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Michael Fieberkorn
fieberkorn@gmail.com

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FROM VICE TO VIRTUE:
CONTOURS OF IDOLATRY AND NEW OBEDIENCE

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

By
Michael Todd Fieberkorn
May 2021

Approved by:	Dr. Joel D. Biermann	Dissertation Advisor
	Dr. Robert A. Kolb	Reader
	Dr. Erik H. Herrmann	Reader

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Ad gloriam et laudem Dei
To the glory and praise of God
(Philippians 1:11)

Et ita vitam Christiani ne imagineris statum et quietem esse, sed transitum et profectum de vitiis ad virtutem, de claritate in claritatem, de virtute in virtutem, et qui non fuerit in transitu, hunc nec Christianum arbitreris.

And so you must not imagine that the Christian's life is a standing still and a state of rest. No, it is a passing over and a progress from vices to virtue, from clarity to clarity, from virtue to virtue. And those who have not been *en route* you should not consider Christians either.

Martin Luther, *Galatians Commentary*, 1519

Das also dieses Leben nicht ist eine Frömmigkeit, sondern ein Fromm-Werden, nicht eine Gesundheit, sondern ein Gesund-Werden, nicht ein Wesen, sondern ein Werden, nicht eine Ruhe, sondern eine Übung. Wir sind es noch nicht; werden es aber. Es ist noch nicht getan und geschehen, es ist aber im Gang und im Schwang. Es ist nicht das Ende, es ist aber der Weg; es glühet und glintzt noch nicht alles, es fegt sich aber alles.

This life, therefore, is not godliness but the process of becoming godly, not health but getting well, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not now what we shall be, but we are on the way. The process is not yet finished, but it is actively going on. This is not the goal but it is the right road. At present, everything does not gleam and sparkle, but everything is being cleansed.

Martin Luther, *Defense and Explanation of All the Articles*, 1521

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PREFACE

This project is an exercise in systematic reflection on the nature of sanctified Christian living as it seeks to discern a particularly Christian ethic. The reasons for engaging in such a study are two-fold. First, among Christians in North America, there hardly seems to be agreement on what is or is not to be considered living in accordance with God's will on a variety of issues, even within the ranks of respective conservative or progressive congregations. Many marshal their favorite Biblical passages in support of their particular position, but do so in a manner that only shows they are more zealous about defending their own view than they are carefully reading Scripture. It has always been troublesome to me that two Christians, who simultaneously hold mutually exclusive points of view on a particular issue try to claim the same Holy Spirit as the true inspiration for their positions. There is no foolproof way of declaring which viewpoint is incorrect, but in the face of positions that seem obviously to contradict God's Word, some means of discernment ought to be possible to attempt to expose which view is false.

I used to think an appeal to natural law, that is "what we can't not know," or "what everybody ought to know" (because Scripture says it is written upon their hearts, see Rom. 2:15), was a sound theological move to set forth indisputably what is or is not God's will. But what has become apparent is that in the context of normal nihilism, darkened as modern minds are in their discernment of natural revelation, few assumptions can be made about what seemingly should be known. What might be obvious to one is hardly obvious to others. As such, accounts of natural law, while no doubt true, still falter in the present context and are not convincing. The best Christians can do, it seems, is to attempt to describe faithfully the specific contours of God's will and then in-turn offer these contours as a suggestion to the wider world for how human creatures are truly designed to live out their earthly lives in the best way.

That being said, my plans for a dissertation evolved over the course of studies from wanting to provide a more thorough defense of natural law to instead locating a ready means by which to describe it. Several years ago, I stumbled across what I then understood to be a largely Roman Catholic notion of the teaching of the "seven deadly sins," or, as I better understand them now, the capital vices. As I became drawn into a rather extensive personal study of these vices, I realized they "read" me as much as I was reading them. In this enduring theological tradition, I discovered a powerful diagnostic tool that supplemented what I already knew from catechesis in the Ten Commandments, even as it drove those tenets ever deeper into an examination of my own sinful heart. Part of this tradition also included an emphasis on corresponding virtues which I had begun to learn about during my Seminary days, but never with any intentional focus.

Next, I took up a renewed interest in reading Martin Luther's writings in order to stimulate my theological mind while in the parish. Having become more familiar with the particular categories of the vice and virtue traditions, I discovered, much to my surprise, far more of this notion present in Luther than I would have otherwise imagined, especially given what knowledge of his work I had accumulated through three-and-a-half decades of life, my Master of Divinity education notwithstanding. I wondered: why did I not know more about this reality already? What I began to realize was that reading Luther through the lens of the vice and virtue tradition was not only supplying me with the beginnings of an account of how one might suggest we arrive at a distinctively Christian ethic, but further, this exercise was also helping me better comprehend a framework by which to articulate more fully the task of the sanctified life. It was here, at the unlikely (and, I would add, unexpected!) nexus of the ancient wisdom of the vice/virtue tradition and the rich Reformation theology of Luther, where the concepts which drive this dissertation were initially conceived.

The second major reason for engaging in such a study, then, has to do with the task of sanctification. Being shaped in a faith tradition that is largely centered on the assurance of the forgiveness of sins given through the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments, I valued not having to live each day wondering whether or not I was truly a child of God. He had baptized me and made me his own and that was that! Still, I was aware that it was true that people wandered away from the faith—both Jesus and Paul, and other writers of the New Testament mentioned that possibility. I had encountered the Calvinist interpretation that those who seemingly fall away were never really "possessors," but merely "professors," of saving faith, this teaching flowing as it does from their "once saved always saved" theology of the perseverance of the saints; but I knew this view was incompatible with clear Scriptural teaching, for instance, Luke 8:13 where Jesus teaches about those who "believe for a while, and in a time of testing fall away."[1] But what bothered me was that despite its insistence on assurance, the gaping "hole," if you will, in Lutheran theology, was that it never was quite comfortable articulating just where the line between belief and unbelief lay. I recognize this is because only God can see men's hearts; still, I always had the troubled notion that sometimes there were people who said they were Christians, but since there was virtually no evidence of faith in their life, I could not help but wonder: were they dwelling in false security? But, who was I to question another's salvation?

I still do not think it is my job to judge, at least with any finality, another man's heart. However, as a pastor faithfully serving those under my care, and certainly even as a Christian serving my brothers and sisters in Christ, I am absolutely called to exercise the Office of the

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from: *Holy Bible English Standard Version*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007.

Keys and judge the heart of other believers based on their outward behavior, as Paul exhorts all inside the church to do (see 1 Cor. 5:12). What I began to consider was that while God's grace is immense, and "a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench" (Isa. 42:3), there is a point at which the light of faith in one's heart can grow very dim, and even a point at which the flicker of faith is gone.[2] My uneasy experience has been that most Christians do not take seriously how lives lived in perpetual rebellion against God and his will can ruin and drive out faith, how the "riches and cares of the world" (Matt. 13:22) can choke out faith. In short, the second reason for this dissertation, in addition to providing an account of the shape of sanctification, is to help Christians take more seriously the reality of sin in their lives and endeavor more earnestly to fight against it, so that the devil will not snatch them out of the kingdom by means of their own indifference. The goal is not to scare or alarm Christians, or to commit the grave sin of "preaching them out of the kingdom," but merely to make them more soberly aware of these realities so that they might not proceed unawares.

If readers of this dissertation, upon encountering the contents that follow, indeed hear anew the exhortation of Jesus and determine to renew their vigilance to "watch … because [they] know neither the day or the hour" (Matt. 25:13), and, following the example of the Apostle Paul, will resolve not to run "aimlessly," but rather to "discipline [their] bod[ies] and keep [them] under control, lest … [they themselves] should be disqualified" for the prize (1 Cor. 9:26–27), then this study will have accomplished its intended goal.

[2] Martin Luther acknowledged as much in the *Smalcald Articles* when he wrote: "Therefore it is necessary to know and teach that when holy people—aside from the fact that they still have and feel original sin and also daily repent of it and struggle against it—somehow fall into a public sin (such as David, who fell into adultery, murder, and blasphemy against God), at that point faith and the Spirit have departed. The Holy Spirit does not allow sin to rule and gain the upper hand so that it is brought to completion, but the Spirit controls and resists so that sin is not able to do whatever it wants. However, when sin does whatever it wants, then the Holy Spirit and faith are not there" (SA III, 43–44 in Kolb and Wengert, 319).

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The esteemed former Air Force Academy head football coach, Fisher DeBerry, whom I had the great privilege of playing under in college, often spoke words that I've been turning over in my mind ever since the first time I heard them uttered. After games or practices, when addressing the team, he would frequently say: "Men, if you see a turtle sitting on a fencepost, you know it didn't get there by itself!" His point…? The point was this: recognize your accomplishments in life have been enabled by the careful efforts of others who are truly the ones responsible for any so-called pedestal on which you stand. As such, I would like to take this opportunity, as is customary at the beginning of a dissertation, to express gratitude to those in my life whose love, support, and encouragement have allowed me to complete such a project. In relative chronological order, I'd first like to thank my parents, Todd and Mary Fieberkorn, for raising me in the Christian church—for regularly taking me to worship, for ensuring I was catechized through participation in Confirmation, and for handing down their faith to the next generation. In doing these things, they have given me the most important gift parents can ever give their child—the gift of faith.

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has also provided continued mentorship without which I have cause to wonder whether my ministry would have survived its fledgling days.

I would like to express my thanks to Michael Zeigler, the lifetime friend I met at the Air Force Academy who faithfully drove me to church for two years, whose life God has remarkably continued to intertwine with my own, and whose presence in my life has had a profound influence on both my becoming a pastor and aspiring to complete a dissertation—I am so appreciative of his continued friendship and encouragement.

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Kolb, Erik Herrmann, and most of all Joel Biermann, the man more responsible for the formulation of my theological mind than any other. I am forever indebted to him for curing me of the most unholy ill of gospel reductionism and imparting to me a positive understanding of God's law by which we are guided in Christian living. I feel unworthy of such a team. Because of the abundance of their influence on so much of what follows, it seems dishonest to have only my name following the copyright on page ii, and so I am quite pleased that the dissertation format allows for their names to appear prominently displayed on the initial, title page.

Dr. Herrmann is a Luther scholar of brilliant stature, who early on prodded me to explore sources I would otherwise not have visited and as such he is responsible for a significant part of the conversation that occurs among the interlocutors included in this project. Further, his insistence on excellence challenged me to reconsider how best to situate this entire dissertation within the larger theological conversation.

Dr. Biermann, in addition to shepherding along the overarching content of this text and providing necessary guidance and influence, sacrificed a great deal of time diligently and expertly wielding his editorial pen. He took what was too often lumbering and languishing prose and redirected it to be lively and lucid—what in places formerly had been ambiguous and dull was rendered sharp and precise. Any readers of this text should be appreciative of his significant efforts that will no doubt aid their encounter with what follows and increase the probability that it will be understood. Should the reader come across what he feels is some particularly poignant turn-of-phrase, all credit should be given to Dr. Biermann. In places in the following where the reader is distracted because the construction is awkward or unclear—I take full responsibility—acknowledging the reality that the relative quality of the initial material supplied limits the degree to which it ultimately can be enhanced!

Dr. Kolb, one of the world's foremost Luther experts, proved a most necessary voice, providing observations of my work that were at times confirming, and at other times, critical. The former encouraged me to express some of my convictions with far greater confidence, and the latter caused me both to correct inaccuracies as well as convey some of my own thoughts with far more humility.

Finally, I am thankful to my family. For almost the entire lives of my three children: Jacob, Kayla, and Logan, I have been a student. I pray the completion of this degree will free up my time and attention so that I can more fully devote it to the joys of being a father. Children are a heritage of the Lord (Ps. 127:3), I love each of mine very much, and I am most proud of them for their brightly shining faith—it is my most fervent prayer that they keep it to the end. And, most of all, I thank Angela, my loving wife, for her support of me throughout this process. She has stood by my side and believes in me. She thought she was marrying an Air Force Officer, and then ended up with a Pastor and PhD student. But, her love and support have never wavered. Her sacrifice has indeed gone the extra mile to allow me opportunity to achieve this accomplishment. I could never have done it without her.

ABBREVIATIONS

Ap	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
CA	*Confessio Augustana* (The Augsburg Confession)
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Ep	Epitome of the Formula of Concord
FC	Formula of Concord
LC	Large Catechism
LCMS	The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
LSB	*Lutheran Service Book*
LW	*Luther's Works*, American Ed. 55 vols. Philadelphia: Fortress; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–1986.
SA	Smalcald Articles
SC	Luther, Martin. *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*. St. Louis: Concordia, 2017.
SD	Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord
STh	*Summa Theologiae*. Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas. Vols. 13–20. Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012.
WA	Luther, Martin. *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [Schriften]. 73 Vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009.
WA BR	Luther, Martin. *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [Briefe]. 18 Vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009.
WA DB	Luther, Martin. *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [Die Deutsche Bibel]. 15 Vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009.
WA TR	Luther, Martin. *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [Tischreden]. 6 Vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009.

ABSTRACT

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What are the specific contours of life lived in accordance with God’s will? That is the primary question this dissertation seeks to answer. Discerning the particular shape of Christian sanctification is difficult. Radical Lutheranism attempts to define sanctification simply as “love,” which lacks the specificity necessary to adjudicate between competing and mutually exclusive claims concerning Christian morality. Theologians attempting to address this insufficiency by incorporating virtue ethics within a Lutheran theological construct must clearly articulate the particularly Christian *telos*.

Reading Luther through the lens of virtue ethics suggests a distinctively Christian ethic defined with more precision than the radical account. In the medieval church, sanctification is cast into a specific shape by the vice/virtue tradition of the capital vices and particular dispositions of the cardinal-theological/contrarian virtues. Observing how this shape is both appropriated and adapted in light of Reformation insight regarding anthropology and the nature of justification reveals a differentiated concept of vice and virtue.

As the vice/virtue tradition is refracted through the Reformation, vice is recast as particular manifestations of idolatry and virtues proper are rendered penultimate to outward works of obedient service towards the neighbor, even as the category of virtue is extended to include not solely dispositions but also the good works of the Decalogue, which comprise the proper contours of Christian sanctification.

Discerning this particular *telos* raises a subsequent question that seeks to understand the potential implications of a Christian failing to strive towards this end. The placing of vice and virtue into the context of the Decalogue not only offers the Lutheran faith tradition an alternate framework through which to comprehend the essence of the sanctified life, but also its task, further revealing the necessity of active participation in the battle against idolatrous vice, and demonstrating the paradoxical role human responsibility plays alongside divine monergism in the perseverance of saving faith though the intentional cultivation of virtue by which the believer mortifies the sinful flesh and engages in the fight of Christian faith.

CHAPTER ONE

THE FRACTURED VISION OF LUTHERAN ETHICS AND VIRTUE

Introduction: Fractured Morality in the World and Church

What is the proper shape of Christian sanctification, that is, the unique contours of the particular *telos* of a Christian life lived in accordance with God's will? That is the primary question for which the ensuing study seeks to suggest an answer. Defining the task of what it means to "live well," has been a pursuit not only of theologians, but philosophers throughout the ages. The lack of a coherent answer to this question within philosophy, and even within the church, underscores the vast difficulty in answering this question with any decisiveness.

In 1981, Alasdair MacIntyre's important work, *After Virtue*, highlighted the lack of a unified vision of ethics and virtues in the modern age, describing the present culture as an age of "unresolved and apparently unresolvable moral and other agreements."[1] The reason for this, he suggests, is that the prior context in which moral utterances were at home, and by which they were rendered intelligible, has been lost. In the rest of his work he then exposes the failed quest of moral philosophers since the time of the Enlightenment to attempt to provide accounts by which to justify moral utterances, but concludes that "what the philosophers in fact provided were several rival and incompatible accounts … [which] became essentially contestable."[2]

He describes "the actual world in which we inhabit the language of morality [as one that] … is in [a] state of grave disorder … [and] what we possess are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts of which now lack those contexts from which their significance was derived."[3] The

[1] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 3rd ed (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), ix.

[2] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, ix.

[3] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2.

prior conceptual scheme which MacIntyre asserts did provide such a coherent account was the teleological tradition articulated in its classic form by Aristotle. Aristotle had famously posited that a clue as to how one *ought* to behave was derived from a proper conception of who they happened to *be*. It is this "is-ought" foundation, the relationship between being and morality, which MacIntyre argues "has to a large degree been fragmented and then in part destroyed."[4]

The moral tradition of Aristotle, says MacIntyre, "was repudiated during the transitions of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries … [as the] Enlightenment project … [sought to discover] new rational secular foundations for morality."[5] However, he continues, "these projects ultimately failed because they "could not be sustained in the face of rational criticism that Nietzsche and all his … successors were able to mount,"[6] namely that "what [were] purported to be appeals to objectivity were in fact expressions of subjective will."[7] MacIntyre argues that as "various and impressive" as some of these "alternative rational secular account[s] of the nature and status of morality" have been, "the philosophers of the Enlightenment never succeeded in providing grounds for doubting [Nietzsche's] central thesis," and this "failure perceived most clearly by Nietzsche … [has] a certain plausibility" which, if the Aristotelian tradition itself cannot be vindicated, "[has] a terrible plausibility."[8]

However, MacIntyre reasons that "the defensibility of the Nietzschean position turns in the end on the answer to the question: was it right in the first place to reject Aristotle? For if Aristotle's position in ethics … could be sustained, the whole Nietzschean enterprise would be

[4] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 5.

[5] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 117.

[6] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 117.

[7] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 113.

[8] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 256.

pointless."[9] Thus MacIntyre concludes that we must either "follow through the aspirations and the collapse of the different versions of the Enlightenment project until there remains only the Nietzschean diagnosis … or one must hold that the Enlightenment project was not only mistaken, but should have never been commenced in the first place."[10] Because part of Nietzsche's critique of Enlightenment moralities was their failure to adequately answer the question of what sort of people we are to become, MacIntyre understands that the trajectories of the various philosophical arguments leave us with only two alternatives: either we must agree with Nietzsche, that morality has no rational foundation on which it can be based and we are left only with Nietzsche's *übermensch* exercising his "will to power" over others, or, we must recapture Aristotle and reassert the "is-ought" teleological construct by which morality can again be given intelligibility. Further, he contends if the latter is chosen, then what is of utmost importance in the present is the "construction of new forms of community within which the moral life could be sustained so that both morality and civility might survive."[11]

Recognizing the reality of this need for moral communities to enable the cultivation of ethical life and thought, Stanley Hauerwas addressed the matter in his 1981, *A Community of Character*.[12] At the outset of that work, Hauerwas makes known his central concern: "to reassert the social significance of the church as a distinct society with an integrity peculiar to itself."[13] He then outlines ten theses towards the end of reforming Christian social ethics, and notes in one of them that a "Christian social ethics depends on the development of leadership in the church that

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[9] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 117.

[10] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 118.

[11] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 263.

[12] Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Towards a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

[13] Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 1.

can trust and depend on the diversity of gifts in the community."[14] This is the old idea that "it takes a village to raise a child." If character formation is to happen, it must happen in a specific community in which a particular kind of character is to be developed, and the development of that character must in-turn be supported by members of the community and reinforced by the leaders of that community. In *Resident Aliens*, a later work written with William Willimon, Hauerwas argues tenaciously that Christian community should be considered as life lived in a colony, in fellowship with a people who live out, and according to, a common story, with common traditions, which serve to provide a consistent and coherent narrative that gives shape to one's life—in this book, he makes his trademark case: "Christian ethics are *church-dependent*."[15]

Thus, the church may certainly be considered one of these communities where morality might be cultivated—especially a church animated by an account of virtue ethics along the lines of Aristotle. While the Roman Catholic tradition, owing, in large part, to the enduring influence of Thomas Aquinas, has made extensive use of Aristotle, a broader look at the church beyond Rome reveals its own moral vision is all too consistent with what is found in contemporary moral theory or ethics driven by the wider culture: the church-at-large is fractured in its conception and account of Christian morality. Contemporary North American Lutheranism is, sadly, no exception to this reality. Joel Biermann, from within this particular context, advocates for the necessity of an intentionally cultivated moral component to Christian community, and notes that congregations need to emulate holiness, and that they should be places where God's standards and expectations are upheld.[16] However, even within what from the outside might be considered

[14] Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 11 (Thesis 1.7).

[15] Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1989), 71 (*emphasis* original).

[16] Joel Biermann, "Sanctuary: The Congregation as Haven in a Hostile World," in *Inviting Community*, ed. Robert Kolb and Theodore J. Hopkins (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2013), 200.

a rather monolithic community within the global church, a significant rift is evident in North American Lutheranism regarding how the moral life is taught among its people. The narrative is indeed a fractured one, with diverging viewpoints about the true nature of Christian holiness and the way it is made manifest in the lives of believers. In fact, despite the importance of providing a coherent account of ethics in the present postmodern context, one somewhat recent manifestation of the Lutheran tradition, invoking the influence of Luther, rejects Aristotle, and hence any conception of talk of virtue, entirely. So-called "radical Lutheranism," in its employment of what might be called an existentialist interpretation of Martin Luther's theology, frames Luther's ethic as intentionally anti-teleological, and sets itself against any vision that would define the shape of the Christian life with any degree of particularity beyond the freedom of "love."

This particular rift is on display, for example, in a piece written in 2002 by Mark Mattes, who is certainly sympathetic to the claims of radical Lutheranism. In his *Lutheran Quarterly* article, "The Thomistic Turn in Evangelical Catholic Ethics," Mattes laments what he feels is an improper movement within contemporary Lutheran ethical discussion. Mattes posits that in recent times, in order to address modern challenges of antinomianism and Gnosticism, some Lutheran scholars have taken what he terms a "Thomistic Turn," that is, a turn toward Aquinas, and hence, Aristotelian virtue ethics. Mattes contends such a move is inconsistent with Lutheran theology, and concludes that a re-appropriation of Aristotle is not in harmony with what he discerns to be Luther's own "anti-teleological focus."[17] For Mattes and other proponents of the radical understanding of Lutheranism any appropriation of Aristotle within the Lutheran faith tradition must be mistaken, especially since Luther's primary critique of medieval theology was

[17] Mark Mattes, "The Thomistic Turn in Evangelical Catholic Ethics," *Lutheran Quarterly* 16 (2002): 85.

centered precisely upon a rejection of Aristotelian virtue ethics, which Luther felt had dominated scholastic theology and compromised the gospel. Rather than a turn toward Aristotle, and virtue ethics, Mattes advocates a (re)turn to "radical Lutheranism" positing that it is a more faithful way to represent and apply Luther's own ethic. In this understanding, virtue is not something that should be thought of as being developed by continual formation, rather it is something that arises spontaneously as a result of hearing the Gospel. This notion is quite different, as will be shown, from what is taught by others within the Lutheran faith tradition.

Radical Lutheranism and the Void Definition of Virtue

The radical Lutheranism Mattes speaks of has its origins in the wake of the Luther Renaissance from the early twentieth century. In response to Roman Catholic criticism towards Luther's teaching of forensic justification, some Lutheran scholars attempted to craft a more careful understanding of the way righteousness is manifested in the justified Christian. It was the old problem of the place of good works and morality in Lutheran theology. In other words, if a Christian is made righteous by grace alone, on the basis of God's merciful declaration upon those who have faith in Christ, then how are we to understand the source and production of Christian holiness in the ensuing life of the Christian? One answer claiming to have its roots in Luther's thought, is that the act of being justified is of such a radical nature it completely changes a Christian's entire life and outlook, causing the spontaneous generation of good works as an explosive response that automatically follows an individual's encounter with the gospel. While the history of the development of this school of thought is worthy of a dissertation in its own right (and no doubt has spawned any number of dissertations!), for my present goal of discerning the proper shape of sanctification, we will focus on one outspoken proponent of this teaching in the North American Lutheran context: Gerhard Forde. It is, after all, Forde's school of thought

which Mattes embraces, and champions over and against the "Thomistic Turn." Indeed, Forde has been hailed by proponents of his theology as the "chief articulator" of radical Lutheranism.[18]

At the conclusion of his ambitious study on the history of the development of Lutheran thought on the law-gospel dialectic (from that of Lutheran Orthodoxy to the positions of theologians such as J.C.K. von Hoffman, Theodosius Harnack, Albrecht Ritschl, Karl Barth, Werner Elert, Helmut Theilicke, Gustaf Wingren, and others), Forde reflects on the further use of the law as a guide for right living in the instance of those who have been made alive in Christ Jesus. He concludes: "The history of the idea of the 'third use of the law'[19] offers little encouragement for its use in a truly evangelical ethic. It has its roots ultimately in the orthodox concept of the *lex aeterna* and has hardly served any other purpose than to impose a new kind of legalism."[20] In this respect he shares the understanding of Werner Elert, who contends that the one time such terminology is found in Luther's writings is the result of a forgery![21] Forde further dismisses what he calls an "attempt to rescue the idea" by Paul Althaus, who, while advocating for doing away with "third use of the law" language, sought to make a distinction between "command" and "law" (*Gebot* and *Gesetz*), proposing that prior to the fall, God's law comes to men as "Divine Command," only becoming (accusing) "law" after the fall.[22] Forde continues describing Althaus' view: "With the advent of faith, the law once again becomes the gracious command." But ultimately, Forde concludes: "it is difficult to see how such a scheme really

[18] Gerhard Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007), Back Cover Biography.

[19] Lutheran theology has traditionally distinguished between three functions, or "uses," of the law. The first, being the civil use, concerns the law serving to preserve order in society, the second, the theological use, concerns the law functioning to convict men of their sins, and the third, the didactic, concerns the law functioning to guide Christians in right living. See the Formula of Concord and its Epitome, Article VI, for the Confessional Lutheran understanding of the "third use of the law."

[20] Forde, *Law-Gospel*, 226.

[21] Werner Elert, *Law and Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 39.

[22] See Paul Althaus, *The Divine Command* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966).

offers much more than a distinction between the essence and office of the law" and that "no doubt, in intending to establish the command of God, it simply makes it harmless."[23]

And herein lies a key part of the radical Lutherans' concern with the law serving to further guide the Christian's sanctified life of love—it is feared that the law's radical demands upon the sinful man are muted and hence the law is thereby rendered ineffective in its ability to truly kill the sinner. In the words of Forde, "the law which is now to be used in a 'third way' must be redefined so radically that it bears little or no relationship to the former uses whatsoever."[24]

Forde acknowledges that attempts to articulate a third use of the law are driven by the felt need to respond to the criticism that there exists a "moral bankruptcy" in the attitude of Protestantism towards the law, and that these attempts seek to salvage the law in a theologically viable way. But, he finally contends, "if the law is to mean anything at all, therefore, it must be placed before and distinguished from the gospel"[25] and that "in light of the gospel, the church is called to eternal vigilance over the use of the law."[26] In other words, according to Forde, "after the gospel" the law has no continuing import for the Christian, other than accusing him as long as he remains in the sinful flesh.

How, then, are good works to be cultivated in the life of a Christian? In Forde's view, they are not. In fact, Forde understood the purpose of his life work being to help somehow, "recapture the explosion" of the impact of the Gospel.[27] He contends that the legal metaphor of justification by faith must be supplemented with a "killing and making alive" account to help towards this

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[23] Forde, *Law-Gospel*, 227.

[24] Forde, *Law-Gospel*, 227.

[25] Forde, *Law-Gospel*, 228.

[26] Forde, *Law-Gospel*, 232.

[27] Forde, *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Life and Death* (Ramsey, NJ: Sigler, 1990), 1–4.

end. To "hedge" on the concept of "faith alone" is to "dampen the explosion."[28] If faith is not bringing forth good works then, it has nothing to do with the lack of a guiding law in the life of the believer, rather, according to Forde, it is merely an indication that the sinner has not been truly killed so as to be made fully alive in Christ.

Forde knows it is human nature to think of becoming righteous according to law, a progressive movement towards virtue, as described by Aquinas in the Catholic tradition. He notes we all "tend to think, as Luther put it, *ad modum Aristotelis* (in the fashion of Aristotle)."[29] Truly, Forde is zealous in defending the forensic view of justification over and against a sanative understanding. However, this impetus against progressive movement carries over into his concept of sanctification. Frankly, the radical school is not concerned about moral progress, assuming it automatically happens in the life of a believer. The temptation begins immediately, he argues, from the very nature of the "radicality of the unconditional act" [of justification] when we begin to protest: "We have to do something, don't we? ... What about good works? Virtue?"[30] The answer? For Forde there is only one right response to any notion of a deliberate turning from vice or a careful cultivation of virtue: "they suddenly stop, come to an end … both our vices and our virtues come to a full stop."[31]

How then does Forde understand sanctification, that is what the Reformers called "good works," "new obedience," and "growth," in the Christian life? It is simply asserted that "faith will bear fruit!" and that if we will only listen to the proclamation of Jesus' forgiveness which grants faith, we will begin to love him and bear good fruit; that is, "good works … flow

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[28] Forde, *Justification*, 9.

[29] Forde, *Justification*, 26.

[30] Forde, *Justification*, 33.

[31] Forde, *Justification*, 35.

spontaneously from justification."[32] One answer Forde will not accept, as already shown, is any move to disarm "the law and [make] it into a gentle guide which *we* use in our quest for virtue."[33] Rather, "if there is progress in the Christian life, it must be seen precisely as a progress driven by the justifying word which brings death and new life."[34] Perhaps this latter understanding is not without merit; nevertheless, what it does not, and certainly does not have the capacity to do, is provide any kind of specific shape for the sanctified life. In other words, this position rules out any potential norm that could be used to help outline the proper contours of Christian love.

At the close of his argument, Forde anticipates this criticism, and acknowledges that the Confessional statements of the Lutheran church do have "some interesting assertions about good works" which he admits his account has not explored, and that the Confessions remind us that even though good works do not justify, Christians are still exhorted to do "all such works as God has commanded," and notes that even the Confessions "generally make some sort of judgment about the *kind* of good works we are to do."[35] However, despite this admission, Forde cautions us to regard carefully statements that attempt to answer the question: "What are you going to do, now that you don't have to do anything?" and the closest he himself comes to defining the true nature of good works is simply to say: "What we are to do, now that we don't have to do anything for ourselves, is *God's* will."[36] The acknowledgment that God indeed has a will is as specific, it seems, as the radical Lutheran account of faith gets to defining that will with any kind of precision.

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[32] Forde, *Justification*, 54.

[33] Forde, *Justification*, 47–48 (*emphasis* original).

[34] Forde, *Justification*, 49.

[35] Forde, *Justification*, 57 (*emphasis* original).

[36] Forde, *Justification*, 58 (*emphasis* original).

The Insufficiency of "Love" as a Guiding Moral Vision

For the radicals, then, the answer to the question "what is the proper shape of sanctification?" is simply: "love." No more, no less. Further, they might argue, since it is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer that brings about sanctification, there is no longer any need for specific guidance in living because, as we all should know, the Holy Spirit does not need to be told what to do. In the context of North American Lutheran theology, this understanding appears prevalent. Many Lutherans advocate for an understanding that the lack of a specific content in Lutheran ethics is indeed one of its defining and most valued features.

For example, one Lutheran layman, a high school teacher in Minneapolis, Jeff Biebighauser, reacting to Joel Biermann's work, *A Case for Character*[37] (to which we shall soon return in the following), shared an online article for the *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* entitled "Against Virtue Ethics." In it he said that in his observation "Lutheran ethicists are typically wary of the claim that 'love your neighbor' is sufficient ethical guidance." But, despite the purported "vagueness" of the command to love our neighbors, he contends that this is in fact a Lutheran ethic's greatest strength. He chastises Biermann for locating "some relatively obscure bits of Melanchthon in order to show that the Reformers would not be aghast by all this talk about Aristotle." He concludes, "virtue must be subordinated to love" and maintains that the "spontaneous, faithful, trusting love I feel for the neighbor can form my character."[38] For some Lutherans, it seems, specifying a more precise shape of Christian behavior is inherently foreign to Jesus' presumably more fluid command to love God and neighbor.

[37] Joel Biermann, *A Case for Character: Towards a Lutheran Virtue Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2014).

[38] Jeff Biebighauser, "Against Virtue Ethics," *Journal of Lutheran Ethics Online*, last modified September 1, 2014, https://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/1044.

Jeff Mallinson, Professor of Theology and Philosophy at Concordia University in Irvine, CA, exhibits a similar sentiment in Concordia University Nebraska's *Issues in Christian Education* forum. Mallinson posits that there is a difficulty in identifying precisely which virtues should be developed, but that this is a problem "only for those who do not adhere to the authority of Scripture" noting that "establishing the virtues through natural law or community consensus seems possible but rather complicated." He concludes, "we emulate Jesus in order to habituate virtue and *need not fret about technical precision*."[39] Later in the same essay, however, Mallinson seemingly betrays this conclusion. He laments the "unfortunate tendency to blame an over-emphasis on the Gospel for progressive Lutherans' acceptance of progressive social values" and says, "nothing could be further from the truth." Rather, he asserts, "progressive and conservative Lutherans differ with respect to the *nature* of ethical behavior and not whether we should strive to be good people."[40] Based on this concession, it seems as if there is perhaps a need, with at least some degree of technical precision, to define what is and is not to be considered virtuous, especially given the reality that in some areas, different Lutheran church bodies who appear to be reading the same Scriptures, following the same Jesus, claiming inspiration from the same Holy Spirit, and even confessing many of the same confessions, arrive at very different conclusions about what would or would not be considered ethical.

The problem with a radical account also becomes vividly manifest when a baptized believer engages in a behavior which he might insist to be inspired spontaneously by the Holy Spirit, but which on the surface appears incongruent with norms that have been clearly expressed

[39] Jeff Mallinson, "Virtue Ethics and its Application within Lutheran Congregations," *Issues in Christian Education*, 50, no. 3, accessed April 27, 2020, https://issues.cune.edu/educating-in-lutheran-ethics/virtue-ethics-and-its-application-within-lutheran-congregations/ (*emphasis* mine).

[40] Mallinson, "Virtue Ethics," (*emphasis* mine).

in the Scriptures themselves. One potential example of some "progressive Lutherans' acceptance of progressive social values," might be the definition of what constitutes a marriage. While the church catholic, across the ages, has unanimously confessed that marriage is the union of one man and one woman for life, today, even under the banner of "Lutheranism," one finds conflicting and opposing views. While my own church body, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), continues to affirm the traditional definition of marriage, another North American Lutheran church body, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), accepts homosexual unions as being within the will of God. As such, according to this position, to love our neighbor as ourselves means accepting these unions without passing judgment. In negotiating between these opposing, and mutually exclusive viewpoints, which both parties claim to be in-concert with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the generic exhortation to "love" falls short of the kind of specificity necessary to attempt to adjudicate which of the two claims is or is not within God's will. In other words, further definition must be supplied to help Christians better comprehend the true shape of what is and is not genuine sanctified living, that is, which position, in the eyes of God, is truly to be considered "loving."

A "conservative Lutheran," on the other hand, in an attempt to justify his position, might point to Jesus' own words: "'Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female,' and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and so the two shall become one flesh'?" (Matt. 19:4–5) as substantiation for the traditional understanding of what is a valid marriage. But notice, in this instance, how the argument has progressed beyond mere "love" to a more specific definition of what true Christian love encompasses through the use of other, more specific guidance detailing the precise contours of specifically Christian love.

Further, if the desired ends of Christian behavior indeed appear spontaneously it follows that it is impossible to define or encourage them before they appear. A teleological virtue ethicist, on the other hand, over and against radical Lutheranism, would assert there are identifiable virtuous ends toward which an individual strives as he practices and develops a habit, and further that it would certainly be necessary to be able to define these ends in advance, at the outset, in order to ascertain whether a person's subsequent actions are indeed God-pleasing or not.

Theologians receptive to the utility of virtue ethics within Christian theology contend that there is in fact Scriptural precedent for such an understanding. Specifically, Paul encourages Christians in several places to "put off the old self" and "put on the new self" (Eph. 4:22, 24), to "put to death" what is earthly, and instead "put on" virtues such as "kindness, humility, and patience" (Col. 3:5, 12), and to "practices these things" (Phil. 4:9). Lutheran theologians might point to the Lutheran Confessions as supporting the habitual effort called for by virtue ethics: "although Christians who believe faithfully have been truly converted to God, and have been justified are indeed freed and liberated from the curse of the law, they should daily practice the law of the Lord," and further, "the Law is a mirror that accurately depicts the will of God and what pleases him. It should always be held before the faithful and taught among them continuously and diligently."[41] Finally, they can even find support for their understanding from the words of Luther himself who encourages all Christians to "drill themselves in the catechism daily, and constantly put it into practice, guarding themselves with the greatest care and diligence against the poisonous infection of such security or arrogance."[42]

[41] Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord VI, 4 in Robert Kolb, and Timothy J. Wengert, eds, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2000), 587–88.

[42] LC Preface, 19 in Kolb and Wengert, 383.

It seems the detractors of virtue ethics fear an emphasis on cultivation of virtue risks a "works righteousness" understanding of the faith, undermining Christianity's central tenet of "salvation by grace alone." However, while the teaching of works righteousness is always a danger for true Christian theology, so too is an antinomian attitude that has little place for the continuing role of the law in the life of a Christian. Unfortunately, this antinomian tendency is ever poised to pervade the thought life of the laity and often results in little concern for sin that is ever-present in the life of believers. The early Reformers certainly recognized this reality:

> For particularly in these last times it is no less necessary to admonish the people to Christian discipline and good works and to remind them how necessary it is that they practice good works as a demonstration of their faith and their gratitude to God than it is to admonish them that works not be mingled with the article on justification. For people can be damned by an Epicurean delusion about faith just as much as by the patristic, Pharisaic trust in their own works and merit.[43]

At the outset of the ensuing study, then, it is important to recognize that what follows is situated not only in the context of current scholarship, but indeed in a centuries-long effort to understand the sanctified life in light of the Reformation renewal of the insight of "justification by faith alone." To do justice to that rich theological tradition is impossible in the confines of a focused dissertation. Nevertheless, there are some theologians today whose own careful reflections on this particular issue (that is, sanctification in the context of monergism) have brought forth works that bear some tangential resemblance to the task at hand, and whose work will indeed prove useful for the present purpose of this study.

Before considering how still others have reacted to the teaching of radical Lutheranism, it is first prudent to acknowledge that the efforts of Forde and others are no doubt well intended—they seek to do nothing other than protect the truth of salvation by grace alone from slipping

[43] FC Ep, IV, 18 in Kolb and Wengert, 499 (cf. FC SD, IV, 39, in Kolb and Wengert, 581).

back into some kind of legalistic scheme that takes us far afield from Biblical Christian faith. To be fair, Luther himself does speak at times in ways that appear consistent with the radical school of thought. Perhaps the most familiar, and representative, example of this is found in Luther's 1522 *Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans*:

> Faith, however, is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God, John 1[:12–13]. It kills the old Adam and makes us altogether different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers; and it brings with it the Holy Spirit. O it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them.[44]

On the surface, such talk seems entirely congruent with an understanding of spontaneity in good works advocated by the likes of Forde. Further, the lack of a need for any kind of presence of the law, or further precision in defining the distinct contours of Christian love, also seems substantiated when encountering claims like the following from Luther's 1519 *Galatians Commentary* for 5:23:

> But the righteous has no law, because he owes the Law nothing, since he has the love which performs and fulfills the Law. Just as three plus seven (the example is Augustine's) do not have to be ten but are ten, and there is no law or rule that one must seek in order that they may become ten, so a house that has been built does not have to be built; for it is what the builder's art, as a law, was seeking. So a righteous man does not have to live a good life, but he lives a good life and needs no law to teach him to live a good life.[45]

It is true that Luther, and especially "early Luther," speaks like this with some regularity. However, after conducting the Saxon Visitations in 1528, and better understanding the proclivity of Christians to abuse their "freedom in Christ," one observes a maturing of Luther's understanding of the further usefulness of the law in the life of a Christian. In his preface to the 1529 *Large Catechism*, Luther, reminds us: "this much is certain: those who know the Ten

[44] *LW* 35:370; *WA* DB 7:10.

[45] *LW* 27:378; *WA* 2:596.

Commandments perfectly know the entire Scriptures and in all affairs and circumstances are able to counsel, help, comfort, judge, and make decisions in both spiritual and temporal matters."[46] Here, it seems, is a clear endorsement of the usefulness of the Decalogue for every aspect of one's life!

Most certainly, attention to positive dimensions of the law as a guide for right living can also be found in abundance in writings from prior to this date.[47] Luther's 1519 *Exposition of the Lord's Prayer* and his 1520 *Treatise on Good Works* are ripe with examples as will be detailed later in the study. Thus, a more well-rounded picture of Luther seemingly moves beyond the more "radical" interpretation of his theology. Nearer to the end of his career, when contending with the antinomians over the necessity of the presence of the law for believers, he expresses his astonishment that anyone would accuse him of some kind of disdain for the continuing use of the law in the life of a Christian:

> It is most surprising to me that anyone can claim that I reject the law or the Ten Commandments, since there is available, in more than one edition, my exposition of the Ten Commandments, which furthermore are daily preached and practiced in our churches. (I am not even mentioning the *Confession* and the *Apology* and our other books). Furthermore, the commandments are sung in two versions, as well as painted, printed, carved, and recited by the children morning, noon, and night. I know of no manner in which we do not use them, unless it be that we unfortunately do not practice and paint them with our deeds and our life as we should. I myself, as old and as learned as I am, recite the commandments daily word for word like a child. So if anyone perchance gained some other impression from my writings and yet saw and perceived that I stressed the catechism so greatly, he might in all fairness have addressed me and said, "Dear Dr. Luther, how is it that you emphasize the Ten Commandments so much, though your teaching is that they are to be discarded?"[48]

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[46] LC Preface, 17 in Kolb and Wengert, 382.

[47] Makito Masaki demonstrates this convincingly in his 2008 doctoral dissertation, wherein he shows that Luther, in his 1522 *Wartburg Postil*, gives particular attention to moral exhortation in his homiletical discourse, revealing Luther's sermons to be full of instruction on the Christian life, and recognizing Luther's concern for ethics from early on, even in the midst of his ardent championing for a recovery of the Gospel truth of grace alone (Makito Masaki, "Luther's Two Kinds of Righteousness and His Wartburg Postil [1522]: How Luther Exhorted People to Live Christian Lives," PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 2008).

[48] *LW* 47:109; *WA* 50:470.

As well-intended as radical Lutheranism might be in attempting to represent "real Lutheranism," this broader view of Luther's work has given rise to frustration within other circles that the radical view is indeed truncated in its understanding. While radical Lutherans would paint Luther as completely at odds with Aristotle, and hence Aquinas, regarding the more formational aspects of the sanctified life, other Lutherans, and even other theologians reflecting on the Lutheran faith tradition, have given this area of the Christian faith more intentional thought and appreciation.

Critics of Radical Lutheranism—Internal and External

Looking outside the confines of North American Lutheranism, one can see that not everyone under the banner of Confessional Lutheranism is so ready to embrace the radical viewpoint. In her introduction to the first available English translation of Tuomo Mannermaa's work, *Christ Present in Faith*, Kirsi Stjerna notes the importance of the "long tradition of strong Luther research in Finland," shaped especially by two "professors of systematic theology at the University of Helsinki, Lennart Pinomaa and Lauri Haikola."[49] Haikola's work especially aimed to examine carefully Luther's understanding of the law and justification and when necessary, to distinguish Luther himself from "Lutheranism." While Haikola himself ultimately lands firmly in the radical camp, other Nordic Lutheran scholars of the past century have been more critical of the radical notion and its understanding about how true renewal comes about in the life of a Christian. Further development of the "Finnish School" has also brought forth the "Mannermaa School," proponents of which are less convinced renewal is simply a spontaneous occurrence in the life of a Christian following an encounter with the gospel. Mannermaa's work has been

[49] Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), xi.

somewhat controversial for two reasons: first, because it suggests that earlier interpretations of Luther have been wrong, and second, because he promotes the notion that a concept of participation with God (*theosis*) is inherent to all of Luther's theology, including both his understanding of justification and the nature of sanctification, as "Christ comes to live in us and makes us one with God—and thus, in a sense, gods."[50] Scott Hendrix maintains that "Finnish Scholarship has performed a service by calling attention again to the new reality in Christ which constituted the heart of Luther's spirituality."[51] Mannermaa employs his own quote from Luther's 1519 *Sermon on Two Kinds of Righteousness*, which, according to Stjerna, "says it well:"

> Thus the righteousness of God becomes our righteousness through faith in Christ, and everything that is his, even he himself, becomes ours … and he who believes in Christ clings to Christ and is one with Christ and has the same righteousness with him.[52]

She continues: "this idea of participation is, according to Mannermaa, the key to understanding different topics in Luther's theology."[53]

While it is not within the scope of the present study to explore further the merit of Mannermaa's understanding of *theosis* proper[54], it is important to recognize that the Nordic schools in general, and Mannermaa, specifically, have been driven in part by their critical reception of radical Lutheranism. Looking at the trajectory of Mannermaa's work on the whole

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[50] Mannermaa, *Christ Present*, xii.

[51] Mannermaa, *Christ Present*, xiii.

[52] Tuomo Mannermaa, "Why Is Luther So Fascinating?" in Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, eds., *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 6.

[53] Mannermaa, *Christ Present*, xiii.

[54] Although, it should be noted, William Schumacher, of the LCMS, in his work, *Who Do I Say That You Are* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), was far more critical in his reception of Mannermaa's work than has been evidenced in the circles of the ELCA, for instance, by Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, who edited the volume *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), the authors of which received Mannermaa's tenets largely positively.

and noting that he seeks an avenue in Luther's theology that will allow him to highlight properly the aspect of "renewal" in the lives of the justified, it can be inferred that he recognized that the radical understanding is insufficient to provide a more robust account of the sanctified life. Instead, in an attempt to describe further this reality of renewal, Mannermaa contends that Christ himself, both his person and his work, is present in the Christian righteousness of faith. For Mannermaa, this means that both "the favor (*favor*) of God (i.e. the forgiveness of sins and the removal of God's wrath) and his 'gift' (*donum*; God himself)" are present in the fullness of his essence. He continues, "Christ is both the *favor* and the *donum*, without separation or confusion (in other words, neither is separate or to be confused with the other), to use the Chalcedonian expressions."[55] I will return to this particular accent of Mannermaa's work later on in this study when exploring the nature of human agency in the sanctified life in Chapter Five.

While this study does not necessarily embrace all of Mannermaa's ideas in totality, his work provides necessary influence and contributes to the conversation of the present study in a positive way. Indeed, per Stjerna, it must. She asserts: "No respected research, in any language, on Luther's central theology—especially around his views on justification, faith, and love—can afford not to refer or to comment on Mannermaa's substantial work from the last forty years."[56] At the very least, Mannermaa is an ally in advocating for a more thorough understanding of Luther's theology than is supplied by the radical account, and demonstrates that there is valid and worthy critique of the radical school within the bounds of Lutheranism.

One particular Lutheran scholar who has been influenced by Mannermaa's work is Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, Professor of Systematic Theology, Gifford

[55] Mannermaa, *Christ Present*, 5.

[56] Mannermaa, *Christ Present*, xi.

Grobien. Grobien's scholarship is important to this study not because of his appropriation of some of Mannermaa's ideas concerning *theosis*, but because Grobien takes up this concept within the realm of his larger work, the task of character formation, which is quite germane to this study. In this instance, Grobien promises to further the task of virtue ethics in the Lutheran tradition while representing a confluence of the thought of both Mannermaa and and Joel Biermann, a scholar whose ideas will be encountered at the close of this chapter and whose work this dissertation will seek to further advance. In his recent work, *Christian Character Formation: Lutheran Studies of the Law, Anthropology, Worship, and Virtue*[57], Grobien makes use of Biermann's framework from *A Case for Character*, especially his advocacy of Luther's teaching on the Two Kinds of Righteousness, for furthering an understanding of how Christian righteousness is formed within the church.

While Grobien's ultimate drive is the development of virtue in the context of the church community and its practices, especially worship, nevertheless his exploration of Christian virtue is important for this study. Specifically, Grobien explores and seeks to better understand what he refers to as Luther's "meta-virtues" of the Christian faith. Grobien further observes that both the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church and the later dogmatic tradition retain a strong emphasis on both the accusing and the teaching functions of the law. He points out that "the longest part of the *Apology*'s article on justification is titled 'On Love and Fulfilling the Law,'[58] in which Philip Melanchthon painstakingly elaborates on the place of good works in the life of a Christian and maintains that these good works of a Christian are in accord with the divine law."[59]

[57] Gifford Grobien, *Christian Character Formation: Lutheran Studies of the Law, Anthropology, Worship, and Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[58] Ap IV, 122–79 in Kolb and Wengert, 140–49.

[59] Grobien, *Character Formation*, 18.

Thus, Grobien laments the disagreement that has arisen in Lutheranism over the role of the law, a disagreement he rightly understands as a debate over whether the law serves primarily propositional or existential purposes for the Christian.

Grobien takes issue with Gerhard Forde's understanding which posits a marked difference between Luther's own understanding of the law and that of Lutheran orthodoxy. While the orthodox Lutherans understood the law of God as an "eternal and unchangeable standard" of propositions to be followed, J.C.K. von Hoffman saw the law as experiential or existential, in that the law should be "understood as concrete and applicable to each person in her situation"—understanding this as representative of Luther's own view.[60] Subsequent nineteenth-and twentieth-century research further expanded this apparent breach, through the work of Karl Holl, Albrecht Ritschl, Adolf von Harnack, and others, as they highlighted the apparent contrast of Luther with orthodoxy with regard to the function of the law. Holding to a more existential understanding, these scholars argued that Luther "discovered a new concept of God and of the radical, personal, religious experience of a person in reaction to God."[61] Grobien notes that Werner Elert, while criticizing Ritschl, Harnack, and Holl for attempting to drive a wedge between Luther and confessional Lutheranism, still himself agreed with their view of the law as primarily an existential experience in the person and maintained that the law "never takes on an instructional function, because Christian love fulfills the law already without needing to be instructed." According to Elert, the "confusion lies in a failure to recognize the central dynamic of Lutheranism, which he identified as the 'impact of the Gospel' (*evangelischer Ansatz*)."[62] This understanding, of course, is manifested today in the so-called radical Lutherans, advocated, as I

[60] Grobien, *Character Formation*, 20.

[61] Grobien, *Character Formation*, 22.

[62] Grobien, *Christian Formation*, 24.

have demonstrated, by Forde and others. Grobien presents this as a “problem for ethics” that is “not being adequately overcome” because such an understanding has a very difficult time specifically addressing the content of the law that is to be taught to Christians, a concern that coincides with the primary purpose of this present study, as I will continue to show.[63]

Grobien allows that while Forde’s treatment of the law-gospel development in Lutheranism is “admirable for its scope and perceptiveness with respect to some points in question, nevertheless his argument is flawed because it assumes that Luther and the subsequent generations of Lutheranism disagreed on their definitions of the law.” He counters, “accusation and instruction are not mutually exclusive, but intertwining properties of the law for human beings in this world.”[64] Because Grobien contends that Luther understood the law to be the “will of God which addresses human beings in their daily lives and situations, demanding compliance”[65] he has a keen interest on further defining Luther’s understanding of the contours of the law and specifically explores further the possibility of a Lutheran virtue ethics. As such, not only is Grobien’s work somewhat analogous to this study, his insights into both how Luther understood virtue and his delineation of Christian “meta-virtues” are directly applicable. While Grobien acknowledges that Luther “greatly prefers the term ‘work’ to ‘virtue,’”[66] nevertheless, “Luther [works] within an understanding of virtue of some sort.”[67] Grobien summarizes the “new character of the life in union with Christ” as one in which the Church “nourishes the fundamental virtues of faith and love.”[68] This faith then serves as a meta-virtue that “underlies, empowers, and

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[63] Grobien, *Christian Formation*, 28.

[64] Grobien, *Character Formation*, 31.

[65] Grobien, *Character Formation*, 32.

[66] Grobien, *Character Formation*, 186.

[67] Grobien, *Character Formation*, 192.

[68] Grobien, *Character Formation*, 185.

directs all other Christian virtues."[69] For the purpose of this study, Grobien represents another scholar within Lutheranism that has highlighted the inadequacy of the radical Lutheran teaching to account for the ongoing use of the law in the life of the Christian, thus demonstrating its inability to provide any kind of definition to the nature and task of the sanctified life.

It is also important to point out that while this dissertation is indeed addressing a proposed shortcoming others and I have identified within the Lutheran faith tradition, this issue is by no means confined to Lutheranism. Michael Allen, from the Calvinist tradition, has also recognized the insufficiency of radical Lutheranism and has observed that its purview is often embraced not only within Lutheranism, but is in fact a particular proclivity for faith traditions shaped by a monergistic teaching of justification, that we are saved by "grace alone." The insistence on the one-sidedness of God's justification of sinners (and rightly so!) has made not only Forde, but any number of theologians skeptical of any kind of talk that would place an emphasis on sanctification, for fear that it might engender a "works righteousness" understanding of salvation among the people of the church.

In his study of sanctification from a 2017 volume contributing to Zondervan's *New Studies in Dogmatics* series,[70] Allen provides his own observations on the issue. They are important to this study for three reasons. First, he adds a Calvinist voice to the conversation. This is significant because it is generally noted that for the Reformed faith tradition, it is often the third use of the law that is seen as primary, over and against the Lutheran tradition which quite consistently places the second use of the law, that is, it's convicting function, at the forefront as most important. As such, Calvinists generally are more sympathetic to understandings that

[69] Grobien, *Character Formation*, 193.

[70] Michael Allen, *Sanctification* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017).

advocate for positive uses of the law in the life of a Christian.[71]

Second, in his study, Allen directly addresses his own specific concerns with the theology of radical Lutheranism. He notes near the outset of his work that "holiness is a difficult topic for those who live in churches marked by the Protestant Reformation" due to, as already noted, their commitment to the teaching of salvation by grace alone. As a result, Allen points out that "from the earliest days of the first generation of Reformers, the charges of moral laxity, or antinomianism emerged from the lips of their detractors," sometimes with assertions that salvation in Christ alone was no more than "legal fiction."[72] Responses to these accusations at times risked compromising the very reality of the gospel the Reformers had sought to bring to light. Allen then expresses his concerns with what he calls a

> recent approach to the theology of Martin Luther [that] has gained some prestige not only among Lutherans but also a number of other Protestant communions. Articulated by Gerhard Forde and some of his students, most notably Stephen Paulson, this historiographic approach to Luther's theology is proposed as an antidote to a fount of ills within the later Lutheran tradition. Indeed, against the supposed compromises that have marked the development of that tradition, this is pitched as "Radical Lutheranism."[73]

Allen continues with his characterization of this school, noting that, "the disastrous impediment to Christian faith and practice, in the eyes of this radical project, is conditionality"[74] and then quotes Paulson who says, "Lutheran theology starts where all others end. Virtue is not the goal of life, virtue is our problem. Religion is not given for morality, it is there to end it."[75] Allen observes then, that, "For the Radical Lutherans, the great danger is that any word would be

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[71] For an outstanding conversation among both Lutheran and Calvinist scholars regarding their respective faith traditions' understandings of the doctrine of Law and Gospel, see Jonathan A. Linebaugh, ed. *God's Two Words: Law and Gospel in the Lutheran and Reformed Traditions*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2018).

[72] Allen, *Sanctification*, 22.

[73] Allen, *Sanctification*, 30.

[74] Allen, *Sanctification*, 31.

[75] Stephen D. Paulson, *Lutheran Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 2.

spoken after the gospel—any virtue, any morality, anything that would necessarily be construed as law."[76] By contrast, Allen's own approach is not so much to deny the Christological claims made by Forde and other radical Lutherans, but rather to seek to relocate them within a consideration of our covenantal relationship with Christ. His charge is that radical Lutherans have not "attested to the multiple tenses of Christ's action and gift, [and the reality that] Christ continues to grace his people with new life, new growth, and new hope, which recalibrates how we approach questions of morality and ethics." Allen ultimately seeks to find a way to "speak positively of virtue, morality, and human action as a part of the gospel promise and not merely a threat to, or compromise of, the gospel."[77] Near the close of his work, Allen cautions: "We must never seek to be more Lutheran than Luther, much less more Christ-centered than Christ himself."[78] Given the fact that Allen shares my own concerns, his contributions, albeit coming from outside the vein of a study of Luther or Lutheranism, nevertheless have import for the present task.

Finally, at the very close of his work, Allen explores the concept of "obeying the law by faith." Here, he points us to Luther's encouragement for believers to focus on the Decalogue and its continuing role in the life of a Christian, both to remind us of the tasks to which we are called, but even to warn us lest we fall into false security:

> We need the Decalogue not only to apprise us of our lawful obligations, but we also need it to discern how far the Holy Spirit has advanced us in the work of sanctification and by how much we still fall short of that goal, lest we become secure and imagine that we have now done all that is required.[79]

While Allen here certainly highlights the continuing role of the law to convict believers of their

[76] Allen, *Sanctification,* 32.

[77] Allen, *Sanctification*, 33.

[78] Allen, *Sanctification*, 272.

[79] Allen, *Sanctification*, 276 (*LW* 41:166; *WA* 50:643, 1539 *On the Councils and the Church*).

sin, he also suggests its further necessary role in sanctification. In this respect, Allen anticipates a major future theme of this study, namely that conformity to the precepts set forth in the Decalogue are indeed the quintessential measure of the sanctified life.

As has been demonstrated, Mannermaa, Grobien, and Allen all represent contemporary work that challenges and pushes back against the notion of radical Lutheranism. While Grobien and Allen both advocate for the role of the continued use of the law in the life of believers, only Grobien begins to attempt to set forth more specifically an understanding of the distinct contours that form the distinct shape of Christian sanctification, albeit doing so at a very cursory level as that is not his primary purpose. Both Mannermaa and Grobien seek to mine the fruit of the teaching of *theosis* in order to provide a more robust account of sanctification. In doing so, however, they still lack a specific focus on the particular contours of the sanctified life, that is, the specifically Christian *telos*. Grobien begins to take a look in this direction by considering what were for Luther "meta-virtues" of the Christian faith but does not develop this direction with any tenacity.

While Grobien shares with Mannermaa a proclivity toward *theosis*, he shares a proclivity toward another trajectory that has been proposed as an account for sanctification—a trajectory that will be explored in the remainder of this work—that is, the account of virtue ethics. Grobien is indebted to Joel Biermann who pushed towards this end within the context of Lutheranism nearly two decades ago. It is to his work we now turn in the effort to locate an account of Christian sanctification that serves both as a corrective to radical Lutheranism as well as provides a direction by which we are able to more fully discern the shape and task of sanctification.

Joel Biermann's Turn Toward Virtue Ethics

Also dissatisfied with the account of the sanctified life that can be supplied through radical Lutheranism, Joel Biermann took what Mattes would consider a "Thomistic turn" in 2002 when he specifically explored the intersection of Lutheran theology and Aristotelian virtue ethics in his doctoral dissertation, "Virtue Ethics and the Place of Character Formation in Lutheran Theology."[80] This work was later published in book form in 2014 under the title, *A Case for Character: Towards a Lutheran Virtue Ethics*.[81] In this work, Biermann takes on a challenge posed to Lutheran ethics by Stanley Hauerwas, who alleges that Lutheranism is particularly culpable for perpetuating the estrangement between ethics and theology.[82] Through a detailed exploration and analysis of the Lutheran Confessions, and the writings of Luther and Melanchthon, Biermann demonstrates that, contrary to what is popularly asserted in the circles of Christian virtue ethicists, Lutheran theology is rich with an understanding of the necessity of character formation. Biermann's research was convincing enough that, after reading his work, Hauerwas concluded: "the language of virtue suffuses Luther's work" and further that "an ethics of virtue is at the heart of Lutheran theology."[83] Whether Hauerwas' assessment is overstated here, or even correct, his comments suggest that Biermann's work helped bring recognition to the reality that talk of virtue is not entirely foreign to Luther's theological program.

In his study, Biermann surveyed contemporary Lutheran voices, several of which noted a deficiency within Lutheranism when it came to a clear articulation of a Lutheran ethic. In search of a paradigm that was both faithful to Luther and the Lutheran Confessions, and expansive

[80] Joel Biermann, "Virtue Ethics and the Place of Character Formation in Lutheran Theology," PhD diss., (Concordia Seminary, 2002).

[81] Biermann, *A Case for Character*.

[82] Biermann, *A Case for Character*, 32.

[83] Biermann, *A Case for Character*, Back Cover Endorsement.

enough to incorporate discussion of ethics, Biermann noted the enduring value of Luther's teaching on the two kinds of righteousness as an avenue which makes possible a discussion of virtue within Lutheran theology. Luther distinguished between passive and active righteousness. Passive righteousness describes man's relationship *coram Deo* (before God), by which one is declared righteous by God's proclamation through no virtue of his own. In contrast to this righteousness, however, there exists a realm of active righteousness, *coram mundo* (before the world) between man and his neighbor. In this plane, the law reigns supreme as God's will and gives distinct shape to Christian life. While the careful distinction of law and gospel has long been a hallmark of Lutheran theological thought, it deals most helpfully with understanding *coram Deo* realities, and for a variety of reasons, as noted by Biermann and others, is seriously hampered in its usefulness for the task of ethics. In the *coram Deo* realm, the law functions only as accuser, justly killing the sinner and preparing the way for him to be made alive through the Gospel promise, but leaving little space for a positive use of the law. An understanding of the two kinds of righteousness, however, expands upon the law-gospel paradigm by incorporating a larger reality that encompasses not only man's relationship with God, but also man's relationship with his fellow man. In this realm *coram mundo*, the law serves a much different function, acting as a ready guide to shape a Christian's love for his neighbor.

