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Caesar Jesus? The Kingship of Jesus and Political Authorities in Luke and Acts

Kendall A. Davis

I. Introduction¹

It was not uncommon for Paul to stir up trouble as he traveled during his missionary journeys. Paul’s preaching is routinely met with a mob, often composed of Jews, who bring charges against him to the local authorities (e.g., Acts 14:1–7, 17:1–9, 18:1–17, 21:17–36). While Acts makes it clear that the charges brought against Paul and others are often baseless (26:31–32) and rooted in personal animus (17:5), the charges nonetheless still reveal much about how non-Christians in the book of Acts perceive the gospel of Jesus and its effects on their society.

The episode described at the beginning of Acts 17 in Thessalonica illustrates this point well. Paul teaches in a synagogue and is accused by some of the Jews who say, “These men are turning the world upside down² . . . and they are all violating the decrees of Caesar by saying that there is another king, Jesus” (vv. 6–7).³ So, is the mob right? Has Paul been violating the decrees of Caesar by proclaiming Jesus as an alternative to Caesar?⁴ Or has the mob simply misunderstood Paul’s message? Commentators are divided on the question. Most read the crowd’s claim as a blatant and perhaps deliberate misunderstanding⁵ while others read the claim as essentially

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented in September 2023 at the Theological Symposium at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. I would like to offer thanks to the following people who read drafts of this article and gave helpful critical feedback: Katherine Dubke, Noah Dunsmore, Christian Einertson, Hayden Lukas, and Kyle Weeks.

² Or perhaps “leading the empire into rebellion.” That *ἀναστατώω* can be used to refer to rebellions is made clear by Acts 21:38. For an extensive argument that *οἰκουμένη* should be understood as “empire” in Luke and Acts, see Barbara Rossing, “Turning the Empire (*οἰκουμένη*) Upside Down: A Response,” in *Reading Acts in the Discourses of Masculinity and Politics*, ed. Eric D. Barreto, Matthew L. Skinner, and Steve Walton (London: T&T Clark, 2017), 148–155.

³ All quotations from the Old and New Testaments are my own unless otherwise stated.

⁴ There is some debate over whether *βασιλεύς* (“king/emperor”) refers to Caesar here. However, it seems clear contextually that imperial claims are in mind here. See the discussion in C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 97–98.

⁵ C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols. (London: T&T Clark, 1994), 2:808; Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, 4 vols. (Grand

Kendall A. Davis is a PhD student in New Testament and Christian Origins at the University of Edinburgh in the United Kingdom. He can be contacted at k.a.davis-3@sms.ed.ac.uk.

more true than false.⁶ Kavin Rowe summarizes the conundrum well: “The opponents’ accusations are at one and the same time both true and false. They are false in that they attempt to place Jesus in competitive relation to Caesar. Such a positioning can only lead to a politics of revolt. The accusations are true, however, in that the Christian mission entails a call to another way of life, one that is—on virtually every page of the Acts of the Apostles—turning the world upside down.”⁷ The claim made by the mob in Thessalonica thus highlights an important facet of how the gospel of Jesus confronted Greco-Roman society in general and imperial authorities in particular: The apostles proclaimed Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords. No earthly authority, including Caesar, was an exception.

This article thus explores how Luke’s portrait of Jesus as God’s anointed king confronts earthly claims of authority. After all, it is a misunderstanding of Luke’s message to see Jesus as a rival imperial claimant like so many other Roman generals and politicians. Yet it is also a misunderstanding of Luke to think that the claims of Jesus do not significantly undermine and reframe the claims of Caesar and other authorities. How then should we understand these issues? This article argues that the Lutheran doctrine of the two realms helps make sense of the conflict between Jesus and political authorities in Luke and Acts since it shows us how both Jesus and Rome make claims to authority in both the spiritual and temporal realms. Luke and Acts offer one of the most extensive explorations of how the message of Jesus confronts human authorities in the New Testament. Thus, a thorough investigation of this material will offer the church today refreshed insight as Christians seek to live as faithful citizens in both of God’s two realms. After a discussion of major scholarly approaches toward imperial authority in Luke and Acts, this article proceeds in three parts. First, I criticize the modern notion of separation between the religious/spiritual and the political as a misunderstanding of the doctrine of the two realms and an insufficient tool for making sense of the conflict in Luke and Acts between Jesus and Rome. Second, I argue that Jesus’ primary enemy is not Rome but Satan. While many have argued that Jesus comes to oppose political, economic, and social systems of power, especially as represented by Roman imperialism, this makes primary what is really a secondary conflict in Luke and Acts. Third and finally, I discuss how Luke and Acts show that Jesus is the ultimate Lord of both the temporal and spiritual realms. I conclude with a discussion of the difference this all makes for the church today.

Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 3:2554; and Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Acts: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 157.

⁶ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 189; and Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 99–102.

⁷ Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 101.

II. Why Would Jesus Be a Threat to Caesar?

Of course, it is not necessarily obvious that Jesus is a threat to imperial authority in Luke and Acts. For most of the history of modern biblical scholarship, Luke's stance toward the Roman Empire was understood to be conciliatory. Luke's writings were frequently read as presenting an apologia to broader Roman society on behalf of the church, trying to show why Jesus and the movement he started were no threat at all to the imperial order.⁸ This view was the traditional scholarly view on Luke's attitude toward Rome for much of the twentieth century.

However, in the latter part of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, a growing number of interpreters have instead argued that Luke and Acts take a much more hostile attitude toward the empire.⁹ The work of these and other interpreters is part of a broader trend in New Testament studies, sometimes going by the name of "anti-imperial readings." Such scholars seek to emphasize the way that New Testament writings engage in both overt and covert opposition and resistance to dominant imperial authorities. Surveys of this work abound,¹⁰ but two of the more prolific and influential names in this area include Warren Carter and Richard Horsley.¹¹ The aim of such interpreters is to highlight the more subtle ways that New Testament writers counteract imperial claims to power. For example, Luke's infancy narrative has provided endless fodder for interpreters who see in Luke's mention of Caesar Augustus in 2:1 the beginning of an extensive comparison between Jesus and Caesar. It is argued that Luke portrays Jesus as a new and better Caesar right from the beginning of the narrative. Carter's comments regarding the angelic announcement to the shepherds in Luke 2:11 are typical. He writes, "The announcement presents Jesus' birth, not the emperor's, as good news. Jesus, not the emperor, is Savior and Lord. Jesus, not the emperor, is the rightly anointed agent . . . and king in the line of David, entrusted with representing God's purposes. And those purposes do not reserve blessing for the privileged, powerful, wealthy few, but extend it to all

⁸ For example, Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (London: Faber, 1960), 138. For a summary of a few variations on this reading, see Steve Walton, "The State They Were In: Luke's View of the Roman Empire," in Barreto, Skinner, and Walton, *Reading Acts in the Discourses of Masculinity and Politics*, 76–82.

