Published in *International Journal of Public Theology* 15, no. 3 (2021): 385-400.

**Church, State, and Pluralistic Society**

**Reforming Lutheran Teaching on the Two Regiments**

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**Abstract:** This article demonstrates that Lutheran teaching on the two regiments can be drawn in different directions and how it was drawn in a particular direction for centuries so that it could provide a theoretical framework for mono-confessional Lutheran societies. It argues that the Lutheran two regiments theory can be developed along a different path, regaining some emphases in Luther’s early reflections: it can thereby contribute to an improved understanding of the role not only of the church but also of the state. While a number of Lutheran theologians believe that Lutheran teaching on the two regiments is particularly difficult to apply today, with some even contending that it should simply be abandoned, this article argues that Lutheran teaching on the two regiments could present a potential for a relevant understanding of the relationship between church, state, and society, and its ethical implications in a contemporary pluralistic society.

**Keywords:** Lutheran ethics – two kingdoms doctrine – Christian ethics – natural law – pluralistic society.

**Introduction**

A number of Lutheran theologians continue to maintain that Lutheran teaching on the two regiments provides important instructions for a Lutheran understanding of the role of the church in society while also outlining a fundamental framework for Lutheran ethics. The historical, cultural, and religious context has, however, changed dramatically since Luther formulated his thoughts concerning both the secular and the spiritual regiments. Luther lived in a religiously monolithic society with no democracy, thus raising the problem that certain aspects of Luther’s teaching on the two regiments cannot easily be applied to today’s context. In view of this dilemma, I will discuss the contemporary relevance of Lutheran teaching concerning the two regiments.

**The Lutheran Tradition**

Let me first of all consider what it implies to reclaim the Lutheran tradition for the twenty-first century. There are at least four matters that should be discussed in this regard. First, it is important to consider the original agendas of the Lutheran tradition, for example, by understanding Luther’s writings and the historical and theological context in which they were written. Second, it is important to understand the history of the Lutheran tradition, for example, by being aware of various formulations of Lutheran theology in different places and at various times. This approach can supply an awareness that pastoral and theological emphases in the Lutheran tradition are always contingent on historical and cultural contexts. Third, it is important to know the writings which are often held to be genuine expressions of Lutheran theology. One such significant work is the *Confessio Augustana*—a writing which is frequently regarded as indicating the contours of the theological self-understanding of the Lutheran church. Finally, in light of original, historical, and confessional matters, it is important to account for the Lutheran tradition’s relation to the church and society of today. The ambition here is to reformulate insights of the tradition, which are of significance and pertinence today through constructive studies.

In this article I seek to contribute to this debate regarding how the Lutheran tradition can be passed on in the twenty-first century. This intention implies a recognition of how Lutheran theology looks very different in various places and at different times. The Lutheran tradition is dynamic. It changes. It renews itself. The evangelization, preaching, and teaching of the church in contemporary societies must take into account how the church exists in increasingly pluralistic milieus rather than in antiquated monolithic societies.

In this regard it is worth noting a passage from Luther’s treatise, *Vom Kriege wider die Türken* (1528). Luther mentions that some have critiqued an article about Muslims he once wrote. They state that his position by no means can be followed in the current situation. Luther writes: ‘I acknowledge that this is my article and that it once was put forward by me and defended by me. If the world has not have changed since I wrote it, then I would also have put forward and defended it today.’[[1]](#footnote-2) The world is no longer as it once was; Luther has modified his viewpoints. He claims that it is absurd to hold him accountable for his old viewpoints when the context in the meantime has become so different. He contends that, with such a method, it is possible to revise even the gospel into a pure and simple lie and present it as if it were self-contradictory.[[2]](#footnote-3) Of particular significance is the way in which Luther himself reckons that any understanding of his writings should depend on the context in which they were written.

**Lutheran Teaching on the Two Regiments**

Luther not only reflects on the two regiments in his treatise, *Von weltlicher Obrigkeit* (1523), but also in his treatises, *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation von des christlichen* (1520), *Ob Kriegsleute auch in seligem Stande sein können?* (1526), *Wochenpredigten über Matthäus 5–7* (1532), as well as in several others.[[3]](#footnote-4) It is fair to claim that the teaching on the two regiments is a relatively central aspect of his theology even though he never characterizes his teaching on the two regiments as a proper doctrine (*Lehre*).[[4]](#footnote-5) Most of Luther’s writings dealing with this teaching address specific problems in certain situations, an approach which in turn determines the argumentation and stance of these writings to a significant extent.[[5]](#footnote-6) Several Luther scholars also make clear that Luther’s terminology and thinking do not seem to be consistent. The German theologian, Markus Wriedt, comments that, ‘Luther was not a systematic theologian. He did not develop and present his ‘teaching’ in concise treatises, logically arranged and secured to all sides. Luther’s theology rather grew out of a concrete situation.’[[6]](#footnote-7) Wriedt’s statement seems to correspond to Luther’s own understanding of his writings. Luther had a long-standing opposition to the publication of his writings in collective form; and, when he gave in, he made sure that no one would think too highly about them. In his preface to the first volume of his collective writings in Latin (1545), Luther writes: ‘My writings have come from the disorderly course of events, and they are a rough and unprocessed chaos that I myself even cannot find an order in’—most of his writings must be regarded as confused nightly products, he insisted.[[7]](#footnote-8)

