

Luther and Society

Two Kingdoms or Three Estates?

Tradition and Experience in Luther's Social Teaching

By Thomas A. Brady Jr.

I

Pity the poor neophyte who surveys the landscape of modern Luther studies! Here stand the great editions, range on range, topped by the frowning Karakoram of the Weimarana, which dares the scholar to mount its slopes. There is the scarred plain of criticism, swept by barrages from masked batteries, whose weight of metal crashes down on the unwary explorer. Further on are the dry beds of bibliography, down which rush without warning, once a year, the floods of new literature. The wanderer longs for a quiet vale, furnished modestly with a few texts and aids, and watered by brevity, clarity and simplicity. A forbidding – but not forbidden – landscape.

One sector of this landscape is called »Luther and society«, and a glance across it today does not justify the confidence expressed by Erich Vogelsang in 1938: »The historical-critical principles, which have come truly to dominate Luther studies only since the World War, have opened our eyes on the fundamental error of the older scholarship: one either read one's own ideas into Luther or listened for him to speak them.«¹ In this sector the fruit of the »Luther Renaissance«² of the interwar era has failed to ripen. This is especially so of the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms – so it was named around 1930³ – about which scholarship has produced no firm agreement.⁴ It is said, on the one hand, to be a

1 Erich VOGELSANG: *Der gefährliche Luther*. ARG 35 (1938), 167.

2 I use this controversial term approximately in the sense given it by Karl KUPISCH: *The »Lutheran Renaissance«*. *Journal of contemporary history* 2 (LO 1967) No. 4, 39–49.

3 Wolfgang HUBER: *Barmer Theologische Erklärung und Zweireichelehre: historisch-systematische Überlegungen*. In: *Zwei Reiche und Regimente: Ideologie oder evangelische Orientierung?*; internationale Fall- und Hintergrundstudien zur Theologie und Praxis lutherischer Kirchen im 20. Jahrhundert. GÜ 1977, 39f, credits Emanuel Hirsch with coinage of this term in 1934; but Heiko A. Oberman informs me, that an example from 1929 has been found.

4 This is clear in the anthology REICH GOTTES UND WELT: *die Lehre Luthers von den zwei*

»necessary« component of Luther's theology,⁵ though no one, on the other hand, can demonstrate consistent relationships among such phrases of Luther's as »two kingdoms«, »two governments« and »two orders«.⁶ This failure marks the limits of a purely exegetical approach to the topic.

A more broadly hermeneutical difficulty is posed by the quest for Luther's relevance to contemporary life and thought, for *Lutherus pro nobis*, which has so often left Luther studies hanging between a perceived need for inspiration and warnings against hasty modernization. The dilemma admits only of an *a priori* solution, and mine is to lay aside the search for *Lutherus pro nobis* and to seek him out in his sixteenth-century German habitat. Let us then free Luther – to borrow a metaphor from Albert Schweitzer – from the rock of twentieth-century Europe's discontents and allow him to walk right past us, back into his own age.⁷ We can observe him there, however, only after we demolish the »three walls« of modernized interpretations from Albrecht Ritschl to Karl Holl and beyond.⁸

Reichen/ ed. by Heinz-Horst Schrey. DA 1969. Harald DIEM's Tübingen dissertation »Luthers Lehre von den zwei Reichen« (M 1938), has been reprinted in *ZUR ZWEI-REICHE-LEHRE LUTHERS*/ ed. by Gerhard Sauter. M 1973, 1–173, which also contains a good introduction by Sauter (VII–XIV), Hermann DIEM's »Luthers Predigt in den zwei Reichen« (M 1947; *ibid.*, 175–214), and a good bibliography compiled by Johannes HAUN (215–245). Indispensable bibliography on this topic also includes Ulrich DUCHROW: *Christenheit und Weltverantwortung: Traditionsgeschichte und systematische Struktur der Zwei-Reiche-Lehre*. S 1970; *DIE VORSTELLUNG VON ZWEI REICHEN UND REGIMENTEN BEI LUTHER*/ ed. by Ulrich Duchrow and Heiner Hoffmann. 2nd, rev. ed./ ed. by Christof Windhorst. GÜ 1978; *UMDEUTUNGEN DER ZWEIREICHELEHRE LUTHERS IM 19. JAHRHUNDERT*/ ed. by Ulrich Duchrow ... GÜ 1975; *DIE AMBIVALENZ DER ZWEIREICHELEHRE IN LUTHERISCHEN KIRCHEN DES 20. JAHRHUNDERTS*/ ed. by Ulrich Duchrow and Wolfgang Huber. GÜ 1976; and the volume cited in note 3 above.

5 Gerhard EBELING: *Die Notwendigkeit der Lehre von den zwei Reichen*. In: Gerhard Ebeling: *Wort und Glaube*. 3rd ed. Tü 1967, 407–428 (English in his *Word and faith*/ trans. by James W. Leitch. Phil. 1963, 386–406).

