

# From Reflection to Responsible Living: Where Do We Go From Here

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It was not until the introduction I was given just now that I realized how prosaic my life has been, how rut-like, and therefore how impossible this morning's assignment is. I have fretted some, I am not embarrassed to admit, about the pretensions of this assignment. But I had pretty well come to terms with the impossibility of it before I arrived here, thinking that if all I had to summarize were the essays of the invited essayists that would be trouble enough—but we could live with that. However, as the week wended on, I was taken by the conference's other pieces of input as well. For example, the responses by local faculty like Mel Piehl, Al Trost, Gottfried Krodel, Jim Nuechterlein, Mark Schwehn and Forrest Vance were so substantive that I realized we could not go on with just a summary of the initial essays without incorporating these respondents' insights as well. The same thing applies, more or less, to the plenary discussions, also to the discussions in small groups.

However, last night as I looked over my notes I felt that was simply more than a human being could be expected to coordinate. So I have gone back to the original plan and decided that I

would, at least explicitly, do my summarizing as assigned. Despite what my former colleague, Al Looman, predicted last night—"Bertram will say what he wanted to say anyway"—I will try to mitigate that somewhat by here and there adding footnotes referring to the addresses that were given this week.

Seriously, I have tried to string these various contributions as beads on a string, and even if the end product does not come out quite the way any one of these speakers or all of them together would have intended, I will have to ask your indulgence for that. Obviously, my remarks this morning are subject to the same critical attention from the audience that the essayists' contributions were.

I find it hard to resist indulging in autobiographical references in view of the nostalgia that sweeps over one coming back upon this campus. But I am going to resist that. You are all the better for that.

## **I. Vocation**

The assigned topic is "From Reflection to Responsible Living." As you might have predicted, I am going to divide my remarks this morning into two major parts (as so many of our speakers this week have done): some reflections upon vocation and some reflections, somewhat more extended, on the two kingdoms.

First, vocation. In pursuing Luther's understanding of vocation I am going to probe the words of my topic, "From Reflection to Responsible Living," and play on one of these words especially, the word *responsible*. It provides a take-off for describing what I take to be not only Luther's but a Lutheran view of vocation.

I recall something that was mentioned yesterday, that the real linguistic home for the word "vocation" is a courtroom picture.

Vocation means calling and calling is what is done in a court of law when witnesses are, as we say, "called" to the stand. Or, if courtroom is too narrow a picture, let us say a *critical* picture, a kind of "magistracy" or "cosmic tribunal." My vocation is my being called to submit to critique. In a strict theological sense of the word *Beruf* or *vocatio* what you are "called" to is not to be a wife or a plumber or an attorney. That is not what you are called to, except in a secondary sense. Gottfried Krodel spoke yesterday of the *vocatio specialis*. Luther would agree. But in the stricter sense of the word—strict in the sense that it is consistent with the forensic metaphor—what you are called to is accountability. You are called to be *verantwortlich*. You are called to give an answer. "Adam where are you?" The husbandman comes back to his household and he requires from his stewards an accounting: "Give an account of your stewardship." That is what *vocatio* is, first of all, accountability. It is only secondarily a job description: a "calling" to be wife, to teach English, to be a mother, a "calling" to come to terms with the nuclear dilemma, to read critically the Valparaiso *Vidette-Messenger*, to be concerned about professional security. All those things, and certainly not only the job as such constitute one's *Stand*, the witness stand, to which you have been summoned for an accounting. And the way you give your answer in the concrete circumstances of your specific "stand" is not simply with words, with credos, or even theological confessions, but most of all, as the Formula of Concord says, "with deeds and actions"—in other words, with your life.

And so back to the terms of the title for this morning's presentation, "Responsible Living." (By the way, the word "responsible," like the word "calling," is also a forensic term. To give an *Antwort*, an answer, is to give a *responsum*, as from a witness stand.) The word "responsible" is a recent word in

English and particularly in the usage in which we employ it today when we say, not, "Who is responsible for this crime?" but when we use it as a compliment, when we say, "He is a very responsible administrator." That is a quite modern use of the term. I remember how H. Richard Niebuhr, in the beginning of his ethics, *The Responsible Self* (in my estimation one of the best things he did), is amazed at how recent this coinage is, this word "responsible." A former teacher of mine and of some of you in this room, Richard McKeon at The University of Chicago (an historian of philosophy), did a landmark essay on the recency and the fascination of this term, "responsible." It is perhaps one of the single most useful categories—and by the way, this might interest us in thinking about the contemporaneity of Luther's view of vocation, especially conceived of in this critical courtroom sort of setting—and one of the most frequently employed categories in contemporary ethics, especially in theological ethics, even more than in philosophical ethics. So much for the word itself: "responsible."

To sum up: The Christian person—and this is true really of everyone, Christian and non-Christian alike—is called to an accounting, to responsibility. The place where you stand is not, obviously, just your job, certainly not just your church membership; it is the whole complex configuration of all those human relationships which intersect at the point which defines Dody Rousch or Fred Niedner or Bob Bertram. There is no other *Stand* in the world like that one, nor will there ever be again. The sheer particularity and individuality of his or her *Stand* is unrepeatable. This is a great vote for the historicity of the Christian faith and Lutheran theology. Particularity and concretion are taken with such seriousness. This is just this one historical person's *Stand* and there she is called to give an accounting—which, of course, on her own she could never

satisfactorily do.

