Université de Montréal

Luther on Love and Law

A Historical Investigation of Martin Luther's Application of Scriptural Authority to Church and State

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présenté(e) par :

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Résumé

Cette thèse s'ouvre avec des commentaires du siècle dernier sur les opinions de Luther à propos de l'autorité du gouvernement et de l'Église, ainsi que sur la nature humaine et la fonction de la loi. Je présente ensuite où ces critiques situent Luther par rapport à la tradition scholastique et par rapport à la tradition romaine au sein de l'Église. Puis, j'explore les œuvres de Luther pour mettre en lumière ses arguments concernant l'Église, la source de son autorité, ainsi que la relation de celle-ci avec les gouvernements, autrement dit les autorités temporelles. De là, je m'intéresse à la comparaison que le réformateur fait entre la place de l'Église dans la société et celle de l'autorité temporelle. Enfin, j'analyse les écrits de Luther à propos de deux évènements concernant la construction du Royaume de Dieu et plus précisément, dans quelle mesure l'Église dépend, ou non, des autorités temporelles pour construire ce Royaume. Nous allons trouver une réponse surprenante à la question de comment l'église est indépendante de l'autorité temporelle dans l'ouvrage spécifique au royaume de Dieu. Le but de ma thèse est de répondre à certains critiques qui reprochent à Luther de s'appuyer sur l'autorité temporelle pour établir l'Église, et par conséquent de donner au temporel le contrôle sur le spirituel. Nous découvrirons que Luther tire son autorité des Écritures. Nous découvrirons aussi les conséquences que cette autorité a sur sa philosophie politique, c'est-à-dire l'importance de la soumission aux autorités gouvernantes en même temps que la libération des individus de la tyrannie d'une fausse doctrine.

Concepts-clés :
Luther – Autorité – Eglise – Etat – Royaume de Dieu – Liberté – Loi - Evangile

Traduction par Emmanuelle Chevallier

Abstract

This paper begins by citing some of the past century's commentaries on Luther's views on authority in government and the church as well as his views on human nature. I will show where his critics place him in reference to the scholastic tradition as well as the Roman tradition within the church. From here I will consider his writings themselves for the arguments that he made regarding the church and its source of authority as well as its proper relationship to the government, or temporal authority. I will address Luther's perspective on the church's place in society as compares with the temporal authority's role. Finally I will present Luther's writings in two specific situations concerning how the kingdom of God is built; more precisely, to what extent, if at all, the church is to depend upon the temporal authority for the establishment of the kingdom of God. The aim of this paper is to reply to the charge of some critics that Luther depended on the temporal authority for the establishment of the church and the implication that he gave the temporal authority control over spiritual matters. We will discover that Luther's final source of authority comes from the Scriptures and the surprising effect that this has on his political philosophy is both to increase submission to the governing authorities as well as to increase freedom from the tyranny of false doctrine.

Key Words:
Luther - Authority – Church – State - Kingdom of God – Freedom – Law – Gospel

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The reason that I was able to come through with this third attempt I believe has something to do with the fact that right before the second try, I came across Luther's absolute favorite among concepts : God's grace. In the Spring of 2007, I heard a pastor telling the parable of the prodigal son who goes out and wastes all of his inheritance, and then, empty-handed, returns to his father with nothing but the hope that his father will take him back and be merciful to him.

I should mention that several months before hearing that message, I had been reading the book of Ephesians in a Bible study and had glimpsed something quite attractive: the unique power of God to produce new life in His people. I immediately identified with the prodigal son, and hungered for the first time since my childhood for the sweet promises that are written in God's Word. My Father responded by laying a banquet before me. I have not lacked any good thing since that day; but whenever I started to forget my newfound wealth again, I discovered that is true that the Spirit comes to remind us of His teachings, and that God brings to completion the works that He begins in us.

You might have noticed that I returned to the Lord before my second try at producing a thesis. I could not wait to try and use my new knowledge to produce the thesis upon which my degree depended. But I was not ready. It was just before the beginning of my third year walking with the Lord that He finally handed me the opportunity to write *this* thesis, with no other hope than to honor Him in my labor.

I have been so blessed to have this opportunity, and to have had the solid support of many people both in the philosophy department, in my family, and among my friends. My director helped me every step of the way with precise instructions for improving my thesis, always very encouraging. He was always available to help; I could not have asked for a better director!

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Martin Luther is just a man, and he has been absent for five hundred years now. There are people close to me who have had a greater impact on me personally. God has used these people to fight for my freedom just as Luther fought for freedom through the Gospel in his time. For all their courage and their sacrifice of themselves, one thing I gained that made it worth their while: I have gained personal knowledge of Jesus Christ, who has taken over the throne in my heart. Above all, thanks to Him!

Joanna Shunk, 2009

Introduction

After the events of World War II, various thinkers have sought to address the issues of authority in government. The Nazi program's temporary success in annexing a branch of the church as a cultural factor into the Nationalist-Socialist program cast a shadow on the church in Germany, though the Confessing Church eventually prevailed in denouncing collaboration with the Nazi program.[1] This paper will deal with authority and the church from Martin Luther's perspective, without making any attempt to specifically address the events of the Nazi regime or the Confessing Church of the 1940's. For Martin Luther, authority demands submission from all men alike. Yet Martin Luther also has a different definition for authority from one that equates authority with politics, and so we will find that Luther made a consistent effort throughout his political involvement to assign significant limits to the temporal authority.

Does the church have a different source of authority from the state, or instead does the church depend upon the law issued by the government for its instruction? If the latter is true, then the church can only behave ethically when the government behaves ethically—otherwise she is bound either to change that government prior to being able to practice the law herself. Figgis and Troeltsch pronounce that Luther did away with ecclesiastical authority in favor of secular authority.[2] In Luther's perspective, however, neither the church nor the state are reliable sources of authority, but rather all authorities are subject to and limited by God's ultimate authority. The secular authority's power over the church, as well as its limits, will be treated in the second section. But first we

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[1] Thielicke, 1966, pp.365-366. The Ratschlag of 1934, addressed to the members of the Nationalist Socialist Evangelical Union of Pastors, declares, "In this knowledge we as believing Christians thank the Lord God that in its hour of need he has given our people the Fuhrer as a 'good and faithful sovereign,' and that in the National Socialist state He is endeavoring to provide us with disciplined and honorable 'good government.'" Lueker's *Lutheran Cyclopedia* documents Hitler's attempts to incorporate the church into the state beginning in Spring of 1933 and the resistance of the *Bekennende Kirche* (Confessing Church) in 1934 with the Barmen Theses. See his entry on *Kirchenkampf.*

[2] For Figgis, see *Political Thought from Gerson to Grotius*, pp. 55-93, "Luther and Machiavelli." Troeltsch is described by Eric W. Gritsch in "Luther and State: Post-Reformation Ramifications," pp. 45-46. References to Troeltsch come from *The Social Teachings of the Christian church* and *Protestantism and Progress: A Historical Study of Protestantism in Relation to the Modern World*. Oakley also makes interesting points about Troeltsch's perspective on Protestantism and Catholicism in "Christian Obedience and Authority," p.160.

will deal with Luther's reform of the church for the impact it had on the notion of ecclesiastical authority.

We will later be examining two situations in which Christians became involved in political initiatives and how Luther responded to their involvement. First, what is the meaning of Luther's approving of the Duke of Saxony to serve as an "emergency bishop"; and secondly, why does Luther refuse the peasants' revolting in the name of Christianity against their feudal lords who are oppressing them? It is generally agreed that Luther did not produce a systematic political program on a par with contemporaries such as Calvin (1941, p.16). Therefore, we'll look at specific contexts that engaged Luther's "practical politics" in order to determine what purpose Luther saw in temporal authority, or *Obrigkeit*, and its relationship with the church.

1. CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON LITHER'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Since the reformation there has been an ongoing effort to incorporate Luther into the ideologies in vogue, as Gritsch notes the irony of Luther's evolution from being a spiritualist for the Pietists to a patriot for the German idealists (1986, pp. 54-55). In the past century some have even suggested that he educated the passive soldier, as epitomized in Hirsch, executing murderous orders for Hitler.

Thomas Brady helps save Luther from the range of responsibilities that have been laid upon him, writing: "In the history of political thought, Martin Luther's role is a small one. He took little part in one of the sixteenth century's chief intellectual creations: the emergence of the idea of the state as "an omnipotent yet impersonal power", "a form of public power separate from both the ruler and the ruled, and constituting the supreme political authority within a certain defined territory."[3] In the conclusion of Skinner's *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, quoted by Brady, and to which we will return in a few pages, he says the closest approximation of the abstract notion of the state before the sixteenth century would be the idea of the prince needing to maintain his "established range of powers", as is thematic in Machiavelli. He goes on to say before the sixteenth

[3]1986, p.31. Brady refers to Quentin Skinner's *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, p. 353.

century the "state of the prince" usually referred to the prince himself as "the final authority and therefore the real government" of the realm" (Skinner 1978, p.353).

However, according to Skinner, the Reformation's impact on the development of the state was quite indirect. "The religious upheavals of the reformation made a paradoxical yet vital contribution to the crystallizing of the modern, secularized concept of the State. For as soon as the protagonists of the rival religious creeds showed that they were willing to fight each other to the death, it began to seem obvious to a number of *politique* theorists that, if there were to be any prospect of achieving civic peace the powers of the State would have to be divorced from the duty to uphold any particular faith" (p.352). Skinner depends already upon this view of the Reformation as a religious/political upheaval of the Protestants against the Catholics for the connection between the state and Luther. Ironically, Skinner maintains as a common point that "The sixteenth century reformers were entirely at one with their catholic adversaries on this point: they all insisted that one of the main aims of government must be to maintain "true religion" and the church of Christ." The implication is clear: true religion, whose definition is not provided in Skinner's text, produces massive upheaval among its own adherents. The indirect message is that the Reformation's greatest contribution is a lesson in the vanity of assertions.

As Brady demonstrates in his essay there was much going on during the period of the Reformation, but what Luther's central motivation was, and whether it was the same as that of his adversaries, is the matter with which we will be more closely concerned. Skinner recognizes that for the formation of the modern concept of state there needed to be a paradigm shift from Augustine's "immensely influential insistence in The City of God that the true Christian ought not to concern himself with the problems of 'this temporal life', but ought to keep his gaze entirely fixed on 'the everlasting blessings that are promised for the future, using like one in a strange land any earthly and temporal things, not letting them entrap him or divert him from the path that leads to God' (pp. 193-5). As I have sought to argue, this in turn suggests that any attempt to excavate the foundations of modern political thought needs to begin with the recovery and translation of Aristotle's Politics, and the consequent re-emergence of the idea that political

philosophy constitutes an independent discipline worthy of study in its own right" (p.349).

Luther said of himself that "if I had never taught or done anything else than that I had adorned and illuminated secular rule and authority, this alone should deserve thanks…Since the time of the apostles, no doctor or writer, no theologian or lawyer, has confirmed, instructed, and comforted secular authority more gloriously and clearly than I was able to do through special divine grace."[4] If Luther were able to give such importance to helping the world in its temporal functions, then does this mean that there is a fundamental difference between Augustine and himself? And furthermore, what would Luther say about regarding politics as a "distinct branch of moral philosophy" as Skinner says was the definitive retrieval from Aristotle that contributed to the modern idea of the state? The question, it seems, is whether Luther was interested in moral philosophy apart from his theology. And the consensus on this matter is that he was not. Brady says Luther failed in his "effort to frame his political teaching in a comprehensive view of human society, much as his scholastic predecessors had done," because of his "subordination of his political teaching to his theology" (1986, p.33). According to Brady and many others, there was a buffer preventing Luther's teachings from being carried outside of the context of God's sovereign rule.

As opposed to the Aristotelian worldview in which politics has immortal ends by virtue of its roots in moral philosophy, most commentators would agree that Luther's contribution was primarily theological with a political branch. How then does his theology compare with a moral philosophy? Is his defense of Obrigkeit, or temporal authority, just a kill-joy to political parties, which according to Skinner would rank him with Augustine? Or is it on the other hand the glorification of human authorities apart from any morality? What does authority mean to Luther?

Francis Oakley notes in Luther "a political theology of formidable complexity" which the other reformers (Zwingli, Bucer, Calvin) essentially shared, but which for the latter was "at once less experiential and more theoretical, the doctrine of God's unconditioned and controlling will" (1991, p.182). Oakley goes on to show the significance of Luther's dualisms in distinguishing him from these other theologians.

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[4]Brady 1986, p.32, quotes from *Weimar Ausgabe* 38:102 (Luther's Works in the original German).

"Without denying them, Zwingli softened the harshness of Luther's other dualisms between the spiritual and temporal realms and spiritual and temporal governance. His emphasis on the law and his preoccupation with the fulfilling of God's will necessitated immediately for him a related preoccupation with the human instrumentalities whereby, in a world in which the elect and the reprobate are inextricably intertwined, that will was to be interpreted and that law enforced" (p.182-183).

The most important dualism in Luther is his contrast between law and grace. Yet he considered his ability to explain the differences between law and grace to be greatly limited, saying that to do so perfectly requires God's perspective. Oakley also explains Luther's explanation of this phenomenon in terms of a dialectical experience (1991, p.166) Between the extremes of sin and grace, despair and faith, divine wrath and divine mercy, no one can build a bridge, but in Luther's own experience God showed his ways to be different from man's and his thoughts to be different from man's thoughts. His humility in regard to his limited vantage point affected the character of his political involvement, such that he did not make himself out to be a master of the law but neither did he consider any other human being as capable of mastering the law. What effect this has on his political philosophy is that it was not limited to a spat with the pope for control over the land.

Lewis W. Spitz demonstrates the effectiveness of viewing Luther's political views from the perspective of his theology rather than vice versa. In Luther's perspective, God's sovereign rule extends over both the spiritual and worldly realms. God's sovereignty is antithetical to human mastery of the same vast range. In this view the Christian is fully responsible for taking a certain part in the world, and not for orchestrating worldly affairs. The character of this responsibility is determined through his submission to God. In other words, God gives Christians things to do in the world rather than Christians having to devise a means to bring the world into submission to God. This harmonizes with Gritsch's view that Luther saw government as having the role of preventing man from becoming a god in his own right, which is obviously not achieved by making men into the authors of the law.

As Spitz sees it, Luther did not have a concrete philosophy of state, but he saw "two realms in which God is active" (1953, p.116). The lack of precision as regards the

borders between these two realms owes to the fact that Luther "did not conceive of church and state in terms of institutions." Luther did not see the government as a project for Christians or the church as a cultural dimension of politics. Rather, he saw God exercising his law and his grace. And the fundamental paradox is that the temporal authority is composed of humans, and yet it is set in place in order to limit human authority, or as Gritsch says, to prevent man from deifying himself. [5]

1.1 The "Godly prince" as a Lutheran Concept

Most Luther scholars who are also biblical scholars recognize Luther's central focus as being on theology, in which he balances the importance of both law and grace. Political philosophers, on the other hand, have a variety of takes on Luther. At the other end of the spectrum from Spitz and Gritsch in contemporary commentaries on Luther, is John Neville Figgis, who actually attributes to Luther the concept of the state as an absolute human authority. What this means requires some elaboration. In his chapter "Luther and Machiavelli", he sets out saying that "It was the function of Luther, of Zwingli, of Anglicans like Whitgift and Hooker, to transfer to the state most of the prerogatives that had belonged in the Middle Ages to the church." Throughout Figgis' text he emphasizes the shifting of power from the church to the state, neglecting any kind of understanding of the church as existing apart from politics and most of all neglecting the strict moral constraints on the temporal authority that come from God's sovereignty. Figgis goes on to say, "the Protestant mind places all ecclesiastical authority below the jurisdiction and subject to the control of the "Godly prince," who is omnipotent in his own dominion. It was not until the exigencies of the situation compelled the Presbyterians to claim rights independent of the State, that the theory of two distinct kingdoms is set forth…" (1960, p.55).

The conflict between this assertion and Luther's beliefs is not over the value of a prince who really is godly. Rather, the problem is to make of this an institutional theory such that secular government, and more importantly, the governed population, depends upon a "Godly prince". (Figgis' quotation marks and capitalization.) The implications of

[5]Gritsch cites a wealth of German thinking on Luther's two kingdom doctrine spanning from Hans Dienn in 1938 to Heinrich Bornkamm to Martin Honecker, all of which see a definitive doctrine of two kingdoms in Luther in "Luther and State: Post-Reformation Ramifications" p.47.

Figgis' assertion, as become clear throughout his chapter, are that the prince's reign consists not only of exercising the law over his people, but that he has power over their souls and that he heads the church. Figgis goes on to say that Luther "based the Royal authority upon Divine right with practically no reservation; and by asserting the duty of the prince to play the part of Josiah made it possible for an Elector Palatine to assert that his subjects' consciences belonged to him" (1960, p.61). Figgis is well aware that it is completely unnecessary for the prince to be truly godly once his "godliness" is an automatic institutional qualification. In Figgis' interpretation, instead of godliness being an excellent though rare quality in a prince, the position of the prince grants automatic godliness. This is contrary to what Luther says in his essay "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed": "You must know that since the beginning of the world a wise prince is a mighty rare bird, and an upright prince even rarer. They are generally the biggest fools or the worst scoundrels on earth; therefore one must always expect the worst from them and look for little good, especially in divine matters which concern the salvation of souls" (LW 45, p.113). However, Figgis admits above when he says that "it was not until the exigencies of the situation compelled the Presbyterians to claim rights independent of the State, that the theory of two kingdoms is set forth," that the doctrine of separate kingdoms counters the heart of the problem of the Godly prince's range of power. Incidentally, he admits this even at the same time as he attempts to smuggle in the additional baggage of rights for the church. How can Figgis attribute such an image as this omnipotent "Godly prince" to Luther when most scholars know Luther to be a zealous teacher of the two kingdoms doctrine?

The chief error in this portrayal of the prince's authority is that he confounds the authority that Luther was willing to give to the prince with authority that belongs only to God. Ruling over people's souls is a big step up from merely exercising authority by laying down the law. But Figgis reveals an important point: that *if* Luther gave the prince control over religion in his realm, and *if* that religion means the rule over people's souls, he most certainly *would* give divine authority to the prince. The question then is how does Luther's doctrine bear on these two issues? In the last section of this paper we will enter specifically into the matter of the prince and control of religion.

Figgis characterizes Luther's reform thus, "It is not the secular head as universal monarch, not of a president of a federal State, that the Reformation affirmed the god-given authority. It tended to reduce the notion of any Divine superintendence of affairs from the international to the territorial sphere; and of the Divine origin of the ruler from a federal to a purely unitary power." In this statement, "Divine" means absolutely nothing. If "Divine" sovereignty cannot even extend to the whole world, then how is it attributed to God? For Figgis, this statement serves as a segue from Luther's known doctrine to the theory of a prince who commands absolute obedience, yet it neglects the meaning for Luther of the Divine origins of authority. This source of authority is a key point that we will cover in the paper.

The False Battlefront: The Secular against the Ecclesiastical in Figgis' Critique

Figgis lays out his central thesis on Luther as relating to his book: that "it was by transferring the notion of non-resistance from the Imperial to the princely, and from the ecclesiastical to the lay power, that Luther gave to the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings such universal and enduring prevalence" (1960, p.71). Figgis recounts that historically the prince replaced the church in authority as a result of Luther's influence. In his attempt to dig "deeper" for evidence that the prince is Luther's replacement for the church, he adds that Luther also wanted to pit the princes against the empire. In Figgis' argument, this battle parallels the battle of the secular versus the sacred as does the lay versus the ecclesiastical. But without scratching the surface of these battles to discover what in the church or the Holy Roman Empire was problematic for Luther, in effect he simply stretches Luther's aims to include territorialism over imperialism. Across the multiple arguments there is no development on the initial claim that though the prince is antithetical to holiness or goodness yet Luther valued the prince over this true godliness.

Figgis brings up important questions amid his various criticisms against Luther. Why does Luther ascribe so much power to the princes, turning to them for both his struggles with the church and the empire? And why does he go against the church's authority if he is for the church? These are the major questions that this paper will deal with. Before we deal with the prince's role in religious matters, we need to see what kind of authority Luther did give to the princes, what characterizes the temporal authority's

role in Luther's doctrine. And we also will need to see what Luther saw as defining the church. But actually the first thing we will address is the unqualified term that Figgis brandishes in the "empire". What is the empire that Luther sought to conquer? The premises are acceptable that the empire is the stronghold of the pope and that the pope took position as the ecclesiastical authority. From these premises Figgis pulls the false conclusion that Luther sought to tear down the church. But who *was* this enemy that Luther fought?

First of all, there is the replacement of ecclesiastical authority with "secular" authority. Figgis puts a humanist spin on Luther's doctrine such that there is an argument for lay *power*. The church has no power in Figgis' appraisal if the church is not the temporal authority itself. As soon as the church is "only" a *congregatio fidelium*, as it is for Luther, it is no longer a real entity that actually makes any difference in the world. No legislative power, no jurisdictional power, and obviously no executive power, make the church seem pretty weak on the political front. In fact, Figgis is absolutely accurate in saying that Luther saw the church as simply a faithful congregation lacking any weaponry of its own to defend itself against the temporal authority. For Luther, the church is the opposite of the temporal authority in that it uses completely different means. The temporal power, unlike the church, exercises coercion, but—to its considerable limitation, as we will see—it cannot interfere in matters of the soul. The church on the other hand has the role of wielding the Word, which is both effective in matters of the soul and is the source of truth as concerns all aspects of life. The Word is not the church, and that is the only sense that the church does not lay any exclusive claim to the authority—it is not her own authority but that of the Word. The church does not defend herself—yet she is not defenseless.

Continuing in his theme of pitting Luther against the church, Figgis conceives of a notion he calls "lay authority", which he sets against the ecclesiastical authority that the pope and his clergy represent. Figgis says "the whole bent of his mind was in favor of the sanctity of the lay power as against the ecclesiastical" (1960, p.56). There are two things going on here. He accurately presents the Roman church's classification, not that of Luther, of the entire population which was under the clerical hierarchy as the laity, a passive body that Luther sought to liberate. The mistake he makes is to proceed to

identify this laity with authority at the same time as maintaining it in its secular trappings. What in fact Figgis is set on is an entity that is not holy and that is powerful, but this is the opposite of Luther's aims. If Luther's goal was to liberate the laity with the message of the Gospel, then he did not seek to overturn law and order and leave the Gospel out of house and home.

If Luther simply handed the authority from the Romanists to the masses, then Figgis would be absolutely right in his argument. Even by Luther's standards, he would then be right in concluding that Luther gave absolute power to the princes because in Luther's own logic, if the authority depends upon the people, then there is no authority at all. The first thing we will research in this paper is with what authority Luther actually sought to replace the pope's authority. If the lay authority meant for Luther what it means for Figgis, which is presumably the reason of the masses, there is nothing more than an argument against monarchy.

As we will see confirmed in his balanced approach of communicating both with the people and the rulers, Luther had no position on such institutional considerations; rather, he devoted himself to arguing in favor of maintaining the law and order and allowing the Gospel to be spread, which we will see has no conflict with law and order. The critical component of Luther's attack on the Roman hierarchy, which will be illuminated in the next sections of the paper, is on the illegitimacy of the pope's claim to authority.

