For the Mending of Creation

The Place of Social Ministry in the Mission of God

The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."[1] This book explores the nature of the world's deep hunger and God's mission to feed that hunger through the ministry of the church.[2] God is calling the church as the body of Christ to act as a servant for the mending of creation (*tikkun olam*). By giving itself away to nourish a world in need, the church discovers its vocation as a ministering community. Jesus told his disciples: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?" (Luke 9:23-25). The church's engagement in social ministry is one of the most controversial of its callings. As we will discover, however, social ministry belongs to the very heart of the church of Jesus Christ. When the church follows its calling to address the world's deep hunger as a ministering community, thereby it discovers deep gladness—in the company of the Crucified One.

Taking up the cross of Jesus Christ is risky business. It involves getting our hands dirty in the messiness of the world's disease. For those who assume the business of religion is to appease my troubled conscience and assuage my inner soul in order that I may function effectively and succeed in my individualized pursuits (for example, the "prosperity" gospel), the cross challenges me to think

again. Instead, it is more aligned with the way of Jesus to understand the cross as God's provocative act "to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable" (Finley Peter Dunne). Jesus became so immersed in the ambiguity of this world that the good religious people accused him of becoming compromised: "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" (Luke 7:34). Jesus Christ became sin, indistinguishable from the world's ambiguity (cf. 1 Cor 5:21). As a consequence of his living for the sake of the world's most vulnerable, imperfect, oppressed, and rejected ones, is it any wonder this Jesus ended up hanging on his own cross?

The church of Jesus Christ finds its vocation in following Jesus to the places he chooses to frequent. It does so not in order to imitate the way of Jesus but because the church itself exists as the body of this selfsame Jesus Christ alive in the world today. The call to social ministry is not about what the church should be doing in this world in response to the call of Jesus. Rather, social ministry is an expression of the very character of the church as the body of Christ. Because the church participates in the incarnation of Jesus Christ in the world today, the body of Christ organically lives out its calling as a reflection of Jesus' own character. The church enters into the very places Jesus Christ chooses to be found:

> "[F]or I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Matt 25:35-40)

In discovering Jesus in the faces and bodies of the world's lost and forsaken ones and by ministering to him there, the church discovers its deep gladness.

Social Ministry *and* Evangelism: Engaging the World's Deep Need

What is the world's deepest need? A troubling conflict commonly emerges among churches as they analyze the core of the human predicament. Is the central issue one of spiritual alienation and separation from God that requires a spiritual solution through salvation in Jesus Christ? Or is the central issue one of physical alienation and material deprivation that requires a material solution through the cause of peace and justice? Churches differ dramatically regarding the relative

priority they think should be given to these two agendas. On the one side, evangelism emerges as the chief missionary aim of the church: to bring all people into life-giving relationship with God in Jesus Christ by their spiritual conversion. On the other side, social ministry emerges as the chief expression of the church's mission: to strive for justice and peace in all the earth through concern for physical welfare. We note how the ecumenical movement itself at the formation of the World Council of Churches sought to bring together these two impulses, with the joining of the Faith and Order movement on the one side and the Life and Work movement on the other. But the joining of these two agendas remains a delicate balancing act, much as discerning the proper relationship between faith and works remains a formidable theological conundrum.

Finally, as I shall explore in the next section, setting evangelism and social ministry in opposition to each other establishes a false dichotomy between them. It is imperative that we construe a theological paradigm that honors *the centrality of both evangelizing and social ministry as indispensable to the church's mission*, just as we must theologically imagine how to relate faith and works constructively—honoring both. When we operate within a theological framework that diminishes either evangelism or social ministry, we undermine the fullness of the church's ministry and mission. Fortunately, God is not limited in mission by the inability of theological systems to reconcile apparent contradictions.

Because this is a book emphasizing social ministry, it is important thereby not to give a false impression about the crucial place of evangelism (or, more accurately, the "evangelizing church")[3] in the church's mission. The church of Jesus Christ is by definition an "evangelizing church" or it is no church at all. Proclamation of the gospel belongs to the foundational concerns of Jesus and the church that follows him in discipleship. To treat "evangelism" as one matter among many others—compartmentalizing it as just another program—distorts the centrality of the preaching of the Christian *kerygma* for the very existence of the church. Any attempt to interpret the social ministry of the church that fails to reckon with the vital importance of evangelizing is doomed to inadequacy from the outset. At the same time, those theologies of evangelism that take no account of the centrality of social ministry in the witness of Jesus and the life of his church also must be deemed lacking. Both evangelizing and social ministry belong to the original vision of Jesus and the kingdom he proclaimed and enacted. What God has joined together, let no one tear asunder!

At the same time as it is imperative to claim that the church of Jesus Christ is an evangelizing church or no church at all, this book argues that *the church of Jesus Christ is simultaneously a shalom church or no church at all*. By "shalom church" I am primarily talking about God's mission through the church to mend the torn

fabric of creation (*tikkun olam*)—God's mission to reestablish created goodness in relation to human beings, the created world, and all creatures. The Hebrew word *shalom* has often been translated simply by the English word *peace*. However, the idea of peace, especially when it is understood merely as the absence of conflict, does not convey the magnitude of shalom.

