
The Distinction of Régimes and Institutional Spheres in the Latin American Context

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Terminological queries

We need to begin by clarifying some concepts. The so-called “Two kingdoms Doctrine” (*Zwei-Reiche-Lehre*) is a twentieth-century creation. As it is used in contemporary discussions, it goes back to an essay by Franz Lau published in 1933,¹ not exactly by coincidence the same year of Hitler’s ascension to power. The focus of the argument is the distinction between the spiritual reality or *spiritualia* and the earthly institutions, as the *carnalia* are defined. The *carnalia* for Lau are an expression of the *lex naturae*, but conditioned to change according to the *jus positivum*, the positive law that adjusts itself to changing circumstances: *tempora mutant leges et mores*.²

What was it that made this “doctrine” to be regarded as a central piece in Lutheran theology,³ when it has such a remarkably short history as a “doctrine”? Arguably, because of the way the relationship between grace and social existence was framed. Most of the discussion on justification and justice has been charted within relatively recent, i.e., twentieth-century, paradigms that demarcate the contours of a possible discussion. And these have been defined by systems and institutions that control and regulate *public* life, and thus confined to a distinctive characteristic of modern institutions, its legitimacy crisis.⁴

1. Franz Lau, “*Ausserliche Ordnung*” und “*Weltlich Ding*” in *Luther’s Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933). Others would date it to the publication of Harald Diem’s seminal work on Luther’s hermeneutics, “Luthers Lehre von den zwei Reichen untersucht von seinen Verständnis der Bergpredigt aus: ein Beitrag zum problem ‘Gesetz und Evangelium,’” in G. Sauter, ed., *Zur Zwei-Reiche-Lehre Luthers* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1973). See Martin Honecker, *Soziallehre zwischen Tradition und Vernunft* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1977), 176.

2. Lau, 38.

3. “For the last two or three decades, the ‘doctrine of the two kingdoms’ has been one of the most debated aspects of Luther’s theology.” Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther’s Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms in the Context of His Theology*, trans. Karl H. Hertz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 1. Idem, *Luthers Lehre von den Zwei Reichen im Zusammenhang seiner Theologie* (Gutersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1958), 5. Gerhard Ebeling sees in “the doctrine of the two kingdoms...the fundamental problem of theology” being expressed; see “The Necessity of the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms,” in *Word and Faith*, James W. Leitsch, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), 389.

4. See Jürgen Habermas, “Legitimation Problems in the Modern State,” in *Communication and the Evolution in Society*, Thomas McCar-

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Luther’s very inconsistency in the use of language to describe the distinction between the worldly and the spiritual realities makes things significantly more complicated. In German, he uses *Reich* (Kingdom), but also *Regiment* (governance). In Latin, he uses only *Regnum*. Speculation about a hidden system in this varied terminology yields little results. Gustav Törnvall has listed some thirty-eight different terminological uses Luther employs that point to the same distinction of régimes.⁵

This picture becomes even more complicated if we compound it to another distinction Luther adopted from the traditional medieval doctrine of the hierarchies, or estates (*Stände*): *ecclesia*, *politia*, and *oeconomia* (which before the industrial revolution included labor, market, and—where the term comes from—the household). They were categories of social orders that Luther inherited from medieval theology as a matter of course: “First, the Bible speaks and teaches about the works of God; no doubt about that. But these works are divided in three hierarchies: economy, politics, and church.”⁶ Around 1530, Luther’s more general references to the worldly régime (*weltliche Regiment*) became nuanced with the underscoring of the “orders.” He was already familiar and had used the popular medieval division of society into three “estates,” “hierarchies,” or publics⁷ distinguishing civil governance from the household (*oeconomia*) quite early on. The first time the three

thy, trans. (Boston: Beacon, 1979), 178–205.

5. Gustaf Törnvall, *Geistliches und weltliches Regiment bei Luther* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1947), 94f.