⁹ For example, Richard J. Cassidy, *Jesus, Politics, and Society: A Study of Luke's Gospel* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1978); Loveday Alexander, "Luke's Political Vision," *Interpretation* 66, no. 9 (2012): 283–293; and Amanda C. Miller, *Rumors of Resistance: Status Reversals and Hidden Transcripts in the Gospel of Luke* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014).

¹⁰ See especially the extensive survey in Judy Diehl, "Anti-Imperial Rhetoric in the New Testament," *Currents in Biblical Research* 10, no. 1 (2011): 9–52.

¹¹ Each of these scholars has numerous works on this subject, but two representative works include the following: Warren Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006); and Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

people.”¹² As with all scholarly trends, not all of these readings are successful. However, the best evidence that Luke portrays Jesus as a counter-Caesar is the use of particular titles for Jesus that were also in common usage for the emperors: *κύριος* (“Lord”), *βασιλεύς* (“king/emperor”), and *σωτήρ* (“savior”).¹³ As Steve Walton writes, “the use of these three groups of words for Jesus so prominently suggests that Luke presents the early Christians as subversively using Caesar’s titles for Jesus.”¹⁴ Thus, it is not hard to imagine why some people in the ancient world, upon hearing the Christian message, might think that Jesus is being proclaimed as an alternative to Caesar.¹⁵ Michael Bird, for example, argues that Christian writers often portray Jesus in ways that are similar to “ancient ruler cults” from throughout the ancient Mediterranean world as a way of mocking the divine claims of such rulers.¹⁶

Of course, the more extreme versions of these anti-imperial perspectives are not without their problems. Perhaps the most obvious is the fact that Jesus does not lead any kind of formal opposition to imperial authority.¹⁷ If Jesus were such a threat to Roman authority, then it is strange that Jesus and his apostles are continually declared innocent by the same Roman authorities who mistreat them (Luke 23:22; Acts 18:15, 19:37, 26:31–32). Christopher Bryan’s conclusion is therefore apt: “Luke’s Jesus is not a rebel seeking to replace one polis with another, nor is he a Gandhi, counseling nonviolent noncooperation with imperial authorities.”¹⁸ Thus, whatever we make of the gospel’s opposition to imperial authority, it is nothing of the crudely revolutionary sort.

¹² Carter, *The Roman Empire*, 99.

¹³ For examples of *κύριος* used to refer to emperors, see Acts 25:26; and Josephus, *Jewish War* 7.418–419. See also the inscriptions listed in Stanley E. Porter and Bryan E. Dyer, *Origins of New Testament Christology: An Introduction to the Traditions and Titles Applied to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023), 5–6. For examples of *βασιλεύς* used to refer to emperors, see 1 Pet 2:17; Josephus, *Jewish War* 3.351; and Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World*, trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan, rev. ed. (New York: Harper, 1927), 362–363. For examples of *σωτήρ* used to refer to emperors, see Josephus, *Jewish War* 3.459; Philo, *Flaccus* 74; and David Magie, *De Romanorum iuris publici sacrique vocabulis sollemnibus in graecum sermonem conversis* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1905), 67–68.

¹⁴ Walton, “The State They Were In,” 99.

¹⁵ See, for example, Joseph D. Fantin, *The Lord of the Entire World: Lord Jesus, a Challenge to Lord Caesar* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011); and Michael Peppard, *The Son of God in the Roman World: Divine Sonship in its Social and Political Context* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011).

¹⁶ Michael F. Bird, *Jesus among the Gods: Early Christology in the Greco-Roman World* (Waco: Baylor Univ. Press, 2022), 295–379.

¹⁷ Seyoon Kim, *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 100–105.

¹⁸ Christopher Bryan, *Render to Caesar: Jesus, the Early Church, and the Roman Superpower* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 99.

More and more scholars thus recognize that it is less than helpful to simply ask whether Luke is for or against Rome.¹⁹ The narratives of Luke and Acts present a complex and multifaceted picture of Roman authority in relation to God's authority. As already noted, Roman officials often declare Jesus and his apostles innocent, yet they still treat them cruelly and capriciously. Luke hardly offers a shining portrayal of Roman justice. And yet Luke also portrays a number of Roman officials positively, even showing some coming to faith without suggesting that they quit their jobs and turned their backs on the empire in order to follow Jesus (Luke 7:2–10; Acts 10).²⁰ A more nuanced theological reading of the conflict between Jesus and political authorities is necessary. I propose that the doctrine of the two realms, when rightly understood, offers a helpful framework for a more nuanced reading of these issues in Luke and Acts.