6 See esp. W. D. J. CARGILL THOMPSON: *The »Two Kingdoms« and the »Two Regiments«: some problems of Luther's Zwei-Reiche-Lehre*. *The journal of theological studies* 20 (Oxford 1969), 164–185; Martin HONECKER: *Zur gegenwärtigen Interpretation der Zweireichelehre*. ZKG 89 (1978), 150–162; Reich Gottes und Welt, 517–556; and Haun's bibliography (*Zur Zwei-Reiche-Lehre Luthers*, 225–227).

7 Albert SCHWEITZER: *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*. 2nd, rev. ed. Tü 1913, 631f.

8 Bernhard LOHSE: *Martin Luther: eine Einführung in sein Leben und sein Werk*. M 1981, 209–246, provides an introduction and bibliography, to which I would add David W. Lortz: *Ritschl & Luther: a fresh perspective on Albrecht Ritschl's theology in the light of his Luther study*.

The First Wall is the antithesis between Luther and the Middle Ages, in which »Middle Ages« is a codeword for Catholicism, Vatican I, the »Kulturkampf« and the Center Party.⁹ Guarded by the nonsensical phrase, »a lapse into the Middle Ages«, ¹⁰ this antithesis proposes a rupture so great that it bursts the bounds of the credible.

The Second Wall is the thesis that the »young Luther«, not the »old Luther«, is the true Luther. Ritschl struck this line in order to rescue the reformer from Orthodoxy and Pietism for a liberal Christianity which required a religion without dogma.¹¹ A corollary holds that a caesura between the young, progressive Luther and the old, reactionary Luther is marked by his treacherous volte-face in 1525.¹²

The Third Wall is the thesis about Luther as the principle author, witting or not, of the elements of modern culture – variously the idea of the authoritarian State, the religion of conscience, the principle of spiritual liberty, the objectivity of science, and the idea of the German nation. Although Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel set this stage, it was again Ritschl who, in evoking Lutherus pro nobis out of the deep past, made possible the slogans about »Luther to Bismarck« etc., between the founding of the »Holy German Evangelical Empire« in 1871 and »the German hour of the Church« in 1933.¹³

If we clear away the rubble from the three demolished walls and gaze back into Luther's century, we see a Luther who is neither »medieval« – if this means the age of Thomas Aquinas and the Emperor Frederick II – nor »modern« – if this means the age of Charles Robert Darwin and Otto von Bismarck, of Albert

Nashville, Tenn. 1974, who breaks new ground; Johannes WALLMANN: *Holl und seine Schule*. ZThK (1978) Beiheft 4, 1–33; Kupisch: *Op. cit.*; and Klaus SCHOLDER: *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich*. Vol. 1: *Vorgeschichte und Zeit der Illusionen 1918–1934*. B 1977, 125–130.

9 Karl Holl to Paul Gennrich 1921: »Der Katholizismus ist doch unser allerschlimmster Feind.

Und den werden wir leider nie loskriegen« (Quoted by Wallmann: *Op. cit.*, 9).

10 That is, »ein Rückfall ins Mittelalter«.

11 Lotz: *Op. cit.*, 93–112.

12 This thesis, which springs from the socialist tradition of Reformation studies, seems to be losing its profile during the current jubilee. Compare Horst HAUN: *Die Diskussion über Reformation und Bauernkrieg in der DDR-Geschichtswissenschaft 1952–1954*. ZGW 30 (1982), 5–22, with THESEN ÜBER MARTIN LUTHER: zum 500. Geburtstag (ZGW 29 [1981], 879–893, esp. 882–885).

13 The first quoted phrase is from Adolf Stoecker (see Kupisch: *Op. cit.*, 41); the second is from Paul ALTHAUS: *Die deutsche Stunde der Kirche*. GÖ 1933, esp. 5–8.

Einstein and Wladimir Iljitsch Lenin, or of Karl Barth and Mao Zedong. We see a Saxon monk who lived on the edge of the German-speaking world, from which westward bound travelers said they were going »into the Empire«;¹⁴ a professor of theology who saw himself as God's instrument for the restoration of pure doctrine and sound piety in these last days;¹⁵ and a councillor of princes whose views reflected the raw world of the German East just as surely as Niccolò Machiavelli's did the moribund world of the Italy city-states. We need to understand this Luther's ideas, not because they might help us with our own social problems, but because they help us to understand him as symbol and shepherd of the mighty social movement that became the German Reformation.

Whoever approaches Luther's social teaching in terms of particular issues will soon share Richard H. Tawney's lament: »Luther's utterances on social morality are the occasional explosions of a capricious volcano, with only a rare flash of light amid the torrent of smoke and flame, and it is idle to scan them for a coherent and consistent doctrine.«¹⁶ If we choose, rather, to look at Luther's teaching on social order and structure, we need a point of reference, and the most commonly used one in recent decades has been the Two Kingdoms: »... the temporal, which is ruled by the sword and is seen with the eyes, and the spiritual, ruled by grace and the forgiveness of sins.«¹⁷ As an alternative has been proposed the doctrine of the Three Estates, »the priestly office, the matrimonial estates, the temporal authority«, that is, the Church, the family and the State.¹⁸ Neither doctrine seems to me to do justice either to the complexity

14 Karlheinz BLASCHKE: *Sachsen im Zeitalter der Reformation*. GÜ 1970, 126.

15 There is no contradiction, of course, between restoring piety and restoring doctrine. See Martin BRECHT: *Martin Luther: sein Weg zur Reformation*, 1483–1521. S 1981, 333f; and Steven OZMENT: *Humanism, scholasticism, and the intellectual origins of the Reformation*. In: *Continuity and discontinuity in church history* = *Essays presented to George Huntston Williams*/ ed. by F. Forest Church and Timothy George. Leiden 1979, 148, quoting WA TR 1, 294, 19–295, 14 (624), Fall 1533.

