

A SCHOLAR DARTMOUTH MANUSCRIPT

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By Peter D.S. Krey

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Gottes Wort und Luther Lehr vergehet niemals und nimmer mehr!
(God's Word and the teaching of Luther will never pass away.)

Luther in Relation with the Peasant's War¹

By Peter D.S. Krey

Theological Ultimate

Luther's life and thought form a contribution that shares in the ultimate. Luther does not need those who accept all his teachings in a totally uncritical way, as much as he does not need the thinkers who used to reject him and his teachings wholesale. Perhaps the followers of Luther can do him more harm than the antagonists who used to revile him as a bedeviled, renegade monk. He was a German prophet and very likely the greatest one produced by the German people, but that does not mean that his teaching and his life do not need real honest encounter.² That can be figuratively called getting back to the

¹ This Scholardarity Manuscript number One begins my investigations of Luther, his theology, and the Peasants' War that extend to four manuscripts and then even to graduate studies and a Ph.D. Thus this whole manuscript is a beginning and not just the beginning of this particular manuscript.

² There were Catholic historians, who rejected Luther completely and some circles of Lutherans, who held that if Luther said it, that ended it.

headwaters of his thought, which ends, however, not in a refutation, as Bugenhagen in those days discovered, but in a more meaningful affirmation of his theology.³ The points of departure in the historical itinerary of his particular life and thought need to be encountered; they should neither be rejected nor taken in total uncritical acceptance, as an uncritical Lutheran might do. Perhaps in such a way, we can understand Luther historically, and we can experience the real Martin Luther, rather than the one so deftly neutralized and domesticated for us today.⁴ Briefly stated in the words of Martin Marty, Luther is a classic person and any serious penetration of the theological field of a Christian in the face of the church and the state, couched in society, has to deal with what Luther said on the subject.⁵

After considering H. Richard Niebuhr's religious typology: Christ of culture, Christ in paradox and Christ transforming culture, etc., no theology could ever be absolute.⁶ One can only

³ See footnote 30.

⁴ To clarify using the word "domestication" for Luther, who, of course, celebrated marriage and the domestication of men as well as women, it is here used in the sense of manners. We usually avoid his allusions to scatology, flatulence, and sexuality. More to the point, however, is Luther's radical civil courage and willingness to confront church and civil authorities about corruption and injustice in a way that few Lutherans do today.

⁵ Martin Marty, Lecture on Luther held at Wagner College in New York on September 19, 1984.

⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1951), page 238.

point to the Absolute. So it follows that Luther's theology cannot make claims to the totality of the truth. (In German: *Sie hat kein Totalitätsanspruch.*) There are some dimensions of the truth that Luther does not represent well. To present an example, which depicts the main concern of this investigation — i.e. Luther and his theology in relation to the Peasants' War — if we assert that we will deal with what Luther said about the uprising of the peasants and their direct action for the social change of the feudal society, then that arena would be shaky ground for Luther. Another questionable example of Luther's theology revolves around the government belonging to the order of creation or redemption; and another, whether or not ruling authorities belong with parents in Luther's Small Catechism explanation of the Fourth Commandment or they should not at all be associated with fathers, if democracy is a government by the consent of the people. These are some examples of the issues that make for some theological insecurity among those following the teachings of Luther, and where there is insecurity, it gives reason for concern.

Without a doubt, Luther's strength is his theological Personalism⁷ with its existential power and integrity. His political and sociological insights are many, but some of them

⁷ Personalism is a theology based more on a transcendent and sacred individual rather than on the society in which such an individual is embedded and sustained. Such a description may fit a more modern interpreter of Luther like Karl Holl, rather than the historical Luther himself. See footnote 11.

are limited by his living under a prince without the experience of a modicum of democracy as achieved in some cities. Thus his psychological and existential insights outstrip his understanding of democracy, i.e. "that worst form of government," as Winston Churchill said, "except for all the others that have been tried."

Luther, like all historical figures, had historical limitations and because of his greatness, he transcended some of them but not others. In so far as Luther had a medieval mind-set, his limitations are easier for us to see from a Twentieth Century vantage point. But with a more careful historical reading of the material of this man's life, actions, and thoughts, and the events in which he played a role, he can certainly be observed to transcend his Sixteenth Century and challenge us even today. Luther emerges as a very strong and turbulent figure, mostly presented to us today in a very toned-down and low-keyed fashion. That seems to be part of his domestication for our fragile times. But Luther was passionately involved in the struggles of his day, deliberately took sides, and whether right or wrong, he shaped history. He allowed God to use him in a very substantial and radical way, and like St. Paul, Luther worked much harder than his contemporaries in the faith. Luther was a genuine servant of our Lord Jesus Christ, and if it were not for my own blindness, I would like to shout

with Isaiah, "Who is as blind as my servant?"⁸ concerning his relation with the Peasants' War. But having experienced many jolts of self-contradiction, I continue on this humble investigation on Luther, the sinner, and Luther, the saint.

In first mentioning a historical methodology,⁹ it can be attempted to present our history in the experiential horizon of the contemporaries of Luther. But in another way it is possible to read structural consequences of the failure of the Peasants' War, for instance, a structural view that allows us to see what no one in that day could yet have understood because of their historical limitations. This approach to history also takes the structures or historical orders of the society into account, even as they have changed dynamically from slave to feudal to mercantile, capitalist, and socialist systems. Our historiography has the vantage-point of looking back over 465 years and understanding many historical implications today [in 1990] for what happened in those days. They may or may not have sensed it subconsciously, but they could not really have known that they were in the feudal, late medieval and early modern periods; nor could they have known the consequences of the harsh punishment of the peasants and the tragedy that whole blood bath

⁸ Isaiah 42:19.

⁹ Horst Buszello, Peter Blickle, Rudolf Endres, Der deutsche Bauernkrieg, (Münich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1984), page 327.

would bring, located as they were in the midst of that experience of their day, namely, the docile and complete subjection of the German common person to authority and their democratic weakness that followed afterward.¹⁰ We have knowledge of the following centuries that could not be known by Luther's contemporaries. From our vantage point then, the events of their time still warrant our consideration and re-evaluation.

One of the questions of this investigation, therefore, will concern the sociological and, to an extent, democratic political, inadequacy of Luther's theology. For example, H. Richard Niebuhr states a truth about Kierkegaard that may well apply to Luther, although Luther in no other way resembles the lonely and solitary Dane. "The existentialism of Kierkegaard [and Luther] is capable of abstracting [them] from the society and abandoning the social problem."¹¹ H. Richard Niebuhr also

¹⁰ In Günter Franz's "Results of the Peasants' War," he tells that the peasant was no longer a subject, but became an object of ensuing German politics, that in consequence of the decimation of 10 to 15 % of the productive men of the regions that the Peasants' War was fought in, a stagnation prevailed and for almost three hundred years the peasant dropped out of the life of the German *Volk*. After the war the peasants no longer had any political role and in an equalizing absolutism, the peasants as well as the knights and burghers, became the underlings of their one territorial lord. Der Deutsche Bauernkrieg, 4th edition, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1956), page 298-300.

¹¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, Op. Cit., p. 244. He sometimes ascribes the attitude of contemporary Lutherans to Luther, because in no way did Luther abandon the social problems of his day. In his Ph.D. dissertation, The Church Struggle in Nazi Germany, 1933-34, Arthur Preisinger writes, "[Karl Holl] still operated with a dualistic interpretation of Luther: 'The Gospel offers no prescription of economic and political affairs but is concerned only about souls.'" And citing him again, "The Gospel affects individuals first and deploys its entire strength at this point....What the Gospel requires can only be satisfied on a personal level." (page 76) His dissertation is online:

states that St. Paul and Luther have been called cultural conservatives and although much can be said for their ultimate work in promoting cultural reform, they tried to bring change only in the church, and whether slavery on the one hand or social stratification on the other, they were content to leave the rest of society unchanged.¹² Naturally, in H. Richard's theology and much more pronounced in that of Reinhold Niebuhr, we hear more Calvin and Zwingli than Luther. But whether such a conservative model of social change should be considered the only possible one,¹³ or whether more questions need to be asked in face of the debacle of the Peasants' War, is what this essay hopes to investigate more thoroughly. The problem it tries to face is the dissonance between Luther's theology of ultimate truth and his unjust stance on the Peasant uprisings of 1524-1526.

In the 500th Anniversary of Luther's birthday in 1983, a plan for an extravagant play in a large outdoor square in West

[http://tlu.academia.edu/ArthurPreisinger/Papers/947282/The Church Struggle in Nazi Germany 1933-34 Resistance Opposition Or Compromise](http://tlu.academia.edu/ArthurPreisinger/Papers/947282/The_Church_Struggle_in_Nazi_Germany_1933-34_Resistance_Opposition_Or_Compromise)

¹² Ibid., p. 187-188.

N.B.: Because the medieval synthesis was unraveling, the church and the state had to be redefined theoretically to lay a foundation for modern times. In his slogan, "the priesthood of all believers," Luther provided the preliminary spiritual equality preceding the sociological, legal, and political one. The phrase "the church and the rest of society" fails to distinguish the way Luther redefined both the church and the state with his two kingdom theory.

¹³ Later I will argue that St. Paul and Luther set subtle and successful revolutions afoot that were disguised as conservative, while direct and blatant revolutions often fail.

Berlin took place. It was called, Luther Is Dead! (In German, Luther ist tot!) The author had placed the Peasants' War into the center of his evaluation of Luther for our day. That intensifies a sense of political and social insecurity experienced in relying solely on Luther's theology. Does Luther split and divorce the inner realm from the outer, the internal from the external, in the face of the social upheaval represented by the peasants and the "common man"? Luther made a great contribution as a political scientist with his two kingdom theory, by which he places the state under the law and reason, while he places the church under the Gospel, thus separating the church and state, the temporal powers from the spiritual powers. In his extraordinary book on the old Luther, Haile calls him a German Machiavelli.¹⁴ It would be difficult to enumerate all the contributions in this regard that Luther made to political science.¹⁵ Then what can we make of his stance in the peasant uprisings of 1525?

¹⁴ H. G. Haile, Luther, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), page 93.