The True Battlefront: Sanctification instead of Domination

What Luther aimed at in posting the 95 Theses was not to destroy the church but to make known that the Roman "church" was not based on Scripture as its authority as the church should be. The idea that Luther believed that the laity was inherently holy apart from the church as Figgis says, is merely a distraction from the real matter at stake. According to Luther, apart from scriptural authority, nothing can be holy. Holiness comes from obedience to God through the Spirit. If the church is not submitted to scriptural authority, then the church is no different from the world and she stands in need of radical reform.

For Luther, the true church is holy, and as a member of the church he fought against a philistine "church" that was not holy. As a token of her unholiness, that church maintained her grip on the empire by force. Sanctity is a term that Figgis uses lightly, but as we see in the next section holiness is not a laughing matter for Luther or just a superficial masquerade, but it is a gift of God that follows the gift of salvation and is not the result of works but is evidenced by works that characterize the church as different from the world. Anything short of that definition of holiness is "cheap grace" according to this century's vocabulary. The idea of sanctity belonging to an elite few ruling over the empire by hook or by crook may be akin to an Aristotelian notion, but Christians worship a king who washed the feet of his disciples and gave his life on the cross. These actions are different from those of any competing world power, whether among the elite few or the masses of the peasants.

In fact, as we will see in his letter to the peasants of Swabia, Luther believes holiness to be demonstrated in Christian submission. One's hope in the world to come and one's foremost investment in obedience to God, and most of all one's trust in God's deliverance from problems, should be sufficient for the Christian in exchange for political power. Figgis interprets in this a doctrine of non-resistance, of "passive obedience"; he considers it to be "passive" because he does not recognize Luther's faith in God's promises to deliver the Christian from evil as being guaranteed by a faithful God. According to Figgis, "it would indeed be hard to find a more thoroughgoing expression of the doctrine of "Passive Obedience," than that of Luther's first address to the peasants. He scoffs at the idea of standing up for one's rights, "Leiden, Leiden, Kreuz, Kreuz ist der Kristenrecht, das und kein anderes" (1968, p.57). The quote is a well-known one among historians.

From here Figgis asserts that Luther aims that passive obedience toward the Christian prince in a theory of state that is not purely secular. He notes later that "what the ordinary medieval theorist did was to assert that in the last resort the "powers that be" in the Commonwealth of Christendom were the ecclesiastical authorities; hence it is only to the Pope that passive resistance is a possible duty; as against the King active resistance is allowed, when authorized from Rome" (1960, p.58). Ironically, there does not seem to be much difference between Luther's model and the papal institution in Figgis' portrayal.

As Allen remarks, it would be strange to regard Luther as not having any notion of resistance because if not what did he exercise against the pope in drafting the 95 Theses? If Luther did not believe in resistance of any sort against the Christian prince, as we do not want to merely fight over words, then why did he believe in resisting the pope? But in fact, not only did Luther resist the pope, refusing to recognize his authority, but he clearly went against dukes and princes and the emperor who favored the papal institution in publishing his stand.

On what authority did Luther question the pope, head of the church? Another question that is related is, how does the Christian fight evil when it lurks amid the higher echelons of power? Going deeper, the question is whether Luther's doctrine regarding obedience to authority contradicts the way he prescribes that Christians are to live. Is it actually possible to honor the authorities in the world without doing harm oneself, even in the event that those in authority are sanctioning harm?

Figgis is very interested in the law of loving one's neighbor and surprisingly recognizes this as being Luther's purpose for government. A question that he dances around in the conclusion of his book is that if the government actually laid down this law, then why is this government not good, meaning by this, why is this rule not sufficient? Though Luther would agree with this hypothetical formulation, he would disagree with the aspect touching human nature. The difference is that Luther does not imagine that the law, even in its perfection, is sufficient to bring people up to standard. Luther does not consider the problem to be limited to the government, or to any who assert themselves as leaders. He considers the problem to be within every man.

It is for this reason that Luther will not pit the people against the authorities: because both are desperately sinful at heart. He brings in Scripture, which is not produced by men's reasoning but breathed by God, as the supreme authority to bear on all injustice, whether in the high places or in the rage of the people. Luther used the same weapon against both the pope's monopoly and the peasants' revolt. The arguments he made from Scripture do not have the reputation of being passive forms of resistance; rather, the might of the reform has been felt for five centuries and counting. While there is not a systematic answer to the question of Christian resistance, yet resistance happens as the Christian obeys and confesses Scripture.

Though Luther humbled the papacy only by the authority of Scripture and not by inciting a horde of angry German peasants or by flattering princes, Figgis implies with his "lay revolution" that there is a toppling of the order taking place. "Ecclesiastical authority", which sounds like a pretty good thing, is, after all, the supposed victim of Luther's upheaval. The role that Scripture has to play in Luther's "revolution" is that Luther denounced the abuses of the pope not on the grounds of being a hierarchical institution in the world, but on the grounds that the pope claimed to be a Christian and in fact the sole interpreter of Scripture. In the same way, Luther rebukes the peasants who claim to be interpreting Scripture in their revolt against the nobles. Why Luther did not allow the people to have their way against the nobles is the same reason for which he fought against the pope—not in favor of the people as a "Christian" community or of the pope as a tyrant over Christendom, but of Scripture as the sole authority over the church and also as effectively powerful over all authority on earth, and toppling any power that claims to be divine that does not come from God.

Figgis' Underlying Argument: Luther as a Humanist

Figgis' assertion of the Godly prince concept in Luther does not make sense until we come to the discussion of Machiavelli and we see that he is trying to create a union between the Reformation's goals and the Renaissance's aims. The idea of the Godly prince is but one way of humanizing Luther. In fact, in his quest for the humanist side of Luther he also later considers him as an advocate of the individual. But, as Skinner recognizes, Luther fails this test of humanism because he believes that the individual's will is in bondage while in its natural state. Even though he laments this bondage, he does not prescribe a self-oriented remedy to this problem, but is adamant about God's grace being the only remedy to the bondage of the will.

Figgis ended his chapter still in bewilderment in regard to Luther because, along with Troeltsch, he asked why one supposedly divine authority should merely be replaced with another supposedly divine authority. From the skeptical point of view which Figgis takes, there is no sense at all in the manner of revolution that Luther proposes. But the conclusion that Luther didn't achieve anything by resisting the pope's authority over the church except to create a trivial shift in the vessels that held power from the Roman

church to an equally power-hungry prince, is to be sadly uninformed of what the Reformation actually did produce.

In short, Figgis has claimed that the Holy Roman Empire is replaced by a miniature version in the principality which is free-floating and subject to no higher authority. Figgis' shock that the principalities should revolt against the empire could be matched only by Luther's complaint that the Roman Empire didn't answer to the ultimate authority, which could not be mustered up by any sum of human beings even if the entire world came together, but as he believes, is vested only in the one true God. There is no way around it: Luther's political theology cannot be reduced to an ideology centering around the state or secular authority under any other name. The temporal authority which is divine by its own pretensions rather than by divine *lending* of power is indeed a Machiavellian conception; and with Nietzsche, one must agree that it would make for a very poor ending to Luther's strivings (1960, p.75-77).

In the following sections of the paper, we will show what Luther's aims were, and hopefully more will come out of this than a mere refutation of the artifice of the godly prince. Inherent in the conception of the divine right, just as in the notion of human rights, is the transcendence of the law by one's position. Further, the divine right is definitely seen as holding power over people's souls. As Francis Schaeffer reflects, Rex becomes Lex.[6] Luther does not provide the secular authority with the right to become God; rather, as Gritsch says,

> "One cannot and should not ignore the basic stance from which Luther addressed the problem of politics; he was firmly convinced that all human beings are constantly tempted to deify themselves. He contended that whenever and wherever human power manifests itself—especially in politics—there will be the notion of one's own ultimate, god-like authority. That is why he held to the view he derived from Jewish and Christian history depicted in biblical writings that all temporal authority is subject to the authority of God" (1982, p.58).

As his own chapter finished, Figgis never managed to reconcile Luther's passion for liberty with his supposed absolutism. The sort of submission that Luther values is twofold: on the surface the policy is that authorities are in place in order to be respected. However, his love for liberty shines in his individual counseling of the Christian citizen, who has no authority but God, and is to voluntarily submit to the authorities, enduring

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[6] Schaeffer refers to Samuel Rutherford's analysis in *How Shall We Then Live?* p.218.

evil against himself but not collaborating in it. If the authorities were always good, then the Christian's job would be very easy, and in fact it would not be in any way distinguishable from the basic requirement of obedience to authorities. Rather, it is in the event that an evil tyrant takes over, or even better a charming ruler who is admired as the savior of the nation or better yet the nations, yet who requires his people to compromise their values and follow his precepts instead, claiming that it is in the best interest of the nation—then Luther says that it is right to resist in one's confession and one's personal practice. Yet many would not resist in such a situation because it might mean losing their lives or at least their reputations.

1.2 Skinner on the Evil Tyrant and Luther's Difference with the Scholastic Tradition

Skinner presents the opposite view of Luther from Figgis, as he enters into Luther's view of the insufficiency of man. Luther confronts man with the law, which has the function of showing man his inadequacy. The divine authorship of the law is what allows it to be the law, and to be the challenge that it is. Luther appreciation of the law centers on its function of drawing man to God's mercy through the recognition of his own insufficiency. The divine origins of the law demonstrate an aspect of God's character as well: the tough side of love. God can use oppression to discipline his people even as its general purpose is to make man aware of the consequences of his sins. Although it is natural not to want punishment, it is also natural not to change one's ways until one has reached despair in himself.

Luther does not provide a political solution for the rage of the people, as we will see in his warning against the Peasant revolt, but beseeches the Christians to be initiators of peace by enduring suffering. And in his overall message he refutes the peasants' proposal to create a new society where they will not have to submit to the lords at all. Even the evil tyrant is to be endured. Now if by endurance we meant passive obedience, this would be nothing more than an attitude of resignation bound to demoralize the citizen in the end. Endurance characterizes the Christian precisely because his hope is not in earthly gain or even earthly peace but in the actual source of all blessings, and this comes from knowledge of God's character and His plan. This knowledge serves to guide

the Christian through situations of political powerlessness for example, whether they are just (due to crimes committed) or unjust.

Skinner brings up Luther's writings on the evil tyrant at the end of his presentation of Luther's principles. Indeed, for Skinner, Luther does not encourage the people to rebellion even in this case. "The people must be prepared to 'suffer everything that can happen' rather than 'fight against your lord and tyrant' (1978, p.18). Some of these reasons are practical: 'it is easy to change a government, but it is difficult to get one that is better, and the danger is that you will not'" (p.19). Skinner notes that the main reason for refraining from rebellion is theological, but perceives an "awkward" consequence—that God becomes the author of evil.

In explanation, Skinner notes Luther's use of the example of Job, a man caught between the devil's taunts and God's will that he prove faithful.[7] This is the only instance in the Bible before Jesus is tempted, where the Lord is actually recorded in dialogue with Satan. The Lord asks Satan if he has noticed Job. He asks, have you noticed "that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?" (Job 1:8). Satan counters, if you take away his goods, he will curse you. He only fears you because you have protected him and richly blessed him. The Lord says, "Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person" (1:12). Ultimately, upon Satan's challenge, the Lord allows him to strike Job with illness, but not to kill him; at every point, the devil must ask the Lord for permission because God is in control. As Job endures all of these tests, complaining to God yet not losing hope, God proves that Job could be faithful after all. At the end of the book Job is given back ten times all the wealth he originally had, and his family is even brought back, all to reward his faithfulness and to show that God did not forsake him even though it seemed that way to many who were around him.

Through this recorded dialogue which comes from even before the time of Moses, Luther illustrates the meaning of God's allowing evil, which also explains why there should be evil rulers. Given that Job is such an exceptional example, one may ask why the same standard should be applied to everyone. After all, it is everyone who must suffer under evil rulers. The standards to which Luther calls the Christian to obey are

[7] P.18. Skinner quotes from Luther's "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved," (LW 46:pp.112-113).

indeed high, but does he also expect the non-Christian citizen to endure the evil ruler? Luther considers enduring evil to be the special message of the Gospel, quoting, "Christ says in Matthew 5:38-41, "you have heard that it was said to them of old: An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, Do not resist evil; but if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also…"" (LW 45, p.87). These are the principles that Luther upholds.

J. W. Allen quotes Caspar Schwenckfeld complaining: Luther "has brought us up out of the land of Egypt and left us to perish in the wilderness."[8] But if this is the case, should the laws be relaxed so that they can be more reasonable, easier for the average citizen to obey? Luther provided a very simple explanation of the basic purposes of government: it is instituted for maintaining peace and order.[9] But he firmly believed that there was a deeper purpose for government as well, associated with its role in giving the law. This purpose is to uphold the rigorous standard of the law. It is only if the government did this that it could have any hope of coming close to the law of loving one's neighbor. The reason why this is significant is that Luther held firmly that obedience to the law could not be a matter of convenience or subject to opinion, but that the law overrides opinion and convenience for the sake of unconditional love of one's neighbor. Yet Luther did not believe that the government actually produces in people the level of obedience to God that is prescribed in the Gospel in the command to love one's neighbor as oneself.

Enduring injustice is part and parcel with the deal. If Luther believed that the temporal authority was both the author of injustices as well as the author of the law, then

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[8] 1941, p.16. In the immediate situation there were Christians who were freed from the Roman church who had to find their way in the wilderness indeed. But as much help as even Moses received in leading the Israelites, Luther definitely did not aspire to be the high priest that Christians follow to this day through the wilderness, but rather pointed to Christ as the only one who could provide guidance for the church in all situations.

[9] See *Temporal Authority*. Helmut Thielicke covers this in depth in *Theological Ethics* p. 361. "What God wills is in fact that preservation of the world in face of the destructive onslaughts of the devil. He wills to bring his world through to the last day. One of his means of preserving it is the "orders," and especially political authority (Obrigkeit), which for Luther is "a sign of the divine grace, of the mercy of God, who has no pleasure in murdering, killing, and strangling," (Table Talk WA TR 1 77) i.e., in destruction. "Temporal authority was not instituted by God to break the peace and to initiate war, but to keep the peace and repress the fighters. As Paul says in Romans 13 (:4), the office of the sword is to protect and to punish, to protect the good in peace and to punish the wicked with war. (PE 5, 56. Thielicke suggests also looking at LW 13, 45)"

this would be problematic. Thus it is critical for Luther to establish that the temporal authority, who may be given the power at times to behave unjustly, is not the lawgiver himself, but God is. Yet, as Skinner continues, Luther "simply insists that the reason why evil and tyrannical rulers are from time to time ordained by God is, as Job says, 'because of the people's sins'. It is 'blind and perverse' of the people to think that sheer power sustains the wicked ruler, and thus that 'the tyrant rules because he is such a scoundrel. The truth is 'that he is ruling not because he is a scoundrel but because of the people's sin'" (1978, p.19). Now this last statement is perhaps equally obscure to the one who believes might makes right. But Luther appeals to the conscience with such statements.

It is surprising that three sentences later, Skinner concludes that Luther makes "scarcely any appeal to an intuited law of nature: Luther's final word is always based on the Word of God." What has he just done but pleaded for wisdom in asking the reader to recognize the sinfulness of man, which is the ultimate appeal to conscience, whether it is redeemed or not? Being able to recognize one's sinfulness, even the sinfulness of one's nation, requires a conscience. In fact, being able to disobey evil orders requires a conscience. Yet Luther's appeal to the conscience goes beyond just recognizing that the orders are evil, that the tyrant is evil, to enduring evil. Luther does not believe that such behavior is natural, yet he is still prescribing it, and so this brings up another question.

Skinner understands that the bondage of the will is literally played out upon the stage of politics in that "God places man in a condition of political subjection as a remedy of their sins" (1978, p.320). Skinner is right about the first part but the term "remedy" is not quite right. If the subjection itself were the remedy, then politics would be an end in itself, and a dead end. A remedy is generally regarded as a cure, which temporal government is by no means for Luther. It is clearly described as a temporary solution, seen as curbing sin rather than eliminating its root. Temporal government cannot solve the problem of sin. For Luther the remedy for sin is as supernatural as the condition of man being sinful is natural. This is what sets Luther so far apart from the radical constitutionalists that claim that man in his nature is free and in fact that "any legitimate political society must originate in an act of free consent on the part of the whole populace." The biblical perspective which Luther holds is that the condition of bondage

is God's illustration of our need of Him for righteousness. This is not a popular view of Luther's political philosophy; in fact, it renders politics an instrument toward repentance, and cannot even be credited, no matter how much suffering is entailed, as the actual redemption process. Rather, it serves to show man his sinfulness so that he will run to God's mercy seat. The worse the conditions are here on earth, the more people are likely to place their only hope in God.

Skinner's question concerning God's justice in the confusing situation of the reign of an evil tyrant, he has already begun to answer himself in his introduction on Luther as he shared Luther's personal revelation of God's sense of justice. He tells that Luther despaired under superstition and self-flagellation until he discovered that God had a plan of delivering man in His righteousness (1978, p.7). "Deliver me in thy righteousness" - *in tua iustitia liberame* (Psalm 31:1). If natural man cannot love his enemies, then what does God expect him to do? According to Luther, he must turn to God's righteousness and accept his grace. Only an individual can do this, not a nation, and so it is that Luther appeals to the conscience to do what the nation cannot do; and furthermore this is even impossible for the individual unless God makes it possible. Yes, Luther is appealing to the supernatural in asking God to deliver him in his righteousness, and apparently a miracle happened on the day that Luther read Psalm 31, because Skinner chronicles that before that day Luther couldn't even look at the word *iustitia* in the Bible without being greatly troubled. Luther's "discovery" was not just an academic excavation, but deliverance in itself.

Skinner does well to say in conclusion to his chapter on Luther's principles that Luther's final word is based on the Word of God, but this does not leave the law of nature meaningless any more than it leaves natural man hopeless. Luther's value of secular authority represents his love of the law. In fact, if the Word of God is his last word, the elementary language man learns is the word of the law. This is not necessarily a scholastic perspective, but rather depends on the conception of natural man as a sinner, requiring external discipline to punish his bad conduct and praise his good conduct. When Skinner goes on to his chapter on the revival of Thomism in the context of constitutionalism, the discrepancy between the law that is written in man's conscience and the laws of men becomes evident.

> "They were now in a position to produce a reply to the fundamental Lutheran contention that man is unable, due to his fallen nature, to understand the will of God and so to live his life according to a genuine law. The error involved in this belief, they now point out, is that of failing to recognize that all men at all times are in fact equally capable of consulting and following the law which is 'inscribed in their hearts'" (1978, p.166).

As we see in this passage, the very fact of having a conscience is equated with the ability to follow the law. But the quote from Paul's letter to the Romans in its context says that man is unable to follow the law, and in fact that the moment the law appeared, men rushed to disobey it, in a pathological vicious cycle. Earlier Paul says that societies can make laws in the absence of the Scriptures, and by these laws they will be judged. However, the law in itself cannot make any man righteous, contrary to the Thomist view here proposed. As is central for Luther, the law and Gospel work hand in hand just for man to come to repentance; even less could the law alone produce righteousness.

Oakley describes Luther's referring to rulers as masks that God wears (1991, p.171). Since the law itself serves to accuse man, it cannot save them, but as Paul says, this does not make the law evil but rather it is good. The law comes from God, and not the breaking of the law. But does this mean that the powers that be are somehow gods themselves? Does it mean that 'political power presupposes either faith or any other supernatural gift in the prince possessing it'? Rather, to be able to judge according to the law and to be able to follow the law are two completely different things; this is why Jesus says, "Hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will be able to see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye".

But rather than recognizing that the same law we judge by we are not capable of following in our natural state, Bellarmine insists "the scriptures, the Fathers and our natural reason all concur in assuring us that we possess 'an inherent justice' which enables us to apprehend the laws of God and employ them in the conduct of our lives". In fact, in Skinner's quote of Suarez, "'the fundamental error of heretics', he insists, is that of failing to see that 'we are truly and intrinsically justified through an inherent justice given by Christ', and thus that we are 'subject to a true law at all times' (1978, p.167). Not only are the proponents of this view saying that the law can be followed by natural man, but also that grace is natural, that we are "intrinsically" and "inherently justified" by Christ. If that is the case, there are many more things that require

explanation in the world today; because we do not see people walking around doing nothing but good to each other.

Skinner goes on to say that "this idea of "imputed justice" constitutes what Bellarmine calls "the seed of all heresies of the present time", or what Suarez, varying the metaphor, prefers to call "the root of every other heresy". "Once this is plucked out", as Suarez goes on, the two major errors in the Lutheran theory of political society can easily be uprooted at the same time. The first is the supposed Lutheran contention that the godliness of a ruler is an honorary attribute ascribed to his position as ruler, even as the title "his majesty". The error of this doctrine according to Bellarmine in *The Members of the church*, is that of failing to concede that political society is not a God-given but simply a man-made thing, and thus that "the foundation of dominion is not in grace but in nature" (Skinner 1978, p.167). Now we see where Bellarmine and Suarez were headed, but the question is whether they are not presenting a terribly mangled version of Luther. Not only do they associate Luther with the divine right of kings, as Figgis does, but they confound the belief that whatever the king does is automatically right with Luther's central belief that God gives the authorities the power that they have. The sovereignty of God over kings is the matter that is most important for Luther, and it is also the chief thing which his critics have trouble digesting.

Luther does not think that the prince is necessarily a true Christian, not to mention that he possesses supernatural gifts because of his position. Rather, if anything, that must be an assertion by so-called Lutherans, fabricated by Lutherans after Luther's death. To the contrary, Luther draws a distinction between temporal government and spiritual government that runs parallel to his distinction between law and grace. Grace is not grace unless it is supernatural and furthermore that it is the free gift of God; furthermore, it is useless to people who are not in need of the remedy. Thus Luther's perspective is contrary to the Thomist view: for Luther, sin is natural in man and grace is supernatural. In the Thomist view, there is no need for grace because man is "inherently just."

In the scholastic perception, there is no room for the very factor that was of greatest importance to Luther in the dynamics of reforming the church as well as the strength of government in society in general. This factor is scriptural authority; that is, the perfect source of the law that does not come from man but from the Word of God. As

we have seen in the various contemporary critiques of Luther, there is an attempt to comprehend the locus of authority that was central for him, but there is no way of logically explaining Luther's stand without considering the place of Scripture at the head of the Reformation. We will see in greater detail in the next section how this affected the Reformation, as concerns the church and as concerns the temporal authority.

2. THE PRINCIPLES OF LUTHER'S REFORM

2.1 The Church in Need of Reform

Luther says in his letter "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate" that if the pope were to pray to God he would have to take off his triple crown. This may seem like a mere quip, mocking the pope, but it becomes clear in the context that he means very seriously that the pope must step down from the position he had assumed as "king of kings". In political terms, this is a position of supreme authority. According to the Bible, this same title actually belongs exclusively to Jesus. As Luther observed, the pope did nothing less than equate himself with God. On the contrary, in Luther's opinion, "if the pope were to pray to God with tears, he would have to lay aside his triple crown, for the God we worship cannot put up with pride" (LW 44, p.140). It is the pope's complete disobedience and proud replacement of God that concerns Luther to no slight degree. This matter is one worth protesting, and as Luther says in his words to Nicholas von Amsdorf who would look over the letter he wanted to present to the Christian nobility,

> "The time for silence is past, and the time to speak has come, as Ecclesiastes says (3:7). I am carrying out our intention to put together a few points on the matter of reform of the Christian estate, to be laid before the Christian nobility of the German nation, in hope that God may help his church through the laity, since the clergy, to whom this task more properly belongs, have grown quite indifferent. I am sending the whole thing to you, reverend sir, (that you may give) an opinion on it and, where necessary, improve it.
> I know full well that I shall not escape the charge of presumption because I, a despised, inferior person, venture to address such high and great estates in such weighty matters, as if there were nobody else in the world except Doctor Luther to take up the cause of the Christian estate and give advice to such high-ranking people" (p.123).

