

LUTHER AND LIBERATION

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I.

The encounter of liberation theologies and traditional or denominational theologies has except on rare occasions fallen into two extremes: a mutual disregard, frequently hiding a visceral reaction of one side against the other, or a psychological fascination for liberation theologies. In the latter case, liberation theologies appear to offer a sacrificial expiation for the guilt of the theological conscience lost in the political ambivalence of late capitalist societies (evil seems to strike more clearly overseas, on the other side of the gender gap, or is more distinguishable against a darker epidermic background). The attitude of disregard obstructs the flow of free communication, while the attitude of psychological fascination is followed by a *sacrificium intellectus*.

Although mutual disregard and fascination tend to exclude each other, they are not truly incompatible. Often, the profound disregard of traditional theology for the various proposals coming from liberation theology is masked by a (superficially) sympathetic attitude toward it. It is no longer surprising that, in the context of Lutheran theology, when interest for liberation theology is shown, there is frequently an avoidance of the question of compatibility and incompatibility between Lutheran theologies and liberation theologies, while there is eagerness to discuss problems like violence, hunger, social justice, revolution, etc. But, when the question of the substantial relation between Lutheranism and liberation theology is pressed and the fear that the chaste virginity of the Lutheran tradition may be prostituted is overcome, a worthwhile and thoughtful answer will emerge. It has become the fashion to say that liberation theology does not take sin seriously enough, and that it reduces sin to its manifestations in the socio-economic structures of society. Obviously, this accusation is correctly grounded on an understanding of sin as a universal condition of humankind. Liberation theology, so goes the argument, has a naive view of the human condition, making us

believe that sin can be overcome through political activity, through solidarity with the dispossessed and those who suffer discrimination, through the construction of a socialist society, and so on and so forth. And, finally, we hear the tortured sympathy: "I am all for liberation, but liberation must be, first of all, liberation from the deepest form of enslavement, which is the human sinful nature, and then all the particular forms of oppression, dependence, etc., will be overcome as good works flow naturally out of genuine faith, as a good tree produces good fruits."

What concerns me in the assessment of liberation theology and in the formulation of arguments against it is the naivete of such a critique which raises the problem of sin to the level of universals and thus makes it the exclusive norm. I suspect that Lutherans are often too quick to talk *formally* about *simul iustus et peccator* and too slow to recognize the particular content of sin itself. They have learned by rote that the mark of a good theologian is the discernment of Law and Gospel, but, for too many, this distinction has become simply a formal one.

It is my suspicion¹ that often the move from Law to Gospel is made by surrendering the differentiated content of the Law itself, i.e., by formalizing it, so that it underscores an abstract need for divine grace on the basis of a universal, putative, sinful condition. The methodological movement that underlies this formalization is presented schematically in a revealing but preposterous syllogism:

1. The particular experience of sin brings us to the awareness that *lex semper accusat* (the Law always accuses);
2. but sin is a universal human condition, so that the Law reveals the predicament of a fallen humanity from which only the divine grace can deliver us;
3. the Gospel addresses to us the justifying word of God.

The transition from point 1 to point 2, the leap from the particular, concrete situation of sin to its abstract universality, which, in turn, makes the response of the Gospel to address only this universal, deserves more careful attention. I am not denying that Lutherans have also insisted, since Albrecht Ritschl and Karl Holl, that there is a return back to the particular, but this return—whether it is called a *Lebensführung* or "personal love"—has its norm and condition of possibility located exclusively in a transcendental *Ideal* or equally transcendental *conscientia*. The Luther-renaissance in this century has framed this problem in terms of the positive function of the Law in its *usus civilis* (civil use). But I will argue later that even the

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recognition of the positive function of the *usus civilis legis* still demands a theological leap to the universal as far as the Gospel is concerned, for the Gospel serves as the antithetical category only to the theological use of the Law—hence, it is assumed that it cannot have a particular function. But if “Law” (in its first, political use) is the *only* category that provides a norm for civil society, novelty must be excluded. If Law, then, should be defined as the stable image of the unstable appearances, it results in the exclusion of change and novelty from historical processes, and it eliminates a priori the possibility of novelty in history. This exclusion of novelty from social and historical experiences in theological reflection turns Law into a principle of conservation and preservation which, if not in harmony with the medieval understanding of political history, is certainly also not adverse to it.² However, when transposed to the post-Enlightenment era, the era of effective political revolutions, such a principle becomes reprobating and reactionary.

