

Gospel at the same time. This also expresses the relationship of justification and justice, wherein justification describes how God sets things right with humanity, and justice describes how God sets things right with our neighbors and the creation. In the work of justification God alone is active, and in the work of justice we are also active, demonstrating a faith active in love.

In the Lutheran tradition, there is no polarization of faith and culture or of God and government. Ordinary life is the setting for Christian discipleship, and our spiritual callings are also lived out in the ordinary walks of life, for our callings and offices differ not in status but only in function. We are one in Christ, and are together summoned to serve God in the church and in the world, with gratitude for the Gospel and obedience to the law.

(*NEWSBRIEFS*, this one written by Paul Seastrand, were produced by the Quincentenary Task Force of the Montana Synod—ELCA to observe the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.)



A FATHER OF A HOUSEHOLD AT WORK

NEWSBRIEF

LUTHER ON GOD AND GOVERNMENT, FAITH AND CULTURE

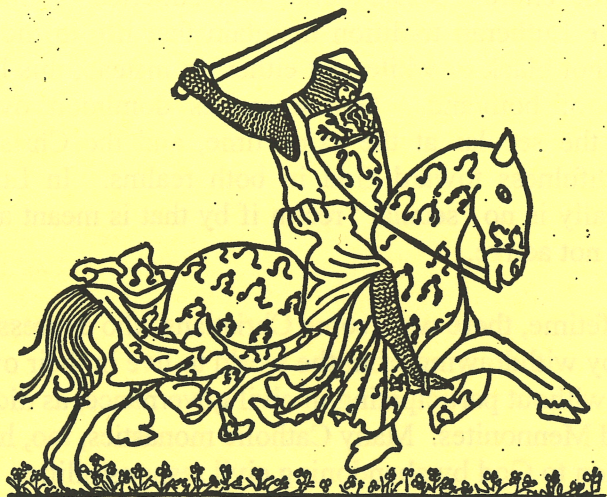
The 500th Anniversary of the Reformation

Hard choices involving God and government, church and world, are played out all the time. The issue may be abortion, taxes, war, weaponry, race relations, use of natural resources, poverty, health care, etc. There are people who say that God and politics, the church and the world, or faith and culture do not mix; but if they mean that these have nothing to do with each other, then they are dead wrong. They are also dead wrong if they say God is Republican, the church is Democrat, and America is Christian. Luther and the Lutheran tradition maintain that life in the world under God is not black or white, not either/or; instead, this life has the character of both/and. God exercises dominion over the spiritual and the secular at the same time, and the Christian is called to faithfulness toward God in both realms. In Lutheran eyes, there really is no “secular” realm if by that is meant a realm where God is not active.

In Luther’s lifetime, there were some Christians who expressed their reform by withdrawing from the world to live in their own communities without participating in civil governance, as did the Hutterites and Mennonites. Many Catholic monastics, too, had sought devotion to God by abandoning civil responsibilities. There were other Christians who sought the ideal of theocracy, a total merger of God and government, as attempted by John Calvin at Geneva, Switzerland. Luther is known for his “two kingdom” doctrine, which says that God works in the church and in the world at the same time with two hands. God’s “right hand” works redemptively in the church, and God’s “left hand” works creatively in the world. In the kingdom on the right, the Church, God works through the Gospel (God’s promise of forgiveness and salvation); in the kingdom on the left, the state (and the natural

world), God works through the law (commands protecting from evil and promoting good).

Luther spelled-out some of this in his 1520 treatise, *Address to the German Nobility*, and again in his 1523 treatise, *Secular Authority: To What Extent It Should be Obeyed*. In *The Augsburg Confession* of 1530 written by Philip Melancthon and approved by Luther, the distinctions are also apparent. Article 16 states: "The gospel does not overthrow secular government, public order, and marriage but instead intends that a person keep all this as a true order of God and demonstrate in these walks of life Christian love and true good works according to each person's calling." This statement is an affirmation of the world and Christian responsibilities within it.



Luther spoke of "orders of creation" which God instituted to uphold human interdependence: the church, the state, and the home. The first represents the spiritual realm, and the latter two the secular realm, and each corresponds to the "callings" which a person exercises. For example, a woman today might be a pastor, a wife, and a city council member at the same time.

God works through these created orders and their particular "offices" (e.g., pastor, plumber, judge, husband, student) even if the office holder is not a Christian, or is a Christian who is less than faithful. Here it is important to realize that while God institutes these orders and offices, it cannot be assumed that their mere exercise makes them just and loving. Instituted by God to guide civil life and restrain sin, these orders and offices and the persons who represent them can be grievously corrupted by sin, and then the rule of God does not actually promote the welfare of human society. The same holds true for the corruptibility of the visible church and its office holders. Evidence of this is not hard to find!

Though a less pronounced theme with Luther, he could also speak of God's creative work in the order of nature. He did so eloquently in *The Large Catechism* in his explanation of The First Article of the Apostles' Creed: God the creator "makes all creation help provide the benefits and necessities of life—sun, moon, and stars in the heavens; day and night; air, fire, water, the earth and all that it yields and brings forth; birds, fish, animals, grain, and all sorts of produce. Moreover, he gives all physical and temporal blessings—good government, peace, security. Thus we learn from this article that none of us has life . . . from ourselves." Accordingly, no sector of creation or human activity is exempted from the provision and rule of God, in whom humans are invited to place their trust.

Martin Luther's "two kingdom" doctrine and Lutheran social ethics built upon his teachings continue to inform and motivate this church. Lutherans affirm the two-fold rule of God whereby the church is primarily the operation of the Gospel in the new age of Christ, and the world is primarily the operation of the Law in the old age of Adam. The kingdoms and the rule of God in both are distinguished, but not separated. Every Christian lives in both realms at the same time, just as every Christian lives under law and