Luther begins his letter by reminding that he is not the first to attempt reform; that "often the councils have made some pretence at reform, but their attempts have been cleverly frustrated by the guile of certain men…" (p.124). The next thing he does is to remind his audience of the submission that any temporal authority owes to God. "'No king is saved

by his great might and no lord is saved by the greatness of his strength' (Psalm 33:16). It may be that they relied on their own might more than on God, and therefore had to fall" (p.125). In his argument in this letter, Luther will set forth two main theses: first of all that the pope has asserted authority on a level that does not properly belong to any man, and secondly that he has used this authority in order to extort the masses as well as the government in ways that Luther set forth in detail in the letter.

Above the Law: A History of Rome's Decay into Lawlessness and Rejection of God

The supreme authority that the pope claims is the core problem of the church for Luther. The fact that the pope indeed claimed such a position is widely acknowledged. Figgis notes that the pope in the Middle Ages asserted himself as the sole authority even as some Caesars did before him. As the pope rode above the law his reign produced injustices that were clearly visible just as in the case of the Caesars who overextended their reach. In many ways, Luther sees the pope as not only a false prophet but a tyrant who, taking the place of God, attempts to rule over people's souls. According to Figgis,

> 'The (church) took over from the Roman Empire its theory of the absolute and universal jurisdiction of the supreme authority, and developed it into the doctrine of the plenitude *potestatis* of the Pope, who was the supreme authority, who was the supreme dispenser of law, the fountain of honour, including regal honour, and the sole legitimate earthly source of power, the legal if not the actual founder of religious orders, university degrees, the supreme "judge and divider" among nations, the guardian of international right, the avenger of Christian blood" (1960, pp. 4-5).

For Luther, such a characterization of the pope proves him guilty of the ultimate injustice. He has placed himself as God over the nations. We will see soon how it is this lawmaking power that allows the pope to make an impact and it is also through the laws that he made that he inevitably published his aims. His ambition to be ruler over the nations, unmatched, goes hand in hand with his desire to formulate the law himself.

Luther describes the "Romanists" like a virus, a sly impostor with an effective self-defence mechanism.

> "The Romanists have very cleverly built three walls around themselves. Hitherto they have protected themselves by these walls in such a way that no one has been able to reform them. As a result, the whole of Christendom has fallen abominably.

> In the first place, when pressed by the temporal power they have made decrees and declared that the temporal power had no jurisdiction over them, but that, on the contrary, the spiritual power is above the temporal. In the second place, when the attempt is made to reprove them with the Scriptures, they raise the objection that only the pope may interpret Scriptures. In the third place, if threatened with a council, their story is that no one may summon a council but a pope" (p.126).

Thus he characterises the pope's claim to authority as being an absolute spiritual one, but that the spiritual authority is to be supreme over temporal jurisdiction, such that they are the absolute authority and power, even if they do not concern themselves with all aspects of the state. The pope's authority is inscrutable—and its mission in turn is to replace true authority. The pope makes the claim in regard to the scriptures that he is the sole interpreter. Therefore, he holds in his hands the words of eternal life, except he is the one who chose the words rather than God. Rather than being subject to the law, the pope became the law.

Francis Schaeffer demonstrates the relationship that God's laws have to the success of the rulers as he chronicles the decline of the Roman Empire (1982, pp.83-89). He mentions how the Jewish population in comparison to the Christian population fared during the reigns of the various Caesars and how this depended on their adherence to God's laws when the Caesar sought to center worship around himself instead of allowing those who would worship God to be free. Schaeffer's historic account illuminates the fact that the pope's efforts were not original as far as the position he took in respect to the law is concerned.

According to Scripture, the conflict between the rulers in power and the law has existed ever since the first ruler of sorts, Adam, fell. Throughout the Old Testament rulers are either confronted by prophets warning them to repent or else they seek out the prophets for help when they see that their reign is in jeopardy. Rulers who didn't personally know God went to the Jewish prophets knowing that their God was relatively speaking the most powerful of the gods. But even King David had to be confronted when he abused his power to take Uriah's wife Bathsheba. The Pharaoh who reigned during the life of Christ, like others before him, had an interest in Jewish customs so long as they did not interfere with his own program; in essence, he maintained ties to the Jews so that he could have a better rapport with the highly successful Jewish population. But he lacked a sincere interest in God's laws. The Caesars tolerated the Jews and their laws for

their own society so long as they recognised Caesar—yet the extent to which their authority need be recognised varied depending on the Caesar. More precisely, the more powerful Rome became, the more recognition the ruler thought he could expect from his subjects. Schaeffer writes of the reign of Caesar Augustus (63 B.C.-A.D.14),

> "Because Augustus established peace externally and internally and because he kept the outward forms of constitutionality, Romans of every class were ready to allow him total power in order to restore and assure the functioning of the political system, business, and the affairs of daily life. After 12 B.C. he became the head of state religion, taking the title *Pontifex Maximus* and urging everyone to worship the "spirit of Rome and the genius of the emperor." Later this became obligatory for all the people of the Empire and later still, the emperors ruled as gods. Augustus tried to legislate morals and family life; subsequent emperors tried impressive legal reforms and welfare programs" (p.86).

Amidst all these reforms in the steadily declining empire, there was an annoying problem that Christians posed in Rome that no other population posed. As Schaeffer noted, the vast majority was thrilled with Caesar Augustus' reforms. Schaeffer explains why Christians did not take to the worship of Caesar and blend with the culture that took swiftly to his moral dictates. "…the Christians not only had knowledge about the universe and mankind that people cannot find out by themselves, but they had absolute, universal values by which to live and by which to judge the society and the political state in which they lived. And they had grounds for the basic dignity and value of the individual as unique in being made in the image of God" (p.86).

Schaeffer's argument in this chapter is that when Christians posed a problem was when their values differed from those of the state; the Christians did not claim exclusivity as a sect, but they submitted first and foremost to the exclusivity of the Bible's teaching, which gave them knowledge and discernment of values that society did not maintain. Luther complained that the pope's rule placed demands on the people that went against the Bible's teaching. Yet much worse, most Christians could not even read the Bible under the pope. In addition, the masses were conducted in Latin, a foreign language to the common people. Luther's reform is primarily concerned with the Bible's place within this so-called Christian government—it is bound and hidden within the pope's discretion.

Luther complains of the reign of the pope not only for his unjust demands on the people but also for having taken the position he has. In fact, Luther's central thesis that

there is no human authority, but only the divine authority which constitutes scripture, remedies the problem as he diagnosed it: that it is because of human authority being placed over scriptural authority that the church's abuses arose. Therefore Luther used scripture in order to refute various church practices, such as the sale of indulgences and grievous taxation of the poor.

The pope did not tolerate contestation on the basis of scripture or by a God-fearing council, both of which would go hand in hand. In the next section, I will deal with government in more detail, but in this section our concern is primarily the church. Luther gives the church her identity in obedience to the Word, which is dependent first of all on knowledge of the Word. If the pope is an obstacle to the Word, he cannot keep his grip on the true church. While Luther does not judge the church on the basis of her behaviour, he holds doctrine taught as being responsible for change, or lack thereof, in behaviour. Thus, the Word needs to come through, and it did through the reform, so that the church can change her ways. But before change of practice comes the change in the object of her commitment.

Heiko Oberman credits to Luther's predecessor Jan Hus, "Amid the conflicts and rival claims of his time, Hus draws the following sharp conclusion: It is not obedience to Rome, but rather obedience to God which is the decisive mark of the true church. To her belong those whom God through His eternal predestination has chosen as the obedient. With its hunger for power and prosperity, the papal hierarchy has forfeited any right to be regarded as part of the true church, which can be recognized by the imitation of Christ and the apostles." (1989, p. 55) Luther follows in the same footsteps as Hus, Wyclif, and William of Occam before him. Jan Hus was burned as a heretic in 1415. Oberman goes on to show how Luther's emphasis was on scripture rather than on the appraisal of the church. Luther differentiated himself from Wyclif and Hus on this basis: "Life is as evil among us as among the papists, thus we do not argue about life but about doctrine. Whereas Wyclif and Hus attacked the immoral lifestyle of the papacy, I challenge primarily its doctrine" (55).

Papal Authority versus Scriptural Authority

What is essential to the church according to Luther is her identity, and that identity rests in the person she honours as her authority. Thus the question is, who is to be the church's supreme authority: Jesus or the pope? And the evidence of her allegiance is in her adherence either to the Bible's laws or to the pope's laws. Figgis takes for granted, that the pope, bishops and priests *are* the church, or *ekklesia*; this is not his own invention but rather he repeats what the Roman clergy asserted itself to be. Luther, on the other hand, declares, "It is pure invention that pope, bishops, priests, and monks are called the spiritual estate while princes, lords, artisans and farmers are called the temporal estate" (p.127). Figgis, as the Romanists would agree, argues that Luther is denouncing the church in favour of the holiness of the people in general.

Luther's main thesis in the letter to the Christian nobility is that the pope is primarily interested in a worldly kingdom, which he spends the majority of the text proving. At the same time, he shows that the pope trespasses far beyond the proper bounds of any ruler. The strong point of Luther's argument is not that the pope had a few personality flaws but that the whole premise of the institution was wrong; that the Roman clergy truly had nothing to do with the true church except to use its name to gain power and make money off of the people. In effect, it also served to apparently replace the true church; this is where Luther stepped in, exhorting those who called themselves Christian to be aware of the deceitfulness of this institution, to recognize the resources they had in Scripture, and moreover what right they had as faithful believers, to defend themselves from this parasite and thief of the church's identity.[10] Therefore the church's identity is foremost in Luther's argument.

v. Beyond a Humanist Critique of the Church

Luther primarily attacks the pope's authority based on the fact that it is not the true authority of the church, but he goes on to defend this point by showing that the institution he runs is not of benefit to the church but actually harmful. These two factors are interrelated because the very proof that the pope is not heeding scripture is based on his

[10] Luther refers to what would happen if the pope's assertions were brought before discerning Christians: "They fear terribly for their skins in a really free council!" (127)

domination of the church for his own good instead of building up the church for the sake of God's glory. At the same time, it is common sense that a ruler should not be unjust. And anyone could see the injustice in the pope's institution, as we will see briefly outlined. Yet is it Luther's intention to tear down the institution of the pope in order that anyone who has the sense to be able to criticise it can make an attempt to rebuild the church? Can anyone who agrees with Luther's critique of the Romanists take control of the church? What is Luther's plan in inviting the Christian nobility, as he does, to respond to the pope's heresy, as he perceives it, as though to a fire? Ultimately, the question here is with what Luther intends to replace the authority that the pope had claimed. It is Figgis' thesis, as well as that of those who place Luther in a continuum with the humanists, that Luther replaced the "ecclesiastical" authority with secular authority.

Skinner, on the other hand, says that Luther was genuinely interested in building up the Biblical church rather than simply tearing down the Roman church's authority. "Luther's attack on clerical abuses also echoed a number of attitudes already prevalent in later medieval Europe. As we have seen, he focused his main attention on the shortcomings of the Papacy, insisting on the need to return to the authority of the scriptures and to re-establish a simpler and less worldly form of apostolic church." (1978, p.27) Most readers of Luther in the perspective of political philosophy, even Skinner at other points in his text, perceive a power vacuum left by the removal of the Papacy. But if Luther had not provided an alternative to the papacy, Luther would be no different from the many humanist critics of the papacy. Skinner passes over the satirists, from Erasmus to Sebastian Brant to Thomas More, who illustrated the folly of the "evils of the age". He quotes Pierre Gringore's morality play entitled "The Folly of the Prince of Fools" (1512).

> "The church is depicted as 'Mother Fool', who confesses at her first entrance that 'men say I have lost my wits in my old age'" (…) "She is greedy for money, cynical about the value of 'good faith', and anxious above all to ensure that she succeeds in 'keeping a hold over temporal affairs by fair means or foul'. She spends her time plotting and machinating with all the fools of the age, and ends by making it obvious that her real ambition is to acquire worldly glory for herself."[11]

[11] Skinner 1978, p. 28. He cites pages 54, 55, 57, 59 and 70 from Gringore's "The Folly of the Prince of Fools".

Simony, pride and hunger for power are certainly nothing original, but as much expected as they are lamented in those who happen to be in power; the only thing that is new is the height of corruption that the church had reached. Skinner quotes Skelton, who rhymes in regard to the clergy, "How they take no heed/ Their silly sheep to feed (p. 284)".[12] The church had forsaken the one thing that could nourish the flock—the Word—and so long as she leads them on, "her" sheep will remain their natural silly selves, following after her and yet starving.

Skinner categorizes the humanists themselves as being critical of human reason, and he has spent the previous section in his work to showing that Luther too was critical of human reason (22-27). In the humanist mind, there is nothing greater than man; yet, More, Erasmus, Brant and many others appear to have recognised that man was not that great. The humanist satires definitely were not unaware of the great extent, if not the universality, of the limitedness of man. Furthermore, neither Luther nor the humanists thought man so insufficient that he could not be coaxed to recognise at least this much. Yet while More's *Utopia* and Erasmus' *In Praise of Folly* compare man to an ideal yet provide no means for man to reach that ideal, Luther had precise aims in his writings toward an alternative to the Romanist establishment and hoped for change even here on earth. Therefore we will not stop at Luther's critique of the papal institution because the humanists also went this far. After going through Luther's critique of the papal institution, we will get into the true church and how Luther thought it could be built up. We will not leave the power vacuum empty. Even if in the process we are forced to absence ourselves from political philosophy, we must not leave the gap open where Luther did not leave it open.

vi. The Pope's Jurisdiction: A Mountain Obstructing the Entrance of the Gospel

We said that the church's identity is a primary distinction that Luther makes, but immediately connected to her identity in the Word is the doctrine she follows. The question of the church's genuineness is a matter of legitimacy. The papacy claimed to be the sole entity with roots that could be traced back to the apostles. Luther does not find it

[12] P.28, quote from *The Complete Poems*, ed. Philip Henderson, London, 1931.

necessary to excavate spiritual genealogies, but rather tests whether the doctrine they teach is the same doctrine that is found in Scripture. If not, then that church's roots, no matter how seamless, were decayed and the church of his time was in need of reform. So we see throughout the text that Luther goes back and forth comparing the canon laws that the pope instituted to the prescriptions in Scripture. Ultimately, through his devotion to the Scriptures and the values that he highlights in this text, even by the criteria of staying true to the original church, he questions the Roman clergy's doctrine. Yet Luther does not look to the early church for his standard: he looks right to Jesus' commands in scripture, and this brings him closer to the early church than if he had devoted his life to researching the life and practices of the early church. Thus we will begin by considering the laws passed by the pope.

The crux of Luther's logical argument is that the pope acted as the divine authority, formulating false means to salvation in his canon laws and even receiving a massive response of obedience. Whereas Luther believed that the only means of salvation was accepting the gift from God, the pope acted as an additional intermediary. Instead of helping people come to salvation through Christ, he created additional rules that the people must follow. Thus Luther's work was carved out for him in distinguishing between those canon laws and the Scriptural means of salvation. The job was not difficult, but required a great deal of bravery for two reasons. There was massive support for the pope among the people who would rather be enslaved to works for the pope than have faith in God and disregard the pope. Luther actually did not even say that there should not be a pope. But in his description of what a pope ought to be, it is easy enough to see that many aspects of the pope's office seem to be inherently prone to corruption. Luther even states what a pope should be. "It should be the pope's duty to be the most learned in the Scriptures and the holiest (not in name only but in fact) and to regulate matters which concern the faith and holy life in Christians" (LW 44, p.160).

We will see later as we consider the role he occasionally gave certain Christians who were actually in secular positions of authority in regulating church matters whether he retained too much faith in such precarious positions as sat on the fence between secular authority and service to the church. If Luther did not institutionally separate church and state sufficiently to safeguard against corruption through the weeding out of

positions of "Christian temporal authority", his emphasis stands all the more on cleaning out the many laws that the pope had brought into existence, that he shows even contradict themselves. His complaint was that all these manmade laws built up a wall so that the people couldn't even enter into the Word of God, the Gospel.

At the other extreme from those who were producing this endless laundry list of laws that Christianity should adhere to is Luther's position that God is the author of the laws that are most important to keep and that these laws must be kept above any laws that men make. At times those could even cause Christians to have to disregard laws that are contrary to God's laws. Allen notes the difference that Luther perceived between the political authority that someone may hold and the power to make laws; furthermore, the right to hold laws over people's souls belongs only to God. He quotes,

> "'The temporal regiment has laws that reach no further than body and goods and what mere things of earth there are besides. For over souls God neither can nor will allow that anyone rule but Himself only. For no man can kill a soul, nor give it life nor send it to heaven or to hell.'…If your Prince command you to believe this or that, or to put away your Bibles, 'you shall answer that it becometh not Lucifer to sit next to God.'"[13]

As will become clear from the Letter to the Christian Nobility, members of the church are also excluded from this divine right—the point is clearly that God is judge in matters of the soul, such as salvation. Allen clarifies, "Luther was not, here, claiming that anyone has a right to disobey authority in defence of any religious belief he may chance to have. He was declaring only that the truth must, at all costs be held to and defended." The question now, as Pontius Pilate asked, is, what is truth? For Luther the truth is not a variable. Allen continues, "We have come to associate the idea of political authority with law-making power. That association hardly existed for Luther. If there may be no forcible resistance to a sovereign legislator, that sovereign becomes as 'absolute' as in the nature of things he can be. But if the sovereign be bound by a law he cannot unmake, the case is very different. Luther knew nothing of sovereign legislators" (20). That is to say, that anyone seeking to add to God's laws would not receive Luther's recognition. Allen explains that this is not to the exclusion of laws that are necessary in regulating society, but even so good judgment was preferable to endless legislation. And to underline

[13]Allen 1941, p. 20. He quotes Luther's "Temporal Authority".

Luther's meaning, Allen says the prince's "authority is strictly limited by the law of God."

As much as Luther did not respect the prince's trespassing God's laws and forcing others to, he had a problem with the pope doing the same in the name of canon law. Luther names a number of injustices in the pope's practices, often operating on the basis of inconsistencies within the canon laws themselves. He denounces the *gratiae expectativae*, which like in the Dickens novel offered dwellings that were already occupied. (LW 44, pp.166-167)

vii. Making Merchandise of the People[14]

Applying to the pope the basic standards that are in place for the Christian, Luther asks, "How can a man rule and at the same time preach, pray, study, and care for the poor? Yet these are the duties which most properly and peculiarly belong to the pope, and they were so earnestly imposed by Christ that he even forbade his disciples to take cloak or money with them (Matthew 10:9-10)."…The pope should restrain himself, take his fingers out of the pie, and claim no title to the kingdom of Naples and Sicily…The same goes for Bologna, Imola, Vicenza, Ravenna, and all the territories in the March of Ancona, Romagna, and other lands which the pope has seized by force and possesses without right." (LW 44, p.166) The editor in the English edition of Luther's works informs, "Behind this papal claim lay a thousand years of history. When the administrative system of the western half of the Roman Empire collapsed in the fifth century, the sole surviving authority was the papacy. By the end of the sixth century the Roman See was in possession of large areas of Italy and Sicily. The responsibility for these territories involved not only administration but sometimes even war." (p.167)

Not only was the pope's investment in worldly things a distraction, but it was the main attraction. "No better way has been discovered of bringing all these to Rome than by creating cardinals and giving them bishoprics, monasteries, and prelacies for their own

[14] There is a passage in the New Testament that seems to speak of this exact situation that existed in the church in Luther's time. "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber." 2 Peter 2:1-3

use and so overthrowing the worship of God." In this formulation, Luther shows that he considers the Romanists like parasites rather than leaders in the church. In fact their so-called ecclesiastical enterprise is just a façade for their real program. Luther appeals to the Christian nobility to recognise the false teaching that is costing them a fortune as well as being a great injustice.[15] As concerns the worship of God, the Roman clergy blocks the means to salvation, which is supposed to be to the glory of God since it is a gift out of His graciousness.

Just the attention that the pope required created moral problems for poor families when husbands felt obliged to make pilgrimages to Rome rather than save money. Pope Boniface VIII encouraged pilgrimages by creating jubilee years in which people could receive indulgences in compensation for going to Rome. In addition, Boniface VIII decreed that people could have the indulgences just for the price of a round trip to Rome. Another good work commanded by canon law was the butter law, in which Luther sees the appeal to the human tendency to want to follow a set of rules.

> "Furthermore fasts should be left to individuals and every kind of food left optional, as the gospel makes them. Even those gentlemen at Rome scoff at the fasts, and leave us commoners to eat the fat they would not deign to use to grease their shoes, and then afterwards sell us the liberty to eat butter and all sorts of other things. The holy Apostle says that we already have freedom in all these things through the Gospel. But they have bound us with their canon law and robbed us of our rights so that we have to buy them back again with money. In so doing they have made our consciences so timid and fearful that it is no longer easy to preach about liberty of this kind because the common people take offence at it and think that eating butter is a greater sin than lying, swearing, or even living unchastely. It is still a human work decreed by men. You may do with it what you will, yet nothing good will ever come of it."[16]

Luther reminds that while such rules may provide temporary solace to the people in causing them to imagine that they have done what God requires, in fact such man-made works could never please God. In fact, they distracted the people from obedience to Scriptural law, which is summed up in loving God and one's neighbour. While not eating butter is a sacrifice people can make with relative ease yet no personal benefit, for

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[15] Figgis says that Luther has contempt for poverty, but he spends as much time criticising the pope's wealth as complaining of the poverty the German people who have sent so much money to Rome.

[16] P. 184. Luther refers to Matthew 15:11 ("Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man."); 1 Corinthians 10:23 ("All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify."); and Colossians 2:16 ("So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths.")

the liar to stop lying begins with repentance to God who gives victory as his life is actually changed for the better. First of all, admitting that one is a sinner goes against human pride and so it already requires God's grace; as a result, there is little room for profit in this equation. Everything necessary for salvation and for growth takes place in a free exchange between God, who gives his righteousness freely through the sacrifice he took upon himself in his death on the cross, and the sinner who accepts. The great temptation of the human heart to make a detour around the cross is matched with a business deal in the canon laws: pay up and you can walk free. Unfortunately, human pride falls for this ploy with stunning reliability. Luther focuses his anger at the merchants involved in this salvation scam, quoting "Woe to you scribes! You have taken upon yourselves the authority to teach, and closed up the kingdom of heaven. You do not go in and you stand in the way of those who enter (Matt. 23:13)" (p. 182).

