



Interpreting the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms: God's Kingship in the Church and in Politics

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I. THE MEANING OF THE QUESTION "CHURCH AND STATE POLITICS"

I am concerned with the question of "church and politics," the urgency and priority which is due to it, because it focuses on the well-being of specific persons, of oppressed people and, finally, of all humanity. It is certainly a theme which raises much anguish in this Latin American historical moment and context, where we live in a situation of centuries of dependence, domination, and oppression, but are also, at the same time, on the road to liberation. The church, by no means, can set aside this question and practice neutrality. Neutrality has never existed; it cannot. Throughout Latin American history, the church has been predominantly an instrument of domination. Could we now become, in this historic hour, an instrument of liberation? The question remains open. Only the historical process will give the answer. At any rate, we have observed that where the church puts into practice its prophetic mission and transforming action, it is thrust into the center of the conflicts which characterize our society. These situations of conflict affect the church(es) not only from the outside, but they also take place inside the church(es).

It is widely held in the church that a Christian should not get involved in politics, and certainly the church should not. This is not a problem exclusively of Lutherans, since this idea can be found—with different variants and intensities—among all the churches, including the Roman Catholic, which traditionally has not been averse to direct political participation. Nevertheless, it was in the sphere of Lutheranism that the so-called "doctrine of the two kingdoms" arose where it has been used to legitimize such belief and posture. There are, however, remarkable variants, as the studies done by the Lutheran World Federation between 1970 and 1977 have shown. In the United States the doctrine has served (among other things) to corroborate the traditional liberal-bourgeois conception

of the separation between church and state. In a very unique adaptation the doctrine also served to conform the majority within German Christendom to the despotism and atrocities of the Nazi regime during the Third Reich. More recently this same doctrine was used as a legitimation for the rupture of Chilean Lutheranism, when a few groups started to give some concrete help and support to Chilean and foreign refugees during the time of the military government headed by Pinochet.

Nevertheless, it is important to point out that this problem does not rely only on the explicit formulation of a doctrine specifically named "The Two Kingdoms." For example, during

the 21 years of the military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985) an increasing number of voices identified with the government have denounced the undue intervention of the church (or, in a more sophisticated manner, of “sectors” of the church) in issues of the state’s competence in the economic, political, and social arena. The rationalizing character of this “pseudo-theological” reasoning becomes even clearer when we realize that the coup d’etat of 1964 took place precisely “in the name of God” and with the public support of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as (explicitly or implicitly) the corroboration of the Protestant churches. In other words, the reasoning regarding the division of competences between church and state took place only when the church (or meaningful and representative sectors of it) started to take a critical posture toward the state and the politics of the military regime. Thus the objectives of the rationalization became evident: to silence the voice of the church, which was then on the side of the weak and of the marginalized, and to hinder the action of the church in solidarity with these outcast people. That means that the purpose being pursued was to limit the church—its voice and, even more, its concrete performance—to a very circumscribed sphere, within its exclusive competence and realm of action. Obviously the economic, political, and social questions would be excluded from this realm. Thus the delimiting character of this pseudo-theological thought became perfectly clear. During the first years of the military regime (approximately until 1968) the dominant powers in Brazil did not ask for silence and compliance from the church but rather for its public support and its services in mobilizing people in order to maintain their secular privileges and system of social domination. As soon as the posture of the churches changed, a dichotomic conception of church and state arose.

Let us give a very brief look now at what has happened inside the churches. In 1964 the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops supported the military takeover. It only began to take a more critical posture after 1968. The Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB), in 1970, reacted very negatively and repudiated the decision of the Lutheran World Federation to transfer its fifth General Assembly, planned for Porto Alegre, to Evian, France. The LWF did this as part of a wide international movement of awareness of the tortures which were systematically going on in Brazil. The IECLB understood this as an affront to itself, and to the country, and ended up denying the reality of torture. It also decided not to participate in the Assembly which had been transferred to France.

However, in the same year of 1970, the IECLB gathered for its general convention in Curitiba, and issued a document—which became known as “The

Curitiba Document”—in which it made a critical analysis of the relationship between church and state regarding the violations of human rights, and the ideological aspects inherent in the introduction of the subject of Civics and Moral Education in the Brazilian educational system. Here we established the principle of the church watching over the state. So the “Curitiba Document” became the starting point of a process of change in the official statements of the IECLB in regard to economic, political, and social matters. Needless to say, we ought not to look only at the changes which have taken place in the statements of the churches, but much more at their concrete actions. Inside the Roman Catholic Church, for example, this new posture became evident even though it brought imprisonments, murders, and expellings of priests and other religious—examples, actually, of the suffering of the Brazilian people.

