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Reformation, Conquest, and Circumnavigation The Global Destiny of Luther's Theology

Vítor Westhelle¹

Introduction

After 500 years Lutheranism reached the point of having more than fifty percent of Lutherans south of the symbolic equator. In this it follows other confessional families as Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, etc. that passed this mark some time ago. This is significant, but as the other confessional families already with a majority in the south show, it does not translate necessarily into a new way of reflecting theologically. In other words, the change in demographics is substantial, but not so much as to considerably alter doctrines.

The question of causation in determining the formation of doctrine is long-debated. For the moment I just want to acknowledge that doctrine has an impact in life and vice-versa. The very issue that prompted the sixteenth century Reformation, the selling of indulgencies suffices as an example. Sustained by a doctrinal armor and ultimately resting on the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, the lives of common folk were being drastically effected by it; and so were the effects of the Reformation's break with the doctrinal presuppositions. Yet, even more important than what a doctrine establishes as normative for the formation of society is what it allows to emerge under its canopy.

With this I propose a thesis. The age of planetary colonialism, inaugurated symbolically by Columbus, finds with the Reformation the announcement of the end of a single and hegemonic moral and doctrinal compass. This was legitimated by the single institution in charge of regimenting this compass, the Holy Roman Catholic Church. The Church had constituted itself and remained with remarkable stability throughout the Middle Ages. With the Reformation all of this was falling apart. In other words, *there is no heresy after the Reformation*. This is the case by recalling the simple fact that there is no instance that has legitimacy to establish doctrine beyond dispute. If break through events – as in Columbus' landfall – symbolize the coming of a new era, the Reformation did the groundwork that established the conditions of possibility for the new to find a lasting form. The old maritime saying: *extra equinoxialem non peccavit*, "there is no sin south of the equator," became a geographical affirmation of the end of a monolithic understanding of truth. But with the return of the caravels, what was projected beyond the equator was brought back home. The expression is indeed anecdotal, but it signaled the emergence of a movement with astonishing theological and philosophical implications.

I present thus a hypothesis that certainly is debatable and a short paper as this will not adequately address it. The hypothesis assumes that the transition from the fifteenth to the sixteenth century marked the arrival of capitalism that is culturally simply referred to as modernity. I uphold that this is the phase of history we find ourselves in, as long as capitalism remains as the dominant mode of production. Further refinements in this calendar,

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suggesting a postmodernity, or hyper-modernity explain some different phases of this mode of production, but they do not identify any new age.

The Faith of the Other and the End of Entitlement

The “New World” was bringing to the fore a very practical issue with direct implications for everyday life. It was the whole debate concerning free will, or free choice (*libero arbitrio*) – an issue the academia has been for long discussing. This issue that seemed helplessly arcane in academic discussions, became the defining issue of the Reformation, exactly because it was at the forefront of the very encounter of the Europeans with peoples in the Americas. To say – as Luther said – that the peoples they encountered did not have free will (as none of us have) on questions of faith meant that no effort to evangelize them would change who God has chosen. If they would decide to express it liturgically with the language of the church, that was up to them; for this they were indeed free. This is the reason that the first writing to appear against Luther’s *De servo arbitrio* was not from Erasmus, to whom it was addressed, but it was penned by Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, the defender of the forced evangelization and enslavement of the indigenous population. The point of the argument regarding free choice is that if we cannot do anything about our own or the indigenous peoples’ salvation; it is not of our choosing or doing. It is a gift of God that we cannot undo by our works and efforts. However, alongside the realm of salvation, there is transient creation in which many choices need to be made for which we are free and endowed by reason to do so. This is the other part of Luther’s argument that did not please Sepúlveda. The Indians of the Americas were in equal standing with the Europeans insofar as their created status is concerned. They were endowed with natural reason. This is the case because they had language for communication and formation of social bounds. Reason for Luther was grounded in intersubjective communication. If there is conversation, there is reason.

