Between the Reformation’s understanding of sola scriptura and the present day stand the traumatic events unleashed by the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, events that changed our views of science, of politics, and of religion. As far as Protestant theology is concerned, sola scriptura or the scriptural principle as it is known seems to have been the first casualty. When Luther and the Confessions describe the scriptures as entailing law and promises, the scriptures do it through prophets and apostles. Prophecy is what points to the gospel, the fulfillment of which is attested by the apostles as witnesses of the life, deeds, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as attested in the scriptures. This understanding was grounded in two fundamental assumptions that have remained unchallenged throughout Christendom until the time of the Enlightenment. The first was that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. The second was that the miracle accounts, particularly the resurrection of Jesus, were factual events and should be regarded as such today.

The philological work of Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768) put these assumptions into question. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781) furthered and radicalized his predecessor’s work rendering the truth claim of the miracle stories and the resurrection as non-demonstrable by reason. This left two options for those who felt the impact and wanted to remain faithful to the Christian message. One was to surrender reason, a sacrificium intellectus, and cling to the literal sense of the scriptures, no matter what reason might argue. This gave birth to what is known as fundamentalism. The other was to ground Christian faith on some other foundation than the scriptures, such as a moral postulate, a feeling of absolute dependence, a ground of being, authentic existence, on universal history as revelation, and so on and so forth, of which the scriptures would be a dated and circumstantial expression. This has been called foundationalism. Both, fundamentalism and foundationalism, are products of the En-
lightenment. One kept the *sola scriptura* but subjected it to an anachronistic misreading, the other simply evaded it. Much of the current debate over the authority of the scriptures, particularly in the United States of America, is a debate over these two options, not realizing that the responses offered still leave the basic question unchallenged. Both foundationalism and fundamentalism are, in fact, celebrations of the Enlightenment's biblical criticism. Both are a concession to Lessing's thesis that "accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason."*¹²* Fundamentalism opted for the truths of history without the aid of reason where as foundationalism went with the truths of reason without historical claims of the Bible. It was an affirmation of Lessing's thesis but validated through the different truths Lessing proposed as exclusive and exclusionary options.

The problem that plagues both answers, ensuing the modern alternative of either having reason (along with will and feelings) alone as arbiter, or blind assent to the letter, lies in Lessing's thesis itself, insofar as it is assumed that it addresses the *sola scriptura* principle. The scriptural principle for the Reformers addressed an entirely different problem than the one that prompted Lessing's quest for truth against or apart from biblical-historical claims. The Reformers' question was not one that concerned primarily reason, logic or even historicity. It was a question of power, namely: Who controls evangelical rhetoric, the art of proclaiming the gospel? Once this is understood, the answers that foundationalism and fundamentalism gave to the Enlightenment become the fallacies of a misplaced question. The irony in all of this is that the *sola scriptura* principle as it was used by the Reformers was an attempt to prevent precisely the fallacy produced by both fundamentalism and foundationalism, that is, to ground the teachings and practice of Christianity anywhere else but in grace, in faith, in Christ as attested by the apostolic witness and registered in the scriptures. *Sola scriptura* is only "alone" insofar as alone is faith, alone is grace, alone is Christ, *sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus*. This is the reason why, since August Twesten (1789–1876) in the early nineteenth century coined the expressions,¹³ we speak of *sola scriptura* as the "formal principle" of evangelical Protestantism while justification, entailed by the expressions *sola fide, sola gratia*, and *solus Christus*, is called the material principle. In other words, the
_scriptural principle is the apostolic principle, that is, what was attested by the apostles as inculcating Christ and him crucified and resurrected. And the “successors” to the apostles we know by name: Moses, Amos, Jeremiah, Mary, Matthew, Peter, Paul, Mark, Mary Magdalene, Luke, John, and so on.

