[*PCS* 2 (2017–2018) 87–108]

TWO KINGDOMS FOR TODAY: LUTHER FOR POST-CHRISTENDOM POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Joshua L. W. Heath
Trinity College, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada

Western nations have undergone profound changes in recent decades. It has been said that "we are currently living through one of the transforming moments in the history of religion worldwide."[1] For centuries, European and European-derived civilizations, in particular North America, have been overwhelmingly Christian, both in population and in self-perception. Christendom, that synthesis of church and political structures, dominated Europe for over a thousand years. Two world wars left European civilization gutted and the modernist dream in tatters, and in the years after the Second World War Christianity declined substantially.[2] Today Europe is largely secular, and Christendom is hardly more than a memory except in perhaps a few select areas. In Canada, the dissolution of Christendom is more recent, but while a majority of Canadians still identify as Christians, there is a trajectory away from Christendom self-identity. The situation in the United States is slightly more complicated, but also appears to be moving in a similar direction, away from a Christian self-identity and towards a post-Christendom future.[3]

In the context of such dramatic cultural and social changes, Christians have been forced to wrestle with how they are to relate their faith to societal and political realities. As the systems of Christendom were discarded or dismantled, the old ways of relating to the political processes became obsolete. Many voices from across the spectrum of Christian tradition have contributed to the

1. Jenkins, *Next Christendom*, 1.
2. Torpey, "A (Post) Secular Age?" 288.
3. Carter, *Rethinking*, 173.

process of rethinking what it means to be the church in a post-Christian context. This article is part of that conversation. From the popular level to academia, there have been numerous influential and articulate proposals building on two of the great Protestant traditions: Reformed and Anabaptist. Yet, when it comes to the instigator of the Reformation, the passionate and brilliant monk-turned-reformer Martin Luther, there has been relatively little constructive work done on how his theology might illuminate and inform Christian living in a post-Christendom political environment. Not only that, but it is common to dismiss Luther as dualistic and thereby responsible for everything from a harmful sacred-secular divide to, occasionally, Hitler's Third Reich.[4] This article contends, on the other hand, that Luther's vision of the relationship between the Christian life and the political sphere, explicated in what has come to be called his two kingdoms theology, actually provides a way forward for the church in a post-Christendom context.

The first section of this article examines contemporary post-Christendom approaches. Two traditions in particular, the Reformed and the Anabaptist, have made substantial contributions to a Christian vision for political engagement. The Reformed tradition has provided a rich vision for cultural engagement and transformation, while the Anabaptist tradition has warned against the dangers of the Christendom coordination of church and coercive power. Both have their limitations, however: the former lacks a clear distinction between the violence of politics and the kingdom of God, while the latter lacks a paradigm for Christian participation in government. In light of these limitations, Luther's two kingdoms offers a way forward. The next section outlines Luther's two kingdoms theology. It sketches in broad strokes the fundamental elements and tensions of the two kingdoms, beginning with the tension between Matt 5 and Rom 13. It outlines the various distinctions Luther makes; between the ends and means of the kingdoms, between the realms of authorities of the kingdoms, and between the person and the office. Each of these distinctions maintains the tension in Luther's theology that

4. An example of the latter is Wiener's *Martin Luther*.

are crucial to the two kingdoms. At the same time there is a unifying force in that both kingdoms belong to God, and Christians are never free to retreat into an ecclesiastical ghetto, but rather should live out their calling and vocation in the world. The final section synthesizes the material in the first two sections, showing how Luther's two kingdoms provides a way for Christians to maintain a nonviolent ecclesiology while simultaneously engaging with the world of politics. This section provides three ways in which Luther's two kingdoms helps clarify Christian engagement in a post-Christendom world. First, it reminds Christians that political engagement must come from a place of service, instead of selfishness. Second, it calls Christians to seek solutions through the political process, rather than seeing politics as a savior. Third, it helps to avoid the danger of social disengagement on the one hand, and the danger of confusing the ends and means of the kingdoms on the other. It concludes that Luther's two kingdoms theology provides a way forward for political engagement after Christendom by providing a way for the church to be the church while at the same time enabling Christians to serve in the political arena. In this way Luther's two kingdoms avoids the extremes of civic disengagement on the one hand, and a return to a Christendom synthesis on the other.