Why did these impressive changes take place? In my opinion we have to list factors in the internal life of the church, as well as factors external to it, in the surrounding Brazilian and Latin American reality. If we look at the end of the 50s, we observe that inside churches, specifically the Roman Catholic Church, there were growing numbers of new pastoral initiatives; for example, there were programs with workers, peasants, and university students. There was a reawakening of Christian lay action. In short, by the end of that decade there was, within the church, a process of re-strengthening and renewing while, precisely at the same time, a model of industrial development attending the interests of transnational corporations was being installed in Brazil. It is clear that antagonistic paths were beginning to develop.

We come to the 60s and note a broad renewal of the Roman Catholic Church. We can also observe this renewal among some Protestant denominations, but not as deep, courageous, and significant as in the Roman Catholic Church (taking into account the traditional Catholicism). Clearly there was a growing concern in the Roman Catholic Church and also among other churches for today's concrete needs of all the people. The World Council of Churches, for example, during the 60s, in the Conference on Church and Society (1966) became aware of the Third World problem and of structural injustice. Even in the developed world of Europe and of the United States, a theological renewal started to take shape in the 60s. It was characterized by a new attention and approach to the political, even though we, from a Latin American standpoint, see in those early efforts signs of developmental approaches and not of structural changes. For Latin America, I do not have to emphasize the tremendous relevance of the Episcopal Conference of Medellin and of the appearance of Liberation Theology which also took shape in the 60s.

If we look now at the global context in which the churches of the 60s lived, we observe that there were attempts at popular organization. Among the students, for example, there were large demonstrations and movements, not only in Brazil but throughout the whole world, from the United States to China, crossing France and Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless, parallel to this, if we pay attention to the Brazilian case, we notice something new and very fundamental: the military taking power. That means that while people talked and dreamed about an imminent revolution and liberation, Brazil was thrown into captivity. The passage to a military regime was experienced in the next years by a large

number of the other Latin American countries, therefore repeating the Brazilian example, and always with the support of the United States.

My very simple thesis, in relation to confronting the changes inside the churches and the economic, political, and social changes in our country, since the end of the 50s, is that while the churches were opening themselves, the regime was closing itself. While the churches were getting more and more on the side of the workers, the government was cutting the means of survival of the workers through the freezing of salaries. While the churches were providing space for the people's meetings, the political participation of the people was being repressed by force. So I repeat: while the churches were opening themselves, the political space, determined by the regime and by the government, was being closed.

It is indeed ironic that today it appears the opposite is happening: while there is an enlargement of the political space, there is also, at the same time, a closing process in the

churches, clearly seen in the Roman Catholic case (coming from Rome). The situation is, at any rate, very ambiguous. Almost all the South American countries got rid of their military regimes (except for Paraguay and the very terrible Chilean case) and were able to establish a liberal-bourgeois democratic regime. (Central America and the Caribbean would deserve a special analysis.) The end of an authoritarian, arbitrary, and repressive political regime was, in fact, a response to the strong commitment of the people and must, therefore, be seen as their achievement. On the other hand, however, social and economic change have not followed as yet. Only a few reforming measures, of a very limited scope, have taken place. The structures of social discrimination and of economic domination are still present. International dependence remains intact. That means that the national and international system of social injustice and of economic exploitation continues with the same cruelty. With a few concessions, mainly at the political level, the privileged classes have been able to stay in power and to preserve the social and economic structures which benefit them. From another perspective, since the political space has been enlarged, and direct repression has diminished in a very meaningful way, the groups which are looking for real structural transformations are facing the question of how to use this new political space given to them in order to achieve the goals of social and economic change. And it is necessary to emphasize that, in the midst of this situation, the churches are facing some big difficulties. They do not know what to do with the political freedom, and they also fear social and economic transformations. That means that they could well become again a legitimizing force of the status quo. And it is exactly in this position that the owners of power would like to see the churches again. Obviously this tendency is reinforced even more by the closing process going on inside the Roman Catholic Church, which is turning decisively against the most far reaching objectives of transformation. (This very role is being played by most of the U.S. missions working in Latin America, conservative as they are and subscribers to the economic interests of the United States.)

It is in the midst of this context that we want to examine the so-called doctrine of the two kingdoms. Can a dichotomous interpretation really be ascribed to Luther, or can we learn something from Luther on this precise matter?