One of the advantages of the Christian faith is truthfulness. To the non-Christian, I suppose, that may seem like a mixed blessing. Whatever else the Christian person gains from this new relationship with God, it includes the advantage of candor, candor which perhaps to the outsider looks like masochism but for the Christian is one of the breaths of fresh air that comes with Christian emancipation. It is candor enough to be able to recognize that on his or her own there is no giving an accounting, at least none that would suffice given the odds that have been set for one in one's *Stand*.

Perhaps we should add here another aspect of our particularity, one I do not think Luther and his 16th century teammates were quite so aware of as we are. That is, one's *Stand* is defined by such particularity that it includes not only the kind of moral problems that are peculiar to one's own generation and biography, not only the singular job description or marital relationship one has, it also includes the unique time in history when one lives. For example, I live in 1983, age 62. That dates me at a time in history which most of you do not share. You have some other dating. I would violate my *Stand* if I acted as though I lived in some other time, either past or future. Historians would call this living anachronistically.

That being so, there is an arbitrariness about evaluating people in past generations as though they were living in our historical *Staende*. The Lutheran Reformation, I think, perhaps without reckoning with all it was doing, did help to lay the groundwork for the view of history as unrolling a step at a time. You take first one hill, then as you cross that one you see what is ahead on the next hill. History is like a book. You turn the pages in order, one at a time. This truth has succeeded in influencing such important later views of history as Hegel's and Marx's.

We have heard, for example, from some of our essayists how Luther's Reformation was perceived as a great liberation movement. To be sure, it was no such thing for the peasants. Maybe it was not their time. To consider it their time would have been reading the play out of sequence. After all, Marx has taught us that the bourgeoisie first had to have a chance in order for the proletariat in turn to have something against which to react. For that matter, as Miriam Chrisman detailed for us so beautifully, the appeal that the Reformation made to the urban-dwelling bourgeoisie was manifest enough. That much liberation was pretty much on schedule.

So, you are not called, at least not in the theological-critical sense of that word, to be first a teacher or a mother or a lawyer or whatever. That is only a derivative, secondary sense of the word, "calling". Rather as a lawyer or a parent you are called to give an accounting. And the stand on which you make that accounting—not only with your words, but most crucially with your life—is that intricate, unrepeatable, absolutely unique intersection of personal relationships which defines you biographically.

This idea also provides the linguistic, poetic figure for Luther's understanding of the role of Jesus. He is the *Antwort*. You do not, thank God, take the stand alone. You answer with all the candor that you may. You were emboldened to mount the stand in the first place because you mounted it not alone but in partnership. When you run out of gas, when the interrogation gets too embarrassing, you remind the magistrate that here is your attorney for the defense and that his biography has been swapped with yours. His history fulfills, fills up, perfects your biography where it has run short. It is not that some day his biography will do that. He is yours and you are his now. Luther, following the medievals liked to call this "the happy exchange." My students call it "the sweet swap." Christ is yours

and you are his. His biography is yours and your biography is his. His biography completes your biography, here and now, at your *Stand* in this moment of *Verantwortlichkeit*. And of course there are much better things to come.

## II. Both Kingdoms: D-E-X-T-R-A

Let us move now to the discussion of our second theme, the two kingdoms. Here I would like to speak a little more specifically about some of the contributions made in the course of the last few days. I am going to play upon a largely outmoded though still somewhat suggestive figure or image, that of “right hand” and “left hand,” in order to explain a “two-kingdoms theology.” (I agree with Bob Kolb’s caution that it is not a doctrine, maybe not even an article or an articulation of the one doctrine of the gospel. Perhaps it is a conceptual framework, or as Carl Braaten says, “the fine art of making distinctions.”) At any rate, mostly for the sake of pedagogy I would like to play upon this image and I hope your intelligence will not be insulted by the fact that I am even going to resort to audio-visual means for illustrating it. I am going to use my two hands. You can tell already just from hearing the rhetoric about right-hand and left-hand that in biblical and Lutheran theology “right-hand” is better than “left-hand.” So, I apologize in advance to those of you in the audience who are left-handed. The image I use does give priority and superiority to the right hand.

When we say “right-hand kingdom *alongside* left-hand kingdom,” that is not to suggest merely that there are two. In fact, I think it is time to declare a moratorium on the word “two.” I would prefer the word “both,” thus, “Luther’s theology of *both* kingdoms.” I am almost sorry that it is necessary to use the plural for “kingdoms.” At any rate, you can tell that it is not merely two kingdoms in tandem, but one kingdom having the upper

hand over the other. God's right hand is God's kingdom in the form in which God majors. God's left-hand kingdom is the administrative style (Braaten calls it the "divine strategy") in which he minors. Thus, there is already a dis-equivalence, an asymmetry, between the two. One is better than the other. One outlasts the other.

