

Forde on the Two Kingdoms

1. From Forde's article: "The Revolt and the Wedding"

[The two kingdoms doctrine's] great contribution to the problem of social ethics is exactly to strip men of their mythologies. For the very fact that it insists that whatever other Kingdom there is, the eschatological one comes **solely and absolutely by God's power alone** means that the only real task for men is to repent, to turn around and take care of this world as best they know how – without myth, but with **reason, love and justice; to be pragmatic**: to solve problems concretely.

The eschatological vision makes it clear that **the secular is our sacred task**. It tears the mask from our pretensions and bids us become human beings. That, I think, is the real significance of Luther's resistance to the Peasant's Revolt, whatever we may think of his final action. He saw quite clearly that if one is to apply this principle, then there could be **absolutely no exceptions**. Not even those who undertake revolutions for the sake of so-called 'Christian principles' can be excepted. Nobody, Prince, Peasant, Preacher, President or what have you, carries out a revolution or a political program in the name of Christ. That is so first of all because Luther categorically refused to allow Christ to become a club with which to beat anyone (a 'New Law' as he called it), and secondly because revolutions and political programs can be carried through only in the name of humanity without appeal to either myth or religion. Luther means that quite radically. **You don't need Christ, or even the Bible, necessarily, to tell you what to do in social matters. You have reason, use it!**¹

First of all, if justification proceeds by way of negation, then the judgment is indeed universal and **all causes are relativized**. This flows from the very nature of the gospel and cannot be compromised.

2. From Forde's book: "Where God Meets Man"

The line between this world and the next is drawn by God's grace. This establishes the world as a place under the law in which man can live, work, and hope.... Hope in the world to come creates the faith and patience to live in this world; it gives this world back to us by relieving us of the burden of our restless quests. Freedom from the world makes us **free for it**.... This is what it means to say that whereas the kingdom to come is a kingdom of grace the kingdom of this world is a kingdom of law.... **Law belongs to earth, not to heaven. It is natural, not supernatural**....

That is why Luther did not speak of law as something static and unchangeable. **Laws will and must change in their form as the times demand. Luther, for instance, refused to grant eternal status even to the laws of Moses.** They are strictly 'natural,' he said, not unlike the common law of any nation. Men on this earth simply don't have access to eternal laws. But men do have **the gift of reason and the accumulated wisdom of the ages as well as the Bible**. Here is the task for man's reason and created gifts. Once cured of religious and mythological ambitions, they can be put to

¹Forde, "The Revolt and the Wedding: An Essay on Social Ethics in the Perspective of Luther's Theology," in *The Reformation and the Revolution* (Sioux Falls, S. Dak.: Augustana College Press, 1970) 85-86.

work as they ought: taking care of men. For in the final analysis, all man's vocations are to be enlisted in the battle against the devil.²

3. From Forde's article, "The Viability of Luther Today: A North American Perspective"

First of all, if justification proceeds by way of negation, then the judgment is indeed universal and **all causes are relativized**. This flows from the very nature of the gospel and cannot be compromised.

Secondly, for Luther's theology, it seems to me that the only way from such universal negation back to the concrete is the way of **freedom**....The Kingdom of God indeed comes by God's power alone, and thus one is turned back into the world for the time being to serve the neighbor....If we are to remain true to the gospel, we must realize that there are **no levers** here. If the movement is not one of freedom, all is lost. Moralists, social reformers, ideologues, revolutionaries, and even just plain zealous religious people may no doubt find this frustrating and maddening, but it is of the **very essence** of the matter. Whenever a cause is exempted from the negation, so as to exert a pressure which destroys this freedom, we come to a serious parting of the ways.³

What does the above quote mean?

1. When Forde writes "all causes are relativized" and "there are no levers here," this means:
 - a. There is no "revealed" or "natural" law except the basic content of the law: love and care for the neighbor. Forde: "**What the law enjoins is love of and service to the neighbor. That is its fundamental and ineradicable content.**"⁴
 - b. There is no third use of the law, no particular revealed law(s) for the Christian, nor can one see through any "natural law" to discern divine intention.
2. The bottom line: "This flows from the very nature of the gospel and cannot be compromised," and the "very essence of the matter." If anyone exerts a "pressure which destroys this freedom, we come to a serious parting of the ways."

This means that any and every attempt to counter antinomism by bringing back "revealed" or "natural" law, **even "evangelical counsels,"** to settle ethical issues, **contradicts the gospel** (Galatians 5:1).

² Forde, *Where God Meets Man* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972) 110-11. Emphasis added.

³ Forde, "The Viability of Luther Today: A North American Perspective," *Word & World* 7 (1987) 29.

⁴ Forde, "Law and Sexual Behavior," *Lutheran Quarterly* 9:1 (Spring 1995) 18.