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## Justice and Rights

Ipgrave, Michael

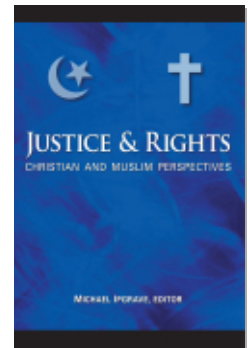
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# Chapter 6

## Traditional Texts

### 6.1 A Letter of St. Augustine

*Rowan Williams*

Augustine of Hippo, writing in North Africa in the early fifth century, defends the policy of using political authority to compel Donatists (schismatic Christians) to enter the Catholic Church. Augustine's stance was to prove highly influential in succeeding centuries, though those who invoked his authority did not always note the nuances in his position.<sup>31</sup>

The origins of the Donatist schism lay in controversy over Christian leaders who had collaborated with secular authorities during the persecution of the church; some of the more rigorist believers condemned these as *traditores* who had lost their spiritual authority and separated from their communion to form a supposedly pure and untainted church.<sup>32</sup> The Donatists, claiming to be the true church of Christ, sought recognition first from the Roman see and then from the Emperor Constantine but were rejected by both.<sup>33</sup> The schism drew on grassroots support, fed by class divisions and by nationalist sentiment; in its extreme paramilitary wing, the *circumcelliones*, it took on something of the nature of a national revolt against the elite represented by the Catholic Church. When Augustine was appointed bishop, he inherited a situation of embittered and violent conflict, with Donatists a majority in many cities. As the state authorities moved to close down the Donatist congregations, confiscate their property, and fine attenders, however, the balance of membership shifted back to Catholicism.

Writing against this background, Augustine frankly admits to the Donatists that he has changed his mind on the use of coercive state pressure to bring them back into the Catholic Church.<sup>34</sup> Originally he had believed that there was no

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Writing against this background, Augustine frankly admits to the Donatists that he has changed his mind on the use of coercive state pressure to bring them back into the Catholic Church.<sup>34</sup> Originally he had believed that there was no

place for compulsion in religion but had been led to a different view by the evident success of imperial policy in bringing people back to Catholicism. He seems to have viewed this not simply in terms of coercion but also, more subtly, as creating the conditions under which individuals could freely enjoy the opportunity to return to the faith—Donatism, particularly in its extreme form, was for Augustine a coercive force keeping people from the truth.

This letter of Augustine represents a new development not only in his own thought but in that of Christianity as a whole: the first recorded justification in Christian literature of state force exercised against a Christian minority. As such it stands at the beginning of the tradition that “error has no rights,” because the obligation to truth of society as a whole must overrule the liberty of individuals to choose that which is false. This represents a very significant moment in Christian thinking, as it initiates and validates partnership between church and state for the crushing of minority religious viewpoints.

It is important to recognize the context within which Augustine was writing, which in some ways mitigates the starkness of his arguments. Against a background of local violence and separatist activity, he insisted that it was improper to kill or to torture members of the Christian minority. On the one hand, the Donatists had themselves already appealed, unsuccessfully, to the state; had they been able to, they would have suppressed the Catholic community and therefore had in principle already conceded the point that they were trying to score against Augustine. Indeed, as he reminded them, like the Catholics they too believed that it was quite right for the authorities to ban disruptive religions such as paganism: In Augustine’s time, the offering of pagan sacrifices was a crime punishable by death. On the other hand, it could also be argued that, as there was little or no difference of theological belief between Catholics and Donatists, what was at stake in this argument was not so much an issue of freedom as a matter of public actions permissible by the state. It is clear that Augustine was irritated by the claim of the Donatists to represent a community of conviction when they appeared to be little more than a group of people held together by a local custom of resentment—“frogs croaking in their own pond,” as he memorably described them.<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, these factors notwithstanding, there is no doubt that Augustine’s argument in this letter marks an unhappy moment in the history of Christian thought and opened the door to still unhappier chapters of Christian history, as the state was called on physically to support the church in coercive ways that led to the violation of human conscience, and so to the corruption of the church. Augustine himself came to have second thoughts over the approach he had developed here. While the following extract begins with a theory of Christian kingship prefigured by Nebuchadnezzar, within a decade Augustine had become skeptical about the idea of a Christian ruler who is always able to discern and en-

force the truth; in the *City of God*, the highest praise is reserved for the Emperor Theodosius, who demonstrates his true piety by knowing how to repent when he has acted unjustly.<sup>36</sup> From this develops the tradition of the *Mirror of Princes* literary genre, in which the justice of the ruler is shown above all by its humility and readiness to share power received from on high.

III.9.<sup>37</sup> You say that no example is found in the writings of evangelists and apostles, of any petition presented on behalf of the church to the kings of the earth against her enemies. Who denies this? None such is found. But at that time the prophecy, “Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings; be instructed ye judges of the earth; serve the Lord with fear” [Ps. 2:10–11], was not yet fulfilled. Up to that time the words which we find at the beginning of the same Psalm were receiving their fulfillment, “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed” [Ps. 2:1–2]. Truly, if past events recorded in the prophetic books were figures of the future, there was given under King Nebuchadnezzar a figure both of the time of the church under the apostles, and of her present time. In the age of the apostles and martyrs that was fulfilled which was prefigured when the aforesaid king compelled pious and just men to bow down to his image and cast into the flames all who refused. Now, however, is fulfilled that which was prefigured soon after in the same king, when, being converted to the worship of the true God, he made a decree throughout his empire that whosoever should speak against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, should suffer the penalty which their crime deserved [Dan. 3:29]. The earlier time of that king represented the former age of emperors who did not believe in Christ, at whose hands the Christians suffered because of the wicked; but the later time represented the age of the successors to the imperial throne, now believing in Christ, at whose hands the wicked suffer because of the Christians.

10. It is manifest, however, that towards those who, under the Christian name, have been led astray by perverse men, a moderate severity (*temperata severitas*), or rather clemency, is carefully observed, lest Christ’s sheep be among the wandering who by such measures must be brought back to the flock; so that by punishments such as exile and fines they are admonished to consider what they suffer and why, and are taught to prefer the Scriptures which they read to human legends and calumnies. For which of us, yea, which of you, does not speak well of the laws issued by the emperors against heathen sacrifices? In these, assuredly, a penalty much more severe has been appointed, for the punishment of that impiety is death. But in repressing and restraining you the thing aimed at has been rather that you should be admonished to depart from evil, than that you should be punished for a crime.

V.16.<sup>38</sup> You see, therefore, I suppose, that the thing to be considered when anyone is coerced is not the mere fact of the coercion (*quod cogitur*) but the nature of that to which he is coerced (*illud quo cogitur*), whether it be good or bad; not that any one can be good in spite of his own will, but that, through fear of suffering what he does not desire, he either renounces his hostile prejudices or is compelled to examine the truth of which he had been contentedly ignorant; and under the influence of this fear he repudiates the error which he was wont to defend, or seeks the truth of which he formerly knew nothing, and now willingly holds what he formerly rejected. Perhaps it would be utterly useless to assert this in words if it were not demonstrated by so many examples. We see not a few men here and there, but many cities, once Donatist now Catholic, vehemently detesting the diabolical schism and ardently loving the unity of the church; and these became Catholic under the influence of that fear which so offends you, by the laws of emperors from Constantine, before whom your party of its own accord impeached Caecilianus, down to the emperors of our own time, who most justly decree that the decision of the judge whom your own party chose and whom they preferred to a tribunal of bishops should be maintained in force against you.