Columbus’ voyages were carried out of commission by the crown and ultimately on behalf of the Holy Church. The riches found in the American ventures were even justified by Columbus in his diary as resources to finance the reconquest of the “holy house of Jerusalem.” There was accountability to the authorities who sent them as emissaries of the crown and church. One of the rich sources of documentation we still have from this period are the letters of Columbus and other navigators writing back to the crown in Spain or Portugal about their ventures. A sense of accountability and entitlement is evident in these documents.

This sense of accountability derived from a yet untouched order of entitlement is, however, also being challenged. Ferdinand Magellan (Fernão de Magalhães), the Portuguese navigator responsible for the first circumnavigation of the world (1519-1522), offers the continuation of the crisis that found its most accomplished expression in the Reformation. Columbus was faithful in writing back to the sponsors of his voyages about his accomplishments and feats. Magellan, symbolically broke with this practice, as if he were saying, “I do not owe accountability to anyone but to my own convictions and the outcomes of my achievements, and certainly not because of your post or title.” Magellan did not leave an epistolary. The end of entitlement was announced and would find its intellectual articulation in the early work of Luther.

While Magellan was amidst his historical journey, Luther addressed Charles V² in the Diet of Worms (1521), who demanded him to recant his books and teachings, saying that bound to his conscience, he would only be accountable to the scriptures and plain dialogical reason. And in this tribunal, he was found without blemish. It is only after the Enlightenment, with the emergence of fundamentalism, that the *sola scriptura* became a positive source of authority. At the time of Reformation, the scriptures functioned mostly as a negative principle to delegitimize any other positive authority, mostly from the magisterium. Even when used positively, it relied on the skills of an interpreter; it was never scripture alone; it was the scripture read and interpreted. What was eliminated was a source of humanly construed legitimacy, be it the Roman curia, the pope, the councils, or the emperor. The end of entitlement was thus established in principle.

The coincidence of the two events that set two defining marks of the modern world, the voyages of Columbus and of Magellan's circumnavigation of the globe, concretely posited two of the defining features of the Reformation and defined its ethos. On the one hand with Columbus came the issue of the irreducible stance of the other in their relationship to God, to ultimacy. This relation was not to be mediated by any human institution or power. This was the force of the argument developed by Luther in the *Bondage of the Will*. On the other hand, any other issue pertaining to human affairs, including the church in its institutional formation ought to be arbitrated by the sound use of human reason. Magellan's forward movement regardless of who had commissioned him tells the tale. What lies ahead outweighs accountability to the past or to tradition. Tradition, or history, is esteemed insofar as it provides the sources of its own criticism. The source of legitimacy does not lie in any authority that has this claim as an endowment. Legitimacy comes from faithfulness to God who chooses in absolute autonomy and the human exercise of the gifts creation has endowed humans with, above all reason in the pursuit of equity. Hence Luther or Lutheranism does not and cannot claim any authority except that one of having constituted itself into an event that heralded and celebrated the end of naturally endowed birthrights. The argument for the priesthood of all believers offered a practical application of its scriptural principle.

The Spirit of Protestantism and the Capitalist Ethic

The constellation of events in the transition of the fifteenth to the sixteenth centuries was momentous. The two voyages, Columbus to the Americas and Magellan around the globe, cannot be pictured without referencing the importance of Copernicus who echoed the spirit of the age with his displacement of the earth as the reliable and stable reference for all motion. A similar comment could also be made about the significance of Guttenberg with the creation of the printing press establishing the conviction that the last thing published is always the most reliable (even in attesting the originality of an ancient document). All of these tell the same story about the emergence of modern conscience to which we are still indebted. However, Columbus' and Magellan's feats were of far reaching symbolic significance.

However, the 500 years that sets us apart from a Columbus, a Luther, a Magellan, Copernicus, or Guttenberg cannot be said as being a smooth process of maturation to present modernity. As the Reformation was receiving clear contours and establishing itself as an historical fact with a life of its own, contradictions also came along. There was not only the

² Incidentally, Charles V is the one that had commissioned Magellan.

counter-reformation aimed at halting the incoming transformations by preempting them, but within the Reformation movement itself, differences in how to establish the truth claims of the reformers emerged. As a result different factions (gneseio-Lutherans, Philippians, Reformed, Anabaptists, etc.) started to solidify with their claims of legitimacy in ways that reverted the very process unleashed by Luther and the early reformers, creating hardened forms of orthodoxies.

