Christian Exodus is an organization that hopes to pave a road out of what it regards as the pervasive moral decay in the United States. Christians, they say, have actively tried to return the United States to its moral foundations for more than thirty years. Yet abortion, marital aberration, irreligious public education, and other deviations from biblical standards persist. Christian Exodus hopes that South Carolina is the land of promise for reestablishing constitutionally limited government founded on Christian principles. Its Web site, www.ChristianExodus.com, explains, “Rather than spend resources in continued efforts to redirect the entire nation, we will redeem states one at a time.” Their strategy is to “move thousands of Christian constitutionalists to specific cities and counties in South Carolina through a series of emigrations.” This relocation of activist émigrés, when combined with the present Christian electorate, will enable constitutionalists to win elected positions “and protect our God-given and constitutionally protected rights within our local community.” A recent news report counted eighty families participating so far.

Ponder for a moment this strategy for Christian involvement in the world and getting a grip on the public square. When I shared this report in an adult Bible class, the reactions ranged from “Well, it’s creative” to “Scary!” The range of responses is not surprising given the several different traditions among Christians about our relation with the world. When the Evangelist John tells us both that “God so loved the world” (John 3:16) and “If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15), he expresses the temporal-eternal tension in which Christians find themselves and for centuries have sought to release, resolve, or manage. No less so today, participants in Christian Exodus as well as Lutherans experience that tension in a variety of ways.

To what extent should we endorse expressions of civil religion such as generic prayers at civic events, a scout troop at an interfaith congregation, the “under God” phrase in the Pledge of Allegiance, and attending a public school baccalaureate service? In what ways should we be involved in political activities addressing same-sex marriage, stem cell research, the Senate’s confirmation of a Supreme Court justice, and other national concerns? Should we encourage some connections between religion and education (consider the creation-and-evolution debates)? Should Christian education in particular strongly integrate subject areas and biblical content? Such questions and alternate answers will not go away

**Russ Moulds**

**The Left and Right Hands of God: Getting a Grip on the Public Square**

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so long as the temporal-eternal tension continues and Christians (and non-Christians) subscribe to their different traditions about how heaven and earth relate.

**Heaven and Earth**

The contrasting biblical themes of conquest and exile account for some of our differences. Christians sometimes emphasize that we are more than conquerors (Romans 8:37) and that the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:4). The images of Israel entering Canaan and Christ defeating the dominion of sin provide a powerful root metaphor for relating to the world in terms of conquest. Luther, for example, uses the perspective of Christus Victor in his hymn, "A Mighty Fortress.

Christians also sometimes emphasize that we are strangers here, heaven is our home (Hebrews 11:13–16), and that our citizenship is not on earth but in heaven (Philippians 3:20). This biblical theme reminds us that we are exiles like Israel leaving Egypt and Judah in Babylon and must consider ourselves resident aliens in this present world. Luther employs this imagery in the Lord’s Prayer that God would deliver us from evil and “take us from the troubles of this world to himself in heaven.” Before Constantine became the first Christian emperor of Rome, the early church often emphasized our exile status. The medieval church established Christendom in Europe and emphasized the conqueror theme. Between these two periods, Augustine wrote his *City of God* in which he proposed a dual citizenship for Christians as settlers and occupiers for God’s transforming work in the earthly city.

These themes of conqueror, exile, and occupier have, along with other theological, social, and political considerations, shaped a collection of orientations to Christ and culture we will examine shortly. But first note that any of the approaches can appeal to Christians today depending on how we perceive the conditions of society and the church. If we believe that society was and is essentially Christian, then we may believe Christians have the obligation as conquerors or occupiers to conserve this social order and repel any forces that threaten it. If, instead, we determine that society is now far removed from any previous Christian heritage, then the perspective of alien and exile may better inform our relationship with the world. A survey of Christians and politics at any particular time—consider today such groups as the Christian Coalition, Lutherans for Life, and Sojourners (see the review of Jim Wallis’s book in this edition)—indicates that people who love Jesus reflect these themes differently and hold rather incompatible ideas about church and world.