Shalom involves all members of God's creation living in harmonious and life-giving relationship one with another.[4] Shalom begins with the prayerful and worshipful relationship of the human being with God. God is the ultimate source of shalom as God chooses to live in generous relationship with us. God desires to bless us with a sense of belonging and to provide for every need, spiritual and physical. Human beings respond to God's goodness with lives of thankfulness, praise, and worship. Shalom at the same time entails human beings living together in harmony with each other, both sharing what is needed for the physical well-being of all and nurturing one another emotionally and spiritually. Living in shalom with one another, human beings pay particular attention to the needs of the most fragile and vulnerable. Furthermore—and this dimension has become acutely important in the twenty-first century—shalom involves human beings living in balance with and respect for the whole of creation.[5] Ecology is teaching us many lessons about the costs of having neglected our solidarity with creation. Shalom leads human beings to foster the flourishing of God's creation for God's sake.

The concept of shalom resonates with vision of an ideal society in other cultures as well, notably in Asia and Africa. In Asia, *sangsaeng* is an ancient concept "of sharing community and economy together."[6] In Africa, the concepts of *ubuntu* and *ujamaa* describe respectively the wholeness of life and life in community. *Ubuntu* involves the sharing of life as a gift from God: "The individual's identity is inseparable from identity within the wider community, which includes past, present, and future generations, as well as flora and fauna, the physical environment and the spiritual realm."[7] *Ujamaa* extends this idea by emphasizing the values of family and relatedness. In each of these concepts the focus is on "life-giving civilization which affirms relationships, co-existence, harmony with creation, and solidarity with those who struggle for justice."[8]

The Hebrew concept of shalom is closely akin to the central motif of Jesus' own proclamation—the in-breaking of the kingdom of God. Jesus taught and enacted the coming of God's peaceable and just kingdom in his parables, teachings, and ministry. The arrival of this kingdom would be the fulfillment of Israel through the participation of all nations as inheritors of God's ancient promises. The coming of the kingdom meant spiritual reunion between God and humankind through the forgiveness of sins and reconciling love. At the same time the emergence of God's kingdom entailed the healing of disease, the exorcism of

demons, miraculous feeding of the hungry, restoration of broken relationships, and the promise of a bounteous creation. In enacting God's new covenant Jesus left his followers a meal, the Lord's Supper, which characterizes life in the kingdom: *at this meal all are welcome and there is enough for all*. At this meal we discover the essence of shalom. The crucifixion of Jesus reveals the extent to which God chooses to suffer in order that the kingdom prevails. God's raising Jesus from the dead verifies the authenticity of the kingdom Jesus came to inaugurate. Even more, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the first fruits of the reality of God's eschatological shalom arriving in time. Together, the Hebrew concept of shalom, the Asian term *sangsaeng*, the African words *ubuntu* and *ujamaa*, and the New Testament idea of the kingdom combine to offer us a glimpse of what God is seeking to accomplish—both now and forever.

The Word of God discloses God's purpose to mend the creation distorted by sin (*tikkun olam*). Israel became God's chosen people to serve in this mission of recreating the broken creation. The God of Israel has been revealed to us throughout the Bible as the God of justice and righteousness. Throughout the testimony of Scripture, God is disclosed consistently as a God who defends the poor, protects the weak, does justice for the oppressed, and insists on righteousness on the part of those who rule. There runs through the Bible an enormous collection of texts that witness to God's way of justice and peace.[9] This "justice trajectory" begins with God's selection of Israel to be the chosen people when God hears the cries of the slaves in Egypt and comes to their deliverance. In the laws of Israel we discover God's partiality in protecting from harm the poor, the widows, the orphans, and the strangers.

When Israel turned to the rule of a king, God sent prophets to remind the royal house of its responsibility to do justice to the poor and to care for the least. These prophets arose in defiance at the abuses of the upper classes and declared God's judgment. When the Messiah would come, God would usher in the kingdom of perfect shalom, including reconciliation between humans and all God's creatures, "the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them" (Isa 11:6). Jesus as the Christ came to fulfill all these hopes as he blessed the poor, reconciled enemies, fed the hungry, healed the sick, forgave sinners, and brought the kingdom. On the cross Jesus suffered the consequences from those who resisted the implications of God's shalom by defending their own interests, winning victory over the principalities and powers. By the miracle of the resurrection, God vindicated the cause of Jesus and guaranteed the ultimate arrival of the kingdom, launching the mission of the shalom church in the mean time. To this day, the church of Jesus Christ follows his way of discipleship in caring for human reconciliation and the wholeness of creation.

