3. The Political Theology of the Two Kingdoms 🔓

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Abstract

This chapter introduces the hypothesis that the conceptual foundations of the liberal model of religious toleration and secularism were laid by a specific theological framework developed during the Protestant Reformation. It will trace the crystallization of this political theology of Christian freedom and the two kingdoms. This was a normative theological framework, which claimed that all believers ought to be free from human interference in the spiritual realm. By implication, this theology also divided human existence into two realms or kingdoms: the spiritual kingdom, where no man could rule but God alone, and the political kingdom, where the believer should always obey secular authorities. Across Reformation Europe, the political theory of the two kingdoms would constitute the basic framework for debates concerning religious toleration and freedom.

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> Christs Kingdom is of another World, and requires none of the Policy of this to manage it; it ought to be kept pure and

> unmixt, being clear of another nature: We see Oyl in a Vessel of Water will not mix, but keep its Body intire to itself, no more ought Spirituals to be mixt with Temporals. But these Spiritual Politicians have mixt Heaven and Earth together, confounded the World with their Policy, and so jumbled things together, that Christianity is almost lost in the Composition, so that men know not where to find it.[1]

Where did the separation of human society into a political sphere and a religious sphere originate? Which conceptual background made this into a significant and sensible distinction? To find answers, we need to travel far back into the history of Western Christianity. The distinction between the temporal and the spiritual, or this world and the other world, has been essential to Christianity and its understanding of human existence from the very beginning. According to the Gospel, Jesus not only said, 'My kingdom is not of this world' (John 18:36 [King James Bible]), but also instructed his followers to 'render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's' (Luke 20:20 [KJB]; Mark 12:17 [KJB]). Building on the biblical distinction between two worlds, the early medieval pope Gelasius I identified two powers for the government of humanity: *regnum* or the royal power, which dealt with material temporal matters, and *sacerdotium*, the priestly power, which cared for spiritual and eternal matters. Medieval thinkers often put this in terms of a metaphor of two swords, each of which had its own sphere of activity.[2] This distinction between the temporal and the spiritual would play a crucial role not only in the Papal Revolution that shook medieval Christendom, but also in the Protestant Reformation that was to transform early modern Europe.

This chapter introduces the hypothesis that the conceptual foundations of the liberal model of religious toleration and secularism were laid by a specific theological framework developed during the Protestant Reformation. It will trace the crystallization of this political theology of Christian freedom and the two kingdoms. Freedom in Christianity was a function of the process of conversion or gradual submission to God's will. Originally, only monks and priests were supposed to go through this lifelong process, which gave them spiritual freedom and the authority to guide the laity.

The Protestant Reformation monasticized daily life by transforming the monastic process of conversion into a general process that was to shape the lives of *all* believers. Here, the moment of secularization took the form of breaking down the walls of the monastery and the Church so that Christian modes of living and institutional structures could reshape the secular world. Along with the secularization of these components of medieval Christianity, however, the Protestant Reformation also generated its own conceptions of true religion. These consistently rejected the trappings of the Roman-Catholic Church and its priesthood as false religion, that is, human additions to divine revelation.

Out of this transformation emerged the Protestant theology of Christian freedom. This was a normative theological framework, which claimed that all believers ought to be free from human interference in the spiritual realm. By implication, this theology also divided human existence into two realms or kingdoms: the spiritual kingdom, where no man could rule but God alone, and the political kingdom, where the believer should always obey secular authorities. Across Reformation Europe, the political theory of the two kingdoms would constitute the basic framework for debates concerning religious toleration and freedom.

Conversion, Law, and Liberty

What does it mean to be a Christian? This question has kept Christian thinkers busy from the time it became clear that Christ's second coming was not imminent. Once Christianity began to dominate the Roman Empire, martyrdom no longer sufficed to define the true Christian. What divine purpose lay behind the prolonging of the phase between Christ's sacrificial death and the advent of the heavenly kingdom? How should Christians live in the saeculum, this temporal worldly age that would last until the second coming of Christ?[3]

The Process of Conversion

The aim of the Christian was submission to God, this much was clear. The true Christian lived to obey his Creator and submit his own

purposes to the divine purpose. In early medieval monasteries, this aim brought about the genesis of a process that structured the lives of the monks, the process of *conversio* or conversion. In this lifelong process of reform or regeneration, 'man turned to God and was reformed to His image'.[4]

From a theological perspective, the basic idea was that human nature had been created in the image of God. But original sin corrupted this nature and humanity became the slave of the sinful flesh. The soul lost its command of the body.[5] As a consequence, human beings are all too easily seduced by the devil to live carnal lives and give in to the desires of their sinful bodies. All they care for is food, property, sex, and the satisfaction of self-interest. Monks were aware of the disorder of this life and of human guilt, and wished to escape from sin by becoming truly spiritual. The escape route was the process of conversion, which could recover the divine spark of potentiality still remaining in the human being.[6]

The monastic orders elaborated and institutionalized this process of conversion in various ways, but everywhere it shared certain properties. First, there was the role of monastic rules. Monks fought 'the devil within' and could no longer give in to the carnal desires of their bodies. Instead, they lived according to a strict ascetic discipline imposed by monastic rules, which were presented as God's own law.[7] A central function of these rules was to make the religious aware of the depth of human depravity. The rules were so strict and demanding that monks could not but fail to live up to them. The resulting experience was one of persistent failure to obey God, which kept reminding monks of their sinful nature: they were miserable wretches before Him, who nevertheless loved them and gifted them His grace.[8]

The second property is the belief that God's grace in Christ is the one force that can save sinful humanity from ruin. Not our human selves, but the Spirit and its gift of grace bring about conversion. As Augustine wrote, it is this importation of the Spirit of grace that elevates our will, without which the teaching of God's law is but 'the letter that killeth', only holding us guilty of transgression.[9] Divine grace alone can regenerate the soul and make the old man into the new, giving him the freedom to resist the seduction of sin and the clutches of the devil.[10]

Third, this process divides both the world and the human being into two realms. The temporal and the spiritual were viewed as two distinct worlds. One was the secular material world of earth, also referred to as 'this temporal world', which would last until the second coming of Christ. The other was the eternal spiritual world, also named 'the other world' or 'the heavenly kingdom'. This corresponded to a fundamental split in human existence: as bodies, we live earthly lives; as spirits, spiritual lives. The monks were expected to turn to God by moving away from the temporal carnal world to the eternal spiritual world.