II. CHURCH AND STATE UNDER THE KINGSHIP OF GOD

1. The Two Realms of God's Action.

I wish to state very clearly, beforehand, that the dichotomic dualism between church and state cannot be legitimately ascribed to Luther. It is true that he drew a distinction of competences between one and the other, but he has never separated them as autonomous identities. The distinction seemed to be an indispensable task for him. His purpose was very clear: to stand against the corruption of the church which had become a temporal and political power. This already comes through in the 95 Theses, where he condemns the traffic of indulgences. The church must offer the free forgiveness of God in Christ and not take advantage of it as a source of enrichment. This distinction can be found, very clearly stated, in the writing "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate" of 1520, in which he turns himself very radically against the political power of popes and bishops (who were often political authorities), against the system of feudal ecclesiastical properties, against the civil jurisprudence of the church, against its complicated and diversified fiscal

system, etc. All this created, in the name of the gospel, a concrete system of exploitation. We should not forget this situation of struggle when Luther points out the specific mission of the church as witness of the Word of God.

At the same time, we have to admit that there is in Luther a dignifying of the social and political office in its widest sense, even and particularly for Christians. Luther addresses himself to the Christian nobility, making them aware that their political service does not originate from their own autonomous and arbitrary competence, but from their universal priesthood as baptized Christians. Therefore, as Christians in a political office, they have to put into practice the necessary economic, political, and social reforms of the German nation. In an analogous way, Luther answered positively the question about the legitimacy and necessity of Christians taking on public jobs such as in the areas of law (for example, as judges), education, and even in the military.

So Luther never meant to make the church and the state autonomous entities. It was the responsibility of the political authorities to achieve economic, political, and social reforms which would also affect the church; and it was the task of the church to confront the political authorities with God's will. Thus the so-called "two kingdoms" can be distinguished regarding their duties and means, but they overlap each other in terms of space. Besides, they are together based on one foundation—God is the Lord of both—and they have a common goal—the good of all humanity. Church and state are therefore instrumentalized, limiting and binding themselves reciprocally. The state limits and regulates the church as a social institution (for example, in matters of property). The church proclaims God's will to the state (for example, criticizing its arbitrariness or calling it to work for social, political, and economic transformations). So Luther was always compelled to address the political authorities, be they princes, nobles, or city counselors, with much advice and economic, political, and social claims—which, by the way, were often wise but sometimes tragic and regrettable. But he never sought neutrality or abstention.

Thus Luther never thought about the "secularization" of the political sphere in the sense of the modern-liberal separation between church and state. It is indeed easy to show that when Luther talked about "secular authorities" he had in mind a definition of functions and not a determination of the autonomous nature of the political office. Besides, Luther did not go beyond the concept of "Christendom." In fact, he makes his distinction from inside this concept, although we could argue the meaning of this distinction with even more intensity at a time in which the system or project of "Christendom" has already ceased. Luther asks from the German nobility the improvement of the Christian estate. This deep bond becomes definitely clear in his educational positions. Luther wants to universalize the educational system, making it a task of the state, particularly of the city authorities. He imagines a new pedagogy, basically humanist. But he wants Christian education. The foundation for the teaching should be the Bible. And he classifies the teacher's work as belonging to the spiritual realm.

At this point I would like to insert an observation about the Latin American Theology of Liberation, many times—both by Catholics and Lutherans—mistakenly considered to be antagonistic to Luther's vision. It is true that they have taken contrary paths, since their starting points are different. On the other hand, they have similar objectives, taking into account their historical differences.

One elementary and very well-known aspect of Liberation Theology is the overcoming of the distinction of planes: the natural and the supernatural. Consequently, the affirmation of only one historical process is essential, within which Christians play a part through their experience and faith. In some places this theoretical affirmation is understood and used in the context of developing a renewal of the church that we should classify as reformist (and thus not revolutionary). It requires the willingness of Christians to participate politically but does not consider the deep conflicts connected with the historical process. Such a praxis employs the term “liberation” but does not succeed in convincingly explaining “from what” people are to be liberated. It is evident that this praxis is induced by the process and the theology of liberation, but it does not do justice to the central intention of that theology, which not only talks about “one history only” but also reflects dialectically upon this history as a process marked by antagonism, conflict, and transformation.

During the past years and even today Liberation Theology has had to clarify this aspect better than it did in the beginning, emphasizing the overcoming of the model of the “two planes.” However, any attentive observer or student clearly recognizes that the dialectic perception was not at all missed by Gustavo Gutierrez in his first book,¹ neither in his analysis of economic-social dependence nor in the placing of “denouncing and announcing” in the very definition of Liberation Theology as a reflection on the experience of Latin American men and women in the process of liberation, which consists of the abolition of unjust structures and the construction of a fraternal order.

¹Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1973).

