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### The Effect of Luther's Philosophy of History on His Writings about Social and Governmental Issues with Special Reference to Some Recent Missouri Synod Interpretation

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**Short Title**

**Luther's Philosophy of History**

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty  
of Columbia University, the  
Department of Historical Studies  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
by  
Richard A. Lamm

R. Fred Lamm

June 1955

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_

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THE EFFECT OF LUTHER'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY ON  
HIS WRITINGS ABOUT SOCIAL AND GOVERNMENTAL  
ISSUES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SOME  
RECENT MISSOURI SYNOD INTERPRETATION

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Systematic Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Divinity

---

by

E. Fred Vonderlage

June 1959

Approved by:

*Bojitz* Advisor

*Leung Thundersick*  
Reader

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Martin Luther made an analysis of history in order to interpret it. We might even call it a philosophy of history although it was not articulated in the sense that he organized his thoughts on the subject. He did, however, express himself in ways that lead one inevitably to try to construct his philosophy of history in a systematic way. This paper will attempt to ascertain why Luther above all others must have had a philosophy of history that was important for his whole theology; especially as it pertained to social life in his day and in particular with respect to his writings on secular authority.

The paper does not attempt the more monumental job of deciding precisely what Luther's philosophy of history was, but it does present some of the thinking that has been going on with respect to interpreting Luther in the light of how God makes himself known to man. When we meet this problem in Luther or any other theologian we inevitably face the task of assigning a separate importance to the secular as well as the church history, neither of which can be easily separated.

Chapter two will deal with the main features of Luther's philosophy of history as demonstrated in his various writings and as abstracted by his interpreters. While intimating what conclusion this paper leans toward, it only intends to propose some interpretations of general areas on which Luther wrote to show that he did speak toward a philosophy of history.

Chapter three presents some of the recent Lutheran scholarship, especially from Sweden, that has had effect on the theology of the Missouri Synod with respect to Luther's treatment of the Two Kingdoms, Church and State, a combination of which seems to show his philosophy of history. However, rather than to present an exhaustive exposition of Swedish position on Luther, the paper draws in a greater representation of Missouri Synod theologians who express themselves on the same subject to examine how and to what extent their views on Luther have been affected by the Swedish theologians and the "catastrophic events" of the past fifteen years. Compared to previous times the Missouri Synod has shown tremendous vitality and breadth on the issues here presented. One of the purposes of the paper is to determine the direction of the trend. Unavoidably the writer's judgments will enter the paper, and these are not self-consciously expunged but are left as part of the discussion to show what great

consequence the issue involves rather than be so bold as to maintain that the answer has been solved.

The most important aim of the paper is to be sufficiently convincing on the proposition that each interpreter of Martin Luther must proceed from his own idea of how Luther conceived of history and its aim and destiny, especially the destiny of the present world. Of course, philosophy of history cannot be separated from God's revelation. Consequently the whole proposition strikes at the heart of all theology and can be summed up by directing scholarship about Luther to his own view of God working mediately through the Word and/or through immediate guiding.

According to Luther the concept of God is not only the basis and the foundation of all knowledge, but also the basis of all philosophy, but for the reformer's doctrine of God is also political.<sup>1</sup> Luther is undoubtedly one of the most important knowledge of the world. He is one of the most important Middle Ages for his time. He is one of the most important strongly indicates that he had a strong, central, and unshakable, of the knowledge of God, the Word of God, and the Spirit of God. This was the basis of his knowledge of God.

<sup>1</sup>L. N. White, *Luther as a Prophet of the Reformation*, *Journal of Theological Studies*, 1911, p. 737.  
<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 738.

## CHAPTER II

### LUTHER'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

#### The General Category

Luther was not primarily a philosopher. However, he appreciated history and made use of it. He also was certainly aware of both the uses of history and the lack of its use in an intelligent way during his lifetime. Luther did not hesitate to use historical data himself to prove a point in correlation with what he had discovered on a certain subject in the Bible. Lewis W. Spitz, Sr., said, "According to Luther the purpose of historical studies and the usefulness of good objective history are chiefly pedagogical, but for the Reformer's immediate purposes also polemical."<sup>1</sup> Luther is considered to have had a respectable knowledge of the early Christian era and the Middle Ages for his time.<sup>2</sup> Luther's use of history would strongly indicate that he had a picture, howbeit not articulated, of the historical process with which he operated. This can be called philosophy of history, or,

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<sup>1</sup>L. W. Spitz, "History as a Weapon in Controversy," Concordia Theological Monthly, XVIII (October, 1947), 757.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 754.



since that area of study once so prominent has fallen into disrepute since Marx did such marvelous things with Hegel, we can call it a "conceptual scheme" as do political scientists who have attempted to answer some of the questions formerly confronting the other named discipline. However one puts it, Luther did conceive of some pattern in which history was moving. His writings reflect this pattern.

#### Luther's Observation of History as a Source

By omission Luther rejected two of the standard views of history: "that history is an atomistic totality of incongruous and chaotic events having no meaning or significance"; or "that history is cyclical, marked by regression equal to progression. . . ." <sup>3</sup>

On the other hand Luther accepted and operated on the basis that "history is in a directed movement." <sup>4</sup> While this cannot be turned into a metaphysical system such as Hegel's which emphasizes the progression of mankind, Luther found his starting point in the Bible and Judaism. "The conception found there was that God had initiated the historical process by a uniquely creative act." <sup>5</sup> Besides

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<sup>3</sup>L. W. Spitz, Jr., "J. L. Mosheim's Philosophy of History," Concordia Theological Monthly, XV (May, 1949), 326.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

creating, God also preserved the creation by directing it toward a new and final state of redemption and judgment. Lewis Spitz, Jr., speaks of J. L. Mosheim's philosophy of history as being in a direct line with the reformation and he "viewed Luther as the restorer of the true Christian doctrine."<sup>6</sup> Spitz goes on to show how Mosheim's pragmatic use of history is in line with Luther. Spitz seems to say that Mosheim's philosophy of history is a natural outgrowth of Luther's embryonic view on history.

Luther, no less than we today, tried to make history meaningful for his present existence and for those who were dependent on him for guidance. Luther was by no means unconscious of such dependence by people on him. He had a feeling of the necessity of his writings and preaching. Luther was perceptive and few will dispute this fact. With respect to the content of what he said many will say that today in various areas his value is lost. These interpreters merely venerate the spirit of his reform. However, Luther lived in a situation that is not without its striking parallels to our contemporary world. This is true not only in the confusion of world events and the speed with which they occur, but it is true in that similar quandry over present use of historical

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 335.

data. In Luther's time few approached history for pedagogical purposes, for the church was to supply the ever present voice of authority in every walk of life. One might say that Luther forced greater use of historical interpretation by displacing the Papacy as the sole voice of final appeal with the Scriptures. Today historians and political scientists find it difficult to discover the unifying principle which would allow them to explain the course of history as it develops. Scholars in these disciplines are very wary of ever using their disciplines to be predictive and even argue whether or not their disciplines can even be classified as a science or just another art.<sup>7</sup> It is not without reason that Heinrich Bornkamm can say: "The measure of historical happenings has today assumed proportions defying our mastery. In view of this we must again turn our ear to where God confronts and addresses us."<sup>8</sup> Things happen so quickly in our world that even the improved methods of research into history, things that make up history, and the dedication of scholars of history cannot keep pace sufficiently to better explain and interpret than could the infant

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<sup>7</sup>This observation comes from my own experience in graduate work at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri in the field of Political Science.