True Christians lived in a perpetual struggle in which the spirit tried to control the flesh. Slowly, the spirit should become less carnal and the body more spiritual.[11] In his *Epistle to the Romans*, the apostle Paul had given a central role to this struggle between spirit and flesh in his explanation of the Christian faith. The law serves to reveal human sin: 'Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin' (Rom. 3:20−23 [KJB]). But one cannot escape from sin through human efforts to obey the law. Only those who are in Jesus Christ, 'who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit', could be saved from destruction through sin' (Rom. 8:1 [KJB]).

Inevitably, believers would fail to attain full spirituality in their lives here on earth. The process of conversion could never be complete, for the hold of sin on humanity is too strong. Yet the lives of true Christians had to be shaped by never-ending reform.[12] The extent to which the believer was converted in this life on earth determined the degree of his freedom. 'Libertas' in early and medieval Christianity was the equivalent of submission to God's will. In so far as one was subject to God, one would no longer be subject to human authorities on earth. Men were free to the extent they had submitted themselves to God. The resulting freedom was the ability to resist the seduction of sin, given by God's grace in Christ.[13]

The church fathers elaborated this idea of Christian liberty in terms of a contrast between the Law of the Old Testament and Christ in the New Testament. Humanity desires good and strives by its own efforts to attain the good, regarding this as the command of the Law. But it becomes clear that we cannot live up to the Law. It is simply beyond our reach. Through His sacrificial death, Christ gained divine grace

for man and through the gift of grace man obtained the power to do good from inner necessity. Thus, Christ overcame the compulsion and bondage of the Law by removing the reason for their existence.[14]

Freedom of the Church

In 1077, Pope Gregory VII forced the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Henry IV, to kneel in the snow near the Italian castle of Canossa and had him beg for papal absolution. This dramatic moment in the history of Western Christendom symbolized the power that would be possessed by the papacy during the next centuries. It was the culmination of a long, sometimes violent, struggle concerning the relation between secular authority and the religious authority of the Church.[15]

In the preceding centuries, monastic Christianity had harboured two tendencies: withdrawal from the world and reform of the world. The second tendency entailed that monks, who had reached a higher spiritual position, also gained the authority to 'convert' earthly society. They were asked to become bishops and leaders of the church. Thus emerged a trend to reform society by transforming it according to the image of the monastic community. The papal reform or revolution sounded the victory of this tendency within Western Christendom.[16]

Before the tenth century, the monastic world had gone through an attempt to unify the rules of various monasteries, centred on the Rule of Saint Benedict. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a reform movement intended to make the monasteries even more uniform and strict.[17] The institutional structures of the monastery functioned as models for the reform of the church in this period, which in effect amounted to *a monasticization of the Church.*

On the one hand, a common and coherent body of law was created out of the various monastic rules and ecclesiastic laws of Western Christendom. The result was the new comprehensive system of canon law that would govern the Church for centuries to come.[18] On the other hand, the papal reform was the culmination of an important change in Western Christendom: rather than the monk, the priest became the principal figure of Christian religion. Christianity turned into *a religion of the priest.* But priesthood was also modelled on the

monastic life, in the sense that the priests had to go through the same process of vocation, reform, conversion, and purification.[19]

How did the priest gain spiritual authority? The idea of freedom as subjection to God became crucial to the medieval conception of the hierarchy. The extent of an individual's submission to God made him either ruler or subject.[20] According to the Church's theologians, not all men were capable of attaining the same spiritual standard. The clergy was superior to the laity, like adults were to children. Because of their asceticism, the monks went furthest in the subjection to God and thus occupied a high place in the holy hierarchy. But this hierarchy would become a reality only in the next world.

In contrast, the clerical hierarchy of the Church was to lead the people of God in this world. Thus, the libertas attained by priests and bishops corresponded to a superior position in this earthly life. As Cardinal Humbert put it:

> Anyone then who wishes to compare the priestly and royal dignities in a useful and blameless fashion may say that, in the existing church, the priesthood is analogous to the soul and the kingship to the body, for they cleave to one another and need one another and each in turn demands services and renders them one another. It follows from this that, just as the soul excels the body and commands it, so too the priestly dignity excels the royal or, we may say, the heavenly dignity the earthly. Thus, that all things may be in due order and not in disarray the priesthood, like a soul, may advise what is to be done.[21]

This analogy to the soul's command of the body symbolized the aims of papal reform. Priests and monks were 'the religious', forming 'the spiritual estate' as opposed to 'the temporal estate'. The clergy was not only superior to, but also responsible for the laity. The Church came to be identified primarily with the clergy, whereas the laity became the flock guided to salvation by its shepherds.