¹⁵ In his pamphlet, "Why the Books of the Pope and His Disciples Were Burned," Luther's 20th thesis states, "[The pope] holds to be true and fosters the great unchristian lie that the Emperor Constantine has given him Rome, land, empire, and power on earth." LW 31: 390 and WA 7:173a. Luther knew about Lorenzo Valla's 1440 discovery of the forgery of the Donation of Constantine.

And Luther's 21st thesis states, "He boasts that he is the heir of the Roman Empire, although everyone well knows that spiritual and secular realms do not get along well with each other." LW 31: 390 and WA 7:173a.

Luther writes that Christ said to his followers, "You shall not be as the secular overlords" [Cf. Luke 22:25-26]. And he says in Luke 22[:25-26], "The Kings of the gentiles exercise lordship over them. But not so with you;

A great deal of condemnation has been poured upon Luther since he published his harsh little pamphlet, "Against the Murderous and Thieving Hordes of Peasants." It began right after he wrote "this hard little book." He received criticism from Kaspar Mueller of the Mansfield City Council, to single out a voice from the storm of criticism he underwent during the brutal punishment of the peasants. And throughout history this chorus of criticism has continued. It is most pronounced in the social left, where from outright condemnations, e.g. Friedrich Engels in his study on the Peasant's War¹⁶ to the sharp critique of a modern day Marxist like Max Steinmetz¹⁷ to the harsh criticism of Reinhold Niebuhr,¹⁸ among other non-ideological reviewers of that situation. There are also Reformed historians, who are very critical, usually naming Luther's harsh condemnation of the Peasants' War a blemish on his otherwise glorious role in the Reformation. There is for example, T. M. Lindsay calling his

rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, the leader as one who serves." LW 31: 387 and WA 7:169a.

In secret meetings with Luther, the Grandmaster of the Teutonic Order of Knights, Albert of Brandenburg changed his ecclesiastical principality into a duchy and Capito, a canon lawyer, gave up his temporal rule under the Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz and began to preach, teach, and counsel Christians with Bucer in Strasbourg.

¹⁶ Friedrich Engels, The Peasant War in Germany, (New York: International Publishers, 1926), page 62.

¹⁷ Bob Scribner & Gerhard Benecke, The German Peasant War of 1525 - New View Points, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), page 18.

¹⁸ Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), pages 184-198.

stance on the Peasants' War "an ineffaceable stain on his noble life and career."¹⁹ J.M. Porter, in a very conservative commentary on Luther's political writings, goes a long way in trying to understand Luther, finding him theologically correct, but regrettably having used antithetical categories, which did not lend themselves well to realistic advice on an economic, social and political level.²⁰ Among historians, to my knowledge, only Paul Althaus and R. Crossby, by and large, agreed with Luther's very unpopular stance.

The problem of historical limitations is again encountered at this point. We can look upon Luther as a person conditioned by the history of his time, as already mentioned, i.e. look upon him in the historical horizon of his contemporaries or from a structural view of history, we can interpret his actions and decisions from the historical vantage-point of our day over 500 years later. This structural view obtains when we ask whether Luther's stance was politically expedient, or whether he was the first ideologist of the incipient bourgeois movement, in terms of changing the orders of society. Perhaps, however, as I would like to argue, he was a revolutionary in a more subtle sense, overturning the feudal order through the Word of God out of an

¹⁹ Thomas M. Lindsay, A History of the Reformation, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906), page 337.

²⁰ J. M. Porter, Luther: Selected Political Writings, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), page 15.

overflowing inner strength of the heart. In such a way he overcame and reshaped the conditions of the external world up to and even including those of our time: witness the value of the separation of church and state. So contrary to the view of H. R. Niebuhr, a subtle revolution could be the only real one.

In our day, however, sometimes Luther's teachings are misused. This misuse has come from some surprising corners. Ronald Reagan's administration used Luther's two kingdom theory to dissipate criticism of his increasing the arms race. His strategic nuclear defense initiative was a government policy, which was in one kingdom and because the church belonged to the other, the administration argued, it had no right objecting to it. East Germany's communist regime used the two kingdom theory in a similar compartmentalizing way to hem in the churches and not allow them out of the privatized realm. The pastors were not allowed to stray from reading their liturgies word for word and they were told that they were stepping out of bounds by criticizing the socialist state, which belonged to the other kingdom.

A powerful dynamic, however, is expressed in Luther's dictum: "For the Word of God comes whenever it comes, to change and renew the world!"²¹ Luther's saying is like the Eleventh

²¹ Lewis Spitz cited this saying of Luther in his Jubilee Lecture, "Images of Luther." The images of Luther that this essay will investigate do not all come from the Lewis Spitz lecture: Was Luther politically expedient?

Thesis on Feuerbach by Karl Marx, who writes: "Philosophers have merely given the world different interpretations; the point, however, is to change it."²² Luther can be interpreted dynamically for issues of our modern day. For his day one can argue that he did not only wish to reform doctrine, but he also wanted to improve the medieval social estates. Luther's desire is expressed in the title of his work: "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation concerning the Improvement of the Christian Estate" (1520). He did not have the improvement of the material existence of the peasant estate in mind, certainly, although the peasants, of course, did; but they also had their spiritual existence in mind, when they demanded new believing pastors, because without them they felt that their salvation was jeopardized. A woodcut showing the peasants protecting the Reformation mill, while all the reformers are at work in it, demonstrates the way the peasants were thought to be ready to defend and take real initiative for Luther's Reformation.²³ They were, however, the last ones Luther had in mind, because he had

Was he a lackey of the princes? Was he the first ideologist of an incipient bourgeois movement? Was he a subtle revolutionary or a conservative one? Or was he the German prophet?

The saying comes from Luther's Bondage of the Will, WA 18: 626 and LW 33: 52. See the Bibliography: **WA** stands for the definitive Weimar Edition of Luther's works counting over 100 volumes and **LW** stands for the 55 volume, St. Louis and Philadelphia, American edition of Luther's Works.

²² Karl Marx and Friedrich, Engels, Ausgewählte Werke in sechs Bänden, vol. 1, (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1974), p. 200.

²³ See R. W. Scribner, For the Sake of Simple Folk, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), page 104. The woodcut is called "The Divine Mill."

addressed his important work to the "Nobility of the German Nation."

Many disturbing questions, however, still arise in this regard.²⁴ Was Luther a lackey to the princes, as often alleged from the Left? Was Luther completely unaware of the danger the princes represented to the church and the gospel? Are Luther's teachings perhaps really inadequate or even irresponsible in some areas of the socio-political realm? Was he duped by the princes, who used him for ulterior purposes, i.e. to usurp the wealth and power of the ecclesiastical estate to aggrandize and enhance their own? The Scandinavian Reformation at first seemed a rather obvious example. Did it ever occur to Luther that the Gospel might have to be defended from the princes and magistrates? But perhaps Luther was cognizant of what he was doing and felt that with the unfolding of the reprinted church an improved government would also emerge.

Here again presuppositions and hot debates over issues in our day can be read into a historical situation 500 years removed from our day and give us a very false picture of that time. To be outraged by the introduction of Lutheranism into Scandinavia is a point at issue here. For Sweden one can argue

²⁴ I was among a group of pastors who attended the Luther Jubilee in Washington, D.C. from November 6th to the 12th in 1983. In the Jubilee 23 lectures were delivered covering many aspects of Luther's theology and life. Thereafter these questions emerged without warning, disturbing my loyal Lutheran consciousness and making a struggle with these questions for me quite unavoidable.

that Luther not only gave the country a reformed church, but also a new government. The church and state were like the two wings of a butterfly, the reconstituted church and the reformed and newly defined government of Sweden resulted.²⁵ Beforehand in the confusion of church and state, the wealthy and powerful ecclesiastical estate successfully prevented the poor and weak government from becoming effective. When the rulers plundered the church, the irresponsible ecclesiastics were relieved of temporal power and an effective government could be established. What future developments might be set afoot by such a historical solution then becomes another matter, for which new historical solutions would become necessary.

Luther was quite aware of the interests of the princes and he was also thoroughly grounded theologically, especially for the issues of his day. Does this mean he was being politically expedient, in order to protect his Reformation and the new proclamation of his Gospel? He may have considered the sacrifice of the church's wealth and power necessary. But he certainly does not argue this way explicitly. Was Luther being used by the Princes for ulterior purposes and did Luther take this into consideration?

²⁵ I thank Prof. Dr. Inge Lønning for making these arguments in a personal discussion with several of us pastors in the Jubilee.

Who would blame Luther for tinges of German nationalism, seeing that stream of indulgence money pouring from German lands over the Alps into Rome? Perhaps some Princes had their eye on ecclesiastical holdings. But then this could not be said of Frederick the Wise. It may be that the Saxon princes had their eye on the large territorial holdings of the Bishopric of Magdeburg and the smaller significant ones of Erfurt and Meissen. That they saw the conflict of interest because of the confusion of temporal and spiritual power may be possible, but to suggest that they were using Luther to such an end is not evidenced historically by any of their words or actions. This again is a projection from our historical vantage-point, which violates their historical integrity. Other Princes certainly were opportunistic in this regard, and what's more, the peasants must have had their eye on the rich monasteries, because they plundered a good many of them in the course of the war (They plundered and leveled about 1,000 monasteries and castles in all, according to Leo Sievers.²⁶) Had these been changed into hospitals, schools, and other public buildings in an orderly process of change, untold wealth would have remained among the people.

²⁶ Leo Sievers, Revolution in Deutschland: Geschichte der Bauernkriege, (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980), page 337.

In the case of Denmark already mentioned, our conviction that the Lutheran teaching was imported for blatant ulterior purposes was not accepted by Professor Lønning of Sweden. Seizing the wealth of the rich ecclesiastical estate by the Swedish Rulers and Princes was the only way to establish effective government. The nobility could not be taxed, the peasants could not be burdened with any more taxes, and therefore seizing the inordinate wealth of the church was the only alternative. To interpret the Scandinavian Reformation as political expedience misses the nature of the power struggle between the secular and ecclesiastical powers, and according to Luther's reforming political insights, the latter were not to have temporal and coercive power.

