

The Use and Abuse of Luther's Political Advice

By Eric W. Gritsch

I Creation and Obrigkeit

The political Luther is a neuralgic theme in Luther research. But no debate about the political Luther can or should ignore his basic stance towards politics: it is part of God's order in creation; and this order is manifested as the law, one component in the communication of God's word, in proper distinction from the other component, the gospel. Luther's theological vision of creation is governed by the well-known scheme of two regiments or realms (Regimente) and three estates (Stände) or »hierarchies.« Whereas non-human life is ordered by laws of nature, human life is ordered by the three estates of family, temporal government (Obrigkeit), and the church. »These are the three hierarchies ordained by God, and we need no more; indeed we have enough to do in living aright and resisting the devil in these three.«¹

Luther was concerned about the proper distinction between these three hierarchies, especially the distinction between family and Obrigkeit on one side and the church on the other. Family and Obrigkeit are ordained to preserve order, equity, and justice in the face of the constant human temptation to confuse the divine and the human realms, which creates chaos. The church is ordained to console consciences with the promise of a new creation initiated by Christ, who nurtures His body, the church on earth, by means of word and sacraments. Whereas the Obrigkeit is identified by the sword, the church is recognized by the word, audible in proclamation and visible in sacramental enactment. Luther contended that the realms of the sword and of the word are not separated but rather distinguished as the two ways in which the one God maintains order in a fallen creation. Since satanic *Anfechtung* lurks everywhere in the world, the family, Obrigkeit, and the church are to work together to avoid chaos.

1 Von den Konziliis und Kirchen, 1539; Am 41, 177 $\triangle$ WA 50, 652, 18-20. This is not the place to discuss the »Irrgarten« of the doctrine of the two kingdoms; cf. Eric W. GRITSCH: Martin – God's court jester: Luther in retrospect. Phil 1983, 111-129.

Luther considered baptism to be the decisive link between the two regiments and the three estates. The three estates encompass all human vocations. As early as 1520, he linked baptism to the reform of the church when he contended that whoever is baptized is already priest, bishop, and pope. If, therefore, bishops failed in their vocation, princes could and should become »emergency bishops« (Notbischöfe) on the basis of their baptism.² Normally, princes are »gardeners and caretakers« of their subjects, »fathers and helpers« to whom is entrusted the preservation of creation from chaos.³ But when the interim – the meantime between Christ's ascension and His return – turns mean, i.e. evil, emergency measures are in order.

Luther's political advice was given from this perspective of the proper relationship between the estates, baptism, and vocations. He gave advice with confidence in God's promise of a new creation and with a strong dose of skepticism regarding human achievements in the old creation. He lived very much in the present, in a kairological time filled with *Anfechtungen* but also pregnant with the spiritual life that is to come. Behind the mask of history he discerned the *deus absconditus* who exercised His majestic power even as Christ on the cross. One can never know with certainty what this God has in mind. He gives with grace to those who live by faith in Christ alone, and He also takes away with a wrath the purpose of which cannot be seen.

Luther's principal spiritual advice was: when in *Anfechtung* about the majesty of God, flee from the God of wrath to the God of mercy. Christians ought to live by faith alone and not worry about the spiritual value of their good works, for then they need feel no guilt for advice that did not accomplish what it intended; and they can concentrate on specific situations without being overwhelmed by ultimate concerns.

Luther was by no means a political thinker.⁴ It was as a preacher of the word of God that he gave political advice, a preacher who had learned to be astonished and to wonder at the strange ways of God, but who was willing to use common sense and pastoral concern when giving counsel. He was quite aware of how

2 *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation von des christlichen Standes Besserung*, 1520; Am 44, 129 $\triangle$ WA 6, 408, 8-11.