A word more appropriate these days than "kingdom" might be "creation." Still, I do not agree with my friend Bill Lazareth who sometimes speaks about left-hand kingdom as "creation" and right-hand kingdom as "redemption." Strictly speaking, I suppose, that is correct, yet it suggests the misimpression that the right hand is not also creation. It is better to follow the New Testament precedent and describe them as "old creation" and "new creation," or if you wish to keep the term "kingdom," talk about them as "old kingdom" and "new kingdom."

Finally, the right-hand kingdom has a future that the left-hand kingdom does not have. The left-hand kingdom is old not only in the sense that it is more ancient, it is old in the sense also that it is antiquated. It has been superseded, though its time for absolute termination has not yet come.

I am going to do a little acronym: *DEXTRA*, the Latin word for "right hand." You will notice it has six letters—*DEXTRA*. I mean "*dextra*" as in the old patristic slogan, *Dextra dei ubique est*. "The right hand of God is everywhere." Or we say that Christ has been raised to "the right hand of God the Father almighty," God's favored position. This is an old Hebraism. Someone with the Hebrew name Benjamin is literally, "son of my right hand." That already implies that the kingdom of God's right hand is God's preferred way of ruling. The right hand is the place of favor with the Father.

The acronym's six letters all describe the right-hand kingdom,



that is, God's preferred administrative style. "D" is for "differs." The right-hand kingdom differs from the left-hand, and in a moment we shall say how. "E" is for "equivalent." There is a sense in which the right-hand strategy is equivalent to the left-hand. "X"—and here I have in mind the Greek *chi* as in *Christos*—is for "crossing." "T" is for "truss." (I apologize. This wild acronymic device was all I could come up with, inflamed as my imagination was, by the "side-splitting," herniating discussion these last few days.) The right hand "trusses" up the left-hand kingdom. Then the letter "R". Kay Baerwald used the word "revolution." Alright, so "R" is for "revolution." The right-hand kingdom "revolutionizes" the left-hand kingdom, turns it upside down. And "A" is for "antiquates." The right-hand kingdom antiquates the left-hand kingdom, leaves it behind. Now, there are hand movements which accompany these letters of the acronym, and this is what I had in mind when I said that I hoped your intelligence would not be insulted.

## 1. "D" Is For "Differs."

"D" is for "differs," and so when you put up two hands, right hand and left hand, like this (both hands held up, apart, palms forward), they certainly do look different, do they not? One thumb faces eastward, the other westward. They are opposite, actually. For example, if you had a left-hand glove, even a very loose fitting one, you could not get both hands into it. For where the one hand has a thumb the other hand has a little finger. The hands are literally counterpoised.

How is the right-hand kingdom, *ala* Luther's and Lutheran theology different from the left-hand? Let me try to make use of some of the contributions we have had from our speakers. First of all, I would like to detail what the difference is not, or at least what it is not primarily. It is not, Bob Kolb said to us, the difference between sacred and profane. That is a

misunderstanding of the two kingdoms that has sometimes been committed, as though the right-hand kingdom is God's kingdom and the left-hand kingdom is not. To quote from Kolb:

*"Luther's evangelical breakthrough to his biblical understanding of what it means to be righteous in God's sight shattered medieval presuppositions about the sacred and the profane. No longer was it possible to take seriously any human activities in a vertical relationship between the creator and the recreated believer. In that realm or government only passive response from the believing creature produced by the work of the Holy Spirit is possible. Nor can any part of human activity be conceived of as profane. Every human activity lies with God's governing, preserving power and desire. Nothing stands outside the temple."*

So the difference between the right hand and the left hand is not that one is more godly than the other. Neither is the difference between the two—and here I am going to take Kolb's terminology literally, though I think I know what he means—the difference between a vertical relationship and a horizontal relationship. Perhaps by "vertical" Kolb meant "soteriological." And true, it is only the right-hand kingdom that involves people in a salvaging, an emancipatory, a saving relationship with the deity. Nevertheless, the left-hand kingdom certainly has its own kind of verticality, too. In that kingdom, too, people are very much *coram deo*. For as you live by the Creator's rule of the left-hand kingdom, there is every reason why you should be *coram deo*, up against God. That is, you should be recognizing that it is from God that the rules come and that it is to God that all accounts are due. So in that sense the difference between the two kingdoms is not that the one is vertical and the other is not.

The difference between the right-hand and left-hand kingdom is also not that the left-hand kingdom is demonized, which, of course, it is. David Lotz pointed out to us that in Troeltsch's critique Luther's article on the two kingdoms tended to glorify power politics. Lotz took up the cudgel against Troeltsch on that score and cited Luther material galore to show that Luther could frontally tie into the power politicians, especially when they used left-hand kingdom resources and left-hand kingdom administrative styles as a way of endearing people to God. Now it might be tempting to think that you have got the difference between the left-hand kingdom and the right-hand kingdom straight if you are just game enough to emphasize how demonic the left-hand can be. But as you know, dear friends, the left-hand kingdom has no monopoly on demonization. As the history of the Christian church alone would be enough to document volubly, the right-hand kingdom is quite capable of being just as demonized as the left-hand, and often more so. So that also is not the difference between the two. If the left-hand kingdom sometimes has pretensions to be salvational, the right-hand kingdom at least as frequently has pretensions to be able to do what only the left-hand kingdom can do.