The symbolic event that marked the retrocession was the Augsburg Peace treaty of 1555, with its maxim: *cuius regio, eius religio*, “who’s the kingdom, theirs the religion.” The territorial mentality won over the reformation principle. It is rather interesting and worth considering that from the time of Luther’s *Bondage of the Will* (1525) to the Augsburg Peace (1555), in that lapse of time there was a sentence in the *autos-de-fé* which read: “They left this kingdom to become Lutherans.” *Autos-de-fé* were documents containing the judgment and sentence read in the ceremony before the execution of those condemned for heresy in the Americas. Little known was Luther’s theology in the new latitudes where the condemnations were carried through, but to summon the appellation “Luther” sufficed to indicate that those condemned of heresy believed and pledged allegiance to a “kingdom,” to an order of things that broke with the existing one. In fact, it does not even call the other reality a kingdom, for the word applied to the already existing reality with Pope, emperor, princes, and their minions all in a given and accepted order. To become Lutheran was to phase out of the grid that established legality. After 1555 this sentence would no longer make sense, because a Lutheran would be Lutheran for belonging to a territory whose prince was a confessed Lutheran, and this was neither illegal nor heretical.

Decisive is that the events happening in the religious/theological sphere with the Reformation was in sync with the major transformations the world was going through. This could be symbolized by Columbus’ attempt to bring the new world under the household of the Iberian kingdom he served and, ultimately, the Holy Roman Empire and its Church. Columbus’ conquest was a struggle to define belonging, and its frustration in never really achieving it. The reformatory principle of the bound choice was the most radical challenge to this establishment of belonging by conquest. The Reformatory outcry was that we do not choose whom to belong; we are chosen. And we are not born into a dynasty or a household that defines our status by birth. It is a gift of grace. And this has implications for the sense of identity of a people which is externally expressed in how they construe and own their sense of belonging, the household they will call home. This seems to me one of the crucial points in which the Reformation intersects with the emergence of the modern sense of autonomy and the search for belonging that became the defining struggle between Europeans and the peoples they encountered for the first time.

The other crucial point in which this intersection takes place is that a new sense of legitimacy was being shaped. The refusal of Magellan to write back to account for his deeds and the stubborn conviction that the accomplishments of the voyage are self-legitimizing illustrates this typically modern reliance on facts and evidences that can reasonably build a consensus. This then dispensed with any argument of tradition, convention, or authority by entitlement. This was becoming a pressing issue with the advancement of the sciences in defiance of dogmatic assumptions. Even a century after these events, the trial of Galileo dramatizes the two epistemological procedures, and becomes a reference for the triumph of empirical evidences to corroborate a claim. However, it was in the realm of theology that the claim in favor of a dogmatic method was hardly under any dispute. Theology had the task of

adjudicating theological claims for which reason was a help as long as it finally would coincide with the truth sustained by the church. In this respect, Luther's rupture with dogmatic procedures is of paramount significance; it hit the heart of an ideological apparatus that was the last bastion of the old regime.

*Sola experientia facit theologum.*³ "Experience alone makes a theologian" certainly loses its edge, in an age in which the significance of context in theology is a commonplace, perhaps even a trendy cliché. But, even though Luther does not elaborate the epistemological implications of his contention, it alone stays as an astonishing assertion when formulated. And this is even more relevant coming not from a Copernicus, Kepler, or Tycho Brahe, but from a theologian exercising an academic discipline that was among all the most monitored for heterodoxies.

These two features that constitute the inception of modernity, progressive conquest and the end of entitlement, placed the claims of the Reformation in harmony with an emerging ethos. These two characteristics move the discussion away from the charted order of faith and salvation and place it within what God has endowed human with creation, namely, reason and sociability because reason is by nature dialogical. In other words, the world has entered another mode of production that is regimented by these two factors. Humanity is called to produce and create its own *oikos*, its place of belonging, which needs to be administered by a reasonable consensus in which empirical facts provided for the broader intersubjective set of norms and rules by which conviviality is expressed. Modern politics is born, and the nation-state emerges as the forum for its exercise. Welcome! We have now entered the brave new world of capitalism.