Figgis charges that Luther has contempt for poverty as a Christian ideal, but in the Letter to the Christian Nobility Luther shows that the real problem is the pope's forcing the masses into poverty through the taxation that is supposedly collected for their salvation. This is a perfect illustration of the choice that a citizen has whether or not to recognise a false authority who claims power over his soul. The man who knows how salvation is truly attained—as a free gift from God that must simply be accepted, is free from this ploy that the pope made. Luther counted thousands of gulden (the German currency at the time) that found its way to Rome. Luther considered all of this as waste—which in fact served the aggrandisement of the clergy in Rome—that was not compelled by any law except that of a false teaching that many ignorant people believed. True salvation couldn't be bought with anything that a man has—the offer of eternal life is not a small thing to receive in exchange for one's whole earthly life. As much as it is a clever political move for the pope to connect the plan of salvation with pleasing him, by requiring money be sent to Rome and centering worship on Rome and himself, it is a foolish one to fall for if one knows the truth of salvation.

viii. The Claim to Legitimacy as the Church

The root of the problem that spawned the Catholic Church as it was in Luther's day, according to Luther, was the different basis upon which they laid their claim of

authenticity. Whereas the biblical church is commanded to remain in Christ in order to bear fruit, which means both that it must not depart from the law of Scripture and that it will bear fruit in keeping with Scripture, the Catholic Church claimed to be the church while bypassing both of these essential indicators of authenticity. They forsook the law of Scripture and they did not maintain the traits of believers in the motives driving their lives. They were motivated primarily by worldly power and they crushed the people with their greed. Specific qualities and responsibilities of the church will be developed shortly that stand in contrast to the practice of the Roman church, but the basic difference is that one bears a nominal characterization—a form of godliness, whereas the other bears the reality of godliness. One claims to be the Mother church, because she desires the honour and benefits, yet she drives her children like slaves and wrenches them from God's ways; the other acts as the true mother and has the interest of her children closest to her heart, teaching them God's ways and giving herself for them.

The "ecclesiastical authority" to which Figgis refers is the role taken by the Roman clergy and indeed they had taken a position of authority as the church. Luther begins by demonstrating how they took authority. In fact, they won much of their prestige by claiming sole rights to privileges that had been given by Scripture to the entire spiritual estate. Rather than being holy because of being part of the "royal priesthood" by which the apostle Peter refers to the whole body of believers, the pope and bishops were esteemed as being able to make men holy by anointing them and making them priests (LW 44, p.127). In fact, they created *characteres indelebiles* out of the priests so that they would be permanently set apart from the rest of the people (129). Luther maintains that there are to be priests and bishops, priests to teach and serve the flock and bishops to encourage the congregations in the right doctrine, but even in so doing he is making a compromise with the existing institution. He argues that the believers are all of the spiritual estate and the critical point here is not so much the holiness of the church as what makes the church holy. In other words, a church that insists on its holiness but does not prove itself to be any different from a worldly institution, and is not excellent even among worldly institutions, is nothing but iron-clad folly.

In the case of the Roman church, the pope and bishops consecrated the priests—meaning it is they that set apart the priests and declared them holy—and it was expected as we will see that the priests remain in obedience to the pope. But in the case of the church set forth in Scripture, the whole body of believers is set apart as they are sanctified by God. God grants them a position of holiness that is not based on their merit or their lineage but by his free gift of salvation in Christ. This leaves no room for boasting of the inheritance and it cannot be placed on the market since it is a free gift and since it is extended equally to all believers so that none can boast that he is above the others. Though the church has no reason to boast as the church, she is expected to boast of the one who has given her so much.

In his writings, Luther sets an example of obedience to this principle of not seeking personal glory but the glory of God when he relies solely on the Word of God as the standpoint from which he may question the pope's teachings. If anyone does not define the pope's injustices in relation to their deviation from Scripture, he may dislike the pope's position of power and he may despise the pope's practices, but he cannot contest the pope as the head of the church. It is only the Bible that can confirm that the pope is not the true head of the church because the Bible is the manual for the church. Whereas in the Roman church, the canon law taught the church, and the pope was the church's head, Luther believes that the Word of God holds authority over the church because Christ, and no mere man, is the head of the church.

The Marks of Legitimacy: The Visible Difference of the Invisible Church

While Hus distinguished the church that obeys Rome from the church that obeys God, Levi Strohl notices a theme in Luther's writings setting apart the visible from the invisible church. This distinction admits that there is an entity known commonly as the church, and then there is the church which is not visible to man. In keeping with both of these points, the Roman church was to a great degree *the* visible church at the time of Luther, and the invisible church has a timeless definition and traces its legitimacy from generation to generation not by any man-made succession such as the papacy claimed linked them and them alone with the apostles, but in its obedience to God. Now the only thing that is problematic, especially for some critics, such as Figgis, is the question of

how this invisible church can be proven to be obedient or a real entity at all for that matter. Clearly it does not make for transparency and good relations to simply say that my righteousness, though it is completely imperceptible and does not make me any different from anyone else, is there and it is real. Therefore the church's obedience to God will have to be something less than invisible for our purposes. After considering what Strohl says, we will consider what actually differentiates the church Luther advocated from the Roman church in its practices. And ultimately this will bring up the question of what Luther invested in the building up of the true church, as he said that the Christian's work is not to destroy the church but to build it up. Luther's reform is in fact based upon the observation that the so-called church that bore no resemblance to the biblical church, which could not be the case if there were no means of judging such things because they are completely inward and spiritual.

> «Les premiers linéaments de cette nouvelle notion d'église se trouvent déjà dans les commentaires rédiges après la journée de la grande illumination en 1513. Est membre de l'église, corps mystique du Christ, celui dans l'âme duquel la foi a été crée par la parole de Dieu. L'église visible ne peut être identifiée avec cette Eglise véritable, car elle renferme des individus qui, bien que baptisés, n'ont pas la foi. Elle compte toutefois toujours parmi ses membres de vrais chrétiens, car, selon Esaie 55 :11, la Parole de Dieu est certainement efficace en quelques-uns. »[17]

Luther gave great importance to the inward state of the believer as opposed to his membership in the entity that was called the church in his time. The church's invisibility actually goes further to describe how much the church is integrated into society than how much it is set apart, because the church is called to service and not to isolation from society. Luther emphasizes the fact that Christians are called to fill ordinary offices in society even though they are members of the kingdom of God. As Strohl develops, "Si l'église se contentait d'être la servante de tous, et n'avait d'autre arme que la Parole, elle redeviendrait ce qu'elle doit être, une grande puissance purement spirituelle, la

[17] Strohl 1959 p.176. "The roots if this new notion of the church can be found in the days following the great enlightenment in 1513. What characterizes the member of the church, the mystical body of Christ, is faith within his soul that has been generated by the Word of God. The visible church cannot be equated with the true Church because even the baptized members of the visible church include some who are faithless. Nevertheless, she always retains true Christians among her numbers because as Isaiah 55:11 says, the Word of God is effective in some."

conscience de l'humanité. »[18] Here he goes a bit further than Luther, who would not say at all that Christians are the only ones with consciences—otherwise the law would have a hard time pricking consciences to bring them to repentance in the first place. But the humble service and lack of ostentation of the church is essential. As a servant, it is not proper for the church to force anything, but just to give freely. Francis Oakley echoes in regard to ministers, "Of coercive power they had none. Their role was one of service; their power, no more than the power of persuasion; their authority, the authority of the Word that addresses itself to the inner hearts of men" (1991, p.170).

This power, though Oakley downplays its importance, was highly coveted. In the negative form, as we will see later, the church has the sole right among men of discerning spiritual things and judging based on scripture. In the positive form, the church has the role among men to persuade men's hearts to belief. The church can only do this with the Word of God, but the church alone among men can do this at all. In "Temporal Authority", Luther shows clearly that there is no way for a person to come to belief by force. But how do they come to belief? How is the kingdom of God built? Most importantly for our purposes, how can we be sure that government is not the efficient means by which people become Christians? If Luther had not demonstrated a commitment to the construction of the kingdom of God, and not just to the destruction of the Roman institution, there could be reason to doubt the sincerity and depth of his commitment to a kingdom that was not of the world, and a realm apart from that of the temporal authority.[19]

iii. The Mission of the Faithful

In fact, the majority of Luther's career is completely obscure to the political-philosophical audience as it was a completely different business. Luther published his small catechism, which is a guide to the basic principles of the Bible regarding salvation as well as understanding God's plan for humanity from creation onward, and especially

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[18]Ibid. "If the church were content to be a servant to all, and didn't have any weapon other than the Word, she would become once again what she should be, a great and purely spiritual power, the conscience of humanity."

[19] John 18:36 "Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My Kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." Cited in letter to Christian nobility, 140.

understanding the law and how to follow it. The points are all corroborated with ample references to Scripture, encouraging the young believer to find out for himself what the Bible says. In short, Luther encourages families to begin in their own households, yet even within the family the authority of Scripture addresses the individual and dissuades him from blindly following in the error of his father or mother. And in similar fashion outside of the household, the Word is shared in humble service. If a natural father does not regard his children as inferiors, and he invests in equipping them with the tools they need to succeed, so the Christian is to act in love toward his neighbour as well as he shares the Gospel with him. Clearly this is something completely different from a political institution, and it does not operate for the sake of such men's own glory. For him to have any interest in extending the word of faith to another must be because he loves God and His kingdom. The church has the role of education but the horizontal (human) relationships it depends on are the family and the bonds between friends or co-workers, not power structures in high places.

There is a reason why the church is given this position and not the government. Within the church, Luther simply states that "Among Christians there shall and can be no authority; rather, all are alike subject to one another, as Paul says in Romans 12: "Each shall consider the other his superior"; and Peter says in 1 Peter 5 (:5), "All of you be subject to one another."…Among Christians there is no superior but Christ himself, and him alone" (LW 45, p. 64). However, the family unit is very important to him, and he certainly recognizes family structure as being organized by authority. Indeed Luther regards the family as the best-suited medium for the transmission of God's laws. Parents discipline their children for their own good. But they also nourish them and protect them. These things all go together. The family persuades its children through its most tender provision and its firm—yet endurable—discipline. Parents' greatest desire is their children's well being and maturity and this is the aim of all of their teaching and rearing. At the same time, no earthly parents can reproduce citizens of the kingdom of heaven by their own efforts alone. At best the love a family gives can bear only a dim resemblance to God's love and the teaching it endeavours to avoid hypocrisy as much as possible. Yet

that which the family can provide is training in the right way, which has a powerful impact.[20]

Aristotle writes on the family in the context of slavery in the Politics. He says that the relationship between the parent and child is not the same as the relationship between a master and a slave. This was not always regarded as such in many cultures. Aristotle says that there is a conditional inequality, even as a child grows up to be mature like his father. The perspective Luther has because of his belief in God's ultimate authority is that men are all equal as sinners. The inequality created by the possession of the Gospel is tempered with the responsibility to share this wealth; it is not intended that those who are in possession of the relationship with God that gives them great insight into His Word, be a tool of manipulation wielded above others. The child of God shows maturity as he becomes a servant to others. And at he same time he is only given the right to this position—that is, to do this work for God—once he has grown in likeness to Christ.

iv. A Contrasting Profile of the Roman Church

The Roman church definitely had its spiritual fathers and its institutions of learning. Luther laments the fact that many Christian schools were lost in the course of the evacuation of the monasteries.[21] He would have much preferred their reform, and noted their disintegration which was already under way before the reform. As for the spiritual fathers, Luther in no way despised the position of the priest as teacher of the Word and as a shepherd to the flock. He considered that the priest in the Roman church was too often either handcuffed by the pope's jurisdiction or else, worse, a willing collaborator in its policies. As the Roman church established in its canon law ways of constraining the masses (which sometimes directly profited the clergy, such as the butter laws), which had nothing to do with the straight forward commands of the law as summarized by Christ, the masses, as well as the priests, would fail to meet the set standards, and the church cast shame on them (LW 44, pp.184-188). The aim of this shame, in contrast to the discipline aforementioned, became evident as the ready solution

[20] For an ample presentation of Luther's views of the role of the family, see the Small Catechism.
[21] See *A Sermon on Keeping Children in School* for Luther's chronicling of the state of education and his views on the importance of education.

was provided, not to seek forgiveness from God, but to pay up to the church. Luther perceives a manipulation of the way that man is designed. First of all, man is designed to serve someone: the masses naturally esteemed works and were encouraged to give up all kinds of "luxuries" (and give to the pope) and to engage in various activities such as the pilgrimage to Rome and confession to the priest, and ultimately to purchase their way out of purgatory. The sacrifices that the church required were unending and were of no benefit to the people.

God inundated man with his laws, as we will see shortly, yet not because he needed men's sacrifices, just as he didn't have a profit motive; but quite the contrary, he kept his laws so that he could provide man with grace, even so that man could get back on track to growing to be like God and eventually enjoy his company. The Roman church showed its true colors in that there was no grace to be had. God, by comparison, is true to his word and sent the substitutionary sacrifice for man's justification. Whereas the bleeding never ends in the worship of the pope and the following of the canon law, following God is supposed to be a trade-off between the heavy load we naturally bear and the light load that Christ asks us to bear in following him. Luther goes on to say that the masses were blocked by these false teachers from entering into the kingdom of heaven. "Woe to you scribes! You have taken upon yourselves the authority to teach, and closed up the kingdom of heaven to men. You do not go in and you stand in the way of those who enter (Matthew 23:13)" (p.182). In correction, Luther asserts the primary importance of faith that is not in connection with works. The true work is distinguished from false works. "Thus when the Jews asked Christ, as related in John 6 (:28), what they must do "to be doing the work of God," he brushed aside the multitude of works which he saw they did in great profusion and suggested one work, saying, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent" (John 6:29); "for on him has God the Father set his seal (John 6:27)" (LW 31, p.347).

The Freedom of a Christian

Luther says in "Freedom of a Christian" that the Christian is at once lord of all and servant of all, and admits that this sounds like a contradiction. This is what the family, as well as the evangelist, as well as the pastor, are supposed to be: servants as

well as masters. In what sense are they masters? In the sense that they are blessed and rich as well as in the sense that they are not slaves. The Christian is heir to all the riches of his father in heaven, though he will not get most of these while still here on earth. He is heir to eternal life in God's kingdom. Luther's purpose in highlighting the great inheritance of the Christian is to illustrate that the Christian is no longer subject to man, but is now subject to God. He explains that the only way man could obtain his freedom was through the mercy of God, who made a way for man to come to him. No man has the ability to reach up to God on his own means. God has to come and set the captives free. In the conclusion of the *City of God*, Augustine describes how heaven will be a place where man is completely free from sin. Similarly, but in reference to life here on earth among believers rather than life in heaven, Luther here talks about two things that are necessary, that define entry into, Christian life: righteousness and freedom.

The necessary humility of the church is based upon the fact that righteousness and freedom cannot be acquired by any amount of human efforts, whether directed toward others or toward oneself. Luther begins with the things that people normally associate with righteousness and freedom, in antithesis to servanthood: sacred clothing, fasting, public prayers, selective diet, and various works. He states plainly that these things cannot possibly be sufficient to produce freedom of the soul or righteousness (LW 31, pp.344-345). It is for these things that the Word of God is solely sufficient. Luther thus pulls the carpet out from under anyone who claims to have the keys to freedom and righteousness yet denies the Word of God's exclusivity in offering these things. He goes on to round out his message by showing that through faith in Christ, Christian life proceeds, and works are commanded, but that the works come after and through faith in Christ. Luther's message is not to destroy works, as he clarifies in his conclusion, but rather to start off on the right foot in regard to authority, that is, the source of government, in spiritual matters. "If works are sought after as a means to righteousness, are burdened with this perverse leviathan, and are done under the false impression that through them one is justified, they are made necessary and freedom and faith are destroyed…They are not free, and they blaspheme the grace of God since to justify and to save by faith belongs to the grace of God alone…" (p.363) There is a replacement that occurs, such that Luther perceives the people as being in bondage to empty works and the

role that spiritual leaders play in this is as follows: “They deceive men and lead them to deceive one another like ravening wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matt. 7:15).”

The proper perspective on good works involves a shift of perspective from the church to the powers that be. As the Shulamite says in the Song of Solomon, “Do not stare at me because I am dark, because I am darkened by the sun. My mother’s sons were angry with me and made me take care of the vineyards; my own vineyard I have neglected.” Works are necessary and they are demanded by those in authority, by the government, by our families, and by all those around us. Yet in relation to the work of salvation, they are of no effect—they can even darken and harden to the extent that one could seem less acceptable to God. Thus, Christians should be “subject to the governing authorities and be ready to do every good work, not that they shall in this way be justified, since they already are righteous through faith, but that in the liberty of the Spirit they shall by so doing serve others and the authorities themselves and obey their will freely and out of love.” (p.369)

Freedom and Scriptural Authority

A sense in which freedom was specifically necessary in Luther’s time is that the majority of the people were held captive by a false doctrine that boasted of spiritual authority. An amazing development of the sixteenth century is simply that the printing press was invented so that “average” person could have direct access to the Word of God. This single development severely handicapped the Romanists’ efforts to thwart the Gospel and replace it with their own laws. Luther believed that the people could be greatly empowered by accessing Scripture on their own. As Luther writes in “The Freedom of a Christian”, the Christian experiences unparalleled freedom when he chooses to serve God rather than tradition or fancily clothed “teachers”. Christians are to be completely different from such teachers, who may deprive their bodies of various comforts and sequester themselves from society, but still not have any freedom. The Word is what makes the difference, and Luther compares it to food.

> “Furthermore, to put aside all kinds of works, even contemplation, meditation, and all that the soul can do, does not help. One thing, and only one thing is necessary for Christian life, righteousness, and freedom. That one thing is the most holy Word of God, the Gospel of Christ, as Christ says, John 11 (:25), “I am

> the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live"; and John 8 (:36), "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed"; and Matt. 4 (:4), "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Let us then consider it certain and established that the soul can do without anything except the Word of God and that where the Word of God is missing there is no help at all for the soul." (LW 31, p.344)

In that "Freedom of a Christian" discusses the Christian's freedom and service hand in hand, this writing also serves Luther's purpose of setting apart the true Christian from an elite group that is devoted to the appearance of holiness but not to its reality. In his letter to the Christian nobility, Luther writes "It is pure invention that pope, bishop, priests, and monks are called the spiritual estate while princes, lords, artisans, and farmers are called the temporal estate. (…) The pope or bishop anoints, shaves heads, ordains, consecrates, and prescribes garb different from that of the laity, but he can never make a man into a Christian by so doing. He might well make him into a hypocrite or a humbug and a blockhead, but never a Christian or a spiritual man." (LW 44, p.127) He goes on to say just how far an ordinary Christian's potential extends. In the event that a group of Christians were stranded on an island, and they needed to baptise someone who came to faith, they would simply have to choose one from among them to do the task, whether he was married or not. In this scenario, there is no pomp or circumstance surrounding the baptism, no special attention given to the person charged with baptising. It is a service, and one which any Christian can do. The only reason not everyone baptises is for the same reason that one is chosen in the island example; that is, it is just a matter of office according to Luther, a formality which gives order to the body and allows it to function.

Another element is important to consider: the difference that Luther shows in "Freedom of a Christian" between the law and vain traditions. Luther recognises as the Jews did throughout history and generally do, that the law is not just the Ten Commandments but all 613 of the commands throughout the books of law (Torah), and these are not regarded as vain traditions but as having a specific purpose prior to the Messiah's coming of causing the people to despair in their own righteousness. "…The commandments show us what we ought to do but do not give us the power to do it. They are intended to teach man to know himself, that through them he may recognise his inability to do good and may despair of his own ability" (LW 31, p.349). It is because of

this character of the law that Luther loves to compare the law and the Gospel.[22] The law is not something which the Christian can shake off—the law is there to stay. In fact, the commandments for Christians are even harder than those set forth in the Old Testament, as complicated and consuming as those laws are, in the sense that Christians are commanded to lay down their lives for Christ—which sometimes means martyrdom. The rigidity of the law does not change in the New Testament—but the quality of service does. Another thing that does not change is the faith factor—faith was equally important in the Old Testament as the New. The people are now commanded to love one another, and here we return to the introduction to "Freedom of a Christian". The Christian owes no obedience to those who would hold either human traditions or expired traditions over his head. The laws of the Old Testament are no longer binding, having been replaced with Jesus' commandment, to love God with all of one's heart, soul, mind and strength and to love one's neighbour as oneself, which more than encompasses all of the Ten Commandments. The Christian is to "owe no one anything, except to love one another."

This is a good transition into Luther's views on the purpose of government. Luther says "Love by its very nature is ready to serve and be subject to him who is loved. So Christ, although he was Lord of all, was "born of woman, born under the law" (Gal. 4:4), and therefore was at the same time a free man and a servant, "in the form of God" and "of a servant" (Phil. 2:6-7)" (LW 31, p.343) The church is under the law along with the rest of the world because the purpose of the law is to make a certain kind of servants of men, not externally but, we could say, in their hearts. We have just walked through the process by which the Christian is set free in the previous paragraphs. And so it has been established not as a freedom that allows one to abandon the law but as freedom from abuses of the law. The Christian is free from laws that contradict scripture or turn it upside down. He is also free from the sentence of the law, which convicts him as guilty and deserving death. Because the law's purpose, according to the Word of God, is to show man his sinfulness, but the Word of God's job is to deliver man in His righteousness through the message of salvation. This we needed to establish in order to

[22] See "Freedom of a Christian" p. 346, where Luther contrasts the words of God (Scripture from an academic, faithless point of view) from the Word of God (the saving message of faith in God's grace).

see why the church must accept the different role she does, which follows in the line of the Word of God's purpose and not that of the law which we are about to see.

2.2 The Temporal Authority and Its Limits

The Purpose of the Temporal Authority within Luther's Theology

We have now seen how the Roman church aspired to take over the role of government even as she had dispensed with the Bible as the supreme authority. And we mentioned that previously Rome had the opposite problem in which the government required religious allegiance. Luther perceives that the church, if it is not submitted to the biblical teaching, and the state, will both try to devour each other, the church aspiring to the power of government, and the state desiring what the church has for its own. We have covered as much as possible, within the limits of the paper, of what the church has in exclusivity. According to Luther, it has a superior source of government and a special type of freedom. But at the same time, Luther constantly affirms the universal requirement of submission to temporal government.

Francis Oakley brings up a few important aspects in Luther's writings on the state's purpose in contrast to the church. "(Luther's) thinking about political life was, indeed, a political theology, one continuous with his great theology of salvation(...) That he should so often evoke a scriptural warrant (Romans 2:14-15) for the notion that there is a natural law underpinning the external justice of the temporal order is consistent with that emphasis" (1991, p.170). It is interesting that he connects Luther's theological motives for addressing politics with an appeal to natural law. The law is both an instrument of God and something that has bound men from the beginning of time such that it is recognized as natural. According to Oakley, Luther enhanced the temporal rulers' "standing in society" (p.171). "This was not only because he now saw them as possessing a monopoly on the use of coercive force, but also because, as the masks (larvae) behind which God conceals the exercise of his temporal governance, they are to be obeyed as much for conscience sake as for fear." To drive home the source of government's authority even further he cites the situation of the tyrant, the test of human obedience to God. "And precisely because of its divine ordination, it is neither to be

abused by an immoral ruler commanding his subjects to do wrong, nor actively resisted by subjects even when they groan under the heel of a tyrant… Should a ruler order what is immoral, we should remember that "it is no one's duty to do wrong; we must obey God (who desires right) rather than men"."