According to the papal reformers, the mystery of ordination had raised the priests above ordinary humanity. Therefore, it was obvious to them that the Church had to be free from lay domination.[22] Until the eleventh century, many Christian churches had been the property

of temporal rulers (the so-called *Eigenkirchen*). Priests were selected, instated, and paid by these laymen. Similarly, the ordination or investiture of bishops was in the hands of the Emperor and other lay authorities. This was intolerable to reformers like Cardinal Humbert and the monk Hildebrand, who would later be appointed as Pope Gregory VII. They argued that clerics could not possibly be invested with a church by laymen, since the latter were spiritually inferior to the former. The laymen had to be content with the position properly theirs in the ecclesiastical order, 'the passive position of a minor who cannot act for himself'. With the battle cry of 'libertas ecclesiae' (freedom of the church), the reformers set out to restore right order in the Christian world and free the Church from all forms of lay domination.[23]

In this sense, the hierarchical relationship between the religious (priests) and the secular (rulers) depended on the process of conversion. The temporal world was the kingdom of bondage, where men were doomed to live under the yoke of Satan and sin. Responding to their vocation, priests turned away from this world towards the spiritual kingdom of God. Through this process, they attained Christian freedom, reached a superior position in the hierarchy, and gained spiritual authority over the laity.[24] The Holy Spirit conferred the gift of grace upon the priests, since they were true servants of God. Through the spiritual leadership of the priest, the layman could then share in this divine grace. Priests became channels of God's grace to the laity.

Once it had become widely accepted that the vocation of priests gave them spiritual authority, the church hierarchy was reinforced: the priests performed sacraments, took confession, and prescribed penance. The Church prescribed orthodox belief and surrender to the priestly hierarchy as the sole route to salvation. Its authority included the power to discipline the laity in this temporal world through a range of measures like excommunication and execution. Hence, it was unthinkable that the hierarchy of priests be subject to the laws of temporal authorities. Instead, the Church 'set out to reform both itself and the world by law'.[25]

The Spiritual and the Secular

The papal reform had revolved around the relationship between the secular powers and the spiritual authority of the clergy. However, it is important to note that this was not a battle for the power and scope of religious authority as against a secular authority standing independently from the religious. The conceptual distinction between the 'spiritual' and the 'secular' had always been drawn *within* the religious framework of Christianity.[26] It corresponded to the division of the world into an invisible eternal realm and temporal earthly realm and that of the human being into spirit and flesh. At the close of the papal reform, the prominent theologian, Hugh of Saint Victor, summed up the foundations of its political theology:

> There are two lives, one earthly, the other heavenly, one corporeal, the other spiritual. By one the body lives from the soul, by the other the soul lives from God. Each has its own good by which it is invigorated and nourished so that it can subsist. The earthly life is nourished with earthly goods, the spiritual life with spiritual goods. To the earthly life belong all things that are earthly, to the spiritual life all goods that are spiritual ... Among laymen, to whose zeal and forethought the things that are necessary for earthly life pertain, the power is earthly. Among the clergy, to whose office the goods of the spiritual life belong, the power is divine. The one power is therefore called secular, the other spiritual.[27]

This demonstrates the extent to which the spiritual–secular distinction depended on an elaborate theological edifice. Without the support of a cluster of Christian-theological notions—soul and body, the earthly and spiritual life, divine power and the kingdom of Christ, and so on—this distinction would dissolve into thin air.

Rather than being general categories of human society, 'the spiritual' and 'the secular' were theological terms embedded in this larger framework. Christianity attributed these two spheres to all human societies, but this again was a theoretical claim of its theological anthropology. In other words, a specific religious framework not only drew the distinction between the spiritual and the secular but also determined the scope of these two realms.

Faith, Conversion, and the Freedom of a Christian

From the twelfth century onwards, popular movements began to reject the papal reform's goal of a hierarchically organized church intervening in every area of life. Common to these movements was a deep concern for the sin and salvation of individual believers. Penitence had become an obsession of popular preaching and lay religiosity in late medieval Christendom. Distress about the need for contrition and conversion grew among the believers. This concern for the spirituality of lay believers generated distrust towards the priestly hierarchy as mediators between the laity and God. In this 'age of anticlericalism', the populace challenged the avarice of the clergy and the tyranny of the church. Many pointed out that the priests were not truly spiritual but slaves of carnal desire.[28]

Anticlerical sentiment was intertwined with the growth of lay piety. Groups of lay people gathered together for spiritual comfort and social support by means of private worship and gospel study. In order to become truly spiritual, they emulated the asceticism of the monks.[29] Thus, the strictures and structures of monastic conversion began to shape the lives of these lay believers. The process, however, lost some of its typical features while spreading in society. Most notably, the need to live in a monastery and submit oneself to monastic rules disappeared. This secularization of the process of conversion or its diffusion in lay society generated the great heresies of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Gradually, it gained the momentum needed to erupt into the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century.[30]

The Monasticization of Daily Life

Whereas the Papal Revolution had extended the monastic process of conversion to the church and its clergy, the Protestant Reformation now extended it to all Christians. In this way, it initiated a monasticization of daily life. The Reformers' anticlericalism was closely related to the expansion of conversion. As a process that now structured the lives of lay believers, it eroded the foundations of the

clerical hierarchy. Often, laymen believed they were more genuine about the ascetic apostolic life than clerics. Stories about lecherous priests and gluttonous monks gained popularity. More and more, the Church was considered an impediment to the flourishing of true Christian faith and its process of spiritual conversion. Instead of conforming to clerical authority, lay believers were expected to go through an individual process of subjection to God's will, modelled on the monastic process of conversion. The result was the Protestant Reformation's conception of faith.

