

THE “THREE KINGDOMS” OF SIMON MUSAEUS: A WITTENBERG STUDENT PROCESSES LUTHER’S THOUGHT

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During Martin Luther’s entire career as a teacher of the Bible, the Wittenberg professor continued to experiment with the best way to convey the biblical message to his students and the wider public. Since he believed that the world’s end was near, he had no conception of his role in fashioning terminology that would find use as dogmatic categories for at least a half millennium. Among the words he employed somewhat loosely was the term “*Reich*.” His usages of the term were not taken up explicitly as doctrinal categories when Philip Melancthon organized such topics or commonplaces for public teaching in his *Loci communes*. Therefore, Wittenberg students employed it in different ways. This investigation assesses a rare instance of one of Luther’s students, who actually put his concepts of the *Reiche* to work in ways that captured at least in part what Luther was saying with his own usage. His “two kingdoms,” the usual English translation for *Reich*, wrought confusion in later centuries, in part because of the several uses to which he put the phrase. Because of the fluctuations in its meaning, this essay employs the German *Reich* instead of any one of the possible English translations.

Martin Luther’s “Two Kingdoms”

James Estes has noted, “As presented in [Luther’s] *On Secular Authority* the doctrine of the two kingdoms seems simple and straightforward [...]. In fact, however, the *Zwei-Reiche Lehre*, as Luther developed it over the years, was a complex set of doctrines whose inherent difficulty was compounded by his imprecise use of terms that have several possible meanings: *Reich*, *regnum*, *Welt*, *weltlich*, and more. No other aspect of Luther’s social and ethical teaching has produced so much discussion or controversy.”¹ Estes correctly notes

¹ Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God*, 38, n. 98.

that what is commonly designated a “*Lehre*” is far more than a single article of faith or doctrinal topic, as this description implies. What the term designates, in its several usages, always involves not one aspect among many of Luther’s teaching, but rather a hermeneutical or presuppositional framework that functions as a guide to interpreting biblical texts and human dilemmas. More importantly, Luther’s multiple uses of “*Reich*” can be confusing; the English translation of “kingdom” adds to the problem of understanding.

Luther frequently chose to render the Greek “*he basileia tou theou*,” the Septuagint’s translation of the Hebrew “*malkut*,” with the word “*Reich*” rather than “*Königtum*,” reflecting the sense of the Hebrew and Greek as well as their usual Latin rendering “*regnum*,” a designation for the ultimate form of rule. In the German “*Empire*” of Luther’s time the term “*Reich*” conveyed the sense of the Roman *imperium*, in English “*empire*” rather than “*kingdom*.” This further exacerbates the ambiguity created by the Wittenberg reformer’s various uses of the phrase.

Only very occasionally did Luther use “two kingdoms” to designate the institutions of church and secular authority, along the lines of much medieval application of Augustine’s contrast of the “two cities.”² Much more frequently, the “two *Reiche*” designate the activities of God and Satan, locked in a conflict that will continue to the Last Day, between God’s truth and Satan’s lie (John 8:44, a passage which Luther used frequently). It is waged for and within the life of every human being, especially intensively in the lives of Christians, according to the Wittenberg reformer.³ The third use of “two kingdoms” language occurs in labeling what Luther could also call God’s two “*Regimenten*,” his distinction of two interlocked spheres or realms of human life, the one lived in relationship to God and the other lived in relationship to God’s creatures, especially fellow human creatures.⁴ The use of “two kingdoms” in this

² See Mantey, *Zwei Schwerter — Zwei Reiche*.

³ See, for example, Asendorf, *Estchatologie bei Luther*, 142–242; Barth, *Der Teufel und Jesus Christus in der Theologie Martin Luthers*, esp. 112–123; Rieske-Braun, *Duellum mirabile*, esp. 66–114, 227–259.

⁴ The discussion of Luther’s distinction of the two realms of human life under the term “*zwei Reiche*” has gone on with intensity particularly since Karl Barth’s criticism of the concept in the 1930s. Among the most important discussions (of varying quality) are: Bornkamm, *Luther’s Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms in the Context of his Theology*; Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther*, esp. 36–61; Cranz, *An Essay on the Development of Luther’s Thought on Justice, Law, and Society*; Dalferth, *Die Zweireichelehre Martin Luthers im Dialog mit der Befreiungstheologie Leonardo Boff*; Duchrow,

third field of meaning is further clouded, however, because Luther sometimes seems to refer to God’s two strategies, of law and gospel, as his two ways of ruling, paralleling only roughly and partially the sphere (realm) of creaturely relationships to the law and the sphere of the believer’s relationship with God only to the gospel.⁵ Both of the “realms” or *Regimenten*, as social setting in which life unfolds, become battlefields where God’s and Satan’s kingdoms fight for the allegiance of human beings.⁶

In fact, both elements in this third usage of “two kingdoms” play a key role in his hermeneutic, which also embraces two other distinctions. They include his vital distinction of law and gospel, along with his fundamental anthropological insight into the distinction between the passive righteousness that God grants in order to bestow the believer’s identity as child of God and the active righteousness that the believer practices to demonstrate that identity in love and service within creation. The gospel is at work transforming the sinner into God’s child in the “heavenly” sphere of life and in motivating that child of God to do good works on earth. The law commands trust in God and prayer and praise in conversation with him in the heavenly realm and love and service to neighbours and care of non-human elements of creation in the earthly realm. Passive righteousness, expressed in trust, constitutes the relationship with God in the heavenly realm; there, active righteousness carries out the commands of the first table of the law. In the earthly realm passive righteousness motivates and empowers obedience to the law, while active righteousness performs it. As complicated as human life is, so complicated was Luther’s finely-tuned hermeneutic, designed to facilitate interpretation of both Scripture and daily life. The difficulty all people encounter in fully explaining their own humanity accounts for the failure of some of Luther’s students and followers to fully comprehend this framework for communicating who God is and what it means to be human.