3 Letter to Elector John dated May 20, 1530; Am 49, 307 (210) $\triangle$ WA Br 5, 326, 51. 53 (1572).

4 I agree with John W. ALLEN: *A history of political thought in the sixteenth century*. NY 1961, 15: »I cannot myself find that he was in any strict sense a political thinker at all.«

inadequate his advice might be, and felt sheepish and foolish in a world he saw fooling itself and being fooled by God.⁵ But he was convinced that God ruled in the midst of tomfoolery, using preachers like court jesters to advise or rebuke the world's rulers.⁶ He knew that the Obrigkeit in particular needed constant reminders that God was in charge. Most ruler are fools and scoundrels, thinking they can overcome the distinction between divine and human power, which is why a wise prince is »a mighty rare bird«.⁷

Luther's political advice to the electoral princes of Saxony, his own Obrigkeit, was influenced by the positive attitudes each had toward the other. The Electors Frederick, John, and John Frederick all respected Luther, and Luther considered them the »rare birds« in a flock of often unreliable and ambitious princes. Luther's basic stance is reflected in the advice he gave Elektor John in 1528, in the context of the Saxon visitations: the elector should continue the role the Emperor Constantine had played in summoning the leaders of the church to Nicea to achieve reform and peace and to avoid dissension and strife in matters of doctrine.⁸ Electors Frederick and John generally heeded Luther's political advice, particularly with regard to ecclesiastical reform.⁹ He knew that few princes were as noble and fair in their role of Obrigkeit as the Saxon electors. At times, Saxony appeared to Luther to have become a model of Solomonic politics, existing according to God's word and blessed with the gifts of divine love.¹⁰ In contrast, Luther viewed Catholic rulers as persecutors of the gospel in league with bad Christians, Jews, Turks, and »Schwärmer«.¹¹

5 Auf des Königs zu England Lästerschrift Titel, Martin Luthers Antwort, 1527; WA 23, 32, 6-14.

6 An den christlichen Adel ...; Am 44, 123 $\triangle$ WA 6, 404, 24f; Das fünfte, sechste und siebente Kapitel Matthei gepredigt und ausgelegt, 1530-1532; Am 21, 124 $\triangle$ WA 32, 402, 8-15.

7 Von weltlicher Oberkeit, wie weit man ihr Gehorsam schuldig sei, 1523; Am 45, 113 $\triangle$ WA 11, 267, 30.

8 Vorrede zum »Unterricht der Visitatoren an die Pfarrherrn im Kurfürstentum Sachsen«, 1528; Am 40, 273 $\triangle$ WA 26, 200, 28-34.

9 Karl TRÜDINGER: Luthers Briefe und Gutachten an weltliche Obrigkeiten zur Durchführung der Reformation. MS 1975, 142: »Die Kurfürsten Johann und Johann Friedrich handelten weitgehend nach seinen Anweisungen.«

10 Wilhelm MAURER: Der kursächsische Salomo: zu Luthers Vorlesungen über Kohelet (1526) und über das Hohelied (1530/31). In: Antwort aus der Geschichte: Beobachtungen und Erwägungen zum geschichtlichen Bild der Kirche; Walter Dress zum 65. Geburtstag/ hrsg. von Wolfgang Sommer unter Mitwirkung von Helmut Ruppel. B 1969, 105-107.

11 Eike WOLGAST: Luther und die katholischen Fürsten. In: Luther und die politische Welt/ hrsg. von Erwin Iserloh und Gerhard Müller. Redigiert von Johannes Koch. S 1984, 62f.

Luther discovered that the satanic disruption of order in God's creation is always linked to specifics, usually to disputes over finances and territory. He felt obliged to advise the dukes of Mansfeld, especially Albrecht, to curb their greed and to care more for the welfare of their subjects, the majority of whom were miners burdened by unjust labor practices.¹² He spent his last days in Eisleben settling a complicated situation involving the dukes of Mansfeld.

