Rethinking Reformation

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Reformation 500: Any Cause for Celebration?

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Abstract: In general the effect of the Reformation has been negative, but this is because it but imperfectly overcame the legacy of later medieval philosophy which was both univocalist and nominalist. In consequence it has encouraged some of the negative features of modernity: capitalism, the emergence of the sovereign state, the disenchantment of nature, iconoclasm, literalism and the disparagement of tradition. However, modern Catholicism has not been altogether free of this legacy and its consequences either. There has also been, to an almost contradictory degree, a positive consequence of the Reformation at its most radical: the pursuit of the ethical for its own sake and a greater sacralisation of all aspects of reality.

Keywords: Protestantism; Scotus; nominalism; Paracelsus; Luther; Calvin; secularisation; ethics

1 Reformation historiography

Over the past half-century, three different trends in historical writing have contributed to a dampening of any unqualified enthusiasm for the Protestant reform. The first is the realisation that we should speak, not primarily of a single "reform", but of a long series of attempted reforms, beginning far back in the Middle Ages themselves and continuing in early modern times in the instance of the so-called "Counter-Reformation" as well as "the Reformation proper". Throughout this long period there was a consistent awareness that the Church and Christendom were not just failing to live up to a Christ-like image, but were severely compromised by pervasive corruption. The Gregorian Reform itself had sought both to remove the contamination of the clerical by the secular life and to establish the supremacy of the former over the latter, in order to insist on the primacy of the spiritual and of reciprocal respect in the governing orientation of the West.¹ Yet the resultant, if unintended further secularisation of the laity, led in turn to movements meant to avert also that drift: tendencies of mendicant priestly involvement in the life of the people and of the poor, of many lay guilds of devotion, intercession and work, of lay communities, like those of the Beguines, seeking to combine worldly work with liturgical patterns of order and renunciation.

Yet despite all this, prevailing patterns of clerical corruption and lay dissolution remained. And reform itself might quickly turn decadent. The great English Fourteenth Century alliterative epic poem, *Piers Plowman*, by the lay clerk William Langland, contains an intermittent denunciation of the way in which the Mendicant friars have corrupted the primacy of the parish by encouraging donations for special prayers, masses and chapels, upon which reliable stream of "gifts" they have grown wealthy.² Meanwhile, more traditional monasteries, like those of the Cluniacs and Cistercians, through the systematic employment of unlanded labourers, were starting to establish something like a proto-capitalist rural economy. Lay guilds

¹ See Rosenstock-Huessy, Out of Revolution, 516-562; Berman, "The Religious Foundations of Western Law", 35-53.

² Langland, Piers Plowman.

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of work could readily become exploitative monopolies of trade, and those of devotion might encourage a burgeoning trade in indulgences. Above all, papal primacy degenerated into an attempted exercise of supreme sovereign power, rather than one of spiritual persuasion.

All that might sound as if it belongs to a traditional Protestant apologetic. And it might well do so: but the point newly stressed by historians is that the Middle Ages themselves were frequently aware of multiple corruption, and in multiple ways constantly sought further reform.³ Just for this reason, the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable reform movements was fluid: there were several sects whose charismatic and eschatological character placed them beyond the pale, yet the Franciscans and especially the spiritual Franciscans exhibited several resemblances to these (and even in rare instances to the positions of the Cathars), yet remained precariously within the embrace of Catholicism. Reformers like John Wyclif and Jan Hus were eventually ejected from the Church which they desired to renew rather than abandon, partly on the grounds that they wished to transfer the material and political dimensions of the Church into the hands of the secular *regnum*, yet William of Ockham sustained a roughly similar position while managing to remain within the fold, albeit in conflict with one of the popes, within a time of split papacy.

Thus to begin with, the various movements that heralded the Reformation, including that of Martin Luther, were characteristically mediaeval phenomena, that might in theory have led to change rather than expulsion. They were, moreover, preceded by several humanist endeavours for reform, focussed more on the lay life, on rhetoric rather than debate and ethical improvement before complex liturgical practice. These suffered a highly mixed fate – some persecution, some rejection, but also much integration on both sides of what eventually became a Catholic/Protestant divide. And although the Catholic Church itself was never to reach a compromise with the Reformers, the Anglican Church *eventually* became, in several and constantly contested ways, to a degree the site of just such a compromise.

This reality of "reform" in the plural and not in the singular is in keeping with the second new insistence on the part of historians. That is on the diverse character of "the Reformation" itself. Luther was simply one voice amongst many, and there was no theoretical or practical consistency amongst these voices. In many ways what characterises Luther (though he was somewhat anticipated by Wyclif and Hus) is not an extremity of reforming impulse, but an abandonment of this impulse in quietist despair that falls back upon the mercy of God alone. It was just this despair of spiritual shaping which meant that it was the Lutheran and cognate reforms that received the backing of secular power, eager to exploit the consequently opening gulf of legitimacy. In turn it was this support which ensured the eventual triumph of Lutheranism (and to a degree Calvinism, though that could sometimes constitute a more revolutionary threat) over alternative and in a sense more genuine reforming tendencies.

One must also understand this triumph within the peculiar context of Germany, where the attempts to create a modern, centralised and bureaucratic "state" out of the Holy Roman Empire were necessarily mediated through an enhanced political role for petty princelings and *seigneurs* now lifted above the mere web of feudal attachments.

In this reforming context, humanist religious reform was desired but had been generally stalled. Its local postponement was already blamed upon the alien and distant power of Rome considerably before Luther's arrival on the scene. Thus Lutheranism curiously fulfilled two in themselves curious exigencies: a supposed need to break with Rome in order to secure reform, besides a desired enhancement of local princely power in independence from the necessarily *sacral* power of the emperor and in alliance with the non-revolutionary concerns of town burgesses. Only in Prussian and Rankean retrospect was Lutheranism a naturally "national" project that should have coincided with the emergence of a "normal" Nation State as occurred elsewhere, and further north led indeed to Lutheran versions of this model, which also, however, mutated Lutheranism. Instead, the peculiar combination of a total handing-over of legality and rule, including of the worldly face of the Church, to the secular arm, with a spiritual and more international "confessional" Church body that placed psychic limits upon the reach of the state, rather exactly fitted the

³ Ozment, The Age of Reform; Simpson, Reform and Cultural Revolution; Taylor, A Secular Age, 25-218.

⁴ Gregory, Salvation at Stake; Gregory The Unintended Reformation, 1–128.

enhanced and yet still limited power of the princes within the empire.⁵ For this combination, the break at once with Rome and with reform as primarily an ethical and ecclesial affair, Luther's seemingly alienated and alienating doctrines were exactly suited.

At the core of these doctrines, sufficient ascesis, habitual good and charitable effort is now seen to be beyond the reach or even the aspiration of a totally depraved humanity. Thus a salvation that is no longer a matter of works is also no longer a matter of "re-forming" or re-shaping, at least in the first instance. It is rather a matter of faith in the grace of God who is alone righteous. The bought gifts of the mediating Church are refused, but a pure dependence on the unmediated gift of God is embraced. Already, in obliquely criticising Wyclif, the poet and vernacular theologian Langland had earlier seen the concealed continuity here: an overstress on unilateral gift, now rendered free, continues to suspend the ordinary operations of measured exchange, and so of justice, besides charity as reciprocity and relationship. But other reformers in Luther's time, in partial continuity with both Langland and the German, in part vernacular theologian Meister Eckhart, had not abandoned the centrality of actual, concrete, realised human justice. 8 Instead, they proposed the Church as a utopian just community, or else, as with the Lutheran medical reformer Paracelsus, in an extension of Luther's own theological linguistic insights, saw faith as from the outset including a specifically "imaginative" re-envisioning of material reality, and a kind of extended eucharistic "working" that would liberate the secrets of nature in anticipation of the eschaton and integrally conform the human body as well as soul to a more Christomorphic shape.9

For extraordinarily enough, as it may seem, Luther himself sometimes defined faith, the trust in things unseen, both eternal and future, as the only human work, the direct power of the Holy Spirit which drives all the other virtues and alone renders us a unified spiritual being. 10 He also considered that the Reformation restoration of this truth was the prelude to the recovery of the lost knowledge of Adam. 11

Reformation then, might mean "no reform" and "no works", at least not as the initial focus; yet it could have the very opposite meaning of "ultra-reform" and "much more transformative works". And this is even to a degree a tension within Luther's writings themselves. One can also note here that just as the "no works" fork tends to mean a downgrading of the mediating human role of Mary, the Mother of God, so also the "ultra works" fork could mean the very opposite. Thus Paracelsus's extremity of Marian devotion, allied to his Lutheran-mediated alchemical programme, led him to consider that the birth of Christ in the flesh had its eternal and celestial prototype: in consequence he reconceived the divine essence as a kind of "goddess", corresponding to the figure of Sophia in the Bible.¹² In a folkloric and narrative account of the Trinity whose apparent heterodoxy might simply be a reflex of this idiom, Paracelsus thought that the "monarchic" Father, from his ungrund, had first generated the goddess Sophia as the divine essence and then in her womb the Son and the Holy Spirit. Undoubtedly, by way of the later "Lutheran Left", especially Valentine Weigel and Jacob Boehme, this is the ultimate source of "sophiology" in modern theology since the Nineteenth Century, first with the Russians but then also more mutedly with Catholic theologians like Louis Bouyer and Hans urs von Balthasar.¹³

Of course, by highlighting Paracelsus I seem to be eccentrically looking at a supposedly marginal phenomenon in the course of a short general paper on the Reformation and its impact. But that is just the point. To begin with, there were a plethora of discontented prophets, of whom Luther and Paracelsus were but two. We must not read Luther's importance anachronistically, from the perspective of his soon to come triumph. Moreover, historiography suffers from a division of labour: the consignment of Paracelsus

⁵ Brady, German Histories in the Age of Reformation, especially 417-420.

