

God's Kingdom, God's Regime-change—some responses

[Preliminary note: The Manipur Mission Fleece, put out last month on the 7th anniversary of ThTh postings, subsequently augmented by our children's note to you on the occasion of our 50th wedding anniversary, has gathered \$18K of mission moisture. We are grateful.]

Colleagues,

Here are some responses to ThTh 369 & 370, the Book Review of CONSTANTS IN CONTEXTS, with its claim that "Kingdom of God" in the NT is God's regime-change with sinners (in Christ alone)—and not to be confused —literally, "fused together"—with all the generic good stuff God does (via a multitude of left-hand agents) throughout the world 24/7. To wit, the difference between the forgiveness of sins and daily bread. Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

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1. I'm with the chaplain [in ThTh 369 "people come to me seeking to be forgiven"]. All day long I deal as a [hospital] chaplain with people who want their sins forgiven. I understand that because I also want my sins forgiven. Christ takes us to him when he forgives us—he does that and we know it. There's nothing to sell, and there's nothing to fix—it is Christ's work, and we are his hands, is all. That's what brought me to him in faith, securely and forever. It's the sum of everything we yearn

for. I think it was Emerson that once said that human beings have the habit of wanting to categorize everything down to the tiniest detail. We got, in your words, the sweetest swap there is in all creation. Why must we complicate everything?

2. This was a long, hard read but well worth the trouble. As always, you slap down the words that give shape to the swirling uneasiness I feel when reading these kinds of books. Peace and justice are nothing compared to the startling sacrifice and forgiveness that God really offers. If peace and justice are all we can offer fellow sinners, it is literally damnation. Thanks again for holding the fort!
3. What we all have in common is a problem with the rosy scales of cultural optimism diminishing our understanding of our parlous state, indeed, of our standing in opposition to God as sinners until God's grace convicts of sin. I suspect, too, that we need a much better catechesis to help people see that this is our situation until we truly accept God's forgiveness.
4. [With this respondent I'll include some of my own response to him. My words come in CAPS, not because they are more important, but to demark them from his.] I wanted to make a comment about the "Constants in Context" reviews, which strike me as a solid critique and quite persuasive. I agree with the position you take with one misgiving, namely, that historically the two-kingdoms teaching has been badly misused and has contributed to quietism within Lutheran churches.

I DON'T THINK THAT IS A MAJOR FACTOR IN SHAPING SO-CALLED LUTHERAN "QUIETISM." SURELY NOT IN THE USA. AND AMONG LUTHERANS ON THE CONTINENT THAT IS NOT SEEN AS A MAJOR FACTOR. IN MY OWN LIFE AS A USA-LUTHERAN I NEVER WAS TAUGHT ANYTHING ABOUT "2 KINGDOMS" IN 8 YEARS OF PAROCHIAL

SCHOOL OR MY CONFIRMATION INSTRUCTION. NEVER HEARD ABOUT IT UNTIL I GOT TO THE SEMINARY. SO I CANNOT SEE WHERE 2K "TEACHING" WAS A FACTOR AT ALL. BUT MAYBE THAT'S JUST MY SHELTERED LIFE "IN MISSOURI."

I THINK USA LUTHERANS STAYED OUT OF POLITICAL LIFE MOSTLY BECAUSE OF THEIR LINGUISTIC AND ETHNIC INSULARISM. THEY LIVED LARGELY AS EUROPEAN CULTURAL COLONIES WITHIN THE USA. THAT WAS TRUE OF MY LUTHERAN UPBRINGING. THE "REFORMED," MANY WHO SPOKE ENGLISH WHEN THEY GOT OFF THE BOAT, AND WERE THE ONES WHO WERE COMMITTED TO MAKING AMERICA "THEIR" NEW PROMISED LAND OF THE COVENANT (CALVINIST STYLE), THEY WERE THE ONES WHO WERE NON-COLONIAL "NORMAL" AMERICANS AND THUS NATURALLY THE ONES WHO WENT INTO PUBLIC LIFE WITH A (SOMETIMES) RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT TO MAKE AMERICA THE PROMISED LAND. ONCE U.S. CATHOLICS WERE "AMERICANIZED," THEY TOO ENTERED PUBLIC LIFE. MY DAD STILL TALKED GERMAN TO ME, HIS FIRSTBORN.