16 R. H. TAWNEY: *Religion and the rise of capitalism: a historical study*. LO 1926, 88.

17 WA 24, 6, 1–3.

18 WA 26, 504, 31; see also WA 31 I, 190, 10–13; 409, 34. The essential literature includes Wilhelm MAURER: *Luthers Lehre von den drei Hierarchien und ihr mittelalterlicher Hintergrund*. M 1970; and Reinhard SCHWARZ: *Luthers Lehre von den drei Ständen und die drei Dimensionen der Ethik*. LuJ 45 (1978), 15–34. Jürgen KÜPPERS: *Luthers Dreihierarchienlehre als Kritik an der mittelalterlichen Gesellschaftsauffassung*. EvTh 19 (1949), 361–374, proposes to substitute the Three Estates for the Two Kingdoms.

of Luther's thought or to its evolution. What may serve, however, is a combination of the Two Kingdoms with the Three Estates in such a way that the enduring tensions between them illuminate the neuralgic points in Luther's social teaching.

II

Luther's teachings on the Two Kingdoms and the Three Estates each expressed a distinct combination of tradition and experience from a particular stage in his career. Luther's quest for grace during the 1510s began with his experience of his own unworthiness and the inadequacy of the Church's proffered means of grace, and it led him through Augustine to Paul. He appropriated the Augustinian sense of radical disjuncture between this world and the next, between the *civitas dei* and the *civitas diaboli*, which he then developed through his luxurious vocabulary of antithesis: future-present, eternal-temporal, spirit-flesh, invisible-visible, hidden-open, inward-outward, heaven-earth, and Gospel-law.¹⁹ He thereby completed the recovery of a radical form of Augustinianism²⁰ which had been muted, if not absent, in the mainstream of Christian thought since the twelfth century. When Luther joined this vision to his principle of justification by faith alone at the end of the 1510s, he erupted into his assault on the visible Church in the name of the invisible one, on the sacerdotal hierarchy in the name of the priesthood of believers. When Luther swept aside the Church as an autonomous social institution, he hardly noticed that his attack menaced the temporal social order as well. He did not, in any case, expect this »kingdom of sin and disobedience« to last much longer.²¹ The palpable imminence of God's kingdom framed Luther's great triple blast of 1520 and his thundering »No!« to

19 Duchrow: *Christenheit und Weltverantwortung*, 447. See the striking argument by Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle: Stoic Luther: paradoxical sin and necessity. ARG 73 (1982), 69–93, that Luther's use of antitheses stems from Stoic origins.

20 For the reevaluation of late medieval Augustinianism, much of it the work of Heiko A. Oberman, see the reference by Francis Oakley: Religious and ecclesiastical life on the eve of the Reformation. In: *Reformation Europe: a guide to research*/ ed. by Steven Ozment. StL 1982, 5–32, here at 17.

21 Ulrich Asendorf: *Eschatologie bei Luther*. GÖ 1967. See Heiko A. Oberman: Luther: Mensch zwischen Gott und Teufel. B 1982, 260–285, and Heiko A. Oberman: Martin Luther: Vorläufer der Reformation. In: *Verifikationen = Festschrift für Gerhard Ebeling zum 70. Geburtstag*/ ed. by Eberhard Jüngel ... TÜ 1982, 91–119, here at 97–102.

Charles V at Worms in 1521. Thus, the juncture between the Augustinian dualism of the Two Kingdoms and the personal experience of faith impelled Luther into his career as a disrupter of this world's order.

Luther's second role, as a teacher of order, began with his reaction to the Wittenberg disorders less than a year after his defiance of the emperor at Worms. In his »Invocavit Sermons« of early 1522, he hammered at the theme of social order, asking the Wittenbergers: »But where is the order?«²² From this point onward, as he later wrote: »I have always been and always will be on the side of those against whom insurrection is directed, no matter how unjust their cause.«²³ The (divinely sanctioned) need for social order and temporal authority now became the *cantus firmus* of his social thought, through the disorders of 1523–1526 – when Luther wrote his most forceful political pamphlets – until, in the catechisms of 1529, he laid down the developed form of his teaching on social order. It took the shape of the doctrine of Three Estates.