When it comes to Luther’s teaching on the two regiments, the German theologian, Paul Althaus, points out that Luther is inconsistent in his use of such central concepts as *Reichen* and *Regimenten* in his main writing on the subject: that in and of itself greatly complicates the task of identifying a consistent theory.[[8]](#footnote-9) The English theologian Graham Tomlin, reckons that this teaching covers a rather complex theory filled with tensions that leaves many questions unanswered.[[9]](#footnote-10) The Swedish theologian, Per Frostin, in his posthumously published book, *Luther’s Two Kingdoms Doctrine*, portrays six quite different interpretations of Luther’s teaching on this one topic.[[10]](#footnote-11) It should come as no surprise that the German church jurist, Johannes Heckel, describes the discussion of this doctrine as an *Irrgarten*, a garden where one will necessarily become lost. The German theologian, Hans-Joachim Gänssler, goes so far as to argue that it is, in fact, misleading to refer to Luther developing a proper *doctrine* for the two regiments on the grounds that this term simply creates false expectations. He proposes that Luther merely distinguished between two regiments, as underlined by the subtitle, *Luthers Scheidung zweier Reiche oder Regimente*, from one of his books.[[11]](#footnote-12)

Luther nevertheless contends that he can boast—with good conscience and with the world as a witness—that by the grace of God no teacher since the days of the apostles has written so gloriously and usefully about the secular authority as he has.[[12]](#footnote-13) He makes this claim several times in his writings; the only other who may have written as clearly and magnificently on secular authority, he suggests, would be Saint Augustine.[[13]](#footnote-14)

**Luther’s Teaching on the Two Regiments’ Inner Tension**

In seeking to deal with Luther’s understanding on the relationship between church, state, and society and its ethical implications, a basic idea taken from Frostin’s *Luther’s Two Kingdoms Doctrine* is crucial. Frostin points out that Luther himself and interpreters of Luther’s reflections disclose a tension between two key themes: the first examines the teaching on the two regiments primarily as *two aspects of human life*, while the second theme understands the two regiments primarily as two forms of governance in the world, which concern two different groups of people, *two different empirically existing groups of human beings*.[[14]](#footnote-15) These two themes can, to some extent, be integrated, but they also represent a tension and different emphases.

Althaus sees the same tension in Luther’s teaching on the two regiments, putting forth that the second theme dominates Luther’s early writings, while the first theme is most evident in his later work.[[15]](#footnote-16) This first theme alludes to the fact that the secular regiment concerns the exterior of human life, while the spiritual regiment the interior.[[16]](#footnote-17) Luther is thus also able to refer to the secular regiment as the exterior regiment, implying that the spiritual regiment then constitutes the interior regiment.[[17]](#footnote-18) The exterior regiment naturally addresses the exterior, such as ‘body’, ‘property’, ‘cities’, ‘lands’, and ‘people’; the interior regiment is about ‘the inner,’, namely, ‘the soul’.[[18]](#footnote-19) For Luther it is vital that a distinction is made between these regiments and that their boundaries are not exceeded because, ‘over the souls God can and will not let others than himself rule.’[[19]](#footnote-20) The second theme also encompasses how God has established two regiments, but it focuses more on all citizens belonging to the secular regiment: only Christians belong to the spiritual regiment.[[20]](#footnote-21) The secular regiment has its own law, whereby society is governed in order to create peace, order, and justice.[[21]](#footnote-22) When it comes to the spiritual regiment, the church is here deployed to preach the gospel so that people are redeemed and sanctified.[[22]](#footnote-23) The law of this regiment is intended to regulate the life of Christians in the world.[[23]](#footnote-24) Frostin demonstrates how the first theme is dominant in the interpretation by Swedish theologian, Gustav Törnvall, of Luther’s teaching on the two regiments, while the second is critical for Johannes Heckel’s interpretation.[[24]](#footnote-25)

It is my view that Luther’s teaching was soon drawn in the direction of emphasizing the first theme and constituting a theoretical framework for a religiously monolithic society. That route was taken despite the evidence to the contrary showing that this framework was obviously in conflict with a number of key statements in Luther’s early teaching on the two regiments.[[25]](#footnote-26)