Two of the most frequent distortions or misunderstandings of Luther’s “two kingdoms’ concepts involve the equation of Satan’s kingdom with the

Christenheit und Weltverantwortung; Duchrow and Huber, *Die Ambivalenz der Zweireichelehre in lutherischen Kirchen des 20. Jahrhundert*; Frostin, *Luther’s Two Kingdoms Doctrine*; Heckel, *Lex charitatis* and also his *Lex Caritatis, A Juristic Disquisition on Law in the Theology of Martin Luther*; Lau, ‘Äußerliche Ordnung’ und ‘Weltlich Ding’ in *Luthers Theologie*; Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*. This summary repeats ideas found in Kolb, “Luther’s Hermeneutics of Distinctions.”

⁵ Nessen, “Reappropriating Luther’s Two Kingdoms.”

⁶ Asendorf, *Estchatologie bei Luther*, 243–280.

sphere or realm of earthly life and the extrication of the earthly realm or sphere and God's strategy of dealing with human beings through the law from the rule of God, granting it an autonomy that Luther's practice of the criticism of governmental authorities for their sins distinctly denied. These are more recent misinterpretations. Sixteenth-century students or followers of Luther faced their own challenges in reproducing this element of Luther's thought.

These adherents within the Wittenberg circle struggled with and over the theological and terminological inheritance left by their instructors,⁷ processing the theological categories and expressions of their mentors in a variety of ways. The term "kingdom" was not among those words that led to disputes; usage appears to cross the 'party' lines that marked the disputes between 1550 and 1577. Especially in biblical commentary and in proclamation the specific phrase "kingdom of Christ" found occasional use. This study focuses on the Genesis commentary⁸ of Simon Musaeus (1529–1582), who employed Luther's "*Reiche*" language in a unique way even though his contemporaries did not ignore the term but employed it mostly in a narrower sense than either Luther or Musaeus.

The "Kingdom of Christ" in Musaeus' Contemporaries

For instance, in interpreting the Old Testament prophets, preachers and professors among Luther's students saw foreshadowings of the kingdom of Christ in the history of Israel and the proclamation delivered to God's ancient people. Musaeus' former colleague at the University of Jena, Johannes Wigand (1523–1587), listed prophecies of Christ's "*regnum*" as one of the concepts key to the "form and characteristics" of prophetic writings.⁹ Among the doctrinal topics that the prophet Obadiah treated, Wigand listed "the spread of Christ's *regnum* among all nations."¹⁰ This topic was also one of Micah's chief messages: specific passages within his book discussed how Christ's rule would extend through the gospel into his people's lives.¹¹ Wigand defined this rule of Christ in commenting on Zachariah 11: it effects the conversion of people

⁷ Dingel, "The Culture of Conflict."

⁸ Musaeus, *Richtige vnd Reine Auslegung*. Henceforth references to this work will be incorporated directly into the text.

⁹ Wigand, *In XII. Prophetas*, +5a.

¹⁰ Wigand, *In XII. Prophetas*, 249.

¹¹ Wigand, *In XII. Prophetas*, 297, 315, 327.

to God and bestows true consolation for anxious and terrified consciences, wounded by the voice of the law.¹²

David Chytraeus (1531–1600), who had studied in Wittenberg while Musaeus was there, interpreted Micah 2:12–13 as a prophecy of Christ’s kingdom, which he equated with the church and the remnant of the people of Israel. Christ serves as their “shepherd and king” [*pastor et rex*]. He leads his church, the communion or congregation of the saints, all pious people in all places and times, those who know God truly, call upon him, and trust the promises of Christ. His rule delivers them from captivity to sin and death and leads them to good pasture through the gospel and Christ’s spirit to life eternal.¹³ Similar definitions of Christ’s kingdom can be found in the commentaries of Nikolaus Selnecker (1530–1592), who also described the conflict between his kingdom and Satan’s,¹⁴ and Viktorin Strigel (1524–1569), who had left Saxony for Heidelberg as his views of the Lord’s Supper shifted,¹⁵ but who reflected his Wittenberg training in much of his biblical comment.¹⁶ Generally, however, none of these four used the concept of God’s or Christ’s kingdom excessively, certainly not as a hermeneutical principle in Luther’s manner, and they all failed to use the terminology for the two realms, vertical and horizontal, in human life.

The Turbulent Life of Simon Musaeus

Simon Musaeus did attempt a systematic formulation and application of Luther’s “kingdom” language, making him distinctive among students of Luther and Melancthon. He recognized its nature as a hermeneutical tool and set it in place as the organizational principle for interpreting Genesis in his German homiletical commentary. His experiment with the terminology reveals something of the variety and potential tensions inherent in Luther’s usage of the term.

¹² Wigand, *In XII. Prophetas*, 573–574.

¹³ Chytraeus, *Explicatio Micheae et Nahvmi prophetarvm*, F3a–F6b.

¹⁴ Selnecker, *Die Propheten Oseas Joel vnd Micheas*, D4b–E1a. See his comments on the *Reich Christi* in his *Der Prophet vnnnd ernster Busprediger Amos vnnnd Obadiah*, h3a, k3a–l1a, and *Der gantze Prophet Jeremias*, Tt4b–Vv1a.

¹⁵ Kolb, “Die theologische Pilgerschaft von Viktorin Strigel.”

¹⁶ Strigel, *XII. Minores prophetae*, 105, 127.