6. WA TR 5:218.

7. Luther names them variously as *Orden*, *Stifte*, *Stände*, *Hierarchien*, *Ertzgewalten*, *fora*, *mandata*, etc. Cf. Ulrich Duchrow, *Christenheit und Weltverantwortung: Traditionsgeschichte und systematische Struktur der Zweireichelehre* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1970), 503f.

estates are mentioned in Luther was in 1519.⁸ But the distinction became most prominent with and after his *Catechisms* and the *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* of 1528.⁹

While *ecclesia* and *oeconomia* could be easily assumed to belong to the prelapsarian condition as orders instituted by God, the fundamental problem of the theology of the orders of creation has to do with the place of the state, namely of *politia*. Although Luther in most of his treatment of it did not recognize the political order as belonging to the prelapsarian condition, he also knew that politics is grounded in economy—resulting in an ambiguous treatment of the issue.¹⁰ Twentieth-century theologians were divided in the interpretation of Luther's intention. While some would defend the prelapsarian origin of the state,¹¹ others would argue that it was an external medicine (*externum remedium*) instituted as a result of the fall.¹² What all agree on is that Luther is ambiguous on the issue and that a choice has to be made to understand the consequences of the human social and political engagements.

To acknowledge these institutional spheres, or publics, and their distinctiveness is crucial for the understanding of how Luther framed the distinction of régimes. These publics belong to the earthly régime, including the *ecclesia*. The Reformer understood them as *larvae dei*, as masks of God. When Luther employs the distinction between *politia* and *oeconomia* he does it in order to stress two distinct forms in which these institutions offer differentiated manners through which humans cooperate with God in the public sphere, where God does not work without us as he insists in *The Bondage of the Will*.¹³ This cooperation is carried out as through instruments or masks.

Luther's use of these two metaphors, instrument (*Werkzeug*/Latin: *instrumentum*) and masks (*Larven*/Latin: *larvae*), even though he uses them interchangeably,¹⁴ is revealing. *Werkzeug* is an instrument or a tool for a work or labor to be accomplished, a metaphor imported from the economic, or *poietic*, sphere, serving therefore as a *synecdoche* by which a part (tool) is taken for the whole (labor). *Larva*, on the other hand, is a mask taken from Greek theater used by an actor to represent a given role a person plays, or from the medieval carnival to render an impersonation. The mask is the metaphor appropriate to describe the political person, the one who speaks on behalf of a cause, a person, or a group representing and communicating interests on account of

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the common good, functioning thus as a *metonymy*. However, for the Reformer it is clear that the agent behind the tool or the mask is either God or the devil and the final end is accordingly decided. The distinction between the two is important for the topic being addressed here. It refers to the two senses entailed in the English notion of “representation.” The first sense is of a pictorial nature, as in the German *Darstellung* or *Vorstellung*. The second has the political or juridical sense of being a proxy, along the German sense of *Vertretung*. But the emphasis here is only to point out that the earthly régime is about representation, while the spiritual régime is about presence, real presence; it is about *parousia*, not about representation in either of its two senses.¹⁵

In the economy/household (*oeconomia*) the representation entails the question of identity. Representation is a work, as if in a work of art (in the sense of *Darstellung*). Who am I? How do I show who I am even before social interaction and intersubjective activity take place? How do I present myself, or make myself? This acceptance of *oeconomia* is important to comprehend for it is in this sphere that the ethnic identity is defined, since *oeconomia* entails both production (for the sustenance of life—Luther: *neheren*) and reproduction (procreation of life—Luther: *mehren*).

In the church (*ecclesia*) the question is somehow different. The church is still a space of representation with its offices, different vocations, politics, structures, and the like. But this ecclesial space is *sui generis*. It borrows representational procedures of the *oeconomia* (as the space of worship, the ornamentation, and other things deemed as important [*bene esse*], but *adiaphora* [*non esse*]), as well as from *politia* (policies, administration, committee meetings, formulation of statutes, implementation of procedural rules, and so forth). But the uniqueness of the church is that representation is employed to open room in which representation is only a resource to create a space in which one finds oneself without any need to be represented. To acknowledge the church as an earthly institution, and yet working itself in counter-institutional practices was the genius of the ecclesiology the Reformation.