This conception consisted of several steps. In the first step, a Christian should try and live up to the law of God. The purpose of these attempts, however, is to reveal the nature of human sin. No matter how hard we try, we cannot resist the seduction of sin and continue to violate God's law.[31]

Persistent failure to live up to the law brings us to the second step. We begin to despair of our own ability to do good. In his *First Sermon at Wittenberg* (1522), Luther stressed this: 'In the first place, we must know that we are the children of wrath, and all our works, intentions, and thoughts are nothing at all'.[32] To John Calvin, it was equally obvious that we should realize that God alone can do good and that we rely on Him at all times.[33] Without this kind of self-knowledge, there can be no knowledge of God. We first have to become aware of 'the world of miseries' within ourselves, to be stripped of all confidence in our own ability, before we can receive knowledge of God.[34]

The third step is reached when the believer realizes that God promises to save him in spite of sin. In Christ, God has given the promise of grace. Once we despair of our own ability, we become aware that God's work alone can save us. Righteousness is attained only through absolute faith in Christ. The worst thing a man can do is to believe in his own or other men's achievements in the search for grace and righteousness before God. We do not depend on ourselves but on something outside ourselves, the promise and truth of God, which cannot deceive.

The final step is to yield completely to the Lord's promise of grace in Christ. This surrender is true faith and genuine subjection to God's will. But the believer should remain aware that even this is not his own work. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul. Conversion of

the will can be effected by divine grace alone.[35] Thus, the believer becomes but the passive recipient of God's grace.

Luther's reading of Scripture revolved around this gradual process of conversion. In his central tract *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520), he divided the Word of God into two significant parts: commandments and promises or Law and Gospel. The commandments express God's will for humanity. Although they tell us what we ought to do, they never give us the power to do it. In fact, they are intended to make us aware that we *cannot* do good as human beings, since we can never ourselves succeed in fulfilling the Law. These laws are only to make us despair of our own ability.[36] This is where the second part of Scripture comes to our aid. It tells us that in Christ we are promised grace, righteousness, peace, liberty, and all things. Simply through faith in Christ, these promises declare, we can fulfil all commandments and subject ourselves to God's will.

The Protestant Reformation extended the medieval process of conversion to all believers. Before, the monks and priests had been the true Christians because of their vocation and conversion. Now God called *all* believers to conversion. *All were priests.* Through this monasticizing of everyday life, Christianity began to pervade society at a much deeper level than it ever had before. At times, the Reformers explicitly stated this goal. A Lutheran pastor suggested that every household had to be transformed into a monastery.[37] Calvin remarked that every family of the pious ought to be a church.[38] By stripping it of its restrictive monastic features, the basic schemes of the monastic way of life could structure the experience of all believers, instead of that of priests and monks alone.

Spiritual Freedom and Temporal Law

The Reformation's transformation of Christian freedom undermined the justification for the authority of the clerical hierarchy. In the medieval understanding of libertas, the spiritual–temporal distinction had corresponded to that between clergy and laity. Because of the process of conversion and purification, priests commanded laymen much like the soul should control the flesh. If the lay believer turned from the carnal to the spiritual world in the same way as priests and monks, then he should also gain the freedom

corresponding to this submission to God's will. Luther, Calvin, and other Reformers all agreed on this point. 'Christian freedom' became the rallying cry of the Protestant struggle against what they called 'the tyranny of the papacy'.

The Protestant teaching of Christian liberty claimed that faith makes us free from spiritual laws because these become redundant. Since God alone can bring about the faith that allows us to come to justification before Him, human actions and laws possibly lead to redemption. No law or work ought to be considered necessary to salvation. This would mean we set up our own human selves as idols, instead of having faith in God. In other words, Christian faith releases our souls from the bondage of all human works and laws, for these are made unnecessary to man's righteousness and salvation. This was the basic message of Luther's *Freedom of a Christian* (1520). 'Yes', Luther concluded, 'since faith alone suffices for salvation, I need nothing except faith exercising the power and dominion of its own liberty. Lo, this is the inestimable power and liberty of Christians.'[39]

Luther's companion Philip Melanchthon explained the nature of Christian liberty in his *Loci Communes Theologici* (1521), the first systematic theological work of the Lutheran Reformation:

> Christianity is freedom, because those who do not have the Spirit of Christ cannot in any way perform the law; they are rather subject to the curse of the law. Those who have been renewed by the Spirit of Christ now conform voluntarily even without the law to what the law used to command. The law is the will of God; the Holy Spirit is nothing else than the living will of God and its being in action (*agitatio*). Therefore, when we have been regenerated by the Spirit of God, who is the living will of God, we now will spontaneously, that very thing which the law used to demand ... Therefore, freedom does not consist in this, that we do not observe the law, but that we will and desire spontaneously and from the heart what the law demands.[40]

This clarifies the idea: as sinful human beings, we necessarily fail to submit ourselves to the will of God. Therefore, the divine will has to act in us in the form of the Holy Spirit and bring about faith in our

hearts. Thus, the Spirit gifts us 'new birth' or conversion: our souls are regenerated and cannot but live up to the law. The will of God now lives in us, so to speak.

Again and again, the magisterial Reformers emphasized that the power and liberty of the Christian are of a *spiritual* nature. As followers of Christ, we are free in spirit. But, in this mortal life on earth, we also have a body. The flesh must be disciplined so that it remains subject to the spirit. Luther stressed that the freedom of Christians does not go beyond the spiritual and that they should obey the laws of the temporal authorities so long as these do not infringe upon faith.[41] True Christians always remain free from every human law, since faith allows them to do everything out of pure freedom. Calvin agreed. In a chapter on *Civil Government* in the *Institutes*, he wrote that some men, after hearing the Gospel's promise of freedom, think they cannot benefit from this freedom as long as any human authority rules over them. Such men wish to reshape the world to a new form, without courts, laws, or magistrates. 'But whoever knows how to distinguish between body and soul, between this present fleeting life and that future eternal life, will without difficulty know that Christ's spiritual Kingdom and the civil jurisdiction are things completely distinct.'[42] The freedom of the Christian should be limited to the spiritual sphere. In the temporal, he always had to obey the laws of human authorities.