Musaeus (Meusel) was born in Vetschau near Cottbus on 25 March 1529; like many of the second generation of Wittenberg students, he sprang from modest circumstances, a peasant's son.¹⁷ After attending school in Cottbus, he moved to the electoral university of Frankfurt an der Oder in 1543, where Melanchthon's son-in-law, Georg Sabinus, taught. Directed to Wittenberg, he studied there in 1545–1547, undoubtedly hearing Luther's last lectures on the book of Genesis as well as Melanchthon. It is noteworthy that both Luther and Melanchthon were experimenting with "kingdom" terminology during his student days.¹⁸ With Melanchthon's recommendation Musaeus became a teacher of Greek at the school of Saint Sebald in Nuremberg. He returned to Brandenburg as a pastor in Fürstenwald in 1549, but because of his marriage the bishop of Lebus was able to drive him from his post in 1551, the first of eight exiles he suffered. Being sent into exile typified the ministries of many prominent Gnesio-Lutherans in this period since their insistence on the importance of pure teaching of Luther's legacy and a consecrated Christian life on the part of governmental authorities, whether at princely courts or in the upper classes of municipalities, often earned them the wrath of local officials.¹⁹ Musaeus undoubtedly viewed these exiles as part of the battle between God's truth and Satan's lie, which tried repeatedly to mute his voice.

His ministry in Crossen ended when his defence of the peasantry against exploitation by the town council again earned him exile. After a short interlude in Breslau, during which he attained the doctorate in Wittenberg at municipal expense, he was dismissed from his office because local Roman Catholic clergy found his vehement attacks on the conservative liturgical practices of the city intolerable and obtained a royal decree demanding his ouster in 1557. He moved into the Gnesio-Lutheran circle in Ernestine Saxony, first as pastor in Eisfeld in the principality of Hildburghausen and then in Jena as superintendent of the church and professor of theology, as a colleague of Gnesio-Lutheran leaders Matthias Flacius, Johannes Wigand, and Matthäus Judex. There he helped compose the Weimar *Book of Confutation*, an official confession of the faith for Ernestine Saxony and a new form for public confessional documents, in the form of a confutation of false teachings on

¹⁷ The following biographical sketch largely follows Schimmelpfenning's article in the *Allgemeine Deutsch Biographie*, 23:91–92. No other reliable summary of his life exists in German or English.

¹⁸ Estes, *Peace, Order*, esp. 205–212.

¹⁹ Dingel, "Die Kultivierung des Exulantentums."

the critical issues of the time.²⁰ He also took part in the composition of theses for the debate in August 1560 between feuding colleagues Flacius and Strigel, focused on the bondage or freedom of the will in conversion.²¹ Although at this time Musaeus took no exception to Flacius' assertion that the sinner exists after the fall in the image of Satan and that original sin constitutes the "substance" or "essence" of human beings who no longer fear, love, and trust in God above all things, he later joined those who condemned Flacius' views, creating a breach between them.²² In August 1560, however, the two stood united in opposition to Strigel's ambiguous arguments regarding the freedom of the will. The disputation was adjourned unresolved because of the death of the Saxon crown prince; Flacius and Musaeus remained at the helm of the Ernestine church. But they and their colleagues in Flacius' circle ran afoul of Duke John Frederick when they opposed his plan for altering the consistorial government of the church. Pressure from the ducal court caused Musaeus to answer a call from the city of Bremen in September 1561, before the prince sent his comrades into exile during the course of autumn and early winter.²³

Musaeus stepped into a particularly delicate situation moving to the Hanseatic centre on the Weser, for he arrived as the replacement for Albert Hardenberg, a friend of Melanchthon and follower of Martin Bucer, whose views of the sacrament had led to his ouster. Although Musaeus had the city's artisans on his side, the merchants, led by a former Melanchthon student, Daniel van Buren, opposed him; Musaeus' personality seems not to have been suited to negotiating delicate situations. His defence of the true presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper led to his exile in 1562.²⁴ After living in Lüneburg without a post for several months, he was called to be a ducal court preacher in Mecklenburg. In 1566 he became superintendent of the church in Gera, where the local princes commissioned him and a Gnesio-Lutheran colleague, Georg Herbst (Autumnus), to draft a confession of the faith formulated in confutations but organized according to the chief

²⁰ Gehrt, *Ernestinische Konfessionspolitik*, 144–178, Kolb, "Bekentnis der reinen lere des Euangelij," 307–324.

²¹ Preger, *Matthias Flacius Illyricus*, 77–165.

²² Preger, *Matthias Flacius Illyricus*, 326–328, 362–363.

²³ Kruse, *Speners Kritik am landesherrlichen Kirchenregiment*, 57–63.

²⁴ On the context of the controversy in Bremen, see Dingel, *Concordia controversa*, esp. 355–364.

parts of Luther's catechisms.²⁵ Throughout his preaching Musaeus used the catechism's outline to drive home the points he wished to make. Musaeus left Gera in 1568 in response to a call from the church of Thorn. Tensions with Roman Catholics there led to another Roman Catholic plea to the king of Poland to oust him, and the local council had little choice. He moved on to Coburg, again in Ernestine Saxony, but when Duke Johann Ernst died, the electoral Saxon regency again sent him on his way. For two years he lived in Soest without a call, working on his commentary on Genesis in this period, and then became pastor there. Tensions with the city council led to his leaving Soest in 1579. He assumed the superintendency of the churches of the county of Mansfeld in 1580, where he died July 11, 1582.