While Biermann's study was important in stimulating Lutheran ethical conversation in new directions, the subtitle of his own book hints that there are additional avenues that must be explored for a robust Lutheran virtue ethic to develop. His work, *A Case for Character*, is meant to push *towards* a Lutheran virtue ethics. There are some important areas where more work remains to be done, areas that Biermann did not address because, admittedly, they were beyond the scope of his thesis. For a virtue ethic to be more complete, one essential component is having

in place a clearer articulation of the specific virtues that serve as the *telos,* or goal, of Christian character. If it is asserted that sanctified living does not simply arise spontaneously from the gospel, but can indeed be cultivated through habitual practice, then one must be able to describe clearly the target towards which one is aiming, or else the distinct vison of any kind of prescribed morality remains ambiguous. While it is true that it is the Spirit who specifically brings about his fruit in the lives of believers, nevertheless this dissertation will attempt to demonstrate that from Luther's perspective, we too are held accountable for the cultivation of these virtuous qualities in our own lives. Aristotle articulated a list of vices and corresponding virtues based on natural revelation he perceived through the testimony of human reason and observed realities. It is worth asking whether a specifically Christian list of virtues and vices, which would also take into account special revelation, looks similar, or whether there are other, distinctive features of the Christian ethic towards which believers should aim as they intentionally develop character. Indeed it was Luther himself who, in his timeless work, *Bondage of the Will*, critically questioned philosophical virtues by asking, "Could men strive after virtue who did not even know what virtue was?"[84]

The Necessity for Further Definition of a Lutheran Virtue Ethic

Even among Christians, or specifically Lutherans, who attempt to follow MacIntyre's lead in re-appropriating an Aristotelian virtue ethic to address both the nihilism of the world as well as the specific insufficiency of the radical Lutheran account, if the ends are not defined, there can be no way of adjudicating if the character one is intending to cultivate is indeed congruent with the contours of God's own will or not. As such, over and against the radical Lutheran camp, a

[84] *LW* 33:225; *WA* 18:742.

proponent of any kind of virtue ethic must seek to arrive at a better understanding of what specific kinds of precepts can with confidence be declared in conformity with God's own holy will. Biermann's work hints at, but does not fully develop, the specific contours of a distinctively Christian ethic, although he does note that to be distinctly Christian, it must, at least in some places, be different from Aristotle.[85] Luther himself would agree: "Therefore the virtues of the heathen must be distinguished from the virtues of Christians … these distinctions require careful judgment."[86] Fallen human beings indeed possess a lingering understanding of what God's own goodness "looks like" based on the natural law which is written on their hearts (Rom. 2:15). However, this understanding is also polluted by the sinful nature ("now we see dimly," 1 Cor. 13:12), and as such, special revelation is necessary to complete our picture of the "good," as God Himself would define it. In fact, Mattes himself, in what is otherwise a generally positive review of Biermann's own work, encourages Biermann to "fill out the details of the compatibility between Scripture and Aristotle," and asks: if Aristotle is to be baptized, "doesn't he need to undergo some catechesis first?"[87] This dissertation, then, will attempt to articulate more clearly the proper shape of a truly *Christian* ethic.

Further, if good works of virtue are not in every case the spontaneous response of the believer upon hearing the gospel, if rather they can be adequately described, and even prescribed and intentionally cultivated, it immediately prompts the subsequent question: what are the implications if character is not being formed in the life of an individual? Are there any potential

[85] Biermann, *A Case for Character*, 85. Here, Biermann notes that "the adoption of Aristotle by any form of Christian virtue ethics requires judicious editing. [While] Christians typically count humility and patience as virtues … MacIntyre observes, 'in the only place in Aristotle's account of the virtues where anything resembling humility is mentioned, it is as a vice and patience is not mentioned at all by Aristotle'" quoting MacIntyre in *After Virtue*, 177.

[86] *LW* 2:125–26; *WA* 42:350–51 (1538 *Genesis Lectures*).

[87] Mark Mattes, Review, "*A Case for Character: Towards a Lutheran Virtue Ethics*. By Joel D. Biermann," *Concordia Journal*: 41, no. 1 (2015): 82.

consequences for the individual whose life cannot be characterized by the contours of Christian virtue? Biermann touches only briefly on this connection between the development of virtue in the *coram mundo* realm and the status of one's faith *coram Deo*. He acknowledges that "The Christian's identity is shaped in Christ also in a reciprocal way—by the actions that are done and the habits that have been developed. It is not entirely a unidirectional event. Habits and actions formed by the person certainly do also affect the believer's standing *coram Deo*."[88]

However, Biermann is reluctant to say much more. While maintaining that "it is important that strong and lively connections between the believer's life *coram Deo* and *coram mundo* be maintained … a clear delineation of these connections is not only difficult, but dangerous—at least theologically dangerous." He continues:

> the interrelationship between growth in virtue *coram mundo* and individual identity *coram Deo* remains at once tremendously dense and delicate, and wisdom would dictate a marked reticence about offering descriptions of it. While an explanation of the relationship remains elusive, it is evident that a relationship does, nevertheless, exist.[89]

Recognizing the wisdom in suggested reticence, and acknowledging that this is a "dense and delicate" relationship, it is nevertheless also the task of this dissertation to explore what more might be said on this subject—especially in light of Luther and whether or not he too heeded this particular caution in his own theological reflection, or if he had more to say. As such, subsequent to the main question of this dissertation, it also asks: what are the implications of the Christian neglecting to strive towards the defined ends of the sanctified life? That is, how does one's relative effort in the *coram mundo* realm affect, if at all, the passive, *coram Deo*, righteousness which has been bestowed by God's merciful declaration?

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[88] Biermann, *Case for Character*, 175.

[89] Biermann, *Case for Character*, 176.

The Decalogue and Its Contours in Luther

While Biermann's work provided necessary space for virtue ethics within the theological construct of Luther's teaching on the two kinds of righteousness what it did not do, but nevertheless welcomed, was further definition of what virtue ethics within this theological construct might look like. And, while his work did not attempt to explore the concrete shape and *telos* of the Christian life, this study will seek to do precisely that, and in doing so will attempt to demonstrate that virtue ethics is not only possible in Lutheran theology, but further that the trajectories for this were already present within the Lutheran tradition, and especially in Luther himself.

While, as shown prior, Luther could often speak of the Christian life as a spontaneous, inevitable effect of faith that needed no encouragement or coercion, Luther never conceived of the Christian life in vague generalities. Specifically *Christian* sanctification was always marked by the very specific needs of one's particular neighbors. Likewise, temptations and threats to one's faith were not merely amorphous dangers and evils, but rather concrete trials that were peculiar to the relative weaknesses of every individual Christian as they sought to carry out their various callings in their particular contexts. Luther himself seems to have had a very clear vision of the shape and *telos* of the Christian life; his own exhortations were filled with a kind of specificity that greatly challenges attempts to use his writings to buttress the radical Lutheran account. As will be demonstrated, Luther's catechesis, and in particular his catechesis of the Decalogue, set forth the clearest lines of Luther's ethical vision—a pattern even the next generation of Lutherans would recognize when they adamantly affirmed that the law indeed had use among Christians in defining the contours of Christian life and works (see FC VI).

Yet it will also be shown that Luther did not simply teach the Decalogue as a generic list of commands that had been imposed upon man by God; rather he was constantly at work

illustrating the manner in which a Christian could realize, or even veer away from these commandments. Perhaps the most common way Luther filled out a description of what it "looks like" to live within God's will was through the use of Biblical stories. Robert Kolb explains that

> Luther looked to the patriarchs and prophets as models of hearing God's Word, of repeating it to others, and of praying. Luther also regarded the god-pleasing conduct of daily life as a significant element of piety … [they] were the models for such living that sprang from the biblical narratives on which Luther preached and lectured.[90]

Kolb continues, adding that Luther would also occasionally employ stories from non-biblical sources for the task of moral instruction, citing "stories from ancient myths, ancient history, historical traditions of the church … what better example of greed than King Midas when attacking the worship of Mammon."[91] Luther praised the use of moral lessons from secular sources, for instance, Aesop's fables, which he remarked contain "more learning … than in all of Jerome"[92] and "are worthy of translation and being put into a proper order and arrangement."[93] He also had high praise for the proverbial wisdom of Cato, maintaining that "it is a result of God's providence that the writings of Cato and Aesop have remained in schools,"[94] because, he felt, "next to the Bible the writings of Cato and Aesop are … better than the mangled utterances of all the philosophers and jurists."[95] In fact, on the eve of the Augsburg Confession, Luther penned a letter to Melanchthon from Coburg notifying Philip of his plans to use his time there to make progress on his work on the Psalter, the prophets, and Aesop's fables.[96]

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[90] Robert Kolb, *Luther and the Stories of God: Biblical Narratives as a Foundation for Christian Living* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012), 12.

[91] Kolb, *Luther and the Stories of God*, 60.

[92] *LW* 54:72; *WA* TR 1:194.

[93] *LW* 54:210; *WA* TR 3:353.

[94] *LW* 54:211; *WA* TR 3:353.

[95] *LW* 54:211; *WA* TR 3:353.

[96] *LW* 49:288; *WA* BR 5:285 (April 24, 1530).

This willingness to use secular sources is a surprising discovery for some, given their understanding of Luther's deep devotion to the Scriptures; but for Luther, if teaching morals is one's goal this practice is quite rational, for "so far as moral precepts are concerned, one cannot find fault with the industry and earnestness of the heathen."[97] Luther understood heathen morality as profitable because it typically echoes the law God had written on the hearts of all human beings (see Rom. 2:15). "From this natural knowledge," Luther writes, "have originated all the books of the more sensible philosophers such as Aesop, Aristotle, Plato, Xenophon, Cicero, and Cato. It is a good idea to set thee books before uneducated and unruly individuals, that their wicked impulses may in some measure be counteracted through this training."[98]

Luther even recognizes that "some prefer Aristotle as a teacher of morals" but ultimately concludes that "all [secular sources] are inferior to Moses,"[99] and must be supplemented by teaching not only morals, but also the worship of God. This summary statement, found in his 1538 *Genesis Commentary*, is a good representation of how Luther used secular sources for ethical purposes, always in light of Scripture's superior revelation. Hence, while Luther is often quite critical of Aristotle, and especially as he is appropriated in the medieval scholastic tradition; nevertheless, Luther will readily employ aspects of the extensive vice and virtue tradition to fill out his own moral teaching but will do so within the context of the more Scriptural tradition of the Decalogue. Indeed, Luther and Lutheran theologians after him would reframe the vice/virtue tradition as a means for exhorting and teaching the Christian life as epitomized through the Ten Commandments.[100] This practice then, helps us understand how one

[97] *LW* 2:160; *WA* 42:374 (1538 *Genesis Lectures*).

[98] *LW* 2:160; *WA* 42:374.

[99] *LW* 2:160; *WA* 42:374.

[100] In the second generation of the Reformation, in fact, virtue books were somewhat common, and often

faithfully can incorporate virtue ethics within the Lutheran tradition and help further our end of defining the particularly Christian *telos* of Christian life in light of not only Aristotle, but the special revelation of Scripture as well.

As such, the methodological procedure that will be applied in this study will be to read Luther's theology through the particular lens of the vice and virtue tradition seeking insight regarding the shape of Christian sanctification as well as to better understand the nature of the task of sanctification. This approach, in fact, was suggested as a perhaps fruitful avenue by Biermann himself in his work. In the midst of exploring what author Robert James Bast had said about the place of virtue in Christian history in his work, *Honor Your Fathers*[101], Biermann briefly reflects on the teachings Pope Gregory the Great advanced for the cause of virtue ethics in the church and appends a provocative footnote which acknowledges "the remarkable influence of Gregory's system in subsequent centuries, indeed, even down to the present," and which further recognizes how the enduring influence of this teaching "provides sufficient argument of its importance." However, Biermann declines to pursue this avenue further, saying a "more thoroughgoing analysis of [Gregory's] detailed proposal lies beyond the scope" of his own study.[102] While Biermann himself did not have space to pursue this specific trajectory, the present study will, in anticipation that it will prove informative. It is hoped that a careful observing of how Luther himself appropriated and adapted the vice and virtue tradition will help further an

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outlined virtues and vices associated with particular commandments. One example of this would be David Chytraeus's *A Summary of the Christian Faith*, from 1568. Here, Chytraeus treats each commandment according to the particular virtues which are related to it. In some ways, then, this study will serve to suggest a recovery of a practice that has certainly since been lost. David Chytraeus, *A Summary of the Christian Faith (1568)*, trans. Richard Dinda, (N.p.: Repristination Press, n.d.).

[101] Robert James Bast, *Honor Your Fathers: Catechisms and the Emergence of a Patriarchal Ideology in Germany 1400–1600*, vol. 63 in Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, ed. Heiko A. Oberman. (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

[102] Biermann, *A Case for Character*, 24 n36.

understanding of how divine monergism faith traditions, like Lutheranism, might both better understand the unique Christian *telos* and further their understanding of how the teaching of virtue ethics clarifies the nature of the Christian ethical task.

The Lutheran Refraction of the Vice/Virtue Tradition

There are any number of ways a theologian could attempt to ascertain and particularly define the sanctified life in an effort to bring a more unified voice to the fragmented milieu of modern ethical discourse—Luther demonstrates that with his own widely varied approach to ethical instruction. While I am certainly under no illusions that the ensuing study can in any way supply some kind of conclusive, definitive answer; nevertheless, it is hoped that it will at least constitute a somewhat different (and some would say perhaps even an odd!) way of attempting to arrive at an answer to the question.

In the church prior to the time of the Reformation there existed a rich vice and virtue tradition that had been in development for over a millennium and had become firmly embedded into the language and practice of the church, serving both as an aid to confession and a ready guide to right living. The Reformers, and most importantly Luther, inherited this framework, and then both made use of its concepts and significantly adapted it in light of renewed insights regarding the anthropology of man and the reality of his being justified by faith alone. Reformation scholar Theodor Dieter suggests that "understanding Luther as [a] late medieval theologian is anything but obvious since he has often been seen as the founder of a totally new theological era. But, [the reality is] Luther grew up, was educated, and lived in a late medieval context; thus he had to relate to it by receiving, rejecting, or transforming doctrines, ideas,

theological and philosophical methods, practices, and institutions of the time."[103] As such, watching how Luther dealt with the vice/virtue tradition in his own theology, seeing what he retained, and what he transformed, is informative.

On the other side of the Reformation one can witness some continuity, but also a significant discontinuity, with the vice and virtue tradition. These observations can shed some light on what we might appropriate to be the guiding principles for Christians regarding both the true nature of idolatry and, ultimately, the true content of the new obedience, helping us better answer the question: what is the proper shape of Christian sanctification?

This specific lens of the vice/virtue tradition, and how it is refracted as it passes through the Reformation, is particularly helpful because it not only looks to the shape of sanctification but understands sanctification in contrast to sin. It is through various vices that the idolatry which dwells within the heart of a Christian is particularly made manifest in the lives of believers, and which in-turn demonstrates the need for the development of specific virtues to oppose those vices and drive out unbelief. Further, if the living out of virtue is to be thought of as walking within God's will, then it is helpful to comprehend just exactly what it looks like for a person to walk outside of that will. Perhaps most simply put, knowledge of vice serves to inform our understanding of virtues that are characteristic of the Christian life.

An understanding of the distinct shape of sin and sanctification is extremely helpful as it corresponds to the Christian ethical task by helping believers better recognize the idolatry which is present in their own lives. I use the term "idolatry" here by intention, because as will be shown, Luther understood every sin and vice to be merely idolatry by another name.[104] Because

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[103] Theodor Dieter, "Luther as Late Medieval Theologian: His Positive and Negative Use of Nominalism and Realism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 31.

[104] This sentiment is expressed profoundly in Luther's discussion of idolatry in his *Large Catechism*, in his

sin is never generic, but always takes on a distinct shape in the lives of God's people, whether that be their irrational anger, or their extreme envy of others, the categories of vice provide us with a tool that allows us to give specific names to our sins. This serves both as an impetus for confession of sin, as well as helping Christians more readily recognize which precise virtues they might cultivate. Practicing forgiveness, for instance, or learning to be more kind or content, might be important habits for one to develop intentionally in order to overcome a certain penchant for anger or envy. Engaging in this task increasingly frees us from our enslavement to our idols and allows us as individuals to live our lives in accordance with God's will more consistently. It enables us to live out more diligently our principal purpose of serving our neighbor in love through the specific works which God has commanded and within the various vocations to which he has called us.

In particular this study will endeavor to demonstrate that while sanctification is cast into a specific shape by the vice/virtue tradition of the capital vices and the particular dispositions of the cardinal-theological/contrarian virtues, observing how this shape was both appropriated and adapted in view of Reformation insight regarding man's anthropology[105] and the nature of justification[106] reveals a differentiated concept of vice and virtue. Vice is recast as particular manifestations of idolatry and virtues proper are rendered penultimate to outward works of service towards the neighbor, even as the category of virtue is extended to include not solely

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catechesis of the Ten Commandments in general, but most specifically in his exposition of the First Commandment, which will be treated extensively at the close of Chapter Three of the present work.

[105] Specifically, a two-fold righteousness anthropology which recognizes man's complete inability, in the *coram Deo* realm, to effect anything towards his salvation by his own natural power due to his depraved and fallen sinful nature.

[106] Specifically, the nature of justification as outlined in Article IV of the *Augsburg Confession*, namely the truth that man is saved by grace alone through faith in the promise of Christ, and not by his own work or merit.

dispositions but also the good works of the Decalogue.[107] The placing of vice and virtue into the context of the Decalogue offers the Lutheran faith tradition an alternate framework through which to comprehend the essence and task of the sanctified life through the lens of virtue ethics.[108]

While Mannermaa, Grobien, Allen, and Biermann all address the topic and task of sanctification proper, they do not further examine Luther or Lutheranism with respect to, and through the specific lens of, the longstanding theological tradition of vice and virtue. That is precisely the methodology that will be followed in this study, in conversation, of course, with

[107] A consistent working definition of virtue, as the term will be used in this dissertation, is important to establish at the outset. Typically, the assumed referent of virtue would be to understand this term in the sense used by Aristotle, as the disposition of a consistent habit that has been developed by practice. However, as will eventually be demonstrated in the following, Luther was much more inconsistent with his use of the word. In general, when advancing the truth of monergism over and against the *via moderna*, Luther was largely critical of the word virtue. Robert Kolb has conveyed to me in personal correspondence (specifically, via an email from January 21, 2020, and a subsequent phone conversation on September 25, 2020) that he feels what might be somewhat problematic for Luther with respect to the word, is that its connotation in both Latin and German is "what one is capable of," given the derivative root word. In Latin, *virtus* most often connotates strength, the very aspect Luther was attempting to undermine with respect to Aristotle, that is "not by one's own reason or strength" that we come to faith—our relative performance does not earn God's gracious favor given on account of Christ. In German, the word is *Tugend*, deriving from the verb *taugen*, meaning more or less "to be of good use (for something)." Again, due to man's fallen nature, we are not "good for anything," apart from Christ and the work of His Spirit in and through us. As such, with respect to these semantic realities, especially when it comes to understanding man's relationship to Christ in the *coram Deo* realm of passive righteousness, the word virtue is somewhat a "soiled" word, and can be detrimental, theologically speaking. However, as will be demonstrated again and again in the forthcoming work, when conveying the realities of the *coram mundo* realm, the active righteousness of man in relation to his fellow men, while Luther seemingly prefers the term "good works," to "virtues," the reality is he will use the two almost interchangeably. Sometimes, when using *virtue* Luther is referring to "virtues proper," that is dispositions of character. Other times, however, he could easily be referencing some good work towards one's neighbor, "virtuous living," as such. Since Luther himself will have the largest word in what follows, and since his own usage was not as neat, clean, and consistent as we might hope, my own definition moving forward in the context of this dissertation cannot be as precise as some might prefer. At times, yes, by *virtue* I am referring to a disposition, at other times, I simply mean the good works of a virtuous life. Context will be key to determining the referent, the usage might not be as concise as it should be in an academic exercise of this sort, and for the instances in the future pages where there remains ambiguity, I beg the reader's forgiveness and understanding.

[108] It is prudent at this juncture also to help the reader better understand what I intend by my use of the term "virtue ethics." Truly, this term might be read to refer solely to the tradition of Aristotle's teaching, or it could be interpreted to encompass both Aristotle and his teaching as it was appropriated for the medieval church by Thomas Aquinas. Here, I mean it is a quite broad sense, inclusive of both these senses, but also somewhat as a synonym for the expansive vice/virtue tradition of the church in general that includes the teaching of the seven capital vices, and the cardinal/theological and contrarian virtues that, as will be demonstrated, were so firmly implanted in the mindset and practice of the medieval church of which Luther was an heir.

others who share both a zeal and insight for the conversation concerning the contours of sin and sanctification. This is a direction that to my knowledge has not been undertaken in current scholarship, but one that I think will prove able to help the reader of this study notice some important aspects of Lutheran theology that can too easily be overlooked in the light of the Lutheran tradition’s historic emphasis on justification by faith alone, apart from the works of the law, which rightly serves as the center of any truly Biblical theology.

In order to follow this planned methodology, it is essential for the following study, at the outset, to characterize selectively the rich history of the vice and virtue tradition by highlighting specific developments that will be germane to the consideration of Luther’s own reception of this tradition. As such, this will be the subject of the following chapter. Subsequent to this overview, Luther’s writings will be analyzed to understand both his appropriation and his adaptations of this tradition, the subject of Chapter Three. An analogy for this study, then, is to think in terms of light refracting through a prism. What emerges on the other side is still the same light, but the observer’s view of it has been substantially changed, further revealing the inner workings of the various components of light which were not visible prior. So too, as the light of the vice and virtue tradition passes through the prism of Luther and the Reformation, it refracts, allowing the observer of this refraction to see new things about vice and virtue, in a new context, and with further detail. This insight ultimately changes our perception of how to consider vice and virtue within a Lutheran, or other divine monergism faith traditions, while still retaining the essential aspects of the vice and virtue tradition itself. As the tradition refracts through Luther, specific contours of the unique *telos* of the Christian life are made visible and these contours are the subject of Chapter Four, which examines vice and virtue within the new context of the Decalogue. Finally, this refraction also allows the reader to consider the nature of the task of

Christian sanctification in light of virtue ethics, that is, the Christian's fight of faith. It reveals the necessity for a believer to intentionally cultivate various virtuous dispositions which redirect Christians away from idols toward the needs of their neighbors, that is, to the faith and love enjoined by the commandments. The focus on the concrete nature of this ethical task of every Christian is the subject of Chapter Five. While the foregoing work cannot ultimately solve the moral crisis that faces our modern age and the present-day church, it is hoped that it will provide grounds for a more unified Lutheran voice as the faithful endeavor to know and live God's holy will in our fragmented church and broken world.

Finally, before proceeding into the remainder of this study, two necessary disclaimers are in order, both concerning the nature of such a project as this. The first concerns the correct diagnosis of the underlying issue within the church which this dissertation is attempting to address. It could be suggested by some, that the true problem with progressive North American Christianity has little to nothing to do with the school of radical Lutheranism, as most North American Christians are not Lutheran, and of those that are, only a minute fraction of them have ever heard of the likes of Gerhard Forde, let alone read any of his writings. One early reader of the content of this dissertation observed that the "real problem" with North American Christians is the unbounded materialism and individualism which confronts every Christian at seemingly every turn—the inescapable warp and woof that comprises the present social milieu. While parish pastors no doubt have this seemingly insurmountable reality to overcome as they minister to a laity who live in a much different context than sixteenth-century Germany, the radical school of thought does them no favors towards this end. Radical Lutherans who remain responsible in their handling of the Word of God certainly would not abandon the content of the Ten Commandments as a positive description of the Christian life lived within God's will. However,

when lay people and even parish pastors get even a whiff of the radical theological program, they can quickly "take what they like" from it and "leave the rest," and too often what they like is the antinomian bent it all-too-easily enables, and what they leave behind is any implied positive import for God's law to address them specifically with respect to how they should conduct their own lives of faith.

A different dissertation might attempt to couch what follows in the larger cultural realities of materialism and individualism which facilitate the attitude among Christians that they can "do what they want to do," remaining unaccountable to their pastor, the Scriptures, or perhaps maybe even their Creator. This task, no doubt, is a worthy endeavor that perhaps could (and should!) be taken up by another author on another day.[109] For the present task, the radical understanding of Lutheran theology remains in my sights, as the binary opposite to which I react, and which compels what follows. This is true because the mindset to which I am reacting is largely that of my former self, far before I had learned of either the reality of radical Lutheranism or encountered Gerhard Forde. I too was taught, whether explicitly, or more often, implicitly, that the task of Christianity is to preach the gospel of forgiveness in Jesus Christ and allow him to take care of the rest—including the relative performance of our lives lived according to his will. I have since come to terms with the reality that this understanding is far too simplistic, and, by my observation, does not seemingly bear out in the lives of individuals within the church, despite anyone's insistence that it might or should. Studying Scriptures, reading Luther, and facing the realities of my own existence, I recognized that a radical understanding had enabled my own ability to embrace materialism and individualism, which over the long term could have had a

[109] Although, in some respects, the following study does at least tangentially touch on the problem of individualism as it treats the vice of pride, and, in some ways, materialism is dealt with as well when the vice of greed is explicated.

detrimental, if not catastrophic, effect on my faith.

As such, this dissertation is not written to take on directly the tsunami of the ever-evolving cultural waves which continually pose the threat of crashing over the defensive wall of our lives and ruining our faith. Rather, the following dissertation attempts to demonstrate how we might shore up what at first might appear to be only a smaller problem, a "hole in the dike," if you will. It is specifically designed for those Christians who indeed might already have their ears attuned to listen for the warning sirens of the cultural tsunami of materialism and individualism, understanding the danger they pose to washing away one's faith, but who might at the same time be too easily inclined to overlook seemingly insignificant minor fissures in the wall of their faith, thereby hindering them from being on similar alert to prevent these smaller, nearly unnoticed cracks from causing the wall to fail from slow, but inevitable, erosion that grows virtually unnoticed over time until it too is sizeable enough to allow faith to be washed away, although likely in a far less dramatic (or even recognizable!) manner. I suspect my personal experience growing up in a faith tradition centered on divine monergism that clings so tightly to "salvation by grace alone, apart from the works of the law," is not an uncommon one, and that there could be many within the ranks of the Christian faithful who have not been taught to take the realities of sin in their life as seriously as they should, and I would even venture to wager that, for some, it has eventually resulted in the loss of their trust in Jesus and subsequently their salvation.

And lastly, before the reader proceeds into the rest of the argument of this dissertation, a second disclaimer is in order, this one concerning the relative focus of the project. It should be noted that the author of this study firmly believes that the primary purpose of Scripture is to make Christ known, as John declares, "These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

A dissertation, then, focusing on the topics of sin and sanctification, that is, the First and Third articles, seemingly skips over the very center of Scripture: the Second Article and Christ Himself! I acknowledge this, and recognize that apart from Christ, his incarnation, death, resurrection, and imminent return, the ensuing discussion is entirely fruitless, a laboring in vain. The thread that ties Scripture together is indeed the promise of Christ, not the demands of the law.

Nevertheless, the law maintains a continuity throughout Scripture as God's created will, the design by which he created the world to function, and even serving as the ultimate *telos* of human behavior in the eschaton, exemplified in earthly time by only Christ himself. And even the Second Article, in some respects, is in service to the First and Third. After his treatment of the Ten Commandments in the *Large Catechism*, Luther begins his exposition of the Apostles' Creed by saying:

> Thus far we have heard the first part of Christian teaching, and in it we have seen all that God wishes us to do and not to do. The Creed properly follows, which sets forth all that we must expect and receive from God; in short, it teaches us to know him perfectly. *It is given in order to help us do what the Ten Commandments require of us*.[110]

Truly the forgiving realities of the Second Article return us to the responsibilities for which we were created, and the Third Article, with the coming of the Spirit, enables us to walk in them in a way that was not possible prior to the incarnation of our Lord. Indeed, it is the failure to take seriously the reality of our Creator God in the first place that causes us to bend and pervert what He has created as good and use it only in a selfish manner, resulting in every vice:

> Here much could be said if we were to describe how few people believe this article [that is, the First Article, expressing the reality that God is the Creator of heaven and earth]. We all pass over it; we hear it and recite it, but we neither see nor think about what the words command us to do. For if we believed it with our whole heart, we

[110] LC II, 1 in Kolb and Wengert, 431 (*emphasis* mine).

> would also act accordingly, and not swagger about and boast and brag as if we had life, riches, power, honor, and such things of ourselves, as if we ourselves were to be feared and served. This is the way the wretched, perverse world acts, drowned in its blindness, misusing all the blessings and gifts of God solely for its own pride, greed, pleasure, and enjoyment, and never once turning to God to thank him or acknowledge him as Lord or Creator.[111]

Finally, it is because of the Third Article reality of our being sanctified, that we now, by the power of the Spirit, are truly returned to the reality of Christ Himself:

> Neither you nor I could ever know anything about Christ, or believe on him and receive him as Lord, unless these were offered to us and bestowed on our hearts through the preaching of the gospel by the Holy Spirit … Therefore being made holy is nothing else than bringing us to the Lord Christ to receive this blessing, to which we could not have come by ourselves.[112]

As such, studying the vices and virtues, and advocating for their continued development in the life of the Christian is not to reduce Christ into some kind of "moral exemplar" or to turn the Christian faith into a religion of "mere morality." Rather, the point of living the virtues is to evermore conform one's self to the image of Christ, to exemplify the very virtuous living his own life exemplified, not for the sake of improving one's own self, rather, in order to free the heart from its entanglements within the grips of idolatrous vice so that one might be increasingly enabled to honor God and serve neighbor in true Christian love.

[111] LC II, 20–21 in Kolb and Wengert, 433.

[112] LC II, 38 in Kolb and Wengert, 436.

CHAPTER TWO

CONTOURS OF VICE AND VIRTUE

> Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is the first systematic treatise on ethics. Over two millennia after it was written, it is still among the best. Even philosophers and intellectuals not sympathetic to Aristotle's philosophy in general or his ethics in particular admit its greatness. It speaks to human beings about themselves and their relations to others as clearly, forcefully, and systematically today as it did when it was written (or dictated) 2,500 years ago. It would … be hard to overestimate its historical importance.[1]

So begins Hye-Kyung Kim's introduction to one of any number of available translations of Aristotle's *Ethics* in the English language. Aristotle establishes the tradition of a school of ethical thought known as virtue ethics. While it is likely that the reader of a dissertation dealing with the theology of vice and virtue already has a basic knowledge of the contours of Aristotle's teaching, it is prudent, at the outset of this study, to rehearse again its primary themes to ensure they are both familiar and fresh in the mind of the reader who encounters what is to follow.

Kim is most certainly correct in her assessment. No person seeking to understand the relative goodness of human behavior can neglect Aristotle's contributions, and they have been adopted, sometimes in almost wholesale fashion, by moral philosophers down through the ages. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, sets forth a systematic theology of ethics that is Aristotelian to its very core, a vast synthesis of philosophy and theology. Other theologians, however, have understood Aristotle's thinking to be particularly problematic for the specifically Christian task. Martin Luther is often cited as a prime example—as someone who felt that when it came to understanding theology, Aristotle had little, if any, utility, and that in fact his philosophy subverted any attempt to comprehend the truly Biblical teaching on divine grace.

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[1] Hye-Kyung Kim, "Introduction," in Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. F.H. Peters with an introduction by Hye-Kyung Kim, (N.p.: Barnes and Noble, 2013), xi.

Aristotle and the Foundation of Virtue Ethics

Aristotle sought to teach the art of living well. His ethical teaching is not based on lists of principles or rules, rather it is centered on understanding how a person develops character, and it is ultimately rooted in his conception of the good. For Aristotle, every act is directed toward some unique purpose, thus he begins his work: “Every craft and every line of inquiry, and likewise every action and decision, seems to seek some good.”[2] The aim or goal is the *telos* of any given activity, and different activities have various ends toward which they strive. However, Aristotle contends, there is one good towards which every human action aims, and that is happiness, or *eudaimonia*, which is axiomatically considered the highest good. This is not to be conceived as some kind of feeling, rather it is an objective state achieved, Aristotle believed, only by living life in accordance with virtue, or *arete*, meaning “excellence.”[3] For Aristotle, the word “virtue” did not connote morality so much as it described a thing or being performing its proper function well. Kim writes, “One virtue of a knife is its sharpness. One virtue of a car is its maneuverability. The question for Aristotle is, what is the virtue of man?”[4]

To answer that question, according to Aristotle, humans have to look to their own nature and what is unique about it in relation to other entities in the world. Aristotle believed that the unique excellence of human beings was their ability to exercise reason. Within the human soul is embedded both the intellect, which itself engages in reasoning, as well as an aspect that listens to reason. As such, virtue can be subdivided into intellectual virtue, that is, reasoning about various things; and moral virtue, that is reasoning about actions and whether they are fitting with respect to human flourishing.

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[2] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1999), 1.

[3] Aristotle, *Ethics*, I.7.15 in Irwin, 9.

[4] Kim, “Introduction” in Aristotle, *Ethics*, xiv.

Aristotle then proposes how one acquires moral virtue, namely through habit, or *ethos*. In other words, virtuous character does not naturally arise in individuals simply because they exist, rather, it must be cultivated through intentional and repeated activity. He writes: "we become builders, for instance, by building, and we become harpists by playing the harp. Similarly then, we become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave actions."[5] A person performing an isolated virtuous act would not therefore make that person virtuous, rather a virtuous person is characterized by the development of a habit, or disposition, to act consistently in a certain manner. Thus, a person can only be truly called virtuous by repeatedly and habitually performing virtuous acts. Aristotle says: "a state [of character] results from [the repetition of] similar activities."[6]

Further, Aristotle asserts, all moral virtue exists as a mean between the extremes of excess and deficiency that tend to ruin virtue. Perfection, then, lies in moderation, attaining what is sometimes call the "golden mean," as he illustrates:

> The same is true, then, of temperance, bravery, and the other virtues. For if, for instance, someone avoids and is afraid of everything, standing firm against nothing, he becomes cowardly; if he is afraid of nothing at all and goes to face everything, he becomes rash. Similarly, if he gratifies himself with every pleasure and abstains from none, he becomes intemperate; if he avoids them all, as the boors do, he becomes some sort of insensible person. Temperance and bravery, then, are ruined by excess and deficiency, but preserved by the mean.[7]

The mean, however, is not a precise point between two extremes, and can be difficult to attain. Sometimes the best that can be done is to simply avoid excess or deficiency and endeavor towards the less faulty of the two, given the circumstances of a situation, as he attempts to convey for his readers:

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[5] Aristotle, *Ethics*, II.1.4 in Irwin, 19.

[6] Aristotle, *Ethics*, II.1.7 in Irwin, 19.

[7] Aristotle, *Ethics*, II.2.7 in Irwin, 20.

> By virtue I mean virtue of character; for this is about feelings and actions, and these admit of excess, deficiency, and an intermediate condition. We can be afraid, for instance, or confident, or have appetites, or get angry, or feel pity, and in general have pleasure or pain, both too much and too little, and in both ways not well. But having these feelings at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way, is the intermediate and best condition, and this is proper to virtue.[8]

So, for example: "getting angry, or giving and spendy money, is easy and everyone can do it; but doing it to the right person, in the right amount, at the right time, for the right end, and in the right way is no longer easy, nor can everyone do it."[9] Hence, acquiring virtuous character is hard work, and virtue is defined as such: "a mean between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency … some vices miss what is right because they are deficient, others because they are excessive, in feelings or in actions, whereas virtue finds and chooses what is intermediate."[10]

In the case of giving and taking money, then, "the mean is generosity, the excess wastefulness and the deficiency ungenerosity … vicious people have contrary excesses and defects; for the wasteful person is excessive in spending and deficient in taking, whereas the ungenerous person is excessive in taking and deficient in spending."[11]

So, Aristotle concludes: "It is right, then, to say, that a person becomes just by doing just actions"[12] and further that "virtue is also *up to us*, and so also, in the same way, is vice,"[13] … "for in fact we are ourselves in a way jointly responsible for our states of character, and the sort of character we have determines the sort of end we lay down."[14]

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[8] Aristotle, *Ethics*, II.6.10–11 in Irwin, 24.

[9] Aristotle, *Ethics*, II.9.2 in Irwin, 29.

[10] Aristotle, *Ethics*, II.6.15–16 in Irwin, 25.

[11] Aristotle, *Ethics*, II.7.3 in Irwin, 26.

[12] Aristotle, *Ethics*, II.4.5 in Irwin, 22.

[13] Aristotle, *Ethics*, III.5.2 in Irwin, 37 (*emphasis* mine).

[14] Aristotle, *Ethics*, III.5.20 in Irwin, 39.

It is precisely this "up to us" aspect that Luther himself will demonstrate is so dangerous to theology, especially the understanding that a person becomes righteous by his own effort. But Luther's criticism is rather complex, and must be read carefully and in full context to be rightly understood. In the following chapter I will seek to situate his criticism in such a way that the reader will be able to better assess what about Aristotle was so problematic, and even, perhaps, ways in which Aristotle might be useful for understanding the sanctified life. For now, however, we return to round out this brief picture of Aristotle's ethic.

Once he has laid the foundation of virtue ethics as such, Aristotle then takes time to list specific moral virtues (such as courage, temperance, truthfulness, and justice), as well as their excesses and deficiencies, for various spheres of action or feeling. For instance, in relation to the sphere of pleasure and pain, the excess he considers licentiousness, the deficiency, insensibility, and the mean, temperance.[15] Concerning the attitude of anger, the excess is irascibility, the deficiency, lack of spirit, and the mean, patience.[16] A complete list in the order of presentation in Aristotle's *Ethics* is found in Appendix One. It is important to recognize that this list is derived both from reason and observation, that is, the experience of natural revelation. It does not purport to be a list revealed from some kind of higher being, rather, it is better conceived as what would be arrived at by any rational thinking human being, were they truly and carefully to consider human life and behavior.

Finally, for Aristotle, the virtues of the intellect are wisdom (*sophia*, referring to philosophical knowledge) and prudence (*phronesis*, roughly, "practical good sense," or good judgment). Prudence is best understood as the ability to decide what is appropriate to a particular

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[15] Aristotle, *Ethics*, III.10–12 in Irwin, 45–49.

[16] Aristotle, *Ethics*, IV.5 in Irwin, 61–62.

situation and then act accordingly and is considered *the* essential factor in the exercise of all moral virtue. [17] For Aristotle, since the intellect was the best part of the soul, it possesses its own excellence, and thus its virtue is the highest virtue, indeed, "the crowning achievement of the good life is contemplation."[18]

While Aristotle's teachings would greatly influence the Christian tradition of vice and virtue, especially, as will be shown, with respect to Aquinas' later appropriation of the cardinal virtues, the predominant understanding of vice in the Christian tradition was understood differently than excess or deficiency from some "golden mean," and itself has a different origin. The understanding of vice that would become predominantly understood by the laity of the medieval church was vice as behavior opposite some good virtue, and this tradition has its nascency not in the halls of philosophical thought, but rather in the cloisters of early Christian monasteries. Rebecca DeYoung asserts: "the capital vices as we know them evolved from a tradition—a tradition interwoven with Christian moral reflection, and one that any serious study of the vices cannot afford to ignore."[19]

The Vice Tradition

Evagrius and Evil Thoughts

Angela Tilby posits that the monk Evagrius of Pontus (c. AD 345–399) was "the first Christian thinker to attempt to analyze the psychology of sin," describing sin as "a sickness that required careful diagnosis and appropriate therapy."[20] While "the first" might be a bit of

[17] Kim, "Introduction" in Aristotle, *Ethics*, Kim, xvi.

[18] Kim, "Introduction" in Aristotle, *Ethics*, Kim, xvi.

[19] Rebecca DeYoung, *Glittering Vices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2015), 25.

[20] Angela Tilby, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (London: SPCK, 2009), 4.

overstatement, it is indeed the furthest back one can trace the origin of what would become known as the so-called "seven deadly sins" which eventually came to serve as the centerpiece of vice theology in the medieval church. Born into a Christian family in Ibora, Pontus, a city in what is now Turkey, Evagrius emerged from an austere beginning to become an educated theologian, notably being ordained as lector in Constantinople in AD 380 by St. Basil the Great, and then as deacon two years later by St. Gregory of Nazianzus in AD 382. Evagrius was known for his skill in theological argument, and ancient biographies relate that he became consumed by vanity from his ability as an orator. He also found himself infatuated with a married woman. Alarmed by these developments and unable to conquer them, he fled, first to a monastery in Jerusalem, and then eventually to isolation as a monk in lower Egypt.

He is most widely known for the writings that stem from this period. "In the midst of intense isolation, Evagrius became cognizant of eight evil *logismoi*, that is 'thoughts,' that he could not escape, even when left alone to himself and apart from all others." His terminology is derived from the Greek word *logos*, akin to "word," or "reason" which "carried a great deal of weight in the early Christian centuries. Here, Evagrius seems to be suggesting that *logismoi* are false rationalizations, the kind of compulsive, twisted logic that can lead to spiritual disaster."[21] In his *Praktikos*, he writes:

> All the generic types of thoughts fall into eight categories in which every sort of thought is included. First is that of gluttony (*gastrimargia*), then fornication (*porneia*), third avarice (*philarguria*), fourth sadness (*lupe*), fifth anger (*orge*), sixth acedia (*acedia*), seventh vainglory (*kenodoxia*), eighth pride (*hypererephania*). [22]

What is perhaps so insightful, and indeed foundational, about Evagrius' understanding of

[21] Tilby, *Deadly Sins*, 4.

[22] Evagrius, *Praktikos* 6 in Robert Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003), 97.

sin is that it comes to us from reflections while separated from the world, the place most typically considered the greatest source of temptation. Evagrius understood from his experience that sin did not originate from without, rather from within a person. This, of course, is in concert with Jesus, who taught that sin has its source and arises from the inside: “For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts (*dialogismoi*), sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person" (Mark 7:21–22).

The three most fundamental of these temptations intuited by Evagrius, that of vainglory, avarice, and gluttony, coincided with Jesus’ own temptations in the wilderness (see Matt. 4:1–11, Luke 4:1–12),[23] as well as what Augustine would define as the three worldly loves identified in 1 John 2:16: “the desire of the flesh (gluttony), the desire of the eyes (vainglory), and pride in possessions (avarice).”

Primarily, Evagrius’ concern “was to deal with the roots of sin within the human person, not merely the symptoms, as they manifest in sinful behavior.”[24] Subsequently, in stark contrast to Aristotle, he felt one “cannot be perfected merely from action that proceeds from the exterior to the interior.”[25] Further, this echoes the letter of James, which insists that the roots of

[23] Tilby notes that “early Christian writers saw the three temptations as archetypal. The conquering of temptation was seen as a key event in the redemption of humanity. By the fourth century they had become in particular a model for the temptations an aspiring monk was likely to confront in the desert. The accounts describe how Jesus after his baptism was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness where he fasted for forty days and nights. Both Matthew and Luke speak of the devil initially tempting Jesus to break his fast by turning the stones of the desert into bread. The order of the second and third temptations are different in Luke and Matthew. Luke has as the second temptation the devil producing visions of all the kingdoms of the world simultaneously and promising them to Jesus in exchange for his submissions. Matthew puts this temptation last. The third temptation in Luke was for Jesus to test his own vocation as Son of God by taking a heroic plunge from the pinnacle of the Temple. This is the second temptation in Matthew’s account. Evagrius would later understand these as the three most fundamental temptations,” *Deadly Sins*, 13.

[24] Tilby, *Deadly Sins*, 7.

[25] Tilby, *Deadly Sins*, 7.

temptation originate from within: “one is tempted by one’s own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death” (James 1:14–15). Tilby notes “here is a causal link between desire, sin, and death, which would prove important in the development of the notion of deadly sin.”[26]

While prior to his time in the monastery, Evagrius was known for his “particular skill for upholding the orthodox faith against heretics,” he was ultimately valued for his *discretion*, “his understanding of the human heart and skill at spiritual direction. He developed practical guidelines for dealing with day-to-day temptation, and it is this part of his legacy which has survived and been transmitted in different ways in the East and West of the Christian world.”[27]

Part of these practical guidelines included, as with Aristotle, the cultivation of the virtues—not for the sake of becoming virtuous in and of itself, but rather as a way to begin to heal the damaged soul (and by “healing,” he did not mean healing form the trauma or harm caused by the world or others in it, rather, the healing that needed to occur in the soul that was damaged from its entanglement with sin). Sinkewicz summarizes: “above all, for the healing of the soul the monk must cultivate the virtues that stand opposite the vices, and in particular two principal virtues, chastity for the healing of the concupiscible part and gentleness for the healing of the irascible part” (this notion previews aspects of what will develop into the “contrarian virtues” at a later stage in the tradition). Progress involves a movement through various stages, first in mastering the passions of the concupiscible part of the soul and then moving on to exercising gradual control over the irascible part. Similarly, “it is only in deep humility that the monk will find refuge from the dangers of vainglory and pride,” and perfection “remains a goal that is not

[26] Tilby, *Deadly Sins*, 13.

[27] Tilby, *Deadly Sins*, 18.

fully attainable in this life."[28] Of extreme help is the fortification of the mind against vice by the cultivation of the virtues of faith, hope, and love.[29]

Here one witnesses not only Evagrius' developing theology of the psychology of sin, but also the suggestion of specific counter practices that serve to expressly overcome vice in one's heart. To summarize: for Evagrius, sin, at its most basic understanding, begins with base thoughts that emerge from the heart and mind of a fallen human being. From these thoughts spring other thoughts, words, and deeds which are sinful. Evagrius understood these eight thoughts as nearly automatic or reflexive, and it is not always clear whether he sees the thought as sinful in and of themselves, or merely neutral. Nevertheless, he argues, "whether or not these thoughts trouble the soul is not within our power, but it is for us to decide if they are to linger in us or not and whether or not they stir up the passions."[30] Even if Evagrius did not see the presence of the thoughts themselves as evidence of a depraved soul, what is clear is that he understood that if the thoughts were left unchecked, they would give rise to behavior which was without question inherently evil, and as such contrary to God's will and ultimately harmful to one's soul. Tilby writes, "for Evagrius and other early ascetics … life was repentance, a constant dying to sin; death was a happy exodus to eternal life with Christ. In the meantime, there was a battle to be won."[31] This concept of developing contrary practices to impede the passions would be further developed through John Cassian who is responsible for introducing Evagrius' ideas into the world of the Latin Christian West, although not without some evolution. It is to this development we turn next.

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[28] Sinkewicz, *Evagrius*, xxxi.

[29] Sinkewicz, *Evagrius*, xxxvii (cf. Evagrius, *Praktikos* 83).

[30] Evagrius, *Praktikos* 6 in Sinkewicz, *Evagrius*, 97–98.

[31] Tilby, *Deadly Sins*, 17.

Cassian and Contrary Practice

While Evagrius' contributions are the beginning of a very insightful theology of vice, his ideas might have remained in obscurity were it not for their appropriation and subsequent development by John Cassian (AD 360–430). Cassian, like Evagrius, was also ordained as a deacon in Constantinople, twelve years later than Evagrius in AD 399 by John Chrysostom. When Chrysostom was exiled in AD 403, Cassian traveled to Marseilles, France, where he became a priest and founded several monasteries. Cassian introduced Evagrius' list and some of its accompanying ascetic practices to the Western Church with his *Institutes* and *Conferences*, which caused this particular set of vices to become an institutional fixture within the monastic tradition, where it was adapted to the shape of communal monastic life.

Because Evagrius' Origenistic tendencies in other areas of doctrine had sullied his reputation, his thoughts might have easily remained contained to his own desert community. But Cassian, in his work *Conferences*, expounds upon "eight principal vices" that attack humankind and claims he learned these from an old monk named Serapion.[32] This name, however, is most certainly a pseudonym for Evagrius, as Cassian knew the latter's reputation would likely taint the very teachings he was trying to appropriate should their true origin be known. The major part of one of Cassian's other famous works, entitled *Institutes*, serves as a beginner's guide to monastic life, and includes an expanded Latin version of Evagrius' spiritual theology. While the list of faults found therein is identical to that of Evagrius, Cassian never acknowledged this fact and throughout his life he concealed any debt to Evagrius.[33]

Tilby further calls our attention to a subtle change in the trajectory of this tradition as it

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[32] Kevin Vost, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2015), 33.

[33] Tilby, *Deadly Sins*, 19.

moves from East to West, beginning first and foremost with different nomenclature—what were prior categorized as "thoughts" were now called "vices," migrating away from a psychological and diagnostic approach towards the notion of temptation and a more familiar list of sins proper.[34] This, she says, moves from the abstract to the concrete, extending and reinforcing Augustine's definition of sin as a matter of the human will, a preference for something other than the will of God, and "contribut[ing] to the development of the forensic and moralistic account of sin which would later dominate the West."[35]

While Cassian's own reflections might be faulted for altering Evagrius' original teaching, it is also true that they enhance it. Cassian began to distinguish between natural vice, such as gluttony, and unnatural vice, such as avarice; he distinguished between vices that are completed with and without bodily action, between those motivated by internal and external causes, and between vices of a carnal and spiritual nature. He began to recognize cause and effect among the vices, noting how some bear a special connection, and give rise to others, the famous example being the row of dominoes beginning with gluttony that leads to fornication, which in turns leads to avarice, which often gives rise to anger, ultimately resulting in sadness, which puts one into a state of spiritual listlessness or acedia. In anticipation of Gregory, who would follow in the sixth-century, Cassian began to consider the myriad of different ways deadly vice is manifest in the sinner's life.[36]

Perhaps most importantly, Cassian carefully develops recommendations for fighting against vice, acknowledging that every human being battles one or more of these vices. His advice was to put forth the most effort in endeavoring to master the vices which have the most

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[34] Tilby, *Deadly Sins*, 31.

[35] Tilby, *Deadly Sins*, 25.

[36] Vost, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 34–35.

mastery over the individual. In giving this advice, however, he cautions against taking any credit for any supposed victory:[37]

> Namely, when you have enjoyed a notable success in warring against the carnal devices and you see that you have been freed from their filthiness and from this world's way of life, you should not be puffed up with the success of the struggle and the victory and ascribe this to your own strength and wisdom, believing that you were able to obtain victory over evil spirits and carnal vices through your own efforts and application and free will. There is no doubt that you would have never been able to prevail over these if the Lord's help had not fortified and protected you.[38]

Cassian, then, might be understood to be an early proponent of the tradition of striving to practice virtue to ward off and protect one's self against sin. Still, he understood sanctification to be God's work in the life of the believer, not a "doing what was in one's self," like later tradition would postulate.

Because Cassian was bi-lingual, he was specifically situated to bridge the world between eastern and western thought. With *Conferences* and *Institutes*, he brought the ideas of the eight evil thoughts into the Latin-speaking world, and hence, in time, into the piety of the people. One such person was Aurelius Prudentius Clemens (AD 348–413), from northeast Spain. From his writings, consisting of much Latin poetry (including perhaps the most ancient Christmas hymn: "Of Father's Love Begotten") we understand Prudentius to be a man of deep devotion to the Catholic Church. One such devotional work, entitled *Psychomachia* in Latin (and translated in the LOEB Classical Library edition as *The Fight for Mansoul*)[39], depicts a dreamlike battle in which personifications of the various Christian virtues contend against specific worldly vices.[40] Specifically, Prudentius pitted idolatry against faith, lust versus chastity, wrath versus patience,

[37] Vost, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 37.

[38] Cassian, *Conferences*, 5.15, trans. Edgard C.S. Gibson (N.p.: Aeterna, 2015), 93–94.

[39] Prudentius, *Psychomachia*, (Harvard, MA: LOEB Classical Library, 1949), 274–343.

[40] Vost, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 41–42.

pride versus lowliness, indulgence versus sobriety, greed versus charitable works, and finally discord versus concord. Here we see early evidence of the tradition pitting vice and corresponding virtue up against one another as practices that vie for control of one's soul and spiritual well-being, as well as another preview of the tradition of the contrarian virtues (that is, virtues that function as exact opposite practices form their vice counterparts).

As the tradition of vice continued to influence Christian thinkers, St. John Climacus' *Ladder of Divine Ascent* provides evidence of further development. Climacus (AD 525–606) lived among the monasteries of the East and his work pictured a reader climbing on a journey of thirty different steps representing ever-higher levels of physical and spiritual aesthetic virtues, the highest being love. Here, the Christian is seen to be ascending a path of spiritual perfection beginning as a battle against sins, continuing with a struggle to build virtues, and culminating in union with God. As Climacus describes the fundamental sinful passions in step 29 of his "ladder," he lists seven, omitting sadness, as would his western counterpart Gregory (to whom we turn next), viewing it as essentially the same thing as acedia.[41]

Per Tilby, "Cassian's writings had a considerable influence on St. Benedict (c. AD 480–543) who is regarded as the founder of western monasticism," and hence it is through Benedict that "Cassian's teaching on sin came to the attention of Pope Gregory the Great and became a keystone of the western moral tradition."[42] Evagrius' name would largely drop out of history as Cassian, Gregory, and their successors used his categories of evil thoughts for the new and somewhat different purpose of categorizing sin.

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[41] Vost, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 49–51.

[42] Tilby, *Deadly Sins*, 22–23.

Gregory and the Proliferation of Sin

Gregory the Great (AD 540–604) is considered one of the original four Latin "doctors of the church" along with Saints Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome. It is to Gregory that we attribute what has become the definitive list of what would eventually be known as the "seven deadly sins," although, as we will see, for Gregory that nomenclature would be unrecognizable. Rather, as will be shown, he would understand his list of seven to be understood as the "capital vices." Gregory served the church after the fall of Rome, in the early days of what is dubbed the Dark Ages. After serving in public office for a time, he entered the monastery at which time he too began to contemplate the nature of sin. In his massive allegorical commentary on the book of Job, *Moralia*[43] (which would become the standard for moral and theological reflection for the next six hundred years), Gregory would expound his own list of vices. The now famous passage stems from an exposition of Job 39:25, a chapter which recalls the varying splendor of some of God's creatures, and in this instance, a text which sets forth the characteristics of a horse. Specifically: "When the trumpet sounds, he says 'Aha!' He smells the battle from afar, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting." His commentary on this verse reads:

> For the tempting vices, which fight against us in invisible contest in behalf of the pride which reigns over them, some of them go first, like captains, others follow, after the manner of an army. For all faults do not occupy the heart with equal access. But while the greater and the few surprise a neglected mind, the smaller and the numberless pour themselves upon it in a whole body. For when pride, the queen of sins, has fully possessed a conquered heart, she surrenders it immediately to seven principal sins, as if to some of her generals, to lay it waste. And an army in truth follows these generals, because, doubtless, there spring up from them importunate hosts of sins. Which we set forth the better, if we specially bring forward in enumeration, as we are able, the leaders themselves and their army. For pride is the root of all evil, of which it is said, as Scripture bears witness; *Pride is the beginning of all sin.* [Ecclus. 10, 1] But seven principal vices, as its first progeny, spring doubtless from this poisonous root, namely, vain glory, envy, anger, melancholy,

[43] Pope Gregory the Great, *Moralia*, trans. John Henry Parker; J.G.F. and J. Rivington (London: Oxford, 1844), http://www.lectionarycentral.com/gregorymoraliaindex.html.

> avarice, gluttony, lust. For, because He grieved that we were held captive by these seven sins of pride, therefore our Redeemer came to the spiritual battle of our liberation, full of the spirit of sevenfold grace.[44]

While Gregory was no doubt already familiar with the influence of Cassian, he brought to bear several of his own modifications. First, he, like Climacus, combined sadness with acedia, and supplied the Latin word connotating melancholy (*tristia*), most often labeled in modern lists with the name, sloth. Second, Gregory combines vanity and pride under the single category of vainglory (*vanagloria*). Pride, thus, is seemingly removed. However, in reality, Gregory felt pride was better understood as the deadliest of all vices, certainly the most fundamental, and truly the root sin which gives rise to all others. Modern lists often just substitute pride itself in the place of vainglory, from which position it heads the list of seven. Finally, to complete his own list (which from his modifications had shrunk from eight to six), Gregory added envy (*invidia*) to arrive at seven, the biblical number of completeness.

While a list of exactly seven might have been intentional, the addition of envy was hardly arbitrary. As Gregory witnessed the clamoring for power in the aftermath of the fall of the Roman empire, he made note of the very real "source sin" of envy that lies deep in the recesses of the sinful human heart. Thus, roughly five out of Gregory's settled list of seven vices, which have remained intact as a whole ever since, are present in the words of our Lord in a single location in Mark 7:21–22, a passage already cited, but here again with vice tradition parallels annotated: "out of the heart of a man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality (1. lust), theft, murder (2. anger), adultery, coveting (3. greed), wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy (4. envy), slander, pride (5. pride), foolishness." Only the inactive sin of sloth is omitted, as well as gluttony, whose omission might have everything to do with the fact that the particular

[44] Gregory, *Moralia*, 31.45.87.

conversation from which Jesus' teaching springs is about food, and Jesus makes clear that all foods are "clean," that is, able to be eaten without violating God's will. It is worth noting that neither Jesus nor his apostles ignore these remaining two sins (sloth and gluttony) elsewhere in their teachings. However, the important point for Jesus, and for Gregory, when considering sin, is again, to recognize that it originates "from within" (Mark 7:21). Sin comes from the heart. While some who study the vice tradition closely might rightly argue that as it developed over time, it was modified from its basic original form found in Evagrius, on this particular point at least, namely the true origin of sin, Evagrius would have reason marvel at the long tradition his reflections inspired.

In addition to establishing pride as fundamental at the head of the list of vices, Gregory also appropriated and further developed Cassian's organic metaphor of sin functioning like a root with offshoots:

> For a tall and spreading tree of a noxious kind will the more easily be made to wither if the roots on which it depends have first been laid bare or cut; and a pond of water which is dangerous will be dried up at once if the spring and flowing channel which produce it are carefully stopped up.[45]

While Cassian had written of sin as though it were some sort of plant with roots and seeds, Gregory further showed how the principal vices have generative power, that is they give birth to various "offspring," that is, other variants of themselves. While all that is wrong can be traced to pride, pride generates seven "source sins," that is capital or chief vices, each which comes with its own "army."[46] As Gregory paints his own picture of spiritual battle, the offspring vices proceed from each of the capital vices like the foot soldiers of generals, with pride as the

[45] Cassian, *Conferences*, 5.10, 87.

[46] Tilby, *Deadly Sins*, 23.

commander-in-chief.[47] Pride can be thought of as the root of the trunk of a tree, which extends upward into the seven main branches, each representing a capital vice. From these vices, in turn, grow many other branches, each with its own poisonous fruit. The seven capital vices grow from pride and tend to proliferate additional sin. Thus, in many thirteenth and fourteenth-century guides for confession, each vice would be listed along with its offspring vices—with sometimes from five to even twenty or more vices sprouting off these main branches.[48]

Thus, the proper term for these seven vices in the history of the tradition is not "deadly sins" but rather "capital vices." The term "capital" derives from the Latin word *caput*, meaning "head" as in "source" or "fountainhead." They are the most basic sins which give rise to all others. In his own allegory, Gregory goes on to identify specific offspring of each of the capital vices. For example: "From avarice there spring treachery, fraud, deceit, perjury, restlessness, violence, and hardness of heart against compassion."[49]

At first glance, the capital vices might not always seem that "deadly"—what they give rise to often seems far worse (for instance, certainly murder, an offspring of anger, is universally accepted as worse than anger itself). So how exactly did they come to be known as the "deadly sins?" The answer lies in the reality that it is from the capital vices that the dangerous path to spiritual death most often begins. Because these vices serve as the starting point for sin, when they are allowed to reign and give rise to other, subsequent, and more malicious sin, the ultimate end is the death of the soul. This understanding also begins to hint at how this tradition prescribes the best way to battle sin in one's life. To be effective in the fight against sin, one must cut it off at the root. The prohibition of murder is hardly effective if one hasn't first dealt

[47] Tilby, *Deadly Sins*, 23.

[48] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 33–34.