**Lutheran Teaching on the Two Regiments in a Monolithic Society**

An exterior identity existed between church and society during Luther’s time, although there were small minorities of Jews and Muslims in Germany in that era. The Danish historian, Uffe Østergaard, observes that in the fifteenth century no clear delineation was usually made between church and society. He posits that the monolithic society of the Middle Ages still prevailed in the perceptions of people who did not know of such division. In this respect, Luther still lived in a kind of medieval theocratic reality, where only one body existed, the *Corpus Christianum*.[[26]](#footnote-27) The Danish church historian, Thorkild C. Lyby, also highlights how Luther thought that Christianity constituted one body, a *Corpus Christianum*, founded by God himself and governed by two authorities, where each was assigned its own area of competence within the same society.[[27]](#footnote-28) The Norwegian theologian Jan-Olav Henriksen concludes that the distinction between the interior and exterior aspects of the human person rests on the premise that Luther lived in a religiously monolithic society where both the secular and the spiritual regiments were viewed as governances that would oversee two aspects of human life in this religiously monolithic society.[[28]](#footnote-29)

Such an interpretation of the teaching on the two regiments came to typify the Reformation, which took place in my own native country, Denmark, in the middle of the fifteenth century. Thus, the Church Ordinance of 1537/39, the law which contained provisions for the new Lutheran state church, demarcates the boundaries between the two ordinances. The ordinance of the church, on the one hand, dealt with the interior affairs of the church, that the gospel should be preached truthfully and that the sacraments should be administered rightly. On the other hand, the ordinance of the king prescribing the exterior arrangements of the church. Poul Georg Lindhardt, Danish church historian, writes that the Church Ordinance expresses a notion of a Christian state, where both ecclesiastical and royal authority are regarded as Christian authorities: it is the church’s task to preach the gospel, while it is that of the king to secure the exterior conditions conducive to this preaching.[[29]](#footnote-30) Thus, the Danish theologian, Asger Chr. Højlund, explains that, for centuries, a strong unity between church and state existed in Denmark. An essential framework for this marriage was the teaching on the two regiments—*even a specific understanding of it*. Namely, it was understood that the secular regiment is responsible for the *exterior*, while the spiritual regiment is in charge of the *interior*.[[30]](#footnote-31) This statement exhibits an interpretation of Luther’s teaching on the two regiments, which constitutes a theoretical framework for a religiously monolithic society. It furthermore displays the close connection between church and state, and where God is in charge of the whole of society, guiding it through two governances that concern the interior and exterior of human life.

Hence, for centuries, Lutheran theology—and especially its teaching on the two regiments—was compelled to move in a direction that it could theoretically legitimize a religiously monolithic society. This happened in Denmark, but also in several areas of Germany and elsewhere in Northern Europe during and after the Reformation.[[31]](#footnote-32) It occurred in spite of Luther explicitly stating that the church should not be led politically and that a country must not be led by the gospel.[[32]](#footnote-33) The Danish theologian, Svend Andersen likewise insists that the German territorial church system was contrary to the very core of Luther’s teaching on the two regiments: Luther only regarded this arrangement to be temporary, which it never became.[[33]](#footnote-34) Moreover, this development did not reflect the eschatological tension between the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of God, an issue which is particularly apparent in *Von weltlicher Obrigkeit*. Thus, a practical and theoretical view of church and government, and the relationship between them, developed. This manifestly stood in opposition to Luther’s early teaching on the two regiments. In the circumstances Luther’s teaching can be redrawn in a different direction which regains some of Luther’s early emphases. In so doing his teaching on the two regiments can then foster a meaningful understanding of not only the role of the church, but also the state in a contemporary pluralistic society.[[34]](#footnote-35)

**Lutheran Teaching on the Two Regiments** **and Pluralistic Society**

**i). The Church in a Pluralistic Society**

In *Von weltlicher Obrigkeit*, Luther writes: ‘All humans can be divided into two groups: One group which belongs to the kingdom of God and one group which belongs to the kingdom of the world. The first group is all who have a real faith and are in and under Christ.’[[35]](#footnote-36) The second group comprises all those who do not belong to Christ. Elsewhere, Luther proclaims a similar sentiment when he writes that there exist two groups of people: ‘the one in the kingdom of God under Christ, and the other group is in the kingdom of the world under worldly authorities.’[[36]](#footnote-37) He further points out that each group has a law, and therefore one must operate with ‘two kinds of laws; for each kingdom needs to have its own laws, because without law neither kingdom or any form of governance will endure’.[[37]](#footnote-38) Luther emphasizes how a certain group of people, namely the Christians, make up the Christian church. Luther thus proposes that there ‘exist many people in the world, but the Christians are a distinctly called people’:[[38]](#footnote-39) this distinct group of people can be identified in the world, and possesses some distinctive marks. Luther further mentions that the Christian church may be known by, among other things, the fact that the gospel is preached, the sacraments are administered, that prayers are prayed, and that it will be a persecuted people in the world.[[39]](#footnote-40)

According to Luther, Christians belong to the kingdom of God, where Christ is king and lord.[[40]](#footnote-41) This kingdom has its own law, Luther notes. It means that Christians should not be hostile to anyone and that they should not embrace hatred, revenge, or envy. Rather they should be willing to help and forgive others.[[41]](#footnote-42) It is a way of being that suggests that Christians should not defend themselves, not collect treasures, not demand their rights, and not worry about tomorrow. Christians should live a life of love, forgiveness, and service.[[42]](#footnote-43) Here, it is interesting that Luther both expands and narrows Christian ethics. On the one hand, he expands Christian ethics when he states that such ethics are not only for the few who are initiated, but for all Christians. On the other hand, he narrows Christian ethics because he stresses that such ethics are only for Christians.