<sup>8</sup>Heinrich Bornkamm, Luther's World of Thought (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), p. 216.

interpretive historical method of the time of Luther. Luther also faced the possibility of his own society being exterminated by the Turk even as our age faces the possible elimination of the world society. Such similarities seem to make Luther's philosophy of history worth looking at in our day for some instruction, not only from the spirit of the utterances but also for the worth of the content.

Today historians, political scientists, and concerned theologians generally recognize as valid conceptual schemes which are expressed to explain history. These explanations include the analysis of many factors interacting in an intricate way to influence the tide of history. Such multi-factoral explanations are attempts at studying all the various known happenings and situations and classifying them and even giving value judgments as to the relative importance of any one given factor. It is admitted that some factors seem more relevant than others. In a limited way, Luther also worked with a multi-factoral system. "Luther stressed three essential factors that shape history: the nation, the law, and great men."<sup>9</sup> One could well add the economic factor because Luther is sentimentally against usury and he is Jeffersonian in his desire for the simple agrarian

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 196.

economic system. To recognize the influence of economics on history shows implicit interpretation by Luther.

To be sure, Luther stood sentimentally in line with men like Nicolas of Cusa who began presenting consent of the governed as the criterion for just power,<sup>10</sup> and he seemed also to stand on the side of the Germanic law as opposed to Roman law.<sup>11</sup> However, his statements concerning the Emperor--his enemy--seem to dispel the thought that Luther held to a strictly geographically bound State. It would seem rather that Heinrich Bornkamm deals well with this problem.

It seemed entirely natural to him that God did not shape all nations on the same last. And because of their dis-similarities . . . God ordains segregating boundaries for each. In contrast to the humanists, who persisted in their medieval dream of a German supernatural dominion, Luther regarded empire and nation (Volk) as coextensive and identical. Each nation has a right, virtually a divine command to live according to its own laws.<sup>12</sup>

Luther did not ignore the greater society under the emperor when he stressed the separate nations. He had no intention of espousing a state which would embrace man's entire life as did the ancient Greek state. Luther defends the difficulties found in his two-sided presentation. Speaking

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<sup>10</sup>Luther Hess Waring, The Political Theories of Martin Luther (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1910), p. 29.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>12</sup>Heinrich Bornkamm, op. cit., p. 197.

of the situation at the time when he posted the Ninety-Five Theses he said:

This was the state of things at that time . . . no one had taught, no one had heard, and no one knew anything about temporal government . . . whence it came, what its office and work was, or how it ought to serve God.<sup>13</sup>

Luther knew he was writing during a time of change. More than likely he felt no urge to build up some idea of local authority that was not already there. This can be substantiated by his Medieval belief that the Roman Empire would be the last of the world's governments.<sup>14</sup> It is significant then that Luther spoke so often of the Temporal Authority residing in various places, based on the function that the person or persons in that office of authority must enact. Luther was not more able to realize from observation where nations or Empires come from than men are today. The question has been plaguing historians and political theorists for years and no answer is forthcoming. Luther took the situation of the Middle Ages and tried to derive meaning from it. In doing so he considered nations, as described by Bornkamm, as one of the three major factors in explaining history--people in a geographical area bound

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<sup>13</sup>Martin Luther, "On War Against the Turk," Works of Martin Luther, edited by Charles M. Jacobs (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1931), V, 31. Hereafter cited as WML.

<sup>14</sup>E. G. Schwiebert, "The Medieval Pattern in Luther's View of the State," Church History, XII (June, 1943), 3.

together by a common ancestry and heritage. We cannot do much better today.

The second factor, law, "draws the line that separates the nation from the mob. This is the second element of historical life."<sup>15</sup> The caricature of the nation which Luther terms "the mob" gives rise to the need for law. In Luther's eyes the idea of the nation being so closely attached to a people could and often did degenerate into a mob. Bornkamm wrote: "to him a nation is a people contained within the firm structure of a state."<sup>16</sup> This is very close to our present use of the term "nation." The sum of the laws would give form to the state. When law is usurped it then is "violence" in the eyes of Luther. This "violence" is the caricature of law.

#### Faith Based on Scripture as a Source

Luther's conceptual scheme of the way things are, according to observation, ran up against a brick wall that we all face when trying to explain changes in the general pattern of life. The nation and law were predictable, for

The law-abiding people and the regulatory power of the law constitute the normal life, as it were, of history. But there is a third, extraordinary, downright unpredictable factor: the great men. Only in

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<sup>15</sup>Heinrich Bornkamm, op. cit., p. 198.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 223.

them does the life of history really find its fulfillment.<sup>17</sup>

This explanation by Bornkamm seems well justified when one reads Luther's commentaries on Psalms one hundred one and fifty-one in which David is exemplified. While the great man theory of history has largely fallen into ill repute among historians today, Winston Churchill excepted, the unpredictable factor in history is certainly attached to human beings. Instead of only considering the unpredictability of great men, social scientists have attempted to delve into the workings of the minds of people of all shades of importance as well as people in groups. Some would even go so far as to develop a hierarchy of the sciences from physics to political science through psychology. In the face of such a fantastically massive job, very respected men in the social sciences have resorted again to explanations of historical happenings that are metaphorical in nature, such as Crane Brinton's Anatomy of Revolution. We have thus returned to the point of departure, that is, despair at finding a unifying principle in history. This becomes even more evident through examination of today's historical literature. Bornkamm is again articulate. When we speak of the unpredictable factor in great men

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 199.



We have already passed beyond all that Luther perceived in history with his physical eye. With a little training it is relatively easy matter for us all to discern this disharmony in historical happenings.<sup>18</sup>

Great men of all times and under all circumstances were under the direct influence of God. Luther's Biblically-based faith had eyes that saw much more in the working out of history. When he asked himself where God was in these tangled happenings Luther always answered that God was everywhere. Historical observation always remained subordinate to his Biblically founded concept of history which found God not only in the good and noble but also the source of life for the evil and the demonia.<sup>19</sup> Because there is no observable explanation, the historians are in a real quandry. Because Luther went to the Bible first, he recognized the quandry for what it was and still is, the unpredictable force of the will of God. To be sure, there were many in the time of Luther who held a similar view and that is why we ought to look farther at the whole philosophy of history which Luther drew from the Bible and for which he found support by observation. Historical observation as well as correct Biblical interpretation had led him to believe that the Pope was not the proper "temporal authority." This can best be observed

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

in Luther's treatise On War Against the Turk. God is active in history and in this area reveals things from which a man can learn while keeping a steady eye on the omnipotence of God.