Post-Christendom Approaches

In the twentieth and twenty-first century, the shifting sands of culture, blowing in the wind of history, have forced Christians to seek after solid ground. In the process they have unearthed some productive and valuable veins of thought, which have subsequently been mined for the enrichment of the Christian community as a whole. This article does not have the space to document the incredible value that has been added to the church's understanding of its mission and identity by these excavations. This section offers a critique of the conversation thus far, and leaves it to the reader to pursue the many riches according to their own

interests.[5] The post-Christendom conversation in recent years has been dominated by two traditions, the Anabaptist and the Reformed. Both traditions have provided essential critiques of past and present mistakes while at the same time making timely contributions to a vision of Christian communal life and cultural engagement. As the church has emerged from Christendom, one thing has been agreed on by virtually every commentator: that whatever one thinks of Christendom in principle, there were, over the centuries, various abuses and failures. From forced conversions to the burning of heretics, these failures usually centered on the use of violence. This violence was typically not carried out by the church directly. In most cases, the violence was carried out by the government authorities. The church, because of the enormous influence it wielded within a Christendom structure, was able to bring the sword of the state down upon its enemies. For this, it is quite clear, the church ought to repent. Now, of course, the church's relationship to the state has changed, and Christians are looking for guidance as they find their footing in a strange new world. How should the church relate to the government? How should the church relate to the violence of government? These questions do not have simple answers but they are of crucial importance in a post-Christendom world.

Probably one of the most influential and productive streams of thought in recent years, when it comes to political and cultural engagement, has come out of the Reformed tradition. The Reformed vision as it is usually articulated today is a vision for transformative cultural engagement. This vision is a central tenet of what is sometimes called neo-Calvinism, and it has been incredibly influential. One author has called it perhaps the most eloquent voice in "contemporary conversations about Christianity and culture."[6] One of the primary concerns of neo-Calvinism is avoiding dualisms that divide life into sacred and secular

5. Such a reading list might include works such as Ronald Sider's *The Scandal of Evangelical Politics*, John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus*, Michael Frost's *Exiles*, H. Richard Niebuhr's classic, *Christ and Culture*, and Craig Carter's *Rethinking Christ and Culture*.

6. VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 16.

realms. The neo-Calvinist emphasizes that Jesus is Lord of all creation, across every area of life. The kingdom of God is here and God is restoring creation, including its civil institutions, to their original intention. The cultural mandate of Gen 1:26–28, a central text for neo-Calvinism, gives authentic import to all creative and cultural pursuits, from the arts to civil politics. Though the fall introduced dysfunction and sin into everything humans do, that original calling is being restored as the kingdom of God grows and spreads.

One of the important contributions of the neo-Calvinist vision is that it affirms the value of human cultural pursuits, and relates them to the Christian calling. The physical, the earthly, and the human are given a place of true value, as they should be. However, the primary limitation of neo-Calvinism perhaps stems from its reaction to dualism. In reaction to those who drew a line between "spiritual" and "secular" work in such a way that it demeaned human cultural activity, the neo-Calvinist model casts out all forms of dualism, adopting, not in name but in practice, a form of monism. All human cultural activity is subsumed under the category of the kingdom of God, including the work of civil government. One of the central aspects of the neo-Calvinist vision is that "the kingdom of God extended to every aspect of life in the original creation and that this kingdom is being restored in the present age in each of these aspects, including the work of the civil state."[7] The problem, of course, lies in the fact that the government as it exists post-fall is inherently coercive—meaning, it relies on violence or the threat thereof. When civil government is incorporated within the kingdom of God, and no distinction is made out of fear of instituting a sacred-secular divide, there is nothing restraining the Christian from wielding the coercive power of the state to bring the culture into conformity with the values of the kingdom of God by force. In fact, according to this view it is the purpose of Christians and the church to be "God's instruments in the renewal or transformation of society into the kingdom of God"—including the civil authorities.[8] It is