The problem in the transition from point 1 to point 2 is that the *usus civilis legis* which determines the first level of our experience of sin according to its particular content functions as a propaedeutic to the “true” dialectics of Law and Gospel. So, even if the *usus civilis legis* takes a positive function of preservation (as in Althaus’ notion of command, for example³), this function is only external to the Law-Gospel relationship: it only provides a cynical *pax mundi* that stages the transcendent eschatological drama of salvation and condemnation. If we ask why the leap from historical existence to a universal relationship of Law and Gospel is demanded, or why we should envisage this cynical view of history and particular experience as providing merely a neutral “infrastructure” for the transhistorical dialectics of Law and Gospel, there is only one logical response: the Gospel is assumed to be exclusively universal so that it can correlate only to the *usus theologicus legis* (theological use of the Law). It is good news for Jews and Greeks alike, for the slaves and for the masters, for prostitutes and Pharisees, but all in a formalistic indifference toward content.

Hence, if the Gospel is universal and *only* universal, the good news that it proclaims and addresses to the human sinful condition ought to be cast in universal terms to the same extent to which it manifests its indifference toward the particular and differentiated content of human historical experience; otherwise, the relationship between Law and Gospel is meaningless. If it is to be meaningful theology, the theologian or preacher will have to learn how to formalize this relationship, going behind the concrete sin. This is the reason that

many are outraged when the Gospel is particularized in utterances like “God is red,” “She is black,” “God sides with the oppressed,” and so on. Out of this mode of procedure we take one thing for granted: the universal is hypostasized so that we know the sinner (*qua* human) without *necessarily* knowing sin. Epistemologically, we have moved up the ladder of the *usus civilis legis* to reach the *usus theologicus legis* and have kicked the ladder away. We no longer need to know sin according to its particular historical content because it does not make any *difference*.⁴

This lack of determination (only the particular can determine) is another way of saying that the particular content of sin does not make any difference as far as the proclamation of the Gospel is concerned.

II.

This leap into the universal is certainly not alien to Luther’s theology, since he defines theology as the study of the relationship between the sinful human being and the God who saves and justifies.⁶ The theological transcendence of the immanent and particular historical existence could be even further emphasized by appealing to another assertion of Luther: “*Ideo nostra theologiae est certa, quia ponit nos extra nos*” (“Therefore our theology is correct because it sets us outside of ourselves”). Now, in spite of these affirmations, it is well known that we will not find in Luther a consistent systematics, nor will we find a consistent methodology. I would even maintain that there are, in fact, different methodological insights at work, and that not always was justification (*iustitia passiva*) or the formal Law-Gospel relationship his *norma normans* or even his principle.

I will use an article of Luther to illustrate this point. The selection of this article is arbitrary and aims only at showing that Luther reflected *theologically* without ever abandoning the particular *content* of sin. Luther, in this article, reflects upon a situation that he regards as sinful and instructs pastors in how to preach about it. So, it is a polemical but not a homiletic piece. It would represent for Luther a fine opportunity to implement the mode of procedure that we described above. But what he does is quite different.