In conclusion, Liberation Theology emphasizes that there is only one history, but this is marked by conflicts, and thus distinctions are also necessary within this history. And it is just such a dialectic that we find in Luther’s writings too.

2. Models of Relationship Between Church and State

My reinterpretation of Luther’s position will become even clearer by giving some examples of the relationship between church and state in various models. Permit me to do so in a schematic way:

A. Model of Separation between Church and State

| <u>State</u> | <u>Church</u> |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Secular | Spiritual |
| Social order | Ecclesiastical order |
| Public order | Private order |
| Body | Soul |
| The power of the sword | The power of the Word |
| Law | Gospel |
| Repression | Love |
| Punishment | Forgiveness |

In this first model, the exemplifying terms of which we could multiply still further state and church are seen as separate powers, as if in tight compartments. Each one has its own field of duties, completely separated from the other. Generally it is maintained that the state is responsible for the secular order and the church for the spiritual order. Or the church is supposed to deal with its internal organization, while the state regulates society as a whole. On one side we have the public order under the state's responsibility, on the other the private and intimate order which the church must sustain. In a simpler way it is said that the state takes care of the body, whereas the church nourishes the soul. The church uses the Word, the state the sword. The church preaches the gospel, the state reinforces the law. The state has to watch over the order and punish the delinquents; the church is the instrument of love and forgiveness.

We have to admit that this model of separation has often been defended by Protestant churches or movements, as well as by secular movements of liberal character. However, we must also observe that this model of separation can take *two forms*, one apparently excluding the other, but fundamentally based on the same premise of separation between church and state.

The *first* variant we could call the demonization of politics. It makes the following claim: everything belonging to the political sphere is fundamentally and existentially characteristic of the fallen world, an expression of human sin or even the work of the devil. Politics is something dirty, and renewed Christians should not take any part in it. They already live in a regenerated world in the midst of the old and fallen one and consequently have the new life, which they might endanger by taking part in politics. So they confine themselves to their private sphere or to the company of the communion of the redeemed. Probably we can find persons or constituted groups with this line of thinking and posture in all churches including the Roman Catholic, but it is doubtlessly more frequent

in Protestant churches or in sectarian groups of apocalyptic character. This tendency is particularly emphasized in the Pentecostal movement even if we should beware of generalizations. In any case, such groups demonize the political order of the world, and consequently the state, taking refuge in the spiritual order. They tolerate the world, since to live in it is inevitable, but they do so in expectation of heaven.

The *second* variant is the autonomy of politics. Admittedly it seems antagonistic, but paradoxically it leads to the same consequences. This variant shares the basic vision that the competencies of state and church are clearly separated. But it does not demonize politics. On the contrary, it expresses a clearly optimistic view of the state. The state is considered to be a part of God's creation and thus good. The same is true about the social and economic sphere. But even so, the church should never interfere with the specific realm of the state. This is due to the fact that politics, the economy, and society are governed by their proper laws. They have an inherent rationality whose rules our technical knowledge should discover and apply. The church would pervert everything if it raised questions of its own spiritual order—such as the gospel, the will of God, and the spirit of Christ—in these specific and technical fields. The church may talk about God, Jesus Christ, and the gospel in a private realm, awaken and strengthen personal morality, and promote the unity of the family, but it should not tackle political, social, or economic questions which should be taken care of by the technical understanding. These realms are considered autonomous, and the church is not allowed to invade them.

This variant is especially tempting to Protestantism. Lutheranism experienced the tragedy of this view in Germany when these same arguments were used in an attempt to legitimize the Nazi ideology and the national-socialistic system of the Third Reich (1933-1945). It seems to me that this view can also be found widely in the United States, a country where the principle of separation between church and state became firmly established, permitting a capitalism to develop with its own rationality, justified by the ideological approval of such a theological concept. This, however, does not impede North American missionary expansion from taking place in the troubled waters of the international implantation of a technocratic capitalism that is insensitive and exploitive. Both sides, even separated, walk hand in hand.

Thus we observe that the two variants share the premise of separation between church and state. Consequently both serve as legitimation of the “status quo.” It is unimportant if one of them divinizes and the other demonizes politics: both of them leave it untouched, be it through the contingent form in which it presents itself, or through the rationale that guides it.

B. Models of Alliance Between Church and State

The visualization of this model is very simple.