17. I have therefore yielded to the evidence afforded by these instances which my colleagues have laid before me. For originally my opinion was that no one should be coerced into the unity of Christ, that we must act only by words, fight only by arguments and prevail by force of reason, lest we should have those whom we knew as avowed heretics feigning themselves to be Catholics. But this opinion of mine was overcome not by the words of those who controverted it, but by the conclusive instances to which they could point. For in the first place there was set over against my opinion my own town, which, although it was once wholly on the side of Donatus, was brought over to the Catholic unity by fear of the imperial edicts, and which we now see filled with such detestation of your ruinous perversity that it would scarcely be believed that it had ever been involved in your error. There were so many others which were mentioned to me by name, that from facts themselves I was made to own that to this matter the word of Scripture might be understood as applying: "Give opportunity to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser" [Prov. 9:9]. For how many were already, as we assuredly know, willing to be Catholics, being moved by the indisputable plainness of truth, but daily putting off their avowal of this through fear of offending their own party! How many were bound, not by truth—for you never pretended to that as yours—but by the heavy chains of inveterate custom, so that in them was fulfilled the divine saying: "By mere words a servant who is hardened will not be disciplined; for though he understand, he will not give heed" [Prov. 29:19]. How many supposed the sect of Donatus to be the true church merely because ease had made them too listless, or conceited, or sluggish to take pains to examine Catholic truth! How many would have entered earlier had

not the calumnies of slanderers, who declared that we offered something else than we do upon the altar of God, shut them out! How many, believing that it mattered not to which party a Christian might belong, remained in the schism of Donatus only because they had been born in it, and no one was compelling (*cogebat*) them to forsake it and pass over into the Catholic church!

XII.50.<sup>39</sup> We disapprove of every one who, taking advantage of this imperial edict, persecutes you, not with loving concern for your correction, but with the malice of an enemy. Moreover, although, since every earthly possession can be rightly retained only on the ground either of divine right, according to which all things belong to the righteous, or of human right, which is in the jurisdiction of the kings of the earth, you are mistaken in calling those things yours which you do not possess as righteous persons and which you have forfeited by the laws of earthly sovereigns, and plead in vain, "We have laboured to gather them," seeing that you may read what is written, "The wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" [Prov. 13:22]; nevertheless we disapprove of any one who, availing himself of this law which the kings of the earth, doing homage to Christ, have published in order to correct your impiety, covetously seeks to possess himself of your property. Also we disapprove of any one who, on the ground not of justice but of avarice, seizes and retains the provision pertaining to the poor, or the chapels in which you meet for worship, which you once occupied in the name of the church, and which are by all means the rightful property only of that church which is the true church of Christ. We disapprove of any one who receives a person that has been expelled by you for some disgraceful action or crime on the same terms on which those are received who have lived among you chargeable with no other crime beyond the error through which you are separated from us. But these are things which you cannot easily prove; and although you can prove them, we bear with some whom we are unable to correct or even to punish; and we do not quit the Lord's threshing-floor because of the chaff which is there, nor break the Lord's net because of the bad fishes enclosed therein, nor desert the Lord's flock because of goats which are to be in the end separated from it, nor go forth from the Lord's house because in it there are vessels destined to dishonor.

## 6.2 A Response of ibn Lubb

*Vincent J. Cornell*

This text, presented here for the first time, comprises a petition by an unnamed Jew of fourteenth-century Granada and the response given by Abū Saʿīd Faraj ibn Lubb (d. AH 782/1381), the *mufīṭī* (jurisconsult) of that city. Both petition and response are written in poetical form, which indicates that they may have been composed for one of the literary or philosophical salons that were common in Nasrid Granada.<sup>40</sup>

This text revolves around the issue of personal responsibility in adherence to Islam or unbelief, focusing on the concept of *kasb*, literally, “earnings.” This key term from Ashʿarite theology is variously translated in the following text as “fate,” “accrued destiny,” or “accrued responsibility,” according to the context in which it appears. The Jewish petitioner uses the concept of *kasb* to depict Islamic theology as predestinarian and presents his predicament as a double bind: God’s desire that he live as an unbeliever precludes his salvation in a way that denies even a modicum of free will. Ibn Lubb’s response refutes this objection by explaining the nuances of the Ashʿarite position on destiny, which posits a parallelism between human choice and divine predestination. The elaboration of the text is such that it reads like a carefully considered policy statement rather than the record of an actual exchange; indeed, it is quite possible that there was no real *dhimmī* involved, but the whole text is a theoretical exercise designed to illustrate ibn Lubb’s point.<sup>41</sup>

The “Verses of the *Dhimmī*” and the explanation by ibn Lubb are presented as an example of the possible theological barriers posed by traditional Islamic thought to the modern notions of religious pluralism and global civil society. Both the latter concepts are dependent on the notion of the autonomous moral individual, whose choice of religious allegiance is personal and privatized. Moral autonomy and the privatization of belief are both called into question by the Ashʿarite theological position outlined by ibn Lubb. For him, as for much in traditional Islam, an acceptance at the level of truth of alternate theologies would go against a natural order in which theology, law, and society are woven together in a totalistic way.<sup>42</sup>



*The Verses of the Dhimmī:*

Oh scholars of religion, a *dhimmī*<sup>43</sup> of your religion<sup>44</sup>  
Is perplexed. So guide him with the clearest proof:

If my Lord has decreed, in your opinion, my unbelief  
And then does not accept it of me, what is my recourse?

He decrees my misguidance and says, “Be satisfied with your fate.”  
But how am I to be satisfied with that which leads to my damnation?<sup>45</sup>

He curses me and then shuts the door against me. Is there any  
Way out at all for me? Show me the outcome!

For if, oh people, I were to be satisfied with my current fate,  
Then my Lord would not be pleased with my evil calamity.

How am I to be satisfied with what does not please my Master?  
Thus, I am perplexed. So guide me to the solution of my perplexity.

If my Lord wills my unbelief as a matter of destiny,  
How can I be disobedient in following his will?

Do I even have the choice of going against his ruling?  
So by God, cure my malady with clear arguments!

*When the Great and Glorious Teacher and Counsellor Abū Saʿīd Faraj ibn Lubb,  
God be pleased with him, came upon this petition, he said in response:*<sup>46</sup>

The Lord has decreed the unbelief of the unbelievers, but he was not  
Content for it to be a responsibility (*taklif*) for every religious community.<sup>47</sup>

He denied His creation [choice] in what He wished to make happen  
And implement. His dominion [over destiny] is the strongest proof of this.

When we are pleased with the Lord’s decree, we take it as a law (*ḥukm*).  
However, our dislike of it leads us into wrongdoing.

Do not be content with an act that [God’s] law has forbidden,  
But submit to the determination and ruling of His will.

He calls everything to account, but leads certain ones  
To success through His special favor. The call, however, is general.<sup>48</sup>

You disobey when you do not follow the road map of His law,  
Even if you seem to be proceeding along the way of His will.<sup>49</sup>

The choice of your fate (*kasb*) is yours, but the Lord is the Creator,  
Who dispenses it among His creation as He wills.

What God does not will, will not exist.  
Exalted and glorified is God, the Lord of Creation!

This is an answer to the petition of a questioner  
Who speaks out of ignorance and is completely blind.

“Oh scholars of religion, a *dhimmī* of your religion  
Is perplexed. So guide him with the clearest proof!”

The scholar Abū Saʿīd said: The first verse of what I have written is taken from the statement of God Most High, “Say: With God is the decisive proof. Had He willed, He could have guided all of you” [al-Anʿām 6:149]. It also refers to the statement, “Had Allah willed, they would not have assigned partners to God” [al-Anʿām 6:107] and the statement, “If your Lord had willed, they would not have done this” [al-Anʿām 6:112], and the statement, “He does not accept unbelief from His worshippers” [al-Zumar 39:7].

The second verse is also taken from the statement of God Most High, “With God is the decisive proof; had He willed, He could have guided all of you” [al-Anʿām 6:149]. What He means by the “decisive proof” is the proof of God’s ownership of acts, as in the noted ḥadīth from *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*:

ʿImrān ibn Ḥusayn asked Abū Aswad al-Duʿlī whether the unbelief of an unbeliever is predetermined. [ʿImrān] asked, “Is this [predetermination] not a form of oppression?” Said Abū al-Aswad, “I was greatly shocked by this question. Then I said, ‘All that exists is the creation of God and belongs to Him. He will not be questioned about what He does, but they will be questioned’” [al-Anbiyāʾ 21:23]. ʿImrān said to him, “You are correct. I just wanted to assess the soundness of your intellect.” Then he related to him the full text of the ḥadīth of the Messenger of God (may God bless and preserve him) on this subject.

The third and fourth verses both refer to the statement of God Most High, “Verily God ordains what He wills” [al-Māʿida 5:1], and His statement, “God has made unbelief, lewdness, and rebellion hateful to you” [al-Ḥujurāt 49:7].

The fifth verse refers to the statement of the Most High, “Beware of those who conspire to evade His command” [al-Nūr 24:63], along with the statement, “Allah summons unto the Abode of Peace, and leads whom He

will to a straight path” [Yūnus 10:25]. Thus, He calls everyone to Heaven but only selects some to be guided toward His way.