7. VanDrunen, "The Two Kingdoms Doctrine," 743.
8. Tuininga, *Calvin's Political Theology*, 13.

in light of this transformational vision without exception or limitation that Troeltsch argued that Calvinism "sought to make the whole of Society, down to the smallest detail, a real expression of the royal domain of Christ."[9] The church's mission, then, includes guiding the hand of the state as it wields the sword of violence. Yet this is precisely the arrangement that led to some of the greatest failures of the Christendom era. Neo-Calvinism offers a profound vision of cultural engagement, but its fear of dualism does not allow it to draw enough of a distinction between the kingdom of God and the violence of the state.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Anabaptist traditions draw very clear distinctions between the kingdom of God and the violence of the state. For the Anabaptists, the form of God's rule is revealed in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The nature of this rule is "neither coercive nor externally triumphal—it is visibly characterized by the story of the cross."[10] The coercive nature of the political system as it operates in a post-fall world is therefore antithetical to the nature of the kingdom of God. Historically, the Anabaptists agreed with Luther that all governing authorities are "*of* God and therefore *under* God, not the devil."[11] However, the Anabaptists did not distinguish between the state of Rom 13 and the state of Rev 13 with respect to divine institution; that is, they did not distinguish between just and unjust, legal or illegal forms of political authority.[12] In light of the state's involvement in Christ's crucifixion, the Anabaptists concluded that the state belongs to the order of sin, identifying the state with the "world" of Johannine literature.[13]

While a recurring theme of the Reformed tradition in recent years has been a concern for eliminating the false dualism between sacred and secular, a prominent theme in the Anabaptist tradition is a concern for recovering a pre-Christendom vision of ecclesiology. Criticism of the Constantinian shift is a hallmark of

9. Troeltsch, *Social Teaching*, 622.
10. Kroeker, "O'Donovan's Christendom," 45.
11. Bauman, "Luther and the Anabaptists," 45.
12. Bauman, "Luther and the Anabaptists," 45.
13. Bauman, "Luther and the Anabaptists," 46.

contemporary Anabaptist political thought. For Anabaptists the problem with Christendom is not a matter of isolated abuses, but a matter of the church's fundamental identity. Contemporary Anabaptists develop a vision for Church life that attempts to be faithful to the nonviolent politics of Jesus. If Constantinianism represents "the fall of the church from its calling as servant into the libidinous desire for historical mastery and political domination," then the Anabaptist goal is to recover the church's self-sacrificial servant identity.[14] Typically this means Christians cannot participate in government insofar as it requires them to participate in coercion. At the same time, it means that the church ought not to have an institutional connection to the government so that it participates as a body in the coercive practices of the state. This does not necessarily exclude participation in the political process, but does limit it.

It has been noted that "Anabaptists shared many of Luther's presuppositions, but few of his conclusions."[15] The Anabaptist movement has historically held to a conception of the nature and role of church and government that is remarkably similar to that of Luther's two kingdoms.[16] This is reflected today in authors such as Ronald Sider, who argues that Christians "must understand that the church and the state are two separate institutions," and though "their interests and agendas frequently intersect . . . their respective spheres of authority and actions must remain clearly distinct."[17] Where they differ is in how the Christian is to participate in those institutions. Specifically, they differ on whether or not Christians are free to serve in government. Luther says they can. Anabaptists say that they cannot. Luther took very seriously the church's servant identity and its nonviolent nature, as will be seen in the following section. For this reason, much of Anabaptist ecclesiology is consistent with Luther's two kingdoms theology. The limitation of the Anabaptist approach is found in its pacifism. For Christians who are not pacifist, the

14. Kroeker, "O'Donovan's Christendom," 42.
15. Bauman, "Luther and the Anabaptists," 44.
16. Halteman, "Anabaptist Approaches," 247.
17. Sider, *Scandal*, 238.

Anabaptist tradition offers a rich vision for Christian life as an alternative community, but it does not provide a paradigm for Christian political participation. For the Christian who believes that the church is called to nonviolent service, but at the same time does not see in Jesus' call a categorical prohibition of violence in all circumstances, the Anabaptist tradition falls short.

Luther's Two Kingdoms

We now turn to Luther's two kingdoms, to examine how it might provide a way forward for the contemporary discussion. Luther articulated his two kingdoms paradigm in a time of crisis for the medieval world. The reformation he started spread across a Europe ravaged by plague, famine, rebellion, and the looming threat of Turkish invasion.[18] In the sixteenth century Christendom was well-established. At the peak of its influence in the twelfth century, the papacy asserted its power over imperial authorities, arguing that the pope had been "entrusted with the two swords, temporal and spiritual."[19] The temporal sword he bestowed on the secular ruler, which he was to use to serve the ends of the pope, who also bestowed upon him his position as emperor.[20] By the sixteenth century, temporal powers had asserted a measure of independence from ecclesial authorities; England and France both refused, in different ways, to grant particular elements of papal control.[21] David Knowles observes that "in practice rulers everywhere erected practical barriers against ecclesiastical pretensions."[22] Still, in theory, the temporal authorities were under the authority of the pope, and were to work together with the ecclesial authorities for the good of the church.

Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms addresses the apparent contradiction between biblical injunctions such as Christ's

18. For an excellent examination of the life and times of Martin Luther, see Oberman, *Luther*. For a broad and detailed overview of the event of the Reformation, see Lindberg, *The European Reformations*.

19. Knowles, "Church and State," 10.

20. Knowles, "Church and State," 10.

21. Knowles, "Church and State," 11.

22. Knowles, "Church and State," 11.

commandment in Matt 5 to love one's enemies and not resist an evildoer, and the practice of Christians participating in the office of temporal power.[23] Luther is concerned to "provide a firm basis for the civil law and sword," and goes on to argue that it is established by God's will and ordained by God.[24] He does this on the basis of passages such as Rom 13:1–7 and 1 Pet 2:13–14, in which Christians are called to be subject to the authorities. Romans 13, in particular, posits that "the authorities that exist have been established by God," that the authorities are "God's servants," who "do not bear the sword for no reason," and that they are "agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer" (Rom 13:1, 4 NIV).[25] At the same time, he recognizes that Matt 5, Rom 12:9, 1 Pet 3, and similar passages give the appearance that the New Testament Christians were not to wield the temporal sword.[26] The two kingdoms address that tension.

Luther starts with the kingdom of God. Christ reigns as king and Lord over the kingdom of God, which is made up of true believers, in Christ and under Christ's Lordship.[27] These people have no need of a temporal sword over them, because they have the Holy Spirit, who, Luther proclaims, "both teaches and makes them to do injustice to no one, to love everyone, and to suffer injustice and even death willingly and cheerfully at the hands of anyone."[28] Crucially, as Svend Anderson notes, using a Habermasian term, "the spiritual project is power-free."[29] Perhaps more clearly, the spiritual project is free of all coercive power. If everyone were Christian, there would only be one

23. Luther, "Temporal Authority," 45:81.

24. Luther, "Temporal Authority," 45:85. He adds, "So no one will doubt that it is in the world by God's will and ordinance" ("Temporal Authority," 45:85).

25. Genesis 9:6, wherein God declares that "whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed," also plays a significant role in Luther's argument that the temporal sword is sanctioned by God within scripture ("Temporal Authority," 45:86).

26. Luther, "Temporal Authority," 45:87.

27. Luther, "Temporal Authority," 45:88.

28. Luther, "Temporal Authority," 45:89.

29. Anderson, "Lutheran Political Theology," 112.

kingdom, with Christ the ruler of all, ruled by grace. Coercion on any level would be unnecessary. But such is not the case, and for this reason, Luther proposes that God has provided another government beyond the spiritual government of the kingdom of God, subject to the sword and under the law.[30] This government is ordained by God in order to restrain sin and keep the world from being reduced to chaos.[31] Luther summarizes the purpose of the two kingdoms as such: "God has ordained two governments: the spiritual, by which the Holy Spirit produces Christians and righteous people under Christ; and the temporal, which restrains the un-Christian and wicked so that—no thanks to them—they are obliged to keep still and to maintain an outward peace."[32] Luther is adamant that both are essential, so long as there are both Christians and non-Christians.[33]

Luther interprets Matt 5 and related passages to mean that the sword has no place in Christ's kingdom, since Christ rules over Christians by the Holy Spirit.[34] Having established this, he addresses Rom 13:1–7 by noting that, though for Christians the temporal government is not essential, they serve the governing authority for the sake of others.[35] Though Christ forbids the use of the temporal sword or law among Christians themselves, Luther notes "that he does not, however, forbid one to serve and be subject to those who do not have the secular sword and law."[36] Hence, he concludes that Christians, if they are called or see a need, ought to serve in the temporal government out of love for neighbor: "In what concerns you and yourself according

30. Luther, "Temporal Authority," 45:90.

31. Luther suggests that "if this were not so, men would devour one another, seeing that the whole world is evil and that among thousands there is scarcely a single true Christian" ("Temporal Authority," 45:91).

32. Luther, "Temporal Authority," 45:91.

33. Luther, "Temporal Authority," 45:92. Luther observes that both produce a kind of righteousness: one becomes righteous in the sight of God by means of "Christ's spiritual government," but for those outside the kingdom of God, at the very least external acts of wickedness are restrained ("Temporal Authority," 45:92).

