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Response: Tat for Teat

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introduced as part of this discussion.

3. Compare Lee Hardy, *The Fabric of This World: Inquiries into Calling, Career Choice, and the Design of Human Work* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1990) pp. 124-185.

4. My first encounter with Lutherans like most of my encounters over the years was very positive on the intellectual and personal level. Dr. James Unglaube was the young dean who hired me and who encouraged interdisciplinary study (which included theology), epistemological reflection and a reflection on the nature of

Christian higher education. Unglaube, as most of my readers will know, went on to the LCA and later ELCA Division of Higher Education where he vigorously encouraged the kind of dialogue I have been proposing ought to take place.

5. Robert Benne is critical of what he perceives as a shift from an Enlightenment view of the autonomy of reason to a postmodernist relativism. See Benne p. 8. It may be that the Lutheran two-kingdom is compatible with some version of both the Enlightenment and postmodernism. For this to be demonstrated, however, requires articulation and defense.

Tat for Teat: Ratke Responds¹

David C. Ratke

When I first read Richard Von Dohlen's critique of the doctrine of the two kingdoms (which I prefer to think of as "two realms") I wondered if I wrote what I had meant. Certainly it did not seem as if Von Dohlen had read what I had written. As I read further I realized that Von Dohlen and I use different languages which arise partly, I think, from different academic disciplines and partly from different theological traditions. I'll begin by saying that I agree with much of what Von Dohlen says although I think he misunderstands me, Luther, and Luther's doctrine of the two realms.

Von Dohlen argues that "it is a potential disaster for social ethics, particularly Christian social ethics which by definition rests on the premise that the Gospel does have implications for the ethical decisions that we make in society and the institutional frameworks with which those decisions are made" (p.1). I agree. Moreover, Luther agrees. It is for this reason that he responded to rulers who asked him how they might exercise their powers and **David Ratke is an assistant professor of religion at Lenoir-Rhyne College in Hickory, North Carolina.**

authority as Christians. It is for this reason that he wrote "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved." His charge to princes and rulers in *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, his *On the Freedom of a Christian*, and *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed*

are all attempts to combat the prevailing notion that to be secular was to be godless and somehow less than Christian. These writings were attempts to combat the prevailing notion that, for example, the pope had an authority (and holiness) higher and better than that of secular rulers. Von Dohlen, although not using Luther, makes Luther's point well.

Von Dohlen, by way of a personal illustration, makes the point "that we live in what sociologists refer to as a highly structurally differentiated society. We all play many roles and live in many institutional structures or, if you prefer, realm. Each of these structures has its own autonomy, so to speak but they are all interdependent in exceedingly complex ways" (p.2). Luther, I suggest, was aware that he was living in a society that was, or at least becoming,

“structurally differentiated.” I won’t try to argue that it was “highly differentiated”; nonetheless it was differentiated and increasingly so. Can a man whose father began life as the son of a peasant farmer and then moved to a new town to become a miner, and then the owner of a mine as well as a councilor in the city government really be unaware—of the differentiation in society? I think not.

Von Dohlen states that “Luther’s sociology may have been appropriate for Luther’s time” (p.2). I’m not sure what Von Dohlen means when he speaks of “Luther’s sociology” so I’ll leave it to him to tell me what that might be. For insight as to the question of Luther’s sociology, I’m tempted to turn to Luther’s response to Assa von Kram, a professional soldier. Here Luther affirms the legitimacy of the soldiering vocation.⁶ It can be abused to be sure, but this misuse does not invalidate it any more than the misuse of the professorial office invalidates that vocation. Indeed the soldiering profession, Luther goes on to explain (borrowing Von Dohlen’s words), is “hellishly complex [and] frustratingly complicated.” Can killing—even in the name of peace and freedom—be justified? If a ruler is wicked and evil ought a soldier serve that ruler? Ought a soldier serve in a war that is apparently unjustifiable? These are the questions which Luther struggles to address. To me these are hellish and frustrating questions; in any case they certainly are not easy. Luther concludes that a soldier must take his faith seriously enough to question authority.⁷ At the same time a soldier’s trust and confidence are ultimately in God: “When the battle begins ... [soldiers] should simply commend themselves to God’s grace and adopt a Christian attitude.” The soldier should then pray: In “faith I will live and die, fight, and do everything else.”⁸ Luther does not seek to evade the questions, nor does he even counsel others to evade hellish and frustratingly complex questions. He does however say, that at the end of the day when one has struggled with such questions, our trust and our confidence are not in our faculties of reason but in the One who has given us these faculties.

It is precisely for this reason that Luther would likely agree with Von Dohlen in saying, “I believe that a theology informed by a sociology (or a psychology, economics, politics, jurisprudence, etc.) which in turn is informed by theology will better enable us to understand and attack some of the problems and alleviate them” (p. 1). It is precisely for this reason that Luther tells Christians that they ought to support schools and educate their children. Luther encourages parents to send their children to schools to be educated so that they can be proud of how their child “maintains and helps to further the whole worldly government. ... It ought to be a matter of great honor and satisfaction for you to see your son an angel in

the empire and an apostle of the emperor, a cornerstone and bulwark of temporal peace on earth, knowing for a certainty that God so regards it and that it is really true. For although such works do not make men righteous before God or save them, nevertheless, it is a joy and comfort to know that their works please God so very much—and the more so when such a man is a believer and is in the kingdom of Christ.”⁹

Faith or theology is important; also important is that faith and reason are in conversation and dialogue with each other. Faith ought to impel the believer to godly service in society.