Luther considered that the Church could only be purified if it was purged of this temporal influence, wealth, and power and he took pains to carefully define and limit and empower effective secular government. In Luther's vision he saw a repristinated church and a newly affirmed secular government, unfolding like the two wings of a butterfly.²⁷ But the Feudal fragmentation of the many German sovereign realms were all held together in a loose, and what became after Columbus, a global sprawling Holy Roman Empire. In it the Electors and princes were subtracting more and more power from

²⁷ I thank Inge Lønning of Norway for this metaphor.

the Emperor, on the one hand, and trying to establish their territorial power through their politically fragmented provinces, on the other. Along with those tendencies, the confusion of the spiritual and temporal power became all the more devastating, making effective and crystallized secular territorial government all the more necessary.

As already mentioned, the play Luther is Dead! placed the Peasants' War into the center of the author's evaluation of Luther and the Reformation. Marxists make the social movement of the Peasants' War the main event of the time, considering the Reformation very much ancillary. On the other hand, could it be that social issues are not central to Luther's theology like his emphasis on grace, judgment, and the cross?²⁸ Are they merely tagged on at the end? Shouldn't social movements also come from the heart of the Gospel? Was the Peasants' War a social movement with the Gospel merely tagged onto it or was it a social movement from the heart of the Gospel, whose theological and theoretical groundwork had not been laid, and could easily be

²⁸ I thank a fellow pastor, James Sudbrock, for this comment. After his Jubilee Lecture, "Luther and the Catholic Tradition," Bernhard Lohse said that he had trouble with some Liberation theology, because some liberation movements are more or less social movements, which have theology tagged on to them, but it is not at their center. We need to learn how to relate the central core of the Gospel, that is, the cross, judgment, grace, and such subjects to the problems of political life and social reforms. Thus concerning the Peasants' War, it is a question whether or not it arose from the heart of Luther's Reformation, from the center of Luther's theology, or only tagged the latter and former onto itself, receiving its real inspiration from elsewhere. It may very well have had Zwingli's theology at its center, although Luther's life and theology was catalytic.

led astray by violent and blood-thirsty men, who took it outside the Gospel? Here of course Luther's arguments about the two kingdoms have to be applied, the theological pluralism (Hus, Zwingli, Müntzer) of the day has to be evaluated, and the problem of the causation of the uprisings needs to be explored, because in so far as Luther's teachings were not only preached from Wittenberg's pulpit, and lectured before the students, and disputed in public debates, they were also widely published in his pamphlets. Before the ink from his pen dried on his manuscripts, the many printing presses of his day were publishing them throughout Germany, indeed throughout the empire. In a way that we don't like to realize in association with the Peasants' War, Germany had become Luther's literary congregation. In how so far were the uprisings then stirred by Luther's writings? And could they be a response to the Gospel as extended technologically through the printing press? The oral preaching of the Gospel is limited to the congregation, while the written Gospel was not at all so limited. But further, is there a reductionism of our theology that leads us to assert that social issues and movements do not relate to grace, judgment, and the cross; or that social movements cannot arise out of the heart of the Gospel?²⁹

²⁹ Perhaps a distinction can be made between the institutional separation of church and state and the whole society being caught up in the proclamation of the Beloved Community.

It would be a strange "exodus" our theology initiated, if the social movement of the Old Testament was extracted out of the Gospel of the New Testament. The movement Jesus initiated was not merely a synagogue reform, but he declared God's reign, that the kingdom of Heaven at hand even in what was then Palestine, a possession of the Roman Empire. In some sense the Gospel universalizes the Exodus, in which only one particular people, the children of Israel, were delivered from the House of Bondage.

An acquaintance with the historical Luther can stir up some insights and extravagant images: Luther, like a medieval Moses standing not before the Pharaoh, but before the emperor and pope, leading a new people out of bondage (pretty much excluding the exploited and decimated peasants to be sure) but a people, nonetheless, who were slowly changing their religious minds and rallying around Luther's banner of the Gospel. It is easy to identify with Bugenhagen, who sat down to read Luther in order to refute him, and found that Luther convinced him, and changed his mind. Bugenhagen later went to Wittenberg, and then as a reformer was called to Denmark to begin the Reformation there. He later became known as the reformer of Pomerania.³⁰

³⁰ Thomas M. Lindsay, A History of the Reformation, page 306: "John Bugenhagen belonged to the Order of Præmonstratenses. He was a learned theologian. Luther's struggle against Indulgences displeased him. He got hold of the Babylonian Captivity of the Christian Church, and studied it for the purposes of refuting it. The study so changed him that he felt 'the whole

The Holy Communion debate at the time was so heated because the theology of Holy Communion was an attempt to describe and define the nature of the human community of that day. Theology was the queen of the sciences, which aside from Aristotle, also delivered the psychology, sociology, economics and political theory and legitimation they knew, all implicit more or less in this one discipline of theology. The division of intellectual labor of the disciplines had not yet developed to the extent it has today. Now when we discuss the teachings of Holy Communion we fail to make these connections. Perhaps if we too were debating the nature of our society and the individual in the Holy Communion debate, we would do so in as heated, rowdy, and as angry a fashion as they did.

The Jubilee Lectures of 1983 illuminated many of the events of the Sixteenth Century, especially those involved with the Peasants' War of 1525. Peasant rebellions seem to have been the predecessors of modern worker strikes, except that in those days the poor peasants were slaughtered, decapitated, broken on the wheel, etc. when they could not escape. Medieval brutality underscores the fact that punishment itself can be a crime.

The questions of the Reformation and Peasants' War still raise burning issues for today that revolve around the individual and the society, religion and politics, religion and

world might be wrong, but Luther was right'; he won over his prior, and most of his companions, and became the Reformer of Pomerania."

the social order. The fact that the social order of the Marxist-Leninist societies are collapsing all around us today, will still not take away the problem of different understandings of the individual and the society, perceived and actual exploitation, dictatorial oligarchic rule and peasant uprisings, for example, in South and Central America in the name of the quasi-secular heresy called Marxism.

The hope for this investigation is to throw light on this social dimension by fathoming Luther's theology for the social dimension in order to help prevent future debacles like the Peasants' War, for the spontaneous mass movements of people today who feel oppressed, because they believed the Gospel and its vision of a better life.

H. Richard Niebuhr seems justified in writing that Luther can be best described as a representative of Christ and culture in paradox. Luther does not fit with Christ against culture and Christ above culture. Does the paradoxical model translate into Christ the transformer of culture or is Luther's theology violated by such a theoretical move?

When Heike Oberman speaks of "*Christus Reformator*" then he means that it is Christ, who is reforming and transforming the world. No one can dispute the fact that the world has in many ways changed a great deal since the Sixteenth Century. A conservative might argue that there is no change except in

externals, and Christ, the living word, is reforming realities only in the sense of bringing greater clarification with a sharpened definition of the Church as it redefines all other important institutions of our society.

Could a powerful and subtle revolution underlie Luther's Reformation? Did intensified changes of the medieval world order come about because of Luther's theology, and if so accidentally or intentionally? Luther tried to align Catholic teaching with the Gospel and reform the church to be its faithful embodiment. Was Luther's point of departure the only one possible historically? Is a theology that would try to complete his in a sociological dimension sound or unsound? H. Richard Niebuhr argued above that Luther abstracted himself out of the social realm, and placed himself in a compartment of the society, the religious institution, called the church, neglecting the problems of society.³¹ Trying to focus on society and trying to determine where Luther's theology touches society, are we led to a fulfillment of his theology or a violation of it?³² When

³¹ Really H. Richard in Christ and Culture, page 244, argues in this way about Kierkegaard, but I take it as an oblique reference to Luther as well. After a better knowledge of the historical Luther, it becomes impossible to deny that he was completely involved with the problems in the society of his day. For example, he wrote against usury, comforted the depressed, wrote a comfort for mothers who had miscarriages, and responded to the twelve articles of the Swabian peasants, while no other theologian did at least to my knowledge. His writing was not systematic but occasional, meaning that he was always responding theologically to an issue facing believers.

³² The questions of the Niebuhrs relate to the Lutherans of today, but hardly to the historical Luther. See previous footnote and number 11.

Anabaptists felt they wanted to complete Luther's Reformation by the reformation of society, Luther felt there was nothing to complete. Is his personalism expansive enough to include the sovereignty of God and is the sovereignty of God personal enough to incorporate the individual? Or does this comprehensive kind of theology, i.e. United, Reformed, and Lutheran help us or not?

Luther certainly stood like a mountain and tried to change and bend all other theologies into surrendering to his own. That is because he was so certain that it was from God. "I don't care for human judgment, when I know the divine judgment."³³ That quote certainly characterizes Luther's attitude. His theology, however, does approach the ultimate and should not be characterized as merely corrective, unable to stand alone. Although his theology is completely concerned with the ultimate that does not mean that it has a monopoly on the truth. How can the theology of Luther have a claim to totality when the historical experience of the Peasants' War, the rise of nationalism, classism, totalitarianism, and Third World

³³ Leif Grane, "New Departures in Lutheran Theology" in *Luther Jubilee*, Nov. 8, 1983. In his lecture Prof. Leif Grane used the concept, "non-theological aspects of history," but he did not define it. In this investigation I have used it in two senses. In the first sense, early in this manuscript it means whatever is recalcitrant and obstructs the Gospel's saving action in history. In the second sense its meaning is more neutral: the social, economic, and political moments in history: i.e. the determinative factors in history outside the theological ones. The theological aspect of history can also impact the non-theological forces. The former are what Luther had in mind when he emphasized the Word of God, the Gospel, and God's actions in human history. Later G. W. Forell will make possible a further distinction between these aspects of history.

upheavals mean that "other grounds and reasons [now] obtain"?³⁴ Should it now be necessary to emphasize a social and political dimension of his theology?³⁵ Luther claimed that a change in the historical context had to be taken into account in order not to make his theology "nothing but a pack of lies."³⁶ We will need to return to this saying of Luther again and again, because he insists that he is no fixed star, but has ever been a wandering planet.³⁷

Non-Theological Aspects of History

In his Jubilee lecture, "New Departures in Luther's Theology," Prof. Leif Grane, did not define what he meant by the

³⁴ Martin Luther, "On War Against the Turk" (1529) in J.M. Porter, op. cit., p. 121. Also see LW 46: 162 and WA 30^{II}: 108-109.