For a variety of reasons people tend to conclude that, Christianly speaking, the only kingdom that really matters is the kingdom of grace and the saving of souls; so the rest of life is thought of largely without reference to God.

THAT'S MORE THE FUNDAMENTALIST OPTION, I THINK. EVEN A DISTORTED 2-KINGDOM THEOLOGY STILL CALLED THE LEFT-HAND KINGDOM "GOD'S" TURF. IF WE LUTHERANS WENT THE FUNDAMENTALIST ROUTE, IT WAS NOT BECAUSE OF ANY 2K DOCTRINE (ABOUT WHICH, I MAINTAIN, THEY/WE KNEW BLESSED LITTLE. IS IT ANYWHERE IN THE LCMS CATECHISM THAT TRAINED US ALL? I DON'T REMEMBER ANYTHING LIKE THAT, BUT I HAVEN'T CHECKED. IF IT REALLY IS THERE, WE MUST'VE SKIPPED IT IN OUR CATECHISM CLASSES.). INSTEAD IF LUTHERANS IN THE USA DID INDEED GO THAT ROUTE, IT WAS BECAUSE THEY (AT LEAST

SCANDINAVIAN AND GERMAN LUTHERANS—WITH EUROPEAN PIETISM IN THEIR VEINS ALREADY) FOUND THE FUNDAMENTALIST/EVANGELICALS TO BE “CLOSE” TO THEIR OWN (MIS-) PERCEIVED NOTIONS OF LUTHERAN PIETY.

And the rest of life is usually where our real commitments lie. You know all of this. It leads me to suspect that it may be more useful to talk about two aspects of God’s rule, or God’s two-fold rule, rather than two kingdoms. Not that doing so is a magic wand, but it might help us think more clearly about the way God’s reign encompasses all of life.

THAT’S WHY I OPTED FOR THE TERMS OF “REGIME” AND “REGIME-CHANGE.” THOSE TERMS FOCUS NOT ON THE TERRITORY —CHURCHY OR WORLDLY, SACRED OR SECULAR—BUT ON THE KIND OF OPERATION GOD IS UP TO. LEFT-HAND REGIME MAJORS IN FAIRNESS (AKA JUSTICE), RIGHT-HAND MAJORS IN FORGIVENESS. AT ROOT THESE ARE CLEAN CONTRARY. FAIRNESS = YOU GET WHAT YOU RIGHTLY HAVE COMING TO YOU; FORGIVENESS = YOU GET WHAT YOU DON’T DESERVE.

To be picky, in part two, p.7, under Summa, you say, “The agenda of peace, justice and integrity of creation is the stuff of the daily bread of human life; it is not the stuff of the KoG, God’s reconciling regime-change with sinners” etc. I agree with your intent here, to distinguish between God’s providence and God’s saving grace; but I think the entire Lord’s Prayer is a prayer of the kingdom.

THAT MIGHT BE MORE THAN PICKY. METHINKS WE DON’T SEE THINGS THE SAME HERE. MY CLAIM (EXEGETICAL CLAIM) IS THAT ALL N.T. REFERENCES TO “KINGDOM OF GOD” ARE REFERENCES TO WHAT GOD IS DOING IN CHRIST (AND NOWHERE ELSE). THAT IS,

RECONCILING THE WORLD UNTO HIMSELF ETC. ALA 2 COR 5. TO SAY IT'S ALL "A PRAYER OF THE KINGDOM" IS TO BE SAYING WHAT SPECIFICALLY? LUTHER'S "CLEAR" DIFFERENCES IN "EXPLAINING" THE TWO PETITIONS (KINGDOM AND BREAD) MAKES ME THINK HE WOULD NOT SAY "IT'S ALL A PRAYER OF THE KINGDOM."

To say daily bread is not the stuff of the kingdom invites the dichotomy that plagues us.

I THINK IT'S WORSE THAN THAT.

WHAT PLAGUES THE CHURCHES TODAY (AS IN THE REFORMATION ERA) IS THAT THEY DO *NOT* MAKE THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN WHAT GOD IS DOING IN CHRIST AND WHAT GOD IS DOING "PROVIDENTIALY," AS YOU SAY, THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. THAT SIGNALS THE VICTORY OF CALVINISM IN THE USA, WHERE GOD HAS JUST ONE REGIME. LUTHER FACED A MEDIEVAL CHURCH THAT ALSO HAD ONLY ONE "REGIME" OF GOD—AND IT WAS ALL GRACE.

