

Two Kingdoms

WHAT IS THE BUSINESS OF THE CHURCH?

Recently a whole brigade of churches made pronouncements about the Aboriginals' joint ownership of land, and on the views of a politician. David Gill, a Uniting Church minister, and secretary of the National Council of Churches of Australia, said that wherever human beings' welfare is involved, the churches should be having a voice. The Lutheran doctrine of the "Two Kingdoms" states very clearly that the welfare of people's bodies is the business of the state, and the church's sole task is their spiritual welfare, essentially, the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins and salvation through Jesus Christ. The more a church gets involved in the process of trying to make this world a better place the more it loses or obscures its real task. It should be a question of rendering what is appropriate either to God or to Caesar. A section of Dr H Hamann's little book, *On Being a Christian* puts the situation very clearly: (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1989), 113-116).

"THE LUTHERAN CHURCH'S MISSION

"The marks of the church determine the mission of the Lutheran Church in the world. It is in the world to bear clear, genuine, unambiguous witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to the sacraments He instituted: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. It is there to make this witness both to those who are Lutherans and to those who are not, both to Christians and to non-Christians, for it is entrusted with the very Word of God, the Word of salvation. The Lutheran Church is there to nurture its members - and all others who will listen... to bring them to a stronger faith, a more perfect love, a more joyful hope. It sees its role in the world expressed in the words of the writer of Psalm 32: *'I shall instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I shall counsel you with My eye upon you'* (v.8).

"Discerning readers will probably think at this point of the argument that I have been guilty of a grave omission in my account of the mission of the church. They will be aware that most churches in the world - and especially the large representative bodies like the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation, as well as the Pope of Rome - have assumed for themselves a leading role in the endeavour to bring about a better world. The various churches make solemn declarations on a whole host of important concerns: on war and peace, on poverty and health, on justice and human rights, on freedom and the role of women in society. The churches have much to say on the proper action of governments in all quarters of the globe, calling upon them to change such-and-such a policy and enact such-and-such reforms. Knowing all this, it may well be a matter for wonder that the present description of the mission of the church has failed to speak of such activity as part of that mission.

"The answer is that the confessional Lutheran just does not consider these matters to be part of the mission of the church. A distinctive teaching of Lutheranism comes up here: the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms - although this traditional view has also been discarded by a great part of the modern Lutheran church. It is clear, we need to look at the rationale of this teaching more closely here.

"THE CHURCH'S COMMISSION

"Its risen and ascended Lord has charged the church with only one commission: to preach the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. All four Gospel accounts conclude with a scene in which the risen Lord appears and gives His disciples directions as to what they are to do at His final departure from them. These directions are couched in quite different words, but the meaning is demonstrably the same. Take St John's Gospel as one example:

Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you. ' And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained (Joh 20:21-23).

In Matthew's Gospel the commission is stated like this:

All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age (Mt 28:18-20).

The apostle Paul puts the situation in yet another way:

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation... in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18,19).

"There is something absolutely right and proper and even inevitable about this whole state of affairs. If the

world has in deed and in fact been reconciled to God by one mighty, historical event, what else remains but that this fact be made known to all those affected by it? We might say that there simply can't be any other task for the church of believers than the one given to it by the Lord of the church.

“The words of the Lord recorded in St Matthew point to another task of the church inherent in that of proclamation, a task affecting those who have heeded the Gospel call to be reconciled to God and have become Christ's disciples. All such disciples are to be guided to live a life of love as long as they are in this world. The will of God for them as contained in the Ten Commandments (the law of love spelt out in specific terms), in the example of Jesus, in the instruction for Christian living contained in Jesus' words (see for example, the Sermon on the Mount), and in the admonitions to be found in the New Testament letters, constitutes this guide. When the church uses this guide to nurture and edify its members, it teaches its members to observe all that Christ has commanded.

“The proper ordering of the world has been committed by God to various structures of society, which He himself has ordained. The chief of these are the home and the state. The home is the natural unit of society, where children can be trained for life in great part by the man and the women who brought them into existence. The ‘powers that be’, the governments of the various independent countries, no matter how organised and no matter how good or bad, are also ordained by God, and are His way, His necessary way, to preserve humanity. Without the law and order and, to a large degree, the protection afforded by government or the state, the human race would soon destroy itself in one big suicidal holocaust. In these structures of society all human beings are tied up, Christians included.”