Musaeus' turbulent career did not prevent him from composing popular literature. His *Postilla*, published first in 1567, experienced at least twelve editions before 1600.²⁶ His Genesis commentary appeared as late as 1615, its third edition.²⁷ The frequent references to Luther's catechisms in his sermons reflected his interest in teaching the faith, for which he also prepared aids.²⁸ Whether his work on melancholy reflects his own personal inward struggles in the midst of his conflicts with clergy and governmental officials or instead demonstrates an aspect of his pastoral concern and care for his congregation, he did pen two devotional works against the "plague" of melancholy and later against the "melancholy devil."²⁹ Certainly, his experiences with persecution shaped his view of the Satanic *Reich*, as presented in his Genesis commentary.

The "Three Kingdoms" of Simon Musaeus

The title of his sermons on Genesis announced that Musaeus was offering a "correct and pure interpretation of the first book of Moses," and that the book concerned "the three powerful *Reiche*, that of nature [that came into

²⁵ Musaeus, *Confessionschrift*. The confession was reissued in several editions in the 1560s and in 1599 by the local princes.

²⁶ Musaeus, *Postilla*. Here the edition Frankfurt/M, 1570 has been used. Urban Gaubisch in Eisleben first published it in 1567; it was reprinted in 1568, 1569, 1570, 1573, 1574, 1575, 1577, 1579, 1583, 1590, and 1597. From 1573 Musaeus' sermons on the epistles were added to those of the gospel lessons.

²⁷ *Richtige und reine Auslegung [...]*. Magdeburg: Ambrosius Kirchner, 1595 and 1615.

²⁸ E.g., *Catechetisch Examen*.

²⁹ Musaeus, *Nu[e]tzlicher Unnterricht von Ersten Gebot*; idem, *Melancholischer Teufel*. See Kolb, "God, Faith, and the Devil."

existence] through creation, that of the devil through Adam’s fall, and that of Christ through the revelation of the gospel” (*Auslegung*,)(1a). The dedication of the work to Joachim Frederick of Brandenburg, administrator of the archbishopric of Magdeburg, and the counts and countesses of Mansfeld sketched the basis on which Musaeus would proceed with his interpretation of Genesis and the three *Reiche* which he saw contained therein. That foundation depicted the eschatological battle between Satan with his lies and God with his truth. God originally communicated with his human creatures orally, but the human traditions introduced into the Christian church by the papacy demonstrate why it is necessary to have, alongside the oral word, “the visible letters,” which “do not permit themselves to be twisted in the same manner as mere, fleeting voices that quickly pass away.” God wishes to work in human hearts through both the written and the oral forms of his Word, and he wages his battle against the devil with both. Against both the papacy and the followers of the spiritualist lay theologian Caspar Schwenkfeld, who dismiss all external forms of God’s Word, Musaeus turned to God speaking in Genesis (*Auslegung*,)(2a–)(3b).

Musaeus used the dedication to introduce readers to his way of speaking of the *Reiche*. From Luther and Melanchthon Musaeus had learned that each biblical book had a core point from which it should be interpreted, an application of humanist rhetorical theory. This core could be labeled an “*argumentum*,” a “*status*,” or a “*scopus*,” a summary of the main concern and the structure of the literary unit, designed to serve as a hermeneutical guide for readers.³⁰ To understand Genesis correctly, Musaeus concluded, readers must digest the book’s message within the framework of these three *Reiche*. It serves as the best *scopus* of the book; Musaeus compared this core to three veins in a productive mine. Two of its veins produce pure, precious gold and silver from God’s heavenly treasure-chest, but the middle vein is filled with nothing but poisonous quicksilver, cobalt, and arsenic. He advised that all Christians become hard-working, tireless miners in the rich treasure store of this book, so that they might use the mine’s rich yield for meeting the daily needs of their souls and becoming rich in heavenly wisdom (*Auslegung*, 4b). In so formulating the argument of Genesis Musaeus was adapting Luther’s thought, although Luther had not bequeathed him this approach to

³⁰ Wengert, “Philip Melanchthon’s 1522 Annotations on Romans”; idem, *Philip Melanchthon’s Annotations in Johannem*, 170–182; Schnell, *Die Homiletische Theorie Philipps Melanchthons*, esp. 44–45.

the first book of Moses. Neither Luther's preface to the first volume of his Genesis commentary (1544) nor his interpretation of the first three chapters mentioned the *Reiche*, although the rivalry between Christ and Satan became clear in both.³¹ Like other contemporaries in the Wittenberg circle, Musaeus reproduced Luther's doctrinal orientation in his commentary on Genesis, but his interpretation of book, chapter, and verse was anything but slavishly copied from his mentor's work.³² His adaptation of the concept of *Reich* in this case demonstrates that this first generation of Wittenberg 'epigones' could be quite imaginative and innovative even while remaining faithful to the heart of Luther's and Melancthon's exegetical practice.

Musaeus' second sermon offered a general introduction to the three *Reiche*. Musaeus' *Reich* of nature roughly replicates Luther's understanding of the realm of the "left hand," the horizontal relationships of life. God created this realm for the reproduction and preservation of all creatures. Adam and Eve were created in God's image; that image was their very "essence and substance," terms which had become theologically significant when Flacius used them in his argument that original sin replaces that image of God as the substance or essence of fallen human beings.³³ In this *Reich* God established marriage and the birth of children as well as dominion over the animals. Without expressly distinguishing the familial and economic aspects of life in the *Reich* of nature, and without mention of Luther's concept of callings to various responsibilities, Musaeus proceeded to speak of Abel as shepherd (Gen. 4:2), Noah as a producer of wine (Gen. 9:20), Abraham as a cultivator of trees (Gen. 21:33), and Isaac as a sower of grain (Gen. 26:12). Jacob gained nourishment by raising livestock (Gen. 30), and God blessed him in this activity. Joseph ruled the kingdom of Egypt (Gen. 4:41–49), an activity not of the *oeconomia* but of the *politia*, mentioned, however, unlike in Luther's commentary on Genesis, without any explicit distinction between the two "estates" of medieval social theory (*Auslegung*, 4b). Musaeus followed Luther's example³⁴ in accentuating his ideas with reference to the biblical narratives,

³¹ Luther, *Werke* [henceforth WA], 42: 1–2 (preface). On the conflict between God or Christ and Satan, particularly on the battlefields of the three estates, see WA 42: 79,20–83,31, 158,16–33; *Luther's Works* [henceforth LW]), 104–110, 212–213.