³⁵ Later in Manuscript 3, the Apologist for Luther and the Two Kingdom Theory, Lazareth will argue that Luther faced clericalism, while we face secularism today.

³⁶ J.M. Porter, op. cit., p. 121. Also see LW 46: 162 and WA 30^{II}: 108-109. Here Luther writes, "Pope Leo X in the bull in which he put me under the ban condemned, among other statements, the following one, 'To fight against the Turk is the same as resisting God, who visits our sin upon us with this rod.' This may be why they say that I oppose and dissuade from war against the Turk. I do not hesitate to admit that this article is mine and that I stated and defended it at the time; and if things in the world were in the same state now that they were in then, I would still have to hold and defend it. But it is not fair to forget what the situation was then and what my grounds and reasons were, and to take my words and apply them to another situation where those grounds and reasons do not exist. With this kind of skill who could not make the gospel a pack of lies or pretend that it contradicted itself?"

³⁷ *Luthers Werke, Weimar Ausgabe, Tisch Reden* (Table Talks), vol. 5:113, no. 5378. (or WATR 5:113) It is not in LW vol. 54, Table Talks, in English.

non-theological aspects of history.³⁸ If the theological aspects of history refer to where Luther's theology really changed history, then the non-theological aspects refer to where the new faith in the Gospel was obstructed. Luther's dictum, "For the Word of God comes whenever it comes, to change and renew the world," would very much support Max Weber's contention in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism that the religious or theological aspects can also be determinative in shaping the course of history.³⁹ Weber argues that the theological forces and non-theological forces are, of course, reciprocal. Luther's sense of the theological aspects is much more dynamic, however, and flies in the face of those who see the Reformation in political and economic terms, discounting the theological aspects even of the period named the "Reformation." Thus the Marxist tradition wanted to make the Peasants' War predominant with Thomas Müntzer for this period and make Luther and the religious Reformation ancillary to it.

Contrary to the Catholic view, tradition of that day was not a value for Luther enshrined from the beginning of history,

³⁸ His lecture took place in the Luther Jubilee in Washington, D.C. on November 8th.

³⁹ Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), pages 182-183.

nor was it an ongoing norm.⁴⁰ Luther reintegrated the Holy Spirit and the critical norms of his theology in the ongoing life. And Luther made his theological criteria clear. Where these theological criteria break through and bring renewal, we are speaking of the theological aspects of history. Where they fail, the non-theological aspects of history become determinative.⁴¹

Leif Grane also introduced the distinction between the horizon of history of a person's contemporaries and the historical vantage-point of our day. Luther has to be seen in his historical setting and in his particular historical limitations. The historian has to start where his historical subjects are, i.e. for Luther, in the late Feudal period. Luther was no friend to the princes, but called them tyrants right to their faces. "But read Luther's history very carefully," Prof. Grane said, otherwise it would be easy to take the non-theological aspects of Luther's time and become a "problem conservative."⁴² (This is his term.) One has to get back to

⁴⁰ For a sense of Catholic tradition in Luther's day: H. Richard Niebuhr cites Pope Leo XIII: "By the law of Christ we mean not merely the natural precepts of morality, or what supernatural knowledge the ancient world acquired, all which Christ perfected and raised to the highest plane by his explanation, interpretation, and ratification; but we mean besides, all the doctrine and in particular the institutions he has left us. Of these the Church is the chief." Christ and Culture, page 139.

⁴¹ See Footnote 33.

⁴² Leif Grane used this term on the misreading of history in relation to social issues in the question and answer period after his Jubilee lecture on Nov. 8, 1983. Similarly Eric W. Gritsch writes, "If structures of thought are made the starting point of historical analysis, a historical person is transformed into a type,

Luther, not just via ideas, but observing the way he thought and acted in his own time and according to L. Grane, "This Luther is strong, very strong" in the face of conditions that prevailed in his time.⁴³ Today we naturally have other conditions, and the "Gospel for our time" might have other consequences, which is perfectly in order.⁴⁴ Leif Grane echoes Luther's changed stance on fighting the Turk, which we alluded to "when other grounds and reasons apply."⁴⁵

The Strength of the Historical Luther

Luther had an overwhelming fear of all insurrection and revolt. He did not support the revolt of the free knights under Franz von Sickingen in 1522, did not support the peasants' uprisings of 1525, and opposed the offensive crusade against the Turks in 1529.⁴⁶ Luther could only see absolute chaos resulting from such revolts against the authorities (*Obrigkeit*). Today we have a sense that authority is also in us, not exclusively in the persons ruling alone. But Luther railed against the

disclosing a particular structure or thought rather than historical reality." In Thomas Müntzer, a Tragedy of Errors, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), page 117.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ J.M. Porter, Luther: Selected Political Writings, p.121. Also see LW 46: 162 and WA 30¹¹: 108-109.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.14.

magistrates and princes, blasted Duke George of Saxony and called him a soap bubble; criticized Henry VIII, lashed out at the most powerful German elector, Albert, the Arch-Bishop, and later the Cardinal of Mainz; and last but not least, he left little unsaid in his rebuke of the popes. H.G. Haile sets aside a whole section of his book on the old Luther about his courage in this respect, and calls it: "Knocking the Grand Heads."⁴⁷ Such details should illustrate Prof. Grane's conviction that Luther was a very strong critic of the powerful magistrates in the land, when he assailed their injustices, immorality, or ignorance.

It is surprising that Henry the VIII did not send an assassin to do away with Luther as he did Tyndale. Luther, who never left his monastery, named the Black Cloister, even after all the other monks had left, hid Robert Graves there secretly, hiding him from Henry. On Graves return to England he was captured by Henry and beheaded. After the Peasants' War, for refuge Carlstadt came to Luther, who hid him from the authorities in the cloister and later negotiated for him or he would have met the same fate as Thomas Müntzer.

Another factor that is important to our subject: Frederick the Wise was a very benign prince. Although he never left the old faith, he felt he should not meddle in theology and

⁴⁷ H. G. Haile, Luther, p. 149.

religion, wanting to leave that to the theologians more competent in this subject than he. Secondly, Frederick died at the peak of the Peasant's War in 1525, and his dying request to Duke John, his brother, who succeeded him, was to be lenient with the peasants, perhaps they and the lords had really wronged them. In Frederick the Wise, Duke John, and his son, John Frederick, who looked to Luther as his mentor, Luther had some very conscientious and dedicated princes in his field of experience. It was these very sensitive and hesitant rulers that he tried to move with his ferocious book against the peasants. It was right at the time when Thomas Müntzer was instigating the peasants very near the door of the little university in Wittenberg and that made it very likely that Luther would be decapitated with the arrival of the peasants.

In terms of Luther's marriage, it is sometimes interpreted that he married on June 13, 1525 to show his spite to the peasants, right after they had experienced a blood-bath. In his letter to the city councilman of Mansfeld, John Ruehl, written on the 4th of May, 1525, however, he notes that he would take his stand against the peasants even if he had to lose a hundred necks (by decapitation), and before he died, he thought he would take his dear Katie to wife.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ H. H. Borchardt and Georg Merz, editors, Martin Luthers Ausgewählte Werke IV, (Muenchen: Kaiser Verlag, 1934), p. 292. After further study, it is perhaps

This letter was written 11 days before the Battle of Frankenhausen, where Thomas Müntzer was defeated, i.e. May 15th. Three major battles all took place at this time, all spelling the peasants' defeat. The other two: Böblingen, May 12th, and Zavern, in Alsace, May 17th. Obviously, with the Elector of Saxony dying, and not much going on against the rampaging peasants at this point in time, Luther is trying to move Duke John to take up the sword, trying to ward off the certain disruption of Wittenberg. The tension is easily observed in Luther's sermon given for Frederick's Funeral on May 10, 1525.⁴⁹

Trying to bring about a peasant uprising, the way fiery T. Müntzer was doing from Nurenberg to Alstädt to Mühlhausen, was not at all what Luther thought was a constructive historical solution to their problem. But Luther wrote a booklet on the Twelve Articles of the peasants, and advised them to negotiate, and warned them that otherwise they were throwing a stone up into the air that would only come down on their own heads.

Thinking he might have the same success that he had calming the Wittenberg Disturbances, Luther did a whirlwind speaking campaign to try to persuade the peasants to gain their ends

more accurate to see Luther's decision to marry as an offensive move (in both senses of the word) in the strategy to further the Reformation in a time when his enemies wanted him to go on the defensive. Also see LW 49: 111 and WA Br 3: 481-482.

⁴⁹ Borchardt and Merz, eds., Luthers Ausgewählte Werke VI, p. 400. This sermon is not in the LW. See WA 17¹: 199b-212.

peacefully. But peasants ridiculed him, drowned him out with church bells, and pelted him with vegetables. He was really taking a risk, because he could see that the peasants no longer cared, and were going to plunder the rich monasteries and destroy the castles of the nobility and those of their liege lords. Luther in his incomparable way did not put his finger up to the wind to see which way it would go, and then throw his weight on that side, like the wicked Margrave of Kasimir, but in the face of the deadly consequences, he lashed out at the peasants right when they seemed to be carrying the day. When reading the history concerned, one can describe Luther as intensely involved and full of courage, action, and conviction for his cause. These historical illustrations again support L. Grane's contention that the historical Luther was very strong.

Encountering the Fiery Luther

L. Grane pointed out that often the historical Luther is abstracted out and becomes presented only by his ideas. This kind of historiography makes a non-historical Luther into a hero or an arch-villain outside of his given set of historical limitations.

In the horizon of his history, Luther's discovery of the Gospel was very powerful indeed and for our day his Gospel can also make the church come alive with renewal. But the Lutheran

churches today do not now represent the Gospel the way Luther proclaimed it and represented it then. When the powerful Gospel of Luther's rediscovery is introduced again today, it will give a new shape to today's church. In Luther's proclamation of the Gospel, he also felt the urgency to act. L. Grane would disagree with those who held that Luther limited himself solely to a reform of theology. Because that was merely his first step, from which he proceeded to reform the university, the campaign against indulgence sales, his stand against the Pope and Emperor in Worms, his battle with the Anabaptists, and the Reformation of the church.

