Proclamation and Obligation: On the Demonstration of the Spirit and of Power

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I.

IN TIMES OF CRISIS, WHICH ARE TIMES OF DECISION, SOME ISSUES THAT SEEM IN other instances undisputable appear altogether different. Times of crisis reveal trends that in other times are hidden. But it is not the split between truth and error that these times reveal; it is rather the collapse of a unitary notion of truth. There are no assurances in a crisis, only the indictment of all pledges. This is Jacob at the Jabbok, fighting through the night in the divide, in the river, in the fearful expectation of meeting the brother he has deceived, fighting not knowing whom—whether the devil or a god—fighting nevertheless, without assurance. This is crisis!

In Europe, 1932 was a year of great crisis. That year, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, addressing the Youth Peace Conference in Czechoslovakia, raised the basic issue in the relationship between proclamation and obligation:

> Can the Church with the same certainty proclaim the law of God as it proclaims

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Proclamation and obligation have been progressively dissociated in western theological tradition. Truth and power must be reconnected in a way that recognizes costly forgiveness while denying cheap community.

the gospel? Can the Church with the same certainty by which it proclaims: 'Your sins are forgiven,' also say: 'We need a socialist economic order'; or: 'Don't go into war'?[1]

Of interest in this statement is what is missing. Bonhoeffer supposes through-out the speech that the gospel proclamation of forgiveness does not in itself entail a change in behavior, a new arrangement of personal and social relations. Bonhoef-fer, here and elsewhere,[2] takes pains to bridge a ditch between the universal proclamation of the good news and the particular social and ethical configurations that this message should have in society. Formulated as a question: Is there a necessary correlation between God's unconditional promise and the law, between salvation and sanctification, between forgiveness and regeneration, between free-dom and duty? Whence the anxiety that Bonhoeffer reveals in his attempt to address the situation of his time?

How far we are from the time when forgiveness was in itself restoration: "For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk'?" (Matt 9:2-8)! How removed we are from an intrinsic relation between repentance and regeneration: "You have been made well! Do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you" (John 5:14)! And more, how far we are from the under-standing that forgiveness itself produces the recognition of what one is doing: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34)! To rephrase: Forgive them; so they will change their minds, so that they will be converted!

There has been in the development of the western theological tradition a progressive dissociation of proclamation from obligation; this finds its presupposi-tion in Augustine's *City of God* and will reach its culmination in the Lutheran reformation. But instead of seeing the reformation as simply a further step in this development, I will suggest that the reformation is the moment in which the development is made manifest, is brought explicitly to consciousness, and is set as a task for modern theological endeavors. However, I will set the problem in a slightly different fashion than Bonhoeffer has done in order to stress the enigmatic character of the problem.

Since Foucault's analysis of the relation between truth and power,[3] it is heuristically rewarding to compare the relation between proclamation and obliga-tion with the way in which we comprehend, imagine, and project the idea that the power of truth is not the same as—indeed, is divorced from—the truth of power. My question is how we came to the idea of dissociating truth and power—holding

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[1]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Zur theologische Begründung der Weltbundarbeit," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, vol. 1 (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1958) 145.

[2]See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan, 1965) 303-319 (on the doctrine of the *primus usus legis*).

[3]Michel Foucault, *Truth and Power*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980) 133: "'Truth' is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A 'regime' of truth."

that the first, grounded in divine self-revelation, is not constituted in and by power relations, while the second is constituted by hierarchies or systems that do not entail a necessary relationship to truth. Thus, I am interested in observing how western Christianity came to suggest that truth (which has its politics of power) and power (which has its regime of truth) came to be understood and considered as two different things, with a desirable but not intrinsic connection.

In what follows I will highlight some historical moments in which the problem of relating truth and power manifested itself with particular sharpness.

II.

An immediate relation between the truth entailed in the message of forgiveness and the power of transformation was subject to question already in biblical times. The question of Paul in Rom 6:1 is suggestive: "Are we to continue to sin that grace may abound?" The response is negative, but the problem remains in that "I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (Rom 7:15).