In the spiritual realm, the Reformers insisted, freedom from human authority should be complete. Since all Christians should undergo the process of conversion, there could be no superior class of priests constituting the spiritual estate. In another famous tract, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (1520), Luther wrote that this distinction between the spiritual and the temporal estate was the invention of power-hungry men. Like so many other doctrines and practices of the Roman-Catholic Church, it was but a human fabrication falsely superimposed onto God's revelation.

All Christians, Luther argued, are of the spiritual estate and the only difference between them is one of office.[43] They are all equally priests, bishops, and popes. All respectable occupations are Christian vocations. Those who preach the gospel and perform the sacraments are not a separate and higher group embodying spiritual power. Because of their abilities, they are elected by a community of

Christians to perform these tasks. Some are the stewards of the mysteries of God, but in the Church, he added, this stewardship has been developed into an idolatrous tyranny, as though laymen were not also Christians. Thus, the liberty of the Christians had been replaced with a false bondage of human works and laws.[44]

The Idolatry of Law

The Protestant notion of Christian freedom entailed that all human laws imposed on the Christian in the spiritual sphere went against true religion. To think that one can serve God by following the laws prescribed by monastic orders or priestly hierarchies now became the worst kind of idolatry. Human laws and works functioned as restrictions on true faith, the work of the Spirit in our souls. False religion was to prescribe human laws as though these were necessary for salvation.[45]

From this point of view, the Reformers rejected the traditions, rites, and canon law of the Church as idolatry and false religion. Zwingli liked to refer to canon law as 'canon twaddle'.[46] An entire chapter of Calvin's *Institutes* carries the title 'The Power of Making Laws in Which the Pope, with His Supporters, Has Exercised upon Souls the Most Savage Tyranny and Butchery'. These spiritual laws, Calvin asserted, invaded the kingdom of Christ and oppressed Christian liberty: 'They say the laws they make are "spiritual", pertaining to the soul, and declare them necessary for eternal life. But thus the Kingdom of Christ … is invaded, thus the freedom given by him to the conscience of the believers is utterly oppressed and cast down.'[47]

The main problem, Calvin continued, was that these human laws were prescribed as *spiritual* laws, binding souls inwardly before God, 'as if enjoining things necessary to salvation'. If these laws are passed to lay scruples upon us, 'as if the observance of these laws were necessary of itself, we say that something unlawful is laid upon conscience. For our consciences do not have to do with men but with God alone. This is the purpose of that common distinction between the earthly forum and the forum of conscience.' The whole case, Calvin concluded, rests upon the fact that 'if God is the sole lawgiver, men are not permitted to usurp this honor'.[48]

This account of Christian freedom from spiritual laws gave rise to a notion that would be central to the pleas for toleration across early modern Europe: the notion of liberty of conscience. The disastrous effect of *Menschensatzungen*—human inventions presented as religious precepts—was their snatching away the freedom of conscience. In the *Loci Communes*, Melanchthon equated Christian liberty to freedom of conscience, for Scripture asserted that the conscience should not be bound by anything going beyond its rules. The papal laws should be endured like any injustice or tyranny, as long as they did not threaten the conscience. Those who allow freedom of conscience to be snatched away by such human traditions become slaves of men: 'For as Christian freedom is freedom of conscience, so Christian slavery is the enslavement of conscience.'[49] This conscience, it should be clear, is not some general human aptitude or faculty to distinguish right from wrong. No, it is the divinely engrained faculty that conveys the will or command of God to the believer in a particular situation.

Importantly, the principles of Christian freedom and the priesthood of all believers constituted a normative framework that gave shape to certain descriptions of the Church. The Church became a reverse image of the Reformation: it was the embodiment of Christian slavery and spiritual tyranny, the very negation of the principles of freedom and equality of all believers before God, and justification by faith alone. In the following centuries, the resulting description of the Roman Church would spread across Europe. It was viewed as a den of corruption, headed by depraved clerics who wished to dominate and manipulate the laity with fabricated religious precepts.

Even though this image is often explained in terms of the 'corruption' of the Church in late medieval Europe, it should be clear that it did not result from any empirical study of European society. Its descriptive terms—'spiritual tyranny', 'idolatry', 'corruption', human fabrications', 'false religion'—were not empirical terms but deeply normative theological concepts. Rather than reflecting the factual condition of late medieval Europe, the framework of Christian freedom filtered out certain facts, construed these in particular ways, and thus produced descriptions of the Church as an abysmal failure to live up to genuine biblical norms.