The sixth verse refers to the statement of the Most High, “Beware of those who conspire to evade His command” [al-Nūr 24:63], along with the statement of the Most High, “God causes whomever He wills to go astray” [al-An‘ām 6:39], and “Whomever God causes to go astray has no guidance” [al-A‘rāf 7:186].

The seventh verse refers to the statement of the Most High, “Allah created you and that which you do” [al-Şaffāt 37:96.], and “God creates everything” [al-Zumar 39:62].

The eighth verse draws its inspiration from the statement of the Most High, “You do not will but God wills” [al-Insān 76:30], and “Even if you desire their right guidance, still Allah will not guide the one that misleads. Such people have no helpers” [al-Naḥl 16:37.], and “Verily you cannot guide those whom you love, but Allah guides whomever He wills.” This finishes what was recorded about this subject at that time. All praise belongs to God.

The scholar Abū Sa‘īd, may God be pleased with him, said: I realized that I needed to clarify the meaning of the seventh verse of my response:

The choice of your fate (*kasb*) is yours, but the Lord is the Creator,  
Who dispenses it among His creation as He wills.

What prompted me to do this was that I came upon the statement of another respondent to the verses of the *dhimmī* who misinterpreted the intended meaning of my verse.<sup>50</sup> After he mentioned the verse, he stated in his text: “The [verse of the *dhimmī*] does not need to be answered in this way. When God obliges a person to be an unbeliever, it is decreed by God throughout one’s life until one’s death. Therefore, it should not be said that one has a choice in the accrued destiny (*kasb*) of his faith or unbelief. This would amount to contesting the fate (*qadar*) decreed by God Most High and opposing the rulings (*ahkām*) of His will. How is it possible for one with a sane mind, a clear conscience, and a sound imagination to grant the right of choosing one’s faith or otherwise to a person for whom God has decreed unbelief throughout his life? Especially one whose unbelief is imprinted on his heart and has been denied God’s mercy? As the Most High says in the unambiguous verses of His Book (*fi muḥkam kitābihī*): ‘And he whom Allah guides, is led aright’” [al-Isrā’ 17:97].

[Said ibn Lubb:] The intent of this respondent, when he discusses moral accountability (*ḥisab*) in his answer and is asked to provide proof of his opinion, is to say: “[Ibn Lubb’s verse] is the statement of a scholar who holds an intermediate position between the methodology of the advocates of free will (*al-Qadariyya*) and the advocates of predestination (*al-Jabriyya*).” Then he comes up with another statement, the gist of which is the following. “What is confirmed by a clear mind and a sound intellect should not

be opposed or argued against by statements that are not confirmed as unasailable or are based on an account (*riwāya*), a tradition (*naql*), or an authoritative teaching (*taqlīd mahd*), unless there is proof to the contrary.”

[Said ibn Lubb:] First, the above-mentioned verse [of my poem] is a response to the verse of the *dhimmī*: “Do I even have the choice of going against [God’s] ruling?” The meaning of this response is that the accrued responsibility (*kasb*) of a person with regard to good or evil is dependent on what one chooses or wishes at the time the act issues from him, knowing that the Lord (may He be glorified) desires the occurrence of that act to be in conformity with the desire of the person. God creates through His power the desire and the act at the same time in accordance with His will. This is the meaning of my statement in the poem: “The Lord is the Creator and the Dispenser.” Now the will that God Most High has created in the person through His power is created from God’s power. At the same time, [the human will] is the basis of moral responsibility (*taklīf*) and the foundation of command and prohibition, the promise of reward, and the threat of punishment. All of this is the creation of the Lord Most High. What God desires negates the tendency [of the human being] to contest fate and contradict rules that are valid eternally. For nothing enters into existence except what God Most High creates in conformity with His will. So how can one deny that a person has responsibility for the contradictory and disputational choices he makes, even though this is what God has decided for him and created for him? To say otherwise would be to adopt the position of the *Qadariyya*, who advocated personal freedom of will and the creation of one’s own acts without attributing them to the Lord. In fact, they believed that one could even go against God’s will. This is because one of their tenets was that God does not will misguidance or disobedience. Exalted is He beyond allowing what He does not will to ever occur in His Dominion or that anyone should be independent of him or that anyone but him should be the creator of anything!

The intended meaning of the seventh verse is completed and expressed in the eighth verse of my poem as follows:

What God does not will, will not exist.  
Exalted and glorified is God, the Lord of Creation!

This meaning is expressed in its entirety in the statement of the Most High in His recollection of the Prophet Noah’s address to the unbelievers among his people, “My counsel will not profit you even if I wanted to advise you, if Allah’s will is to keep you astray” [Hūd 11:34]; this is because God created [the desire for misguidance] in the human being. God Most High confirms His will that the human being [be misguided] in the statement: “if Allah’s will is to keep you astray.” Then He delegates a choice to the human being, which is the personal desire expressed in the statement, “If I wanted.” Then he renders the will of the human being ineffective in contrast to the will of the Creator Most High

in the statement, “My counsel will not profit you.” One should then consider the statement of the Most High that follows this: “He is your Lord” [Hūd 11:34]. This alludes to the following deductive argument: In other words, how could the command be otherwise, when [God] is the Lord and we are the slaves? God’s warning to [Noah’s people] caused them to be afraid because of their unbelief, as in His statement, “And unto Him you will be brought back” [Hūd 11:34]. Thus, the meaning of my two aforementioned verses did not deviate from the context of this verse or any other verse of the Qur’ān in any way. The Qur’ān is full of verses with the same meaning.

It is therefore incorrect to say about the response in my verses, while alluding to the places where these meanings are mentioned in the Qur’ān, that it amounts to using the Qur’ān to demonstrate that one may deny God and not submit to him, which is what the *dhimmī* says in his verses. I only meant to refute the *dhimmī*’s purpose in intending to demonstrate opposition and enmity toward the creed of the people of Islam. Then I demonstrated in my answer the refutation of his critique and the correctness of the method [of the people of Islam] according to established rules of rational argumentation. Next, I pointed out the places where he presumed to find arguments for his critique in the Qur’ān. The Most High has presented many intellectual arguments as unassailable proofs for the assertion of divine unity: “If there were therein gods beside Allah, then verily both (the heavens and the earth) would be ruined” [al-Anbiyā’ 21:22]. God Most High also said: “We have neglected nothing in the Book” [al-An‘ām 6:38]. Were it not for consideration of length, I would have demonstrated my objectives in composing all of these verses, one by one.

My argument in the remainder of the verse, “Who dispenses it among His creation,” has two aspects. The first alludes to the fact that God’s determination of the fate of the human being is conditional on the relationship between the immediate outcome and the ultimate result [of an act]. God Most High says: “Surely, We will ease his way unto the state of ease” [al-Layl 92:7]; and He says about the other party: Surely, “We will ease his way unto adversity” [al-Layl 92:10]. He says in the ḥadīth: “Work, for everyone finds his way easily to what was created for him.”<sup>51</sup> The second aspect of my statement alludes to the fact that God Most High determines the act for which the person is responsible (*al-fi’l al-kasbī*). This is commensurate with the will to act that is created by God for the responsible person (*al-‘abd al-muktasib*) and what is appropriate to that person’s ability. If not, it might be said that if the responsibility for the fate (*kasb*) of the human being belonged entirely to the Lord as has been established, then a person could never jump over the sea, for example, or fly through the air, such that it would become a habitual affair for him. This is because God’s power prevents all of this from happening. However, it is [more correctly] said that the linking of accrued destiny to the limited created ability of the person is what prevents this from happening. Thus, if ever this parallelism were to break down, it would be a miracle and not a behavior for which one would be responsible. Because of

this parallelism, some people differ in their ability to jump and others differ in their destinies. For the Most High has created destinies without fixed proportion and everyone earns the destiny that is fated for him. “Say: Each person acts according to his own manner” [al-Isrā’ 17:84].