34. Luther, "Temporal Authority," 45:93.

35. Luther, "Temporal Authority," 45:94.

36. Luther, "Temporal Authority," 45:95.

to love and tolerate no injustice toward yourself as a true Christian," Luther instructs, but "in what concerns the person or property of others, you govern according to love and tolerate no injustice toward your neighbor."[37] Therefore, Christ's command in Matt 5:39, "do not resist an evil person" applies only to Christians in that they must not use violence for their own welfare, while Christians are at the same time encouraged to use the law through legitimate means for the good of the public.[38]

Having established the need for two kingdoms on a biblical basis, Luther goes on to draw some crucial distinctions that guide the Christian's participation in the two kingdoms. First, Luther draws a distinction between the person and the office.[39] The spiritual government rules according to the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God; Christ is the ultimate example of service in this office.[40] The person serving in the office of the church therefore ought to lead the church as Christ leads the church. The temporal government, on the other hand, rules according to principles of coercion, using means that sometimes do not, in and of themselves, seem like works of love.[41] However, these actions are authorized by God to restrain evil and preserve a measure of peace. Luther compares the apparent incongruity of the distinction between person and office to a doctor who commits acts of violence against a limb to save the body.[42]

Second, Luther draws distinctions between the ends of the two kingdoms—on the one hand, the salvation of humanity, on the other, good governance and the restriction of wickedness;

37. Luther, "Temporal Authority," 45:96.

38. Beeke, "Was There a Time," 204.

39. Luther, "Whether Soldiers," 46:94.

40. Luther, "Temporal Authority," 45:100.

41. Luther, "Whether Soldiers," 46:96. Law enforcement and legitimate military action are the two prominent cases.

42. Luther, "Whether Soldiers," 46:96–97. Luther is brutally realistic about the tool available to the temporal kingdom to assert its rule: "its tool is not a wreath of roses or a flower of love, but a naked sword" ("Open Letter," 46:70). Still, Luther is always consistent in insisting that the sword only ever be turned "against the wicked, to hold them in check and keep them at peace, and to protect and save the righteous" ("Open Letter," 46:70).

between the means of the kingdoms, which are governed according to the temporal sword or the spiritual sword; and between the realms over which the kingdoms exercise legitimate authority.[43] Luther never gives the temporal government unlimited authority; rather, he argues that their authority extends only to "life and property and external affairs on earth," things such as taxes, honor, and the restraint of evil.[44] According to Luther, the realm of the soul, conscience, and orthodoxy is under the authority of the church, and the church is to govern these using the spiritual sword of the Word of God.[45] Therefore bishops and church leaders are to rule in spiritual matters, while princes are to rule in temporal matters.[46] Luther is particularly concerned that the rulers rule in their respective realms, and not confuse ends and means. He was disturbed by the fact that bishops were ruling "castles, cities, lands, and people outwardly," instead of "ruling souls inwardly by God's word."[47] Similarly, he expressed disgust with the temporal princes who failed to govern the lands and institute justice, and instead tried to establish a spiritual rule over souls."[48] It is especially important for Luther, given his conflict with the Roman church authorities, that he establish that heresy is firmly in the realm of the spiritual authorities, and not a matter for the temporal authorities.[49] Temporal authorities should not use the sword to enforce matters of doctrine. Luther proclaims that "we should overcome heretics with books, not with fire, as the ancient fathers did."[50]

43. Korey Maahs notes that the distinction between the realms does not mean that there is an "unbridgeable chasm" between them, since "not only is God himself the King who rules in each kingdom, but so also the Christian lives simultaneously as a citizen in each" ("Paradox," 60).

44. Luther, "Temporal Authority," 45:105–11.

45. Luther, "Temporal Authority," 45:105–06, 114–05.

46. Luther, "Christian Nobility," 44:145.

47. Luther, "Temporal Authority," 45:109.

48. Luther, "Temporal Authority," 45:109.

49. Luther, "Temporal Authority," 45:114.

50. Luther, "Christian Nobility," 44:196. Luther is convinced that "heresy can never be restrained by force" ("Temporal Authority," 114). Later in his life, Luther claimed that the authorities had an obligation to suppress the Anabaptists with force, a reversal of his earlier position. Heresy, Luther argued,

The two kingdoms ought never to limit Christian engagement in politics, but rather it should provide direction for the nature of that involvement. Love, for Luther, is the basis of the Christian ethic.[51] It is for this reason that Anderson argues that the function of government, in Luther's thought, goes beyond simply the struggle against sin. Sin must be restrained because it is destructive to God's creation, human life. Love ought to compel one to take action to better the situation of one's neighbor, using legitimate political means if necessary. Luther is adamant that the temporal kingdom, which God has provided to restrain sin and hold back the chaos that would otherwise ensue, ought never to take upon itself the goal of advancing the spiritual kingdom. At the same time, neither should the church expect the temporal kingdom to forfeit the tools of coercion that God has ordained it to use. Christ-like sacrificial love governs the Christian's action in both kingdoms, but the form of that love by necessity takes different shapes.