Social ministry can be defined as the work of the church to serve God in alleviating human suffering and the degradation of creation. While the ministry of evangelizing focuses the church's attention on the proclamation and sharing of the good news so that all may believe in the saving power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, social ministry concentrates on the inexorable implications of the gospel for the mending of creation (*tikkun olam*). Social ministry involves attending to the physical needs of all people for food, water, health, shelter, clothing, and fulfilling work, while at the same time mindful of the spiritual need of humankind for trusting the gospel of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, and especially at this moment in history, social ministry entails intentional care for the well-being of all creation—wisdom about the symbiotic relationship between human beings and all other members of creation in a single web of life. In the ecology of the divine Trinity, all creatures exist in life-giving relationship one with another. Given their status as those created in God's image, human beings are called to accountability before God as they steward the balance and well-being of the whole.

The world's need for the church's social ministry is evident each new day in multiple arenas. The reality of extreme poverty continues to plague tens of millions of human beings on a daily basis, leaving them suffering from malnutrition, inadequate water supplies, homelessness, and lack of basic health care. Diseases, many of them curable through basic preventive measures and treatments taken for granted in the circles of affluence, leave many populations of the world decimated. Political unrest, economic disparity, war, and natural disasters contribute to the migration of massive numbers of people, raising issues of relief, the legal status of refugees, and human rights. Nations and factions within nations turn to violence in order to attempt to rectify what they perceive to be injustices, leaving countless victims dead, injured, and in anguish. Torture, sex trafficking, and slavery emerge as threats to fundamental human dignity, unimaginable in their horror. Moreover, environmental degradation through depletion of the earth's resources, ecological imbalances, and toxic wastes threaten the very infrastructure of life upon which all depend for their existence. Finally, increasing numbers of people find themselves made idle through the lack of meaningful, adequate employment through which they might contribute to the common good.

This book develops a theologically grounded ecclesiology as the basis for the church's social ministry in response to the deep need for the mending of creation (*tikkun olam*). For this project I draw on many resources from the biblical and theological tradition—Paul, Luther, and Bonhoeffer chief among them. I will also draw on the expertise of those who are engaged with a range of social issues, such as those described in the previous paragraph. In the next section I draw constructively upon Luther's concept of the two kingdoms for understanding

the nature of the church's ministry as indispensable to God's overall mission to the world.

God's Two Strategies for the Mending of Creation (*Tikkun Olam*)

How do we imagine God's mission to the world through the church? Many conceptualizations have been offered over the centuries. Although misinterpretations have given it a checkered history (leaving many to despair at the possibility of its constructive retrieval), Luther's two-kingdoms teaching, properly understood, continues to offer creative insight for imagining what it is God seeks to accomplish in the world through the church. While I have elsewhere developed the historical grounding of Luther's thought, here I will draw constructively from Luther's thinking for the life and mission of the church today.[10]

One of the central misunderstandings of Luther's two-kingdoms teaching has been the assumption that the "first" kingdom refers to the world and the "second" kingdom to the church. This has led to the false assumption that what Luther was talking about was, in essence, the separation of church and state (that is, the church has to do with religion and the state with everything else). To construe Luther's thought according to the separation of church and state has led the church into quietism, whose disastrous effects have been evident not only in Nazi Germany but also in our own North American context. According to this misunderstanding, the church needs to stay out of politics. However, the church cannot begin to engage in social ministry without engaging matters that are by nature political.

We do well at this point to recall how Jesus himself got involved in political matters pertaining to the arrival of the kingdom of God: feeding the hungry, healing the sick, advocating forgiveness and nonviolence, welcoming strangers. This kingdom agenda involved Jesus in heated controversy with the religious and political establishment of his time, provocatively leading to his eventual execution by the government. For those who would prefer political quietism, we discover little comfort or support in the witness of Jesus. Nor do we gain much support from the life of Luther, whose religious message contained political dynamite. Excommunicated by the pope and outlawed by the emperor, Luther engaged throughout his career in trenchant critique not only of the religious but also of the economic and political affairs of his time. His letters and treatises disclose how fully Luther was engaged in the arts of political persuasion and advocacy, albeit (like Jesus) within the societal order of his time, which is not the same as our own.

To begin to grasp the meaning of Luther's two-kingdoms paradigm, we have to acknowledge how Luther, according to his worldview, envisioned life as an avid

contest between God and Satan with the fate of humanity very much hanging in the balance. God struggles against a very real and very well-equipped foe. In his diabolical purposes, Satan appeals to all that make perverse and distort God's benevolent intention for creation: egoism, selfishness, self-diminishment, greed, envy, lust, lies, slander, violence, and hatred. We could list all of the seven deadly sins and much more. In Luther's worldview Satan makes use of all the powers of evil in order to win over humankind to his agenda of ultimate destruction and death. God opposes Satan in this battle, employing the forces of life to defeat the devil's wiles: concern for neighbor, altruism, spiritual wholeness, generosity, honor, truthfulness, charitable speech, peaceful relations, love, and seeking the other's welfare. Above all, God sends the beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to deliver humanity from the clutches of Satan. Ultimately, God wills to usher into existence the realm of life-giving relationships among all creatures in a restored creation, the reality we call the kingdom of God, shalom.