We see then a delicate balance between the place Luther gives to temporal authority and the limits he defines. What Luther returns to temporal authority is its governmental office given by God. His purpose is to "provide a sound basis for the civil law and sword so that no one will doubt that it is in the world by God's will and ordinance." (LW 45, p.86) Luther makes the simple assumption that if the government possesses no authority then it is no government. He continues with a quote from Romans, "Let every soul be subject to the governing authority, for there is no authority except from God; the authority which everywhere exists has been ordained by God. He then who resists the governing authority resists the ordinance of God, and he who resists God's ordinance will incur judgment." The government is in place in order to instil God's ordinances, and it must have authority, it must be given its due respect as government. There is not in Luther an ambiguity between violence and punishment: the sword is there to punish the wicked, and as such does no violence. "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed" (Gen. 9:6 quoted pp.86-87). Yet Luther notes that the first mention of the death penalty in the Bible is made when Cain fears for his life after having killed his brother Abel. "He was in such great terror of being killed in turn that God even placed a special prohibition on it and suspended the sword for his sake, so that no one was to slay him." Thus in one story Luther brings out the principle of justice that Cain was well aware of, probably by Adam's teaching, which involves temporal punishment for murder, and also God's mercy.

Luther is armed with both the Old and New Testament to show both God's mercy and God's justice as he seeks to establish the basis upon which the temporal government is established and continuous, not put to an end with the coming of Christ. It is the Old Testament example that we have just seen. He moves on to the New Testament with an interesting reference to Christ's admonition to Peter "He that takes the sword will perish by the sword." Maybe it would be helpful to bring in the context of this teaching. By the time Christ has said these words, Peter has already lopped off the ear of a Roman soldier.

It should be noted that Peter is known to be a passionate fellow, but not one to go around inciting brawls. In this case, however, there is an army of Roman soldiers come to take Jesus and crucify him. Peter reacts in defence of his Lord whom he loves. Jesus had already told his disciples that he would be taken away to be crucified, that it was all part of His Father's plan. He intended to prepare them so that they would not panic and rush to his defence. But Peter forgets all of this in the moment of danger, and fearing for his Lord, he swings for the Roman soldier and, missing the target, chops off his ear. Jesus has to heal the soldier's ear and then he is taken to be crucified as planned. As William Lane Craig says, the Romans were experts in execution, and this case is no exception: whether Peter scratched the legion or not, they were there to accomplish Jesus' arrest. Even in this event, the soldiers were justified in bearing their swords, but Peter was not.

The sword is granted in the same way that the law is granted for the sake of temporal government, and not for Christian life. Their intended purpose is to punish the wicked and to praise the righteous. (p.86) Whereas the Christian has no use for the sword and no need for the law, the sword and the law are there to maintain much-needed order. In fact, if it weren't for the law, enforced by the sword, Christian would be the first to be slaughtered according to the analogy that Luther makes below. We have already described Christian freedom, and the fact that the Christian is not ruled by the law of works or subject to any human authority. He is governed by the Spirit, which leads him to righteousness that is greater than what the law can produce. This applies to the Christian not automatically via his nomenclature but by a change in which the Spirit gives him new life and frees him from sin. Without this happening, there is no new government to speak of. And in the absence of the spiritual government, the temporal government is necessary.

> "If anyone attempted to rule the world by the Gospel and to abolish all temporal law and sword on the plea that all are baptized and Christian, and that, according to the Gospel, there shall be among them no law or sword…He would be loosing the ropes and chains of the savage wild beasts and letting them bite and mangle everyone, meanwhile insisting they were harmless, tame, and gentle creatures; but I would have the proof in my wounds. (…) take heed and first fill the world with real Christians before you attempt to rule it in a Christian and evangelical manner. This you will never accomplish; for the world and the masses are and always will be un-Christian, even if they are all baptized and Christian in name. Christians are far and few between (as the saying is). Therefore, it is out of the question that

> there should be a common Christian government over the whole world, or indeed over a single country or any considerable body of people, for the wicked always outnumber the good. Hence, a man who would venture to govern an entire country or the world with the Gospel would be like a shepherd who should put together in one fold wolves, lions, eagles, and sheep, and let them mingle freely with one another, saying, 'Help yourselves, and be good and peaceful toward one another. The fold is open, there is plenty of food. You need have no fear of dogs and clubs." (p.91)

The law is there so that both the beasts and the lambs will survive for a while. The beauty of Luther's analogy is that it reveals the goodness of the law in opposition to the reality of man's nature, which is murderous at its worst, and selfish at best. The law at once draws a line between the lion and the lamb and says to both parties, you will not cross this line. The law is in all of this analogy clearly not an end in itself because of what use is it to maintain lions and lambs at a distance from each other while the lambs must live in constant fear lest the line be crossed and the lions in constant hunger when the line cannot be crossed?

In this analogy, the Christians are of course the lambs. In his essay, with the aim of driving home the difference between the Christian's source of government and the secular source of government, Luther says that Christians do not need the law and that the law is there for the lawless. According to Luther, the Christian does not do what is right in response to the law, by force or out of fear of punishment, but rather out of a different nature. "A good tree needs no instruction to bear good fruit; its nature causes it to bear according to its kind without any law or instruction. I would take to be quite a fool any man who would make a book full of laws and statutes for an apple tree telling it how to bear apples and not thorns, when the tree is able by its own nature to do this better than the man with all his books can describe and demand." (p.89) Luther's purpose is bringing up this aspect of Christian theology is in explaining why the temporal authority is at once insufficient in producing righteousness and properly so. The law never produced righteousness such that a lion could become a lamb. The temporal authority is limited to "instruct, constrain and compel," but the Gospel has a different way of producing righteousness, and the argument here is that it is the only way to produce righteousness that is complete and lasting. The temporal authority establishes some temporary boundaries, but this is not satisfactory.

The beauty of the law, on the other hand, is that it does not lay a great burden on those who are already vulnerable; rather it serves to protect the vulnerable and to constrain the powerful. Luther lays a great emphasis on the law's purpose of protecting the innocent. The law is a means by which good behaviour is praised and bad behaviour is punished; though it cannot produce good behaviour it nevertheless is designed to maintain this distinction. If it fails in this function, it is useless. Luther's great concern was that the law be maintained to prevent the greatest injustice of all: that wrong would be approved as right and right as wrong, the criminal a saint and the saint a criminal. He put great weight on the law; he prescribed the law. What he understood as the law, however, was not dependent on the temperament of those in authority. By the law he understood the true unadulterated law; only this law could achieve even the limited purpose that he sets out in this essay. As we will see in his response to the peasant revolt, he held the Christian to a higher standard than the law of the land—he held him to the perfect law; at the same time, we will see just how high a demand this is. When we drop the plastic, life is not as idyllic as it would seem from the picture he paints of temporal authority maintaining law and order, peace and justice. Luther's emphasis on the character of the law sets him cleanly apart from Machiavelli's line of reasoning; it cannot be said that Luther bore any cynicism in regard to the integrity of the law. It follows that regardless of the temporal authority, the law remains constant.

The Limits of Temporal Authority

The temporal government extends as far as it needs to for the protection of both the beasts and the lambs from outward violence. Where it stops is at the doorstep of the soul. The spiritual government, which reigns over the other kingdom, does not stop at this boundary because those under this government have offered their lives to be directed by the Spirit. But the temporal government politely leaves the soul to its own devices. The kingdoms remain separate in their respective policies, yet coexisting much thanks to the temporal government. The temporal power is to be given great honour here on earth.

> "Our God is a great lord and ruler; this is why he must also have such noble, highborn, and rich hangmen and constables. He desires that everyone shall copiously accord them riches, honour, and fear in abundance. It pleases his divine will that we call his hangmen gracious lords, fall at their feet, and be subject to

> them in all humility, so long as they do not ply their trade too far and try to become shepherds instead of hangmen." (p.113)

One cannot help but catch a controlled chuckle as Luther writes these words. The honour that these men receive is only an analogy for the honour due to God. And their array of wealth serves only to symbolize the beauty of the law which these men bear. In fact, they are as constrained as anyone to the law and in addition they have forfeited their rights to be shepherds. For temporal rulers, the rule is that so long as they remember that they are not shepherds, they are staying within their bounds and doing their job and they have their share of fading glory.

The point that Luther is driving home is the boundary here. Luther's complaint against the Romanists is that they failed as governors because they ruled on matters of heresy, thereby taking the role of the shepherd, and they failed as bishops because they used the sword in order to punish heresy. In Luther's view, it is the church that should deal with matters such as heresy and heresy cannot be restrained by force. But Luther was considered a heretic by the papal government, as were Wyclif and Hus before him, because a heretic is a rebel against spiritual authority. Thus it boils down to who is regarded as a spiritual authority. The pope called himself the sole spiritual authority and anyone who spoke against him was therefore a heretic. The pope used the same means to defend his power against heresy as he used to obtain his power in the first place: by force of deceit and threat. Luther, on the other hand, said Scripture alone could fight against heresy since heresy was rebellion against scripture. "God's word must do the fighting. If it does not succeed, certainly temporal power will not succeed either, even if it were to drench the world in blood. Heresy is a spiritual matter that you cannot hack to pieces with iron, consume with fire, or drown in water. God's word alone avails here as Paul says in II Corinthians 10 (:4-5), and Luther quotes, "Our weapons are not carnal, but mighty in God to destroy every argument and proud obstacle that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and to take every thought captive in the service of Christ"" (p.114).

3. A KINGDOM APART FROM THIS WORLD

3.1 The Prince as Notbischöfe

In stark contrast to the humble yet esteemed role that we have just seen Luther ascribe to the temporal authority, is the idea of giving unlimited rights to the persons in office and giving them a position of divine authority. As Skinner covers the Thomist Revival, he shows how Luther was considered a heretic because of his views on the limits of natural law and in the next paragraph cites historians that regard Lutherans as granting the king a divine status. Whether the Lutherans deviated from Luther's principles is not the subject of this paper. What is of interest to us here is the narrow passageway that Luther in fact must walk in order to satisfy the critics. He must grant the necessary recognition of human authority while not allowing it to attain divine status.

It is Luther's opponents who gave such a generous estimate of human nature that, as we saw in the first section, man is inherently justified and the very foundations of government lay in men's hands. Is this position not closer to giving divine status to a human being than the position we have seen Luther defend in the last section, in which he reserves divine status for God's laws and God himself? Luther encouraged submission both to God and to earthly authorities, yet never are these two entities confounded.

The elements of Luther's view that we will be considering now are the limits not only of temporal authority but of human authority and that including Christian authority, or ecclesiastical authority. We will not be observing human authority just in theory now but in several events in Luther's times in which he was involved: the role Luther allowed Duke Johannes as "Notbischofe", Luther's reaction to the peasant revolt, and several other events in passing.

Perhaps surprisingly, we see that it is in the cases in which he gave too much authority to man and depended too much on the establishment of human institutions that he received the most criticism in this century. We will see that Luther did not despise natural law as is implied by the Thomist critique cited by Skinner, as we will see how he was able to employ the law of the land to demonstrate the error of the Peasant Revolt. Yet he does not stop at a simple analysis on this level.

The factor that is overlooked in the Thomist interpretation is that if humanity is automatically righteous, then human beings, whether in the form of the masses or the few, are their own gods and if the interpretation is correct they should be able to manage quite well in maintaining peaceful government. According to Gritsch, Luther considers the chief purpose of government to be to prevent the deification of man. Gritsch thought that Luther was equally concerned with the opposite problem: how to prevent the government from becoming a god in its own right (pp.58-59).

This concern we have already begun to deal with in the last section covering Luther's resistance of the Romanists. As we saw in Luther's letter to the Christian Nobility, the priests were supposedly *characteres indelebiles,* who were permanently set apart from the people. Luther refutes this claim, and in the process incurs Figgis' complaint that he has done away with the holiness of the church in favour of the holiness of the laity and the secular sphere. Her holiness is not the product of her priests' inherently and eternally divine status, which was actually just a contrivance of men, but it is a difference in character, or in nature as Luther says in the essay on temporal authority. In the same way, but in the other kingdom, Luther teaches that the secular authority is not to be feared because it is inherently divine but because it was granted by God to defend his law, which is divine. The difference is that instead of the persons in authority having the right to define the law, Luther says that God has given them the office they have and it consists only of laying down God's law.

We will see in this section how the limitations Luther routinely applied to the temporal authority stand in contrast with Luther's allowance of Duke Johannes to choose visitors to check up on doctrine in the churches. In this last section, we will address the relation between the church and the temporal authority in greater detail, entering into the two sides between which various historians and theologians have noticed a tension in Luther. Is this in keeping with Luther's core principles, or is it outright dependence on the temporal authority? To what extent, if at all, is Luther's overall doctrine inclined toward the building of the kingdom of God through temporal force as opposed to the independence of the church from worldly institutions? We won't provide an exhaustive survey here, of course, but a sampling of applicable evidence.

Temporal Force and Christianity

So far we have dealt with Luther's critique of the papacy as a tyrannical authority. We have seen how he exposed the pope for his true intentions, which were not of edifying the church but rather of seeking to make merchandise of people who were seeking salvation. We even saw by what methods Luther intended to build and did build up the church and how he defined a shepherd for the sake of protecting the sheep against false prophets. We have seen the conflict, in fact the antithesis, between hunger for temporal power and service in the kingdom of God. Did Luther consider the best solution to raise a wall between those governed by the Word of God and the world? On the contrary, he clearly develops that the Christian is to work in the world, hold office in the world, and serve the temporal authority whether it is his neighbor or the prince or the emperor. But this raises the question, also dear to Luther, if Christians live in the world, how are they to survive without protection? We have covered this aspect of the temporal authority's role. The temporal government is entrusted with punishing the wicked and praising the righteous, and as framed in the essay on temporal authority, this serves to protect the lambs from the lions.

Did Luther consider this to be a wide enough scope for the temporal government to adequately protect Christianity from heretics, to preserve true doctrine? Or did Luther think it necessary for the temporal government to help the church in a special way through regulation to prevent heresy? This is the crux of the matter as it is the dividing line between the church that is delivered by a sovereign God and the church that seeks worldly dominion and special favors in the courts of law.

Allen says he allowed the ruler the right to "forcibly suppress false doctrine and false worship within his own dominions." Yet he also says that Luther agreed with the common view that the ruler should "allow his subjects to believe what they could and live and worship accordingly, just as far as was consistent with the maintenance of social order" (1941, p.24). These two views do not seem to be coherent with one another; yet do they both accurately express Luther's views? Allen also ambiguously expresses the responsibility that he attributes to Luther in his concluding remark that Luther's life was a tragedy because he "gave his great name to state churches". Spitz however concludes on the clear note that Luther did not aim "toward state-churchism. On the question as to

whether the state-controlled church as it developed historically, especially after his death, was in accordance with Luther's wishes, it is possible to say that Luther was clear, consistent, and articulate in demanding that there be no mixture of the spiritual and secular realms" (1953, p.134). How clear was Luther, we will examine for ourselves.

Maintaining Religion or Maintaining the Law?

Allen understands that Luther was not in favor of secular authority being above the law, but rather being bound by a fixed law that is coherent with both Scripture and conscience, being given by God and not formulated by the secular authority itself. Allen adamantly repeats that Luther is therefore not for an absolute state right. In the effort to defend Luther, he compares him to his contemporaries on the following question concerning temporal force: "Is the prince bound, in order to maintain true religion, forcibly to suppress false doctrine and false worship within his own dominions?" (1941, p.24). He provides three answers: supposedly Luther struggled between the first and third, while it is only the second that represents the position of absolute state right.

> "It might be held that the civil sovereign was under a positive obligation to maintain true religion by force and use his sword to exterminate wolves that threatened the fold. This was the view taken by Calvin and his followers and by large sections of the Catholics, usually including the Pope. Or it might be held that, though the secular sovereign had a right to suppress heresy by force, he was under no obligation to do so. It lay with him to 'tolerate' or not as seemed good to him and to 'persecute' as much or as little as he chose. This, of course, was the view that all governments tended to take. Thirdly it was held, not by isolated thinkers, but by considerable groups of people, that the sovereign was bound to allow his subjects to believe as they could and live and worship accordingly, just as far as was consistent with the maintenance of social order" (p.25).

Convinced that he must classify Luther within these three currents, he says that Luther vacillated between the first and the last policy because his "deepest convictions and feelings were at variance with his sense of what was practically and immediately necessary." Later Allen specifies that Luther at first believed that temporal force was ineffective in controlling heresy, but later he decided that force could be used. I think that some investigation is necessary to determine why it is unclear what Luther's position is on the matter of temporal force and heresy. Did Luther vacillate between the first and last position, or are these simply not adequate descriptions of his position at any point in

time? His difference with each of these three stances is essential to understanding where Luther is situated among his contemporaries.

Allen argues in the beginning that the law is provided by God and this is what distinguishes Luther from the position of absolutist state right because in the one case God lays down the law and in the latter case the state lays down the law. If God is an unknown or inconstant entity, and if the law is not knowable without the precondition of belief in God, then there is no difference between the two positions as far as politics is concerned. The people are persuaded to believe in either case that an omnipotent entity forces them to follow their instructions regardless of what they may be. If we take the position that Luther is *not* in favor of absolute state right *because* he places the temporal authority under God's laws, then we must mean by God's law something that is not arbitrarily defined but that is both constant and known. Human judgment is held responsible for perceiving God's laws as such and distinguishing between what they are and what they aren't.

Luther favored true belief and worship of God and he also upheld the law. Yet he did not consider belief in God to be necessary for knowing the law and therefore judging and being judged according to the law. Therefore, he could uphold God's laws as the standard without first forcing all to worship God. In fact, he considered the truth of God's laws to be as real as the impossibility of forcing true worship of God. This is the only way that man can be held accountable for failing to satisfy the law even though it is humanly impossible to satisfy the law. Luther divided the law from the Gospel, which we have already begun to see in principle in the previous section. The Gospel message is that the penalty for sin, disobedience of the law, is satisfied by Christ's death on the cross, and it is only satisfied by this; belief in the Gospel is freedom from the curse of the law, which is the punishment that everyone deserves who has failed before the law. Since, as Luther believes, Christ is the only means to satisfy the penalty incurred by the law, it is not through the law by God's grace through faith in Christ (*sola gratia*; *sola fides; solo Cristo*) that man can be made righteous. Thus there is no question of any earthly authority being able to make anyone else righteous; this depends on their having believed in Jesus Christ. There can be nothing further than this perspective from violent

coercion (in any sense of the terms) to worship God; we will see the role the law plays in maintaining that boundary as long as it is kept.

This contrast between the law and the Gospel affects Luther's view of society in the sense that he cannot universalize the righteousness that comes from Christ's blood, but he can universalize the law in the sense that everyone has a conscience designed to inform him of God's law. Since the law is not sufficient to produce righteousness at all whereas grace does so perfectly, but the law is universally known, and grace is not universally known, Luther worked as an evangelist connecting the two. In the midst of all his labors to describe their relationship, he avoided the collapse of the two into one. In the term "religion" as Allen uses it, however, the two are unfortunately collapsed into one. How do we know this to be the case? Because in his formulation, the view in which religion is applied by force is opposed to the view that worship is free. Since Luther considered mere outward conformity to the law, in the sense of the application of the government by God's laws, to be not equivalent to the uniform worship of God, he could fight for maintaining the integrity of the law at the same time as he fought to keep the people free from any religion—defined, let us say, as outward binding to the law—which was forced on them by men.

Having attacked the false unity of outward conformity under the law and belief in the Gospel in the term religion, there is now the possibility of dealing with the relationship between the two since this is what concerned Luther so much. Luther believed that there is inward belief that is to be distinguished from mere outward performance of the law. Luther definitely does not have any doubts that inward belief cannot be changed by force.

Luther was therefore in favor of the temporal authority's defending the law, which had an absolute significance, being *given* by God and not determined by man. He favored and counseled this, and most of all he argued based on Scripture in favor of this. Luther of course favored the ruler who would in practice uphold God's laws. The dilemma between applying force to the establishment of religion and allowing freedom of worship is therefore neglecting the fact that for Luther, religion is merely outward compliance with God's laws and the lack or defiance of God's laws is the antithesis of freedom.

Temporal Control of Heresy within the Limits of the Law

Allen perceives that Luther buckled on the matter of the *effectiveness* of using temporal force for the control of heresy. He hypothesizes that he originally believed that temporal force was ineffective in controlling heresy, but later decided that it might work after all. In the essay on temporal authority, Luther defines heresy as a spiritual matter and not something that the temporal authority could or should try to control. This is a 180 degree shift from the definition of heresy as the defiance of the temporal authorities, whether or not they are Christian. As we will see, the way that heresy is defined determines whether the temporal force can act against it. If heresy is defined as going against the law, the answer is yes. But if heresy is inward rebellion against God without necessarily including the outward breaking of the law, the answer is no.

> "Again you say, "The temporal power is not forcing men to believe; it is simply seeing to it externally that no one deceives the people by false doctrine; how could heretics otherwise be restrained?" Answer: This the bishops should do; it is a function entrusted to them and not to the princes. Heresy can never be restrained by force. One will have to tackle the problem in some other way, for heresy must be opposed and dealt with otherwise than with the sword. Here God's word must do the fighting. If it does not succeed, certainly the temporal power will not succeed either, even if it were to drench the world in blood. Heresy is a spiritual matter which you cannot hack to pieces with iron, consume with fire, or drown in water" (LW 45, p.114).

Here Luther has explicitly opposed the position of prince to the position of bishop for the sake of their different functions. But as we will see shortly, he did not hold firmly to this structural safeguard. The point strongly argued above is that temporal force is not to replace God's word in matters of heresy. The question is, what does Luther intend by the law in regard to heresy? Is the law itself neutral in regard to personal belief in God, or is it not?

As we have said, Allen believes that Luther was at first in favor of no temporal force in relation to Christianity, and subsequently he was in favor of using force to control heresy. He claims that the latter was not an absolutist stance because it was not at

the ruler's discretion, but the question then is at whose discretion it was. The unspoken implication is that both positions are in accordance with the law, that is, with Scripture.

In what sense, then, does the civil magistrate have the responsibility to "maintain" true religion and right worship? The only possible answer is that, as Allen understands, love fulfills the law, and so as long as the church adheres to the biblical principle of love, the civil magistrate will not in any way be able to complain against the church. But insofar as the church becomes a god in her own right, taking authority over others and using violence for her cause, then the civil magistrate will have to persecute such a growth in the "church". Thus it is like gardening—the gardener does not determine what corn looks like or tastes like (at least this is how things were originally, before genetic modification), but he weeds out anything that is not corn. How does the civil magistrate know what to weed out in terms of heresy? The only logical sense in which the civil magistrate can rule in matters of heresy is that heresy is also against the law.

Luther's address to the Christian nobility, those who held temporal clout and were in the visible church, was an example of appealing to the secular authorities with a logical argument that required no faith and pertained to temporal matters. He was fighting a problem that had started as heresy by his definition and had grown fully into outward rebellion, attacking the product on a logical basis, saying that the pope was a tyrant ruling over them. Luther's central argument was against the pope as legislator because Luther believed that only God should be the legislator, who gave man the Scriptures so that he could know God's laws. It follows naturally that one man cannot claim to be the sole law-interpreter, because then that man would be the lawgiver. At that point it was a Christian man's responsibility to point out the error in the pope's logic and his rebellion against God. All of this is nonviolent, but Luther did not consider himself to be personally fighting heresy using his own equipment. His logical equipment fought with the pope's illegal deeds, while his Scriptural defense alone dealt with the heresy.

