

Christianity, a Culture of Love, and Kraynak's Critique

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Robert Kraynak's critique of Christianity's embrace of liberal democracy is powerful, but flawed by a subtle ambiguity. His argument is ambiguous insofar as it tends to obscure the fundamental "openness" of "all flesh," including the state, the economy, society and the culture--as part of what John Paul calls "the entire reality of man"--to the "supernatural order of charity, holiness, and grace." It is the task of the Church to bring to the culture, and therefore to all of its political, economic, and legal institutions, an authentic interpretation of "the entire reality of man."

Borrowing Augustine's idea of the Two Cities, Robert Kraynak's provocative book raises the fundamental question of how, what he calls, the "spiritual realm" (which he correlates with the Augustinian *Civitas Dei*) and the "temporal realm" (*Civitas terrena*) relate to each other.¹ I would like to focus on the following crucial statement regarding this relationship:

Yet the transpolitical character of Christian spirituality does not mean that the state is entirely secular. A more accurate statement of the Christian position is that its doctrine of the Two Cities implies *a distinction but not a separation* of the spiritual and temporal realms (Kraynak, 184, emphasis original; cf. also xiv).

The reason for selecting this passage is that it suggests both the strength and, perhaps, a subtle ambiguity in Kraynak's argument. The crucial phrase, of course--on which Kraynak's use of the "Two Cities" doctrine in fact turns--is "*distinction but not separation*." Our understanding of this phrase will shape our understanding of the other crucial ideas referred to in this passage and throughout the book: "the spiritual and temporal realms," "secular," "transpolitical," and, of course, the notion of the "Two Cities" itself.

I

Let us begin by acknowledging that Christianity is--in some as-yet-to-be-determined sense--fundamentally "transpolitical." Kraynak is quite right, and in accord with the tradition, to point to the Synoptic logion concerning what is owed to God and what is owed to Caesar (Mt 22:21; Mk 12:17; Lk 20:25). Indeed, one of the most impressive parts of Kraynak's argument is his observation that both collectivist and liberal accounts of the relation between the "spiritual and temporal realms" tend toward a kind of reduction. This tendency is manifest in various Marxist-inspired trends in modern theology, such as in the work of Gustavo Gutiérrez (Kraynak, 255). And it is present as well in various sorts of totalitarian regimes, in that such regimes turn the state, which controls every aspect of human life through juridical and physical coercion, into a kind of idol (Kraynak, 186-187).

Now, Kraynak's response to these tendencies might seem to suggest a replication of the liberal and neoconservative distinction between the public and private spheres. Thus the distinction would perhaps seem to support, rather than confront, the liberal model. Certainly, preventing the absorption of the spiritual into the secular realm is precisely what liberalism purports to accomplish. But Kraynak's primary argument is instead that liberalism *fails* to maintain the proper distinction between the "spiritual and temporal realms." As he rightly points out, almost all of modern Christianity, after some initial and significant resistance, has now rushed headlong to embrace liberal democracy and individual rights as fully consistent with, and even implied by, Christian revelation regarding the nature and dignity of the human person. It seems self-evident to almost everyone (including devout Christians) that inviolable private rights, the liberal sense of individual freedom, and democratic self-government constitute *in principle* the *only* foundation for a truly just society.

As Kraynak argues, however, liberal democracy in fact tends to subvert Christianity, even as it claims to secure a "private" space, in the form of individual rights, necessary for its unimpeded practice. When we ask what a liberal sense of human dignity is, liberalism can go no further than to affirm (tautologically and nihilistically) that this dignity is grounded in

