bergpredigt bei Luther* (1920), quoted in Thielicke, *Theological* 365; *Der Zusammenbruch des Luthertums als Sozialgestaltung* (1921), in *Two Kingdoms* (ed. Hertz) 175–176.

¹²*Two Kingdoms* (ed. Hertz) 176–178; Duchrow, *Ambivalenz* 40–43.

¹³Excerpted in Duchrow, *Ambivalenz* 43–48.

the *Volk* and thus makes no demands upon the state or its moral character.¹⁴

It seems reasonable to conclude that the widespread hostility of clerics and theologians to the Weimar Republic that historians have convincingly documented, coupled with a teaching that implied political irresponsibility and the historical heritage of subservience to the monarchical order in Germany, left the Church spiritually unarmed when the time came for the struggle with National Socialism.¹⁵

IV. THE TWO-KINGDOMS DOCTRINE AND THE THIRD REICH

The use of the two-kingdoms doctrine among churchmen during the tragic years of the Third Reich is a complex topic, but space limitations preclude anything more than a cursory discussion. However, the manner in which the teaching prepared German Protestants for the new order was well summarized in a statement made in 1939 by the Nazi Minister of Church Affairs, Hanns Kerrl:

The Protestant Church has learned from Martin Luther to differentiate sharply between the sphere of reason and of faith, of politics and of religion, of the state and the church. The National Socialist world view is the national-political doctrine which shapes and determines [the German] man. As such it is also binding upon the Christian German. The Protestant Church honors in the state an order decreed by God and demands of all its members faithful service within this order.¹⁶

This viewpoint or variations of it were repeated throughout the Church. Among the most important statements of such a perversion of the two-kingdoms doctrine were the Rengsdorf Theses. Drawn up at a conference in October 1933 convened by the Protestant bishop of Cologne-Aachen in the town of Rengsdorf and distributed to all pastors in the Rhineland, they affirmed that there is no universal Christianity as such. It is rooted in the respective nations, and for the German there can only be a Christianity that has its roots in the German nation. Moreover there is no contradiction between an unconditional allegiance to the gospel and a similar commitment to the German nationality. After praising the German Reformation, the National Socialist revolution, and the values of the national community, the statement declared that state and Church are both divinely ordained orders and that "the church is obliged to

¹⁴On this see W. Tilgner, *Volksnomostheologie und Schöpfungsglaube* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1966); R. V. Pierard, "Why Did German Protestants Welcome Hitler?", *Fides et Historia* 10 (Spring 1978) 15-16.

¹⁵The literature on this topic is substantial, but a few items are particularly worthy of mention: J. E. Groh, *Nineteenth Century German Protestantism: The Church As Social Model* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982); J. R. C. Wright, "Above Parties": *The Political Attitudes of the German Protestant Church Leadership 1918-1933* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1974); J. Jacke, *Kirche zwischen Monarchie und Republik: Die preussische Protestantismus nach der Zusammenbruch* (Hamburg: Hans Christians, 1976).

¹⁶Quoted in H. Tiefel, "Use and Misuse of Luther During the German Church Struggle," *LQ* 25 (November 1973) 402.

obey the state in every earthly matter."¹⁷

Various members of the dissenting party within German Protestantism, the so-called Confessing Church, spoke against this misuse of Luther's political teaching. Probably the most forthright of the critics was Barth, who among other things issued a ringing response to the Rensdorf Theses and composed the first draft of the Barmen Theological Declaration that was adopted in May 1934. The latter's second article spoke directly to the two-kingdoms matter: "We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords—areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him."¹⁸

Less than two weeks later two prominent Lutheran theologians at Erlangen—Althaus and Werner Elert—put together a document that was intended to express the "voice of genuine Lutheranism." Called the Ansbach Proposal (*Ratschlag*), it was signed by six other persons. Hermann Diem in his important work on the two kingdoms in Luther's preaching referred to this statement as "the theological foundation of the National Socialist state" and said "its views were held in common by church people all over Germany."¹⁹

It is formulated as a response to the Barmen Declaration. It distinguishes between gospel (the message of Jesus Christ who died for our sins and was raised for our justification) and law (the immutable will of God that meets us in the totality of life). Law binds everyone

to the station to which he has been called by God and obligates us to the natural orders to which we are subject—such as family, people, race (that is, blood relationship). Furthermore, we are associated with a certain family, a certain people, a certain race. Moreover, inasmuch as the will of God always confronts us in our here-and-now world, it likewise binds us to a historical moment in the family, the people, or the race, that is to say, to a certain distinct point in its history.