This treatise was written in 1540 and was called “An Admonition to the Pastors to Preach against Usury.”⁷ I have chosen this particular text not

because it is the only one of its kind, but because, unlike others, it addresses a subject—an economic situation—which shares many characteristics with our own economic situation and, thus, creates for the interpreter a dissonance (part of the heuristics of suspicion) that cannot be dismissed as easily as others that fall in the background of a *passé* Christendom. But I should also make it clear that the choice of this article was *not* made on the basis of the moral character of the argument, as if its use would provide us with an anachronistic criterion to pass a judgment on modern capitalism. It is certain that, at the time Luther was living, the economic foundations of capitalism were being established in southern Germany and northern Italy. The usurer is, in fact, the primate of our *homo pecuniosus*. But this similarity is used only as a mode of approximating the methodological implication of the argument.⁸

Luther, whom Marx called the “first German economist” (which would not offend Luther for whom there has been no saint who was not well versed in economics and politics), demarcates the concept of usury in this treatise. Luther first takes issue with the apparently popular claim that the usurer, by lending money, is actually providing a service to the people. Foreshadowing the modern criticism of ideology Luther says:

whoever takes more or better than he gives is doing usury and this is no service at all, but wrong done to his neighbor as when one steals and robs. All is not service and benefit to a neighbor that is called service and benefit. For an adulteress and adulterer do one another a great service and pleasure. . . . The devil himself does his servant inestimable service.⁹

Appealing to reason and to the concept of equity¹⁰ as well as to philosophy (Aristotle and Seneca) Luther wants to demonstrate that injustice lies in the “unnatural” (*wider die Natur*,¹¹ i.e., not in the interaction of humans and nature) mode of producing value.¹² This would not be a problem in itself if it were not for the fact that usury cannot create value except by using alien labor.¹³ Usurers can produce value only by using others to work for them. The instrumental use of money was later transformed into the ownership of the means of production, but Luther has the merit of recognizing the same structure at work in financial capital at a time when this structure was providing the foundation for capitalism. Since this process tends to escalate to a maximum surplus gain, Luther does not stay short of giving his verdict: “Even if we were not Christians, reason alone would tell us all the same . . . that a usurer is a murderer.”¹⁴ After showing by means of reason alone—“We must spare our theology hereupon”¹⁵—that usury is unjust, he turns himself against the Christians, and particular-

ly preachers, who are indifferent to it. By associating themselves with usurers, they belong where the usurer belongs: in hell.

The heathen were able, by the light of reason, to conclude that a usurer is a double-dyed thief and murderer. We Christians, however, hold them in such honor, that we fairly worship them for the sake of their money.¹⁶

And the attack continues:

. . . a usurer sits safe . . . on his stool when he ought rather to be hanging from the gallows, and be eaten by as many ravens as he has stolen guilders, if only there were so much flesh in him. . . . Meanwhile we hang the small thieves . . . little thieves are put in the stocks, great thieves go flaunting in gold and silk. . . .¹⁷ Therefore there is on this earth no greater enemy of man (after the devil) than a gripe-money and usurer for he wants to be God over all men . . . a usurer and money-glutton . . . would have the whole world to himself, and every one may receive from him as from a God and be his serf for ever.¹⁸ Usury is a great huge monster, like a were-wolf who decks himself out, and would be thought pious, so that people may not see where the oxen have gone, that he drags backwards into his den. . . . And he will not own that he has done it, and thinks no one will find him out, because the oxen drawn backwards into his den, make it seem, from their footprints, that they have been let out. So the usurer would deceive the world, as though he were of use and gave the world oxen, while he, however, rends and eats all alone.¹⁹ And since we break on the wheel, and behead highwaymen, murderers and housebreakers, how much more ought we to break on the wheel and kill, . . . hunt down, curse and behead all usurers.²⁰

But if we now expect Luther to make the turn to the universal to declare usury as a manifestation of original sin which some think is the only land worthy of a theologian’s attention, we are going to be surprised. He even considers this argument and says:

They say that the world could not be without usury. This is certainly true. For so strong and stiff can no government in the world ever be and has never been. . . and even if a government could prevent all sin, there would still be the original sin, the origin of all sin. . . . But if with this [argument] they think they are excused, let them see.²¹

And the preachers who do not dare to speak against usury “make a comedy of their preaching office . . . and turn themselves against the truth. . . . Such people cannot promote the gospel.”²² Earlier Luther had compared these preachers who generalize their preaching so much that they do not turn against the usurer *in particular* (but only against sin and the sinner *in general*) to those who want to dam a flood (Luther’s favorite metaphor for social injustice and political anarchy) with a wired fence.²³