"inalienable rights." The modern "synthesis" of liberal democracy and Christianity, therefore, attempts to subordinate rights to the fundamental Christian understanding of human dignity based on relation to God, on man's status as *imago Dei* (Kraynak, 159). But this subordination is difficult in practice to maintain, and rights tend to reemerge as a kind of first principle, according to which all else, including the hierarchical structures of the Church (and by implication even the human relation to God), must be measured. Hence, we are left with an unsustainable tension. Liberal democracy "needs" Christianity, if it is to avoid falling into a nihilistic failure to offer any foundation for its vaunted protection of personal "dignity," but all the while it undermines Christianity, because it tends to supplant Christianity's understanding of the source of human dignity with its own fundamental positivism (and finally nihilism). Effectively, liberalism reconfigures Christianity into its own interpretation of man. The result is that legitimate hierarchy (whether ecclesial or secular), as well as the basic sense of creation as gift and the response of creaturely gratitude, are rendered unintelligible to the modern mind. The symptoms are everywhere: mass culture, a consumerist society, an obsession with technological mastery over nature, an ethos of economic and social self-determination, and so forth (Kraynak, 25).

In short, while Christianity might seem to some (e.g., Jacques Maritain) to offer a foundation for liberal rights, Kraynak argues--very convincingly--that liberalism, like Marxist ideologies and various totalitarianisms, progressively reconstitutes Christianity in its own image. To put it another way, like collectivism, liberalism subtly tends to assimilate the sacred, *ecclesial*, sacramental order of grace and charity into the secular, political, legal and economic order of civil society.

Kraynak also points to another possibility: the tendency toward theocracy. According to Kraynak, theocracy is "illegitimate because it tries to unite the two realms under the church, thereby absorbing the state into the spiritual order and denying the legitimate but circumscribed independence that God gives to Caesar in the temporal order" (Kraynak, 187). Thus, theocracy occurs where the Church displaces the authority of the state by asserting juridical and coercive

control over the state's domain of authority, by placing priests over kings, as it were. In this regard, Kraynak contrasts Christian teaching with Islamic *sharia*, on the one hand, and the Jewish *halakah*, on the other, each of which imposes a civil or legal code through divine law (Kraynak, 72). Here, we might say, the absorption is from above. The problem with theocracy, then, is that the Church imposes herself juridically on the secular order, dictating the state's political life through a usurpation of its temporal *sovereignty* (Kraynak, cf. 188).

II

Certainly, no one should gainsay the importance of stressing "*distinction but not separation*." But as I mentioned, Kraynak's use of this idea is also a source of difficulty for his argument. In order to see this difficulty, we might start by examining a famous passage from John Paul II:

The Incarnation of God the Son signifies the taking up into unity with God not only of human nature, but in *this human nature, in a sense, of everything that is "flesh"*: the whole of humanity, the entire visible and material world. The Incarnation, then, also has a cosmic significance, a cosmic dimension. The "first-born of all creation," becoming incarnate in the individual humanity of Christ, unites himself in some way with the entire reality of man, which is also 'flesh'-- and in this reality with all 'flesh,' with the whole of creation.²

A number of important points can be drawn from this passage. First, for Christians, no part of creation can be abstracted from its origin and destiny in Jesus Christ without compromising its fundamental integrity and meaning. The "whole of humanity," "the entire reality of man," and indeed all of creation, is taken up into unity with God in Christ's Incarnation. But most importantly, this "taking up into unity with God" is not an end that is imposed on human reality from without. Rather, unity with God in Christ is the destiny of "all flesh" from the beginning. As the "first-born of all creation," in and for whom "all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions or

principalities or authorities" (Col 1:15-17), Christ brings into unity both creation and redemption. He is both the origin and purpose of creation.³ This ordination toward unity with God in Jesus Christ, and the fact of having been taken up in the Incarnation, means that the whole of "human reality" is given its interior form, its original openness to fulfillment and perfection, in Christ. As David Schindler puts it, "our human nature takes its deepest meaning from being brought into the service of God's revelation, that is, by virtue of the downward movement of God's grace and love which affects us (already and not yet) from the moment of our created existence."⁴ No area of created reality, therefore, can be viewed as "neutral" or "closed," that is to say, as not shaped from its very beginning by this destiny.