³² Kolb, "Sixteenth-Century Lutheran Commentary on Genesis."

³³ Schultz, "Original Sin"; Sparn, "Substanz oder Subjekt?"; and idem, "Begründung und Verwirklichung."

³⁴ Kolb, *Luther and the Stories of God*.

which made details of his message concrete. Another popular postil author, Johannes Mathesius, who had studied in Wittenberg before Musaeus arrived there, also mastered the art of recalling and retelling the biblical stories to good homiletic effect.³⁵

Proceeding chronologically, Musaeus summarized the *Reich* of the devil, as it appeared in Genesis. It is present in “sin, God’s wrath, the curse, a bad conscience, war, illness, death, the devil, and hell.” Again, the stories concretize how Satan’s Reich functions: Adam and Eve fled from God and were expelled from paradise after eating from the forbidden tree. Cain murdered his brother Abel and fled, cursed and despairing (Gen. 4:1–16), and he “erected the devil’s church.” The flood came as punishment upon sinners. Ham and Nimrod established the Chaldean Ur and practiced “the first idolatry,” erecting the tower of Babel, which God destroyed (Gen. 11:1–9). “The Sodomites, Chaldeans, Canaanites, and Egyptians practiced licentiousness and idolatry and were punished with fire, war, and hunger.” Judah committed incest (Gen. 38); Simeon and Levi slaughtered the Shechemites (Gen. 34:25–29). These and many other sad cases illustrate the existence of the devil’s *Reich* (*Auslegung*, 4b). Again, the narratives helped concretize the description of evil.

The *Reich* of Christ emerged as God’s means of reclaiming those who had fallen under the domain of the devil’s rule. It consists in the revelation of the gospel, the miraculous establishment and rule of the church, and further in God’s grace, blessing, righteousness, salvation, faith, prayer, and new obedience. Adam and Eve were taken into God’s grace and made righteous and alive as God’s people. Other examples of how Christ establishes his rule could be seen in “Abel’s offering which pleased God; the godly life of Enoch, who was taken bodily into heaven; Noah, who found favour with God along with his household and was preserved in the flood. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, whom God took care of during all kinds of affliction and temptation, spread God’s Word in the blind, idolatrous world and fell asleep in a peaceful death in Christ. Joseph, whom the Holy Spirit moved with a special stimulus and guidance, planted a new religion in Egypt; found the Israelite church a refuge in Egypt in its exile; and courageously defended himself against the temptation from the devil of unchastity.” Along with other “great and comforting miracles of God and all kinds of great Christian virtues of the church” the “*Gnadenreich Christi*” emerged (*Auslegung*, 4b–5a).

³⁵ Kolb, “Bibelauslegung.”

Each *Reich* reveals something of God's characteristics. The *Reich* of nature illuminates his immeasurable wisdom, omnipotence, and eternity, in his creating, blessing, and preserving of all creatures. The devil's *Reich* reveals his strict righteousness as he condemns and punishes sin. Christ's *Reich* brings to light his limitless mercy and goodness in the forgiveness of sins. This framework enabled proper application of the book to the reader's daily life. In so far as we have health, nourishment, peace, protection, good government, we live in the *Reich* of nature and should give thanks to God. In so far as we live as blind and perverted heathen, in sin and impurity, and stand under condemnation, we live in Satan's *Reich* and, Musaeus implied, should repent. In so far as we live as converted, believing Christians, we have the forgiveness of sins and are ruled by the Holy Spirit, living as new creatures in fear of God, faith in God, and new obedience (*Auslegung*, 5b–6a). If all Christians and saints studied Genesis in terms of the three *Reiche*, they would not be reduced to tears and laments when faced with the misfortune and harm which the devil's *Reich* inflicts. Instead, they would thank God for the eternal blessings and treasures of Christ's *Reich*. This would enable them to be truly thankful also for the blessings of the temporal realm. Musaeus unfolded the story of Job as an example of one who found peace in the midst of tribulation by acknowledging Christ's *Reich* in the promise that his redeemer would awake him from the earth and that he would see God in his flesh (Job 19:25). David also illustrated his point, Musaeus observed, with his thanks for all blessings in the *Reich* of nature in Psalm 139. Also Saint Paul praised the *Reich* of nature in preaching in Athens (Acts 17:24–28) and lamented the power of the devil's *Reich* (Rom. 3:10–18; *Auslegung*, 6a–6b).

Musaeus did capture Luther's concept of the spheres of life being the battlefields on which the devil's *Reich* and Christ's *Reich* wage their conflict. "If the devil's *Reich* obtains the victory and dominates up to the point of death, then the *Reich* of nature, with all its works and blessings, is an abomination to God, no matter how significant and precious they appear, since they all took place without faith, from a dead heart, for the person's own honour and benefit." But "if the Christ's *Reich* holds the upper hand, then the *Reich* of nature with all its works and blessings pleases God, no matter how insignificant they appear, since they take place in faith, through the Holy Spirit, to the honour of God. "From this fountain flows the difference among the works of the believers and the unbelievers that Moses describes throughout the book." Musaeus turned again to two stories that contrast believers and unbelievers:

Cain and Abel, Noah with his family and all his contemporaries (*Auslegung*, 5b). Musaeus agreed with Luther that faith and false faith determine whether the exercise of responsibilities and the enjoyment of blessings in the *Reich* of nature are God-pleasing or not.