_Sola Scriptura: The Negative Principle_

The _sola scriptura_ principle is not an invention of the Reformation. It was inherited, as were many other theologumena, from late medieval theologians, preachers, and philosophers. It was used with different emphases and nuances by Roger Bacon, John Wyclif, John Hus, Marsilius of Padua, William Occam, Jean Gerson, Wessel Gansfort, and others. All of them, like Luther, used it primarily as a negative principle to oppose the claims of a special and independent authority as argued by the Roman Curia. What were these claims? There were two and they were interrelated. One is that the scriptures are obscure and require, therefore, an external authority to interpret them. The other was that some ecclesial practices are divinely ordained and ought to be universally maintained, even if they are not in the scriptures of the two Testaments. This hypothesis of a “third testament,” a third covenant not registered in the scriptures available to us common sinners, is built around a legend in wide circulation in the Middle Ages, but its origin goes back to early Gnosticism. Legend has it that in the forty days the glorified Christ was on earth after his resurrection and before his ascension he taught his disciples things that were never rendered to print, but were passed on orally or by the silent laying on of hands from the first apostles to following generations of bishops in historical succession to the present day.4

The first time this argument was explicitly stated was when Basil of Caesarea in his treatise _On the Spirit_ (of 374) explained the institution of some practices that he regarded as normative and divinely ordained, like crossing oneself or turning to the east in prayer. “What writing has taught us to turn to East at the prayer?” he asked. And so he answered with another rhetorical question: “Does not this come from that unpublished secret teaching which our fathers
guarded in a silence out of the reach of curious meddling and inquisitive investigation?” He continued making the further point that even what was written down needs this extra knowledge to be well understood: “This is the reason for our tradition of unwritten precepts and practices, that the knowledge of our dogmas may not be neglected and contemned by the multitude through familiarity [for there is] obscurity employed in Scripture, which makes the meaning of dogmas difficult to be understood for the very advantage of the reader.” Basil is relying on a fundamental distinction: “‘Dogma’ and ‘kerugma’ are two distinct things; the former is observed in silence; the latter is proclaimed to all the world.” The reason for the distinction is for dogma to interpret and supplement scripture, which has been preserved in most of Orthodox and Roman Catholic theology. Modern Protestant theology has also invoked it, as in the nineteenth-century proposal by Karl Friedrich Kahnis to introduce an “ecclesial principle” along side with the formal and material principles. More recently, Carl Braaten suggested that between the Reformation’s clear and exclusive distinction between ius divinum and ius humanum, a third one should be introduced and he called it ius ecclesiasticum.

The Clarity and Sufficiency of the Scriptures

In the Bondage of the Will, Luther objected forcefully to this argument for a “silent” or “secret” (Basil’s words) tradition entailing the assumption of divinely sanctioned rites not supported by the two obscure Testaments:

It is true that for many people much remains abstruse, but this is not due to the obscurity of Scripture, but the blindness or indolence of those who will not take the trouble to look at the very clearest truth... on this account I have attacked the pope, in whose kingdom nothing is more commonly stated or more generally accepted than the idea the Scriptures are obscure and ambiguous, so that the spirit to interpret them must be sought from the Apostolic See of Rome... The Scriptures are perfectly clear.

Melanchthon in the Apology took issue with the related claim, that there are non-scriptural rites to be universally kept: “The opponents say that universal traditions [catholic rites] ought to be observed be-
cause they are thought to have been handed down from the apostles. Such religious people!... Therefore the intention and counsel of the apostles ought to be sought from their writings."

The clarity and sufficiency of the scriptures is an old theme in Christian theology and it first emerged in the struggle against Gnosticism. It was in the late second century that Irenaeus was faced with the first versions of the theory of a secret or sophisticated knowledge, which exceeded biblical witness and claimed that the scriptures are "ambiguous and that the truth cannot be extracted from them." Irenaeus knew the old legend held by those who, he reports, "maintain that the Savior privately taught these same things not to all but to certain only of his disciples." Irenaeus' response is clear: "... the entire Scriptures, the prophets, and the Gospels, can be clearly, unambiguously, and harmoniously understood by all, although all do not believe them." And he further insists:

... We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the gospel has come to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith.

As New Testament and early church scholar Oscar Cullmann once observed, for Irenaeus the church does not establish the canon, it receives it and this reception is an act of humility and deference to the apostolic witness. That means, in receiving the scriptures as ground and pillar, we are giving credence to the witness of those who knew Jesus and were eye-witnesses of his life, death on the cross and resurrection. What they saw is left for us to believe, but we do believe on account of those who have seen it and recognized him to be the one the prophets foretold and pointed to. And their testimony, as left in print, was regarded by Irenaeus as sufficient to anchor the faith of the church.