Now it is also true, of course, that, in this taking up of the whole of human reality, nature and her interior laws are not absorbed or supplanted. But while grace does not supplant the "laws" of creatures, it does bring these to their fullness, their perfection and fulfillment, from within. "It is from within that faith transforms reason, that the Church influences the state" Henri de Lubac tells us. "As the messenger of Christ, the church is not the guardian of the state; on the contrary she ennobles the state, inspiring it to be Christian and thereby more human."⁵ The important point here is that the "inspiration" of the Church makes the state "Christian," but in doing so it does not deprive the state of its character as a secular state, governed by civil laws. The state does not disappear or become merely a function of the Church. Rather, it becomes *more human, more a state.*

Finally, while we certainly can and must distinguish conceptually the "supernatural order of charity, holiness, and grace, including...the institutional church" from secular and civil society, there is, at the same time, no clear line that can be drawn between them. This complicates the nature of the distinction substantially. In fact, it is impossible to mark the exact boundary between the Church and the world because the Church is not only a juridical structure governed by priests and bishops, but is the entire body of Christ. Not only does the Church make human reality her own, but also she "is the place of the continued embodiment of God in the world, a reality that radiates forth and wells up beyond her own self."⁶ As Hans Urs von

Balthasar puts it:

It is only in a superficial perspective that the Church can be called a *societas perfecta* "alongside" the secular (civil) society. For one thing, the material on which the Church works is present in the Church herself--nature, the world, with their ordered structures and regular patterns such as the family but also the social structures of society. For another, the material of secular society is not merely secular but also Christian (and thereby ecclesial), in that the members of the state are Christians and, more generally, are persons who stand within the realm of grace and redemption....⁷

If what I have said thus far is true, then the Church's only real mission, to "evangelize" (John Paul II speaks of the "new evangelization") all "flesh," all of human reality, means to bring the fundamental structures of human community into conformity not with her juridical structure, but with her own interior, Marian structure as a communion of persons (*communio personarum*).⁸ Moreover, then, if it is true that the Church is a "*societas perfecta* 'alongside' the secular (civil) society" only from a "superficial perspective," it is also true that "secular (civil) society" is a *societas perfecta* alongside the Church only superficially.

III

If we turn our attention, then, to the sense of "*distinction but not separation*" suggested by Kraynak, we may highlight the following passage, one which is echoed throughout the book in a number of different forms and which captures a core element of Kraynak's main argument:

[T]he distinction of the Two Cities means that the spiritual and the political realms are instituted by God and accountable to God; but they are guided by different kinds of law and serve different ends. The spiritual realm, or City of God, is guided by divine law and an order of charity, holiness, and grace that serves the highest end, eternal salvation. The temporal realm or earthly city is guided by natural law which prudence formulates into human or civil law for the secondary ends of the

temporal realm.⁹

What is most striking in this passage is that the relationship between "the spiritual and the political realms" is framed in terms of distinct juridical structures, one "guided by divine law" and the other by natural and civil law, one serving the highest end and the other serving secondary ends. The "unity" between the two "realms" arises from their both being ordained by God for human happiness; the distinction arises in the nature of that happiness ("temporal" versus "eternal") and in the different kinds of law by which they are guided ("natural" and "civil" versus "divine").¹⁰

Now, Kraynak's concern is clear and unassailable. In order to preclude the reduction of creation and redemption, in either direction, it is necessary to maintain their "distinctness." Neither an assimilation "from below," such as happens when worldly structures shape the order of "charity, holiness and grace," nor an assimilation "from above," where the structures of the world are supplanted by divine law or ecclesiastical power, can be reconciled with authentic Christian teaching. The precise character of this "distinctness" is nevertheless crucial if we are to avoid certain problems, such as the tendency toward a complete disconnection between faith and daily, political and economic life, that is to say, a false secularization. We should immediately add that Kraynak intends to address this issue by placing the "temporal realm" hierarchically under the "spiritual realm" and by including in the ends of the state the promotion of virtue and piety. However, a false secularization necessarily and by definition occurs wherever, and precisely insofar as, nature is viewed (at least tacitly) as structurally and ontologically "closed."