A Digression

Entering a mined territory by discussing religious allegiance and capitalism requires a digression. When Max Weber wrote the classic *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), he indeed hit the main issue by showing how a given form of Protestantism flourished and assisted the development of the capitalist mode of production with a distinct profile. He was right in showing that Luther, useful as he was with his understanding of vocation, was not helpful at all in promoting the "spirit" of capitalism. In fact, I believe this could be said about the early reformation in general. Weber acknowledged that Luther disentangled worldly achievements from the order of salvation. But Weber's genius was to show that early on followers of the Reformation would again make a new connection between the order of salvation and our actions with a doctrine of predestination that worked as a well-oiled machine. Instead of seeing the human work as being somehow causative of salvation, as the Church had taught until then, human actions should *reflect* who God has chosen, by divinely bestowed blessings. Obviously the "spirit" of it for Weber worked with this rationale: if you are really prosperous, this is a sign that you are chosen. The outcome is certainly preposterous, but it does the trick: work, then, for your prosperity.

This crudely simplified interpretation of the relationship between the order of salvation and life in this finite world infringes what precisely was the main point of the Reformation. Grace is gratis, it is free. What changed from the logic behind the indulgences to this new interpretation of the causal relation between grace and work was only the vector by which the causation works. I don't do the work to achieve my salvation, but I do it in

³ WA TR 1, 16, 13 (no. 46)

thankful confirmation of it. And also, the work that produces salvation is not done to serve the other, but it is done to serve myself for there is where the validation of my salvation is verified. This is different from the teaching the early reformers opposed.

The intention here is not to discuss Weber's thesis, but the connection between the onset of the capitalist mode of production and the Reformation. This connection is synergetic. Even, or precisely when the Weberian rationale for the formation of the "spirit" of capitalism is not there, when the severance between the order of salvation and quotidian work is kept, this symbiosis holds. Weber's thesis holds if one proviso is maintained: that a particular string of the Reformation (a form of puritanical Calvinism) held sway. And that seems to apply not to capitalism as such, but to its peculiar formation in the USA, which presently happens to be the most powerful expression of it, but by no means the only.

The Spheres of Public Life

What the Reformation did was to provide the ideological and theoretical ground for the new mode of production to thrive, and that is its significance for the world. And this was done, as already seen, through the severance of a causal connection between the order of salvation and the world of finite quotidian life. The latter receives autonomy. But a second step was taken, and in this regard Luther was particularly important. Virtually all the reformers agreed on the first point mentioned above and expressed it each in terms similar to what in Lutheran circles came to be known as the "doctrine of the two kingdoms," or the two regimes theory. But this was, in the case of Luther, complimented by his understanding of the instituted orders of public life (*Ständelehre*), particularly the acknowledgment of the strict distinction between the forces of production and reproduction of life, providing for the survival and achievement of the species, on one hand, and, on the other, the means through which humans establish sociability, with codes, laws, and mores designed to protect life and defend the weak, and legislate social relations. These two spheres in which life unfolds itself is complemented by a third one that protected religious needs and the right along with the rest of nature to enjoy periodically a time for rest and renewal. While the two first contemplated the dimensions of active life (*vita activa*), the third one pertained exclusively to passive life (*vita passiva*). This third faculty was called *theoria*.

The acknowledgement of the different spheres and the clear distinction between the sphere of production and reproduction of life, from the sphere pertaining to establishing a sociability for human societies is of paramount significance. Luther called the first sphere *oeconomia*, while the second received the designation of *politia*. In the German texts, he would not translate these Latin terms by any single expression. In the German language, Luther would offer a descriptive explanation as to what those terms referred to. *Oeconomia* is not exhausted by "economy" or "household" though there is an implication when it refers to all forces through which life is sustained, promoted and reproduced. In the same fashion, *politia* is not "politics" in any strict sense but all the means through which human devise and legislate on how to conduct human inter-subjective relations. Anthropologically, Luther was very likely relying on the Aristotelian distinction of human faculties presented in the beginning of Book VI of *Metaphysics*, differentiating between *poiesis* and *praxis* as two human activities that were quite distinct from each other. While *poiesis* referred to all human production that had an objective result (a chair, a harvest, a child, etc.), *praxis* describes human activity for its own sake without any objective result (a conversation, a discourse, a gesture, a dance, a song, etc.). Reason, therefore, belongs to *praxis*. In any of these spheres

legitimacy is not granted by endowment, tradition, entitlement, or any other source, but reason alone for the achievement of the common good, or equity (*epieikeia*, *aequitas*, *Billigkeit*), to use Luther's word.