If we will not learn out of Scriptures we must learn out of the Turk's scabbard, until we find in our hurt that Christians are not to make war or resist evil.<sup>20</sup>

It is not possible then to carry about the concept from the Bible of God's working in history in a dynamic way without using it, for it then becomes as nothing. Yet, in applying this working of God even Luther found it to be a tormenting mystery which he could not fathom. Nor can we. We cannot ignore God's cause to victory either, for we would then be doubting God's omnipotence.<sup>21</sup> In Luther's great-man-theory he was again declaring with great boldness that God is the life of all history. As much as Luther loved Germany he professed that

his war the Turk's is nothing else than outrage and robbery, with which God is punishing the world. . . . For he does not fight from necessity or to protect his land in peace, as the right kind of ruler does. . . . He is God's rod and the devil's servant, there is no doubt about that.<sup>22</sup>

Luther could call Hannibal a great man, also Alexander, in that both as the tools of God changed the course of

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<sup>20</sup>WHL, "On War Against the Turk," V, 85.

<sup>21</sup>Heinrich Bornkamm, op. cit., p. 203

<sup>22</sup>WHL, "On War Against the Turk," V, 88.

history. Again, it appears that in matters of the order of creation, God uses immediate, non-predictable methods. This, as will be stressed later, is distinctly different from the strictly mediate means which God uses in the order of Faith to bring about His will.

Luther also presented the caricature of the great-man theory.

It has often happened, indeed, it usually happens, God gives a whole land and Kingdom good fortune and success through one single man; just as, on the other hand, through one knave at court brings a whole land into all sorts of distress and misery; . . .<sup>23</sup>

Just as God could use a bad ruler or a good one to the same advantage of carrying out his eternal purposes, so could he also use the devil toward the same purposes. Luther could call the devil "Gottes Teuffel." This Monism has caused many interpreters to reject Luther's position because of the system of dualism around which their own theology is based. In taking the path that he did, Luther freed secular government and its rulers from the stigma of the old dualism that neither fit the Bible nor fit his historical conception. The secular state is not necessarily the tool of the devil but is ordained by God. This is an outcome of Luther's philosophy of history, which is based on the Bible. God raises up kingdoms to defeat kingdoms.

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

What a man cannot lift, he must let lie. If we can do no more, we must let our Lord Jesus Christ counsel and aid us, by His coming, which cannot be far off. For the world has come to its end; the Roman Empire is almost gone and torn to bits . . . and so, I think, now that the Roman Empire is almost gone, Christ's coming is at the door, and the Turk is the Empire's token of farewell. . . .<sup>24</sup>

### The Function of Pessimism

Thus we might deduce a basic pessimism from Luther with respect to the hope of the world. But it is not to be called a hopeless pessimism for there is a hope in another world. This Godly pessimism precedes whatever answers man has worked out, such as the progression of civilization to ever higher plains, or the condition of a nation by battle for a just cause. Reality no longer is found in these explanations nor in the concept of the survival of the fittest. Even without technical warfare confronting him, Luther considered any warfare non-sensical according to the Scriptures.<sup>25</sup> On account of the fact of sin Luther was pessimistic about the fate of the world in the long run and in the contemporary times in which he lived. Bornkamm again explained this well:

Nowhere is Luther's historical perceptivity mirrored more clearly than in the horror with which he contemplates the nations that have perished. For they did not die a natural death. . . . Nations

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>25</sup>Heinrich Bornkamm, op. cit., p. 204.

do not perish of themselves, but God wipes them out because of their sins.<sup>26</sup>

He did justice to Luther again when he stated:

This will of God may remain incomprehensible in its associations and its immediate aim, but its meaning is clear: it always signifies either mercy or judgment. . . .<sup>27</sup>

The eyes of faith allowed Luther to derive ultimate meaning from the historical happenings about him. Guilt and punishment were inseparable to his mind; the one always following the other. This order held for internal as well as external manifestations, ruler over ruled, and ruler against ruler. In every case of punishment one must look for the cause in sin and guilt. This raises many questions but for the purposes of this paper it must be left at that point.

#### Luther's Eschatology Interprets his Pessimism

Luther's pessimism is called Godly pessimism for it was not despondent and hopeless. Luther, though the accusation is often leveled against him, was not being glib when he spoke of the demise of nations or the duty to obey an oppressive ruler or to suffer in the situation in which one finds himself. The answer is found in his underlying eschatological thinking that expects the second

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

coming of the Savior at any moment. This was expressed above in the quotation from the treatise On War Against the Turk. Indeed, Luther appears so calm that he is accused of fathering quietism over against the rulers of states. There is some good material to draw from if one wants to accuse Luther of quietism if secular criteria are used. Luther waits for the striking of God's clock. Consequently, he seemed always to be conservative in the sense that he wanted to be sure of one's calling to a position or task. He can be accused of being utterly pragmatic in dealing with issues on this basis. But is this not accusing Luther of failing to see the forest for the trees? In any given situation Luther deals with the situation on the basis of the greater plan of the dynamic God. That plan is to have order in the world so that the Gospel should be preached. The Gospel should be preached because Christ was coming soon. Therefore Luther could say to the peasant leaders in A Reply to the Twelve Articles:

I have helped the worldly rulers, even those who persecuted the gospel and me, to maintain their power and honor. But I have stopped with committing the matter to God. . . . therefore . . . He . . . preserved my life. . . . He caused my Gospel . . . to increase . . .<sup>28</sup>

And to the methods of Muenzer and his followers: "You

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<sup>28</sup>WML, "A Reply to the Twelve Articles," IV, 232.

want to help God . . . and you are hindering it [the Gospel]."<sup>29</sup> Through all of Luther's latent scheme of history based on the Scriptures there were two very important elements: God's dynamic control and the fact that there was to be an end of this world. It is typically paradoxical of Luther, then, who built up the power of secular government, to have torn it away from the Church's clutches so that he could minimize for Christians the importance of earthly government as an ultimate concern.

Luther's great requirement for earthly secular government was that it should provide order. Given this order Christians could keep their consciences free from earthly concerns that might jeopardize their faith. But Luther is not optimistic that worldly government will provide this good atmosphere.

Worldly government will make no progress. The people are too wicked, and the lords dishonor God's name and Word continually by the shameful abuse of their Godhead. Therefore, he [the Christian] prays for another government and Kingdom in which things will be better.<sup>30</sup>

Luther's negative attitude toward worldly government closely influenced his positive attitude. When men find themselves in difficulty as individuals or in groups Luther applies

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Martin Luther, "Selected Psalms," Luther's Works, The American Edition, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), XIII, 72. Hereafter cited as AE.

to them the same judgement on sin. Three conclusions with which we might well concur are found by Bornkamm. These regard Luther's view of history which we have been so bold as to call a latent philosophy of history or a conceptual scheme.

First, that God's judgment is consistently judgment of our sin, and . . . the same sin: presumption and ingratitude.<sup>31</sup>

and:

Secondly, the eyes of faith perceive that God does not withdraw His gifts from the world even in the storm and tumult of his judgments. 'So long as the world stands, government, order, and power must endure.'<sup>32</sup>

and:

faith must come . . . thirdly, direct its eyes to the wonderful fact that God's judgments rightly understood, must inspire confidence rather than fear . . . for . . . they . . . contain a sweet kernel in a bitter shell: the nearness of the living God.<sup>33</sup>

Having arrived at his conceptual scheme primarily through the use of the Scriptures, but also by observation of the past and his contemporary scene, Luther brought scheme and method into play when asked to present a treatise on a certain topic dealing with temporal use of authority.