The Theory of the Two Kingdoms

According to the Reformers, it was insanity to think that priests were a superior spiritual estate with the authority to rule the temporal estate. All men lived in the spiritual and the temporal sphere at the same time. Entering the domain of political theology, Luther described these spheres as two kingdoms, 'the temporal, which governs with the sword and is visible; and the spiritual, which governs solely with grace and with the forgiveness of sins'. The spiritual kingdom, where Christ rules in the hearts of men, Luther asserted, we cannot see, 'because it consists only in faith and will continue until the last day'.[50] The political theology of the two kingdoms had been born.[51]

Luther liked to remind the believers of the fact that the temporal world is the kingdom ruled by Satan, the dominion of darkness from which we can be delivered only by the light of the Holy Spirit. The other spiritual world is the Kingdom of Christ, to which only God's grace can bring us. These two are bitterly opposed to one another, he wrote in *The Bondage of the Will* (1525), and the children of Adam and all of humanity are divided into two classes corresponding to the kingdoms.[52]

On the one hand, there are those belonging to the kingdom of God, 'all the true believers, who are in Christ and under Christ, for Christ is King and Lord in the kingdom of God'.[53] On the other hand, there are those who belong to the kingdom of the world. This is the majority of humankind. In this present life on earth, the masses are and will always be un-Christian and wicked. True Christians belong to the spiritual kingdom since they have turned from the carnal to the spiritual. They are saints, who have completed the process of conversion. But here on earth, fallible human beings cannot possibly see who is a saint and who is not. The spiritual kingdom is invisible. Therefore, in this earthly life, we have to accept that all live in the two kingdoms at the same time.

This split corresponded to two realms within the human being. Luther's entire account of Christian freedom was structured in terms of the twofold nature of the human being, spiritual and bodily. As he said, the opposition between these two spheres of human nature is commonly referred to as that between the soul and the flesh, or that

between the inner and the outer man.[54] The soul alone is affected by the growth of faith; the flesh is intrinsically corrupt. In it, the inner man meets a contrary will 'which strives to serve the world and seeks its own advantage', and this will must be held in check and conformed to faith.[55] True Christians would eventually succeed in disciplining their flesh but they are few and far between. Therefore, the body should always be subject to the coercive laws of human authority.

In a chapter on Christian freedom in the *Institutes* (1559), Calvin drew the same distinction between the spiritual and the temporal jurisdiction. The former pertains the life of the soul; the latter the present life. The former resides in the inner mind; the latter regulates outward behaviour. 'The one we may call the spiritual kingdom, the other, the political kingdom.'[56] Luther's views expressed in *On Temporal Authority* (1523) built on the same foundation. Like all kingdoms and governments, he says, both of the kingdoms that divide human existence need their own laws and statutes. Christian freedom implies that human laws can never rule over the soul. Therefore, the laws of temporal authority extend only to life and property and external affairs on earth.[57] Human ordinances, Luther continued, are limited to the earthly life and the external dealings that men have with each other. This was the theory of the two kingdoms, which would play a central role throughout the Protestant world.

It said that God alone should rule in the spiritual sphere and, in matters concerning the salvation of the soul, only His Word should be taught. It is foolish to try and compel anyone to believe this or that, for God alone can know, judge, condemn, and change the souls of men. Faith is a free act. Human force has no role to play here.[58] An important theological justification for this freedom of the soul from human judgement was the belief that all humans are equally fallible and sinful. There is no privileged class to guide the believers to salvation. As fallible beings, we cannot possibly show others the way to heaven. This would be like a judge who blindly decides cases, which he can neither see nor hear.

In the temporal kingdom, on the contrary, human authority should not be questioned. The flesh has to be constrained by strict laws and severe punishment. If not, chaos will defeat order. People will pursue self-interest without being concerned about their fellow human

beings in any way. They will kill, rob, and rape. In this earthly sphere, then, force *is* the legitimate instrument.

Importantly, the distinction between the two kingdoms did not entail some general separation of church and state. Luther and his followers viewed the temporal government as a divine order and Calvin suggested that church and state should assist each other in fulfilling their divine obligations.[59] Rather, the point was that secular authorities could not rule over the spiritual kingdom, which belonged exclusively to our Lord in heaven. Many activities of the church took place in the temporal sphere and here the secular authorities could very much assist the churches. The princes and magistrates were called on to punish any practice that went beyond the purely spiritual.

The Praxis of the Two Kingdoms

The theology of the two kingdoms would have enormous impact upon the development of Western political thought in centuries to come. It became the conceptual framework within which Protestant leaders and thinkers addressed many political issues confronting them. Not surprisingly, the location of the border between the two kingdoms was to become a principal issue in the clashes between different Christian groups.

In the free imperial city of Nürnberg, for instance, a debate took place that illustrated the issues at stake. During the second half of the 1520s, the major part of this city's population, including its clerics, laymen, and city council, had become advocates of the Protestant Reformation. However, when the city council began to impose a new orthodoxy and church order on the citizens, one of its members, Georg Frölich, objected in the name of religious freedom. He argued this freedom had been denied by the city council to the Anabaptist community. In 1530, this gave rise to a brief controversy on the question 'whether secular government has the right to wield the sword in matters of faith'.[60]

Frölich began by noting that there is no end to the executions and banishments for reasons of faith. Lutheran and Zwinglian governments refused to tolerate Anabaptists, while the 'papists' burn, hang, or banish Lutherans, Zwinglians, Anabaptists, and everyone else who is not of their faith.[61] It was obvious to Frölich that

the Roman Catholic Church was inspired to persecution by its 'worthless' canon law. In contrast, the Reformation had shown that the New Testament made Christians free from all spiritual laws. It speaks of two kingdoms on earth: 'The spiritual kingdom is the kingdom of Christ in which Christ is king. Similarly, the secular realm also has its king, namely the emperor and other authorities. Just as each kingdom has its own distinct king, so each has its own distinct sceptre, goal, and end.'[62] The sceptre of the spiritual realm was the Word of God; the sceptre of the secular realm the sword.