Finally, in the political sphere (*politia*) the basic issue is the one of representation (in the sense of *Vertretung*) in the *polis* for the regulation of social existence and protection—politics and police. This is the political public sphere, in which one exhibits

8. See his pamphlet “The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism.” LW 35:38–41; WA 2:734.

9. LW 37:364f.

10. See in this connection WA 42:79; LW 1:103–104.

11. See in this respect Lau, “*Ausserliche Ordnung*,” 13–14; Elert, *Morphologie des Luthertums* 2:49–65; and, in a peculiar way Gustaf Törnqvall, *Geistliches und weltliches Regiment bei Luther* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1947), 38.

12. Diem, “Luthers Lehre,” 56–59, 70–72; Heckel, “Im Irngarten der Zwei-Reiche-Lehre: Zwei Abhandlungen zum Reichs- und Kirchenbegriff Martin Luthers,” *Theologische Existenz Heute* 55 (1959): 343–345; Bornkamm, *Luther's Doctrine*, 34–35.

13. LW 33:243.

14. See the use of these two terms used for politics in the Lectures on Galatians (LW 26:96; WA 40, I:176).

15. Ulrich Asendorf, *Eschatologie bei Luther*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 127. The author distinguishes the *Totalaspekt der Rechtfertigung* from the *Partialaspekt der Heiligung*. Doxological language addresses the “breaking in of the eschaton in time.”

one's persona, which is another word in Latin for "mask," for the sake of organizing a safe and just society. Which face do we present in our interactions in this realm of the *polis*? Who and what do we represent, for whom or what do we stand?

It is important to underscore that for Luther these publics even if they can be used by the devil, are under the canopy of Christian love.¹⁶ As such they are the spheres in which faith becomes efficacious in love. Love is, for Luther, public and recruits reason for its exercise for the sake of fairness, equity (*Billigkeit*).

The Latin American context

With this clarification as far as Luther's thesaurus is concerned, we turn to the Latin American situation, looking at some significant episodes in which Lutheran theology played a role. It is to be noted that neither Luther's thought regarding the régimes, nor his adoption of the medieval orders was used explicitly. It was not used to justify blunt injustices; it was also not initially used to condemn the same.¹⁷ This is even more telling considering the history of its use. Unlike the case of Germany, in which Luther was indeed used politically, either to justify or to condemn outrageous regimes, this did not happen for the most part in Latin America until the late 1970s. The absence of the use of Luther to justify or condemn socio-political injustices does not mean that Luther's motifs were not at work. The distinction of régimes does not appear very often as an operational concept or a doctrine.¹⁸ However, issues that emerged, if dealt with in confessional terms, would be suited to be framed along the lines of the distinction of régimes, or of the institutional public spheres. The right to resist, the orders of creation, autonomy (*Eigengesetzlichkeit*) of the secular orders, church state relation, ethnicity, and nationalism are but a few of such issues that eventually emerged. For example, if "orders of creation" was taken into consideration, there is no reference to Luther's use of the medieval tripartite division of institutional orders or spheres through which God, in cooperation with human beings, governs the world "as through masks and instruments."

But in each of the cases there is one institutional public sphere that receives prominence. So, at the end, the distinction of

16. "Above these three institutions and orders is the common order of Christian love." LW 37:365.

17. But see Lambert Schuurman, "Some Observations on the Relevance of Luther's Theory of the Realms for the Theological Task in Latin America," *Lutheran Quarterly* 22 (1970), 86–91. Schuurman was a Dutch Reformed theologian teaching at ISEDET in Buenos Aires.