The impossibility, even in a state of grace, to be empowered so as to avoid sin reaches its clearest formulation in Augustine. In books 13 and 14 of *The City of God,* that culminate in an explanation of the nature of the two cities, Augustine begins by explaining the origin of death as "the separation of the soul from the body":

> For the very violence with which body and soul are wrenched asunder, which
> in the living had been conjoined and closely intertwined, brings with it a harsh
> experience...till there comes a total loss of sensation.[4]

Sensation (the "very interpenetration of spirit and flesh") disappears, and this is the mark of death. However, death is not only the final consummation of the separation of body and soul, but it is, as the wage of sin, already present in the disconnection or disturbances between the will of the soul and the motion of the body. This disturbance that signalizes death in a person is then illustrated at length by Augustine with the example of the generative organs that are frequently not subjected to the will but might move lustfully without control of the will.[5] Sin as the disembodying of the will can therefore be shown to produce death. Once this has been demonstrated and accepted, Augustine is ready to present the distinction between the two cities, the one that lives "by the love of self, even to the contempt of God," and the other "by the love of God, even to the contempt of self."[6] It is this love of God and contempt of the self that subjects the will and disciplines the body. The distinction is important because it assumes the necessity of an institution to deal with the defective soul in its inability to control the body and to master itself.[7]

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[4]Augustine, *The City of God* (New York: Modern Library, 1950) 13:6 (416).

[5]Ibid., 14:23-24 (470-473). See also 13:13 (422): "They [Adam and Eve] experienced a new motion of their flesh, which had become disobedient to them, in strict retribution of their own disobedience to God."

[6]Ibid., 14:28 (477).

[7]Ibid., 14:23 (471).

This is what necessitates the subordination of the soul to God and of the body to God's city, the church.[8] In Augustine, the Platonic formula is inverted: the soul is the prison of the body.

Although the earthly city and all its evils would continue to subsist, it is the heavenly city that guarantees salvation in the life to come and a relative realm of peace in this world. Augustine inaugurated a millennial tradition that subordinated civil duty and power to ministry and proclamation. But above all it was Augustine that granted to this subordination the status of a legitimate arrangement.[9]

This hierarchy of powers consolidated itself in the middle ages. Since the apocryphal "Donation of Constantine"—dated from the eighth century, but taken to be issued by Constantine until it was discredited by Lorenzo Valla in the fifteenth century—it was taken for granted that "inasmuch as our imperial power is earthly, we have decreed that it shall venerate and honor his most holy Roman Church and that the sacred see of blessed Peter shall be gloriously exalted above our empire and earthly throne."[10] This tradition will find its most radical expression in Pope Boniface VIII's Bull "Unam Sanctam" (1302):

> We learn from the words of the Gospel that in this Church and in her power are two swords, the spiritual and the temporal. For when the apostles said, 'Behold, here' (that is, in the Church, since it was the apostles who spoke) 'are two swords'—the Lord did not reply, 'It is too much,' but 'It is enough.' Truly he who denies that the temporal sword is in the power of Peter, misunderstands the words of the Lord, 'Put up thy sword into the sheath. Both are in the power of the Church, the spiritual sword and the material. But the later is to be used for the Church, the former by her.'[11]

III.

The consciousness of a diastasis (or rift) in this hierarchical arrangement emerges clearly only with the reformation's protest against the way in which freedom and obligation were related to one another. Two centuries after Boniface,

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[8]We have to recall that *The City of God* was written as a response to Alarik's sack of Rome in 410 which prompted many to accuse the Christian faith and its rejection of the Greco-Roman deities of having caused or failed to prevent the calamity. Augustine skillfully reverts the contention by arguing that it was because of the Christian church that an even greater evil was averted (cf. book 1).

[9]The most emphatic formulation of this harmony is given by Innocence III in his analogy of the relationship between the pontifical authority and the royal power as the one between the sun and the moon. *Documents of the Christian Church*, Henry Bettenson, ed. (New York/London: Oxford University, 1957) 157-158.

[10]Ibid., 140.