Luther advised princes to use the ban and the sword to fight chaos and rebellion in order to preserve order in creation. Rebels like Thomas Müntzer and the Münster Anabaptists deserved no mercy. But he also criticized princes – indeed he called them satanic – when they attempted to impose total control in their territories, including control over the souls of their subjects.¹³ He contended that no ruler had the right to control souls, and if he did so it was the duty of Christians to resist him on the basis of the apostolic injunction to obey God rather than human beings (Act 5, 29). However, Luther rejected all notions of violent resistance on the part of the common people. To him, such resistance was nothing but satanic, utopian »Schwärmerei«. He called instead for allegiance to the only true and final insurrection which Christ had begun »with His mouth«.¹⁴

Although Luther intended to be guided by his theological rationale for order in a fallen creation when giving political advice, he at times increased the tension between rationale and concrete advice to the breaking point. His advice to kill rebellious peasants and »Schwärmer« is an example, as are his advice to Philip of Hesse to commit bigamy and his advice to the princes to persecute the Jews. But on the whole, Luther remained consistent. At least he was sagacious in discerning the sin of confusing human and divine power, be it in the political realm or in the realm of life in general. He was convinced that all political advice

12 Hermann KUNST: *Evangelischer Glaube und politische Verantwortung: Martin Luther als politischer Berater seiner Landesherrn und seine Teilnahme an den Fragen des öffentlichen Lebens*. S 1976, 21.

13 Luther rejected territorial church orders that permitted total government control. Letter dated October 22, 1543 to the superintendent of Dresden, Daniel Greiser (WA Br 10, 436, 3-16 [3930]); cf. also Heinrich BORNKAMM: *Das Ringen reformatorischer Motive in den Anfängen der sächsischen Kirchenverfassung*. ARG 41 (1948), 93-115.

14 *Eine treue Vermahnung zu allen Christen, sich zu hüten vor Aufruhr und Empörung*, 1522; Am 45, 67f $\triangleq$ WA 8, 683, 18f; cf. also Eric W. GRITSCH: *Luther and violence: reappraisal of a neuralgic theme*. SCJ 3 (1972), 37-55.

must be grounded in obedience to the First Commandment of the Decalogue, to let God be God, and that violation of this commandment leads to idolatry and is based on the desire »to be like God«. ¹⁵

II Abusus non tollit usum

The history of the effect (Wirkungsgeschichte) of Luther's political advice discloses more abuse than proper use. More often than not, the abuse is closely linked to a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of what Luther said and did when confronted with diverse political situations. At times, practitioners of hindsight use a hermeneutics of convenience and present the political Luther as a mirror image of their own age. But whatever the method, the neuralgic aspect of any such history is the so-called doctrine of the two kingdoms.

Recent case studies of how the doctrine has been used in Lutheranism have demonstrated that Luther's view of the two realms and three estates has been substantially abused. ¹⁶ The findings disclose two basic abuses. The first is the collapse of the two regiments into one governance embodied by government, which also dominates family and church. This caesaropapism was most vividly represented in Nazi Germany by the slogan »one kingdom, one people, one leader« (»Ein Reich, ein Volk, ein Führer!«), and by the establishment of a »Reichskirche«. ¹⁷ The second abuse is the separation of the two regiments and the three estates. This particular abuse presupposes independent spheres of life, each of which generates its own power and exists within a system of political pluralism. Both these abuses create »a special problem of destroyed wholeness«, i.e., »the dangerous shift of emphasis from political responsibility to diakonia of

15 Gn 3, 5. See Luther's explanation to the First Commandment in the Large catechism; BOOK OF CONCORD/ed. by Theodore G. Tappert. Phil 1959, 365-369 ≙ BSLK, 560, 30-569, 31 ≙ WA 30 I, 133, 9-137, 35.

16 See the illuminating work by the Department of Studies of the Lutheran World Federation: LUTHERAN CHURCHES — SALT OR MIRROR OF SOCIETY?: case studies on the theory and practice of the two kingdoms doctrine/ ed. by Ulrich Duchrow. Geneva 1977 ≙ ZWEI REICHE UND REGIMENTE: Ideologie oder evangelische Orientierung?, internationale Fall- und Hintergrundstudien zur Theologie und Praxis lutherischer Kirchen im 20. Jahrhundert/ hrsg. von Ulrich Duchrow. GÜ 1977; TWO KINGDOMS AND ONE WORLD: a sourcebook in Christian social ethics/ ed. by Karl H. Hertz. MP 1976.