After this, I say: The denial of the addition of choice to the actions of the human being amounts to a repudiation of necessity and is in opposition to the Shari‘a. As for necessity, the human being senses desires, aims, and intentions within his soul, and then distinguishes between his states either purposefully or absent-mindedly, willingly or unwillingly. As for the difference [in choices], this goes back to the relationship between the existence and non-existence of desire. Responsibility with respect to command and prohibition is not validated except by means of the desire and ability that God has created in the human being. However, when God deprives him of this, the human being is not held responsible, for “God does not burden a soul with what it cannot bear” [al-Baqara 2:286]. The premise of absolute predestination does not take into account what the Shari‘a has confirmed about the will and ability of the human being. The Most High states: “For whomever among you desires to follow the straight path” [al-Takwīr 81:28], “he who wishes will choose a way unto his Lord” [al-Insān 76:29], “yet you will not do so, unless Allah wills it” [al-Insān 76:30]. Thus, [human] wanting is the same as [divine] willing. The Most High also states: “So be conscious of Allah as much as you can” [al-Taghābun 64:16]. Thus, capability is the same as ability.

In his *Sunan*, Abū Dā‘ūd cites the following ḥadīth from ibn Shihab: “It was reported to us that the Messenger of God (may God bless and preserve him) used to say when he preached: ‘That which is coming is near, but it is farther than what is coming. God does not hasten it because of one’s hastiness and He does not lighten it for people’s convenience. What God wills is not what people want. People want one thing, and God wants another. What God wills, will be, even if people dislike it. There is no putting off what God brings near and there is no bringing near what God wants to put off. Nothing exists without the permission of God.’”

It is said among the Sunni Muslims that this is “predestination,” in the sense that whatever belongs to the human being of will, capability, and accrued destiny is the creation of God. It is likened to predestination in this sense. However, this statement takes into account God’s preference with respect to reward, justice, and punishment according to the proof of dominion that the Most High possesses over human affairs. “Say—and belonging to God is the decisive proof—had He willed, he could indeed have guided all of you” [al-An‘ām 6:149]. In respect of this is the statement: “Say: The matter belongs to God alone [Āl ‘Imrān 3:154], for verily, to Him belong the creation and the command” [al-A‘rāf 7:54]. On this matter was revealed the divinely inspired statement that is one of the treasures of heaven, as is mentioned in the ḥadīth: “There is no power and ability but through God.” In other words, one does not have the power to disobey God nor does one have

the ability to obey God, except through God. The essence of the meaning that is derived from this statement is that there is no power to turn away from a thing or ability to do a thing except through God. Thus, the statement links disobedience to obedience, just as it otherwise links actions to their opposites.

Now see how the speaker contrives an argument from my verse when I state, "The choice of your fate is yours," intending by this the infidel author of the verses of the petition. Our intention, however, was to address any responsible person. So how does he understand from what was intended by the verse that the infidel, who is supposedly imprinted with his unbelief, has the choice of being responsible for his faith, despite the fact that faith is not mentioned in the verse? However, he did mention accrued destiny (*kasb*) in it, and the accrued destiny of the unbeliever is in fact his unbelief. He links this to his act of choice, and the verse continues on the subject of personal right as it continues to discuss the right of the believer to own responsibility for his belief. Look how [the second respondent] added to the meaning of the verse and to the position of the people of the Middle Way, who are the Folk of the Sunna: that it is permissible for the aforementioned infidel to choose responsibility for his faith and that he could utter this, while taking into consideration that God would not accept it of him! Thus, he made the contestation of fate and opposition to the divine will allowable, although there was no expression of this in the verse. For the accrued fate of every person is through his own act and that of his sect. The folk of the Methodology of the Middle Way are not to be blamed for obliging the unbeliever to take such a course. Those with knowledge of God did speak about the way of Abū Lahab and said:<sup>52</sup> His responsibility for his faith was from the standpoint of a responsibility that could not be borne and was understood only in this sense, because the occurrence of the opposite of what is already known and willed by God is impossible. Thus, Abū Lahab's faith was neither a matter of accrued destiny nor of choice. However, the critic added this to the verse in answer to the following question: "Do I even have the choice of going against his ruling?" In other words, of going against God's decree upon [the infidel]. He juxtaposed this with my statement, "The choice of your fate is yours," in the sense, "You will receive what you have asked for." Then he ignored the remainder of the verse and the following verse. All that I have said in the two verses is: You have the choice of the accrued destiny that God has created for you and has willed for you, existing as it has always existed. The occurrence of what God does not want from you or from anyone else is impossible. May God, Lord of All, be exalted and glorified above the occurrence of something that goes against His will and His decree within His Dominion!

Here ends the statement of what I wanted to clarify, may God be praised.

The author (may God be pleased with him) recorded this at the beginning of Rabi' al-Thani in the year 762/1361.

### 6.3 A Treatise of al-Ghazālī

Vincent J. Cornell

Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī's (d. 1111) *Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayn al-Islām wa al-zandaqa* (The Decisive Criterion for Distinguishing Islam from Heresy) was written to counteract the tendency of partisan Muslim scholars to condemn their opponents as unbelievers or heretics. Al-Ghazālī belonged to the Ash'arite school of theology, which taught that one could not call oneself a Muslim unless one could rationally justify why one believed the way one did.<sup>53</sup>

According to al-Ghazālī's text, statements of the Qur'ān and the Sunna may be interpreted on five different levels: (a) ontologically-existentially (*dhātī*), (b) experientially (*ḥissī*), (c) conceptually (*khayālī*), (d) intellectually (*'aqlī*), and (e) metaphorically (*shabahī* or *majāzī*). These five levels constitute the boundaries of interpretive space, and all five are valid as long as they do not lead to the conclusion that God or the Prophet is lying, that is, as long as they rest on an acceptance of the text as such. It should be noted that to defend the validity of all five ways is not the same as to assert the correctness of them all, but rather to affirm that somebody following them cannot be condemned as a heretic. Nevertheless, al-Ghazālī's rules of hermeneutics do imply that the theologian will at times be compelled to acknowledge "the logical impossibility of the apparent meaning of a [sacred] text." Once this becomes the case, hermeneutical space is opened for a variety of alternative explanations. According to the epistemological standard held by al-Ghazālī, all hermeneutics constitute informed speculation (*ẓann*) and not truth (*ḥaqq*). Thus no one may claim an exclusive right of interpretation, and no single interpretation of a text is definitive.

Al-Ghazālī's approach clearly defines the limits of an enlarged space within which difference is possible in the Islamic community. In this respect, his method is irenic, defending a freedom based on our inability fully to know the will of God. This very epistemological reticence, though, can equally lead to skeptical tendencies, which in the case of the multifaceted al-Ghazālī were coun-



tered by the dimension of direct knowledge that he believed could be derived from Sufism.

VIII. Listen now to the Rule of Figurative Interpretation. You already know that all of the parties agree on the aforementioned five levels of figurative interpretation, and that none of these levels falls within the scope of “deeming a statement to be a lie.” They also agree, however, that the permissibility of engaging in figurative interpretation is contingent upon having established the logical impossibility of the apparent meaning (*ẓāhir*) of a text. The first level of apparent meaning corresponds to ontological (*dhātī*) existence. Whenever this is conceded, the remaining levels are entailed. If this proves (logically) impossible, however, one moves to the level of sensory existence (*ḥissī*), for it too embraces those levels below it. If this proves impossible, one moves to the level of conceptual (*khayālī*) or noetic (*‘aqlī*) existence. And if this proves impossible, one moves to the level of analogous, allegorical existence (*al-wujūd al-shabāhī, al-majāzī*).

Now, no one is permitted to move from one level (of interpretation) to a level beneath it without being compelled by logical proof (*burhān*).<sup>54</sup> Thus, in reality, the differences among the various parties revert to (differences regarding) logical proofs. In other words, the Ḥanbalite says that there is no logical proof affirming the impossibility of aboveness being the domain of the Creator. And the Ash‘arite says that there is no logical proof affirming the impossibility of the beatific vision. In other words, it is as if each party is simply dissatisfied with the justification adduced by its opponent and does not deem it to constitute a definitive proof. But however the matter may be, neither party should brand its opponent an Unbeliever simply because it deems the latter to be mistaken in what it holds to be a logical proof. Granted, one party may hold the other to be misguided (*dāll*) or to be guilty of unsanctioned innovation (*mubtadi‘*). As for being misguided, this may be said inasmuch as they veer away from what the one (judging them) holds to be the right path. As for being guilty of unsanctioned innovation, this may be said inasmuch as they (may be understood to have) innovated a doctrine that the Pious Ancestors were not known to have openly advocated, it being well-known, for example, that the Pious Ancestors held that God will be seen in the Hereafter. Thus, for anyone to say that He will not be seen is for them to be guilty of unsanctioned innovation. So is it for them to advocate openly a figurative interpretation of the beatific vision. In fact, if it should appear to one that the meaning of this beatific vision is simply a seeing that takes place in the heart, one should neither disclose nor mention this, because the Ancestors did not mention it.