All the saints should exercise their “entire theology and practice of piety in meditating on the three *Reiche*,” Musaeus urged, suggesting that the Lord’s Prayer would make a good outline for this exercise. The first three petitions concern Christ’s *Reich*. In praying for the sanctifying of God’s name they pray for the revelation of his truth and wisdom; in praying for the coming of God’s *Reich*, they pray for the stimulation and strengthening of faith; and in praying for the fulfillment of God’s will, they pray for new obedience. The fourth petition, for daily bread, asks for the temporal good of the *Reich* of nature. The last three petitions ask for protection from all the misfortune and harm that the devil’s *Reich* causes through sin, the curse, and all evils (*Auslegung*, 6b). In subsequent sermons on Genesis 1–3 Musaeus described the *Reiche* in detail.

The Reich of Nature

Musaeus’ comments on Genesis 1:1 dealt specifically with the “origin of the *Reich* of Nature.” The first article of Creed, with its confession of faith in God as creator and master builder of the world, provided the hook upon which readers and those who heard the sermons preached by other pastors from this commentary were to hang their understanding of the *Reich* of nature. Implicitly operating with Luther’s distinction of God hidden and revealed, Musaeus reminded readers that God in his eternal “aloneness” [*Einsamigkeit*] cannot be understood or fathomed. “When God is not present coming to us and building paths and ways to him, everyone would be climbing up to God with his own thoughts, and certainly fall on his neck and bring a consuming fire upon himself.” Therefore, the preacher placed the divine work of creation within the written Bible, the great, visible book, in which there is enough regarding the *Reich* of nature for life-long study (*Auslegung*, 7b).³⁶

After commenting on the doctrine of the person of God the Trinity that he found in Genesis 1,³⁷ Musaeus went onto to speak of God’s work, comparing it to that of the head of the household who gathers materials and tools to build his house. God had no material with which to work; he faced

³⁶ A more explicit mention of the “hidden work of the divine majesty” is found on 9b.

³⁷ Following Luther, WA 42:43,12–45,17, LW 1:57–60.

“real chaos, a mass of nothing, without any structure, until God shaped it. He created the world from nothing with his Word. This comforts God’s people in times of temporal want, for they know that God has power to take care of them” (*Auslegung*, 8b–91). Lutheran preaching addressed not only the spiritual cares of the congregation, but also people’s worries about the things of this world.

Musaeus continued to treat the *Reich* of nature throughout a series of fifteen sermons on Genesis 1 and 2, filled with praise for the details of the “*Reich* of nature” as constructed by the master builder, in “its entire essence and structure” [*Wesen vnd Gebew*], with few further explicit references to the concept of *Reich* (*Auslegung*, 7a). His exposition of Genesis 1: 1–6 noted that God’s continuing care for his creation, particularly for his human creatures, was just as much an article of faith as the original creation (*Auslegung*, 34a). God worked in his creation through the service of human beings, which occurred appropriately to their “walk of life and calling.” At the end of his treatment of the calling of married couples in Genesis 2 he referred to God’s grace in the *Reich* of nature, reminding readers of God’s equipping his saints “for the battle and war against the devil and his *Reich*, both internally and externally: internally with his divine image and the rule of the Holy Spirit, outwardly with earnest threats of death and the enforcement of his strict righteousness, in regard to the fall and disobedience” (*Auslegung*, 46a, 54a).

Satan’s Reich

Musaeus’ comment on Genesis 3 treated, of course, first of all, the *Reich* of Satan. Like all Wittenberg students, he began by insisting, as Luther and Melancthon maintained, that God is not responsible for death and has no desire to see the death of the sinner and the ruin of earthly life.³⁸ Human apostasy turned the golden age of the *Reich* of nature into the iron age of the *Reich* of the devil. Musaeus captured Luther’s focus on original sin as doubt and rejection of God’s Word.³⁹ The snake, who was merely Satan’s instrument, was able to communicate in human language. He went to the heart of human life by addressing the subject of God. Acting out of pure jealousy for

³⁸ E.g. in Augsburg Confession XIX, *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 75; *The Book of Concord*, 52/53.

³⁹ WA 42:105–129, LW 1:141–172.

God’s newly created favourite creature, the devil lured Adam and Eve from their trust in God and his Word by lying and provoking them to turn against God. He struck first at Eve, whom Musaeus maintained was the weaker of the pair (*Auslegung*, 54a–55b). The battle placed God’s Word against Satan’s word, truth against lie. The lie constituted the nature of Satan’s *Reich*. His mouth spewed out poison by enticing Eve to play loosely with God’s Word and not to trust it as God had given it. Such glossing of Scripture poses a danger for Christians at all times (*Auslegung*, 57b–60a). Christians are no stronger against Satan than a stalk of straw is against fire, or David against the mighty Goliath, or a little flock of sheep against hungry lions and bears, but God stands with them. His strength is made perfect in their weakness (2 Cor. 12:9); his power proceeds from the mouths of children and infants (Ps. 8:2). Paul noted that we are but clay vessels to demonstrate that it is God’s power, superior to all else, and not we who governs our lives (2 Cor. 4:7; *Auslegung*, 57a).