The difference between the right-hand kingdom and the left-hand kingdom is also not as Carl Braaten might have been understood to say, that the right-hand kingdom has already come in Jesus the Christ, crucified and resurrected, but that for the rest of us it has *not* yet come except in hope, in our anticipation of it. I understand Luther at least to say that though the kingdom certainly has not come fully and finally and perhaps has begun to come only meagerly, it nevertheless *has* begun to come also to *us*. So then that is not the difference, either, that only the left-hand kingdom is already here whereas, except in the person of Jesus Christ, the right-hand kingdom is still only in the future except for our subjective hopes about it.

Then, what is the difference between the two kingdoms? David Lotz urged us all to go back to the 1523 Luther document, *Von der weltlichen Obrigkeit*. "On Secular Authority: (and I think "secular" is a better translation here than "temporal") To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed." Lotz, in his summary of that treatise's argument, said that the difference between the two kingdoms is that in the left-hand kingdom people are moved to do the things they do predominantly out of self-interest. "Right-hand kingdom", by contrast, describes that other strategy of the Creator by which people are moved to do the things they do, not out of self-interest but out of a self-sacrificial, Christ-like interest in the world, in the neighbor, in the commonweal. Incidentally, such Christlike ones were for Luther an awfully discouraging minority, not only a minority of the human race but a minority in the Christian church. He was very skeptical that there really were all that many Christians, and he was not all that sure about himself. At any rate, that is the difference between the two kingdoms, at least for the Luther of 1523.

But not even that is all the difference. If the left-hand kingdom were only the realm of self-interest, then those Calvinists and neo-Calvinists would be right who would prefer not to describe it as a kingdom of God at all but rather, as did some of the remarks these days, as the kingdom of Satan. Which, by the way, it also is. But how can it be the kingdom of God if it is shot through with and is, in fact, driven by human self-interest and even by the power of the demonic? How may an evil realm qualify for such a prestigious title as "kingdom," *basileia tou theou*, kingdom of God? Bob Benne reminded us in his essay—and I thought it was very wholesome pastoral counsel—not to become too moralistically critical of Christian lay behavior and lay ethos. As he observed, even autonomous morality or heteronomous morality may very often be par-for-the course *Christian* morality as well. Benne mentioned, with allusions to

Luther, how even within the realm of egoism there are resources for making egoism function not only for its own selfish interests but in such a way that self-interest can be gained only by serving the neighbor in the process.

Then what is it, at least according to Luther in 1523, in his treatise "On Secular Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed," that qualifies the left-hand kingdom, being a kingdom of evil, as being simultaneously a kingdom of God? It is that God, who is righteous and not sinful, so creates as to use human sinfulness to achieve a modicum of righteousness. Most of God's creation, by far, is of this nature. The Creator utilizes people's self-interest, and usually does so not in crass forms of obvious egotism. I suppose what Benne called autonomy and heteronomy qualifies and may be standard morality in the left-hand kingdom. God so uses human self-interest as to achieve the interests of others. I do not know, for example, who wall-papered this room, and I do not think you would accuse me of being unduly cynical if I would say, "Though the wall-papering of this room had the final effect of serving us [it simplifies the maintenance of the wall and certainly adds an aesthetic texture to the surroundings] I would not be at all surprised if the paperhanger who put it up did it for—in those days what was it, Al?—perhaps \$2.25 an hour." Luther could marvel at the fact that the creation was by and large so arranged, with glaring exceptions to be sure, that often human beings can achieve their own selfish ends only by first of all accommodating the needs and the interests of others. That is the cunning of history under the left-handed God, the same God by the way who creates right-handedly. It is that he can use even the satanic forces of evil, including Cyrus of Persia and others, to accomplish his creative ends.

To be able to appreciate that is an act of faith. Luther remarks somewhere that it was not until he had experienced his joyous

breakthrough to the gospel that he realized that so many of the things which previously he had attributed to the diabolical forces of darkness turned out in the end to be the doings of God, the shrewdly good Creator. "Reason illuminated by faith," Luther calls such insight. In his treatise "On Secular Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed," a recurrent and fascinating phrase is the term "unfettered reason." Faith had liberated reason to discern the Creator's rationale even in the midst of—even with the aid of!—human and cosmic evil. Faith in the gospel brings a reinstatement of *ratio*, of reason, of rationality. Faith unfetters reason. Thus, what a pre-faith reason might have been inclined to ascribe to the powers of darkness, a liberated, rejoicing reason through Christ is enabled to see as the cunning of God who out-smarts Satan by using often enough even Satan's own ploys to turn him against himself.