The literary roots of the doctrine of Three Estates reach back to ancient Greece and Plato, but the European form first took shape in the northern French heartland of feudalism during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.²⁴ Its division of the social order – *oratores*, *bellatores*, *laboratores* – served from the first to guard against more egalitarian social notions. With the revival of Aristotle, the division of society into three estates or orders, usually ecclesiastical, military and civil, became the typical doctrine of social structure for the entire Christian-Aristotelian tradition.²⁵ It came to Luther both through scholastic theology and through the medieval catechetical tradition.

Prior to the Wittenberg disorders, Luther understood the Three Estates in a quite traditional sense, that God has ordained »for some the matrimonial, for others the ecclesiastical, and for yet others the political estate«, as he wrote in 1519.²⁶ During the following decade, however, Luther altered the received

22 WA 10 III, 9, 10–13; see Heinrich BORNKAMM: *Martin Luther in der Mitte seines Lebens: das Jahrzehnt zwischen dem Wormser und dem Augsburger Reichstag*/ ed. by Karin Bornkamm. GÖ 1979, 72–75.

23 Am 45, 63 ≙ WA 8, 680, 32–34.

24 Georges DUBY: *Les trois ordres ou l'imaginaire du féodalisme*. P 1978 (English: *The three orders: feudal society imagined*/ transl. by Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago, Ill. 1980).

25 Very valuable still is Ruth MOHL: *The Three Estates in medieval and renaissance literature*. NY 1933; and there are full references to the (disappointingly scanty) literature in Maurer: *Op. cit.*

26 WA 2, 734, 20–28.

doctrine in three ways. First, he uprooted the Church's primacy and made the three estates equal in dignity.²⁷ Secondly, he claimed Biblical authority for the doctrine and for the estates themselves: »But the holy orders and true institutes founded by God are these three: the priestly office, the matrimonial estate, the temporal authority . . . Therefore, such three institutes or orders are encompassed by God's Word and ordinance.«²⁸ Thirdly, Luther came to see the estates not as distinct social groupings but as modes of social relationships. »First of all«, he wrote, »you must be part of a family, a father or mother, a child, servant or maid. Secondly, you must live in a city or in the country as a citizen, a subject or a ruler. Thirdly, you are a part of the Church, perhaps a pastor, an assistant, a sexton, or in some other way a servant of the Church, if only you have and hear the Word of God.«²⁹

Within the framework of the Three Estates Luther developed his teaching of the »calling« (vocatío, Beruf), which was long the most hotly debated aspect of his social teaching. It was contended, in particular, that with a single, revolutionary stroke Luther transferred the monastic concept of vocation – a calling by God – to secular trades and professions. The truth seems to be that Luther completed a transfer which had been underway since the twelfth century.³⁰ He taught that coram mundo one stands not alone but in social relations, for each is »bound in this life to another person«.³¹ These relations build up from the offices into which God calls individuals, which collectively make up his or her social place, and which may change with the different stages of life. A man may be father to his children, husband to his wife, master to his servants, councillor in his civic regime, subject to his prince, and parishioner in his congregation. A

27 Maurer: Op. cit., 33.

28 WA 26, 504, 31–505, 10.

29 WA TR 6, 266, 16–27 (6913), here transl. by George W. FORELL: Faith active in love: an investigation of the principles underlying Luther's social ethics. NY 1954, 123. Many other key texts are translated in F. Edward CRANZ: An essay on the development of Luther's thought on justice, law and society. Cambridge, Mass. 1959.

30 The basic work is Gustaf WINGREN: Luthers lära om kallelsen. Lund 1942 [German: Luthers Lehre vom Beruf/ transl. by Egon Franz. M 1952; English: Luther on vocation/ transl. by C. C. Rasmussen. Phil 1957]. See now Werner CONZE: Beruf. In: Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland. Vol. 1. S 1978, 490–507, here at 402. I pass over the topos, because it is no longer very controversial.

31 WA 32, 390, 33 f.

female child may become a maid in service, wife to a husband, mother to children, mistress to her household, though not, I think, councillor or pastor. The callings, which are webs of social relations and not social groupings, form the content of the Three Estates. Through them God governs His human creatures.³² Each estate is thus a *politia divina*,³³ but not a *politia christiana*, which would be a contradiction in terms, as social place is meaningless *coram deo*.

It was Luther's political reaction to the problem of social order during the 1520s that created a tension between the Three Estates and the encompassing structure of Two Kingdoms. Through his political pamphlets during the years 1523–1526, Luther developed his teaching on temporal authority, chiefly the power of the sword to punish wickedness, whose wielder is hardly bound by Christian moral law.³⁴ Finally, under the concepts of authority and obedience he presented, in the catechisms of 1529, his unified doctrine of patriarchal social authority. Following a long catechetical tradition, Luther placed this teaching under the rubric of the Fourth Commandment: »For all other forms flow from and are extensions of parental authority. . . . Thus all those who are called ›lords‹ stand in the parents' stead and necessarily take their power and authority to rule from [the parental office]. Therefore, the Bible calls them all ›fathers‹, because they exercise in their governance the office of a father and ought to regard their folk with a fatherly heart. Just as, many years ago, the Romans and others called the lords and ladies of the households ›patres et matres familias‹, that is, ›fathers and mothers of the household‹, so they called their princes and rulers ›patres patriae‹ or ›fathers of their country‹. It is shameful that we Christians today don't call them by the same titles or at least regard them and honor them as

32 WA 40 III, 210, 14; 43, 106, 17; 340, 23. God's action through the forms of this world is especially powerfully expressed in the lectures on Genesis of 1535–1545, for example at 43, 70, 5–10. See also the exposition of Psalm 127 (1524), in WA 15, 368, 18–23; 31 I, 410, 13–17.

