



Chapter from Book

MARTIN LUTHER AND THE "TWO KINGDOMS"

by

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Abstract

Professor R. H. Tawney, in a moment of inspired frustration, once compared Luther's utterances on social questions to "the occasional explosions of a capricious volcano, with only a rare flash of light amid the torrent of smoke and flame", adding gloomily that "it is idle to scan them for a coherent and consistent doctrine". More commonly Luther has been accused of being an exponent of the modern doctrine of the "religion of the State", even of being a precursor of Hitler. Luther himself was convinced that he had made important contributions to political thought. What is the truth of the matter? That he was not a political thinker in the conventional sense is undeniable. He had no conception such as Machiavelli's of politics as an end in itself and little interest in the actual workings of society. Luther's approach to politics was theological. For him all political problems were ultimately theological problems, aspects of the larger problem of man's relationship with God. Luther may not have been a political philosopher like Hobbes or Rousseau; he was undoubtedly a political theologian. Far from turning his back on the world, he was deeply involved in it. As a pastor he conceived it to be as much part of his duty to instruct his flock on their temporal responsibilities as to prepare them for the spiritual life of the world to come. From the moment that he emerged into the limelight in 1518 until his death in 1546 he dealt with virtually every social problem of the day – usury, mendicancy, prostitution, the care of the poor, the provision of education, as well as with such fundamental issues of principle as the limits of political obedience and the relations of civil and ecclesiastical authority.

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