[49] Gregory, *Moralia*, 31.45.88.

with the anger that serves as the beginning of a path of vice that leads to murder. How would one go about accomplishing this, and winning the fight against capital sins? By habitually practicing the corresponding and opposite virtue, in the instance of anger, patience and forgiveness.[50]

Gregory ends this allegory in setting forth a similar sentiment, noting how detecting vice in advance, and "smelling the battle from afar" postures one for victory:

> But the soldier of God, since he endeavors skillfully to pursue the contests with vices, smells the battle afar off; because while he considers, with anxious thought, what power the leading evils possess to persuade the mind, he detects, by the sagacity of his scent, the exhortation of the leaders. And because he beholds the confusion of subsequent iniquities by foreseeing them afar off, he finds out, as it were, by his scent the howling of the army.[51]

At this point, it is pertinent to review the contours of the vice tradition covered so far. First, while the tradition certainly has underpinnings in Scripture itself, it formally begins as a concerted theological reflection with Evagrius of Pontus, who, while in the monastery, became aware of eight evil thoughts which were seemingly inescapable, even in isolation. Evagrius began to consider how to combat these impulses which lead to further sin and evil. His teaching crossed over into the west through Cassian, who institutionalized his ideas in the life of the monastic church, building upon Evagrius' understanding of contrary practices and introducing these ideas to Pope Gregory the Great. Gregory refined and advanced the "list," expanding our understanding of the generative nature of the vices. This understanding of the proliferation of sin would be taken up by Aquinas who inherited this tradition in its entirety and used his superb intellect to systematize the entire vice and virtue tradition and entrench its ideas firmly into the thought life of the western church. Before turning to Aquinas proper and his own role in developing the tradition, we will first give the virtue tradition its due and trace its development

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[50] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 28–29.

[51] Gregory, *Moralia*, 31.45.91.

also to Aquinas.

The Virtue Tradition

Jean Porter, in her analysis of moral discourse in medieval Europe, points out what she sees as the relatively surprising phenomenon that "ideals and theories of the virtues" played a "prominent role." She suggests this is surprising simply for the reason that, in contrast to categories of law and sin, "virtue" does not seem to be a predominant scriptural motif, nor does it have obvious theological connotations. But, very early on in Christianity, by at least the third century, or perhaps earlier, conceptions of virtue play a central role, simply because "they were too deeply entrenched in the moral discourse of late antiquity to be ignored by educated Christians … What is more," she writes, "classical reflections on the virtues turned out to offer much that was of value to theological speculation, including both providing illuminating perspectives on key doctrines, as well as supplying practically accessible approaches to spiritual formation and pastoral care."[52]

If any reasonably well-informed Christian living in the Middle Ages were asked to identify the central virtues, one of two answer's might have been common. The first answer might have been those "virtues" commended by St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians: "faith, hope, and love," along with the classic cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance suggested as foremost by Plato and Aristotle. However, in monastic traditions, which focused more on the formation and care of souls, another set of virtues was identified for their use as effective remedies for deadly vices which threaten one's salvation. Porter notes that "while the list(s) would overlap … to some extent, they would be organized differently, and different

[52] Jean Porter, "Virtue Ethics in the Medieval Period," in *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, ed. Daniel C. Russell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 70.

virtues would be given prominence; for example, humility … is regarded as a leading virtue within the monastic and pastoral traditions, given its importance as a remedy for the capital vice of pride."[53] These two ways of analyzing the virtues, the classical, and the pastoral, each developed simultaneously in the church.

Classical Virtue Reflection

To understand how Christianity arrived at this point, the evolution of the virtue tradition must be explored to some extent. Ancient theories of virtue, Aristotle's as foremost, set the framework for later Christian scholastic virtue ethics. For Aristotle, virtues were first of all understood as stable qualities of an individual's character expressed through actions, but they were also conceived of as active dispositions, oriented toward achieving appropriate balance in judgment for diverse areas of life. DeYoung helps us recognize how the list of what would become the "seven principal virtues … claim[ed] both explicit biblical and weighty philosophical sources," and that it is "probably for this reason [that] the list of virtues fluctuated little over much of its history."[54] Though he does not use the Greek term for virtue (*arete*) in the passage, the three theological virtues of course originated from the Apostle Paul's treatment of love in 1 Cor. 13. The four cardinal virtues are mentioned in the book of Wisdom (8:7), which DeYoung notes was "written for the Jews in the Diaspora about 300 B.C., the same era the four cardinal virtues were prominent in Greek philosophical ethics" and "the Septuagint does use the Greek term *arete* which the Latin Vulgate translates *virtus*."[55] She continues:

> It is likely that biblical writers, like later church fathers, found the classical Greek concept a convenient category for the excellence of moral character they wanted to describe … [Since] all ancient and medieval ethical systems framed questions about

[53] Porter, "Virtue Ethics," 70–71.

[54] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 26.

[55] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 26.

> morality in terms of the perfection of character or human nature over a lifetime[,] such a framework made the virtues—as building blocks of good character—the central ethical category for centuries.[56]

Christian intellectuals drew freely on the classical tradition, and St. Augustine of Hippo (AD 354–430) especially did so. Augustine considered all virtues as varying expressions of the single virtue of love, bestowed only by God, and characterized by placing all human affection in its proper order.[57] In doing so he and other church fathers would "explicitly endorse the list of the four cardinal virtues and integrate them into a Christian ethic." DeYoung recognizes that "by making them all forms of Christian love, Augustine intentionally transformed this philosophical set of virtues, which were part of a Greek ethic of self-perfection, into Christian virtues dependent on God's grace."[58] While this dependence on grace was clear in Augustine's theology, because this set of virtues had its roots largely in philosophy and its logic, as we'll come to see, the understanding of the relative degree of grace necessary for developing or acquiring the virtues would become a matter of marked contention and debate as the Christian tradition developed.

Despite Augustine's early reflections, however, Porter observes that true "systematic reflection on the virtues in the classical mode, i.e. analyzing them in relation to some overall account of human well-being, only got underway with the emergence of scholasticism in the early twelfth century," and notes that "the two … earliest and most influential scholastics," were Peter Abelard (AD 1074–c. 1142) and Peter Lombard (c. AD 1100–1160), each of whom "offered contrasting approaches to the virtues."[59] While Abelard, "offered an Aristotelian

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[56] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 26.

[57] Porter, "Virtue Ethics," 74–75.

[58] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 27.

[59] Porter, "Virtue Ethics," 77.

analysis of virtue as a habit through which persons are able to act in a truly moral way … to merit supreme beatitude," Lombard, in his *Sentences*, instead, "sets forth a pointedly theological analysis of virtue … closely linked with the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit…" and defining virtue "in terms taken from Augustine's writings," and demonstrating that it is "God [who] brings about virtue in the soul" as the free will acts "in cooperation with God's grace." Hence Lombard concludes, "there can be no virtue without grace."[60] While Abelard's understanding was sympathetic to Aristotle and much more willing to see the development of virtue as completely within man's power, Porter suggests that on the surface, Lombard's analysis "would seem to imply that Christian analysis has no place for a distinctively philosophical analysis of the virtues."[61] In other words, Aristotle's theory alone cannot account for a comprehensive *Christian* view of virtue, simply because it does not leave room for the necessity of grace.

Porter concludes, "at any rate, it is certainly the case that scholastics in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries generally draw freely on Aristotelian terminology and themes in developing their theories of the virtues, thus continuing in the broad lines set out by Abelard,"[62] who tended to marginalize the role of grace in the development of virtue. This, then, "is the context within which to place the extended theory of the virtues developed by Thomas Aquinas … who frames his analysis of the concept of virtue in terms taken from Lombard's definition: 'Virtue is a good quality of the mind, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God brings about in us, without us.'"[63]

[60] Porter, "Virtue Ethics," 77–78.

[61] Porter, "Virtue Ethics," 78.

[62] Porter, "Virtue Ethics," 80.

[63] Porter, "Virtue Ethics," 80 (quoting Thomas Aquinas, *STh*, I–II, 55.4, where Aquinas is referring to Lombard's *Sentences* 27.5).

Synthesis of the Vice/Virtue Tradition in Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas (AD 1225–1274) offered his own synthesis of Christian theology and Aristotelian theology. Kevin Vost says that Aquinas' "great role" is his integration of "virtually all the wisdom that came before him."[64] DeYoung validates this praise of Aquinas observing that his descriptions "formed a highly systematic and philosophically sophisticated account."[65]

In fact, of particular relevance for the present discussion, DeYoung notes that the extensive section of Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* on the virtues and vices circulated independently, and quickly became the most well-known and well-used part of this work in the centuries after his death. While Aquinas begins his definition of virtue in concert with Lombard, "he goes on to qualify this definition in one crucial respect, adding that the last clause of Lombard's definition," that is, of virtue being something "God brings about in us, *without us* … applies only to the infused part of the virtues … in contrast to the acquired virtues, which as the name suggests can be attained through human effort, without grace."[66] With this move, Aquinas embraced a way of understanding virtue "in decidedly Aristotelian terms, seeing virtue as a *habitus*, that is, "a stable disposition of the intellect, will, or passions inclining a person to act in one kind of way rather than another."[67] Thus, Aquinas differentiates between infused and acquired virtues. While acknowledging the necessity for grace in the former, the development of the latter is up to man and the use he makes of grace. This expanded role for human agency in virtue acquisition would lay the groundwork for even further development in the nominalist account of Ockham and Biel, which will be addressed at the close of the chapter.

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[64] Vost, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 70.

[65] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 29.

[66] Porter, "Virtue Ethics," 80.

[67] Porter, "Virtue Ethics," 80–81.

Concerning the specific contours of virtue, Aquinas draws heavily on the philosophical foundations laid by Plato and Aristotle, from which emerged the four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. In the second part of his *Summa*, Aquinas poses and answers 303 separate questions dealing with the wide scope of morality. In the first portion of the second part, Aquinas considers whether there are four cardinal virtues, and concludes that there are, with prudence as the principal virtue among them.[68]

J. Budziszewski concedes that due to "St. Thomas's frequent mention of Aristotle it would be easy to get the mistaken impression that the two thinkers agree about everything,"[69] but contends that this is far from the case. While Aristotle's *Ethics*

> peters out in a diffuse list of twelve 'means' of assorted kinds; we are left wondering why he lists just these virtues and not others … St. Thomas takes sides with a more powerful and suggestive tradition which holds that although there are a great many moral virtues—certainly far more than twelve—four of them surpass all the others, and are in certain sense their heads … all other acquired virtues [being] associated in some way with these four [as is the case in that] all of the infused virtues are associated in some way with faith, hope, and charity or love.[70]

The actual term "cardinal virtues," according to Budziszewski, was "coined centuries earlier by St. Ambrose of Milan. While "principal virtues" was also common terminology meant to convey their relative importance, use of the Latin root *cardo*, was meant "to say much more: It evokes the images of a hinge on which lesser virtues pivot, an axis on which they turn, a point from which they are surveyed, boundary in which they are contained, and a tenon-and-mortise joint by which they are connected."[71] Aquinas reasons about whether there should be less or more than four cardinal virtues, but ultimately concludes, on the authority of philosophy, church

[68] *STh*, I–II, 61.

[69] J. Budziszewski, *Commentary on Thomas Aquinas's Virtue Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 43.

[70] Budziszewski, *Commentary on Aquinas*, 43.

[71] Budziszewski, *Commentary on Aquinas*, 44–45.

tradition, and his own reason, that "no matter which method we use, we discover the same four," though, he admits, prudence heads the list much as pride headed the list of the capital vices.[72] In regards to their content, Budziszewski offers the following to summarize Aquinas' thought:

> Viewed as a general quality of mind which all virtues require, *prudence* is a perfectly developed discretion about everything. Viewed in the same way, *justice* is the rectitude of mind by which we do what she should and avoid what we should not. Viewed in the same way, *temperance* is the moderation of all our passions and activities so that they remain within their proper bounds. Viewed in the same way, *fortitude* is the strength of firmness of mind which enables us to do what is reasonable despite temptations to deviate.[73]

In addition to these virtues then, Aquinas considers whether there are any theological virtues. Since human happiness is twofold, proportionate to the human nature, and that which surpasses man's nature and can be obtained by the power of God alone, he argues that there also exist distinctly theological virtues in addition to the cardinal virtues, namely faith, hope, and love.[74] He concludes that because "Divine law commands us to perform acts of virtue, and among these are acts of faith, hope, and love … it follows from this that faith, hope, and love are virtues which direct us to God—and these are precisely the virtues traditionally called 'theological' or spiritual." [75] Aquinas knew, beyond Aristotle, that "happiness cannot exist without a rightly directed will," and that "we are not completely happy so long as there remains something more to desire and seek" which our natural powers always fail to reach thus warranting the theological virtues by which "God pours his own power into His followers" that they might become, as St. Peter expresses in his second letter, "partakers of the divine nature."[76]

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[72] *STh*, I–II, 61.2.

[73] Budziszewski, *Commentary on Aquinas*, 61 (expositing *Summa*, II–II, 123.2).

[74] *STh*, I–II, 62.

[75] *STh*, I–II, 62.1

[76] Budziszewski, *Commentary on Aquinas*, 71 (alluding to 2 Pet. 1:4).

After establishing his rationale for these categories, Aquinas spends extensive time considering each virtue, structuring this entire "second part of the second part" of his *Summa* around the cardinal and theological virtues, and also discussing specific vices in relation to them.

When considering the nature of the seven capital vices, like Gregory, Aquinas saw pride as standing alone as the fundamental cause and root of sin, the source of all the others: "Pride, however, is called the beginning of all sins because it supplies the overarching motive of the capital vices themselves. For this reason, it should be considered not one among other capital vices, but the universal vice—as St. Gregory puts it, the 'queen of them all.'"[77] Aquinas also considered whether there are rightly seven particular vices to be assumed into this category. He ultimately reasons that while the capital vices are certainly "not the *only* causes of sins … they are the *most frequent* cause of sins"[78] and as such, are suitably reckoned as such, thus embracing the tradition given "by the authority of St. Gregory the Great, in his Morals on the Book of Job."[79]

Reflecting on the capital vices, Rebecca DeYoung considers the nature of these particular vices that had been recognized by prior Christian thinkers. The following quotation is a rather lengthy, but worth citing in full as it demonstrates how these vices "chase" after fulfillment which they can never truly provide:

> Why count these seven as the main sources and most fruitful of the vices? Aquinas' explanation is that they aim at the things that most attract human beings, the goods which we most long to possess. Because each good on the list … holds a close affinity to human fulfillment, we are tempted to substitute them for true fulfillment as the goal of our lives. The vices offer subtle and deceptive imitations of the fullness of the human good, what we often simply call "happiness." Lust offers pleasure; avarice promises self-sufficiency. In the words of one contemporary author [Barbara Brown Taylor]: "The simplest definition of an addition is anything we use to fill the empty

[77] *STh*, I–II, 84.4.

[78] *STh*, I–II, 84.4.

[79] *STh*, I–II, 84.4.

place inside of us that belongs to God alone." Augustine too refers to this substitute-fulfillment pattern of sin in his *Confessions*: "My sin was this, that I look for pleasure, beauty, and truth not in [God] but in myself and in his other creatures, and the search led me instead to pain, confusion, and error."

> The vices have such attractive power because they promise a good that seems like true human perfection and complete happiness As Augustine says, "Specious vices have a flawed reflection of beauty." They promise us a shortcut recipe for self-made satisfaction. In their own twisted way the vices are our attempts to attain goods like love and friendship, provision and security, recognition and approval, comfort and pleasure, status and worth, all by ourselves.
>
> When our character is distorted by vice, we seek these goods—and they are genuinely good things—in a misguided or even idolatrous manner: in the wrong way, at the wrong times and wrong places, too intensely, or at the expense of other things of greater value. That's what make the vices evil. Our values are out of whack—or in Aquinas's Augustinian terms, our loves are "disordered" … [Ultimately,] When good thing are wrongly pursued, sin happens. And when sin accumulates, our character becomes warped and misshapen a well.[80]

Recognizing this pattern of seeking happiness in the wrong places, the vice tradition anticipates a theme that, as will be shown, was readily recognized by Luther, who would expose every vice as a clinging, in some way or another, to an idol—that is, a placing of one's trust in something that has no power to bring about happiness and leading to all manner of sin in the lives of people.

Aquinas also takes up the question of habituation, that is, whether (as Aristotle had taught) virtues can be "brought about in us by practicing the acts which correspond to them."[81] Addressing several objections, he ultimately concludes that, with regard to human virtues which are "ordered to the good as measured by the rule of human reason," these virtues "can be brought about by human acts … for it is precisely in the power and rule of human reason that such good lies." However, by contrast, those virtues "which are ordered to the good as measured by Divine law … cannot be brought about by human acts the starting points of which lie solely in human

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[80] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 38–39 (The quotation DeYoung cites here from Barbara Brown Taylor is taken from her work, *Home by Another Way* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1999), 67).

[81] *STh*, I–II, 63.2.

reason. They can be brought about in us only by the work of God."[82] In other words, the distinction between the classical and theological virtues holds also with regard to their source and maturation.

Finally, another teaching Aquinas introduces which is pertinent to establish prior to the following chapter is the distinction between mortal and venial sins. In Catholic moral theology, mortal sins[83] are called such because it is taught they cause spiritual death, cutting one off from God's grace. Venial sins, on the other hand, may dispose a person to mortal sin, but do not sever union with God. It is important to note that the mortal sins of the mortal/venial distinction are not the same as the capital vices, though because the latter are often referred to as the "deadly sins" there is often confusion between the capital vices and mortal sins. As will be shown, even Luther will, on occasion, conflate the terms, at times intending to refer to the capital vices while using the label "mortal sins." Aquinas, however, is consistent in his nomenclature, referring to the list of seven only as "capital vices."[84]

Dorothy Sayers points out that the seven capital sins (or vices) may also be called the "Seven Roots of Sinfulness." She observes that "in classifying sin under these seven main heads, the Church displays more subtlety and a profounder psychology than is sometimes supposed."[85] Sayers continues, in a vein quite consistent with the tradition:

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[82] *STh*, I–II, 63.2.

[83] A mortal sin as defined by the Roman Catholic church is a sin which "by attacking the vital principle within us—that is, charity—necessitates a new initiative of God's mercy and a conversion of heart which is normally accomplished within the setting of the sacrament of reconciliation." Further, for a sin to be considered "mortal," the object of sin must be grave and the sin must be committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent." The Catechism quotes Thomas Aquinas *STh*, I–II, 88.2, and notes some examples of a mortal sin might be blasphemy, perjury, homicide, or adultery. Pope John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Second Edition*. (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 507.

[84] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 35.

[85] Dorothy Sayers, "Introduction," in Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy II: Purgatory*, trans. Dorothy Sayers (New York: Penguin, 1955), 66.

> It is often, for instance, asked: "Why does the Church not count Cruelty as a Deadly Sin?" The answer is that although cruelty is indeed (in one sense) a sin deadly to the soul that indulges in it, it is not a root-sin. No sane person is cruel for cruelty's sake: there is always, hidden behind the act and habit of cruelty, some other (often unacknowledged and unsuspected) evil motive. It is important … to discover what, in any particular case, the root of cruelty is. It may, in fact, derive from any one of the Capital Sins: from sheer selfish indifference to others' needs and feelings (Pride); from jealously, resentment, or fear (Envy); from ill-temper, vindictiveness, or violent indignation (Wrath); from laziness, cowardice, lack of imagination, complacency, or irresponsibility (Sloth); from meanness, acquisitiveness, or the determination to get on in life (Avarice); from self–indulgence and wanton pursuit of pleasure (Gluttony); from perversions of sexual and personal relationships, such as sadism, masochism, or possessiveness (Lust). And so with other symptomatic sins. Even in this world, it is usually found insufficient to punish symptoms without an effort to discover the underlying spiritual disease.[86]

Here, one can see, despite the apparent confusion that the term "deadly sins" might give in relation to the Roman Catholic tradition's classification of mortal sin, the title "deadly sins" is not an inappropriate shift in preferred terminology. Sayers rounds out her picture concluding: "The seven vices are not just any seven bad habits. Nor are they the worst possible or most frequent vices, although some critics mistakenly think this, complaining that cruelty and murder should have made the list (as the worst) or drunkenness and lying (as the most frequent). [Yet] the labels for the lists lend a clue as to why they were chosen."[87] In other words, "capital vices" is appropriate to designate their nature as "source vices" which give rise to all others, but "deadly sins" is appropriate to warn of the great danger these vices pose to the soul when left unchecked.

The Contrarian Virtues

Having reflected on the development of the classical virtue tradition, it is time to say a word about the pastoral tradition that developed simultaneously, namely that of the contrarian virtues. First, we should recognize that, largely, Aquinas held to the classical understanding in

[86] Sayers, "Introduction," 66.

[87] Sayers, "Introduction," 66.

his theological exposition, as DeYoung says:

> In his *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas follows the Aristotelian pattern of opposing each virtue to it's own pair of vices. Every virtue, in his account, lies on a continuum between two opposing vices, once on each extreme. So generosity is a virtue characterized by a love of giving and an appropriate freedom from attachment to money. Avarice or stinginess, on the one extreme, names an excessive attachment to money so that one hoards money for oneself rather than giving it away when one ought. On the other extreme is the vice of deficiency—prodigality or spend thriftiness—a habit of not being attached enough to money, to the point of carelessness or wastefulness. [For Aquinas] the virtue, therefore, lies somewhere between the two extremes, [just as in the] "golden mean" [of Aristotle].[88]

However, she confirms what is readily discerned, "The list of seven vices does not directly correlate with the seven principal virtues—faith, hope, charity, practical wisdom [prudence], justice, courage, and temperance." Further, "historically, the seven vices were sometimes paired with a list of opposing virtues; for example, as mentioned prior, in Prudentius' *Psychomachia*, anger is overcome by patience, pride by humility, lust by chastity, and so on."[89] The complete list of vices with their contrarian virtue counterparts as these came to be recognized in the tradition is as follows:

Table 1. Capital Vices and their Contrarian Virtues

Capital Vice	Contrarian Virtue
Pride	Humility
Envy	Kindness
Anger	Patience, Forgiveness
Sloth	Diligence or Zeal
Greed	Generosity or Charity
Gluttony	Temperance
Lust	Chastity

[88] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 37.

[89] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 37.

While there is not necessarily a single source that definitively lists these particular contrarian virtues, and one can witness slight nuances across various lists, the basic contours of the list included in the above table are evident in Prudentius' *Psychomachia*, and they develop over time to correspond to the definitive, classical list of vices given by Gregory in his *Moralia*. The development of this tradition is probably most evident (as will be shown) as it finds its place in prominent literature, demonstrating the reality of its familiarity among church laity, and revealing how its influence was extended through widespread use.

The notion of contrarian virtues, while not the predominant understanding of Aquinas, was still present for him when he treated various virtues, as Kevin Vost observes:

> Aquinas' book *De Malo* takes up the capital vices at the midway point through the work and devotes nearly the entire rest of the book to the topic! He provides a somewhat briefer examination in his *Summa Theologica*. Because he takes this matter up in the context of his exposition of virtue and grace, each sin is addressed in the context of the specific virtue it opposes. As such, Aquinas provides insight into the understanding of virtues as being contrary to their corresponding vices. He notes that as virtues are habits that make a person good, vices are habits that dispose us toward evil—evil being the lack of good. In his mind sins are to vices as good deeds are to virtues.[90]

So, even in the midst of his largely Aristotelian arrangement, when presenting various virtues, Aquinas' discussion did also include pairing them with corresponding contrary vices. It is this prior-mentioned pastoral, contrarian tradition, it seems, which would take the firmest hold in the hearts and minds of the medieval faithful.

The Hearts and Minds of the Medieval Faithful

As the vice and virtue tradition became established, it spread westward. The deadly vices as set out by Cassian would begin to form the basis for penitential manuals for monks, with penances for particular sins involving contrary disciplines. Additionally, in AD 1215, the Fourth

[90] Vost, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 74.

Lateran Council made the practice of confession to a priest mandatory, dictating that: "Everyone who has attained the age of reason is bound to confess his sins at least once a year to their own priest, and to receive the Eucharist at least at Easter."[91] Since the practice of confession needed to be implemented with integrity, it was accompanied by a teaching program for both clergy and laity to ensure that the most serious sins would be recognized. As such, Tilby observes that "during the next century we begin to find teaching about the Seven Deadly Sins in medieval catechisms designed for everyday parish use. No longer for monks only, the deadly sins provided a checklist for everyone, as well as warning of the danger of persistent sin."[92]

Porter points us to the reality that "throughout the medieval period … the virtues were a favorite theme for literary works, preaching, and practical pastoral advice. These treatments of the virtues tended to employ the older schema of the virtues as correctives to the vices, yet in the writings of Chaucer and Dante (for example), this old schema took on unprecedented beauty and power."[93] In Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, for instance, the climax of the entire journey is a final tale given by the Parson which is in essence an extended treatise exhorting avoidance of the seven deadly sins. While most modern English translations omit this tale as superfluous, indeed it is truly the end toward which the entire journey throughout the work has been aiming. In his brief preface and summary to "The Parson's Tale" in the Penguin Classics edition, Nevill Coghill summarizes this tale (the only in the entire work written in the form of prose and not verse!) to be nothing less than "a sermon on preparation for confession and the true nature of the seven deadly sins."[94] Written at the very close of the fourteenth-century in London, Chaucer's

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[91] Tilby, *Deadly Sins*, 27–28 (Summary: Canon 21).

[92] Tilby, *Deadly Sins*, 27–28.

[93] Porter, "Virtue Ethics," 76–77.

[94] Nevill Coghill, "The Parson's Tale (*in synopsis*)," in Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, trans. Nevill Coghill, (London: Penguin Group, 1951), 487.

work is considered some of the finest English literature of the period, and demonstrates how deeply the vice and virtue tradition had embedded itself into the thought-life of the people.

Tilby suggests that "the contrast of virtues and vices gave plenty of opportunity for illustration and vivid imaginative teaching"[95]—and I would add, this is perhaps nowhere more evident than in Dante. Dante's *Divine Comedy* is a journey through a three-fold world of hell, purgatory, and paradise. The journey through hell was intended to demonstrate God's eternal judgment for those who do not repent, as well as his subsequent judgment for particular kinds of sinners. Purgatory, on the other hand, provided evidence of God's love for the penitent, offering them redemption after their sins had been properly purged. Dante pictures purgatory as the ascent up a mountain, where the gate to paradise awaits one at the top. The mountain's terraces are modeled after the seven deadly sins, and the journey "involves the disciplines of the Church as laid down in the Fourth Lateran Council and as expounded by Aquinas," where the purpose of each stage is to undo the damage sin has caused.[96] The therapies that Dante imagined in purgatory consist of either suffering the effects of sin, or of practicing an opposing virtue, or a combination of both.

Dorothy Sayers reflects how Dante's literary appropriation and interpretation of the vice/virtue tradition couples with Augustine's understanding that sin, at its essence, is "disordered love." She writes:

> Dante's argument rests upon the great Augustinian premise that evil in itself is nothing and can originate nothing positive—not even sin. It can only be a parasite upon the good which God has created. Man has a natural impulse to love that which pleases him. This impulse, which is the root of all virtue, can be perverted, weakened, or misdirected to become the root of all sin. Thus, all the Capital Sins are shown to derive from love for some good, either falsely perceived, or inadequately or excessively pursued. Accordingly, the three Lower Cornices [of Mount Purgatory]

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[95] Tilby, *Deadly Sins*, 29.

[96] Tilby, *Deadly Sins*, 31.

> are devoted to the purging of Love Perverted (love, that is, directed to a false object), and the four Upper Cornices to the purging of Love which, though directed to an object legitimate in itself, errs either by Defect (Sloth), or by Excess (Avarice/Covetousness, Lust) … On every cornice, the discipline of penitence follows the same pattern, and comprises … The Penance itself, appropriate to the sin, and taking the form of either (a) the patient endurance of the sin in its effects, or (b) the practice of the opposing virtue.[97]

Few works of literature have so captured the hearts and minds of first, the Italians, and subsequently, Christians throughout the world, than Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Dante's images in *Inferno* portray the deep horrors of hell with provocative and unforgettable images that emblazon themselves into the conscience. However, it was the "deadly sin" tradition which forms the structure of *Purgatorio*, which steeped the faithful with images of both the damage sin causes to the soul and its remedy in the virtues. Theologically, however, as Sayers argues, the structure of *Purgatorio* teaches us how to understand all sin as related to a common theme, what Luther would label idolatry, but which Augustine and Dante expressed as "disordered love." Here, sin is love directed in the wrong way, or, toward the wrong things.

From this understanding, Sayers provides helpful definitions to assist in our understanding of the nature of each of the capital vices. Again, at the bottom of the mountain, the first three cornices, or confrontations, demonstrate how love is *perverted* in our lives. Pride is really the "love of self perverted to hatred and contempt for one's neighbor." Envy equates to "love of one's own good perverted to the wish to deprive other men of theirs." Finally, wrath is none other than "the love of justice perverted to revenge and spite." At the top of the mountain, another three vices demonstrate how love, when directed *in excess* towards things in the world which have inherent goodness, ultimately results in an idolatrous fascination with things that cannot provide true security, and hence do not deserve the excess of love which humans are apt

[97] Sayers, "Introduction," 66–67.

to assign to them. Avarice [sometimes, covetousness], is constituted by the "excessive love of money and power." Gluttony is the "excessive love of pleasure," distinguished from lust which is the "excessive love of persons." In the middle of the mountain one encounters the final vice, sloth, which is understood as neither love of some good thing *perverted*, nor love of some good thing *in excess*, but rather, an *indifference* toward love, that is, "the failure to love any good object in its proper measure, and, especially, to love God actively with all one has and is."[98]

By desiring the wrong things, the heart grasps for security in places where it cannot be found, resulting in trusting in either the self, or some created thing in the world. This, of course, is rooted in human fear that is a result of living in a post-fall world. DeYoung expands on how each of the capital vices have their beginning in fear:

> We should also be aware, however, of the way fear can drive us into vice, showing our lack of trust in God's provision and control and tempting us to seek happiness in safer, more secure, and self–sufficient ways. Each vice can therefore also show us compensating for our perceived vulnerabilities with an attempt to take control. When we are afraid we won't get what we need, or worry that we won't have enough, it makes sense to spend our energy on constant acquisition, pursuing abundance to achieve self–sufficiency—this is the vice of avarice. When we are afraid that justice will not be done or that we won't get our just deserts unless we personally take charge of doling out vengeance in the way we see fit—then the vice of wrath takes hold. When we are afraid that we will not be accepted by others, that we won't fit in or live up to others' expectations, and thus do our best to hide behind a falsely inflated reputation—this is vainglory. When we are afraid we are not worth anything unless we are better than others, and we are afraid that we can't compete with them, so we engineer their downfall—this is envy. When we are afraid we will always feel empty and needy, so we overfill ourselves with pleasures we can supply for ourselves—this is gluttony. When we are afraid we are unlovable, so we use people to gratify ourselves without ever giving ourselves in return—this is lust. When we are afraid of the effort loving others will cost us, so we hold everyone, even God, at arm's length in indifference—this is sloth.[99]

Indeed, DeYoung notes, "By the thirteenth-century, therefore, not only theologians and

[98] Sayers, "Introduction," 67.

[99] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 183–84.

clerics, but laypeople too, knew the vices. Confession manuals and guides … typically listed each of the vices, along with reasons for shunning the vice, the specific sins springing from the vice, and remedies for it. The list of vices had become primarily a practical and pastoral tool, not a theological construct. If it had not been for this usefulness, the list might never have attained such popularity.”[100]

As a preview of what is to come, it is worth noting that in general the Reformers gravitated away from this understanding, noting that “the seven vices are not found as a list in scripture,” and thus feeling “the list of the seven lacked credibility” and as DeYoung conveys:

> As confessional practices of self-examination extended more widely outside the intentional, ascetic communities in which the rubric of vices was originally anchored, accounts of the moral life shifted toward ways of thinking that were more systematically satisfying or directly scripturally based—for example, the Ten Commandments or the fruits of the spirit. Moreover, although priests continued to use the list of seven for pastoral and confessional purposes, theories of ethics gradually shifted way from an emphasis on virtue and vice, and more toward law and casuistry, obligation and obedience. After the Reformation, Protestants who worried about “works righteousness” were wary of exhortations to practice the virtues; similarly, their emphasis on justification by faith and grace alone made them suspect efforts to purge one’s life of the vices.[101]

Nevertheless, it remains true that in the social milieu of the church in the time preceding the Reformation, no “system of moral entities proved to be so attractive that it could seize the popular imagination to the degree, and with the range of application, that was achieved by treatments of the capital vices to the very end of the Middle ages.”[102]

Beyond Aquinas: Scotus, Ockham, Biel, and the *via moderna*

Before departing from this highly selective account of the development of the vice/virtue

[100] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 29.

[101] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 29–30.

[102] Richard Newhauser, “Introduction,” in *In the Garden of Evil: The Vices and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies: 2005), xii.

tradition of the church, and turning to its reception in the Reformation, it is pertinent to call our attention to some late medieval developments, in particular because they loom large in understanding the context of the Lutheran Reformation and its attitude towards the topic of virtue. Porter writes "already in the late thirteenth century, and continuing throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, scholastic analysis of the virtues was shaped, and eventually transformed, by controversies over free will and the relationships among the will, the intellect, and the passions."[103]

"The Franciscan theologian Duns Scotus (c. AD 1265–1308)," Porter rightly avers, "offers what are probably the most influential accounts of will, moral law, and moral goodness to emerge in this period, and for that reason, his remarks on the virtues merit attention."[104] Scotus largely rejected Aquinas' earlier distinction between infused and moral virtues, instead advocating the position that "we are naturally capable of carrying out the characteristic acts of charity, including self-sacrifice and the love of God above all, and while God's grace may render these kinds of actions easier, it is in no way a necessary condition for their performance or their salvific value." Porter observes then that "these views represent radical departures from earlier scholastic views on the distinctiveness and necessity of grace."[105] As such, Scotus is "often blamed, or credited, with the collapse of scholastic virtue ethics. Certainly," Porter contends, "he influenced Luther's wholesale rejection of the idea of Christian virtue, together with Aristotle and all his pomps."[106] Truly, Luther ends up rejecting both Scotus and Aquinas' notions of how

[103] Porter, "Virtue Ethics," 86.

[104] Porter, "Virtue Ethics," 87.

[105] Porter, "Virtue Ethics," 89.

[106] Porter, "Virtue Ethics," 89.

grace works with respect to man's salvation.[107] For Luther, what mattered was not how much grace one has, or when grace was supplied, but simply a matter of reimagining the true nature of grace as not a quality or quantity related to the individual, but rather the favor of God upon men.

Berndt Hamm points out in the four decades leading up to the Reformation (the years between AD 1480–1520) there were substantial changes within scholasticism, first and foremost:

> the love of God was no longer identified with the coming of the Holy Spirit to human souls, as people like Peter Lombard, the influential teacher of the early scholastic period … had put it … Instead, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, the love of God became its own particular quality of the soul, providing the foundational habit of virtue and giving all other virtues their loving orientation to God. With this though, the love of God was absorbed so much into the human psyche that it could be disconnected from the gracious working of the Holy Spirit, as seen in the work of William of Ockham (ca. AD 1285–1347) and his students. Ockhamists like Gabriel Biel (d. AD 1495) could say that a person could produce acts of pure love of God and true repentance by natural powers. [While] most theologians around the year 1500 contested this possibility, seeing the love of God being poured instead into a person's soul, constituting an unformed but justifying mercy of God[,] they also stressed the rule … that sinners had to prepare to receive this grace, this true love of God, and this true repentance through the exertion of their own souls.[108]

Hamm helps us grasp the essence of the *via moderna* by stating that Ockham was influenced by "the ancient Greek idea of the rational being's freedom to choose … like Hercules at the crossroads … between the arduous path of virtue and the easy road of vice." He believed that "with their free wills, people can decide for or against God's justifying grace, either opening or closing themselves to it. Naturally, they can only be saved through the gift of this new quality of grace, but whether or not they receive this grace depends on their decision … this is the

[107] There is little evidence that Luther was overly familiar with Scotus or ever directly read his work. Here, Porter's observations of influence and subsequent rejection are best understood as influence in terms of the trajectory set by Scotus, as it in-turn influenced Ockham, and then Biel, the latter of whom Luther is directly responding to in his rejection of scholastic teaching.

[108] Berndt Hamm, *The Early Luther: Stages in Reformation Reorientation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 10.

freedom of autonomous individuals to determine their own fate with respect to grace."[109]

This, of course, by contrast, is a "quite different understanding of freedom [than] can be found in those scholastic theologians who set themselves firmly on the theology of grace characterized by the Pauline theology of the late Augustine … [examples include both] Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae* and [even] Luther's superior in the order, his teacher and pastor Johannes von Staupitz (d. AD 1524)."[110] For these and other theologians

> freedom in the theological sense was not a freedom to decide about grace but a freedom that first comes from grace; this is a freedom and a certainty of will poured out through grace. This means that God's grace, working in people and reversing the direction of their wills, empowers them to voluntarily do what is good from within their innermost drive, so they can thereby fulfill the true intention of God's law.[111]

While ultimately, this latter understanding, known as the *via antiqua*, would also be set aside by Luther as misleading when it comes to understanding God and His grace, it was the concept of the *via moderna*, as we will soon see, which drew Luther's greatest ire.

While Heiko Oberman contends that Luther was more a student of the nominalist school of Ockham and Biel than is normally recognized, and senses there is often a "tendency" to "stress contrasts between Luther and late medieval theologians and in general to assign Luther more to the tradition of St. Paul and St. Augustine than to that of William of Occam [sic] and Gabriel Biel," it nevertheless remains the case that Luther takes serious issue and rejects many central aspects of the nominalist school as he learned it in Erfurt.[112] Two points of the nominalist school are worth developing here prior to turning to Luther's reception in the next chapter. First, for Biel, "the conclusion is drawn that original sin seems to [be more] guilt and punishment than sin

[109] Hamm, *Early Luther*, 156.

[110] Hamm, *Early Luther*, 156.

[111] Hamm, *Early Luther*, 156.

[112] Heiko Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1965), 1–2.

in the strict sense of the word … Like Lombard, Biel speaks about the *fomes peccati*, that is, the "tinder of sin."[113] This, of course, implies that concupiscent desire is not necessarily sin, but rather just its beginnings. This leads, then, to an emphasis on man's remaining powers, even after the fall, and the problematic formula "*facere quod in se est*," that is, the capacity "to do what is in one's self," apart from the assistance of grace. While Oberman attempts to mitigate an unduly harsh rejection of this teaching, insinuating that Luther's reception of it was not quite accurate, it does seem clear that Biel sought to maximize man's capabilities apart from grace far more than the scholastic tradition which preceded him. Biel asserts "the impact of original sin and its consequences leaves the freedom of the will intact," and ultimately concludes that while "the requirements of a love of God for God's sake … is not easy to meet … nevertheless … this absolute love is within the reach of natural man *without the assistance of grace*."[114]

While these developments obviously should be read largely in the context of the question of justification, nevertheless, because of their emphasis on the understanding of the relative role of man's agency, these ideas inevitably affected also how one viewed moral improvement. Ozment notes that, in the view of Aquinas, "with the infusion of supernatural grace an individual receives the essential foundation, an initial disposition, basic instruction, as it were, in how to order his life in obedience to God. He still must exercise the grace he has received in order to become 'expert' in the art of loving God and man."[115] Scotus initially reacts against this understanding, and Ockham himself would come to see "no necessary relationship between salvation and grace-induced habits of love."[116] This naturally led to Ockham being open to the

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[113] Oberman, *Harvest*, 126–27.

[114] Oberman, *Harvest*, 133 (*emphasis* mine).

[115] Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250–1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 32.

[116] Ozment, *Age of Reform*, 37.

charge of Pelagianism as he argued that "one could perform works acceptable to God simply by doing the best one could with one's own natural ability (*ex puris naturalibus*)." Ozment notes how with Ockham, "unassisted ethical cooperation now preceded, as a condition, the infusion of grace, which, with subsequent ethical cooperation, won man salvation," and how, "to the traditional mind such an argument was Pelagianism."[117]

Gregory of Rimini (c. AD 1300–1358) would take great issue with Ockham's theology, specifically the assertion that man could naturally do good works and love God above all things without the special aid of grace, and it was on the eve of the Reformation when Biel marshaled his own defense of Ockham against Rimini's attack. Luther subsequently defended Rimini against both Ockham[118] and Biel, and would accuse both, along with all of late medieval theology, as being "tainted" with Pelagianism."[119]

The Reformation Context

A rich tradition of vice and virtue thinking certainly existed by the advent of the Reformation, a tradition in which, as a son of the church, Luther no doubt would have been steeped. But as Luther's renewed theological insights into the nature of justification took on a life of their own, what would he do with this tradition of vice and virtue? In what ways would his

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[117] Ozment, *Age of Reform*, 40–41.

[118] It is worth noting, that while Luther took umbrage with Ockham on this one particular point, namely, his Ockhamist instructors' views of salvation, there is much good that Luther took from his Ockhamist training and readily utilized for his theological program. Oberman observes that "Luther proudly referred to himself as a member of the school of Ockham: 'My master Ockham was the greatest dialectician,'" (Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, Translated by Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 120). In addition to finding value in Ockham's dialectical method, Robert Kolb, in his work, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), notes that Luther relied heavily on Ockham and Biel for a number of key ideas including the "image of God as almighty Creator and of human dependence on his self-revelation," an understanding of God's absolute power over all things, God's ultimate responsibility for defining what is good as Creator of the law, and the authority of Scripture and the reality that God binds himself to his promises (32–33). Further, Oberman even observes how Luther referred to himself as a "Terminist," after the heritage of his Ockhamist school, over and against the Scholastics (Oberman, *Luther*, 169–70).

[119] Ozment, *Age of Reform*, 42.

own new thought be consistent with it? In what ways would he understand this tradition to be incompatible with his theological program? Tilby provides a helpful preview:

> The Commandments functioned in the Reformation age as the deadly sins had done previously. They provided a standard by which people measured their closeness or distance from God. The Reformers dropped the distinction between deadly [mortal] and venial sins. They also dropped the whole apparatus of priestly confession, penance, and absolution … [Since] human merit availed nothing at the divine tribunal, in a sense this marked the end of asceticism as the choice of a distinctively radical response to the call of Christ. Withdrawal from the world, celibacy, and extreme poverty were no longer seen as virtuous choices. Yet all Christians were encouraged to live their faith deeply and for the glory of God. Daily work and family life were the setting for a new kind of Christian ascetic effort in which good works and moral purity were seen as proof of the salvation given through Christ's death; though good works could never contribute anything to the attainment of salvation. [120]

As can be discerned, the theological freight of the Reformation would have a significant influence on how the moral life was conceived, but it would not simply ignore the necessity of good works altogether, rather it would set them in their rightful place, that is, as the vocations of everyday life. However, even as the teaching of divine monergism was protected in matters of salvation, the mystery of the continuation of sin and evil in the lives of the baptized remained an ever-present reality. Tilby recognizes that

> even for those who are compelled by [the teaching that we are saved by grace alone, apart from works], the human problem of sin is not finally solved. People go on sinning and not living up to their expectations, falling short of the Christian ideal. Salvation may be once for all, but we have to go on living with ourselves and with others in the present and the future. The question of how to live virtuously is a real one for all of us."[121]

The question on how to live virtuously was indeed something Luther considered and addressed frequently and extensively. Observing and interpreting what I call Luther's refraction of the vice and virtue tradition provides important insight, I believe, towards a more refined

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[120] Tilby, *Deadly Sins*, 33.

[121] Tilby, *Deadly Sins*, 34.

understanding of the proper shape of Christian sanctification as well as the legitimacy and even necessity of an active pursuit of the sanctified life.

This refraction, then, is the subject of the following chapter. Luther will be read bearing in mind the lens of the vice and virtue tradition which he inherited, and we will observe how this teaching changes as passes through the Reformation. At times, Luther can be seen appropriating its major themes, and making use of its insights. At other times, he will reject some of the tradition's developments, deeming them problematic to an understanding of the gospel. Finally, Luther will adapt these teachings to better suit his own theological program. Discerning the final shape of the vice and virtue tradition after it passes through Luther will provide some necessary insight for answering the two major questions of this dissertation. First, it will provide insight into what for Luther are the proper contours of the sanctified life. We will see how Luther's *telos* shifts from the dispositions of the virtues to the commandments of the Decalogue, which the virtues support by serving as habits which facilitate the living out of the commandments of God. Second, this refraction of the vice and virtue tradition will further reveal realities concerning the necessity of active engagement in sanctified living. It will show the importance of cultivating virtues precisely so that they might drive out idolatrous vice, which, when left unaddressed, ultimately leads to unbelief.

CHAPTER THREE

A LUTHERAN REFRACTION OF VICE AND VIRTUE

A Refraction of Vice

Martin Luther's own references to the capital vices *in toto* are somewhat sparse when considering the enormity of his prolific writings. However, it can be concluded with a high degree of confidence that this category of thinking was firmly implanted within his thought life throughout the entirety of his career as a Reformer. In that pivotal year of 1515, when his study of the Psalter shows evidence of his evolving theological outlook, commenting on Ps. 95 and its initial exhortation for the faithful to "come" to the Lord, he notes that some indeed are in need of this summons, for they are "far away." And what has caused this separation? Luther identifies the reasons: "some by pride, greed, sloth, luxury[1], gluttony, anger, envy." He continues, "To come,' then, is to forsake those regions and to approach their opposite, and thus to adore."[2]

Here, several things are of note. First, while it will become apparent that Luther, with great frequency throughout his writings, will refer to at least several of the capital vices together as representative for the whole, this is one of the places he systematically employs the entire list. Second, he recognizes that these vices are indeed the very things that separate one from God, that is, have either prevented or interrupted faith. Finally, in apparent concert with the vice/virtue tradition, he recognizes that to approach the Lord and adore is to forsake vices for the sake of their opposites, presumably, by a life lived in virtue.

L'ubomir Batka points out that Luther used these categories early on, for instance: "In his

[1] Here, Luther is employing the Latin term, *luxuria*, which is the term used for lust in Gregory's list.

[2] *LW* 11:259; *WA* 4:106.

sermon on Christ's circumcision of January 1, 1517, Luther spoke in relation to Ps. 51:5 about universal '*malum originale*', which leads to many other evil desires, creating anger, pride, luxury, and greed," and that "at this stage his enumeration leaned on the medieval catalogue of seven mortal[3] sins, which create total separation from God and give rise to many subsequent sins." He continues, "progressively up to 1517, pride became the most important in Luther's view,"[4] and notes further:

> Just before Easter 1518, Luther published *A Brief Explanation of the Decalogue* in order to create a new book for preparation for penance. To each commandment of the Decalogue Luther ascribed a particular mortal sin. Pride is included in the first two commandments, lust and gluttony in the sixth, wrath and envy in the fifth, sloth in the third, and greed in every commandment.[5]

However, Batka continues, while "Luther still used this distinction known to his contemporaries [he] simultaneously moved the emphasis to egocentrically selfish love and contempt for God and neighbor as the result of original sin." Batka believes that eventually, "as Luther's theology developed, he ceased to use this distinction entirely."[6] This is only partially correct, however. It is true, as will be shown, that Luther's conceptualization of sin became less concerned about specific sins, and his understanding moved in the direction of considering all sin

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[3] Here is an example of Batka conflating the term "mortal sin" with that of a "capital vice" or "deadly sin." The clear reference in what follows are the particular categories of the capital vices from the vice tradition, not the Roman Catholic category of mortal sins (as opposed to venial). It is likely that Batka is merely following the lead of Luther, who on occasions conflates this terminology as well. In many cases, when discussing the distinction of mortal and venial sins, Luther truly means mortal sins proper, but he will use both the term "mortal" and "deadly" to refer to the categories of the seven capital vices.

[4] L'ubomir Batka, "Luther's Teaching on Sin and Evil," in *Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, (Oxford, UK: 2015), 237.

[5] Batka, "Sin and Evil," 237 (Citing *WA* 1:254).

[6] Batka, "Sin and Evil," (Citing *WA* 1:322). While in this reference Luther refers to each of the capital vices, and does refer to them as "mortal sins," Batka, in attempting to demonstrate that Luther eventually ceases to use this distinction, actually conflates the categories of capital vice and mortal sin. He continues, speaking of Luther abandoning "the differentiation between *peccatum veniale* and *peccatum mortale*" [rejecting] the vice catalogues" (236). While this is true, that Luther abandons this latter distinction of "mortal sins" proper, one can hardly be so dismissive about Luther's further use of capital vice categories, because he employs this terminology with extreme frequency when discussing sin in particular fashion.

a particular manifestation of idolatry, with the result that pride became the most important. However, regarding the distinction of the "mortal (that is, in this case, specifically the capital vices, or, deadly) sins," Luther would continue to refer to them well beyond 1518, and makes use of their nomenclature with great frequency throughout the corpus of his writings when specifically addressing sin, as will be shown.

Since 1515 represents the very early stage of the development of Luther's theological mindset over and against Scholasticism, one might expect remnants of that pattern to be retained for a time, and then, later shed. However, such is not the case. Thirteen years later, in 1528, Luther's outlook has matured, and indeed even been nuanced by his growing realization that the sinful nature within believers is all too apt to abuse the freedom given by the true gospel of Jesus Christ. In that formative period that called forth the Saxon Visitation to confront the moral laxity of life in the typical Christian parish, Luther was also in the midst of lecturing on 1 Timothy. There, in passing reference, he comments: "I don't know whether I would want to live with crude barbarians. In any kind of people I find Satan and the seven deadly sins."[7] Here, at mid-career, as Luther considered sin in a generic, comprehensive way, the category of capital vices had certainly not left his thoughts.

As Luther's life drew to a close, the last decade was dedicated to a focus on his Genesis lectures, albeit punctuated by other tasks, notably negotiations at Smalcald and tending to the antinomian controversies. In 1545, however, in some of the last exegetical commentary Luther would pen, we find another pertinent reference. Expositing the Joseph narrative, and speaking of the nature of the typical royal Egyptian household, Luther notes that though Joseph was loved much and admired by many for all the notable virtues that adorned his life, still, not all the

[7] *LW* 28:340; *WA* 26:89.

servants loved him and he certainly had rivals and opponents, for “the court devil is not so dead, and here the seven deadly sins hold sway to a far greater extent than they do in the households of private persons.”[8] Near the end of his life then, Luther recognized that sin always manifests itself in familiar ways—invoking the cultural memory of the capital vices, well aware of the way that the devil uses these vices to warp what is good, right, and just in the world.

Thus, in the three decades spanning the second half of Luther’s life, rather than shun these categories of vice in favor of a generic and bland talk of “sin,” Luther continued to use them as lively categories to illustrate the manifestation of sin. While it is true, and will be shown, that Luther had little patience for the “enumeration of sin,” according to various lists invented by man, still, he had an appreciation that sin wears predictable and familiar faces in the lives of sinful human beings. His understanding and appreciation of this reality are perhaps what allowed him to retain this old categorization of chief vices throughout his life, even as he distanced himself from all things scholastic. Indeed, for Luther, sin is always specific, particular, and sadly recognizable when it rears its ugly head in the lives of the faithful.

Concupiscence as Original Sin

While insights concerning the nature of justification are typically considered the primary fruit of the Reformation, Luther certainly arrived at this understanding in tandem with his recognition of the radical nature of sin which imprisons man in complete bondage to unrighteousness. Berndt Hamm notes that as we study the early lectures “on the Psalms (1513–15), Romans (1515–16), Galatians (1516–17), and … Hebrews (1517–18)” (which began in the winter semester of the *95 Theses*), we are given “a clear glimpse into how Luther’s Reformation

[8] *LW* 8:56; *WA* 44:620.

theology came into being. They show us how he sought a way out of the agonizing discrepancy between the late medieval religious demand for achievement and his experience of radical sin."[9]

What Luther realized through both his personal existential experience and his careful reading of Scripture, is that contrary to what he had inherited from the scholastic tradition, concupiscence, or sinful desire, should not merely be considered the tinder of sin, but rather is to be identified as evidence and the lasting remnant of original sin itself. His conclusions on this subject are expressed over and against Latomus in 1521: "I say that they cannot deny that two evil things survive baptism, sin and its passions. The words of St. Paul are self-evident: sin, the tinder [*fomes*], is natural evil, while passion and lust are its motion."[10] This position was settled upon by Luther already as he lectured on Romans in conjunction with his study of Augustine. There he writes:

> [Men] are driven to forget that the flesh is itself an infirmity or wound of the whole man who by grace is beginning to be healed in both mind and spirit … For it is the same body which seeks health and yet is compelled to do things which belong to its weakness. The same body does both of these things *Contra Julianum*, III, 20, says: "Concupiscence is so great an evil that it cannot be overcome in actual combat, until, like a wound in the body, it can be healed by the perfect cure."[11]

And further,

> In *Contra Julianum*, Book II, blessed Augustine says: "For how is sin dead, when it works so many things in us even when we struggle against it? … It is no longer called sin in the sense that it makes us guilty, but because it comes to us as a result of the guilt of the first man and because by its rebellion it strives to draw us into the same guilt. This sin is the original blemish of the tinder about which we have stated earlier … and in the first book, chapter 23 of his writings to Valerius, Augustine says: "Concupiscence is no longer a sin in the regenerate, so long as there is no consenting to it" … but in a manner of speaking it is called sin because it has been produced by sin and makes a person guilty.[12]

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[9] Hamm, *Early Luther*, 158.

[10] *LW* 32:214; *WA* 8:96.

[11] *LW* 25:340–41; *WA* 56:352.

[12] *LW* 25:341; *WA* 56:352–53.

Thus, in wrestling with the reality of the struggle of the sinful flesh depicted by St. Paul in Rom. 7, Luther came to the conclusion that while reason might not understand mere desire to be sinful in and of itself, nevertheless, the revealed law of God with its prohibition against coveting demonstrates that it is. Luther writes: "For [Paul] clearly adduces the moral law in Romans 7[:7], 'I should not have known that concupiscence is sin, if the law had not said, You shall not covet.'"[13] Later, in his polemical piece, *Against Latomus*, he would expound further: "For nature did not call this wanton itching sin, but rather its evil use on the bodies of others, as in debauchery, adultery, and fornication. Similarly, it does not call anger and avarice sin, but rather their expression in theft, fraud, slander, murder—and so for other vices."[14] Luther understood that while natural revelation does not convict us that the existences of these vices alone are sinful, God's Word calls on us to acknowledge the reality that sin exists not just at the level of the outward deed, but within the deepest desires of our fallen hearts.

In the treatise *Freedom of a Christian* in 1520, Luther reflects on how the commandments of God "teach us what we ought to do, but do not give us the power to do it. [Rather] they are intended to teach man to know himself, that through them he may recognize his inability to do good an may despair of his own ability … for example, the commandment, 'You shall not covet' [Exod. 20:17], is a command which proves us all to be sinners, for no one can avoid coveting no matter how much he may struggle against it."[15] In the *Treatise on Good Works* from that same year, he identifies the presence of sinful desire with original sin:

> The last two commandments are perfectly clear. They forbid the sinful lusts of the flesh and the coveting of temporal goods. These desires do no harm to our neighbor, and yet they persist to the grave … set[ting] as a goal [that] which we do not attain … for nobody has ever been so holy that he never felt some evil inclination within

[13] *LW* 34:114; *WA* 39/1:49 (1535 *Theses Concerning Faith and Law*).

[14] *LW* 32:224; *WA* 8:104.

[15] *LW* 31:348; *WA* 7:52.

> himself … for original sin is born in us by nature: it may be checked, but it cannot be entirely uprooted except through death.[16]

Batka says that this position then "became the *cantus firmus*" of Luther's theology. "He continued reading Augustine and became firmly convinced he was right. Regardless of its condemnation by Leo X in *Exsurge Domine* 1520 … he never gave up this position."[17]

Indeed, Rom. 7:7 (and really all of Paul's thought expressed in Rom. 7) was pivotal for Luther, as it taught that the stain of sin remained after baptism, as evidenced by the continual and unavoidable presence of covetous desire. He quips about the Scholastics:

> They call it Penalty and not guilt, claiming it to be a defect or weakness, rather than sin. My answer is that all this is arbitrarily fabricated without any basis or reason in Scripture. Indeed, it is contrary to Scripture, for St. Paul does not say, "I find in me a defect," but expressly, "With my flesh I serve the law of sin" [Rom. 7:25], and again, "The sin which dwells in me" [Rom. 7:20] does the evil. And St. John says not, "If we say that we have no defect," but, "If we say we have not sinned" [1 John 1:10].[18]

Galatians 5:17 was also key for Luther in bolstering this teaching. Continuing in his *Defense and Explanation of All the Articles* of 1521 he pens:

> [Paul] writes to baptized people and to saints in these words: The desires of the flesh are against the spirit, and the desires of the spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would." What can anyone say in reply to this plain passage? It says clearly that they have flesh and spirit within themselves, two contradictory desires or lust which are so deep-rooted that although they would wish to be without the desires of the flesh, they cannot achieve this. Where does such evil lust come from in people who are baptized and saints? No doubt from their physical birth, when this original sin of evil desire is born with them; and it lasts until death and battles and resists our spirit as long as we live.[19]

In this same treatise Luther sharpens this position: "this original sin, born in the flesh, passes away with baptism as guilt, but remains as work, although it is forgiven, nevertheless it

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[16] *LW* 44:114; *WA* 6:276.

[17] Batka, "Sin and Evil," 239.

[18] *LW* 32:25; *WA* 7:338.

[19] *LW* 32:19; *WA* 7:329.

lives, twists, turns, raves, and assails us."[20] This understanding too, Luther was sure, was held by Augustine, and the central thread of Luther's argument in *Against Latomus* is expressed in the repeatedly cited words from Augustine: "All sin is forgiven in baptism, not so that it no longer exists, but so that it is no longer imputed."[21] For Luther Augustine's authority was derived from Paul, who was also clear on the issue: "Paul calls that which remains after baptism, sin; the fathers call it a weakness and imperfection, rather than sin. Here we stand at the parting of the ways. I follow Paul, and you the fathers—with the exception of Augustine … I have Paul's term on my side."[22]

Luther continued to express great frustration against scholastic schools for not recognizing what for him is a clear Biblical reality. When writing his *Misuse of the Mass* in 1521, Luther chides: "While they write and say that evil desire in the Ninth and Tenth Commandments is no sin, they pretend at the same time to preach and teach both commandments, although in fact they permit evil desire and thus break the commandment of God."[23] Indeed, in addition to Augustine, and the authority of the Apostle Paul, Luther leaned on the Decalogue to teach the truth concerning concupiscent desire. Earlier in the *Misuse of the Mass*, he wrote:

> In order that every man may be aware of these things, however, let us run through the Ten Commandments and see how the pope deals with them, beginning with the last and least commandment. Moses says: "You shall not covet or desire" [Exod. 20:17; Deut. 5:21]; and Paul repeats it in Rom. 7[:7]. Hence evil desire and covetousness is a sin, as Moses and the divine law have ordained. Over against this the Sodoms and Gomorrahs of Paris and Louvain with their master, the pope, have set up a new principle and article of faith, which reads thus: Evil desire and covetousness is no sin, but a weakness and a failing; and if the flesh rages against the spirit, that is no sin. Therefore it is quite proper, according to the pope's new ten commandments, to have evil desire and covetousness without sinning. And Moses and God have lied, as have

[20] *LW* 32:27; *WA* 7:343.

[21] *LW* 32:209; *WA* 8:93 (citing Augustine *Retractions*, I, 19, *Migne* 32, 614).

[22] *LW* 32:220–21; *WA* 8:101–02.

[23] *LW* 36:210; *WA* 8:547.

> all who agree with Moses when he said: "You shall not have evil desire and covetousness." If you reject Moses, however, you also reject Christ; because those who have such evil desire are defended and immediately freed by the pope, and have no need of Christ's grace.[24]

Fifteen years later, in 1536, Luther again takes up these themes in his *Disputation Concerning Justification*. His words evince complete consistency with the understanding he had arrived at early on:

> St. Augustine and the blessed Paul are the most reliable doctors on the matter of original sin. For they define this sin correctly. The whole Epistle to the Romans, as well as the Epistle to the Galatians, is a definition of original sin, which is a kind of corruption of nature, which drives us to resist the Spirit. So St. Augustine correctly defined it against Julian an Jerome. But the scholastic doctors contended that it is only a condition and not sin of the kind that would cast us away from the eyes of God. Just as Aristotle speaks of affections which are in us but bring neither blame nor praise, so according to them as according to him, concupiscence is a kind of indifference affection … which does not damn us … for they deny that concupiscence is sin after baptism, so that if you follow concupiscence and only do not commit adultery, it is not sin … All the scholastics agree with the philosophers. Accordingly, since that very concupiscence is really that evil which is innate in us by nature … it is necessary for us to examine original sin diligently so see what it is.[25]

Again in this treatise he twice cites Augustine's reflections "Sin is forgiven not so that it does not exist, but so that it is not imputed"[26] and concludes: "We … declare [this] with Augustine, who alone preserved this teaching for us."[27]

Luther's doctrine of concupiscence has continuity and even strong affinity with the vice tradition, which identified the desires catalogued by the capital vices as not merely inert precursors to sin, but rather dangerous and deadly in themselves. In other words, a lustful thought is not, as Aristotle might posit, a mere affection which becomes either a vice or virtue, or, in the eyes of the scholastics, mere tinder which is not sin unless it becomes enflamed by

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[24] *LW* 36:204; *WA* 8:542.