We said that Luther's doctrine of the calling was very important in the light of the view he took of history. As

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<sup>31</sup>Heinrich Bornkamm, op. cit., p. 210.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 212.



Luther respected the calling of ministers by God to serve His Church so he also respected the call of God to people into every walk of life. Just as the divine call of a minister today causes us perplexity, so it also troubled Luther in his time. This applied to people as they were called to positions in life. How did one get the calling to his station in life? Luther could only say that it was an immediate calling by God no matter how one came to get that calling. In Luther's time God seemed to call emperors by election, dukes and other nobles by birth, secular authorities in Free Cities by other means. Luther accepted them all and traced the authority directly to God. Each man, therefore, was responsible to God although it may have seemed that they were responsible to electors, to no one, or to the people themselves. For Luther's thinking God worked primarily through men. But while every individual was responsible to God for his own faith,<sup>34</sup> this did not hold true for the secular realm. There men were called immediately by God to perform a function of order. There was for Luther a limited class system. Each man was to fit into a niche. Luther himself felt this tug strong and assumed that everyone else would also feel it. It is in this area that Luther is accused

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<sup>34</sup> Martin Luther, "Secular Authority," Works of Martin Luther, (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Co., 1915), VII, 253. Hereafter cited as HE.

of fatalism. If it must be thus termed, it is a Godly fatalism. Besides, Luther did not deny social mobility at all, but he was a great advocate of public education especially for Bible literacy but also for secular learning.<sup>35</sup> It had to be orderly social mobility and if laws were made to allow greater social mobility, it is difficult to merely assume that Luther would have felt this wrong. He may have spoken against extreme mobility because it might lead to disorder. In other words, Luther was perfectly sincere in thinking that the peasants should remain peasants, if their only release from this status would be through the use of force. They did not have the call to use force on their own. God had not given them the gift of authority.

God had given the gift of force to the powers that existed. Luther could not separate that power exclusively from the person of the ruler anymore than the power of the Apostle could be separated completely from his person. This was the mystery. How does one know when the authority is legitimate? This question has never been answered. Luther did not consider the call to civil authority an especially fortuitous one because it was a calling fraught with difficulty and strain. In addressing the princes he could say: "It is not the peasants, dear lords,

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<sup>35</sup>L. H. Waring, op. cit., p. 115.

who are resisting you, it is God himself who is resiting in order to visit your raging upon you."<sup>36</sup> People will always rise up against oppression because there is self will on every side. Luther would not have the peasants think that they were right in such an undertaking of revolt because theirs would not be legitimate power. The Lords retained the right to enforce their wills, but Luther did not advise this because God would surely put them down. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay," quoted Luther. "Be subject to the good lords but also to the wicked."<sup>37</sup> In these cases Luther was only speaking to the Christians. For all he knew, God was using others, either the Turk or the radicals within the nation to keep the lords in line. On the one hand he could be fully cognizant of the Greek theories of freedom and admire their civic righteousness, and on the other hand deprecate the same theories. He gave his reasons.

The heathen did not know that temporal government is God's ordinance, for they held it is the good fortune and deed of men and therefore they jumped right in here and thought that it was not only right, but also praiseworthy to depose, kill and drive out the worthless and wicked rulers.<sup>38</sup>

There is always a heavy responsibility accompanying

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<sup>36</sup> WML, "A Reply to the Twelve Articles," IV, 221.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>38</sup> WML, "Whether Soldiers Too Can Be Saved," V, 43.

usurpation of the ruling power. Hence Luther considered usurpation of power a dangerous thing to attempt for a Christian. That is why he reasoned as follows:

But I am not discussing here what heathen do or have done, or anything that resembles their examples and history, but what one ought to do and can do with a good conscience, so that one is safe and sure that the thing he does is not in itself wrong before God.<sup>39</sup>

And again:

My teaching is only for those who would like to do right. To these I say that rulers are not to be opposed with violence and rebellion, as the Romans, the Greeks, the Swiss and the Danes have done. But there are other ways of dealing with them.<sup>40</sup>

God wants order. He calls men to keep civil order. Those who do not have that call should not take it upon themselves. If the called ruler misuses that call, then Luther says he will be opposed by another as a judgment. However, a Christian should not align himself with this active opposition. The opposition can only come through the Word. In his own Christian nation this is where Luther brought himself into the picture to appeal for justice. He even deals with epieikeia or aequity or Billigkeit or what we would call "justice." A ruler's ability to dispense such justice depends on his wisdom and it determines whether or not he really is a great man of God because

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

law must be framed simply, in dry, short words, it cannot possibly embrace all the cases and hindrances. Therefore, the judges and lords must be wise and pious in this matter and meet out reasonable justice, and let the law take its course, or set it aside accordingly.<sup>41</sup>

This rather remarkable use of a pagan idea must be attached closely to Luther's view of history and the fact that the ruler is not held to this by rights of people but by his responsibility to God. And still Luther's development of the concept of justice speaks forcibly enough to be framed into a present day principle; that is, that justice depends on God, not on men. Bornkamm explained that

Luther has far more in mind than an equitable adjustment of the fair claims of all concerned, and he is less interested in the natural justice . . . than he is in the duty of love incumbent on all . . ."<sup>42</sup>

Still, it is not an immutable, eternal, natural law, but it is imperfect and can never be called Christian. It is rather a matter of reason. It is amazing to notice the concern that Luther held for his fellow human beings in the earthly realm despite the fact that he felt this realm to be an insignificant thing in comparison to the spiritual realm. Luther saw himself called to a position in life to fulfill God's plan both in history and also in the salvation of men. He thought that he was one of the

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>42</sup>Heinrich Bornkamm, op. cit., p. 249.

men in whom God worked. This was not arrogance for he felt that God could and would raise up ten Luthers to do his work if he should be disposed of.<sup>43</sup> By personal experience he knew that God worked in men. Therefore, since the Bible both pointed and confirmed him to this realization, he applied it to all of mankind and most particularly to the realm of secular authority. The only balance against that absolute sovereignty, rightly speaking, could be the Word of God forcefully showing the sin of the ruler.

#### The General Effect on the Social Writings of Luther

After fifteen years we are beginning again to recognize that what was considered to be a boom time for Christianity in the United States due to the war was primarily a boom for religion in general. There are doubts as to the good of war and rebellion for Christ's message. The effect of war is a neutral thing at best and probably a great cost in terms of human suffering. Luther always held this peaceful opinion and therefore vociferously advocated passivity of the ruled. When evil was done by the ruler it was to be denounced but not actively resisted. Luther did not recognize the right to revolt, according to his ever mindful idea of the mob as the caricature of the

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 296.

nation. It is often stated that Luther upheld the princes so strongly because he wanted an ally against the Pope. This is the position that has to be taken if we consider Luther merely pragmatic with respect to views on temporal authority, on governing and obeying. As we have stated, Luther's position on revolt was not stated primarily to keep order but to guard consciences.