18. It became an important theoretical resource in the 1970s when Lutherans began to argue theologically in favor of a critical voice in societies experiencing deep injustices and abuses of human rights. This was the time the Lutheran World Federation's Commission on Studies, under the leadership of Ulrich Duchrow, undertook a concerted effort to study regionally the impact of the "Two Kingdom Doctrine" in several parts of the world. See Ulrich Duchrow and Wolfgang Huber, eds. *Die Ambivalenz der Zweireichelehre in lutherischen Kirchen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 1976). In English one text of documentation and another of studies were published: Karl H. Hertz, ed. *Two Kingdoms and One World* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976) and Ulrich Duchrow, ed., *Lutheran Churches—Salt or Mirror of Society* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977).

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régimes and the discrimination of the different spheres pointing to discrete dimensions of the same problem would have helped to carry the discussion along. The discrimination or separation of the three publics is of importance here. This distinction was decisive for Luther as well,¹⁹ as he saw each of the spheres in a functional way as the display of human fundamental faculties that inform the establishment of each of the publics (*theoria*, *poiesis*, and *praxis*).²⁰ Each of these faculties is share by humanity, and we are thus all involved in each of these public spheres. But the point here is to show that the critical issues appear most prominently in one of the publics that each of the discrete faculties constitutes.

Three cases in Latin America that had issues pertaining to the distinction of régimes will be discussed here. First among these is the Chilean case in which the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile lost most of its members and another church was formed, the Lutheran Church in Chile. The largest Lutheran church in Latin America, the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (ECLCB) provides the second example. And finally, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of El Salvador offers a third case study. These three examples were chosen because each revealed a crisis in the relationship between the church's identity and social responsibility. And, it was the place where Luther's distinction of régimes was at play.

Stepping by faith into the politia.

The case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile seems exemplary for the way in which the distinction of régimes works when in interface with the political sphere. In the now symbolic 9/11, but of 1973 (!), the military took over the democratically elected government of Chile headed by President Salvador Allende. Much has been said and written about the brutal *coup-d'état*. Also known is the way the churches have reacted to it. But the point here is the reaction of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Chile (ELCC). The ELCC was a small church providing religious services for a significant number of German descendants in Chile. Services were held in the mother-tongue. Most of the pastors serving the congregations were missionaries sent by Germany or later also by the United States. After the coup, most of the pastors entered

19. Vult Deus esse discrimina ordinum (WA 44, 440, 25).

20. For how these faculties are correlated to the three publics, see Vitor Westhelle, "Power and Politics: Incursions in Luther's Theology," in *The Global Luther: A Theologian for Modern Times*, Christine Helmer, ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 284–300.

into the political arena. The presiding pastor, (also titled bishop, even though there was no episcopal system in the church) Helmut Frenz, a German missionary, took the public lead and was followed by almost all of the pastors of the church (except one out of a dozen, and a second one remained uncommitted to either side) in denouncing the government, working with ecumenical peace organizations, and smuggling out refugees during the night to foreign embassies. Frenz was the one who started the process of creating a Chilean church by opening the first Spanish-speaking congregation in a working-class neighborhood in Concepción, not far from the capital, Santiago. Other pastors, such as the United States missionary James Savolainen, followed suit. By 1975, some two years into the coup, things precipitated; some of the pastors were deported, others, as Savolainen, had to flee the country with a family of five, overnight with few hours of notice, to prevent their being on the list of the “disappeared.” No Lutheran lingo was used. Yet some pastors and lay leaders, mostly from the newly formed Spanish-speaking congregations, made a decision to represent in the political realm what their faith stood for.

By this time the situation was somehow irreversible. The military régime had already established its hegemony. The church, as an organization, was in shambles. About 93 percent of its members left the ELCC while 85 percent formed a new church named Lutheran Church of Chile (LCC). Most of the pastors stayed or had to leave the country. Bishop Frenz had his visa revoked and had to return to Germany.²¹ In the case of Chile there was no use of Lutheran theology either to support, or to denounce the situation. Bishop Frenz made use of the cross motif to account for the predicament of those who were persecuted by the Pinochet dictatorship. But the references were biblical, with only a side reference that it was the theology of the cross that also animated the Reformation movement.²² Biblical prophetism was used to explain the risky acts of denunciation and protest that pastors mostly were engaged in. The pro-Pinochet party of the majority of Lutherans did not appeal to Luther either, with the exception of an indirect reference in the Declaration of Principles of the newly formed denomination saying the church should be of and for the laity.²³ This could be construed as a veiled reference to Luther’s doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, but was not used in this explicit way. The reference to Luther’s distinction of régimes and their interface appears only, and for the first time, in the analyses and theological reflections done after the dramatic events to explain the situation and denounce it. Helmut Frenz compares the Chilean situation of the mid-1970s to Nazi Germany, designating both by using the expression *lucha eclesiástica* (viz. *Kirchenkampf*).²⁴