⁶ Luther, On the Bondage of the Will [De Servo Arbitrio], V.iv, 203-205 [Weimar Ausgabe, XVIII, 709-710].

⁷ Milbank and Milbank, "I am Imagynatyf".

⁸ See Žižek and Milbank, The Monstrosity of Christ, 208-209.

⁹ Weeks, Paracelsus.

¹⁰ Luther, Von den Guten Werken (1520), in Weimar Ausgabe, VI:206, 24-27. Luther here contrasts faith as "work" which he accepts, with faith as habit, which he rejects. Cited and discussed in Büttgen, Luther et la philosophie, 224-225.

¹¹ Luther, Tafel-Reden, in Weimar Ausgabe, I:574, 8-19 (no. 1160). Cited and discussed in Bayer, Martin Luther's Theology, 108.

¹² Weeks, Paracelsus, 81-85.

¹³ See Martin, The Submerged Reality.

to the "history of science" obscures the truth that his "medical" thought is really a mode of lay theology partially instigated by Luther, and that it continued to have an enormous influence in shaping the so-called "scientific Revolution" which, in the case of several figures like Bacon, Descartes and Hobbes was in some respects, and traceably, a secularisation and mechanisation of his alchemical-eschatological vision. ¹⁴ The same division of labour tends to mean that historians of doctrine relatively downplay tendencies, as with Paracelsus (and even with Luther himself), to blend Reformation with the continued power of Renaissance pieties – not just with literary humanism and Erasmian allowance for human free will, but also with neoplatonism and Hermeticism (for example amongst the Puritans during the English Civil War). Just such currents were also often linked with never-abandoned efforts at ecumenical reconciliation and the re-uniting of Christendom. ¹⁵

We have seen in the first place that a reforming discontent was nothing new for the Medieval period. In the second place we have seen that, at the time of the Renaissance and Reformation, this discontent became both more multiple and more radical. The third new historiographical stress, in this case deriving from British Catholic historians like J.J. Scarisbrick and Eamon Duffy, might seem to be in tension with the first two. ¹⁶ For this is to the effect that the decadence in practice of the later Middle Ages has been much exaggerated, along with the initial popularity of the Reformation.

However, there is, in the main, no contradiction: just because corruption was always prevalent in the Middle Ages, if not dominant, one can only talk, at best, about an increase in the later period. Equally, pressures for reform were usually a minority concern: most people cleaved to what they knew and found immense comfort in the parish and pictorially-based modes of mediation. Furthermore, as Charles Taylor and James Simpson have stressed, insofar as reforming efforts tended to focus on morals and discipline, they tended to downplay or suppress the more ritual and above all festive aspects of popular piety. In this sense religious reform ironically ran the danger of encouraging secularisation, since it unintentionally suggested the possibility of an ethical and political order without God, in a way that started to become a reality in some Renaissance Stoic and Republican thought, supremely with Machiavelli, but also with the later "Tacitean" current, leading to Grotius and Hobbes. Of course, Luther and Calvin's emphasis on faith and grace seemingly countered this ethical reduction, yet it could also reinforce it in an opposite manner, to the degree that a despair of human works and a continued suspicion of image and ritual might hand these over to mere disenchanted pragmatic convenience. Eventually, with the work of Hobbes, the State controls even the external affair that is Biblical exegesis and the confessional Church is obliterated in favour of the sheer liberty of the individual within an evermore private and restricted realm.

One can, therefore, agree with Duffy and now many others, that the Reformation was not, initially, a widespread popular phenomenon – with the earlier exception of Hussitism in Bohemia, where an official embrace rendered it also a matter of prodigious nationalism. In general, the Reformation was more an affair of scholars and burghers, with peasants and artisans increasingly discontented for primarily material and political reasons, if anything attracted to the more active, "works exacerbating" wing of reform.

Nevertheless, it is arguable that Duffy and his followers tend somewhat to underplay, as other scholars like Brad Gregory, Michael Gillespie and Thomas Pfau have indicated, the degree to which a decadent scholastic theology did tend to encourage an increasingly Pelagian and transactional approach to salvation, which underwrote the burgeoning trade in indulgences that was Luther's prime initial target. The more the notion of a symbolic, participatory link between God and Creation was undone by the theologians of the *via moderna* in favour of the vision of an inscrutably powerful God laying down arbitrary conditions of redemption, the more conceptions and practices of the Church's mediation tended to become purely power-

¹⁴ See Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, 170–254.

¹⁵ See, for example, Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*. For all its inaccuracies and questionable claims, this work helped to open up the proper investigation of the undoubted intellectual and cultural importance of "esoteric" currents of Christianity. **16** Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*.

¹⁷ Taylor, A Secular Age; Simpson, Reform and Cultural Revolution.

¹⁸ See Tuck, Philosophy and Government, 1–119.

¹⁹ Gregory, The Unintended Reformation, 25–73; Gillespie, The Theological Origins of Modernity, 19–43; Pfau, Minding the Modern, 160–213.

based, jurisdictional, instrumental and mercenary. If not at an entirely popular level, then at least at a vernacular one, the witnesses of Langland, of Chaucer in his *Pardoner's Tale*, of Dante, Boccaccio, Eckhart, Ruysbroeck and a host of other literary and mystical writers would seem to bear this verdict out.

2 Protestantism, the *via moderna* and humanism

A fourth recent historical current, most represented by Brad Gregory's The Unintended Reformation, has blamed Protestantism for the eventual advent of secularisation. This obviously counters a still far more popularly dominant narrative which regards it, to the contrary, as a beneficial harbinger of modernity. There is an entire cluster of problems and cruxes involved here.

First, many secular historians have nevertheless noted tensions of the Reformation with a humanist optimism that they take to be modern. Second, if one is Protestant, one cannot straightforwardly celebrate the road from 1517 to 2017, but will either have to identify the Enlightenment as anti-Protestant, or to argue that we have fatally forgotten the Protestant theological grounding of the latter. Against this background of perplexity, Gregory's thesis seems both more subtle and plausible: the Reformation's very anti-humanist despair of this world tended in the long term and unintentionally to hand it over to worldly forces. In this way, as Pierre Manent has also argued, the Reformation's pious downgrading of the role of an intervening divine economy in the name of a purified transcendence proved fatal.²⁰ For sheer divine distance is not the concealed essence of Christianity which Protestantism finally brings to the fore; rather, as Manent argues against Marcel Gauchet, since monotheisms offer a cult of the hidden highest, their manifest focus must be upon a seemingly impossible and unlikely *mediation*. To try to refuse, or at least marginalise the latter, as with extreme versions of Sunni Islam, is inevitably to substitute a positive, non-negotiable and authoritarian human mediation in the guise of a literally revealed divine will. But Christianity is the monotheism that, of its essence, rather most refuses this evasion, since God has drastically mediated himself through the Incarnation and its perpetuation as the Church. Insofar as Protestantism has been in danger of removing the Incarnational focus for one upon Christ's passion, transactionally regarded (and this is by no means wholly the case), then it tends simultaneously to encourage the supposed opposite of secularised disenchantment and of non-negotiable text-based fundamentalism.