III. Spiritual and Temporal Kingship?

One common way to resolve the conflict between the authority of Jesus and human political authorities is in fact a misunderstanding of the doctrine of the two realms. Such a misunderstanding asserts that Jesus and Caesar operate in two different, largely nonoverlapping realms, that is, Jesus is a spiritual king over a spiritual kingdom while Caesar and other earthly authorities are kings of temporal kingdoms. Caesar has his kingdom while Jesus has his. No conflict necessary. Of course, most who offer this answer will still acknowledge that Jesus retains some kind of ultimate authority. However, this is typically left fairly vague, something like the American platitude “one nation under God.”²¹

Of course, modern Americans are not the only ones tempted to make such a division. Eusebius relates an account from Hegeippus wherein the grandchildren of Jude, the brother of Jesus, were called in for questioning before the emperor Domitian because he was trying to exterminate the descendants of David:

¹⁹ Drew W. Billings, *Acts of the Apostles and the Rhetoric of Roman Imperialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2017), 3–11; Diehl, “Anti-Imperial Rhetoric,” 34–41; Michael Kochenash, “Taking the Bad with the Good: Reconciling Images of Rome in Luke-Acts,” *Religious Studies Review* 41, no. 2 (2015): 43–51; Timothy W. Reardon, *The Politics of Salvation: Lukan Soteriology, Atonement, and the Victory of Christ* (London: T&T Clark, 2021), 1–3; Matthew L. Skinner, “Who Speaks for (or against) Rome? Acts in Relation to Empire,” in Barreto, Skinner, and Walton, *Reading Acts in the Discourses of Masculinity and Politics*, 107–125; and Walton, “The State They Were In.”

²⁰ See Alexander Kyrychenko, *The Roman Army and the Expansion of the Gospel: The Role of the Centurion in Luke-Acts* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014).

²¹ I call this slogan a platitude because it is not clear how it makes a difference for American governance. For example, there is no constitutional provision that laws must be in accord with Scripture nor is it even clear which God the slogan refers to.

When asked also, respecting Christ and his kingdom, what was its nature, and when and where it was to appear, they replied, “that it was not a temporal nor an earthly kingdom, but celestial and angelic; that it would appear at the end of the world, when coming in glory he would judge the quick and dead, and give to every one according to his works.” Upon which, Domitian despising them, made no reply; but treating them with contempt, as simpletons, commanded them to be dismissed, and by a decree ordered the persecution to cease. (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.19–20)²²

The grandchildren of Jude are not wrong, but they do undersell the temporal and earthly aspects of Jesus’ kingdom, though this is perhaps understandable given their circumstances. Domitian, accordingly, dismisses them, clearly viewing their alternative kingdom as no threat to him and a waste of his time. Michael Bird has written that these events “show that Luther’s two-kingdoms theology had ample and early precedent.”²³ Bird’s comments are no isolated phenomenon. The doctrine of the two realms has often been misunderstood as the idea that the spiritual and the temporal, or the religious and the political, are entirely separate domains, something like the American notion of the separation between church and state.²⁴

Of course, as neat of a solution as it may be to argue that Jesus’ kingdom and the emperor’s kingdom have nothing to do with one another, there is little in Luke and Acts to warrant it. To be sure, Jesus is no revolutionary in the traditional sense, as made clear by his arrest in Gethsemane when he stops his disciples from defending him with violence (Luke 22:47–53). Furthermore, many of the basic functions of government such as the raising of taxes and the bearing of the sword are affirmed in the Gospel of Luke, as seen, for example, in John the Baptist’s instructions to soldiers and tax collectors (3:12–14) and in Jesus affirming, somewhat cryptically, that taxes should be paid to Caesar (20:19–26). However, none of this means that Jesus *ever* cedes the temporal realm to Caesar or any other authority. In fact, one of the very first things said about Jesus in Luke’s Gospel is the following from the angel Gabriel: “The Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his reign will have no end” (1:32–33). Certainly David’s kingdom was a temporal kingdom. Luke thus gives us no reason to expect that the kingdom of this ultimate son of David will not also be a temporal kingdom. There is no idea that Jesus’ kingdom is merely a heavenly, spiritual

²² Translation from C. F. Cruse, *Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History*, rev. ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998).

²³ Bird, *Jesus among the Gods*, 356.

²⁴ For more on these issues, see the essays in Matthew C. Harrison and John T. Pless, eds., *One Lord, Two Hands? Essays on the Theology of the Two Kingdoms* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2021).

kingdom. This is confirmed later in the Gospel when Jesus affirms that he will return to reign as king *on earth* (19:11–27).

Not only does Jesus' reign extend to the temporal realm, but also the claims of Caesar extend to the spiritual realm. In fact, the emperors made numerous, quite extravagant spiritual claims about their own authority.²⁵ The empire claimed to rule not on the basis of popular favor, as in modern democracies, but on the basis of divine favor and power. The gods themselves allegedly sanctioned Roman rule and their continued assistance was necessary for the continued success of the empire.²⁶ This is one reason why sacrifices were such an important part of civic and military life.²⁷ Furthermore, the first century saw the rise of the worship of the emperor as a kind of divine figure.²⁸ This was particularly prominent in the Greek-speaking, eastern part of the empire. Judy Diehl puts her finger on the problem for early Christians: "If Caesar was considered a god, what did that mean for the earliest Christians who gave allegiance to 'another' God?"²⁹ In other words, even if Luke did portray Jesus as only making a claim to spiritual authority, this would still counter imperial claims to authority. There is no clean separation between the spiritual and the political that modern people take for granted. Such an idea is an Enlightenment construct entirely foreign to both the New Testament and the broader Greco-Roman world. As Timothy Reardon writes: "This division of spheres derives, at least partially, from presupposed compartmentalization characteristic of modern, Western space. Though such divisions as religion and politics, or even religion and the public sphere, seem natural, these delineations of space are discursive products of power consolidation. The modern imagination in many respects is rent by this categorical fault line, so that the divide between the political and religious defines the present and is assumed of the past. It is a discursive act from which NT interpretation and the study of Lukan soteriology are not immune."³⁰ Thus, however we answer the question posed by this article, the idea that Caesar and Jesus have separate, nonoverlapping domains does not stand up to either the biblical or historical witness. This should not surprise Lutherans in the slightest. After all, the doctrine of the two realms does not teach the American idea of separation between church and state as often supposed,³¹ but rather, in the words of Joel Biermann, "The realms—both the spiritual and the temporal—belong to God and are directed by him for specific and

²⁵ Again, see Bird, *Jesus among the Gods*, 295–379.

²⁶ Carter, *The Roman Empire*, 7–8.

²⁷ This is the conflict at the heart of Tertullian's *De corona militis*.

²⁸ See Gwyneth McIntyre, *Imperial Cult* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

²⁹ Diehl, "Anti-Imperial Rhetoric," 10.

³⁰ Reardon, *Politics of Salvation*, 2.

