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Two Kingdoms & Two Cities: Mapping Theological Traditions of Church, Culture, and Civil Order

Robert C. Crouse

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017 (274 pages)

With a nod to the famous (or perhaps infamous) typology of H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*, Robert Crouse sets out to spur political theology toward new typologies of the church's relationship to culture and the social order. To that end, Crouse's study focuses on one tradition of political theology: the two-kingdoms tradition, especially as it developed in the wake of Martin Luther's famous (or, again, perhaps infamous) articulation of God's two kingdoms. In contemporary theological terms, Crouse presents his study as "theological cartography" or "mapping" (xix). A jaded theologian might be tempted to think that this is just a fancy way of saying "exposition," "analysis," and "survey." And *Two Kingdoms & Two Cities* is largely that: exposition, analysis, and survey.

In chapter 1, Crouse—closely following William J. Wright's line of interpretation—expounds Luther's understanding of the two kingdoms as a comprehensive Christian view of reality consisting of visible (law, outward) and invisible (gospel, inward) dimensions. Crouse concludes that an ambiguity inheres in Luther's vision, namely, that Luther separated the internal gospel from external social realities while simultaneously stressing the importance of Christian participation in common life and society's estates. This ambiguous relationship between the inward and the outward was then bequeathed to inheritors of Luther's two-kingdoms idea.

In subsequent chapters, Crouse surveys diverse conceptions of the relationship between the two kingdoms and analyzes the various ways that two-kingdoms thinkers have grappled with the gospel's relation to the external order. In these chapters Crouse looks at (in order) Reinhold Niebuhr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Robert Benne, John Courtney Murray, Richard John Neuhaus, David VanDrunen, Meredith Kline, R. A. Markus, Charles Mathewes, Eric Gregory, Augustine, and Oliver O'Donovan. The order of treatment, while not obviously intuitive, is significant. Crouse is presenting streams of two-kingdoms thought, organized into types, with Luther as the headwaters. Niebuhr and Bonhoeffer represent a "dialectical" adaptation of Luther's motif. Benne, Murray, and Neuhaus represent "paradoxical" versions of the two kingdoms concept. VanDrunen and Kline represent a Reformed adaptation that makes the two kingdoms run in "parallel" lines. Markus, Mathewes, and Gregory represent an "eschatological" vision of the kingdoms that, in some sense, unites them in the here and now for proximate ends, but separates them only in the eschaton. The biggest oddity here, of course, is the placement of Augustine *after* Luther and modern writers. Crouse's defense of this move—with his vague warning about the overemphasis of unnamed "scholars"—is a bit thin:

Addressing Augustine in the middle, not at the beginning, of our two-kingdom exposition has the odd effect of comparing Augustine to Luther, rather than the other way around. But this reversal helps to avoid the temptation of drawing a straight path from Augustine

to Luther. Scholars have sometimes overemphasized the degree to which Luther's two-kingdom thought is "dependent" on Augustine's two cities. (175–76)

Another oddity is that in a typology of the two-kingdoms tradition there is an entire chapter—a final chapter—on a critic of that tradition, Oliver O'Donovan. Crouse opens by acknowledging that O'Donovan opposes the Lutheran law/gospel distinction. He also readily points out O'Donovan's opposition to two-kingdoms conceptions of natural law. So O'Donovan serves, in Crouse's words, as a "foil" to the recent two-kingdoms proposals (220). And yet, in a bit of a twist—and in what seems to be a climactic gestalt moment in the book—Crouse argues that O'Donovan does in fact have a functioning twoness concept that not only reflects aspects of Luther's thought, but also reflects aspects of *all* of the previously discussed types of two-kingdoms thought. O'Donovan, it would appear, is ultimately not Crouse's two-kingdoms foil, but his two-kingdoms champion.

Historians and those who specialize in one of the figures presented may be frustrated with Crouse's typological method, which at times downplays evidence that might sully a clean typology. For example, in the conclusion to his chapter on Reinhold Niebuhr and Bonhoeffer, Crouse catalogs their departures from Luther's two-kingdoms idea, but then he says that they nevertheless, "somewhat unwittingly, retrieved a tradition of the two kingdoms" (60). This kind of heavily hedged claim in the face of counter evidence may drive some historians and specialists crazy, as may the aforementioned location of Augustine in the study.

It needs to be remembered, however, that *Two Kingdoms & Two Cities*, while containing much historical argument, is not principally a work of history. It is rather a work of theological typology. It is an exposition and classification of how several theologians have used a particular motif to express the gospel's relationship to social realities. And Crouse is a perceptive surveyor of this landscape. This is especially on display in his conclusion when he outlines key decision points that shape models of political theology (221). This brief, sixteen-page discussion is quite helpful for clarifying why Christian social and political thinkers take so many different approaches to the gospel's relationship to the social order. In the end, as a work of typology, and when read as such, *Two Kingdoms & Two Cities* is a helpful introduction to the "Lutherish" two-kingdoms idea, particularly as it has taken shape in recent decades, and the book should serve well as a reference work on two-kingdoms approaches to Christian social thought.

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The mission of the journal is to provide a forum for the scholarly exploration of the relationship between economics, theology, and ethics. The study of these fields unites in its concern with the human person and, more specifically, with human action. A primary objective of the journal, then, is to bring practitioners in these fields together and engage in spirited debate concerning the possible areas of mutual concern and intersection among their disciplines. A secondary objective is to develop and promote economic personalism. Economic personalism is a school of thought inspired by the centuries-old tradition of Christian reflection on the ethical character of social and economic life, which draws from Christian social thought, the natural-law tradition, and the insights of free-market economics. The goal of economic personalism is to produce a new paradigm for a humane economy based on a theological vision of the person.

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