However, to reach this verdict is not to say that the Reformation alone is responsible for secularisation. Gregory himself, at times somewhat sotto voce, allows that, in theological terms, it was only building on a late scholastic legacy that was already problematic, in agreement with the longstanding theses of the Catholic scholars Louis Bouyer and Josef Lortz.²¹ More recently, the notion that Reformation theology was substantially both Scotist and nominalist has been challenged, but in my view with insufficient discernment of the conceptual depths involved here.²²

It is of course the case that both Luther and Calvin reacted against the sheerly logical and rationalist style of late scholasticism. It is also the case that they reacted against its semi-Pelagianism and relative downplaying of the centrality of the work of Christ and our participation in this work, in favour of a focus on the eternal divine decree.²³ For both reformers we should instead concentrate on the wonder of God's incarnate suffering on our behalf, in which we somehow share, both ontologically and affectively. This was an enormous gain and involved a new Christocentricity not always maintained previously even by the Catholic mainstream, for which an ascetic and often monastic ascent to God had at times inhibited reflection on the priority of God's descent to us, in Creation as well as redemption.

Nevertheless, even in the mode of their reaction against nominalism, as found especially in the perspectives of William of Ockham and Pierre d'Ailly, the reformers scarcely escaped the terms of logical reference which those thinkers had laid down.²⁴ Thus nominalist semi-Pelagianism assumes that creative

²⁰ Manent, Metamorphoses of the City, 304-327.

²¹ Bouyer, The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism; Lortz, Reformation in Germany.

²² Muller, "Not Scotist".

²³ Bagchi, "Luther and Scholasticism", 3-15.

²⁴ See White, Luther as Nominalist.

and created will are in some sense on the same "concurrent" level, such that more of one means less of the other. Luther does not relinquish metaphysical concurrence (albeit in a negative mode) because, in order rightly to insist on the incommensurable otherness of the divine will, he eventually denies altogether the capacity of the human will, and does not, like Aquinas, see the very effectiveness of the divine will as disclosed in its synergy with the human will, elevated by an infused supernatural *habitus*. ²⁵ The absolute refusal of the human "contribution" still testifies to the model of a zero-sum game. For Luther we are only "single" when we have submitted everything to God in faith; otherwise we are falsely united in carnal terms under the dominance of the only real human habit, which is the inherited sin of Adam. So much is this the case that there are no such things as natural human habits, acts or potentials. Such an extreme refusal of Aristotle is surely not of the philosopher alone, but of most ordinary human assumptions in favour of a supposedly revealed truth of divine determinism. ²⁶

Thus in rightly refusing Erasmus's own version of "concurrence", for which human free-will is but a partial "contribution", Luther's "co-operation" of the elect nonetheless does not really attain to a synergic outlook, as the imagery of either God or Satan "riding us", like a man his horse, tends to reveal.²⁷ Any Christologically synergistic imagery is conceptually overridden by his quasi-stoic determinism, according to which the soul is inevitably bound either to a trajectory of decline or a trajectory of ascent.²⁸ It is true that the equine symbolics can here seem to favour a human contribution, since God's omnipotence is bound to be negatively shown in the inevitably increased stumblings of the fallen "lame horse" who has hopellesly sought to will against it.²⁹ Yet for Luther what we see here is also the outworking of the general order of the natural law, whereby a just God not only foreknows but also predetermines the doom of the sinner. Even though this is obfuscated, Luther in effect also affirms the inscrutable divine predestining of these sinners to sin in the first place, as equally of the elect to glory. And otherwise Luther would not have fretted over apparent divine injustice of the most monstrous kind.³⁰ It follows that predestination is not of a synergic sharing-in, but of an overmastering.

This is exactly why fallenness cannot, for Luther, as for Catholic faith, be a matter of mere impairment or degree, the dilution of a synergic gift. Rather, any degree of fallenness must be read as a sign of the total withdrawal of divine favour and is therefore absolute, not really a matter of degree after all. Luther in this respect only differs from Calvin in his adoption of a more piously apophatic rhetoric, whose denial of *any* analogical insight into the difference of the divine righteousness, nonetheless betrays the real apophatic legacy. His claim here is that just as the light of grace "explains" the disparity perceived by the mental light of nature whereby the wicked prosper, since we now see in the light of the gospel that they do not prosper within their souls, so eventually the light of glory will disclose just why the seeming injustice of God in his works of grace is supremely just after all. But the proportionate comparison here is in every respect crass: the wicked in the most genuine sense do not prosper even outwardly; by the light of mere nature a failure of their psychic prospering had already been noted by the pagans. Thus the "light of the gospel" was in fact naturally anticipated, just as the gospel proclaims more clearly also an outward and not merely concealed flourishing of the just in the ecclesial life of charity.

One can therefore see that the crudeness of Luther's inner/outer duality is of a piece with the crudeness of his outright contrast between "now" and "later". Instead, one can venture that just as nature inwardly pre-knows a gospel causality which is also external, so also the light of grace inwardly anticipates the final

²⁵ Luther, On the Bondage of the Will, VI:viii, 267-271 [Weimar Ausgabe, XVIII, 754].

²⁶ See Büttgen, Luther et la philosophie, 223.

²⁷ Luther, On the Bondage of the Will, II:ix, 104-107 [Weimar Ausgabe, 635–638].

²⁸ See Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, 146–161. Gillespie points out that, in *On the Bondage of the Will* Luther explicitly accepts the Humanist game he is playing with Erasmus, whereby the latter is repeating antique scepticism and he is repeating antique stoicism and its call for "inflexible" men of iron resignation to fate.

²⁹ Luther, On the Bondage of the Will, V:iii, 195-23 [WA 703-709].

³⁰ Luther, *On the Bondage of the Will*, VI:i, 239-272 [WA733–756]. Claims that Melanchthon, but not Luther, embraces this view of predestination clash with Luther's admiring references to his humanist sidekick here and elsewhere: *Introduction*, 600.

³¹ Luther, On the Bondage of the Will, VI:i, 239–272 [WA 733–756].

flowering of divine righteousness which must be a final matching of destiny to deed.³²

The fine Norwegian theologian Knut Alfsvåg seeks to deny these evidences of Luther's negative adherence to concurrence, yet appears to contradict himself in admitting Luther's essentially Ockhamist alienation of all real activity to the side of God; something only compounded by the strange Platonic element in Luther that tends to embrace a monistic reading of Plato's *Parmenides*, and to ignore the more elaborated Platonic philosophy of the near equality of the One with the Many.³³ It may appear true that Luther allows a genuine synergy, presupposing an incommensurability of divine and human causes beyond any merely "co-operating" concursus in the case of genuine human merit under grace, yet, as we have seen, this is ultimately overridden by God's inscrutable predestinating decree.³⁴ In Platonic terms this corresponds to the view that creatures only participate in divine activity, and not (by dint of extreme paradox), in the ultimate imparticipable divine essence. Just such a Proclean affirmation, as Alfsvåg does not see, was upheld by Nicholas of Cusa, but not by Luther.³⁵ In this fashion a link is forged in Luther between a continued if subtle adherence to Ockhamist concurrence, and a certain (ultimately more Plotinian) mode of Platonism, that reserves the ultimate One from any mediation. There is also a parallel to be drawn here with the dubious Palamite duality of divine essence and energies in the contemporary Christian east.

It is true that Luther refuses in De Servo Arbitrio the entire inherited Medieval distinction of the divine potentia absoluta from the potentia ordinata, as especially foregrounded by Scotus and later by nominalism.³⁶ His sense of the divine mystery and simplicity is admirably too strong to continue to allow that rift. For him, indeed, God's actions are entirely at one with his eternal nature. Along with that rejection, Luther refused also the notion of grace as infused habitus, since for the nominalist theologians, this remained part of God's ordained will, even though, according to his absolute power he might have willed to redeem us without grace, entirely according to our natural being. This conception, in a third strand, accordingly helped to develop the (un-patristic and un-Thomistic) notion of a pura natura, a created character existing independently of grace and the return through spirit of all things to God. Yet as the French medievalist Paul Vignaux was the first to note, in modification of the over-assimilation of Luther to Ockham by the German Dominican H.S. Denifle in the Nineteenth Century, Luther coherently rejects all three strands – even though he retains pure nature as a state of sheer perdition.³⁷

For him there can be no salvation outside the real and direct action of the Holy Spirit upon us and in this respect he returns to Peter Lombard's (probably distorted) version of Augustinian doctrine which also refused any mediation by created grace and infused habitual charity (in contrast to Aquinas). As Vignaux argued, this return to Lombard is crucial for Luther's whole trajectory and can to a degree be seen as belonging with the post-nominalism of Denys the Carthusian, who also made just such a return.³⁸ Since for Luther grace consists in the direct action of God upon us, he has no use for the idea that there might be any "reserved" aspect of God not totally committed to his decision for this action.

But all the same, this action is by us traceable solely to the divine decree and the expression by this decree of the eternal and unaltering divine justice remains for us utterly inscrutable. Thereby, in a sense, the fearful reserve of the divine absolute power has been transferred from the ontological to the epistemological plane. But the existential upshot of anxiety remains the same. In any case, an ontological dimension remains insofar as the divine mercy remains apparently selective and without grounds, albeit without reserve and detachment.