While some might find Luther's late medieval worldview antiquated or even off-putting in its vivid depiction of God's cosmic battle with Satan, existentially there is much to commend it. Those engaged in the ethical life so often experience themselves caught between competing forces as they seek to live with integrity. We know the discrepancy between "what is" and the way things ought to be.[11] Moreover, those who become involved in political advocacy know what it is like to contend with the principalities and powers. Walter Wink has written a remarkable trilogy (later condensed into one volume) that recovers for our time the significance of the biblical concept of God's engagement with the powers, which was so vivid also for Luther.[12] We might go so far as to imagine the task of social ministry in the church as aligning our efforts with the things of God in contest with the demonic distortions perpetrated by God's arch enemy. In this battle we might brace ourselves also for the difficulty of the struggle.[13]

The genius of Luther's contribution to our thinking involves the way he articulates God's two distinct *strategies* (or kingdoms) in this combat. Following Luther's imagery, God employs both a right-hand and a left-hand strategy in the mission of defeating Satan and ushering in the kingdom of God, shalom. The right-hand strategy entails God's mission of bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world through the church. The primary instruments for carrying out this strategy are the proclamation of the gospel and the sharing of the means of grace, baptism and the Eucharist. Word and sacrament ministry are central to the church in its worship life and are stewarded by those called to ordained ministry. God seeks to encounter us in Word and sacrament in order to forgive sin, deliver us from the powers of the evil one, and bring us to eternal life (following Luther's summary in his Small Catechism). By his cross and resurrection Jesus Christ has done all that

was necessary to disarm the principalities and powers, ensuring their ultimate demise. The reality of Christ's victory is mediated to us through the proclamation of the gospel and through Christ's real presence in the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion. Furthermore, the church carries the gospel to the world by its engagement in evangelizing.

Examining in more detail how the Holy Spirit works in the right-hand strategy, there are several aspects that deserve our special attention. First, according to Luther, the law of God functions in the right-hand strategy to convince human beings of their sinfulness and need for God's grace. This is a peculiar theological understanding of the law of God. When the law is proclaimed in this way, the hearers become acutely aware of having failed to live up to the expectations God has for our lives and also to the obligations we know we owe to others. The theological use of the law brings us to the conviction that we sin "in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone."[14] Within the right-hand strategy the law functions to prepare us for hearing the gospel by convicting us of our sins. The Holy Spirit works in this way the death of sinners, in order that the gospel can resurrect the new human being in Christ. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, by the power of the theological use of the law and the reality of the gospel mediated by Word and sacrament, become enacted again in the lives of those baptized into Christ.

A second consideration involves the place of reason, works, and righteousness in the right-hand strategy. It is commonly (but wrongly!) believed that Luther had an exclusively negative view of human reason, good works, and works-righteousness in his theology. In fact, Luther had a very complex and carefully differentiated view of these key concepts. We would do well not only to speak of the first and second use of the law in Luther's theology, but also of a first and second use of reason, works, and righteousness. Without elaborating in detail, the "second use" of reason, works, and righteousness as part of the right-hand strategy is rejected by Luther as human presumption, while the "first use" of reason, works, and righteousness within the created order are affirmed as good and necessary. According to God's right-hand strategy Luther indeed claimed that as human effort these three are to be rejected. However, when we next develop the contours of God's left-hand strategy, all of these three—reason, works, and righteousness—are to be considered as indispensable gifts to be received with gratitude from God's hand.

Luther saw all too well that as part of the right-hand strategy each of these gifts becomes distorted and misused when employed as human attempts to contribute to God's salvation. Reason cannot contribute anything but presumption to the enactment of God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. Human reason sees the cross only as foolishness (1 Cor 1:18-25). Works too are out of place as attempts

to please or satisfy God and win God's pleasure in the scheme of salvation. Our purported good works in the right-hand strategy only deceive us into thinking we have a constructive role to play (if even a tiny one) in accomplishing salvation. They lead us to think we can cooperate with God's purposes. In a parallel way, human righteousness is nothing in the presence of the holy God. Before God we have no human righteousness to offer that is God-pleasing. We are totally dependent on the alien righteousness of Christ that makes us holy. Note well that this is not all Luther has to say about reason, works, and righteousness. However, the proper arena for each of these human capacities is not the right-hand but rather the left-hand strategy of God.

Through the power of the proclaimed gospel, God sets the sinner free. This is the genuine meaning of Christian freedom. God in Jesus Christ grants us true freedom to become again what God created us to be. In his treatise *The Freedom of a Christian*, Luther elaborated brilliantly the dual thrust of the liberty God gives us.[15] Freedom is both freedom *from* something and freedom *for* something. Typically in the church we have concentrated on what God has freed us *from*. We are grateful that in Christ, God has set us free from the power of sin, death, and the devil. The forgiveness of sins, the gift of eternal life, and deliverance from bondage have thereby all been secured as gifts of God's love and grace. Yet, while these are illimitable gifts for which we rejoice and give profound thanks, Christian freedom does not end there. The freedom of the Christian also means freedom *for*! Freedom for loving my neighbor! Freedom for living out my baptismal vocation in the world on behalf of those in need! Freedom for serving all those in need, including the wounded creation! We need to recognize how the Christian life in service to the world, including our involvement in social ministry, flows directly out of what God has done for us in Christ through the gospel.