 Let me offer a few examples of the latter. In his interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, *Wochenpredigten über Matthäus 5–7* (1532), Luther clearly indicates that Jesus only directed his sermon to Christians:

Therefore, pay close attention to what Christ is talking about and who he is speaking to, as it is the key to understanding these issues. He speaks of the spiritual being and life, and he speaks to his Christians how to live and how to relate to God and the world.[[43]](#footnote-44)

In *Von weltlicher Obrigkeit* Luther writes that Jesus exclusively preached his sermon for

his dear Christians. It is also only those who will listen to it and act on it … If all people were now Christians, then all those words would concern them, and they would act upon them. But when they are not Christians, the words do not concern them, nor do they act upon them.[[44]](#footnote-45)

It would thus appear that Luther recognizes that Christian ethics is not intended to be ethical instructions for the whole of society. Rather, such an ethics represents ethical guidance for the Christian church. In this way, the Christian church functions as a *locus* for Christian ethics.[[45]](#footnote-46) On account of the role it plays in their lives Christians do not require secular laws because ‘they have the Holy Spirit in their hearts, who teaches them, but does not watch over anyone, love anyone or love itself, and is happy with the passing of time, yes, even death’.[[46]](#footnote-47) For Luther Christians are usually persecuted because of their faith; priests will particularly experience this persecution and must be subjected to, on a daily basis, all sorts of hate, ridicule, and envy, as well as mockery, contempt, and disdain.[[47]](#footnote-48)

There are thus two forms of governance in the world, each with its own law. The first form of governance is spiritual and concerns Christians who accept Christ as saviour and lord, and who thus regulates Christians’ lives in the world. Luther can write that the spiritual regiment should not only create Christians, but pious Christians through the Holy Spirit.[[48]](#footnote-49) The spiritual regiment concerns not only the justification, but also the sanctification of Christians who are called to embody Christian ethics. The second form of governance is secular and must regulate society with the objective of creating peace, order, and justice in the world. According to Luther, both of these forms of governance are necessary, but one must nevertheless distinguish between them because each of them has its own nature and purpose.

There is clearly a difference between Christian and worldly ethics according to Luther. In the book, *Von Kaufshandlung und Wucher* (1524), Luther comments how secular laws allow Christians to file lawsuits against each other. Although allowed, Christians should not make use of this practice because it is in conflict with Christian ethics. Similarly, Luther claims that secular laws permit whorehouses. Yet, even though this is the case, Christians must not frequent such locations because this behavior is in contravention of Christian ethics.[[49]](#footnote-50)

This presentation of the spiritual regiment captures certain crucial aspects of the early Luther and, at the same time, holds the potential for understanding the role of the church in a contemporary pluralistic society. One of the consequences of pluralization processes affecting many contemporary societies is that the Christian church no longer consists of *everybody* in society, but only of *somebody*. Under the current societal circumstances, the church must regard itself as a distinct people. This group is called to embody Christian ethics, as evidenced by Luther’s early thinking on the two regiments. Although there may have been an exterior identity between church and society during Luther’s time, he was an Augustinian monk and thus operated, again and again, with the church as a distinct people, as a kind of a *civitas Dei* which cannot be harmonized with the *civitas terrena*.

**ii). The State in a Pluralistic Society**

According to Luther, a worldly government, or the state, is nothing less than a divine arrangement. He refers to epistles in the New Testament, which claim that there is no authority that is not from God (Rom. 13:1): Christians must, therefore, submit to this order (1 Pet. 2:13–14).[[50]](#footnote-51) According to Luther, the state has a specific role to play in society. It must promote order. Luther stipulates that in the secular regiment one must set and observe differences between individuals so that everyone knows what he or she must do so that order is maintained in society.[[51]](#footnote-52) It must promote peace and justice within society. In the secular regiment Luther advises that one must set and observe differences between various people’s possessions, enforce justice, and exercise punishment. Luther thus recognizes that lawyers must contribute to the maintenance of such order so that a peaceful and just social condition is maintained.[[52]](#footnote-53) In order for this order to happen, God allows the use of swords to ensure that citizens live up to their duties, namely paying taxes and respecting the property of others, for example.[[53]](#footnote-54) This is divinely intended: the authorities bear with good reason swords to discipline those who do not respect this order (Rom. 13:4).[[54]](#footnote-55)