³¹ See the examples in Joel Biermann, *Wholly Citizens: God's Two Realms and Christian Engagement with the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 39–46.

distinct, but equally God-pleasing work.³² To say that Jesus is king and Lord is to say that *both* the spiritual and temporal realms belong to him and this must, therefore, contradict the particular universal claims to authority made by Caesar.

Thus, in order to give a more fitting answer to how Jesus' status as king stands in contrast to Roman claims in light of the doctrine of the two realms, we must further flesh out what Luke has to say about two topics: first, how Luke teaches us to understand Jesus' enemies and, second, how Luke would have us see Jesus' own authority and ministry.

IV. The Real Enemies

Who are Jesus' primary enemies? Many scholars observe the ways that the kingship of Jesus and the coming of the kingdom of God stand in tension with Roman claims and insist that the central conflict in Luke and Acts is between Jesus and Caesar. For example, Seyoon Kim argues that the mention of Caesar Augustus in both Luke 2:1 and the close of Acts in Rome creates an *inclusio* in Luke's two-volume work: "Luke deliberately contrasts Jesus the Messianic king/lord to Caesar Augustus, and implicitly claims that Jesus is the true *kyrios* and *sōtēr*, the true bearer of the kingship of God, and that he will bring the true *pax* on earth, replacing the false *pax* brought about by the military conquests of Caesar, a false *kyrios* and *sōtēr*."³³ There are, however, several problems with this reading. First of all, while it is certainly significant that Paul ends his journey in Rome, this is not because of some overarching conflict with Caesar. The last chapter of Acts mentions Caesar but only because Paul tells the Jews in Rome that he has come there because he has appealed his legal case to Caesar. Paul comes not to defeat Caesar but to appeal to him, to get Caesar to declare Paul innocent and perhaps for Paul to proclaim to Caesar the gospel along the way. Moreover, the emphasis of this final part of the narrative is on how Paul continues his pattern of ministry now in Rome even while under imperial arrest.³⁴ Having begun in the capital of the Jewish people, Jerusalem, Paul has now brought the gospel to the capital of the Gentiles, Rome. This is a fulfillment of Jesus' words at the beginning of Acts that the apostles would be his witnesses in Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (1:8). Now the gospel has, in a sense, come to the ends of the earth.

³² Biermann, *Wholly Citizens*, 5.

³³ Kim, *Christ and Caesar*, 80–81.

³⁴ Luke Timothy Johnson concurs that the point of the end of Acts is not Paul's confrontation with Caesar (*The Acts of the Apostles* [Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992], 476). For more on the narrative complexities of the ending of Acts, see Troy M. Troftgruben, *A Conclusion Unhindered: A Study of the Ending of Acts within Its Literary Environment* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

Second, the reference to Caesar Augustus in Luke 2:1 does not set up some kind of grand showdown between Jesus and Caesar.³⁵ While Jesus is indeed referred to with terms like *κύριος* and *σωτήρ* that were often used of Caesar, Luke does little to highlight this fact. Luke 2:1 is not even the first mention of a king in Luke's Gospel. Luke begins his Gospel by referring to "the days of Herod" (1:5). At the beginning of chapter 3, Luke again refers to a number of rulers to pinpoint the events in time. The purpose here is not to set up a conflict between Jesus and these earthly rulers but rather to locate these events in time, as any historian would do, and to evoke the language of the beginnings of so many of the prophetic writings (e.g., Isa 1:1; Jer 1:1–3; Hos 1:1).³⁶ The claims that Luke and Acts make about Jesus certainly conflict with Roman claims (e.g., Luke 1:33, 2:11; Acts 10:36, 17:30–31), but this particular conflict is just not as front and center as has often been claimed.

Another problem for readings that see the central conflict of Luke and Acts to be the conflict between Jesus and Caesar is that while Jesus himself almost never gets into direct conflict with representatives of Roman rule,³⁷ he is constantly getting into conflict with local Jewish authorities (e.g., Luke 4:22–30, 6:1–5, 11:37–52). When Jesus is put on trial, it is the Jewish council that condemns him (Luke 22:71) while Pilate declares him innocent (Luke 23:4). Likewise, Paul and the other apostles more typically find themselves getting into trouble with Jewish authorities rather than Roman ones (e.g., Acts 4:1–22, 12:1–5, 14:19). One episode that demonstrates this pattern well is when Jesus is asked about how Pilate killed a group of Jewish Galileans by mingling their blood with the sacrifices (Luke 13:1–5). Jesus could have offered woes against the evil, corrupt political authorities who were committing such violence against God's people. Instead, Jesus takes the event as an opportunity to insist that these people did not die because they were particularly bad sinners. Rather, this and the incident at the tower of Siloam offer a call to repentance. At least in this instance, Jesus believes his most important opponent is not Pilate but human pride.

The upshot of all this is that Rome is not the main focus of opposition in Luke and Acts. Of course, many interpreters who say otherwise recognize that Jesus and his apostles do not spend all their time denouncing the Roman Empire. However, they typically assert that on account of the threat of imperial persecution, authors like Luke were not able to voice their opposition to imperial rule as openly as they

³⁵ So also Michael Wolter, *The Gospel according to Luke*, trans. Wayne Coppins and Christoph Heilig (Waco: Baylor Univ. Press, 2016), 1:126.

³⁶ It has been frequently noted how much Luke evokes the language of the LXX, especially in the first several chapters of his Gospel; see Chang-Wook Jung, *The Original Language of the Lukan Infancy Narrative* (London: T&T Clark, 2004).