Moreover, an ontological duality persists in an altered guise: outside an entirely intrusive and overwhelming action of grace, nature of itself is sheerly damnable. It is for just this reason that Luther,

³² That should also be held to include God's ultimate overcoming of evil in order that God be "all in all" in everything and everyone if the divine determining is indeed synergic. If one wishes to refuse semi-Pelagianism then one must embrace Origen's "hyper-orthodox" universalism, else one compromises the divine goodness, however much one dresses this up in false pieties.

³³ Alfsvåg, What No Mind Has Conceived, 177-259.

³⁴ White, Luther as Nominalist.

³⁵ Nicholas of Cusa, De Coniecturis, I.11. And see John Milbank, "Christianity and Platonism in East and West", 107-160.

³⁶ On the Bondage of the Will, V, viii, pp. 216-218 [WA 718-719].

³⁷ Büttgen, Luther et la philosophie, 193-225.

³⁸ See Rosemann, The Story of a Great Medieval Book.

unlike Augustine, is unable to think of the trajectory of grace within us as one of integral and continuous reform. Instead, at every instance we are equally and simultaneously both justified according to the indwelling of the spirit and alienated from God according to our always sheerly sinful nature. And here again it is in fact a questionable nominalist metaphysics that distorts a theology supposedly purified of all philosophy. For Luther adopts Ockham's highly modern and un-Aristotelian as well as un-Augustinian view of motion according to which it can always be broken down into infinitesimal static instances. In consequence, every change is either mechanical and immanently preordained, or if more radical must be extrinsically supernatural and renewed at every instance by God, rather than infused and synergically sustained.³⁹ In order to sustain the latter, more Biblical and Patristic account, one needs indeed the notion of a created, habitual grace even though this remains, as for Aquinas, entirely infused by God. In lieu of this genuinely participatory view, Luther's account of grace hovers uneasily between one of total and alienating mystical fusion on the one hand and sheer imputation on the other.

What is more, Luther speaks of the divine government of his fallen creatures "outside His Kingdom" as being "under his general omnipotence", whereas his working with his creatures "within His Kingdom" amongst the redeemed occurs "under the special power of His Spirit". ⁴⁰ This shows that he sustains the Scotist and nominalist-derived division of God's "general" from his "special" operations which was so fatefully to shape modernity, all the way to Rousseau.

This is once more part and parcel of a "concursus" account of causality, since rather than regarding, after the Fathers and Aquinas, all of God's action as simple in unity with his essence, and so as equally determinative, and in a totally fused way, of the universal and the particular, Luther thinks of the divine action as after all but "partial" in its very normative and transcendental generality, and as distinctly "special" only when it intervenes directly on the plane of finite secondary causality. Grace, for Luther, is this kind of special intervention, rather than a radical, if divinely simple transfiguration of his natural operation, to which nevertheless it is always historically and eternally conjoined.

Just because of this still nominalist ascription of "generality" to the divine action, Luther can think of fallen finite evil action as something sheerly external to it, rather than as something privatively participating in it and therefore never, for that reason, reaching a degree zero of depravity.

In the case of the Kingdom of the elect, as of all finite natural goodness, the tell-tale use of the general/special dichotomy, when strangely combined with Luther's "stoic" determinism, has to mean that, for him, the divine general will of itself fully supplies the "special" component, such that it fully determines finite secondary causality *at* this secondary level. This is subtly but drastically different from the inherited Christian neoplatonic account of the divine *influentia* fully shaping the lower level by emanative influx from above, but in such a way as to cause it to sustain synergically the very causal spontaneity and finally spiritual freedom of that level itself in all its integrity.

A somewhat similarly complex relationship to nominalism is apparent in the case of the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity. The nominalists had struggled with the realist Patristic accounts of "nature" in the former case and of the realist Augustinian-Thomist account of "substantive relation" in the latter. A consequent insistence that God has only assumed in the Incarnation a single individual with certain properties appears to verge on Nestorianism. Equally, an insistence that the persons of the Trinity must be first identified by individual properties before they are identified by relational ones – distinguished from the divine essence by a Scotist "formal distinction" which Ockham inconsistently allows only for God – appears to verge on tritheism.

By comparison, Luther proclaims that Christianity offers a "new language" in which the normal ontological considerations do not apply: somehow, the particular properties of Christ fail to coincide with his personal individuality; somehow the persons of the Trinity fully coincide with their relations which are therefore real.⁴¹

However, this does not betoken any conversion to a fully-fledged metaphysical realism (as opposed

³⁹ See Dieter, "Luther as Late Medieval Theologian", 31–48, especially 43–44.

⁴⁰ On The Bondage of the Will, VI:viii, 267-271 [WA, 753-755].

⁴¹ White, Luther as Nominalist, 299-348.

to nominalism) on Luther's part. Instead, in a demonstrably still Ockhamist manner, for Luther God does not assume a universal human nature as such, but only the particular attributes of the individual Christ: Christ was "thirsty, a servant, dead", but not "thirst, servitude, death", as he puts it.⁴² Nestorianism is only avoided by a radical insistence that the divine Son is the personal subject of these attributes. But in this way it would appear that the God-Man is less an ontological amalgam, than simply God who has tacked onto himself a random set of isolated, individual properties. If there is, in consequence, no integrity of human nature, and indeed no divine nature apart from his singularity, then how is one to escape the monophysite conclusion that the God-Man is a pure fusion, such that human properties have become one with a divine nature that is indistinguishable from a divine individuality?

It is true that (arguing against Graham White in this respect, whose analysis I have nonetheless just deployed) Luther's notion of a "new language" in his Operationes and in Anti-Latomus, did go beyond these drily semantic considerations of the Terminists. Invoking Quintilian, in a humanist mode, Luther celebrated the power of rhetoric to invoke the entirely absent, and in a thoroughly Renaissance manner he links this capacity with a certain Platonism. Rhetoric is *indispensable* to truth, just because literal speech is complicit with sinful appearances: only the figural invocation of what is not can allow us to invoke the invisible divine and healing reality which is not in any way manifest or present. Yet the Incarnation has rendered this hidden depth once more available to us. For this reason it has altered language and disclosed its hidden capacity: a primacy for metaphor and the greater truth of the figurally transferred over the literal. Christ is apparently a human sinner who dies, but through the "marvellous exchange" is really also God who has taken on human properties. We can only express this in metaphorical terms of translatio. And the same applies to the reverse process of human deification: in Christ we remain human creatures who have nonetheless really started to assume divine attributes by grace. In natural, finite terms this is improper, and so can only be spoken of improperly.⁴³ Since these transformative processes are real, it is also clear, as Oswald Bayer has argued, that for Luther these divinely instituted signs can have a performative affect, that they themselves institute the reality that they refer to.44

This primacy of poetic, metaphorical language over the rules of logic was applied to scriptural exegesis by Luther's Croatian fellow-reformer Matthias Flaccius Illyricus, and later further developed by radical pietists like Oetinger and Hamann in the Eighteenth Century.⁴⁵ As with Paracelsus and Boehme's in part Luther-derived view that faith as the supreme work is also imagination, the divine power to transfigure, their contribution later shapes the spirit of Romanticism, which is in these respects less novel and modern than many suppose.

In the later pietist instances, a shift away from nominalism to a new sort of linguistic realism allows for the fully paradoxical import of the metaphorical and Christological exchanges. In keeping with the Cusan coincidence of opposites, one should understand such paradox as a full admission of the breaking with the law of non-contradiction always really implied by Proclean-derived "analogy of attribution". But in Luther's case (and again in criticism of Alfsvåg here), the non-analogical import of metaphor opens the way for a dialectical dissolution of paradox that will eventually have fatal historical consequences. For Luther's theological metaphorics are more obliterating than unitive: Creation, humanity and sin are ontologically as nothing, and thus the metaphorical transfer tends altogether to remove the literal vehicle, resulting strangely in an ultimately literal triumph of the transferring dimension of metaphor and of the rhetorical gesture of abstraction over its concrete verbal ground. In ultimate reality there is only the One, inscrutable divine action. Everything created exists only as participation in the One but any real sharing that would allow creatures as creatures to be God in their depths (as with Augustine and Eckhart) is trumped by a final

⁴² Ibid., 283.

⁴³ See Alfsvåg, What No Mind Has Conceived.

⁴⁴ Bayer, Martin Luther's Theology, 52. Whether or not Luther was unprecedented in his doctrine of the performative signum as also res, as Bayer claims, is perhaps arguable. Surely the Catholic understanding of eucharistic institution from St Ambrose onwards already carried this implication. It is certainly present later in Antoine Arnauld's defence of transubstantiation in the Seventeenth Century.