Von Dohlen charges that “the Lutheran two-kingdom doctrine assumes an academic culture characterized by epistemological monism that is neutral with respect to anthropological assumptions” (p.2). I was raised on small words so I’m not exactly sure what Von Dohlen means. If he means that Lutherans or at least the two kingdoms doctrine thinks that academic culture is neutral or that it is neutral about its assumptions about humanity and God, about nature and the cosmos, then I think that I and others have misled Von Dohlen. Luther is pretty clear in his “Heidelberg Disputation” about his reservations concerning the neutrality of reason. Reason can accomplish some things, but it can seriously mislead. For this reason Luther says that what we can say about God always has to be said in light of the cross.

Luther, as near as I can determine, makes no claims about epistemology with respect to a Christian’s role in (secular) society. He merely argues that a Christian lives in the world, the world is good because God created it, and therefore a Christian ought to contribute to the welfare of God’s good creation by participating with God in fighting against the forces which threaten to upset good order and peace. If anything Luther acknowledges the plurality of epistemologies and the possibility of a single view of reason: “Both reason and natural law belong to God’s creation and therefore are not separated from God’s will.”¹⁰ Luther’s point in writings like *On Temporal Authority*, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate*, and *The Freedom of a Christian* is that there is more than one valid and legitimate epistemology. Each discipline has its own legitimate epistemology. The Christian’s task if anything is to ask “what is the gospel?” and “how *might* it be proclaimed?” No more!

Von Dohlen rightly condemns the oft heard argument from some Lutherans that “there were a separate sociological realm with distinct institutional structures and ethical norms that had no direct bearing on the gospel. This was surely nonsense. They sometimes talked as if we were living in an age where there was cultural consensus about the nature of

truth and justice. This too was patently false" (p.3). It's hard to know what to say in response. I agree with Von Dohlen. Luther's doctrine of the two realms has too often been misunderstood by both its proponents and its opponents. The gospel does not have a bearing on other "other" sociological realms and vice versa. To bifurcate in this way is to introduce an unnecessary dualistic element. This is what occasions Luther's thinking on two realms. Christians have a two-fold existence. Both the secular and the sacred make legitimate claims on the Christian's earthly existence.

The point of the two realms doctrine is to firstly acknowledge the duality of our earthly existence and secondly the ambiguity of earthly phenomena and knowledge. What is the meaning of "2+2=4" or 7+5=12"? Christians are called within their individual vocations to wrestle with the significance of these truths; and, as Christians, they are called to wrestle with the "gospel" within these truths. Both facets of our existence are important; neither can be abandoned without imperiling the identity of the individual who is created uniquely in God's image.

Lutherans like Granger Westberg have been instrumental in the establishment and management of institutions like the Parkridge Center for Health, Faith and Ethics because they take seriously their dual identity or citizenship. Our identity is not as either Christian or academic, but as Christian *and* scholar. To assume otherwise and to understand Luther differently is to bifurcate something which was intended to combat a bifurcated dualism. Von Dohlen in his advocacy for a wholistic understanding of the human and of scholarship is to be commended. On the basis of Luther's understanding of the two realms, I gladly and willingly volunteer to combat those forces which

attempt to bifurcate.

NOTES

1. The title of the copy of the Von Dohlen paper I originally received was "A Fifth Tit on a Cow: The Irrelevance of the Lutheran Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms for Academic Life." I found out that there was a discussion among my colleagues as to whether it ought to be a "teat" or a "tit" (the slang variation of the same term). Happily I missed that discussion.
2. There is no doubt that the military profession is in itself a legitimate and godly calling and occupation" (LW 46:100).
3. In response to the question of whether a soldier ought to go to war when his lord is wrong Luther says, "if you know for sure that he is wrong, then you should fear God rather than men ... and you should neither fight nor serve, for you cannot have a good conscience before God." (LW 46:130)
4. LW 46:135-6
5. "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School." in LW 46:240-1
6. Walther von Loewenich, *Martin Luther: The Man and his Work*, trans. Lawrence W. Denef (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982), 239. Von Loewenich sets up this assertion by noting that both the secular and sacred authorities "have their unity in God's decree" and that "the kingdom of Christ could not endure in this world without temporal authority—without defense against evil and efforts made toward earthly peace. On the other hand, spiritual authority assists temporal authority by proclaiming God's will to government and to all classes...God rules in both kingdoms (through both authorities) ... It is possible for love to be operating through the harsh realities of justice, punishment, the death penalty, 'wrath', and the 'sword' ... God must at times carry out his 'proper work' only under the form of his 'alien work'—his love under wrath, his grace under judgment" (237-9).