³⁷ In fact, Jesus seems to get along fairly well with the representatives of Roman power he encounters in the Gospel, for example the centurion whom he enthusiastically commends (Luke 7:9) and Pilate, who is constantly declaring him innocent (Luke 23:4, 23:15, 23:22).

might like and accordingly relied on subtlety and “hidden transcripts” to make their point.³⁸ Consider, for example, Gertrud Tönsing’s reading of the parable of the minas in Luke 19:11–27. Tönsing argues that the real, hidden message of this parable is that the third servant, who is condemned by the king, is actually the hero since this servant is the one who refuses to comply with the unjust demands of the king and thereby begins a movement of resistance against unjust power.³⁹ The fact that in the Lukan context the parable undeniably pictures Jesus as the king merely serves as a plausible, public meaning of the parable to remove any suspicion from the true, hidden meaning of the parable, which must obviously be a message of resistance. The problem, of course, with readings like this is that any detail that would contradict an anti-imperial reading can be dismissed as merely part of the public message, which only distracts from the true meaning of the text. If that were not enough, there is little reason to think of Rome as a kind of Orwellian surveillance state, meaning that New Testament authors had little reason to hide their opposition to the empire if they wanted to express it.⁴⁰

Instead, the most basic opposition at the heart of the Lukan narrative is not between Jesus and Rome but between Jesus and Satan. This is the conclusion of Matthew Monnig in his study of Satan in Luke and Acts, where he calls Satan “the primary antagonist to Jesus.”⁴¹ After all, the idea that the people of God have enemies is present in Luke’s story from the beginning. In Zechariah’s song after the birth of John the Baptist, Zechariah mentions how God will save Israel from her enemies, from the hand of those who hate her (Luke 1:71–72), but Zechariah is rather vague about who exactly these enemies are.⁴² It is therefore instructive that the first clearly defined conflict to occur in Luke’s Gospel is the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness by Satan (4:1–13). As Jesus begins his ministry, Luke makes it clear whom Jesus has

³⁸ The sociological concept of “hidden transcripts” refers to the way that oppressed people can covertly communicate their opposition to their oppression without engaging in open revolt, as described in James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1990).

³⁹ J. Gertrud Tönsing, “Scolding the ‘Wicked, Lazy’ Servant; Is the Master God? A Redaction-Critical Study of Matthew 25:14–30 and Luke 19:11–27,” *Neotestamentica* 53, no. 1 (2019): 139–140.

⁴⁰ Laura Robinson, “Hidden Transcripts? The Supposedly Self-Censoring Paul and Rome as Surveillance State in Modern Pauline Scholarship,” *New Testament Studies* 67, no. 1 (2021): 55–72.

⁴¹ Matthew S. Monnig, “Satan in Lukan Narrative and Theology: Human Agency in the Conflict between the Authority of Satan and the Power of God” (PhD diss., Duke University, 2019), 276.

⁴² Of course, Robert C. Tannehill has argued on the basis of Luke 19:43 that the enemies who Zechariah references should indeed be understood to be the Romans (*The Shape of Luke’s Story: Essays on Luke–Acts* [Eugene: Cascade, 2005], 49–50). Tannehill makes a persuasive case that Rome should be considered *one* of Israel’s enemies. However, it is not clear to me why they deserve pride of place among Israel’s enemies (note the plural in Luke 1:71), especially when elsewhere Jesus calls Satan and the Jerusalem elite who reject his kingship enemies (Luke 10:19, 19:27).

really come to oppose. Jesus' fight is with the evil spiritual powers that reign over the present world and subject it to the powers of sin and death. Thus, in the very next episode, when Jesus preaches to his hometown synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus frames his anointed ministry as a ministry to the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed (4:18). And the reader sees over the course of the next several chapters that Jesus fulfills this ministry by healing the sick, the injured, and the dead. He cleanses lepers and casts out demons. He gives sight to both the physically blind and the spiritually blind. When a group of John the Baptist's disciples come to ask if Jesus really is the one whom they have been waiting for, he points to these very sorts of acts to show them that he is in fact God's promised anointed one (7:22). As Jesus takes up the throne of his father David and the mantle of the prophetic ministry of Elijah in his own messianic ministry, Jesus does battle not with Rome or the Sanhedrin but with Satan. He fights Satan by undoing Satan's work, by freeing God's people from death, sickness, uncleanness, and demonic powers. While it might not be immediately obvious that Jesus' healing ministry constitutes a battle against Satan, this becomes clearer when we observe the association between healings and exorcisms in Luke's Gospel. In describing Jesus' healings and exorcisms, the narrator frequently lists both actions together, often depicting the healings and exorcisms as occurring together (e.g., Luke 4:40–41, 6:18, 7:21, 8:2, 9:1–2). At several points the narrator or other characters talk about Jesus "healing" people of evil spirits (Luke 7:21, 8:2 [θεραπεύω], 9:42; Acts 10:38 [ιάομαι]). Furthermore, sometimes demonic possession causes what modern people may otherwise identify as medical problems (Luke 9:37–43), and the healing of medical problems is described using the language of exorcism (Luke 4:39). Consider the account of the healing/exorcism of the bent woman on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10–17). The woman is described as having a spirit of illness (πνεῦμα ἀσθενείας, 13:11). Jesus says that Satan has bound her in this illness for eighteen years (13:16). While Luke's Gospel still makes a distinction between healings and exorcisms, they often seem to be two sides of the same coin, and the kingdom of God is proclaimed equally against both as a battle against the devil (Luke 9:1–2). As Monnig concludes, "In Luke's view, all healing of illness, whether there is a direct involvement of an evil spirit or not, is an illustration of God's power being wielded against the oppression of the devil."⁴³

Later on in the Gospel, Jesus explicitly frames his work as a fight against the devil. In Luke 11:14–23 Jesus is accused of casting out demons by the power of the devil. Jesus rejects this accusation as absurd and contradictory. Instead, he affirms that in his ministry he is doing battle with the devil to plunder his house and manifest the reign of God (11:20–22). Satan, for his part, fights back. At the end of the

⁴³ Monnig, "Satan in Lukan Narrative," 124–125; see also 124–132.

temptation of Jesus, the narrator notes, “The devil left him until the proper time” (Luke 4:13). This ominous foreshadowing finds its fulfillment when Satan enters Judas before Judas makes a plan to hand Jesus over to the Jewish authorities (Luke 22:2). But Jesus is not alone in fighting Satan. Just like Jesus, the apostles in Acts regularly do battle with demonic forces (e.g., 5:16, 16:16–24, 19:11–20) and heal people of various diseases (e.g., 3:1–10, 9:32–35, 9:36–41). Thus, the way Luke tells the story, the primary opponent of Jesus and his kingdom is the devil. Unsurprisingly, this is also Paul’s view of things in Ephesians: “For us it is not a fight against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the global rulers of this darkness, against the wicked spirits in the heavenly realm” (6:12).