At this point, however, the Ḥanbalite might say: Affirming the aboveness (*al-fawq*) of God is well-known among the Ancestors, as is the fact that none of them ever said that the Creator of the universe is neither connected

to nor disconnected from the universe, nor (that He is) neither within nor outside of it. Nor (did they say) that the six directions are devoid of Him, or that His relationship to the direction of up is like His relationship to the direction of down. All of these statements constitute, therefore, unsanctioned innovations, since “unsanctioned innovation” (*bid’ā*) refers to the origination of a doctrine that has not been handed down on the authority of the Ancestors.

It is here that it should be made clear to you that there are two vantage-points (from which these matters might be considered).

The first is that of the masses (*‘awamm al-khalq*). The proper thing for them to do is to follow (established doctrine) and to desist forthwith from altering the apparent meanings of texts. They should beware of innovating proclamations of figurative interpretations that were not so proclaimed by the Companions; and they should close the door at once to raising questions about such things. They should refrain from delving into speculative discussions and inquiries and from following the ambiguous passages of the Qur’ān and Sunna. Indeed, it was related in this regard on the authority of ‘Umar, may God be pleased with him, that a man once asked him about the meaning of two (apparently) contradictory verses, to which ‘Umar responded by striking him with a whip. And it was related on the authority of Mālik, God show him mercy, that he was once asked about mounting (the Throne), to which he responded: “(The fact of) mounting is known; acknowledging it is obligatory; its modality is unknown; and asking about it is unsanctioned innovation.”<sup>55</sup>

The second vantage-point is that of the speculative theoreticians (*al-nuzzar*) who come to harbor misgivings about inherited theological doctrines handed down from the past. Their investigations should not go beyond what is absolutely necessary. And they should only abandon the apparent meaning of a text upon being compelled by some definitive logical proof. Moreover, none of them should condemn the others as Unbelievers because he holds the latter to be mistaken in what they hold to be a logical proof; for rendering such judgments is no trifling matter that is easily substantiated. Instead, let them establish among themselves a mutually agreed-upon criterion for determining the validity of logical proofs that enjoys the recognition of them all. For if they do not agree on the scale by which a thing is to be measured, they will not be able to terminate disputes over its weight. We have cited the five (probative) scales in our book, *al-Qistās al-mustaqīm*.<sup>56</sup> These are the scales regarding the validity of which it is inconceivable that anyone disagree, assuming that they have been properly understood. Indeed, everyone who understands these scales acknowledges them to be an absolute means to certainty. And for those who have mastered them, dispensing and exacting fairness, exposing (the subtleties of difficult) matters, and terminating disputes become matters of ease.

None of this precludes, of course, the possibility that the various parties may (continue to) differ with each other. For such may result from a failure of some of them to satisfy all the prerequisites (to the use of these scales). Or it may be due to their abandoning these scales and measures during the course of inquiry in favor of a strict reliance upon natural talent and disposition, like one who, after mastering the meters of poetry, returns to relying upon his innate sense of taste in order to escape the drudgery of having to calibrate the meter of each individual line. Such a person will be prone to making mistakes. Or it may be due to differences in (the level of mastery of) the various sciences relied upon in forming the propositions of logical syllogisms. Indeed, among the sciences that are basic to logical syllogisms are empirical (*tajribī*)<sup>57</sup> sciences, sciences that are based on diffuse and congruent reports (*tawāturī*)<sup>58</sup> and other sciences. And people differ in terms of their experience and exposure to diffusely congruent reports from the past. Indeed, one person may deem a report to be diffuse and congruent while another person does not; and one person may experience a thing that another does not. Or it may be due to a confusion between suppositious (*wahmī*) and rational (*'aqlī*) assumptions. Or it may be due to the tendency to confuse words that are widespread, commonly used, and positive in meaning, with *a priori* categories and first principles, as we have explained in detail in our book, *Mihakk al-naẓar*.<sup>59</sup>

In the end, however, if they master these scales and carefully perfect their use, they will be able to identify mistakes with ease, assuming, that is, that they are willing to abandon obstinacy.

IX. There are, on the other hand, people who rush to figurative interpretation under the influence of speculative presumptions rather than on the basis of definitive logical proofs. Even these people, however, should not in every instance be immediately branded Unbelievers. Rather, one should observe. If their figurative interpretation pertains to a matter that is not connected with the basic principles and requirements of creed, we do not brand them Unbelievers. An example of this would be the statement of some Sufis to the effect that what is meant by (the prophet) Abraham's seeing the stars, moon, and sun, along with his statement, "This is my lord" [al-An'ām 6:76–78], is not the apparent meaning of these things but rather angelic, luminous essences, whose luminosity is noetic rather than perceptual and whose essences are characterized by ascending levels of perfection, the level of disparity between them being like the level of disparity between the stars, the sun, and the moon. They support this on the argument that Abraham was too noble to have to see a body disappear before coming to the belief that it could not be his god. Had this body not disappeared (they argue), do you think that he would have taken it to be his god, despite his (prior) knowledge of the impossibility of godhood resting with created bodies? They also

ask, “How was it possible for the stars to be the first thing he saw, when the sun is more prominent (than the stars) and is (usually) the first (celestial body) a person sees?” And they point to the fact that God the Exalted mentioned first, “In this way we show Abraham the hidden realities of the heavens and the earth . . .” [al-An‘ām 6:75], after which time Abraham is cited as having spoken the words in the aforementioned verse. How was it possible (they argue) for him to suppose (that these things were his Lord) after the hidden realities had already been revealed to him?

All of these arguments are based on speculative presumption (*zann*), not logical proof (*burhān*).<sup>60</sup> As for their statement, “He was too noble to . . .,” it has been said that Abraham was a youth at the time. And there is nothing incredible about one who is to become a prophet entertaining a notion like this in his youth only to abandon it shortly thereafter. Nor is there anything incredible about his taking the disappearance (of things) to be more of a proof of temporality than are proportionment (*taqdīr*) and corporeality (*jismiyya*).

As for his seeing the stars first, it has been related that he had secluded himself in a cave as a youth and emerged (for the first time) at night.

As for the Exalted having stated first, “In this way we show Abraham the hidden realities of the heavens and the earth . . .,” He may simply have mentioned the final stages of this ordeal only to return to the beginning stages subsequently. At any rate, all of these are speculative arguments that are taken to constitute logical proof (*burhān*) by people who know neither what logical proofs really are nor what is required to sustain them.

This is representative of the kind of figurative interpretation in which these people engage. They even figuratively interpret “staff” and “shoes” in God’s statement, “Take off your shoes” [Ṭā’ Hā’ 20:11], and “Throw down what you have in your right hand” [al-Qaṣaṣ 28:19]. And perhaps they should be given the benefit of the doubt regarding such interpretations that are not connected with basic principles of creed, just as we treat (differences over) logical proofs in connection with (questions on) basic principles of creed. They should neither be branded Unbelievers nor deemed guilty of unsanctioned innovation. Granted, if opening the door to this (kind of interpretive activity) leads to confusing the minds of the masses, then charges of unsanctioned innovation should be leveled specifically against those who engage in this activity regarding those views of theirs that have not been handed down on the authority of the Pious Ancestors.

Similar to the above is the view of some of the Bāṭinites<sup>61</sup> to the effect that the “calf” of the Samaritan is a figure of speech [al-Qaṣaṣ 28:87–88], since it is not likely that a large population of people would be devoid of rational individuals who knew that a thing fashioned from gold could not be a god. This too is speculative. For it is not at all impossible for a large group of people to come to such a conclusion, as is attested to by (the existence of entire communities of) idol worshippers. The fact that this is rare yields no certainty whatever (of its impossibility or non-existence).