33 See Gerhard GLOEGE: *Politia divina: die Überwindung des mittelalterlichen Sozialdenkens durch Luthers Lehre von der Obrigkeit*, reprinted in his *Theologische Traktate*. Vol. 2: *Verkündigung und Verantwortung*. GÖ 1967, 69–108, who concludes: »Luthers Bedeutung für die Geschichte des Staats- und Gesellschaftsgedankens besteht darin, daß er den ›Staat‹ und die durch ihn bezeichnete Wirklichkeit vom neuentdeckten Evangelium her verstand« (107f). This conventional view is, as Maurer (op. cit.) has shown, quite wrong.

34 WA 19, 625, 21–24. See Lohse: *Martin Luther*, 70; and Walter von LOEWENICH: *Luthers Stellung zur Obrigkeit*. (1966). In: *Luther und die Obrigkeit*/ ed. by Gunther Wolf. DA 1972, 425–442.

fathers.³⁵ All forms of authority being essentially paternal, each person has several kinds of father.³⁶ Some years later, Luther reversed the direction of this unification of »earthly« or »outward« (äußerlich) authority by collapsing all forms into the authority of the ruler.³⁷

Although the unification of all authority in the ruler has an absolutist ring, and though Luther may have provided some grist for the absolutist mill through his emphasis on St. Paul's teaching on obedience (Romans 13), he did not permit the ruler to invade the father's authority over the household, the »Haus« or »das ganze Haus«, a step which came only much later.³⁸ Nor, on the other hand, did Luther allow the heads of household any claim of right or obligation on the prince.³⁹

The ruler is father of his land; the father is ruler of his household. Luther's teaching represents neither a clear derivation of the State from the household nor of the household from the State; and he thus stands squarely in neither camp of the struggle between popular sovereignty and absolutism.⁴⁰ The relationship between household and State may be characterized as an *analogia socialis*, the ultimate model of which is God's sovereign authority over the created world. Through numerous parallels and comparisons between *oeconomia* and *politia*, Luther reinforces the analogy again and again.⁴¹

The *analogia socialis* thus accounts for the structures of two of the Three Estates and represents Luther's attempt to legitimize the principles of social order. What of the third estate, the Church? Here the Two Kingdoms and the Three Estates do not properly mesh. Luther began with a fundamental distinc-

35 WA 19, 152, 20–35; Maurer: Op. cit., 19–24.

36 WA 30 I, 152, 19–153, 35; 155, 3f.

37 See von Loewenich: Luthers Stellung zur Obrigkeit, 433.

38 Otto BRUNNER: Das »ganze Haus« und die alteuropäische »Ökonomik«. In his *Neue Wege der Verfassungs- und Sozialgeschichte*. 2nd ed. GÖ 1968, 103–127; Michael MITTERAUER, Reinhard SIEDER: *The European family: patriarchy to partnership from the Middle Ages to the present/* transl. by Karla Oosterveen and Manfred Hörzinger. Chicago, Ill. 1982, 7–10 (German: *Vom Patriarchat zur Partnerschaft: zum Strukturwandel der Familie*. 2nd, rev. ed. M 1980).

39 See WA 16, 504, 1f.

40 On Luther's relationship to absolutism, see now Quentin SKINNER: *The foundations of modern political thought*. Vol. 2. Cambridge 1978, 19; and the thoughtful conclusions of Sheldon S. WOLIN: *Luther: the theological and the political*. In: Wolin: *Politics and vision: continuity and innovation in Western political thought*. Boston 1960, 141–161, esp. 142–144.

41 WA 40 III, 207, 36f.

tion between the spiritual and temporal churches, corresponding to the Two Kingdoms, though the Church alone exists in double form, in both kingdoms: »The first, which is natural, fundamental, essential and genuine, we should call a spiritual, internal Christianity; the other, which is fabricated and external, we should call a fleshly, outward Christianity. Not that we want to separate them, one from the other; but it is just as when I talk about a person and call him »spiritual« according to his soul and »fleshly« according to his body.«⁴²

The estate called »Church« is primarily this latter, »fleshly« Church, which is linked to the other, »spiritual« Church through the preaching of the Word and through the sacraments. Over the spiritual Church the ruler (*Obrigkeit*) is Christ alone, who »can and will tolerate or suffer no head or lordship in His Church, by virtue of which one person might strive to be higher and better than another«.⁴³ Thus, although the visible Church does not mirror the spiritual, »true« Church, neither did Luther give it a patriarchal principle of authority of its own, analogous to the other two estates. This is the reason for his »lack of an ecclesiological program«⁴⁴ and for the Church's »disputed and indeterminate« relationship to the other two estates.⁴⁵ It is also the unstable theological ground of all those odd forms of the Lutheran territorial church, distinct but not autonomous.

