

IN DEPTH BIBLE STUDY: SPIRITUALITY OF THE CROSS

CLASS 22 and POWER POINT 22:

LIVING IN TWO KINGDOMS: The Sacred and the Secular:

CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE:

IMPLICATIONS OF THE TWO KINGDOMS (TK):

1. The first use of Moral law is to restrain evil, specifically the evils of society. When rulers (Political systems or cultures) violate God's moral law, when they are corrupt, oppressive or evil, they are in rebellion against God's will. They act outside of their vocations, and they are to held accountable. Citizenship is a vocation and Christians are to criticize evil when they see it. Christian leaders, too, are to work for social/political/cultural righteousness in the public square.
2. The contention that L tolerates tyranny, (including the horrendous charge that Lutheran social theory allowed the rise of Hitler), has been thoroughly refuted by Uwe Siemon-Netto in his book, "The Fabricated Luther." As in EV's own book, "Modern Fascism, Hitler, rejected Scripture due to its "Jewishness," summarizes his ideology as "Triumph as the will," was not only anti-Christ, but anti-Luther. The German church that supported National Socialism had long since embraced the role of cultural religion, teaching that the culture rules Christianity and it minimizes the Bible's supernatural claims. Orthodox L, which upholds Scripture and recognized, Luther's "Bondage of the Will," must reject in person and witness by faith all who worship such culture and its idolatry and rebellion against God's commandments.
3. L perspective on politics is very realistic. It is skeptical of utopian schemes. No humanly-devised system or institution is perfect. They must be subject to moral criticism based upon God's transcendent, trans-cultural L. At the same time the doctrine of vocation in God's earthly Kingdom validates social, cultural and political activism. Christians are to be under no delusion that they can create heaven on earth through their activism, but they must apply God's moral demands.
4. The doctrine of the TK frees Christians for effective action in the secular arena and untangles the dilemmas they face in public policy. Morality, is assumed to be the main business of religion. Thus those who oppose abortion are accused of trying to impose their religion on others. Invocations of moral principles are routines rules out of bounds in a nation that separates church and state. According to L, morality is not the main business of the church, but of the state.
5. In religion, one's relationship to God is not based on the L, but G. Our social relationships are based upon the L. God's moral law is written even in the hearts of unbelievers, (See Romans 2:14-15). The protection of life is the business of all governments and cultures and Christians can oppose abortion on moral grounds. This is not imposing religion on anyone. That would involve forcing people to have faith in Christ, which cannot be done. Christians can protect life and uphold other principals through pragmatic tactics, cooperating with non-Christian allies, playing politics and passing laws.

6. The doctrine of the TK keep Christians active and engaged in the culture, at the same time it keeps the church separate and distinct from the world. The church is not to imitate the culture or follow its agendas. The church's priority is to proclaim the G, not enforce the L. Christians are free to participate in their cultures, not uncritically, recognizing sin and maintaining a certain degree of detachment from the transience of the world. "For here we do not have enduring city, but we are looking for a city that is to come." Hebrews 13:14.

CONFUSING THE TWO KINGDOMS:

7. Problems come when TK are confused with each other, when the church functions like the culture or the culture functions like the church. What is appropriate in one realm is not for the other. The profit motive works well in economics and law breakers are put in prison by the state. The success of the church is not to be found in the amount of money it makes, and it may not lock up people who disagree with its teaching. The church has absolutely no business conducting inquisitions or holy wars.
8. To "impose" one's religious beliefs on others would be a violation of the G. The Church to Luther may not use coercive power. The church is not allowed to use "the sword, but the Word." A churchman says Gustav Wingren, "Must abstain from earthly weapons, from all coercion and lust for worldly power; for The Word is to use no outward force. The preacher goes forth trusting in the inner, invisible power of the preached Word, and is thus one faithful to his vocation." A war may be just and fought within one's vocation, but a religious war, the notion of conquering people for Christ as Luther believed is out of 'order.'
9. Christians, he said, should suffer for their faith following the cross of Christ, rather than defend their faith through violence. Faith is a gift of God, the work of the Holy Spirit operating through the means of grace. It cannot be imposed on anyone through some act of the Sword.
10. The secular ruler on the other hand does use the sword. The lawful, secular authorities---not the church may wage war, coerce obedience, and punish wrongdoers. The secular authorities may not, however, tell pastors what to preach or otherwise interfere with the office of The Word. The need and should protect the church as the church will not protect itself.
11. Confusion of the kingdoms come when the earthly kingdom tries to wrestle away the workings of the spiritual kingdom. Before EV became a Christian, he listened to a minister argue that the solution to the crime problem is to release all convicted criminals from prison. Jesus said that, "He came to release the captives," didn't he? If we believed the Bible we would take it literally. If we emptied our prisons, the murderers and robbers would be so moved that they would be reformed. Even at the time, this proposal seemed naïve. EV saw this as confusing the TK.
12. The earthly kingdom exists to carry out the law, the spiritual to carry out forgiveness. A judge must execute justice, not the unconditional mercy found only in the G. To be sure, lenience is possible in the judicial system, under certain conditions, but the legal system cannot simply forgive criminals. Christ, of course, can! A criminal may repent, turn to Christ and receive full forgiveness and acceptance in the church. But a conversion does not exempt a criminal from being punished. ("Christ forgave your debt, but one still has a debt to society")
13. The kingdoms are confused when earthly authorities presume to grant spiritual benefits. Projects that claim to solve all of humanities' problems, reform human nature, and eliminate the effects of sin, all through human engineering, even well intentioned can be dangerous. When humans set up schemes for heaven on earth, they come closer to setting up hell!