⁴⁵ Matthias Flacius Illyricus, How to Understand Sacred Scripture. And see, see Shuger, Sacred Rhetoric, 65-106 and passim.

construal of participation as alienation to the side of God. 46

It is true that for Luther this Parmenidean primacy of the One as transcendent "nothing" is massively qualified, as Alfsvåg argues, by his Christology which divinely confirms the One as also the multiple actual unities of created things. The Incarnation is the ultimate divine gift in which we substantively participate and is not just forensically transferred to us. And yet, still in *via moderna* mode, behind this recognisable good gift stands the morally inscrutable decree of divine grace, as if Luther had effectively detached the Platonic One from its identification with the divine Good.

One cannot here agree with Alfsvåg that Luther provides a Christological qualification to Dionysius's excessive apophaticism. For in the case of Dionysius the mystical transcending of either affirmation or negation is precisely allied to the liturgical conveying of the Christological manifestation of this transcendence. In Luther by contrast, a much more ultimate negativity of the entirely inscrutable *Deus Absconditus* (including as to his Goodness) is in unmediated dialectical tension with the merely positively decreed manifestation of what is recognised *by us* (and only according to our apprehension!) as a positive created goodness in Christ.

In this way predestination appears to trump Christology. But it also undermines the orthodoxy of Christology insofar as Christ's created, human nature can have no really secure ontological standing. Thus the nominalist unity of Luther's Christ must inevitably merge with his nominalist and pseudo-Platonic henology. Insofar as Christ's human nature is fully real it must altogether be subsumed into the divine One.

In order to avoid this monophysite reduction Calvin later insists, surely within the same nominalist, or possibly at least Scotistic *episteme*,⁴⁷ that something in the divine personhood is reserved from its involvement in the hypostatic union, as is witnessed by his "humanist" reduction of the Patristic *communicatio idiomatum* to a *mere* figure of speech, lacking the profound ontological import that it has in Luther, and his referral of the sense of this figure of exchange *solely* to the transactional swapping involved in substitutionary punitive atonement (as Calvin conceives it) and not to an ontological reciprocity. In this way the absolute linkage of the human and divine natures becomes merely "improper, though not without reason", but the reason is merely the divine instrumental usage of a sheerly human sacrifice.

Any Cyrilline paradox of a divine "impassable suffering" does not figure here, as it does later in the more Thomistic Christology of the Anglican Richard Hooker.⁴⁸ Similarly, Calvin simplistically supposes, in defiance of the imagery of Christ's eternal offering in the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, that the divine Son will eschatologically "cease to be the ambassador of the Father" and "discharge the office of the Mediator". This offends any notion of divine simplicity for which nothing can possibly begin or cease to happen to the divine persons or the divine nature.

To insist upon this *extra Calvinisticum* (as Lutheran scholastics later termed it) is inevitably to entertain the idea that Christ's human properties are set apart from the divine person and so must be in some fashion of themselves hypostasised – especially if they are not generally or universally bound together. ⁴⁹ Equally, the notion that the divine person of the Son can be in any way "reserved" from the human nature that he has assumed again implies an accidental property of the *Logos* that contradicts the divine simplicity. In this way Calvin appears (despite his apparently impeccable Chalcedonian credentials) to sustain the Nestorian tendencies of nominalist and, indeed Franciscan scholastic Christologies in general in a longer term. ⁵⁰

In the case of the Trinity, a unique reality requires for Luther that a "new language" speak of relation as substantive. But unlike Aquinas, Luther is unable to offer any metaphysical reasons for, or inklings of, such a reality – allowing of course that it escapes any complete rational grasp. He is forced to leave it as sheer surd mystery, metaphorically expressed, and again in such a way – given the ontological denial of

⁴⁶ Alfsvåg is surely wrong to say that Luther is original in stressing the positive, "all things exist as unities" as opposed to the negative "the true absolute One is nothing" dimension of the *Parmenides*. For this is already just the way it is read by Plotinus and Proclus.

⁴⁷ Steinmetz, "The Scholastic Calvin", 16–30. Scotus affirmed, unlike Aquinas, a human *esse* for Christ and a continued purely human unifying formality of the human nature.

⁴⁸ See my as yet unpublished essay, "On Anglican extremism".

⁴⁹ Calvin, Institutes, II.xiv.

⁵⁰ See Riches, Ecce Homo.

both analogy and real relation⁵¹ – that must favour an ultimate real and literal "transference" to the pole of unity and paternity.52

The same applies to his emergent eucharistic thought which, encouraged by the reasonings of Pierre d'Ailly,53 embraces a substantive change of the elements as "sacramental union", yet refuses to give any sufficient metaphysical grounds for this. Insofar as he does so, then he seems, and interestingly, to regard the mystery of the Mass as a direct continuation of the Incarnation, such that the substance of Christ's body entirely perfuses the substance of the elements, just as the divine nature entirely perfuses the human one in the case of Christ's personhood. In general Luther's understanding of the eucharist, as Martin Wendt has shown, is construed in terms of profound triadic and liturgical intimacy, whereby the eucharistic gift immediately and intelligibly manifests the divine reality, but in such a way that this manifestation is inseparable from our immediacy of active response and inwards appropriation.⁵⁴ Of course this third dimension is equally given in its entirety by God. 55

However, this proximity of the eucharist both to the Incarnation and to the Trinitarian economy causes Luther sarcastically to ask whether the doctrine of transubstantiation would not require, by analogy, the flesh of the Virgin to be marginalised as merely "accidental". ⁵⁶ And this analogy seems, first, to compound Luther's "monophysite" version of the communicatio idiomatum, by thinking in terms of a quasi-physical "mingling" of the natures, rather than their personal union of idiom as "style" or personification. Secondly, to confuse a perfect integration brought about by a single divine personhood or hypostatic "character", with one brought about by a material substance (Christ's body, which retains a human materialised soul as "form", though not a human individuating substance), which cannot be perfectly blended with its accidents in the way that individuality or personhood can.

Quite simply, Christ's body can be manifest in the modes of bread and wine (for Aquinas), but it is obviously not of its essence eatable or potable. Therefore it is inappropriate to compare, as Luther does, the sacramental union with that of fire and iron when iron has been heated red-hot, for fire is not of its nature iron and a fortiori Christ's body cannot as eternal have anything "added" to it, just as the divine nature cannot "become" human in the Incarnation, as Luther is in danger of affirming. The folkish metaphor deployed here will simply not do the metaphysical job required.

⁵¹ I can see little evidence that Luther espouses, as Alfsvåg asserts, an ontology of relation over one of substance. Rather I think he clearly espouses a nominalist theology of substance – though he ably sees how this can re-open Platonic aporiae as to wherein lies unity.

⁵² White, Luther as Nominalist, 181–230.

⁵³ Luther, "On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church", 285. D'Ailly accepted transubstantiation merely on the grounds of Church authority, which throws into a very dark light his chairmanship of the committee at the Council of Constance which sent Jan Hus to the stake.

⁵⁴ Wendte, *Die Gabe und das Gestell*, especially 11–15, 329–353, 487–491.

⁵⁵ This is not at all something which I would wish to deny, as Wendte seems perhaps to imply (Die Gabe und das Gestell, 346–347) even though he himself rightly qualifies Marion's unilateral account of the gift in a somewhat more "exchangist" direction. Rather the whole issue for me is whether God gives in the mode of synergic participation. If he does not, then surely one has a merely ontic and not ontological God, in a rivalry with the created plane of action. This is surely the risk which Wendte runs by adopting the terms of dialectic rather than analogy and by thinking of "ideal realism" as a Trinitarian oscillation between transcendence and immanence in a way that adopts Schelling and Hegel's attempt to have a post-critical constitutive metaphysics. Such a metaphysics is forced either to identify Kantian limits themselves with the absolute or to absolutise a play between these limits and the self-determining sublime transcendent ground of the unlimited. This ground may be either wholly known (Hegel) or wholly unknown (Schelling). For Wendte it appears to be the latter, rendering his ideal realism a continual interplay between the wholly unknown and the phenomenologically present, but not an analogical mediation. On this account indeed one can only maintain (as one should) the absolute causal priority of the initiating and fully real divine instance in terms of its overwhelming of any natural action and enture provision of the third moment of receptivity, even at the natural level. One can indeed read Luther as foreshadowing and historically helping to generate such a cognitive pattern. However, without analogy, how are we able to read the gifts of the Incarnation and Eucharist as gifts rather than arbitrary transfers from an ambivalent source - which is a problem, I am contending, with Luther himself? For a gift to be recognised as a gift must be marked with a sign of the donor. It is a gift not just because it has material and enjoyable substance but also because it constitutes the mark of a further and perpetual promise of donation from an inherently generous source. For the question of Luther and promise see further in the main text below.