**Scripture as Interpreter Itself: The Positive Principle**

Luther's often quoted thesis that the "scripture interprets itself" (*scriptura sui ipsius interpres*) is well known. Gerhard Forde, Oswald Bayer, and Steven Paulson have independently phrased this well when they say that we do not interpret the scripture, but the
scripture interprets us. But how is this brought about? The common English translation is not precise and suggests that one should be using the scriptures against the scriptures in order to find the correct meaning. This is in fact a post-Enlightenment translation, which, although not completely wrong, misses the sharpness of the literal translation. It should literally be translated as “the scripture is in itself the interpreter.” The word *interpres* in Latin is a noun, designating that which stands between two values or “prices” (*inter-pres*). The etymology of the word points to the exchange of merchandize in markets of antiquity. It was often the case that because of difference in the languages or dialects spoken by the merchants bargaining for the value of goods there was need for an interpreter to convey the value or the price asked by a merchant to another in the process of negotiating an exchange. That the scripture interprets itself has the precise meaning that it is not interpreted, but is the interpreter itself. The scripture stands between two “values” and allows for the exchange to happen.

What are those values? Luther’s concise definition of what theology is about says it all: *homo peccator et Deus salvator*, or simply: Jesus Christ and us. The scripture interprets this exchange, Christ in our stead and we in the stead of Christ. That was why Luther could call it a happy or marvelous exchange. As our interpreter, the scripture makes intelligible to us a language that for us is foolishness (*moria, I Cor 1*), because we come to the “market” with the notion that we can barter with the valuables we think we have. And the interpreter tells us that it is worth nothing and yet the other party is giving even himself to us in this foolish and scandalous exchange: nothing for all, all for nothing. If we try to do something, even that little we suppose we retain (*facere quod in se*) in this exchange, we destroy the gift, and the happy exchange turns into a miserable deal. A gift can only be given if it is free and without return, otherwise it is no longer a gift. Its sheer reception is called faith. Hence the *sola scriptura* stands between two other *solae*, *solus Christus* and *sola fide*, the gift and the reception conveyed by grace alone, *sola gratia*.

The problem with foundationalism in all its liberal variations is that it took the scripture to be negotiated by the theologian or philosopher who stands between the scripture and its reader and gives
the hermeneutic key to know its worth, that is, the scriptures, not Christ. The fundamentalist with all shades of biblical legalism does the same thing, as the negotiator, asserting its immense purchase value, but in the exchange loses Christ. Between the two, foundationalism and fundamentalism, it is only the price tag that each puts on the scriptures is different, but it still is a merchandize in the market of ideas and morals. For each, the scripture is a value in and of itself and no longer the interpreter. To say that the scripture is itself the interpreter does not put a price tag on the scripture. Therefore, the scripture, like the interpreter in the market place, does not have a value in itself. Its importance is to make possible the exchange, a very foolish yet happy exchange at that. Hence it is not valueless, but value free.

Worth noticing is that this process in which the means of exchange become the end of a bargain is a modern phenomenon typical to capitalist economies. And it is not surprising that this problem of the scriptures turning into a commodity is a phenomenon that coincides with the triumph of capitalism. In pre-capitalist economies the “interpreter,” that is, money, is a means and not an end in itself, it exists only to make possible the exchange of goods. In capitalism a reversal occurs. As Marx put it in his classical description of this transition to capitalism, we move from the formula C-M-C (commodity-money-commodity) to M-C-M, by which money is transformed into capital. Accumulation thus becomes an end in itself. Fundamentalism and foundationalism are approaches to scripture ruled by a similar capitalist ethos. While the Reformers conceived of the reader under the law facing scripture to be the reader under the gospel (R-S-R), foundationalism and fundamentalism see scripture under examination by the reader to be transformed into the scripture interpreted (S-R-S).

More than Enough: Rhetoric and Dialectics

So, is sola scriptura sufficient? Is alone enough? Simply put, no! It is not enough because it is more than enough! If I were just to say that it is not enough, lurking behind would be the suspicion of a sug-
gestion that we need a further Gnostic knowledge to complement what is lacking or not clearly exposed in it, a position that Irenaeus and a number of theologians leading to the Reformers so much criticized, and that foundationalists are reintroducing. But if I would say that it is simply enough, lying in wait would be the suspicion that the scripture is no longer the interpreter but a value, or the value in itself, as fundamentalist merchants of the scripture advertise.