**Typology**

Published fifty years ago, H. Richard Niebuhr’s book, *Christ and Culture*, catalogues five different orientations of church and world and remains a common reference for those discussing the church’s role in the public square. But these orientations are not templates, for they receive as much critique as they do attention, particularly among Lutherans. Niebuhr’s typology has been thoroughly examined many times. We will only briefly review it as a route to consider some clarifications and suggestions about a Lutheran two kingdom perspective and how better to use this perspective for our ministry to congregations and students.

Niebuhr’s first way by which Christians have tried to understand their relationship to the world is called “Christ against culture.” The exile theme dominates this orientation, and it tends to absolutize Christ’s words, “He who is not with me is against me” (Matthew 12:30). Carried to extreme, this orientation regards culture as evil and dismisses all authority—parents, government, education, science, religious leaders—except Christ. The view is usually associated negatively with sects and cults (we seem to make an exception with the Amish), and though we sometimes hear it proclaimed or pilloried, not many Christians actually subscribe to it.

The next orientation is called “the Christ of culture” and emerged from the theological liberalism of the 19th century. Many churches which began as protesting or separatist movements eventually grew in membership and wider social acceptance. By the 19th and 20th centuries, the sciences and secular politics which these churches had helped engender gained cultural ascendancy. Churches that
began with a "Christ against culture" under-tone now sought to remain relevant by accommodat-ing their message to modern times. Niebuhr calls this "the accommodationist view," meaning that Christ works compatibly with and through culture. Today this orientation is often associated with the old "mainline" denominations, though Evangelicalism is now obviously the mainline Christianity. Neither old nor new mainlines are exiles, and many of their members wonder whether they are occupiers or merely occupants.

A much older orientation that Niebuhr names "Christ above culture" prevailed under the Roman church in the middle ages. Christ and the church are "above" the world and culture, not in the sense that heaven and earth are divided but such that Christ through the church reaches down and draws the world to himself. As Jesus says in John 12:32, "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself," Niebuhr calls this "the synthesist view" because, in the theology of Thomas Aquinas, God’s grace—particularly the church as his gift—completes what nature cannot do. Christ who is above and beyond culture super-intends both our temporal and eternal good, and so his church, with authority in both realms, ultimately assimilates society into its rule. Since this classic mode of "Christ above culture" no longer applies, the papacies of John XXIII and John Paul II can be interpreted as efforts to adapt it from a "conqueror" to "occupier" image for the present age.

The fourth perspective, "Christ and culture in paradox," is for us Lutherans, though we may not embrace Niebuhr’s version. Early in Luther’s treatise, On Secular Authority, Luther writes, "We must divide all the children of Adam into two classes: the first belongs to the kingdom of God, the second to the kingdom of the world." Though Luther goes on to qualify this distinction in several ways, Niebuhr infers a strict "dualist" view from Luther’s initial proposition. As a result, he characterizes Luther’s two-kingdoms distinction as a division of the right-hand kingdom of the Gospel from the left-hand kingdom of civil order. Both Christ’s kingdom and culture’s kingdom are God’s kingdoms, but they have nothing to do with each other. Yet Christians must live in both—hence, the paradox. This view implies Lutheran theology is inevitably a confusion of the conqueror and exile images: Christ has conquered sin in our spiritual lives, but we remain spiritual exiles living chiefly as accommodationists in the kingdom of the world. For several decades Lutheran scholars have examined and challenged this oversimplification, yet popularized treatments among Lutherans have perpetuated it. We’ll come back to this.

The last of Niebuhr’s orientations is "Christ transforming culture," best represented by John Calvin’s adaptation of Augustine’s two cities idea. This view does not claim that Christians can bring the New Jerusalem down to earth and inaugurate the end-times kingdom of heaven (though some have pushed it that far). It retains a two-kingdoms perspective but identifies the work of the Holy Spirit as creating union with Christ within the church. By the Spirit’s power through the guidance of God’s law, Christians can fashion a holy Christian community that actualizes Paul’s exhortation to "come out from among them and be separate from them" (2 Corinthians 6:12). This "conversionist" view, attractive to many Christians, combines the exile and conqueror images in a way that seeks to transform society and may fit the Christian Exodus program described at the beginning of this article.