In order that "divine positive law" not be reduced to pure *positivism*, that is to say, to a voluntaristic or nominalistic extrinsicism, it is crucial to see that divine law appeals to the deepest inclinations (the *desiderium naturale*) of the creature.¹¹ We could say, then, that divine positive law comes as a gift that answers the deepest yearnings of the natural law itself. The "order of charity, holiness and grace" is, therefore, not most felicitously conceived as a parallel juridical "realm." Rather, the discussion up to now should show us that grace brings the

temporal order to a paradoxical fulfillment "beyond itself." Language, such as "independence...[but] not entirely independent," (Kraynak, 87) or "semi-independence" (Kraynak, 86), or "the spiritual and temporal realms" or "spheres" to describe this "distinctness," tends to generate an overly-neat division between grace and nature, or the Church and the world. So while Kraynak is certainly right to emphasize the Christian distinction, or even "infinite distance," between man's worldly ("temporal") existence (the *saeculum*) and his destiny in divine life, at times this distinction seems to fall into a kind of extrinsicism, as though the two "realms," the "Two Cities,"¹² relate simply as two "things," lying ("semi-independently") alongside each other. His argument is ambiguous, then, insofar as it tends to obscure the fundamental "openness" of "all flesh," including the state, the economy, society and the culture--as part of what John Paul calls "the entire reality of man"--to the "supernatural order of charity, holiness, and grace."

As a result, Kraynak sorts out various realities according to whether they are "spiritual" (the Church, the sacramental life, the family, charity, holiness, grace, etc.) or "temporal" (government, politics, economy, civil law, military, etc.). But, as the passage from Balthasar indicates, the categories are not, in reality, so neat. The family, for example, is both sacred and secular, both "domestic Church" and "fundamental cell of society." It both consists of relations grounded in gift and gratitude and offers itself to civil society as the basis for a genuine "culture of love." Indeed, it is the role of the family to bring its "trinitarian" and "ecclesial" form of human relations, *mutatis mutandis*, to all social relations. So, while I would not want to dispute Kraynak's main point that the Gospel does not dictate a particular form of government, civil laws, economy, etc., I would immediately add that the Gospel *does* bring to fullness the whole of man and of the cosmos (without destroying the integrity of either). This means that the Church's mission to the world, her "evangelization," cannot be limited to proposing individual moral conversion, but must entail proposing the form of trinitarian communion to worldly structures and the whole of "human reality."¹³ John Paul II has therefore characterized the generation of a "civilization" or "culture of love" as fundamental to the ecclesial mission (and to the mission of

the Christian family in particular).¹⁴

It is important to see the difference between this proposal and theocracy. The distinction between state juridical structures and divine or ecclesiastical law is maintained. The Church and the order of grace do not replace civil, political, or economic structures. Nor are they simply conceived as existing *above* the temporal as the superior order. Rather, the "supernatural order of charity, holiness, and grace" enters the world, and transforms it from within, as de Lubac says, "inspiring it to be Christian and thereby more human." What is really at stake in our understanding of "distinction but not separation" is, therefore, not so much a correct hierarchy of juridical orders as it is an adequate theological anthropology and its implied culture.

Of course Kraynak is well aware that the political and economic orders cannot be abstracted from the implications of Christianity, and he argues that Christianity implies at least political hierarchy and even, ideally, some form of "constitutional monarchy."¹⁵ He is aware that what makes liberalism particularly dangerous for Christianity is that it comes as an alternate interpretation of man, rather than (at least initially) as a competing or coercively imposed juridical structure. Indeed, it is ingredient in his main thesis that liberalism, as a form of political economy, not only dictates a sense of political rights and economic exchange, but also mediates an entire (false) theological anthropology. "The state, the economy, the arrangement of social classes, the military, and the rules of warfare," not to mention "human or civil law," invariably and unavoidably both embody and mediate *some* theological anthropology. They cannot be abstracted from culture, and culture cannot be abstracted from the sacred, *ecclesial*, and sacramental order of grace and charity. It is the task of the Church to bring to the culture, and therefore to all of its political, economic, and legal institutions, an authentic interpretation of "the entire reality of man." It is this last point that will largely inform our understanding of the "transpolitical" (or "transeconomic," or "translegal") character of Christianity.