Leif Grane did not emphasize Luther's reliance on the Word of God, the way Luther ascribed the powerful movement of the Reformation to it. For example, while Luther was hidden away at the Wartburg, Andreas Bodenstein von Carlstadt along with the former Augustinian monk from Luther's monastery, Gabriel Zwilling, instigated an iconoclastic rampage in Wittenberg that led to Luther's face to face controversy with Carlstadt. After the smashing of images and other violent acts that threatened the old believing priests, Luther's delivered the Eight *Invocavit* Sermons to bring the Reformation back under control. In these sermons he kept referring to the Word of God that carries out the task for which it was proclaimed as a powerful force for change. What Luther referred to here is what Grane

calls the theological aspect of history; indeed, the very essence of it.

The non-theological aspects of history are encountered when we feature and emulate the sinful people and conditions of Luther's day; those people who did not open themselves to the Gospel and refused to be changed by it. They perpetuated and reestablished a recalcitrant stand against the Gospel that we, following them, can misguidedly and sinfully continue in our day.

Some of this recalcitrance is also in Luther himself. Thus Hitler's use of Luther's writings against the Jews is a case in point. With them Hitler resurrected a modern racial anti-Semitism in the German Nazi Reich. Also we should not confuse the forum *coram deo*, that is, before God with the horizontal one before others. Importantly, justification by faith does not preclude direct action for social change. It is before God that passivity is required in the way Luther experienced it, while direct action challenges injustices *coram hominibus*, that is, in the forum before others, challenging injustices in the society and state. In our democratic ethos, in which we also have freedom of speech and assembly, we are thus provided with "different grounds and reasons" that were not present in Luther's day. Quietism therefore in the face of social injustice is another such misguided stand against the Gospel.

There was plenty of resistance to the Gospel in Luther's day and it needs to be rejected there so it is not reenacted here. Another example was the barbaric punishments inflicted in those days: the torture of offenders and opposition leaders, all the beheadings, the burning of heretics at the stake, the persecution and execution of the Anabaptists, the brutal oppression of the peasants, to name just some of the early modern practices that stand out because of their sadistic cruelty. The non-theological aspects represent the darkness of the time that the light of the Gospel had not reached, traditions that are to be rejected and not emulated.

In the same way there are non-theological aspects recorded in the Scripture for New Testament times.⁵⁰ We should not go back to St. Paul and justify slavery and sexism just because they are in the Scripture. Such features of an age, whether in the time of Luther or of St. Paul are the sinful conditions that the Gospel was unleashed to overcome, and it is not right to use these non-theological aspects of history from the First or Sixteenth Centuries to perpetuate them in a cruel reaction and resistance against the Gospel. Luther rediscovered and proclaimed the Gospel, but in his own time, the Gospel gained only a little ground even in the great religious renaissance that we call the sixteenth century Reformation. Looking back we

⁵⁰ The non-theological aspects of history can be understood pejoratively or neutrally as merely social, economic, and political aspects.

can see how much more ground needed to be covered, as we know how much more ground the Gospel today needs to cover, which is the challenge the Word of God faces among us, the challenge facing "*Christus Reformator*." The latter term used by Heike Oberman makes the important distinction between Luther and Christ, who is the Word of God, who actually brings renewal.

After reading the Niebuhrs, one receives the impression that the focus of Luther's Reformation was more personal than social. But Luther reformed the church as an institution and thereby he redefined and reconstituted the government. He also encouraged the establishment of a public school system for the children of German lands. In all these ways Luther was also focusing on the social institutions, not to mention his teachings on marriage and family. The Gospel certainly has to get into an open heart and capture a person by the message of forgiveness and the love of God in Christ's dying and being raised for us. The Gospel, however, also impacts the institutions of the society for another kind of conversion, which the concept of the "reformation" refers to, i.e. a conversion of the basic institutions of society. Like the concept of revolution, "reformation" means more than the conversion of merely individual persons.

Modern individualism does not begin in the Reformation but earlier in the Humanism of Italy.⁵¹ Reinhold Niebuhr argues that the Reformation brought the individual to the highest point in the Christian religion, because the "priesthood of all believers," brought the individual into a direct relationship with eternity above and at the "end" of a believer's life.⁵² He also writes that the Renaissance went beyond the limits set by the Christian religion, that is, by the development of the great and unique "autonomous" individual.⁵³ Luther emphasized that each believer was his or her neighbor's priest, not his or her own and he was very much interested in marriage, schools, the university, and defining the Church and state.

It does not make much sense, therefore, to argue that the Reformation applied to individuals and not to the rest of society, because it applied to the whole society and all its institutions as well.

Luther's theory of the two kingdoms is an important example of the way his theology impacted the basic institutions of society. Martin Marty argues that the principle of separation of church and state did not come to the United States of America

⁵¹ Harm Klueting, Luther und die Neuzeit, (Luther and New Times), (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 2011), page 11.

⁵² Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, vol. II, pages 308, 310.

⁵³ Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, vol. I, pages 59 and 64.

from Luther's theory, but from the influence of the sects. The principle of the separation of church and state, even with their definition, certainly affects the whole society – the whole culture – forming and shaping all the people whether they are Christian or not.⁵⁴

Luther's two kingdom theory subtracted temporal governance from the church, whose mission was only to persuade, preach the Gospel, teach, and counsel the people. He placed the temporal government under the law and reason, and as the lesser of evils, allowed it to use coercive force to check evil. With that distinction Luther introduced a very important value at a time when a confusion of spiritual and temporal powers caused great harm.

In our collective culture Luther also strengthened the value of not acting against one's own conscience. He stood his ground at the Diet of Worms despite untold the pressure not to do so. Luther also stands for another value we hold precious today: the freedom to think for oneself unhindered by the authority of the Church.⁵⁵ This value affects all people in our culture to a lesser or greater degree and can even take on different social forms, as for example, trying to think independently of the authorities in the news media.

⁵⁴ Martin Marty, "Luther and American Freedom," in Luther Jubilee Lectures, November 6-12, 1983, held in Washington, D.C.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

In Luther's famous Eight *Invocavit* Sermons that he delivered after returning from the Wartburg, he refers again and again to the Word of God doing its work and making the necessary changes for the much desired Reformation. But the Word of God is not bound. (2 Timothy 2:9) Luther could not chain it to his own purposes. What could he do if the peasants responded to the Word, even though they responded wrongly? The Word of God breaks free. When unleashed, it goes about doing its saving work. Luther certainly is aware of the revolutionary character of the work of the Gospel. But he could not see in what way the Gospel liberated a serf, how the social estates could become more equal, or how the medieval world order could be changed by it, even while he was changing it.

Because of our structural view or vantage point, after Karl Marx was able to describe the inner principles by which a whole socio-economic and political system, i.e. capitalism worked, building a conceptual and theoretical model, we can look at a slave system changing into a feudal system, changing into a mercantile, capitalist, and socialist one and understand that world orders change.⁵⁶ But Luther did not have a clear grasp of such a possibility. For him the peasants' threatening the feudal order brought Germany to the threshold of anarchy and

⁵⁶ Christ already used parables to point to the same reality: no one pours new wine into old wineskins or places a new patch onto an old piece of cloth. Mark 2: 21-22, Luke 5: 36-38, and Matthew 9: 16-17.

annihilation. An improved social order was inconceivable for him on this side of eternity.

But such was not the case with Thomas Müntzer, although his chiliastic order would have been the tyrannical nightmare Luther feared, make no mistake. (One need merely think of the reign of the chiliastic Anabaptists at Münster of 1534-1535!) Michael Gaismaier of the Tirolian Peasant League also developed social changes that would have converted the medieval order into a very different one, and perhaps he penetrated to a dynamic social imagination, because he had secret meetings with Huldrich Zwingli in Zurich, who very much imagined a military campaign necessary for the protection of the Reformation. Perhaps the knight Ulrich von Hutten, writing to Luther from Franz von Sickingen's castle, envisioning a reform of the empire, jarred a few thoughts in this direction for Luther. Luther was determined not to get into a violent revolt, even if led by the nobility and knights, because the Reformation in his sense could be spread only by the Word of God and would be completely compromised by a violent campaign or crusade to establish it. Or were Luther's opponents right? Did Luther forget the Psalm, which forbade him to place his confidence in the princes? (Psalm 118:9)

Zwingli, however, opposed to Luther, wanted a military defense for the Reformation and boycotted trade with the canton

of Schwyz because the Old Believers there had burned a missionary from Zürich at the stake for preaching the Gospel. He was using a coercive measure to open the way for new believing pastors in the Swiss Catholic cantons. They came up and attacked him in Zürich with 8,000 Catholic soldiers against his 1,500 Protestant ones, killing him in the Battle of Kappel on October 11, 1531.

In his Jubilee lecture, "The Images of Luther," Lewis Spitz quoted Luther's dictum: "For the Word of God comes, whenever it comes, to change the world!"⁵⁷ And the peasants did not only plunder and riot; some really planned a peasant parliament for the voice of the common man to be represented in the diets, i.e. parliaments. They planned to have peasant representatives sit with the nobles, the clerics, and the patricians, if the burghers were not yet in power in the cities. But the planning was soon dashed as battles started to be lost.

From Reinhold Niebuhr, we now get the language and vocabulary to try to support the peasant claims, i.e. a greater approximation of justice not a perfect society, the distinction between a public and private ethic, the dictum: You can't understand the ultimate, if you don't diligently pursue the

⁵⁷ See footnote 21 for the LW and WA references.

proximate."⁵⁸ He explores all the nuances and complexities of social justice.