Through the right-hand strategy, mediated by the proclamation of the gospel and the sacramental means of grace, the Holy Spirit sets us free *from* all that holds us in bondage—guilt, painful memories, past failures, addictions, fear of death—and sets us free *for* engaging the world on behalf of the needs of others. The centrifugal force of the gospel propels us outward in Christian freedom to care for a world in need. The church has been freed by Christ to participate in God's right-hand strategy of spreading the gospel to all people—through inviting them to meet Jesus Christ at worship as the assembly gathers for Word and sacrament and through active involvement of the baptized in the work of evangelizing. Worship and evangelizing are core activities for the implementation of God's right-hand strategy for the life of the world. At the same time, the people of God are also freed by the gospel for participating in God's left-hand strategy of bringing the kingdom of shalom. To the elaboration of this left-hand strategy I now turn.

The second, left-hand strategy of God for defeating Satan and ruling this world involves what Luther called the "temporal order." God does not only operate within the confines of the church. God is also God of this world, indeed of the entire universe. In engaging the "rest" of the world, God employs a particular and different strategy that has its own peculiar means toward the end of bringing the kingdom, shalom. This left-hand strategy involves the establishment of a just, equitable, peaceful social order that entails distinct attention to four arenas: family, work, church, and state. It is crucial to notice how Luther does not abandon the world to its own devices by relegating the activity of God only to what happens in the church building. Rather, Luther sees all of life, organized according to these four arenas, engaged by God through the left-hand strategy.

As a distinctive strategy, God uses distinctive means to accomplish the just, equitable, and peaceful ordering of the world. Above all, God employs the law to bring order to a world distorted by sin and to approximate justice in a fallen creation. Luther called this the *first* (or political) use of the law. Throughout the Bible we read how God sought to foster life by establishing the laws by which people can live in peace with equity. Wherever just laws are implemented to structure families, the workplace, the institutional church, or the government, these should be seen in principle as expressions of God's left-hand strategy. God seeks to accomplish divine purposes through the establishment of a rule of law that protects the weak and fosters the common good. Because just laws are of concern to God, Christian engagement in the process of adopting and refining those laws is not only authorized but indispensable. While human society will never achieve perfection through the implementation of a flawless set of laws, God's left-hand strategy always strives toward approximations of legal justice.

In the left-hand strategy, human reason, works, and righteousness find their good and proper place. In understanding the world, reason is one of the best gifts God has bestowed on humankind. We are to use our minds to analyze, reflect, and comprehend the ways of the world in order to come to the most intelligent ethical conclusions. Quality education is, accordingly, an extremely important enterprise for the well-being of human society and the foundation for the participation of all people in the process of ordering life justly. Science has contributed much to the advancement of human knowledge by refining the methods by which we investigate and solve perplexing problems. At the same time, the liberal arts contribute their own rich methods, traditions, and insights for appreciating and understanding the mysteries of life. Human reason is one of the chief gifts God has given us for negotiating the world and participating in God's left-hand strategy.

Within the left-hand strategy, it is crucial to emphasize how Christians are called upon to reason and cooperate with those of other religious faiths or no

faith at all. We live in an increasingly pluralistic world in which all people must be respected according to the laws of society. The goal is not the enactment of "Christian" laws or policies; the goal is the enactment of laws and policies that are equitable and just to all. For this reason, according to the left-hand strategy, Christians seek to build coalitions with those who share their reasoning about the benefits of particular legislation or policies. Christians can welcome cooperation with and support from those who do not share their religious commitments, yet who do share their political reasoning and agenda. Moreover, Christians are free to join in supporting the agendas and projects initiated by others, insofar as they accord with sound reasoning. Christians are to view themselves as part of a diverse population in which they do not have all the answers. Instead, as part of the reasoning process, Christians can listen humbly to the viewpoints of others, evaluate carefully the persuasiveness of the arguments, and choose to join common cause (or not). This approach guards Christian political engagement against parochialism or even triumphalism, opening the church to the larger give-and-take of the political process.

If Luther decried the attempt to justify ourselves before God on the basis of our good works and righteousness, he was just as insistent that good works and righteousness have their necessary place in relationship to the good of the neighbor. The neighbor in need—whether a family member, colleague at work, church member, or someone across the globe—is in need of our good works. The gospel in fact frees us from self-preoccupation about our own salvation and eternal destiny so that we may devote our undivided attention to meeting our neighbors' genuine needs. Good works are those works of mercy and justice that our neighbors need to survive and thrive in their own lives. We perform such good works not to secure our relationship with God but purely because this is what serves the neighbor's well-being. Under the theology of the cross, Christians seek not their own self-preservation but life for others. This is a radically other-oriented and ethical understanding of good works that has nothing to do with works as a way of appeasing God.