However, he continued to work for peace just as in the same way he did not have much hope for the emperor in battle against the Turks, if it were God's will that they should not win. Luther still wanted the emperor to give his people the protection. The infinitely greater importance of men's souls did not cause Luther to surrender to chaos in every day living. At any rate, it seems that Luther stands convinced in his way when he appeals for people to maintain order and not to revolt because there would be no assurance where revolt would terminate. Besides, the fruits of freedom can be just as faith-destroying or more destroying than the bondage of slavery. The noted contemporary theologian Karl Barth can earnestly denounce the Babylon United States and claim that the Christians in East Germany might well be better off with respect to their faith than might so-called Christians in the United States. With regard to Luther's answer to the supreme question of his day and our day: "Whether

religion justified resistance," the early twentieth century British scholar J. N. Figgis put it well when he said:

It would indeed be hard to find a more thorough-going expression of the doctrine of "passive obedience," than that of Luther's first address to the peasants.<sup>44</sup>

We refer back to Luther's firm conviction that the worst and same sin that convicts men again and again is that of presumption and ingratitude. He warned:

The fairer your cause and the better your rights, the less should you presume to boast of them. Rather fear God, who likes to put to shame the most just claims and to overthrow the best causes because of the arrogance with which you boastfully rely on them.<sup>45</sup>

This is a hard saying. In the short run of history it seems ridiculous. However, seen on the long scale of history and in the light of redemption it would appear different. For, while it is important that there be order and peace, the type of any one government is not absolutely an integral criterion to judge the probable prosperity of Christianity in a given place.

Underneath all of Luther's practical application of his concept of the flow of history lay his idea of dual citizenship. This concept has justly received more

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<sup>44</sup>J. N. Figgis, From Gerson to Grotius (London: Cambridge University Press, 1907), p. 65.

<sup>45</sup>Heinrich Bornkamm, op. cit., p. 210.



interpretation than any of the other concepts, for it helps explain his apparent contradictions. Men, by the fact that they are men, are under God's order of creation and therefore are responsible to a visible form of secular authority. Under that visible form of secular authority each man has a call in life. This is his vocation. It would seem he comes by this vocation immediately. Luther is not always clear as to how one would determine when or how he was certain he had found his calling. At any rate, God guided this fitting of a man into his vocation. On the other hand, some people came under another kingdom of God, the heavenly kingdom brought by Christ. This kingdom was invisible to man and it came through means: the means of Grace, the revealed Word, and the Sacraments. The visible kingdom would be ruled by outward law; the invisible kingdom by the inward spiritual working of the Word, a rule of love. In one breath Luther could speak to a man as a Christian and tell him not to resist any temporal authority, and in the next breath could tell him to serve the ruler as a citizen in fighting a just war. Justifiably, a man might think he was walking a tight-rope, but Luther might well have conceived of his two kingdoms as walls against which one might push out simultaneously with one's hands in order to maintain balance.

And yet, Luther never would have suggested such an

approach had the tight-rope no end. For Luther there was coming a consummation at which time Christians would walk solidly on the floor of the one true kingdom of Jesus Christ. This is why his Christological, Gospel message must always be taken into account. It has to do with an end to the present world. This, it must be admitted, is a concept of history that sheds light on the "why" of Luther's pronouncements on government and the social order. To be sure it was taken directly from the Bible, but it was certainly verified by his concept of history.

### CHAPTER III

## WHY THE MISSOURI SYNOD FOUND THE NEED TO REINTERPRET LUTHER'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

### The New Situation

It is necessary to repeat that Luther's position on the social order has for a long time been met with opposition from outside the Lutheran church. On the continent of Europe Lutherans also began consciously to be disturbed by their interpretation of Luther's thought. The influence of this thought in recent years has been felt in the Lutheran Churches of the United States. Since the close of World War Two this influence has also been strongly apparent in the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. Since that time, and no doubt previously in a minor way the presentation that Luther gave temporal authority derived both from his Biblical research and consequent conceptual scheme or philosophy of history, began to get under the skin of Missouri's men. Small wonder, for many of these men during the late war had increased their area of maneuvering, coming into contact with new situations and men of a different type from those they had previously known. These new situations and new acquaintances were

bound to produce some interesting reactions. The outcome was that these men felt a new surge of social responsibility which they intended hopefully to carry into practice. They thought that Luther was some sort of a deterrent as he had traditionally been interpreted with respect to the social, governmental issues by Missouri. Some found their way to what they considered a fruitful re-interpretation of Luther by themselves and applied it to the problem, while others found a ready-made starting point if not a whole new re-interpretation worked out for them.

#### The Swedish Influence

The reinterpretation of Luther by Lutherans was the famous fruit of the Swedish or "Lundensian school" of theological thought. This school, applied the method of "motif research" also to Luther's corpus or writings and the history of his life. In fact, it intended to use Luther as the starting point in each research project undertaken.<sup>1</sup> It cannot be overlooked either that Germany was greatly upset by the varied attitudes that the clergy took toward Hitler's government: completely passive, co-operative, or defiantly against. This also had its influence on American Lutherans. In fact, it was a non-Lutheran German, Emil Brunner, who expressed the discontent

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<sup>1</sup>Edgar M. Carlson, The Reinterpretation of Luther (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1948), chapter 1.

with the traditional Lutheran expression concerning secular authority.

We are called, and who else is called if not Christians, to raise our protest against any form of State absolutism and omnipotence. Times have changed since the Reformation. At that time the great need was to release the State from the bondage of the Church; today the need is to deliver life from suppression by the State.<sup>2</sup>

Significantly enough, this quotation was taken from an article in the Concordia Theological Monthly by Dr. Alfred M. Rehwinkel, professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, one of the two Missouri Synod seminaries.

This thesis agrees with the concern expressed by the Missouri Synod men mentioned in this volume, but questions some of the more extended conclusions that can be drawn from a rather wholesale marketing of the "motif" research into Luther's writings. In other words, in many cases the essence as well of the spirit of what Luther maintained so forcefully ought to be retained. In this thesis the main concern is with reference to Luther's treatises on social issues, political issues or whatever one may call them. Actually the influences of this brand of scholarship run much deeper than the reinterpretation of Luther, and they must be explored briefly to apply them to Luther also. Edgar M. Carlson, a Swedish American Luther

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<sup>2</sup>Emil Brunner, Justice and the Social Order, as quoted by A. M. Rehwinkel, "The Christian and Government," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXI (May, 1950), 462.

scholar of the Augustana Synod, in his book entitled The Reinterpretation of Luther summarized the Swedish attitude toward Revelation in this way:

Revelation is dynamic as over against all static historicism and intellectualism. It cannot be limited to certain historically given teachings, to a historic personality, or to a certain epoch such as primitive Christianity. It does not consist in a series of revelatory moments in history—not even Christ can be regarded as such an isolated fact.<sup>3</sup>

Early in the twentieth century when this was applied directly to Luther by Einar Billing, it became clear how malleable the corpus of Luther's writings could then be.