Yet this does not mean that the gospel of Jesus has no conflict with political authorities. A failure to understand political authorities from the perspective of the two realms leads to one-sided readings. For example, the idea that Luke presents the church as entirely compatible with and subservient to Rome focuses too exclusively on the relative lack of conflict in the temporal realm. On the other hand, the idea that Luke presents the church and Rome in diametric opposition focuses too exclusively on the conflict in the spiritual realm. As discussed above, to proclaim Jesus as Lord, King, and Savior does indeed contradict claims made by Caesar to be lord, king, and savior. For Jesus to claim ultimate divine authority is to set himself above Caesar, who claims to be a god among men. What is more, Jesus establishes a new polis in the church. While the church does not try to overthrow Caesar, the church does establish an alternative system of relations. This affects not merely spiritual matters but also the distribution of resources (Acts 4:32–37, 6:1–6) and standards of behavior (Acts 15), that is, matters of the temporal realm. Most importantly, this is a polis that recognizes only God, not human beings, as the ultimate authority (Acts 5:29). Thus, the proclamation of the kingdom of God radically relativizes political authority, but it does not overthrow it.

That being said, human authorities can also become Jesus’ opponents when they ally themselves with the devil’s kingdom rather than God’s kingdom. As Monnig writes: “While it is true that Luke, especially in Acts, is subtly but clearly putting the gospel in tension with political authorities, the immediate narrative context is the theological one implicated by Jesus’s conflict with Satan. Luke does not associate Satan with political powers in any systematic way, but rather with opposition to God and his work in Jesus in any way, in which both political and religious powers are associated.”⁴⁴ Rome’s complicity with Satan is thus most clearly established when Roman authorities participate in the persecution of Jesus and his apostles, such as when Pilate acquiesces to the demands of the Jerusalem elite to have Jesus executed

⁴⁴ Monnig, “Satan in Lukan Narrative,” 93, n. 118.

(Luke 23:1–25)⁴⁵ or when Felix holds Paul in custody so that he might receive a bribe and later to curry favor with the Jews (Acts 24:26–27).

Nevertheless, it is not the case that every authority everywhere is necessarily a servant of Satan. Luke and Acts note two instances of Roman centurions coming to faith (Luke 7:1–10; Acts 10), and the centurion at Jesus' crucifixion declares Jesus innocent (Luke 23:47). Toward the end of Acts, Paul appeals to King Agrippa to believe the prophets' testimony about Jesus and become a Christian (26:27–29). This would make little sense if all political authorities were hopeless servants of Satan. After all, even Luke would affirm the claim made elsewhere in Scripture that the authority of earthly rulers comes ultimately from God, as affirmed by Romans 13 and John 19:11 (see also AC XVI). In the second temptation of Jesus, Satan offers to give him authority over all the kingdoms of the world (Luke 4:5–7). Yet Satan acknowledges that this authority has been handed to him by someone else (Luke 4:6), and though Luke's Gospel does not specify who Satan received his authority from, the only reasonable answer is God (cf. Rev 20:3, 20:7). All authority, even Satan's, ultimately comes from God. Thus, even when earthly rulers surrender themselves to the devil's ways, their political authority still ultimately comes from God. We express a similar idea in our systematic theology when we talk about distinguishing between an office and the person who holds an office.⁴⁶ Political authority itself is a God-given gift to be exercised well. Yet Luke would also emphasize that those who occupy offices of temporal authority must watch out lest they end up serving Satan rather than God.⁴⁷ Thus, earthly authorities are always subordinate to God and sometimes obedient to the devil. While Jesus' real fight is with the devil and his minions, human authorities can also become the devil's minions when they submit to his ways. Jesus' conflict thus extends to earthly rulers as well in a secondary way but only when they ally themselves with Jesus' ultimate foe.⁴⁸ Of course, a further distinction is made between human and nonhuman enemies in that while no call to repentance goes out to the devil and his forces, Jesus' disciples are called to offer a

⁴⁵ This would also show how Israel's leaders are also subservient to Satan, a theme that recurs elsewhere in Acts (e.g., Acts 4:1–37, 6:1–8:40, 17:1–9; 21:1–24:27) yet has received far less scholarly attention.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Hans Joachim Iwand, "Estate and Sacrament," in *Hans Joachim Iwand on Church and Society*, ed. Benjamin Haupt, Michael Basse, Gerard den Hertog, and Christian Neddens, trans. Christian Einertson (London: T&T Clark, 2023), 147–169.

⁴⁷ Compare Paul's discussion of the way that his hearers can be slaves of sin or slaves of God depending on how they conduct themselves (Rom 6:12–23). See also Biermann, *Wholly Citizens*, 20–21.

⁴⁸ One observes a similar idea in Matt 25:41 when, in the parable of the sheep and the goats, the Son of Man says to the goats on his left, "Get away from me you cursed ones into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels." The fire exists because of evil spiritual forces. However, human beings are sent to this fire because they are on the side of the devil and not the Son of Man.

call to repentance and the proclamation of the kingdom of God to human authorities (Luke 12:11–12), as many of the apostles in fact do throughout Acts (4:8–12, 7:1–60, 24:24–26, 26:27–29). Likewise, while Jesus engages in violence against evil spirits (Luke 4:34, 8:26–33), violence against human beings is generally postponed until the parousia (Luke 19:27; cf. Luke 9:51–56, 22:49–51; see also Acts 17:30–31),⁴⁹ thus offering human authorities a chance to repent.