17 Lutheran churches ..., 301.

charity«. ¹⁸ As a result, Luther's idea of wholistic care for the neighbor in need has been downgraded to a charity that separates religion from politics. ¹⁹

The historical trajectory of abuse begins with a shift of emphasis regarding the relationship between Obrigkeit and citizens. Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) no longer considered good Obrigkeit »a mighty rare bird«. Instead, he considered Obrigkeit a divine ordinance to whom Christians should be subject in the same manner as they are subject to »the laws of the seasons and to the change of winter and summer«. ²⁰ Such a view of government precludes the critical tension between the gospel and Obrigkeit that Luther had advocated. Seventeenth-century Lutheran Orthodoxy accepted this static view, and coordinated ecclesiastical constitutions with those of the state. The church, the third estate in Luther's scheme, was now comprised of three components – economic, political, and ecclesiastical – representing a loyal, not a critical link with government. The church thus functioned as a part of the body politic in a territory in which the prince was summus episcopus. In this sense, Lutheran Orthodoxy had revived the medieval synthesis of prince and priest, with the latter being all the baptized who now constituted the Landeskirche of a given territory.

There were exceptions to this prevailing view. Matthias Flacius (1520-1575), who idolized Luther, objected to the princes controlling the church, and labeled them the embodiment of »a new political Antichrist«. ²¹ Roger Williams (ca. 1604-1683), the English champion of religious liberty, cited Luther in support of his campaign to separate church and state. According to Williams, there is a definite connection between freedom of conscience and Luther's distinction between spiritual and temporal realms; conscience must remain free and the state must be separated from spiritual matters. ²² This abuse is quite different from that of the defenders of territorial Lutheran orthodoxy. Yet both are abuses, since Luther advocated neither caesaropapism nor a spiritualistic notion of faith.

¹⁸ Ibid, 302-305. 311-315, quotation, 311.

¹⁹ Ibid, 311-315.

²⁰ Apology of the Augsburg Confession, art. 16, 6; Book of Concord, 223 $\triangle$ BSLK, 309, 1-6 / 2-11.

²¹ Jörg BAUR: Flacius – radikale Theologie. ZThK 72 (1975), 368.

²² The link between Luther and Williams has been analysed by Dietrich ERDMANN: Roger Williams: das Abenteuer der Freiheit. Kiel 1967. Williams' reference to Luther is in the Preface to »The bloody tenant yet more bloody«; Roger WILLIAMS: The complete writings. Vol. 4. NY 1963, 19f.

German and American pietists reacted to caesaropapist views by urging the Obrigkeit to cooperate with the church in establishing the kingdom of God on earth by way of good works of love and justice. August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) lobbied for governmental institutions to care for general education and welfare, an appeal that was heeded by the Prussian government. »Kings and princes must be awakened« he declared, »so that the kingdom of Satan in the world might be demolished and the kingdom of God erected«.²³ The American pietist Samuel Simon Schmucker (1799-1873) was even more optimistic about cooperation between church and state to enhance the kingdom of God. Appealing to Luther's spirit in the »Augsburg Confession«, he urged the church »to inculcate the justice of revolution« in those governments which, like the American government, failed to bring an end to such sins as slavery.²⁴ Luther was not that optimistic, being convinced that Christians will always remain »simultaneously righteous and sinners« (»simul justi et peccatores«) as long as they exist in this world.