State + Church

At first glance this model seems to be contrary to the first one. That is, however, a mistake because here too there is a division of spheres of competence. The difference lies only in the fact that the separation is transformed into cooperation: active, conscious, and deliberate cooperation. The fields of action

are divided, but both sides work together toward a common project, for the sake of which the alliance was made, one task falling to the church, another to the state. In this model, moreover, we can distinguish two variants, because when two bodies start to cooperate, the question of how to divide the tasks inevitably arises. Who shall have the power? Who shall decide over whom? In the final analysis: Will the church dominate the state, or the state the church? Studying the history of the church one encounters occasions when this question was very acute, as for example during long periods in the Middle Ages, during the conflicts between the pope and the emperor. Church and state are not two complementary entities on the same level but one dominates the other, restricting and exploiting it.

The first case, the one in which the church dominates the state, is characterized by the authority of spiritual power over secular power. The state is submissive to the church which wields the “sword” as well as the “Word,” and the state complies with its task by delegation and commission of the church, being controlled by her. We had this kind of relationship during certain periods in the Middle Ages. Today the best example of this model has to be taken from outside Christianity, i.e., in the Shiite Islamism controlling the state and politics in Iran. It would be very difficult, if not impossible, to find similar examples in present day Christianity. This shows that the modern evolution of the state and the process of secularization either leads to the separation of church and state or is likely to invert the parts, making the church dependent upon the state. The state is the decisive power that either grants the church a specific but limited field

of action or employs it to strengthen its power and legitimize its ideology.

I shall give two examples of this second variant in which the state dominates the church. The first refers to Lutheran churches: Luther in his time found it necessary to protest against the authority of the church over the state. Historical development brought along the rupture and division of Christianity into two ecclesiastical bodies—against Luther’s desire, who desired an evangelical restoration within the one church of Christ. And the task of reformation was carried out in Germany by the nobility, the princes, who could count upon Luther’s support. Measures that Luther had meant to be only temporary were implanted in a definite way, such as the establishment of territorial churches in which the religious affiliation of the citizens was determined by the option of the ruler (the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*), confiscation and redestination of ecclesiastical property and even the appointment of priests and bishops by the state, measures that lasted until relatively recent days. Even if the relationship between church and state in modern time is mostly defined in terms of division, there still exist Lutheran state churches, as in the Scandinavian countries.

I take the second example from Latin American history. The history of its colonization is marked by the alliance between state and church. There was certainly much tension, and also resistance, but the dominant project was exactly that of Christendom, in which state and church were allies. The sword and the Word formed an alliance in order to conquer this continent and its indigenous population and even to import black slaves. This alliance is also one of the state’s power over the church. The model was that of Christendom that connected the economic and political system of colonization with the implantation of Iberian

culture and Christian faith. Through the patronage system it was the state that was in charge of sending out missionaries and, consequently, it could also call them back home in case of conflicts.

I would like to make one more comparison between the model of separation and that of alliance between church and state. Both of them, in whichever variant, ultimately have the same result, i.e., to strengthen the interests of power. Be it putting the church in direct service, as in the last example, be it limiting the church to a private, spiritual sphere, or be it granting the state autonomy, in all these cases the dominating interests are always furthered. If we want to find out the principles for political action of Christians and churches we shall have to consider the question from yet another angle in pursuit of a really alternative model. I suggest the following question: Who are the great absent ones in the schemes so far presented? The people is one, God is the other. In these models, institutions are dealt with—the state and the church and their relationship—but no mention is made as to the concrete necessities of the people nor the actual will of God. The next model will, thus, depart from exactly this point:

C. Model of the Relationship Between Church and State in the Context of the Struggle for Justice

Here I shall try to schematize Luther’s position (I shall simplify and actualize a diagram elaborated by Ulrich Duchrow²—see next page). The relationship became more complex exactly because the church and the state as well as human beings have to find their proper places in God’s struggle against the idols, and in favor of the implantation of the kingdom of God.

Let us first have a look at the “frame” of the chart, i.e., the superior and inferior lines, as

well as the columns to the right and the left.

The situation of creation is in no way characterized by neutrality. On the contrary, creation is a disputed territory; humanity lives in a situation of conflict. The ongoing results are between God and the idols (in traditional language: the devil). It is not a matter of a dualist Manicheism, because the result of the dispute is already known. God is superior to the idols, and his is the victory (Christus Victor). The final result will be the kingdom of God, the new heaven and the new earth. But, nevertheless, creation and humanity still continue to be objects of struggle. There are a lot of terms that could characterize what is at stake. We have selected some of these possible terms in the side columns. God defends justice against injustice, truth against lie, liberation against domination, and so on. The final outcome is no longer uncertain, since it became reality in the death and resurrection of Christ, to whom the idols (the devil) are subdued. (This terminology by Luther is a heritage of an apocalyptic-Augustinian tradition. On the other hand, the distinction between “secular” and “spiritual” emanates from the medieval question of the “two swords” and only in Luther’s writings has significance in the context of the major duality between God and the devil.)