However, grammatically speaking, the expression “more than enough,” can have two meanings. In a rhetorical sense, we can use the expression to denote something that exceeds expectations. A gift that comes with no strings attached (only so it is a gift) and enriches our lives beyond what we had envisioned can be described as “more than enough” in this rhetorical sense; it is something that comes by sheer grace. But “more than enough” can also be interpreted in a logical sense as that which exceeds a condition set or a requirement made, and the excess is superfluous or overcharged.

Between these two senses of “more than enough,” which is meant to be taken? Can not both be true? In fact, the scripture is more than enough as it is the interpreter that presents the story of a gift that is self-surpassing, which we call gospel and all that points to it and inculcates Christ (was Christum treibet). It is the story of God who becomes flesh and dies the death of a sinner, of the greatest sinner (maximus peccator) so as to meet us on our terms, we who have nothing to bargain, we who stand condemned by the law, we to whom all is given, even God’s own self. This is the rhetorical sense of “more than enough.”

But the logical sense to “more than enough” is also true. There is plenty in the scriptures that exceed what for us is necessary and sufficient, even as it is salutary for times and places in which they were promulgated and will serve us as examples if correctly understood, that is, according to its “grammatical, historical meaning,” as Luther insists.20 This is what Luther says clearly in “How Christians Should Regard Moses (1525)”: 

One must deal cleanly with the Scriptures. From the very beginning the word has come to us in various ways. It is not enough simply to look and see whether this is God’s word, whether God has spoken it; rather we must look and see to whom it has been spoken, whether it fits us. That makes all the difference between night and day.... The word in Scripture is of two kinds: the first does
not pertain or apply to me, the other kind does. . . . The false prophets pitch in and say, "Dear people, this is the word of God." This is true, we cannot deny it. But we are not the people. \(^{21}\)

\textit{The Universal Word Speaks Dialect}

The question is to whom are the words addressed? If the words are spoken to the one who is \textit{totus peccator} and entails the promise of Christ that makes us \textit{totus iustus}, this is the word for all of us that the scripture interprets. Now, if the word addresses a particular individual or groups of people, and is bound to that particular situation and context, it is a different and distinct kind of word; it is equally the word of God, but we might not be the people to whom it is addressed. If it is not the universal word that brings us to Christ in the midst of our \textit{totus peccator} condition, if it is a particular word, that addresses a political, economic, social, familial, gender, race, or sexual situation, then this word needs translation (\textit{trans-latio}, bringing over from a given context to another context), because the universal Word also speaks dialect. \(^{22}\) This is the distinction between what is apostolic and what is not, even if spoken by an apostle. In one of his many criticisms of the book of James, Luther said:

And this is the true test by which to judge all books, when we see whether or not they inculcate Christ. For all the scriptures shows us Christ, Romans 3 [21]; and St. Paul will know nothing but Christ, I Corinthians 2 [2]. Whatever does not teach Christ is not [yet] apostolic, even though St. Peter or St. Paul does the teaching. Again, whatever preaches Christ would be apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate or Herod were doing it. \(^{23}\)

Even Christ's own command when he bids the ten healed lepers "go to the priest and make sacrifice does not pertain to me," said Luther, and he adds: "The example of their faith, however, does pertain to me; I should believe Christ, as did they." \(^{24}\)

Is Luther contradicting himself, since the case was earlier made that the scriptures are the interpreter and also that which needs to be translated? Legalists and liberals alike would charge Luther for trying to have it both ways. And so he does, because interpretation is not translation. The scriptures are both the interpreter and also that which needs translation, depending on the use of the "word" implied. The
scripture is our immediate interpreter insofar as the word is for us, both as the universal word that condemns us and leads us to the promise, and as the civic mandate that pertains to the worldly affairs. And these two coincide when we are brought by them to Christ. However, it needs to be translated whenever its dialect does not speak to us. And this distinction remains through the eschaton: *Duplex est forum, theologicum et politicum.*25 In today’s dialect we would say: Theology and ideology are different orders of discourse. One pertains to the ultimate, the other to penultimate realities. One is the Word that alone speaks, promises and delivers; the other is a dialect that the Word speaks for circumstances demarcated by time and space. One does what it says (*sacramentum*), the other exemplifies what the doing implies for a given context (*exemplum*).26