"D", we are saying, stands for "differs," how right-hand differs from left-hand. And it does so in one fundamental respect. God's ruling right-handedly—that is, in his preferred way—is that kind of driving force which impels Christians (and their number is astonishingly meager) as they operate within the realm of God's left-handedness, to do fundamentally the same righteous things that left-handed people do and more so but to do all these, as Dave Lutz told us, not because these Christians need the sanctions which the sword, the carrot-and-stick, exert by way of motivation. Nevertheless, though these Christians may not need carrots and sticks themselves, they are willing to employ such means, such left-handed means, for the sake of God's kingdom, that is, for the sake of all God's creatures, especially those who are being neglected and oppressed.

Just a quick comment on Luther's symbol, "the sword." It is unfortunate, I think, that when people think of the left-hand kingdom as the realm of the sword they tend to restrict left-

handed administration much too much to the realm of physical coercion and the employment of violence, something which in our society at least is legally entrusted only to civil government. In truth, however, left-hand kingdom works wherever retribution works, wherever carrot/stick works. For example, if you all proceeded to go to sleep right now, you know from your own experience with public speaking that you would be exercising tremendous retribution upon this speaker. Or if you laugh (as you now have) that is an opposite, gratifying kind of retribution. Strokes and shafts are incentives to self-interest, and they accomplish a lot, all of it without a literal, physical sword. If you go to sleep, the speaker hurries to finish his or her address. Granted, if you laugh, you just might encourage the speaker falsely to go on longer than he would have anyway. At any rate both responses, however gentle, are still retributive. They are a harnessing of self-interest.

By contrast, right-handed Christians, the subversives of Jesus who infiltrate this left-handed realm, operate with those same measures but not for themselves; yet they can do so with good conscience. That is what makes the crucial difference. They can do it with good conscience because though it kills them (in Christ Jesus it does) they do it for the sake of the others who depend on that "sword"—like retribution—the oppressed, the deprived, the marginated. The followers of Jesus do that, though always cruciformly, for those others who need the wielding of reciprocity, remuneration, retribution. As the Augsburg Confession says, even the waging of just wars, buying and selling and trading, cost-benefit analysis and all the rest is available even to the right-handers in order to get the world run with a modicum of justice rather than injustice.

## 2. “E” Is For “Equivalent.”

Note how if you take your two hands and do not hold them out side by side, one thumb next to the other thumb, but instead clap them together palm to palm, they now form the same profile—not a D as in *different* profile but an E as in *equivalent* profile. The thumbs are now at the same place, the little fingers are at the same place, and so on, so that if I had a glove, either right-hand or left-hand, I could put both hands in the same glove and two thumbs would both fit together in the one thumb hole of the selfsame glove.

How are the two kingdoms equivalent? As I recalled earlier, Bob Benne had stressed this feature about the ethos of Christians, that heteronomous and autonomous morality are practiced by non-Christian people as well as by Christians. Both groups make the same kinds of compromises, also the same kinds of gutsy decisions. Moreover, for the most part, the way in which right-handedness or left-handedness shows in the form of ethos comes out with each looking much the same as the other.

In fact, even the two groups' ethical ideals may be much the same. Though there may be some partial validity to the distinction between Christians being in favor of love and non-Christians favoring justice, I think non-Christian people, too, reflect a preference for love. Certainly the Nobel prize-awarding parliament in Sweden is not stocked wall-to-wall with Christians when they vote Mother Theresa the prize. You do not have to be a Christian to admire *agape*, even *agape* as love of enemy. That does not mean that *agape* gets exercised. It does not get all that exercised by Christians, for that matter, as Benne reminded us. Neither does it take a Christian to know that *agape* is better than just plain dog-eat-dog ways of settling a deal.

In terms of the ideals of both kingdoms and the ethos of each,



therefore, there is a kind of rough equivalence between them. If non-Christians do—I am not sure they do, but if they do—tend to shrink from the high aspirations that Christians have—for example, the aspiration to *agape*—I doubt that it is because the non-Christians do not recognize in *agape* a superior form of living. I suspect rather that they perceive it to be so ideal as to be idealistic, with really no chance for achievement or realization. Hence one might as well not entertain it if one is only going to be disappointed in the long run. However, in terms of ideal ethical aspirations both kingdoms may still be recognizably equivalent.

### 3. “X” Is For “Crossing.”

What do I mean by crossing? How do the hands go? First there was “Different.” Then there was “Equivalent.” Now watch how the hands cross. Hands still palm to palm, but now the fingers of the right hand fold into, intersperse the fingers of the left hand. Right-hand proceeds to cross over into the left-hand realm. It interpenetrates the left-hand realm.

That right-handed interpenetration of the left hand is not first of all an action by Christians; first of all it is an act of Jesus the Christ. How does he, as the first to do so, cross over? Here I would like to invoke again that favorite metaphor of Luther’s, the “happy exchange.” Ordinarily, when the Creator has to rule left-handedly, people should get what is coming to them. But in God’s right-handed reign that is not what they get. There they get what is coming to someone else, namely, to Jesus the Christ. If the basic rule of the left-hand kingdom is that people should get what they deserve, then the right-hand kingdom looks diametrically opposed to that. It even looks unfair—unfair to God. People like us, being who we are, should get death. Saddled with our sins, we are terminal therefore. God, by contrast, deserves praise and lasting life. However, in God’s

historic action in Jesus, say the Christians, the tables are turned—most unrighteously. What we should get, namely, righteousness and life, we get. That is the baptismal exchange.