²Ulrich Duchrow, “Introduction,” *Lutheran Churches—Salt or Mirror of Society?*, ed. U. Duchrow (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1977) 6-7.

| GOD | CREATION/HUMANITY | | DEVIL/IDOLS |
|--------------------|--|--|----------------|
| Justice | New reality | Old reality | Injustice |
| Truth | + (Christus victor) | | Lie |
| Hope | 1. The human being | | Despair |
| Faith | <i>(simul justus et peccator)</i> | | Sin |
| Conscience | Faith | Disbelief | Alienation |
| Love | Hope | Despair | Exploitation |
| Liberty | Love | Egoism | Oppression |
| Liberation | 2. The church | | Domination |
| Fraternity | (word and sacraments) | | Egoism |
| Equality | Communion | Instrument of | Discrimination |
| Resurrection | and | | Death |
| etc. | Liberation | Domination | etc. |
| | 3. The state | | |
| | (coercive power, “sword,” rationality) | | |
| | Defense of the oppressed | Instrument of the oppressors | |
| | Social well- being | Dominating interests | |
| | Participative and equalitarian society | Divided and discriminating society | |
| THE KINGDOM OF GOD | | NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH | |

At present this battle does not take place in a nonhistorical manner or without human participation. History itself is the battlefield of this fight in which humanity and creation are inevitably involved. They are indeed the objects of the dispute. They are not mere spectators but participants. They may be instruments of oppression or liberation. Faith centered in Jesus Christ, dead but risen, gives the certainty of victory even if, at the moment, this seems to be “against appearance” (Luther, explanation of the First Commandment in the Large Catechism). Against the apparent victory of injustice, despair, oppression and death, faith clings to reality and to the divine promises, trusting the supremacy of justice, hope, liberation, and life, This conflictive situation I have tried to show in the central columns of the chart. History as well as the human being turn out to be the scene of the conflict between justice and injustice, in the chart called “new” and “old” reality. The whole present reality is penetrated by the “new” and the “old.” And when we evaluate the human being, the church and the state, we should always ask this question: What are they serving, the “old” or the “new” reality? Of course, “old” and “new” here are terms of quality, not of chronological order. “Old” is everything that, in light of God’s victory, is doomed to disappear, even if it is very active and apparently prevailing, “New” is everything that, in light of the kingdom of God, is predestined to triumph, even if at present it seems very weak.

Frequently the dividing line between the “old” and the “new” passes through the whole of reality, the proper human being, the church and the state. This is shown on the chart through the broken line. As long as we still expect the kingdom to come in its fullness, no one, no institution whatsoever, including the church, can claim to be totally characterized by the “new.” On the other hand, no one needs to resign in confrontation with the “old” because, since the advent of Christ, the kingdom is already present, even though it is contested by that which has been overcome. At each step we suffer the anguish of the “old” reality but also see signs of the “new.”

Everywhere the old and new realities are manifest, coincident and antagonistic. The relationship between church and state which we have been considering is too narrow if it is not set into the greater sphere of God’s will and antagonistic reality. Thus what is of interest is not the church-state relationship in itself by how the cause of justice goes. Considering persons and institutions we always have to ask whether they represent the “new” or the “old” reality, whether they favor justice or protect injustice.

Within this outline we can imagine many different varieties. It may be that we have such an oppressive and disturbed situation that both the church and the state are on the side of the “old” reality. They form a “holy” alliance as instruments of domination. In the second place we could imagine an inverse situation in which the church is fundamentally an instrument of communion and liberation, at the same time as the state defends the oppressed and promotes a participative and egalitarian society. Since we are still on the way to the consummated kingdom of God, we will not find this possibility in a “pure” manner but always only approximately, requiring the permanent, critical watching of both institutions. In the third place we can imagine a perverted state, an instrument of domination, and a church really serving Christ and thus in critical resistance to the state. But we can also imagine the opposite, in which the church continues to defend the old reality, desires its institutional preservation, and is built on privileges, while the state is the instrument of the popular wish for transformation and the construction of a just society. However, pure cases are difficult to find. Usually there will be a complex situation

involving the people, the church, the state, and the institutions. Ultimately it is always a matter of discovering one's place in the midst of God's fight, against the idols and for his kingdom.