Yes, the Word speaks dialect, a specific mode of carrying a conversation confined to a given context and addressing particular issues that pertain to and are demarcated by that context. From the same root *dialect* we have the word dialectics which, before Hegel gave it an ontological meaning, was one of the ancient basic arts in what was called the *trivium*, which included also grammar and rhetoric. Dialectics was the art of mastering the logic or rationality of a given dialect, a conversation within a given context. For example, different are the dialects of the court room, a market place, a street gang gathering, church liturgies, or a church convention, and so forth. Each entails its own rules and logic, which are bound to the very context of the dialect employed.

Luther used the distinction between the Word, as law and gospel, that pertains to all, and words that pertain to some only and under certain circumstances, describing them as two different linguistic arts: rhetoric and dialectics. Dialectics for Luther was what we would call the logic of an argument, by which a postulate, proposition, or mandate is put forward, sets and begs its counterpart, and demands a fitting response. As with a commandment, something is proposed and a response is expected; it presupposes an exchange, an interaction that might not be a happy one. Dialectics counted as the art of reasoning within the rules of conversation in the context of a given "dialect." It is the craft Luther employed in the disputations. It implies that both the rules and the context must be understood and discerned.
The context in which it happens must be specified by reading it grammatically and historically. Luther’s criticism of the spiritual meaning in biblical exegesis as a tool of interpretation was precise and incisive because “spiritual” exegesis (entailing allegorical, tropological, or anagogical meaning) sought a universal meaning in a particular dialect and did not “deal cleanly with scripture.” Rhetoric, on the other hand, is just telling the story, proclaiming it. Such is the gospel, which Luther again and again defined simply as a discourse or story about Christ that grasps us as the overwhelming gift of God. It does not make a proposition to be argued, neither is it about a conversation among different parties. It belongs to a different economy. This is why there is no such thing as a dialogical sermon. It is pure deliverance in both senses of the term: it dispenses and releases in the same act; it is law and gospel.

The Rule of Grammar

How do we discern these two genres? Certainly it is to know if the text is “for me.” But could I not be in denial? For Luther this discernment is done by the primary liberal art and the most important of the trivium for theology as theology: grammar. “Among the human sciences devised, the most useful for the theological propagation is grammar.” Why grammar? Because it is grammar that reveals what genre is being employed by scripture, whether it is dialectics or rhetoric, whether it is the external form or the inner energy it releases in the word-event it becomes. Ergon or energeia are the terms often used to describe these two aspects of language that grammar discerns. The universal word as energeia is that which effects my conviction as sinner and announces the unconditional gospel. It does what it says and says what it does. Different are the circumstantial expressions that survive for our edification in the letter of the scriptures. This corresponds to the distinction Luther uses between Christ as a sacrament and as an example. The sacrament grasps us for what it is; it is the means of grace itself. The example indeed needs a translator. Foundationalists, with their liberal strategies, evade the distinction and invent a new grammar alongside with
scripture. They create an "Esperanto" that is as salutary as the actual Esperanto is in the world today: worthless. Fundamentalists, with their legalistic strategies, conflate the distinction and idolize dialectics, legislating it as the only lingua franca.\textsuperscript{30}

For Luther, the question left for theological discernment was about the distinction. Thus he writes from Coburg to Justus Jonas in June 1530: "we start with this distinction: the Decalogue is the dialectic of the gospel and the gospel the rhetoric of the Decalogue, and thus we have all of Moses in Christ, but not all of Christ in Moses."\textsuperscript{31} In other words, Moses is enough yet we never make it, Christ is more than enough and we don't need to make it.