V. Jesus, Lord of All

If this is the perspective Luke would have his readers take of earthly authorities, then his image of Jesus as the ultimate authority does even more to shatter the modern separation between spiritual and temporal authority. This is because Jesus is clearly the Lord of both of God's realms. To begin, we observe that Luke often portrays Jesus as one possessing authority. As mentioned already, the angel Gabriel says that Jesus will be given the throne of his father David forever (Luke 1:32–33). Jesus is born in Bethlehem, the city of David (2:11). Jesus is later acclaimed as son of David by the blind man on the road to Jericho (18:35–43). As he enters Jerusalem he is acclaimed as king by the crowds (19:38) and will later be crucified as the “king of the Jews” (23:38). Yet this is not the only discussion of authority. Jesus astonishes the crowds at Capernaum because his word and teaching possess authority (4:32), and he exercises authority over the demons (4:36). Jesus also gives this authority to cast out demons and to cure diseases to his disciples (9:1). Elsewhere, Jesus, when faced with a dispute about keeping the Sabbath, affirms that he is Lord of the Sabbath (6:5). When asked by some of the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem where he gets his authority, Jesus refuses to answer, but the implication of his response is that Jesus' authority comes directly from God (20:1–8), something that the reader already knows from the beginning of the narrative and that is confirmed during Jesus' trial (22:69).

Perhaps one of the strongest affirmations of Jesus' authority and the most helpful for our purposes is found in Acts 10 in Peter's speech to the centurion Cornelius. Peter says that Jesus is “Lord of all” (10:36). This is significant for several reasons. First, when Luke calls Jesus “Lord,” as he so often does, this is an affirmation of Jesus' identity as *the* Lord of Israel's Scriptures who is Lord not just over Israel but also over the whole world and over all of his creation.⁵⁰ Second, it subtly highlights the contrast between Jesus and Caesar. While Caesar is called “Lord” (see Acts 25:26)

⁴⁹ With at least two notable exceptions in Acts: Ananias and Sapphira (5:1–11) and King Herod (12:20–23).

⁵⁰ See C. Kavin Rowe, who argues at length that Luke creatively uses the title *κύριος* to narratively merge the identity of Jesus with the identity of the God of Israel (*Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009]).

and even “Lord of all the world,”⁵¹ these claims are exposed as blasphemy, as “usurpation by a human being of the identity that belongs to the God of Israel alone.”⁵² Thus, in contrasting Jesus with Caesar, it is not so much that Jesus is presented as a rival emperor to Caesar, as the Jews in Thessalonica may have thought. Rather, it is that *Caesar* has appointed himself as a rival lord to the Lord of heaven and earth. As Rowe writes, “Jesus does not challenge Caesar’s status as Lord, as if Jesus were somehow originally subordinate to Caesar in the order of being. . . . It is Caesar who is the rival; and what he rivals is the Lordship of God in the person of Jesus Christ.”⁵³ Thus, Jesus is indeed a threat to Roman imperial rule insofar as Jesus threatens to tear out the entire blasphemous system by the roots, to corrode the idolatrous ideology from the inside. Christians are happy to honor and pray for the emperor (1 Pet 2:17), but they do so having fundamentally rejected the emperor’s own basis for his claim to authority. Christians honor the emperor not as the divine son of the gods and lord of all, but as a mere man who occupies an office that exists at God’s good pleasure, a man who can be replaced whenever God sees fit, as in fact happens to Herod (Acts 12:20–23). This is an attitude that the church today must seek to cultivate since we live in a context where politicians of various stripes present themselves as the only hope and savior of their constituents.

But Peter’s affirmation that Jesus is Lord of all (Acts 10:36) does not merely remind us of Jesus’ divine authority over mere men like Caesar, but it also reminds us that as Jesus proclaims and enacts the reign of God in his messianic ministry, he inevitably does so as Lord of all of God’s creation, which means as Lord of both of God’s two realms. It is certainly easy to frame Jesus’ ministry primarily in terms of his work in the spiritual realm. This is the most common strategy in our preaching, after all: Jesus has come to repair the relationship between God and man, to forgive sins, and so on. This is all certainly true and forms a vital part of both Jesus’ work and the work of his apostles. However, Jesus’ work also takes place in the temporal realm as well. This is, of course, not to say that Jesus gets himself elected to office and starts enacting reforms. After all, the temporal realm is not synonymous with human government. Rather the temporal realm “is simply God’s provision for the smooth functioning of the creation.”⁵⁴ Thus, whenever Jesus heals the sick (Luke 4:38–40), cleanses lepers (Luke 5:12–16), makes the paralyzed walk (Luke 5:17–26), raises the dead (Luke 7:11–17), feeds the hungry (Luke 9:10–17), teaches the rich to share with the poor (Luke 18:22), or heals the blind (Luke 18:35–43), he is, in a prophetic way, restoring creation to its proper functioning. Any politician who figured

⁵¹ See Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 106.

⁵² Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 111.

⁵³ Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 112.

⁵⁴ Biermann, *Wholly Citizens*, 4.

out how to do even half these things would find himself hailed as one of the greatest statesmen ever.

Jesus thus conducts his ministry in both the spiritual and the temporal realms. He heals the sick and forgives sins. He raises the dead and casts out demons. He cleanses lepers and preaches the good news of the kingdom. The healing of the paralytic who is lowered through the roof offers an excellent picture of how Jesus' ministry operates in both realms (Luke 5:17–26). The paralytic's friends bring him to Jesus so that Jesus might heal him. However, the first thing that Jesus does is forgive his sins. When Jesus' authority to forgive sins is questioned, he demonstrates his authority over the spiritual realm by demonstrating his authority to make this paralyzed man walk again. The logic here is that if he has the authority to make the paralyzed walk, then surely, he also has the authority to forgive sins. Here ministry in both realms comes together. Jesus is concerned with the whole human person, and thus he ministers to the whole human person because he has authority over the whole human person. Thus, Jesus' fight with Satan is a grand cosmic battle that takes place on multiple fronts. This will even include, when necessary, conflict with human authorities by bearing witness to the truth in front of them (Luke 12:11–12).

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, Luke presents Jesus as a deeply political figure. He is the heir of the throne of David. He is God's anointed prophet and king, and these claims to authority are what get him killed toward the end of the Gospel. Jesus' apostles continue to get into trouble with earthly authorities when the message of Jesus is rightly perceived to be a threat to their authority. While Jesus does not come to overthrow these authorities like a common revolutionary, the kingdom of Jesus is indeed a threat to these earthly authorities, both Gentile and Jewish, insofar as they serve not God but Satan in their God-ordained offices of leadership. Jesus is not a new Caesar. But in a way he is everything Caesar claims to be and more. Jesus' rule exposes Caesar's claims to be the blasphemous and empty posturing that they really were all along. Thus, as Christians seek to follow their King and Lord of all in a world filled with all kinds of earthly authorities, Luke's writings might remind us to keep a few things in mind.