As for that material that is connected to the fundamental principles of creed, anyone who alters the apparent meaning of a text without a definitive logical proof must be branded an Unbeliever, like those who deny the resurrection of the body and the occurrence of sentient punishment in the Hereafter on the basis of speculative presumptions, suppositions and assumed improbabilities in the absence of any definitive logical proof. Such persons must be branded Unbelievers, absolutely. For there is no logical proof to attest to the impossibility of souls being returned to bodies. Moreover, public proclamations of such beliefs are extremely detrimental to religion. Thus, everyone who attaches himself to such beliefs must be branded an Unbeliever. And this includes most of the philosophers.

Similarly, those who say that God the Exalted knows nothing other than Himself must be branded Unbelievers. Likewise with those who say that He knows only universals, concrete particulars connected with individual things and events falling outside His knowledge. For all of this constitutes an act of deeming what the Prophet taught to be a lie, absolutely. It has nothing to do with what we mentioned regarding the different levels of figurative interpretation. For the evidence contained in the Qur'an and the reports (handed down from the Prophet) teaching of the resurrection of bodies and of God having knowledge of the concrete particulars affecting individuals are too numerous to accommodate figurative interpretation. Moreover, the philosophers admit that they are not engaged in figurative interpretation. Instead, they say: Since it is in the interest of the people to believe in the resurrection of bodies, because of the inability of their minds to grasp the meaning of a noetic resurrection (*ma'ad 'aqli*), and since it is in their interest to believe that God the Exalted knows what befalls them and that He watches over them so that this can generate hope and fear in their hearts, it was permissible for the Messenger to give them this understanding. And anyone whose aim it is to improve the condition of others by telling them that which promotes their interests cannot (really) be deemed a liar, even if what he teaches them is factually untrue.

This view of theirs is absolutely false, for it amounts to an explicit claim that the Prophet lied, followed by an attempt to cover this up with an excuse that would effectively deny that what he did was properly an act of lying. But the office of prophethood must be raised above such depravity. For truthfulness and the efficacy of reforming people through truth negates any need for lying.

## 6.4 A Treatise of Martin Luther

*Miroslav Volf*

Martin Luther (1483–1546) reflects in the treatise “Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed” on the relationship between the two realms within which the Christian must live simultaneously: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. The kingdom of this world, governed by the civic authorities, has a proper place in restraining wickedness and maintaining order, but Luther states clearly (here at odds with Augustine’s stance on the Donatists) that temporal authority must not be used to enforce the Christian faith. For Luther, that would be to usurp the work of the spirit of God and to deny both divine freedom and human conscience.<sup>62</sup>

Paul’s discussion of the believer’s response to imperial authority generated a tension in the tradition that is addressed in this treatise by Luther. On the one hand, Christians were enjoined not to avenge themselves; on the other hand, the apostle explains that the government is authorized by God to execute vengeance. This tension becomes acute when those charged with authority belong to the community of faith: If Christians participate in government, how are these two principles to relate to one another? The radicals of the Reformation extricated themselves from this tension, between the claim of Christ to radical obedience and the need for authority to impose constraints, by withdrawing from government. Luther, by contrast, sought to accommodate the tension through a doctrine of “two governments,” yet this can only be understood through framing it with his distinction of the “two kingdoms,” which are yet simultaneously present with one another.

The spiritual government is exercised by Christ as king over the self, the inner person standing before God. Here God rules by his word of grace, and there is freedom of religion as a consequence of a voluntary and individuating act. The temporal government, where God rules by law enforced by the power of the sword, is mediated by Christ through the rule of princes and regulates the outer person in his or her relationships with others, embracing the sphere of politics, eco-

nomics, and so on. The commands of Christ speak to the individual directly as a private person; as a public person, the individual is subject to the commands of the ruler.

How are these two governments to be related to one another? Clearly they are in one sense a contrasting pair, yet when set in the context of the distinction between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world, both can be seen as ways in which God is establishing his kingdom; governed overall by love, in the temporal sphere that will take the form of care for the neighbor. Luther insists strongly that the temporal may not insert itself into the spiritual, where coercion has no place; equally, the spiritual is not entitled to rule in the temporal, for then gospel would become law. The two are also related more positively, though: The temporal, by guaranteeing peace and creaturely good, provides the conditions in which the spiritual can grow, while the spiritual in turn makes genuine temporal good possible, because righteousness can only truly be effected through a change in the self before God: Without the spiritual, the temporal would be full of hypocrites.

Luther's doctrine of two governments is set within his account of two realms, that of God and that of the world.<sup>63</sup> Those who have embraced Christ belong to the former, while the latter encompasses all the children of Adam. Nevertheless, this distinction cannot be pressed too sharply: Even those who belong to the kingdom of God are, according to Luther's doctrine of justification, also fallen, *simul justus ac peccator*, while even the worldly are also creatures of God. Thus the kingdom of God has something of the world's kingdom in all its citizens, while there is something of God's good creation in the world. The relation between the two kingdoms is thus highly dialectical; it is within this struggle that Luther identifies a divine sanction for temporal government, parallel to, yet distinct from, spiritual government.<sup>64</sup>

### *Part 2: How Far Temporal Authority Extends*

We come now to the main part of this treatise. Having learned that there must be temporal authority on earth, and how it is to be exercised in a Christian and salutary manner, we must now learn how far its arm extends and how widely its hand stretches, lest it extend too far and encroach upon God's kingdom and government. It is essential for us to know this, for where it is given too wide a scope, intolerable and terrible injury follows; on the other hand, injury is also inevitable where it is restricted too narrowly. In the former case, the temporal authority punishes too much; in the latter case, it punishes too little. To err in this direction, however, and punish too little is more tolerable, for it is always better to let a scoundrel live than to put a godly man to death. The world has plenty of scoundrels anyway and must continue to have them, but godly men are scarce.

It is to be noted first that the two classes of Adam's children—the one in God's kingdom under Christ and the other in the kingdom of the world under the governing authority, as was said above—have two kinds of law. For every kingdom must have its own laws and statutes; without law no kingdom or government can survive, as everyday experience amply shows. The temporal government has laws which extend no further than to life and property and external affairs on earth, for God cannot and will not permit anyone but himself to rule over the soul. Therefore, where the temporal authority presumes to prescribe laws for the soul, it encroaches upon God's government and only misleads souls and destroys them. We want to make this so clear that everyone will grasp it, and that our fine gentlemen, the princes and bishops, will see what fools they are when they seek to coerce the people with their laws and commandments into believing this or that.

When a man-made law is imposed upon the soul to make it believe this or that as its human author may prescribe, there is certainly no word of God for it. If there is no word of God for it, then we cannot be sure whether God wishes to have it so, for we cannot be certain that something which he does not command is pleasing to him. Indeed, we are sure that it does not please him, for he desires that our faith be based simply and entirely on his divine word alone. He says in Matthew 18, "On this rock I will build my church" [Matt. 16:18]; and in John 10, "My sheep hear my voice and know me; however, they will not hear the voice of a stranger, but flee from him" [John 10:27, 5]. From this it follows that with such a wicked command the temporal power is driving souls to eternal death. For it compels them to believe as right and certainly pleasing to God that which is in fact uncertain, indeed, certain to be displeasing to him since there is no clear word of God for it. Whoever believes something to be right which is wrong or uncertain is denying that truth, which is God himself. He is believing in lies and errors, and counting as right that which is wrong.

Hence, it is the height of folly when they command that one shall believe the Church, the fathers, and the councils, though there be no word of God for it. It is not the church but the devil's apostles who command such things, for the church commands nothing unless it knows for certain that it is God's word. As St Peter puts it: "Whoever speaks, let him speak as the word of God" [1 Pet. 4:11]. It will be a long time, however, before they can ever prove that the decrees of the councils are God's word. Still more foolish is it when they assert that kings, princes, and the mass of mankind believe thus and so. My dear man, we are not baptized into kings, or princes, or even into the mass of mankind, but into Christ and God himself. Neither are we called kings, princes, or common folk, but Christians. No one shall or can command the soul unless he is able to show it the way to heaven; but this no man can do, only God alone. Therefore in matters which concern the salvation of souls nothing but God's word shall be taught and accepted.