Similarly, righteousness (correctly understood)—what Luther called "proper" righteousness—is that righteousness we demonstrate in care for the needs of others. While in the right-hand strategy of God, the only appropriate form of righteousness is the "alien" righteousness that we receive from Christ as a gift, in the left-hand strategy we are free to express human righteousness in relationship to what is needed by others—whether that be the need for food, water, clothing, shelter, meaningful work, or any other actual need. In this way, it is profoundly accurate to say that human beings were created exactly for good works and righteousness for the sake of the neighbor.

God's two strategies for mending the world (*tikkun olam*), the right-hand strategy of the sharing of the gospel and the left-hand strategy of bringing justice, belong together as the core dimensions of God's mission in the world. God is ambidextrous! God invites Christians to participate in the right-hand strategy through the ministry of a worshiping, evangelizing church and the left-hand strategy through the embodiment of shalom church. God's entire mission to the world and creation can be encompassed by means of this paradigm, which we find best articulated by Luther and as clarified by his later interpreters.[16] While this book concentrates on the involvement of the church according to God's left-hand strategy, we must remain ever vigilant never to lose sight of the intrinsic importance of the right-hand strategy. Within the life of the church the left-hand strategy unfolds in two distinct ways: through the lives of the baptized engaged in their various arenas of daily life and through the corporate vocation of a public church. To the discussion of these matters I now turn.

The Vocation of the Baptized in the World and the Vocation of the Public Church

Social ministry is carried out by the church in faithfulness to God's left-hand strategy for the life of the world in manifold ways. In one sense, every act of service in the world by every baptized person, every organized act of charity by every congregation, and every collective effort to meet human need by denominations, organizations, or agencies are expressions of social ministry. This broad view provides a starting point as we next begin to reflect more systematically about the various forms of social ministry, distinguishing among them through the elaboration of constructive categories.

An initial distinction is between social service and social advocacy. By "social service" I refer to those forms of social ministry that provide direct assistance to relieve human need. One might think immediately of disaster relief, hunger programs, medical assistance, or housing projects. Also falling into this category are many of the common ministries by denominational social-service agencies: adoption programs, counseling services, refugee resettlement, job training, homeless shelters, sheltered workshops for those with disabilities, assistance to people who are blind or deaf, support for single parents, programs for the elderly, and a host of other charitable works. While there is great consensus among members of the church about the importance of social service, when we turn to social advocacy, we enter an arena that can be highly contested.

By "social advocacy" I mean efforts on the part of the church to change societal structures, promote economic policies, or enact legislation that is consistent

with its understanding of God's kingdom, shalom. The charters of organizations like Bread for the World and Amnesty International provide a reference point for this distinctive type of social ministry. Denominational advocacy efforts with regard to racism, sexism, heterosexism, poverty, hunger, homelessness, violence, war, arms proliferation, prisons, capital punishment, environmental concern, and others fall into this category. Likewise congregations, or members thereof, may wish to raise their voices on behalf of a particular cause that entails changing societal structures.

The controversy over the place of social advocacy in the church's outreach has come about for many reasons. Fundamental to the debate are conflicting views about the proper relationship of church and state, in particular the role of the church in society. According to a very popular view, the primary role of the church is to minister to the spiritual needs of people through worship and pastoral care with the secondary role of offering charitable assistance to people in need. The ministry of the church belongs to the private realm of individuals and families who choose to participate in it. The mediation of the church's ministry is highly personal, based on concern for the spiritual welfare of persons and helping with individual needs. In this view the ministry of the church is relegated to the private sphere. It remains properly separated from matters debated in the public square, except when those debates threaten the rights of the church's functioning in the realm belonging to it. Beginning with the nineteenth century, the church has been subject increasingly to the privatization of religion, with its relegation to a separate sphere, leading to the quietism of the church in public affairs.

A second and dramatically contrasting approach for relating church and state has been taken, for example, by the so-called Christian right.[17] In this approach, the church is called to be vigilant in ordering society according to Christian principles. In the Bible God has revealed the truth about key social issues (for example, regarding abortion, marriage, homosexuality, or the teaching of evolution) and it is a Christian's responsibility to become involved in the political process to ensure that the "Christian" position on each of these issues prevails. Churches operating with this mindset often issue directives to their membership about how to vote, not only on particular issues but also for particular political parties and candidates who they reckon will offer the best support for their agenda. These churches also actively advocate with legislators according to their established agenda.

In U.S. society there are many Christians who understand the relationship of church and state according to this paradigm. This approach has had significant influence on the outcome of key elections. This has led many politicians to calculate how they can best appeal to the power of this voting block. At the same time the assertiveness of the Christian right has led to a significant backlash by

those who reason differently and have come to different conclusions on the issues, including many Christians. Many secular citizens and those from other faith traditions often wrongly assume that all Christians share this approach to politics. This complicates all the more the challenge facing Christians who operate out of other paradigms for relating church and state, such as God's two strategies developed in this chapter.