[11]Ibid., 162. The fact that this Bull would cause the outrage of Philip IV of France, who plundered the papal palace and imprisoned the Pope for a few days, should be taken as both a reaction to the extreme way by which the hierarchy of powers was defined and a confirmation of the fact that the Augustinian arrangement was experiencing the first signs of erosion. We have just to remember that the first significant and lasting attack on the model would be published only two decades after, in 1324: *Defensor Pacis*, the major work of Masilius of Padua.

Luther broke completely with that tradition by carrying the initial distinction to its last consequences:

> What, then, are priests and bishops? Answer: Their government is not a matter of authority or power, but a service and an office....Their ruling is nothing more than the inculcating of God's word, by which they guide Christians and overcome heresy.[12]

Luther's distinction has far-reaching consequences. It is not only a distinction and separation of competence, it dissolves an intrinsic bond between truth and power that had begun a thousand years earlier: "the governing authority must not be resisted by force, but only by confession of the truth."[13] Although Luther would often remain faithful to an analogical relationship between the truth revealed for the inner person and the power exercised by the outer person, this could count only as a negative argument, like outer tyranny as indication of inner apostasy[14] or usury as evidence of idolatry and impiety.[15] Positively, sanctification could not be held as indication of blessedness, as Luther argues in the *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* of 1528: "For to be holy (*heilig*) and to be saved (*selig*) are two entirely different things. We are saved through Christ alone....Even the godless may have much about them that is holy without being saved thereby."[16]

It is with the reformation[17] that western Christianity became aware not only of the radical and paradoxical simultaneity of freedom and duty, between the power of truth and the truth of power,[18] but also of the eventual difficulty or impossibility of keeping the two together. So it is clearly argued by the Smalcald theologians in the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*:

> Christ gave the apostles only spiritual power, that is, the command to preach the Gospel, proclaim the forgiveness of sins, administer the sacraments, and excommunicate the godless without physical violence. He did not give them the power of the sword.[19]

In spite of Luther's occasional correlation between proclamation and obligation, it was the dissociation between the two that remains as the heritage of the reformation for the modern era. While in Luther the simultaneity of freedom and obligation was maintained for the whole person, in the enlightenment the freedom

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[12]*LW* 45:117.

[13]*LW* 45:124.

[14]*WA* 12:470.

[15]*WA* 51:368, lines 28-29.

[16]*LW* 37:367.

[17]Obviously the reformation did bring to the surface what was for almost two centuries being discussed, i.e., the relationship between the church's authority and the secular government. See Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor Pacis*, trans. and intro. Alan Gewirth (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1980) esp. 108-140.

[18]*LW* 31:344: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."

[19]*The Book of Concord*, trans. and ed. Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959) 325.

and obligation were related to the separation of the public and private use of reason so drastically expressed in Kant.[20]

In the nineteenth-century renewal of theology, inspired by Kant, the relation between truth and power became a central topic. This formed the background for the question that Bonhoeffer would raise. Truth was reduced to a disposition toward power. The principle of love, which now expressed the content of the Christian truth, was an inner impulse that could not be objectively measured in practice. The forgiveness of sins, in the words of Albrecht Ritschl, finds "practical applications only on the condition that the believer at the same time takes an active part in the recognized purposes of God's kingdom."[21] Although the subjective interpretation of the "ethical disposition includes necessarily a disposition to uphold the law,"[22] this is a commitment to a principle, the imperative of the kingdom of God, and not to any particular objective form it might take: "the legal constitution of a people or a state is in itself indifferent to Christianity."[23]

While the Kantian option remains influential in theological constructions, it represents for western theology the dead end of the Augustinian model within the Augustinian premises. This premise is the one that distinguishes truth and power to set them in a causal nexus. While Augustine sought to subordinate power to truth, post-Kantian protestant thinking made the relation tenuous enough to depend on the disposition of one's consciousness, so that truth and power would be connected only in and through personal love. Apart from this they remained independent of one another.

IV.

Three main theological traditions can be singled out as responses to this issue, all of them supposing the same dilemma: What is to be done after the harmony between truth and power is broken? Once more: What is the relation between the Christian proclamation of forgiveness and civil obligation? Each of the three traditions has particular consequences for ministry and social engagement. I will call them the ecclesiocentric, the theocentric, and the christocentric models.