However, we could still argue that Luther is only focusing his criticism on one *manifestation* of sin—so that the justifying word of God could still be addressed to the usurer as a person, to the conscience of the usurer. (From Hoil²⁴ through Elert,²⁵

Althaus,²⁶ and Heckel,²⁷ this interpretation has been given as the "received view" of Lutheran theology). But this is not what Luther says. God is not only the enemy of usury (as the particular *appearance* of original sin) but of the usurer.²⁸ The usurer is called, *de iure* and *de facto*, unbeliever and idolatrous,²⁹ and Luther admonishes the preacher not to take any usurer as a Christian. Furthermore, Luther argues, they should not be allowed to participate in the sacraments, not be given absolution, and they ought to be excluded from any Christian congregation.³⁰ Even an implicit hierarchy of sins is presented: "Therefore there is in this earth no greater [notice the comparative quantitative characterization] enemy of man (after the devil) . . . than a usurer for he wants to be God over all men."³¹ And this is not a "spiritual" (*geistlich*) sin but an historical and political one. The usurer does not claim that salvation is accomplished through work; the usurer acts in this way! The usurer is not judged on the basis of orthodoxy but on the basis of orthopraxis. The criterion Luther gives for this theological judgment is not a strictly dogmatic one: the "usurer wants to condemn the whole world to hunger, suffering and misery."³²

The question here remains: Is the gospel correlated in a *particular* way to the civil use of the law which, as we have seen, Luther does not abandon before he can make proper theological reflections? What Luther says is concise but nevertheless surprising for a pre-modern thinker who could not have conceived of novelty and emancipation in history and society:

If our gospel is the true light, then it must truly shine in the darkness. . . . If we do not want suffering, if we want to transform the world [*die Welt anders haben*] then we must go out into the world [*zur Welt hinaus gehen*] or create [*schaffen!*] another world which will do whatever we, or God wants.³³

And Luther adds: "God's marvelous power and wisdom must have its signs and must be grasped herein [*hierin*]."³⁴

III.

This brief review of Luther's admonition to pastors to preach against usury gives us an indication that, at least in this case, he does not perform the methodological leap from the *particular* situation of sin to the *universal* condition of sinfulness in order for the Gospel to be addressed. The good news was not interpreted as a forensic "yes" to all believers and sinners (*simul*) independent of their

particular sins. He connects faith and *social* life together and states, peremptorily, that the usurer *cannot be a believer*, no matter how pious, confessing, and faithful a Christian the usurer might appear to be. What is important is that, in this practical situation, Luther does not take for granted the sinful condition of humankind before he announces the Gospel as the new world that prints its marks (*Spuren*)³⁵ in the midst of the old world. Here, his theology is grounded on particular historical practice in which *ius* and *peccatum* are opposed to each other. This opposition *sub specie mundi* is illuminated by grace that grants the believer participation in the totality of God's salvific plan which Luther called *geistliches Regiment* (spiritual government). The usurer *qua* usurer cannot be *simul iustus et peccator* in the manner in which Luther defined the simultaneity (as *totus iustus et totus peccator*) from the eschatological point of view which sees the totality of God's mode of governing the world, encompassing simultaneously all condemnation and all grace. Only doxologically can the total simultaneity be affirmed. It is through this doxological medium that the believer can gaze through the *larvae* (masks) of God's being in history and participate in the immediacy of the eschatological totality.³⁶

In the world, this simultaneity is only partial and posits itself in oppositions. Hence, we can say that, from the standpoint of history (*coram mundo* or *sub specie mundi aut historiae*), we can affirm only a *simul partim iustus simul partim peccator* (in part righteous and in part sinner).

I hope it is clearly understood that I am not advocating abandoning the doxological function of paradoxical language in relating Law (*usus theologicus*, or what Heckel called *lex iustitiae universalis contra peccatum originalis*³⁷) and Gospel. In fact, I wish to keep the distinction as sharply as Luther did and to avoid the same confusion that Luther detected in both Roman Christendom and among the Enthusiasts. The former made of the theologico-political discourse a doxological one, the latter turned the doxological language into a political language.