Notice, by the way, that this is no crude vicariousness. It is not as though God is a great bookkeeper sitting a million light years away with his double-entry ledger who somehow behind our backs, while we all sleep through the transaction, transfers Christ's account to ours and vice versa. No, this all happens quite immanently within the realm of our own biographies and within the realm of history. As we take on Christ's righteousness and life, we also take on his death and resurrection. Quite empirically we do that. And as he takes on our sin and our death, he takes them on not merely in some transcendent sense but quite empirically on a wooden cross, on a hill called "The Skull," outside the walls of Jerusalem on a given date.

That is the crossing to which I refer. I would like at this point to allude to at least two of the essays we have heard and try thereby to elevate the crisis involved in this crossing. For here, I think, is where the two-kingdom doctrine really gets wrestled to the floor, here at the christological crossover. I quote first from Benne's paper again, from one particularly eloquent paragraph: "Finally," he says, "life in the theonomous mode [remember, this was the mode that was not reducible to even the highest stage in Kohlberg's developmental series but was to be uncoupled from that series and was much less predictable than those stages] is characterized by confidence in the justifying grace of God in Christ. In each of the stages of moral development a powerful crisis lurks." Keep that word in mind, "crisis." "The egoist [remember, that was the first stage of moral development]

*is finally pushed up against his or her own impotence and*

*guilt. The heteronomist will sooner or later recognize that the group has feet of clay up to its neck. The autonomist will come to see that even the most creative practical intelligence cannot measure up to the challenges of the whole picture. Further, those with a specific Christian sense of calling will recognize that they fall short of both the mission they have been called to and the special moral summons they have been given. All the persons are driven by their involvement in finite and sinful existence into a sense of helplessness and worthlessness before the transcending task that is theirs. Moreover, they are aware of the ambiguity of human choices. That is to say that no one can justify themselves by their own performance before the ultimate claim of life that is before God (coram deo). All fall short and must place their trust in the faithfulness of God in Christ.*

What I would add to that—and I do not believe I am adding anything substantively to what Benne was saying—is that the very place where we are often tempted to *stop*, namely, at the point of saying “place their trust in the faithfulness of God in Christ,” is precisely where the two kingdoms debate needs to *begin*. It is the point, in other words, of the christological crossover. What difference does that make, given this awful crisis that lurks at any stage? What difference does it make for God to be faithful in Christ Jesus?

At least in classical Lutheran christology and soteriology, that Christ conquered this crisis is, of course, self-evident. How immanently, that is, how down-to-earthly, he has conquered the crisis is the issue. How presently, not only futuristically, has he conquered the crisis? As you know, for Luther the *pro nobis*, that Christ has done it for us and for our salvation, is key. The “for us-ness” is crucial, though the full realization of that “for us-ness” still awaits the *eschaton*. In decisive ways

the victory has already been delivered and is being delivered through the church's ministrations of Word and sacraments. So the conquest by Christ is already, though it is also not yet, a present possession, possessed not only by Christ Jesus but also by those who are his.

There are a dozen different ways to try to make sense of that, different metaphors just within the New Testament. I like, and I predict other people will increasingly like, the "happy exchange" metaphor. I find that metaphor is gaining currency again. Twenty years ago I would not have given a plugged nickel for the chances that someday the so-called two kingdoms doctrine would be "in." Well, friends, it is in. Or at least it is fast on its way to becoming in, and in all the right hands, I find. I hope to go to South Africa later this year, where I find it is the venturesome Lutherans who are significantly standing up to the principalities and powers supporting *apartheid*. And it is these Lutherans who there are reviving and reinstating the theology of the two kingdoms. My guess is that a fitting christological metaphor—and it would not have to be this one, necessarily—that will accord with a "both kingdoms" theology is the kind of christological crossover described in "the happy exchange."

I want next to cite Carl Braaten's paper. I covet clarification from him on this point because for my own taste, perhaps because I am a fellow systematician (and about to be his colleague next fall), his was perhaps the single most exciting paper of the conference for my own use. Let me call attention, however, to a problematic paragraph in that paper. Braaten said, "The root of the two kingdom doctrine lies in the answer of the early church to this question: 'What is the community of the end time to do in the meantime?'" I would suggest that a big part of the early church's answer was that it (the church) should enjoy the fact that it is *already*, prior to the end time and already in the

meantime, beginning to *realize* the right hand kingdom. But Braaten has re-opened the question, as a question, "What is the community of the end time to do in the meantime?" What are we Christians to do in this field of great tension between the now-already of the coming by Messiah Jesus, and the not-yet of his kingdom? Presumably, the arrival of the final kingdom is still outstanding with regard to the world itself.