These two spheres when not clearly distinguished, and to the extent they are not, produced distortions. Production when affected by the way society is organized, stops playing its role of promoting sustainability to serving a class that has domination over the social conversation. The same distortion happens when production of goods is determined by who controls the social conversation. Luther, in the commentary on *Genesis*, even believes that the *politia*, was instituted by God only after the fall, i.e., after sin was committed. Yet, Luther is not consistent throughout his writings on the post-lapsarian origin of *politia*.⁴

This is the heritage of the Reformation. This heritage came along with the two features that described the presupposition for the emergence of a new mode of production and organization of social life. One, the creation of a place that defined the space that gives one identity, symbolized by Columbus' venture. The other is the forward movement that turns the result of an effort the sufficient justification for its undertaking, exemplified by Magellan circumnavigation of the globe.

A Critique

Now comes the most serious issue regarding this interpretation. It concerns the affirmation of the autonomy of the public spheres. German theologians in the first half of the twentieth century had this problem identified as a justification for the emergence of Nazism. Luther and the theologians that emphasized the autonomy were severely criticized for their incapability of opposing Hitler, and even allowing the autonomy argument to justify their inaction and eventual support to the Nazi regime. Led by Karl Barth and his followers, theology took an aversion to anything connected with the notion of the autonomy of the secular and promoted the lordship of Christ against any "lord" (read: *Führer*) of this world. In the face of possible attack and the *post factum* indefensibility of the autonomy argument, Lutherans backed off, and pleaded at most for a "relative autonomy."

One of the major failures on the Lutheran side of the dispute was not to recognize that the problem was not about too much autonomy. On the contrary, there was too little. In other words, while this whole discussion was being held, it was not brought to attention that the two key principles of the Reformation were being disregarded, while they constituted the foundation for the autonomy argument. First, God's free choice preempted any ground for condemning someone on the ground of race or of their faith, or for that matter any quality endowed by God to the creature. And, second, the distinction of the ends toward which the basic purpose of the spheres worked was disrespected. The end toward which the political organization of a society works is to offer protection and safety, particularly for its most vulnerable members. That this is the case is grounded for Luther not in a desirable virtuosity in the work of charity; it was sustained by the strict core of Luther's theology.

What's Faith Got to do With It?

The third sphere that Luther called *ecclesia* was grounded in the faculty of *theoria*. It is to be noted that *ecclesia* did not mean the community of faith whose true nature is always

⁴ This is, incidentally, a point to observe: sins for Luther are social and public, different from Sin, our original alienation from God.

hidden, but the institutional public organization established to secure a space of peace and quiet for the word to be proclaimed and shared, and the whole of creation be allowed to rest and renovate itself, fulfilling the third commandment. Yet this describes the purpose of any religion. As the other spheres describe universal human faculties, so does this one. In fact, Luther saw this church already in paradise, serving Adam, Eve, and their descendants, i. e. the whole humanity. Structurally this third sphere is still under the mandate given to all spheres, to provide for the means to fulfill its task in a reasonable and equitable way. This third sphere describes the contemplative attitude of a receptive mind in an utterly passive way. Here we get closer to faith for this sphere provides for the formal structure within which faith may flourish. Yet it is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for faith to be present. Lutheranism, Catholicism, Methodism, Calvinism, or Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, etc., insofar as they represent the organized form of religious devotion, all are subsumed under the category of *ecclesia*.

But then once more, what's faith got to do with it?