Power under truth. The first model grows out of a reaction against the modern predicament emerging from the reformation's awareness of the conflictive relationship between truth and power. It remains, however, within the Augustinian paradigm; better, it represents an attempt to reinstate the Augustinian arrange-

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[20]"The use, therefore, which an appointed teacher makes of his reason before his congregation is merely private,...as a priest, he is not free,...but as a scholar, whose writings speak to his public,...his reason enjoys an unlimited freedom." Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?" in *On History*, ed. and intro. Lewis W. Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1981) 6.

[21]Albrecht Ritschl, *Three Essays*, trans. and intro. Philip Hefner (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972) 237.

[22]Ibid., 246.

[23]Ibid.

ment. But it should not be taken as a mere continuation of the prevalent model of the middle ages, for it also supposes the awareness of the rupture brought about by the reformation. The main argument is that only a particular institution with a universal claim of truth, the church, can also guide and orient the erratic ways of power.[24]

The main difficulty faced by this position is the question of the legitimacy of the institution that claims universal validity as the basis of its claim to truth and to the administration of truth, while it lacks the social cohesion in and through which its claim can receive the credence it implicitly assumes. This claim of universality and absolute validity supposes a relation to power that is itself beyond the scrutiny of its own coherence. The formalism of this option becomes problematic exactly when the principle of love reveals contradictions with its material content, when the power of truth yields to the truth of power. In the form of a question: How can the absoluteness of love be sustained by and embodied in an institution, when it fails in its own practice to be the expression of this principle? Although this model represents a powerful criticism of the reformation's ecclesiological deficit, it fails to take into account the valid criticism that the reformation raised against the post-Augustinian arrangement.

Truth without power. The second option, the theocentric, accepts the funda-

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[24]In 1917 Max Scheler gave an address called "Christian Love and the Twentieth Century" (Max Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, trans. Bernard Noble [London: SCM, 1960] 359-402. This book belongs to the "Catholic period" of Scheler that will here serve as illustration for this position, but this does not mean that this option is restricted to Catholicism). He opens the argument pointing to the fact that the European "demoralization" is related to the fact that "the Christian ethos is no longer the leading spirit of Europe" (364). To blame is the modern idea of humanitarianism with its corollary: individualism, collectivism, nationalism, absolutism, cultural autonomy, and capitalism. Responsible for the introduction of this new Olympus are the reformation and the enlightenment and its consequences. Even if the reformers were not at all in tune with the spirit of humanitarianism, that was the main result of the reformation so that a living faith would generate love and community "only as a *consequence* of the forgiveness and justification reached through faith" (369). The enlightenment radicalizes this trend, splitting asunder the constitutive unity of the double commandment to love, or even "the erasure of the *first part of the commandment of love*" (368). "Therefore the new humanitarian love of man (and only man) is as much a principle of levelling and disintegration as the Christian commandment of love is one of edification and *organization*" (369). This has resulted in the commandment of love being "driven out of visible public life...in the frame of the Church...with its dangerous abandonment of the task of *inbuilding* God's Kingdom into this intractable world" (371). Scheler sustains a strict analogical argument by which only the visible unity of the church can sustain and warrant the "*ideal and model of every human corporation*" (383). "Only...a return to the holy Church and the idea of the community of which it is the guardian and sole agent...can preserve Europe as the foremost homeland of civilization" (391). The primacy of love over knowledge, of redemptive will over the communication of truth, allows and demands Scheler to make a blunt defense for the rearticulation of the relation between power and truth. Asserting the Augustinian subordination of power to truth, Scheler argues that the maintenance of the truth that at the center of all things resides the infinite and absolute loving-kindness of God will require an organ, an institution, that will be able to preserve this truth against the vicissitudes of history with its relativistic claims. Since this truth can only be absolute or it is not a truth at all, "the *infallibility* of an all-embracing 'Church' *qua* Church in matters of salvation is a consequence....Not to believe *absolutely* is not to believe in what *is* absolute" ("Problems of Religion," ibid., 344). This should be sufficient to illustrate an option for facing the cleavage between forgiveness and duty which has gained a number of adherents in Catholic and protestant camps that look with dismay to the consequences of the privatization of Christianity and the relativization of values in the free market of ideas.

mental cleavage introduced by the reformation between proclamation and obligation, truth and power. Contrary to the ecclesiocentric model it relies on a fundamental distinction between two administrations of the law or two functions of power: one that is spiritual, accusing the sinner and revealing the need for the gospel; the other that is earthly, providing the necessary means to rule over social relations.[25] Distinguishing the two functions of power allows for an insightful view of the relation between truth and power, but only by broadening the ditch between the inner and the outer functions of power.