Heresy, as Luther uses the term, is not rebellion against the state, therefore, or rebellion against the church, but rebellion against God. However, the breaking of the law is a symptom a ways down the course. Luther's entire system is not dependent on the law therefore, but the law can serve as an indicator of one's standing with Scripture. According to Luther, man's own conscience serves to validate Scripture—not infallibly,

but by design. Allen explains that Luther's view of the law and God as the lawgiver goes against the notion of the absolutist state, but he clarifies that it does not lead to the natural rights theories either (p.19).

A Breach between the Kingdoms? Enter, Duke Johannes

When Luther allows the prince to serve as bishop in the case of Duke Johannes of Saxony, he seems to go against his clearly defined limit on the temporal authority that he states, "It pleases his divine will that we call his hangmen gracious lords, fall at their feet, and be subject to them in all humility, so long as they do not ply their trade too far and try to become shepherds instead of hangmen" (LW 45, p.113). If this institutional constraint were respected, then the prince should have stayed focused on secular matters and not taken it upon himself to choose visitors to inspect the churches' doctrine. As far as Luther's principles are concerned moreover, the Christians owed no special attention to the counsel provided by the "visitors" sent by the prince because of the fact that they were issued by the prince. That fact did not give these visitors any authority to dictate on spiritual matters. But let's take a closer look at the situation.

Lewis Spitz takes an interest in the case of the Notbischöfe, about which Luther says, "I wish to leave the jurists…to settle this disputation…I will write as a theologian and as a heretic," and thereby left a legacy of controversy both to jurists and historians. With equal truth Luther could write, "The other articles…I commend to the lawyers, for it is not my business as an evangelist to decide and judge on these matters. I shall instruct and teach consciences what pertains to divine and Christian matters," and still maintain, "that since the time of the apostles the secular sword and authority has never been so clearly described and grandly lauded as by me, which even my enemies must acknowledge" (1953, p.113). Spitz sets before himself the task of reconciling all these things in Luther. In this effort he brings up, among other things, the separation of the spiritual and secular spheres. He seeks to show the purpose Luther had in dividing these two spheres.

> "I must always drum in and rub in, drive in and hammer home such a distinction between these two kingdoms, even though it is written and spoken so often that it is annoying. For Satan himself does not cease to cook and brew these two kingdoms into each other. The secular lords wish in the devil's name always to

> teach and instruct how man should order the secular government. That is throwing the secular and spiritual government together and mixing them, when the high spirits or wiseacres wish in an imperious and lordly manner to change and instruct God's words, declare themselves what one should teach and preach, which is forbidden them as well as the most humble beggar."[23]

In this text Luther is concerned with the corruption inherent in secular efforts to infiltrate the church. This is significant because Figgis and Gritsch seems to be worried with the opposite in Luther—that he allows the state more control over the church than he allows the church over the state. What concerns Luther the most in this passage is that secular interests and worldly ways not work their way into the church. Luther denounces those who go against God's Word—changing it, perhaps under the title of jurisprudence—and force this teaching instead of teaching that is true to the Bible. He specifically casts shame on the notion that their position in society could give them the right to change doctrine from God's Word.

Christendom and Roman Catholicism

Spitz considers Luther's Catholic heritage to see the extent to which Luther's thought continued in the same vein. He also charts the history of interpretation that Luther's understanding of the relation of Christendom to worldly government has received.

> "Luther's position on the *corpus christianum* has enjoyed a long and honorable history of varying historiographical interpretation. During the period of confessional Lutheranism the view prevailed officially that Luther had an all-embracing *respublica christiana* concept with the three orders of "Lehr"-, "Wehr"- and "Nährstände." The Aufklärung found in Luther's view of governmental authority its own emphasis on public virtue, while Pietism condemned Luther's inclination toward secular government. Among mid-nineteenth and twentieth-century critical historical views it is possible to distinguish three groups with differing emphases. The first and oldest group about the middle of the past century held the concept of the Christian State as central, with church and state clearly separate as two independent organizations or institutions but playing a part in each other's functions, the state drawing ethical strength from Christianity. A second group of authorities saw the uniqueness of the reformer's position in his emphasis on the independence of the state, in contrast with the catholic conflation of the spiritual and secular powers, basing it upon a natural law foundation; the church also having an independent status as a *Bekenntniskirche* or autonomous confessional church. (Thus, Holl) Finally there

[23] Spitz 1953, p.117. Excerpt trans. from WA, LI 239f.

> is a third group of scholars oriented toward the *corpus christianum* idea in Luther, represented by Sohm and others whose views we have already discussed" (1953, p.120).

It is evident in Spitz's history that there is not an evolution in interpretation of Luther so much as a consistent battle between the view that despises secular interests (the Pietists and the Confessing Church) and the view that interprets Luther's desire for Christendom with the supreme value of public virtue. Was Luther ambivalent in his central focus? In other words, did he lack a central focus?

It would appear that history has spilled the contents of Luther's treasure cache. As Luther predicted, there has been a great interest in joining the temporal kingdom and the spiritual kingdom into one entity as is in the *respublica christiana*. Spitz delves deeper into the matter as he approaches the question of the bishop's office. He begins by attempting to approximate Luther's ideal. He summarizes, "The true bishop is one who explains, proclaims, and serves others with the Word. What a bishop is must be learned not from the church, but from the Scriptures. Putting all the papists together, one cannot find a single bishop" (1953, p.124). Spitz goes on to define what essentially characterizes a bishop as being the concern with word and life, from which he derives a logical possibility of a prince or anyone serving as a bishop if he has a function pertaining supposedly to the regulation of doctrine. But what he just demonstrated in understanding of Luther's meaning of the bishop deserves more than an instant's consideration amid the ongoing debate.

The True Bishop

Spitz's synthesis of Luther's teaching on the "bishopric" is that one could not determine what the bishop was by looking at the church as it was but only by looking to Scripture. According to Scripture, when it comes to the value of the bishop, the proof is in the pudding. Spitz alludes to the office of the bishop growing out of the office of visitation in the early church, but the "office of visitation" is already degrees removed from Scripture. Luther believed, as Spitz says, that the true bishop is one who explains the Word and serves others with the Word. If we maintain the Word but neglect the aspect of service, the Word is not upheld at all; for, as we will see more in the context of the peasant revolt, service and relationships of devotion and submission, are commanded

by the Scripture to all followers of Christ. This may seem paradoxical because we are indeed saying that even correction, admonition, and setting straight of others, is to be done in total humility and service and sacrifice of oneself for others. The apostle Paul wrote letters to several congregations that he traveled between, but he nevertheless devoted his life to nurturing these congregations and caring for them intimately so that he knew where they needed correction and encouragement in the Word. Further, he prayed for them, cared for them, and proved all of this through his commitment to them and sensitivity to their needs.

Luther expresses this understanding when he comments in the letter to the Christian nobility that 1. "If they had less wealth and pomp, they could pray and study more diligently to be worthy and diligent in dealing with matters of faith, as was the case in ancient times when bishops did not presume to be kings of kings" (LW 44, p.163). In this he meant not that the king could not be a Christian but that he would have to assume a lesser role than the bishop in the Christian body because he simply would not be able to devote himself adequately to praying for others and growing in the Word due to the demands of his position. And further, Luther asks straight out, "How can a man rule and at the same time preach, pray, study, and care for the poor? Yet these are the duties which most peculiarly belong to the pope, and they were so earnestly imposed by Christ that he even forbade his disciples to take cloak or money with them." (Matthew 10:9-10) Christ commanded this because it is almost impossible for anybody to fulfill these duties if they have to look after one single household. Yet the pope would rule an empire and still remain pope" (p.166). Luther already clearly said that "there is no true, basic difference between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, between religious and secular, except for the sake of office and work but not for the sake of status" (p.129). The status he is referring to on this page is worldly status, meaning that the bishop is not elevated in worldly status in relation to the prince. But clearly based on his practical considerations, service defining the true bishop, the prince could not take on such a task even if he would like to. Christ says to his disciples that "whoever desires to become great among you shall become your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be the slave of all" (Mark 10:44). To sever these duties from the position of the bishop

not only exposes the bishop to corruption but prevents him from being a bishop at all. He will be more than useless to his flock.

The prince can definitely be a Christian, but it is impossible that from his princely perch he can serve his country in the way that a bishop does, and according to Luther's word in the essay on temporal authority the prince has to forfeit any role of spiritual shepherdhood. His role is to rule justly, but the work of the shepherd entails more than just the enforcement of God's laws. The bishop does not just check up for doctrinal accuracy like a federal standardized test distributor going from school to school to administer the proper materials. The bishop has to have a personal relationship with the congregations he ministers to because the only thing permitting him to be of any assistance to them in the Word is his knowing not only the Word but them also. The prince has the more standard job, and is essentially limited in his office. Thus it cannot be said that Luther has no knowledge of the personal and non-political nature of Christian ministry.

We have established that it is not effective or even possible, not to mention being a necessity in any situation, for a prince to be a bishop by Luther's own standards. Yet Luther waged an extensive battle not only with the Romanists' fallacies but also personally with his own inclination toward Christendom. The same problem that he had with maintaining the Scriptural bishop as opposed to the Catholic bishop, he had to some degree with "Christendom" in general. In the following passage it would seem that his despair in the apparent destruction of the church—though this destruction was the product of the Romanist influence in his times, led him to grasp for a replacement.

> "But though the Romish court is so dreadfully afraid of a free Christian Council, and shuns the light so shamefully, that it has [entirely] removed, even from those who are on its side, the hope that it will ever permit a free Council, much less that it will itself hold one, whereat, as is just, they [many Papists] are greatly offended and have no little trouble on that account [are disgusted with this negligence of the Pope], since they notice thereby that the Pope would rather see all Christendom perish and all souls damned than suffer either himself or his adherents to be reformed even a little, and his [their] tyranny to be limited, nevertheless I have determined meanwhile to publish these articles in plain print, so that, should I die before there would be a Council (as I fully expect and hope, because the knaves who flee the light and shun the day take such wretched pains to delay and hinder the Council), those who live and remain after me may have my testimony and confession to produce, in addition to the Confession which I

> have issued previously, whereby up to this time I have abided, and, by God's grace, will abide. (Smalkald Articles 1.3)

Yet in the tenth article, he says:

> "…I verily desire to see a truly Christian Council [assembled some time], in order that many matters and persons might be helped. Not that we need it, for our churches are now, through God's grace, so enlightened and equipped with the pure Word and right use of the Sacraments, with knowledge of the various callings and of right works, that we on our part ask for no Council, and on such points have nothing better to hope or expect from a Council. But we see in the bishoprics everywhere so many parishes vacant and desolate that one's heart would break, and yet neither the bishops nor canons care how the poor people live or die, for whom nevertheless Christ has died, and who are not permitted to hear Him speak with them as the true Shepherd with His sheep. This causes me to shudder and fear that at some time He may send a council of angels upon Germany utterly destroying us, like Sodom and Gomorrah, because we so wantonly mock Him with the Council." (Smalkald Articles 1.10)

Luther recognizes in the tenth article 1. That the churches do not need a council; that they are for the moment finding God's grace sufficient, and 2. That the Romanist Council does not care for the people's spiritual lives, and yet he still says 3. That he desires a truly Christian Council, believing that this would be able to help many people and many things. If Luther was torn, as Allen says, between his desires and what was practically possible, it was in this sense: that he would have wanted all the Christians in his surroundings, which were the Germans, to be built up by the Word, and yet at moments he did not fully trust that it could happen in the way that it says in Scripture. But this lack of trust was not part of but against his own convictions. As he said, I think he believes, "Here God's word must do the fighting. If it does not succeed, certainly the temporal power will not succeed either, even if it were to drench the world in blood" (LW 45, p.114).

The *Instruktion*

Luther could not resist the zeal of Johannes, Duke of Saxony in his offer to send visitors to check up on the teachings in the churches throughout the region to make sure that doctrine was now in order. Following are the words with which Luther received the temporary institution of the Notbischöfe.

> "Who can tell how needed such an office is in Christendom?...Therefore for conscience sake we wanted to do it and for the office of love which is commanded all Christians universally continue in it, and humbly with the

> submissive conscientious prayer approached the Serene, Highborn prince and lord, Herr Johannes, Duke of Saxony, the arch marshall and Elector of the Holy Roman Empire, Landgrave of Thuringia, Margrave of Meiszen, etc., our gracious Lord as the prince and our certain secular lord ordained by God; that his Electoral Grace out of Christian love, for he is not responsible as secular overlord, and for God's sake for the good of the Gospel and for the benefit and welfare of the distressed Christians in his Electoral Grace's land, graciously would appoint and ordain for this office some competent persons…This also his Electoral Grace did through God's pleasure…God grant that this become a worthy example to others…and just as his gracious Lord holds the same Gospel of Christ, the same pure doctrine of grace, which the whole Christian Church agrees to and uniformly promotes…so his gracious Lord has commanded the same to his visitors…And we might well not allow these things to go out as a firm command, not as a new papal decretal, but more as statement or relating, as a witness and confession of faith: so we hope that all pious peaceful preachers who love the Gospel will immediately and with one accord go with us, as St. Paul teaches us that we should do, Phil. 2,2. We will submit to the zeal of our lords and gracious princes, thereto our love and good intention they should not despise in unthankfulness and pride but willingly and without compulsion in the manner of love be subject to such a visitation and live peacefully until God the Holy Ghost through you (princes) or through us gives us something better. Where, however, certain men stubbornly are opposed and without good grounds wish to make differences, as one finds wild heads, who out of mischief cannot participate in something communal or bear conformity, but are different and willful in heart and life; we must put such away from ourselves as straw on the threshing floor; and here also we do not want to leave the help and counsel or our gracious lords untried.
> For although his Electoral Grace is not commanded to teach and rule spiritually, nevertheless he is responsible, as secular ruler, to maintain things so that dissension, bands, and disorder do not arise among the subjects.[24]

Luther concludes on the note that he only honors the Duke's initiative in appointing the visitors because he is trying to prevent disorder from arising. Yet he says that this initiative should not "go out as a firm command, not as a new papal decretal, but more as…a witness and confession of faith." There seems to be some confusion on the matter of whether this office is going to involve forceful elimination of dissension or whether it will be a plea for doctrinal purity.

This problem relates to the manner by which the kingdom of God is to grow. As we covered in the previous section on papal authority versus Scriptural authority, the pope took a position of superiority over Christians. Yet we concluded that Luther was not merely concerned with equality among Christians but that his main concern was for false doctrine not to have influence simply because it is garbed in royalty. Even though

[24] Quoted in Spitz 1953, p.131-132 from the *Instruktion* found in W. A. XXVI, 196 ff.

the prince is here acting as a fellow Christian Luther still must treat him as the prince and thus there is confusion which we see coming to the surface as Luther says, "We will submit to the zeal of our lords and gracious princes, thereto our love and good intention they should not despise in unthankfulness and pride but willingly and without compulsion in the manner of love be subject to such a visitation and live peacefully until God the Holy Ghost through you (princes) or through us gives us something better." Even if this was intended to be a temporary situation, is it a passable means of "maintaining" the Gospel for one who is concerned for his liberty? And worse yet, what are the possible repercussions further down the line of thus mixing of the roles of prince and bishop?

In spite of the fact that there is a recourse to the prince as bishop, the bishop is not seen as benefiting from the temporal clout he had in this instance in the princely office. That is, even though it is the prince who assisted in the process of selecting the visitors, the use of force is not within the scope of the project underlined by Luther in this letter. The only purpose that can be coherent with Luther's beliefs is the protection of the church from false doctrine, but what he did in this gesture was help establish a worldly "kingdom of God" by relying on the temporal support. Yet we know from his consistent position that he believed the true Christian was rare and that the kingdom was a construction project that would never be finished in this era. As Spitz concludes, though there be a degree of confusion brought into the picture by an event such as Luther's pass to Duke Johannes, various scholars, such as Grisar, recognize on the basis of Luther's overall career that he never intended to forge state-ecclesiasticism.

In conclusion to this chapter of our discussion, we have seen how institutionally speaking Luther seems to allow the prince the very prerogative that he denied the emperor, of arbitrating doctrine. However, we have maintained that the essential difference is that Luther neither intended for prince nor emperor to take advantage of his position for the sake of skewing doctrine. He clearly believed that Duke Johannes was willing to use his power for the benefit of the church. Nevertheless, Luther was not implement Christianity through the old machinery of the temporal authority? Was this not a dangerous move?

Spitz defends Luther most effectively by presenting the context into which he enters as far as the Roman Catholic conception of Christendom as a worldly kingdom is

concerned. He documents that, "The introduction of Roman law, which took no cognizance of the estate system and tended to regard the prince in the old Roman sense of the princes, accelerated the rise of the secular rulers. Many jurists of the territorial courts long before the reformation had decided that the princes, after the example of the *pontifex maximus*, should be concerned also with religious affairs, granting the emperor only reserved powers" (1953, pp.114-115). It should be clear from our second section that the interchange between the prince and the emperor is not the battlefield to which Luther devoted himself. Yet the existence of this tradition may explain why some scholars less familiar with Luther's own views or less concerned with expounding them, may emphasize his contribution, though minor, to this flow of tradition, over his major focus.

In this section so far we have covered Luther's teaching that heresy can only be controlled as it sprouts into illegality, whereas the church itself maintains doctrinal purity through personal relationships of teaching truth in love. If Duke Johannes was in line with Luther's own theology, which Luther clearly believe to be the case, and if the office of the bishop that he considers Biblical is one exercised both in love and in submission to Scripture as the sole authority binding Christianity, as we saw, and not one that depends upon temporal force, then Luther's move was not, as Figgis implies, to grant the prince control over his subjects' consciences or to allow the prince himself to be the standard for religion within his region (Figgis, 1960, pp.55-61). But precisely because Luther could not have flattered the prince to this extent in keeping with his own beliefs, there is a logical concern with the utility of the Duke's effort.

It is impossible to compel a person to love. If heresy is indeed a spiritual matter, then the Duke could not ensure the spiritual soundness of any congregations in his region, but could only evaluate them in terms of external abiding by the law. The question then remains, so long as this initiative remained within the limits of the law, what distinguishes this office from the general rule of the law? What need did the church have of this special help? The clearest conclusion in keeping with Luther's principles is that the Duke provided the church with a special favor, but like feeding a squirrel in the park, the danger is that the squirrel will become lazy and expect handouts all the time. Did Luther want the church to be dependent on this sort of nourishment?

We will see next in the case of the peasant revolt, there was not an overabundance of men like Duke Johannes in Luther's times; on the contrary, the vast majority of the lords and the princes fell far short of Luther's standards of zeal for the law of love. Luther devoted himself primarily to spurring the peasants to independence in obeying the Gospel; far from encouraging them to wait for an edict to be passed before they adjusted their behavior, he encouraged them to take the first step as Christians in obeying God's laws.

B. The Peasant Revolt

"How can one know what sin is without law and conscience?" ("Against the Antinomians" LW 47, p.113".)

The Church under the Law

In the last section, we considered how Luther veered toward Christendom in his favoring Duke Johannes' appointing visitors to the churches. The centralized, temporal authority-clad means of checking up on the church seemed a bit like using steel wool to give a baby a bath. Yet Luther was dealing with some foes in his times that took cover under the mantle of the church, and he considered the only means of dealing with this problem was the law—the universal solution for separating the wheat from the chaff. Gritsch offers insight into the matter with his thesis concerning the purpose of the temporal authority in relation to the church. At the outset, he says that Luther perceived a condition that was far from the ideal in the church. Gritsch goes so far as to say that he "developed his views within a specific historical context wherein he judged the church, rather than the state, to be the source of tyranny."

> "It seems plain to me," Luther told his students during his lecture on Romans 13:1 ("Let every person be subject to the governing authorities") that in our day the secular powers are carrying on their duties more successfully and better than the ecclesiastical rulers are doing. For they are strict in their punishment of thefts and murders, except to the extent that they are corrupted in insidious privileges. But the ecclesiastical rulers, except for those who invade the liberties, privileges, and rights of the church, whom they condemn to excessive punishments, actually nourish pride, ambitions, prodigality, and contentions rather than punish them (so

> much so that perhaps it would be safer if the temporal affairs of the clergy were placed under secular power.)[25]

In the above analysis by Luther, there is no end-justifies-means reasoning. Nor is Luther saying that the church is by nature morally inferior to the state. What he is admitting is that the so-called ecclesiastical rulers were among the most corrupt people around in his day. This is not a detail that Luther is willing to sweep under the carpet. Two senses in which the church is sinful—the existence of heretics within the visible church who are disguised as sheep, as well as the acceptance of these heretics by the sheep—are of incredible importance in Luther's thought on the function of the law.

This quality of the church provides another function to the law that extends from the function we saw earlier of praising the righteous and punishing the wicked. The temporal authority does not exist only to maintain peace between two static groups but also to exercise judgment according to the law. By necessity the law must deal out justice without respect of persons. Does the temporal authority exist to protect the church or to punish it? Both. But isn't the temporal authority supposed to punish the wicked and praise the righteous? Yes. But doesn't that mean that the church is both wicked and righteous? Now we are getting deep into Luther. To be precise, the Christian is *simul justus et peccator*, at once righteous and a sinner. Before we saw Luther's words in his essay on temporal authority which emphasize the way in which the Christian is made righteous, which is not by the law but by grace; yet now we will develop on Luther's firm position that the Christian does indeed stand in need of the law in a similar way to the non-Christian, and we will see what role that law plays.

In Luther's disputation "Against the Antinomians" he provides the deep explanation for the universal situation of man under the law, that is, man's sinfulness. Luther compares the efficacy of the law and the efficacy of Christ in drawing man to repentance and shows how closely Christ and the law are intertwined in Christ's sacrifice on the cross. "For the law terrifies me even more when I hear that Christ, the Son of God, had to fulfill it for me than it would were it preached to me without the mention of Christ and of such great torment suffered by God's Son, but were accompanied only by threats. For in the Son of God I behold the wrath of God in action, while the law of God shows it to me with words and with lesser deeds" (LW 47, p.113).

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[25] Gritsch 1986, p.47. Quotes from "Lectures on Romans, 1515-1516", LW 56:478.26-32.

Allen shows how far Luther went to place the church as well as the world under the law, and he also showed that Luther saw the conflict between being under the law and relying on a mountain of human regulations. (p.21) The effect is like so many nails in a beam of wood that end up weakening the beam even though iron is stronger than wood. The problem lies in the person who seeks to bend the law in his interest. Luther believed that even the Christian is *simul justus et peccator*; hence his emphasis on both the church and the world in general being submitted to the law. Even the Apostle Paul was both righteous and a sinner. In "Against the Antinomians", Luther writes that the Christian needs the law continually. The law therefore serves as a classroom and its structure is good for the Christian as well as the non-Christian. A Christian might like to have special protection, a special deal sheltering him from the law—but in reality *all* he has is the assurance that the temporal government only has a temporal hold on him, and he is destined after this life for everlasting life without sin and death to threaten him anymore. In this very moment, a Christian may have to suffer all things, and Luther said he should be prepared to. He absolutely did not believe in protecting the Christian from the law.

Let us consider the law for a moment in relation to temporal authority. Exposing the law in its purity at the head of all authorities cleanses the temporal authority from corruption even in the name of mercy or religion. The law knows no favoritism and justice is blind. The church cannot depend on the temporal authority because the temporal authority must deal with the church in the same way as it deals with the rest of the world. From the perspective of expedience, it is unwise to imagine that one can trust the government to protect him from the law because the law has the upper hand and the final word; and from the perspective of Scripture, it is also organized rebellion against God and idolatry of the temporal authority. Luther's argument against the pope is that he managed to acquire special status of legal immunity through his supposed status as king of kings, supposedly inherited through his legacy from the apostles. This was the paramount injustice.