Two Kingdoms for Today

Each of the three traditions that have been discussed in this article offer important lessons for Christians looking to engage with politics in a post-Christendom world. The discerning reader will seek to glean the best of each perspective and integrate it into his or her worldview and practice. The Reformed tradition offers a rich vision for cultural engagement. The Anabaptist tradition offers a rich vision of ecclesiology and the radical nature of the kingdom of God. Luther's two kingdoms offers a way to conceptualize the relationship between the coercive force of the government and the nonviolent nature of Christ's calling. By doing so Luther provides a way to live in peaceful ecclesiology and rigorous cultural engagement without returning to the abuses of

manifested as blasphemy, which rulers ought to punish in order to protect the faith of those they ruled.

51. It is this emphasis on the gospel freeing the human to serve their neighbor in love that ought to undermine any tendency towards social disinterestedness (Raunio, "Luther's Social Theology," 216).

Christendom. Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms is not a comprehensive political theory, and was never meant to be.[52] Rather, it provides a way of understanding the relationship between the mission of the church and the violence of the temporal government. This contribution is invaluable for any political theology that wishes to navigate the complexities of our twenty-first century, post-Christendom Western culture.

The reality of the kingdom of God has important implications that Luther's two kingdoms helps clarify. First, Luther reminds Christians to engage politics from a place of service instead of selfishness. The rise of identity politics in recent years has coincided with an increasingly fractured political arena. In the United States the gap between the political left and the political right has grown significantly. The Canadian political scene, though less binary than that of the United States, likely reflects this trend. In a highly polarized environment, politics becomes a battleground where the interests of one's own group take priority over all other interests. Politics easily becomes a zero-sum struggle for power. Luther reminds us that the church is not to use politics for its own benefit. This is a radical subversion of the way politics is often perceived. Christians can and ought to subvert political expectations, because they are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live selflessly. Augustine of Hippo argued that a Christian political service ought to come "not from a love of power, but from a sense of the duty they owe to others—not because they are proud of authority, but because they love mercy."[53] Luther is in continuity with Augustine in centering his discussion of the use of temporal authority on Christian love for neighbor. While the church is not, as an institution, integrated into the political process—neither in Luther's thought, nor in post-Christendom society—the church is a body of Christian individuals who are freed and obliged to engage politics selflessly, out of love for God and love for neighbor. It must be noted that selfless political

52. As noted above, all of Luther's overtly political writings were directed toward particular situations, and were never intended to be comprehensive works of political theory (Shoenberger, "Justifiability," 4).

53. Augustine, *City of God*, 2:323.

involvement does not, in itself, solve the thorny issues of how to address the pressing and complicated issues of our time. Luther's two kingdoms does not provide a comprehensive program of social reform. It is not designed to. Luther believes that love compels action, and a Christian who is living by the Spirit will desire to serve his or her neighbor. Luther challenges us to ensure that our hearts are in the right place when we engage in politics.

Second, Luther's two kingdoms is a call to seek solutions in politics rather than to see politics as a savior. Luther's distinction between the kingdoms is a timely reminder that the kingdom of God is not in the structures of society and government. While improving societal and governmental structures is a legitimate and indeed crucial political task, Luther's two kingdoms warns that one must not conflate that political endeavor with the advance of God's spiritual kingdom. The hope of the church is not found in politics, because the political system will always be tainted by sin. The church cannot create a perfect society through political means, nor is it called to. However, this should not stop Christians from serving their neighbors by trying to better their situation through the political systems, or by improving the political systems themselves. Again, love compels action. Luther himself leveraged his influence to try and persuade the German rulers to properly and justly exercise their office.[54] Luther's two kingdoms wards off naive utopianism on the one hand, and political passivism on the other. Put another way, distinguishing between the two kingdoms provides a means of resisting the danger of succumbing to ideological totalitarianism, while also providing grounds for resisting it. Totalitarian ideologies, like those that ravaged the twentieth century, peddle utopian visions and exhibit salvific overtones. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, ideological tyranny has receded from the public consciousness. However, there is always the temptation for the government to assume the status of savior and lord, and to reach into every area of life, commanding absolute fealty. In Luther's view, this must