Luther's historical significance, according to Billing, does not lie in the particular ideas to which he gave expression, but in the fact that he was the outstanding preacher of the Gospel of his day.<sup>4</sup>

These two statements considerably alter the doctrine of Revelation which Luther held, as well as the basis of Luther's doctrine of Revelation and any other doctrine that Luther might articulate. While Luther would place the Revelation of God solely in the Scriptures (with the unifying principle of Justification by Faith) the Swedes promote the belief that God reveals things in and to the Church independent of the written word. We have already maintained that Luther found this immediate hand of God shown in the order of creation rather than in the Church

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<sup>3</sup>Carlson, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

where the Scriptures are the means of knowing God's will. The Church can only pray "Thy will be done." It can only ask, "Thy Kingdom (of heaven) come." This the Church learns from what the Swedes are prone to call "static historicism." It seems that there is here a basic disagreement with Luther on the doctrine of the Word rather than on a reinterpretation of his actual words. While that in itself is a significant departure, the effect on the conceptual scheme of Luther for history is also greatly effected. By putting God's call to Luther into the realm of the Church as a special call the Swedish theologians find the immediate hand of God continuing to work out the destiny of the Kingdom in a dynamic, dramatic way. There seems to be justification for this on the surface and Carlson said:

If further evidence is needed to substantiate the contemporary and dynamic character of revelation in Luther's theology, one may point to the idea of omnipotence in The Bondage of the Will and to the repeated parallels which he draws between his own situation and that of Paul. Luther is convinced that he is an instrument of God's ongoing contemporary activity.<sup>5</sup>

It is, however, significant in this instance that this evidence is found in Luther's treatise on The Bondage of the Will. The strongest emphasis there is the Monism of God, as opposed to the dualism that the Swedish theologians

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

find in Luther's theology. This dualism must be an integral part of the dynamic work of God, continually working itself out in a contemporary way in the form of a drama. Luther's reason for writing The Bondage of the Will is admittedly for the comfort of people and the surity of God's protection, and therefore when it is applied to matters of faith "one little word could fell" the temptor. He has little power left for those who are members of the Church. According to the traditional interpretation which is so strongly upheld by Lutheran theologians such as Martin Franzmann of Concordia Seminary, the drama of the devil against Christ and the devil against us is a minor plot found in the Bible. Thus one can see how deeply this discussion cuts.<sup>6</sup> The Swedes would apply the dualism of the secular world primarily to the Kingdom of Grace. To be consistent, the contention of the interpretation here espoused would have to maintain that Luther actually held his own call to be in the secular realm where God's hand led him against the forces of the devil. He had another call, but that was in the Invisible Church where all men were priests.

It is perfectly consistent for the Swedish theologians not only to reinterpret Luther with regard to his Monism,

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<sup>6</sup> Author, Lecture notes from Martin Franzmann's course on "The Kingdom of God," at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, 1958-59.



but actually to disagree. Carlson admitted that their general conclusion is that Luther presents a "naturalistic conception of God" in The Bondage of the Will.<sup>7</sup> For Runestan "Luther's doctrine of the sovereignty of God here becomes metaphysical determinism."<sup>8</sup> Others, such as Bohlin, take a stronger, more negative stand. However, Carlson concluded by saying that, "All these men solve the problem by asserting, in a more or less emphatic way, that Luther is inconsistent in stressing God's unconditional omnipotence . . ."<sup>9</sup> However, there seems to be a more sane and reasonable approach found in Bring who held that

Luther does not employ a naturalistic conception of God in his idea of the divine omnipotence. On the contrary, when he attributes evil to both God and the devil, he is dealing with a typical tension, with a purely religious problem.<sup>10</sup>

But while it is more reasonable, it may be the more misleading because in stating the problem to be primarily a religious one, Bring and Nygren again bring the struggle between God and the Devil into the Church. This, of course, is based on the idea of the Visible Church. Luther can be interpreted to include the Visible Church in the

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<sup>7</sup>Carlson, op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

earthly realm, and if this is accepted, then the battle ground becomes the one on which Luther considered himself to be a part of the earthly realm. The position expressed by Bring does not hinder him from making valid pronouncements about the way in which the Church should be a voice to the civil authorities. The Visible Church becomes a sort of hybrid or no man's land between the Invisible Church and the Secular Authorities, while participating in both areas. Luther often speaks of the Visible Church in more than one way, thus adding to the confusion. When speaking of the secular authorities Luther is not constrained to insist that the church follow the program of the State, but at least the Visible Church must not forcibly oppose it.<sup>11</sup> When speaking about the program of the Invisible Church not made with hands, the Visible Church must be concerned with individuals. The latter function of the Visible Church is what Luther always wanted to stress and sometimes, therefore, he ignores the other function. This has led to the dissatisfaction with what Luther said about the state. The Swedes have made the Church more visible and therefore have brought the battle between God and the Devil into the Church as the main theme of the

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<sup>11</sup>Martin Luther, "Secular Authority," Works of Martin Luther, edited by Charles M. Jacobs (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1931), III, 237.

ongoing revelation of God. In stressing the spiritual character of the Church, Luther made the main theme the sureness of God's salvation dependent on the Word of the Gospel in the once and for all sacrifice on the cross in which all Christians participate in a spiritual manner.

This has caused dismay among Lutherans on both sides of the Atlantic. There has been an increasing tendency to make the Church programmatic in a way similar with that of the State or secular authority. Recently it places more stress on the program of the church in the social life. To Luther the job of the Church was to work with individuals to make more Christians, and he expressed his doubts as to the possibility of making every one or even most people Christian. In attempting to make the Church more civically programmatic the Swedish theologians have met their greatest difficulty in Luther with this statement:

This I maintain and insert, that God, when he works without the Spirit's grace, works everything in everyone, even in the ungodly, in that he alone with his omnipotent moving power sets in motion, drives, and carries with him all that he alone has created. This power the created one cannot escape or change, but must necessarily follow and obey, each according to the measure of his power, given of God. Thus even the ungodly co-operated with him.<sup>12</sup>

It would seem that the same urge that Luther felt when he went to Mansfield to help settle a jurisdictional

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<sup>12</sup>Carlson, op. cit., p. 54.

problem among noblemen was indeed the same call in public life that sent him to the defense of his beliefs at Worms where he is reputed to have said, "Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise." Scholars generally agree that whether he said the words or not is of little importance, for his whole attitude and deportment spelled out what the words say. So it is of great importance for scholars today in interpreting Luther to come to a decision as to this part of Luther's philosophy of history: how did he think of his own call? Was it immediate? Did God work in history this way? It is conclusive that Luther felt that God did work immediately in history and therefore Luther has this basic factor as a part of his thinking. It is not the object of this thesis to ascertain whether Luther thought that the immediate working was for him within the Churchly function (related inseparably from his faith) as the Swedish theologians maintain; or whether he felt it to be an immediate call in history as the traditionalist interpreters of the Church would have to maintain in view of the challenge of the theories proposed by the Swedes. It is enough to see the scholarly struggle between the two sides and conclude that Luther's philosophy of history indeed loomed large in all his writings and especially in

his social writings.<sup>13</sup>

Nowhere within close touch of the Missouri Synod scene has the importance of understanding the view that Luther (and for that matter his followers) held of his own position under God been more urgently insisted upon than in the paper delivered by Otto Piper of Princeton Theological Seminary to The First Institute on The Church and Modern Culture.<sup>14</sup>

While Piper does not consider the separate influence of the abstract Church that the Swedes are wont to strongly present, he does agree with the correctness of the term "Amt" that Michael Coelius probably coined, and translates it as the "divine Mission" of Luther.<sup>15</sup> Piper claims that Lutheran scholarship has stayed so close to Luther's writings for this very reason. He does not take the next logical step as the Swedes who claim that a divine mission

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<sup>13</sup>Carl S. Munding, "Some of the Contributions of Lutheranism, With Special Reference to the Past and European Countries, To the Theory and Practice of Government and Society," Proceedings of the First Institute of the Church and Modern Culture, 1951, edited by John G. Kunstmann (Valparaiso, Indiana: Valparaiso University Press, 1953), pp. 61-68.