Perhaps, however, when Luther argues that only an internal change is brought about by the Gospel, he means something different from our understanding of it. What Luther meant by it, according to Leif Grane, was being spiritually free, that is, setting the conscience free for a person to act. For Luther "internal" should not be understood in the modern totalitarian context, precluding any external freedom so that only "inner freedom" could be hoped for. But Luther as well as St. Paul come very close to a spiritualized definition of freedom, which angers Marxists so much, because the proximate is considered completely unimportant and the ultimate all-important to such philosophers and theologians. The Gospel has to make an internal change in a person, but that change does not remain internal. Because of the power of the Spirit, the external becomes an expression of the internal. The "internal" need not be spiritualized as an escape from the injustices experienced externally. Within the believer God in Christ is the active free

⁵⁸ Reinhold Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny of Man, vol. II, p. 211: „There is, therefore, no way of understanding the ultimate problem of human existence if we are not diligent in the pursuit of proximate answers and solutions. Nor is there any way of evaluating the ultimate solution without constantly relating it to the proximate possibilities.“

agent working internally by creating and saving in the proximate as well as in the ultimate.

In this essay we have merely begun this investigation. No hard and fast conclusions can yet be drawn. They will hopefully be reached in the process of exploring different approaches and methods of researching historical documents and their interpretation, along with those of the Niebuhr brothers, the theologian, William Lazareth, the historian George Forell, and others.

The Gospel can enter into the heart. The question is, how does the Gospel relate to the basic institution of society that we call the Church and the institution of the state? Luther certainly included social aspects of reality in his theology. Investigating the powerful institutional changes that the Reformation set afoot demonstrates that Luther was also revolutionary, but a subtle one, effective and successful because of it.⁵⁹ The oxymoron of a conservative revolutionary may also point to the same idea.

⁵⁹ The word "subtle" may point to a useful approach, when obstacles are far too ingrained to change. The Church had already been struggling for a reformation in head and members for 200 years. Thus one avoids direct action and a direct assault on the proximate, meanwhile focusing completely on the ultimate, which, or rather Who, changes the proximate. Luther's emphasis on the Word of God uses language and the power of definition to create the condition in which the changes take place, to make the point in secular terms.

Using H. Richard Niebuhr's concepts, when Luther's Christ in paradox with the culture⁶⁰ made the break with the Christ of culture model of the late medieval period, the disintegrating social medieval synthesis unraveled even further. Importantly, H. R. Niebuhr's criticism of that model of Christian group, which holds Christ in paradox with culture and whom he calls Christian dualists, will need more attention in this investigation. It is obvious that H. Richard chooses Christ the transformer of culture over Christ in paradox with culture, although by relativizing each theology, he tries to lay the groundwork for theological pluralism.

The "theological aspects of history" relate to the subtle revolution, the source of revolutions that we call the Reformation. The victorious Gospel is the hand of God in history, the living Christ, *Christus Reformator*. The Christian faith introduces dynamic change into history. Luther's dynamic dictum, "For the Word of God comes whenever it comes to change

⁶⁰ H. Richard Niebuhr's presents five models of different kinds of Christians. 1/ Those believers who follow a Christ against culture stand in basic disagreement and opposition to it. Tertullian would be a good example of this type. 2/ The Christians of his second model see Christ as a hero of the culture and stand in basic agreement with it. Culture Protestantism in Germany is a good example of the Christ of culture type. The medieval Church is another example of this type. 3/ But where the synthesis of Christianity and the feudal culture then advanced to the Christ above culture, we have an example like St. Thomas Aquinas. 4/ The Christ and culture in paradox type of Christian lives in a polarity and tension with culture. An example would be Luther, who lived his life precariously and sinfully in the hope of a justification beyond history. 5/ H. Richard's fifth type is made up of Christians who believe in conversion and who believe that Christ even transforms culture. He names John Calvin and Augustine as examples of this type. Christ and Culture, pages 40-45.

and renew the world," along with that of Marx from his Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach, "Philosophers have all variously interpreted the world, the point, however, is to change it," can be "translated" into a dynamic Kantian version: "We live in the realities of this world, but out of God's transcendent source of strength, by which we accept inhumane realities only in order to overcome them."⁶¹ We live in the realities we face but not out of those realities. A person lives out of God's strength, the source of life, because our help comes from God who made Heaven and Earth, and who can change our realities by the power of faith.

In this investigation I will argue that faith affects the inner person, the soul, and the heart, as well as the social order; meaning that it also affects external realities. "The internal / external issue is not really the point of the two kingdom theory, however. It is rather whether reason or the Gospel is the better tool to use for social justice. Luther opts for reason over ideology, because the Jew and the Muslim must also be able to contribute to society. Luther would have rather

⁶¹ After Bonhoeffer and Max Weber it is impossible to maintain with Marx that the human being is merely an ensemble of social conditions. A person is transcendent when living out of the source of an ultimate strength. By God's grace we can change inhumane conditions into more human ones.

trusted a just Turk than an unjust Christian ruling the government."⁶²

In underscoring the dynamic movement of the Reformation, it is possible to provide a meaning for the "theological aspects of history" beyond what Leif Grane understood by the term. Beyond Luther's Word of God saying, Marx's dictum, and the Kantian version, it is also possible to bring Pierre Teilhard de Chardin to bear on this subject. In his law of complexity and consciousness, he maintains that the higher the complexity of the organism the higher the consciousness. From his divine breakthrough bringing about the birth of life, the birth of thought, and – one can easily extrapolate – the birth of love, he hopes for humanity's crossing the threshold of collective thought. In Teilhard dynamic sense of evolution, the latter will become ever more possible in the intensification and centering of human complexity and consciousness. Christ the Omega point is the new species drawing the old Adam and Eve out of its entanglement with evil and injustice into being the Children of God.

Teilhard also points out that as opposed to uniformity, true unity differentiates, it does not confound.⁶³ The oneness we

⁶² I thank my brother, Philip Krey, for bringing my two kingdom theory back on course with these words.

⁶³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, The Future of Man, New York: Harper Torch Books, 1964), pages 54-55: "the coming together of the separate elements does

have within allows us to be as different as can be externally, while internally having one heart and soul. In addition he maintains that to set the individual off against the group is a false habit of mind.⁶⁴ In the internal dimension, our oneness is beyond number, and a new person as well as a new order can find external expression.

Paul Ricoeur has a more Hegelian understanding of change in his translation of the thesis-antithesis-synthesis movement into an orientation-disorientation-reorientation schema, which he finds in Freudian psychology as well as in Marx's sociology.⁶⁵ With his schema Ricoeur also generalizes and idealizes Marxian dialectical materialism, by which Marx theorized that the slave system becomes a feudal one that in turn becomes mercantile, capitalist, socialist, and finally communist. What needs to be underscored is not the accuracy of the Marxian schema but the dynamic sense of history it entails. Kierkegaard takes Hegel into a personal existential direction claiming that human beings develop from an aesthetic stage which is pleasure based, to an ethical one characterized by responsibility, and finally with a

nothing to eliminate their differences. On the contrary, it *exalts them*. In every practical sphere *true union* (that is to say, synthesis) does not confound; it *differentiates*."

⁶⁴ Ibid., pages 54-55.

⁶⁵ Paul Ricoeur, Freud & Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970) and also see Ricoeur's The Conflict of Interpretations, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

leap of faith they enter the spiritual religious stage.⁶⁶ Added to the theological, philosophical, anthropological, sociological, and existential sense of dynamic history, it is also possible to add a linguistic aspect. Walter Breuggeman, a biblical scholar, uses Paul Ricoeur for his study of the Psalms, and speaks of a dynamic language event, the "Sermon Dei,"⁶⁷ by which people and institutions are changed. He anticipates performative language couched in Luther's promises of the Gospel and commands of the law.⁶⁸

All these dynamic approaches to history are mobilized to dislodge the misuse of Luther's two kingdom theory for the intransigence sometimes found in a modern Lutheran perspective.

⁶⁶ William F. Lawhead, The Voyage of Discovery: a Historical Introduction to Philosophy, Second Edition, (Stamford, CT: Wadsworth, Thomson Learning, 2002), pages 407-411.

⁶⁷ Walter Brueggemann, "Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function" in Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 17/ June, 1980, 3 - 32.

⁶⁸ Language events in the Philosophy of Language are investigated as speech-acts, which as performatives bring about the reality they express. They range from insignificant to world changing.

In How to Do Things with Words, J. L. Austin writes that "performatives begin with a highly significant and unambiguous expression, such as 'I bet', 'I promise', 'I bequeath' an expression very commonly also used in naming the act which, in making such an utterance, I am performing, e.g., betting, promising, bequeathing, etc. From O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa, editors, J. L. Austin, How to Do Things with Words, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 32.

In his article "How Performatives Work" John Searle describes performatives as executive, self-referential speech acts, which need to be in the first person and the dramatic or present-present tense. See the journal Linguistics and Philosophy. 12 (1989): 535-558.

There is also an intransigent human perspective today along with an individualistic ideology, which resigns itself to "unchangeable" social structures. When dynamic historical movements are set a foot, institutions and social structures can change rapidly.

When considering such a dynamic historical perspective, often direct action or even violence is chosen to bring about the change. Thomas Müntzer, the Marxist hero today, was all too ready to use force to bring about his vision of the new society. If the peasants had listened to Luther in the case of this particular upheaval in Thuringia and Saxony, as distinct from the other regions of the Peasants' War, then they would not have all been swept into the abyss of death. Who led them into this abyss? Thomas Müntzer. Reinhold Niebuhr may not have known about the pathetic events that took place at Frankenhausen, but it was the closest regional uprising to Luther, and the one he was reacting to with the most fear. At this time perhaps news of the plundered monasteries and the castles razed to the ground already come to Wittenberg. The atrocity of Jäcklein Rohrbach against the nobility would have come later, but it did not at all match the blood-letting that the Swabian League's general, George Truchsess von Waldburg perpetuated on the often helpless peasants.

Three major victories over the peasant "armies" came all at once in the middle of May. Reinhold Niebuhr has his sophisticated political analysis of Luther's position, and from our historical vantage-point, Niebuhr is, of course, right. But wasn't Luther right in his historical situation? Had the peasants listened to Luther rather than Müntzer, they could have been saved and the subtle revolution could have progressed.