Luther’s teaching on the two regiments can contribute to a meaningful comprehension of the relationship between church and state in a pluralistic society. Three examples are in order. First, where the spiritual regiment expresses God’s salvific will, the secular regiment expresses God’s creational will; and, where faith is a prerequisite in the spiritual regiment, this is not the case in the secular regiment. As Andersen states, the secular regiment does not assume Christian faith.[[55]](#footnote-56) In other words, God maintains the created world for all, regardless of religious beliefs. God let the sun rise above all regardless of religious beliefs. God maintains the world through the work of humankind as craftsmen, farmers, and diplomats, regardless of religious beliefs. In the secular regiment, Christian faith is not a prerequisite for acting as a judge or physician, and one does not necessarily become a better judge or physician by being a Christian. Schools, universities, and tribunals do not have to be Christian in the secular regiment. This approach allows for different people to engage themselves in a variety of ways within a pluralistic society.[[56]](#footnote-57) This is a consequence of Luther’s (early) teaching on the two regiments whereby a society should not be led in a specific Christian manner. Instead, today’s citizens must enter into a common discussion about pressing societal issues.

Yet, how can one argue normatively in such discussions? This question leads me to the second perspective. According to Luther so much here depends upon natural law and how it is (to some degree) available to human reason. It is based on this understanding that Luther can argue how any human being, on a general basis, can discern how she or he should act in the secular regiment.[[57]](#footnote-58) It also lays the ground for why the Christian faith cannot form the basis of human activity within the world, nor can such faith be the normative foundation for a public discussion about current societal issues. Nevertheless, with natural law, there is a common basis for public discussions consisting of elements, such as dialogue, experience, language, and reason. Hence, there exists the possibility for conversations across different traditions and between varying positions. Using common languages, common experiences, and rational arguments, dialogue between differing views on ethical issues, for example, in a pluralistic society can take place.[[58]](#footnote-59)

This brings us to a third perspective, namely, the necessity of a common legal framework. Luther believed that in the secular regiment one must establish and observe the distinction between individuals’ private possessions, the enforcement of justice, and punitive action. He also thought that lawyers must contribute to maintaining such an order so that a peaceful and just social order can be preserved.[[59]](#footnote-60) In other words, a society requires a legal philosophy and a law that can express the consensus reached in society, while courts can supply a powerful institutionalization of norms that regulate social behavior and, in this way, create social cohesion in society.[[60]](#footnote-61)

**iii). The Church and State in a Pluralistic Society**

This article sets out to interpret the teaching on the two regiments, primarily as two forms of governance in the world. As a continuation of this approach, one can ask whether the result of this interpretation will not be a complete separation of the mandate of the church and state. Such a point of view was widespread among a number of German Lutheran theologians in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century and had fatal consequences. These theologians stated that the church should merely proclaim the gospel and not interfere in social matters. Lutheran Christians hardly distanced themselves from the national socialist regime, with many even supporting it as a consequence.[[61]](#footnote-62) This perspective would not have gained ground within the Lutheran reform movement of the fifteenth century, which was not just a theological, but also a political-social reform movement.

 Luther was interested in both theological discussions along with school reforms, university reforms, prostitution, regulation of the banking world, ownership rights, tax liability, legal philosophy, etc. Luther’s clear concern for social responsibility could well inspire today’s Lutheran churches to take on social responsibility as well. One essential aspect of a Lutheran church’s social responsibility is to sustain the state’s proper role in society. It is the task of the state to promote a peaceful, orderly, and just society. In addition, the government must not contend with its borders and interfere in the internal affairs of the church. It follows that a Lutheran church must act as *the conscience of the state*.[[62]](#footnote-63) It must not only mirror the attitudes of society; rather, it is also called to act as light and salt in this world (cf. Matt. 5:13).[[63]](#footnote-64) This requirement can only be ensured by a church as a distinct people in this world, not because the church or gospel is for the few. The church will normally be a distinct people and must, as such, be witness to the society in which it lives.

**Conclusion**

There exist many different interpretations of Luther’s teaching on the two regiments, as well as a great deal of diverse applications of this so-called doctrine. Lutheran teaching on the two regiments was drawn in a particular direction for centuries so that it could provide a theoretical framework for a religiously monolithic society—even though this approach was clearly in conflict with certain key statements in Luther’s early teaching on the two regiments. Some Lutheran theologians believe that Lutheran teaching on the two regiments is difficult to apply today; some even believe that it must simply be abandoned.[[64]](#footnote-65) Contrary to these views, this article has demonstrated that Lutheran teaching on the two regiments may reflect a meaningful and relevant understanding of the relationship between church, state, and society along with some of its ethical implications in a contemporary pluralistic context. The argument of this article in many ways supports the document *The Church in the Public Space* published by the Lutheran World Federation as it avoids the teaching on the two regiments to spiritualize the church but instead provides orientation for the church to engage itself a religiously plural society.[[65]](#footnote-66)