Through its unique subordination to its counterpart in the *regnum dei*, the visible Church remains a crippled, amorphous estate. Luther surely intended that the Three Estates be universal in scope and symmetrical in form: »God's estates exist and endure through all kingdoms, through the whole world, and for as long as it shall last.«⁴⁶ The priesthoods, cults and religious laws of non-Christian peoples, particularly the ancient Hebrews, might constitute churches *coram mundo*, but only the preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments forge a connection between churches in both kingdoms. While Luther manages to prevent the radically egalitarian »spiritual« Church from invading the world of the Three Estates through this connection – this would have produced an illegitimate »theocracy« – the connection itself robs the

42 WA 6, 296, 38 – 297, 5. See Wolfgang STEIN: *Das kirchliche Amt bei Luther*. Wiesbaden 1974, 202–213; Lohse: *Martin Luther*, 187, summarizes the state of the question.

43 WA 47, 233, 6–8.

44 Lohse: *Martin Luther*, 180.

45 Maurer: *Op. cit.*, 124.

46 WA 31 I, 410, 16f.

»fleshly« Church of the character of a true estate. Speaking strictly *coram mundo*, therefore, in a Christian society there are only two estates, family and State, which in fact moved in to take over much of the control of religious discipline in Lutheran territories.⁴⁷

This analysis helps to illuminate the odd development of Luther's teaching on the Church.⁴⁸ Until 1522 or 1523, Luther emphasized the priesthood of all believers, even to the extent of sometimes seeming to derive ecclesiastical office from it. Then, presumably in reaction to the Wittenberg disorders, Peasants' War and Anabaptism, his focus shifted from general priesthood (*sacerdotium*) to ecclesiastical office (*ministerium*). This change ran parallel to the tendency of the *regnum diaboli* to become, in Luther's eyes, merely the *regnum mundi* and for the Church to become a »third government« (*drittes Regiment*).⁴⁹ The tension, however, was never resolved: the *sacerdotium* never took visible form; the *ministerium* never became autonomous.

III

Throughout its long history, Lutheranism has been nagged by Luther's refusal to permit the priesthood of believers to take visible form in the *regnum mundi* as a congregationally organized Church, either in the constrained, Zwinglian form or in the freer, Anabaptist one. His decision against reconstituting the Church in this way, which he reached sometime between 1521 and 1525, must be traced in large part to his profound mistrust of the common people and his fear of social equality.⁵⁰ Contempt for »Lord Everybody« (*Herr Omnes*) and »the mob« (*der Pöfel*) runs like a red thread through his writings between the Revolution of 1525 and 1531, the year after the Diet of Augsburg.⁵¹ The king-

47 See Gerald STRAUSS: *Luther's house of learning: indoctrination of the young in the German Reformation*. Baltimore; LO 1978, 108–131.

48 See Lohse: *Martin Luther*, 180.

49 Maurer: *Op. cit.*, 29.

50 There is nothing newer on this theme than Friedrich LEZIUS: *Gleichheit und Ungleichheit: Aphorismen zur Theologie und Staatsanschauung Luthers*. In: *Greifswalder Studien: theologische Abhandlungen*, Hermann Cremer zum 25jährigen Professorenjubiläum dargebracht. GÜ 1895, 285–326.

51 WA 19, 635, 7–16; 24, 676, 34f; 677, 3f; 28, 250, 8; WA Br 5, 93, 21f (1432), 31 May 1529; WA 29, 600, 5; 32, 485, 1–3; WA TR 1, 360, 20–24 (758); 2, 314, 24–30 (2082), 16 June–14 August 1531.

dom of this world, he wrote against the rebels in 1525, »cannot endure where there is no inequality of persons, so that some are free and some bound, some are lords and some subjects«. ⁵² Unlike most Christian Aristotelians, Luther condemned revolt against the ruler in all cases, arguing that the prince, however unjust, will kill fewer persons than will the rebels. ⁵³

Luther's fear of social equality and rebellion explains sufficiently his lifelong preference for monarchy. ⁵⁴ He did not condemn »aristocracy, . . . as in Germany, the [ancient] Roman empire and Venice«, ⁵⁵ and he knew that in remote corners of the Empire, in Ditmarsh and Switzerland, there was »democracy, where many of the Common Man rule«. ⁵⁶ This knowledge did not blunt, however, his conviction that ordinary folk are incapable of governing their own affairs.

Luther's lack of confidence in ordinary people may be seen in the light of his own social experience. Luther lived in a Saxony which lacked the dense network of durable corporate and communal institutions that characterized the older settled lands of the German South and West. ⁵⁷ The general economic recovery after 1470, and in particular the wealth that flowed in silver streams from the Erzgebirge and other mining districts, not only made Saxon urban life fluid and unstable, it also made the State far less dependent than elsewhere on local institutions. ⁵⁸ The remark of Saxon travelers westward, quoted above, that they were going »into the Empire«, had a social as well as a geographical

⁵² WA 18, 327, 6–8.