In his commentary to the Ten Commandments in the \textit{Small Catechism} Luther provided the example of how to translate a dialect, even one that Luther could praise so much as the Decalogue, even proclaiming himself to be a new disciple of it.\textsuperscript{32} He turned negative statements into positive ones, making very clear what is positively for us (\textit{Wir sollen} . . . ) out of what was negatively formulated for the people of Israel (\textit{Du sollt nicht} . . . ). Even if you are not under the civil charge of murdering someone, the Fifth Commandment applies to you because you must "help and support [the neighbors] in all of life's need." He does this exemplarily in his commentary on the Third Commandment in the \textit{Large Catechism} where he distinguished the outward sense that concerned only the people of the Old Testament, and the Christian meaning of people having the duty and the right to have time to hear the Word of God and for leisure (also for the common folk who were not socially protected, he insists). Or he could go even further than that as he did in the "Theses Concerning Faith and Law":

"49. . . . if the adversaries press the Scriptures against Christ, we urge Christ against the Scriptures. . . . 52. For if we have Christ, we can easily establish laws and we shall judge all things rightly. 53. Indeed, we would make new decalogues. . . . 54. And these decalogues are clearer than the Decalogue of Moses."\textsuperscript{33}

Indeed, \textit{tempus mutat mores et leges} (time changes costumes and laws). However, with the antinomian controversy raging (1535), Luther makes it clear that not anything goes, and he continues: "58. Nevertheless, since in the meantime we are inconstant in spirit, and the
flesh wars with the spirit, it is necessary, also on account of inconstant souls, to adhere to certain commands and writings of the apostles, lest the church be torn to pieces.”34 Yes, to “certain commands.” But which ones are they? The response can only be one that follows from Luther’s and the Reformers’ apostolic or scriptural principle: those that do not divert us from but lead us to hearing the story of God in the flesh, crucified and resurrected, for, Luther adds, if the question is “Christ or the law, the law would have to be let go, not Christ.” In other words, any law that pretends to have universal validity except the one that declares every one of us equally totus pecator thus leading us to Christ is a grammatical confusion of dialectics and rhetoric. Any law that prescribes works and conditions to the belonging in the priesthood of all believers, to be listeners and proclaimers of the Word must be let go for it is not the law that has already condemned us. And by this law alone, dead we are. This alone is the law that always convicts and kills us (lex semper accusat), the rest is overkill.

The Proper Uses of the Law

Therefore, Luther distinguished between two senses or kinds of law and justice, what the later confessors phrased as the first and the second use of the law. The first use is the civil or political use of the law, the “logical” or dialectical use. The second is the theological use, the one that the rhetorical “more than enough” addresses. The civil use belongs to the dialect that addresses particular contexts and situations and can change and will change according to civil arrangements and political contracts. Why is the first the civil use and the second the theological use? Because it concerns the relation to the neighbor in ever changing circumstances. We are all creatures, human beings in God’s continuing creation, before we are believers.

The first use of the law applies to all, Christian and non-Christians alike, and they are to be found in the scriptures and also elsewhere, because they are local expressions of the orders of creation framed by Moses for the Jewish people and written in the heart to find expression in Roman law, in the civil code of Luther’s Saxony (Sach-
senspiegel\(^{35}\)), in the Constitution of the United States, or in Koranic legislations of Islamic countries. They apply to all, but not all phrase it in the same way. Luther, for example, found the justification for polygamy given in Leviticus 25:5–6 a “very good” rule that protected a widow, kept the name and lineage of a deceased father.\(^{36}\) For that context it was a good law and its example should teach us that toward those same ends we should enforce legislation. These civil uses of the law, wherever they are found, need translation, for they are dialect-bound. Not only tempus but also situs mutat mores et leges (time and location change costumes and laws). When the Word speaks dialect, when the first use of the law is concerned, it is for Luther still the law of God spoken to a given community or individuals and its meaning for us needs to be translated, carried over from one place to another, from one time to another. And the means of its translation is communicative or dialogical reason, “the head of all [temporal] things… the all-best, yes, something divine.”\(^{37}\) And this communicative reason is what can be exercised across human communities regardless of religious allegiances. And the end of reason is to prevent chaos, produce equity (Billigkeit), bringing about civil justice, and peace for the proclamation and the hearing of the Word. This is the telos, goal and end of all laws.