Rather, my criticism is directed against any theological leap which abandons the concrete and particular reality of sin before the proclamation of the Gospel can take place. My suggestion is that, if the two uses of the Law are neither collapsed nor dualistically separated but are simply *distinguished*, the Gospel will not be restricted to a universal spiritual meaning and will not be exclusively correlated with the theological use of the Law. The Gospel must have a substantive and practical function that correlates with the civil use of the Law so that its "marks" can be "grasped

herein." Therefore, there must be a double "function" (*munus*, in the want of a better term) of the Gospel according to the double use of the Law, a *munus theologicus evangelii* and a *munus civilis evangelii*, or a doxological and an historical function of the Gospel. The proper locus of the first is the church and of the second society.

Reference should be made to the fact that the search for a correlative category for the *usus civilis legis* has been present in Lutheran theology since Melanchthon supported a "third use" of the Law. Elert was correct when he emphasized the distinction between Luther and Melanchthon at this point,³⁸ but he was right for the wrong reason. The problem in defending a third use of the Law in the context of Luther's theology is one of inner consistency and not primarily one of synergism or utopianism, as Elert claims.³⁹ He overplays Luther's supposed opposition to Melanchthon's affirmation that *vult Deus esse consociationem* (God desires association),⁴⁰ glossing over Luther's emphatic affirmation of the notion of divine-human cooperation in the earthly government.⁴¹ The difficulty with the third use of the Law is that it makes a new ethos possible only for the *renati et justificati* (reborn and justified),⁴² while Luther in general does not tie the responsibility for the renewal of civil law to conversion.⁴³ This problem of social ethics is one of the most difficult for Lutherans living in an age when changes in legislation constantly raise ethical issues. In face of this, a polarization arises: either one must affirm with Elert that civil law is only the word of compulsion and restraint, or one opts for a model of "Christ transforming culture" (H. Richard Niebuhr) which implies a third use of the Law.

Althaus attempted to avoid this impasse by introducing the category of command (*Gebot*)⁴⁴ to account for a positive renewal of the Law (*qua lex civilis*), which he sees as necessary to account for the source that keeps the Law in pace with historical development. The concept of command is, then, the mode through which God (*quasi ex machina*) reestablishes stability in the earthly government. But this device is really a *petitio principii* requiring, after the historical emergence of political revolutions, a *sui generis* intervention of God for the reestablishment of justice. This proposal has two problems.

First, by remaining faithful to Luther's disregard for change and novelty in political history, this proposal contradicts Luther's understanding of the earthly governance as being the one defined by the *cooperatio hominis cum deo* (cooperation of humans with God)⁴⁵ when, unable to be oblivious to historical and social developments, it has to explain them by appealing to a supernatural cause. To the extent that Luther did not recognize

historical development, this problem could not emerge for him.⁴⁶

Second, there is no metaphysical necessity that requires God to act in two independent and different ways (spiritual salvation and earthly preservation). Again, Luther did not need to address this problem, for he could not conceive of a legal development, and, therefore, the notion of preservation did not require an external and arbitrary act of God, for God creates and preserves in one and the same act. For Luther, the conservation of the political order was the best he could think of the world with the relatively static political view he shared with his time.⁴⁷ But the post-Enlightenment Althaus repristinates Luther's political conservatism into a politically reactionary stance that now turns itself *against* any change and renovation of civil law when necessitated by the historical process itself. Only the postulation of a Law-Gospel dialectic on the concrete and particular ground of history offers a genuine alternative.

IV.

The claim of this paper—that the interpretation of Luther in the midst of a changing world entails, for the sake of consistency, two dimensions in which the relationship between Law and Gospel unfolds itself—produces a critical problem.

The proposition that there is a theological crisis in Luther's methodology leaves a fundamental issue undecided. If there is a possible theological discourse that can be argued on the basis of a logic of liberation in the particular historical correlation of Law and Gospel (according to their civil use and function), there must be some criteria by which this correlation between Law and Gospel can be discerned. Luther's attack on the legally sanctioned practice of usury was not only an expression of frustration, as Benjamin Nelson suggests.⁴⁸ It is also an expression of hope in the possibility of creating new standards of justice that a reasonable mind would have to consider.