This distinction showed that the secular government ought never to force any person to accept a particular faith. On the contrary, Christ had forbidden this in the Parable of the Tares,[63] where He revealed that the sword of the secular government should not be used to root heretics out of His kingdom (Matthew 13:24–30 [KJB]). The sum and substance of the matter, Frölich continued, was that a secular government must leave it entirely to Christ to determine and judge whether any teaching about faith is true or false. He needs no assistance from the temporal authority. This authority could use its sword or sceptre only in the secular realm, against external misdeeds such as harming the bodies or goods of other persons. The temporal sword could never succeed at forcing people to adhere to some faith. You could hang or drown them, but the choice to go to heaven or hell had to be left to them.[64]

In a period when the threat of rebellion was invoked as a reason for transgressing upon Christ's spiritual kingdom, Frölich insisted that the secular powers should respect the boundaries between the two realms of life. Thus, the distinction between the secular and the spiritual began to give shape to the political debates concerning religious toleration in this period. Importantly, Frölich's opponents in Nürnberg and elsewhere never questioned the notion of the two kingdoms. As one of them wrote, they all agreed that 'no human ordinance can possibly extend as far as heaven, over God, angels, souls, consciences, or anything on earth that no one can either see or hear, but solely to earth over the external dealings of men with one another which men can see, know, judge, condemn, or absolve'.[65] However, these parties disagreed as to the nature of the separation between the spiritual and the temporal. The German theologian Johannes Brenz, for instance, argued it was indeed true that secular

government should not punish faith, since faith was located in the hearts and consciences of men. But, he continued, one has to make a distinction 'between true or false faith on the one hand and the works and deeds of true or false faith on the other'.[66] Public behaviour based on faith clearly belonged to the temporal realm and its external matters. Therefore, the secular magistrate could wield the sword to curb false doctrine and worship among his subjects, whenever these entailed public crimes. One of the Nürnberg clerics agreed that 'teaching, preaching, the use of ceremonies, etc., are all external, and God's kingdom does not depend on them, even though they hinder or promote it'.[67] Hence, the government should control these aspects of life.

The disagreement in such controversies concerned *the location of the boundary* between the spiritual and the temporal. From one perspective, the spiritual sphere of freedom encompassed all matters related to faith. Therefore, groups such as the Anabaptists should always be left free by the secular authorities to believe and worship as they please. From the other perspective, all external manifestations of faith *belonged to the temporal sphere* and should therefore be disciplined by the secular authority and its coercive legal system. Such a standpoint could well entail punishment of the Anabaptist community whenever it practised its faith out in the open.[68]

This split of perspectives allows us to account for an internal tension within the Protestant Reformation. The theology of Christian freedom claimed that it was God's will that all believers should be free from human authority in the spiritual realm of religion. Importantly, it constituted a *normative* framework, which told any secular authority that it *ought not to* interfere in the religious realm or the spiritual kingdom. Each conscience *ought to be* left free from human interference. From this, it appeared to follow that religious toleration was the duty of all states and religious freedom the right of all men. Given the Reformation's own tendencies towards intolerance and persecution, how could it lie at the root of these principles of toleration and religious freedom?

The fact that early Reformers proclaimed Christian freedom as God's gift to humanity does not tell us much about its scope. Luther and Calvin insisted that this freedom was limited to the spiritual realm. Many types of blasphemy, heresy, and idolatry, they added, extended

far beyond that realm and could not be tolerated. The distinction between private religious belief and the public practice and propagation of falsehood allowed for this. So, even though spiritual freedom was proclaimed as God's gift to humanity, this principle could be interpreted in various ways and its scope could shift in different directions.

The political theology of the two kingdoms formulated by the Reformers had a long theological history. The main point of the story told in this chapter has been to show how Christianity divided the world into two separate realms. Its conception of faith as a process of conversion to God was structured by the division between soul and body, between spirit and flesh, between the invisible and the visible. This corresponded to a partition of human social life into the spiritual and the temporal. As souls or spirits, human beings live in the eternal kingdom of heaven. As bodies, we live in the temporal kingdom of earth.

When monastic Christianity crafted conversion as *the* Christian way of life, this was conceptualized in terms of a turning away from the carnal to the spiritual realm. The process gave spiritual liberty to the priests of the Roman Catholic Church. This liberty, in turn, imparted them with spiritual authority and a higher position in the medieval hierarchy. After the Papal Reform of the twelfth century, the process of conversion became the foundation to distinguish between the spiritual estate of clerics and the temporal estate of laymen.

All this changed dramatically once the Protestant Reformation unleashed its forces on the European continent. Every Christian was to go through the process of conversion, the Reformers insisted, and all believers were priests. Therefore, all possessed the precious treasure of Christian liberty. This transformed the distinction between the two spheres in a way that would affect Western political thought for centuries to come. The spiritual kingdom became the sphere of liberty or freedom. True religion demanded freedom of the soul from the idolatry of human works and laws. The sinful body, in contrast, was to remain subject to human secular authority and its coercive laws. As a consequence, the temporal kingdom turned into the realm of law and coercion.

The structural similarities between this political theology of the two kingdoms and the contemporary liberal model of religious toleration

and the secular state are striking. Both divide human existence and society into two spheres, one of politics and another of religion. In the first sphere, human beings are subject to the laws of the secular authorities; the second is a sphere of freedom where the individual conscience can live according to its own religious beliefs and values. Both are also normative frameworks: they tell us that the political and the religious ought to be separated and that each human being ought to possess freedom of conscience. However, in themselves, such structural similarities cannot establish that the liberal model of secularism and religious toleration is a secular translation of the political theology of the two kingdoms. One could just as well point out the many differences between these two conceptual models to argue the opposite.