54. See Luther's letter "Christian Nobility," an extended treatise on the ills of the religiopolitical situation in Germany at the time and the proper temporal response.

be opposed. Helmut Thielicke observes that temporal kingdom "must not take on sacral significance or equip itself with the dynamic . . . of a religious sense of mission. It must not become an idolatrous imitation of the kingdom of God."[55] The church should never allow itself to be subsumed into the idolatry of the state.[56] Instead, the church should prophetically call the state to account.

Luther's two kingdoms allows for clear-sighted engagement. The inherent violence of the political order does not reflect the Christian eschatological hope. Nevertheless, Luther maintains that it is ordained by God for the current time. The state is not the church, and should not be expected to behave as such. It has been given the sword by God to perform particular functions. Therefore, Christians should not attempt to abolish the use of the sword, but rather should make every effort to ensure that the sword is used justly. Luther's two kingdoms provides freedom from false expectations of government. It frees from the expectation that government will ever be perfect, because the temporal kingdom is not the kingdom of God. It frees from the expectation that government ought to be nonviolent, again, because the temporal kingdom is not the kingdom of God. It frees from the expectation that salvation will come through politics. Free from those false expectations, Christians can engage contemporary politics with a clear head, with the goal of helping government reach the standards of justice and service it is called to.

Third, Luther's two kingdoms helps to avoid the danger of extremes. On the one extreme, recognizing the reality of God's two kingdoms should offset the tendency toward political and social disengagement. Politics can be a hostile arena. At times the political process can be messy, inefficient, or completely wrong-headed. It can be tempting to give up on politics as a lost cause, and retreat to an ecclesiastical bubble, waiting for Christ to return to bring justice and peace. The Christian hope is indeed ultimately grounded in Christ's return; however, Luther stresses the obligation of the Christian to serve their neighbor through all

55. Thielicke, *Politics*, 60.
56. Grobien, "Christian Voice," 124.

legitimate means, including political. Love compels action, and the fact that both kingdoms belong to God and are established by God means that love should compel action in both kingdoms. On the other extreme, distinguishing between the means and ends of the kingdoms should mitigate the danger of Christendom-style ecclesiastical abuse of political power. Christians need to be very careful that whatever power they seek in politics is for the purpose of service, and that in their service through politics they are not confusing the kingdoms. The greatest abuses of Christian history came when the ends and means of the two kingdoms were confused. The coercive means of the government should never be used to advance the cause of the gospel. The gospel should never be used as a means to the end of governing, as an ideology, a tool for the state to maintain control. The end of social and political justice and peace should be pursued through the means of the temporal government, while the end of the spread of the gospel should be pursued using the means of the kingdom of God. Such an approach will guard against the greatest abuses of the past. A proper understanding of Luther's two kingdoms brings clarity to the discussion, and frees Christians to engage wholeheartedly in the political realm while maintaining their Christian identity and calling. Because of this, Luther's two kingdoms contributes to the church's ability to embody what William Cavanaugh calls "a different sort of politics," one which does not rely on violent coercion, serving as the "sign of God's salvation of the world" and "reminding the world of what the world still is not," while being faithful to the biblical passages that legitimize temporal authority.[57] Luther's two kingdoms allows the church to be the church, while providing a paradigm for Christian political service and engagement. In so doing, Luther's two kingdoms avoids the dangers of civic disengagement on the one hand, and the dangers of a return to Christendom coercion on the other.