An Alternative View

The conventional Lutheran perspective, however, generally regards this view, such combinations, and related projects and programs as a confusion of the two kingdoms Luther named in his treatise, On Secular Authority. I agree. But other Christians usually do not fathom why, and neither do most Lutherans. As a highly regarded colleague trained in isagogics once said to me, "The more I try to get the two-kingdoms doctrine in focus, the more it goes out of focus." His remark is our cue for considering how we may better express this sometimes obvious, sometimes elusive distinction that we call the two-kingdoms, and some clarifications that can help us get a grip on the public square. To get at those clarifications, here is what I think is one fairly good synopsis of the two kingdoms doctrine that begins not with "two-kingdoms" language but with a book title.
The title of Heiko Oberman’s biography is *Luther: man between God and the devil*. This title captures the larger context of creation, fall, and imprisonment out of which Christ must lead captive humanity (Ephesians 4:8). And this is the context—man between God and the devil—in which Luther always thinks, though any particular Luther document we’re reading such as his two kingdoms treatise, *On Secular Authority*, may not explicitly say so.

Scripture informs us of a couple of strategies God is using to free humanity captive to the devil. (God may use more than these but, if so, Scripture doesn’t tell us, and so we shouldn’t speculate too much.) One strategy is to create some temporal arrangements—Luther cited marriage, civil government, and the church, though not in a rigid, categorical way—generally to do three things: keep the sinful world in check to stave off chaos; promote as much common good and justice as can be had under the circumstances of the fall and the devil’s hold on the world; and provide opportunities by which any person, Christian or not, can contribute to promoting that common good and justice. Nothing about this strategy defeats the devil, saves the world, or accomplishes any one’s righteous status before God, not even the church as an institution. Note also that even though these temporal arrangements are man’s activities, they are actually all God’s short-term good works that he does in his own hidden way. He does these things to sustain that larger context for the time being so he can employ his other strategy to defeat the devil, make us righteous, and redeem creation.

God’s other strategy is to propel some additional, peculiar news into our present larger context. The news is that, entirely without our assistance or participation, a carpenter’s life, ministry, death, and overcoming death has and continues to come between us and the devil, undo his hold on the world, take us out of that captivity, return us to God, and put things right between heaven and earth. Like many powerful news stories, this news has a power to change people. Its particular power is that of promise and hope, hope boosted by God’s own pledge standing behind the promise. God delivers this curious news in his own personal way in Jesus and continues to circulate it just as personally through Jesus’ friends using word-of-mouth plus a few ways to visualize those words. Even though this news flash comes through the likes of us, it is, like the first strategy, also all God’s work done in his own hidden way for accomplishing his long-term aim of restoring the world and everything in it to his good graces.

So both strategies are God’s strategies. God inducts us very actively into the first, like workers given vocations, and absolutely passively into the second, like babies being born or dead men being raised. God provides us with all the needed resources for the first: food and clothing, home and family, daily work, and all I need from day to day. For the second strategy, God imparts to us his Word from which, like a small child with no initial decision or intention, we learn to speak and then grow to speak with others. And God works both these strategies together in a way that for him is complementary and interactive, though it often doesn’t look that way to us. He does all this to bring about his aim of getting us out from between him and the devil and simply with him. And that’s the two-kingdoms doctrine. There are other ways to express it and other angles in it to explore, but this is a fair summary, I think.

Notice that while the above synopsis includes some standard religious language, it doesn’t say much of “kingdoms” or “government,” church-and-state, or even Law and Gospel. A difficulty with the two-kingdoms literature is that it uses a lot of jargon somewhat inconsistently and often without explanation, and it tends to go out of focus as you try to read through it. Which is a shame because Luther’s two kingdoms notion is, as David Truemper says, “a helpful and even necessary tool for keeping clear and straight the Gospel by which Christians live … and one of the most realistic features of his thought.” When you read enough about it, you can begin to infer what the terms mean, provided you don’t quit first or oversimplify its highly textured hermeneutic insights. Here, then, are three offers of assistance for making better sense of the two-kingdoms doctrine and using it to get a right-hand (Gospel) perspective and a left-hand (Law) grip on the public square.
Developing Two Kingdoms Views

First, some readings. Rather than churn out one more boiled down oversimplification of an important idea with important consequences for the Christian, the church, and the civil order, it is better to provide some helpful references for apprehending the idea and its consequences. At the close of this article is a manageable selection of essays and books sufficient to give the reader a good working knowledge about the two kingdoms as a Lutheran doctrine. They supply a collection of theologically rich and powerful concepts, far more than can be adequately addressed in this article.