To that I would say, that is almost correct. However, we do have the pledge, the promise of the kingdom in Jesus Christ already, and I would say we have a good bit more than that. Braaten himself said earlier, "The kingdom is hidden at present in the person of Messiah Jesus. And the word of this event can only be received through faith and the power of the Spirit." But I would add that what Braaten calls "the Word," which admittedly can only be received through faith and the power of the Spirit, that "Word" extends to and includes the church's actual, out loud, here and now *proclaiming* of that Word. And that much is a present, empirically present activity of the Kingdom, now. Moreover, though it does take the eyes of faith to see that God is already ruling right-handedly, still the lives of the Christians in whom God has already begun that rule, perhaps ever so meagerly, are lives which are present here and now even to the eyes of flesh. But maybe that is what Braaten meant, too: the Crossing, not only for Christ but also for those who are in him, is already under way, and not only in our hoping it is.

#### **4. "R" Is For "Revolutionizes"**

"D" was for "differs." "E" was for "equivalent." "X" was for "crossing." How do the hands go next? "R" is for "revolutionizes." How do the hands revolutionize? Hold the hands out horizontally, palm to palm, the right hand beneath the left hand and supporting it, right-hand fingers interlacing the left-hand. Now, with a twist of the wrist, the hands begin ever so

gradually to rotate together, the under hand (the right one) slowly becoming the upper hand. "R" is for revolutionizes.

Here I am reminded of something which Kathryn Baerwald said to us. She said, "While Luther was a revolutionary in his theory of the priesthood of all believers [and I subscribe to that] and our ordination is by baptism into that priesthood, it appears to me that we have lost much of that revolutionary fire. We largely focus on the function of lay people within the church structure. What is needed is to shift our attention from the laity within the church and to turn the church loose in the world by means of the laity." I agree. I agree also, of course, with the shadow side of Baerwald's diagnosis: that while Luther was a revolutionary, Lutherans by and large are not. But I would not count Kay Baerwald among those who are not. When she says, "Baptism is ordination" and continues by saying the things I have just quoted to you, she too is a revolutionary. Watch and see.

In his essay Carl Braaten said something so important but so quickly that I would like to retrieve it for special attention. He said that one of the ways in which the church has obfuscated and confused the two-ness of the kingdoms has been in identifying the church with the right-hand kingdom. This was a mistake not only of Lutherans. It began long before Lutherans ever came along. But Lutherans have done this as long as they have been around, as have most other Christian traditions. If there is ever another conference on this theme, I would strongly encourage the planning committee to consider this problem of equating the right-hand kingdom with the church as a follow-up theme. Braaten's comments suggest that this confusion represents a problem which, far from being theoretical, is really quite practical. The danger is in regarding the church as an end in herself and to think that if the church runs well internally, its obligations have thereby been cared for.

As I read the New Testament, the church is always and only in order to the kingdom. If by the church one means, "where two or three are gathered in his name," or if by the church one means, "the assembly of believers gathered around the Word and sacraments," then, as Kay Baerwald pointed out, we are talking about a very slim time component in Christian people's work-weeks. Such churchly gatherings are but a means, an instrumentality, to the kingdom. As the preacher stands at the narthex door when folks file out and say, "Pastor, that was a good sermon," the pastor says wisely when he replies, "Thank you, but I believe it is a little too early to tell." The pastor is right on theologically, because the whole function of the liturgy, of the gathering around the Word and the sacraments is to go out and to actualize what Daniel Berrigan meant when he said, "Church is a good place to be from." How do we send each other out nowadays at the end of the liturgy? We say, "Go in peace, serve the Lord." That peaceful going and serving of the Lord is really the church's beginning, its beginning to be something more than itself, the kingdom of God.

But if that is true, if the church's own job comes to fruition not in its own worship but in the carrying out of the kingdom (right and left) then that also means, does it not, that for the most part the church's job description—because it includes such things as determining how to cure cancer, what to do about the nuclear threat, how to get food to the starving, how to get to work by 8:30 down the Dan Ryan Expressway—is not defined by the church itself. In that respect, the church does not set its own agenda. The closest the church gets to defining the kingdom's agenda is when the church's *members* learn from *experience in the kingdom of God* how you do get to work by 8:30 down the Dan Ryan Expressway, how you do resolve the problem of the nuclear holocaust, how you do deal with herpes and AIDS and all the rest. Not even from the gospel do you learn that, not directly.

If our effectiveness as church finally comes to the test Monday through Saturday, wouldn't it be nice if in the liturgy on Sunday we not only sent people out but, on the following Sunday, would debrief one another, as to how the church "out there" has been actualizing the kingdom this past week. Until then, until the troops return, it is "a little too early to tell." And nobody can tell except those Christian subversives who have been traveling out there all week long, most of them quite anonymously, as Christians beginning to revolutionize the left-hand kingdom wherever God's right hand gains the upper hand.

## 5. "T" Is For "Trusses"

I am sorry. I just now realize that, in ticking off the letters of our acronym, D-E-X-T-R-A, I skipped T: "T" is for Trusses. Please, pardon that omission. I shall leave it to you to imagine how the right-hand kingdom "trusses" up the left-hand. "It does it when," Kay Baerwald said, "we all support each other and then we go out and embrace the world with love." Really, what I have to depend on is not so much your imagination as your faith, your imaginative faith. It is by appeal to your faith that I ask you: Would this society of ours, just within the U.S.A., which at its best operates most of the time left-handedly, do as well as it does if you somehow subtracted all of the Christians from it? I *believe* it would not. I *believe* that even our very left-handed civilization is "trussed" up, undergirded by the right-handed reign of Christ and his Christians. The Epistle to Diognetus in the early years of the church could claim that the church is to the world as the soul is to the body. In hidden ways Christ and his members animate and structure the course of the world. That is the trussing.