The natural orders establish our entire natural existence and are the means by which God creates and preserves our earthly life. Christians are thankful for every order because they are tools for realizing the divine purposes. Recognizing this fact,

we give thanks to God the Lord for bestowing the Führer (i.e. Adolf Hitler) as "a pious and faithful chief of state" upon our people in their time of need, just as we thank God for desiring to grant us "good government," a government with "discipline and honor," in the form of the National-Socialist state.

For this reason, we recognize that we are held responsible before God to assist the Führer in his work through our respective vocations and professions.

Proceeding from these principles, the statement spelled out the Church's threefold relationship to the natural orders: (1) It must proclaim the law of God, which will confirm the majesty of the natural orders and remind them of

¹⁷*Two Kingdoms* (ed. Hertz) 184–185.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 188.

¹⁹H. Diem, *Luthers Predigt in den zwei Reichen*, in *Zur Zwei-Reiche-Lehre* (ed. Sauter) 184. The text is in *Two Kingdoms* (ed. Hertz) 189–192. For a critique of the statement see Thielicke, *Theological* 365–366.

their God-given task; (2) Church members themselves are subordinate to the orders, and their obligation to their own nation receives definite content at the hands of the present national political regime; (3) the Church's distinguishing characteristics resemble those of the natural orders and are subject to historical modification. Thus it must constantly reexamine its own order, and the task of reforming the Church always appears anew in every historical moment.

Backed up by thinking like this, many if not most German Lutherans remained loyal to Hitler to the end. He was still the authority ordained by God in the sense of Romans 13. Also by accepting the doctrine of the orders one could arrive at the position articulated by Friedrich Gogarten: "The claim of the church upon man does not negate the claims of the state. For the church claims man in his eternal life while the state may claim the totality of his earthly existence."²⁰ Or, as Stapel crudely put it: "Everything concerning justice and morality belongs to the totalitarian state. Everything that concerns the kingdom of heaven belongs to the church."²¹

V. CONCLUSION

An adequate analysis of the attack that Barth made upon the two-kingdoms doctrine would require another essay but, as John R. Stephenson points out, reaction to it was conditioned by his antipathy to the implicit natural theology in Luther's view of "a universal revelation of divine-cum-natural law in the conscience."²² Barth sought to replace what he perceived as a sharp bifurcation by connecting law and gospel as closely as possible and emphasizing that the state is an agency to assist the Church in its task of proclaiming redemption. "Its existence is not separate from the Kingdom of Jesus Christ; its foundations and its influence are not autonomous. It is outside the Church but not outside the range of Christ's dominion—it is an exponent of His Kingdom."²³ His emphasis on the importance of not separating the sacred and secular and thereby adopting a stance of political irresponsibility was an antidote to the thinking that allowed so many German Christians to fall prey to the enticements of National Socialism.

Eberhard Bethge, the biographer of the Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer who early saw the peril of the two-kingdoms doctrine (e.g. his discussion in *Ethics*), warns against those who closely guard the boundary between the Church and the world, arouse people's emotions by campaigning against the "politicization of the church" and, armed with the doctrine of the two kingdoms, today advocate nonviolence but have nothing to say about institutional vio-

²⁰F. Gogarten, *Einheit von Evangelium und Volkstum* (1933), quoted in Tiefel, "Use" 403.

²¹W. Stapel, *Die Kirche Christi und der Staat Hitlers* (1933), quoted in Tiefel, "Use" 404.

²²Stephenson, "Two Governments" 334.

²³K. Barth, *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1960) 156. See D. D. Wall, "Karl Barth and National Socialism, 1921–1946," *Fides et Historia* 15 (Spring 1983) 80–95, for an excellent discussion of his views and actions.

lence.²⁴ Although he is speaking about the contemporary German scene, his message is applicable to American evangelicals just as well. It is all too easy to avoid becoming involved with social and political issues by saying that we must be concerned with the "primary" or "spiritual" tasks.²⁵

Evangelicals in our day can learn much from the German experience. Let us not make the same mistake that Christians in that unfortunate land did by misinterpreting the two-kingdoms teaching and using it as the excuse either for noninvolvement or supporting the status quo.

²⁴E. Bethge, "Bonhoeffer's Assertion of Religionless Christianity—Was He Mistaken?", in A. J. Klassen, *A Bonhoeffer Legacy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 5.

²⁵*Kirchengemeinschaft und politische Ethik* (ed. J. Rogge and H. Zeddies; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1980) 25–26.