3. The Criticism of Secular Power

Even if the image of a Luther subservient to the political authorities, especially the princes, is very widespread, one can also find much harsh criticism against them in his writings. I would like to exemplify this through Luther's interpretation of Psalm 82, in 1530, a text which I, significantly, did not find in any of the popular editions or selections in Spanish, English, or German.³

According to Luther, this is a political psalm. The first verse describes God as "standing up," i.e., as a judge, in the midst of the congregation, to judge the "gods," i.e., the political authorities, the princes. Their judgment takes place in

³I am using the edition, *D. Martin Luthers Psalmen-Auslegung*, ed. Erwin Mühlhaupt (3 vols.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959-1965) 2.466-485. Translations mine.

the congregation, so it is the church which transmits the judgment of the Word of God concerning the political authorities. In his introduction Luther shows how the princes, after having been liberated from the pope's tutelage through the Reformation's proclamation of the gospel, now want to be liberated from the gospel itself in order to, in their turn, be the dominators and even put themselves above God. They want to shut the mouths of the preachers who criticize them, accusing the preachers of being "revolutionaries" and "agitators." But the gospel is revolutionary, and it is part of the preacher's task to denounce that which is evil.

Luther understands 82:2-4 as a description of the political office. Each ruler should have them written "in his room, over his bed, at his desk, and also on his clothes." Luther distinguishes three tasks: first, to guarantee the free preaching of the gospel, precisely critical and prophetic preaching; second, to defend justice and the rights of the weak and abandoned; and finally, to guarantee the order, peace, and protection of the poor. The sequence of the tasks is not coincidental. The free preaching comes in the first place so that through its criticism the political power might be permanently limited, contested in its claim to the absolute, and reminded of its duties. In the second place comes the establishment of right and justice as a premise to the execution of the task of maintaining order, peace, and protection. And all these tasks, according to the Psalm, are not done to serve the rulers but are always aimed at the weak, the abandoned, the poor, the wronged, the oppressed.

According to Luther, the princes have seriously harmed their rights by getting rid of the gospel, putting themselves above God, governing in their own favor, and oppressing the people. Therefore, it is necessary that the preachers serve as the voice of God's judgment. At this point Luther begins to criticize the various kinds of preachers who try to avoid this mission. Among these he distinguishes three kinds. First, there are the unfaithful and lazy ones who prefer to keep silent due to accommodation and fear of retaliation; second, there are the flatterers, who out of self-interest and connivance support the political regime. Finally, there are the slanderers, the ones who prefer to criticize behind the back, privately, but do not have the courage to do so publicly in the worship service. Against all these Luther sets the true preacher, who does not have his own interests to defend and who does not let himself be compromised out of fear of personal

consequences and persecution that he may have to suffer. I quote: “Observe the consequence of this first verse: it is not subversive to criticize authorities, when it is done in the way here described, i.e., freely, publicly, and honestly, in the ordained ministry and through the Word of God. On the contrary, it is a rare, noble and praiseworthy virtue, yes, an especially great service to God, as the Psalm here testifies.” Truly, with Luther it is impossible to legitimize the total autonomy of politicians and the political inaction of the church, restricting itself to the so-called spiritual realm.

III. CONCLUSION: THE LIBERATING KINGSHIP OF GOD IN THE CHURCH AND POLITICS OF LATIN AMERICA

In conclusion, the dualist vision of the so-called “doctrine of the two kingdoms” that separates the gospel and politics, church and state, cannot rightfully be ascribed to Luther. To be sure, he does make a distinction as to their competencies, which is of undeniable importance to us. To have broken the sovereignty of the ecclesiastical authorities over the political realm was, without doubt, a historical liberating contribution of Luther. It is equally necessary to resist every intention or system of absolute autonomy of the political realm. In fact, the situation of the modern states is not at all similar to that of ecclesiastical sovereignty over politics, but much more analogous to the situation described by Luther in his explanation to Psalm 82: the autonomy and secularization of the state. Consequently, Luther’s admonitions about obedience to the secular authorities are of less immediate interest, while his call for criticism and resistance to injustice and oppression gains relevance.

The current importance of this distinction of competencies can be exemplified by the political practice of the “Christian base communities.” Clodovis Boff explains how these base communities played an important political part during the many years of dictatorship.⁴ As communities of faith they were the only possibility for organization of the people. He shows how they now relate to other groups of liberation in a historic hour as other possibilities of popular organization develop, such as local concerns groups, labor unions among rural and factory workers, and even popular political parties. The difficulties experienced by a base community in this changed context are well known, ranging from the fear of foreign ideological and/or political infiltration to the fear of losing control of the popular claims and struggles. The most mature communities, however, are discovering that they are a place of faith in which their participants are strengthened to action within the popular organizations outside the walls of the ecclesiastical community. Many times there is a close personal and group connection between the base communities and the popular organizations, but there is a division of competencies.