In 1540, Luther engaged in a curious endeavor. He wrote a long essay over one hundred pages called *Supputatio annorum mundi*, "A Chronology of the World," or "A Reckoning of the Years of the World."⁵ This found two Latin editions, one in 1541 and an enlarged one, in 1545, a year before Luther's death. Luther shared with many of his contemporaries an apocalyptic worldview that was common currency at the time. The question about the end of the world was a question regarding God's presence. Apocalyptic is a phenomenon that always grows in the proportion that there is a longing or dread for the presence of what is ultimate, whose absence is felt, even while its proximity is hailed. *Apocalyptic is a symptom of the crises of representation*. When representation fails to compensate the need for real presence, the answer takes apocalyptic overtones. At the time of the Reformation the entire Eucharistic disputes that brought about the most heated debates are an indication of this crisis of representation.

As Luther engages reading biblical chronology, he does it on the basis of many Jewish and Christian chronologies available. However, he does it making careful critical observations when others are, according to him, in error. He parts from a Talmudic text, attributed to Elijah, that the world has three ages: 2000 years from creation to the Law; 2000 years from the Law to the Messiah; and 2000 from the Messiah to the cosmic Shabbat, completing 6000 years. Writing in 1540, Luther reckons that the world was precisely 5500 years old, which meant that it would last for another 500 to complete the 6000 that would launch the final Shabbat (2040!). In the midst of an apocalyptic climate, Luther engages an apocalyptic motif only to find that the world is likely still many generations away from its final consummation. Yet, if the consummation will have to wait, the end (*telos*) of the world is closer than anything else.

Revelation means presence, or the coming of the Messiah, the *parousia*. The words itself has been vitiated by its common translation as "second coming," a non-biblical, second century notion. *Para-ousia*, means presence, "being by the essence." This presence is what marks the "end" of all pursuits, the *telos* in which God is all in all. It does not imply the consummation of all. Indeed, Luther believed in the consummation of this world, but this

⁵ WA 53, (1) 22-182

belongs to everything created that is also transient and has a termination. Presence refers to another dimension all together. The words of Luther's Confession on Christ's Supper of 1528 in explaining the *communicatio* of Chalcedon is about this end as pure presence: "you must place the existence of Christ ... far, far beyond things created, as far as God transcends them; and, on the other hand, place it as deep in and as near to all created things as God is in them."⁶ This is what faith got to do with it. The strict separation of the order of salvific faith comes together with the affirmation that reason cannot administer or explain this faith, but is totally free and is "among other things of this life, the best and something divine."⁷

Luther confessed that in writing *Supputatio* he was doing it for leisure, as a hobby, to kill time as it were (*per otium*). Yet the facts tell a different tale. That Luther revised and enlarged the text for a second edition (1545) indicated that he also had an ulterior motive. It signals that he was engaged in showing that the question was not primarily of time, but of presence. God's presence was true for the believer here and now. The apocalypse is here and now for the one who sees in the crucified Christ *now* the revelation of God in the very depth of the stuff of this world. In other words, matter is capable of the spirit. In the depth of the stuff of this world you find the presence of the crucified. This is Luther's spirit filled materialism.

Luther's often disparaged and misused quotation, *pecca fortiter*,⁸ sin boldly, grows out of this conviction that we cannot but dishonor this God whenever we are engaged with the stuff of this world, this is even our calling. We cannot but sin in the fulfilling our vocation. In fact, the quote does not end here, but continues, *sed fortius fide et gaude in Christo*, but believe with greater strength and rejoice in Christ. It is that faith that allows for the boldness. Tillich's definition of faith as courage to be is an insightful one, only to be complemented by fact that this being is sinful. This sinful being vis-à-vis God is original in the sense that it is different from the sins we commit in the spheres of public life.