[25] *LW* 34:186–87; *WA* 39/1:117–18.

[26] *LW* 34:180, 194; *WA* 39/1:111, 39/1:125.

[27] *LW* 34:180; *WA* 39/1:111.

outward action. No, these "thoughts" are the very essence of the sinful nature within—for Luther the "motions of original sin … just as Paul says, 'I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive' [Rom. 7:23], as lust for young women."[28] Indeed this original sin "disturbs us greatly … [and] moves man to avarice, disobedience, and other vices."[29]

Covetousness as Idolatry

Luther's insistence over and against the scholastics on the depth of our depravity, and the resulting recognition that even inner concupiscence is sin was only the first step toward another important recognition: not only is all desire in fallen man sinful, but all coveting is nothing other than idolatry. He sets forth in the *Freedom of a Christian*, "Therefore in order not to covet and to fulfil the commandment, a man is compelled to despair of himself, to seek the help which he does not find in himself elsewhere and from someone else, as stated in Hosea [3:19]: 'Destruction is your own, O Israel: your help is only in me.' As we fare with respect to one commandment, so we fare with all, for it is equally impossible for us to keep any one of them."[30] Here Luther exposes all coveting as a grasping for help, but inevitably seeking help in the wrong places—either in the self or some other thing.[31] When these things are trusted more than God, it

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[28] *LW* 34:182; *WA* 39/1:113.

[29] *LW* 34:182; *WA* 39/1:113.

[30] *LW* 31:348; *WA* 7:52.

[31] Michael Lockwood, in his study on Luther's theology of idolatry, *The Unholy Trinity* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2016) provides another way to comprehend the nature of idolatry. He conveys that "Luther describes idolatry as primarily a matter of faith, and defines idols in terms of the function we expect them to play in our lives" (243). As such, he posits that when Luther approached the topic of idolatry, he never understands idols to serve as substitutes for a generic God, rather, idols attempt to provide substitutes for the specific functions of the triune God, "attempt[ing] to replace him means replacing [specifically] Father, Son, and Holy Spirit … Since the true God for Luther is always the triune God, he then looks for things that people put in the place of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (34). Lockwood observes that when we trust in things to provide for our physical needs, we substitute those things as idols in place of God the Father who alone provides. When we seek alternative means to justify ourselves, we establish those means as idols over Christ, the Redeemer, and when we seek to become wise and holy by means

is indeed exposed as idolatry. As Rom. 7:7 provided *the sedes doctrinae* concerning an understanding of concupiscence as sinful, so Col. 3:5 supported Luther's acknowledgement that all covetousness is idolatry: "The Apostle Paul calls no other sin idolatry except covetousness [Col. 3:5], because this sin shows most starkly that a man does not trust God for anything, but expects more benefit from his money than from God."[32]

In 1524, Luther penned an *Exposition of Psalm 127 for the Christians at Riga in Livonia*, as a courtesy response to the community of believers gathered there. The sustained theme of the exposition is from verse 1 of the Psalm: "unless the Lord keeps the city, the watchman guards in vain." Luther tells his audience that "I selected this Psalm because it so beautifully turns the heart away from covetousness and concern for temporal livelihood and possessions toward faith in God, and in a few words teaches us how Christians are to act with respect to the accumulation and ownership of the world's goods."[33] He goes on to convey how concern for things of the world hinder the Gospel from bearing fruit, and indeed this comprises the thorns among which some of the seed of God's Word is eventually choked out, proving unfruitful. Luther instead exhorts the faithful Christians at Riga to be "diligent, in order that the gospel may become rich and fruitful among [them] in all manner of understanding and of good works" noting that it is

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other than the Holy Spirit and His Word, this too, is idolatry (34). Lockwood's analysis of replacing the functions of God is helpful, and a complementary way to conceive of the nature of idolatry. The present study looks specifically at classic ways the replacement of these functions takes form in the sinful human heart. For example, greed is a specific way sin is manifest in those who seek security in earthly goods, and not the provision of the Father. This of course, comports well with Lockwood's analysis of idolatry serving as a replacement for a specific function of God. However, this study will also demonstrate that idolatry is manifest in ways that perhaps are not specifically replacements for the functions of the triune God. For instance, when we consider a vice like envy, this is not precisely seeking to replace the function of either God as Provider, Son as Redeemer, or Spirit as Revealer, but rather it is best understood as discontentment with one's God-given status in the world, and a perverted reaction towards one's neighbor as a result of that discontentment. As such, while in many ways Lockwood's analysis of idolatry is helpful and even complementary to the present study, this project will treat of idolatry through a slightly different lens of the vice tradition as it is appropriated by Luther, and reveal further and somewhat different contours of the nature of idolatry as well.

[32] *LW* 44:108; *WA* 6:272 (1520 *Treatise on Good Works*).

[33] *LW* 45:317; *WA* 15:360.

indeed “covetousness” which works against these things, which is the “fruit of pernicious unbelief,” that is, idolatry.[34]

Here, Luther moves toward a consideration of sin’s actual nature, rather than worrying over specific sins. All specific sins, for Luther, are but the symptoms of idolatrously clinging to false gods.[35] Certainly, the primary false god people typically trust is themselves. As was noted above, Batka observes that over time, pride became the most important vice for Luther, overshadowing and heading the list of all others, just as the vice tradition had recognized it as the root of all sin. Luther readily concurred with the great Confessor from Hippo: “In all of these [sinful] deeds we can see the same thing: love of self which seeks its own advantage, robs both God and one’s neighbor of their due, and concedes neither to God nor man anything they have, or are, or could do or become. Augustine expressed this succinctly when he said, self-love is the beginning of every sin.”[36]

This “self-love,” or pride, that became so primary for Luther will be dealt with more specifically later in this dissertation. For now, however, we consider the reality that both pride and avarice have sometimes battled for the status as the truly ultimate “source sin.” Luther in his late Genesis lectures affirms this: “avarice and pride at the court are the root of all evils.”[37] Here again, Luther takes his cue from Scripture, specifically Paul in 1 Tim. 6:10, from which Luther

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[34] *LW* 45:336–37; *WA* 15:378.

[35] Robert Kolb, in his work *Luther’s Treatise on Christian Freedom and Its Legacy*, observes “in lecturing on Romans 6 and 7 Luther experienced what Thorston Jacobi has labeled ‘a kind of reformational breakthrough’ in distinguishing a ‘moral-metaphysical and a theological understanding of the sin and the law.’ [Luther] no longer regarded the law’s demands for external obedience and the violation of commandments two through ten as the fundamental meaning of ‘sin’ and ‘law’ (23). As such, the first commandment becomes the proper lens through which Luther would view all sins—as will be shown in the following—he regards them as various manifestations of idolatry.

[36] *LW* 43:21; *WA* 10/2:385 (1522 *Personal Prayer Book*).

[37] *LW* 8:63; *WA* 44:626.

calls avarice the “home and training ground of all vices”[38] because, as he had noted earlier in his Psalms lectures “for … covetousness is the root of all evils.”[39] Even in the *Large Catechism* Luther would state: “So these commandments [the Ninth and Tenth Commandments] are aimed directly against envy and miserable covetousness, so that God may remove the root and cause from which arise all injuries to our neighbors.”[40]

Here, truly “avarice” is used by Luther with a connotation nearly equivalent with covetousness, that is a generic wanting. In the vice tradition, and perhaps even likely in 1 Tim. 6:10, the intended referent might more likely be avarice in the sense of greed for ever-more possessions or money. But this does not obfuscate the simple point Luther is trying to establish, that sin and evil arise from inner desires, which inevitably cling to the self (pride) or things or the world (greed), and from this comes unbelief, that is idolatry—a trusting in that which is not God and thus cannot help. And so Luther can conclude, as expressed already in 1520: “Therefore God has rightly included all things, not under anger or lust, but under unbelief.”[41] In his 1527 exegesis of Hebrews he writes: “It follows as a corollary that faith in Christ is every virtue and that unbelief is every vice.”[42]

This expansive understanding of covetousness prompted Luther to deplore any attempts to enumerate all sins and to be more concerned about man as “sinner” than about a man’s particular sins. Ultimately, this led to Luther’s efforts to subvert the distinction among sins, specifically Aquinas’ distinction between venial and mortal sin. In his work, *The Sacrament of Penance*,

[38] *LW* 6:7; *WA* 44:4.

[39] *LW* 11:444; *WA* 4:326 (1515 Lecture on Ps. 119:39).

[40] LC I, 310 in Kolb and Wengert, 427.

[41] *LW* 31:350–51; *WA* 7:54 (1520 *Freedom of a Christian*).

[42] *LW* 29:155; *WA* 57/3:151.

from 1519, Luther asks: “What are mortal and venial sins? There has never yet been a teacher, nor will there ever be one, learned enough to give us a dependable rule for distinguishing venial from mortal sins, except in such obvious offenses against God’s commandments as adultery, murder, theft, falsehood, slander, betrayal hatred, and the like. It is, moreover, entirely up to God to judge which other sins he regards as mortal.”[43] In his 1520 *Discussion on How Confession Should Be Made*, he reinforces this statement saying, “It is impossible for a man to know when he is mortally proud, or lustful, or envious in heart,”[44] and “the most mortal of all sins, however, is not to believe one is guilty of damnable and mortal sin before God.”[45] The following year he would write in *Against Latomus*: “if you call [what remains after baptism only a] venial sin … you have made sin to reign, you serve it, and have sinned mortally.”[46]

What Luther knew was that if all covetous desire is not only sin, but ultimately “deadly,” then it is fruitless to attempt to weigh the relative degree of various sins or try to assess its impact on one’s soul. While it was obvious that different kinds of sins have varying degrees of effect upon our souls and on our neighbors, since they are all different symptoms of the root sin of idolatry, none of them can be dismissed as merely “light” or venial, and all of them can capably damn the sinner to hell. He reasons, concerning scholastic teaching, “Even if this ‘tinder’ we have been talking about were, as they mistakenly think, not sin but only a disease or weakness, everyone nevertheless realizes, I would think, that this weakness would also bar the entrance to heaven.”[47]

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[43] *LW* 35:20; *WA* 2:737.

[44] *LW* 39:33; *WA* 6:161.

[45] *LW* 39:35; *WA* 6:163.

[46] *LW* 32:214; *WA* 8:96.

[47] *LW* 32:30; *WA* 7:347.

Vice as the Proliferation of Idolatry

Too readily, it seems, students of Luther simplistically conclude that by his assigning all manifestations of sin under the head of "idolatry," Luther's continuity with the capital vice tradition is thereby diminished. This conclusion, however, is a serious mistake. Luther absolutely set out to expose covetous desire itself as idolatry thereby undermining scholastic teaching. But this reality should not be allowed to overshadow another reality: Luther clearly understood that sin is never generic, but always manifests itself particularly—the natural end of idolatry is always some particular vice, and Luther demonstrates this when he addresses sin. The twenty years that passed from Luther's *Lectures on Romans* to his *Disputation Concerning Justification* are bookended by statements that attest to this reality. He considers in his work on Romans how men "fashion a gracious God for themselves," as they "worship the figment of their imagination more truly than the true God." This "brings along," he writes, "a love of vanity, which produces blindness; this in turn results in idolatry, idolatry leads to a whirlpool of vices."[48] Two decades later he writes: "Unbelief brings with it all the other sins, since it is the principal sin against the first commandment,"[49] and a few years after that, in his Genesis lectures, concludes: "the source of all sin truly is unbelief and doubt and abandonment of the Word. Because the world is full of these, it remains in idolatry, denies the truth of God, and invents a new god."[50]

Luther's awareness of the deadly specificity and particularity of sin is evident early on. From the 1515 Psalms lectures he observes with classic vice verbiage, "Now the devil is satisfied, not when they have fallen, but when they persevere in the sins of the flesh. And note the sequence, how riches produce luxury … the riches come in openly through covetousness, and

[48] *LW* 25:160; *WA* 56:179.

[49] *LW* 34:154–55; *WA* 39/1:84.

[50] *LW* 1:149; *WA* 42:112.

then follows idleness and gluttony and delight in the use of riches … the flesh is weighed down with its vices."[51] Another obvious reference to the capital vices and their sinful spawn is his *Exposition of the Lord's Prayer* from 1519: "The old Adam is simply the evil leaning in us toward *wrath, hatred, unchastity, greed, vainglory, pride*, and the like. These evil impulses were inherited from Adam and born in us through our mothers. *From these stem all kinds of evil deeds* such as murder, adultery, robbery, and similar transgressions of God's commandments."[52]

As the vice tradition taught that sin is proliferated when the capital vices give rise to various offspring, so too Luther understood that sin gave way to more sin. Even in his landmark essay, *Treatise on Good Works*, one can see echoes of Gregory and Prudentius's battle imagery: "For sin has hemmed us in with … powerful and mighty armies … God gives us unceasing occasion to do good works, that is, to fight these very real enemies and sins."[53]

Of particular note is Luther's practice of refusing to speak of sin in merely generic terms. Rather, as he quips at Latomus, one should use "unmistakable terms, not simply speaking of sin, but calling it by its names: anger, passion, covetousness."[54] Indeed, the "sin and evil passion that remain after baptism … are openly called anger, lust, covetousness, and incontinence—names which, by universal consent and in all languages, are customarily used to designate faults and sins."[55]

One can see this emphasis on the explicit naming of sins readily on display in Luther's 1539 *On the Councils and the Church*. There, he contends, "we should be happy if there were no

[51] *LW* 10:357–58; *WA* 3:421.

[52] *LW* 42:43–44; *WA* 2:100–01 (*emphasis* mine).

[53] *LW* 44:49; *WA* 6:225.

[54] *LW* 32:207; *WA* 8:92.

[55] *LW* 32:216; *WA* 8:98.

pride, avarice, usury, envy, drunkenness, gluttony, adultery, or wantonness among our people. But there is so much weakness and imperfection among us that we induce but a few to do these good works [the Ten Commandments]."[56] In his 1519 *Exposition of the Lord's Prayer* when treating the Sixth Petition regarding "lead us not into temptation," Luther sets forth the reality that the "dragon assails us constantly, bent on swallowing us with his jaws … in other words, he says that all our members and senses hinder us, lure us on, and move us to unchastity, anger, pride, greed, and the like." He continues by explaining how when trial comes into the life of a Christian, we are assaulted from "two sides." First, we are assaulted from what he terms the "left side" (that is, misfortune in life). In the midst of this suffering, some call upon God and are able to overcome, but others "go their own way in anger, hatred, and impatience … the trial has defeated them, and now they yield to every base impulse." Another sore trial, Luther teaches, is found at the "right hand" (that is, the sinful flesh). "It is the trial that lures us to unchastity, lust, pride, greed, and vainglory."[57] Here the inclusion of vice language to describe sin's manifestation in the Christian's life is abundantly apparent.

In the *Large Catechism*, addressing the Sixth Petition on the subject of temptation, Luther vividly expresses the challenges we face as we "live in the flesh and carry the old creature around our necks; it goes to work and lures us daily into unchastity, laziness, gluttony, drunkenness, greed and deceit, into acts of fraud and deception against our neighbor—in short, into all kinds of evil lusts that by nature cling to us and to which we are incited." He continues, warning that the world "assails us by word and deed and drives us to anger and impatience," so that "in short , there is nothing but hatred and envy, enmity, violence and injustice, perfidy,

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[56] *LW* 41:18; *WA* 50:516.

[57] *LW* 42:72–74; *WA* 2:123–25.

vengeance, cursing, reviling, slander, arrogance, and pride, along with fondness for luxury, honor, fame, and power."[58] While these vice lists admittedly go well beyond the traditional seven capital vices, it remains illustrative of the reality of Luther's penchant for forthrightly and routinely addressing sin in all of its terrible particularity.

Even in Luther's scriptural exegesis, the categories of vice are never too far away. In a 1515 lecture on Ps. 102, Luther informs the reader that he believes this Psalm "is properly esteemed as one to be prayed for the penitent … as often as they have fallen … [into] the fire of anger, luxury, gluttony, greed, pride, etc."[59] In a 1532 commentary on Ps.45, Luther laments "what a great disgrace it is that man's will should be turned from God, that he … is full of lust, pride, avarice, and the like."[60] The categories of the capital vices being employed here are unmistakable.

Luther is so often assumed to have been fully dismissive of "vice and virtue theology" due to its dominance in scholastic teaching, that it seems prudent to demonstrate with a few more examples the remarkable prevalence of traditional vice language in Luther's writing. From his early Romans lectures, he writes: "it is easy, if we use any diligence at all, to see the depravity of our will in our love of sensual evils and our flight from things that are good, if, for instance, we are drawn toward lust, greed, gluttony … and we abhor chastity, generosity, sobriety, humility, shame."[61] Further he considers the truth that by successfully enduring the temptations of vice, we are strengthened in their opposites, "thus luxurious living makes the soul more chaste when it attacks, pride makes the soul humbler, laziness makes it more active, avarice makes it more

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[58] LC III, 102–03 in Kolb and Wengert, 454.

[59] *LW* 11:303; *WA* 4:152–53.

[60] *LW* 12:207; *WA* 40/2:485.

[61] *LW* 25:245; *WA* 56:258.

generous, anger, more mild, gluttony, more abstemious."[62] Not only is the entire list of seven capital vices, save envy, included in this example, but Luther readily pairs these vices with their corresponding virtues, early evidence of his awareness and willingness to see virtuous living according to the contrarian scheme.

Later in the same lectures, he speaks about how one may be "guilty of pride, wantonness, avarice, contentions, wrath, and … may possesses a whole catalog of vices."[63] In a 1522 *Preface to St. Peter*, he notes that Peter clearly depicts false teachers by identifying them with "avarice, pride, wickedness, fornication, and hypocrisy."[64] In a 1528 *Sermon on the Lord's Supper*, he exhorts the faithful to partake of the Sacrament for their own sakes, due to the "exceedingly great" temptations of "adultery, of fornication, avarice, hatred, pride, envy, of unbelief, and despair."[65] From his 1540 commentary on John's Gospel: "The world perseveres in its lusts, gluttony, drunkenness, pomp, greed, hatred, envy, and other sins."[66] Again, once a reader becomes even slightly familiar with the categories of the capital vice tradition, Luther's allusions to it, in part, and sometimes in whole, are unmistakable, and easily recognizable. Examples could easily abound showing Luther's studied practice of addressing sin in the particular ways it is present. And the reason for this, to be discussed shortly, was that vice served as a ready diagnostic of the sins of the inner heart, and thus was of great application in the practice of the confession of sins.

Truly, Luther recognized, when it came to vices, the Christian has no escape. Every

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[62] *LW* 25:319; *WA* 56:331.

[63] *LW* 25:469; *WA* 56:447.

[64] *LW* 35:391–92; *WA* DB 7:315.

[65] *LW* 51:191; *WA* 30:120–21.

[66] *LW* 22:390; *WA* 47:111.

believer will struggle with at least one vice and probably more, and at any given stage in one's life the particular vice he struggles with is constantly evolving. As Luther wrangled with Latomus regarding the true nature of sin, he taught:

> It is indeed true that there is no one passion ceaselessly driving us to distraction. Anger does not always burn, evil desires does not always rage, we are not constantly tormented with envy, but one of these succeeds the other. When they all sleep, then languor and sloth do not sleep. If you are strenuously active, then pride awakens. As I have most truly said, just as we are not without the flesh, so we do not work without the flesh. So we are neither free of carnal faults, nor do we act without them.[67]

Since we cannot free ourselves form vice, our only refuge is to confess those vices which have us in their grips that we might implore our Lord to grant us pardon and release from them. It is to the topic of confession with respect to the inner heart that we now turn.

The Decalogue and the Inner Heart

The medieval church's heavy emphasis on the sacrament of penance led to the development of the practice of very extensive and in theory exhaustive confession of sins. In his treatise from 1520, *A Discussion on How Confession Should Be Made*, Luther attempts to educate Christians on the proper manner of confession and warns that the prevailing practices were apt to lead one to trust in the robustness of his confession, rather than God's mercy:

> In our time, almost every conscience has been seduced by human teachings into a false trust in its own righteousness and works, and learning about faith and trust in God has nearly ceased. That is why it is necessary, above all, that he who confesses should not put his trust in the confession he is about to make or has made. Rather, he should put his trust in the most merciful promise of God alone, with complete faith and with certainty that he who promised the forgiveness of sins … for we are to glory not in making confession but in him who promised forgiveness to those who confess. That is, [we glory] not in the merit and sufficiency of our confession (for such do not exist), but in the truth and certainty of his promise.[68]

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[67] *LW* 32:253; *WA* 8:124.

[68] *LW* 39:28; *WA* 6:158.

He goes on to warn specifically against "confusion of distinctions" such as "what [a man has sinned] against the three theological virtues of faith hope and love, and against the four cardinal virtues; what [he has sinned] through the five senses, through the seven mortal sins…"[69]

At the beginning of his *Prayer Book* in 1522, Luther precisely takes aim at other common prayer books of the day, specifically popular titles such as *Hortulus animae* and *Paridisus animae*, calling for their "total extermination" because they "drub into the minds of simple people such a wretched counting up of sins and going to confession."[70] Later in the *Large Catechism* Luther bemoans the "pope's tyranny" of the "intolerable burden and weight he imposed on the Christian community" greatly burdening and torturing consciences with "the enumeration of all kinds of sin that no one was able to confess purely enough," and continued to advocate for the call to release the faithful from the "torture of enumerating all sins in detail."[71]

Indeed, as was common in confessional rites of the day, various collections of what Luther labeled "tedious catalogues" of sins were not only in use, but popular. For instance, Kolde's catechism, *A Fruitful Mirror*[72], included examination of the conscience for six sins against the Holy Spirit, the seven deadly sins, the seven sacraments, the seven gifts of the spirit, the eight Beatitudes, the nine alien sins, the twelve articles of faith, and more.[73] Luther called these kinds of lists "most hateful" and declared them "utterly useless, indeed, altogether harmful."[74] It is

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[69] *LW* 39:36; *WA* 6:163. Here Luther uses the term "mortal," though the clear intent is to refer to the "deadly sins," that is the particular sins that comprise the list of seven capital vices. It is also worth noting in this instance how Luther has in his sights the entire notion of the vice and virtue tradition, with the notable exception of the contrarian virtues.

[70] *LW* 43:11–12; *WA* 10/2:375.

[71] LC VI, 1–4 in Kolb and Wengert, 476.

[72] A helpful English translation of Kolde's Catechism is found in Denis Janz' work: *Three Reformation Catechisms: Catholic, Anabaptist, Lutheran* (New York and Toronto: Mellen, 1982) 29–130.

[73] Janz, *Three Reformation Catechisms*, 65–73.

[74] *LW* 39:36–37; *WA* 6:163 (1520 *Discussion on How Confession Should Be Made*).

important to note here, what will ultimately be concluded by the close of this section—namely, that Luther's issue with the practice of the extensive enumeration of sins was centered on the reality that it needlessly vexed the consciences of the faithful. His issue was not against the practice of carefully naming one's particular sins. As was shown already, for Luther, giving specific names to one's sins is important. However, torturing one's conscience regarding whether or not every last sin has been confessed is something altogether different. Exhaustive enumeration obscured the gospel, calling into question God's forgiveness for the one who fretted that he had not confessed thoroughly enough. Diagnosing one's sin specifically, on the other hand, is simply the proper repentance that rightly prepares one's heart to receive the gospel's assurance.

One could perhaps get the impression that Luther would just as well do away with distinctions like the capital vices, even if for no other reason than the way such lists were abused through their use in the confessional booth to unnecessarily burden the conscience of the penitent. This, however, would not be entirely accurate. Luther maintained that the practice of confession was quite important but desired its simplification. As such, he pointed Christians away from the "tedious catalogues" and instead to the Decalogue. This, he offers, as a "simple Christian form of prayer and mirror for recognizing sin."[75] His counsel was uncomplicated: "we begin with the commandments and there learn to perceive our sin and weaknesses, that is, our spiritual sickness which prevents us from doing or leaving undone as we ought."[76] He confirms the value of the Decalogue in the *Treatise on Good Works* counseling, "there is just no better mirror in which to see your need than the Ten Commandments, in which you will find what you

[75] *LW* 43:12; *WA* 10/2:375 (1522 *Prayer Book*).

[76] *LW* 43:14; *WA* 10/2:377.

lack and what you should seek."[77]

While Luther directs Christian confession towards the Decalogue, though, it is important to note that he does not do so at the expense of the capital vices. Rather, he says, the reason "why one should briefly examine God's Commandments themselves" is because they "undoubtedly contain all sins if understood correctly."[78] In practice, within the same *Prayer Book* which discouraged "useless lists," Luther encourages the penitent believer better to understand how sin is comprehended not by many and sundry lists, but rather *within* the larger context of the Decalogue. He notes that the seven capital vices are in fact part and parcel of the Decalogue, noting how "pride [is] in the First and Second, lust in the Sixth, wrath and hatred in the Fifth, gluttony in the Sixth, sloth in the Third, and for that matter, in all of them."[79]

Thus, Luther urges examination of the conscience in the context of the Ten Commandments, not merely at the level of outward word or deed, but rather, at the level of the Christian heart, from within, where vices representing the sources of sin lie. It is true that Luther explicitly says he is "content with the fact that not all the sins of the heart have to be confessed … for such thoughts are frequently passions … which the soul is forced to bear against its will … therefore, if these secret sins of the heart are to be confessed at all, confession should be made only about those which involved full consent to the deed."[80] But it is also important for Luther, that when deeds against the commandments are confessed, it be recognized that theses sins originate from sinful vice within:

> For example, regarding the commandment, "Thou shall not commit adultery," one should quickly say in what manner he has succumbed to lust be it by deed, word, or

[77] *LW* 44:63; *WA* 6:236.

[78] *LW* 39:37; *WA* 6:164 (1520 *Discussion on How Confession Should Be Made*).

[79] *LW* 43:21; *WA* 10/2:385.

[80] *LW* 39:33–34; *WA* 6:161–62.

> consent, as though he were describing himself completely … likewise, regarding the commandment "You shall not kill," one should quickly say by what kind of anger he had sinned, whether by hate, slander, cursing or the deed itself. And so on with the rest, as I have tried hard to show in my *Preceptorium* and notes on the Decalogue.[81]

Again, it seems clear, it is no accident that Luther chooses as examples two of the seven capital vices.

The same encouragement to consider one's life in light of the cardinal vices can be seen often when Luther treats the Decalogue. In the *Treatise on Good Works*, for instance, as Luther considers the negative side of each commandment he provides a list of how it is broken not just by the outward deed, but by various vices that comprise the inner desires and attitudes of the heart that lead to the act. This practice is present in the *Prayer Book*, the *Large and Small Catechisms*; and in his brief pamphlet *A Simple Way to Pray*, comprised for his barber, where Luther points the Christian to the Decalogue for the examination of conscience.

Luther even used the Decalogue at the level of inner desire as a systematic analytic of the transgressions of Rome. As noted earlier, in his 1521 *Misuse of the Mass*, Luther employed the Decalogue as a rubric for diagnosis: "In order that every man may be aware of these things, however, let us run through the Ten Commandments and see how the pope deals with them…"[82] Then follows over a dozen pages that systematically employ each commandment not only calling out transgressions of outward deed, of which Luther lists plenty, but also exhorting an examination of the inner motives of the heart. For example: "In the Sixth [Commandment] they praise and commend nothing so highly as chastity, but only with words, *not with their hearts* … [because] they occasion greater and more shameful unchastity than the flesh with its ardor and evil desire ever could or would commit," and again, "In the Fifth Commandment they loudly cry

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[81] *LW* 39:37–38; *WA* 6:164.

[82] *LW* 36:204; *WA* 8:542.

that one should not kill, so that everyone would think they mean it *from their hearts*. But by teaching and preaching that one may be angry with one's enemy … they are in truth preaching and teaching the transgression of this commandment of God."[83] In this treatise the Reformer laments how certain papal law "accomplishes the result that men live and remain in pure envy and hate, which is wholly forbidden by God in this commandment," thereby "eradicate[ing] the cross of Christ throughout the world."[84] He further observes how these laws are "breaking and tearing apart not only 'the least of these commandments' … but the greatest as well," thereby "mislead[ing] and ruin[ing] the people,"—sinning "against good morals, but [also] against the faith," and resulting in sins which are to be considered "immeasurably greater than any adultery or murder."[85]

For Luther, then Decalogue served as a readily available mirror of the Christian life within Scripture, and he noted its ability not only to absorb all categories of vice within its prohibitions, but also, as will be shown later, to serve as the most comprehensive guide to the good works of the Christian life. Of course, in doing so, again Luther's justification comes from Scripture and the teachings of our Lord himself. For example, in treating the Sermon on the Mount from Matt. 5, Luther offers a description of the way that Christ himself summarizes the Fifth Commandment: "we must not kill, either by hand, *heart*, or word, by signs or gestures, or by aiding and abetting. *It forbids anger* … anger, reproof, and punishment are the prerogatives of God."[86]

To comprehend how Luther's absorption of virtues into the contours of the Decalogue

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[83] *LW* 36:210; *WA* 8:547 (*emphasis* mine).

[84] *LW* 36:207–08; *WA* 8:545.

[85] *LW* 36:209–10; *WA* 8:546.

[86] LC I, 182 in Kolb and Wengert, 411 (*emphasis* mine).

began to influence a shift in the mindset of the church at the time of the Reformation, one can look again to the art of the church. While it was noted earlier that visualizations of deadly sins and lively virtues were prevalent in churches of the medieval period, by contrast, from the time of the Reformation, even church imagery slowly began to favor the Ten Commandments. Batka writes, "The effect of this new position is visualized vividly in the famous painting from Lucas Cranach in the Lutherhaus in Wittenberg; the painting depicts the transgression of the Decalogue and not just the seven mortal sins."[87] Lucas Cranach's woodcuts associated with each of the commandments in Luther's *Small Catechism* are another example of this, showing the beginnings of a trajectory in church art that has carried down to the present.

Having better understood Luther's appropriation of the themes of the vice tradition, next we take up his relationship to the virtue tradition. But first, there may be some benefit to recap what has been covered to this point. Luther, in concert with the school of the capital vices, but over and against subsequent and recent scholastic thought, understood concupiscent desire within the heart to be not merely the tinder of sin, but rather the living remnant of original sin within humanity that will linger with all, believers and unbelievers, until death. Further, this covetousness which reaches out for the things of the world and either trusts in the self (by pride, envy, or anger) or in some other thing in the world (by greed, gluttony, or lust) are simply one thing: idolatry. In this sense Luther would have us focus our conception of sin in a narrow sense—all vice, regardless of its nature, is merely a particular outward manifestation of idolatry. In this respect, of course, every vice is mortal, or deadly, resulting in the reality that recognizing that one is indeed a sinner is more important than worrying about specific sins. On the other hand, there is Luther's real recognition that idolatry is proliferated in the forms of vices in the

[87] Batka, "Sin and Evil," 237–38.

world, and always manifests itself in specific and particular ways. Rather than discard vice, Luther absorbs the categories of vice into the larger context of the Decalogue for the sake of a simpler examination of the conscience, interpreting the Decalogue at the inner level of the heart, as did our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount. Now we turn our attention to Luther's reception, criticism, and adaptation of the virtue tradition.

A Refraction of Virtue

Perhaps the most well-known and oft-cited theses from Luther's 1517 *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology* are those spoken specifically against Aristotle's *Ethics*, Theses 41–44:

> 41. Virtually the entire *Ethics* of Aristotle is the worst enemy of grace. This in opposition to the scholastics.
>
> 42. It is an error to maintain that Aristotle's statement concerning happiness does not contradict Catholic doctrine. This in opposition to the doctrine on morals.
>
> 43. It is an error to say that no man can become a theologian without Aristotle. This in opposition to common opinion.
>
> 44. Indeed, no one can become a theologian unless he becomes one without Aristotle.[88]

These assertions culminate in the statement of Thesis 50, which seems to render any attempt to appropriate Aristotle's philosophy for the theological task (or at least, presumably, for Luther's theological task!) impossible: "Aristotle is to theology as darkness is to light."[89]

Here, in what is really Luther's first major theological treatise, Luther sets forth to demolish the main contours of scholastic theology, specifically those tenets he had inherited from the Ockhamist school of Gabriel Biel, which he felt posed such a threat to a truly evangelical theology. Of course, what begins to drive that conviction, as we just explored, had

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[88] *LW* 31:12; *WA* 1:226.

[89] *LW* 31:12; *WA* 1:226.

everything to do with Luther's developing insights on the true nature of man's anthropology, that is, the radical nature of his sin. The way had been prepared for Theses 41–44, and 50 and their attacks on the Aristotelian philosophy that had been adopted by scholastics, by what Luther had earlier asserted in the *Disputation*. In Theses 21–23, Luther establishes, contrary to Biel, that concupiscence is indeed sinful, a "fornication of the spirit," that cannot be set aright by the virtue of hope. Further, in Thesis 33, Luther states, "This is false, that doing all that one is able to do can remove the obstacles of grace"—for, as he states in Thesis 38, not even moral virtue exists apart from sin. Without God's grace, Luther contends, even if a person should not kill or commit adultery, or become angry, yet he still sins incessantly (Thesis 62), because it is only by the grace of God that one does not lust or become enraged (Thesis 67).[90]

Indeed, one year later in the *Heidelberg Disputation*, Luther declares that one must first become foolish in Christ if he hopes to philosophize using Aristotle without doing great danger to his soul (Thesis 29), and the works of the righteous are mortal sins if they are not feared as such out of piety towards God (Thesis 7).[91] Robert Kolb rightly contends that this particular work of Luther's offers a "new beginning for theology" as Luther "cut to the quick and talked about the nature of God and the nature of the human creature trapped in sin."[92]

Much later, in the 1536 *Disputation Concerning Man*, Luther's position does not change. The sentiments of Theses 26–28 parallel those expressed two decades prior:

> 26. Therefore those who say that natural things have remained untainted after the fall philosophize impiously in opposition to theology.
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> 27. The same is true of those who say that a man "in doing what is in him" is able to merit the grace of God and life;

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[90] *LW* 31:11–13; *WA* 1:225–27.

[91] *LW* 31:40; *WA* 1:359.

[92] Robert Kolb, "Luther on the Theology of the Cross," *Lutheran Quarterly* 16 (2002): 443.

28. So also, of those who introduce Aristotle (who knows nothing of theological man) to witness that reason aspires to the best things;[93]

Here again, the point of attack regarding Aristotle is preceded by Luther's blatant rejection, based on his convictions about man's depravity, of Biel's assessment that *facere quod in se*, that is, "to do what is in one's self," can in any way merit grace. Just what remains of fallen man's natural powers? This, posits Denis Janz, is the anthropological question, "the *cardo rerum*—the hinge on which [Luther's] whole Reformation theology turned," namely, "the question of *de potentia hominis ex suis naturalibus* … what is the capacity of man's natural powers alone (i.e. unaided by grace) and what soteriological significance do these powers have, if any?"[94]

De potentia hominis ex sui naturalibus and the Prerequisite of Faith

Berndt Hamm notes: "The Ockhamist teaching of Gabriel Biel, which [Luther] acquired during his theological studies in Erfurt, could only strengthen his religious drive for perfection. In this teaching, he learned that people can reach a state of pure love of God and true repentance by their own natural powers, *ex puris naturalibus*."[95] But as Dennis Bielfeldt recognizes, Luther maintained that "Aristotle had been misunderstood by theologians of his time, [and] this understanding eventuated in much theological and philosophical mischief," and that "theologians must understand Aristotle correctly if they are to avoid being misled with regard to the possibilities of human goodness and knowledge."[96]

Hamm's extended analysis of Luther's emerging thought is worth citing in full:

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[93] *LW* 34:139; *WA* 39/1:176.

[94] Denis Janz, *Luther and Late Medieval Thomism: A Study in Theological Anthropology*, (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1983), 1.

[95] Hamm, *Early Luther*, 39.

[96] Dennis Bielfeldt, "Introduction to the Heidelberg Dissertation," in The *Annotated Luther, Volume II: Roots of Reform* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 75. (Here Bielfeldt notes that this position "is argued conclusively in Theodor Dieter's *Die Junge Luther und Aristoteles*, 431–631).

> In the fall of 1512, having sprouted up academically into a doctor of theology, Luther succeeded Staupitz as professor of biblical interpretation in Wittenberg. It is incredibly fortunate that all Luther's early lectures (beginning in 1513) have been preserved … his lectures on the Psalms (1513–15), Romans (1515–16), Galatians (1516–17), and—beginning in the same winter semester as the Ninety-five Theses—Hebrews (1517–18). These outlines of a biblical theology give us a clear glimpse into how Luther's Reformation theology came into being. They show us how he sought a way out of the agonizing discrepancy between the late medieval religious demand for achievement and his experience of radical sin. Step-by-step, they show us how he found theological and existential clarity through the interpretation of the Bible. The decisive departure from the tradition that ushered in a new epochal understanding of freedom started already in the Psalms lectures and was completed in the Romans lectures. Here, out of all the complex and controversial problems surrounding Luther's "Reformation turn," we can simply sketch one line of development. When Luther began his interpretation of the Psalms in 1513, he had already experienced the collapse of his monastic striving for piety. He could then work out that experience through the idea that people can never be good "in themselves," for God alone is *bonus in se ipso*. Instead, people remain sinners before God all their lives.[97]

Janz too traces Luther's thought development from as early as his marginal notes on Lombard's *Sentences* at Wittenberg in 1509, the very same time he was also lecturing on Aristotle's *Ethics*, through 1516, and finds this same line of thought emerging. Luther himself would later confess, in his *Leipzig Disputation* of 1519, that he himself used to hold the very theological anthropology that he would come to denounce so vehemently. While his "anthropology at the stage of the *Dicta Super Psalterium*, 1513–1516, is by no means clear," still it "marks a period of transition in Luther's theological development."[98] A famous gloss on Ps. 84 sets forth quite clearly what would become his fundamental criticism of Aristotle, and scholastic theology: "Aristotle must not be so understood that one who is not yet righteous can do righteous deeds. But he cannot do it with a perfect disposition. He must be righteous in the will and thus go on to the deed."[99]

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[97] Hamm, *Early Luther*, 158 (referencing *LW* 11:347; *WA* 4:210–11).

[98] Janz, *Luther and Late Medieval Thomism*, 8–12.

[99] *LW* 11:174; *WA* 4:19.

In his academic disputations of 1516–17 then, Janz sees evidence that "Luther comes to recognize even more the crucial nature of a correct theological appraisal of the natural powers of man."[100] It is this appraisal that had to reject Aristotle's exact opposite assertion, namely that man "is made just by doing just things." In what Luther himself describes as a letter written "in great haste" from 1516 to Spalatin, he expresses, "For we are not, as Aristotle believes, made righteous by the doing of just deeds, unless we deceive ourselves; but rather—if I may say so—in becoming and being righteous people we do just deeds. First it is necessary that the person be changed, then the deeds [will follow]."[101]

In 1521 Luther rails against Latomus, "[the scholastics] teach that so much can be effected by work actually performed, providing they are done with all of one's natural powers, that God necessarily and infallibly grants grace to them. This is, 'to do what is in one,' even though Paul, and after him Augustine, loudly thundered that man through the law, without grace, only becomes worse."[102] Because of the "root sin" which dwelt deep within man's heart, without grace, even the best virtues are evil:

> Therefore it is only the law which shows that these [virtues] are evil—not, to be sure, in themselves, for they are the gifts of God, but because of that deeply hidden root of sin which is the cause of men being pleased with, relying, and glorying in these things which are not felt to be evil. This is now and always the innermost evil of sin, for trust, pleasure, and glorying must be in God alone.[103]

[100] Janz, *Luther and Late Medieval Thomism*, 22.

[101] *LW* 48:25–26; *WA* BR 1:70.

[102] *LW* 32:153–54; *WA* 8:54.

[103] *LW* 32:226; *WA* 8:105.

While virtues might appear on the surface to be good and right, in 1536 in his *Disputation Concerning Justification* Luther expresses the true reality that "the devil rules even in the best virtues ... Civic man has virtues to be sure, but he is not free from the devil."[104]

A year prior, in his *Galatians Commentary*, Luther rightly reasoned, "neither Jerome nor Gregory nor Benedict nor Bernard nor any of the others whom the monks set forth to be imitated as examples of chastity and of all Christian virtues could get to the point of not feeling any desire of the flesh at all."[105] Because this is the stark reality of man's sinful condition, Luther had already long asked since his earlier, 1519, *Galatians Commentary*: "What does virtue profit if sins remain?"[106] For Luther, if there is not faith, then all virtue is merely show, making us the worst hypocrites, indeed they are "virtues in outward appearance but vices in reality."[107] Indeed, these outward works "glitter very nicely, but inwardly they remain full of malice, anger, hatred, pride, impatience, unchastity, etc."[108]

Luther's overall assessment of Aristotle can be seen in his late Genesis lectures, where he writes: "Aristotle and Cicero … teach many things about the virtues and bestow superb praise on them because of their civil purpose; for they see that they are beneficial in both public and private life. Concerning God, however, they teach nothing."[109] With respect to one's salvation,

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[104] *LW* 34:144; *WA* 39/1:180.

[105] *LW* 27:84; *WA* 40/2:105.

[106] *LW* 27:172; *WA* 2:458.

[107] *LW* 29:119; *WA* 57/3:110 (1522 *Lectures on Hebrews*).

[108] *LW* 42:40; *WA* 2:98 (1519 *Exposition of the Lord's Prayer*).

[109] *LW* 2:124–25; *WA* 42:350. It is worth noting, also, at this juncture, that, as Robert Kolb notes: "at the most fundamental level, Luther's world and Aristotle's world were antithetical, for Aristotle knew no personal Creator and therefore defined humanity in terms of human performance of proper acts. He could not create a system in which God stands at the center of human life," Kolb, *Confessor of the Faith*, 34. As such, while Luther could (and would) ultimately at times praise the civic virtue Aristotle would articulate, because Aristotle did not recognize One who ultimately defined what good is, he often drew Luther's ire, and, especially in matters of faith and salvation. At other times, he will grant that Aristotle teaches and articulates "second table ethics" quite well.

for Luther, unless virtue is accompanied by faith, it is useless. This is due to the reality that, while the "works of the Law" were the "highest and most beautiful virtues," they "contributed nothing toward righteousness."[110] Further, while "God demands virtues and does not want us to be addicted to the lusts of the flesh but earnestly charges us not only to hold them in check but to slay them completely, yet our virtues cannot help before God's judgement; for they are polluted and contaminated by lust."[111]

Earlier, when contending with Latomus, Luther had considered how these virtues "seem good, for instance, prudence, courage, chastity," and while "common sense of all men can detect nothing wrong with these things, so that … even … theologians number them among the goods," nevertheless "they do not merit the kingdom of heaven when they are present apart from grace."[112] In these instances, Luther references righteousness *coram Deo*, affirming that our virtuous works contribute nothing to our standing before God. The wholesale rejection of Aristotelian virtue ethics applies only when there is an intrusion of Aristotle into the realm of righteousness *coram Deo*.

For Luther, it is obvious that faith must be present in every good work for, as he expresses in the 1520 *Treatise on Good Works*, "without faith of this kind no work is a genuine and living work."[113] Thus Aristotle can never achieve true virtue. This does not at all mean, however, that Luther thereby rejected any pursuit of virtue or good works; rather, Luther's point is that due to the root of sin which dwells within, faith itself becomes the necessary prerequisite to any true virtue. Luther's conclusion then, as expressed in this treatise, is to praise faith as the highest

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[110] *LW* 3:22; *WA* 42:564.

[111] *LW* 3:22; *WA* 42:564.

[112] *LW* 32:225; *WA* 8:104.

[113] *LW* 44:87; *WA* 6:255.

work, and, as he writes:

> to include all works under it … See why I exalt faith so much … and reject all works which do not flow from it … This is the teaching of St. Paul in Romans 14[:23], 'Whatsoever is not done of faith or in faith is sin.' It is from faith as the chief work and from no other work that we are called believers in Christ … They have set faith not above but beside other virtues."[114]

In this way too, insofar as one has faith, "all works become equal, and one work is like the other; all distinctions between works fall away, whether they be great, small, short, long, many or few. For works are not acceptable for their own sake but because of faith … however numerous and varied these works always are."[115]

He elaborates on this understanding writing later that same year in the *Freedom of a Christian*:

> From this you once more see that much is ascribed to faith, namely, that it alone can fulfil the law and justify without works. You see that the First Commandment, which says, "You shall worship one God," is fulfilled by faith alone. Though you were nothing but good works from the soles of your feet to the crown of your head, you would still not be righteous or worship God or fulfil the First Commandment, since God cannot be worshiped unless you ascribe to him the glory of truthfulness and all goodness which is due him. This cannot be done by works but only by the faith of the heart.[116]

Later in this same work, Luther sets forth his analogy (after the words of our Lord in Matt. 7) of the good and bad trees to communicate how the existence of faith must precede any mention of subsequent good works. This understanding would thereafter become a hallmark of his theology:

> The following statements are therefore true: "Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works; evil works do not make a wicked man, but a wicked man does evil works." Consequently it is always necessary that the substance or person himself be good before there can be any good work, and that good works follow and proceed from the good person, as Christ also says, "A good tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit" [Matt. 7:18]. It is clear that the fruits do not bear the tree and that the tree does not grow on the fruits, also that, on

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[114] *LW* 44:25; *WA* 6:206.

[115] *LW* 44:26; *WA* 6:206.

[116] *LW* 31:352–53; *WA* 7:55–56.

> the contrary, the trees bear the fruits and the fruits grow on the trees. As it is necessary, therefore, that the trees exist before their fruits and the fruits do not make trees either good or bad, but rather as the trees are, so are the fruits they bear; so a man must first be good or wicked before he does a good or wicked work, and his works do not make him good or wicked, but he himself makes his works either good or wicked ... But as faith makes a man a believer and righteous, so faith does good works.[117]

Once faith is in place however, that is, once one has a firm trust in the work of Jesus Christ on his behalf, various good works flow from this primary virtue of having faith, as Luther further teaches in the *Treatise on Good Works*:

> The work of the first commandment …"Thou shall have no other gods" … means … thou shalt place all thy confidence, trust, and faith in [God] alone and no one else … and because this commandment is the very first of all the commandments and the highest and best, [the one] from which all others proceed, in which they exist and by which they are judged and assessed, so its work (that is, the faith or confidence that God is gracious at all times) is the very first, highest, and best from which all others must proceed, in which they must exist and abide.[118]

Indeed, Luther continues: "Faith is the master workman and the motivating force behind the good works of generosity, just as it is in all the other commandments. Without this faith, generosity is of no use at all; it is just a careless squandering of money."[119] And, similarly: "faith must be the foreman behind [these] work[s] … without faith no one is able to do … work[s]. In fact, all works are entirely comprised in faith."[120]

For Luther, just as idolatry was the common ingredient in every vice, so too faith must be present in every good work, otherwise, "without faith of this kind no work is a genuine living work: it is neither good nor acceptable. Many heathen have brought their children up charmingly,

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[117] *LW* 31:361; *WA* 7:61.

[118] *LW* 44:30; *WA* 6:209–10.

[119] *LW* 44:109; *WA* 6:272.

[120] *LW* 44:113; *WA* 6:275.

but all that is lost because of their unbelief."[121]

Finally, faith is what gives the Christian confidence that one might trust in God's favor, not thinking what one does is the basis for pleasing God, but rather knowing that the good one does is indeed an "exercise" of faith, tasks done for the "honor and praise of God alone" and for the "benefit of his neighbor."[122] Faith is the "highest work because it blots out these everyday sins and still stands fast by never doubting that God is so favorably disposed, [that] ... *even if deadly sin should arise* (which, however, never or rarely happens to those who live in faith and trust in God), nonetheless faith always rises again and does not doubt that its sin is already gone."[123]

The twin theses that structure the 1520 treatise, *Freedom of a Christian*, set the tone for how Luther would understand the relationship between the faith that justifies with nothing required of man and the sanctification that follows with its obligation of service.[124] With faith, in regard to the Gospel, the Christian is "perfectly free lord of all, subject to none." But with respect to his neighbor, he is "perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."[125] Indeed Luther, writes, "many who … hear of this freedom of faith, immediately turn it into an occasion for the flesh and think that now all things are allowed them;"[126] but, Luther is clear: "we do not … reject good works; on the contrary, we cherish and teach them as much as possible."[127]

Further, just as idolatry resulted in the proliferation of sin, so too, the offspring of a true

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[121] *LW* 44:87; *WA* 6:255.

[122] *LW* 44:97; *WA* 6:263.

[123] *LW* 44:37; *WA* 6:215 (*emphasis* mine).

[124] Robert Kolb observes that this particular treatise "presented trust in Christ as the core of Christian righteousness or identity, and it demonstrated that works in obedience to God's command are the natural outgrowth of that trust," *Luther's Treatise On Christian Freedom*, 9.

[125] *LW* 31:344; *WA* 7:49.

[126] *LW* 31:372; *WA* 7:69.

[127] *LW* 31:363; *WA* 7:63.

and living faith are good works. Indeed, “there are so many additional good works that every moment of [our] lives [we] have an abundant number of tasks and opportunities to serve God. But these works, like others, should also be done in faith.”[128]

Love as the Highest Virtue

It is quite obvious, for soteriological reasons, that Luther rejected Aristotle and virtue ethics insofar as they diminish a believer’s true understanding of the nature of righteousness in the *coram Deo* realm, and instead highlighted the necessary prerequisite of faith for any work to be considered good. However, Bielfeldt calls our attention to the reality that we should not exaggerate this to the extent that we exclude the reality that Luther maintained a very lively concern for ethics in general when it came to the sanctified life of a Christian. He writes:

> Luther discards the Scholastic philosophical categories in favor of a biblical proclamation … one should not overstate Luther’s discontinuity with tradition … like most late medieval theologians, Luther did not reject reason or philosophy *in toto* but, rather, a particular and limited employment and understanding of it hat supposed reason, through its own resources, could provide access to God’s nature and actions. Similarly, Luther did not reject morality and good works, but clarified how particular notions of human action fail to conform to a proper notion of God’s relationship to creation.[129]

As Luther considered the nature of good works he recognized that every deed carried out in conjunction with God’s will is indeed a manifestation of the singular concept of love, as shown by this statement from his early *Galatians Commentary*: “The logical conclusion is that the law of the Spirit is that which the Law of the letter requires. I mean the will. Psalm 1:1 says: ‘But his will (that is, his love) is in the Law of the Lord.’ Rom. 13:10 says: ‘Love is the fulfilling of the Law.’ And 1 Tim. 1:5 states that love is the end of the Law.”[130] And again, in his *Prayer Book*:

[128] *LW* 44:97; *WA* 6:262–63 (1520 *Treatise on Good Works*).

[129] Bielfeldt, “Introduction,” 69–70.

[130] LW 27:235; *WA* 2:500.

"The conclusion of all this is that the commandments demand or forbid nothing other than love. Only love fulfils and only love breaks the commandments. Therefore St. Paul declares that 'love is the fulfilling of the law' [Rom. 13:8-10], just as an 'evil love' breaks all the commandments."[131] In his later, 1535 *Galatians Commentary*, Luther describes love as the "highest virtue,"[132] indeed the "noblest virtue," and says, "nor could a more perfect kind of virtue be given than love."[133]

Luther continues by setting forth his understanding that "Paul is an outstanding interpreter of the commandments of God. For he compresses all of Moses into a very brief summary and shows that in all his laws, which are almost endless, nothing is contained except this very brief word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" He further reiterates that "no one can find a better, surer, or more available pattern than himself; nor can there be a nobler or more profound attitude of the mind than love; nor is there a more excellent object than one's neighbor."[134]

George Forell in his masterful study of Luther's ethic, *Faith Active in Love*, says that Luther's ethical principle is just that: "faith active in love."[135] Forell then asks the all-important question, "how is love to be defined?" and concludes that "for Luther, love is modeled after the love of Christ, love that does not consider self-interest,"[136] a "receiving of God's love and passing it along to his neighbor."[137] We will give further attention to this others-directed aspect of Luther's ethic below. It is this sharp focus on service for the good of the other that perhaps

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[131] LW 43:21; *WA* 10/2:385.

[132] *LW* 27:58; *WA* 40/2:72.

[133] *LW* 27:351–52; *WA* 2:577–78.

[134] *LW* 27:57; *WA* 40/2:72.

[135] George Forell, *Faith Active in Love: Luther's Social Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1954), 93.

[136] Forell, *Faith Active*, 97.

[137] Forell, *Faith Active*, 100.

pushes Luther beyond virtues proper, to substitute the good works of the Decalogue in lieu of virtues, as the chief *telos* of the sanctified life.

For Luther, love exists alongside faith as what Grobien terms a "meta-virtue," and these virtues of faith and love stand above and over all other virtues. Grobien writes, "the regeneration of faith is, among other things, the establishment of a new character with accompanying virtues. This new character acts in faith and love." He continues, "faith itself, since it is received passively, may not be developed by habituation, but the virtues which it stimulates, since they are exercised regularly, may be developed through habituation … with this in mind, faith in particular might be called a meta-virtue in that it underlies … all other Christian virtues," especially that of love, which has "primacy" among the rest of the virtues.[138] As covered in the prior section, faith is recognized as a necessary precondition for the existence of all other virtues. Faith, however, is established by God alone and man bears no responsibility for its creation. On the other hand, the existence of faith creates love, the other meta-virtue, which itself stands over and above all other virtues. Grobien recognizes the reality that unlike faith, love can be cultivated through the intentional actions of a Christian. We now turn our attention to consider how love is manifest in its various forms in the lives of those who have faith.

Virtue as the Proliferation of Love

While Luther often names love as the highest virtue, he taught that it always brings along with it many other virtues. True faith is always active in love, and love is indeed the overarching "shape" of an active faith. However, love was by no means generic. Love always takes on a distinctive shape, that is, love itself is proliferated into a variety of specific virtues. Christian love

[138] Grobien, *Christian Character*, 191–93.

brings with it specific qualities, and it is these particular qualities that become manifest as love is lived out among God's people. The *Treatise on Good Works* transitions the discussion from faith to works with: "And this faith soon *brings along with it* love, peace, joy, and hope."[139] In his late Genesis lectures, Luther writes, "Thus faith brings with it a multitude of the most beautiful virtues and is never alone … faith is the mother, so to speak, from whom that crop of virtues springs."[140]

But what are these particular virtues? When scouring Luther's extensive writings, one largely searches in vain for references to the four cardinal philosophical virtues. Certainly it is not the case that Luther is unaware of these, as his critiques of both Aristotle and Aquinas indicate he was quite familiar with both Aristotle's *Ethics* and Aquinas's appropriation of the great philosopher's work for an understanding of virtue. Indeed, these virtues are in his purview as categories all along, as evidenced by this passage from his 1535 *Galatians Commentary*: "Of those who are perfect it is said, 'I send you wise men' (Matt. 23:34); of those who are beginning to be it is stated: 'Reprove a wise man, and he will love you' (Prov. 9:8). In accordance with this meaning one should also understand the other virtues, namely, that the terms, 'brave,' 'prudent,' 'chaste,' 'just,' and 'temperate' are sometimes taken in their full sense and sometimes improperly. But one must by all means have this understanding about perfection."[141] References like these, however, are exceedingly rare.

While Luther acknowledges the value these "civic virtues" hold for society, he is not keen on using them as categories to describe the distinctively Christian contours of sanctification, indicating that, "the virtues of the heathen must be distinguished from the virtues of

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[139] *LW* 44:26; *WA* 6:206 (*emphasis* mine).

[140] *LW* 3:25–26; *WA* 42:567.

[141] *LW* 27:169; *WA* 2:456.

Christians."[142] This was in part due to the fact that, as Luther recognized, "If they are followed in behalf of the fatherland, they become virtues; if against the fatherland, they become vices, as Aristotle learnedly argues."[143] The philosophical virtues are indeed valuable as they accord with natural law and possess the capacity to benefit society in positive ways. However, since they do not always readily have their logical end in the "other," a characteristic we will come to see common to the more Scripturally based manifestations of love, the philosophical virtues are more vulnerable to being pursued in a misguided manner. Certainly, it can be observed, there are limited occasions where Luther will esteem prudence, or consider the virtues of justice or temperance. However, the search for instances where Luther employs the set of cardinal virtues as a particular theological category, so evident in the context of Thomas Aquinas's treatment of virtue ethics, is a futile one.

The same observation can be made for Luther's treatment of Aquinas's three theological virtues. Benefitting from their Scriptural credentials, the virtues of "faith, hope, and love," are certainly discussed by the Reformer in any number of contexts, especially when exegetical writings on texts with these terms demand their exposition. In early lectures on the Psalms, for instance, we find a few references. In a bizarre allegorical interpretation of Ps. 102 in 1515, Luther writes: "Through humility one conquers the devil, through poverty the world, and through continence the flesh. And so the pelican is for the devil, the owl for the world, and the sparrow for the flesh. This is also what the three theological virtues do, as is clear."[144] In another place, in 1517, when treating the seven penitential Psalms, specifically, Ps. 130, Luther writes: "For the new man, whose occupation is nothing but waiting for the Lord and tarrying for Him, should not

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[142] *LW* 2:125; *WA* 42:350 (1538 *Genesis Lectures*).

[143] *LW* 2:125–26; *WA* 42:350–51.

[144] *LW* 11:307; *WA* 4:155.

give up, as the outer man does and must do. That is living in the three supreme virtues: faith, hope, and love." The type and nature of these virtues is described in the psalms as "attitudes and the works which proceed from them." Luther finishes, "In this little psalm, therefore, the whole life, work, and activity of the inner man is masterfully described."[145]

In his 1520 *Treatise on Good Works*, again, we recognize that the existence and usefulness of the three theological virtues as a set is by no means foreign to Luther: "Therefore, St. Augustine speaks rightly when he says that the works of the first commandment are faith, hope, and love."[146] Luther knew of the rich theological tradition surrounding these particular virtues, and over the course of his career, there are certainly places where Luther addresses the individual topic of faith, or that of hope or love. But one looks largely in vain for any kind of systematic treatment of these three theological virtues together as a unit. Further, it is not as if they somehow drifted completely out of his purview as the years wore on. An extremely late reference is found in his 1539 *On the Councils and the Church*:

> For Christian holiness, or the holiness common to Christendom, is found where the Holy Spirit gives people faith in Christ and thus sanctifies them, Acts 15[:9], that is, he renews heart, soul, body, work, and conduct … That is called new holy life in the soul … it is also called the *tres virtutes theologicas*, "the three principal virtues of Christians," namely faith, hope, and love; and the Holy Spirit, who imparts, does, and effects this (gained for us by Christ, is therefore called "sanctifier" or "life-giver." For the old Adam is dead and cannot do it, and in addition has to learn from the law that he is unable to do it and that he is dead; he would not know this of himself.[147]

One would expect to find this kind of sentiment expressed more frequently over Luther's career if he held this category in as high esteem as it seems he does here. Such, however, is not the case. Thus the classic virtue tradition's categories of the four cardinal and three theological

[145] *LW* 14:193; *WA* 18:520.

[146] *LW* 44:30; *WA* 6:210.

[147] *LW* 41:145–46; *WA* 50:626.

virtues are not significant categories in Luther's ethical program. It could be argued that one reason for this is that the first of these categories is not scriptural. However, surely, qualities such as prudence and temperance are discussed in scripture. Nevertheless, Luther largely abandoned these for more blatantly Scriptural categories—categories given credence by the reality that Scripture itself binds them together. Similarly, surely, faith, hope, and love are important qualities for a Christian, nevertheless, when Luther speaks of virtue proper, that is in terms of a specific disposition, he almost always speaks of qualities that are "other-directed," those that have their natural orientation toward the neighbor—such as in kindness, generosity, etc. And, at least when treating Galatians, Luther seems to favor the fruit of the spirit from Gal. 5 as the particular virtues of the faithful.

> Paul does not say "works of the Spirit," as he had said "works of the flesh"; but he adorns these *Christian virtues* with a worthier title and calls them "*fruit of the Spirit*." For they bring very great benefits and fruit, because those who are equipped with them give glory to God and by these virtues invite others to the teaching and faith of Christ.[148]

The association of virtues proper with the fruit of the Spirit, however, is not merely limited to the times Luther is directly treating the texts of Gal. 5.