These laws are for Luther the expression of something deeper, which for him, following Paul and the later natural law tradition, can be found in every human heart. The Decalogue and all the other biblical prescriptions are but an expression of natural law codified in given dialects: thus, says Luther, “I keep the commandments which Moses has given, not because Moses gave commandments, but because they have been implanted in me by nature, and Moses agrees.”\(^{38}\) Or even, as we have seen, insofar as Moses agrees. “Moses” is a dialect, which even gives us language to help us in our conversation toward finding our own voice to achieve equity. And this is an ideological task, a civic and political exercise that theologians alone will not accomplish, for their proper forum is alone the Word. But as members of a civil community they are called upon to testify as to the way the people of the Bible carried out such conversations, such dialectics, the contextual results they have achieved and the example it provides us with.
But is Luther sponsoring a double theory of truth by which revelation stands beside a natural and perennial truth, that is, a metaphysics? Nothing could be further away from Luther than that. His point is only that natural law sustains us like crutches in the provisional affairs of this world. This is what natural law discloses, and what is universal about it, why there is so much coincidence in legislations from all over the world and through all times as to what conveys our civil and social obligations. But this is also why in different societies with their different dialects there are varied amazing ways in which this might be expressed and are always subject to change. But is there one code that is immutable? No, there is none. (From all we know the only one there ever was, was broken and what we are left with are dialects trying to convey it (Exodus 32:19). All that we have is our hearts that are also broken and fail in every attempt to express that image of God implanted in it.

Here is a simple example. We all share the sense that in our hearts there is something written, along the lines of the Fifth Commandment, like “don’t kill.” However, this general law is concretely rendered with many variations through time and space. Some societies think this pertains to all living creatures. Many think that it is right to kill that which threatens our human lives including some bacteria or those labeled as terrorists. Some think that it pertains to all human beings, including the arch-murderer Cain (Genesis 4:15). Some include the unborn; others also those who are brain-dead. Still others think that it applies to all humans except those condemned in a court of law to be executed. According to the option chosen by a local dialect, does anything go? Certainly not, because our broken hearts reflect their brokenness in communities severed from one another precisely over these “translations.” Yet, it is the same longing of the hearts to find expression of the law written in them that also forms communities. And these communities long for broader fellowship of all human race and all creatures as much as they assert their differences that are at once expressions of sin, of the injustices we create and perpetrate, and as symptoms of our yearning to live out the law written in the heart and give to it a timely and contextual expression.

We all in our stations of life need these crutches to get along, no matter in what shape or form they are cast. For Luther, they took
three shapes: the household (*oeconomia*), the state (*politia*) and the church (*ecclesia*). Yes, even the church as a visible, institutional or empirical reality is nothing but a crutch to help us in our infirmity as much as the state and the household are.

*Antinomianism?*

Natural law is only the shorthand for the universal human search to live together under the condition of utter sinfulness, which we normally call original sin. This does not imply metaphysics, a universal truth that raises our nature to an immutable status beyond nature's vicissitudes. It implies, however, reasoning through our ever changing infirmities to find institutions that address them. And they always change because God is not only the creator, but the one who continuously creates and we are not only sin-ful, but indeed sin-ners; we keep finding new ways to dodge our condition and go against it. Antinomianism is the name we give to this attitude of living without these institutions as if the crutches that carry us were only addictions from which we have been set free. This would be like believing that throwing away the crutches would by itself heal us.

The work or function of the law in its two uses or senses is finally only one, to bring us to Christ, to be the pedagogue of Christ. Theologically, it brings us to Christ because it finally accuses us leaving us with nothing but a promise received in faith, that is, nothing but all. Politically, it provides for institutions and structures fit to times and places in which the word as law and gospel can be proclaimed. This is why justice is such a precious and overwhelming topic in the scriptures. It is the pedagogue of justification. It teaches us what we can never accomplish: the imputation of a righteousness we can only receive as a gift. Injustice, as Moses and all the other dialects that try to render the law written in our hearts warn us, is so detrimental not only because it creates a "noise" in God's communication to us, but also because in denying the love of the neighbor, the love of God is at the same time changed into the love of an idol that suits ourselves.