Yet even these readings have some trapdoors and rabbit holes that can trip up the reader. Brent Sockness cautions that "the task of interpreting and evaluating Luther’s two kingdoms doctrine . . . is notoriously difficult and controversial." Or as the quip goes, when it comes to the two kingdoms doctrine, you can’t say one thing! Second, then, some clarifications for doing the reading and thinking about the two-kingdoms:

1. "The two kingdoms" is certainly one way to talk about the two strategies God uses in his one campaign for us and against the devil. And though it is biblical (Mark 1:15; John 12:31, 17:14, 18:36; 1 Corinthians 15:28; Romans 13:1) and Luther does use it initially in his treatise, On Secular Authority, and elsewhere, it’s a confusing expression that doesn’t readily work for us today. Many have suggested alternatives including two realms, two spheres, two governments, two swords, two perspectives, two orders, left hand and right hand, and simply justification and sanctification. Each of these can convey some aspect of biblical content and Luther’s thought but may tend to remain static and one-dimensional about the dynamic, dialectic interplay of God’s activity through world and Word. And each uses a limiting image or metaphor that conjures up geometry, geography, or thrones, just as my synopsis above using “strategy” and “campaign” language has a military cant.

2. The more nuanced writings recognize the two-kingdoms idea as one of the ways Luther and his tradition have developed to talk about Law and Gospel, two distinct Words of God, both necessary to make sense of Scripture and the human situation and both necessary in God’s project of our salvation. This particular way of talking about Law and Gospel gives us insight to how these two Words of God are at work not just making sinful persons into sinner/saints but also at work in the world. God applies his Word of Law through parents, flag persons on road crews, organized office managers, farmers who plow straight rows, the FBI, and all others and their institutions (whether they know it or not) who sustain order and preserve the world by keeping temporal goodness active. The devil, of course, does his damage, but God keeps at least enough temporal goodness in action so that he can proclaim and apply his other Word of Gospel by which he nullifies the ultimate harm of all the devilry (including our own) and reclaims us for himself. Instead of "two kingdoms," this way of talking about what God is doing uses expressions like "God’s two perspectives," "God’s working two works," "God’s two ways of ruling," and the one I like, "God’s two-fold strategy."

3. Two kingdoms, works, or strategies rather than one is important. In fact, it’s critical because it signals that not both but only the second of these Words or works or strategies can actually restore us to God. The first is indispensable insofar as it maintains the setting or opportunity for the second. (So much for "Christ against culture," Niebuhr’s first orientation.) Luther constantly underscored this distinction in a variety of ways (and so should we) to clarify that though God uses our works within his providence to temporarily preserve social orders in the world, he does this so that his second Word can get a hearing. That second Word of Gospel is sheer hope and promise with no conditions attached, conditions such as our status and accomplishments in the social order or projects we may pursue to restore ourselves to God, whether spiritual, moral, or otherwise. This distinction keeps the Gospel non-coercive. That is, it saves us from participating in our own salvation since we could never know if we have done enough or done it rightly. And we never can since, in the larger context of things, we’re not initially free and autonomous but captive to the devil.
4. When we select an expression and stick with it, that limited image excludes insights and dimensions that it cannot express. Luther realized this in *On Secular Authority*, his first major writing on how to relate Word and world, which he wrote in 1523 because some secular authorities were banning his books. In this treatise he begins with “kingdom of God and kingdom of the world” language but then switches to behavioral descriptions in which the Christian both suffers injustice done to the self for the sake of the Gospel and fights ferociously in the world against injustice done to the neighbor. He then changes his two-fold language again to God’s rule over the soul and our righteousness of faith through the Gospel and God’s rule over the body and our civic righteousness in obedience to the law. The point here is that relying on only one expression or dimension of the two kingdoms discussion about Law and Gospel will inevitably distort something about the Word, the world, or both.