First, we must not forget that the conflict between Jesus and other authorities is first and foremost a spiritual battle. This is true in two senses. In one obvious sense, Jesus comes to defeat Satan. Everything Jesus does is in opposition to this ancient foe, and he wins the victory over this enemy for his faithful people. Thus, those who have sworn allegiance to Jesus engage in a deeply political act. They turn away from the present ruler of this world and toward the one whose rule is dawning just over

the horizon. This is one reason why it is fitting that in the Lutheran baptismal rite, candidates publicly reject the devil and all his works.⁵⁵ Those who would like to be citizens of the kingdom of God must renounce the citizenship into which they were born, the kingdom of Satan. In another sense, Jesus is engaged in a spiritual battle because other authorities, even earthly authorities, make spiritual claims and are engaged in spiritual work. The lines of division between the temporal and spiritual realms are indeed quite permeable.⁵⁶ This is not to say that earthly authorities are always engaged in evil spiritual work—far from it. They may make unobjectionable spiritual claims and may even be engaged in good and salutary spiritual work, as was Frederick the Wise in Luther's day. The point is simply to recognize that the spiritual work of temporal authorities is necessarily an element of their work that cannot be ignored by Christians.

Second, Luke would remind us to distinguish between an office and the one who holds it or, better yet, between authority, which ultimately comes from God, and the ways that the people who exercise that authority choose to serve Satan in their offices. In his narrative, Luke tells the stories of several centurions who offer faithful responses to the message of Jesus. Many Roman and even Jewish authorities declare Jesus and his apostles to be innocent of any crimes. Jesus is no anarchist. Instead, as Bryan asserts, "The biblical tradition subverts human order . . . by consistently confronting its representatives with the truth about its origin and its purpose. . . . Powers . . . are allowed to exist, and may even be approved, but they are always on notice."⁵⁷ One implication of this is that while many in the United States and elsewhere have become disillusioned with particular officeholders, Christians should avoid letting this disillusionment boil over into a general distrust and disrespect for earthly authority itself. It is just and reasonable to distrust particular officeholders, but this should not be misdirected to a distrust of the idea of earthly authority or the office itself. Furthermore, since all authority ultimately comes from God, earthly authorities are measured not against the standards that they set for themselves but against the standards that God sets for his creation. This is why Christians, of all people, must avoid becoming captive to the more simplistic forms of partisan politics. After all, all political parties find ways to ally themselves with demonic forces. Christians should be ready to be a voice of critique to all earthly authorities, not merely the authorities from another political party.

Finally, the church, while primarily concerned with the spiritual realm, also rightfully engages in the temporal realm. Jesus is Lord of both realms, and his

⁵⁵ The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, ed., *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 270.

⁵⁶ Biermann, *Wholly Citizens*, 16.

⁵⁷ Bryan, *Render to Caesar*, 125.

ministry engages in both realms. This is a pattern followed by the apostles themselves, who not only call sinners to repent and believe in Jesus, but also heal the sick and ensure that widows are provided for (Acts 6). This does not merely mean that the church should manage its finances well or be engaged in what is often called “social ministry,” that is, food pantries, soup kitchens, and the like, though these are certainly all commendable tasks. The point is that when Christians are formed as part of the church, they are formed into a new polis, a new way of life. This is Rowe’s central point in his excellent book *World Upside Down*, where he claims the following:

For Luke, the kingdom is obviously not a “human kingdom” in the straightforward simplistic sense, and in this way the Christian mission does not threaten Rome as did, for example, the Parthian kingdom. Yet, against every Gnosticizing impulse . . . , the kingdom of which Jesus is King is not simply “spiritual” but also material and social which is to say that it takes up space in public. The very fact of the disturbance in Thessalonica—that *this* is what happens—attests to the publicly disruptive consequences of the conversions ([Acts] 17:4). There is no such thing, at least in Acts, as being a Christian in private.⁵⁸

This means that the church must think carefully about how she “takes up space in public.” Congregations must think about how their life together is structured such that it leads to faithful lives and human flourishing in the present age.⁵⁹ For example, are husbands and wives taught how to love one another and raise their children in the faith? Are the lonely given the chance to find community? Are the poor provided with what they need? Are the rich given the opportunity to use their riches to make themselves rich in good works?⁶⁰ Furthermore, as Christians live their lives in the world, they inevitably offer the world witness about their Lord and the heavenly citizenship that is their baptismal birthright. This does not stop as they approach the issues that particularly vex our society, culture, and government. Our lives in God’s two realms are not a bifurcated, schizophrenic reality but a single reality united under the messianic lordship of Jesus. While congregations typically do well to avoid telling their members how exactly most issues that face our civic institutions should

⁵⁸ Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 101.

⁵⁹ One such proposal can be found in Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Sentinel, 2017). Regardless of what one makes of Dreher’s proposal, in my estimation, Dreher asks many of the right questions.

⁶⁰ Questions like these are often addressed in the tables of duties found toward the end of several New Testament Epistles (e.g., Col 3:18–4:1; 1 Tim 5:1–6:2; 1 Pet 2:13–3:7). While we might be tempted to read these passages as providing instruction merely to individuals, we should keep in mind that these were instructions given to the whole church and therefore implicate not just the individuals to whom they are specifically addressed, but also the entire body of Christ.

be decided,⁶¹ they can teach Christians that the faith speaks to both realms and that Christians do not stop being Christians when they enter the public square because their Lord does not stop being the Lord of all at the ballot box, the school board meeting, or any other function of government. Jesus is the Lord of both realms because he is the Lord of all creation.

⁶¹ Though there are certainly exceptions to this. Pastors and their congregations also shirk their duties if they fail to speak to issues of public concern when Scripture offers clear guidance; see Biermann, *Wholly Citizens*, 118–122.