The two senses of the law coincide in the *eschaton*, in every moment of judgment, every *eschata* (plural) by which the "terrors that strike the conscience when sin is recognized" are addressed by the
gospel of forgiveness, which is received in faith and produces fruits. This is the very moment in which the law in both its uses comes to its end and fulfills its task and the rule of God reigns. This is why Luther insisted so much that the law in its civil sense must address us, must be a dialect that speaks to us so as to bring terror into our conscience. (If terror does not strike us first, what we get is terrorism.) Only then can it also be theologically useful. But it must always strike us before them, I before you, for only then can I love you before myself; only then can we love others before ourselves; only then can we love the Other before ourselves—otherwise it simply would not be love. For Luther the end of all laws is love.\textsuperscript{40} And we reach this end only if the law fulfills its task in us in the first place. This is why the Formula of Concord (Solid Declaration) art. VI defines antinomianism as prescribing the law to others, but not to ourselves insofar as we regard ourselves the true Christians.\textsuperscript{41} Antinomianism is as much living without the law as it is to apply to others what we do not apply to ourselves. In this sense, ironically, it reversed Luther’s maxim in affirming that the end of all love is the law.

Conclusion

Is scripture alone enough? It is more than enough. More than enough in a double sense. First, it exceeds anything we can bargain for, and in fact leaves our bargaining as worthless and detrimental insofar as it conveys us Christ, being for us the interpreter of the absolutely unequal exchange between what we bring (brokenness) and what Christ brings (wholeness). And, second, it also exceeds in providing us with a plethora of examples that pertain to different circumstances of how this works out in our everyday life with its challenges, limits, circumstances and possibilities.

NOTES

3. August Twesten, Vorlesungen über die Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche, nach dem Kompendium des Herrn Dr. W. L. de Wette, Erster Band, Zweite, verbesserte Auflage (Hamburg: Friedrich Perthes, 1929), pp. 280–282 where he distinguishes an “objective material principle” (objective materiale Princip) as the doctrine of justification and a “formal principle” (formale Princip) as the scriptures. He then (p. 284) identifies a third “subjective or generative principle” (subjective oder erzeugende Princip), which he describes as the “alertness of conscience” (Regsamkeit des Gewissens). See the informative essay by Erik M. Heen, “The Distinction ‘Material/Formal Principles’ and its use in American Lutheran Theology,” Lutheran Quarterly 17 (2003): 329–354.


13. Oscar Cullmann, “La tradition,” Cahiers Théologiques 33 (1953): 41–52. The appeal to Irenaeus in defense of episcopal succession misses the argument that he makes for keeping the apostolic succession only as long as it was necessary for the canon to be received by the church. But once it was received its need is preempted. See Vítor Westhelle, “Augsburg Confession VII and the Historic Episcopate,” Dialog: A Journal of Theology 39/3 (Fall 2000): 222–228.

14. WA 7. 97, 20–22 is the locus classicus for the expression.


23. *LW* 33: 396; *WA* 7: 385–86. This is also the reason that Luther in criticizing the spiritual (allegorical, tropological, and anagogical) exegesis argues that “literal meaning,” which was the medieval alternative, “is not a good term” and prefers “grammatical, historical meaning.” *LW* 39: 181; *WA* 7: 652.


26. For a typical description of the distinction see *WA* 5, 639, 13–16.


30. One might be reminded, as an illustration, that the commandments of God, dictated by God, were written by Moses and carried his handwriting, his dialect, as if it were. The original tablets written by God were broken when Moses saw the idolatry of the people. The message could not be more suggestive: for an idolatrous people even a text written in God’s own handwriting would become an idol and, as idols do, would arrest the gaze from the One to whom the gaze should be directed. Again this would put a tag on the scriptures turning it from the interpreter into a value in itself.

31. *et coepi iudicare, decalogum esse dialecticam euangelu et euangelium rhetoricam decalogi, habereque Christum omnia Mosi, sed Mosen non omnia Christi* *WA Br* 5, 409, 28–30.


33. *LW* 34: 112–113; *WA* 39/1: 46–47.


37. *Et sane verum est, quod ratio omnium rerum res et caput at prae caeteris rebus huus vitae optimum et divinum quoddam sit. WA 39/1: 175, 9–10; LW 34: 137.


40. *Si enim lex contra chantas temest, non est lex Se chantas est domina et magistra legis. WA 42: 505, 11–12; LW 2: 340.

41. “...we reject and condemn as a harmful error...the teaching that the law is not to be urged...upon Christians and those who believe in Christ but only upon unbelievers, non-Christians, and the impenitent.” Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, art VI, “Third Use of the Law” § 25, *BC*, p. 591.