In opposition to the ecclesiocentric model, the diastasis is not bridged here, but rather sharpened. To Bonhoeffer's question at the beginning of this essay, the answer would be a resounding No! Law as outer power can neither receive positive expression nor can it be brought into a relationship with the truth of the gospel. Here forgiveness is a divine juridical action that might be embodied in different ways but cannot be ruled or even confirmed by these embodiments. Forgiveness is finally disembodied.[26]

Truth conforming power. The third model should be called the christocentric

[25]Werner Elert attributed to the reformation the sublation (or obliteration) of the notion and practice of a unified church, thus linking the church with the national states and creating the conditions for the modern sense of sovereignty (Werner Elert, *Morphologie des Luthertums*, vol 2, *Soziallehre und Sozialwirkungen des Luthertums* [Munich: C. H. Beck, 1953] 11-12). This meant that there was no longer any universally normative instance to regulate matters of doctrine and conduct. Out of this emerged an obvious dilemma: how to avoid both a theocracy, on the one hand, and the irrelevance of the gospel, on the other. Elert's solution is to distinguish clearly between the complete freedom in face of God (*coram deo*) and the dutiful relations with other human beings (33). The relationship to God, through which forgiveness is granted, produces exactly the opposite effect of what forgiveness meant for the ecclesiocentric model. Here it is the freedom that allows one to accept the orders and power of the world in their own right, an autonomy (*Eigengesetzlichkeit*) which is only in the last instance accountable to God (64). This last instance is only binding as a uniquely personal experience of God's forgiveness. So human responsibility cannot be deduced from love, freedom, or the neighbor (37). It stands on its own as part of God's intended order of creation with its own rules based on natural law: "'Natural law'...is nothing other than the 'order of creation'" (338). Elert's sharp distinction between law and gospel manifests his anti-Augustinian interpretation of the relationship between freedom and obligation; it sustains the cleavage between truth and power, between salvation and inner-worldly affairs: "Either the law or the gospel is the end of God's ways, but not both" (Werner Elert, *Law and Gospel* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967] 48). Elert binds the relationship between obligation and proclamation to the distinction between law and gospel, a relationship that for him is antithetical. The law in its primary use, its political function, is a coercive instrument. (Here he is quoting Luther, *WA* 40/1:479, line 30: *Primus intellectus et usus legum est cohercere impios*; see *Morphologie*, 26.) In its theological use, the law also has only a negative function, serving to condemn: *lex semper accusat* (*Law and Gospel*, 11). The gospel is the word of God incarnate in Jesus—given, after our condemnation, as the word of forgiveness "for our justification" (16-17). The connection between the word of God as law and the word of God as gospel is to be found in God, the one who issues both words, *tertium non daretur*. Elert has a consistent negative definition of the law, and therefore also a negative definition of power as coercion and accusation. The relation between truth and power, between God's self-manifestation in Jesus and God's created orders is an antithetical one, although not a dualistic one. The antithesis is found in God's self who operates both in an alien manner through the law and in proper manner through the gospel.