Therefore it is consistent with Luther's position on the law and the church that there is no dependence on the state; furthermore, there is a relation of provisional discipline between the temporal authority and the Christian should the Christian leave behind the law of perfection. The discipline of the temporal authority is characterized as

easy for the Christian to bear since the Christian is supposed to already be submitted to the law of Christ, which demands perfection. But the Christian is of course not always perfect. In fact he can err all the way to the point where he requires punishment just like anyone else. The law's purpose in judgment is always to the benefit of both the believer and the world in general. In Luther's own words,

> "To put it here as briefly as possible, Paul says that the law has been laid down for the sake of the lawless (1 Tim. 1:9), that is, so that those who are not Christians may through the law be restrained outwardly from evil deeds, as we shall hear later. Now since no one is by nature Christian or righteous, but altogether sinful and wicked, God through the law puts them all under restraint so they dare not willfully implement their wickedness in actual deeds. In addition, Paul ascribes to the law another function in Romans 7 and Galatians 2, that of teaching men to recognize sin in order that it may make them humble unto grace and unto faith in Christ. Christ does the same thing here in Matthew 5:39, where he teaches that we should not resist evil; by this he is interpreting the law and teaching what ought to be and must be the state and temper of the true Christian, as we shall hear further later on" (LW 45, p.90).

When Paul says that the law is for the lawless, he is referring to natural man. The Christian, governed by God, is by no means lawless. Luther says above that no one is by nature Christian or righteous. Luther says all of this not to mean that the Christian has no more hope than the non-Christian for righteousness and freedom from sin, but on the contrary to place all the weight on Christ for his sacrifice for man's sin and for washing His bride, the church, and presenting her to himself a spotless bride. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:25-27).

Ultimately, the law's neutrality and the church's purity both flow from the principle of *sola scriptura, sola fides,* and *sola gratia* for deliverance from evil and most importantly from their own unrighteousness. On any other foundation, the church would not have the grounds to claim any kind of holiness. Furthermore, the Christian would lack the means of changing in character. Luther establishes the church's dependence on Christ in antithesis to any dependence on man in his disputation against the Antinomians. The same argument used to differentiate himself from those who were in favor of ridding

the church of the law served to set the church on a rock, on a veritable dependence on God.

> "A thousand years ago you and I were nothing, and yet the church was preserved at that time without us. He who is called "who was" and "yesterday" had to accomplish this. Even during our lifetime we are not the church's guardians. It is not preserved by us, for we are unable to drive off the devil in the persons of the pope, the sects, and evil men. If it were up to us, the church would perish before our very eyes, and we together with it (as we experience daily). For it is another Man who obviously preserves both the church and us. He does this so plainly that we could touch and feel it, if we did not want to believe it. We must leave this to him who is called "who is" and "today." Likewise we will contribute nothing toward the preservation of the church after our death. He who is called "who is to come" and "forever" will accomplish it. What we are now saying about ourselves in this respect, our ancestors also had to say, as is borne out by the psalms and the Scriptures. And our descendants will make the same discovery, prompting them to join us and the entire church in singing Psalm 124: "If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, let Israel now say," etc.[26]

In the last section we covered the debate over the council and the form that it could possibly take. This message cuts contrary to the message that we received from Luther's interest in the council and the prince for maintaining the church. In the above passage, we see an illustration of man's inability to preserve the church. Man is cut down after every generation, so even if he wanted to he could not exercise continued guidance for the church generation after generation. In the same way man is limited in his authority that he can take in the church within his time. As we saw in the development on the true bishop, the higher up he is in rank in terms of society, the less man can do to help the church due to his lesser ability to serve anyone.

The Threat of Revolt

On the surface of the peasant revolt, there may seem to be an experiment taking place within Christianity, in which the militants are testing to see how far they can go in establishing the kingdom of God on earth. In Luther's evaluation, the peasants are in fact

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[26] LW 47, p.118. The Psalm is not quoted any further than this line in Luther's text. Here is the entirety of the psalm, which is very relevant to Luther's argument: "If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, let Israel now say—if it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when the men rose against us, then they would have swallowed us alive. When their wrath was kindled against us; then the waters would have overwhelmed us, the stream would have gone over our soul; then the swollen waters would have gone over our soul." Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us as prey to their teeth. Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

just reacting to the oppression they had endured under the nobles and Christianity is bearing the bad name for a violent revolt. As he begins his Admonition to Peace, the nobles are the first to receive Luther's rebuke for their oppression of the peasants and their suppression of the Gospel, but then he turns to the peasants who have joined into the conflict threatening violence if they are not released from serfdom and granted various other liberties and goods, and all of this in the name of the Gospel.

We see doubly confirmed in his reaction to the peasant revolt the fact that Luther intended to wield the Word against anyone, whether prince, peasant, priest, or pope, who sought to misuse Scripture against Christianity. Through the use of Scripture, Luther seeks to mediate the conflict; hence the "Admonition to Peace". His aim is to prevent the peasants from facing the retribution of the lords and the princes that is imminent if they carry out their revolt. From one angle, we will see how the law of the land serves as a last resort for combating heresy. We will see furthermore how the law has a necessary characteristic of confronting man with his selfishness. In this sense the law puts a temporary end to the partisan politics at work in the conflict between the peasants and the nobility.

Most interesting of all is Luther's attitude in extending this admonition to the princes and the peasants. In spite of the tough language for modern ears, he is actually trying to prevent both parties from "hitting the wall". He comments to the lords, "Not only have we suffered your persecution and murdering and raging; we have also prayed for you and helped to protect and maintain your rule over the common people. If I desired revenge, I could laugh up my sleeve and simply watch what the peasants are doing or even join in with them and help make matters worse; may God keep me from this in the future as he has in the past" (LW 46, p.21). The question of Luther's attitude toward the peasants is the other side of the matter which we will consider. We will see that from the beginning he extends them the offer of peace, but in the end, when they choose to revolt violently in spite of his exhortation, he does not take the side of those who are in the revolt but allows the lords to control the revolt by force. His original message not having been one of protecting them from the law but of warning them of the law, he remains consistent throughout the conflict.

Luther distinguishes himself from the lords by communicating with the peasants and reasoning with them. He also offers them an alternative that the lords do not offer for equity, freedom and even justice. Also unlike the lords, he does not assume that all of the peasants are set on violent revolt even though it would appear that they are all set on revolt. He hopes to gain the audience of some. What is astonishing about the admonition is that he holds both the peasants and the lords to the high standard of the perfect law, that of loving one's enemies, even though it would appear to be a hopeless battle to preach peace to the peasants who are bent on retribution and the lords who have a great financial interest in continuing the oppression of the peasants.

Admonition to Peace

Luther begins his call to peace between the peasants and the lords with a brief word to the princes and lords, blaming them for the very reason that the peasants were revolting. "We have no one on earth to thank for this disastrous rebellion, except you princes and lords, and especially you blind bishops and mad priests and monks, whose hearts are hardened, even to the present day. You do not cease to rant and rave against the holy Gospel, even though you know that it is true and that you cannot refute it. In addition, as temporal rulers you do nothing but cheat and rob the people so that you may lead a life of luxury and extravagance. The poor common people cannot bear it any longer" (LW 46, p.19). He proceeds to talk about the fact that the wrath of God is in the peasants' revolt—at this point only threatened—and if they do not change their ways they are going to actually see God's punishment. He goes on to develop on the fact that the nobility was continuously involved in preventing the Gospel from being preached. His message in the admonition, however, comes to its chief point in the following remark: "You, and everyone else, must bear witness that I have taught with all quietness, have striven against rebellion, and have energetically encouraged and exhorted people to obey and respect even you wild and dictatorial tyrants" (p.20). Luther's understanding of obedience and respect nevertheless comes within the limits of allowing the lords to continue as the lords over their physical property and not over the spiritual property of the peasants' souls. Though he will encourage the peasants to remain as serfs, he seeks to

liberate them from their concept of church as the authority and power of men as a starting point toward the right understanding of Scripture.

Luther Evaluates the Peasants' Articles

The first battle cries of the peasants' revolt are heard when the peasants publish their Twelve Articles, making the gesture of transparency "that if one or more of the articles set forth here is not in agreement with the word of God (though we think this is not the case), and this disagreement is shown to us on the basis of Scripture, we shall withdraw such an article—after the matter is explained to us on the basis of Scripture" (LW 46, pp.15-16). Luther's job is cut out for him. He accepts their indirect invitation, having received a copy of the articles, and proceeds to go through the articles and test them according to Scripture. He commends the transparency that they show in their offer to be corrected. "The thing about them that pleases me most is that, in the twelfth article, they offer to accept instruction gladly and willingly, if there is need or necessity for it, and are willing to be corrected to the extent that it can be done by clear, plain, undeniable passages of Scripture. And it is indeed right and proper that no one's conscience should be instructed or corrected except by Holy Scripture" (p.17). We will see as we go through Luther's response that he holds them to their word, and honors their transparency only to the extent that they follow through on it by accepting correction. It becomes clear later in his letter that he is well aware that the revolt will probably still take place, but he by no means thinks that his admonition is therefore in vain. He performs his role as "one of those who deal with the Holy Scriptures here on earth" in spite of his diverse audience. We will see how in the course of his response both law and Gospel are applied. The application of the law is once again a forceful weapon that Luther wields as he enters the battlefield of social justice.

In summary, the peasants' articles propose the end of serfdom and the redistribution of wealth, among other things, all based on the Gospel. Luther responds that they must endure servitude to their masters and that they can have the Gospel for themselves regardless of what the world around them believes and demands. In fact, if they are interested in changing society based on the Gospel, the proper order in which to go about things is to first take care of one's personal faith before demanding that the

world be conformed to Christian equality. His message to them is that if they did this much they would already have true Christian liberty, and they would not even have to join into a violent revolt. Luther compares their revolt to his own resistance of the pope. He also fought for spiritual freedom as well as relief from economic oppression caused by the Catholic Church; yet his argument is that his resistance was different in means as well as ends. He had already argued that one should not attempt to create Christian government apart from the law, and here he takes the opportunity to underline this point.

In his essay on the limits of temporal authority, he explains the potential dangers of overthrowing the law in favor of a "Christian government". He says it would be like putting the lions in the same pen as the lambs and saying "Help yourselves and be good and peaceful toward one another" (LW 45, p.91). The reasons he set forth in that essay are now supplemented with more explanation. Whereas before his message seemed to be that in a lawless society the Christians are victimized, here he will illustrate that in fact, given a lawless society, the Christian may be tested for his strength. The message here stands in contrast to one of dependence on the temporal authority. First of all the Christian has a completely different attitude toward suffering injustice. Whereas the basic response toward injustice is reacting to it and calling it what it is, the Christian has the additional ability to personally suffer injustice. For Luther simply to advocate suffering injustice would be a shallow attempt at pacification because by nature man does not suffer injustice. But in calling upon the Christians to suffer injustice, he understands two things: 1. That the Christian has an incorruptible source of the law and therefore does not need to react in the same way as society does and 2. That the Christian has grace to draw from in the measure in which he has received. Thus he does not ask the Christian simply to be a victim, but to be victorious as a keeper of the perfect law. Whereas in his essay on temporal authority, Luther developed on the law from the perspective of God's intentions for the law, which is to curb man's evil intentions, here we can see how Luther understood God's expectations for Christians, even in the worst of circumstances, which shows again not their own strength but God's grace.

Before looking at the articles, it should be noted that Luther's appeal to the peasants comes in the context of their oppression under the Roman church. The Roman church, as we saw in the section on the papal authority, took advantage of supposed

spiritual authority to make merchandise of the peasants. They turned the church into a cover for extortion of the masses. We saw previously that they did this on the basis of the presentation of the pope as the official mediator between God and man. In addition to everything else the Gospel offers there was also on offer the freedom from the lie of the Roman church. Although he did not promise them immediate release from serfdom, he offered them a way to avoid the additional bondage that they were under due to their allegiance to the spiritual authority of the pope through their ignorance of the true Gospel.

In addition it should be noted that Luther's corralling the peasants into obedience to the Word would have been in vain if he had hoped to reach all of the peasants with his message—in that case he truly would have assumed that all the peasants were true Christians and that he could simply persuade them to hear the call of the Gospel. Instead he offers the message on a "take it or leave it" basis. He knows that most will choose to follow their own desires for immediate wealth and relief from suffering. His hope was not so much preventing the revolt, though he tries to, but to expose it for what it really is, of purely political interests and not with Christian aims. "Just listen attentively, as you offer many times to do. I will not spare you the earnest warning that I owe you, even though some of you have been so poisoned by the murderous spirits that you will hate me for it and call me a hypocrite. That does not worry me; it is enough for me if I save some of the goodhearted and upright men among you from the danger of God's wrath" (LW 46, p.24).

As we turn to the first article, on the surface we seem to be dealing with the same program of reform as in Luther's letter to the Christian nobility where he says that the pope has taken upon himself sole authority over the church, and that the pope is much more interested in worldly power than spiritual things and caring for the flock. The first article begins, "We humbly ask and request—in accordance with our unanimous will and desire—that in the future the entire community have the power and authority to choose and appoint a pastor. We also desire the power to depose him, should he conduct himself improperly." They go on to mention some nice biblical qualities they are looking for in a pastor—that he will "instill and strengthen true faith in us" (LW 46, p.10). They even use some of the language that Luther used of access to God by faith.

Luther is concerned that their strength is only in their reaction to the injustice they have endured under the princes. They have suffered under a political "church" in which they were oppressed and abused, and their protest is a natural response but not one that is different enough in character to produce lasting change in society. They are reasoning with the same people that he reasoned with, and in reaction to many of the same problems, except he is concerned that their designs are not the same as his. Nevertheless, he speaks to their methods rather than their aims since only these can be proven one way or another in the proximal timeframe. Their methods include two aspects: their reasoning within the articles as well as their threat of violence in the case that their requests are not granted. The character of their methods is revealed when they actually revolted, but Luther seems to already be aware of the direction in which they are headed. He warns, "you must most seriously consider not merely how strong you are and how wrong the princes are, but whether you act justly and with a good conscience" (LW 46, p.23). His next point will be to show how their methods betray their different aims.

Luther appeals to common sense and the Scripture saying that "no one may sit as judge in his own case or take his own revenge.(…) The divine law agrees with this and says, in Deuteronomy 32:35, 'Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, says the Lord.'"[27] Luther chastises their Machiavellian reasoning: "For the word of Christ in Matthew 7:3 applies to you; you see the speck in the eye of the rulers, but do not see the log in your own eye. The word of Paul in Romans 3:8 also applies, "Why not do evil that good may come? Their condemnation is just."[28] Luther goes on to reveal the key point of the peasants' aims: the authority which they desired in the first article at the expense of the temporal authorities is the same temporal authority that the Romanists desired at the expense of the

[27]LW 46, p.25. Luther later (p.29) quotes Paul who quotes this same verse from Deuteronomy in Romans. In the context it says: "Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse…Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, **"Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord**. Therefore, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:14, 17-21)

[28]For context: Romans 3:5-8 "But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man). Certainly not! For then, how will God judge the world? For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? And why not say, 'Let is do evil that good may come'?—as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just." Luther is dragged down by the peasants, who blatantly have this attitude. He does not want to take part or be associated with them.

rulers. Although the scenery has changed slightly, the peasants want to claim the same rights to the material goods of others in the name of Christianity. In this case it is supposedly in the name of Christian liberty and equality.

i. Redirection of Tithing with a Profit Motive

Also in the first article, the peasants introduce an interesting new avenue for tithing: the tithe should be redistributed to the poor.

> "Second, since the tithe is prescribed in the Old Testament, although it is fulfilled in the New, we are willing to pay the just tithe of grain, but it must be done in a proper way… Since men ought to give it to God and distribute it to those who are his, it belongs to the pastor who clearly proclaims the word of God, and we desire that in the future this tithe be gathered and received by our church provost, appointed by the community. With the consent of the whole community the pastor, who shall be chosen by an entire community, shall receive out of this tithe a modest, sufficient maintenance for him and his; the remainder shall be distributed to the poor and needy in the same village, according to the circumstances and with the consent of the community. Anything that then remains shall be kept, so that if the needs of the land require the laying of a war tax, no general tax may be laid upon the poor, but it shall be paid out of this surplus" (LW 46, p.10-11).

They begin with an apparent zeal for the law, even saying that they are willing to keep a law that was set in the Old Testament but that was fulfilled in the New Testament. What is ironic is that due to their ignorance, they are laying a much greater yoke on themselves than necessary. According to Scripture, giving to the Lord is free, and no one can be forced to give any sum. In fact, the practice in giving that is the most severely punished in the book of Acts is the boastful promise that one couple makes of giving away all that they have to the church, of which they in fact withhold a sum. But in fact, what they hide is that in the New Testament the commandment to give one tenth is replaced by the exhortation to freely give as much as one can. It is a gesture of generosity that demonstrates that the Lord has richly blessed those who are his and takes care of their needs. The tithe is an opportunity to give to the Lord, not to give with the intention of receiving. Their interpretation of this biblical command—the tithe—makes it an opportunity for personal financial gain.

It might be argued that they are reacting to the Romanist theft and extreme abuse of the command of tithing. But Luther's complaint is precisely with the fact that they are indeed reacting in kind to the Romanist extortion. Their hidden logic is to take back what has been stolen from them, which is natural. On this basis Luther knows that they are not defending Scriptural truths. Luther does not appreciate the political fluctuations between popular power and centralized power, and targets the mangling of biblical truths that is taking place in the peasants' manifesto. They have no concern for the purpose of tithing that is coherent with Scripture, that the tithe is supposed to be for God and not for anyone in the church to do what he pleases.

ii. Departure from Biblical Freedom

In the third article, the peasants declare that they shall be released from serfdom on the grounds that A. it is unChristian to be in slavery or to hold slaves and B. their rulers are Christians. They say "It has been the custom for men to hold us as their own property. This situation is pitiable, for Christ has redeemed and bought us all with the precious shedding of his blood, the lowly and the great, excepting no one. Therefore it agrees with Scripture that we be free and will be so." Furthermore, they say they should "humble themselves, not before the rulers only, but before *everyone*. Thus we willingly obey our *chosen* and appointed rulers (whom God has appointed over us) in all Christian and appropriate matters. And we have no doubt that since they are true and genuine Christians, they will gladly release us from serfdom, or show us in the Gospel that we are serfs" (LW 46, p.12). Apparently the rulers they currently have are not their chosen and appointed rulers, and they do not deserve their obedience. They press the lords to show them where in the Gospel it says that they are serfs. Luther says both of their statements in the argument against serfdom are false premises. In fact, their rulers are for the most part not Christians, and are therefore ignorant of the Bible's teachings on freedom; and secondly, the Bible does not say that they are not to be slaves.[29]

They are appealing to Christian freedom, but with a much different understanding from the one that we saw in Luther's "Freedom of a Christian". Their concept of

[29] Luther refers them to Urbanus Rhegius, author of Serfdom and Slavery: A Discussion of the Christian Relationship between Lords and Serfs on the Basis of Divine Law.

freedom requires liberty in the present time from any bonds and limitations on themselves. In fact it goes so far as to creating a "free" society in which there is nothing but common ownership of the lands. They apply God's original intentions, such as existed in the Garden of Eden, to the present day so that they could live outside of the bounds of law. Luther corrects, saying that Christ did not come to make everyone immediately free in just a physical sense. "Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it, but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price, do not become slaves of man. Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called" (1 Corinthians 7:21-24). And, "Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. And you masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with Him" (Ephesians 6:5-9).

The writers of the articles seek to manipulate the rulers by saying that if they are Christians they will free them. Luther criticizes this especially because many of their rulers do not know Scripture at all, unlike those who drafted the articles, who have extensive knowledge of Scripture even though they apply it incorrectly. Luther complains that they are a bad testimony to the rulers on behalf of Christianity, citing 1 Timothy: "Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed. And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things" (1 Timothy 6:1-2).

He terms their unwillingness to be slaves as unwillingness to suffer injustice—thus he clearly does not think their bondage is an end in itself, and he does not glorify their slavery or poverty. He recognizes that as slaves not only must they serve but they must endure injuries. He says nevertheless that under the Gospel they must be willing to

accept these injuries and not return them. The alternative that the peasants have chosen, Luther points out, is an even greater injustice: to rob their masters both of their authority and their service. He says that they can pray for freedom from oppression though, and if they pray then they may even be released in time without doing any violence to their masters.

Granted that he does not regard suffering as an end in itself, he reaches to the level of those peasants who are swept up by the promises of prosperity and freedom. Of course prosperity and freedom are nice things. He doesn't try to deny any value in these things, but places them in their proper perspective within the Gospel. Prosperity and freedom are shallow and fleeting if acquired through the disobedience of God; they are blessings, on the other hand, if they are given by God. But more importantly for Luther, these things are not necessary for joy and peace as a Christian. "A slave can be a Christian and have Christian freedom, in the same way that a prisoner or a sick man is a Christian, and yet not free." And further, there is the fact that "in Christ the lord and servant are equal" (LW 46, p.39). If they do not get the material goods and equality that they desire in the timeframe that they desire, they will yet have plenty of blessings if they wait on the will of God. In correction of the peasants' demands, Luther writes that they must remain servants, and by no means be freed by their own force. Though he gives no inherent value to bondage, he insists that freedom must be granted by the Lord, and in his time. Here Luther is putting them to the test. If they are immature and lack understanding of the Gospel, they will not wait on God and they will revolt because they will think that this is absolutely necessary and they will fear for their well-being as well as their status. In short, all of Luther's reproaches, though based on the Bible, will seem to them as foolishness if they lack personal faith.

Exposing the Real Aims of the Revolt

It may seem that Luther is making high demands on the peasants by holding the rigorous standard of the Gospel over their heads. However, they insist that their articles are based on the same Gospel; and furthermore they said they were open to correction based on Scripture. They contend that on the basis of the Gospel they will have their freedom from serfdom as well as an equal right to the lands—or else they will seize these

things by force. Thus not only do they desire their freedom, but they demand it. Luther declares, "Your name and title ought therefore to indicate that you are people who fight because they will not, and ought not, endure injustice or evil, according to the teaching of nature. If however, you will not take that name, but keep the name of Christian, then I must accept the fact that I am also involved in this struggle and consider you as enemies who, under the name of the Gospel, act contrary to it, and want to do more to suppress my Gospel than anything the pope and emperor have done to suppress it" (LW 46, p.32). And "**Even though they (the articles) all were** just and equitable in terms of natural law, you have still forgotten the Christian law" (p.34).

This was a hypothetical statement, as the bold words show, because he does not consider their actions to be just and equitable. He is referring to the fact that they are returning evil for evil, which is natural but which does not produce any greater justice or equity. What he refers to in this text as natural law does not coincide with perfect justice and it has the property of basically contradicting itself. Earlier in his response, Luther says "Would to God that the majority of us were good, pious heathen, who kept the natural law, not to mention the Christian law!" Which law is he judging them by? The absolute antithesis between natural law and Christian law does not support Luther's argument, but neither does the equivalence. As in his essay on temporal authority, he is repeating in his reply to the peasants that the 'Christian law', or Gospel, is above the natural law. It would seem between his two statements that his understanding of the value of natural reason is that it usually functions well as a judge of others but is a handicapped guide for one's own conduct. In other words, the Christian law being to love one's neighbor as oneself, this is a law that we apply to our neighbors but the opposite of the law we apply to ourselves, which is that we serve ourselves and no one else. This is a contradiction and yet both of these premises are undeniably the natural human response.

