

TWO KINGDOMS, NOT ONE

The "freedom of the Christian" is the battle cry of the Reformation. This freedom has practical consequences for all of life, including politics.

Christian freedom comes from the cross. The cross creates the Lutheran distinction between law and gospel which is the basis for the distinction between God's two kingdoms. The kingdom on the right is God's perfect kingdom. The kingdom on the left is this good but fallen world. Both kingdoms are the Lord's.

Let God be God

God's right-hand kingdom comes by his power alone. On the cross God solved the problem of sin and death by himself, without our help, and it is finished (John 19:30). He alone effects the great exchange: On the cross he takes our sin and gives us his perfect kingdom.

The church's unique agenda

The church is called to tend and contend for the "pure gospel" because only this gospel opens the gates of paradise.

The church proclaims Christ's kingdom which is not of this world (John 18:36) – and his peace, which is "not as the world gives" (John 14:27).

The gospel opens the gates of paradise and simultaneously shuts the door on all schemes to bring in God's kingdom.

Proclaiming the "pure" gospel is inherently polemical because it means rejecting church-led jihads for social causes of any stripe.

Because salvation is at stake, the church devotes itself to contending for the "pure" gospel and resists the temptation to make its "mission" social causes, including peace, justice, and the care of creation.

Not "one kingdom"

If there were only one kingdom, then Christians would be called to bring heaven on earth.

If there were only one kingdom, then the Bible could be used as a blueprint of causes and agendas for the world. Politicians of every stripe could use Bible verses to give a patina of holiness to their agendas (as in the claim to be a "public church").

If there were only one kingdom, then clergy would have special wisdom to give a thumbs-up to some causes and thumbs-down to other causes.

If there were only one kingdom, then clergy would serve as moral visionaries leading the building of God's kingdom on earth.

Two kingdoms

There is not one kingdom; there are two. God's left-hand kingdom, this good but fallen world, is properly governed by common reason and the sword.

Christian life in this world is a holding operation. The task: To restrain evil that life may endure. Common reason and the sword are the proper tools for restraining evil.

For the sake of both kingdoms, the church serves the secular realm **by disavowing all religiously-infused politics and politically-infused religion.**

Freeing the Church

If there were only one kingdom, the church would be *the* moral arbiter in society, guiding others about what is right and wrong.

Because there are two kingdoms, it is important to keep clear that the church is God's means of bringing the Word and sacraments. But in the kingdom on the left the church

is an organization like any other: broken, sinful, and dependent upon common reason, a moral voice like other voices but never *the* moral arbiter.

As an institution in the world, the church has no special gift of the Spirit for politics. Its assemblies, even after prayer, have no special spiritual guidance for politics.

As a consequence, the church is free to focus on its unique mission – proclaiming God's perfect kingdom through the cross and proclaiming the freedom for life in this world which comes from the cross.

Because the church has no special wisdom in politics, it is free to say "No" to spending time and money on lobbyists, public policy statements, and sending bishops to Washington.

Freeing believers

The cross frees individual believers to be involved in politics, knowing that no political party – of the left or right – represents God's politics.

The cross frees believers to use their heads in politics, knowing, as Luther said, that it is better to be ruled by a wise Turk than a stupid Christian.

The cross frees believers to uphold the law and to care for the law, knowing that law is God's good instrument for restraining evil that civilized life may endure.

Lay people serve as moral leaders in arenas where they have expertise. This is not to say that every Lutheran economist is wise. But wisdom about moral dilemmas in economics is more often found in skilled economists than in clergy prone to utopian politics.

The same is true for peace, justice, war, ecology, and the like.