Pietism in general did not advocate a dualistic distinction between Luther's two regiments, but it often did encourage people to become relatively independent of governing bodies. It allied itself with peasant movements opposed to monarchy and the state church in Scandinavia, especially in Finland. This attitude was also transmitted by pietist missionaries to Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

The Enlightenment, the rise of a liberal bourgeois society in continental Europe, and a concern for »Protestant social« (evangelisch-soziale) values – especially in German politics – produced a particularly perverted understanding of Luther. Frederick (1712, 1740-1786, later dubbed »The Great«), crown prince of Prussia, expressed regrets that Luther was not an enlightened Deist, but granted him a precursory spirit in that direction. He added that Luther should have advocated a nontrinitarian, Socinian Christianity that subjects itself completely to the monarchy.²⁵

23 Quoted in Erich BEYREUTHER: August Hermann Francke, 1663-1727: Zeuge des lebendigen Gottes. Marburg/Lahn 1956, 181f.

24 Quoted in Two kingdoms and one world, 120.

25 Letter dated May 14, 1737, to Voltaire; quoted in Ernst W. ZEEDEN: The legacy of Luther: Martin Luther and the Reformation in the estimation of the German Lutherans from Luther's death to the beginning of the age of Goethe (Martin Luther und die Reformation im Urteil des deutschen Luthertums (engl.))/ tr. by Ruth Mary Bethell. LO; Westminster, Md. 1954, 151f.

Throughout the nineteenth century, politicians and intellectuals in Germany used Luther to support their own understanding of the relationship between Christianity and the secular world. They claimed that Luther had advocated a spiritual, inward life of faith which had no bearing on external political decisions. This position was promulgated by the leaders and spokesmen for the German Evangelical-Social Congress, of which Friedrich Naumann (1860-1919) was a typical example. He insisted that Luther had regarded political matters as lying outside the sphere of the Christians message of salvation, and that what one does as a citizen is not informed by the Christian faith or the Bible. To be a Christian means to be inwardly free from life's external compulsions, »and it is in this part of our life that we will first of all be servants of Jesus«.²⁶ Thus Christianity was restricted to the inner personal sphere, as autonomous as the external political one. The historical-critical Luther research initiated by Karl Holl (1866-1926) produced considerable debate about Luther's political advice but did not end the abuse. Holl defended Luther as the pioneer of the modern »culture state« (Kulturstaat), but Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) viewed Luther as the advisor to advocates of territorial absolutism (particularly in Prussia). Such absolutism, according to Troeltsch, is simply a repetition in modern dress of medieval authoritarianism, encouraged first by Luther and then by his modern disciples.²⁷

The rise of Nazism in Germany prompted »German Christians« (Deutsche Christen) to invoke Luther and his Reformation in support of an unconditional alliance of the gospel with the national-socialist state, thus justifying their allegiance to the new Germany.²⁸ Karl Barth (1886-1968) accused Luther of being the spiritual father of what he called the Christianized version of German

26 Quoted in Lutheran churches . . . , 15.

27 Karl HOLL: The cultural significance of the Reformation/ tr. by Karl and Barbara Hertz and John Lichtblau. NY 1959, 51. German text in Karl HOLL: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte. Bd. 1: Luther. Tü 1927, 468-543; Ernst TROELTSCH: Proterstantism and progress: a historical study of the relation of Protestantism to the modern world (Die Bedeutung des Protestantismus für die Entstehung der modernen Welt (engl.))/ tr. by W. Montgomery. NY 1912, 111-113. Cf. also Eric W. GRITSCH: Luther and the state: post-Reformation ramifications. In: Luther and the modern state in Germany/ ed. by James D. Tracy. Kirksville, Missouri 1986, 45f.

28 [Karl Heinrich] RENGSTORF THESIS. No. 3. In: Two kingdoms and one world, 184/ tr. of DIE RENGSTORFER THESEN (OKTOBER 1933). In: Die Bekenntnisse und grundsätzlichen Äußerungen zur Kirchenfrage des Jahres 1933/ ed. by Kurt Dietrich Schmidt. GÖ 1934, 91.

paganism.²⁹ Although the German »Confessing Church« (Bekennende Kirche) used Luther to affirm that the lordship of Christ includes all areas of life,³⁰ a large majority of Germans hailed – or at least tolerated – Luther as the German Hercules who had opposed Roman power and proposed German power. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) conceded the possibility of such a view of Luther because Luther had confirmed the old Constantinian fusion of church and state, which had resulted in a »minimal ethic of inner-worldliness«.³¹ American critics have blamed Luther for what happened in Germany under Hitler, charging the reformer with making the dangerous distinction between a personal and an official ethic and teaching absolute obedience to political authority.³²

Although some work has been done in tracing the historical trajectory of distortions and abuses and contrasting them with Luther's own writings, much more work needs to be done.³³ But, since there is solid evidence demonstrating the proper use of Luther by Lutherans facing arrogant modern political power, it can be argued that abuse does not eliminate use. One example shall suffice.

