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NEWSLETTER



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SO HELP ME GOD

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PHOTO: AIR FORCE TECH. SGT. ROBERT R. ADAMS



PHOTO: MARINE CORPS CPL. BRENNAN PRIEST

WHERE IS GOD "FOR YOU"?

by Rev. Peter M. Burfeind

My first unit as a Reserve Chaplain was Civil Affairs. One drill weekend, one of the companies visited a water treatment facility near Columbus, Ohio. We spent several hours there, surveying the pipes, tanks, spigots, dials and gauges, listening to our host explain all the ins and outs of the facility.

At one point, we were in a room gathered in a circle around our instructor — mind you, again,

we're surrounded by water — when suddenly one of the soldiers keeled over and fell to the ground. Thankfully we had a doctor there, who ran over and attended to the soldier, cradling his head and trying to revive him. The doc then looked up and asked, "Does anyone have any water here?"

Everyone laughed. It was funny. We were at a Water. Treatment. Facility. Of course there was water. There was water everywhere!

But, of course, this misses the point. Having water everywhere is not the same thing as having the water there for that soldier. In order for

the water to be there for that Soldier, there needed to be some means of delivery — a spigot, a cup, and a person to give it to the soldier.

I was reminded of a quote from Martin Luther, who said, "God is everywhere, that is true. But where is God FOR YOU?"

The military currently favors a very "spiritual" or "non-sectarian" understanding of God. "God is everywhere" is the sentiment, and He communicates with people on their own terms. This is understood as "spirituality," and it fits nicely among a millennial population which increasingly claims to be "spiritual but not religious." Why

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UNDERSTANDING TWO KINGDOM THEOLOGY

by Rev. Winston Grieser

Buzz words, buzz words, buzz words. They are the favorite friend of confirmands and the bitter foe pastors or anyone else trying to actually teach anything. If I were to ask, “How are we saved?” and you answered, “Jesus,” that would be a buzz word. That answer doesn’t tell me anything. Do you mean the word “Jesus” is a password to get into heaven? Or do you mean knowing the historical fact that a man named Jesus of Nazareth once lived is enough to go to heaven? Or do you mean Jesus Christ, Son of God and son of the Virgin Mary, died on the cross to pay for the sins of all mankind, and that men are declared righteous in the sight of God by grace through faith? Buzz words are great at covering up our ignorance but serve as a great hindrance to learning and articulating Christian truths.

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WHAT DO LUTHERANS MEAN BY THE TWO KINGDOMS OR TWO KINGDOM THEOLOGY?

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So, when I ask, “What do Lutherans mean by *the two kingdoms* or *two kingdom theology*?”, it is unhelpful to respond, “The kingdom of the left and kingdom of the right.” What are those exactly?

The kingdom of the left is the secular world: government, businesses, and the like. In the kingdom of the left, order is maintained by earthly power and authority, laws and armies. Here God rules through temporal authorities, rather than the preaching of the Gospel, the forgiveness of sins and the administering Sacraments. The right-hand kingdom, on the other hand, is the Church. In the Church, Jesus Christ rules as our kindly Lord and Master through the Gospel, not by compulsion or brute strength. His people are His willingly, servants and brothers and sisters through the waters of Holy Baptism. We submit to Christ’s rule by faith.

This is the difference between the two: in the kingdom of the left, the sword (temporal power) is used to enforce the law and maintain power, while in the Church, all is carried out through the work of the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel. It is impossible to use earthly power extend God’s Kingdom. It is true that misguided attempts to convert people to the Christian faith have been made in the past, such as those by the Spanish conquistadors. However, forced conversion at sword-point can never create faith, which remains the work and gift of God the Holy Spirit.

However, we must avoid confusion about the left- and right-hand kingdoms. The argument



PHOTO: ARMY SGT. AMBER I. SMITH, DOD

that Christians should not serve in the civil realm because it establishes a religion is faulty. All people, regardless of their religion or lack thereof, are informed by a worldview. And that *world view* will shape how those people craft and interpret civil law. So how would a Christian mayor, who is, let's say, an elder in a LCMS congregation, navigate such a landscape? The answer is having a clear understanding of the two kingdoms.

As a mayor he is obligated to uphold the rule of law in the city, by force if necessary. As an elder he is to hold to the pure teaching of the Gospel and the Lutheran Confessions. If a group wants to rent out a public space like the fairgrounds for a convention or a wedding or something else, he should allow it if it meets with the various rules that the city has in place and doesn't lead to public unrest. As a public servant, the mayor is a subject to the rule of civil law. If he thinks Vikings are ridiculous, for example, he still can't deny them the use of the fair grounds for their axe-throwing and log-flipping contests.