57. Cavanaugh, *Migrations*, 138.

Conclusion

In our post-Christendom world, the church has been deposed from its position of privilege and power that it occupied for so long. In the last fifty years there has been a radical shift in how society views the place of the church and how the church sees its own place in relation to government. Just like Luther did during the Reformation, the church in the West finds itself in a period of change, and to a certain extent, crisis. This is an important time for Christians to think creatively about how the calling to follow Christ intersects with the world of politics and government. Through his two kingdoms theology, Luther issues a call to engage the world in love and service, as members of God's kingdom here on earth, and as servants of our neighbors through politics. This article began by outlining two major voices in the conversation surrounding post-Christendom societal engagement, the Reformed and Anabaptist traditions. Both traditions have made significant contributions, the former to a vision for cultural engagement, and the latter to a vision for ecclesiological witness. Nevertheless, there are limitations to both approaches that Luther's theology of the two kingdoms helps to overcome. Luther's two kingdoms, by distinguishing between the ends, means, and realms of the two kingdoms, by distinguishing between person and office, and by maintaining the tension between Matt 5 and Rom 13, manages to provide a way forward in a post-Christendom context. Luther reminds Christians to engage politics from a place of service rather than selfishness, he calls Christians to pursue solutions through politics, rather than to see politics as offering salvation, and charts a path that avoids the danger of political passivism on the one side, and the danger of confusing the ends and means of the two kingdoms on the other. In a post-Christendom context, Luther's two kingdoms provides a way forward for political engagement. He provides a framework for Christian action in both the spiritual and temporal realm, in the church and in politics. His two kingdoms theology provides a way to avoid disengagement from society on the one hand and Christendom synthesis and coercion on the other,

freeing Christians to love their neighbors through selfless service in both of God's kingdoms.

Bibliography

Anderson, Svend. "Can We Still Do Lutheran Political Theology?" *Studia Theologica* 67 (2013) 110–27.

Augustine. *The City of God*, edited by Marcus Dods. 2 vols. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1881.

Bauman, Clarence. "The Theology of 'The Two Kingdoms': A Comparison of Luther and the Anabaptists." *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 38 (1964) 37–49.

Beeke, Jonathon David. "Historical and Theological Studies: Martin Luther's Two Kingdoms, Law and Gospel, and the Created Order: Was There a Time When the Two Kingdoms Were Not?" *Westminster Theological Journal* 73 (2011) 191–214.

Carter, Craig A. *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006.

Cavanaugh, William T. *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.

Frost, Michael. *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture.* Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006.

Grobien, Gifford A. "The Christian Voice in the Civil Realm." *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 78 (2014) 115–30.

Halteman, James. "Anabaptist Approaches to Economics." In *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity and Economics*, edited by Paul Oslington, 245–62. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Jenkins, Philip. *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Knowles, David. "Church and State in Christian History." *Journal of Contemporary History* 2 (1967) 3–15.

Kroeker, P. Travis. "Why O'Donovan's Christendom is not Constantinian and Yoder's Volantariety is not Hobbesian: A Debate in Theological Politics Re-defined." *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 20 (2000) 41–64.

Lindberg, Carter. *The European Reformations*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996.

Luther, Martin. "An Open Letter on the Harsh Book against the Peasants." In *Luther's Works,* edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman, 46:57–86. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967.

———. "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed." In *Luther's Works,* edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman, 45:75–130. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967.

———. "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation." In *Luther's Works,* edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman, 44:123–218. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967.

———. "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved." In *Luther's Works,* edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman, 46:87–137. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967.

Maahs, Korey D. "A Lutheran View of Life and Learning: Paradox as Paradigm." In *Liberal Learning and the Great Christian Traditions*, edited by Gary W. Jenkins and Jonathan Yonan, 50–68. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015.

Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture.* New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951.

Oberman, Heiko A. *Luther: Man between God and the Devil.* Translated by Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Raunio, Antti. "Luther's Social Theology in the Contemporary World: Searching for the Neighbor's Good." In *The Global Luther: A Theologian for Modern Times*, edited by Christine Helmer, 210–27. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009.

Shoenberger, Cynthia G. "Luther and the Justifiability of Resistance to Legitimate Authority." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40 (1979) 3–20.

Sider, Ronald J. *The Scandal of Evangelical Politics: Why Are Christians Missing the Chance to Really Change the World?* Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008.

Thielicke, Helmut. *Theological Ethics*. Volume 2. *Politics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969.

Torpey, John. "A (Post) Secular Age? Religion and the Two Exceptionalisms." *Social Research* 77 (2010) 269–96.

Troeltsch, Ernst. *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches Volume II.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992.

Tuininga, Matthew J. *Calvin's Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church: Christ's Two Kingdoms.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

VanDrunen, David. *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010.

_____. "The Two Kingdoms Doctrine and the Relationship of Church and State in the Early Reformed Tradition." *Journal of Church and State* 49 (2007) 743–763.

Wiener, Peter F. *Martin Luther: Hitler's Spiritual Ancestor*. London: Hutchinson, 1945.

Yoder, John Howard. *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972.