NOT SO, HE SAID. THE SCRIPTURES ARE CLEAR ABOUT THIS. GOD HAS A REGIME OF LAW THAT IS NOT GRACE-FUL. IT'S FAIR, HOWEVER. IT PRESERVES THE FALLEN CREATION. IT'S FUNDAMENTAL AXIOM IS: YOU GET WHAT YOU'VE GOT COMING. AND GOD HAS THIS OTHER REGIME THAT REDEEMS CREATION—LITERALLY BRINGS IT BACK TO GOD'S OWNERSHIP—STARTING WITH HUMAN HEARTS—THE MOST ALIENATED SEGMENT OF THE ENTIRE OLD CREATION, THE ROOT OF CREATION'S "GROANING" ALA ROMANS 8.

TO MY LIGHTS THAT IS ONE WAY TO SEE WHAT IS AT THE CENTER OF THE LUTH. REFORMATION. MEDIEVAL ONE-REGIME-ISM, VS. REFORMATION TWO REGIMES. TO MAKE EVERYTHING GOD DOES = "GRACE"—SO SAID BONHOEFFER — IS TO WIND UP WITH CHEAP GRACE.

To enter the kingdom by grace and seek it first allows us (however imperfectly) not to worry about daily bread. And

trusting God for daily bread gives us freedom to seek first the kingdom. Both movements work in happy symbiosis, and both require trust, which is at the core of our relationship with God. Trust in God's grace and trust in God's providence are different, of course, but so intimately intertwined for the believer that they are rightly part of Jesus' kingdom prayer. Or so it seems to me.

"TRUSTING GOD FOR DAILY BREAD" IS INDEED LINKED TO GOD'S RIGHT-HAND REGIME. THE KEY WORD IS "TRUST." THAT COMES ONLY VIA GOD'S REGIME IN CHRIST. BUT GOD'S OPERATION TO GIVE "BREAD FOR THE WORLD" IS GOD'S LEFT-HAND REGIME IN ACTION, DISTINCT FROM THE REGIME THAT CHRIST BRINGS INTO THE WORLD. GOD'S BREAD-REGIME INTENDS TO FEED, NOURISH ALL, INCLUDING THE SINNERS (=ALL OF US)—EVEN APART FROM THEIR DISTRUST IN GOD. THE SECOND REGIME OF GOD IN CHRIST—AKA THE OFFER OF FORGIVENESS—GENERATES THE VERY TRUST THAT IS MISSING FROM THE BREAD REGIME. THAT SORT OF TRUST THE BREAD-REGIME CANNOT GENERATE. SO THE REGIMES *MUST* BE DIFFERENT. 'FACT IS, TRUST IS EVEN "UNNECESSARY" IN GOD'S BREAD REGIME, SINCE GOD GIVES DAILY BREAD TO ALL—EVEN TO THE DISTRUSTERS.

I would add that the kingdom of God is a kingdom of love and justice, which embraces the concerns of the fourth petition, even if, as you rightly assert, our efforts at love and justice do not get us into the kingdom.

ARE LOVE AND JUSTICE SYNONYMS? ON WHAT GROUNDS? ARE MERCY AND JUST DESERTS SYNONYMS? DON'T THINK SO. IF "JUSTICE" = THE DEATH OF SINNERS (WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH), THEN THE REGIME THAT JESUS BRINGS IS NOT JUSTICE. MERCY IS THE OPPOSITE OF JUSTICE. FORGIVENESS IS THE OPPOSITE OF FAIRNESS.

“JUSTICE” IS NOW A SHIBBOLETH IN SO MUCH THEOLOGICAL TALK, THAT LIKE GRACE IN BONHOEFFER’S DAY, IT IS “CHEAP.” WHICH FINALLY MEANS MEANINGLESS. “JUSTICE” IS GOD’S LEFT-HAND OPERATION, THE REGIME THAT STANDS IN CONTRAST TO CHRIST’S – AS CRAZY OR AWFUL AS THAT MAY SOUND. WHEN PAUL NEVERTHELESS HAS THE CHUTZPAH TO CALL THE WORK OF CHRIST A “DIKAIOSYNE,” A JUSTICE, HE KNOWS HE’S BLOWING PEOPLE’S MINDS—AND EXPLODING THE LINGUISTIC WINESKIN LABELLED “JUSTICE.” CURRENT CHEAP TALK ABOUT “PEACE AND JUSTICE” AS GOD’S PROJECT HAS NO ANTENNA FOR THE “SCANDAL” OF THE (STRICTLY SPEAKING) “IN-JUSTICE” OF GOD FORGIVING SINNERS.