Which tasks belong to the base communities and are not transferrable because they belong intrinsically to them? C. Boff mentions the celebration of faith and the education of faith. Protestant terminology would speak of worship and Christian education. We would further add the propagation of faith, i.e., the proclamation and mission which Boff omitted, probably on the false presumption that the whole Latin American population is already Christian and made up of believers (if this were true, it would mean a remarkable success of the colonial project of Christendom). Worship, Christian education, mission—celebration of faith, education of faith, proclamation of faith—these make up the Christian community which finds its fountain of life in the gospel of Jesus Christ and its historical reality in the practice of the liberation of the poor.

Let us look at the relevance of the political action related to the struggle of justice against oppression. First, Latin American oppressive governments are more and more confronted with not only the critical voice of the churches (if

⁴Clodovis Boff, "CEBs e Prática de Libertação," *REB* 40/160 (December 1980) 595-625.

they are true to their prophetic calling) but also directly with the force of popular organization. Even if they manage to win a small part of society for themselves, a part becoming more and more a minority, at the same time they have to face up to a growing movement of claims and demonstration for justice among workers, rural laborers, civil servants, etc.

Second, in the period of transition from military governments to civil ones, the church has an opportunity to rediscover its proximity to the people and its historical task together with the people. It need not anymore be the voice of the voiceless as during the years of harsh repression and captivity. The question that the churches face now is: Are they going to be satisfied being an auxiliary voice of a people that is learning to speak its own language? They need not be the voice of the voiceless anymore but could rejoice at the words of the people themselves and re-emphasize them. Consequently, the churches have completely ceased to be the only place for popular organization that they used to be in some Latin American countries in the dark years of repression. Are they going to be content in being "only" a support for these forms of organization that the people are trying out in popular movements, labor unions, political parties, etc.? Or are they going to be fearful of giving up the control of these organizations of the people?

The question of making the churches instruments of other groups may be a real problem, and they have the right, like every other organized group, to be critical and watchful. However, the mark of the real church is not prudence but courage; not withdrawal behind one's own walls but missionary outreach; not accommodation with the mighty rulers but solidarity with the oppressed. Therefore it will be a reason for gratitude and joy if Christians and the churches become simply an auxiliary voice instead of a voice speaking in the name of the others; a supporting channel for the organization of the people instead of an organism substituting for the people.

Third, with even less right could the churches aim at commanding the people and, consequently, dominating the state some time in the future at a favorable moment. That is why we have to reject those ideas which reappear in official Catholicism that the churches should patronize a model of their own, a political, social, and economic model of Christian inspiration and maybe exclusive authority of the churches. This is the old longing for the times of the powerful church. The fundamental option, as we have seen, is not between church and state but between justice and injustice, truth and lie, liberty and oppression, life and death. With this option, the gospel confronts both the church and the state. Thus the problem is not to defend the state from the interference of the church nor to protect the church from the control of the state. It is rather to participate concretely in the fight in favor of justice and rights, of democracy and popular participation, be it in the order of the state or in that of the churches themselves.

We have come to our final conclusion. For the concrete action of Christians, the forms of adaptation to current political-social-economic structures are discarded from the outset, be they the dualist variants of separation or the models of coordination and alliance. Only a dialectic posture of distinction and critical participation is permitted by their faith. The concrete action,

understanding, will still be submitted to variations according to the actual historical situation and commanded by political practice. For many Christians only a critical-constructive participation would be permissible in any situation. This is a nonhistorical vision. The critical-constructive participation is legitimate in situations such as the current one in Nicaragua, but it is not advisable when the ruling system is irremediably corrupted by injustice and oppression. As an alternative we can consider the critical-passive resistance adequate when the fight for active transformation is hindered by repressive violence. To maintain a critical conscience throughout captivity is a task of extraordinary importance.

Finally, at this time when spaces for a direct transforming participation are opened or achieved, the option imposed on the Christian conscience is that of a critical-active transformation.⁵ This type of action is required on two conditions: (1) the recognition of a fundamentally unjust system characterized by social oppression, and (2) concrete possibilities of action given by the historical process and the circumstantial moment. It seems to me that presently both these conditions are given in most Latin American countries. It still remains to call attention to the concrete means of action at the present moment. This means is nothing else than the organizations of the people such as the local concerns movements, the labor unions, the rural laborers' associations, and the political popular parties. Thus I conclude that supporting the organizations of the people, participating in them, aiming at the transformation of the established oppressive system, is the political praxis (action) that the will of God demands from Christians and the churches in most Latin American countries today.

⁵I have taken this typology from U. Duchrow, "Concluding Section," *Lutheran Churches—Salt or Mirror of Society?*, 300-307.