

Anabaptist archives: The two kingdoms

Appearing for the first time in English is this essay found in a handwritten book owned by an Emmenthaler farmer. It is the “rod and staff” of Anabaptist belief—the doctrine of separation from the world.

Little is known about Hans Schnell except that he was a Swiss Brethren Anabaptist who sometimes went by the name Hans Beck. In 1541 his wife Margarete was imprisoned for her faith; he himself left the faith for some 14 years, but had returned by 1575 and was an elder, baptizing and preaching at night in the fields in the area of Urbach and Gottingen in south Germany.

This version is excerpted from a translation by Leonard Gross and Elizabeth Horsch Bender.

There are two different kingdoms on earth—namely, the kingdom of this world and the peaceful kingdom of Christ. These two kingdoms cannot share or have communion with each other.

The people in the kingdom of this world are born of the flesh, are earthly and carnally minded. The people in the kingdom of Christ are reborn of the Holy Spirit, live according to the Spirit, and are spiritually minded. The people in the kingdom of the world are equipped for fighting with carnal weapons—spear, sword, armor, guns and powder. The people in Christ’s kingdom are equipped with spiritual weapons—the armor of God, the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit to fight against the devil, the world, and their own flesh, together with all that arises against God and his Word. The people in the kingdom of this world fight for a perishable crown and an earthly kingdom. The people in Christ’s kingdom fight for an imperishable crown and an eternal kingdom.

Christ made these two kingdoms at variance with each other and separated. There will therefore be no peace between them. In the end, however, Christ will crush and destroy all the other kingdoms with his power and eternal kingdom. But his will remain eternally.

Christ has chosen his elect from the darkness of this world and called them to his heavenly kingdom and enlightened them through the Holy Spirit with the true godly understanding of his eternal truth. One can distinguish the children of God and the children of this world by their fruits. The children of God let their light shine with good works before the children of this world, so that they shine amid this perverse generation like a light in all honesty.

When God made his covenant with Noah after the flood, he commanded vengeance and punishment with the power of the sword to punish the evil and to

put to death the blood guilty and murderers, saying, "Whoso sheddeth men's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." This vengeance to punish evil has remained unaltered in the kingdom of this world with its temporal authority and will remain until the Last Day of his coming, when God will annihilate all the power of this world. Christ also testifies to this when he commanded Peter: "Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." From these words of Christ we learn that the power of the sword will remain in the kingdom of this world to put to death the blood guilty and murderers according to his Father's order.

But in his kingdom peace should be kept, as he says to Peter: Put up thy sword in its sheath and let them proceed. For that reason he healed Malchus' ear at once, and does not want Christians to fight with the sword for their lives.

Concerning this power of the sword Paul teaches us, saying: "The powers that be are of God ... For rulers are not a terror to good works but to the evil." Also: "He beareth not the sword in vain, for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil."

The power of the sword in the kingdom of this world is ordained and commanded by God, and whoever resists the ruler, unless he orders what is against God, resists God's order. But if the authorities command something that is against God, I say with Peter and John: "It is better to obey God than men." Likewise the three men in the fiery furnace and Daniel in the lion's den.

Paul's words cited above prove that the vocation of government and the vocation of the Christian are diametrically opposed to each other, like light and darkness.

Therefore the government is a good institution in the world, in that it punishes the bad and protects him who does good. For if there were no government, one could not keep order on earth. Each would then do violence to the other.

But Christ has given those in his kingdom a very different calling and office. "Recompense to no man evil for evil." Also: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves but rather give place unto wrath. For it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.'" Further: "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

The government is taught to execute vengeance and slay the blood guilty and murderers. In the New Testament Christians are forbidden all revenge and resistance; they are not to resist evil. Peter merely wants permission to ask for revenge. But Christ not only refuses him this, but reprimands him for it, saying: "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." A Christian in the peaceful kingdom of Christ has a loving, peaceable, merciful spirit in the manner Christ's. He forgives the penitent sinner all sin and transgression. He does not resist evil.

He kills nobody physically. He does not preserve his possessions with force but rather presents also the other cheek rather than to oppose the one who strikes him with force. He does not war. He does not injure and kill people but prays for those who persecute and rob him. He who is born again through, the Spirit has his Father's nature and qualities in him and is minded as Jesus Christ was minded. Christ not only forbade revenge in his kingdom but also, by his death on the cross, left us an example for us to follow in his footsteps, and prayed for his foes on the cross, which believers also do.