Allusions to the fruit of the spirit are exceedingly prevalent throughout Luther's writings, and he frequently refers to them as "virtues." A string of examples from his 1519 *Exposition of the Lord's Prayer* readily illustrates this reality, emphasis is my own:

> We pattern ourselves after the Father, and all his ways … *for the names of all virtues are also the names given to God*. And since we are baptized into these names and are consecrated and hallowed by them, and since they have thus become our names, if follows that God's children should be called and also be *gentle, merciful, chaste, just, truthful, guileless, friendly, peaceful, and kindly* disposed toward all, even our enemies … but whoever is wrathful, quarrelsome, envious, rancorous, unkind, unmerciful, unchaste, who curses, lies, swears, defrauds, and slanders, that person

[148] *LW* 27:93; *WA* 40/2:116–17 (*emphasis* mine).

truly defiles, blasphemes, and profanes the divine name in which he was blessed, baptized, or called…[149]

> If you want to know the kingdom of God, do not go far afield in search of it. If you wish to have it, you will find it close to you. Yes, it is not only close to you, it is in you. For *decency, humility, truthfulness, charity and all other virtues* (these make up the true kingdom of God).[150]

> God's kingdom consists of nothing other than piety, *decency, purity, gentleness, kindness, and of every other virtue and grace*; they do not know that God must have his way in us, that he alone must be, dwell, and reign in us.[151]

This pattern is also apparent in the *Large Catechism*:

> Once again we have God's Word by which he wants to encourage and urge us to *true, noble, exalted deeds, such as gentleness, patience, and, in short, love and kindness* towards our enemies.[152]

> If seems to me that we shall have our hands full to keep these commandments, practicing *gentleness, patience, love toward enemies, chastity, kindness*, etc., and all that is involved in doing so.[153]

These "Scriptural virtues" of the fruit of the Spirt certainly have a very real orientation toward the care of one's neighbor. Again, it is not as if the philosophical virtue of justice, for example, disregards the neighbor, for the practice of justice most certainly benefits the neighbor; still, on the whole, the fruit of the spirit as members of a specific category are much less inclined to a self-focused, individualistic orientation and have a clear Scriptural underpinning.

In taking this path, Luther assumes an understanding of virtue that is much more compatible with that of the pastoral tradition of the contrarian virtues, virtues which bear a strong affinity to the particular fruits of the spirit. While it is by no means an exact correlation, these precise Scriptural categories of the fruit of the spirit comprise a list that is quite similar not to the

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[149] *LW* 42:28; *WA* 2:87–88.

[150] *LW* 42:41; *WA* 2:98.

[151] *LW* 42:41; *WA* 2:98.

[152] LC I, 195 in Kolb and Wengert, 413.

[153] LC I, 313 in Kolb and Wengert, 428.

cardinal and theological virtues, but rather the more pastorally suited contrarian virtues. A rough comparison is provided in the following table:

Table 2. Contrarian Virtues as Compared to the Fruit of the Spirit

<table>
<tr><th>Contrarian Virtue</th><th>Fruit of the Spirit</th></tr>
<tr><td>Humility</td><td>Gentleness</td></tr>
<tr><td>Kindness</td><td>Kindness</td></tr>
<tr><td>Patience/Forgiveness</td><td>Patience, Peace</td></tr>
<tr><td>Diligence</td><td>Love</td></tr>
<tr><td>Generosity</td><td>Goodness[154]</td></tr>
<tr><td>Temperance</td><td rowspan="2">Self-Control</td></tr>
<tr><td>Chastity</td></tr>
</table>

Luther also uses these kinds of categories when contending with Latomus about what "good works" are:

> Surely there will never be any peace, if it is necessary to have good works, and no one in his whole life knows when he has them. Wherefore God cares admirably for us by making us certain of two things. First, he teaches in Gal. 5[:22] what good works are manifest. "The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace," etc.; and, in Matt. 7[:20], "You will know them by their fruits."[155]

Here one should note a tendency that will become standard practice for Luther who freely uses the distinct terms, *virtues* and *works*, almost interchangeably. Grobien demonstrates that most often, when Luther is referring to "virtue" or "virtues" he is in reality referencing what we would commonly call "good works" and not necessarily categories we would typically associate

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[154] While on appearance in English translation, the similarity between "generosity" and "goodness" is not self-evident, the Greek word here for "goodness," *agathosune*, carries with it the particular connotation not of generic "goodness" as such, but rather specifically of generosity. BDAG defines it as "a positive moral quality characterized especially by interest in the welfare of others," and specifically denotes its meaning as that of "generosity" when employed in the context of Gal. 5:22, BDAG, 4. Indeed in the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard from Matt. 20, nearly every English translation renders the word *agathos* in verse 20:15 as "generosity," where Jesus says, "Do you begrudge my *agathos* (goodness/generosity)."

[155] *LW* 32:193; *WA* 8:82.

with virtue. Truly "virtues," in the proper sense of the term, as Aristotle used them, are habitual dispositions that cause a person to act consistently in a certain manner. "Good works" on the other hand, is a term typically referring to an actual outward work that is accomplished for the benefit of another. Grobien acknowledges the reality that "a simple reading of Luther's ethics could lead to the impression that Luther opposed virtue ethics and taught good works as duty in accord with the Ten Commandments."[156]

With this final sentiment, as will become evident in what follows, I wholeheartedly agree. However, as Grobien observes when considering Luther's *Treatise on Good Works*, "while he does not often use the term 'virtue,' he describes many 'works' which we would typically call 'virtues.' His description of works does include actions to accomplish a good end which are in conformity to God's command, yet the word 'work' here also refers to a number of qualities which incline toward goodness." As such, "this *Treatise on Good* '*Works*,' is, in many ways, a treatise on the virtues of a Christian."[157] Indeed, Luther's nomenclature when referring to virtues proper (such as habits or dispositions) and outward works of the Decalogue is slippery at best, and not too much should be made of this practice. If any point can be made, Grobien notes that "rhetorically, he appears to intentionally use the term 'works' rather than 'virtues' to emphasize the active nature of goodness … [because] for Luther, goodness is not just a disposition or inclination, but activity which bears real fruit in relation toward others."[158]

While Luther indeed values the qualities which the virtues bring into the Christian life, for him, they can only be preliminary ends. As has been shown, for Luther, mere dispositions can be self-serving, unless they are directed outward, toward the neighbor, in concrete works. While

[156] Grobien, *Christian Character Formation*, 185.

[157] Grobien, *Christian Character Formation,* 185.

[158] Grobien, *Christian Character Formation*, 186.

qualities such as “peace, kindness, and gentleness,” have their natural end in the “other”—more directly perhaps, than the cardinal virtues—still Luther turned elsewhere when considering the best guide for Christian living. As he did with respect to the vice tradition, so too Luther directs the Christian not towards virtues as such, but rather to the Decalogue—and specifically to the good works God commands therein.

The Decalogue for the Neighbor as New Obedience

Just as Luther had subsumed the concept of vice within the contours of the Decalogue to comprehend them specifically in that context, as an aid to examine the inner heart, so too, when conceiving the proper shape of the outward deeds he pointed to the good works of the Decalogue as the gold standard for Christian living. In his *Treatise on Good Works* he expresses this thought:

> Whoever wants to know what good works are as well as doing them needs to know nothing more than God’s commandments: Thus in Matthew 19[:17] Christ says, ‘If you would enter life, keep the commandments.’ When the young man in Matthew 19 asks what he should do to inherit eternal life, Christ sets before him nothing else but the Ten Commandments. Accordingly, we have to learn to recognize good works from the commandments of God.”[159]

He continues in this treatise noting that the reason the commandments are so valuable, is that they provided a sure and clear guide for the Christian attempting to live within God’s holy will:

> Now see how much a man has to do if he wants to do good works, for there are piles of them around, surrounding him on all sides, and, unfortunately, because of his blindness he leaves them lying there and seeks out and runs after others of his own high thinking and delight. No man can speak strongly enough against these and no man can adequately guard himself against them. The prophets had to contend with all this and were put to death because they rejected such self-devised works and preached only God’s commandments.[160]

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[159] *LW* 44:23; *WA* 6:204.

[160] *LW* 44:45–46 *WA* 6:222.

This concept of regarding the Decalogue as preeminent in guiding the Christian life is likewise made abundantly clear in the *Large Catechism*:

> Here, then, we have the Ten Commandments, a summary of divine teaching on what we are to do to make our whole life pleasing to God. They are the true fountain from which all good works must spring, the true channel through which all good works must flow. Apart from these Ten Commandments no action or life can be good or pleasing to God, no matter how great or precious it may be in the eyes of the world.[161]

He further writes there that these particular commandments "are to be exalted and extolled about all orders, commands, and works that are taught and practiced apart from them."[162] In his conclusion to the Decalogue in the *Large Catechism*, Luther wrote it is indeed a "devilish presumption" to attempt to "find a higher and better way of life and status than the Ten Commandments teach"[163] and in the *Treatise on Good Works* held "that a young man [can] be more easily trained and encouraged by the fear of God and by his commandments than by any other means."[164] Indeed, when treating the Lord's Prayer, and considering the Third Petition he remarks: "What does it mean to say that God's will is done, or that it is not done? That God's will be done means undoubtedly nothing else than that his commandments are kept, for through these God has revealed his will to us. Here it is necessary to know and to understand God's commandments."[165]

On every occasion when Luther sets out to instruct Christian believers on the shape of good works, invariably he turns to the Decalogue. This is evident in his 1518 sermon series on the Ten Commandments, in the 1520 *Treatise on Good Works*, in his 1522 *Prayer Book*, in the 1529

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[161] LC I, 311 in Kolb and Wengert, 428.

[162] LC I, 333 in Kolb and Wengert, 431.

[163] LC I, 315 in Kolb and Wengert, 428.

[164] *LW* 44:44; *WA* 6:221.

[165] *LW* 42:43; *WA* 2:100 (1519 *Exposition of the Lord's Prayer*).

Large Catechism, and in the 1535 pamphlet, *A Simple Way to Pray*.

As has already been suggested, these good works of the Decalogue, to be truly good works, must have their end in love and service to the neighbor. Forell calls our attention to this "socio-ethical implication" of Luther's ethic, noting that "henceforth it had been called a good work which allegedly contributed to the eternal welfare of the person doing the work," but, for Luther, "faith active in love was man receiving God's love and passing it along to the neighbor." This neighborly focus, the reality that a truly good work finds its purpose in the other and not merely the self, Forell suggests, is a "very real difference" between "Christian life 'in Christ' and the 'virtue' of pagan philosophy" and one that had tended to be "minimized"[166] by Christian theologians, at times allowing "egocentric striving for merits [to] become the motivat[ing] force of the Christian life."[167] This was another reason Luther felt heathen virtues must be distinguished from the virtues of Christians: "It is true that the hearts of both are prompted by God. But among the heathen the zeal and ambition for glory eventually corrupt these divine impulses in great men," and as such he continues in his commentary on Genesis, "the true goal, obedience toward God and love of one's neighbor, receives no consideration.[168]

Mannermaa also has this emphasis in mind as he explores what he calls "two kinds of love," noting that "it is characteristic of Luther's concept of neighborly love that he does not accept the loving person's good intention as such as the criterion for the moral goodness of an act. The golden rule places such a criterion outside the loving person in the needs and good of the other person."[169] Mannermaa advances the understanding that a right concept of God's love

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[166] Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, 71.

[167] Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, 73.

[168] *LW* 2:125–26; *WA* 42:350–51.

[169] Tuomo Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love: Marin Luther's Religious World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010), 70.

acknowledges that it is a love that always presses outward, toward an object that is, in essence, unlovable. While natural human love merely turns toward that in which some good can be sought in return, a Christian exemplifies God's love when turning toward the neighbor, in whose lack the Christian discerns his necessary good work. Mannermaa posits: "According to Luther, the need of the neighbor is the criterion for neighborly love. This principle is expressed in the golden rule, the shortest version of which reads: 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"[170] This neighborly thrust of the good works of love is extremely important when considering the differences between love as understood in the scholastic tradition, which Luther set aside, and the proper Biblical concept of love which Luther sought to develop over and against a philosophical one.

When encountering Luther's summarizing words from *Freedom of a Christian*, it seems that Mannermaa's assessment of the relative importance of the neighbor in shaping Luther's ethical program is indeed an accurate insight:

> We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor.[171]

As Luther expressed in the *Prayer Book*, where faith was considered essential prior to virtue because it alone keeps the commands of "the first or righthand tablet … the first three, which instruct a person concerning his duty toward God—what he should do or leave undone, how he should conduct himself in relation to God," it is not God, but precisely the neighbor who is explicitly exalted in the "the second or lefthand tablet of the commandments [which] includes the

[170] Mannermaa, *Two Kinds*, 69.

[171] *LW* 31:371; *WA* 7:69.

… seven commandments, in which a person is taught his obligation toward his fellowman and neighbor, what he should do and leave undone."[172] He continues:

> In all such actions we see nothing but a strange, all-comprehending love toward God and our neighbor which never seeks its own advantage but only what serves God and our neighbor [1 Cor. 13:5]. It means to devote oneself freely to belonging to one's neighbor and serving him and his concerns … We have clearly emphasized that these commandments prescribe nothing that man is to do or leave undone for his own advantage, or expect of others for himself, but rather what a person is to do or leave undone toward his neighbor, toward God, and toward his fellowman. Therefore we must comprehend the fulfilment of the commandments as meaning love for others and not for ourselves.[173]

It is worth considering this very extended quotation from *Freedom of a Christian* which encapsulates the indisputable necessity for our works of faith to be directed outward, toward the other:

> Let this suffice concerning works in general and at the same time concerning the works which a Christian does for himself. Lastly, we shall also speak of the things which he does toward his neighbor. A man does not live for himself alone in this mortal body to work for it alone, but he lives also for all men on earth; rather, he lives only for others and not for himself. To this end he brings his body into subjection that he may the more sincerely and freely serve others, as Paul says in Rom. 14[:7–8], "None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord." He cannot ever in this life be idle and without works toward his neighbors, for he will necessarily speak, deal with, and exchange views with men, as Christ also, being made in the likeness of men [Phil. 2:7], was found in form as a man and conversed with men, as Baruch 3[:38] says.
>
> Man, however, needs none of these things for his righteousness and salvation. Therefore he should be guided in all his works by this thought and contemplate this one thing alone, that he may serve and benefit others in all that he does, considering nothing except the need and the advantage of his neighbor. Accordingly the Apostle commands us to work with our hands so that we may give to the needy, although he might have said that we should work to support ourselves. He says, however, "that he may be able to give to those in need" [Eph. 4:28]. This is what makes caring for the body a Christian work, that through its health and comfort we may be able to work, to acquire, and lay by funds with which to aid those who are in need, that in this way the strong member may serve the weaker, and we may be sons of God, each caring for and working for the other, bearing one another's burdens and so fulfilling the law of

[172] *LW* 43:14–15; *WA* 10/2:377–78.

[173] *LW* 43:23–24; *WA* 10/2:307–08.

> Christ [Gal. 6:2]. This is a truly Christian life. Here faith is truly active through love [Gal. 5:6], that is, it finds expression in works...[174]

Finally, it must be recognized, that for Luther, lovingly expressed virtues that drive us to carry out the specific good works of the Decalogue can hardly be understood to be spontaneously generated by faith in every instance. This is evident when Luther and Melanchthon speak of the doing of good works as nothing less than obedience, what in the *Saxon Visitation Instructions* they designate as the "third element of the Christian life:"

> These two are the first elements of Christian life: Repentance or contrition and grief, and faith through which we receive the forgiveness of sins and are righteous before God. Both should grow and increase in us. *The third element of Christian life is the doing of good works*: To be chaste, to love and help the neighbor, to refrain from lying, from deceit, from stealing, from murder, from vengefulness, and avenging oneself, etc. Therefore again and again the Ten Commandments are to be assiduously taught, for all good works are therein comprehended. *They are called good works not only because they are done for the welfare of our neighbors, but because God has commanded them, and so they also are well pleasing to God. God has no delight in those who do not obey the commandments*, as is stated in Mic. 6[:8]: "O man, I will show you what is good and what God requires of you, namely, to do justice. Yea, do justice, delight to do good to your neighbor, and walk humbly before God."[175]

For Luther, conformity to the commands of God is demanded: "God is not joking. God speaks to you and demands obedience. If you obey him, you will be his dear child; but if you despise … you will have shame, misery, and grief as your reward."[176] As Luther expresses in his *Exposition of the Lord's Prayer*, this is an obedience that that comes forth only as our own sinful human nature is hindered:

> This good will in us must be hindered for its own improvement. God's only purpose in thwarting our good will is to make of it a better will. And this is done when it subordinates itself to and confirms to the divine will … until the point is reached

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[174] *LW* 31:364–65; *WA* 7:64.

[175] *LW* 40:277; *WA* 26:204 (*emphasis* mine).

[176] LC I, 149 in Kolb and Wengert, 407.

> when man … knows nothing except that he waits upon the will of God. Now that is what is meant by genuine obedience.[177]

In response to those who might contend such teaching undermines the Reformation tenet of "grace alone," in the *Saxon Visitation Instructions*, Luther and Melanchthon argue: "[to those who] clamor: good works are not meritorious," it would be "better to teach them to do good works and drop the sharp disputes. For the truth is that God gives blessings because of his promises, not because of our works, yet the good works which God has commanded must be done." And, therefore, "undisciplined people need forcefully to be reminded how severely God punishes those who are disobedient..."[178]

As such, when referring to the sanctified life, at least in the *Augustan*a of 1530, the Reformers' preferred terminology was not to speak of "virtues," but rather "good fruit and good works,"[179] and not under a heading of "Christian Love" as perhaps a radical Lutheran would expect, but rather under the heading of "The New Obedience"[180] as delineated in Article VI.

Despite the Reformers' insistence that genuine faith brings along with it love, and that true faith expresses itself in love, they also knew that such love requires active obedience on the part of the baptized believer. This new life of active obedience is not most often couched in language of "virtues" as such, but rather, "good works," and, as will be shown, given the focus of Luther's catechetical writings, almost certainly have as their logical referent the good works of the Ten Commandments.

Thus, reading Luther through the lens of the vice/virtue tradition has demonstrated that far from a "Lutheran" ethic being devoid of any specific shape, or being defined, as radical

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[177] *LW* 42:47; *WA* 2:104.

[178] *LW* 40:280; *WA* 26:206–07.

[179] *CA* VI in Kolb and Wengert, 41.

[180] *CA* VI in Kolb and Wengert, 41.

Lutherans have advocated, by some broad, sweeping, and undifferentiated notion of love, the true Lutheran ethic, while deviating from an Aristotelian-shaped ethic, indeed has specific contours. Love is refracted into the particular virtues of the fruits of the spirit, which have as their natural end specific good works of God's commandments done in obedience to serve the neighbor in the various spheres of life. Tracing the contours of this new obedience is the subject of the next chapter, suggesting a Decalogue-centric shape of the sanctified life. However, before turning to this task, we consider the pattern of Luther's catechetical teaching—how vice and virtue were incorporated into his catechesis of the Decalogue. This exercise will not only provide structure to the presentation of the following chapter, but also situate this study for the discussion on the nature of the fight of the Christian faith, which comprises the subject of the final chapter.

Vice and Virtue in Luther's Catechesis of the Decalogue

Vice as Fear, Love, and Trust in the Created

It can be demonstrated that not only were vice and virtue/good works an important concept for Luther in understanding both man's sinful nature and his sanctified life, but in fact their pairing as opposites becomes the standard rhetorical and pedagogical device of Luther's catechesis of the Ten Commandments.

Near the close of Chapter Two, it was noted that vices have their origin in some of our greatest fears, causing us to grasp at things in our world in an attempt to assuage these fears, and in-turn provoking us to place our trust in these things rather than in God who alone who is able to provide for our needs of body and soul. In concert with the vice tradition, Luther too demonstrates an understanding that idolatry, and thus all sin and vice, has its origin in fear. In a treatment of Ps. 127, he acknowledges this reality by pointing out the example of how anxious one can become simply by worrying about where our next morsel of food will come from. He

writes: “Here then we see how Solomon, in this one little verse [Ps. 172:1], has solved in short order the greatest of all problems among the children of men … namely, how to feed our poor stomachs.”[181] Later he notes how this particular Psalm is particularly directed against our anxiety, the anguish we experience when we fear our most basic needs will not be met. Luther recognized that those who are in fear have a proclivity to turn to themselves or the things of the world for security, placing their trust in something other than God.[182] In the *Treatise on Good Works* he reasons that “those who do not trust God at all times and do not see God’s favor and grace and good will toward them … seek his favor in other things or even in themselves … [and] practice idolatry.”[183] As such, a man can be “generous because he trusts God and never doubts but that he will always have enough. In contrast, a man is covetous and anxious because he does not trust God.”[184] This is indeed how unbelief arises: “First one overlooks the Creator, takes pleasure in in the creature, and clings to it as though it were good … next, a habit of loving it is established, and thus the heart is hardened toward the … Creator. Then unbelief follows.”[185] Thus, what begins as fear ultimately results in unbelief due to the reality that sinful man is all-too-inclined to place his trust in the wrong places.

In a *Sermon on the First Commandment* from 1528, Luther again adheres to this pattern, showing how idolatry is truly a matter of the hand grasping for the creature, or the created things of this world, rather than trusting God with one’s heart:

> From this there follows the greatest wisdom. One who fears something else and trusts it makes of it a god. That is why all sorcerers transgress this first commandment; they neither trust God nor fear him. You see, then, what faith is and what idolatry is. If

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[181] *LW* 45:327; *WA* 15:369.

[182] *LW* 45:332–33; *WA* 15:373–74.

[183] *LW* 44:30; *WA* 6:210.

[184] *LW* 44:109; *WA* 6:272.

[185] *LW* 29:154; *WA* 57/3:150 (1518 *Lectures on Hebrews*).

> you fear the prince more than God, then the prince is your god. If you trust your wife or money more than God, then these are your god. But God is held not in the hand but in the heart. If you fear him and trust him then you need fear no one and trust no one except God. Therefore the first commandment claims the two parts of your heart: fear God and trust him.[186]

This pattern understood by Luther is entirely in concert with the way that the capital vices can be understood to function in the life of a believer. For instance, a person experiencing fear with respect to his reputation, sinfully fails to place his trust in God to uphold him and endeavors instead to tear down another giving birth to the vice of envy. Beginning in the heart, this envy eventually gives rise to the typical generative sins of envy such as slander or malice intended to hurt the reputation of another. Thus, the individual pridefully places trust in his own ability to preserve his reputation. Or, as was encountered above in Luther's reflections on Ps. 127, a person fears they will not have enough provision to live, and so seeks to find security not in God, but rather in things, resulting in the accumulation of wealth or possessions as he develops the habit of avarice, or greed, evermore clinging to the things of the world. This too, gives rise to further, outward, transgressions of God's commands, such as stealing, or scheming to get what is our neighbors by means that only appear honest.

Batka observes: "Luther understood unrighteousness primarily as the turn to created things and the lack of love for God," and quotes the Reformer who writes: "iniquity is that by which a person is turned toward the creature because he prefers its love to the love of God, and that is evil."[187] Luther famously elaborates on this teaching in the *Large Catechism*:

> In this category also belong those who go so far as to make a pact with the devil so that he may give them plenty of money, help them in love affairs, protect their cattle, recover lost property, etc., as magicians and sorcerers do. All of them place their

[186] *LW* 51:138–39; *WA* 30/1:59–60.

[187] Batka, "Sin and Evil," 236, quoting *WA* 3:174.

> heart and trust elsewhere than in the true God, from whom they neither expect nor seek any good thing.[188]

Indeed, some mistakenly seek their security in the things of the world, chief of which are the possessions of money and property, and thus trust in those things instead of seeking security in God alone:

> There are some who think that they have God and everything they need when they have money and property; they trust in them and boast in them so stubbornly and securely that they care for no one else. They, too, have a god—mammon by name, that is, money and property—on which they set their whole heart. This is the most common idol on earth … so, too, those who boast of great learning, wisdom, power, prestige, family, and honor and who trust in them have a god also, but not the one, true God … Therefore, I repeat, the correct interpretation of this commandment is that to have a god is to have something in which the heart trusts completely.[189]

Thus, any of the capital vices, which result in a clinging to the creature, or some created thing in the world, exhibit the result of trusting in a false god:

> What does "to have a god" mean, or what is God? Answer: A "god" is the term for that to which we are to look for all good and in which we are to find refuge in all need. Therefore to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart. As I have often said, it is the trust and faith of the heart alone that make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true one. Conversely, where your trust is false and wrong, there you do not have the true God. For these two belong together, faith and God. Anything on which your heart relies and depends, I say, that is really your God.[190]

Thus Luther encourages a thorough examination of one's heart, to see where one is really placing his faith:

> Search and examine your own heart thoroughly, and you will discover whether or not it clings to God alone. If you have the sort of heart that expects form him nothing but good, especially in distress and need, and renounces and forsakes all that is not God, then you have the one, true God. On the contrary, if you heart clings to something else and expects to receive from it more good and help than from God and does not

[188] LC I, 12 in Kolb and Wengert, 387.

[189] LC I, 5–10 in Kolb and Wengert, 387.

[190] LC I, 1–3 in Kolb and Wengert, 386.

> run to God but flees form him when things go wrong, then you have another god, an idol.[191]

Luther reminds people as he teaches in the *Large Catechism* on the First Commandment: "Idolatry does not consist merely of erecting an image and praying to it, but it is primarily a matter of the heart which fixes its gaze upon other things and seeks help and consolation from creatures, satins, or devils. It neither cares for God nor expects good things from him sufficiently to trust that he wants to help, nor does it believe that whatever good it encounters comes from God."[192] Indeed, as our idolatrous hearts "fix their gaze on other things," this manifests itself in sadly recognizable vices—habits of clinging to self, or money, food or drink, reputation, and the like. Vice is truly best understood as a trust in something other than the Creator. Virtue, on the other hand, is made manifest particularly when individuals place their trust in God alone.

Virtue as Fear, Love, and Trust in the Creator

Luther continues by encouraging, in lieu of a fearful, idolatrous heart that clings to the things of the world, the formation of a heart that trusts in God alone:

> "See to it that you let me alone be your God, and never search for another." In other words: "Whatever good thing you lack, look to me for it and seek it from me, and whenever you suffer misfortune and distress, crawl to me and cling to me. I, I myself, will give you what you need and help you out of every danger. Only do not let your heart cling to or rest in anyone else."[193]

Rather than have fear, and in turn cling to and love the things of the world, Luther in his *Large Catechism* exhorts believers to let "all our actions proceed from a heart that fears God, looks to him alone … and trusts in him alone."[194] Rather than be people who "neither expect nor

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[191] LC I, 28 in Kolb and Wengert, 390.

[192] LC I, 21 in Kolb and Wengert, 388.

[193] LC I, 4 in Kolb and Wengert, 387.

[194] LC I, 323 in Kolb and Wengert, 429.

seek any good thing"[195] from our God, we should instead know the one "who will help [us] and lavish all good things upon [us] richly,"[196] and hence we should "trust in God alone, look to him alone, and … expect him to give us only good things."[197] Luther reflected on what a "great reproach and dishonor to God" it is "if we, to whom he offers and pledges so many inexpressible blessings, despise them or lack confidence that we shall receive them and scarcely venture to ask for a morsel of bread. The fault lies wholly in that shameful unbelief that does not look to God even for enough to satisfy the belly, let alone expect, without doubting, eternal blessings from God."[198] Instead, he urges, "this much … should be said to the common people, so that they may mark well and remember the sense of this commandment: We are to trust in God alone, to look to him alone, and to expect him to give us only good things; for it is he who gives us body, life, food, drink, nourishment, health, protection, peace, and all necessary temporal and eternal blessings."[199] Once a believer recognizes this reality and trusts that God provides, his heart is increasingly freed from the vices by which he has been clinging to created things and enabled instead to serve the needs of the neighbor. The newfound trust in God allows the cords of vice which had formerly enslaved him to be broken and shed and allows the opportunity for new virtuous habits to be developed in their place. Once one gives up trying to control his own destiny and establish his own security, he can orient his heart outward, toward the neighbor, and serve him by means of the loving virtues.

This moving away from unbelief and idolatry to a fear, love, and trust of God, then, is why

[195] LC I, 12 in Kolb and Wengert, 387.

[196] LC I, 15 in Kolb and Wengert, 388.

[197] LC I, 24 in Kolb and Wengert, 389.

[198] LC III, 57–58 in Kolb and Wengert, 447–48.

[199] LC I, 24 in Kolb and Wengert, 389.

Luther says "the First Commandment is to illuminate and impart its splendor to all others … [it] is the chief source and fountainhead that permeates all the others; again, to this they all return and upon it they depend, so that end and beginning are completely linked and bound together."[200] Indeed, even if one's life is lived in the utmost purity, Luther recognizes if it does not trust in God, all is in vain:

> Now you see for yourself that all those who do not trust God at all times and do not see God's favor and grace and good will toward them in everything they do and everything they suffer, in their living or in their dying, but seek his favor in other things or even in themselves, do not keep this commandment. Rather, they practice idolatry, even if they were to do the works of all the rest of the commandments and had in addition all the prayers, fasting, obedience, patience, chastity, and innocence of all the saints combined.[201]

Luther summarizes this teaching with words that have become synonymous with his name and his catechesis for now five centuries, namely the words, "*fear, love, and trust*."

> This word, "You shall have no other gods," means simply, "You shall *fear, love, and trust* me as your one true God." For where your heart has such an attitude toward God, you have fulfilled this commandment and all others. On the other hand, whoever fears and loves anything else on heaven or on earth will keep neither this one nor any other. Thus the whole Scriptures have proclaimed and presented this commandment everywhere, emphasizing two things, fear of God and trust in God.[202]

Quite simply, fear, love, and trust of God are what is called for in the First Commandment, and Luther ties every other commandment together with the first in his carefully articulated explanations of the commandments in the *Small Catechism*, beginning each with the words, "We should fear and love God, so that…"—a pattern which will be explored in the following section. At the close of his treatment of the Decalogue in the *Large Catechism*, Luther teaches how the keeping of all commandments comes from a heart that "trusts in Him alone," demonstrating that

[200] LC I, 326 in Kolb and Wengert, 430.

[201] *LW* 44:30–31; *WA* 6:210 (1520 *Treatise on Good Works*).

[202] LC I, 324–25 in Kolb and Wengert, 429–30.

all transgression of individual commands are the outworking of a heart that is turned toward the creature, resulting in every vice, instead proceeding from a heart that looks to God alone:

> God declares how important the commandments are to him and how strictly he will watch over them, namely that he will fearfully and terribly punish all who despise and transgress his commandments; and again, how richly he will reward, bless, and bestow all good things on those who prize them and gladly act and live in accordance with them. Thus he demands that all our actions proceed from a heart that fears God, looks to him alone, and because of this fear avoids all that is contrary to his will, lest he be moved to wrath. Conversely, he demands that our actions proceed from a heart that trusts in him alone and for his stake does all that he asks of us, because he reveals himself as a kind father and offers us every grace and blessing.[203]

Luther's insight into the connection between the idolatry prohibited in the first commandment, and its relation to the vice that manifests itself in the breaking of all other commandments, shows us that the importance of addressing the vice present in believers' lives is not solely to enable them to become more virtuous; no, rather, it is at the same time a continual movement from unbelief to faith, from fearing God will not provide, to trusting in Him to supply every need of body and soul, from idolatrous vice to love for one's neighbor.

The Contrarian Scheme of the New Obedience

Because vices are truly idolatrous habits that drive out faith, one must fight against them daily, so that faith in the true God can be nourished. As the Christian's heart is continually freed from its enslavement to false gods it is increasingly enabled to serve God and the neighbor in love. All truly good works then, must flow from fearing, loving, and trusting in God. This understanding serves as impetus for the "contrarian scheme"[204] of Luther's treatment of the

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[203] LC I, 322–23 in Kolb and Wengert, 429.

[204] Recall the term "contrarian" is meant to denote a pairing of opposites. Within the context of the vices and virtues, for instance, the contrarian virtue of humility is paired with pride, as the specific virtue which stands opposite and against pride. Within his catechesis of the Decalogue, Luther also sets vice over and against virtue and good works, first highlighting what the commandment is calling us to refrain from, and often employing the language of vice, and then in turn highlighting what good the commandment calls us to, highlighting the virtue or good work that results as one moves away from the grip of vice and towards the outward love of the neighbor.

Decalogue. Albrecht Peters, in his monumental commentary on Luther's Catechisms, recognizes this interplay of vice and virtue/good works in Luther's treatment of the Ten Commandments:

> The reformer does not inquire only about the specific goods of the neighbor that are to be protected by the individual commandments. He simultaneously analyzes our attempts to scale this protective wall by all means imaginable. This aspect should yield to a different structuring of the Commandments: *negatively*, so to speak, according to the individual *vices* with which we attack the Commandments; *positively* according to the *virtues* by which we help to build a protective wall around the particular goods of our neighbor.[205]

Peters highlights as particular examples:

> God demands in the prohibition against killing that we by "meekness" overcome our "angry and vindictive covetousness." The prohibition of adultery commands the battle of "purity or chastity" against "unchastity" and "evil lust." The prohibition of theft seeks ultimately the "mildness" springing from faith, which overcomes greed begotten by unbelief. The prohibition of false testimony seeks the person who, as a witness to truth, rejects the seduction to lying. The double prohibition against coveting attacks the basic evil of original sin itself…[206]

Peters observes, "the reformer seeks the individual transgressions and fulfillments in the attitudes indicated by the mortal sins and their corresponding virtue."[207] He further notices in the catechisms Luther's repeated method of filling out the particular contours of the precepts of the Decalogue by focusing, "his interpretation of the commandment on the vice to be combated and the virtue commanded that helps to overcome it."[208] This pattern of prohibiting vice and encouraging virtues and good works is also evident beyond the catechisms when Luther explores the right use of the Decalogue in other treatises such as his *Prayer Book*, *Treatise on Good Works*, and even at times when he provides instruction on how to make confession.

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[205] Albrecht Peters, *Commentary on Luther's Catechisms: The Ten Commandments* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2009), 95 (*emphasis* mine).

[206] Peters, *Ten Commandments*, 95.

[207] Peters, *Ten Commandments*, 95–96.

[208] Peters, *Ten Commandments*, 96.

Luther's thoughts at the close of his discussion of the Fifth Commandment in the *Large Catechism* serve as an excellent example, even with the usual order inverted, of his use of the vice and virtue relationship:

> Once again we have God's Word by which he wants to encourage and urge us to true, noble, exalted deeds, such as gentleness, patience, and, in short, love and kindness towards our enemies. He always wants to remind us to recall the First Commandment, that he is our God; that is, that he wishes to help, comfort, and protect us, so that he may restrain our desire and revenge.[209]

Here we see his pattern of instruction on the commandments that involves a restraining of our sinful desire and a corresponding encouragement to virtue/good deeds. This pattern was present early on for Luther. In the *Sermon on the Two Kinds of Righteousness*, he has us understand righteousness as opposite sin: "We read in Rom. 6[:19] that this righteousness is set opposite our own actual sin: 'For just as you once yielded your members to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now yield your members to righteousness for sanctification.'"[210] Whether or not he was aware, this treating of sins according to the negative and then, conversely, the positive, has its heritage in the earliest examples of Christian catechesis. William Weinrich points out that two of the leading motifs in ancient catechesis involve, one, "abstinence from all things impure … often [taught via] a list of vices … from which one is to abstain," and then second, "holy living characterized by mutual love" to which "a list of virtues might be added."[211] This arrangement is pervasive in Luther, as just these select few additional examples from his *Large Catechism* demonstrate:

> Now you understand what it means to take God's name in vain. To repeat it briefly, it is either simply to lie and assert under his name that something is not true, or it is to

[209] LC I, 195 in Kolb and Wengert, 413.

[210] *LW* 31:300; *WA* 2:147.

[211] William Weinrich, "Early Christian Catechetics: An Historical and Theological Construction," in *Luther's Catechisms–450 Years: Essays Commemorating the Large and Small Catechisms of Dr. Martin Luther* (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1979), 69.

> curse, swear, practice magic, and, in short, to do evil of any sort. In addition, you must also know how to use the name of God properly … for it has been revealed and given to us precisely for our use and benefit.[212]

> Our heart should harbor no hostility or malice against anyone in a spirit of anger and hatred. Thus you should be blameless in body and soul toward all people, but especially toward anyone who wishes or does you evil. For to do evil to someone who desires good for you and does you good is not human but devilish. In the second place, this commandment is violated not only when we do evil, but also when we have the opportunity to do good to our neighbors and to prevent, protect, and save them from suffering bodily harm or injury, but fail to do so.[213]

Contrary to those who would be content with "love your neighbor," or "do the loving thing," as sufficient moral instruction and Christian direction after the reception of the Gospel's grace, this chapter has demonstrated that for Luther, there is indeed a very specific shape given to the sanctified life, it is first and foremost the precepts of the Decalogue. However, it should also be abundantly clear that this emphasis on the commandments hardly means that Luther has completely jettisoned an understanding of vice and virtue as he moves well beyond his scholastic formation. Far from discarding the workings of virtue ethics as such, the vices and virtues are taken up into the context of the Decalogue, used, and even transformed. Vices, due to their groundedness in the language of Scripture itself, inhabit the negative side of the Decalogue as it is interpreted at the level of the inner heart, revealing themselves as idolatry operating with other names. The classic virtues on the other hand, are largely discarded in the philosophical sense, and the more Scripturally grounded categories of the fruit of the Spirit inhabit their place. But these latter virtues are not for Luther ends in and of themselves, rather, they are to be considered penultimate to the good works the commandments themselves expect and demand. That is to say, the virtues are encouraged because these will in-turn lead to the actual doing of good works

[212] LC I, 62–63 in Kolb and Wengert, 394.

[213] LC I, 188–89 in Kolb and Wengert, 412.

directed by the Decalogue and for the benefit of the neighbor. Even the virtuous fruits of the Spirit have vitality and relevance only insofar as they are lived out in in good works toward the neighbor and in the context of human vocation. In this respect, however, the vices and virtues provide rich contours to the Decalogue-centric shape of the life of new obedience. It is to these particular contours of the sanctified life we turn next.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONTOURS OF IDOLATRY AND NEW OBEDIENCE

Reading Luther through the lens of the vice/virtue tradition has suggested we comprehend the shape of sanctification not through vice and virtue as such—at least not as it was operating in the world of Luther, but rather by means of a Decalogue-centric scheme. Certainly, however, the ancient insights of the rich vice and virtue tradition are adeptly employed by Luther in such a manner as to bring about further definition and detail with respect to the specific contours of the new obedience. Over and against radical Lutherans, and many in the church who both knowingly and unknowingly sympathize with their position, this study suggests there exists a specific shape for the sanctified life, more concrete than the mere exhortation to love. In an effort to further Biermann's task of moving toward a Lutheran virtue ethic, and to answer the first question of this dissertation regarding the content of the true Christian *telos*, this study suggests that the Ten Commandments, as they are lived out in love for the neighbor, serve as the end towards which Christian behavior should strive.

There is more to this *telos*, however, than simply a ten-point checklist. Reading Luther through the lens of the vice/virtue tradition not only points us to the good works of God's commandments as the shape of sanctified living, but further suggests that this end is not realized automatically simply because one has received God's gracious forgiveness and been declared righteous in his sight. Rather, the contours of the Christian life can only be rightly lived when there exists a true faith which endeavors to fear, love, and trust in God alone. Fearing, loving, and trusting in something other than God is idolatry, which manifests itself in vice, that is, specific dispositions that further enslave the Christian in habits other than loving God and neighbor, and will even jeopardize his Christian identity. Obviously then, vice must be overcome

so that the heart is freed continually from these habits, and so that the Christian is able to pursue other habits, instead regularly engaging in the positive works of the Decalogue. The vice/virtue tradition suggests that the virtues (and in accord with Luther's appropriation of the tradition, these should be understood primarily in terms of the contrarian virtues, or the fruit of the Spirit), are habits which serve to mortify the sinful passions of the flesh and move the Christian from unbelief to belief, from vice to virtue, from being enslaved to one's self and one's passions to being free to serve one's neighbor.

To better understand how vice, virtue, and the good works of the Decalogue might be understood alongside one another, this study makes selective use of a categorization of the Decalogue conceived by Lutheran ethicist Gilbert Meilaender in his work, *Thy Will Be Done*[1], which is his own exposition of the Ten Commandments. In this work, Meilaender sorts the commandments according to the positive principles of life which they support. Meilaender explains his rationale for this categorization:

> Because God is said to have written these ten words on two stone tablets, it has also been common to divide them into "two tables"—the first treating our relation to God, the second our relation to one another. Useful as this division can be in certain respects, my own discussion draws the second and third commandments into close connection with the bonds of community to which the commandments of the second table point … [and] I treat the seventh, ninth, and tenth commandments together as aspects of what I will call the "possessions bond." More generally, I use all the commandments after the first as an invitation to reflect upon the importance of five different bonds that unite human beings in community: the marriage bond [sixth commandment], the family bond [fourth commandment], the life bond [fifth commandment] … and the speech bond [second and eighth commandments].[2]

The following table delineates how Meilaender's various "bonds of community" align with each of the commandments:

[1] Gilbert Meilaender, *Thy Will Be Done* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2020).

[2] Meilaender, *Thy Will*, x–xi.

Table 3. Table of Meilaender's "Bonds of Community" and the Ten Commandments

"Bond of Community"	Commandment(s)
The Possessions Bond	Seventh, Ninth, Tenth Commandments
The Speech Bond	Second and Eighth Commandments
The Marriage Bond	Sixth Commandment
The Family Bond	Fourth Commandment
The Life Bond	Fifth Commandment

Source: This table is a visual representation of Meilaender's categories as described in his book, *Thy Will Be Done* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2020), x-xi.

These categories intuited by Meilaender demonstrate how the specific commandments of the Decalogue together serve to uphold the structure of various principles of life, or as he calls them, "bonds," around which human existence and relationships revolve. Grouping the commandments together around these distinct principles calls to mind Luther's own drawing up of the vices into the context of the Decalogue, as he does in his 1519 *Personal Prayer Book*:

> The five senses are comprehended in the Fifth and Sixth Commandments; the six works of mercy in the Fifth and Seventh; the seven mortal sins—pride in the First and Second, lust in the Sixth, wrath and hatred in the Fifth, gluttony in the Sixth, sloth in the Third, and, for that matter, in all of them.[3]

This, of course, does not address every last capital vice, but is suggestive enough to illustrate Luther's thinking that every vice is already included within the Commandments. Keeping with Meilaender's concept—but altering his own organization slightly in light of Luther's categorization helps us see how various vices and virtues hinder and support the living out of the good works of the Decalogue. The following arrangement is proposed:

[3] *LW* 43:21; *WA* 10/2:385.

Table 4. Correlation of Good Works of the Decalogue, Vices, and Virtues

Good Work (Commandment)	Vice	Virtue
Protecting Possessions (7,9,10)	Greed	Generosity/Goodness
Upholding Reputation (8)	[Envy]	Kindness
Sanctity of Sexuality (6)	Lust/Gluttony	Chastity/Temperance/Self-Control
Sanctity of Life (5)	Wrath/Anger	Peace/Gentleness/Forgiveness
Honoring of God's Representatives (4)	[Wrath/Anger]	Patience
Esteeming God's Word (3)	Sloth	Diligence/Zeal
Trust in the True God (1,2)	Pride	Humility

Source: Based for the most part on Luther's own organization, I devised this particular correlation of the Decalogue, vices, and virtues as a construct by which to treat these categories in the remainder of this chapter. The vices set off in [brackets] denote those Luther himself does not explicitly assign to a particular commandment, and which I have supplied by extrapolating from the trajectory he suggests.

Note, the virtues reflected in the above organization are akin to the fruit of the Spirit/contrarian virtues. This is following Luther's own understanding that the Scriptural concept of the virtues are more similar to these dispositions than those of the classical virtue tradition. Each of these virtues in turn is supportive of particular works done for the good of the neighbor as expressed by the positive side of each commandment. Certainly, this organizational concept is not exhaustive, and does not purport to represent every possible vice or virtue that could rightly be supplied within such a scheme.

Utilizing the schematic correlation represented in the above table, the reader can encounter Luther's writings as a whole, and in particular his catechesis of the Decalogue, with new eyes to see how the vices and virtues work in concert with these categories, either hindering or helping towards their ends. It should be understood that this organization is provided merely as a teaching tool for clarity, and a method by which to encounter Luther's own thoughts on these specific contours of idolatry and new obedience—it is not meant as a kind of rigid

categorization. As Luther says himself, sloth is present as a deadly vice in all of the commandments! Certainly, any number of given vices can have an impact upon, and can affect particular good works of various kinds. Nevertheless, it is still generally true, that one particular vice typically seems to especially pair with each commandment. For example, when it comes to upholding the reputation of others, a vice like envy, which leads to gossip, or what Luther repeatedly refers to as "backbiting,"[4] is indeed a primary hindrance to this task. And, the corresponding virtue of kindness, while applicable in every instance of the outward working of Christian love, is specifically called for as we endeavor, as Luther exhorts in his explanation of this commandment in the *Small Catechism*, to defend, speak well of our neighbor, and put the best construction on everything. Coincidentally, the latter part of this phrase has even been rendered in a more recent English translation of the catechism as to "explain everything in the *kindest* way."[5] Appropriately, kindness asserts itself as the virtue that embraces the commandment. The following presentation of the intersection of vice and virtue within the context of the Decalogue will proceed with my suggested organization, hopeful that it will prove a useful arrangement through which to encounter the remaining contents of this chapter, while at the same time acknowledging the oversimplification it might inadvertently convey.

One would expect, in a dissertation which intends to focus on topics of vice and virtue, that the specific connotations of the various categories of good works, vice, and virtue would have been encountered much sooner. Thus far, these categories have only been dealt with in a largely superficial manner, using their names without further delving into their nature and

[4] For instance, when treating the eighth commandment, Luther talks about how "it applies especially to the detestable, shameless vice of backbiting or slander by which the devil rides us," LC I, 264 in Kolb and Wengert, 421.

[5] SC, 14 (This and all other quotations from the *Small Catechism* are taken from the 1986 translation of *Luther's Small Catechism* by Concordia Publishing House).

character. This was primarily because the preceding intended to set up a systematic doctrinal construct by which to appreciate vice and virtue within the context of the Decalogue. But, that having been accomplished, the time now comes to explore more deeply the contours that comprise the good works of the new obedience, as well as the nature of the vices which prohibit, and virtues which facilitate, our living out of these proper Christian ends.

Our exploration will proceed in more or less descending order through the precepts of the Decalogue. We begin to fill out the particular contours of the distinctively Christian *telos* by commencing with the treatment of a principle that is manifest in the Seventh, Ninth, and Tenth Commandments, striving to more carefully consider our Lord's concern with the integrity of possessions among men and women of the world.

The Seventh, Ninth, and Tenth Commandments: Possessions

"Help [My Neighbor] Improve and Protect His Possessions and Income"

Luther begins his explanation of the Seventh Commandment in the *Large Catechism* by setting forth the context of the prohibition against stealing: "After your own person [Fifth Commandment], and your spouse [Sixth Commandment], the next thing God wants to be protected is temporal property, and he has commanded us all not to rob or pilfer our neighbor's possessions."[6] Truly Luther saw this commandment as setting up a boundary around what is rightfully another's, presupposing that having private property is the nature of created life. He continues, then, by saying we are not to "acquire someone else's property by unjust means," which includes "taking advantage of our neighbors in any sort of dealings," for this would be to steal, "a widespread, common vice."[7] In the *Small Catechism* Luther teaches that this

[6] LC I, 223–24 in Kolb and Wengert, 416.

[7] LC I, 224 in Kolb and Wengert, 416.

commandment calls for the good work of upholding the integrity of others' possessions, that is, we are "to fear, love and trust God, so that we do not take our neighbor's money or possessions, or get them in any dishonest way, but help him improve and protect His possessions and income."[8] Similarly, the Ninth and Tenth Commandments, with their prohibition of all coveting, are useful not only in demonstrating the internal thoughts of the heart as sinful (by exposing covetousness as idolatry), but they also reinforce the integrity of our neighbor's belongings. Again, in the *Small Catechism's* explanation of the Ninth Commandment, Luther says we are not to "scheme to get our neighbor's inheritance or house, or get it in a way which only appears right, but help and be of service to him in keeping it."[9] Thus, the neighbor's possessions are secured by the obedient, non-coveting Christian.

Luther continues to describe stealing, not just as "robbing someone's safe or pocketbook," but also taking advantage of someone in the market, in all stores … in short, wherever business is transacted and money is exchanged for goods or services."[10] Here we should note a practice Luther employs at every turn when expositing the Decalogue, namely his insistence on expanding the application of the principle set forth in the command to the present societal context. In his sound study, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, Paul Althaus conveys Luther's understanding that "all good works must have their source here [in the Ten Commandments, for] nothing lies outside [their] sphere," but notes that when Luther gives high praise for the Decalogue, "he is thinking not simply of the Decalogue in its historical form … but of the Decalogue as contained in the whole Bible, as interpreted and fulfilled by the prophets and

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[8] SC, 14.

[9] SC, 15.

[10] LC I, 224 in Kolb and Wengert, 16.

Christ," who have established "new Decalogues."[11] Here, Althaus cites Luther from his 1535 *Theses Concerning Faith and Law,* specifically, Thesis 53: "Indeed, we would make new decalogues, as Paul does in all the epistles, and Peter, but above all Christ in the gospel."[12] It should be noted that use of the term "new" can be misunderstood. I advocate for the understanding that the principles of the "new Decalogues" being applied to the present context are certainly not to be considered new in the sense of "novel," rather, they are aspects of what may be considered the natural law, the guiding principles of rightly ordered creatureliness which are woven from the foundation of the world into the structure of creation itself by God's gracious design, Moses's Ten Commandments serving as a concise summary of this natural law. What is "new" are these principles' particular and specific applications in the life of a Christian believer in whatever social milieu he finds himself.

Althaus, given his penchant for an understanding of Christian spontaneity with respect to the living out of God's commands (and his advocacy for an understanding that the Spirit guides us to "arrive at right judgments"), pushes perhaps too far when he suggests that these "new decalogues express the intention of God's commandments better, more completely, and more deeply than the Mosaic Decalogue does."[13] Better is his analysis which shortly follows, explaining that what Luther really was doing was "interpreting the commandments" of the Mosaic Decalogue, that is, as Luther next elucidates in Thesis 54, making them "clearer" for use in the immediate context.[14] While Luther's explanations certainly do go "beyond the

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[11] Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1965), 30–31.

[12] LW 34:112; *WA*. 39/1:47

[13] Althaus, *Ethics*, 31.

[14] *LW* 34:112–13; *WA* 39/1:47.

Decalogue"[15] in terms of application, they hardly do so in terms of principle. Indeed, Luther says of the Seventh Commandment, "here belongs all that is to be taught about avarice, fraudulent gain, deceit, craftiness, or allowing harm to happen to or hindering our neighbor's keeping what belongs to him."[16] As such, for Luther, stealing can even include when one is lazy, and wastes time while earning a wage,[17] or when people "take advantage of the other by deception and sharp practices and crafty dealings."[18] The duty of the commandment then, is "not to harm our neighbors, to take advantage of them, or to defraud them … [but rather] faithfully to protect their neighbor's property and to promote and further their interests, especially when they get money, wages, and provisions for doing so."[19]

Now that we have explored Luther's own teaching to gain a clearer picture of the particular nature of the good works called for in these commandments that deal primarily with the integrity of our possessions, it is time to examine how Luther provided additional contours to this precept's shape through his incorporation of the concepts of vice and virtue within the sphere of this statute. In the *Treatise on Good Works*, Luther introduces the Seventh Commandment with: "This commandment also has a work which includes very many good works while opposing many vices," and notes that:

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[15] Althaus, *Ethics*, 31–32.

[16] *LW* 43:23; *WA* 10/2:387. In the 1522 *Prayer Book*, an extensive list is given of various ways by which the principle of the Seventh Commandment is broken: "Whoever steals, robs, and practices usury, Whoever uses short weights and measures [Deut. 25:15], or who passes off poor merchandise as good, Whoever gets an inheritance or income by fraud, Whoever withholds earned wages [Deut. 24:15] and whoever refuses to acknowledge his debts, Whoever refuses to lend money without interest to a needy neighbor, All who are avaricious and want to get rich quickly, Whoever in any way keeps what belongs to another or keeps for himself what is only entrusted to him for a time, Whoever does not try to prevent loss to another person, Whoever does not forewarn his neighbor against possible loss, Whoever hinders what is advantageous to his neighbor, Whoever is vexed by his neighbor's increase in wealth" (*LW* 43:20; *WA* 10/2:384).

[17] LC I, 225 in Kolb and Wengert, 416–17.

[18] LC I, 227 in Kolb and Wengert, 417.

[19] LC I, 233 in Kolb and Wengert, 417.

> It fights not only against theft and robbery, but against every kind of sharp practice which men perpetrate against each other in matters of worldly goods. For instance, greed, usury, overcharging, counterfeit goods, short measure, short weight, and who could give an account of all the smart, novel, and sharp-witted tricks which daily increase in every trade![20]

Indeed, the particular vice most problematic in the realm concerning the integrity of other's possessions, and their overall material well-being in general, is that of greed—the vice that comes first in Luther's list.

Greed and Generosity

Albrecht Peters observes that Luther grounds his discussion of the Seventh Commandment under the category of the vice of greed, writing, "the reformer places the prohibition of stealing under this scope: the holy zealous God watches over our human community and protests the possessions of our neighbor against infringements of our greed." He continues his observations noting Luther's affirmation of God's watchful care over all areas of human living: "in artful arrangement, he unfolds this zealous watching of God over all sectors of our economic life together."[21]

Ricardo Rieth, in his 2001 *Lutheran Quarterly* article "Luther on Greed," notes that Luther "found his hermeneutical guidelines for interpreting most of the passages on greed especially in the first, seventh, and ninth commandments," (but also noting he draws from the Sermon on the Mount, and New Testament statements on greed as the root of evil (1 Tim. 6:10) and idolatry (Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5)).[22] Rieth continues by explaining that for Luther, the concept of greed was communicated by the word *Geitz* in German, and *avaritia* (avarice) in Latin. While both words

[20] LW 44:106–07; *WA* 6:270.

[21] Peters, *Ten Commandments*, 266.

[22] Ricardo Willy Rieth, "Luther on Greed," in Timothy J. Wengert, *Harvesting Martin Luther's Reflections on Theology, Ethics, and the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 153.

are closely related in their common use during the Reformation era, the latter term's more particular connotation tended to convey the notion of "retaining or accumulating," while the former term's more particular connotation is "wanting to have more," hence more closely associated with our contemporary notion of greed. This was the term more frequent in Luther, although he made use of both, and often interchangeably.[23] While in the context of modernity and capitalism, greed has at times been understood in a positive sense, this is the exception in medieval thought. At the time of the Reformation, certainly, greed is almost always understood to be a negative quality. Luther was particularly dismayed by this vice, indicating that it was "so widespread … that it is practically futile to preach against it."[24]

Thomas Aquinas defined greed as an excessive love of or desire for money or any possession money can buy.[25] DeYoung points our attention to the reality that "when it comes to our giving and our getting, greed corrodes the virtue of generosity and leads us to ignore the claims of justice."[26] She observes that in Scripture, Jesus takes a "hard line" against greed, observing that instruction concerning matters of money and possessions predominate in Jesus' teachings.[27] Indeed, as Luther writes in the *Large Catechism*, mammon is the most common idol in all the earth.[28] Nothing, Jesus teaches, more accurately reveals where your true heart is than what you do with your money, it is the clearest window into the inner heart: "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21; Luke 12:32–34). Luther is keenly aware of how readily men place their trust in possessions:

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[23] Rieth, "Luther on Greed," 153.

[24] *LW* 24:162; *WA* 45:609 (1537 *Sermons on John 14–16*).

[25] *STh*, II–II, 118.2.

[26] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 101.

[27] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 100.

[28] LC I, 7 in Kolb and Wengert, 387.

A rich man trusts and relies upon his money and possessions, and they help him; and are we not willing to trust and rely upon the living God in the faith that he would help us and wants to help us? They say that gold makes bold; and it is true, as Baruch 3[:17] says, "Gold is a thing in which men trust." But far greater is the courage which the highest eternal God gives, in whom not men, but only God's children trust.[29]

Because of this reality, Luther ultimately connects the vice of greed to the First Commandment:

[Moses] continues his exposition of the First Commandment and begins to show in what ways one sins against it, and he teaches how to avoid occasions for sinning against it. First he takes up wealth and abundance, that is, mammon and greed, of which Baruch writes (3:17): "Gold, in which men trust." And Paul makes greed idolatry and the root of all evil. "See to it [he says], when you are full, not to forget the Lord your God" (v. 12). For the human heart trusts goods at hand but mistrusts those not at hand, as the saying goes: "Having gold makes men bold; being poor makes them sour." But trust in wealth cannot rule in the heart at the same time with faith and love. And this he calls here "to forget the Lord God." For you do not remember the Lord if you merely mouth His name, but if you cling to Him and love Him with constant faith in your heart. See for yourself how Moses first treats the First Commandment spiritually—against the idolatry of the heart, against trust in property, toward trust in God—before he talks about idols. Therefore you should not suppose that Moses' whole concern was about idols. Thus the meaning is: Have one God, that you may trust in Him alone. Even if wealth abounds, do not trust in it. If it is not there, do not be mistrustful; but always trust in the Lord, as the psalm also says (69:10): "If riches increase, do not hang the heart there"; and (Ps. 62:10): "Do not lust for loot, nor become vain."[30]

DeYoung observes, "Our greedy tendencies to trust in money for happiness and security undercut our trust in God. Like other vices rooted in pride, greed expresses the do-it-yourself method of finding happiness, instead of the contentedness of receiving the good that God has to give and depending on his provision."[31]

In a similar way, Rieth points out how Luther unmasks greed as idolatry, especially based on Paul's linking of the two terms (greed and idolatry) in Eph. 5:6 and Col. 3:5, in addition to the words of our Lord who said we cannot serve both God and mammon (Matt. 6:24).[32] Luther

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[29] *LW* 44:48–49; *WA* 6:225 (1520 *Treatise on Good Works*).

[30] *LW* 9:70–71; *WA* 14:612–13 (1525 *Lectures on Deuteronomy*).

[31] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 101.

[32] Rieth, "Luther on Greed," 154–56.

writes, “the Apostle calls no other sin idolatry except covetousness [Col. 3:5], because this sin shows most starkly that a man does not trust God for anything, but expects more benefit from his money than from God.”[33] This idolatry is especially deceitful, however, because “greed has a very pretty and attractive cover for its shame; it is called provision for the body and the needs of nature.”[34] Reith further observes: “one could never sufficiently describe how perfectly greed disguises itself as something beautiful, virtuous, correct, and honest. It seems normal to apologize for seeking mammon’s idolatry with the excuse of seeking personal and family subsistence—both necessary and ordered by God—and thus to disguise greed or anxiety for sinful wealth.”[35] Ultimately, then, to be in the grips of greed is for Luther a sign of unbelief—if not outside of saving faith, at least in direct opposition to a faith which would trust in God’s gracious aid.[36]

As was shown in the prior chapter, sometimes Luther saw greed as a chief vice along with that of pride. It was indeed the “lust of the eyes,”[37] from 1 John 2:16 that existed alongside the “pride of life” and the “lust of the flesh.” He teaches in his 1527 lectures on this book:

> Many are the allurements of the eyes. I believe, however, that here avarice is meant most of all. For the eyes are satisfied with other things, but they are not satisfied with the accumulation of gold. No, they always lust for more, such as large numbers of estates, fields, and houses. Avarice is not content with the things it uses. No, it desires even the things it can never use.[38]

If pride heads the list of sins which demonstrate a trust in one’s self over and against God, greed heads the list of vices that trust in the things of the world in place of God. And, per Paul’s own

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[33] *LW* 44:108; *WA* 6:272 (1520 *Treatise on Good Works*).

[34] *LW* 44:107; *WA* 6:271.

[35] Rieth, “Luther on Greed,” 158.

[36] Rieth, “Luther on Greed,” 163.

[37] *LW* 10:35; *WA* 3:32 (1515 *Lectures on Psalms*), LW 24:162; *WA* 45:609 (1537 *Sermons on John 14–16*).

[38] *LW* 30:250; *WA* 20:664 (1527 *Lectures on 1 John*).

"admonition against greed" … [it is] "the 'root of all evils.'"[39] He writes that it is often seen as a "root sin" alongside pride: "The root and first 'heaviness' is greed, from which sprouts wrath, envy, pride, malice, deceit, and practically all the works of the flesh."[40] Greed is an especially troublesome vice because it is insatiable. Along with the ancients, Luther in his 1526 lectures on Habakkuk, observed:

> The more money acquired, the greater the greed. Man can never be sated with wealth; but his appetite for it grows and grows. The same is true of all other evil human lusts. The more honor a man receives, the more he covets. The more land and power, the greater the desire to increase these.[41]

Later in the same exposition, Luther writes:

> And at the same time the prophet also shows the disposition of the human heart when it covets goods and honor; namely, the more it has, the more it wants. If it possessed the entire world, it would like to have two worlds; if it had two, it would like to have ten. In short, when hell and death are sated, then a greedy heart, too, will have enough, but not before. Therefore we must not give thought to finding ways to satisfy greed, death, and hell, giving them so much that they will say: "Enough!" No, greed must be killed as death and hell are killed.[42]

Evagrius observed this very early on in his writings, reflecting that as "the sea is never filled up even though it takes in a multitude of rivers (see Eccles. 1:7); the desire of the avaricious person cannot get full of riches. He doubled his wealth and wants to double it again, and he does not stop doubling it until death puts a stop to his endless zeal."[43]

Luther points out the futility of the avaricious accumulation of goods:

> When people have devoted all their care and effort to scraping together possession and great wealth, what have they accomplished in the end? You will find that they have wasted their effort and toil. Even if they have piled up great riches, these have

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[39] *LW* 28:372; *WA* 26:111 (1528 *Lectures on 1 Timothy*), *LW* 11:219; *WA* 4:72 (1515 *Lectures on Psalms*).