III The case of Norway

When Germany began its military occupation of Norway on April 9, 1940, the Norwegian Lutheran church, led by Bishop Eivind Berggrav (1884-1959), made effective use of Luther's political advice in its resistance to the nazification of Norway.³⁴ As a leader of the ecumenical movement in the 1930s, Berggrav had

29 Karl BARTH: *Eine Schweizer Stimme*, 1938-1943. Zollikon-ZH 1948, 113.

30 BARMEN THESIS. No. 2. In: *Two kingdoms and one world*, 187f $\triangle$ *DIE GESCHICHTE DER GLAUBENSBEWEGUNG DEUTSCHE CHRISTEN*/hrsg. von Arnold Dannenmann. Dresden 1933, 37f.

31 Dietrich BONHOEFFER: *No rusty swords: letters, lectures and notes, 1928-1936*/ tr. by Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden. NY 1965, 324.

32 Reinhold NIEBUHR: *The nature and destiny of man*. Vol. 2. NY 1953, 194f; and William L. SHIRER: *The rise and fall of the Third Reich*. NY 1959, 236.

33 The Commission on Studies of the Lutheran World Federation has sketched the trajectory of the abuse of Luther's two-kingdom doctrine. Its conclusion: Luther advocated a Christian's responsibility for the world, »that is to say, the church witnesses to truth and right in every dimension of life«; cf. *Lutheran churches* . . . , 5. That Luther's doctrine of the two regiments has enduring relevance has been argued by a variety of scholars; cf., for example, Peter MANNS: *Luthers Zwei-Reiche- und Drei-Stände-Lehre*. In: *Luther und die politische Welt*, 25f; note 11 above.

34 Cf. Arne FJELLBU: *Luther as a resource of arms in the fight for Democracy*. In: *World Lutheranism of today: a tribute to Anders Nygren*. SH 1950, 81-97. For a history of the Norwegian

tried to prevent the impending world war, and he had learned much from the German *Kirchenkampf*. He was placed under house arrest from April 1942 until the end of the war in 1945, but he had succeeded in uniting the Norwegian church against Nazism.

Both sides in the struggle appealed to Luther. On June 13, 1940, the Quisling government's Department of Church and Education sent a circular letter to the Norwegian clergy who had resigned from their offices along with their bishops, demanding they return to their duties. The letter claimed the clergy were in sharp conflict with Luther's position, and that the clergy had the God-given duty to support the state. The Swedish newspaper »Stockholms tidningen« commented on the Norwegian government's letter with the statement that, according to Luther, obedience to the state assumes that government obeys common law. »This is not the case in Norway today, where the Quisling government regards itself above the law.«³⁵

Berggrav made obedience to Norwegian law one of the principal issues. Appealing to the Norwegian Bar Association to join the church in its resistance to the Nazi regime, he reminded the lawyers that the oldest Norwegian property law of 1140 begins with the words »The source of our laws is the fact that we bow ... before Christ.«³⁶ Religion and law, Berggrav contended, must be properly distinguished on the basis of the views of Paul and Luther that salvation comes not through good works but through grace. For the sake of justice in the world, however, good works must be done through the law. Tyranny perverts law because it rejects the foundation of the law's liberty and purity, »a philosophy of life which acknowledges the absolute.«³⁷ Although the church submits to the law, this does not mean that it submits to what is seemingly a law. Because conscience creates law in recognition of an absolute God, law and religion are intimately linked to each other. That is why the church maintains morality and asserts the dignity of every person.³⁸

Kirchenkampf see Bjarne HÖYE; Trygve M. AGER: The fight of the Norwegian church against Nazism. NY 1943; Torleiv AUSTAD: The doctrine of God's two-fold governance in the Norwegian church struggle from 1940-1945: fifteen theses. In: Lutheran churches ..., 84-94.