When Paul explained the power of the government and what its calling and function imply, he called it not only a minister of God, but also says that it is our obligation to pay taxes in order that it may offer such protection. That was at the time when Nero reigned as Emperor, a pagan and a godless man who persecuted and destroyed the church of God and Christ as severely as possible. Nevertheless Paul calls him a minister of God. For God used him as a rod of punishment until the rod was worn out; then he cast it into the fire. Even Pharaoh, who is called a vessel of wrath fitted for destruction, according to Paul's teaching was also God's minister. The governor Pilate was also a minister of God. To him was given the power from on high to crucify Christ. For Pilate and Herod performed what God had previously planned. Through Pilate's false sentence and great sin which he committed against Christ, the sins of all of us were reconciled and annulled in Christ's guiltless death.

Thus God uses the government as his minister, whether it performs well or badly. If they are tyrants, God uses them as his rod of punishment, who will, however at the proper time be held accountable to their Superior and will have to render an exceedingly strict account, as it is written: "The powerful will suffer powerful pain."

Christ said: "They which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them: and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever among you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For the Son of man came not to be ministered unto." This proves that in Christ's kingdom here on earth none should consider himself higher than another. For that reason Christ set us an example by washing feet. Believers are of one family and of equal rank. Much rather each shall esteem the other higher than himself.

It has now been sufficiently demonstrated that God has given to the unbelieving world the government to resist evil. As is written: "To all the nations God gave a ruler. But the Lord's portion is Jacob." Therefore God gave Israel its own laws and commandments, with which Israel was widely separated from the heathen and differentiated, among which laws and commandments God also gave them the power of the material sword to punish the evil, to execute vengeance, and to

demand an eye for an eye and a limb for a limb; thus, he who broke the law had to die without mercy.

Therefore our opposites, the supposed Christians, insist in introducing into Christendom the power of the sword with the government to execute vengeance. But as God in the figurative law gave and commanded to Moses the vengeance and power of the sword to punish the evil, this does not apply to Christians in the New Testament. For Christ, who is the fulfillment of the law, has cancelled it. We have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that we are now no longer under Moses but with another—of course, with him who was raised from the dead. Only what Christ teaches us by word and example applies to Christians. Therein they are to follow after him. For in his kingdom he has created a new order.

God gave Israel the law that through the law it might be made clear how great sin is. And for sin and transgression God set an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a body for a body. And this vengeance in the law, to punish transgression without pity, remained in force until the coming of the promised seed which is Christ Jesus.

When Christ, a king of peace, came into the kingdom of Israel and was seated according to the promise of God on the throne of his father David, he then inaugurated in his kingdom a new spiritual regime and a new covenant which he sealed and instituted with his own blood.

For the Prince of our salvation was made perfect through suffering, which testament is not made according to the old one, which executes wrath, but he has a new peaceable kingdom in which mercy and forgiveness of sins operate. As it is written: "Old things are passed away and he who sat upon the throne said, Behold I make all things new." And again: "Old things are passed away and all things made new."

Just as Christ inherited the royal throne from the tribe of Judah, he also inherited the office of High Priest from the tribe of Levi, which two high offices Melchizedek, a priest and king, foreshadowed. As it is written: "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent. Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." Therewith the annulling of the previous law takes place because of its weakness and uselessness. For of what benefit to us was the blood of oxen or rams? It was an introduction of a better hope in the blood of Christ, through which we are cleansed and washed, which blood cleanses us from all sin. But now that the priesthood was changed and passed on to Christ, Paul says, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. In the law sin takes the upper hand. In Christ, mercy still more takes the upper hand. Therefore he abolished vengeance.

Christ has redeemed us from the vengeance of the law and established a peaceable kingdom in which the vengeful sword is put away and broken, and

warlike weapons have been recast. As Isaiah says: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks."

The believing and peaceable in the kingdom of Christ here on earth dwell safely among one another; none injures or kills another with weapons of war. With this Zechariah also agrees, saying: "And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace to the heathen." Of this peaceable people the Holy Ghost speaks (Psalm 46): "Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and putteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire." Also the 76th Psalm witnesses to this and says: "In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion. There he brake the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle. Selah."

All of these many cited Scriptures and Psalms pertain to all the peacemakers in the kingdom of Christ and his church, among whom all warlike weapons are broken to pieces and cast away, as has been frequently proved. You shall not resist evil, because Christ forbids ruling with force in his kingdom and says: The princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you.

Hans Schnell

By Hans Schnell