Notes

1. Robert Kraynak, *Christian Faith and Modern Democracy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2001). Kraynak characterizes the first "realm" as consisting of "the entire supernatural order of charity, holiness, and grace, including, but by no means restricted to, the institutional church," while the second "realm" consists of "the state, the economy, the arrangement of social classes, the military, and the rules of warfare" (Kraynak, xiv-xv). On this distinction, see n. 12, inf. Subsequent references to this work will be noted in the text and notes by the following: Kraynak.
2. John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem* in *The Encyclicals of John Paul II*, ed. J. Michaels Miller, C.S.B. (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 1996), 50.3 (emphasis in original).
3. Cf. J. Martínez Camino, "'Through Whom All Things Were Made': Creation in Christ," *Communio* 28 (Summer 2001): 214-229.
4. "Christology, Public Theology, and Thomism: de Lubac, Balthasar, and Murray," in *The Future of Thomism*, ed. Deal Hudson and Dennis Moran (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 250.
5. David Schindler, "The Authority of the Church in Temporal Matters," *Theological Fragments* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 212, quoted in Schindler, "Christology, Public Theology, and Thomism: de Lubac, Balthasar, and Murray," op. cit., 251.
6. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "The Layman and the Church," in *Explorations in Theology II: Spouse of the Word* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 316. See also, *Lumen Gentium*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J. (*The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989), 8.
7. Von Balthasar, 316.
8. See the profound development of this point in Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans

Publishing, 1996), esp. 1-40.

9. Kraynak, 184-85. Elsewhere these "secondary ends" are specified as consisting in "temporal happiness" (Kraynak, xv), or the threefold ends of civil peace or tranquillity, the inculcation of moral virtues, and the promotion of Christian piety (Kraynak, 88).

10. While Kraynak emphasizes St. Thomas' view in the *Summa Theologiae* that human law, as distinct from divine law, is ordered to the inculcation of virtue and the good of civil society (cf. I-II, Q. 100, a. 2), Thomas also argues that because the virtues are ordered to attaining the final end of divine life, so too is civil society ordered to the final end of divine life (*De Regimine Principum*, ch. 14).

11. Cf. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* in *The Encyclicals of John Paul II*, ed. J. Michaels Miller, C.S.B. (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 1996), 7.1. See generally, Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (New York: Crossroads, 1998) and *Surnaturel: Études historiques: nouvelle édition avec la traduction intégrale des citations latines et grecques*, Aubier-Montaigne, Paris 1946 (reprinted, Desclée de Brouwer 1991).

12. This point suggests a difficulty in Kraynak's attempt to "recover" Augustine's own doctrine (Kraynak, cf. xiv). Kraynak effectively treats the "Two Cities" as two "orders," each with its own integrity, which seems alien to Augustine's actual thought. After all, Augustine describes the Two Cities as arising from two different loves, one being the love of God to the point of contempt for self, and the other being the love of self to the point of contempt for God (*City of God* 14.28). Augustine's fundamental distinction is therefore eschatological--corresponding to two "societies," the saved and the damned (*City of God* 15.1), who are mixed together in any given historical state.

13. Cf. Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church*, op. cit., 1-40.

14. Cf. John Paul II, *Letter to Families* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1994), 13.

15. Needless to say, the selection of "constitutional monarchy" as theologically ideal raises a large number of issues, all of which, however, are beyond the scope of the present project.