[26]The insistently negative conception of the law and the autonomy granted to the powers, combined with a forensic or judicial understanding of justification, led Elert to dissociate forgiveness from morality completely: "For one can speak of faith only so long as certainty of this righteousness is based not on empirical facts but solely on the 'Word of God,' namely, on the promise of forgiveness of sins" (Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, vol. 1 [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1962] 105).

one. In it the relationship between truth and power is one between the universal and the particular. The choice is always for a shape of power that will be tolerant to the truth, a power that will allow for the "opportunity for the *right* word to be heard."[27] However this "right word" is not a possession of the church; the church is the means in and through which this "right word" is acknowledged and announced. Unlike the ecclesiocentric model and breaking also with the Augustinian motif, the church is not the regulative agency of truth but its eschatological creation. The church receives the knowledge of the kingdom and, therefore, can remind the powers of their own responsibility. But it is the word of God that gives shape to the performance of duties. The shape that these duties take, the form of power, should be left to human judgment: form follows function.[28]

Contrary to the other models, here the church is neither an institution beyond the vicissitudes of history (the first model) nor is it a particular national institution (the second model). It is catholic but in permanent process of decision, for the word that the church announces is also a word that applies to itself as an organization; it needs to shape its own existence in accordance with the gospel. Unlike the ecclesiocentric model and closer to the theocentric model, here the church, although ecumenical (i.e., catholic), will not be able to regulate the form and shape of power, for this is contingent upon the particularity of circumstances.[29] The primacy of truth over power, having the first as a universal and the second as particular manifestations, leaves untouched the question about the contradiction between the two. If forgiveness is a function of the gospel, as the first and the last word, this

[27]Karl Barth, *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1968) 149-189.

[28]To illustrate this model I will use Karl Barth and the Barmen Declaration. Two texts are here of importance: the fifth thesis of the Barmen Declaration of 1934 (in Rolf Ahlers, *The Barmen Theological Declaration* [Lewiston/Queenston: Edwin Mellen, 1986] 39-42) and Barth's commentary on this thesis which was published as "Christian Community and Civil Community" (in *Community, State, and Church*, 177). The Barmen text reads: "Scripture tells us that, in the as yet unredeemed world in which also the church stands, the state has by divine anointment the task of providing for justice and peace. (It fulfills this task) by the means of the threat and exercise of force, according to the measure of human judgement and human ability. The church acknowledges the benefit of this divine appointment, in gratitude and reverence before him. It calls to mind the kingdom of God, God's commandment and righteousness, and thereby the responsibility both of rulers and ruled. It trusts and obeys the power of the Word by which God upholds all things." New in this model is the decisive role that the eschatological dimension of the kingdom of God plays in arrangement of the relationship between the church and the state. The second thesis had already established that just as Jesus Christ is "God's comforting pronouncement of the forgiveness of all our sins...he is also God's vigorous announcement of his claim on our whole life" (Ahlers, 41-42). Similar to the ecclesiocentric model and different from the theocentric one, here there is no antithetical relation between truth and power, between gospel and law. In Barth's famous assertion, the two are related like content to form (cf. *Community*, 80: "Law is nothing else than the necessary *form of the Gospel*, whose content is grace"). In spite of continuity between truth and power, the state is not the kingdom and will not become the kingdom; it is rather to be seen "as an allegory [*Gleichnis*], as a correspondence and an analogue to the Kingdom of God that the Church preaches and believes in" (ibid., 169).

[29]Hence the analogical relationship between the kingdom and the state is reproduced also in the relationship between the church and the state: "The real Church must be the model and prototype of the real State" (ibid., 186).

model tends toward a merely negative attitude toward the uses of power; power is of concern to truth only insofar as power contradicts truth.

V.

A trinitarian model for the understanding of the relationship between proclamation and obligation now suggests itself. The argument is sustained by the communion theology of recent trinitarian discussions.[30] Forgiveness is understood as the divine strategy to our own reconciliation with God and in God, whose "defining character is love,"[31] as well as with creation and our fellow human beings. Opposing all "general and abstract forgiveness,"[32] the trinitarian argument allows for a close connection and parity between truth and power: "forgiveness is not so much a word spoken, and action performed, or a feeling felt as it is an embodied way of life in an ever-deepening friendship with the Triune God and with others."[33] Implied here is that the trinitarian life of God is dynamic, and always embracing the estranged. The crucial question has to do with the persistence of sin in face of the truthfulness of God's love. The solution seeks to avoid both a single and a double predestination, to affirm the undecidability between God's mercy and God's judgement: "The reality of hell must be acknowledged, as also must the possibility that ultimately hell will be empty."[34] But this is not left for humanity to decide. We can only *"hope* that all will be saved, and...pray and love others accordingly."[35]