Again, consummate fools though they are, they must confess that they have no power over souls. For no human being can kill a soul or give it life, or conduct it to heaven or hell. If they will not take our word for it, Christ himself will attend to it strongly enough where he says in the tenth chapter of Matthew, “Do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing that they can do; rather fear him who after he has killed the body, has power to condemn to hell” [Matt. 10:28]. I think it is clear enough here that the soul is taken out of all human hands and is placed under the authority of God alone.

Now tell me: How much wit must there be in the head of a person who imposes commands in an area where he has no authority whatsoever? Would you not judge the person insane who commanded the moon to shine whenever he wanted [it] to? How well would it go if Leipzigers were to impose laws on us Wittenbergers, or if, conversely, we in Wittenberg were to legislate for the people of Leipzig! They would certainly send the lawmakers a thank-offering of hellebore to purge their brains and cure their sniffls. Yet our emperor and clever princes are doing just that today. They are allowing pope, bishop, and sophists to lead them on—one blind man leading the other—to command their subjects to believe, without God’s word, whatever they please. And still they would be known as Christian princes, God forbid!

Besides, we cannot conceive how an authority could or should act in a situation except where it can see, know, judge, condemn, change, and modify. What would I think of a judge who should blindly decide cases which he neither hears nor sees? Tell me then: How can a mere man see, know, judge, condemn, and change hearts? That is reserved for God alone, as Psalm 7 says: “God tries the hearts and reins” [Ps. 7:9]; and, “The Lord judges the peoples” [Ps. 7:8]. And Acts 10 says, “God knows the hearts”;<sup>65</sup> and Jeremiah: “Wicked and unsearchable is the human heart; who can understand it? I the Lord, who search the heart and reins” [Jer. 17:9–10]. A court should and must be quite certain and clear about everything if it is to render judgment. But the thought and inclinations of the soul can be known to no one but God. Therefore, it is futile and impossible to command or compel anyone by force to believe this or that. The matter must be approached in a different way. Force will not accomplish it. And I am surprised at the big fools, for they themselves all say: *De occultis non iudicat Ecclesia*, the church does not judge secret matters.<sup>66</sup> If the spiritual rule of the church governs only public matters, how dare the mad temporal authority judge and control such a secret, spiritual, hidden matter as faith.

Furthermore, every man runs his own risk in believing as he does, and he must see to it himself that he believes rightly. As nobody else can go to heaven or hell for me, so nobody else can believe or disbelieve for me; as nobody else can open or close heaven or hell to me, so nobody else can drive me

to belief or unbelief. How he believes or disbelieves is a matter for the conscience of each individual, and since this takes nothing away from temporal authority the latter should be content to attend to its own affairs and let men believe this or that as they are willing, and constrain no one by force. For faith is a free act, to which no one can be forced. Indeed, it is a work of God in the spirit, not something which outward authorities should compel or create. Hence arises the common saying, found also in Augustine, "No one can or ought to be forced to believe."<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, the blind, wretched fellows fail to see how utterly hopeless and impossible a thing they are attempting. For no matter how harshly they lay down the law, or how violently they rage, they can do no more than force an outward compliance of the mouth and the hand; the heart they cannot compel, though they work themselves to a frazzle. For the proverb is true: "Thoughts are tax free." Why do they persist in trying to force people to believe from the heart when they see that it is impossible? In so doing they only compel weak consciences to lie, to disavow, and to utter what is not in their hearts. They thereby load themselves down with dreadful *alien sins*, for all the lies and false confessions which such weak consciences utter fall back upon him who compels them.<sup>68</sup> Even if their subjects were in error, it would be much easier simply to let them err than to compel them to lie and to utter what is not in their hearts. In addition, it is not right to prevent evil by something even worse.

Would you like to know why God ordains that the temporal princes must offend so frightfully? I will tell you. God has given them to a base mind [Rom. 1:28] and will make an end of them just as he does of the spiritual nobility. For my ungracious lords, the pope and the bishops, are supposed to be bishops and preach God's word. This they leave undone, and have become temporal princes who govern with laws which concern only life and property. How completely they have turned things topsy-turvy! They are supposed to be ruling souls inwardly by God's word; so they rule castles, cities, lands, and people outwardly, torturing souls with unspeakable outrages.

Similarly, the temporal lords are suppose[d] to govern lands and people outwardly. This they leave undone. They can do no more than strip and fleece, heap tax upon tax and tribute upon tribute, letting loose here a bear and there a wolf. Besides this, there is no justice, integrity, or truth to be found among them. They behave worse than any thief or scoundrel, and their temporal rule has sunk quite as low as that of the spiritual tyrants. For this reason God so perverts their minds also, that they rush on into the absurdity of trying to exercise a spiritual rule over souls, just as their counterparts try to establish temporal rule. They blithely heap alien sins upon themselves and incur the hatred of God and man, one scoundrel with the other. Then they lay all the blame on the gospel, and instead of confessing their sin they blaspheme God and say that our preaching has brought about that which their perverse

wickedness has deserved—and still unceasingly serves—just as the Romans did when they were destroyed. Here then you have God’s decree concerning the high and mighty. They are not to believe it, however, lest this stern decree of God be hindered by their repentance.

But, you say: Paul said in Romans 13 that every soul [*seele*] should be subject to the governing authority [Rom. 13:1]; and Peter says that we should be subject to every human ordinance [1 Pet. 2:13]. Answer: Now you are on the right track, for these passages are in my favor. St Paul is speaking of the governing authority. Now you have just heard that no one but God can have authority over souls. Hence, St Paul cannot possibly be speaking of any obedience except where there can be corresponding authority. From this it follows that he is not speaking of faith, to the effect that temporal authority should have the right to command faith. He is speaking rather of external things, that they should be ordered and governed on earth. His words too make this perfectly clear, where he prescribes limits for both authority and obedience, saying, “Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, honour to whom honour is due, respect to whom respect is due” [Rom. 13:7]. Temporal obedience and authority, you see, apply only externally to taxes, revenue, honor, and respect. Again, where he says, “The governing authority is not a terror to good conduct, but to bad” [Rom. 13:3], he again so limits the governing authority that it is not to have the mastery over faith or the word of God, but over evil works.

This is also what St Peter means by the phrase, “human ordinance” [1 Pet. 2:13]. A human ordinance cannot possibly extend its authority into heaven and over souls; it is limited to the earth, to external dealings men have with one another, where they can see, know, judge, evaluate, punish, and acquit.

Christ himself makes this distinction, and summed it all up very nicely when he said in Matthew 22, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s” [Matt. 22:21]. Now, if the imperial power extended into God’s kingdom and authority, and were not something separate, Christ would not have made this distinction. For, as has been said, the soul is not under the authority of Caesar; he can neither teach it nor guide it, neither kill it nor give it life, neither bind it or loose it, neither judge nor condemn it, neither hold it fast nor release it. All this he would have to do, had he the authority to command it and to impose laws upon it. But with respect to body, property, and honor he has indeed to do these things, for such matters are under his authority.

David too summarized all this long ago in an excellent brief passage, when he said in Psalm 113, “He has given heaven to the Lord of heaven, but the earth he has given to the sons of men” [Ps. 115:16]. That is, over what is on earth and belongs to the temporal, earthly kingdom, man has authority

from God; but whatever belongs to heaven and to the eternal kingdom is exclusively under the Lord of heaven. Neither did Moses forget this when he said in Genesis 1, "God said, 'Let us make man to have dominion over the beasts of the earth, the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air'" [Gen. 1:26]. There only external dominion is ascribed to man. In short, this is the meaning as St Peter says in Acts 4, "We must obey God rather than men" [Acts 5:29]. Thereby, he clearly sets a limit to the temporal authority, for if we had to do everything that the temporal authority wanted there would have been no point in saying, "We must obey God rather than men."

If your prince or temporal ruler commands you to side with the pope, to believe thus and so, or to get rid of certain books, you should say, "It is not fitting that Lucifer should sit at the side of God. Gracious sir, I owe you obedience in body and property; command me within the limits of your authority on earth, and I will obey. But if you command me to believe or to get rid of certain books, I will not obey; for then you are a tyrant and overreach yourself, commanding where you have neither the right or the authority," etc. Should he seize your property on account of this and punish such disobedience, then blessed are you; thank God that you are worthy to suffer for the sake of the divine word. Let him rage, fool that he is; he will meet his judge. For I tell you, if you fail to withstand him, if you give in to him and let him take away your faith and your books, you have truly denied God.