Social advocacy belongs to the responsibility of the baptized, according to the left-hand strategy of God, both through their personal initiative as citizens and through the collective efforts of the institutional church in its functioning as a public church. There is a major difference, however, between the political approach of the Christian right and the nature of advocacy according to God's left-hand strategy. I have already emphasized the constructive use of reason as God's gift in analyzing and understanding the world. When it comes to political involvement by Christians, rather than basing their judgments on explicitly biblical warrants or religious arguments, effective Christian participation in politics requires that Christians employ reasonable arguments that are intelligible and coherent to all citizens, not just to those who share their Christian theological commitments. Christians are to use a language and reasoning that is accessible to all. They are to direct their attention primarily to the well-being of the neighbor in their advocacy, reasoning according to what contributes most to the common good of society, with particular concern for those who are suffering under the current policies and programs.

This approach differs dramatically from the politics of the Christian right, which is heavy laden with biblical and religious arguments and whose goal is to impose its particular viewpoint on the whole society. By contrast, based on Christian motivation—freed by the gospel of Jesus Christ for neighbor love—Christians participate in God's left-hand strategy by speaking out and engaging in the political process as citizens who advocate for the well-being of the neighbor, using reasonable arguments that appeal to the consciences and common sense of others, building coalitions wherever possible with those who have a common vision, and avoiding special pleading based on a narrowly "Christian" agenda. While Christians certainly base their political involvements on their faith—also contemplating the significance of Scripture for their convictions—when they move into the public arena, they favor reasoning and explanations that are accessible to all. This allows the left-hand strategy to be informed by Christian motives and values as these are translated into political reasoning that appeals to Christians and non-Christians alike, people of faith and people who claim no faith at all. It is an approach that honors the authentic spirit of the separation of church and state as the studied avoidance of allowing the state to impose any religious view upon its

citizenry. Again, this is dramatically different from the approach of the Christian right, which on almost every issue has as its agenda the legal imposition of its religious conclusions on society.

In participating in God's left-hand strategy for ruling the world, Luther and the reformers stressed four arenas in which the baptized exercise responsibility for the sake of the common good and God's just ordering of human affairs. The *first arena* is the family. God sustains the well-being of creation by placing us in families and giving us obligations to fulfill for the nurture and flourishing of those to whom we are related by blood or by adoption. Parents have responsibility to care for the health and maturation of their children. Children are to honor their parents in mutual love, especially demonstrating concern for aging parents who find themselves in need of physical and emotional care. Siblings have responsibility to encourage one another to grow in maturity and responsibility for others. All members of the extended family—grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and others—are to live in relationships of mutual care, especially tending those who have special needs of any kind. Moreover, families are responsible to instill the fundamental posture of learning to look beyond the bonds of kinship to care for the world and all people in need. [18]

The *second arena* in which the baptized are to express their responsibility according to God's left-hand strategy is the workplace. As God blesses each of us with particular gifts that can be employed in the service of others, so God desires that each person have productive and meaningful work where these gifts can be channeled into the care of others. In his time, Luther celebrated the value of all kinds of honest labor. The world needs able and honest shoemakers, farmers, and shopkeepers to keep the creation running smoothly.[19] The Reformation sought to overcome the notion that explicitly religious vocations (clergy, monks) were superior by nature to service in non-religious vocations (for example, accountants or nurses). Instead, every useful occupation contributes to God's purposes of ordering the world for the good of all. Each worker is to contribute to God's care for the world through her or his daily work.

This concept is severely tested, however, in the modern world, where the financial benefits and status of some vocations is vastly disproportionate to those of others.[20] Whereas some discrepancies in pay and status are inevitable, the degrees of separation demand redress, if we are to approximate a more just society. Moreover, this concept is also radically tested where people either cannot find employment at all, or they languish in jobs that do not give expression to their creativity and talent.[21] One of the important matters for Christian advocacy must involve full employment and fair labor practices, if we are to create a system in which people have access to viable jobs with adequate pay and a sense of meaningful

work—in the spirit of Luther's imagination for the workplace as an arena for serving God and neighbor.

The *third arena* for the involvement of the baptized in the life of the world involves the ministry of the institutional churches and other faith communities; today we might refer more generally to nonprofit organizations. Here we are depicting churches, faith communities, and nonprofit organizations as institutions serving the good of society, through acts of charity and benevolence on behalf of others. According to God's left-hand strategy of caring for the world, there is an urgent need for non-governmental agencies that offer service to others, especially to those in most acute need. As part of God's left-hand strategy, we are not referring in this place to the explicit ministry of the church in the area of worship, spiritual care, and evangelizing. Rather, churches, faith communities, and nonprofit organizations can contribute to human welfare and the care of creation apart from their peculiar efforts to propagate their religious beliefs. The baptized render valuable and needed service to the upkeep of God's created order, whenever they become involved in volunteer activities through faith communities and nonprofit organizations designed to assist the neighbor. Likewise the public church renders service to society through all forms of social ministry, the subject matter of this book.