⁵³ WA 28, 250, 27–32. See also the long diatribe against rebels WA 28, 246, 35–247, 10.

⁵⁴ Lezius: Op. cit., 303. Luther's view on the Imperial constitution are analyzed by Wolfgang GÜNTHER: Martin Luthers Vorstellung von der Reichsverfassung. MS 1976, esp. 175–180.

⁵⁵ WA TR 4, 240, 41–43 (4342), 7 February 1539. See his comments about the nobles in »Ob Kriegsleute auch im seligen Stand sein können« WA 19, 643, 13–644, 11.

⁵⁶ WA TR 4, 240, 43f (4342). See his comment in WA 19, 635, 17f: »Man sagt, die Schweytzer haben vorzeiten auch yhre Öberhern erschlagen und sich selbs frey gemacht etc.«

⁵⁷ See in general Blaschke: Sachsen im Zeitalter der Reformation; and Karlheinz BLASCHKE: Die Struktur der Gesellschaft im obersächsischen Raum zur Zeit Luthers. Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur 92 (1970), 21–44. Günther Vogler has recently reminded us that the commune was not a universal German institution and was weak or absent in the German East. ARG: Literaturbericht 11 (1982), 10, reviewing Peter BLICKLE: Deutsche Untertanen: ein Widerspruch. M 1981.

⁵⁸ Adolf LAUBE: Studien über den erzgebirgischen Silberbergbau von 1470 bis 1546. 2nd ed. B 1976, 281, notes that the mining districts exhibit »relativ fortgeschrittene gesellschaftliche Verhältnisse mit Übergangscharakter«. On ducal revenues, see *ibid.*, 77–81.

meaning.⁵⁹ The one center of stability in this socially fluid world was the territorial State, which in Luther's day waxed fat on the silver from the mines.⁶⁰

Luther was born as well into an upwardly mobile family which was moving away from its rural roots. He had no proper hometown,⁶¹ spending his boyhood in Eisleben, Mansfeld, Magdeburg and Eisenach, before landing in the university and the monastery at Erfurt. Neither institution provided him with a corps of lasting friends and comrades; and from Erfurt he went to Wittenberg, a university without corporate traditions. There, perhaps, during his last twenty years, Luther found collegueship and cooperation.

IV

Tradition and experience shaped both skeletal structures of Luther's social teaching, the Two Kingdoms and the Three Estates. The Two Kingdoms, which expressed Luther's development during the 1510s from a troubled professor into a reformer, emerged from the transformation of Augustinian tradition through his personal search for grace. The Three Estates, which expressed Luther's development during the 1520s from a reformer into a Protestant churchman, emerged from the transformation of Christian-Aristotelian social thought through his revulsion at social disorder. Two traditions: one Augustinian, the other Christian-Aristotelian, both essentially medieval. Two experiences: one deeply personal and radical, the other social and conservative, both reflecting the disintegration of medieval thought and institutions.

The development of Luther's teaching on the Three Estates during the 1520s softened and dampened the harsh antinomies of the Two Kingdoms, as Luther became ever more entangled in this world, not least through his advice to princes.⁶² The lack of conformity, however, between the Two Kingdoms and the

59 Blaschke: *Sachsen im Zeitalter der Reformation*, 126.

60 See Karlheinz BLASCHKE: *Wechselwirkungen zwischen der Reformation und dem Aufbau des Territorialstaates*. *Der Staat* 9 (1970), 347-364.

61 Brecht: *Op. cit.*, 13-33. Oberman: *Luther*, 91, judges the social conditions of Luther's boyhood as already »modern« (neuezeitlich).

62 Lohse: *Martin Luther*, 197, notes, »das Bild von der Obrigkeit ist für Luther offenbar in erheblichem Maße durch die Erfahrung mit Friedrich dem Weisen und der kursächsischen Regierung bestimmt«. A good deal of fresh air has been brought into the subject of Luther and the princes by two books: Hermann KUNST: *Evangelischer Glaube und politische Verantwort-*

Three Estates at their chief point of juncture, the Church, never disappeared. Through the boundary poured the inspiration for Pietism, that »German Puritanism«, whose program called for »conversion and regeneration in the service of the social improvement of the world and humanity«. ⁶³ Defamed by Ritschl and offhandedly dismissed by Troeltsch, Pietism and its social activism nonetheless lay claim, alongside Orthodoxy's social quietism, ⁶⁴ to Luther's practical legacy as reforming professor and pastor. Much, indeed, of his teaching softens with admonitions to Christian love the harsh conduct of the world's affairs, not least in economic matters, in which his notoriously anticapitalist attitudes are very well documented. ⁶⁵

Many and eloquent are the claims for Luther's shaping influence on the modern age, ranging from Hegel's contention that »civil freedom and the public rule of law are solely the fruit of the rediscovered freedom in God«, ⁶⁶ to a recent

tung: Martin Luther als politischer Berater seiner Landesherrn und seine Teilnahme an den Fragen des öffentlichen Lebens. S 1976; and Eike WOLGAST: Die Wittenberger Theologie und die Politik der Evangelischen Stände: Studien zu Luthers Gutachten in politischen Fragen. GÜ 1978. It is worth noting that Frederick the Wise and George the Bearded were unusually able and steady figures in a princely generation of which three members had to be deposed for strange or violent behavior: Duke Heinrich of Württemberg, Margrave Christoph I of Baden, and Margrave Friedrich V of Brandenburg-Ansbach – not to mention the exploits of Duke Ulrich of Württemberg!