## 6. "A" Is For "Antiquates"

Finally, "A." Let me remind you of the acronym once more. "D"



was for “differs.” “E” was for “equivalent.” “X” was for “crosses.” “T” was for “trussed up.” “R” was for “revolutionizes.” “A,” in conclusion, is for “antiquates.” The right-hand kingdom, and that too entails Christian faith and hope, eventually leaves the left-hand kingdom behind. The left-hand kingdom is now outdated. Stronger language would say it is doomed. It is the right-hand kingdom that has a future. When The Last Analysis comes, as we just read in a lesson for the First Week after Easter, from I Corinthians 15, Jesus will have completed his work and will turn over his reign to his Father; then God will be all in all. But it is the right-hand kingdom, God’s rule as it operates by the tender mercies of the cross—though even then it operates within God’s left-handed glove—which finally is destined to be the life that lasts. That is the divine rule which has a future, perceived now only by hope but eventually by experience.

### III. “Critical”

May I conclude by saying just a word more about revolution? Carl Braaten, I thought, used a term frequently and effectively to describe the Christian’s right-handed participation in the left-hand realm. He called it “critical participation,” a sort of watchdog politics. The word “critical” is the word I would like to fix upon for my closing observations. That word, by the way, is also a relatively recent word. It is a term from the Enlightenment. But it has great New Testament precedent.

The revolution that the Reformation brought, and I think it brought it without clearly knowing that it brought it, had highly significant social and political overtones. Luther comments on several occasions about the *magna experientia*. the “huge experience that we are having.” With our own eyes, he says, right here in front of us, something is happening which

ten years ago we would not have dared to expect. As of today—and this was already in the 1520's, by the way, as Miriam Chrisman documented for us anecdotally—all of life was coming to be seen as *sub judicio nostro*, under our judgment—that is, under the critical judgment of ordinary folks. Case in point? “I would never have guessed,” says Luther, “that I would see the day when the commonest peasant could by his own spontaneous inferences from the gospel make the judgment that his *Stand* was superior to the *Stand* of the monastic.”

This new trend, all of society and life *sub judicio nostro*, was then already gathering force, and that trend was trussed up and given momentum by the gospel of Christ. It gathered additional force in the coming Enlightenment, when the critical edge was turned not only against church authorities but also against political authorities. Today you and I, in this very room, are living out that critical role, according to which virtually everything is now *sub judicio nostro*. We are expected to be able to read and write so that we can exercise free and independent judgment over against oppressive authority, the kind of free and critical judgment which is essential for human emancipation. We are expected to read good newspapers. We are expected to exercise our franchise as society's critics and judges. This university is a testimony to the kind of Enlightenment revolution whose seeds were germinating in the Reformation.

The critical seed the Reformation sowed was not only in the egalitarian leveling of clergy and laity, to which our attention in this conference has already been called.

I would suggest that the critical revolution had a deeper root. The movement toward the critical responsibility of every human being finds its ground in the Reformation's article on justification *sola fide*, by faith alone. Faith, you will recall the reformers said, is never without works, for works are

faith's home, its natural and indigenous matrix. Faith is simply the depth dimension of works. But neither is faith without repentance, what Marxists and Hegelians in their secularist way might call "negation." Faith, which includes repentance, does have a profoundly negative side to it. Faith is the christological repeat, the reduplication in our own biographies of dying with Christ every day over. That is the penitential downthrust of faith. And faith's Easter-like resurrection is what Miriam Chrisman called "the new self-confidence," the kind that comes to those oppressed ones who by Messiah Jesus are liberated from the sense of what Martin Luther King, Jr., called their overwhelming "nobodyness"—that is, their unfaith and their ultimate rejectedness.

Social ills do have soteriological implications. If social structures are so oppressive, as they were also in the 16th century, as to rob people of a sense of their value until finally it robs them of a sense of their value *coram deo*, and if even the preaching of the gospel is futile in the face of such negation, then along must come this radical kind of self-critical faith which criticizes not only the oppressor but also, as some neo-Marxists are smart enough to see, can finally bring emancipation full term only when the oppressed can turn that critical edge upon themselves as well and can raise the question, "What was it about *us* that allowed *us* to cave in and be oppressed in the first place?"

The great thrust of the Christian gospel is that it can afford to take that kind of negative, critical punch, not only over against our oppressors but also against ourselves, that being our freedom. I mean, we can move out into the critical, left-handed darkness seeing as we do the light at the end of the tunnel, namely, that even the left-handed kingdom must be God's and must therefore be borne. But that is all a lot easier to believe considering that the divine word of judgment has by

God's right hand been trumped. And the trump is the word of divine approval and co-habitation with us, present through Word and sacraments, our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ, the very Son at God's right hand.

Robert W. Bertram  
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[FromReflection \(PDF\)](#)