[40] *LW* 10:55; *WA* 3:48 (1515 *Lectures on Psalms*).

[41] *LW* 19:187; *WA* 19:385.

[42] *LW* 19:202; *WA* 19:399.

[43] Evagrius, *On Evil Thoughts*, 3.8 in Sinkewicz, 79.

> turned to dust and blown away. They themselves never found happiness in their wealth, nor did it ever last to the third generation.[44]

Not only is wealth fleeting, but obsession with it only increases trouble in life, so that it is never enjoyed. Again, Luther's insight is on point: "how many people are there who scrape and scratch day and night and are not even a penny richer? Even though they amass a great amount, they have to suffer so many troubles and misfortunes that they can never enjoy it."[45]

Finally, Rieth observes that for Luther, "greed destroys the fruits of faith. It destroys the good works that spring from faith … ruin[ing] the basic principle which should determine one's attitude to goods and money in reference to oneself and others … [the] fundamental principles to administer the investment of goods and money … through fraternal love."[46] In his *Exposition of Psalm 127*, Luther writes to his recipients:

> I selected this psalm because it so beautifully turns the heart away from covetousness and concern for temporal livelihood and possessions toward faith in God, and in a few words teaches us how Christians are to act with respect to the accumulation and ownership of this world's goods … For not only the evangelists, but all the prophets as well, complain that covetousness and concern for this world's goods hinder the gospel greatly from bearing fruit. Indeed, the precious word of God sometimes falls among thorns and is choked [Matt. 13:22] so that it proves unfruitful; sadly enough, our daily experience shows us this only too well. And Paul also complains that all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ [Phil. 2:21].[47]

Greed, then, is troublesome not only because it causes unbelief in our own heart, but, in the end, risks depriving our neighbor of necessity. Here, by reflecting on how the greed of vice provides additional insight into the negative side of these commandments, one can see their extrinsic nature come to the fore—overcoming greed is not just about personal rectitude (for the sake of guarding the heart and obeying the First Commandment), but it is ultimately about

[44] LC I, 43 in Kolb and Wengert, 391.

[45] LC I, 243–44 in Kolb and Wengert, 418.

[46] Rieth, "Luther on Greed," 166.

[47] *LW* 45:317; *WA* 15:360.

serving the neighbor in love. When it is at its worst, DeYoung reasons, "greed incites us to the obstinate refusal to meet even the demands of basic justice, as we opt to keep more than our share," and in this way, "avarice is a sin directly against one's neighbor, since one person cannot overabound in external riches without another person lacking them, for temporal goods cannot be possessed by many at the same time."[48] She continues observing how Pope John Paul II taught that "making money the measure of all things … is really a cover for making human beings—the makers and controllers of the money—the measure of all things, including the value of other human beings." He then concluded: "this instrumentalization and commodification of human beings by others reveals a deeper connection between avarice and injustice than one individual's impulse to steal or hoard."[49]

Applying the principle of the Seventh Commandment, then, to his own context, Luther was especially concerned about the burgeoning practice of usury, and set forth his position with abundant clarity in a 1540 treatise, *Trade and Usury*.[50] For Luther, the practice of usury too easily promoted the vice of greed and the accumulation of wealth at the expense of the neighbor: "because of his avarice, therefore, goods must be priced as much higher as the greater need of the other fellow will allow, so that the neighbor's need becomes as it were the measure of the goods' worth and value."[51] Luther duly admonished: "it should be known in our times (which the Apostle Paul prophesied would be perilous [2 Tim. 3:1] avarice and usury have not only taken a mighty hold on the whole world, but have had the nerve to seek out certain subterfuges by which

[48] DeYoung, *Glittering, Vices*, 107.

[49] Pope John Paull II, *Evangelium Vitae I*, as quoted in DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 110.

[50] *LW* 45:245–310; *WA* 15:293–313.

[51] *LW* 45:248; *WA* 15:295.

they might freely practice their wickedness under the guise of fair dealing."[52] Perhaps the biggest issue with the practice of usury, was not its existence, but its ability to exploit, and all the while putting on the pretense of a "just" business dealing. Scholars might debate whether Luther, in our own day, would take a hard line against lending at interest. Some could contend that as long as rates were reasonable, and not oppressive, and that the lender too shares in some degree of risk, usury might not in every instance be a breaking of the Seventh Commandment, but nevertheless, its practice nearly always at least "gives the occasion for avarice," by which "every window and door to hell" might be opened.[53]

Money, for Luther, is a gift from God, to be used yes, for the provision of one's own family, but also, for serving the neighbor in need. Kolb observes that "Material blessings need not necessarily tempt … into idolatry; they can serve as tools for aiding and supporting others."[54] He points our attention to Luther's observations to his congregation in 1531: "It is no sin to have money and property, wife and children, house and home. But you must not let it be your master. You must make it serve you, and you must be its master."[55] DeYoung again is insightful as she observes, "The hallmark of well-entrenched greed, then, is a willingness to use people to serve our love of money, rather than the use of money to serve our love of people."[56] As such, the way to combat and overcome one's greed is to practice generosity, indeed, "part of being generous now is adequately trusting God for the future."[57] Luther thus describes the virtuous positive work of the Seventh Commandment in the *Treatise on Good Works*, and describes the generous

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[52] *LW* 45:273; *WA* 6:36.

[53] *LW* 45:247; *WA* 15:294.

[54] Kolb, *Luther's Treatise On Christian Freedom*, 76.

[55] LW 21:189; *WA* 32:455 (1532 *The Sermon on the Mount*, exposition of Matt. 6:24).

[56] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 109.

[57] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 104.

person: “He does not cling to money; he uses his money cheerfully and freely for the benefit of his neighbor. He knows full well that he will have enough no matter how much he gives away.”[58]

The virtue of goodness, or generosity as the word is sometimes rendered, was for Luther a virtue that was characteristic of our Lord Himself in his dealings with men:

> *Goodness*, that most gracious treatment of us and attitude toward us in Christ … [It is] not to be understood as referring to the substance of human nature, as they have explained it, applying it to the incarnation. Here [we are] speaking about Christ’s activity. It means loving-kindness toward human beings; that is, He lived among us in the sweetest of ways, offended no one, and tolerated everyone. With this sweetness He did not serve Himself but sought to show love and the effects of love toward blind men by giving them sight, as Matt. 11:5 says; for this was the purpose and effect of His φιλανθρωπία, that He was eager to serve men out of generosity and friendliness. These virtues we see in Christ and in God.[59]

Indeed, this “goodness” is a fruit of the Spirit, which Luther says “means willingly helping others in their need, being generous, and lending to them.”[60]

Luther, in outlining the positive way to keep the Seventh Commandment in his *Prayer Book*, calls on Christians: “to be poor in spirit [Matt. 5:3], generous, willing to lend or give of our possessions, and to live free of avarice and covetousness.”[61] Indeed, Luther exhorts, we should be cognizant of “how [we] deal with the poor—there are many of them now—who must live from hand to mouth.” Further, he warns that those in positions of authority “should be alert and courageous enough to establish and maintain order in all areas of trade and commerce in order that the poor may not be burdened and oppressed.”[62] Rieth again provides strong insight into Luther’s overall position: “he held love of neighbor to be the principle by which to evaluate

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[58] *LW* 44:108; *WA* 6:272.

[59] *LW* 29:79; *WA* 25:62 (1527 *Lectures on Titus*).

[60] *LW* 27:94; *WA* 40/2:119 (1535 *Galatians Commentary*).

[61] *LW* 43:23; *WA* 10/2:387.

[62] LC I, 249 in Kolb and Wengert, 419.

diverse economical conditions—salary and pricing policies, formation of monopolies, external trade, and so forth. He wanted thus to expose and denounce situations characterized by sin and injustice."[63]

The major impediment to generosity, then, is the vice of a greedy heart. A generous heart, Luther says in his exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, "is not concerned for its own sake, but for the neighbor's sake," it forgets its own interests, is not concerned with its own advantage or with mammon, for "the man whose money is dear to him and who is on the lookout for his own advantage will not have much regard for his neighbor or for the office that involves his neighbor." He continues: "no greedy belly can be a Christian … the two are intolerable to each other—being greedy or anxious and being a believer—and one has to eliminate the other."[64] In summary, in opposition to a greedy heart one is commanded, Luther says, to "promote and further our neighbor's interests and when they suffer want, we are to help, share, and lend to both friends and foes. Anyone who seeks and desires good works will find here more than enough things to do that are heartily acceptable and pleasing to God."[65]

Thus, the Seventh, Ninth and Tenth Commandments call on us to watch zealously over our neighbor's income and possessions. Luther envisions the many ways this is lived out in society, and the intention of these commandments go well beyond a mere refraining from stealing or coveting. In short, they cover every aspect of our interaction with our neighbor in the economic realm. Luther readily recognizes that greed is the most troublesome vice hindering our keeping of this precept in our lives, as it entails idolatrously clinging to our money and possessions in an effort secure our own good. To be freed from this vice, the virtue of generosity must be

[63] Rieth, "Luther on Greed," 162.

[64] *LW* 21:194, 291; *WA* 21:459, 465 (1532 *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*).

[65] LC I, 252 in Kolb and Wengert, 420.

cultivated. Giving away our mammon to provide for others helps us increasingly to recognize that all our provision comes from God, the true Provider and Sustainer, and not from ourselves. As our trust in him is developed, the greedy heart is continually put to death and generosity is increasingly practiced.

The Eighth Commandment: Reputation

"Defend, Speak Well of, and Explain Everything in the Kindest Way"

Just as we cannot live well without necessary goods which sustain our existence, so too we cannot live with unjustly broken reputations. Luther recognizes that "besides our own body, our spouse, and our temporal property, we have one more treasure that is indispensable to us, namely our honor and good reputation. For it is important that we do not live among people in public disgrace and dishonor."[66] Not only is our reputation important, but so too is our neighbor's: "Therefore God does not want our neighbors deprived of their reputation, honor, and character any more than of their money and possessions; he wants everyone to maintain self-respect before spouse, child, servant, and neighbor."[67] To this end, by means of the Eighth Commandment, the prohibition against bearing false witness, or sometimes more simply put, lying, God intends to protect our reputation and the reputation of others.

Luther acknowledges the most direct application of this commandment is the protection of legal rights, that is, giving a true witness before the court of law. That, no doubt, was its context in the life of the Old Testament Israelites. However, he writes "it extends much further when it is applied to spiritual jurisdiction or administration," with respect to how we treat our neighbor; this most readily plays out in our lives, of course, through "sins of the tongue by which

[66] LC I, 255 in Kolb and Wengert, 420.

[67] LC I, 256 in Kolb and Wengert, 420.

we may injure or offend our neighbor."[68] It is by our speech then, that we most readily employ a weapon by which our neighbor's reputation is damaged.[69] In the *Treatise on Good Works* Luther acknowledges that "this commandment seems insignificant, and yet it is so great that he who would rightly keep it must risk life and limb, property and reputation, and all that he has. And yet it includes no more than the work of that tiny member, the tongue," and noting that "he who would keep this commandment would have both hands full just keeping it in those matters concerning the tongue."[70] Peters conveys that in employing this understanding of the commandment, Luther was putting emphasis not only on the protection of the neighbor but also on the purity of one's own soul, and observes that this is in concert with the medieval confessional manuals which "repeatedly mention lying" in their rubrics for confession. This emphasis on the "mouth" is also advanced much earlier by Augustine.[71]

Because it is true that "everyone would rather hear evil than good about their neighbors"[72] Luther summarized the positive aspect of this commandment's explanation in the *Small Catechism* by saying that we are not to "tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way."[73] Luther recognizes that at times Christians will become aware of legitimate sins of others.

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[68] LC I, 262–63 in Kolb and Wengert, 421.

[69] Indeed, in the exhortations from his 1522 *Prayer Book* on how one breaks the Eighth Commandment, nearly every prohibition involves something that has to do with integrity of speech: "Whoever conceals and suppresses the truth in court: Whoever does harm by untruth and deceit. Whoever uses flattery to do harm, or spreads gossip, or uses double-talk. Whoever brings his neighbor's conduct, speech, or wealth into question or disrepute. Whoever allows others to speak evil about his neighbor, helps them, and does nothing to oppose them. Whoever does not speak up in defense of his neighbor's good repute. Whoever does not take a backbiter to task. Whoever does not speak well about all his neighbors and does not keep silent about what is bad about them. Whoever conceals the truth or does not defend it" (*LW* 43:20–21; *WA* 10/2:384–85).

[70] *LW* 44:110–11; *WA* 6:273.

[71] Peters, *Ten Commandments*, 295.

[72] LC I, 264 in Kolb and Wengert, 421.

[73] SC, 14.

In this case, he reasons, "there is a very great difference between judging sin and having knowledge of sin" and while we may "certainly see and hear that [our] neighbor has sins … [we] have no command to tell others about it."[74] Rather, Luther points all Christians to our Lord's instructions for dealing with sin in Matt. 18, and instructs: "Let this be your rule … that you should not be quick to spread slander and gossip about your neighbors but admonish them privately so that they may improve."[75] Further, not only is a person to avoid spreading gossip, but "if [they] encounter someone with a worthless tongue who gossips and slanders someone else, [they are to] rebuke such people straight to their faces and make them blush with shame."[76] Thus, this precept calls for careful vigilance not only over our own words, but also over the words of our neighbors, ensuring we do not fall into further sin by omitting to curtail the careless utterance of others.

Luther concludes his treatment of the good work that is called for in the Eighth Commandment with these words:

> Now then we have the summary and substance of this commandment: No one shall use the tongue to harm a neighbor, whether friend or foe. No one shall say anything evil to a neighbor, whether true or false, unless it is done with proper authority or for that person's improvement. Rather, we should use our tongue to speak only the best about all people, to cover the sins and infirmities of our neighbors, to justify their actions, and to cloak and veil them with our own honor. [77]

The chief reason for this, he concludes "is the one that Christ has given in the gospel, and in which he means to encompass all the commandments concerning our neighbor, 'In everything do to others as you would have them do to you'"[78] (Matt. 7:12). Few things, however, hinder our

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[74] LC I, 266 in Kolb and Wengert, 421.

[75] LC I, 276 in Kolb and Wengert ,423.

[76] LC I, 273 in Kolb and Wengert, 423.

[77] LC I, 285 in Kolb and Wengert, 424.

[78] LC I, 286 in Kolb and Wengert, 424.

ability to uphold the reputation of our neighbor, or more readily cause us to slander him with our speech, than the vice of envy present in our lives. We next consider how the vice of envy and the virtue of kindness add insightful contours to enhance our understanding of the Eighth Commandment.

Envy and Kindness

It is important, then, to consider what condition of the heart would lead a person so deliberately to sully the reputation of another. The reasons could obviously be many, and even multi-faceted, but as was just mentioned, one of the primary vices which compels the slander of others is that of envy. Luther himself explicitly makes this connection:

> When your neighbor sees that you have received from God a better house and property, or more possessions and good fortune than they, it irritates them and makes them envious of you so that they slander you. Thus by the devil's prompting you acquire many enemies who begrudge you every blessing, whether physical or spiritual.[79]

In fact, the most basic definition of envy in the vice tradition, as defined by Aquinas, is to understand it as sorrow for another's good.[80] In other words, when you see the success of your neighbor, you desire what is rightfully theirs, and then this quite naturally leads you to want to tear them down. DeYoung analyzes how this typically plays out: "the envious person resents another person's good gifts because they are superior to his or her own. It's not just that the other person is better; it is that by comparison their superiority makes you feel your own lack, your own inferiority, more acutely."[81] Envy is thus distinguished from greed in this respect: we envy

[79] LC I, 184 in Kolb and Wengert, 411.

[80] *STh*, II–II, 36.1

[81] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 42.

not the possession of another, but the seeming superiority of the person who possesses it.[82] She continues: "When the envious are forced to confront a self they judge lacking in worth, their unhappiness and grief can be unbearable. They feel compelled to do something—anything—to get themselves out from under it. Usually this means sabotaging the rival."[83] Luther himself cautions against this kind of an attitude:

> We must learn that God does not want you to deprive your neighbors of anything that is theirs, so that they suffer loss while you satisfy your greed, even though before the world you can retain the property with honor. To do so is underhanded and malicious wickedness, and, as we say, it is all done "under the table" so as to escape detection. Although you may have wronged no one, you have certainly trespassed on your neighbor's rights. It might not be called stealing or cheating, but it is coveting—that is, having designs on your neighbor's property, luring it away from them against their will, and *begrudging what God gave them*.[84]

Indeed, in the ancient near east, to begrudge what another had was to cast an "evil eye" upon them, and this practice was considered shameful and was to be avoided intentionally.[85] In the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard from Matt. 20:1–16, Jesus uses this exact terminology in verse 15: "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or is your *eye evil because I am good*?" Most Bible translations typically render this latter question more in accord with the English Standard Version: "Or do you *begrudge my generosity*?" which obscures the unmistakable connection to this idiom concerning envy that was common in Jesus' day. The Germans even developed a specific word for what envy means: *schadenfreude*, which is literally

[82] It is true, in modern usage, we tend to think of envy as applying to possessions as well as people, for instance, envying another person's car. But in the vice tradition, envy is more appropriately used to convey the notion of desire with respect to another's status. In his work *The Cardinal and the Deadly: Reimagining the Seven Virtues and Seven Vices* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015), Karl Clifton-Soderstrom helpfully teaches: "if envy has a definable shape, it is not in the content of what is desired, or even in desperately wanting something you lack. Envy becomes vicious when it turns our desire for anything good into malice toward those who already enjoy what we don't have" (85).

[83] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 45.

[84] LC I, 307 in Kolb and Wengert, 427 (*emphasis* mine).

[85] *Seven Deadly Sins* (History/A&E Television Networks, 2008), DVD.

rendered "sorrow-joy" and is understood as the state of rejoicing when a rival's reputation, life, or property is damaged.[86]

DeYoung writes: "according to Aquinas, envy typically starts with 'detraction,' more commonly known as backstabbing."[87] Luther shared in this observation, and when treating the Eighth Commandment, while he does not often reference envy, he most definitely does call attention to one of envy's most infamous "offspring," that of gossip, or what Luther called "backbiting." He notes that the Eighth Commandment "applies especially to the detestable, shameless vice of backbiting or slander by which the devil rides us." He continues: "to avoid this vice, therefore, we should note that none has the right to judge and reprove a neighbor publicly, even after having seen a sin committed … [for] those who are not content just to know but rush ahead and judge are called backbiters. Learning a bit of gossip about someone else, [and] spread[ing] it into every corner."[88] In his *Exposition of the Lord's Prayer*, he vents: "The widespread vice of backbiting and judging the sins of others is just about the most accursed thing on earth. All other ills contaminate and harm only him who commits them, but this miserable yelping cur has to befoul and ruin himself with the sins of others."[89]

In this utterance, Luther is also keenly aware of another aspect of envy. Not only does it typically manifest itself in slander of another, but in fact, it does perhaps even greater harm to the person who engages in the vice. DeYoung explains how the vice tradition observed this reality: "If the envious try to undermine their rival, and are not successful, then their bitterness intensifies, and they resent the other person's good even more. If unassuaged, envy can lead to a

[86] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 46.

[87] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 46.

[88] LC I, 264–67 in Kolb and Wengert, 421–22.

[89] *LW* 42:69; *WA* 2:121.

full-scale hatred of a rival" which ultimately blocks our own happiness.[90] This sentiment is captured quite potently in the Proverb "envy makes the bones rot" (Prov. 14:30). Luther himself observes the connection to this Proverb while commenting on 1 Tim. 3:3 where Paul speaks of "passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another."[91] Luther elaborates on the threat of envy: "some people pine away with envy, [and] will be consumed with the most evil thoughts, and are their own worst cross."[92] This, of course, is the origin of the expression "green with envy," denoting the pallor of individuals who have invited illness upon themselves through this particular vice.[93]

Perhaps most dangerous of all is that envy is deadly, not just to one's life, but to one's soul: "one's hatred of one's neighbor spills over into hatred of the one who stacked the deck against one. God."[94] Because envy is ultimately a "dissatisfaction with our place in God's order of creation," the "envier's solution to her predicament is to try to rearrange the rankings so that she comes out excelling her rival" and as such, "the envious thus expend all their efforts usurping God's role … creating their own superior status by engineering the downfall of their competitors."[95] As such, envy is also another manifestation of idolatry—not a clinging to the things of the world, as in greed—but rather a clinging to one's self as a better "god" than the Creator Himself. However, "playing God," is all the envious can do, and rather than engineer their success, they can only ruin both their neighbor and themselves in their quest.

The contrarian virtue tradition recognized that the way to combat the vice of envy is quite

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[90] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices* 46.

[91] *LW* 29:77–78; *WA* 25:61 (1527 *Lectures on Titus*).

[92] *LW* 29:77; *WA* 25:60.

[93] Lawrence S. Cunningham, *The Seven Deadly Sins: A Visitor's Guide* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria, 2012), 59.

[94] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 46–47.

[95] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 51–52.

straightforward, it is to choose to develop the corresponding virtue of kindness and act accordingly towards the neighbor. Luther notes this exact connection, highlighting the necessity of moving from the vice of envy to this particular virtue in a sermon on 1 Peter: “Thus if I suppress hatred and envy, I become all the more willing to be kind and friendly to my neighbor.”[96] Interpreting Paul’s use of the term χρηστότης (kindness), a fruit of the Spirit, Luther writes in his 1535 *Galatians Commentary*:

> This means a gentleness and sweetness in manner and in one’s entire life. For Christians should not be harsh and morose; they should be gentle, humane, affable, courteous, people with whom others enjoy associating, people who overlook the mistakes of others or *put the best construction on them*, people who willingly yield to others, who bear with the recalcitrant, etc. Thus even the heathen have said: “You should know the manners of your friend, not hate them.” That is how Christ was, as can be seen throughout the Gospels. We read of St. Peter that he cried whenever he remembered the kindness Christ had manifested in His daily life. This is a very great virtue, and one that is necessary in every area of life.[97]

In his earlier 1519 *Galatians Commentary*, Luther had noted the use of an alternate Latin translation of the Greek χρηστότης as “benevolence,” but indicates that in his opinion “it would have been more correct to say ‘kindness’ (*suavitas*) than ‘benevolence’ (*benignitas*), because malignity, the vice that is the opposite of benevolence, is too harsh to apply to those who are morose and unpleasant (*insuaves*).”[98] Here, in plain sight, is an instance of Luther being selectively conscious of correctly pairing a particular vice with its appropriate contrasting virtue. In this instance, he prefers to translate the virtue reflected by this particular fruit of the Spirit as kindness precisely because it more appropriately conveys the contrary of the specific vice it

[96] *LW* 30:118; *WA* 12:372.

[97] *LW* 27:94; *WA* 40.2:119 (*emphasis* mine). The reader scratching his head and attempting to recall the location in the Gospel accounts of Peter weeping over his recollection of Christ’s kindness can be put at ease by learning that this reference stems from a legendary account apparently included in *Legenda aurea* (see *LW* 24:147, n83, and also *LW* 24:178–179, n97).

[98] *LW* 27:376; *WA* 2:594–95.

opposes, in this case, that of morosity.

Closely associated with kindness for Luther was the virtue and fruit of the Spirit of πραΰτης, usually translated as 'gentleness,' which is also conveyed by the Greek word ἐπιεικεία. In his 1527 *Titus Commentary*, Luther conveys the importance of associating this particular virtue with, and over and against, envy:

> Πραΰτης is that noblest of virtues which does not become angry ... Here [Paul] sets some vices over against the virtues so that on the basis of these you might understand what he means by *epieikeia* and courtesy. We should, he says, bear the malicious acts of others. Why? Look behind you. If you see how your envy is tolerated and how those who are compelled to put up with your envy behave, you should act the same way toward that of others.[99]

Here again, we see another occasion where Luther is quite intentional in his treatment of the relationship of various virtues and vices, and carefully reasons concerning how their mutual connotations inform their respective understanding of one another, and thereby help the Christian discern more specifically what behavior is being warned against and what kind of positive dispositions one is called upon to cultivate in order to overcome particular vices.

We see, in particular with respect to Luther's treatment of the Eighth Commandment, the contours of the *telos* far exceed the basic prohibition against lying, and the Reformer expands the horizon of this commandment's application, especially calling our attention to the nature of speech in general and the importance of preserving the reputation of our neighbor in the community. Luther understands that the vice of an envious heart is absolutely devastating for the one who would aspire towards the end of maintaining his neighbor's good standing, and recognizes how envy drives us to gossip, slander, and malice. Thus, Luther gives newfound depth to the contours of this precept by acknowledging the necessity of cultivating kindness as a

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[99] *LW* 29:76–77; *WA* 25:60 (The word ἐπιεικεία appears in a non-Greek font in the original source and is rendered as such in the translation being cited).

means by which to uphold this specific statute with greater fidelity.

Having explored the last four commandments of the second table of the Decalogue and considered their relationship to particular vices and virtues, next we reflect on the good work of the Sixth Commandment which upholds the purity of our created sexuality.

The Sixth Commandment: Sexuality

"A Sexually Pure and Decent Life in What We Say and Do"

In beginning his instruction on the Sixth Commandment in the *Large Catechism*, Luther notes that the Sixth and following commandments "are easily understood from the preceding one (for they all teach us to guard against harming our neighbor in any way)."[100] And, since we have been approaching the commandments in a mostly descending order, we are able to recognize how this is true. The breaking of the Seventh Commandment by our greed harms our neighbor's property and possessions. The breaking of the Eighth Commandment due to our envy or any other reason harms our neighbor's reputation and good-standing in the community. While the Fifth Commandment deals with the protection of the neighbor in general, the Sixth Commandment goes on "to speak of the person nearest to them, the most important thing to them after their own life, namely, their spouse, who is one flesh and blood with them."[101] The Sixth Commandment then, with its prohibition against adultery, exists to protect the bonds of marriage, conveying the reality that, "It is explicitly forbidden to dishonor another's marriage partner." Adultery is specifically called out, Luther feels, because it is the "most widespread form of unchastity among men"[102]—a vice to which we will soon return.

[100] LC I, 200 in Kolb and Wengert, 413.

[101] LC I, 201 in Kolb and Wengert, 413.

[102] LC I, 201 in Kolb and Wengert, 413.

In the *Small Catechism*, Luther summarizes the good work that flows from this commandment when we "fear, love, and trust in God, so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor each other."[103] It is noteworthy that this is the only commandment in the *Small Catechism* for which Luther does not explicitly express the negative side of the command, with particular prohibitions. Being written, as it was, for the instruction of the young, it seems that Luther is wisely reluctant to be complicit even in planting thoughts in the minds of the youth of how one might transgress this command. As such, lacking (but no doubt implied!) is a particular prohibition against the vice of unchastity, or lust. Peters notes how this was a direct departure from the practice of medieval confessional manuals which always included a list of prohibitions. While this was meant as an aid to the person confessing, it had the unintended consequence of being a terrible instruction in sinning![104] More detail, however, on how sinful men creatively violate this commandment is delineated in the 1522 *Prayer Book*, which was not written with children in mind.[105]

The estate of marriage, Luther reasons, is a "blessed walk of life" which God "highly honors and praises" being established as it was "before all others as the first of all institutions … [by] creating man and woman differently (as is evident) not for indecency, but to be true to each other, to be fruitful, to beget children, and to nurture and bring them up to the glory of God."[106]

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[103] SC, 14.

[104] Peters, *Ten Commandments*, 237.

[105] "Whoever violates virgins, commits adultery, incest, and similar kinds of sexual sins. Whoever commits sexual perversions (called the unnamed sins) [Rom. 1:26–27; Lev. 18:22–23; 20:10–16]. Whoever uses lewd words, ditties, stories, pictures to incite others to sexual lust or displays such lust himself. Whoever stirs up sexual desires in himself and contaminates himself by ogling, touching, and sexual fantasies. Whoever does not avoid provocation to sexual sins—heavy drinking and eating, laziness and idleness, sleeping too much, and associating with persons of the opposite sex. Whoever incites others to unchastity by excessive personal adornment, suggestive gestures, and other means. Whoever allows his house, room, time, or assistance to be used for such sexual sins. Whoever does not do and say what he can to help another person to be chaste" (*LW* 43:19–20; *WA* 10/2:383–84).[105]

[106] LC I, 207 in Kolb and Wengert, 414

Here it is presupposed that the obvious meaning of marriage is the union of male and female together. Luther focuses his comments saying that "married life is no matter for jest or idle curiosity, but it is a glorious institution and an object of God's serious concern. For it is of utmost importance to him that persons be brought up to serve the world, to promote knowledge of God, godly living, and all virtues."[107] Here again, one can see how this commandment, like all the others, is ultimately designed to serve the good of the neighbor well beyond the home. When marriage is honored, when children are raised in the faith and taught "all virtues," all of society reaps the benefits this precept is designed to foster.

Considering the nature of this commandment and its application in the context of our contemporary church, one can discern that it speaks quite pointedly to several issues Christians encounter as commonplace in society, in particular the pervasive assumptions and perspectives about sexuality which sabotage God's intended design for his creatures and create a cultural pressure which intrudes upon believers' thinking and leads them to struggle in their efforts to honor and uphold the Sixth Commandment's principles. Meilaender calls our attention to the reality that "the good gift of marriage written into the structure of creation, is, of course, like the rest of life, damaged and distorted by sin."[108] Due to the dominance of our passions, and the common understanding of love primarily as an emotion, rather than a commitment, the design of marriage intended by God is challenged by human passions. Sexual intimacy is to occur within the bounds of marriage, not prior, and thus cohabitation does not allow the "marriage bed to be kept pure" per God's intention (Heb. 13:4). Indeed, the lack of commitment implicit in cohabitation undermines the intended permanency of God's design. "For Christians there can be

[107] LC I, 208 in Kolb and Wengert, 414.

[108] Meilaender, *Thy Will*, 26.

no such thing as a trial marriage," for in marriage, "the task God sets before us is … to hand over our future in the marriage vow, undertaking life together" in faithful, lifelong commitment.[109]

Given this design, Christians also may not take the possibility of divorce lightly. While the Lord permits (though certainly does not require) divorce if one's spouse has been unfaithful, in every other case his counsel is clear and unequivocal: "everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery" (Luke 16:18) and "Whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery" (Matt. 19:9). One can only sadly agree with Meilaender when he concludes that when we consider the passages of Scripture on this matter as a collective whole, we are left with the distinct impression that the Lord "surely views divorce with far more seriousness than many Christians today," and that "the church's way of life has not been strong enough to resist tendencies within the broader culture."[110] He further reasons:

> Our first word to those in troubled marriages should not be one that contemplates the possibility or permissibility of divorce. If our churches regularly offer remarriage to divorced Christians, paying little attention to the New Testament witness, we forfeit the right to be taken seriously when we try to teach about sexuality and marriage.[111]

Surely the issues of marriage, with respect to divorce and remarriage, are intricately complicated matters that require careful and discerning pastoral care. Pastoral practice in such matters, then, must proceed in a manner that both never affirms or condones actions which are considered contrary to God's will, but also recognizes that "in at least some cases … the opportunity to remarry may mean that God is calling us back to a new task from which we once turned away. We should not underestimate the power of God's faithfulness to renew our own."[112]

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[109] Meilaender, *Thy Will*, 28.

[110] Meilaender, *Thy Will*, 31.

[111] Meilaender, *Thy Will*, 31.

[112] Meilaender, *Thy Will*, 32.

What has been said thus far, certainly in Luther's day, was largely adequate for a treatment of the gift of marriage and its protection by the Sixth Commandment. A further word, however, must be said for the current context—a word which no doubt would constitute a "new decalogue," that is a new, or at least particular, application of the Sixth Commandment for the present milieu. At the outset of this dissertation I mentioned specifically the example of disputed notions for God's design for marriage that exist within the confines of North American Lutheranism, specifically between the LCMS and the ELCA. I noted then that the vague exhortation to "love" was not sufficient to adjudicate between these mutually exclusive viewpoints. However, when the Decalogue is recognized as the proper *telos* of the Christian life, the application of the Sixth Commandment can be brought to bear on the discussion and provide more concrete direction for Christian life. In particular, part of what the Sixth Commandment plainly presupposes is that the marriage bond is a union of male and female.

Gilbert Meilaender notes, "important as the bond of marriage is to human life, we should not forget that it is an expression—indeed, the central expression—of something more fundamental still: the creation of humanity as male and female," noting that while "we do not all marry … we are all created male and female," and as such as humans we have the "task of learning to accept the fundamental difference between male and female."[113] This is necessary to say explicitly because notions of sexuality, and specifically, gender, are being attacked during this time in our history. Threatening to replace the binary categories of male and female in revolt against the givenness of one's sexuality in creation, many are attempting to advocate the notion that gender itself is a fluid concept. But, as Meilaender reminds us, "the body matters to a person's identity." And he rightly maintains that we cannot obscure this reality in our world by

[113] Meilaender, *Thy Will*, 17.

replacing language of "sexual difference" with "gender difference." This is because "sexual difference is a bodily, biological category that is not culturally malleable in the way gender distinctions (of masculinity and femininity) are."[114] Here, one can see how the application of the Sixth Commandment extends not only to informing our understanding of the true nature of marriage, but also provides necessary contours to address every aspect of our created sexuality.

Further, attempting to displace sexual difference ultimately undermines the estate of marriage, where "a man and a woman … vow to live in faithful communion with one who is 'other' and 'different,' not a mirror of oneself." Meilaender asks: "are we beings who confer meaning and value on our acts by our choices? Or are we beings who discover meaning and value in the embodied life God has created?"[115] To answer the first question in the affirmative is to assert the creature's preeminence and prominence over and against the Creator, to embrace the latter question in the affirmative is to find one's rightful place within God's creation as He has designed it. The former is most certainly contrary to God's gracious will, the latter is a beautiful demonstration of walking within it. In short, those engaged in homosexual relationships idolatrously seek to stand in the place of God and re-create marriage in their own image—all in the name of lustful vice that seeks pleasure in appeasing one's bodily passions rather than from living within the Creator's good design. And, while lust has the ability to thwart God's intended design for marriage through homosexual relationships, lust certainly also destroys otherwise God-pleasing heterosexual unions as well.

The preceding has further delineated God's purposes in establishing marriage, creating the foundation of the worldly structure of the family with the estate having its natural end in the

[114] Meilaender, *Thy Will*, 18.

[115] Meilaender, *Thy Will*, 21.

raising of children in the Christian faith. Ultimately, Luther views the estate of marriage as a "necessary one," "solemnly commanded by God," adding that "in general both men and woman … who have been created for it, shall be found in [it]" with only "rare exceptions" due to the precise reality that "it is not possible to remain chaste outside of marriage." As such, marriage was also established to "make it easier for people to avoid unchastity in some measure … so that all may have their allotted portion and be satisfied with it" though he notes that, "here, too, God's grace is still required to keep the heart pure."[116] The particular vice, then, which threatens to drive out the doing of this good work of sexual purity and maintaining the marital estate, and for which the virtue of chastity must be developed, is, as was just mentioned prior, that of lust.

Lust/Gluttony and Chastity/Temperance/Self-Control

We now turn to the topic of lust, but will begin doing so by way of a discussion on gluttony. I assure the reader this is more than an attempt to "shoehorn in" the seventh capital vice which otherwise might seem to have no landing point within the context of the commands of the Decalogue! Rather, recall that Luther outlined in the earlier quoted citation from his *Prayer Book*, that gluttony belongs in the Sixth Commandment. While this might not have been the most obvious pairing for a modern reader, both Luther, and especially the ancient church fathers, recognized the integral connection between unchastity and gluttony. In the *Treatise on Good Works*, for instance, Luther notes this connection at the very outset of his treatment of the Sixth Commandment writing that "the temptation to unchastity is daily increased through gluttony and drunkenness" and further that "gluttony [and] drunkenness … are weapons of unchastity."[117] The same sentiment is expressed by Paul, of course, when he says "do not get drunk on wine, which

[116] LC I, 211–12 in Kolb and Wengert, 414–15.

[117] *LW* 44:104; *WA* 6:268.

leads to debauchery" (Eph. 5:18) and was later expressed in the earliest beginnings of the vice tradition by Evagrius, who taught: "gluttony is the mother of licentiousness," and likewise "the one who fills his stomach and then announces he is chaste is like one who says he can hold in check the action of fire … so [it is] impossible to stop the licentious impulse that is fired by satiety."[118]

One can again see the explicit connection made between gluttony and lust in the list of ways Luther provides for keeping the Sixth Commandment in his *Prayer Book* where "moderation in eating and drinking" are linked with "encouraging chastity."[119] Luther even includes the two together when considering the "lust of the flesh" from 1 John 2:16, writing: "the lust of the flesh is that pleasure with which I desire to indulge my flesh, such as adultery, fornication, gluttony, ease, and sleep."[120]

While food is the good and necessary gift of our Creator God, to be enjoyed by his people whom he nourishes, Aquinas defined gluttony essentially as inordinate desire for food or drink.[121] While in our modern world gluttony is often thought of as merely indulging with excess consumption of food, for the ancients, one could be gluttonous in a variety of ways, including eating too particularly, too expensively, too ravenously, or before the proper time. In other words, it was an inability to manage one's self in relation to food and drink. Why was this important? As Gregory the Great observed, the one who cannot control something as simple as what they consume has not even begun to engage in the spiritual fight: "unless we first tame the

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[118] Evagrius, *Eight Thoughts* 1.11 in Sinkewicz, *Evagrius*, 76–77.

[119] "Chastity, decency, modesty in deeds, speech, attitude, and thought. Also moderation in eating, drinking, sleeping, and doing whatever encourages chastity. Here belong all precepts concerning sexual restraint, fasting, sobriety, temperance, praying, being vigilant, working hard, and whatever else furthers sexual restraint" (*LW* 43:23; *WA* 10/2:387).

[120] *LW* 30:250; *WA* 20:664 (1527 *Lectures on 1 John*).

[121] *STh*, II–II, 148.1.

enemy dwelling within us, namely our gluttonous appetite, we have not even stood up to engage in spiritual combat."[122] How could one who had not trained himself to say "no" to something as simple as a morsel of food control the urges and passions of sexual desire? To be gluttonous is to train one's self only to feel "full" by sating the stomach; in-turn, one never learns what it means to live "not only by bread alone, but by the word of God" (Matt. 4:4). For those who are always full, more important desires for more important things can never emerge. DeYoung observes: "Gluttony's insatiability is the opposite of godly contentment (1 Tim. 6:8) and gratitude." The result is that "our spiritual desires are left empty … [as we] have effectively trained ourself to appreciate [food and drink] to the eclipse of [our abiding, spiritual needs]."[123] Like in the case of the avaricious, gluttons find pleasure in the created things of the world, and not in the Creator, and hence food becomes an idol, or as Paul once pronounced, "their end is their destruction; their god is their stomach" (Phil. 3:19).

Not surprisingly, fasting is often cited as a practice by which to fight off gluttonous desires, and also, to kill other passions of the flesh, such as lustful intent. DeYoung observes that "fasting reveals the things that control us."[124] It is true, that when we find ourselves most "empty" inside, and at our more vulnerable points, we understand what our deepest and most driving passions truly are. Fasting also "increases our appetite for spiritual goods, and makes us keenly aware of our dependence on God,"[125] thus further driving out unbelief and strengthening faith.

Luther certainly understood the necessity of conquering gluttonous desire, knowing that it was essential in battling nearly all other sin. This following passage from his exposition of

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[122] Graham Tomlin, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2014), 106.

[123] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 146.

[124] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 155.

[125] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 156.

Romans is worth quoting at length, tying together as it does the prior themes that have just been rehearsed:

> Opposing the same vice in 1 Tim. 2 and 3, and Titus 1 and 2, the apostle orders that bishop, deacon, elders, young men, and women are to be sober, and to all he forbids drunkenness and reveling like a plague. Thus a comparison of those passages with this one, and of this with those, gives us a correct understanding of the apostle's thinking, when in this passage he shows what he does not want and in the others what he does want. *Not in debauchery and licentiousness.* That is, they should be watchful and chaste. For in the foregoing passages he has prescribed chastity and watchfulness, beginning with the bishops and then applying it to the elders and to others. And this is clearly a proper order. For reveling and drunkenness foment unchastity, or as the Greek says, lasciviousness. Thus the holy fathers stated that he who wishes to serve God must above all fight against the vice of gluttony, because it is both the first and the most difficult vice to overcome. If this is not rooted out, even if it does not lead to chambering and lasciviousness, as sometimes happens with older men, yet it renders the mind unprepared over against divine matters. For this reason fasting is one of the strongest weapons of Christians, but gluttony is one of the most potent machines of the devil. But there is much on this subject in the writings of the saints.[126]

Another pertinent resource on this topic is a *Sermon on Soberness and Moderation Against Gluttony and Drunkenness* preached by Luther on May 18, 1539, based on the text from 1 Pet. 4:7–11. While the entire sermon deserves to be quoted, obviously space does not allow me to do so here. Nevertheless, I will again quote at length this wise and sober counsel, as it vividly illustrates Luther's understanding of how these particular vices thwart the living out of God's commands, and further, endanger one's salvation:

> What, therefore, shall we do? The secular government does not forbid it, the princes do nothing about it, and the rulers in the cities do nothing at all but wink at it and do the same themselves. We preach and the Holy Scriptures teach us otherwise; but you want to evade what is taught. Eating and drinking are not forbidden, but rather all food is a matter of freedom, even a modest drink for one's pleasure. If you do not wish to conduct yourself this way, if you are going to go beyond this and be a born pig and guzzle beer and wine, then, if this cannot be stopped by the rulers, you must know that you cannot be saved. For God will not admit such piggish drinkers into the kingdom of heaven [see Gal. 5:19–21]. It is no wonder that all of you are beggars. How much money might not be saved! Twenty years ago this was considered among the princes to be a shameful vice. If we do not watch out, it will become common

[126] *LW* 25:482; *WA* 56:489–90 (1516 *Lectures on Romans*).

among virgins and women. Therefore I am utterly terrified by that word of the Lord concerning gluttony: [“Take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a snare” (Luke 21:34)].

Listen to the Word of God, which says, “Keep sane and sober,” that it may not be said to you in vain. You must not be pigs; neither do such belong among Christians. So also in 1 Cor. 6 [:9–10]: No drunkard, whoremonger, or adulterer can be saved. Do not think that you are saved if you are a drunken pig day and night. This is a great sin, and everybody should know that this is such a great iniquity, that it makes you guilty and excludes you from eternal life. Everybody should know that such a sin is contrary to his baptism and hinders his faith and his salvation.

Therefore, if you wish to be a Christian, take care that you control yourself. If you do not wish to be saved, go ahead and steal, rob, profiteer as long as you can, but fear Jack Ketch and the magistrates. But if you do want to be saved, then listen to this: just as adultery and idolatry close up heaven, so does gluttony; for Christ says very clearly: Take heed “lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly” [Luke 21:34], “as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west” [Matt. 24:27]. Therefore be watchful and sober. That is what is preached to us, who want to be Christians.

You parents must help to see to it that your children do not begin too early to fall into this vice.[127]

As with gluttony, the lustful too encounter the world from the perspective of satisfying their own desire for pleasure. In the *Large Catechism*, Peters conveys how Luther expands the command beyond the more narrow context of the protection of marriage, and extends its protection to all—both married and unmarried—with the prohibition of unchastity.[128] Luther chastises those who under the guise of sanctity avoid marriage, and yet “indulge in open and shameless fornication or secretly do even worse—things too evil to mention … [whose] hearts remain so full of unchaste thoughts and evil desires that they suffer incessant ragings of secret passion.”[129] Luther’s move in this respect is hardly novel, but merely acknowledges what Jesus

[127] *LW* 51:293–94; *WA* 7:759–60.

[128] Peters, *Ten Commandments*, 243.

[129] LC I, 214–15 in Kolb and Wengert, 415.

had taught in the Sermon on the Mount concerning the Sixth Commandment's prohibition against adultery, that even a lustful glance was the equivalent of adultery in the heart (Matt. 5:28).

In the *Treatise on Good Works*, Peters notes how "Luther emphasizes exclusively the spiritual meaning of the commandment,"[130] and then adds, "unchastity is a serious and rabid vice. It rages through all our members: in the thoughts of our heart, in the seeing of our eyes, in the hearing of our ears, in the words of our mouth, in the works of our hands, our feet, and our whole body. To control all of these calls for labor and effort."[131]

In the ancient vice and virtue tradition, the vice of lust was a difficult one to navigate. It required distinguishing between the inherent goodness of sexual desire within the context of marriage, and the dual faults of turning sexual pleasure into a meaningless base instinct or elevating it as spiritual ecstasy to be pursued by any means. Because the latter two "traps," can exist even within the marriage bond, this becomes more complicated.[132] While sex is God's good gift, "lust, by contrast, pretends sex and sexual pleasure are a party for one. Lust makes sexual pleasure all about me. It is a self-gratification project," rather than being a "mutual gift of oneself," it is rendered a mere "exchange of bodily stimulation" for the sake of pleasure itself.[133] It is connected to pride and idolatry because it is an exercise in engineering one's own happiness, and further it is ultimately a sin against the neighbor, treating them as a mere means to an end, rather than a valuable end in and of themselves. Certainly engaging in such things as viewing pornography is also only a sham, shallow version of pleasure that shuns the created means of a

[130] Peters, *Ten Commandments*, 245–46.

[131] *LW* 44:104; *WA* 6:268.

[132] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 160–61.

[133] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 164–65.

faithful, monogamous marriage in which that pleasure is designed to be experienced as the union of two into one.[134]

As with the Seventh Commandment, in the *Treatise on Good Works*, Luther introduces the Sixth Commandment by instructing that it is a "command which embraces much virtue and drives out much vice,"[135] and speaks of purity or chastity while readily granting that if "no other work but chastity were commanded we would have our hands full doing it."[136] He writes that St. Augustine is correct in considering chastity one of the most difficult works of the Christian, because unchaste desires never cease. As such, he points out how the Apostle Paul calls for "fasting, watching, and working godly weapons by which unchastity is mastered," for "if … chastity lasts, it will lead to many more good works."[137] Luther offers further counsel saying "real chastity is the kind which does battle with impurity, struggles against it, and unceasingly drives out all the poison injected by the flesh and the devil." He then quotes St. Peter, "I admonish you to abstain from fleshly desires and lusts, which continually wage war against your soul" [1 Pet. 2:11].[138]

Many further examples, then, could be given from Luther's writings warning about the dangers the passions of the flesh pose for one's salvation, and making known the reality that, as Paul says, the "sexually immoral" will not inherit the kingdom of heaven (1 Cor. 6:9). We certainly do not have space to explore them all, but a few more relevant passages from Luther must be noted. First, from his exposition of 1 Peter, Luther encourages sobriety in the fight

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[134] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 169.

[135] *LW* 44:103; *WA* 6:268.

[136] *LW* 44:104; *WA* 6:268.

[137] *LW* 44:104; *WA* 6:269.

[138] *LW* 44:106; *WA* 6:270.

against lust:

> Sobriety serves the body externally and is the chief work of faith. For even though man has become righteous, he is not yet completely rid of evil lusts. To be sure, faith has begun to subdue the flesh; but the flesh continues to bestir itself and rages nevertheless in all sorts of lusts that would like to assert themselves again and do what they want. Therefore the spirit must busy itself daily to tame the flesh and to bring it into subjection, must wrestle with it incessantly, and must take care that it does not repel faith. Therefore those who say that they have faith, think that this is enough, and, in addition, live as they please, are deceiving themselves. Where faith is genuine, it must attack the body and hold it in check, lest the body do what it pleases. For this reason, St. Peter says that we must be sober.[139]

Again, in 1535, expositing Gal. 5:21 on the terms "drunkenness and carousing" the Reformer writes a stern warning against those who, unless they control their desires, will forfeit the kingdom of God:

> Paul is not saying that drinking and eating are works of the flesh; he is speaking of drunkenness and carousing, and nothing is more widespread in our lands today. Those who are addicted to such debauchery, which is more degraded than the behavior of animals, should know that they are not spiritual, regardless of their boasting, but that they are following the flesh and are performing its works. Such people heard the dreadful sentence pronounced upon them that they shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Thus Paul wants Christians to avoid drunkenness and intoxication and to live a sober and frugal life, lest a well-fed flesh provoke them into wantonness; for the flesh is usually powerfully stimulated after excessive drinking and gluttony. Yet it is not sufficient to restrain only the violent sexual appetite that accompanies intoxication; but even a sober flesh must be held in control, lest it gratify its desires.[140]

Pursuit of the virtue of chastity then, is simply an exercising of the classical virtue of temperance, or the fruit of the Spirit Paul called "self-control." Indeed, of that fruit, Luther continues, it "refers to sobriety, temperance, or moderation in every walk of life" and that is why the Apostle Paul "wants Christians to live a chaste and sober life; not be adulterers, immoral, or lustful persons … not to be drunken, not to be addicted to intoxication … all this is included in

[139] *LW* 30:27–28; *WA* 12:282 (1522 *Sermons on 1 Peter*).

[140] *LW* 27:91–92; *WA* 40/2:115.

chastity or self-control."[141] Earlier, in 1519, he had said the same about this cardinal virtue, noting that "self-control" is "more correctly, 'temperance,' which we must understand in reference not only to chastity, but also to drink and food. Its meaning, therefore, embraces chastity and moderation."[142] Truly this virtue must be pursued in earnest to mortify the desires of the lustful flesh and enable one to carry out the work of living a "sexually pure and decent life in all we say and do."

The preceding section on the Sixth Commandment has shown us Luther's understanding of its vast application to every facet of our created sexuality—from the right concept of marriage and divorce, to issues of sexual activity, sexual identity, gender, and the like. Further, as Luther is read with the vice and virtue tradition in mind, we see how he draws the tradition up into this commandment, adding even more definition to its already rich contours. It has been demonstrated that Luther understood the vice of lust, or unchastity, which is too-often enabled by the vice of gluttony, to be the single greatest threat to Christians living out their created sexuality within God's holy design. Further, Luther recognized that this vice is overcome specifically by developing the virtuous disposition of temperance, which serves to shun the passions of the flesh for sexual pleasure, or food or drink, instead freeing the heart to find pleasure in serving the neighbor—whether that neighbor be as near as the spouse in our own home, or the men and women of society at-large who profit both from seeing the Christian design for marriage modeled as well as by reaping the benefits of interacting with citizens in the world who have been nurtured in godly homes and formed to live virtuously. And, of course, individuals and their families can only flourish in the context of a life lived in relative safety and security, without

[141] *LW* 27:95; *WA* 40/2:115 (1535 *Galatians Commentary*).

[142] *LW* 27:378; *WA* 2:596 (1519 *Galatians Commentary*).

continual fret or fear of harm. This context, of course, is supplied when the provisions protected by the Fifth Commandment are upheld in society. It is to this precept we turn next.

The Fifth Commandment: Life

“Help and Support in Every Physical Need”

In the Fifth Commandment, Luther sets forth his understanding of the human responsibility to uphold the physical well-being of the lives of our neighbors. He remarks that this commandment should be familiar to Christians, as well as easy to understand, because “we hear Matthew 5 every year in the Gospel lesson, where Christ himself explains and summarizes it: We must not kill, either by hand, heart, or word, by signs or gestures, or by aiding and abetting. It forbids anger except, as we have said, to persons who function in God’s stead, that is, parents and governing authorities.”[143] We will return to this understanding of the authorities carrying out God’s own wrath in the next section dealing with the Fourth Commandment. For now, however, we consider the personal responsibility to refrain from anger. While the literal words of the commandment seemingly prohibit only the act of murdering, Luther knows the words of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount force us to recognize this sin not merely at the level of outward deed, but within the heart, to the extent that “whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire” (Matt. 5:22). Luther knew, as the ancients knew, what Jesus had taught, that “when hearts turn in rage,” they “are ready to shed blood and take revenge. Then follow cursing and blows, and eventually calamity and murder.”[144] He further teaches: “For wherever murder is forbidden, there also is forbidden everything that may lead to murder. Many

[143] LC I, 182 in Kolb and Wengert, 411.

[144] LC I, 184 in Kolb and Wengert, 411.

people, although they do not actually commit murder, nevertheless curse others and wish such frightful things on them that, if they were to come true, they would soon put an end to them."[145]

Peters points out that when Luther conveys his understanding that the "origin and root of killing do not lie in our hand, [but rather] … lie in the heart overcome by anger," he actually follows Augustine and Thomas and "with them the entire late medieval interpretation of the commandment," which unfolded an "elaborate gradual progression following the basic outline" echoed by Luther's own text cited in the preceding: "*manu-ore-adiutorio-consensu-corde*."[146]

In the *Large Catechism*, Luther then goes on to convey that the Fifth Commandment is "violated not only when we do evil, but also when we have opportunity to do good to our neighbors and prevent, protect, and save them from suffering bodily harm or injury, but fail to do so."[147] As such, sins of omission are largely in view in this particular commandment for Luther, knowing that while Christians might not often do actual physical harm to a neighbor, their lack of "helping and supporting them in every physical need,"[148] as the *Small Catechism* calls for, is often overlooked and so neglected. Again, Luther supplies a ready list of how one can break this particular commandment, by both commission and omission, in his *Prayer Book*.[149]

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[145] LC I, 186 in Kolb and Wengert, 411.

[146] Peters, *Ten Commandments*, 227.

[147] LC I, 189 in Kolb and Wengert, 412.

[148] SC, 14.

[149] This list includes: "Whoever is angry with his neighbor. Whoever says to him, 'Raca' [Matt. 5:22.]—which represents any expression of anger and hatred. Whoever says to him, you nitwit, you fool [Matt. 5:22], that is, uses all sorts of insults, profanity, slander, backbiting, condemnation, scorn against his neighbor. Whoever makes his neighbor's sin or shortcomings public rather than protecting him from publicity and trying to see the good in him. Whoever does not forgive his enemies, does not pray for them, and whoever is unfriendly and does them no kindness. Breaking this commandment includes all sins of anger and hatred, such as murder, war, robbery, arson, quarreling and feuding, begrudging a neighbor's good fortune and rejoicing over his misfortune [1 Cor. 13:6]. Whoever fails to practice merciful deeds even toward his enemies [Matt. 5:44; Rom. 12:20]. Whoever sets persons against one another and incites them to strife [Prov. 16:28]. Whoever causes disunity between persons. Whoever does not reconcile those who are at odds with one another [Matt. 5:9]. Whoever does not prevent or forestall anger and discord wherever he can" (*LW* 43:19; *WA* 10/2:383).

As is true of the entire Decalogue, this commandment's applications continue to unfold as its precepts encounter new and different settings. Specific applications of the Fifth Commandment are quite necessary in addressing several contemporary issues related to God's good gift of life in order to ensure the distinct *telos* of Christian obedience is brought to bear when contemplating these issues. Of course, recognizing God as the author of life also entails the reality that it is ultimately he, not his creatures, who decides when life begins or ends. At the beginning of life then, this includes issues of terminating pregnancies early through abortion or contraceptives designed to prevent further development of a fertilized embryo. At the end of life, it involves issues such as suicide, and also euthanasia. Certainly the former is an issue known across time and space, and Meilaender makes clear suicide is, as Bonhoeffer once recognized, a "paradigmatic temptation to 'be like God,' our own attempt to give final human meaning to a life which has become inhumanly meaningless."[150] While suicide is clearly sin, and the one who commits it indeed has no opportunity to repent, nevertheless, Meilaender recognizes that it does not necessarily follow that this act settles the question of one's eternal destiny, as is sometimes asserted.[151] Luther shared this sentiment, once voicing a remark at the table recorded by Viet Dietrich: "I don't share the opinion that suicides are certainly to be damned. My reason is that they do not wish to kill themselves but are overcome by the power of the devil. They are like a man who is murdered in the woods by a robber."[152]

Euthanasia, as is now often performed through physician-assisted suicide, is a more recent phenomenon, involving as it does, the sentiment that when one's quality of life is considered no

[150] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Neville Horton Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 167.

[151] Meilaender, *Thy Will*, 58.

[152] *LW* 54:29; *WA* TR 1:95, from April 7, 1532.

longer up to the standards of some given individual's understanding of dignity, then one may be put "out of their misery," as a so-called act of care. Meilaender reminds, however, that this kind of decision still falls under the purview of the Fifth Commandments' prohibition against murder. He writes: "the claim that compassion should move us to endorse euthanasia, really means by 'compassion' something that is a pale—and false—imitation of genuine Christian compassion." He continues, "Our compassion for one another ought to be the compassion of equals, those who share equally the life bond to which the fifth commandment points. Genuine compassion is grounded in the fact that we do not make one another."[153] As such humans are "not authorized to say the time has come to snuff out [another's] life … the virtue of compassion has a shape and limits; it is not just a formless emotion."[154] Finally, Meilaender concludes, in concert with the principle of the Fifth Commandment: "the imperative that should guide our care of others is not "minimize suffering," but "maximize care."[155]

One last point of contemporary application must be made given the prominence of the practice of abortion around the globe. While Meilaender includes his discussion of this topic under his category of the "Family Bond" and hence treats it under the Fourth Commandment, it is applicable most readily to the Fifth as well. Meilaender writes, "Surely Christians more than others should not fail to see that even the youngest and weakest among us—even the fetus hidden in the darkness of the womb—is, in all stages of life, equally one of us." Consequently those who consider themselves part of the Christian church "should repent of the church's failure to give an undivided witness against the acceptance and, even, affirmation of abortion in our

[153] Meilaender, *Thy Will,* 60.

[154] Meilaender, *Thy Will,* 60–61.

[155] Meilaender, *Thy Will,* 60–61.

world."[156]

In the *Treatise on Good Works*, Luther introduces the Fifth Commandment by noting that, beginning here, this and the following commandments deal with "men's passions and lusts, in order to kill them." He further writes, "discord and insult come [our] way to show [us] how much anger and wickedness are really in [us] and to warn [us] to strive for meekness and drive out anger."[157] Luther thus couches the task of this entire commandment from the outset as a movement from the vice of anger to the virtue of, in this case meekness; in other places, however, as will be shown, one might be led as well to other virtues such as peace, patience, and forgiveness. It is to anger and these other virtues we turn next.

Anger and Peace/Gentleness, Forgiveness

Anger has a complicated history among the capital vices. Unlike the others, it is not necessarily classified as a blatant sin in every instance, after the pattern of Paul in Eph. 4:26: "In your anger, do not sin." Indeed, the ancients, Luther, and also people today readily recognize that there are times when injustice occurs, and a feeling of anger is seemingly justified. Further, we recognize that sometimes a "righteous anger" spurs people to do great things in the name of justice, serving as a positive motivator. Luther himself once quipped in January 1522 to friend Conrad Cordatus, "I have no better remedy than anger. If I want to write, pray, preach well, then I must be angry. Then my entire blood supply refreshes itself, my mind is made keen, and all temptations depart."[158]

After all, it also seems clear that our Lord Himself expressed anger. Mark records in his

[156] Meilaender, *Thy Will*, 46.

[157] *LW* 44:100–01; *WA* 6:205–06.

[158] *WA* TR 2:455.

Gospel an occasion when: "[Jesus] looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart" (Mark 3:5). Several Gospels include the account of Jesus upending tables of the moneychangers in the temple (Matt. 21:12–17; Mark 11:15–19; Luke 19:45–48; John 2:13–22), an apparent action taken due to the emotion of anger he felt upon discovering that his Father's house had been turned into a "den of thieves." It is probably true that one can have a "righteous anger," but it is also probably exceedingly rare. Aquinas defined the vice of anger as the love of justice perverted into the desire for revenge.[159] Aquinas would further concede that anger is at times justified, "as a response to injustice … followed by a subsequent desire to set things right." DeYoung notes, however, that other thinkers like Cassian were less willing to grant the exception and counseled that "anger is rarely, if ever justified"[160] and invoked the declaration of our Lord's brother James who argued "the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:20). Indeed, anger, or some equivalent of anger, is included in virtually every sin list given in the entire New Testament. Even given Aquinas' allowance for the possibility of a righteous manifestation of anger, he still understood wrath as something which quite easily became "disordered" in several ways—by getting angry too easily, getting angrier than we should, or getting angry for too long.[161] When this happens, emotion has given way to vice, and outward manifestations of sin are rarely far behind, given how anger "gives the devil a foothold" (Eph. 4:27) in one's life. This is why one must always be "slow to anger," (James 1:19), just as our Lord was "slow to anger" (Exod. 34:6).

Luther himself expresses how easy it is to confuse true love of justice from what is simply our own misguided zeal:

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[159] *STh*, II–II, 158.2.