DICTIONARY-DEFINED JUSTICE IN ALL THE LANGUAGES I KNOW IS “SUUM CUIQUE” = GETTING WHAT YOU HAVE COMING TO YOU. TO GIVE SINNERS FORGIVENESS AND CALL THAT “JUSTICE” (DIKAIOSYNE) IS ONLY POSSIBLE IF YOU FOLLOW PAUL’S LABYRINTH ON THE “RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD” (E.G., IN ROMANS) IN ORDER TO GET TO SUCH A MIND-BLOWING, EVEN OFFENSIVE CLAIM. NO WONDER THE “JUSTICE-COMMITTED” (=TORAH-COMMITTED) JEWS WITH WHOM PAUL DEBATED IN ACTS AND HIS EPISTLES CALLED THIS SORT OF JUSTICE A SKANDALON. ‘T WAS A MORAL ABOMINATION.

I’m probably not saying this well, but I’m too old to be embarrassed, so I would welcome your comments. Even more, your advice on how we might better persuade people that being saved by grace through faith means seeing the whole of life differently, through the lens of the kingdom, which launches us into works of love, and therefore such things as justice, peace, and the care of the earth.

I HAVE NO OTHER AGENDA THAN WHAT YOU HERE SAY SO WELL, IN ALL THESE THURSDAY THEOLOGY POSTINGS. MY MAJOR ANGLE, I THINK, IS THAT THE RADICAL MERCY/FAITH/PROMISE STUFF OF

GOD'S REGIME-CHANGE IN CHRIST HAS BECOME SO HO-HUM—REALLY SO CHRIST-LESS—“OF COURSE, GOD FORGIVES SINNERS. THAT'S HIS JOB.” SO I KEEP POUNDING ON THAT. AT ROOT, IT IS THE BONHOEFFER AGENDA—FIGHTING CHEAP GRACE THAT IS SO PLANET-WIDE. AND HUSTLING THE RADICAL PROMISE-AND-FAITH JUSTICE/JUSTIFICATION SO THAT FOLKS TRUSTING THE REAL THING WILL BE LAUNCHED INTO THE STUFF YOU SPEAK OF IN YOUR LAST LINES ABOVE. CHEAP GRACE LAUNCHES NO ONE INTO ANYTHING EXCEPT ON-GOING INCURVATURE INTO SELF AND ONE'S OWN AGENDAS. CHEAP GRACE IS THE REASON LUTHERANS—OTHER CHRIST-CONFESSORS TOO—STAY UNLAUNCHED AND STILL GLUED TO THEIR EASY CHAIRS. THE ONLY THING CHEAP GRACE—AND CHEAP KINGDOM TALK—CAN PRODUCE IS COUCH-POTATOES. TO TELL THEM TO GET OFF THEIR BUTTS, WITHOUT DISLODGING THEIR ADDICTION TO CHEAP GRACE, IS A LOST CAUSE. ONLY CHRIST'S RADICAL REGIME-CHANGE WILL GET FOLKS OFF THEIR DUFFS AND LAUNCH THEM AS EQUALLY RADICAL SOUTHPAWS IN GOD'S OWN LEFT-HAND REGIME.

SO IT SEEMS TO ME.

5. [And finally this one, claiming that in my review I was not feisty enough!]Appreciated your willingness to hold accountable those “who have eyes but will not see.” Your concluding statements...

- One of God's regimes is terminal. The other (hallelujah!) isn't. We have his word for it.
- KoG mission theology is grounded in the one that lasts.

...cannot be spoken enough in and to this world today. That being said, I wonder where is the outrage at those who propose such sweeping guidelines for the church and its mission as B & S do and are so wrong. . . . You seem entirely too calm about this, Ed. But perhaps you know that such outrage would not even begin to be heard these

days.