Luther is a name that cannot be dissociated from the emergence of capitalism, even if it cannot be associated with its implementation in the USA. But his view of capitalism was one not different than Marx's whose merit was also to recognize the distinction of these two dimensions that constituted complementary aspects of quotidian life, the economic and the political order. Luther regarded it an unjust system that needs constant correction and strict distinction of competences among the public spheres, particularly between the *oeconomia* and the *politia*. In its American form of implementation, there is a vast confusion of these two, which create distortions. These are so obvious in cooptation of the political system by the economic elite that does not need mentioning. This distinction of two different human faculties that define their activities was still present among the Greek, then disappears in the medieval age only to come back with Luther's analysis of these two spheres. It disappeared again, only to return with Hegel in his phenomenological discussion and distinction between "work" or "labor" (*Arbeit*), and "interest." And finally, it is made central in Marx's understanding of the two facets of a mode of production, the forces of production, and the relations of production, in short, between modern economy and politics.

⁶ WA 26, 335f.; LW 37: 222-24.

⁷ WA 39/I, 175, 9f; LW 34: 137

⁸ WA Br 2, 372, 84f.

Faith and Love

At its inception Luther provided capitalism with a theoretical framework that could serve as a platform for one of its possible courses, building up the conditions necessary for its own supersession. Signs of this can be seen, where the distinction of the political sphere from the sphere of production and reproduction are kept. This is what countries of the south, after having suffered the devastating effects of an imperial capitalism are now doing in making their own choices in which labor and women reproductive rights are in front of the agenda to the disturbance of evanescent colonial powers. To keep labor and women's reproductive rights out of the reach of the political maneuvering of a bourgeoisie, often aided by religious ideas, is possibly still a vigorous contribution of Luther and the Reformation midst the contradictions of capitalist modernity. To the extent that this is happening, it is due mostly to Luther and much less to Lutheranism.

The issue at stake is how to relate faith and love. They are distinct and discrete dimensions of human existence and not stages in a continuous scale or quantities that can be added to each other, as was the prevailing idea. To explicate this duplex dimensionality Luther resorted precisely to Paul. "Concerning the verse in Galatians (5:6), 'faith working through love,' we also say that faith doesn't exist without works. However, Paul's view is this: Faith is active in love, that is, faith justifies that which expresses itself in acts. Faith comes first and then love follows."⁹ The decisive point, however, is that there is no causal relation between the two that can be established *a priori*; one does not attest to the other, as prosperity would be the consequence of election. On the contrary, in the very moment good works insinuate themselves as even an indication of faithfulness the opposite is the case: "The works of the righteous would be mortal sins if they would not be feared as mortal sins by the righteous themselves out of pious fear of God."¹⁰ As far as faith is concerned, love has nothing to do with it, and yet wherever there is faith, there love too must be. In his "Disputation on Justification" of 1536, Luther phrases this point with elegance: "It is one thing that faith justifies without works; it is another thing that faith exists without works."¹¹

This counter posing of faith and love corresponds to Luther's affirmation that "being holy [*heilig sein*] and being saved [blessed – *selig sein*] are entirely different things." And he adds: "We are saved [*selig*] through Christ alone; but we become holy through this faith and these divine foundations and orders."¹² Here love is spelled out as that which takes place in what Luther defined as the *coram mundo* relation. *Coram deo* is a relation defined by faith alone; love is a term reserved for the human and institutional (!) relations, which take place in this world that is passing away.

In this respect the reformer is following the Pauline reduction of the double commandment of love to the love of the neighbor alone (Gal. 5: 14). This radical commandment of love of the neighbor is reserved precisely for this world that is passing. In this passing, the love is uncompromisingly radical precisely because this passing renders vain any investment toward making it permanent, or extending it indefinitely. This constitutes idolatry and is the reason why works do not merit grace. They can only merit

⁹ LW 54: 74.

¹⁰ LW 31: 40.

¹¹ LW 34: 176; WA 39/II, 106, 26f.: *Aliud est fidem iustificare sino operibus, aliud est esse fidem sino operibus.*

¹² LW 37: 65.

love, the love of the neighbor, the uncompromising love for those who are in this passing world, but awake for the “yet-time” (*ho nun kairos*) of messianic presence (*parousia*).