Yet, the fundamental problems faced by the liberal model's division of society into two separate spheres do indicate a connection. In the Protestant theology of Christian freedom and the two kingdoms, the distinction between the two spheres was relatively clear and coherent, because it could rely on clusters of other beliefs shared by Christian communities. Different clerics and rulers disagreed about the scope of the two kingdoms, but they all knew what they were referring to when they discussed these two, because they shared a common framework. It was very clear that the opposition between the secular and the religious was an internal Christian distinction. It even made sense to speak of 'a Christian secular government'.[69] If the notion of the two kingdoms were to be extracted from this theological framework and reformulated in secular terms as though it concerned a neutral rational distinction, this would lead to intractable conceptual problems. One would no longer be able to refer to the shared theological background that lent sense and significance to this distinction. It would have to become a pre-theoretical given, never to be questioned. The following two chapters shall examine two questions: Did this indeed happen in the centuries following the Protestant Reformation? If it did, how did this secularization of political theology unfold itself?

Notes

1   Anonymous (1688b), p. 17.

2   Bethke Elshtain (2008), pp. 29–55; Morris (1989), p. 17.

3   See Markus (1988) and (1990).

4   Ladner (1967); Morrison (1992); Tellenbach (1993), pp. 102–3.

5   Augustine (2000), p. 13.

6   Morrison (1992), p. 29.

7   P. King (1999), p. 76, p. 96, p. 387.

8   See the description of this process in Balagangadhara (2005b).

9   Augustine (1995a), p. 91.

10   Tellenbach (1993), p. 106.

11   Augustine (2000), p. 20

12   Ladner (1967), p. 31; Morrison (1992), p. 75.

13   Augustine (1995b), p. 472.

14   Tellenbach (1991), pp. 4–5.

15   Bethke Elshtain (2008), pp. 45–7.

16   See Berman (1983); Morris (1989), pp. 98–9; Tellenbach (1991), p. 164.

17   P. King (1999), pp. 103–58.

18   See Berman (1983); Kuttner (1980).

19   Tellenbach (1993), p. 128.

20   Tellenbach (1991), p. 41.

21   Excerpted in Tierney (1964), p. 42.

22   Tellenbach (1991), p. 134.

23   Tellenbach (1991), p. 111, p. 126; see also Tierney (1964), p. 40.

24   See the letter by Pope Gregory VII to the Bishop of Metz, justifying his deed of deposing and excommunicating King Henry IV, excerpted in Tierney (1964), pp. 69–70.

25   Berman (1983), p. 83.

26   Similar points are made by S.D. Smith (2010), pp. 112–17 and by Stolzenberg (2007), pp. 30–1.

27   Hugh of Saint Victor, *De Sacramentis Christinae Fidei*, excerpted in Tierney (1964), pp. 94–5.

28   Elm (1993), p. 13; Moore (1987), p. 19; Moore (1994), p. 69; Moore (1995), p. 27; Thayer (2002).

29   Glover (1984), p. 21; Reventlow (1984), pp. 23–7; Moore (1987), p. 21.

30   Glover (1984), pp. 45–6.

31   See Luther's early text, *The Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), in Luther (1989).

32   Luther (1989), p. 414.

33   Calvin (1960), vol. 1, p. 13.

34   Calvin (1960), vol. 1, pp. 35–6.

35   Calvin (1960), vol. 1, p. 289, pp. 294–7.

36   Luther (1989), p. 600.

37   Karant-Nunn (1997), p. 40.

38   Calvin, *Commentaries on Genesis I* (part 25, § 12).

39   Luther (1989), p. 607.
40   Melanchthon (1969), p. 123.
41   Luther (1989), p. 621.
42   Calvin (1960), vol. 2, p. 1486.
43   Luther (1989), p. 12, pp. 14–15.
44   Luther (1989), p. 608.
45   For example, see Luther's *Avoiding the Doctrines of Men* (1522) in Luther (1999), vol. 35.
46   Cited in Ozment (1991), p. 58.
47   Calvin (1960), vol. 2, pp. 1180–1.
48   Calvin (1960), vol. 2, pp. 1180–6.
49   Melanchthon (1969), pp. 67–8.
50   Luther (1989), p. 138.
51   For analysis, see Witte (2002), pp. 89–99.
52   Luther (1989), p. 218.
53   Luther (1989), p. 662.
54   Luther (1989), p. 596.
55   Luther (1989), p. 611.
56   Calvin (1960), vol. 1, p. 847. This basic doctrine of the two kingdoms returned in many of Calvin's works; see Vandrunen (2004).
57   Luther (1989), p. 683.
58   Luther (1989), pp. 680–8.
59   Hamburger (2002), pp. 22–3.
60   See Estes (1994).
61   Estes (1994), p. 41.
62   Estes (1994), pp. 42–3.
63   In the Parable of the Tares, Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to a field where a man sowed good wheat seeds while his enemy sowed tares. When his servants want to remove the tares immediately, the man suggests that they should wait until harvest time, when the reapers will first gather and burn the tares and then gather the wheat and stack it in his barn. In the history of Christianity, this Parable has often been understood as an instruction to tolerate heretics here on earth: it is only at the time of the Last Judgement that heretics should be separated from true believers.
64   Estes (1994), pp. 44–5.
65   Estes (1994), p. 94.
66   Estes (1994), p. 55.
67   Estes (1994), p. 83.

68   It is often suggested that the confrontation with seditious Anabaptists had Luther change his views about the two kingdoms drastically: he now backed the *Staatskirchentum* (state-churchdom). However, David Whitford (2004) cogently argues there was no such radical change in the Reformer's political thought. He continued to support the theology of the two kingdoms, but argued that the princes could punish the Anabaptists because these challenged secular authority.

69   Frölich in Estes (1994), p. 53.