In the analyses of the situation that were published or circulated in mimeo form, often the critical contribution that the Lutheran

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distinction of régimes could offer was lifted up to examine the practice and often to denounce abuses. But there is no indication that the distinction of régimes in Luther was ever used to justify the stance of the church vis-à-vis the political government. The analyses of what was happening might have been furthered assisted by Luther’s transactional analysis of the institutional spheres operating in the earthly régime. The Chilean example is an exemplary case of the *oeconomia* taking over the *ecclesia*. Hence was not only a problem of interpreting the régimes, but the way in which the spheres of the *oeconomia* and of *ecclesia* were not discriminated. The institutional church was being used to justify and support the German-Chilean “household.” Instead of having the church as a space for the Sabbath to happen, away from idols and demons, most Chilean Lutherans caved into the idol of the “household” of the Germanic identity and took the church along. If the pastors and some members became politically engaged in the moment of crisis it is because the *politia*, as the sphere that establishes social accountability, was the one to be called upon to preserve the vocation of the church distinct from the one of the household.²⁵

What was considered an inappropriate political activity of the pastors, did not start by participation in any resistance to the military coup and the help offered to refugees. It started in the late-60s with the creation of the first Spanish-speaking congregations and the modest but significant influx of non-Germanic descendants into the ranks of the church, and Spanish began to be used in worship. This was essentially a political act of stepping into the public square. The support of many pastors for the Allende government was initially both an opening of the church to the Chilean political reality as well as ethical support for the policies implemented to meliorate the condition of poor Chileans. Among them was mainly the agrarian reform that directly affected the German-Chileans among whom were many of the largest land-owners in the country. It can be said that politics came as

25. This reduction of the church to the “German household” was such that when the church was first formed by the merger of synods it was called the German-Evangelical Church of Chile that in 1937 pledged allegiance to the *Reich*. Many of its pastors were members abroad of the National-Socialist Party of Hitler. See Fritz Mybes, *Die Geschichte der deutschen Einwanderung entstandenen lutherischen Kirchen in Chile: Von Anfängen bis zum Jahre 1975* (Düsseldorf: Müller, 1993), 190f; and Daniel Lenski, *La División de la Iglesia Evangélica Luterana en Chile 1974/75* (Köln: Roland Reischl, 2012), 20.

21. See his biographical account in Helmut Frenz, *Mi Vida Chilena* (Santiago: LOM, 2006).

22. Frenz, *Mi Vida*, 228.

23. See Vitor Westhelle, “Considerações sobre o etno-luteranismo latino-americano,” *Estudos Teológicos* 18/2 (1978) 77–94.

24. Frenz, *Mi vida*, 245.

the unavoidable result of the attempt to differentiate between the *ecclesia* and the *oconomia*, between the freedom to preach the Gospel and *Deushtum*, “Teutonism.”

Stepping by faith into the oconomia

The case of the Brazilian church, the ECLCB, shows some similarities with the Chilean church. The church’s self-understanding and politics had a similar profile, but a crucial difference is that in the Chilean case the political option adopted by most of the members of the church in support of the military dictatorship was to preserve intact the pact between *oconomia* and *ecclesia*, between the Germanic household and its investments and the church. If, in the case of Brazil, *Deushtum* had become almost *nota ecclesiae*,²⁶ in the case of Chile *Deushtum* was not only a *nota*, but the *articulus standis aut cadentis*,²⁷ the justification of its own existence, *solus germanicus*. So, the incursion (mostly by pastors) into the political sphere triggered the crisis that revealed the collapse of the church into the Teutonic household.