5. This distortion can happen, for instance, when we use images like “two spheres” or “two governments” (which Luther sometimes used) and infer a radical, non-intersecting separation of God’s two works as if they have nothing to do with each other. An example comes from JHC Fritz’s once widely used text on pastoral ministry in which he insists that

[A]ny religious exercises (prayers, religious address or sermon, religious hymns) in connection with school commencements, so-called baccalaureate services and the like, or religious exercises of any kind in connection with political meetings, or other meetings of civic bodies, whenever members of different denominations take part, is unionism. In these particular instances such is also the result of a failure to understand the doctrine of the separation of Church and State, not keeping each other in its proper sphere.

Luther does not propose such radical separation in *On Secular Authority* and says instead, for instance, that the prince must receive godly instruction “about what the attitude of his heart and mind must be with respect to the laws” and that “he must picture Christ to himself and imitate him.” Following the disastrous Peasants’ War and later entanglements with civil authorities, Luther and Melanchthon confirmed that radical separation is unrealistic and untenable. They had to craft fluid documents and diplomacies for dealing with the princes now emancipated from Rome. By 1540, they found they needed secular support for promoting true religion and the teaching of it—not a model of practice we can use today, but it is a model of sustaining and not dismissing or collapsing the tension of Word and world that will endure yet change until the close of the age.

6. Luther’s writings and Lutheran theology often describe the institutions of this world as located in either one kingdom—the left-hand kingdom of the world—or the other—the right-hand kingdom of Christ. This sort of strict assignment is expedient when making some particular and important point such as: only the Word of Gospel rules in the church; or, the civil government wields the temporal sword and the church wields the sword of God’s Word. But because God’s two ways of ruling through Word and world are always at work, describing institutions as either “left hand” or “right hand” is sometimes misleading. For instance, the congregation is not strictly “right hand.” The pastor conducting a wedding serves as an agent of the state. The trustees comply with the local health codes. Most church school teachers are certified. What’s more, civil courts of the left hand kingdom can reflect God’s mercy, sometimes surprisingly so. Now, the courts do not and cannot forgive sin. And the church must not coerce belief or behavior. Yet God’s two Words of Law and Gospel are at work across institutional boundaries including marriage (a divine order instituted before the fall), church (congregations obey zoning laws), and government (prisons host chaplains). The church is not the kingdom of Christ, though that kingdom is present there in Word and Sacrament. The Concordia University System is not merely another educational institution, though that is now a growing concern. God’s two Words and their free recourse (2 Timothy 2:8) rightly create tension in our institutions as we consider—or should consider—how these two Words are at work in them.
7. So God’s two ways of working through Word and world do intersect while remaining distinct. Ultimately, they intersect and completely converge in God, their source and their end (alpha and omega), which is why Paul says that God’s plan is to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth (Ephesians 1:10). In the meantime, they intersect without converging. Clarifying these intersections will help clarify our ministry of Word and Sacrament and our ministry of Word in the world which we call vocation. This in turn will begin to clarify a range of postures the Christian and the congregation can take toward the public square.

Intersections

God’s two ways of working certainly “intersect” in Jesus, an intersection to which the Gospels clearly testify as the Word incarnate whom God sends into the world. For example, though Jesus’ ministry is not a political program, he obviously conflicts with and ministers to the political conditions. God’s two ways of working intersect in the apostles to whom Jesus says, “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (John 20:21). They intersect in Paul and Christian outreach as he declares, “I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some.” (See 1 Corinthians 9:19–23).

And in Luther they conspicuously intersect, for example, in his efforts in education.\(^1\) He opened schools at every opportunity to teach heaven’s promises and earth’s needs. He called for the secular authorities to fund these schools. He demanded secular intervention for compulsory education when parents neglected to send their children. He developed university curricula for educating godly professionals to advise the princes and shape a society amenable to the Gospel. These are not the activities of a quietistic pietist waiting for the end times or a revolutionary firebrand engineering heaven on earth. These are the activities of an engaged Christian finding and creating intersections of Word and world, crafting his secular situation where the Law presently prevails into a culture where the Gospel can receive a hearing for its eternal purposes. The culture was important not for its own sake but for the sake of the neighbor whose experiences of both justice and injustice will prepare her for hearing and trusting the Gospel. (Though our situation today is not Luther’s, you may want to compare and contrast his efforts to our opening illustration about Christian Exodus.)