Musaeus dedicated a concluding sermon on the Fall into sin to the topic of original sin, reflecting his involvement in the controversy over its proper definition. He emphasized that original sin is a “bottomless corruption and perversion against God, with the result that although before the fall we were created in God’s image (*Bild*), that is, we resembled God in wisdom, righteousness and life under his grace and blessing, through Adam’s fall we have become like the devil’s ugly masks (*Larven*) in blindness, unrighteousness, and condemnation, under God’s furious wrath and curse, and cannot do the tiniest thing on our own power to turn again to God or prepare ourselves for salvation by means of a spark that remains of our free will.” This “terrible infection” is an “unfathomable abyss and poisonous well from which come all evil thoughts, mean-spirited behaviour, deceptive words, and harmful works” that lead to death (*Auslegung*, 66a–67a). Original sin is passed on from parents to children; it is not God’s doing, but arises from the free exercise of the will by the devil and by human beings, in what Musaeus could only label an “inscrutable mystery.” To battle against the possibility of human beings repenting, the devil either tries to diminish the significance of original sin or makes it so great and heavy that it is defined as the very stance of body and soul, the error of the “Manicheans,” specifically of Flacius, whose position Musaeus determinedly rejected, along with others, including Tilemann Heshusius and Johannes Wigand, who had earlier supported the Illyrian (*Auslegung*, 67a–68b). Musaeus affirmed the Wittenberg eschatological reading of human

life, based on the narrative of the Fall in Genesis 3. He experienced directly Satan's opposition in one location after another, and that only confirmed what Luther and Melancthon had taught him.

Christ's Reich

God's promise of the woman's seed, who would bruise Satan's head (Gen. 3:15), served all in the Wittenberg circle, as it had medieval exegetes, as the first proclamation of the coming Christ and his saving work. Musaeus was no exception. He dated the fall into sin to the morning of the first Sabbath, when "the devil set up his hellish chapel of lies next to God's church." On the same day the promise established Christ's *Reich* to combat the "heat of the devil's *Reich* and the flames of God's judgment." God called Adam and Eve before his "consistory" to receive his judgment, but the Word of promise, which John would identify as the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God (John 1:14), was present in Eden as "the highest high priest, the first and foremost voice of the gospel, from the Father's heart, revealing and proclaiming, as a deeply hidden mystery, the gracious will and decree concerning our deliverance and salvation." Without developing Luther's understanding of the unconditional election of the faithful, Musaeus indicated that the rescue from sin rests upon "Jesus Christ, who is a faithful mediator and throne of grace, according to the grace given in the secret counsel of God." He hurried to speak with Adam and Eve after the fall (*Auslegung*, 69a–70a).

Musaeus discussed how Christ's *Reich* comes to fallen sinners. God calls them to repentance through the law, which strips away their useless fig leaves (Gen. 3:7), but then he demonstrates his mercy in providing the gospel as an antidote to the law's condemnation. Pain in childbirth, sweat from labour, and the terrible condemnation of the devil proceed from God's judgment in Eden, but his promise and his faithfulness toward his people remain (*Auslegung*, 70a–71a). Satan's *Reich* elicits God's condemning law; Christ's *Reich* produces God's life-restoring gospel.

The confrontation between these two *Reiche* unfolds as combat, for God made Satan and the woman's seed enemies (Gen. 3:15). Musaeus adopted Luther's focus on the assurance that Christ's resurrection victory gives to the embattled believers in the midst of the eschatological war that continues throughout human history.⁴⁰ Christ has his battle plan, his orders of the day.

⁴⁰ Rieske-Braun, *Duellum mirabile*.

First, he has placed “his church, the elect, in the world gathered by his Word and the Holy Spirit, as his faithful and obedient bride and wife.” It stands under continual assault from Satan, who tries to kidnap it and make it into his whore, but Christ fights back. He tells the devil that he “awakens, strengthens, and rules [the church] with my Word, power, and Spirit against you, so that it abjures its service to you and its friendship with you and returns to me, in opposition to you, as to its beloved bridegroom, giving me honour with heartfelt fear, trust, love, prayer, and the confession of my name.” The battle is never-ending (Job 7:1), but Christians can stand without despair, fresh for engaging Satan on the battlefield since Christ stands by them and gives them aid. Musaeus returned to the catechism to confirm this point; in the sixth petition believers pray for help against temptation, and that help comes in the absolution and the Lord’s Supper. That provides believers a great comfort (*Auslegung*, 74a–75b).

Relatively little polemic graces Musaeus’ commentary on Genesis, but he took the opportunity to develop the topic of the devil’s false religions as his bride and whore, “a fancied-up, smooth, sprightly, well-endowed Madonna [as Mary was often depicted in contemporary altarpieces],” in comparison with whom Christ’s bride and church appear completely black and emaciated from the heat of the cross.” He identified the devil’s church as that of “the pope, the Turk, and the false sects” (*Auslegung*, 75b–76b).

Christ’s Reich stood at the heart of Musaeus’ interpretation of Genesis. Satan’s Reich perverts the Reich of nature and continually attacks it and Christ’s Reich, but Christ has assured the final triumph of his Reich through his death and resurrection.

Musaeus’ Use of the Hermeneutic of the Three Reiche

Once he had his hermeneutical framework for reading Genesis in place in the sermons on Genesis 1–3, Musaeus made explicit mention of the schema only on rare occasions. He assumed that his readers had fixed the structure in mind and that together with the distinction of law and gospel, an assumed foundation for all Lutheran preaching, the distinction of the three *Reiche* would facilitate their unfolding of the text.

A few examples suffice to demonstrate how readers were to think in terms of the *Reiche* in reading Genesis. The flood served as a type of Christ’s Reich. Operating with the Wittenberg typological or prophetic principle of

interpretation, Musaeus asserted, reflecting the Wittenberg presupposition that Christ's voice fills the psalms, that the Lord himself had called out in Psalm 69:1 "God help me, for the waters are up to my soul, I sink in miry depths, where there is no foothold." This depicted God's immeasurable wrath against sin, which he had poured over Christ, which cup he drank in his passion (Matt. 20:22–23). The rush of the mighty waters will not overcome the saints (Ps. 32:6), words which in Musaeus' mind pointed backward to the flood and forward to the forgiveness of sins that Christ's saving righteousness delivers in the midst of the torrent of God's wrath. Likewise, the reference to a dove in Isaiah 60:8, in the context of God's promise of peace and deliverance, sufficed to bring Musaeus' readers to the conclusion that the dove that came to Noah's ark (Gen. 8:8) foreshadowed Christ's bringing peace (*Auslegung*, 146b). Musaeus hoped that readers would make such associations throughout the text.