Capitalism “as though not”

One particular text of Paul, 1 Corinthians 7: 29-30, has been regarded “a remarkable passage that may be his [Paul’s] most rigorous definition of messianic life.”¹³ In it all turns around the expression *hos mē*, “as not” (or “as though not”), which is repeated five times in these three verses. Luther refers to this passage several times in his writings.¹⁴ In the Genesis Commentary he uses it to explain how Abraham, being well off in affairs of the house and of the state, was still in exile, having means at his disposal, but not possessing them as ends.¹⁵ But it is in his commentary on Psalm 68 that brings this passage to a sharp resolution interpreting the conditions of this world to which the “as-not” applies as boundaries that the faithful “peers with the awaking eyes of faith over ... to the life beyond ... and to celebrate the Sabbath.”¹⁶ Within these boundaries, however love is all that matters. Following Paul’s reduction of love this is how his argument goes: “For the sum and substance of the entire Gospel is faith in God and love of neighbor ... Faith points away from us toward God; love bears all things and points us toward our body, that is, toward our neighbor.”¹⁷

Luther reads the sheepfolds of Psalm 68:13 as the transitory confines or boundaries of what constitutes this world that passes, and the staying within those frontiers as a state of sleeping.¹⁸ This is then juxtaposed to peering “with the awoken eyes of faith over these boundaries.” As such, the comparison leads naturally to Paul’s own summons to being awake for the messianic *kairos* in the very midst of this world, in its passing, in its utter transience, in its being bound to *chronos*. The boundaries are the ones Luther defined as the institutional public spheres of the transient world. Within those publics love finds its most sublime expression precisely because it calls for a detachment in dealing with this world for the sake of the other instead of taking it as a means of commerce to attain permanence! And this love is no sentimentality; it demands reason and efficacy for the sake of justice and equity. Reason and equity are the yardsticks that gauge love’s efficacy in the affairs of this transient world. The act of loving the world is not done in spite of its transience, but precisely because of it. Only by virtue of this transience, its passing away, can love be genuine.

Paul, and Luther following him, submits the love commandment to the reduction of loving the neighbor because love can only be shown toward transience, toward the world that is finite, toward that which needs care and is threatened. For Paul and those who followed his lead, as did Luther, God is to be trusted and feared; the world is to be loved.

Luther saw the emergence of financial capitalism, and with his anthropological reading of the three public spheres he understood the basic features of the new order, which consisted primarily in differentiating the realm of political and social interchange from the realm in which production of the means for the sustenance of life and its reproduction is

¹³ Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 23.

¹⁴ E.g. LW 2: 252 f.; 13: 15; 35: 280-83.

¹⁵ LW 2: 252f.

¹⁶ LW 13:15.

¹⁷ LW 13:14.

¹⁸ The original expression for “sleeping within these boundaries” (LW 13: 15) in Luther’s translation is “Schlafen zwischen den Grenzen” (WA 8, 14, 28).

pursued. It is the maintenance of the distinction that allowed for legislation to be conceived apart from the system of entitlement that controlled the reproduction and production of life that created the distinction among different social stances on the basis of birthrights. It was also on this basis the ownership of the means of production (land and tools and machinery) was determined. Moreover, the emergence of new social contracts ensured that a time of rest was warranted; even to enhance the fitness and disposition of workers to increment production. With this the accumulation of capital was made possible, eventually overcoming the unalienable property system controlled through endowment by the nobility.

Luther, while acknowledging the emergence of a new epoch was not only its herald, but already its critic. Some of the most infuriating and yet insightful texts Luther wrote were reserved to the condemnation of the emerging new financial practice of usury reaching the dimensions it had.¹⁹ The use of reason for the sake of establishing an equitable social pact remained the criteria by which the workings of the public spheres of life were judged. Yet, most importantly, he saw this emerging epoch as a transient one and in it we were called to exercise our vocation. The transience of this new order in which capital would reign as the controlling force did not imply that Luther envisaged its overcoming by a new order which later would be called socialism and communism. He only understood that it too would pass. In his worldview this overcoming would be the incoming of the eschaton. Yet unlike many of his contemporaries there is enough evidence that Luther saw this new order of things as going to last for a good while. And during that time Christians were called to live and thrive in it, but only as though they were not.

¹⁹ See a text not yet translated into English that Karl Marx quotes at length in the first volume of his *Kapital*: "An die Pfarrerrn, wider den Wucher zur predigen, Vermahung" WA 51, 331-424.