⁵⁶ Luther, "On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church", 288-289.

The same metaphysical deficiency applies yet again to his account of predestination, where (as admittedly for Aquinas, who is very inadequate in this regard) he affirms salvation as occurring through pure divine election, which involves the divine withholding of election from some sinners, yet inconsistently (again like Aquinas) denies that this implies divine election to reprobation, since if omission can ethically be commission for us, then all the more must this hold for an infinite power. Long before Calvin, Gregory of Rimini had already fully owned up to this latently grim conclusion of Western theology in the wake of Augustine's final writings.⁵⁷

In all these instances, Luther's metaphysical undernourishment encourages a fideism that is the natural ally of authoritarianism. It could only be escaped by stronger doctrines of mystical participation, required in order to understand how the saved were able to enter into a Christ-space nominalistically foreclosed against any substantive or really relational sharing. Inevitably then, Lutheran Mystics like Weigel began to develop more realist modes of metaphysics, and this was even to a degree true of Protestant scholasticism.⁵⁸

Yet it is easy to be misled here by some later apparent Protestant scholastic espousals of Thomistic analogy: a frequent primacy in their writings of the analogy of proportionality as equivalence of ratio between the divine and human can conceal an effective adherence to univocity, as can even an embrace of the primacy of attribution if this is seen in terms of efficient causal instigation by a therefore entirely unknown goodness and truth etc as opposed to a real participatory communication of a formality and a teleology.

Equally, the confinement of a general metaphysics to "being" as univocal, and the positing of a "special metaphysics" or "natural theology" for God by Goclenius and others at the turn of the Sixteenth Century is not evidence, as Richard A. Muller suggests, of a departure from Scotist univocity, but precisely witness to the embrace of the new *schema* for metaphysics which only Scotism allowed. According to this scheme, metaphysics is not equally and aporetically about God and Being, nor does God lie as cause of finite being altogether outside the scope of metaphysics, as for Aquinas, but rather he is regionally and secondarily located within the scope of a metaphysics whose subject is univocal being, even though as incommensurable infinite being he is the cause of being insofar as it is finite.⁵⁹

Where some Protestant scholastics experienced unease about this subordination of God to being, they tended, as Muller notes, to appeal, in line with Luther's "Parmenideanism", to a neoplatonic notion of God as *supra-ens*, though often in such a way as to increase a rupture of sheer distance between God and his creation, since they did not usually embrace a neoplatonic emanationist *schema*.

It is also the case that the Protestant insistence on the primacy and absoluteness of the divine will meant that they tended to embrace what is, at least genealogically, a Scotist account of contingency. For this account the contingent is not, as for Aquinas, simply utter dependency upon God who is alone pure necessity, but is only genuinely contingent if always shadowed by a possible "might have been otherwise", even after the enactment of the divine decision. Antonie Vos and others have shown how pervasive this "synchronic contingency" is for Protestant thought. Vos, as Dutch Reformed, wishes to celebrate it as offering a new and valid Christian ontological paradigm, but, to the contrary, it tends to diminish God by denying the inscrutable necessity and disclosive character of all that he has done, which essentially belongs to him as an infinite simplicity to whom nothing can be really added. Once more the post-Scotist retreat from Patristic and Dominican (Albertine or Thomistic) realism involves a weakened sense of the ontological difference which threatens the divine majesty in the name of a merely onticising desire to elevate it.

Finally, against Muller's attempted (and to a degree successful) rebuff of the common claim that Protestant thought was Scotist and univocalist, it must be insisted that Luther was metaphysically Ockhamist (in accordance with his university education)⁶² and that this position assumes and indeed exacerbates

⁵⁷ Peter Martyr Vermigli was familiar with Gregory of Rimini in this respect. See James, "Peter Martyr Vermigli", 62-78.

⁵⁸ See Muller, "Not Scotist".

⁵⁹ See Boulnois, Métaphysiques rebelles, 261–311.

⁶⁰ One can note here that Luther clearly espoused the Scotist view that God could have created matter without form. See Alfsvåg, *What no Mind has Conceived*, 193–194.

⁶¹ Vos, "Scholasticism and Reformation", 99-119.

⁶² Bagchi, "Luther and Scholasticism".

univocity. In the case of being, a univocal status and meaning applies not just to to each existing thing in quid, but also, beyond Scotus, directly in quale, with respect to its specifying difference. But Ockham went still further in generalising univocity so as to make it apply also to identities internal to essences besides identities internal to existence. For as Olivier Boulnois has argued, later medieval nominalism was built upon univocity of being and of meaning because, just as Scotus reduced "being" to a property semantically generalised from its always particular and complete occurrences (whether as infinite or finite, substantive or accidental etc), so, also, Ockham reduced any shared essential quality to a nominal or (in his mature thought) mental generalisation from specific instances that were always, in reality, entirely particular and contingent.63

It is, indeed, in part Luther's nominalistic confinement which disables him from placing the participatory at the ontological outset – instead, it tends to be for him a secondary and impenetrably mystical phenomenon, in accordance with his mode of "Parmenidean" and Plotinian Platonism for which there is an unambiguous "reserve" of the imparticipable. As we have already seen, just this foreshortened perspective on methexis encourages the over-literal notion of an ultimate "region" infinitely distanced from us, and yet thereby after all within the same ontic space. This can then subtly perpetuate a "concurrence" perspective upon causality, placing the One/God ultimately in competition with created action and freedom.

Thus, for all his Christocentricity, eventually in the evolution of Luther's thought the forensic comes first: the interval from the ineffably individual God to us can only be bridged by a descending decree to which we must ineluctably submit.⁶⁴ Even in the case of Christ, transmission of this decree is his "proper" work and only "accidentally" is he our example, as reiterating the Law and encouraging our sanctification. 65 Similarly, we must first have faith in God as all-powerful and only secondarily do we receive his love as this is revealed to us. This love is moreover dominated by God's powerful will – a love that wills, disinterestedly, our well-being and in so sense offers, as Anders Nygren realised, an erotic fusion.⁶⁶ Just by token of its agapeic unilaterality it is at first purely received without supposed taint of mutuality, despite the fact that a love received entirely prior to our loving response would be indistinguishable from a violent blow. Again here, Luther's theological conceptuality runs up against the metaphysical limits of his envisioning of causation and the infinite/finite ratio. The irony of Protestantism is that, in trying to sideline metaphysical reason, it falls victim to it, save when it frequently realises that it must retreat from this sidelining.

Even where metaphysical participation plays in Luther a strong secondary or even primary role, it is not clear how this can be compatible with his fundamental terminism⁶⁷ whose logic cannot readily (despite some recent, anachronistically "analytic" opinions to the contrary) be separated from its metaphysics. 68 Within a fundamental, if not explicitly univocal and nominalist outlook, this can even, as we have seen, result in an excessive "Parmenidean" mode of participation, if there is no medium between difference and identity.

In consequence, the divine presence in the world is too much seen by Luther, as Thomas Torrance argued, as God's entering within and under the spatially finite in order to pervade it, as if it were a kind of literally bounded receptacle or container, thereby risking a sort of panentheism. ⁶⁹ Equally, the participation of the believer in Christ is seen as a repetition of the communicatio idiomatum, exchanging perfection with sinfulness which, if it is to be seen as more than forensic (on a Calvinist model) tends to imply, given terminist assumptions, not simply a deifying entry by humans into divine personhood (though this is sometimes the language which the earlier Luther deployed) but a mystical fusion of the corrupted and the incorrupt, and

⁶³ Boulnois, Métaphysiques rebelles, 343-379.

⁶⁴ For the relevant debates here, see Braaten and Jenson, Union with Christ.

⁶⁵ Luther, Commentary on Galatians, 366; Su-Young Kim, Luther on Faith and Love.

⁶⁶ Nygren, Agape and Eros.

⁶⁷ The late Middle Ages itself spoke of terministi rather than 'nominalists'. But the same meaning is conveyed: universals are considered to be only "terms" or "names".

⁶⁸ Boulnois, Métaphysiques rebelles.