<sup>14</sup>This is a general reference to the whole of the above mentioned presentation which appeared under the cover title: The Church and Modern Culture.

<sup>15</sup>Otto Piper, "The Lutheran Contribution to Theology," Proceedings of the First Institute of the Church and Modern Culture, edited by John G. Kunstmann (Valparaiso: Valparaiso University Press, 1953), p. 81.

will fall upon others in subsequent history of the Church. Yet there is no logical reason why he cannot. When Piper calls Luther a prophet (and what Luther does not loosely use this term at various times?) the question must arise: Must a prophet be considered God working in the Church or in his plan of history?<sup>16</sup> While we do not propose here to answer this question, we again state, it is not as easy to decide as one would hope and yet it is apparently the question of the hour.

That Piper's paper was delivered at a symposium for Missouri Synod Lutherans is basic for this chapter, because the connection between Swedish theology and Missouri's is somewhat direct. The use of Carlson's book found its way into this thesis as a result of a footnote of Piper's. And not only is the Swedish influence seen but also that of German scholarship is found throughout the publication of the larger share of the papers delivered. The outcome of these influences, of which we have only mentioned two, in the Missouri Synod has been a steady flow of writings and preaching about the church with a capital "c." Essentially this is derived from the concern over "justification by faith" but finds its unique character in the interpretation of the working of God in the Church.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

The Church is the instrument of the divine activity. The Church is always in a state of becoming; it is never a finished product. Since God's activity is essentially fellowship creating love, to be included in that fellowship is to become the active agent in the creative process. Inasmuch as the Church is constantly bearing witness to the redemptive action of God, it is itself the instrument of his continuing activity.<sup>17</sup>

Representative Contemporary Missouri Synod  
Approaches to the Reinterpretation  
of Luther

In connection with this reinterpretation we have mentioned that the depression and World War Two affected the theology of the Missouri Synod with respect to its pronouncements on the social activity of the Synod as the Church. Arthur Simon, in his Master of Sacred Theology thesis of 1957 at Concordia Seminary, made a study of this effect and concluded that the trend was indeed a healthy one.<sup>18</sup> The "quietism" of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod was a misinterpretation of Luther. The other side of the coin is presented briefly here in treating the philosophy of history that Luther used with regard to issues of governmental secular authority. Actually the two sides cannot be separated. Simon provided a more complete bibliography than this thesis attempts. This paper

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<sup>17</sup>Carlson, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>18</sup>Arthur Simon, "Political Thought in the Missouri Synod" (unpublished Master of Sacred Theology Thesis, Pritzlaff Memorial Library, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, 1957).

presents representative thinking on the issue in order to show some of the effects of a certain type of interpretation of Luther's philosophy of history upon his writings about government and social problems.

In connection with Simon's thesis one cannot neglect the importance of Martin H. Scharlemann of Concordia Seminary, who has spearheaded the move to more social awareness in the Missouri Synod and used the organization which he founded, The Lutheran Academy for Scholarship to further such study and promote the cause of it in the Lutheran Church. Dr. Scharlemann also stated in the Concordia Theological Monthly that "There may have been a time when the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod could afford to keep itself aloof from its American environment. That day has passed."<sup>19</sup> Again: "Our Synod has in fact been catapulted in medias res by the catastrophic events of the last fifteen years."<sup>20</sup> In his opening address to the Institute Scharlemann mentioned three values of the Lutheran Church "which could influence our way of life for good." They are: "The Lutheran (and Biblical teaching) concerning nation and nationality; our doctrine of vocation; and our

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<sup>19</sup>Martin H. Scharlemann, "The Lutheran Church and Its American Environment," Concordia Theological Monthly, LXVI (August, 1955), 597-602.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.



careful distinction between Law and Gospel."<sup>21</sup> Fortunately, Dr. Scharlemann steered the emphasis away from the programmatic work that a visible church would propose and instead proposed doctrinal contributions. Yet this was by no means to be a limit and the practice seems to go beyond the teaching example of the Lutheran Church in the area of social life, and develops programs for conscious cultural development and significantly for social development. The question of the correctness of the practice does not enter into the question here, but instead the focus is on the difference from the traditional approach. Instead of the former aloofness there seems to be an optimism as to the good that the Lutheran Church as a Church can effect in the secular community. Again, we submit that this new optimism stems from the different philosophies of history which the two sides maintain: on one hand the philosophy which the lectures to the Institute generally propounded, the concept on the positive aspects of Luther's social pronouncements; on the other hand, the negative side of Luther's attitude toward the world was stressed. In the one case Luther's optimism and sureness stem from his wonder and appreciation of the creation and the work that

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<sup>21</sup>Martin H. Scharlemann, "Opening Address," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXVI (August, 1955), 24.

man has in the creation.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, the sadness with which he beheld the chaos man could make of the creation, always brought him back to the Christocentric, eschatological point of God's revelation. The one side becomes too humanistic, the other too separatistic. If anything, the current trend in the Missouri Synod is toward the optimism of humanism which works wholeheartedly in the world as though this work held real promise. This is not foreign to the attitude which Luther held, but points out a definite appeal to certain interpretations of his world view.<sup>23</sup>

While Otto Piper made that admission, Jaroslav Pelikan progressed to the generalization that to interpret any aspect of a presentation such as the inter-relations of Church and State one

must go behind those statements to the entire world-view that is presented there and recover the dynamic intention of the Confessions underlying their affirmations on Church and State.<sup>24</sup>

Pelikan furthermore found this dynamic in both the Law and the Gospel because as Walther said: "There is no doctrine that does not call upon us to rightly divide the Law and

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<sup>22</sup>Heinrich Bornkamm, Luther's World of Thought (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), chapter 9. This has to do with Luther's picture of nature.

<sup>23</sup>Piper, op. cit., p. 92.