The case of Brazil was different in this regard. In Brazil, the German household was itself broken up, fragmented. The social stratification among German immigrants was significant and growing. With the military coup of 1964 and the new agrarian policy that privileged large farm (*latifúndios*) monoculture “extractivism” for export directly affected a significant part of the members of the church who were little farmers who sustained themselves by a small and diversified agriculture. Many of them, driven into debt, lost their land or became so impoverished that their option was to sell their small portion of land to a large farmer and migrate to the city in search of a low paying job or become seasonal workers on large farms.²⁸ With the downward mobility, the ethnic identity could no longer be sustained and the economic struggle triggered the awareness of the confusion of spheres. The household no longer had a single construction of its identity. To use Luther’s metaphor of the mask, the façade of who the German Lutherans produced themselves to be was cracked. It was the economy that raised the awareness that no possible harmonious relation between the *oconomia* and the *ecclesia* could be sustained. As the architect of the formation of the Brazilian church and its first national leader, Pastor Hermann Dohms (1887–1956) gave expression to this conviction that the household provided the identity of the people as Christian and citizen. He was impressed by the work of the champion of the Inner Mission in Prussia in the middle of the nineteenth century, Johann H. Wichern (1808–1881). So he concluded: “...the family

26. Martin N. Dreher, *Kirche und Deushtum in der Entwicklung der Evangelischen Kirche Lutherischen Bekenntnisses in Brasilien* (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Munich, 1975), 4.

27. As traditionally quoted the sentence might have been based in other expressions of Luther as in: *...quia isto articulo stande stat Ecclesia, ruente ruit Ecclesia* (“Because if this article [of justification] stands, the church stands; if this article collapses, the church collapses.”) WA 40/3.352.3.

28. In addition to that the construction of immense hydroelectric dams, particularly the one of Itaipú in the west of the state of Paraná expelled many farmers whose land was close to the river, many among them were Lutherans of German descent.

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is the necessary and inevitable intermediary between the divine will and the national history” that is the political state.²⁹ “Orders of creation” (*Schöpfungsordnungen*) was the term used to describe this ensemble of language, ethnicity, and nation. This “order” was seen as being ordained by God and enjoyed a certain autonomous character “as God’s order for our salvation.”³⁰ Significantly it was not the *ecclesia* but the *oconomia*, the institutional form, that was the instrument through which God’s will was made manifest. But later when the household was found in disarray, that is where the crisis manifested itself.

Awareness of this was activated not directly (as in Chile) by the political coup (which in Brazil had taken place a decade before the Chilean coup, in 1964), but by an ecclesial event that brought to the fore the fact that the Brazilian Lutheran church no longer had the household it thought it had in *Deushtum*, in the presumed *oconomia*. The household was in disarray. The Fifth Assembly of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) was set to take place in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 1970. This was to be the first assembly of the worldwide organization to take place outside the north-Atlantic axis. The venue was changed, with short notice to Evian, France, due to protests concerning the violation of human rights in Brazil.³¹ This cancellation was the proverbial last straw, a wake-up call in the waiting. The idol of a Germanic church on Brazilian soil fell to the ground. The identity of the church presumed to be glued together by the household no longer held.

In the same year, 1970, a group of pastors and theologians produced a manifesto (since then known as The Curitiba Manifesto, named after the city where the drafting group met), which later that year was adopted by the General Council of the Church. The language of the manifesto called for the church to take a stance on public issues that pertained to people beyond the Germanic household. Although it is normally regarded as a political call, it was primarily something more elemental. The language of that manifesto was shaped around the question of church and politics, recognizing them as different spheres in life. But what it was implicitly acknowledging was that the problem lay in the other distinct sphere, the *oconomia*. The Curitiba Manifesto was

29. Hans-Jürgen Prien, “Identity and Problems of Development,” in Duchrow, ed. *Lutheran Churches*, 204.

30. See Prien, “Identity,” 205, citing Dohms.

31. For an account of these events and the controversy, see *From Federation to Communion: The History of the Lutheran World Federation*, Jens Holger Schjørring, Prasanna Kumari, Norman A. Hjelm, eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 59–61, 382–396.