63 Carl HINRICHS: Preußentum und Pietismus: der Pietismus in Brandenburg-Preußen als religiös-soziale Reformbewegung. GÖ 1971, 12.

64 The long campaign to extricate Luther from »Melanchthonian Orthodoxy« seems to have begun with Ritschl's attempt to prove Luther's relevance to the modern age (see Lotz: Op. cit., 170–186). The suggestion has recently been renewed by Oberman: Luther, 315, that Orthodoxy was formed by Melanchthon. It is no business of mine here to comment on this century-long indecision about what parts of Luther's thought ought to be carried into the future. I merely point out that it requires great credulity to believe, as we are asked to do, that the social conservatism of Lutheran Orthodoxy represents not a genuine development of Luther's thought but the product of a »misunderstanding« of Luther by those who knew and loved him best.

65 For theological orientation, see Paul ALTHAUS: The ethics of Martin Luther/ transl. by Robert C. Schultz. Phil 1972, chap. 7 (German: Die Ethik Martin Luthers. GÜ 1965, 116–158); and for a very brief historical orientation, see Francesca SCHINZINGER: Ansätze ökonomischen Denkens von der Antike bis zur Reformationszeit. DA 1977, 96–101.

66 From a German translation of Georg Friedrich Wilhelm HEGEL's Latin rectorial address in 1830, excerpted by Heinrich BORNKAMM: Luther im Spiegel der deutschen Geistesgeschichte. 2nd ed. GÖ 1970, 237.

comment that Luther »was one of the preparers of those transformations through which . . . Europe entered the age of . . . bourgeois revolutions«. ⁶⁷ Whatever their truth on other grounds, such claims are hardly justified by Luther's social teaching. The radical possibilities of the revived Augustinian dualism and Luther's own struggle for grace were caught and held by Christian-Aristotelian social thought and Luther's frenetic search for authority. Caught and held, but not extinguished, for in the Church the boundary between the Two Kingdoms remained thin and translucent enough to allow the egalitarianism of the *regnum dei* to be perceived in ghostly outline by the *regnum mundi*. Tenuous as it was, the connection across this boundary sufficed to keep the Church from becoming a true social estate, though the connection could not, on the other hand, trouble the structure of authority, hierarchy and power in the other two estates. The Church thus possessed neither hierarchical power of its own as one of the Three Estates nor world-transforming power through its unique connection between the Two Kingdoms. Here lies the single great innovation of Luther's teaching on social order: the Church ceased to be an institution of social power, authority and independence. Standing at the juncture of the Two Kingdoms with the Three Estates, shaped by a double tradition and a double experience, Luther's Church possessed the specific qualities and powers of neither.

The Luther who becomes visible in the broad social landscape of sixteenth-century Germany, once we dismantle the walls erected by his modernizers, is a conservative revolutionary, a man of the Church. It is perfectly fruitless to seek in his thought a great turning point in the history of European ideas about economy, society and the State. On the ground of the Church, however, the power of his teaching proved both radical and permanent. To the degree that the Church in and before Luther's time was a genuine social institution, this change constitutes the claim on our historical attention of Luther's social teaching.

Theses

1. Luther's mature social teaching combined the Augustinian idea of the Two Kingdoms with the Christian-Aristotelian idea of the Three Estates.

⁶⁷ Erich HONECKER: Unsere Zeit verlangt Parteinahme für Fortschritt, Vernunft und Menschlichkeit. In: Martin Luther und unsere Zeit: Konstituierung des Martin-Luther-Komitees der DDR am 13. Juni 1980 in Berlin. B 1980, 13.

2. Starting from a radically Augustinian dualism during the later 1510s, Luther developed the tripartite doctrine of *ecclesia*, *oeconomia* and *politia* in response to the social disorders of the years 1521 to 1526 (Wittenberg disorders, Peasants' War, Anabaptism).

3. The development of Luther's teaching is to be explained by his experiences: just as his personal struggle for grace transformed the Two Kingdoms into a weapon of reform, so his reaction to the social disorders transformed the Three Estates into an instrument of social order.

4. The two entirely worldly estates, family and State, have a common structure which is patriarchal and authoritarian, but not absolutist.

5. The Church, the third estate, became neither a force for radical change through its unique connection to the *regnum dei* nor a patriarchal, authoritarian estate like the family and the State. This indeterminancy marks the chief point of juncture between the Two Kingdoms and the Three Estates.

6. The chief respect in which Luther's social teaching can be said to have had normative value for the European future is this: the Church ceased to be a social institution of independent authority and power.