<sup>24</sup>Jaroslav Pelikan, "The Interrelations of Church and State," Educational Conference Report, 1950 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), pp. 45-51.

the Gospel." It would seem then that God's activity still goes on in the Gospel also. Pelikan does not say with respect to the Gospel whether God's activity goes on immediately or mediately, but he considered Luther primarily a prudent churchman rather than a political theoretician. In effect, Pelikan, like the Swedes, placed more emphasis on the unity of the Law and the Gospel in love than on the separation and we hope this is where the issue has been focused. Pelikan said:

there is but one God, and all life is subject to Him. Law and Gospel, Church and State are both His. Regardless of what the current political theory may be, our faith demands that we see God's purpose at work in both the Law and the Gospel.<sup>25</sup>

In short, we are forced back to the point of departure, to the place where we find out whether God works immediately in the secular realm or also in the realm of the Church. For Pelikan, it seemed that in his phrase "prudent Churchmanship" there is a certain wish for, if not an acceptance of, immediate help by God for the Church.<sup>26</sup>

While this thesis does not uncover a direct relationship between Dr. Pelikan and Dr. Scharlemann's movement, it does establish contact between it and H. R. Klann, at present a Missouri Synod pastor to students in New York City. In an article produced from a lecture to students

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

at Yale University in New Haven and printed in The Lutheran Scholar, the literary publication of the Lutheran Academy for Scholarship, Dr. Klann develops the theory of what he calls "theological mysticism" in Luther.<sup>27</sup> While denying that this mysticism is derived from any immediate source, Klann is dissatisfied with Luther's position on secular authority for it does not produce the abandonment of the contemporary secular authority of the time. If this "theological mysticism" is the "consequence of justification,"<sup>28</sup> Klann's desire for this to be applied to political reform seems to be out of line. He himself wants "theological mysticism" (always a produce to justification) to apply to the preservation of God's creation by our participation in this dynamic.<sup>29</sup> Again, we must confess that this is another honest attempt to drive meaning for Luther's over-all position according to Luther's view of the way in which God establishes contact or fellowship with man, or in other words his view of revelation. Klann's Lutheran "theological mysticism" is defined by him as the dynamic conformity to God's will. To this writer it seems he, as well as the others fails to make a distinction between God's

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<sup>27</sup>H. R. Klann, "Luther's Political Ethics," The Lutheran Scholar, (July, 1957, pp. 550-560.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 551.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 557.

calling which allows no refusal in the kingdom of power, and the calling which can be refused, and is presented in the means of grace. Christians are not mere tools of God. Persons in public life are.

We have again arrived at the point of defining what Luther so often meant in the words which we translate "call." In this respect, Dr. Carl S. Mundinger's essay, which appeared in the Proceedings of the aforementioned Institute, would seem to be very important.<sup>30</sup> In particular his description of Dreistandlehre and the Lehre vom Beruf is enlightening and helpful in pointing out the hand of God in history.

according to Luther no particular moral distinction attaches to any one stand. There is no looking down the nose on the temporales domini and the communis populus in ordained Status Ecclesiasticus, Status Oeconomicus, Status politicus. All three are holy orders because they have special holiness, which derives from God's creation. There is no special holiness attached to the Status Ecclesiasticus, more specifically to the clergy. . . . The men engaged in preaching the gospel are sinners in the same degree as the men who spend their life in performing the functions of government. . . . The preaching of the gospel is a noble function, but it is done by sinful men. . . .

Luther's Dreistandlehre is tied up with his Lehre vom Beruf. This latter doctrine throws real light on the attitude of Lutheranism to government and society. Although all men belong to all three Staende each man has a special call from God to perform special tasks. This call sanctifies all labor.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Mundinger, loc. cit.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 61-62.

Unfortunately Mundinger does not go on to show that it is not agreed whether Luther felt that a man in the Church, even a minister when he spoke to the secular authority to give it advice or to vilify it as Luther himself did, was speaking according to one of the three Staende or according to his special call (in Luther's case this being the call to be a professor, his Beruf). To be sure it can be argued that Luther or any Christian can come to his viewpoint strictly on the basis of his Christian conviction based on the Bible. Yet, when he was about to speak he would speak as a member of the Status politicus or Status Oeconomicus. In Mundinger's own words: "The ordo politicus includes not only the rulers but also the ruled. Both the clergy and all people engaged in government belong to the Status Oeconomicus."<sup>32</sup> However, we have to be thankful to Mundinger for presenting the facts of this problem in the discussion for it may lend more fruit than will the theories on the Church, for the former deals with individuals more than with groups. This individual approach has been the traditional viewpoint of the Missouri Synod, the one which is finding less and less favor in the Synod.<sup>33</sup>

It would be very possible to bring much more material to bear on the issue that one's attitude on Luther's

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>33</sup>Simon, op. cit., pp. 118-121.

philosophy of history integrally affects his presentation of Luther's consequent pronouncements. One side uses a certain pericope of quotations to prove its point and the other uses what appears to be an equally valid set of quotes to prove its point. To decide on which side one is to stand one must decide whether Luther's Biblically oriented pessimism concerning the history of human kind, which he derived from his reading of the Scriptures and the experience of his time, leads him always and ultimately to the eschatological, justifying implications of the cross and resurrection is decisive. Or he must determine whether Luther emphasized the sanctifying, this-worldly-aspect of the cross to transform men into a relationship with God that will bring forth a new order now. Unfortunately, the Missouri Synod is barraged with the extreme positions on either side, and men within the Synod have made rather extreme expressions that irritate the other camp. It seems clear then, that this is the basic search for every Luther scholar: to articulate Luther's conceptual scheme or philosophy of history which in turn is grounded in his doctrine of revelation.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

We have said that Luther's philosophy of history had a healthy, Godly pessimism that forced him always into the arms of God's grace and caused him to see the end of this world's present order of linear history. Secular authority has no permanent future and exists to preserve each for the life of Christians in order that the Word may be preached. And yet, this pessimism led Luther into a love of all God's creation, and therefore, whenever possible he attempted to promote understanding between factions in society.

In developing the argument for the importance of a philosophy of history for Luther, this paper has admittedly raised many questions that were left unanswered. This was done in the belief that the presentation of a thesis should not only answer questions but in the process of research uncover basic questions that lead to other answers. In other words, it is the final purpose of the thesis to make evident that each interpreter of Luther, in order to derive meaning, must read Luther according to some posited philosophy of history. It is a fruitful question to



inquire into what Luther's philosophy of history was.

Besides this the thesis endeavored to show what position it holds concerning Luther's philosophy of history. While using a primitive multi-factoral analysis of some of the factors working to play out the line of history, Luther recognized that Christianity's richest theme is that history cannot be predicted by men on the basis of human analysis and synthesis. However, the knowledge of the hand of God in history endowed Luther with a purpose because this knowledge gave the whole human narrative a beginning, a center, and an end.

God acts in history. The debate goes on continually among Luther scholars whether Luther's belief that God still worked immediately in the history of salvation or whether the salvation wrought by God in Christ was a once and for all act that could be enacted over and over again through the power of the written word of Holy Scripture and by the lip to ear repetition of the central fact in history. This thesis adopts the latter interpretation as the one which presents the fewest difficulties. This stand is held mainly on the basis that the interpretation finds Luther believing in a Church living dynamically in a separate existence from the Holy Scriptures. This would be a romantic flight from the written Word, a flight of which Luther could seldom if ever be accused, despite the fact that he saw God working immediately in secular history.

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