[160] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 118.

[161] *STh*, II–II, 158.3.

[Some] like to see punishment to be meted out, not because they seek their own advantage, but through the punishment and restoration of their own things they seek the betterment of the one who has stolen or offended … but no one ought to attempt this unless he is mature and highly experienced … lest he mistake wrath for zeal and be convicted of doing from anger and impatience that which he believes he is doing from love of justice.[162]

In regard to anger, Jeff Gibbs, a lifelong disciple of Matthew's Gospel, has developed through his extensive study of both Old and New Testament references extremely wise counsel concerning the vice of anger, and, in particular, the relative possibility of the existence of "righteous anger" on the part of sinful men. His thoughts on the matter are so well developed, they are worth visiting at length. Ultimately, he concludes:

The Bible, and especially the New Testament, teaches straightforwardly that human anger is a common and dangerous reality in our lives. That is the dominant message, and it should be the dominant way that Christians think about their anger. It would be going too far, I believe, to say that the emotional reaction of anger is always and intrinsically sinful; it is not. It would not be going too far, however, to say that anger is always spiritually dangerous and that we need to deal with it seriously and piously. Anger is never extolled; it is not a fruit of the Spirit. As I noted above, the connection between anger and actual sin is so close that both Christ Jesus and his apostles can simply equate the two: anger in many New Testament texts simply is a form of sin...

Is there such a thing as "righteous anger"? With regard to sinful human creatures, the answer is, "It is a theoretical possibility." Nowhere, however, are we commanded to act in righteous anger and even when it seems a possibility (as with Eph. 4:25–27 or James 1:18–19), there is an immediate warning against sinning. For what it's worth, I suspect that the category of "righteous anger" most of the time is a smoke screen, an attempt to justify sarcasm and punitive actions and angry insults. Yes, in the case of Moses or Elijah or Paul, the texts do narrate that they were angry and then acted in response to evil of some sort. But this does not mean we should think that our anger is like theirs, or even that in their anger they did not sin at all. And if someone would like to appeal to the anger of Almighty God or of the Lord Jesus Christ in support for the category of "righteous anger," the simple answer is that God is pure and unable to sin and the Lord Jesus Christ was perfect. And we are not.[163]

The title of Gibbs' article, then, communicates the overall sentiment well—when it comes to

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[162] *LW* 31:306; *WA* 2:152 (1519 *Sermon on Two Kinds of Righteousness*).

[163] Jeffrey Gibbs, "The Myth of Righteous Anger," https://concordiatheology.org/2018/11/jeff-gibbs-the-myth-of-righteous-anger/.

sinful human beings, the notion that our anger could truly be righteous and without sin, is largely a myth. Ultimately, anger too is idolatry, an attempt to take what is rightfully God's vengeance into our own hands, standing in his place as the judge and avenger of injustice, thinking we can do a better job of meting out justice than he. Thus, anger must be fought against in the life of a Christian, beginning, Luther maintains, by developing its opposing virtues.

The Reformer writes in the *Large Catechism* that the goal of keeping the Fifth Commandment must begin with "removing the root and source that embitters our heart toward our neighbor," that is by "learn[ing] to calm our anger and have a patient, gentle heart, especially toward those who give us cause to be angry, namely, our enemies."[164] Again, at the close of his treatment of this command he writes:

> Once again we have God's Word by which he wants to encourage and urge us to true, noble, exalted deeds, such as gentleness, patience, and, in short, love and kindness towards our enemies. He always wants to remind us to recall the First Commandment, that he is our God; that is, that he wishes to help, comfort, and protect us, so that he may restrain our desire and revenge.[165]

In this respect, Luther extols the fruits of the spirit of peace, patience, gentleness, and the like. Regarding peace and patience, he notes these are the qualities exemplified by Christians through which they are "not quarrelsome and do not hate one another but bear one another's burdens with patience; for without patience peace cannot continue." These virtues are demonstrated when "someone not only bears adversity and insults, injury, etc., but even waits patiently for some improvement in those who have harmed him." Finally, gentleness is a "virtue by which one is not easily provoked to anger. Innumerable occasions in this life provoke us to anger, but they are conquered by gentleness."[166]

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[164] LC I, 187 in Kolb and Wengert, 411.

[165] LC I, 195 in Kolb and Wengert, 413.

[166] *LW* 27:94–95; *WA* 40/2:118–20 (1535 *Galatians Commentary*).

The virtue of patience will be further considered in the next section, in the context of honoring authorities. However, before moving beyond our consideration of the virtues that oppose anger and enable us to look out for the well-being of our neighbor, we should also consider the practice of forgiveness, which is sometimes paired opposite anger in the listing of contrary vices and virtues. Indeed, forgiveness is essential to quelling anger. Quite simply, we are called to extend the same forgiveness to our neighbor that our Lord has provided for us, a petition, of course, of the Lord's Prayer: "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us" (Matt. 6:12). It is difficult to remain angry with someone whom we genuinely forgive from the heart. In fact, to withhold forgiveness from another in anger brings eternal consequences to our own soul, as Luther demonstrates:

> You wretch, see whether you have an enemy or whether you would endure an enemy who damns you before men as fully as you damn yourself before God and all the saints with your very own prayer. And what harm has such a person done to you? Simply a temporal harm. Why would you, because of this trivial, temporal hurt, bring eternal harm to yourself? Beware O man! Not he who offends you but you who refuses to forgive inflicts a harm on you greater than the whole world could do.[167]

The contours of the sanctified life defined by the Fifth Commandment, and extrapolated by Luther, are many. The prohibition of murder, in its broadest application, is truly a call to do everything in our power to uphold the dignity of our neighbor's lives. Certainly, this entails recognizing that matters of life and death reside in the Lord's purview alone. Considering this particular aspect of the Christian *telos* in light of the vice and virtue tradition demonstrates that Luther, in concert with that tradition, recognizes how easily the emotion of anger escalates into deadly vice. This vice regrettably manifests itself in outward sin that would hurt or harm our neighbors, often through our words, or, in worst cases, by taking life itself. While anger

[167] *LW* 42:66; *WA* 2:119 (1519 *Exposition of the Lord's Prayer*).

righteously desires justice in the face of injustice, it becomes a vice when humans wrench justice out of the hands of God and set themselves up as righteous judges in the place of the only Righteous Judge, thereby committing grave idolatry. What this commandment calls for among followers of Jesus, on the other hand, is the cultivation of a patient, gentle, and forgiving heart—one that is willing to consider carefully, and even perhaps overlook, the nature of the wrong, and a heart that is willing to endeavor to develop proper virtues which serve to temper one's response—so that the reactions stemming from one's emotions do not grow disproportionate to the injustice that has been perpetrated, and thereby promote undue harm to both our neighbors and ourselves. Above all, by considering the Fifth Commandment in light of the vice/virtue tradition it is manifest just how essential the virtuous Christian practice of sharing forgiveness is for the upholding of this precept in our lives.

The Fourth Commandment: God's Representatives

"Honor, Serve and Obey, Love and Cherish"

Without question, in both the *Large Catechism* and in his *Treatise on Good Works*, Luther spends more time discussing the Fourth Commandment than any other. Even too, in the *Saxon Visitation Instructions*, so much space is devoted to this commandment that, once it is finished, Luther abandons treating the rest and moves on to the next section! This is because for Luther, among the commandments of the second table which deal with our relation to our neighbor, it is the "first and greatest." Yes, Luther says, for "God has given this walk of life, fatherhood and motherhood, a special position of honor, higher than any other walk of life under it."[168] Truly, the highest duty called for in the *coram mundo* realm is to "honor" one's parents, a task which at

[168] LC I, 105 in Kolb and Wengert, 400.

times can prove difficult. Its opposite would be to dishonor them, in the words of the *Small Catechism* by “despising and angering them,” rather than “serving, obeying, loving, and cherishing them.”[169] The reason for this honor to be given is that parents serve as God’s representatives to us on earth, and they are responsible, ultimately, for raising children in the faith as well as inculcating within them the virtues by which they might become decent neighbors and productive members of society. Grasping the importance of this commandment, then, along with its attendant vices and virtues, is essential for filling out a right understanding of the Christian *telos*.

In the *Treatise on Good Works*, Luther stresses that the keeping of all the other commandments depends on keeping this one:

> Indeed, it is because parents are commanded to teach their children that the knowledge and keeping of the first three and the last six commandments depend on this commandment. As Psalm 78[:5–6] says, “How strictly has God commanded our fathers to make known his commandments to their children, that the generation to come might know them and declare them to their children’s children.” This is also the reason God bids us honor our parents, that is, to love them with fear; for that other love is without fear, therefore, it is more dishonor than honor.[170]

In fact, in the *Large Catechism*, Luther reminds all parents, that it is their “chief duty—at the risk of losing divine grace—first to bring up their children in the fear and knowledge of God,” and that some thus “bring upon [themselves] sin and wrath, thus earning hell by the way [they] have reared [their] own children, no matter how holy and upright [they] might otherwise be.”[171] Prior, in the *Treatise on Good Works*, Luther had similarly equated parents who fail in their work and train their children to love the world more than God as sacrificing them to an idol[172] and says that

[169] SC, 14.

[170] *LW* 44:83; *WA* 6:252.

[171] LC I, 176 in Kolb and Wengert, 410.

[172] *LW* 44:83; *WA* 6:252.

parents can “earn hell” no more easily than this![173]

Further, in this treatise Luther expands the application of “honor your father and mother,” to include all those in authority over us, as he does also in the *Large Catechism*:

> From this commandment we teach that after the excellent works of the first three commandments there are no better works than to obey and serve all those who are set in authority over us. This is why disobedience is a sin worse than murder, unchastity, theft, dishonesty, and all that goes with them.[174]

For his part, Peters reiterates how here Luther’s explication of the commandment in this way actually endorses the custom of medieval confessional manuals which regularly include spiritual and secular fathers and lords in the commandment regarding parents.[175] This clearly serves as another testament to Luther’s familiarity and indebtedness to the tradition. According to the pattern already established in the consideration of the previous commandments, Luther includes, in the *Prayer Book*, a concise summary of how this commandment is both broken and kept[176]; with respect to this particular commandment, however, the treatment in the *Large Catechism* and *Treatise on Good Works* is much more extensive.

In addition to addressing obedience to one’s supervisors, and advising household members and servants to show the same deference to the head of the household as children, in the *Large*

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[173] *LW* 44:86; *WA* 6:254.

[174] *LW* 44:80–81; *WA* 6:250.

[175] Peters, *Ten Commandments*, 197.

[176] “*Breaking the Fourth Commandment:* Whoever is ashamed that his parents are poor, have faults, or are not highly regarded. Whoever does not provide clothing and food for his needy parents. Especially whoever curses or strikes his parents, slanders them, and is hateful and disobedient toward them. Whoever does not in all sincerity regard them highly simply because God has so commanded. Whoever does not hold his parents in honor even though they might do him wrong and even use force against him. Whoever does not honor those in authority over him, remain loyal and obedient to them, no matter whether they are good or bad. Whoever does not help others to obey this commandment and resist those who break it. Here belongs every kind of arrogance and disobedience” (*LW* 43:18–19; *WA* 10/2:382). “*Fulfilling the Fourth Commandment*: Show a willing obedience, humility, submissiveness to all authority as pleasing to God, as the Apostle St. Peter says [1 Pet. 2:13], without protesting, complaining, and murmuring. Here belongs all that Scripture says regarding our obedience, humility, submissiveness, and giving honor” (*LW* 43:22; *WA* 10/2:386).

Catechism's treatment of the commandment Luther gives particular attention also to civil authorities, saying, "through civil rulers, as through our own parents, God gives us food, house and home, protection and security, and he preserves us through them. Therefore … it is also our duty to honor and respect them as the most precious treasures and most priceless jewel on earth."[177] Finally, Luther encourages honor be given not just to "fathers by blood, fathers of a household, and fathers of the nation," but additionally, "spiritual fathers," that is, "those who guide us by the Word of God."[178]

Regarding civil authorities, then, in the *Saxon Visitation Instructions*, Luther and Melanchthon outline several ways to obey the government, using Rom. 13 as their guide: first, the payment of taxes, second, respect, and third, honor through both love and prayer.[179] Additionally the Reformers remind Christians how through government God:

> gives peace and punishes the wicked, so that we may support wife and children, bring up children in the discipline and knowledge of God, have security in our homes and on the streets, that each may help the other, and communicate and live with another. Such gifts are altogether heaven, and God desires that we consider and recognize them as gifts of God. He desires us to honor government as a servant of his and to show gratitude to it because through it God gives us such great benefits. Whoever, thus, might see God in government, would have sincere love towards government. Whoever could estimate the blessings which we receive through government, would be heartily thankful toward government … because the common man does not acknowledge such blessings as peace, justice, and punishment of the wicked, we need often to remind him of them and diligently explain them to him.[180]

While it is right to acknowledge the many gifts our Lord provides in and through governing authorities, it is also true that those who have been entrusted with these earthly responsibilities can abuse their power. In instances when authorities govern in ways their subjects might find

[177] LC I, 150 in Kolb and Wengert, 407.

[178] LC I, 158 in Kolb and Wengert, 408.

[179] *LW* 40:281–83; *WA* 26:207–09.

[180] *LW* 40:283; *WA* 26:208–09.

displeasing, or burdensome, nevertheless, the call for the Christian remains one of obedience, because the office of these authorities remains divinely ordained. Luther and Melanchthon echo and affirm the Apostle Paul's teaching from Rom. 13:2 in this respect when they exhort: "Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment."[181]

Much more detailed treatment of these concepts is set forth in Luther's twin works which have the subject matter of obedience to authorities as their primary concern: *A Sincere Admonition by Martin Luther to All Christians to Guard Against Insurrection and Rebellion,*[182] from 1522; and, *Temporal Authority: To What Extent Should it be Obeyed*,[183] from 1523. Space does not permit a thorough treatment of these important texts, but still, a few pertinent items must be mentioned to ensure our treatment of this particular aspect of the Christian *telos* is not found lacking. First, in the former document, Luther warns about the futility of rebelling against authorities:

> Even if insurrection were a practical possibility, and God were willing to impose so merciful a punishment upon them, it is still an unprofitable method of procedure. It never brings about the desired improvement. For insurrection lacks discernment; it generally harms the innocent more than the guilty. Hence, no insurrection is ever right, no matter how right the cause it seeks to promote. It always results in more damage than improvement…[184]

Thus, Luther reminds the reader that not only is rebellion forbidden by God, but the improved state it desires to bring about is never realized.

Second, regarding the possibility of disobedience, Luther does recognize the truth taught by the Apostle Peter in Acts 5:29 and acknowledges there is a limit to the Christian's obedience to

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[181] *LW* 40:281; *WA* 26:207.

[182] *LW* 45:57–74; *WA* 8:676–87.

[183] *LW* 45:81–129; *WA* 11:245–80.

[184] *LW* 45:62–63; *WA* 8:680.

earthly authority; in certain instances, "we must obey God rather than men." When a temporal ruler commands a Christian to act in a manner contrary to God's own will, the Christian must disobey. Luther writes:

> If your prince or temporal ruler commands you to side with the pope, to believe thus and so, or to get rid of certain books, you should say, "It is not fitting that Lucifer should sit at the side of God. Gracious sir, I owe you obedience in body and property; command me within the limits of your authority on earth, and I will obey. But if you command me to believe or to get rid of certain books, I will not obey; for then you are a tyrant and overreach yourself, commanding where you have neither the right nor the authority," etc. Should he seize your property on account of this and punish such disobedience, then blessed are you; thank God that you are worthy to suffer for the sake of the divine word.[185]

Choosing to be civilly disobedient towards earthly authorities out of one's allegiance to God certainly invites upon one's self the established consequences designated for such noncompliance. However, the Christian gladly faces these punishments, as those who suffer for the name of Christ.

Anger and Patience

When considering the reality that divinely appointed earthly authorities "bear the sword," in order to punish wrongdoers, it is important to consider again Luther's exceptions concerning anger for those whose vocational duties call for them to express it as they act as God's representatives and bring punishment to the wrongdoer. He wrote, concerning the Fifth Commandment, that it "forbids anger except … [on the part of] persons who function in God's stead, that is, parents and governing authorities." He notes that "anger, reproof, and punishment are the prerogatives of God and his representatives and are to be meted out to those who transgress this and other commandments."[186] As such, with regard to the prohibition on murder,

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[185] *LW* 45:111–12; *WA* 11:267.

[186] LC I, 182 in Kolb and Wengert, 411.

"neither God nor the government is included in this commandment, nor is their right to take human life abrogated."[187] This means, insofar as these representatives carry out God's wrath, their bearing of the sword and potential taking of life is authorized as they serve as agents of God himself. Thus, the soldier is fulfilling a valid Christian vocation; and Christians need not be pacifists but can occupy secular positions that are required to take life with a clear conscience, as Luther delineated so clearly in his treatise, *Whether Soldiers Too Can Be Saved*, from 1526.[188] With steady consistency, we find the same argument made pointedly in *Temporal Authority*:

> [The] governing authority is God's servant, we must allow it to be exercised not only by the heathen but by all men … Now it would be quite un-Christian to say that there is any service of God in which a Christian should not or must not take part, when service of God is actually more characteristic of Christians than of anyone else … For the sword and authority, as a particular service of God, belong more appropriately to Christians than to any other men on earth.[189]

Thus, the anger expressed in and through these vocations is to be considered God's anger, which is always just. As has been demonstrated already, our anger, on the other hand, is almost always unjust. Gilbert Meilaender writes that, in carefully reading Rom. 13:1–4, "if we attend to the context of these verses, we will note that this judicial and retributive function is granted not to individuals in their private capacities, but to government."[190] As such, as he acts in his own individual capacity, the Christian's call remains to refrain from anger. Prior to this section on Romans, Paul clearly tells Christians to not return evil for evil, but rather to "overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21). This is consistent with Jesus' own admonition from the Sermon on the Mount to be a "peacemaker," (Matt. 5:9) and to "turn the other cheek" (Matt. 5:39). And after treating the nature of the government's retributive work, Meilaender turns our attention to Paul's

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[187] LC I, 180 in Kolb and Wengert, 410.

[188] *LW* 46:93–137; *WA* 19/2:623–62.

[189] *LW* 45:99–100; *WA* 11:257–58.

[190] Meilaender, *Thy Will*, 62.

admonition which follows: “owe no one anything, except to love one another” (Rom. 13:8). Because Christians are commanded not to avenge wrongs they endure, but instead are instructed to love even their enemies, and because Christians sometimes suffer injustice that even the authorities do not prosecute, it is always the case that they are called to practice patience continually, trusting God to act through his chosen means. They must trust that the wrongs perpetuated against them and others eventually will be avenged, if not by temporal authorities in the present, at least on the Last Day by their Father in heaven, as promised in Rom. 12:19: “Vengeance is mine, I will repay.” Luther and Melanchthon point our attention to this reality in the *Saxon Visitation Instructions*: “Even if government cannot in every instance punish our violations, still we should know that God will punish.”[191] Indeed, all the virtues discussed previously apply as we strive to resist and overcome our emotion of anger and instead cultivate the peace, patience, and gentleness that are so appropriate for those privileged to be called children of God.

Here again, we see that the Fourth Commandment is supplied with increased texture when considered in light of the virtues which promote, and the vices which prohibit, the carrying out of this statute. The call to honor and obey earthly authorities indeed demands great patience as we bear with those God has placed over us as his representatives—whether they be father or mother, teacher or coach, pastor or professor, police officer or President. Because raising children in the faith is the highest calling in all of creation, children must willingly obey their parents. Because governing a people in prosperity and peace is perhaps the most challenging task in all of creation, citizens must exercise restraint in rushing to judge those in authority over them. When we allow our anger or pride to supersede these greater concerns, we do damage to our society at

[191] *LW* 40:281; *WA* 26:207.

large, and most especially to our neighbors, both near and far.

The Third Commandment: God's Word

"Hold It Sacred, Gladly Hear and Learn It"

When it comes to the Third Commandment, Luther most certainly had to move past the particular application to Old Testament Israel in an effort to assist Christians is understanding how its provisions might apply today. Since Jesus had declared the command to rest obsolete by his coming (Mark 2:27) and since the New Testament taught that the "Sabbath rest," is now a rest in Christ (Heb. 4:1–11), Luther had to conceive of how the spiritual meaning of the command retained continuity across the Testaments, recognizing that the immediate literal meaning as it applied to ancient Israel no longer concerned Christians.[192] Peters notes how "Luther does not … place emphasis on the command to rest but on the sanctification of the day" and notes this unfolds in his thinking progressively to the point that, "he can express it unambiguously in the *Large Catechism*." Peters elaborates on this development: "in his earlier interpretations, he looked instead to the inner Sabbath rest of the soul," and "only little by little does the hearing of the Word of God move to the center and finally eliminate all other aspects."[193] Luther's Sabbath development culminates in the *Small Catechism* which reads: "We should fear and love God, so that we do not despite preaching and his word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it."[194]

The command to rest, however, is not completely eliminated. Luther realizes that nature teaches that our bodies need rest, so that we can be refreshed. However, the greatest reason we

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[192] LC I, 82 in Kolb and Wengert, 397.

[193] Peters, *Ten Commandments*, 167.

[194] SC, 13.

need a break from the routine work of the week, Luther reasons, is to make available a day on which God's people have the occasion to "attend worship services, that is, so that they may assemble to hear and discuss God's Word and then to offer praise, song, and prayer to God."[195] Indeed, Luther sees as primary in the Third Commandment the exhortation to "keep it holy." What does it mean to keep it holy? "Nothing else than devoting it to holy words, holy works, and holy living" for the day is already holy in and of itself, since it is created by God, but it becomes holy for us only when we "make use of God's Word and exercise ourselves in it." Consequently, "rest in idleness" is not the intent.[196] Luther focuses particularly on the holiness of the Word since "the Word of God is the true holy object," and as such, "God's Word is the treasure that makes everything holy … whenever [it] is taught preached, heard, read, or pondered."[197] Once again, in his 1522 *Prayer Book* Luther provides a pair of comprehensive lists delineating specific ways that one might keep or fail to keep the Third Commandment.[198]

Sloth and Diligence

Because the command to keep the Sabbath holy involves active participation and attentiveness to the Word of God, the "one thing needful" (Luke 10:42), Luther particularly recognizes sloth as the primary vice which hinders our keeping of this commandment.

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[195] LC I, 84 in Kolb and Wengert, 397.

[196] LC I, 87–90 in Kolb and Wengert, 398.

[197] LC I, 91–92 in Kolb and Wengert, 399.

[198] "*Breaking the Third Commandment:* "Whoever does not listen to God's word or try to understand it. Whoever does not offer prayer to God. Whoever does not regard all he does as God's work. Whoever, in all he does and endures, does not quietly allow God to do with him as he pleases. Whoever does not help the other person do all this and does not restrain him from doing otherwise" (*LW* 43:18; *WA* 10/2:382). "*Fulfilling the Third Commandment*: "Yield to God so that all we do is done by him alone through us. This commandment requires a person to be poor in spirit [Matt. 5:3], to sacrifice his nothingness to God so that He may be that soul's only God and that in that soul God's deeds may be glorified [2 Cor. 9:13] as the first two commandments require. Here belongs everything required of us: serving God, listening to what is preached about God, doing good deeds, subjecting the body to the spirit [1 Cor. 9:27]. And so that all we accomplish is God's and nothing our own" (*LW* 43:22; *WA* 10/2:386).

> God ... will require of you an accounting of how you have heard, learned, and honored his word. In the same way those conceited spirits should also be punished who, after they have heard a sermon or two, become sick and tired of it and feel that they know it all and need no more instructors. This is precisely the sin that used to be numbered among the mortal sins and was called *acidia*—that is, laziness or weariness—a malignant, pernicious plague with which the devil bewitches and deceives many hearts so that he may take us by surprise and stealthily take the Word of God away again.[199]

This deadly vice, following the pattern of all vice, then manifests itself in specific sins as the Reformer complains: "this commandment is violated … by those who grossly misuse and desecrate the holy day, like those who in their greed or frivolity neglect the hearing of God's Word or lie around in taverns dead drunk like swine.[200] In his preface to the *Large Catechism* Luther had expressed similar concern with the laziness not only of the people but of those tasked with serving the people as their spiritual shepherds:

> It is not for trivial reasons that we constantly treat the catechism and exhort and implore others to do the same, for we see that unfortunately many preachers and pastors are very negligent in doing so and thus despise both their office and this teaching. Some do it out of concern for their great learnedness, while others out of pure laziness and concern for their bellies … Oh, these shameful gluttons and servants of their bellies are better suited to be swineherds and keepers of dogs than guardians of souls and pastors.[201]

Indeed, in a late Table Talk recorded in 1538, Luther opined that idleness is one of the greatest temptations:

> The greatest temptation in the world is that nobody fulfils his calling faithfully but everybody wishes to indulge in idleness. I am now exhausted and full of cares, yet I am plagued with many duties. Others are idle and unwilling to do anything. I think that if we didn't have to do what we do, if we weren't driven to it, we wouldn't do anything either. I mark well where the pope came from; the lazy, idle lords and princes emptied him from their bowels.[202]

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[199] LC I, 98–99 in Kolb and Wengert, 400.

[200] LC I, 96 in Kolb and Wengert, 399.

[201] LC Preface, 1 in Kolb and Wengert, 379.

[202] *LW* 54:281; *WA* TR 3:647.

Set in opposition to the vice of sloth is the Christian virtue of diligence. DeYoung observes that the root word of this virtue is the Latin *diligere*, "to love," which in this case involves a sense of responsibility, dedication, and hard work committed to doing one's duties, perhaps even with a zeal akin to love. By comparison, sloth is an indifference to our duty and a neglect of another's needs.[203] Those caught within the grips of sloth are most noticeably identified by their sheer apathy towards most every facet of daily life.[204] This is why Luther could say that sloth is present in every commandment. Every command of God sets a duty before us, and if we fail to love our neighbor in and through these duties, we are guilty of sloth. Faithful Christian living is not opposed to hard work, as the Apostle Paul admonished, we are to "work with our hands" (1 Thess. 4:11–12). Luther agrees, and late in his career when addressing this topic in his Genesis lectures he intentionally employs the Greek name of the capital vice to make the connection explicitly:

> God wants to arouse the hearts of the saints so that they do not become smug and dull and perish from ἀκηδίᾳ ("from indifference") and from sluggishness of spirit. For if the spirit is aroused, faith is sharpened, the knowledge of God grows, and the new man is renewed from day to day and is taught what is the good and perfect will of God (see Rom. 12:2).[205]

It is important to recognize that in the capital vice tradition, the vice of sloth does not always mean one is lazy but can also entail spending too much time working on things that are not important. As such the relative "busyness," or "industriousness," of individuals might to all appearances seem as diligent as could possibly be, but if the time and effort invested in whatever

[203] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 81.

[204] Dorothy Sayers, in her brilliantly written essay, "The Six Other Deadly Sins," an address given to the Public Morality Council at Caxton Hall, Westminster, on October 23, 1941, provides a witty description of the particular vice of sloth: "It is the sin which believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and only remains alive because there is nothing it would die for." ("The Other Six Deadly Sins" *in Letters to a Diminished Church* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 97.

[205] *LW* 6:362; *WA* 44:270 (1543 *Lectures on Genesis*).

task is at hand is to the neglect of the more important tasks of serving a neighbor, or attending to God's Word, the actions are slothful indeed. As such, sloth is best understood as the neglect of a necessary spiritual duty—either from busyness or laziness.[206]

Luther fully understands this reality of the power of sloth and the remedy provided by contemplating the Word of God as evident in commentary he provided on the epistle to the Hebrews:

> Since we are in the midst of enemies and are continually attracted by innumerable allurements, hindered by cares, and engaged in business affairs, through all of which we are withdrawn from purity of heart, therefore there is only one thing left for us: we must exhort ourselves with all zeal and, so to speak, stir up our sluggish spirit by means of the Word of God, by meditating on it, reading it, and continually listening to it, as the apostle admonishes here. Just as we read about St. Cecilia that she "constantly bore the Gospel of Christ in her heart and devoted herself day and night to prayer and conversations with God." If this did not happen, we would certainly be swallowed up in the end by the great number of those things, and acedia and lukewarmness of spirit, the greatest of all dangers, would overwhelm us. This is what the Jews experienced in the wilderness when they became sick of the manna. Thus Ps. 107:18 says: "They loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death." Indeed, the psalmist, too, had this experience. In Ps. 119:28 he says: "My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to Thy words." And again (Ps. 102:4): "I am smitten like grass because I forgot to eat my bread." For just as the body cannot do without its bread—otherwise it is weakened—so the heart of man is not strengthened except by this bread of God's Word. For as often as we forget the Word of God, so often do we fall back into the love of things and are polluted. We are cleansed from this pollution only when we return to the Word.[207]

He expresses a similar sentiment in his 1535 *Galatians Commentary* that is, like the prior reference, worth quoting at length for its insight into his thought:

> What is more, we ourselves, who teach the Word, do not perform our own duty with as much care and zeal here in the light of truth as we used to in the darkness of ignorance. The more certain we are about the freedom granted to us by Christ, the more unresponsive and slothful we are in presenting the Word, praying, doing good works, enduring evil, and the like. And if Satan were not troubling us inwardly with spiritual trials and outwardly with persecution by our enemies and with the contempt and ingratitude of our own followers, we would become utterly smug, lazy, and

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[206] De Young, *Glittering Vices*, 85.

[207] *LW* 29:153–54; *WA* 57/3:148–50 (1518 *Lectures on Hebrews*).

> useless for anything good; thus in time we would lose the knowledge of Christ and faith in Him, would forsake the ministry of the Word, and would look for some more comfortable way of life, more suitable to our flesh. This is what many of our followers are beginning to do, motivated by the fact that those who labor in the Word not only do not get their support from this but are even treated shamefully by those whom their preaching of the Gospel has set free from the miserable slavery of the pope. Forsaking the poor and offensive figure of Christ, they involve themselves in the business of this present life; and they serve, not Christ but their own appetites (Rom. 16:18), with results that they will experience in due time.[208]

Because of the ever-present temptation to be slothful, Luther exhorts Christians to embrace their routine work for daily bread with zeal and with trust in God: "Our toil must be motivated more by our desire to serve God through it, to avoid idleness, and to fulfill God's command addressed to Adam, 'In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread' [Gen. 3:19], rather than by our worrying and fretting over our nourishment. God will surely take care of this as long as we do our work according to his commandments."[209] To this end, he prays, concerning our steadfast resolve to carry out God's will for the sake of his kingdom: "Grant that we may bear patiently and overcome whatever we must suffer on its account, so that our poor flesh may not yield or fall away through weakness or sloth."[210]

As mentioned above, the virtue which overcomes sloth is diligence. In a 1534 commentary on Ps. 101, Luther speaks of this virtue. He begins by paraphrasing King David's words in the Psalm, saying: "Therefore David says here: 'I am concerned about what is mine and look after those who are about me. Other kings should also be that solicitous about their own, so that if I venture to be too shrewdly and busily occupied among strangers, I may not meanwhile neglect myself and those who are mine.'" And then he reasons:

> And David may well be thankful for such a virtue. For it is indeed a very lovely thing and a special gift of God to be a good, diligent man who carefully looks after his own

[208] *LW* 27:49; *WA* 40/2:61.

[209] *LW* 42:62; *WA* 2:115 (1519 *Exposition of the Lord's Prayer*).

[210] LC III, 67 in Kolb and Wengert, 449.

> things and really pays serious attention to them, especially to God's Word, without letting extraneous matters lead him astray. Obedience is the crown and glory of all virtues; but if slothfulness is mingled with it, then mildew, or, as Isaiah calls it, corrosive rain (Prov. 28:3), has spoiled it. Then people become nothing but quacks, bunglers, and busybodies, who neglect much and cannot do anything for anyone out of love or gratitude.[211]

Indeed, in the *Treatise on Good Works* the Reformer links faith and Christian diligence, encouraging the Christian to be "holy and full of good works" and to "exercise himself at all times in this faith in all his life and works. Let him learn to do and to leave undone all things in such continual faith. Then he will find how much work he has to do, and how completely all things are included in faith, and how he may never grow idle because his very idling must be the exercise and work of faith."[212]

The virtue of diligence should be exercised in all the good works God has commanded his people to do in service to their neighbor, but for Luther it is especially to be exercised in learning the teachings of the church. Note how he earnestly encourages diligence with respect to learning the Catechism in this classic section from the *Large Catechism* as he concludes his discussion of the Third Commandment:

> Let me tell you this. Even though you know the Word perfectly and have already mastered everything, you are daily under the dominion of the devil, and he does not rest day or night in seeking to take you unawares and to kindle in your heart unbelief and wicked thoughts against these three and all the other commandments. Therefore you must constantly keep God's Word in your heart, on your lips, and in your ears. For where the heart stands idle and the Word is not heard, the devil breaks in and does his damage before we realize it. On the other hand, when we seriously ponder the Word, hear it, and put it to use, such is its power that it never departs without fruit. It always awakens new understanding, pleasure, and devotion, and it constantly creates clean hearts and minds. For this Word is not idle or dead, but effective and living.[213]

I will let Rebecca DeYoung, whose observations and reflections on the vice tradition have

[211] *LW* 13:176; *WA* 51:224.

[212] *LW* 44:34; *WA* 6:212–13.

[213] LC I, 100–01 in Kolb and Wengert, 400.

enhanced and shaped so much of the preceding presentation, have the last word in this section. As noted above, these insights and warnings about the threat of sloth apply not just here, in our consideration of the Third Commandment, but in reality, to every commandment of the Decalogue. Sloth, she writes, "is a resistance to the discipline and transformation demanded by our new identity as God's beloved children, created and redeemed to be like him. The slothful like the comforting thought of being saved by love, of being God's own, but balk at facing the discomfort of transformation—the slow putting to death of the old sinful nature."[214] She finally reasons that "it is not to those who take up their crosses who find them an unbearable weight, but those who resist the demands of love—those who suffer from the self-imposed burden of *acedia*—that Jesus gives the invitation, 'Come to me all your that are weary and carrying heaven burdens, and I will give you rest … for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'"[215] Indeed, the yoke of following Jesus and his demands is much lighter than the self-imposed yoke of refusing to take up one's own cross and obediently follow.

Contributing its own particular contours to the defined shape of the Christian *telos*, the Third Commandment highlights for Luther our need to attend to the Word of God and drink deeply from its well—learning its tenets and diligently living them out in our daily lives. The carrying out of God's holy will in the world is impeded by a slothful indifference to God's commands that disregards the good works God has prepared in advance that we might walk in them (see Eph 2:10). As we endeavor to cultivate the virtue of diligence, and increasingly overcome our sluggish dispositions, we not only learn to hold God's Word sacred in our lives, but, upon hearing and learning it, we are freed to carry out those tasks to which God's Word calls

[214] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 92.

[215] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 96.

us with a joyful zeal in service to our neighbors. We this conclude this chapter at last, then, by considering the first two commandments of the Decalogue, and contemplating how these precepts which call for trust in the true God are enhanced when considered in the light of the vice/virtue tradition.

The First and Second Commandments: Trust in the True God

"Fear, Love, and Trust"

The close of the prior chapter dealt extensively with the demand called for by the First and Second Commandments, that is, the call to "fear, love, and trust" exclusively in the one true God for our every need and blessing. Indeed the vast majority of Luther's exposition of the First Commandment has already been cited there. Little more needs to be added to the basic truth that the Lord forbids idolatrous trust in any other entity, whether the self or a created thing in the world which we would covetously desire as an object of our trust and look to for any kind of good thing. Still, it remains for us to consider what things might get in the way of our keeping this command. Ultimately, the great threat is, of course, pride—pride that stems from our fear and says "I will secure my own good." Indeed, every vice is rooted in pride, originating as pride does from our doubt of God's own power and goodness. Pride steps in and insists on assuming God's role. Anger pridefully steps into God's spot to be the judge. Envy steps into God's place to be the distributor of worldly status. Greed pridefully seeks security through what one can acquire by one's own means. Lust and gluttony seek fulfillment in self-created pleasure. As was reiterated earlier, it is only by rightly remaining in our place as creatures, receptive to the Creator's blessings, that we can truly battle and by God's grace finally kill our pride. This involves, naturally, developing evermore the contrasting virtue of humility in conformity to the image of Christ. It is with a look toward the final vice/virtue pairing of pride and humility that

this treatment of the contours of the new obedience, the intertwining of good works, virtues, and vice, concludes.

Pride and Humility

Like his forebears from the vice tradition, Luther understood pride to be the deadliest of all vices, indeed pride is the source of all unbelief because it doubts God's goodness and refuses to trust in God alone. He singled out pride in a reflection on the Lord's Prayer, "anyone who has a thorough understanding of the Lord's Prayer, and only that, would be equipped with doctrine sufficient to combat all vices, especially that of pride."[216] Pride, Luther writes in the *Treatise on Good Works*, is a vice "contrary to the first two commandments," "an exceedingly dangerous sin, yet most common of all," and thus one should "be on one's guard, to flee from and avoid all temporal honor, and praise, and never to seek a name for oneself." He adds, "all the holy fathers have complained of this vice and are united in the conclusion that it is the very last vice to be overcome. St. Augustine says all other vices are practiced in doing evil works: it is only honor and self-satisfaction that are practiced in good works and by means of them."[217] Truly, pride is the sin that places one's self in God's spot and attempts to control one's own life in lieu of God.

The great difficulty in overcoming pride is expressed by Luther in the 1521 *Defense and Explanation of All the Article*s, when he asserts that: "No one is certain that he is not continually committing mortal sin, because of the most secret vice of pride." He continues:

> St. Gregory writes at the end of his *Moralia*, "How can we ever be saved, when our evil works are absolutely evil and our good works never absolutely good?" Again, Job 9[:21] says, "Though I were godly, even this my soul does not know," and again, "I am afraid in all my works, for I know thou dost not spare the sinner" [Job 9:28]. Commenting on this, St. Gregory says, "What I have done openly, I see; but what I have suffered secretly, I do not know." This means that no one can fully know his

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[216] *LW* 42:33; *WA* 2:92 (1519 *Exposition of the Lord's Prayer*).

[217] *LW* 44:43; *WA* 6:220.

> secret pride, as this same teacher says many times, and through it all works are made unclean and cannot stand in the light of God's just judgment. This is what David says in Ps. 19[:12], "Lord, who can discern his errors? Clear thou me from hidden sins."[218]

Seen in the light of this wisdom, it is clear that the vice of pride is not as easily recognized as every other vice, first for the reason cited above by Augustine, that pride is often exercised in what otherwise are truly good works, and second, because the one who is guilty of pride is too often blind to that reality. It is also the case that sinful men are often quite blind to the presence of various other vices in their lives as well. However, if confronted about a certain behavior, men generally do not consider themselves "proud" of their ability regularly and gluttonously to engorge themselves at the dinner table, or habitually to lose their tempers in fits of anger. When these realities are brought to their attention, they may make excuses for them, or even deny them, but rarely will they defend them. The very nature of pride, on the other hand, is to be completely turned in on one's self, and thus unable to stand outside one's self and with any kind of objectivity provide an honest self-assessment of one's prideful behavior. Further, as Augustine recognized, because pride is so often employed in the pursuit of positive undertakings, it is far easier to "fool" one's self into thinking it is not a problem.

Luther recognized the vast problem the vice of pride poses for the Christian. When commenting on 1 John 2:16, "the pride of life," Luther calls pride the "greatest stumbling block," adding that the world "always seeks things that are high. Everyone wants to be exalted," but the Christian, rather, is called to the opposite, and should "not want to exalt himself but should be content with what he has."[219] Thus Luther identifies what is perhaps the most troubling aspect of this vice: "the world regards this terrible vice as the highest virtue."[220] Luther's insight underlines

[218] *LW* 32:91; *WA* 7:445.

[219] *LW* 30:250; *WA* 20:665 (1527 *Lectures on 1 John*).

[220] *LW* 44:43; *WA* 6:220 (1520 *Treatise on Good Works*).

one of the marked differences between virtue grounded in the commandments and teachings of Christ over and against the classic virtues of Aristotle. A markedly different *telos* leads to a dramatically different evaluation of pride, placing it in a far different position than the other, chiefly salutary, cardinal virtues. Typically, due to the reality of the natural law pervading human existence (most often unwittingly among pagans), pagan and Christian virtue look nearly alike. In other words, pagans are able to discern the "good," from natural revelation as ably as Christians see this same "good" confirmed in special revelation. Following that full revelation in Christ, however, Luther understood and articulated what Aristotle alone could never tell us working only in the limits of natural law—Luther knew that is pride is no virtue, but rather the worst vice. Humility, on the other hand, while seen as a deficiency in pagan philosophy, through the revelation of Christ, is understood to be the highest virtue. Indeed, Luther understood this and taught it consistently.[221]

Luther was well aware that the "virtues of the heathen must be distinguished from the virtues of Christians." Written in a period that marks Luther's most mature thought, the Reformer continues in this section of commentary on Genesis by articulating the overarching, summarized *telos* of the Christian life, and observing that, among the heathens, "the true goal, obedience toward God and love of one's neighbor, receives no consideration," and asks, "what sort of virtue is it where nearly all the causes are missing except the natural one, which is only something passive, that is, a drive or impulse by which the heart is moved to keep faith with an

[221] Robert Kolb notes that early on, Luther had emphasized humility, but relying on a theology of humility from the Taulerian tradition, had noted how humility was a virtue that served to attract God's grace, serving as a movement toward grace by winning God's sympathetic attention. However, writes Kolb, "By 1520, Luther had left behind [this] emphasis on humility … abandoning this view that attributed some merit before God to humility." He continues, however, by conveying that "despite abandoning this view that attributed some merit before God to humility, [Luther] never lost his appreciation of the significance of the humble heart for proper Christian engagement with God and the world. That humility recognizes the pattern set down by Christ's earthly life, though inimitable in its saving power, does present the model of true human living," *Luther's Treatise on Christian Freedom*, 65.

enemy?"[222] As shown in both his *Sermon on the Two Kinds of Righteousness* from 1519 and in *Freedom of the Christian* in 1520, from very early on Luther understood humility to be the virtue that most exemplifies the pattern of Christ, expressed powerfully by the apostle as Luther recognized in his paraphrase of Phil. 2:5–9: "Christ did not count himself equal to God" but rather "freely take[s] on the form of a servant."[223]

A year later, in the latter essay, Luther returned to Paul's letter paraphrasing earlier verses in Phil. 2: "do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves … each [should] look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." Luther continues commenting: "Here we see clearly that the Apostle has prescribed this rule for the life of Christians, namely, that we should devote all our works to the welfare of others, since each has such abundant riches in his faith that all his other works and his whole life are a surplus with which he can by voluntary benevolence serve and do good to his neighbor."[224]

Humility is a virtue that not only positions one properly as a creature to live within God's will with respect to our civil righteousness, those areas governed by the second table of the law, but it is also especially pertinent to the first table, addressing our relationship with the Lord. It is humility (which the vice tradition within the church understood to be not some kind of self-deprecating meekness, but rather a groundedness to the *humus*, or earth)[225], which embraces our specific role as earthbound creatures, and not Creator, and so overcomes the vice of pride, thereby allowing us to accomplish what Luther calls the "chief work" of faith,[226] that is, as was

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[222] *LW* 2:125–26; *WA* 42:350–51 (1538 *Lectures on Genesis*).

[223] *LW* 31:302–03; *WA* 2:148–49 (1519 *Sermon on Two Kinds of Righteousness*).

[224] *LW* 31:365–66; *WA* 7:65 (1520 *Freedom of a Christian*).

[225] Bishop Robert Barron, *Seven Deadly Sins, Seven Lively Virtues* (Word on Fire, 2017), DVD.

[226] *LW* 44:25; *WA* 6:206 (1520 *Treatise on Good Works*).

treated extensively at the close of the prior chapter: fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things.

Kolb observes that "when the reformer mentioned the example of Christ, who came into human likeness and form, he presumed that readers would know that this description of Jesus in Phil. 2:1–11 began with admonition to practice 'the mind of Christ.' That mean they were to follow Christ's example not only in external actions, but also in the fundamental attitude toward life and others."[227] Humility addresses both the core of our internal disposition, and ultimately our relationships with others as it is consummated by our outward actions. In his 1519 *Sermon on Two Kinds of Righteousness* Luther declares how our *coram mundo* righteousness towards our neighbor "follows the example of Christ in this respect [1 Pet. 2:21] and [we are] transformed into his likeness (2 Cor. 3:18)."[228] And, a year later, in *Freedom of a Christian*, Luther demonstrates he is not afraid to follow the apostle and forcefully invoke the example of Christ not as a means to righteousness before God, but as the way of humbly serving his neighbor:

> Although Christ was filled with the form of God and rich in all good things … yet he was not puffed up by them and did not exalt himself above us and assume power over us … but, on the contrary, he so lived, labored, worked, suffered, and died that he might be like other men and in fashion and in actions be nothing else than a man, just as if he had need of all these things and had nothing of the form of God. But he did all this for our sake, that he might serve us and that all things which he accomplished in this form of a servant might become ours.
>
> So a Christian, like Christ his head, is filled and made rich by faith and should be content with this form of God which he has obtained by faith; only, as I have said, he should increase this faith until it is made perfect. For this faith is his life, his righteousness, and his salvation: it saves him and makes him acceptable, and bestows upon him all things that are Christ's, as has been said above, and as Paul asserts in Gal. 2[:20] when he says, "And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God." Although the Christian is thus free from all works, he ought in this

[227] Kolb, *Luther's Treatise On Christian Freedom*, 64.

[228] *LW* 31:300; *WA* 2:147.

> liberty to empty himself, take upon himself the form of a servant, be made in the likeness of men, be found in human form, and to serve.[229]

As was stated at the outset, the true goal of all virtue is not to save one's self but to serve others. The reason to develop virtues is not merely to create character for the sake of self-improvement, but ultimately to conform to Christ for the sake of the neighbor. This reality grounded in and shaped by Christlike humility encompasses the sanctified task of every Christian as he daily battles the flesh and all sinful desire in the fight of faith. It is to the nature of this fight that we turn next.

[229] *LW* 31:366; *WA* 7:65.

CHAPTER FIVE

FROM VICE TO VIRTUE: THE CHRISTIAN FIGHT OF FAITH

Recall the overarching structure of this dissertation: the analogy of the light of the vice and virtue tradition being changed by its refraction through the Reformation as a method to help towards answering questions about both the necessity and shape of sanctification. The previous chapter demonstrated how vice and virtue were incorporated into the larger reality of the Decalogue—the vices filling out the specific deadly contours of the negative side of the Decalogue and its prohibitions as Luther so skillfully aimed them at the inner heart, and virtues were rendered penultimate to the good works of the Decalogue, these fruit of the Spirit serving as dispositions that, when present, overcome idolatrous vice, and enable the Christian to more consistently carry out God's designed works of service for the neighbor. Now, in this chapter, our attention shifts to a consideration not of the content, but rather of the task of sanctification. In doing so we follow the lead of St. Paul who referred to this work as the Christian's "fight of faith" (1 Tim. 6:12).

Habitus: The Necessity and Nature of the Fight

The Danger of False Security

Because vices are manifestations of an idolatrous heart and foster unbelief, their presence is obviously antithetical to Christian life. While the fallen heart, even the fallen heart of a Christian, will never be entirely free from vice, nevertheless, if vice is dismissed, ignored, or left unchecked, it can certainly drive faith out of the Christian heart. In fact, Luther and Melanchthon warn in their 1528 *Saxon Visitation Instructions* of the danger of security without requisite repentance:

> Many now talk only about the forgiveness of sins and say little or nothing about repentance. There neither is forgiveness of sins without repentance nor can forgiveness of sins be understood without repentance. It follows that if we preach the forgiveness of sins without repentance that the people imagine that they have already obtained the forgiveness of sins, becoming thereby secure and without compunction of conscience. This would be a greater error and sin than all the errors hitherto prevailing. Surely we need to be concerned lest, as Christ says in Matt. 12[:45] the last state becomes worse than the first.[1]

While "works righteousness" comprised the "first state" that was indeed an intolerable offense to the true gospel, this "last state" of carnal security, that is, living according to the desires of the flesh without regard for the will of God, ran the risk of being an even greater error. Luther and Melanchthon recognized the reality that a Christian with a works righteousness understanding of salvation who had a terrified conscience could ultimately "land" and rest secure on the grace of Jesus Christ. Those living a life rife with vice and subject to its control and yet in their delusion mistakenly confident of God's grace, however, proceed to their own doom tragically unaware. The Reformers continue:

> For many who hear that they should believe, so that all their sins will be forgiven, fashion their own faith and think they are pure. Thus they become secure and arrogant. Such carnal security is worse than all the errors hitherto prevailing. Therefore in preaching the gospel it is necessary in every way to instruct the people where faith may be found and how one attains it. For true faith cannot exist where there is not true contrition and true fear and terror before God.[2]

As Luther witnessed Christians flaunting their "freedom in Christ," he warned them that genuine faith does not exist without true contrition. A year later in the *Large Catechism*, Luther reiterated this same sentiment, noting that the "evil plague of security and boredom" is a "horrible vice"[3] and warning:

> Learn from these words, then, how angry God is with those who rely on anything but him, and again, how kind and gracious he is to those who trust and believe him alone

[1] *LW* 40:274; *WA* 26:202.

[2] *LW* 40:293–94; *WA* 26:217–18.

[3] LC Preface, 5 in Kolb and Wengert, 380.

> with their whole heart. His wrath does not subside until the fourth generation, but, in contrast, his kindness and goodness extend to many thousands. Therefore, people should not live in false security and trust in luck, like brutes who think that it makes no great difference how they live.[4]

Thus assumed security in Christ without regard for how one would conduct his life was in truth a "false security," and hence, what the Luther and Melanchthon in the *Saxon Visitation Instructions* would without equivocation would label an "imagined faith":

> We are to teach the people diligently that this faith cannot exist without earnest and true contrition and fear of God, as it is written in Psalm 110 [Ps. 111:10] and Prov. 1[:7], "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." And Isaiah says in the last chapter: "On whom does God look except on the trembling and contrite heart?" This shall be proclaimed repeatedly, so that the people do not entertain false notions and think they have faith when they are far from having it. It shall be made clear that only if they have faith can they truly repent and grieve over their sins. Without repentance theirs is an imagined faith.[5]

Recall, the first question guiding this study is: what is the shape of Christian sanctification? The suggested answer is the specific contours of the Decalogue. Answering this question, however, prompts a subsequent question: what are the implications of the Christian neglecting to strive towards this end? Here, in Luther, we see a clear answer: death and hell itself! Luther warns against the "devil, who baits and badgers on all sides, [whose] purpose is to … draw us into unbelief, false security, and stubbornness," and exhorts Christians to "cry out and pray every hour that God may not allow us to become faint and weary and fall back into sin, shame, and unbelief."[6]

While some might posit that this conviction did not pervade Luther's thought and was only occasioned by the Saxon Visitation, Luther actually was exceedingly consistent in this regard from quite early on, even during the nascent days of his gospel rediscovery. In the 1520 *Treatise*

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[4] LC I, 32–34 in Kolb and Wengert, 390.

[5] *LW* 40:276; *WA* 26:203.

[6] LC III, 104–5 in Kolb and Wengert, 454.

on Good Works, for instance, Luther without hesitation will quote 2 Peter to reiterate the need for the Christian actively to strive to live the Christian life: "Further, honoring God's name helps very much to strengthen and increase faith, although all works help to do this, as St. Peter says in 2 Peter 1[:10], 'Dear brethren, work hard so that you make your call and election certain through good works.'"[7] He notes that "anyone may very easily try and find out whether he is a Christian and a true believer in Christ … [by] whether he is doing good works or not."[8] A year later, in his *Defense and Explanation of All the Articles*, Luther says concerning our vices, that we must:

> Battle unceasingly against sin, to destroy it. Where [Christian faith *and this battling* are] … not present, sin is imputed, is not forgiven, and condemns us eternally … those who would hide our sin from us and make it out to be merely a weakness, lull us into false security, make us lazy and sullen, take Christ from us, and allow us to go on without fear and without care concerning the eradication of our sin. If we become callous in such horrible presumption we shall relish neither Christ nor God. God preserve us from this presumption and save all those now caught up in it. Amen.[9]

The dire warnings to resist the temptation of false security continue throughout Luther's career.

Luther never let his confidence in the gospel override his recognition of the ever-present danger of sin's ability to drive out and destroy faith. In his 1536 *Disputation Concerning Justification*, providing explanation for an argument on 1 Cor. 13:2 ("If I have all faith … but have not love, I am nothing"), Luther writes:

> Paul speaks thus and argues against those who glory and debate about a feigned and false faith. For the Corinthians practiced faith without works, since they were altogether devoid of the work of love, as many also today are Christians in name only, who cry, "Faith, faith, gospel, gospel, miracles, miracles!" The preaching of love must always thunder against them. And Paul storms against such people as are numbered among but are not Christians in reality. But if you do not have love, he says, your faith is false and empty, even if it is possible for you to move mountains from place to place. Yet, he does not say that men are justified by works or love. For Paul speaks, as it is necessary for us to speak, in human fashion on account of those

[7] *LW* 44:39–40; *WA* 6:217.

[8] *LW* 44:113; *WA* 6:275.

[9] *LW* 32:28–29; *WA* 7:345 (*emphasis* mine).

> who boast of faith without works. True faith is not idle. We can, therefore, ascertain and recognize those who have true faith from the effect or from what follows.[10]

Earlier in the same work, Luther clarifies his understanding about the relationship between faith and works of obedience: "We say that justification is effective without works, not that faith is without works. For that faith which lacks fruit is not an efficacious but a feigned faith … it is one thing that faith justifies without works; it is another thing that faith exists without works."[11] For Luther true faith always manifested itself in works. One who has faith and not works merely lives in false hope.

In his late 1539 treatise, *On the Councils and the Church*, Luther expresses clearly that the ongoing presence of vice in the life of an individual who does not endeavor to lead a new life in the spirit in fact forfeits Christ:

> That is what my Antinomians, too, are doing today, who are preaching beautifully and (as I cannot but think) with real sincerity about Christ's grace, about the forgiveness of sin and whatever else can be said about the doctrine of redemption. But they flee as if it were the very devil the consequence that they should tell the people about the third article, of sanctification, that is, of the new life in Christ. They think one should not frighten or trouble the people, but rather always preach comfortingly about grace and the forgiveness of sins in Christ, and under no circumstances use these or similar words, "Listen! You want to be a Christian and at the same time remain an adulterer, a whoremonger, a drunken swine, arrogant, covetous, a usurer, envious, vindictive, malicious, etc.!" Instead they say, "Listen! Though you are an adulterer, a whoremonger, a miser, or other kind of sinner, if you but believe, you are saved, and you need not fear the law. Christ has fulfilled it all!" … But our Antinomians fail to see that they are preaching Christ without and against the Holy Spirit because they propose to let the people continue in their old ways and still pronounce them saved. And yet logic, too, implies that a Christian should either have the Holy Spirit and lead a new life, or know that he has no Christ.[12]

Elsewhere in this same work Luther reasons: "For there is no such Christ that died for sinners who do not, after the forgiveness of sins, desist from sins and lead a new life." He

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[10] *LW* 34:183; *WA* 39/1:114.

[11] *LW* 34:176; *WA* 39/1:106.

[12] *LW* 41:113–15; *WA* 50:599–600.

sharpens his argument declaring that those who do not understand the necessity of intently living out the new life in Christ might be, "fine Easter preachers, but they are very poor Pentecost preachers, for they do not preach *de sanctificatione et vivificatione Spiritus Sancti*, 'about the sanctification by the Holy Spirit.'" And then the Reformer finishes with a flourish: "he who does not abstain from sin, but persists in his evil life, must have a different Christ, that of the Antinomians; the real Christ is not there, even if all the angels would cry, 'Christi Christi' He must be damned with this, his new Christ."[13] Indeed Luther was convinced that false security was a particular danger for those of an antinomian bent. In his *Against the Antinomians*, also from 1539, Luther minces no words about the consequence of "sweet security:"

> But the devil devotes himself to making men secure, teaching them to heed neither law nor sin, so that if sometime they are suddenly overtaken by death or by a bad conscience, they have grown so accustomed to nothing but sweet security that they sink helplessly into hell. For they have learned to perceive nothing in Christ but sweet security. Therefore such terror must be a sure sign that Christ (whom they understand as sheer sweetness) has rejected and forsaken them. That is what the devil strives for, and that is what he would like to see.[14]

This kind of sentiment means that for Luther, those whose lives consist of persistent and unrepented vice have reason for alarm. As he writes in his *Exhortation to Communicants* from 1525:

> But those who cling to open sins, such as greed, hatred, anger, envy, profiteering, unchastity, and the like and are not minded to renounce them, shall herewith be barred [from the Supper] and be warned faithfully not to come lest they incur judgment and damnation for their own souls, as St. Paul says [1 Cor. 11:29].[15]

Clearly, for Luther, failing to engage in the fight of faith against sin is not an option for a true Christian. But what exactly is the nature of this fight? Consistently, for Luther, the fight of faith

[13] *LW* 41:114; *WA* 599–600.

[14] *LW* 47:110–11; *WA* 50:471.

[15] *LW* 53:105; *WA* BR 3:463.

is the battle against the sinful desires of the flesh.

Mortification of the Flesh

In his *Treatise on Good Works* Luther describes the task of putting the flesh to death as one that must engage the believer on a daily basis:

> Real chastity is the kind which does battle with impurity, struggles against it, and unceasingly drives out all the poison injected by the flesh and the devil. St. Peter says, "I admonish you to abstain from fleshly desires and lusts, which continually war against the soul" [1 Pet. 2:11]. And St. Paul says in Romans 6[:12], "You should not obey the body according to its lusts," and so on. In these and like passages we are shown that nobody is without evil lust, but that everybody should and must fight against it daily.[16]

For Luther, the task of Christian sanctification was abundantly clear. It was a call to "mortify the flesh" the sin which has "hemmed us in with … mighty armies … to fight these very enemies and sins."[17] He describes man's heart and mind as

> Incline[d] always to evil, that is, to pride … anger, hatred, covetousness, etc. … in all that he does or leaves undone … he seeks his own honor, rather than God's and that of his neighbor … Now if God is to live and work in him, all this vice and wickedness must be choked and uprooted … here the spirit resists anger, lust, and pride, while the flesh wants to enjoy pleasure, honor, and comfort. Of this St. Paul says in Galatians 5[:24], "They that are our Lord Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts."[18]

In the same treatise, Luther continues writing that the "highest and first work of God in us and the best training is that we let our own works go and let our reason and will lie dormant, resting and commending ourselves to God in all things," but then follows, "after this comes the discipline of the flesh, the killing of its gross evil lust … we must kill the flesh and subdue it with fastings, watchings, and labor."[19]

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[16] *LW* 44:106; *WA* 6:270.

[17] *LW* 44:49; *WA* 6:225.

[18] *LW* 44:72–73; *WA* 6:244.

[19] *LW* 44:74; *WA* 6:245.

In the *Freedom of a Christian* from the same year, Luther distinguishes between the realities of the "inner man" who is "sufficiently justified by faith" and "has all he needs" and the "outer man" who "remains in this mortal life on earth."[20] Here, Luther's "inner man" might be equated to the *coram Deo* realm, while the "outer man" corresponds to his lived-out reality *coram mundo*. Luther explains that "in this life" (that is the life of the outward man), "he must control his own body … here the works begin; here a man cannot enjoy leisure; here he must indeed take care to discipline his body by fastings, watchings, labors, and other reasonable discipline and to subject it to the Spirit so that it will obey and be conformed to the inner man and faith and not revolt against faith … as it is the nature of the body to do if it is not held in check."[21] He then describes again this "war" that plays out in the justified Christian, the battle between the will of the flesh and the spirit of faith:

> While [serving God], behold, [man] meets a contrary will in his own flesh which strives to serve the world and seeks its own advantage. This the spirit of faith cannot tolerate, but with joyful zeal it attempts to put the body under control and hold it in check, as Paul says in Rom. 7[:22–23], "For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin," and in another place, "But I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified" [1 Cor. 9:27], and in Galatians [5:24], "And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." … We must … realize that these works reduce the body to subjection and purify it of its evil lusts, and our whole purpose is to be directed only toward the driving out of lusts. Since by faith the soul is cleansed and made to love God, it desires that all things, and especially its own body, shall be purified so that all things may join with it in loving and praising God. Hence a man cannot be idle, for the need of his body drives him and he is compelled to do many good works to reduce it to subjection.[22]

While it is true Luther believed that the Christian, insofar as he is a "new man" at times will freely desire to engage in the battle against sinful desire, he recognizes that it is a task to be

[20] *LW* 31:358; *WA* 7:59–60.

[21] *LW* 31:358–59; *WA* 7:60.