1. . WA 30II,108 (*Vom Kriege wider die Türken*): ‘Jch bekenne noch frey das solcher artickel mein sey und zu der zeit von mir gesetzt und verteidingt, Und wo es itzt ynn der welt stuende wie es dazumal stund, so wolt und must ich den selbigen noch itzt setzen und verteydingen’ (my own translation above). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. . WA 30II,108 (*Vom Kriege wider die Türken*). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. . In the following, when I cite these and other writings by Luther, I have chosen to place the original text in the footnotes and a translation in the main text. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. . The American theologian, Jonathon David Beeke, states: ‘[U]nderstanding Luther’s two kingdoms is crucial for a proper understanding of his whole theology.’ See Jonathon David Beeke, ‘Martin Luther’s Two Kingdoms, Law and Gospel, and the Created Order: Was There a Time When the Two Kingdoms Were Not?’, *Westminster Theological Journal* 73:2 (2011), 194. It was Karl Barth who used the expression, *Zwei-Regimente-Lehre*, regarding Luther’s differentiation between the two regiments for the first time according to Beeke. He did that in 1922. See Beeke, ‘Martin Luther’s Two Kingdoms’, p. 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. . Eric W. Gritsch, *Martin – God’s Court Jester: Luther in Retrospect* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2009), p. 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. . Markus Wriedt, ‘Luther’s Theology’, in Donald K. McKim, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. . WA 54,179 (*Vorrede Luthers zum ersten Bande der Gesamtausgabe seiner lateinischen Schriften*): ‘Multum diuque restiti illis, qui meos libros seu verius confusiones mearum lucubrationum voluerunt editas, tum quod nolui antiquorum labores meis novitatibus obrui et lectorem a legendis illis impediri, tum quod nunc Dei gratia exstent methodici libri quam plurimi, inter quos Loci communes Philippi excellunt, quibus theologus et episcopus pulchre et abunde formari potest, ut sit potens in sermone doctrinae pietatis, praesertim cum ipsa sacra biblia nunc in omni prope lingua haberi possint, mei autem libri, ut ferebat, imo cogebat rerum gerendarum nullus ordo, ita etiam ipsi sint quoddam rude et indigestum cahos, quod nunc nec mihi ipsi sit facile digerere’ (excerpt quoted above is my own translation). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. . Paul Althaus, *Die Ethik Martin Luthers* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1965), p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. . Graham Tomlin, *Luther and His World* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 2002), pp. 132–133. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. . Per Frostin, *Luther’s Two Kingdoms Doctrine: A Critical Study* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1994), pp. 11–48; see also Beeke, ‘Martin Luther’s Two Kingdoms’, p. 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. . Hans-Joachim Gänssler, *Evangelium und weltliches Schwert: Hintergrund, Entstehungsgeschichte und Anlass von Luthers Scheidung zweier Reiche oder Regimente* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1983). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. . WA 30II,110 (*Vom Kriege wider die Türken*): ‘ich von der weltlichen oeberkeit also herlich und nuetzlich geschrieben habe, als nie kein lerer gethan hat, sint der Apostel zeit’. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. . See, for example, WA 19,625 (*Ob Kriegsleute auch in seligem Stande sein können?*); WA 30II,110 (*Vom Kriege wider die Türken*). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. . Frostin, *Luther’s Two Kingdoms Doctrine*, p. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. . Althaus, *Die Ethik Martin Luthers*, pp. 56–58; see also Paul T. McCain, ‘Receiving the Gifts of God in His Two Kingdoms: The Development of Luther’s Understanding’, *Logia* 8:3 (1999), 29–40; see also Knut Alfsvåg, ‘Christians in Society: Luther’s Teaching on the Two Kingdoms and the Three Estates Today’, *Logia* 14:4 (2005), 15–16. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. . WA 11,259.262.265 (*Von weltlicher Obrigkeit*). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. . WA 11,266–271 (*Von weltlicher Obrigkeit*). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. . WA 11,262–264 (*Von weltlicher Obrigkeit*). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. . WA 11,262 (*Von weltlicher Obrigkeit*): ‘Denn uber die seele kan und will Gott niemant lassen regim denn sich selbs alleyne’ (my own translation above). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. . WA 11,251–252 (*Von weltlicher Obrigkeit*). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. . WA 11,251 (*Von weltlicher Obrigkeit*). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. . WA 11,251 (*Von weltlicher Obrigkeit*). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. . WA 11,251 (*Von weltlicher Obrigkeit*). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. . Frostin, *Luther’s Two Kingdoms Doctrine*, pp. 18–20, 22–23; Gustav Törnvalls, *Andligt och världsligt regemente hos Luther: Studier i Luthers världs- och samhällsbild* (Stockholm: Svenska Kyrkans Diakonistyrelses Bokförlag, 1940); Gustav Törnvalls, ‘Der Christ in den zwei Reichen’, *Evangelische Theologie* 10:2 (1950); Gustav Törnvalls, ‘Die sozialtheologische Hauptaufgabe der Regimentenlehre’, *Evangelische Theologie* 17 (1957); Johannes Heckel, ‘Luthers Lehre von den zwei Regimenten: Fragen und Antworten zu der Schrift von Gunnar Hillerdal’ in by Gunther Wolf, ed, *Luther und die Obrigkeit* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972); Johannes Heckel, ‘Recht und Gesetz, Kirche und Obrigkeit in Luthers Lehre von der Thesenanschlag von 1517: Eine juristische Untersuchung’, *Zeitschrift der Savigny-stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte* 26:1 (1937); Johannes Heckel, ‘Zwei-Reiche-Lehre’ in *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon III* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959); Johannes Heckel, *Im Irrgarten der Zwei-Reiche-Lehre: Zwei Abhandlungen zum Reichs- und Kirchenbegriff Martin Luthers* (München: Kaiser, 1957). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. . The German historian Heinz Schilling has proposed a confessionalization theory which shed light on the confessionalization of Scandinavian societies during and after the Reformation. See ‘The Confessionalization of European Churches and Societies: An Engine for Modernization and for Social and Cultural Change’, *Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 110:1 (2009). Later, the German church historian Thomas Kaufmann has offered a modified version of Schilling’s confessionalization theory in which he defines *Lutheran confessional culture* as ‘essential aspects of contemporary culture were more or less intensely shaped by ideas, attitudes, and mentalities founded in the Lutheran interpretation of Christianity and could be legitimized by respective doctrinal norms’. See Thomas Kaufmann, ‘What is Lutheran Confessional Culture?’, Per Ingesman, ed, *Religion as Agent of Change: Crusades – Reformation – Pietism* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), p. 131. In this article, I refer to *religiously monolithic societies* rather than *Lutheran confessional culture* although the meaning of the two phrases overlap to a great extent. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. . Uffe Østergaard, ‘Martin Luther og dansk politisk kultur: Nationalkirke, luthersk reformation og dansk nationalisme’, *Kritik* 195 (2010), p. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. . Lyby, ‘Luthers øvrighedsskrift i historisk perspektiv’, pp. 15–16. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. . Jan-Olav Henriksen, ‘Pluralism and Identity: The Two-Kingdoms Doctrine Challenged by Secularization and Privatization’ in Niels Henrik Gregersen, Bo Holm, Ted Peters and Peter Widmann, eds, *The Gift of Grace: The Future of Lutheran Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), p. 278. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. . P.G. Lindhardt, *Den nordiske kirkes historie* (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, 1945), pp. 109–110. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. . Asger Chr. Højlund, ‘Det blivende anliggende: Toregimentelæren i en postkonstantinsk tid’ in Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen, ed, *National kristendom til debat* (Fredericia: Kolon, 2015), p. 217. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. . This is exemplified in a number of contributions in Bo Kristian Holm and Nina Javette Koefoed, eds, *Lutheran Theology and the Shaping of Society: The Danish Monarchy as Example* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018). For more research on Lutheran theology and the development of the Scandinavian societies during and after the Reformation, see Martin Schwarz Lausten, *Die Heilige Stadt Wittenberg: Die Beziehungen des dänischen Königshauses zu Wittenberg in der Reformationszeit* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2010) and Ole Peter Grell, ed, *The Scandinavian Reformation from Evangelical Movement to Institutionalisation of Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. . WA 11,251–252 (*Von weltlicher Obrigkeit*). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. . Svend Andersen, ‘Hvad er kirkens funktion i forhold til samfundet?’, *Kritisk Forum for Praktisk Teologi* 147:1 (2017), p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. . I emphasize that the understanding I present in the following section does not constitute an exhaustive actualization of Luther’s teaching on the two regiments; rather, it indicates the potential for an actualization of Luther’s teaching on this topic. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. . WA 11,249 (*Von weltlicher Obrigkeit*): ‘[Hie muessen wyr] alle menschen teylen ynn zwey teyll: die ersten zum reych Gottis, die andern zum reych der welt. Die zum reych Gottis gehoeren, das sind alle recht glewbigen ynn Christo unnd unter Christo’ (my own translation above). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. . WA 11,262 (*Von weltlicher Obrigkeit*): ‘der eyns ynn Gottis reych unter Christo, das ander ynn der welt reych unter der uberkeyt ist’ (my own translation above). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. . WA 11,262 (*Von weltlicher Obrigkeit*): ‘zweyerley gesetz haben. Denn eyn iglich reych muß seyne gesetz unnd rechte haben, unnd on gesetz keyn reych noch regiment bestehen kan’ (my own translation above). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. . WA 50,624 (*Von den Konziliis und Kirchen*): ‘Nu sind in der welt mancherley Voelcker, Aber die Christen sind ein besonder beruffen Volck’ (my own translation above). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. . WA 50,641–643 (*Von den Konziliis und Kirchen*). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. . WA 11,249–259 (*Von weltlicher Obrigkeit*). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. . WA 50,643 (*Von den Konziliis und Kirchen*). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. . Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen, “Kristen etik i et pluralistisk samfund: En ny kurs for dansk teologisk etik”, *Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 79:2 (2016), 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. . WA 32,389 (*Wochenpredigten über Matthäus 5–7*): ‘Diesen unterscheid fasse und merck wol als den grund der sachen, darnach man auff solche fragen leichtlich kan antworten, das du sehest wo von Christus redet und wer die leute sind den er predigt, nemlich von geistlichem wesen und leben und fur seine Christen, wie sie fur Gott und jnn der welt leben und sich halten sollen’ (my own translation above). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. . WA 11,252 (*Von weltlicher Obrigkeit*): ‘Eigentlich sagt ers nur seinen lieben Christen. Die nehmens auch alleine an und tun auch also … Wenn nun alle Welt Christen wäre, so gingen sie alle diese Wort an und sie tät also. Nun sie aber Unchristen ist, gehen sie die Wort nichts an, und sie tut auch nicht also’ (my own translation above). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. . Nikolajsen, “Kristen etik i et pluralistisk samfund,” 116-117. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. . WA 11,250 (*Von weltlicher Obrigkeit*): ‘die weyl sie den heyligen geyst ym hertzen haben, der sie leret unnd macht, das sie niemant unrecht thun, yederman lieben, von yederman gerne und froehlich unrecht leyden, auch den todt’ (my own translation above). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. . WA 32,313–314 (*Wochenpredigten über Matthäus 5–7*): ‘Sonderlich aber die lieben prediger mussen solchs wol lernen und teglich damit geubt werden, das sie allerley neid, has, hon under spott, undanck, verachtung und lesterung dazu mussen jnn sich fressen.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. . WA 11,251–252 (*Von weltlicher Obrigkeit*). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. . WA 15,293–322 (*Von Kaufshandlung und Wucher*). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
50. . WA 11,247 (*Von weltlicher Obrigkeit*). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
51. . WA 32,389 (*Wochenpredigten über Matthäus 5–7*). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
52. . WA 32,374.389.394 (*Wochenpredigten über Matthäus 5–7*). [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
53. . Henriksen, ‘Pluralism and Identity: The Two-Kingdoms Doctrine Challenged by Secularization and Privatization’, 277. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
54. . WA 11,251 (*Von weltlicher Obrigkeit*). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
55. . Svend Andersen, ‘Religion og social sammenhæng: Kristendom og den moderne velfærdsstat: Et teologisk perspektiv’, *Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift* 48:1 (2006), 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
56. . Henriksen, ‘Pluralism and Identity’, 279. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
57. . Andersen, “Religion og social sammenhæng,” 27; see also Jørn Henrik Petersen, “Velfærdsstatens normative grundlag”, *Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift* 48:1 (2006), 12-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
58. . Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen, “Christian Ethics, Lutheran Tradition, and Pluralistic Society”, *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 62:3 (2020), 307. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
59. . WA 32,374.389.394 (*Wochenpredigten über Matthäus 5–7*). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
60. . One can ask whether this actualization of Lutheran teaching on the two regiments simply ignores some of Luther’s emphases, such as the distinction between interior and exterior. It is possible; in which case, I should not regret it. I do not want to write off any distinction between interior and exterior, but often this distinction seems to me to be quite problematic. It is difficult to see how this distinction will not lead to the privatization of the gospel and the kingdom of God. The Lutheran theologian, Carl E. Braaten, is also critical of a dualism between the interior and exterior, where the interior alone is about the spiritual, while the exterior singularly is regarding the earthly. By way of illustration, Braaten refers to the dogmatics of the German theologian, Christian Luthardt, which gained widespread popularity among German priests in the second half of the nineteenth century when this dualism was so radically advanced that the gospel had nothing to do with earthly life. According to Braaten, this widespread thought contributed to the fact that German national socialism was ever so slightly contradicted by Lutheran Christians in Germany during the early twentieth century. See Carl E. Braaten, ‘The Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms Re-examined’, *Currents in Theology and Mission* 15:6 (1988), 498–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
61. . For example, see Richard V. Pierard, ‘The Lutheran Two-Kingdoms Doctrine and Subservience to the State in Modern Germany’, *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 29:2 (1986). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
62. . The expression *the conscience of the state* has been used by various theologians in Denmark for several decades. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
63. . Cf. the title of the book *Lutheran Church: Salt or Mirror of Society: Case Studies on the Theory and Practice of the Two Kingdom Doctrine*, edited by Ulrich Duchow(Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1977). [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
64. . For example, see Gänssler, *Evangelium und weltliches Schwert*, pp. 109–112, 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
65. . Lutheran World Federation, *The Church in the Public Space* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2016), p. 20. This article is a translation of my article ‘Kirke, øvrighed og pluralistisk samfund’ published in the anthology *Kirke og øvrighed i et pluralistisk samfund* in Denmark in 2017. Some revisions have been made. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)