For Luther, the most characteristic positive feature of the earthly government was the proper use of reason (*ratio* or *Vernunft*). Ulrich Duchrow, in his still unsurpassed study of the two kingdoms doctrine,⁴⁹ has made clear that, with the exception of some few passages in which compulsion or the "sword" seems to be the ultimate criterion for ruling civil society, Luther himself insists that "not power, but wisdom or reason must rule over evil as

well as good people."⁵⁰ Reason is even regarded as the "master" of civil law.⁵¹ The world itself is conceived positively as a *regnum rationis*.⁵²

The appeal to reason as the governing agent in the structuring of political history should not lead one to the interpretation that Luther is thinking of reason in terms of technical rationality.⁵³ Reason, in Luther, is a function of the *persona publica*.⁵⁴ "To the essence of reason belongs its public character."⁵⁵ Reason, then, becomes dialogical and is expressed in the praxis of public conversation for the discernment and harmonization of human interests. Even compulsion is to be seen as a function of public reason for the "use of publicly controlled and legitimated force to the protection of general welfare."⁵⁶ The use of reason is avowed only insofar as it is maintained in the public domain with the purpose of administering justice and achieving equity even beyond the domain of the law.⁵⁷ The Luther research has already taken notice of the fact that "the main characteristic element of the 'regnum rationis' in Luther is the frequently used concept of equity."⁵⁸ Equity functions as the material criterion that calls upon reason to discern in the public forum those issues in which the legal codes are either insufficient or inadequate.⁵⁹ Laws and mores must be subjected to the criterion of equity.⁶⁰ For Brian Gerrish, the close connection between equity and reason sometimes seems to suggest that Luther equates the two.⁶¹ Luther had special appreciation for Aristotle's discussion of *epieikeia* in *The Nichomachean Ethics*. In fact, Luther's account of equity (*Billigkeit*) as providing the criterion for civil law is almost a paraphrase of Aristotle's understanding of equity as the criterion for "rectification of legal justice."⁶²

With the emergence in the modern historical consciousness of the relativity of the standards of justice and legality, the question of "rectification of legal justice" assumes an unexpected importance. We can no longer ask the question of equity in isolation from the constitutive forms of social and economic existence. It is to the change in the constitutive forms of social existence that the legal system owes its need for transformation. Hence, the question of equity is relative to the possible justice that a given form of social existence can provide. Only the public use of reason can decide on these matters.

Luther's concept of reason has received very little attention in the literature. Two works have broken a long silence on this issue. Bernhard Lohse's *Ratio und Fides* has shown how Luther's understanding of reason ought to be interpreted along the lines of his notion of "works." The main point in both (works and reason) is to distinguish them from faith.⁶³ Reason has to be condemned

when it is used for self-interest or for the enforcement of private will.⁶⁴ Gerrish, in his book *Grace and Reason*, goes even further, suggesting that Luther's understanding of reason should be properly understood as practical reason.⁶⁵

All of this seems to indicate that Luther's understanding of reason can be better interpreted in terms of the notion of communicative praxis as it is used in contemporary critical theory than the concept itself, mediated historically by Cartesian rationalism and positivism, immediately indicates. In fact, reason understood in terms of communicative praxis or public discourse allows for a reconstruction of Luther's theology that radically maintains the concern he stressed in defining the *regnum rationis* as being in service of others. It is the practice of an ever inclusive emancipatory conversation in solidarity with others that becomes "the origin of a possible God talk," (theo-logy) as Helmuth Peukert insisted.⁶⁶

The concept of reason as the discursive praxis of emancipatory communication that aims at extending the conversation beyond the prevailing moral and ideological boundaries, beyond the particular manifestation of the civil law, becomes the historical mediation between Law and Gospel by virtue of the fact that this conversation constitutes the forum for the regeneration of civil law—the forum that makes possible the word of novelty to be expressed as the strange word of the victim of the law. Luther's implicit affirmation of the need for such a conversation for the enforcement of equity is made evident in his attack on the lawful practice of usury while he extends the conversation beyond the law to the victims of civil law. Bringing them into the forum of debate creates the possibility of the regeneration of the law. It is by including the victim in the conversation that the particular function of the Gospel is manifested; it is what makes possible the re-creation of justice.