35 Quoted in Höye, Ager: The fight ..., 111.

36 Quoted from a lecture given before the Bar Association in Oslo on February 5, 1941. In: Eivind BERGGRAV: Man and the state/ tr. by George Aus. Phil 1951, 287-299, quotation, 288.

37 Ibid, 293.

38 Ibid, 298.

39 Berggrav: Man and the state, 8.

Berggrav identified Hitler as the prince in Niccolò Machiavelli's »Il principe«, translating »principe« as »leader« (Führer).³⁹ He called for opposition to the Quisling government because that government required allegiance to Hitler, a situation Berggrav considered analogous to one in which »the driver is out of his mind« – the title of a 1941 lecture on Luther's view of the duty of disobedience.⁴⁰ »It is high time«, he declared as his main thesis, »to establish that for Luther, as for us, there is *only one* [kingdom], and that is God's kingdom . . . We have only one Lord, and there is only one kind of obedience.«⁴¹ »Where power is first and law is second, we are in Satan's kingdom. Luther calls this *tyranny*. Tyranny's authority is like that of a crazy driver or a runaway horse.«⁴²

Berggrav cited Luther to show that no government has unconditional authority. Unconditional authority is sinful and satanic, and the church must fight when the state sins in this manner. »*It is one's duty to be disobedient*« in such a situation.⁴³ Berggrav agreed with Luther that Christians have two weapons in such a fight, namely the word and suffering. He compared the Norwegians' plight with that of the inhabitants of Leipzig under the Duke George's persecution: the Leipzig citizens were not permitted to cross the border into another territory where Lutherans held worship services; they were compelled to present themselves with marks of identification for confession; they were expelled from the territory; and they were robbed of their freedom of conscience. Berggrav then cited Luther's reaction in 1533 to this persecution as a model for Norway: Luther condemned the duke for extending his rule over body, property, and worldly things to encompass heart and conscience, and declared that such use of power comes from Satan and must be opposed by refusing to cooperate and by speaking up against it in word and in suffering. »*He who keeps silent shares in the guilt.*«⁴⁴

Berggrav appealed to Luther's definition of the word of God as both gospel and law in accordance with Christ's mandate. »To preach the gospel in heavenward-soaring generalities is to deny the Word that wants to become flesh. He who silences Christ *the rebuker* has also silenced Christ *the Savior*.«⁴⁵ Luther, moreover, had linked the communication of the word of God to the public office of ordained ministry. This office, like the office of Obrigkeit, exists within

40 Ibid, 300-319.

41 Ibid, 300f.

42 Ibid, 306.

43 Ibid, 307.

44 Ibid, 309-311, quotation, 308; cf. also Verantwortung der aufgelegten Aufruhr von Herzog

Georg samt einem Trostbrief an die Christen, von ihm aus Leipzig unschuldig verjagt, 1533;

WA 38, 110, 19-23.

45 Berggrav: Man and the state, 312.

God's created order in order to rebuke Satan. »The circumstance is not one in which a *spiritual* person is to rebuke an *official* person. It is one in which one of God's offices is to speak to another of God's offices.«⁴⁶ In this sense, the office of the word has the duty to preach God's law to the office of the sword.