Let me illustrate. In Meissen, Bavaria, the Mark, and other places, the tyrants have issued an order that all copies of the New Testament are everywhere to be turned in to the officials. This should not turn in a single page, not even a letter, on pain of losing their salvation. Whoever does so is delivering Christ up into the hands of Herod, for these tyrants act as murderers of Christ just like Herod. If their homes are ordered searched and books or property taken by force, they suffer it to be done. Outrage is not to be resisted but endured; yet we should not sanction it, or lift a little finger to conform, or obey. For such tyrants are acting as worldly princes are supposed to act, and worldly princes they surely are. But the world is God's enemy; hence, they too have to do what is antagonistic to God and agreeable to the world, that they may not be bereft of honor, but remain worldly princes. Do not wonder, therefore, that they rage and mock at the gospel; they have to live up to their name and title.

You must know that since the beginning of the world a wise prince is a mighty rare bird, and an upright prince ever rarer. They are generally the biggest fools or the worst scoundrels on earth; therefore, one must constantly expect the worst from them and look for little good, especially in divine matters which concern the salvation of souls. They are God's executioners and hangmen; his divine wrath uses them to punish the wicked and to maintain outward peace. Our God is a great lord and ruler; this is why he must also have such noble, highborn, and rich hangmen and constables. He desires that everyone shall copiously accord them to riches, honor, and

fear in abundance. It pleases his divine will that we call his hangmen gracious lords, fall at their feet, and be subject to them in all humility, so long as they do not ply their trade too far and try to become shepherds instead of hangmen. If a prince should happen to be wise, upright, or a Christian, that is one of the great miracles, the most precious token of divine grace upon that land. Ordinarily the course of events is in accordance with the passage from Isaiah 3, "I will make boys their princes and gaping fools shall rule over them" [Isa. 3:4]; and in Hosea 13, "I will give you a king in my anger, and take him away in my wrath" [Hosea 13:11]. The world is too wicked, and does not deserve to have many wise and upright princes. Frogs must have their storks.

Again you say: "The temporal power is not forcing men to believe; it is simply seeing to it externally that no one deceives the people by false doctrine; how could heretics otherwise be restrained?" Answer: This the bishops should do; it is a function entrusted to them and not to the princes. Heresy can never be restrained by force. One will have to tackle the problem in some other way, for heresy must be opposed and dealt with otherwise than with the sword. Here God's word must do the fighting. If it does not succeed, certainly the temporal power will not succeed either, even if it were to drench the world in blood. Heresy is a spiritual matter which you cannot hack to pieces with iron, consume with fire, or drown in water. God's word alone avails here, as Paul says in II Corinthians, "Our weapons are not carnal, but mighty in God to destroy every argument and proud obstacle that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and to take every thought captive in the service of Christ" [2 Cor. 10:4-5].

Moreover, faith and heresy are never so strong as when men oppose them by sheer force, without God's word. For men count it certain that such force is for a wrong cause and is directed against the right, since it proceeds without God's word and knows not how to further its cause except by naked force, as brute beasts do. Even in temporal affairs force can be used only after the wrong has been legally condemned. How much less possible it is to act with force, without justice and God's word, in these lofty spiritual matters! See, therefore, what fine, clever nobles they are! They would drive out heresy, but set about it in such a way that they only strengthen the opposition, rousing suspicion against themselves and justifying the heretics. My friend, if you wish to drive out heresy, you must find some way to tear it first of all from the heart and completely turn men's wills away from it. With force you will not stop it, but only strengthen it. What do you gain by strengthening heresy in the heart, while weakening only its outward expression and forcing the tongue to lie? God's word, however, enlightens the heart, and so all heresies and errors vanish from the heart of their own accord.

This way of destroying heresy was proclaimed by Isaiah in his eleventh chapter where he says, "He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked" [Isa. 11:4]. There you

see that if the wicked are to be slain and converted, it will be accomplished with the mouth. In short, these princes and tyrants do not realize that to fight against heresy is to fight against the devil, who fills men's hearts with error, as Paul says in Ephesians 6, "We are not contending against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickedness, against the principalities which rule this present darkness" [Eph. 6:12]. Therefore, so long as the devil is not repelled and driven from the heart, it is agreeable to him that I destroy his vessels with fire of sword; it is as if I were to fight lightning with a straw. Job bore abundant witness to this when in his forty-first chapter he said that the devil counts iron as straw, and fears no power on earth.<sup>69</sup> We learn it is also from experience, for even if all Jews and heretics were forcibly burned no one ever has been or will be convinced or converted thereby.

Nevertheless, such a world as this deserves such princes, none of whom attends to his duties. The bishops are to leave God's word alone and not use it to rule souls; instead they are to turn over to the worldly princes the job of ruling souls with the sword. The worldly princes, in turn, are to permit usury, robbery, adultery, murder, and other evil deeds, and even commit these offences themselves, and then allow the bishops to punish with letters of excommunication. Thus, they neatly put the shoe on the wrong foot: they rule the souls with iron and the bodies with letters, so that worldly princes rule in a spiritual way, and spiritual princes rule in a worldly way. What else does the devil have to do on earth than to masquerade and play the fool with his people? These are our Christian princes, who defend the faith and devour the Turk! Fine fellows, indeed, whom we may well trust to accomplish something by such refined wisdom, namely, to break their necks and plunge land and people into misery and want.

I would in all good faith advise these blind fellows to take heed to a little phrase that occurs in Psalm 107: *Effundit contemptum super principes*.<sup>70</sup> I swear to you by God that if you fail to see that this little text is applicable to you, then you are lost, even though each one of you be as mighty as the Turk; and your fuming and raging will avail you nothing. A goodly part of it has already come true. For there are very few princes who are not regarded as fools or scoundrels; that is because they show themselves to be so. The common man is learning to think, and the scourge of princes (that which God calls *contemptum*) is gathering force among the mob and with the common man. I fear there will be no way to avert it, unless the princes conduct themselves in a princely manner and begin again to rule decently and reasonably. Men will not, men cannot, men refuse to endure your tyranny and wantonness much longer. Dear princes and lords be wise and guide yourselves accordingly. God will no longer tolerate it. The world is no longer what it once was, when you hunted and drove people like game. Abandon therefore your wicked use of force, give thought to dealing justly, and let God's word have its way, as it will anyway and must and shall; you cannot prevent it. If there is heresy some-

where, let it be overcome, as is proper, with God's word. But if you can continue to brandish the sword, take heed lest someone come and compel you to sheathe it—and not in God's name!

But you might say: "Since there is to be no temporal sword among Christians, how then are they to be ruled outwardly? There certainly must be authority even among Christians." Answer: Among Christians there shall and can be no authority; rather all are alike subject to one another, as Paul says in Romans 12: "Each shall consider the other his superior" [Rom. 12:10]; and Peter says in 1 Peter 5: "All of you be subject to one another" [1 Pet. 5:5]. This is also what Christ means in Luke 14: "When you are invited to a wedding, go and sit in the lowest place" [Luke 14:10]. Among Christians there is no superior but Christ himself, and him alone. What kind of authority can there be where all are equal and have the same right, power, possession, and honor, and where no one desires to be the other's superior, but each the other's subordinate? Where there are such people, one could not establish authority even if he wanted to, since in the nature of things it is impossible to have superiors where no one is able or willing to be a superior. Where there are no such people, however, there are no real Christians either.

What, then, are the priests and bishops? Answer: Their government is not a matter of authority or power, but a service and an office, for they are neither higher nor better than other Christians. Therefore, they should impose no law or decree on others without their will and consent. Their ruling is rather nothing more than the inculcating of God's word, by which they guide Christians and overcome heresy. As we have said, Christians can be ruled in faith, not with outward works. Faith, however, can come through no word of man, but only through the word of God, as Paul says in Romans 10, "Faith comes through hearing, and hearing through the word of God" [Rom. 10:17]. Those who do not believe are not Christians; they do not belong to Christ's kingdom, but to the worldly kingdom where they are constrained and governed by the sword and by outward rule. Christians do every good thing of their own accord and without constraint, and find God's word alone sufficient for them. Of this I have written frequently and at length elsewhere.

## Notes to Part II

1. For a discussion of these texts and the events they describe, see Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), xlv, 1–2.
2. *Ibid.*, 4.
3. *Ibid.*, 6.