The law applies to the peasants regardless of the fact that they are reacting to the oppression of their masters since they themselves are now threatening violence and robbery of the lords. Luther responds that the Gospel would have been the only way to put an end to the conflict, but that instead they will incur the punishment of the law: "You have not been putting this program in effect and achieving your goals by patiently

praying to God, as Christians ought to do, but have instead undertaken to compel the rulers to give you what you wanted by using force and violence. This is against the law of the land and against natural justice" (LW 46, p.34). In effect, they have broken both the Christian code of conduct and natural justice. But how is this possible? Doesn't this mean that all men are judged by the standard of the Christian law? Are all men measured against the standard that the good Samaritan exemplified, who took care of the Judean man, an enemy, who was beaten and robbed and left naked on the side of the road? (Luke 10:33) If this is the case, then why does Luther go to such lengths in establishing the distinction between the law and Gospel and of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world? Why not come into the open and demand the same behavior from people that they demand from others? Are not the peasants for that matter making the lords aware of the contradiction of their ways? Luther's answer aims to establish whether the peasants are in fact upholding the law or tearing it down with their new program.

In brief form, the articles ask that the lords cease to require their labor but at the same time share all of their property and the natural resources. There is nothing indicating that they are ready to forfeit the benefits of civilization and truly live off of the land, but they want civilization on their own terms. Luther does not split hairs on the last nine articles, which continue in the same trend as the first three, but some focus on the ownership and rights to the waters, game, woodcutting, and others ask for reduction of rent according to the yield of the lands. He does not argue with the legitimacy of every one of these requests, yet it is apparent that they would fall under similar criticism for the manner in which they are requested. They repeatedly cite the promises from God's covenant with Adam in Genesis before the fall, including authority over animals and rule over the earth. Because man was originally free and promised the abundance of the lands, they demand that the idyllic situation before the fall be restored. They demand this of the lords. Indeed some of these requests may have been reasonable, but this fact only goes to conceal the greater problem which is the theological confusion that is generating their demands.

Luther takes on the sum of the articles saying, "not one of your articles teaches anything of the Gospel. Rather, everything is aimed at obtaining freedom for your person and for your property. To sum it up, everything is concerned with worldly and temporal

matters. You want power and wealth so that you will not suffer injustice. The Gospel, however, does not become involved in affairs of this world, but speaks of our life in the world in terms of suffering, injustice, the cross, patience, and contempt for this life and temporal wealth" (LW 46, p.35).

How then are the peasants doing more to counteract Luther's efforts in spreading the Gospel than the emperor and the pope have done? (LW 46, p.32) Of course he does not believe they are suppressing the Gospel by declaring freedom for everyone and common ownership of goods. Luther's argument is that this is an empty promise and that the real content of the articles and the revolt itself is the message that they are supported by the Gospel to do as they wish and exercise selfish behavior. For this to be even worse than the pope and emperor's work is quite a statement coming from Luther. Yet what distinguishes the peasants' revolt from the pope is the direct assault on the law. And what makes it more dangerous than anything the pope and the emperor had done is its strong appeal to the masses' selfish desires. The writers of the articles have the form of God's law—and they boast of having it on their side—and yet they show none of God's power to make them different as Christians. Hence the contrast between the promises declared in the articles and the reality of the revolt, which consisted of murder, rape, and pillaging.[30]

A Wolf in the Pen

Thomas Muntzer, probably the main leader of the revolt, succeeded in acquiring a great following because he declared that it was the time to acquire justice and bring all things into submission to the elect, and this by means of the sword. There is a replacement in Muntzer's theology of Christ by the elect, and the way in which this "elect" behaves is completely different from the way that Christ told Christians to behave and the example that he set. Instead of the elect following Christ, the elect are to completely take over the kingdom and as the content of the articles shows, they would bring all things into submission to their own desires. Considering the appeal such a movement could have, Luther grants that, "By God's permission you might accomplish

[30] Luther describes the heights that the revolt has reached and fully demonstrates the disparity between the supposed aims of the revolt and its reality in "Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants", LW 46, pp.45-55.

something as the heathen and the blasphemers you are—and we pray that he will prevent that—but it will only be to your temporal and eternal destruction. However, as Christian, or Evangelicals, you will win nothing. I would stake my life a thousand times on that" (LW 46, p.34).

Luther does not believe that the vast majority of the peasants are aware of the character of those inciting them to revolt. Luther on the other hand is aware of the ideals of Thomas Muntzer among the instigators of the revolt. He is interested in persuading the rulers to his cause, first of all. According to the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, he may have given a copy of the Sermon to the Princes to the same Duke Johannes of Saxony whom we spoke of previously. The same source documents the following regarding Thomas Muntzer's involvement in the revolt.

> In February 1525 Müntzer was back in Mühlhausen, to which city Heinrich Pfeiffer had returned by the end of December 1524. At this point Müntzer placed upon the rebellious peasants his last hope and chance of carrying out his apocalyptic program. Between February and May of this year he may rightly be called the preacher of the peasants, encouraging them mainly during the last three weeks to violent action—expecting at any moment the great crisis of mankind. On 15 May the tragic battle at Frankenhausen was fought (or rather not fought by the confused and discouraged peasants), followed by the senseless massacre which ended the Peasants' War in Thuringia. Müntzer, who tried to hide, was caught, imprisoned, and soon tortured to make him yield a full confession of all his misdeeds. He recanted, accepted the Mass according to Catholic rites, and wrote a farewell letter to his followers in Mühlhausen which is a complete turnabout from his former position. On 27 May 1525 he was beheaded. His symbol and heraldic sign had always been "a red cross and a naked sword."[31]

Even though this is from an Anabaptist website, it may be too harsh on the character. If this is the case, we should turn to Muntzer's own words to see whether his views were as extreme as they are portrayed to be. In his "Sermon to the Princes", he writes,

> "Therefore a new Daniel must arise and expound your dreams to you and (...) he must be in the vanguard, leading the way. He must bring about a reconciliation between the wrath of the princes and the rage of the people. For once you really grasp the plight of the Christian people as a result of the treachery of the false clergy and the abandoned criminals your rage against them will be boundless, beyond all imagining. (...) For they have made such a fool of you that everyone swears by the saints that in their official capacity princes are just pagans, that all they have to do is to maintain civic order. Alas, my fine fellow, the great stone will come crashing down soon and smash such rational considerations to the ground, as Christ says in Matthew 10: 'I am not come to send peace, but he

[31] http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/M858.html June 13, 2009

> sword.' But what is one to do with the sword? Exactly this: sweep aside those evil men who obstruct the Gospel! Take them out of circulation! Otherwise you will be devils, (...) Have no doubts that God will mash all your adversaries into little pieces... Now if you are to be true rulers, you must seize the very roots of government, following the command of Christ. Drive his enemies away from the elect; you are the instruments to do this. My friend, don't let us have any of these hackneyed posturings, about the power of God achieving everything without any resort to your sword; otherwise it may rust in its scabbard. (...) Hence the sword, too, is necessary to eliminate the godless. To ensure, however, that this now proceeds in a fair and orderly manner, our revered fathers, the princes, who with us confess Christ, should carry it out. But if they do not carry it out the sword will be taken from them (Daniel 7), for then they would confess him in words but deny him in deeds. (...) The tares have to be torn out of the vineyard of God at harvest-time."

The articles use biblical principles as the reasons for their revolt yet they are not submitted to the overall plan and message of the Gospel. The articles claim that their plans for society come from the Bible, just as Muntzer claims in the above letter that he speaks as a prophet, comparing himself to Daniel even. Yet the plan of the Gospel for how to prepare the kingdom of God is very clear, and it does not speak of using the sword. The Gospel says that Christ came to usher in his kingdom first by extending to sinners the free gift of salvation. The whole age between his first coming and his return to establish his kingdom on earth for the millennium is a time of extension of that grace. His disciples are to proclaim that good news in the mean time. At the end of this age, Christ himself will come to set up his kingdom on earth. He does not need help beforehand in the judgment, and his coming will be very clear according to the book of Revelation—it will not be possible to miss it. At that point it will be too late to repent. But the good news refers to the present time which is the time to accept God's grace. God's plan, unlike Muntzer's plan, reflects His attitude toward man, which is one of extended patience and mercy in not only allowing this period of grace but choosing to establish his kingdom in the way the He chose, through humble servants. The peasants do not accept this timing of God, but want the earthly kingdom now, and they want to force everyone into compliance. The question is, into what would people be forced into compliance? This kingdom will not resemble God's kingdom even if they succeed though, because they are not building it in obedience to God but in defiance. They are preempting God's judgment, doing his revenge for Him. They are sitting as judges but they are not exercising any submission to God. Their means are violence.

The Lesson on Resistance

Luther's involvement in the revolt was primarily aimed at helping the peasants avoid this conflict, but at the same time he needed to distinguish his own methods and most importantly his goals, from their goals. When the peasants claim that their goals are to live under the Gospel, he questions them on the consistency of their methods. As we have seen they demanded that everyone live according to their ideals. Their ideals spoke of freedom and wealth and equality, which are all things that are not devalued in the Bible. Yet the way to obtain these goods was for them not faithful work or faithful prayer but demanding them from the landowners and seizing them. Their reaction to evil in the world was to fight it with all their strength but not to involve God in the process except in a nominal manner through the misuse of Scripture. The peasants not only claimed to be headed for freedom, wealth and equality, but for the best interest of everyone in question. And yet, this could hardly be perceived as such by the lords, who were to have their goods seized from them and to be suddenly forced to work for themselves.

Luther regards their will to break free from their masters as robbery. Their bodies as serfs did not belong to themselves, but to their lords to whom they owed their service. Luther did not need to speculate on whether the peasants could come up with a better way of organizing society because he understood that it was not their prerogative in the first place to assert their freedom.

At the same time, he reminded that the Gospel does talk about freedom and that they can be free immediately through the Gospel regardless of their status as slave or master. They are not compelled therefore by the Gospel to acquire their temporal freedom because according to the Gospel they have the much greater thing, which is eternal salvation and deliverance.

The captivity from which the Messiah is to deliver in the passage cited by the peasants—Isaiah 61—is the captivity from sin and ultimately from its presence and all of its effects. The ultimate front of resistance that Luther suggests, therefore, is perseverance in their faith because the kingdom awaits them in which sin will no longer exist and therefore suffering also will no longer exist. Luther threatens of the

consequences of their rebellion as eternal damnation. Of course Luther cannot judge their souls and he does not mean to. Nevertheless, he is drawing the line between the behavior of unrepentance and the behavior of faithfulness. The immediate reward for holding firm to one's faith, if one has faith, is present confidence in one's eternal salvation. The point is that the benefits of true Christianity far outweigh the benefits of rebellion here on earth, and the two cannot commingle. Luther calls for them to make a choice.

The choice is not whether or not to resist evil. Luther clearly sees the peasants' rebellion as evil in itself, being violent and selfish. He is also not blind to the injustice that they suffer, not denying that their lords are often unfair. He lays before them the choice between two forms of resistance: the temporary violent resistance that like a bad diet is sure to do them more harm than good, or the solid resistance that he considers trusting in God to be. He even views Christian resistance as granting independence: "For no matter how right you are, it is not right for a Christian to depend upon the law, or to fight, but rather to suffer wrong and endure evil; and there is no other way (1 Corinthians 6:1-8). You yourselves confess in the preface to your articles that "all who believe in Christ become loving, peaceful, patient, and agreeable." Your actions, however, reveal nothing but impatience, aggression, anger, and violence."[32] One might ask, in what way are the peasants depending on the law if the overwhelming message of Luther's admonition is that they are breaking the law? The law that they are depending on is the authority of men. Ideally, this law would provide the very protection and the justice that the peasants were taking into their own hands. But in the event that this protection fell short of what it was intended to be, the people are not to revolt against that authority. They were hauling their masters into court, whereas they should have been enduring evil. That is to say, if they were Christians. Thus he clarified that Christians are not to depend upon anyone to deliver them from harm, including themselves. They are not to use the temporal authorities as a crutch, nor are they to take their own vengeance. Thus they would seem to be left completely defenseless in society.

But Luther's firm belief is that this is far from the case. His belief is that God is glorified by delivering His own, but that he cannot do this if they help themselves in such

[32] LW 46, p. 31. See p. 9 of Articles (LW 46) for the peasants' statement.

matters. He says at the same time that suffering is necessary and to be expected, especially in the Christian life, but suffering achieves nothing unless it is an occasion for the Christian to grow in dependence on God and an occasion for God to deliver in his time. Luther knows that the peasants are not likely to choose on a massive scale to deal with the social injustices God's way—most of them are probably not believers. They will most likely choose man's way, which is to assert themselves. If they do so, his main concern is that there be no confusion as to their allegiances. Thus he makes abundantly clear that they could have great power in resistance if they prayed, but they must also obey God. Since they do not obey, they cannot have their prayers answered even if they pray, and since they do not ask for God's help and for his will to be done, they will not be able to see victory in their revolt. Similarly to what he said about the pope needing to remove his triple crown before praying to God, he says, "You cannot have such confidence and assurance in prayer because your enterprise in heathenish, and not Christian, and, under the name of the Gospel, works against the Gospel and brings contempt upon the name Christian. I know that none of you has ever once prayed to God or called upon him in behalf of this cause. You could not do it! You dare not lift up our eyes to him in this case. You only defiantly shake your fist at him, the fist which you have clenched because of your impatience and unwillingness to suffer." (LW 46, p.33)

While they are not to be dependent on the law, they are to take an independent and active role in upholding the law. Obedience to God is the most complete way of fulfilling the law, and it is otherwise phrased as doing no harm to one's neighbor. The resistance that Luther considers the most important for eternal and temporal purposes is personal resistance of evil, which in this case meant simply non-collaboration. This is not a passive stance or a weak stance because it requires going against the crowd. Furthermore, it is not weak in that it does not depend on the temporal authorities for all justification. The personal choice of following God's laws could come down to the ultimatum in which one must give one's own life so as not to harm another human being, which is the ultimate proof that one can make of one's commitment to doing what is right. Of course this extent of goodness is not natural. We can naturally appreciate such behavior, but to do it is another thing. In Luther's own life, there was also a continuous battle to live up to these standards, and he of course did not meet the standard of

perfection by his works. It is not man's perfect performance that proves the effectiveness of the resistance, but much more perseverance in faith, because this is not a man-powered resistance but something that glorifies God.

Thus we have seen that Luther defended God's way versus man's way in resistance to evil. We have seen that there is an end to the suffering and that in fact it is the reward for following Luther's guidelines, which involve taking much more responsibility in fact than the revolters do. Surely it is easier to join the crowd in revolt than to suffer day after day of injustice, and to listen to the crowd than to listen to conscience. Luther encourages the peasants to wait and pray and to keep on working all the while. This is not what the peasants wanted to hear. Having already spoken against the apathy of the nobility, he now denounces the rage of the peasants.

Speaking to his own methods, Luther says, "Now what have I done that the more pope and emperor raged, the more my Gospel spread? I have never drawn sword or desired revenge. I began neither conspiracy nor rebellion, but so far as I was able, I have helped the worldly rulers—even those who persecuted the Gospel and me—to preserve their power and honor" (LW 46, p.31). This may seem like flattery except that we know he did not flatter the emperor or the pope. In fact, we have seen how he challenged the pope's practices. Yet he did not engage in a conspiracy, but instead maintained his priority in openly encouraging the return to the Scriptures. Although Luther incidentally says "my Gospel", it would go against everything stated above in terms of Luther's values to initiate an organized resistance under his name—in fact, Luther recognized the derisive intentions of his enemies in applying the name "Lutheran" to the groups that resisted the Catholic teaching. He knew that if all he achieved was to start a rival church in his own name, he had failed. If on the other hand he brought people to knowledge of the Gospel and encouraged many to grow in it, but did not create any new institution or political change, he knew he had succeeded.

According to Luther's beliefs, human effort and human authority are not the foundation or the pillars of the kingdom with which the Gospel is concerned. The reason that it must be so is that every man is fallible. The Christian does not presume to have inherent knowledge of God's plans for even the near future, and this is precisely the reason why Luther speaks so much of prayer in his admonition rather than even an

apparently reasonable reaction. Luther says that prayer is what distinguishes the Christian. The Christian says, "Thy will be done" and "deliver us from evil" (Matt. 6:10, 13) (LW 46, p.34). As far as the promotion of the Gospel, which was the supposed goal of the peasant revolt, these same principles apply.

Allen seeks to defend Luther against those who would say that he gives absolute right to the state by saying that Luther's doctrine is not one of non-resistance. Indeed, Figgis' contention is a tenuous one on this point, arguing at once that the prince was an absolute authority and that Luther favored a lay revolt. We see in the context of the peasant revolt why Luther's position between the peasants and the nobles may be confusing politically speaking: he doesn't really take a side but favors both insofar as they do what is right and condemns them both insofar as they are in the wrong. In spite of his language he does not generalize between the two groups but considers it important that peace be extended to the lords and in so doing that there be a testimony for Christianity, and also he believes that there are peasants who would be willing to obey God and cease from revolting. He makes a division within the peasantry between those who are passively being led to revolt and those who are inciting the revolt, chastising the leaders severely and also strongly warning the followers not to collaborate. All of this goes to demonstrate as Allen says that Luther was indeed not in favor of non-resistance in the sense of total obedience to temporal authorities (1941, p.19).

Conclusion: The Submissive yet Independent Church

Luther expresses this understanding of the Gospel in his writing to the peasants. All in one thought he declares his passion for the Gospel and his independence from temporal force in this regard. "It is intolerable that anyone should be shut out of heaven and driven by force into hell. No one should suffer that; he ought rather lose his life a hundred times. But whoever keeps the Gospel from me, closes heaven to me and drives me by force into hell; for the Gospel is the only means of salvation for the soul. And on peril of losing my soul I should not permit this. Tell me, is that not stated sharply enough? And yet it does not follow that I must rebel against the rulers who do me this wrong. "But," you say, "how am I supposed to suffer it and yet not suffer it at the same time?" The answer is easy. It is impossible to keep the Gospel from anyone. No power

in heaven or earth can do this, for it is a public teaching that moves about freely under the heavens and is bound to no one place. It is like the star that went in the sky ahead of the Wise Men from the east and showed them where Christ was born" (LW 46, p.36). This also explains the nature of his resistance of the pope. Although the pope was in power in every temporal sense of the term, Luther considered it normal to preach the Word in public, even though this went against the pope's teaching. The truth of the Gospel cannot be lawfully restricted, and even if the temporal authorities do restrict it, it is by divine law and by the nature of the Gospel to continue to teach it regardless. That is because there is no harm in the true teaching of the Gospel.

By the same token, Luther did not condemn the false teaching of the writers of the articles of the peasants on the basis of a gut feeling or the fact that they were not in the same group as he, but because of the illegality of their methods. Beginning with the charge of illegality he proceeded to take the opportunity to teach the Gospel since he perceived that they were not acquainted with the true Gospel.

The free movement of the Gospel is closely connected with its satisfaction of the law; and in fact the distinguishing aspect of the Gospel is its degree of satisfaction of the law, which is perfect. On these grounds no one can claim authority over the Gospel or alter it, because this would inevitably change its perfection. This all stems from the fact that the Gospel is about a perfect man, Jesus Christ, and his sacrifice of love for the world. The moment someone claims immunity from the law in the name of the Gospel, he spits in the face of the Gospel message. In the *Admonition to Peace* Luther says to the lords regarding those involved in the revolt, "You lords are not fighting against Christians—Christians do nothing against you; they prefer to suffer all things—but against outright robbers and defamers of the Christian name" (LW 46, p.43).

Luther's point here is not that Christians act rightly at all times, but that true Christian confession is never one of rebellion against the law. When Christians act together confessing Christ, they cannot do any harm. "For when two or three gather in my name, I am there with them" (Matthew 18:20). But a false congregation of believers is a false unity, and there is no common confession there, which is evidenced by the collective abandon of Scripture and the law.

By the same token, Christians do not require much to be fully established. Luther describes in the letter to the Christian nobility that there is no need for the pope to ordain priests, and he does not add that the temporal ruler must ordain them. Rather, he says that if a group of Christians were stranded in the desert they would appoint from among them a leader and he would be as much a bishop as any bishop ordained by Rome. And in his letter to the peasants of Swabia, he writes,

> "It is not necessary, for the gospel's sake, for you to capture or occupy the city or place; on the contrary, let the ruler have his city; you follow the gospel. Thus you permit men to wrong you and drive you away; and yet, at the same time, you do not permit men to take the gospel from you or keep it from you. Thus the two things, suffering and not suffering, turn out to be one. If you occupy the city for the sake of the gospel, you rob the ruler of the city of what is his, and pretend that you are doing it for the gospel's sake. Dear friends, the gospel does not teach us to rob or to take things, even though the owner of the property abuses it by using it against God, wrongfully, and to your injury. The gospel needs no physical place or city in which to dwell; it will and must dwell in hearts" (LW 46, p.37).

The peasants' struggle bore certain similarities to that of the Roman church. Luther warns the peasants that their leaders are trying to turn them into Galatians, whom Paul warned, "Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3) Christianity as true faith, which Luther elucidated very well, cannot be maintained any more than it can be initiated by the temporal kingdom. It is only sustained by grace through faith.

The Peace of Augsburg settles matters on a grand scale, declaring, "He who rules the region determines the religion." But this lofty statement is happily not the last word on the dispersion of the gospel. Otherwise, this same human command would "determine" that many nations would never have the Gospel. According to Luther, the Gospel does not know any such bounds. Luther believed that official religion had a value apart from true faith only in the sense that the proper order—that is, the rule by God's laws—was beneficial both to the temporal kingdom and the kingdom of God.

What is the relationship between Christianity and the temporal authorities? Most importantly for the purposes of the temporal authority is Luther's message that the kingdom of God is not an earthly kingdom. Although this places limits on the temporal authorities' aspirations, it also informs the temporal authorities that the true Christian is not in competition with the temporal authority for world power. In fact, the Christian can

achieve all the victory in the world without dishonoring the temporal authorities in their earthly role as lawgivers. But if this is the case, then it follows that the temporal authority can be completely blind as far as the name "Christian" is concerned because all manner of evil may be done by supposed Christians whereas there can be no law against doing right. The temporal authority could be advised not to listen even if Luther himself asks for something that is against the law, or seeks to in any way compromise the function of the temporal authority in laying down the law. He should not ask anything more from the temporal authority than what the temporal authority is in place for. It is the temporal authority's responsibility to lay down the law, and nothing should inhibit this function.

The temporal authority acts as a true friend by not yielding in the case in which the people are defying the law of love in the supposed attempt to promote the gospel. As Luther says to the peasants, "I will put the whole matter into God's hands, risk my neck by God's grace, and confidently trust in him—just as I have been doing against the pope and emperor. I shall pray for you, that God may enlighten you, and resist your undertaking, and not let it succeed…" (LW 46, p.33). Of course it is rare that someone should ask for others to hold him accountable, and it is certainly not a pleasant task; but this is what Luther believed the highest purpose of the temporal authority to be.

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