Like Luther, Berggrav distinguished between tyranny and lawful authority. Luther had never admonished anyone to be obedient to authorities that disregard divine law and order in creation. But disobedience must be exercised in the name of the law and not in the name of the gospel or of Christ. »At this point the Christian citizen is no higher than the Second Table [of the Decalogue]. He exists in that situation not as a child of God but as one who is subject to civil authority. He must act in the name of the law.« Neither the church nor individual Christians may resort to violence, but they must risk their lives in order to point out sin and injustice. »Luther had a forbearing and profound reverence for authority. But he also had — as contrasted with those who later called themselves by his name — a fearless, God-given freedom toward all earthly authority.« Norwegians, too, should let God be God, who »cannot and will not suffer anyone to rule over the souls of men but Himself«.⁴⁷

Berggrav's appeals were quite effective. All Lutheran bishops and deans resigned their offices; only sixty of the one thousand pastors stayed in office; and a large majority of citizens supported the government in exile and the church's resistance. In October 1942, when the Quisling government ordered the confiscation of Jewish property, sixty church leaders signed an open letter of protest, admonishing the government that, »according to God's Word, all people have, in the first instance, the same human worth and thereby the same human rights«.⁴⁸ They added that such admonition was not interference with matters of state but rather, according to Luther, obedience to the highest authority, »which is God«.⁴⁹ If a government through tyrannical laws violates Christian consciences, Luther's words »worldly authority shall not rule over conscience« apply, and this government »must not be obeyed«.⁵⁰

46 Ibid, 313.

47 Ibid, 315. 318f; last quotation from Von weltlicher Oberkeit, ...; Am 45, 105 $\triangle$ WA 11, 262, 9f.

48 PROTEST OF THE TEMPORARY CHURCH LEADERSHIP AGAINST THE PERSECUTION OF JEWS IN NORWAY; Høye, Ager: The fight ..., 147. 49 Ibid, 149.

50 THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHURCH: a confession and declaration, Easter eve 1942. Section V: About the proper relation of the Christians and the church to the authorities; Høye, Ager: The fight ..., 178.

The Norwegian church renounced its allegiance to the state on April 5, 1942, and became a self-governing folkchurch until May 8, 1945. At the same time, it was a confessional church basing itself on Luther and the Lutheran Confessions in its struggle to achieve the pure communication of the Word of God.

IV A concluding reflection

It has become commonplace to debate Luther's statements about politics. This is so because he spoke to many situations, frequently shooting from the hip, as it were. As a result, there are many images of the political Luther produced by his own and by subsequent generations.⁵¹ Luther research has concentrated more on a systematic-theological assessment than on his impact on the world in his time or later. There is a need to do more reflection about the political Luther, who was troublesome to both his contemporaries and to later generations.⁵²

Luther was convinced that his own time was more burdened by the arrogance of political power in both church and state than any other age. Indeed, he thought his own time might be the final age of history, the era in which satanic power reaches its climax. But he did not succumb to apocalypticism. He alerted his world to this power with a Christian realism, calling for the constant distinction between divine and human power by speaking of two regiments and three estates as a divinely instituted order until the end of time. He offered political advice and lived with confidence in God, the power of the future. To Luther, politics was the daily grind of working for a balance of power in order to prevent tyranny and to permit people to interact with each other on the basis of their calling as Christians. Christians are to be Christs to their neighbors in need and, if need be for the sake of justice, emergency caesars.

51 See the illuminating history of Luther images by Heinrich BORNKAMM: *Luther im Spiegel der deutschen Geistesgeschichte: mit ausgew. Texten von Lessing bis zur Gegenwart*. 2., neu bearb. und erw. Aufl. GÖ 1970, esp. chapters 6 and 19 on the Luther image in the political movement of the 19th and 20th centuries (ibid, 52-77. 168-182).

52 Hartmut LEHMANN: *Luthers welthistorische Wirkung gezeigt am Beispiel der USA und Australiens im ausgehenden 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert*. In: *Luther und die Folgen: Beiträge zur sozialgeschichtlichen Bedeutung der lutherischen Reformation/ hrsg. von Hartmut Löwe und Claus-Jürgen Roepke*. M 1983, 199: "... gerade weil Luthers welthistorische Bedeutung weit über das Gebiet der Theologie hinausging, sollte man heute wieder mehr über den für Zeitgenossen wie Nachwelt unbequem politischen Luther nachdenken."