As an elder, however, if said Vikings were to wander into the Divine Service, he must warn the pastor that they should not commune because they are not Christians (1 COR. 10:21) and have not been properly instructed in what the Lord's Supper is, and thus they cannot discern the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 COR. 11:27-30). While the Vikings are free to use the fairgrounds, when they enter the church, God's Word reigns supreme. Therefore, the mayor, as a Christian and elder, must support the pastor in being faithful.

And yet, whether in the church or outside of it, the mayor is a Christian and is compelled by his faith to behave as one. And according to the First Amendment of U.S. Constitution, he has every right to do just that. What Christians should do when laws are evil, especially when in positions of authority, is a topic for another time. But if the Vikings show up the mayor's church, he should let the sword of the Spirit do its work. Namely, rest in the fact that the Holy Spirit creates faith when and where He wills through the preaching of the Gospel. If, on the



PHOTO: LCMS COMMUNICATIONS/ERIK M. LUNSFORD

other hand, the Vikings decide to have good old-fashioned pillaging sessions, then the mayor can call in a S.W.A.T. team or whomever he needs to restore law and order. As Scripture says, *"For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain"* (ROM. 13:3-4).

Therefore, it is good and proper to distinguish between the left- and right-hand kingdoms. This does not mean, however, that the Gospel has no place in the secular realm, or that discipline has no place in the Church. The civil realm operates at its best when it is filled with Christians, and a church without discipline is a church in chaos. Christian mayors are more likely to strike the right balance between mercy and justice because they know God's Law and have received mercy from Christ their Savior. In the same way, Christian businessmen will be more generous, being moved by love for neighbor rather than profit margins. In the Church, all will be well, for Christ our dear Lord rules and reigns by His Gospel for our eternal good. And we, being shown our sins through the preaching of the Law, should flee to the Gospel and receive forgiveness and mercy from our Lord through His Word and Sacraments. And then, having been forgiven, a new man will arise to live before God in holiness and righteousness forever.

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CHECK IT OUT!

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go to the Church with all its dogmas, rituals and religiosity, when I can have God on my personal terms? Isn't God everywhere?

Martin Luther recognized the danger of this sort of thinking. God is everywhere, this is true, but what sort of God do you run into when, say, you meet him in a thunderstorm (as Luther had)? Or what sort of God do you run into when you're in the middle of a desert without water? Or what sort of God do you run into when you're in a bout of self-loathing or self-doubt?

Frankly, the God we run into on our own terms is fickle, demanding and unforgiving. If you want to see what a God would look like who emerges on our terms, just look at the internet. Is the internet a place of mercy, forgiveness and love? Hardly! More often than not it's loaded with shallow support, fake care, bullying, and creepy surveillance by ex-girlfriends or ex-boyfriends. That's us!

Luther spoke these words when talking about the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Why did God become a man? So that He could draw near to people where they were. Think of a leper. The leper seeking healing could go to a tree, up a mountain, or into a lion's den, and God would be in every one of those places. But only when the leper went to the flesh and blood man Jesus could he have any hope and certainty of being healed.

The same is true with us. Lots of "spiritualities" can offer feel-good sentiments or good psychology, but there is not the sort of promise and guarantee we have where Jesus is present in His flesh and blood. And where is that? It's in His Church, gathered around His Body and Blood in the Sacrament.

What is the promise we get there? Forgiveness, life and salvation in His Body and Blood and through His Word, all delivered by the "doc" we call the pastor through the means of grace.

Yes, that involves rituals, formal activities and other people — all the things associated with "religiosity." Similarly, that soldier getting water required its own rituals, formal activities and other people: someone had to get a cup and turn on a spigot and perform a list of ritualized activities. But the ritualized activity all served the end of being that "means of delivery" for the gifts.

In our "spiritual but not religious" world of minds drifting off through their smart phones into the fantasy world that is the internet, we are becoming disconnected from our own flesh. Our Lord is the antidote to some dangerous screen-related habits. He presents Himself to us in the flesh and blood, giving Himself fully to us, leaving us in no doubt where He is "for us."

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PHOTO: NAVY PETTY OFFICER 3RD CLASS ISAAC MAXWELL

WORSHIP AND DEVOTIONS

worshipanew.org

MILITARY ONE SOURCE

militaryonesource.mil

VETERANS CRISIS LINE

veteranscrisisline.net

WARRIORS OF FAITH

<https://www.lhm.org/studies/studydetail.asp?id=21041>

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<https://www.lhmgift.org/storefront/product.asp?style=&id=Project%20Connect&code=6BE140>

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