[22] *LW* 31:359; *WA* 7:60.

engaged in despite one's vacillating motivation: "and if we do not freely desire to put off that form of God [and empty ourselves, as did Christ] and take on the form of a servant, let us be compelled to do so against our will,"[23] for "the passions for one's own advantage must be destroyed."[24]

The nature of the fight against the flesh is two-fold. Luther recognizes that one way the flesh is mortified is by evil that assails an individual from without. In his *Exposition of the Lord's Prayer* on the Third Petition, he teaches the other way this takes place, namely: "the old Adam is mortified by us when we subdue and suppress our base impulses, when we restrain our unchastity by fasting, watching, prayer, and labor, when we undo our neighbor's hatred and ill will by alms and other acts of kindness, in short, when we break our own will in every way." He continues, urging that a man "must learn to do not what his own will wants him to do, but always to do what runs counter to his will. He must always work against his will."[25] Thus it is by engaging in intentional practices meant to run counter to sinful desires that the Christian's will is broken and he is freed to live within God's will. In his 1521 *Defense and Explanation of All the Articles*, Luther minces no words:

> God makes this struggle between our flesh and our spirit, with their contradictory desires, the task of all whom he causes to be baptized and called … this means that spirit and flesh strive against one another, but the spirit shall prevail, though only with difficulty and hard work, and shall put down the disobedient flesh, as St. Paul says in Gal. 5[:24], "All who are Christians or belong to Christ crucify the flesh with its lusts and vices." And St. Peter says, "Beloved brethren, abstain from the passions of the flesh that wage war against your soul." [1 Pet. 2:11].[26]

Here, in his paraphrase of Gal. 5:24, Luther intentionally uses the word "vices" in his loose

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[23] *LW* 31:303; *WA* 2:149.

[24] *LW* 31:305; *WA* 2:151.

[25] *LW* 42:44; *WA* 2:101.

[26] *LW* 32:20; *WA* 7:331.

rendering. Soon after in the same work he expands on this notion writing, "ceaselessly we must fight against avarice, unchastity, anger, and ambition. Steadfastly and with toil and sorrow we must wrestle with carnal desires."[27]

In this respect, the *Saxon Visitation Instructions* in particular called for a return to a genuine Lutheran understanding of penance, which the Reformers describe as a "sincere contrition and sorrow over one's sins and sincere fear for the wrath and judgment of God, … 'Mortification of the flesh,' [which] is also, properly [called] penance." This, they conclude, is "most important in teaching the people. For where there is no contrition and sorrow for sin, there also is no true faith."[28]

Christian Moral Responsibility

All this, then, raises the question of moral agency, that is: by whose power is the task of sanctification, this task of mortifying the flesh, carried out? Countless examples could be provided regarding how Luther answered this question throughout his writing corpus, but perhaps his commentary on a single verse from Galatians can represent them all. Whose power is responsible for Christian sanctification according to Luther? The answer: the Holy Spirit. Expositing Gal. 5:16 in 1535 Luther writes, "*by the Spirit* you battle against the flesh" and again, "resist … *through the Spirit*," and further, "you fight back … *by the Spirit*."[29] In this same exposition he writes:

> Therefore when a preacher preaches in such a way that the Word is not frustrated in producing fruit but is efficacious in the hearers—that is, when faith, hope, love, patience, etc., follow—then God supplies the Spirit and performs powerful deeds in the hearers. Similarly, Paul says here that God has supplied the Spirit to the Galatians and has performed powerful deeds among them. It is as though he were saying:

[27] *LW* 32:22; *WA* 7:333.

[28] *LW* 40:294; *WA* 26:218.

[29] *LW* 27:63–67; *WA* 40/2:78–83 (*emphasis* mine).

> "Through my preaching God has not only brought it about that you believed but also that you lived holy lives, produced much fruit of faith, and suffered evil. By the same power of the Spirit you, who used to be covetous, adulterous, angry, impatient, and hostile, have become generous, chaste, gentle, patient, and loving toward your neighbors."[30]

This understanding, of course, is challenged somewhat by Mannermaa, who asserts that "Christ … is the effective producer of everything good in [us]."[31] Due to what he believes is Luther's underappreciated emphasis on "union with Christ," Mannermaa seems to attribute to Christ what Luther most often grants to the Spirit. Indeed, Mannermaa posits that Christ, being both God's favor and gift (*donum*), becomes "the means through [which] the believer is made a participant in the divine nature."[32] As the Christian participates in the divine life in Christ, Mannermaa ultimately concludes that "the true subject, producer, and agent of sanctification [is] the Holy Spirit of Christ."[33] Thus, "the fight against the flesh is fought in the power of the 'Spirit of Christ.'"[34] If, as Mannermaa seems to be asserting, the Spirit of Christ is the only responsible agent in sanctification, then the agency of the Christian is seemingly entirely undercut, and hence the usefulness of developing any kind of virtue through the believer's intentional habituation would be rendered superfluous.

Here, it might be observed that Mannermaa's position is not so different from what can be observed in Luther, in the respect that for both, the sole agent in sanctification is God (whether by the indwelling of Christ or the Holy Spirit), and not the Christian. This would seemingly substantiate an accusation by Jennifer Herdt that Luther's theology resulted in an "exodus from

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[30] *LW* 26:220; *WA* 40/1:351–52.

[31] Mannermaa, *Christ Present*, 49.

[32] Mannermaa, *Christ Present*, 57.

[33] Mannermaa, *Christ Present*, 71.

[34] Mannermaa, *Christ Present*, 63.

virtue," due to its purely passive understanding of human agency.[35]

Herdt, in her 2008 study, *Putting on the Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices*, contends that, beginning with Augustine, there arises a "suspicion" regarding humanly acquired virtue, "captured by the tag so often attributed to Augustine: the pagan virtues are vices, if glittering ones."[36] Such sentiments, she feels, led Luther to see the gradual process of habituation as nothing other than a "put-on," because, due to man's depravity, any "attempt to act virtuously in order to become virtuous is … essentially hypocritical."[37] Herdt further argues that because Luther believes the starting point of any virtue must be a "perfect recognition and acknowledgement of the bankruptcy of human agency" the cost of this position is a threat to any "coherence of any account of Christian moral agency."[38] She quotes Mannermaa, noting his stress that "the true agent of good works and the person performing them is Christ who is present in faith."[39] Herdt herself notes that this understanding cedes agency solely to Christ who dwells within, and ultimately drives to the conclusion that, "Luther leaves no room for autonomous human agency."[40] While acknowledging that Luther "affirms the reality of gradual progress (sanctification) in the Christian life,"[41] her concerns nevertheless remain since as she sees it, given Luther's advocation for pure passivity with respect to human agency, his position is "a precarious one to maintain."[42] The rest of her work is an attempt to recover a role for virtue in

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[35] Jennifer Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[36] Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 2.

[37] Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 2.

[38] Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 175.

[39] Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 183.

[40] Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 185.

[41] Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 184.

[42] Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 186.

Christianity, which she feels has been diminished by the "exodus from virtue" that has occurred in the period since the Reformation, stemming in large part from the overwhelming influence of Luther's theology.

Simeon Zahl brushes off Herdt's attempts to criticize Luther's attitude towards virtue ethics, concluding that her arguments "do not succeed in refuting Luther's theology of passivity," largely because they "fail to recognize that Luther's view of human agency and his critique of virtue are based … on a different kind of argument: namely, empirical reflection on the experience of sin … especially … the unmasterability of sinful affections through discipline, habit, or effort."[43] He further observes that Herdt's efforts are becoming "commonplace in recent theology" by those who likewise accuse Luther with committing a basic philosophical error, that is, assuming that "divine and human agencies must necessarily compete with one another on the same ontological plane." Zahl summarizes the basic contours of Herdt and others' argument, noting that they contend, "that it is in fact possible and even necessary to conceive of divine and human agency in 'non-contrastive' or 'non-competitive' terms," that "God and humanity are not opponents in some zero-sum game; to claim that they are … is to preclude any coherent account of the integrity of creaturely freedom or moral responsibility."[44]

Zahl ultimately concedes that these critical interpretations of Luther's theology of passivity are "elegant, consistent with a certain contemporary theological mood, and at least partially true," nevertheless, he feels that "reducing Luther's theology of passivity to metaphysical considerations is unacceptably simplistic," and that while "divine and human agency can be at least partially disentangled … until the experiential dimension of Luther's argument is engaged

[43] Simeon Zahl, "Non-Competitive Agency and Luther's Experiential Argument Against Virtue," *Modern Theology*, 35, no. 2 (April, 2019): 199.

[44] Zahl, "Non-Competitive Agency," 199.

on its own terms … [this] recent revival of virtue ethics is on less solid ground than it appears."[45]

Herdt and Zahl's contrasting reflections demonstrate the difficulty in understanding moral agency in light of virtue ethics. If, as has been suggested, the shape of Christian sanctification can indeed be discerned (and so expected and urged) in advance of particular moral acts by the individual, providing a recognizable *telos* towards which the Christian can strive, and if indeed the pursuit of this *telos* is not simply automatic in the life of a believer, but can be cultivated, then further consideration of role or non-role of responsible agency in the process of sanctification is a topic that must be addressed in any study that seeks to incorporate an understanding of virtue within the context of monergism.

One possible avenue by which to explore human moral agency, and a significant feature of Allen's work, is his in-depth study of the reality of the Christian being "in Christ." While, along with Grobien, he is much more cautious about the blurring of the divine and human regarding our union in Christ than is Mannermaa, he nevertheless advocates that the truth of a real "union with Christ" is essential for understanding Biblical sanctification. With respect to responsible agency, Mannerma and Allen diverge in a significant way in their understanding of how grace functions as a "gift" in and through the life of a believer and that gift's role in the process of sanctification.

As Allen calls to our attention, there is another way than the familiar concept of *favor dei* to understand how grace functions as gift. He notes, "Calvin is instructive: 'By partaking of him [Christ], we … receive a double grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a judge a gracious Father, and secondly, that sanctified by Christ's spirit *we may cultivate* blamelessness and purity of life.'" Allen reminds us

[45] Zahl, "Non-Competitive, Agency," 219–22.

that this is Calvin's famous teaching of "double grace" (*duplex gratia*), and claims that it is neither "idiosyncratic nor even innovative," but "actually draws on patristic teaching on the ways in which Christ rules his church: by means of a 'rule of faith' (belief) and 'rule of love' (obedience), which involve not only substitutionary work in their stead (which they trust) but also his transforming work in their very selves, which they then live out."[46] Here, grace as "gift," implies not merely agency of Christ's spirit, as in Mannermaa, but active participation on the part of the Christian who is enabled by Christ's empowering grace. Allen turns to John Barclay and his understanding of a "Pauline rhythm of grace and agency" to shed further light on this twofold work of grace: "in all cases, the logical sequence (whatever its grammatical expression) places divine grace anterior to human action, and affirms the continuation of that grace in human activity. But in no case does that human actor become passive or inactive in the face of divine grace."[47] Luther also (actually, several years before Calvin!), understands and endorses the distinction and reality of man having received both grace and gift. He writes in 1521 in his treatise, *Against Latomus*:

> Now we finally come to the point. A righteous and faithful man doubtless has both *grace* and the *gift*. Grace makes him wholly pleasing so that his person is wholly accepted, and there is no place for wrath in him any more, but the gift heals from sin and from all his corruption of body and soul … Everything is forgiven through grace, but as yet not everything is healed through the gift. The gift has been infused, the leaven has been added to the mixture. It works so as to purge away the sin for which a person has already been forgiven, and to drive out the evil guest for whose expulsion permission has been given. In the meantime, while this is happening, it is called sin, and is truly such in its nature; but now it is sin without wrath, without the law, dead sin, harmless sin, *as long as one perseveres in grace and his gift*. To be sure, for grace there is no sin, because the whole person pleases; yet for the gift there is sin which it purges away and overcomes.[48]

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[46] Allen, *Sanctification*, 37 (*emphasis* mine).

[47] John Barclay as quoted in Allen, *Sanctification*, 238.

[48] *LW* 32:229; *WA* 8:107 (*emphasis* mine).

Luther continued to express this distinction of grace and gift a year later as he penned his 1522 *Preface to Romans*, there he writes: "between grace and gift there is a difference … grace actually means God's favor, or the good will which in himself he bears toward us." On the other hand, he acknowledges the reality that "the gifts and the Spirit increase in us every day, but they are not yet perfect since there remain in us evil desires and sins that war against the Spirit." While God's grace is not "divided or parceled out," but rather given in all its fullness along with the bestowing of faith, the gifts are only "begun in us" and remain incomplete.[49] A similar understanding of grace as *donum*, appears as late as 1539 in *On the Councils and the Church*, where Luther emphasizes both the incompleteness of our growth as sinful men, and also the transformation God's gift ought to bring:

> Christ … has purchased redemption from sin and death so that the Holy Spirit might transform us out of the old Adam into new men—we die unto sin and live unto righteousness, beginning and growing here on earth and perfecting it beyond, as St. Paul teaches. Christ did not earn only *gratia*, "grace," for us, but also *donum*, "the gift of the Holy Spirit," so that we might have not only forgiveness of, but also cessation of, sin.[50]

When it comes to the task of mortifying the sinful flesh, forgiveness is assured, as long as one perseveres, that is labors with the gift alongside grace, to cleanse from sin. In *Against Latomus*, he even recognizes the implications this might have for one's salvation, concluding that "a person neither pleases, nor has grace, except on account of the gift which labors in this way to cleanse from sin. God saves real, not imaginary, sinners, and he teaches us to mortify real rather than imaginary sin."[51]

Here one can see that, for Luther, the task of sanctification, can hardly be understood as a

[49] *LW* 35:369–70; *WA* DB 7:10.

[50] *LW* 41:114; *WA* 50:599.

[51] *LW* 32:229; *WA* 8:107.

purely passive one. Even Zahl, an ardent defender of the idea of Luther's passivity, must leave a door, at least afar, for this reality. He writes that "much of Luther's theology can be understood as a reflection of the unilateral character of divine grace and the corresponding passivity of the human agent in salvation, and *to a significant degree* in the Christian life."[52] Zahl, concerned primarily with bolstering the passivity of Luther with respect to agency in salvation, does not elaborate exactly to what degree he thinks this passivity also corresponds to the realm of active righteousness. However, it is clear, even for Zahl, that agency in the living out of the Christian life cannot be marked by *complete* passivity.

The reality is that man's will is engaged to some degree in the fight against sin and unbelief and if it is not engaged, a person can be considered no Christian. For Luther, if a man does not actively engage in the fight against sin, his salvation is in jeopardy. We should not simply retreat, however, into some kind of non-competitive model of agency as advocated for by the likes of Herdt. Of course, as she suggests, sanctification should not be considered a "zero-sum game" where our agency somehow diminishes God's own. It is true that human agency can be at work without detracting from the agency of the Spirit. Still, the concept of a non-competitive model seems hardly to do justice to Luther's actual position. In one sense, Zahl, Mannermaa, and others are correct in asserting a "purely passive" understanding of Luther's view of human agency. God is 100% responsible for our sanctification in that he gets all the credit for it. But to be truly in tune with Luther, we should also be just as clear in asserting the stark reality that man is also 100% accountable for his own sanctification. This model, it seems, goes beyond being described as merely "non-competitive," which only suggests that any relative amount of human agency does not detract from God's own agency in some proportional manner, simply allowing room for

[52] Zahl, "Non-Competitive Agency," 202 (*emphasis* mine).

some degree of human agency while allowing God's agency to remain ultimately primary. No, Luther's understanding, it seems, is entirely paradoxical, asserting complete divine agency and complete human responsiblity at the same time. While Herdt's assertions do not reject this possibility outright, one must insist on stressing the profound and comprehensive nature of Luther's position.

Perhaps the difficulty in the discussion, however, lies in how it is too-often framed. Most often, when Luther himself addresses man's engagement in matters of faith and life, he is not framing it in terms of human or divine *agency*, but rather, as Robert Kolb has pointed out, in terms of ultimate divine dominion and subsequent human *responsibility*, and hence, *accountability*, within that larger reality. Kolb recognizes how the stories of the Biblical narrative call our attention to two simultaneous realities: first: "God as almighty Creator—Lord of all creation, responsible in every way for it … and [second,] Scripture's insistence on human beings' full responsibility in their own sphere of responsibility as it is created for them by God."[53] He continues noting that as much as humans might try to explain or simply illustrate this paradoxical reality there is "no description that captures the mystery of the relationship of Creator and human creature, in view of the total responsibility within their respective and contrasting spheres."[54] Scripture asserts, he contends, but never explains, this relationship.

In his very thorough and insightful work, *The Quest for Holiness*[55], Lutheran theologian Adolf Köberle's own position agrees with that espoused by Kolb and there he asserts that it is the only expression which is able to fully capture Luther himself on the matter. Köberle insists this paradoxical standing alone gives justice to the "facts of faith," especially as it relates to the

[53] Kolb, *Luther and the Stories of God*, 94.

[54] Kolb, *Luther and the Stories of God*, 94.

[55] Adolf Köberle, *The Quest for Holiness*, trans. John C. Mattes (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, n.d.).

nature of our justification: “The Biblical teaching … [is one] which holds fast, without any qualification, both to God’s sole activity in the work of salvation and also to man’s full moral responsibility”[56] and as such the “Scriptural answer must of necessity bear a paradoxical character that can be affirmed only through the deepest experiences of the conscience.”[57] He concludes, “faith can never surrender this paradox.”[58] Thus, as suggested above, to be faithful to the Reformer, one can only describe Luther’s understanding of Christian faith and life as one of paradox.

This paradoxical understanding in matters of saving faith also applies to matters of the living out of Christian life—the matter of our own moral obligations. Regardless, then, of abstract philosophical wranglings about human and divine agency in the realm of the sanctified life, Luther, and the Scriptures, speak of the question in a different way, and ask instead: what is man’s moral responsibility? Here, the answer is clear: man, as an individual, in the concrete, is held accountable for his own moral behavior, as he labors alongside, and in the power of the Sprit. In his *Sermon on Two Kinds of Righteousness*, Luther describes our striving for the “second kind of righteousness” [*coram mundo* righteousness] as a righteousness that “we alone do not work,” but rather work along with our “first and alien righteousness”[59] [*coram Deo* righteousness]:

> The second kind of righteousness is our proper righteousness, not because we alone work it, but because we work with that first and alien righteousness. This is the manner of life spent profitably in good works, in the first place, in slaying the flesh and crucifying its desires with respect to the self, of which we read in Gal. 5[:24]: “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” In the second place, this righteousness consists in love to one’s neighbor,

[56] Köberle, *The Quest for Holiness*, 142.

[57] Köberle, *The Quest for Holiness*, 142.

[58] Köberle, *The Quest for Holiness*, 144.

[59] *LW* 31:299; *WA* 2:146.

> and in the third place, in meekness and fear toward God. The Apostle is full of reference to these, as is all the rest of Scripture. He briefly summarizes everything, however, in Titus 2[:12]: "In this world lest us live soberly (pertaining to crucifying one's flesh), justly (referring to one's neighbor), and devoutly (relating to God)."[60]

Indeed, while Luther can on one hand speak of agency in sanctification as being "by the Spirit," in the same *Galatians Commentary* from just three verses earlier (on 5:13), Luther can exhort: "now, it is *up to you* to be diligently on your guard not to use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh."[61] Indeed he describes this "struggle between our flesh and spirit … [as] the task of all whom he causes to be baptized and called."[62] In this truly pastoral approach, Luther can be witnessed always straddling the line between what "God alone works in us" and what is truly accomplished "through our own effort," as he makes clear in the *Treatise on Good Works*:

> that *our works cease and that God alone works in us*, is accomplished in two ways. In the first place through *our own effort*; in the second, through the effort or urging of others. *Our own effort* is to be made and directed in such a way that in the first place we resist and do not heed our flesh, senses, will, and thoughts when we see that they are tempting us, as the wise man says, "Follow not your own desires" [Ecclus. 18:30]. And Deuteronomy 12[:8], "You shall not do what is right in your own eyes."[63]

Köberle too sees this paradoxical expression of the reality of divine agency and human accountability in matters of sanctification emerge in Luther's writings. In chapter four of his work Köberle convincingly asserts the truth of his chapter's title: "Sanctification as the Work of God in the Life of the Justified Sinner." However, he just as forcefully defends the reality of the next chapter's title as well: "Sanctification as the Answer of the Justified Sinner," noting that in contrast to other theologians, "Luther understood much more profoundly this paradox of God's

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[60] *LW* 31:299; *WA* 2:146–47.

[61] *LW* 27:48; *WA* 40/2:60 (*emphasis* mine).

[62] *LW* 32:20; *WA* 7:331.

[63] *LW* 44:73; *WA* 6:244 (*emphasis* mine).

sole activity in working salvation and of human responsibility for its loss."[64] Indeed, Kolb concurs recognizing that "the Biblical narrative gives no straightforward answer because the question is unanswerable, and [there] is no consistent treatment except [to maneuver] between the two extremes."[65]

Köberle then points out that the resolution achieved in the debate between Luther's theological heirs over the relative necessity of good works in the life of the Christian in no way dissolves this tension. The well-known "Majoristic" controversy was driven by George Major's assertion that "good works are necessary for salvation." Nicholas von Amsdorf took the contrary position that "good works are harmful to salvation." The resolution[66], which affirmed the necessity of the presence of good works in the life of believers, but stopped short of extending this necessity to salvation, says Köberle, was "anything but a weak compromising of the problem," rather, it "shows a much deeper insight into the paradoxical character of divine freedom and human responsibility."[67] While he asserts that "sanctification is the work of God in the justified sinner," and that any advance must be seen as a "progress produced by God," nevertheless he calls attention to the reality that "if man can neither save nor preserve himself, but can always destroy himself," then, "the most important task of the Christian is to cut down and overcome the power of the old nature that continually threatens faith," noting that in the fight of faith, "there can be no lasting neutrality in this warfare, but only the alternative of victory or defeat … we only have the choice between growing in faith through sanctification or

[64] Köberle, *The Quest for Holiness*, 228.

[65] Kolb, *Luther and the Stories of God*, 24.

[66] The resolution of the Majoristic controversy is documented in the Lutheran Confessions in the Formula of Concord, Article IV (FC SD IV in Kolb and Wengert, 574–581; FC Ep IV in Kolb and Wengert, 497–500).

[67] Köberle, *The Quest for Holiness*, 236.

dying."[68]

Köberle is adamant: "alongside [Christ's call, which brings with it the full pardoning love of the Father] … is the unqualified requirement, 'only those who do the will of God and have a pure heart' shall share in the reign of the King," and he further notes that "the same double note of acceptance and responsibility runs through the preaching of St. Paul."[69] He continues, instructing: "Any one whose ears have been opened will detect throughout Scripture the paradoxical antithesis of justification *and sanctification*, of God's free redemptive acceptance on the one hand and the holiest obligation on the other."[70] Practically, for the Christian, this ultimately means they are to "hallow themselves," to "strive after purity," to "mortify [their] members," and "strive for the goal that has been set before [them]"—"whoever has the treasure must still so run that he grasps it."[71]

The point is clear: while the inner workings of the relationship between divine and human responsibility are largely shrouded in mystery, and cannot be comprehended by careful philosophical rationalization, no matter how nuanced, this does not mean we can say nothing about it in the concrete task of day-to-day life for the Christian in terms of his sanctified living. From this perspective, man is held fully accountable for his sanctification, and failure to engage actively in the fight against vice, idolatry, and unbelief risks grave danger to his salvation.

Habituation

An understanding that man has a role to play in the process of sanctification opens the door to discuss the possibility of Christian habituation, that is the intentional practice of developing

[68] Köberle, *The Quest for Holiness*, 236–37.

[69] Köberle, *The Quest for Holiness*, 256.

[70] Köberle, *The Quest for Holiness*, 256 (*emphasis* mine).

[71] Köberle, *The Quest for Holiness*, 256.

good virtues over and against vices, striving continually to drive vice out, lest false security lull into unbelief. While few, if any, scholars would suggest Luther is an advocate of an Aristotelian or Thomistic teaching of "habituation," a case can be made that while Luther may have not used their specific terminology, he was certainly a proponent of the concept itself. Luther notes that Christians, especially young ones, must be trained in such a way that Christian truth "takes root in their hearts."[72] We are to learn the Ten Commandments and "practice them in all our works and ways … daily … in all circumstances,"[73] and we should "be occupied with the practice of this work for the rest of [our] life."[74]

Habituation is encouraged frequently in the *Large Catechism*, beginning in the preface, where Luther exhorts: "Let all Christians drill themselves in the catechism daily, and constantly put it into practice, guarding themselves with the greatest care and diligence against the poisonous infection of such security or arrogance." He admonishes, "it is the duty of every head of a household at least once a week to examine the children and servants one after the other and ascertain what they know or have learned of it, and, if they do no know it, to keep them faithfully at it."[75] He endorses training that shapes the person so that "with simple and playful methods" people should be brought up to fear and honor God, and the "First and Second Commandments may become familiar and constantly be practiced."[76] With great practical insight, Luther offers concrete counsel to a man who struggles with the vice of anger:

> Step forward … do good works, please God, and be saved! Let him set his enemy before him, keeping him constantly before the eyes of his heart as an exercise whereby he may curb his spirit and accustom his heart to think kindly of his enemy,

[72] LC I, 77 in Kolb and Wengert 396.

[73] LC I, 332 in Kolb and Wengert, 431.

[74] *LW* 44:109; *WA* 6:273 (1520 *Treatise on Good Works*).

[75] LC Preface, 4 in Kolb and Wengert, 383.

[76] LC I, 75 in Kolb and Wengert, 396.

> wish him all the best, care for him, and pray for him; and later, when the opportunity occurs, speak well of him and do good to him. Let him who is willing try this, and if he does not find plenty to do as long as he lives, then let him make me a liar and say that what I said was wrong.[77]

Here, the testing of the heart for anger, purposeful prayer, extending encouraging words, and doing acts of kindness are identified as habits to be developed over a lifetime of intentional practice.

Rebecca DeYoung reflects that Luther and other Protestants can indeed incorporate an understanding of habituation without having to sacrifice the central tenets of Reformation theology. She posits that the most obvious way they are able to do so is by: "Framing the role of vices and virtues in terms of the lifelong process of sanctification. Cultivating virtue requires our effort, to be sure, but every effort we make is empowered by grace, as 2 Peter 1:3 states, 'His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness.'"[78] Bolstering her case, she quotes Dallas Willard, who argues:

> We are saved by grace of course, and by it alone, and not because we deserve it. That is the basis of God's acceptance of us. But grace does not mean that sufficient strength and insight will be automatically "infused" in our being in the moment of need … A baseball player who expects to excel in the game without adequate exercise of his body is no more ridiculous than the Christian who hopes to be able to act in the manner of Christ when put to the test without the appropriate exercise in godly living.[79]

DeYoung then wisely concludes that Willard's observations have important meaning for Protestants who might be "suspicious of works-righteousness." When it comes to talk of habituation, she believes Christians should understand "saving or justifying grace … [as] only

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[77] *LW* 44:102; *WA* 6:267 (1520 *Treatise on Good Works*).

[78] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 30–31.

[79] Dallas Willard as quoted in DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 31. Original text from Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 4–5.

the beginning, not the finale, of our Christian story. Living as a Christian takes discipline and practice, but these activities are enabled by Christ's saving work, rather than replacing it."[80]

Luther, it seems clear, fully appreciated such an understanding when it came to the formation of habits, the necessary skills for living one's life as a Christian. Near the end of his exposition of the First Commandment in the *Large Catechism*, he encourages Christians to "walk straight ahead on the right path, using all God's gifts exactly as a shoemaker uses a needle, awl, and thread for his work."[81] Clearly Luther understood that the skill necessary to accomplish this task as it needed to be done was acquired only by much practice and daily discipline. As a cobbler becomes more skilled in his craft from a lifetime of practice, so too the Christian can make use of his gifts and continually fine-tune his skill for living out the Christian life. Indeed, engaging in this task is simply a perpetual living out of the reality of one's baptism, indicating that "the Old Adam in us should by *daily* contribution and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should *daily* emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever."[82]

The Question of Progress

This discussion leads us at last to the question of progress in the life of a Christian with respect to his sanctification. Zahl contends that Luther's conviction that man can never completely rid himself of sinful desire is the reason he rightly held to such a passive model of the Christian life. Does this mean Luther thinks progress in holiness is impossible? In short, not at all. Luther describes the Christian life rather as "begin[ning] every day and mak[ing] progress"[83]

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[80] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 31.

[81] LC I, 47 in Kolb and Wengert, 392.

[82] SC, 24 (Baptism, Part IV, *emphasis* mine).

[83] *LW* 27:169; *WA* 2:456 (1519 *Galatians Commentary*).

and says we must "grow day by day in good works."[84] While "original sin is restless even in us" he continues in his *Disputation Concerning Justification*, nevertheless, "that poison decreases more and more from day to day, and we always wipe out, wash, and cleanse the poison, with the poison becoming less."[85] And in his Psalms lectures, he instructs: "the virtues do not ascend unless our weaknesses also descend. The ascent and the descent takes place at the same time, that is, the increase of virtues and of humility."[86] "Nothing is so necessary," he writes in the *Large Catechism*, "as to call upon God … and increase … faith and the fulfillment of the Ten Commandments and remove all that stands in our way and hinders in this regard."[87]

Still, Luther acknowledges in his *Galatians Commentary*, "there is no one who attains this goal perfectly."[88] As he contemplates the relative completeness of God's kingdom coming into our lives while expositing the Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer in 1519, he reasons,

> God's kingdom does indeed begin and grow here, but it will be perfected in yonder life. Thus the petition, "Thy Kingdom come," briefly declares this: "Dear Father, do not let us sojourn very long here on earth, so that your kingdom may be consummated in us and we may be delivered completely from the devil's kingdom. But if it pleases you to let us linger longer in misery, grant us your grace that we may begin to build and constantly increase your kingdom in us…"[89]

Two years later, in the *Defense and Explanation of All the Articles*, Luther describes the gradual process of sanctification in light of Jesus' Parable of the Leaven in Matt. 13:33:

> The new leaven is the faith and grace of the Spirit. It does not leaven the whole lump at once but gently, and gradually, we become like this new leaven and eventually, a bread of God. This life, therefore, is not godliness but the process of becoming godly, not health but getting well, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not now what we shall be, but we are on the way. The process is not yet finished, but it is

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[84] *LW* 34:181; *WA* 39/1:111.

[85] *LW* 34:182; *WA* 39/1:113.

[86] *LW* 11:325; *WA* 4:178.

[87] LC I, 2 in Kolb and Wengert, 440–41.

[88] *LW* 27:379; *WA* 2:596.

[89] *LW* 42:40; *WA* 2:98.

> actively going on. The is not the goal but it is the right road. At present, everything does not gleam and sparkle, but everything is being cleansed.[90]

Then, in his 1535 *Galatians Commentary*, he urges: "But one must by all means have this understanding about perfection. For in this life no one, not even an apostle, is so perfect that he should not become more so. In fact, as the wise man says; 'When a man has finished, he is just beginning' (Ecclus. 18:7)."[91]

In one place, Luther sternly admonishes, "God will … punish still more severely if there is no improvement here."[92] In another place he exhorts, "Take my word for it, Christ did not come that you might remain in your sin and in condemnation. You will not be saved unless you stop sinning … you must cease your covetousness, adultery, and fornication … therefore see to it that you avoid … open vices and sins."[93] Yet he is also able to reassure "there is no condemnation if [Christians] fight against themselves and their sin."[94] And in another place he encourages, "But because of God's forgiveness, this sin does not impair our salvation *provided we fight against it* and do not surrender." He continues, elaborating his thought, "God does not hold against us whatever sin is still to be driven out, because of the beginning that we have made in godliness and *because of our steady battle against sin which we continue to expel*."[95] To Latomus he expresses that God "has promised mercy and forgiveness to all who, at the very least, do not consent to this part of themselves but fight against it and are eager to annihilate it."[96] While growth in holiness is hardly unimportant for Luther, he recognizes it is always imperfect.

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[90] *LW* 32:24; *WA* 7:337.

[91] *LW* 27:169; *WA* 2:456.

[92] *LW* 40:276; *WA* 26:203 (1528 *Saxon Visitation Articles*).

[93] *LW* 22:389; *WA* 47:110 (1530 *Commentary on John*).

[94] *LW* 32:239; *WA* 8:114 (1521 *Against Latomus*).

[95] *LW* 32:28; *WA* 7:343 (*emphasis* mine).

[96] *LW* 32:212; *WA* 8:95.

Nevertheless, the *engagement* in the fight against sin is all-important. For those who "persist … and live in open sins, in whoring and adultery, are not Christians at all. For the Christian shows his life and that he has been made a Christian by love and good works and flees all vices."[97]

In his 1519 *Galatians Commentary*, Luther provides an articulate, and I believe, complete and compelling summary of the essence of this Christian fight of faith:

> And so you must not imagine that the Christian's life is standing still and a state of rest. No, it is a passing over and a progress from vices to virtue, from clarity to clarity, from virtue to virtue. And those who have not been *en route* you should not consider Christians either … Love is not idle, but it continually crucifies the flesh and is unable to rest constant at its own level; it expands itself to purge a man throughout his being.[98]

As long as there is struggle, faith can exist, regardless of relative progress. Likely, there will even be seasons in a Christian's life when there is apparent regress. This, in itself, is not evidence that faith is absent. When the fight is abandoned, however, it is a sure sign that faith has been lost. This understanding of the necessity of the ongoing participation of the Christian in the fight of faith is summed up quite nicely in words Luther penned at the outset of the Reformation. The first of the *95 Theses* acknowledges: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."[99]

For Luther, it seems that there is a relationship of reciprocity between one's endeavoring in the *coram mundo* realm of active righteousness and one's standing before God in the *coram Deo* realm. Only God's merciful declaration is able to truly make one righteous in God's eyes, and in this respect, man is truly passive. However, when man shuns God's created design for living and pursues instead habits of unbelief by living in vice, faith and trust in God's mercy is steadily

[97] *LW* 34:161; *WA* 39/1:92 (1536 *Disputation Concerning Justification*).

[98] *LW* 27:289; *WA* 2:536.

[99] *LW* 31:25; *WA* 1:233.

eroded, and, in time, the link one has to God by grace can be fully severed by one's own stubborn, persistent, and perpetual unrepentance which refuses to trust in God and live accordingly.

Praxis: Practices in the Fight of Faith

Confession in the Language of Vice

This understanding of the necessity of the fight of faith necessarily evokes questions about how the fight practically takes place in the life of a believer. Based on a reading of Luther through the lens of the vice and virtue tradition, and considering his admonition to engage in battle, we do well to consider specific practices that will guide the believer in this endeavor. Throughout his writings, Luther seems to suggest two very concrete practices that should be appropriated in the Christian's fight of faith: one, the continual examination of the conscience in light of the vices at work within one's heart; and second, continually praying for the cultivation of virtue in one's life to battle vice and enable loving service to God and neighbor. Concerning the first, Luther counsels in the *Treatise on Good Works*:

> Then proceed to the Second Table of the Commandments. See how disobedient you have been and are still toward father and mother and all in authority; how you sin against your neighbor with anger … how you are tempted to unchastity, covetousness, and injustice … against your neighbor. In this way you will without a doubt find that you are full of all need and misery, and that you have reason enough to weep even drops of blood if you could.[100]

In the *Saxon Visitation Instructions*, he and Melanchthon encourage preachers to point out and condemn specific vices present in the lives of the faithful:

> Proclaim and explain the Ten Commandments often and earnestly, yet not only the commandments but also how God will punish those who do not keep them and how he often has inflicted temporal punishment ... So too they are to point out and condemn various specific vices, as adultery, drunkenness, envy, and hate, and how

[100] *LW* 44:63; *WA* 6:236–37.

> God has punished these, indicating that without doubt after this life he will punish still more severely if there is not improvement here. The people are thus to be urged and exhorted to fear God, to repent and show contrition, lest their ease and life of false security be punished. Therefore Paul says in Rom. 3[:20]: "Through the law comes (only) knowledge of sin." True repentance is nothing but an acknowledgment of sin.[101]

He says again: "we are to teach penance and contrition on the basis of the gross sins we all know. We are to condemn drunkenness, unchastity, envy and hatred, greed, falsehood, and the like. We are to awaken the people to contrition, and hold before them the judgment of God, his condemnation, and the scriptural examples of God's punishment for sin."[102] In encouraging this practice Luther was truly returning a theology of vice to one of its most original purposes. DeYoung expresses this well:

> The desert fathers' classification of seven vices began as a Christian system of self-examination in the fourth century and continues to provide an almost ubiquitous rubric for confession in penitential manuals up until the fifteenth century—an endurance that testifies to their power as a spiritual tool for confession and repentance. When we study the vices, we can better articulate for ourselves what parts of our sinful nature we are grappling with and trying to put to death, and learn how one vice might variously reveal itself in feelings and actions. We can use the list of vices to recognize and identify networks of sin in our lives and discover layers of sin of which we were previously unaware. In this way, our confession can be fine-tuned.[103]

This insight from Luther, and his predecessors in the early church, provides impetus for the church today to supplement her practice of the confession of sins. In the most-recently published hymnal for use in the LCMS, *Lutheran Service Book*, for instance, our primary language for confession of sins is as follows:

> Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve Your present and eternal

[101] *LW* 40:276; *WA* 26:203.

[102] *LW* 40:295; *WA* 26:219.

[103] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 21.

> punishment. For the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.[104]

This confession of sins is in every respect Scriptural in the language it employs for means of examination. And yet, its primary confession is merely that one has not "loved" properly. Expressing this failure to love merely generically, this confession does serve as a diagnostic tool to help the believer understand specifically how they have failed to love. However, while it confesses sins of "*thought*, word, and deed," it does not consider what kinds of thoughts, inner desires, and passions have specifically transgressed God's will. Having confessed a failure to love, the prescription moving forward can hardly be more specific than a call to "love" God and others. This confession lacks the kind of specificity necessary, as has been demonstrated, to ensure that one's love is indeed consistent with God's holy will. Confessing in the language and spirit of vice, however, helps us "fine-tune" our confession which consequently reveals to faithful Christians specific ways in which they might more consistently "delight in God's will, and walk in His ways." A suggested rubric for an alternate form of confession that might be used on occasion, and specifically employs the language of vice, is included in Appendix Two of this work.

Luther exhibits the sort of specificity encouraged in the vice tradition when in the *Small Catechism* he takes up the Office of the Keys. In the process of discerning the sins for which we have incurred guilt, Luther first instructs: "Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments," and then in the context of specific vocations he directs "are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker?" Finally, one is to consider whether he has been "lazy" (slothful), or "hot-tempered" (angry), and more. While most of the rest of the list

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[104] *LSB*, 151.

still involves confession at the level of outward deed, such as being "quarrelsome," or "stealing," the language here begins to trend in the direction of the inner heart, examining not just outward thought or speech, but the heart of the inner man.[105] Vice language is also present in the task of self-examination called for in the *Prayer Book* which includes in its lists of failed standards being "angry with the neighbor,"[106] "lust,"[107] and "keeping ourselves from avarice."[108] It is truly the *Large Catechism*, though, in and through the exposition of the Decalogue and the Lord's Prayer, where one can find abundant examples of vice language, and specifically all seven of the capital vices, being used to describe sin.[109]

In 1529, Luther wrote *A Short Order of Confession Before the Priest for the Common Man*, in which he also ensures confession happens in this manner:

> I confess before God and you that I am a miserable sinner, guilty of every sin, of unbelief and of blasphemy. I also feel that God's Word is not bringing forth fruit in me. I hear it, but I do not receive it earnestly. I do not show works of love toward my neighbor. I am full of anger, hate, and envy toward him. I am impatient, greedy, and bent on every evil. Therefore, my heart and conscience are heavy, and I would gladly be freed of my sins. I ask you to strengthen my little faith and comfort my weak conscience by the divine word and promise.[110]

Perhaps most insightful is a fleeting glimpse into Luther's personal practice, as evident in a Table Talk recollection from March, 1532, where Luther remarks: "I am free of avarice, my age and bodily weakness protect me from sensual desire, and I am not afflicted with hate or envy

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[105] SC, 25.

[106] *LW* 43:19; *WA* 10/2:383.

[107] *LW* 43:20; *WA* 10/2:383.

[108] *LW* 43:16; *WA* 10/2:379.

[109] Cf. Pride (LC I, 38, 391; II, 21, 433; III, 90, 452; III, 103, 454), Envy (LC I, 184, 411; I, 307–10, 427; III, 43, 445; III, 103, 454), Anger (LC I, 182, 185–86, 411–12; III, 103, 454), Sloth (LC Preface 1, 4, 9, 379–81; I, 96–99, 399–400; II, 67, 449; II, 102, 454), Greed (LC I, 43, 391; I, 96, 399; I, 243, 418; I, 307, 427; II, 21, 433), Gluttony (LC Preface, 2, 379; I, 96, 399; II, 43, 445; III, 102, 454), Lust (LC I, 201, 413; I, 215, 415; III, 43, 445; III, 102, 454), all page numbers in Kolb and Wengert.

[110] *LW* 53:117–18; *WA* 30/1:344.

toward anybody. Up to now, only anger remains in me, and for the most part this is necessary and just."[111] Here, one can see Luther using vice categories in his own personal diagnosis of his particular struggles.

Cultivation of Virtue

Examination of one's sin at the inner level of the heart, where vice resides, will inevitably cause the believer to be aware of his great need. In these moments, Luther urges in the *Treatise on Good Works*, the believer must call upon God who:

> Hears most of all when you are in the greatest need and fear. Why then are you so foolish in this instance, where there is immeasurably greater need and eternal hurt, that you do not ask for faith, hope, love, patience, obedience, chastity, gentleness, peace, and righteousness, unless you are already free from unbelief, doubt, pride, disobedience, unchastity, anger, covetousness, and unrighteousness? Well then, the more you find yourself lacking in these things, the more ought you diligently to pray and cry unto God.[112]

For Luther, our prayer in the face of particular vices should be to ask for the virtues necessary to combat those vices.[113]

In his *Prayer Book*, Luther concludes his treatment of the Second Petition in the form of a prayer, asking for deliverance from vice, but more importantly, praying for the cultivation of virtue. I have emphasized the wealth of vice and virtue language contained within just this single prayer:

> Protect us from unbelief, despair, and from boundless *envy*. Deliver us from the filthy *lust of unchastity* and grant us a love of every kind of virginity and *chastity*. Deliver us from discord, war, and dissension, and let the *virtue, peace*, harmony, and tranquility of your kingdom draw near. Grant that *anger* or other bitterness does not

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[111] *LW* 54:26–27; *WA* TR 1:87.

[112] *LW* 44:64; *WA* 6:237.

[113] Toward this end, I have developed a prayer for use on occasion in the corporate worship setting which prays specifically for various virtues in the categories of the fruit of the Spirit, and asks that these virtues would be cultivated in us in order that we may carry out the good works of the Decalogue, which are then reflected by employing the language of Luther's explanations from the Small Catechism. This prayer is included in Appendix Three.

> reign over us, but that by your grace, genuine *kindness*, loyalty, and every kind of friendliness, *generosity*, and *gentleness* may reign in us. Grant that inordinate *sadness and depression* may not prevail in us, but let joy and delight in your grace and mercy come over us.
>
> And finally may *envy* be averted from us and, being filled with your grace and with all *virtues and good deeds*, may we become your kingdom so that in heart, feeling, and thought we may serve you with all our strength inwardly and outwardly, obediently serving your purpose, being governed by you alone and never following self-love, the flesh, the world, or the devil.
>
> Grant that your kingdom, begun in us, may daily increase and improve, lest cunning malice and apathy for doing good overcome us so that we slip back. Rather grant us both earnestly to resolve and to be able to make a beginning to live a pious life as well as to *make vigorous progress in it and reach its goal*. As the prophet says, "Lighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death or become *slothful* in the good life I have begun, lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him.'"[114]

And, later in the *Prayer Book*, we find petitions specifically asking for protection from vice:

> Protect us from the great *vice of avarice and covetousness* with regard to the riches of this world. Protect us from seeking honor and power in this world, or from even being inclined in this direction. Protect us that the deceit, delusion, and enticement of this world may not stir us to seek after them. Keep us that we be not drawn into impatience, vindictiveness, *anger, or other vices* by the world's evil and unpleasantness.
>
> Help us renounce and forsake the world's deceit and delusion, allurements and fickleness–all its good or evil, as we vowed to do in baptism. Help that we may remain steadfast and grow in [the promise of our baptism] from day to day.[115]

The task of the Christian life, then, at least in part, can be understood as one of active prayer for, and pursuit of, virtuous living, that these virtues we cultivate might drive out vice and in turn free our hearts from bondage to an idolatrous clinging to the self and the things of this world so that we might in-turn be able more consistently to serve our neighbor in love—obediently living out the good works God has commanded. Luther understood that the "driving out of vice" and the "embracing of virtue" were indeed part and parcel of living a life of good

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[114] *LW* 43:32; *WA* 10/2:398–99 (*emphasis* mine).

[115] *LW* 43:37; *WA* 10/2:405–06 (*emphasis* mine).

deeds. He expresses this understanding quite clearly as he takes up the topic of chastity in the *Treatise on Good Works*:

> In this commandment, too, a good work is commanded which embraces much virtue and drives out much vice. The work is called purity or chastity, of which much is written and preached. Chastity is well known to everybody, but it is not as carefully observed and practiced as the other works which are not commanded. We are so ready to do what is not commanded and to leave undone what is commanded. We know that the world is full of shameful works of unchastity, indecent words, stories, and ditties, and that the temptation to unchastity is daily increased through gluttony and drunkenness, idleness, and excessive finery. Yet we still go about as if we were Christians. When we have been to church, said our little prayer, observed the fasts and feasts, we think that that is all we have to do.[116]

Here Luther expresses dismay at those who think the Christian life is merely lived on the surface, consisting of a mere "going through the motions." No, rather, it is intentional work. It is a matter of "careful observance," and "practice."

One superior analogy of the task of the Christian life of sanctification might be that of tending a garden. Indeed this was a familiar picture offered in the Middle Ages, especially in the realm of vice and virtue. One of the common prayer books of the day of which Luther was critical (specifically because of its vast enumeration of sins) was entitled *Hortulus animae*, that is, "the garden of the soul." In this respect the Christian life is conceived of as a laboring to cultivate the fruits of faith in one's life, and this no doubt involved the difficult work of "weeding out one's garden"—continually ridding it of vice so that the faith that has been planted in one's heart might thrive and bear abundant fruit. Luther spoke this way, for instance, in discussing the prohibition of the Fifth Commandment against murder. He writes, "many people, although they do not actually commit murder, nevertheless curse others and … would soon put an end to them." In this light, he continues, "God wishes to *remove the root and the source* that

[116] *LW* 44:103–04; *WA* 6:268.

embitters our heart toward our neighbor." As pointed out in the prior chapter's consideration of the Fifth Commandment, Luther encourages the Christian to "learn to calm our anger," by developing a "patient, gentle heart."[117] Later he remarks, concerning the Ninth and Tenth Commandments, that they are "aimed directly against envy and miserable covetousness, so that God may *remove the root and cause* form which arise all injuries to our neighbors."[118] In discussing the Third Petition, Luther notes that "nothing is so necessary as to call upon God incessantly and to drum into his ears our prayer that he may give, preserve, and increase in us faith and the fulfillment of the Ten Commandments and *remove all that stands in our way and hinders us in this regard*."[119]

Of course this imagery coincides well with that of our Lord, who said the kingdom of heaven was indeed like seed sown in soil. Especially dangerous towards the desired end of fruit-bearing is the potential circumstance of the seed sprouting in faith and growing, but then being choked out by the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches—problems, or in other words, *vices*, which were not being diligently weeded out, but rather were allowed to grow—eventually causing faith to die and resulting in a fruitless life (see Matt. 13:1–9, 18–23; Mark 4:1–9, Luke 8:4–8).

Conclusion

It is hoped that after encountering this study, the reader will have an increased understanding of and appreciation for the nature and task of the sanctified life, specifically as it takes shape within faith traditions that confess the Reformation truth that sinners are saved by

[117] LC I, 187 in Kolb and Wengert, 411 (*emphasis* mine).

[118] LC I, 310 in Kolb and Wengert, 427 (*emphasis* mine).

[119] LC III, 2 in Kolb and Wengert, 440–41 (*emphasis* mine).

grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Further, I hope the reader of this dissertation will have developed an understanding, over and against the radical Lutheran school of thought and those who share their thinking on Christian life, of the importance of making the effort carefully to consider the distinct shape of Christian love as it is lived out in the lives of believers, that they might "become obedient from the heart to the *standard of teaching* to which they were committed" (Rom. 6:17, *emphasis* mine). Finally, I pray that the reader would comprehend the vital necessity of Christians endeavoring to strive towards our Lord's intended *telos* for those who seek to follow him. Given the obvious reality from Christian experience that this progress does not always and necessarily arise spontaneously in the heart of a believer, we must capitalize on the complementary reality that this progress can be encouraged and developed through continual and intentional effort as we "work out our salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12) and "*make every effort* to supplement our faith with *virtue*" (2 Pet. 1:5, *emphasis* mine) as our Lord has called us so to do.

One might wonder whether radical Lutherans would feel vindicated by a conclusion that would discard the customary Aristotelian virtues, as well as the notion that man works solely by his own effort to become virtuous, as Aristotle had taught. This, it seems, would confirm their suspicion of any appropriation of virtue ethics in the Christian life. Certainly, virtue ethics in the context of Christianity must look different than in the context of philosophy. But I believe this study has shown clearly that, for Luther, there is indeed a specific *telos* towards which a Christian aims. It must, and does, certainly differ in some significant ways from the *telos* of Plato and Aristotle. For one, natural revelation does not reveal, in the same way that Scripture does, that the ultimate end of virtue is not the improvement of the self but service of the other, and it profoundly misses the great truth that humility, rather than pride in one's own effort and

accomplishment, is the truly central virtue that is necessary for keeping faith in God and serving one's neighbor in love. Finally, I believe this study has made clear that while virtuous Christian living can never be perfected, it nevertheless can be pursued through the intentional effort of continual practice, and improvement is not only possible, but necessary, and this can readily be demonstrated without question by the very words of Luther himself.

In this respect, there is much to be gained by reflecting on and applying to our contemporary Lutheran understanding of the Christian life specific tenets of the virtue ethic tradition. The Christian *telos* is most certainly distinct from that advocated by Aristotle, but it is a *telos* nonetheless. Christians should strive, with all their being, to live out the precepts of the Decalogue in service to their neighbors. And, one must understand that human responsibility plays a vital role in the process of sanctification, for it is clear that when one neglects to engage in the fight of faith, faith itself is put in a dangerous position, and can most certainly be lost. Christians can indeed, as Scripture makes clear, "be disqualified for the prize" (1 Cor. 9:27), have their faith "choked out" (Mark 4:18–19), and "make shipwreck of their faith" (1 Tim. 1:19).

This study suggests, I believe, several areas of inquiry that might be explored further, or in more depth than was possible in the preceding. The following are suggested trajectories for future study, that would enhance, build upon, and perhaps even serve to correct this study. For one, there likely needs to be a further concentrated work that explores, as its primary area of investigation, the interplay of human and divine agency in the sanctified life and the development of virtue. While I have suggested that a so-called paradoxical model seems to fit Luther's own understanding as the question is considered across the corpus of his writings, this study has hardly delved as deep as is possible into Luther on this matter. Another potentially fruitful area of study would be to develop more fully Luther's theology of humility as that central

theme plays out across his work.

Some work has no doubt already been done with respect to Luther's theology of imitation, whether that be "imitation of Christ," or as Luther often suggests in his Genesis lectures, the "imitation of the saints."[120] But, a larger, more focused study would be welcome, as indeed, Luther himself remarks that "the Holy Scriptures teach ethics, or the theory of duties, far better than any Ciceros or Aristotles."[121] Gifford Grobien, as mentioned prior, has begun to delve into the role Christian community plays in the formation of character and virtue, especially through corporate worship and teaching in the parish, but an even more extensive look at the role of the church in character formation, especially the way that the parish serves as a central community for the young believer, would also be a welcome contribution. Finally, this study did not advance very far into how virtue-enabled good works drive the Christian into the various vocational duties comprising the specific spheres of his existence, that is, the primary estates of *oeconomia, politia*, and *ecclesia*. Albrecht Peters has noted how Luther always placed the Decalogue within the "coordinate system of estates and vocations,"[122] and always "assigns something specific to each commandment," whether that be the "estate of marriage in the Sixth Commandment," or "establish[ing] zealous holiness over the human economic community" in the Seventh Commandment.[123] As such, a more thorough-going look at the interplay between virtue, the Decalogue, and vocation would be most helpful.

[120] For example, Luther speaks about Abraham as a "most beautiful example of love, gentleness, kindness, and virtues" (*LW* 3:185; *WA* 43:7), and in another place how Joseph "was an outstanding and incredible example of faith, hope, love, patience, and all virtues" (*LW* 7:130; *WA* 44:395). Elsewhere Luther writes that "urged on by the example of the saints, we might imitate the virtue of their sufferings" (*LW* 42:137; *WA* 6:115). It is worth noting that Robert Kolb in his work *Luther and the Stories of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012), has already taken a step in this direction, drawing on Luther's use of Biblical narrative to convey an ethic of Christian callings.

[121] *LW* 2:303; *WA* 42:478.

[122] Peters, *Ten Commandments*, 82.

[123] Peters, *Ten Commandments*, 99.

As for the present study, I have concluded that despite his misgivings about Aristotle and Aquinas, Luther made extensive use of the language of virtue and vice and employed the terminology throughout his career as a Reformer. He drew heavily on the vice tradition to develop his understanding of sin, but departed significantly from the virtue tradition, preferring instead to let the Decalogue serve as the primary guide for the task of living out the Christian life in various stations.

This study has also demonstrated that the suggestion that Luther was indifferent about understanding sin in a specific manner, or was ambivalent about mortifying the sinful nature through repeated practice in living a life of new obedience, is simply not substantiated by his writings. At the very least, I hope this work has encouraged a greater appreciation for the undercurrents of vice and virtue as a significant feature within Luther's theology, complementing his monumental contributions of the distinction of law and gospel, the hidden and revealed aspects of God's nature, the two realms/kingdoms serving as God's "right and left hands" by which he exercises his respective ecclesial and temporal rule, the two kinds of righteousness, discussed extensively in the preceding, and, finally, his theology of vocation, which recognized secular, earthly vocations are holy callings from God through which the Christian serves his neighbor in love. In fact, near the close of his monumental 1539 piece, *On the Councils and the Church*, arguably the most significant treatment of ecclesiology found within the vast corpus of his writings, Luther specifically highlights the existence of the movement from vice to virtue as a hallmark of genuine Christianity and bestows upon this progression the high honor of being included as an addition among the indisputable "outward signs that identify the Christian church" and verify its presence in our world:

> When we bear no one a grudge, entertain no anger, hatred, envy, or vengefulness toward our neighbors, but gladly forgive them, lend to them, help them, and counsel

> them; when we are not lewd, not drunkards, not proud, arrogant, overbearing, but chaste, self-controlled, sober, friendly, kind, gentle, and humble; when we do not steal, rob, are not usurious, greedy, do not overcharge, but are mild, kind, content, charitable; when we are not false, mendacious, perjurers, but truthful, trustworthy, and do whatever else is taught in these commandments … Thus we must constantly grow in sanctification and always become new creatures in Christ. This means "grow" and "do so more and more" [2 Pet. 3:18].[124]

I will close by sharing a concept of the church Luther once offered, a description which I imagine his theological heirs likely might not readily recognize as his own and over which they would probably puzzle, at least initially—but nevertheless a description of the church which I hope, in light of the preceding study, has been rendered wholly intelligible and shown to be absolutely authentic to Luther's own theological construct. Indeed, I pray that my work here will aid the reader, and thus those in the church, better to know and acknowledge the great truth expressed by Luther in his 1535 commentary on Psalm 90:

> The church is made up of those who move forward in the process of sanctification, who day by day "put off the old and put on the new man" (Col. 3:9 ff.).[125]

[124] *LW* 41:166; *WA* 50:643.

[125] *LW* 13:89–90; *WA* 40/3:506.

APPENDIX ONE

VICE AND VIRTUE LIST FROM ARISTOTLE'S *ETHICS*

Sphere of action or feeling	Excess (Vice)	Mean (Virtue)	Deficiency (Vice)
Fear and confidence	Rashness	Courage	Cowardice
Pleasure and pain	Licentiousness	Temperance	Insensibility
Getting and spending (minor)	Prodigality	Liberality	Illiberality
Getting and spending (major)	Vulgarity	Magnificence	Pettiness
Honor and dishonor (major)	Vanity	Magnanimity	Pusillanimity
Honor and dishonor (minor)	Ambition	Proper ambition	Unambitiousness
Anger	Irascibility	Patience	Lack of spirit
Self–expression	Boastfulness	Truthfulness	Understatement
Conversation	Buffoonery	Wittiness	Boorishness
Social conduct	Obsequiousness or Flattery	Friendliness	Cantankerousness
Shame	Shyness	Modesty	Shamelessness
Indignation	Envy	Righteous indignation	Malicious enjoyment

Source: Aristotle, *The Ethics of Aristotle. The Nicomachean Ethics*, *Further Revised Edition*, trans. J. A. K. Thomson (New York: Penguin, 2004), 285–86.

APPENDIX TWO

CONFESSIONAL KYRIE IN THE LANGUAGE OF VICE

P: Let us confess our sin to God our Father in heaven, pleading for His mercy for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ:

C: Father, forgive me for evil thoughts that come from within me, out of my unclean heart. *(Mark 7:21–22)*

P: Lord have mercy.

C: Father, forgive my greedy heart, which seeks security in the abundance of possessions at the expense of my neighbor in need. *(Luke 12:15)*

P: Lord have mercy.

C: Father, forgive my envious heart, which begrudges Your generosity to others and finds joy in their sorrow. *(Matt. 20:15)*

P: Lord have mercy.

C: Father, forgive my lustful heart, which pursues pleasure with adulterous eyes and uses others for my own gratification. *(Matt. 5:28)*

P: Lord have mercy.

C: Father, forgive my gluttonous heart, which attempts to live by bread alone and not by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. *(Matt. 4:4)*

P: Lord have mercy.

C: Father, forgive my angry heart, which does not produce the righteousness You desire but avenges injustice through hatred of my enemies. *(Matt. 5:22, Rom. 12:19, James 1:20)*

P: Lord have mercy.

C: Father, forgive my slothful heart, which is indifferent to Your Word and neglects to walk in the good works You have prepared for me. *(Eph. 2:10, Matt. 25:31–46)*

P: Lord have mercy.

C: Father, forgive my prideful heart, which displaces You as rightful Lord instead of being Your humble servant. *(Matt. 20:26, Phil. 2:3–7, James 6:4–10)*

P: Lord have mercy.

A: Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

P: Jesus Christ was delivered over to death for your trespasses and raised for your justification. He gives you a new heart and puts a new Spirit within you. He removes your heart of stone and gives you a heart of flesh. Your sins are forgiven, go in peace. Amen. *(Rom. 4:25, Ezek. 36:26)*

APPENDIX THREE

PRAYER FOR VIRTUE IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE DECALOGUE

P: Let us pray for the Church, that the loving fruit of the Spirit might be manifest in our lives for the accomplishing of the good works which God has prepared in advance for us to do:

P: Spirit, grant us goodness, that we might generously give to our neighbors in need and help them improve and protect their possessions and income. Lord, in Your mercy:
C: Hear our prayer.

P: Spirit, grant us kindness, that we might steadfastly uphold the reputation of others by defending them, speaking well of them, and explaining everything in the kindest way. Lord, in Your mercy:
C: Hear our prayer.

P: Spirit, grant us self-control, that we might shun the passions of the flesh which wage war against our soul and lead a sexually pure and decent life in all we say and do. Lord, in Your mercy:
C: Hear our prayer.

P: Spirit, grant us gentleness and peace, that we might help and support the needs of our neighbor and forgive others as You have forgiven us. Lord, in Your mercy:
C: Hear our prayer.

P: Spirit, grant us patience that we might bear with those in authority over us, honoring them, serving and obeying them, and loving and cherishing them. Lord, in Your mercy:
C: Hear our prayer.

P: Spirit, grant us joy in our callings, that we might diligently serve God and neighbor in love as we hold Your Word sacred and gladly hear and learn it. Lord, in Your mercy:
C: Hear our prayer.

P: Spirit, grant us faithfulness, that in humility we might consider others better than ourselves and look not to our own interests, but to the interests of others, taking on the form of servants and not considering equality with God something to be grasped. May we have the mind of Christ. Lord, in Your mercy:
C: Hear our prayer.

P: Into your hands, O Father we commend ourselves, that we might remain in and be nourished by the True Vine, Your Son Jesus Christ, and bear abundant fruit, empowered by the love which You abundantly pour into our hearts through the Holy Spirit Whom You have sent to us; through Christ our Lord,
C: Amen.

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VITA

Michael Todd Fieberkorn

July 18, 1980

Sturgis, Michigan

Collegiate Institutions Attended

United States Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, CO, Bachelor of Science in Management, 2003

Graduate Institutions Attended

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, Master of Divinity, 2013