However, this norm remains abstract if the pursuit of justice and equity does not determine the content for such a conversation. If the claim of a victim is not legally recognized, it does not follow that all those whose claims are denied are victims, or that all victims' claims have the same merit. The material question at stake asks for the nature of the claims and interests that make up part of the conversation. To take into consideration the quest for justice and equity *restrains* the scope of the praxis of emancipatory conversation to the extent that it makes the conversation legitimate only if its ground is the search for equity at all levels of civil existence: economic, social, political.

In conclusion, the entire scope of the argument does not claim to have drawn from Luther's hidden intentions, the "true sense" of Luther's method, or

anything along these lines. My purpose has been to show that Luther's essay on usury typifies a critical moment in Luther's own understanding of how theology is done, and that this moment of crisis, magnified by the centuries that separate us from Luther, provides us with possibilities for the theological reconstruction that each age demands.

The implications of the argument here developed for what, in Luther, was theology proper, theology done *in loco iustificationis*, has been only alluded to. The consequence to be pursued is that the *coram deo* aspect of theologizing appears as an *actus secundum* within theology itself. However, it will not be a rationalization of the first phase of theological reflection done in the midst of emancipatory history, but a doxological moment in which the community confesses, proleptically and in faith, that the *totality* of reality is created, redeemed, and kept, in and by God's grace alone.

Notes

1. I do not presume that the heuristic merits of the method of suspicion with which I am engaged in this preliminary discussion justify the development of any theological argument. But I do insist that it offers a necessary correction to theologies that have for too long been oblivious to the one lasting contribution of the sociology of knowledge (from Marx through Mannheim, Scheler, and Habermas): that the common perception of reality and the representative function of common language is not simply a debasement and vulgarization of conceptual thought and high-level theoretical language, but that the former manifests some hidden traits masked in the latter, if and to the extent that both participate in the same socio-cultural and historical context.
2. For all the welcome reminders that the Middle Ages, and especially the High Middle Ages, were falsely accused of being the "dark ages," it is impossible to attribute to the Middle Ages the concept of change as essential to political history and social structures. See Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1980) and Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Ethics* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), pp. 126-31.
3. Paul Althaus, *The Divine Command* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966).
4. The irony of this stance is that the universal recognition of the human sinful condition presupposes the epistemological elevation to a prelapsarian stage in which we have knowledge of sinfulness without having sin to determine this very knowledge. And this is gnosticism.
5. WA 40/2:328: "*homo reus et perditus et deus iustificans vel salvator.*"
6. *Ibid.*, 40/1:589.
7. *An die Pfarrhern, wider den Wucher zu predigen*. WA 51:331-424. To my knowledge this essay has never been rendered into English.
8. Luther's moral assessment lacks the recognition of the fact that, without the usurer, the transition from medieval economy to capitalist economy is unthinkable, and that the accumulation of surplus capital, all the social functions of taxation, social mobility, and other historical achievements would not have been known. Luther's argument was, for his time, conservative, though it seems now, in late capitalism, quite revolutionary. The non-recognition of the importance of this distinction is the flaw in Guenther Fabiunke's otherwise fascinating interpretation of Luther's economic thought: *Martin Luther als Nationaloekonom* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1963).
9. WA 51:338-39.
10. *Ibid.*, 51:344.
11. *Ibid.*, 51:360.
12. For Aristotle's argument see *Treatise on Government*, bk. 1, ch. 10.
13. WA 51:351.
14. *Ibid.*, 51:361-62.
15. *Ibid.*, 51:344.
16. *Ibid.*, 51:361.
17. *Ibid.*, 51:362.
18. *Ibid.*, 51:396-97.
19. *Ibid.*, 51:399-400.
20. *Ibid.*, 51:421.
21. *Ibid.*, 51:353-54.
22. *Ibid.*, 51:409.
23. *Ibid.*, 51:353.
24. Karl Holl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, 3 vols. (Tuebingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1928-48), 1:246-50.
25. Werner Elert, *Morphologie des Luthertums*, 2 vols. (Muenchen: Beck, 1931), 2:24, 36.
26. Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), p. 79.
27. Johannes Heckel, *Lex Charitatis* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973), p. 33 *passim*.
28. WA 51:422.
29. *Ibid.*, 51:368.
30. *Ibid.*, 51:367-68.
31. *Ibid.*, 51:396.
32. *Ibid.*, 51:397.
33. *Ibid.*, 51:409.
34. *Ibid.*, 51:412.
35. *Ibid.*, 51:412.
36. Ulrich Asendorf, *Eschatologie bei Luther* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), p. 246. In fact, all paradoxical statements that abound in Luther are ingenious linguistic creations used to break the spell of finitude, and, as such, they are appropriate only to describe the "spiritual" government of God. Paradoxical language is not conceptual and analytical and is, therefore, inappropriate to describe the finite God-human cooperation in history. The paradoxical language, by breaking the barriers of finite conceptual categories, is intuitive, and its function should be regarded primarily as doxological.
37. Heckel, *Lex Charitatis*, p. 21.
38. Elert, *Morphologie*, 2:26-36.
39. *Ibid.*, 2:30-31.
40. *Ibid.*, 2:31, 51.
41. WA 18:754.
42. Elert, *Morphologie*, 2:26.
43. See Ulrich Duchrow, *Christenheit und Weltverantwortung* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1970), pp. 496-98.
44. Althaus, *Divine Command*.
45. WA 18:754.
46. It should be noted, however, that Luther does have a way of accounting for radical political changes in history. God impels certain people, the *Wunderleute*, or the *virii heroici* (heroes) to perform extraordinary acts in history that are necessary for the reestablishment of law and order. These heroes can be Christian or not. See Asendorf, *Eschatologie*, p. 260, and Gustav Wingren, *Luther on Vocation* (Philadelphia:

- Muhlenberg, 1957), p. 92. The appeal to extraordinary individuals to explain change in history only emphasizes Luther's lack of historical consciousness.
47. It is interesting to notice, however, that this view is challenged exactly at the time he wrote this article, at least to the extent that he was realizing the impossibility of harmonizing the interests of the princes with those of the emperor. Benjamin Nelson, *The Idea of Usury* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), p. 46, might be right when he says that the essay on which we commented reflects Luther's disappointment with the political situation of the time. But I would like to suggest that more important than the disappointment is Luther's emphasis that the political and economic orders were not to be taken for granted by the theologian.
 48. *Ibid.*
 49. Duchrow, *Christenheit*, pp. 495-98.
 50. *WA* 30/2:556.
 51. *Ibid.*, 11:272.
 52. Duchrow, *Christenheit*, p. 498.
 53. For the distinction between critical and technical reason see Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory* (New York: Seabury, 1972), pp. 188-252.
 54. Duchrow, *Christenheit*, p. 499.
 55. Martin Honecker, *Soziallehre zwischen Tradition und Vernunft* (Tuebingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1977), p. 205.
 56. Ulrich Duchrow, ed. *Lutheran Churches: Salt or Mirror of Society* (Geneva: LWF, 1977), p. 4.
 57. *Ibid.*, p. 587.
 58. Duchrow, *Christenheit*, p. 498.
 59. *WA* 19:632.
 60. *Br* 3:485.
 61. Gerrish, *Grace and Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), p. 35.
 62. *TR* 6:345; *WA* 44:707; cf. *Aristotle Ethics* 1137a30-b30.
 63. Bernhard Lohse, *Ratio und Fides* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958), pp. 126-30.
 64. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
 65. B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Reason*, p. 170.
 66. *Wissenschaftstheorie-Handlungstheorie-fundamentale Theologie* (Duesseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1976), p. 311.