Each of the three *Reiche* illuminated aspects of Abraham's life. A kind of obituary summarizing the patriarch's days brought Musaeus' comment on Genesis 25 and on the entire narrative of Abraham's journeys to a close. The patriarch had experienced the *Reich* of nature "in his marriage, giving birth to children, planting trees in Beersheba, and supporting his family with the raising of livestock." He had experienced the devil's *Reich* during his first seventy-five years, spent in "Chaldean idolatry and in the several instances when he often stumbled in his faith." The *Gnadenreich* of Christ revealed itself "not only in that he became a pious Christian who spent his life in faith, patience, and love for God and the neighbour, but also in his serving as a particularly enlightened prophet and patriarch, who reformed the entire church in the face of heathen idolatry and darkness and planted the saving gospel during an entire century. God blessed his carrying out the responsibility of proclaiming [the gospel] so that he converted mighty kings. God faithfully protected and strengthened Abraham, so that he never became ill during his many difficult journeys which required much effort and placed him in danger, nor was he placed under any other person's lordship." God kept his promise to Abraham that he would bless those who blessed him and curse those who cursed him (Gen. 12:3; *Auslegung*, 269a). In this instance Christ's *Reich* embraced God's providential care in earthly matters, actions that fell into Luther's realm of the left hand, as elements of the horizontal life of all people. This passage does demonstrate that Musaeus understood his *Reich* of nature in terms of Luther's responsibility of the household although Luther also viewed Abraham as

representative of one who exercised the responsibilities of all three situations, as ruler and prophet as well as head of his household.⁴¹

In his postil, published nine years earlier, Musaeus seldom used the concept of the *Reiche*. However, his sermon for the first Sunday in Advent on Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday indicates that nearly a decade before he composed the Genesis commentary he was already thinking in terms of the conflict of Christ's and Satan's *Reiche*. Ever the preacher and teacher of the catechism, Musaeus began the sermon by placing the account of Christ's riding into Jerusalem in the context of the entire second article of the Creed, "where we praise and confess the bodily coming of Christ as our heavenly king, in assumed human nature, who has knocked off the king of hell, the devil, in the battle of his passion and won for us the *Reich* of heaven."⁴²

The sermon went on to describe the *Königreich* of Christ on the basis of the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9. The first of its five characteristics consists in the treasures it bestows: righteousness in the face of sin and deliverance and salvation in the face of damnation. "Certainly, in regard to temporal needs, the body, property, and honour, earthly kings and rulers can be upright and help their subjects maintain peace and order and protect them from [the abuse of] power and injustice from evil people; God set them up to do that and gave them the sword, which David, Solomon, Augustus and others have wielded. But in regard to eternal, spiritual needs, in the face of sin, God's judgment, death, the devil, and hell, they not only cannot help others, but are even subject to these afflictions themselves." Only one king, Christ, can provide such help. The second characteristic of Christ's *Reich* concerns the "form and means" by which "he attained the two treasures of righteousness and salvation and redeems us from our guilt and punishment, God's wrath, sin, death, the devil, and hell." Earthly kings display their power with violence and war, but, as Zechariah had prophesied, Christ the King comes as a poor man, suffering violence rather than inflicting it, and in this way "strikes down the devil and wins the eternal fatherland." Through his poverty Christ makes his people rich, righteous, and blessed, that is, through his obedience to the law and his suffering. "Those are the guns and cannons with which he struck the devil, quieted the law, shot sin, strangled death, opened heaven and became the one who saves and justifies us." The third characteristic of Christ's

⁴¹ WA 42:378,5–13, LW 2:165.

⁴² *Postilla*, Ib.

Reich is its sceptre, through which righteousness and salvation is delivered and gathered his church. Earthly rulers accomplish that through force and sword, but Christ's *Reich* advances through the power not of the fist but of the mouth, in the responsibility for preaching the Word of God and administering the sacraments. The fourth characteristic of Christ's *Reich* consists of the worship of the church, in the repentance of believers and their turning to the gospel and the sacraments. Like Luther, Musaeus held the highest worship of God was faith and the confession of the faith. Finally, Christ's *Reich* knows no limits, in time, place, or power. It spreads through history and throughout the world.⁴³ Musaeus, like Luther, saw in Christ's *Reich* the destruction of Satan's Reich and the restoration of the humanity God created in the *Reich* of nature — "Epigone" perhaps, but one with theological acuity, imagination, and sensitivity to his own hearers.



Luther was not conscious of the use which would be made over a half millennium of his ever-developing refinements of the categories of theological analysis he put to work in his preaching and teaching. It is therefore not surprising that his students and followers did not always grasp what seems to scholars five centuries later to be clear (though in the case of his "two *Reiche*" terminology not always clear even to them). The failure of his sixteenth-century adherents to reproduce precisely what modern scholars find in Luther should not be ascribed to their dimwittedness. "Epigones," perhaps, they were, but a goodly percentage of them demonstrated imaginative and creative adaptations of his thought that indeed conveyed his concept of God and humanity to the church and world of the Late Reformation in a manner that makes them enviable to those who stand on, or somewhat above, their shoulders.

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⁴³ *Postilla*, IIb–Va.

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