Reinhold Niebuhr's Serenity Prayer contains real wisdom: "Lord give me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." Luther understood what could be changed and how it could be changed, while Müntzer had courage in the face of the things he could not change, but passively accepted the things he could have changed, i.e. his vindictive, self-righteous, and violent spirit. Insofar that he could not tell the difference, he was utterly foolish.

The historical situation was naturally more complicated by the oppression that the peasants were experiencing. Thus this depiction of Müntzer is certainly an oversimplification. The dilemma at issue is whether the social structures could have been changed or not.⁶⁹ Luther was a participant in the Feudal order and may have been convinced that the peasants could not

⁶⁹ To include another comment of my brother, Philip Krey: "Luther had no problem with social structures being changed. He had a problem using the Gospel to justify their change."

change it at this particular point in time and, in addition, that violence was a completely wrong-headed way to go about it. He may also have thought in terms of the orders of creation, meaning that being completely engulfed in the Feudal order he identified it with the created order itself. Consequently, he may have felt that there was no alternative to it, but utter destruction of their civilization, the end of the world itself. Perhaps to understand social orders as dynamically changing, especially in the sophisticated sense of achieving only greater approximations of justice, would be anachronistic for Luther's time. Müntzer was also not fighting for that kind of a rational outcome but as a chiliast for the Kingdom of God.

So we are still left with what H. Richard Niebuhr calls "the enduring problem" in chapter one of his work, *Christ and Culture*. Christ transforming culture seems to be alien to Luther, but look at the theological aspects of history in the power of the Word to do the Reformation by changing hearts. Luther did not need to raise an army to drive the monks and nuns out of their cloisters. They would be seized by the Gospel and convinced in their hearts that their real vocation lay out in the world and they would leave their cloisters all by themselves.⁷⁰ Luther considered the militant alternative, and he

⁷⁰ Luther's reinterpretation of the Christian vocation from the clergy alone to the laity in general is very important.

said he could have really caused havoc if he would have liked.

In Luther's own words from his Eight *Invocavit* Sermons on Monday March 10, 1522:

Take my example: I stood up against the pope, the indulgence and all the papists, but without violence, mischief, rioting, but I was driving, preaching and writing the Word of God alone. Otherwise I did nothing in addition. When I was sleeping or having a good time drinking Wittenberg beer with Philip and Amsdorff, the Word alone set so much into motion, that the dominion of the pope became so weak and faint, that never a prince nor an emperor has ever been able to break so much away from him. I did not do it, it was alone the Word, preached and written by me, which arranged and handled all of this. If I had also proceeded herein with violence and trouble, I could have easily begun such a play that all Germany would have come into a great blood-letting through it. But what would it have been? It would have been a fools' play of ruin and corruption of body and soul. I sat still and let the Word act.⁷¹

These words come from Luther's Second Sermon of the eight preached on March 10, 1522, during the time when von Hutton was soliciting his joining von Sickingen's uprising. Luther answered in a letter:

I would not like that one would fight for the Gospel with violence and blood-letting. Through the Word the world is overcome, through the Word is the church sustained, through the

⁷¹ Borchardt and Merz, *Luthers Werke*, IV, p. 46. Also see LW 51: 77-78 and WA 10^{III}: 18c-19c. Luther was referring to his colleagues Philip Melancthon and Nicolaus von Amsdorff.

Word it will also again become repaired, and the Antichrist will fall without violence...⁷²

Perhaps the invitation from Ulrich von Hutten to join the revolt of Franz von Sickingen and the free Knights was a larger temptation for Luther than we know. But for Luther the Word of God had to do the Reformation if it was going to last. His Gospel could not be spread by crusade and the edge of a sword.

Luther also tends to contradict Karl Marx and his materialist ideology that an idea has to be carried by human interest or by human classes to become effective; otherwise the idea is impotent and cannot bring about change.⁷³ For Luther it is precisely the opposite for the Word of God. It alone by its power can make the changes, and our interests, and human groupings organized for the power to enforce or carry out the idea interfere with the lasting change that is being sought. To hear Luther's words again from the same *Invocavit* sermon:

Thus God effects more with his Word, than if you and I and the whole world were to gather all the power of the whole world and melted it together in one pile. Because with the word God captures the heart, and when the heart is taken in, you have already won the person. At that point a thing has to fall by

⁷² Leo Sievers, op. cit., p.184-185.

⁷³ "The 'idea' always disgraced itself insofar as it differed from the 'interest'" Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The Holy Family, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), page 96.

itself and cease.⁷⁴ One should surrender it to God and allow his Word alone to work without our additional work and doing.⁷⁵

Underlying this opposition of view-points, of course, is that of the idealist-materialist philosophers, and Luther subscribes to neither, but looks to the right hand of God, the Word of God, *Christus Reformator* doing the work of our salvation. That is the "theological aspect of history" which needs to be understood.

Perhaps the proper appreciation of the Word of God, or the Divine Word, acting in history, would allow Luther to join in subscribing to the Niebuhrian model of Christ transforming culture, albeit in a subtle way. Martin Marty argues that shifting the basic authority in society⁷⁶ even as a conservative, who changes the medieval model of Christ of culture to the early modern Christ in paradox with culture, necessarily also makes a break with tradition and brings about revolutionary changes in society.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Borchardt and Merz, Luthers Werke, IV, p. 44. Also see LW 51: 76 and WA 10^{III}: 16c.

⁷⁵ Ibid., page 43. WA 10^{III}: 15c.

⁷⁶ Martin Marty, "Luther and American Freedom" Jubilee Lecture.

⁷⁷ Martin Marty, Lecture on Luther held at Wagner College in New York on September 19, 1984. He stated that "Changing a transformation model into a paradoxical model certainly will change the society as well and give it a different character." (Taken from my notes from his lecture.)

A very technical analysis of this history should not miss that many theological postures fail to see the real agent of social change and historical change, namely, the living and risen Word of God. The model of Christ transforming culture would be alien to Luther if it were to be done by any other means than the Word of God, and the patient struggle to let God take all the action, so that we do not interfere with God's doing by our so-called good works,⁷⁸ which usually include some pressure, direct action, power, even armed struggle and violence. Not that this cannot be reasonable for people organizing a state and society, but this is not the divine change that will endure and be the real lasting and continuing Reformation.

From the vantage point of Luther's faith, the Wittenberg iconoclasts under Carlstadt, the Free Knights and with Franz von Sickingen, and the peasants all succumbed to the temptation to do with various shades of violence and coercion what was alone in God's domain to carry out by the power of the Word.

Carlstadt wanted to reform the church; von Sickingen, the empire, and the peasants, the entire social order. It may not

⁷⁸ Although the ancients, like Plato, thought that the macrocosmic state was merely the microcosmic individual writ large, i.e., having the same determinative principles in each, we now know that different principles apply when considering the individual and the collective levels. On the individual level Luther quotes the mystic Johannes Tauler, "[One] should know that [one] has done great damage if one does not wait for God's work." Luther writes that God's work crucifies and mortifies us, reducing us to nothing, in order to form and shape us for eternity. This does not seem to hold true on a collective level. See LW 7: 133 and WA 44: 397.

have been just for Luther to deny them legitimizing themselves by the Gospel and the Law of God, because his teachings were just developing on this subject, and it was common in medieval times to have theological legitimation for the ruler. In those days religion carried and legitimated not only the ecclesial body, but the body social as well, especially because the rule had to be God ordained. Such a government for Luther was the left hand of God. In Luther's day the modern fissure between religion and society had not yet taken place.⁷⁹

A historical note: it seems the conscious space between the government and church was very narrow in Luther's early modern period. The image that Inge Lønning used of the social body as a butterfly with its two wings unfolding as the church and state is an apt one. The metaphor could be changed, with the institutions of church and state representing two engines making the society work. For the most part the church and state were in a partnership in those days, because heresy was almost immediately named sedition as well. It was felt that theology and religion undergirded the government, so that without theological agreement at Marburg in 1529, e.g., Philip of Hesse could not enter an alliance with Zwingli of Zurich. Anabaptists

⁷⁹ George L. Moss, The Reformation, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1953), p. 4.

were considered not only heretical but even seditious. A Lutheran in a Catholic region had to be a traitor and vice versa. Religion functioned as the chain (*catena* in Latin) or the glue that held society together. On the other hand Aristotle was used as a secular philosophy for legitimating the state,⁸⁰ but theology of the church undergirded the temporal powers positing rule by divine right.

When Thomas Müntzer was preaching his sermon to the magistrates, he drew the implication from Luther's theology that "The princes are in respect to their office a pagan people. They are said to be able to maintain nothing other than a civil unity."⁸¹ Müntzer called this a shameful conception by which Luther was misleading the rulers and making them fools.⁸² We can be sure that Frederick the Wise's brother, Duke John and his son, John Frederick, must have cringed at the thought of this alien kind of office Luther was giving them. From Luther's perspective, however, a Jew or a Muslim could be just rulers for the purposes of civil unity, which Müntzer, because of his ideological conception of government, could not accept. Luther

⁸⁰ Theology was not the only legitimation of the state, however. In the words of Philip Krey, "There was a long tradition of Aristotelian philosophy of the state which granted the state its own legitimacy without requiring the sacred umbrella of the Church. Luther inherited that tradition. "If you want to know how to run the state," he writes, "Read Aristotle."

⁸¹ George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergals, eds., Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1957), p.65.

⁸² Ibid.

"boasted, however, that not since the time of the apostles have the temporal sword and temporal government been so clearly described and highly praised as by me."⁸³ Luther held that the temporal government should be guided by law and rationality, even using the Philosopher, i.e. Aristotle. A saying of Luther, for which a source cannot be located, but that certainly makes Müntzer's point states, "I would rather be ruled by a wise Turk than a stupid Christian." But the pope as well as many prince bishops had spiritual and temporal authority over their ecclesiastical principalities in the feudal order of society, continuing even until 1870.

For Müntzer to classify Luther's teaching of the magistrates' office as being virtually pagan somewhat exaggerates Luther's position. He defined the government with enhanced powers, giving them almost a quasi-episcopal function in the Reformation.⁸⁴ Although he saw the church and government being separated in function, yet together they formed a partnership of the left and right hand of God in the social body. The government provided the order that made it possible for the Church to preach the Gospel.