Implications

Finally, here are some implications to keep in mind when thinking about God’s “left hand” and “right hand” work in the public square. The first is that because God’s Word and work of the Gospel has already fully secured our well-being with God, Christians have all the freedom and latitude of Jesus himself to strive for our neighbor’s good in any opportunity and circumstance we encounter. Though our efforts will never be entirely effective, and we will miscalculate some efforts, and some efforts will fall flat, through them God works hiddenly with both his Words and works to bring about his purposes anyway (Romans 8:28). Given the aim of God’s strategies and campaign, this latitude created by the Gospel is obviously no license for sin. But it does make the Christian simultaneously harmless and dangerous, and this makes some people nervous (like the Herods).\(^1\)

Another implication is that in the divine diversity of God’s activity in the world, the square has different sorts of “publics” in which Christians conduct their efforts. Martin Marty distinguishes the public square for which tax and legislative support is in any way involved such as public schools and military chaplains from the public square in which taxes and legislation are not involved such as front yards and businesses. (See his editorial in this edition of Issues for his discussion.) David Tracy identifies the three publics of our academic theologians in dialogue, of the community of us believers, and of the “unprotected space” of the civic forum.\(^1\) (An on-going question about the civic forum is how protected or unprotected religious expression should be, how, and by whom.) David Adams counts four publics: Christians in relation to persons of other religions and no religion; the church in relation to public policy; the church in relation to other church bodies; and the church...
in relation to American civil religion. However we count the "publics," all are eligible for our getting a grip on the public square.

God’s hiddenness has implications especially for Lutheran public speech, and not just in our sermons. Private and public talk about God frequently addresses God’s will in terms of direction and in times of tragedy. The visitors to our offices want to know where God is leading them. They want to know why bad things happen. Presidents give speeches invoking God’s destiny for the country and God’s providence in times of emergency. But we seldom hear a thoughtful articulation of the hidden things belonging to God (Deuteronomy 29:29), which is Luther’s concept of Deus absconditus. We often hear that “God has a plan” and “God is in control” with much filling in of blanks as speakers cast visions, condemn others, or reassure listeners that we remain in God’s favor, all without a Word of Law that applies to us or that God does things about which we know nothing. Lutherans can contribute a more modest perspective to temper our own and others’ triumphalist religious talk in the public square, a perspective that can clear some space for the other Word God has spoken clearly to us from the cross.

Part of the public square debates has to do with the support of civil religion before it usurps true religion. Nebraska, the state in which I write, has an education code which requires in its preamble to Title 92, Chapter 27, that "The educator shall believe in the worth and dignity of human beings" and "recogniz[e] the supreme importance of the pursuit of truth, the devotion to excellence, and the nurture of democratic citizenship.” Here the two kingdoms imagery serves well to critique this public text. By intoning quasi-religious language (believe, supreme, devotion), the code shifts otherwise worthwhile human virtues of the left-hand kingdom into the faith and belief realm of the right-hand kingdom—and literally turns belief into law.

A further implication, then, for a two kingdoms posture in the public square includes vigilance that the state and other institutions, while penultimately and temporarily essential for the world, do not assume transcendence and ultimacy. The Christian who is increasingly aware of God’s two Words and works practices a range of responses to the world’s institutions and their activities. The Christian citizen may alternately support, critique, defend, and actively resist them to the point of martyrdom, depending on the institution’s conduct in God’s larger context of world and Word. These responses are not rule guided but exercised through Christian liberty and judgment informed by Scripture and Christian community. As Luther explains in both On Secular Authority and The Freedom of a Christian, this judgment may lead one sometimes to trust God and suffer injustice to self, sometimes to trust God and actively correct injustice to neighbor, and sometimes to trust God and combine both of these.

One more (but not final) implication particularly for Lutherans in the public square is the two-works opportunities in education. Thoughtful Lutheran essayists sometimes stake out a strong dualistic position arguing that the Gospel unilaterally secures our justification and well-being with God, freeing us for educational pursuits without much reference to God’s eternal aims. Education is about our vocation in this world, and the danger of mixing our efforts into God’s saving Word and work is just too great. This view suggests that it is better to keep the two apart except as they intersect in the justified and sanctified life of the individual Christian.