⁶⁹ Torrance, Space, Time and Incarnation (Edinburgh: T.and T. Clark, 1997).

of death and life.⁷⁰ The implications of this fusion are compounded by Luther's ambivalent hints as to the divine causing of human "hardening" and so evil, and insistence that the divine essence lies completely outside the reach of human ethical assessment – just as, Alfsvåg appropriately says, zero cannot genuinely be divided. The path towards a heterodox tensional fusion of even good and evil and the grounding of this in God, as with Jacob Boehme and his German Idealist successors, Schelling and Hegel, would seem clearly to be opened up.⁷¹

Calvinism was indeed more rationalist than Lutheranism and so tended to refuse a fideistic mysticism, even if from the outset it could also embrace a mysticism of reason. The hypostatic union must accordingly be more explained and not left as an entirely indiscernible and miraculous fusion, even though the cost of the Calvinist mode of explanation, as we have seen, is to weaken the union itself. Relations in the Trinity must equivalently be subordinated to individual possessed properties, although that borders on heresy. Substantive eucharistic presence must likewise be denied in terms of a more spiritual real presence, despite the fact that this seems to deny the words of Christ at the last supper. Above all, double predestination must be logically embraced (and still more clearly by Calvin's followers than by Calvin himself) even though this threatens divine goodness and love and thereby the entire substance of Christianity.

What we can see, therefore, is that John Henry Newman was even more right than he realised: the Reformers were nearer to repeating Patristic-era heterodoxy than might be thought. However, this was already true of the univocalist and nominalist theology whose legacy they could not free themselves from, through lack of sufficient philosophical reflection. In either case, the problem is distortion of theology by a mutated metaphysics – even if ultimately there are theological reasons, lying often in the Franciscan legacy, for this mutation.

3 The negative consequences of the Reformation

We should confirm then, the entanglement of the Reformation with both univocity and nominalism. These two can be taken, as so many have now argued, as the main theoretical motors of secularisation. Univocity of being at once eventually renders finite being fully self-standing and God irrelevantly remote. Nominalism disconnects and disenchants reality, rendering it at once both meaningless and the playground of divine arbitrariness and impenetrable decree. Taken together, these conclusions suggest both that the Reformation was *not* the main long-term source of secularisation and *equally* that it played a big part in the latter eventual outcome.

⁷⁰ See Juntunen, "Luther and Metaphysics", especially 154–155. Juntunen would not endorse my conclusion here, but he astutely points out that Luther appears trapped between metaphors of one substantial union of the human being with Christ, and others of a consubstantial "two substances" in us, tending to a kind of schizophrenia. As he rightly says, *neither* is what Luther intends, but I would argue that he lacks a realist metaphysics which would allow him properly to understand our incorporation into Christ's divine humanity (into his human body and divine spirit) as an ever-increased sharing in his divine personhood, a non-identical repetition of his divinely articulate character. My reading is also confirmed (though again the author would deny it) by Dennis Bielfeldt's plausible objection to Juntunen (and the Finnish reading of Luther in general), that, with respect to our union with Christ, Luther is not talking about participation, but about "the relation of being *present in*". Bielfeldt takes this "perichoresis" as more avoiding any dangerous confusion of the human with the substance of the infinite (failing to understand that Proclean, Thomistic and Cusan participation in the infinite substance does not involve such confusion), yet does not see, for the reasons given above in the main text, that precisely *this* model of perichoretic presence is likely to imply, in Luther's nominalistic terms, just the divine-human fusion – more *drastically* than does "participation" – which he is trying to avoid. See Bielfeldt, "Response to Sammi Juntunen, 'Luther and Metaphysics'", 161–166.

⁷¹ See O'Regan, Gnostic Apocalypse.

⁷² Calvin, *Institutes*, XIII.6: "Now of the three substances I say that each one, while related to the others, is distinguished by a special quality." Calvin goes on to explain that the Son is "intermediary" Wisdom, embarrassedly rushing through his immanent eternal nature to focus on his economic function in Creation and Incarnation: 7–13. Similarly the Spirit is dynamic life (14–15) but the distinctness of this function is to be understood from his economic role (which actually can give no account of its distinctness whatsoever: that can only be articulated as substantive relation analogically intimated in the ontological structures of the Creation and especially in their grace-filled renewal – this is a more genuinely participatory account of the economic function).

We can, very briefly, summarise the latter, as well detailed by Brad Gregory and several others.⁷³ Protestantism has tended to disenchant nature, often encouraging ideas of the natural world as dead mechanism or meaningless force, even though the course of later scientific research has often shown, experimentally, that this desired vision does not fully correspond to reality. Yet the vision often prevails and leaves us with an inexplicable residue of consciousness and free will. We are then tempted to reduce these psychic phenomena respectively to mere representational record and the operation of force, or else to cling to spirit in the mode of sheer choice or impulse, that can itself be equated with Newtonian motion in a void, suffering no obstacle.

Our vision of nature and of ourselves within nature has thereby become debased, to our imminent ecological and cultural peril. Equally, the Reformation debased our notion of language, to which it uniquely cleaved. It failed fully to allow that texts are only constituted within, and become readable by, complex contexts of oral tradition, shared liturgical practice and educative formation. To subtract the text of the Bible from this context as a foundational authority is falsely to suggest that it can operate unequivocally and non-enigmatically, which requires it to be denatured as a set of univocal propositions and commands, as though it were the Koran as envisaged by much Sunni orthodoxy. Thus as Philippe Büttgen has pointed out, when Luther discards Augustine's interpretation of the six days of Creation in terms of an initial, spiritual creation, as being allegorical and fanciful, he has to ignore details of the literal text which Augustine is trying to take into account and in a by no means implausible fashion: especially the separation of light and darkness which occurs before the creation of "lights in the firmament".⁷⁴ Instead, Luther's attempt to equate the literal reading always with a natural one, in this case assuming a strictly naturalistic interpretation of the six days of Creation, provides Protestantism with what will eventually prove to be a scientifically embarrassing legacy.

Since the Bible is not a simplistically literal kind of text, even by intention, this exegetical approach effectively hands its reading over to hidden mediators, to clerical forces claiming merely to read when in reality they are construing. And even they, in order to prevent hermeneutical chaos amongst their own kind, must focus mainly on the doctrine of predestination in a search for God's inscrutably elective, but literally unambiguous decree. If only a revealed text is normative and normative only as literal, then only the signs of an arbitrary eternal decree can count as to real textual content. Moreover, without mediation, the problem of application of this text to life must mean viewing life itself as the extension of a bleak Bible. In James Simpson's words, "what remains for the Christian is to search for signs of election: all of life, that is, becomes an opaque book, full of doubtful signs."⁷⁵

Where this authority of Protestant orthodoxy was quickly refused, then it tended to be replaced by an unmanageable plethora of individual and private authorities, imposing their own wills and desires on the text, with a resultant cultural and social chaos. The only way out then became a public appeal either to a fideistic ideology (able to organise, like Salafist Islam, in a relatively formless manner) or to the supposedly transparent text of a disenchanted nature, including human nature, as with the more Socinian and rationalist tendencies of the Reformation, which were also there from the outset and later became the enlightenment. As James Simpson puts it, "repress the material institution and you will land up with an ideational institution". He rightly adds that "given the quirkiness of the human psyche, ideational institutions can be, and usually are, more punishing than material ones", and bears this out with a demonstration that the vast increase of religious persecution in the early modern period can clearly be correlated with Biblical literalism (to some extent on the Catholic as well as on the Protestant side).⁷⁶

⁷³ Gregory, The Unintended Reformation.

⁷⁴ Büttgen, Luther et la philosophie, 98-108.

⁷⁵ Simpson, Burning to Read, 140-141; Gregory, The Unintended Reformation, 74-128.

⁷⁶ Simpson, Burning to Read, 142-183, 260-282. Burning for heresy had only become civil law in England in 1409, but few heretics were actually burnt before the following century. Writers like Thomas More were embarrassed in their recognition that the Church Fathers did not admit the death penalty for religious fault, and justified it in terms of the dire threat to civil order posed by Luther, which More linked to a misreading of Erasmian texts that he was later purportedly quite happy to have banned - in favour, as Simpson points out (despite all his own Biblical scepticism), of a more draconian public policing of the reading of scripture and assurance of the dominance of single authoritative meanings.

The same Protestant refusal of mediation resulted in various degrees of iconoclasm, strongest in first Bohemia, then the British Isles and Southern France. Just as nature became disenchanted, so too did the image: no longer a conveyance of the transcendent, it sunk to the level of mere "art" to be regulated by taste and collected in museums. The Kantian view of beauty as a meaningless but enjoyable immanent play of the faculties is the most logical transcription of this resultant attitude. However, as James Simpson has argued, iconoclasm does not stop with the image; once commenced as a suspicion of idolatry it can, by definition, never stop, and eventually tends, as in the French Revolution to terror, ⁷⁷ Idols were held to bind by their power or imagined power; liberty was thereby defined as negative freedom from idolatry. Not just the idolising of images but soon also, after Bacon, of concepts, traditions and authorities. In the end, only the originally self-authenticating, which means the pure isolated will itself can be allowed to stand – giving us, as Simpson points out, the ultimate paradox of the "statue of liberty", the idol of non-idolisation.