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a call for the church to follow its own flock into the social spaces of its people, the changed character in the profile of the household. This is why it has been described as a move from ghetto to participation,³² from the illusion of a single household to many different and stratified economic spaces. With some irony, the church was in fact living out and putting into effect the theme of the planned Assembly: “Sent into the World.” The church was no longer being conceived of as a guesthouse where even strangers could come in and be tolerated, but as a pilgrim church in search of a household that it could claim as home, for the old home was no more—at least not for the majority of Lutherans facing the gruesome economic realities of the new times.

As has been already documented,³³ internal tensions and unrest in the self-identity of the household of Lutherans in the country could be registered from the time of WWII when Brazil joined the Allied Nations and sent troops to fight in Europe (in the case of Brazil, Italy). Then with the coup of 1964 and the imposed wave of nationalism (“Brazil, love it or leave it” a slogan later used in the United States in connection with the Vietnam War), the unease and discomfort started to send premonitory signs of what was to come. The change of venue of the Fifth Assembly of the LWF only opened a sore wound of a household that no longer was, as in an old photograph whose pictures time had taken care to fade out the definitions and blend them into the background.

The affirmation of a former president of the Synod Riograndense (the afore mentioned Dohm)—that the more German on ecclesiastical affairs the more Brazilian in political matters one must be—reflected the actual situation although it was meant with the supposition that German was a self-explanatory identity. In this it precisely missed the point; it harmonized and acknowledged the distinction of *politia* and *ecclesia*, but missed altogether the *oconomia*. The situation thus became tumultuous, disaggregated. It was observed that much earlier, starting in the 1930s “the for-

mer economic and social homogeneity of the settlers... had given place to marked difference in their economic and social status.”³⁴ But this would come into sharp focus in the late '60s and '70s. Students at the Faculty of Theology abandoned studies to work in factories, to live with the people, to be small farmers; lay people and pastors joined the ecumenical works of the Commission on Land (CPT) along with Roman Catholics. A yearly publication of homiletic help to preachers and leaders was created in 1974 called *Proclamar Libertação* (“Proclaim Liberation) and continues with its fortieth volume this year. A ministry emerged called Lutheran Grassroots Ministry (PPL).³⁵

Stepping by faith into the Ecclesia

The case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of El Salvador presents yet another possible variation of how the cluttering of the earthly spheres defines the problem of the régimes. The basic issue is still the same. The muddling of the distinction of earthly spheres in the case of El Salvador was still different from the cases of Chile and Brazil. In Chile, the church and the Germanic household were indistinguishable, requiring the political dimension to come to the fore, while in Brazil the adjustment of the church to the political order was shaken when the awareness of the disarray in the household became obvious requiring the church to address the plea of its own people who joined the ranks of the oppressed and were socially marginalized. In the case of El Salvador, the church, a very small entity that was the result of the branching out of a Guatemalan mission of the LCMS, started to claim their rights to be church while politics excluded the people from participation and the economy expelled the people from their own household. The struggle over politics produced victims in indescribable brutality, and the economic order generated famine and poverty. This was the background for the decisive work of the church in carving a sphere for the Shabbat where the Word of God could be proclaimed giving voice to the voiceless, exorcizing the political demons that sequestered free speech and destroying the idols of an economic system that demanded devotion to gods the oligarchy had erected.³⁶

The constitutive element in this affirmation of the healing function of the church has been most visibly expressed in the work in defense of the persecuted, the tortured, and fugitives who found sanctuary in the *Fe y Esperanza* hostel for refugees and victims of torture exercising Christian love.³⁷ But of theological and ecclesiological significance was the appeal made to the concept

32. See Rolf Schünemann, *Do Gueto à Participação: O Surgimento da Consciência Sócio-política na Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil entre 1960 e 1975* (São Leopoldo: Sinodal/EST, 1992).