In describing God's will and character, this welcome trinitarian argument closely knits together reconciliation and love, even as it concedes the possibility of certain ultimacy to God's wrath. It yields therefore to a possible separation between God's justice (that remains hidden) and God's love. But the same is not the case in the human sphere, where justice is "understood as virtuous habits and patterns of relationship contextualized within a wider account of the forgiveness wrought by the Triune God."[36] Here, justice might be interpreted as a function of reconciliation: "God's judgement and anger are real, as is God's punishment; but they are in the service of a reconciling, covenantal love."[37] However, this might not be the case within the inscrutable trinitarian economy, where justice might be served by condemnation alone, for "none of us can *presume* forgiveness regardless

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[30]Such an approach is offered by L. Gregory Jones in his recent book *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), which will here serve as an initial guide for the argument.

[31]Ibid., 259.

[32]Ibid., 228.

[33]Ibid., xii.

[34]Ibid., 254.

[35]Ibid. 259. Although elsewhere he can also say: "condemnation is neither God's first nor God's final word" (107).

[36]Ibid., 89.

[37]Ibid., 107.

of the lives we lead."[38] In other words, punishment is a strategy of God's reconciling love (a means to an end). But on the human side this can only be expressed in the "craft of forgiveness" as the truth in despite of all power. Having kept the basic features of the embodiment of power in the ecclesiocentric model (without falling into institutionalism) and the shaping of power of the christocentric model (without surrendering a constructive function of power), what is missing here is the emphasis on the condemnatory function of power, held by the theocentric model, which ought to be maintained without succumbing to its dissociation from truth.

The postulation of the undecidability between God's mercy and punishment will have different consequences for human behavior if we are to sustain that God's punishment is as much a function of God's justice as it is of God's love. Or better, that God's justice is Jesus Christ. If this is granted, then we can also say that human love might express itself not only in reconciliation and in the "craft of forgiveness" but also in condemnation. Thus, if the truth of God's loving character and will does not contradict the power of condemnation, why should this not also be the case in human affairs? Hegel's notion that the criminal has the *right* to be condemned finds its theological truth precisely in the fact that the one who embodies this love in humanity is also proclaimed as the one "destined for the falling and the rising of many" (Luke 2:34).

The argument I am here making by radicalizing the insightful trinitarian proposal is tricky; it has lent itself often to abuse, including the sheer justification of hatred that can be traced back to an abusing Father in the Trinity. Objections granted, we must, however, sustain the argument lest we yield once more to the danger of pronouncing a "costly forgiveness," which, nonetheless, dissimulates a cheap community that banalizes the power of evil. The argument should be maintained with the crucial understanding that God's church, the trinitarian communion of love, is not to be interpreted simply as the "reunion of the separated," but requires also the separation of those who are not blessed, those whose lives and practices are precisely the cause of the crisis in the community. Mythically, this is rendered in the narrative tradition of Lucifer, that falling star in the communion of heaven.

Embodying forgiveness and acting in love is a risky practice, not of finding a center of reunion, but rather of drawing borders in which those excluded by the world are empowered by the truth of their blessedness and the powerful are made known for their untruthfulness and unfaithfulness. The diastasis between truth and power rests on the assumption that power is defined as control and then associated with a center of dissemination, be it the self (pride) or an institution (authority). With this understanding, truth and power can be harmonized only through an alternative center: the church, God the creator, or Christ. The perspective changes and the relationship to truth can be reestablished if power is conceived as resistance, a resistance that testifies to the all abiding love of those in trial. This is the power that the excluded ones have in naming their exclusion, even in face of God: "Why have

[38]Ibid., 254.

you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). Condemnation is not only a function of reconciliation, but reconciliation is also a function of condemnation.

The reformation has laid bare the Augustinian corrosion of the intrinsic bond between truth and power. What remains as an unfulfilled task is finding again the relationship between truth and power that is embodied in the lives of those many whose strength God has chosen to shame the strong (1 Cor 1:26-27). ⊕