The peasants of 1525 clearly could not have understood these new teachings of Luther. Indeed, he was just developing

⁸³ From "Whether Soldiers, too, Can Be Saved," LW 46:95 and WA 19: 625.

⁸⁴ Lindsay, op. cit., p. 337.

them himself. But their grievances were not being heard, and seeing the Earth begin to move under them in the changes that were sweeping over them, everywhere where Luther's Reformation was beginning to take hold, suddenly they had the impression that other old intransigent, historical institutions could also be set aside, overcome, replaced, and improved. But the instrumentality of change for them was an organized uprising and they took to arms in order to make their demands and intended to defend themselves now that they had courageously disobeyed their Lords. They had a great example in the one who had courageously disobeyed the pope and the Emperor. And they mouthed many of the same reasons for their stand, which however was not a stand, but direct action, and other actions of a very mixed and undisciplined quality, for example, from drunken riots and plundered cloisters to orderly preaching events. They wanted to introduce a new order and they therefore constituted themselves into a Brotherly Christian Union, with planned peasant representation in the new country parliaments or councils that they envisioned. Even when they called Luther, he would not come and advise them or negotiate for them. It would have cost him his life, because he was an outlaw of the empire and as free as a bird for the killing outside of Ernestine Saxony. So he did pen the "Admonishment to Peace, a Reply to Twelve Articles of

the Peasants of Swabia;" Luther was a theologian who always became involved.

In this pamphlet, however, Luther used much more ink to warn the peasants to stay in line, than demand that the Princes correct their injustices. But, to be fair, he also admonished the princes and the lords quite harshly. Luther did not consider a struggle over the justice of material existence as an ultimate. But perhaps because of his vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, Luther projected a detachment from his material subsistence to the peasants, who were not at all in a position to be that detached. Luther made a whirlwind speaking campaign to bring the peasants back to their sense even on Thomas Müntzer and Carlstadt's turf; but the peasants were already on the rampage and could not be prevented from their suicidal protest.

A mighty shift in history was taking place, but it did not shift with the peasants, but against them. Luther was also on the side that moved against them, and therefore he is also a participant in the crushing blow given their movement and armed protest. But in as much as Luther was by no means the whole cause of their revolt, he was also not the whole cause of their deadly punishment, which came at the hands of the powerful Lords. Luther's harsh little book was misused for their blood-thirsty revenge on the rebel peasants. Luther really intended it for the benign Princes of Saxony to mobilize them

against an ever more violent Thomas Müntzer. A man like Müntzer wanted to leave a trail of blood behind him. A purge of the "ungodly" old believers, i.e. the Catholics was on his agenda.

It is historically ironic that Müntzer developed the way he did under benign princes, who had long tried to abide and tolerate him. He remained implacable and determined to fight even though he had never had a baptism of fire or knew what a battle was like. Absolute tyrants ruled in some other regions of the war and the peasant leaders under them incessantly hesitated instead of fighting. They did not realize the blatant betrayal of their trust that the lords were using as a conscious strategy. Truchsess and his army of the Swabian League needed time to await the reinforcements of soldiers returning from the Battle of Pavia (February 24, 1525) in Italy - where Emperor Charles the V defeated Francis I, gaining the victory over the French in his Italian campaign. General Frundsberg hurried back returning from the battle to join General Truchsess in decimating the peasants. If these peasant leaders had been more determined to fight in the spirit of Müntzer, Truchsess and the Swabian League would have had much more trouble. It would still have been fools-play, to use Luther's words, because the emperor would have then mobilized forces to defeat them.

In the debacle of the Battle of Frankenhausen, the Thuringian peasants should have persuaded Thomas Müntzer that he

was no general, but a mere preacher, even though he had done everything he could not to be merely a preacher, but a peasant leader. Müntzer may have been more helpful against George Truchsess, when the latter bluffed and had to negotiate the Weingarten Treaty of April 17, 1525, because he felt too weak for battle with the very large and well-armed three Swabian peasant league "armies." But Thomas Müntzer may also have lost the battle in that theater of the war as well. The Swabian peasants still had moderate leaders who wanted a peaceful resolution and Müntzer may have convinced the peasants to fight the Swabian League when it was the most vulnerable.

Even if the three peasant league "armies" had defeated Truchsess and the army of the Swabian League instead of signing the Weingarten Treaty with him, Günter Franz argues that it all still would have been in vain. The northern and eastern principalities were not at all involved nor restless and revolutionary like the peasants of upper Germany, i.e., the southern principalities, and the lords would have used the former as a stronghold to overcome the peasants in the south.⁸⁵ In Alsace no one fought the peasants as they asserted their rights and their power with a force of 20,000. Then the Duke of Lorraine came over from France and slaughtered them all at Zavern!

⁸⁵ Günter Franz, 1956, op. cit., page 294.

Leaving the military strategy of the Peasants' War and turning to the theology of Luther and H. Richard Niebuhr once more, the latter's transformation model of Christ and culture may not be compatible with Luther's Word of God theology. Fitting Luther into his model may still distort Luther's position profoundly. Leif Grane, the Danish theologian, often seems to have "praxis" and a materialistic dialectic of history in mind derived from a Marxist orientation, which is very far from Luther. For example, once Luther admonishes Carlstadt never to confuse or collapse theory and practice.⁸⁶ The philosophy of Marx involves *praxis* and reflection, often entailing a reductionism of transcendence, which is the source of values.

Abraham Friesen, to whom our study will return later, asserts that a variation of Old Testament and New Testament types are here at play between the social project to create a perfect society on Earth versus the commitment to live in a tension between the real and the ideal. He notes that this problem has remained from St. Augustine to Karl Marx.⁸⁷

Reinhold Niebuhr has taught us a language that can replace the concept of "perfection" with approximations. In the field of

⁸⁶ Borchardt and Merz, Luthers Werke, IV, "Against the Heavenly Prophets, Concerning Images and the Sacrament" p. 149: "Teaching and doing are two separate things; I repeat, teaching and doing should be kept as separate from each other as heaven and earth." See LW 40: 129 and WA 18: 112.

⁸⁷ Abraham Friesen, Reformation and Utopia: The Marxist Interpretation of the Reformation and its Antecedents, (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1974), p.236.

tension between the real and the ideal, Reinhold Niebuhr argues that a greater approximation of justice can be achieved. These approximations could constitute steps on the way to the transformation model. From another perspective, in the field of tension, a new society can be born, a new social order can come into existence, precisely out of the tension of the real and the ideal. This new social order need not be called the kingdom of God, nor pretend to be a perfect society, but merely a more just one, with more mature persons living, moving, and having their being in it.

According to J.M. Porter, Luther made a significant contribution in understanding political millenarianism and developed a critique of the apocalyptic position. According to Luther they could be identified by two key attributes: their appeal to make the kingdom of God immanent. In such a way they abolish the distinction between the two kingdoms. Secondly they use power and force to compel the conscience or the inner person in order to serve spiritual perfection. Luther refutes these two chiliastic propositions by maintaining the Augustinian position that human nature is such that it could not achieve perfection even if a person were a true Christian. And secondly, the goal of perfection does not belong to the political realm. Love and grace are the required means for achieving perfection, not the coercive power used by the kingdoms of this world. In sum, the

end of perfection is beyond human power, because the kingdom of God is entered by faith through God's grace.⁸⁸

Often in our time we reject and rage against Luther's two kingdom theory. The problem is its misuse in our times. But a careful reading of the history of Luther's time will demonstrate its value and function for separating the church and state. It is a modern distortion of the theory to think it forbids involvement in society and relegates all Christian life and change solely within the church. The latter stance is a complete theological distortion of the heart of Jesus' teachings and life. Jesus was not merely about the reformation of the synagogue. His concern with the temple was primary, because judgment begins in the house of the Lord. But the House of the Lord stands for the kingdom of God, meaning that the reform of the temple involves the reform of the whole society as well as the lives of the persons living in it.

The misuse of the two kingdom theory is what has made it difficult to accept today. When the real and the ideal are not held in tension, but become split and divorced the theory becomes distorted. God is certainly in the kingdom of the left and that of the right, even as Christians are. We are not schizoid. But perhaps in extreme cases, and especially in the modern world where the grounds and conditions are very different

⁸⁸ J. M. Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 19-20.

from what Luther faced, the two kingdoms have become divorced in the Christian person, and people are in compartmentalized lives that easily divide and nullify the Christian vocation in many diverse areas of their lives, such as the job, faculty position, political vocation, military career, etc.

Could an incipient divorce of the kingdoms have caused the tragic stance of Luther in the Peasants' War? I think not. Luther was certainly someone who wielded incredible public influence. That is why the knight, Ulrich von Hutten, and the Swabian peasants, not T. Müntzer and the Frankenhausen Peasants, mind you, would have liked Luther on their side. The lack of clarity of the medieval order in the unraveling of its synthesis made it impossible to work in an utterly secular way by negotiating, compromising, and rearranging the political order for the inclusion of the voice of the peasants and common people. That political agenda could not yet be separated from the holy enterprise of the Reformation. It is now possible to separate them, although many historians still fold the struggle of the peasants into Luther's Reformation. To preserve the theological aspect and dimension of the Reformation, Luther distanced himself from the peasant uprisings in no uncertain terms when it all started breaking loose.

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The Jubilee Lectures, November 6-12, 1983

Jaroslav Pelikan:

"Martin Luther, Doctor of the Church and Prophet for our Time"

Bernhard Lohse: "Luther and the Protestant Tradition"

Otto A. Pesch: "Luther and the Catholic Tradition"

Gerhard O. Forde: "The Concept of Justification"

Gordon W. Lathrop: "Luther and Worship"

James M. Kittelson: "Luther and Christian Education"

Laura Youens: "The Music of Luther and the Reformation"

Leif Grane: "New Departures in Luther's Theology"

David Lotz: "Luther and Biblical Authority"

Inge Lønning: "Luther and Ecumenism"

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 "Polemical Images in Reformation Broadsheets and Pamphlets"

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Hans Hillerbrand: "Luther and the Left Wing of the Reformation"

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