The *fourth arena* for the participation of the baptized in service to the world is as citizens of a particular nation, state, and local community. Already I have sought to distinguish the particular character of this participation by those seeking to cooperate with God's left-hand strategy for ruling the world (in contrast to the approach of the Christian right). But here it is important to stress that political involvement truly belongs to the responsibility of the baptized as they care for God's world. It does make a difference which candidates are elected, which laws are enacted, and which governmental policies are implemented. These things make a difference regarding how the resources of government are distributed on behalf of the common good or not. Christians employ their best reasoning as they get involved in the political process. It is all too evident that different Christians can and do reason differently about how to accomplish what they perceive to be the most urgent political goals. While we may sometimes fear the fallout from political arguments, these differences among us can be a good thing for the whole democratic process, if we genuinely believe that the collective reasoning process will be better than that of any private individual.

There are a variety of ways for Christian citizens to get actively involved in the political arena. The first involves becoming educated on issues in general and especially on legislation currently under deliberation by legislators and other elected officials. Second, Christian citizens have an obligation to exercise their right to

vote and also to seek to influence the votes of others by the art of persuasion. A strict boundary must be maintained, however, between the active involvement of Christians as citizens in the electoral process and partisan politics in the church. Because we come to worship as those baptized in the name of the same Savior, matters of party affiliation are suspended there due to our shared belief in Jesus Christ. We gather at worship as brothers and sisters in Christ, not as members of political parties. At the same time, in its Christian education activities, it is most appropriate to engage in deliberation of *moral and political issues*, provided that we can set aside our partisanship for the sake of the mutual pursuit of better knowledge and deeper commitment.

Third, Christian citizens can participate in active advocacy for particular causes and political agendas. Christians do so not because any particular issues are "Christian" but because the reasoning is sound and the cause compelling. To this end the advocacy offices of church bodies and the efforts of various lobbying organizations can help church members to become better educated on the issues and to insert themselves into the debate in the most constructive way—through letters, emails, petitions, and phone calls to our elected representatives. Fourth, Christians may choose a political vocation by running for elected office or working for a governmental agency. While the ethical dilemmas faced by politicians and elected officials are stunningly complex, God also needs responsible officials who care for the common good in order to accomplish the divine purposes in the left-hand strategy.

Not only do individual Christians get involved in the political process as a way of living out their baptismal vocations in the world, but Christians also engage corporately in the political process through advocacy efforts by church representatives who work on behalf of regional judicatories and denominations. Such involvement belongs to the most controversial activities on the part of the public church in its responsibility for the ordering of the world according to God's left-hand strategy.[22] The church, in its exercise of responsibility for the common good, goes public with its best reasoning, analysis, and conclusions on specific issues affecting the well-being of society.

There are several methods by which the public church may voice its concerns about matters of public policy. In some cases the public church adopts social statements on major and perennial issues, delineating a framework for the deliberation of urgent ethical questions. At other times, the public church weighs in on specific pieces of legislation before the legislature, especially through its designated office of governmental affairs. On occasion, the leaders of judicatories or denominations may issue commentary on current events from the perspective of the Christian faith. In every instance, however, it is the responsibility of the public church to

pay particular attention to the needs of the weakest members of society in its deliberations, not merely to pursue its own self-interest.

There are several salutary consequences deriving from the public church's development of social statements. First, the moral deliberation of the church can serve as a very constructive teaching role for congregations and individual Christians. As church members face social issues in their personal and corporate lives, the social teaching of the church is a vital educational resource for learning about the issues and examining different points of view. Second, the process by which the church engages in moral deliberation provides a salutary example of how congregations and Christians can themselves participate in the discernment process. In a world of highly polarized political discourse, often we lack constructive models of how to engage issues without acrimony and in a spirit of goodwill. Third, the public church's moral deliberation provides specific guidance to Christians facing ethical dilemmas in their own experience (for example, regarding abortion, the death penalty, genetic engineering, and human sexuality). Those who are confronted with acute moral crisis can greatly benefit from the public church's balanced reasoning that seeks to consider issues holistically. Lastly, the church's adoption of social statements can guide the denomination in its own institutional decision making and in its advocacy of particular political legislation. Because of the thorough and highly participatory process undertaken by denominations in developing social statements prior to their adoption, these documents convey wisdom to the church as it engages in social advocacy regarding current legislative bills and policy decisions. Such statements offer sound reasoning for the positions that the public church takes on the issues of the day.

This opening chapter has oriented the reader to several key issues regarding the calling of the church to live in service of God's shalom through social ministry. I have (1) explored the inextricable relationship between social ministry and evangelizing as core to the church's mission, (2) articulated how the mission of God comes to expression in the world through two distinct strategies, and (3) offered concrete guidance for how the church can engage in social ministry both through the lives of the baptized and through the corporate engagement of the public church. In the next two chapters I will develop the biblical (chapter 2) and theological (chapter 3) foundations that ground social ministry in the very character of the church, exploring what it means to be the body of Christ in the world. Thereby I will construct an ecclesiology for the shalom church.