But Christians are an Easter people in a lively end-time community hard at work in the meantime that remains. Our work in this meantime sustains a world that is passing away (1 Corinthians 7:29), generating as much goodness and justice for our neighbor as circumstances allow so that the Gospel can be proclaimed in the world God loves and is redeeming (Romans 8:18). So if the Gospel does free us to take risks for the sake of the world and God’s coming kingdom, education done by Lutherans will look both quite normal and also rather peculiar. My closing observation is that education done by Lutherans actually looks pretty normal without the peculiar.

How normal-plus-peculiar works out in detail needs another article. However, two sample critiques of Lutheran higher education may provoke further discussion.
the Concordia University System (pick your campus) has sufficiently good resources, 1) it has never put them together to create a college of political science and public service that embodies both the right hand and left hand Words of God to graduate informed, articulate Christians for involvement in both the politics of the left and the right; and 2) it has never put its resources together to create a college of journalism that investigates both the world’s news and God’s news and graduates critical yet hopeful Christians to help all people better understand the human story. To this extent, the Concordia University System has failed to integrate Lutheran ethics and education for these spheres of public service.

Education, media, vocations in the public sector, business that can read a balance sheet and a Bible, and, sure, working for the political candidate of your choice, political action committees, lobbying—all these are ways to get a grip on the several public squares. When thinking and acting on these and other ways, Niebuhr’s five orientations to Christ and culture help us monitor two temptations. One is to isolate God’s two works from each other. The other is to conflate his two works into each other. The first dismisses the Gospel as merely otherworldly. The second mutates the Gospel into Law. Both collapse the tension between God’s two works or “kingdoms,” the tension needed to sustain a fallen world while keeping the Gospel in but not of that world so it can do its unique, saving work.

**Readings Treating Luther’s Two Kingdoms Perspective**

The following readings are well-written general treatments of Luther’s two-kingdoms perspective available through the usual sources and academic data bases.

**From Luther:**

*On Secular Authority* (LW 45:88–91); *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (LW 36:3–126); and “Commentary on Ps. 101” (LW 13:166–201). The first two are included in Dillenberger, John, *Martin Luther: selections from his writings* (Doubleday Anchor, 1962).

**Essays:**


**Books:**


End Notes


3 Carl Braaten commented in 1988 that Lutheranism still has no consensus on the right interpretation or application of the two kingdom doctrine. See Braaten, C., “The Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms Reexamined” in Currents in Theology and Mission, December 1988.

4 Compare my version with those in the suggested articles in the reading box.


7 Ibid. Sockness analyzes Luther’s treatise, On Secular Authority, “to highlight the complexity of Luther’s argument [regarding the two kingdoms] in a single treatise.”

8 The Fritz quotation is cited in Schumacher, Concordia Journal, 2004. Samuel Nafzger, in his article, “Syncretism and Unionism,” Concordia Journal, July 2005, states, “Not every occasion where worship takes place is a manifestation of church fellowship (e.g., joint prayers; participation in civic events, including offering prayers, speaking, and reading Scripture) and participation in “once-in-a-lifetime” situations where joint worship takes place with Christians not in doctrinal agreement do not necessarily constitute syncretism or unionism [Nafzger’s italics].”


10 Derek Davis argues that “the American system must be understood as embracing three distinct, yet interrelated sets of rules: separation of church and state, integration of religion and politics, and accommodation of civil religion [Davis’s italics].” See Davis, Derek H., “Separation, Integration, and Accommodation: religion and state in America in a nutshell,” Journal of Church and State, Winter 2001.


12 The seminal source for this discussion is Luther’s essay, “The Freedom of a Christian,” which can be found in John Dillenberger, Martin Luther: selections from his writings (Doubleday Anchor, 1962) or in Luther’s Works, 31:297–306.


17 Stephen Schmidt, for example, proposes the idea that Lutheran education should find ways to educate the public about Christianity in his article, “Toward a Strategy for Public Christian Education,” Religious Education, Summer 1987.