33. See Martin N. Dreher, *Kirche und Deutschtum in der Entwicklung der Evangelischen Kirche Lutherischen Bekenntnisses in Brasilien* (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Munich, 1975); Hans-Jürgen Prien, “Identity and Problems of Development,” in Duchrow, ed. *Lutheran Churches*, 192–242; Vítor Westhelle, “Considerações sobre o etno-luteranismo latino-americano,” *Estudos Teológicos* 18/2 (1978) 77–94; Rolf Schünemann, *Do Gueto à Participação: O Surgimento da Consciência Sócio-política na Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil entre 1960 e 1975* (São Leopoldo: Sinodal/EST, 1992).

34. Käthe Harms-Baltzer, *Die Nationalisierung der deutschen Einwanderer und ihrer Nachkommen in Brasilien als Problem der deutsch-brasilianischen Beziehungen 1930-1938* (Berlin, 1970), 13f.

35. The comic remark made in the United States to whoever tries a complex explanation for the cause of a certain problem—“it is the Economy, stupid”—applies in this case as a glove.

36. For the argument that the evil in the *politia* results in demonry and in the *oconomia* creates idols see Vítor Westhelle, *The Church Event: Call and Challenge of Church Protestant* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010) 84–105.

37. Gómez, Medardo, *Fire Against Fire* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990).

of the priesthood of all believers as the cornerstone on which the conception of this church was built.³⁸ This took concrete form with the ordination of a number of “lay pastors” among them many women.³⁹ The term “lay pastors” was still remnant of a hierarchical turf-mentality that was meant to indicate that those who were preaching and administering the sacraments were indeed pastors, minus the fact that they did not have a required special theological training in a theological seminary.

But the intentional use of Luther’s argument for the priesthood of all baptized allowed voices to utter words of proclamation that could neither be curbed by politics, nor controlled by economic interests. With that claiming of a space in which another word could be uttered, a third space, as it were, the Lutheran Church of El Salvador gave life to an institution that recreated Luther’s own figure for the church, the Shabbat. This is the image of the church that Luther championed as the church of Adam and Eve and their descendants; this was truly a universal church that encompassed all religions.

Medardo Gómez, the bishop of the Lutheran Church in El Salvador, and himself a victim of torture and exile, has been the catalyst of an emerging church even without explicit reference to Luther’s thought. On the sphere of life to which the church belongs, or on the teachings regarding the distinction of régimes, this church was faithful to the ideas of the Reformer. Medardo Gómez has been viewed by many as the emblematic successor of his

38. Gómes, Medardo, *Teología de la Vida*, Immanuel Zerger, ed. (Managua: Nicarao, 1992).

39. Aaltonen, Heli, *Fe y Esperanza: Women’s Road to Ministry in the Lutheran Church of El Salvador 1952-2009* (Åbo, Finland: Åbo Akademi University, 2013).

On the sphere of life to which the church belongs, or on the teachings regarding the distinction of régimes, this church was faithful to the ideas of the Reformer.

compatriot, the martyred Roman Catholic bishop Oscar Romero (assassinated in 1980). Obviously, the comparison is quantitatively out of proportion since the Lutheran Church in El Salvador is less than 0.3 percent of the population and at most 0.6 percent of the population that professes themselves as Roman Catholics (over 55 percent of the population). But quantities only detect; they do not define theological issues at the heart. Core theological issues define that which matters. And this is possibly the great contribution of the Lutheran Church of El Salvador, that is, to explain to us all what Luther referred to as the manifestation of Christian love that surpasses domestic vocation and political duties and even the ecclesial sphere, encompassing them all.⁴⁰ But what is so important and illustrative in the El Salvadorian church was the unique gesture of bringing the church’s role to prominence, a church that was an absolute minority, yet it came to be the church catholic; it vindicated a sabbatical space for the whole—*kata-holos*.

40. See LW 37:365.