What end could there ever be in sight to this since, as Kant realised, we can never be quite sure of the authenticity of our own freedom? Today the process of suspicion has ceased to distinguish the dead idol from the living image of God that is the human being – even the sacred imaging status of the latter must be torn down, and especially the confines of the body that render that image manifest: thus the ultimate as it were "Protestant" iconoclasm is the insistence upon the absolute rights of the will over a body reduced to a possession, which must necessarily include a denial of the human status of the foetus and of the objective significance of gender-difference. Further down this road already lies the "transhuman" blending of the human person with alien biological and machinic matter, encouraged by the "ideational" authority of the new online market in inner emotions and preferences.⁷⁸

For in the end, if universals and relations are unreal and nothing mediates, then only money, increasingly torn away from sign and image, can truly do so. Not Luther himself, but Calvin and other reformers gradually lifted the restrictions on usury and the social obligation to ensure just prices and wages. A world without value and a world of total human fallen depravity is a world that can only be governed by contract and convention, supply and demand. This is now a self-governing world without God, but it was originally, for a post-Protestant vision, a world that God was held to govern by the perverse means of passion tempering passion, vice tempering vice. As Brad Gregory has argued, the Protestant vision of a world naturally abandoned to pleasure tends to ensure in the long run the eventuation of just such a world, given a despair of the reprobate and a limited account of how far the redeemed can recover fallen nature, or even the relevance to eternally ultimate concerns of doing so.

Nevertheless, not even in the modern period is Protestantism the only, or necessarily even the main vehicle of secularisation. As Eamon Duffy has argued, after John Bossy, the early modern Catholic Church departed, as much as the Reformation ones, from the high mediaeval priority of a sacramental community of fellowship, directed towards the harmonising of society, the encouragement of social virtues and the realisation of charity as a state of being in a way that gave almost as much scope to feasting as to fasting (to link this to Charles Taylor's thesis).⁷⁹ Instead, in either case, a confessionalised religion became more a matter of formal belief, prescribed rule, private beneficence and clerical surveillance. If the word was sundered by Protestants from tradition and liturgical practice, then the same applied to Catholic exercise of authority. That too, as Michel de Certeau argued, was rent from the time of development and rendered something fully present, over-against the laity, rather than something arising from them as part of the Church and coursing through them by participation.⁸⁰

All this ensured that it fared little better with the Catholic treatment of nature, word, knowledge, image

⁷⁷ Simpson, Under the Hammer.

⁷⁸ See Virno, A Grammar of the Multitude.

⁷⁹ Duffy, *Reformation Divided*, 1–15; Taylor, *A Secular Age*. Ronald Thiemann's attempted criticism of Taylor in his *The Humble Sublime*, 2–3, rests on a bizarre misreading. For he contends that Taylor is dualistically opposing the sacred to the secular and therefore opposes "incarnational" practices such as those of the Mendicant orders and movements of lay piety. But Taylor offers no such blanket critique: instead he criticises an excessive "ethicisation" of Christian practice that sunders it from a much *more* incarnational festive and ritual dimension. He sees this as perpetuated and exacerbated by Protestantism. But for a slight modification of this view, to which Thiemann positively contributes, see further in the main text below.

⁸⁰ De Certeau, The Mystic Fable.

and money than with the Protestants. Catholics now tended to confine sacramentality to the lone officially sacramental seven instances, and thus Catholic natural philosophers also, like Mersenne, Gassendi and Descartes, embraced mechanisation for largely theological reasons. Albeit the Bible was at first more critically seen by Catholics like Thomas More, John Fisher and later Richard Simon as subject to historical vagaries and so in need of interpretation, this tended to be handled by rigid ecclesial imposition of meaning outside any allowance before Newman (significantly at first an Anglican) of the reality of organic development.⁸¹ Faith was in consequence here also sundered from reason and the latter remained equally captivated by a Scotist and Suarezian conception of metaphysics, idolising God as merely the highest being rather than Being as such, corralling the finite from the infinite and nature from grace.

As to images, they indeed proliferated all too much, but little recovery was made of an authentic sense of the iconic or theophanic, of the invisible shining through the visible, though not fully captured by it. By perpetuating and extending the mere rhetoric of instructive representation, a popular misreading of this as inviting adoration of the material image as material (which the stronger iconic vision ironically tends to avoid) was further encouraged, thereby ensuring that Protestant horror at idolatry was not altogether misplaced.

Finally, early modern Catholicism also much diluted its opposition to usury and it was Jansenists still more than Calvinists who started to shape the science that became "political economy", largely predicated on the supposedly inevitable need for an amoral regulation of contract, transaction and the employment of Labour.⁸² The most that can be said here in mitigation is that Catholics retained marginally more than Protestants a suspicion, sometimes tending to outright critique, of modern Capitalist processes.

And in general it can be said that, while modern Catholicism has shared with Protestantism in a philosophical, theological and cultural *episteme* that has eventually engendered secularisation, it has done so in a somewhat more muted degree, more persistently recalling elements of a different Christian past. What is more, it is supremely the Protestant ethos that has most tended to render univocal, nominalist and transcendentalist assumptions more than just academic postures. Instead it has converted them into matters of widespread and predominating cultural habit, built into the very fabric of our lives.

4 The positive consequences of the Reformation

But is that all there is to be said about the Protestant legacy? Are we bound to reach such a *purely* negative verdict, if especially it has led to iconoclastic destruction linked to human slaughter, as already evidenced in the behaviour of Oliver Cromwell?83

I would suggest not. First, we need to mediate the contrast between Luther and the "Lutheran left". There is another way of reading the secondariness of works and love in Luther, especially if we allow, like Lutheran mystics, that our divine election (properly extended, after Origen, into the election of all spirits) is our very substantial, eternal reality in the light of an entirely loving God. In accordance with Luther himself we can say that doing good works and loving others are not of their true nature reactive: not originally designed to correct a prior bad or impaired situation, exactly as St Paul envisages the surpassing of the Law. 84 Instead, if to be justified by faith is itself a supreme work that involves a beginning with our eternal real being which is our unshakeably promised "salvation" in God, then the works of love are a gratuitous extra, even though such an extra is the very being of Creation itself and even of the infinite Trinitarian God.

Here we can note that if Vignaux was right to see Luther's return to Lombard and refusal of grace as habit

⁸¹ Simpson, Burning to Read, 10-33, 222-282. Simpson notes how Thomas More retreats in an ironically "Protestant" fashion from his earlier Erasmian fluidity about texts, in order to confront the Protestant civil danger. But he also rightly dismisses Brian Cummings's charge that More was threatening both the Scriptural foundation of Christianity and the integrity of textual meaning. Instead More more radically sees, in the face of Protestant denial, the inextricable links of text to historical contingency, institutional transmission and oral tradition.

⁸² See Milbank and Pabst, The Politics of Virtue, 23-26.

⁸³ Tombs, The English and their History, 213-248.

⁸⁴ See Milbank, The Word Made Strange, 219-232.

as a crucial initiation of his break with preceding theology, then Oswald Bayer is also right more recently to argue for the equal importance in this respect of Luther's insistence against Cajetan on the infallibility and unconditionality of Christ's promise of salvation. Ecretainly, one should defend Cajetan against Luther insofar as one should take this promise to mean a promise of real spiritual transformation channelled through the Church, which every individual can perversely resist. Yet Luther becomes after all correct if we understand this promise, as he did not, but some later Lutheran mystics like Hamann did, in both a fully participatory and a universalist light. Then the promise is indeed infallible and unconditional in the sense that the true deified being of each and everyone always lies in God, and that this reality will eventually be cosmically made manifest on pain of God not really being God and so both good and omnipotent. Though how he will eventually draw all wills to himself, rendering them indeed at last truly free because truly desiring, we cannot tell.

Given this radical "left Lutheran" revision, any doubly predestining qualification of the primacy of God's goodness as shown in his *promissio* is removed. At the same time, any precedence of blind faith over charity is also removed: the work of faith is now also from the outset a charitable work and so from the outset – in God, in divine Creation, in our acts of co-creation – one has the ethical as the "beyond good and evil", as a non-reactive gratuitous outpouring of surprising beauty and harmony. Yet even in the case of Luther himself, the admittedly later, yet almost immediate consequence of an initiating faith, grounded in the ineluctable divine promise, are gospel works performed utterly for their own sake and not in a reactive manner that assumes the prior presence of evil.

Regarded in this way, Protestant works are *more radical* than Catholic works and the positive mark of the Lutheran legacy is ironically its remarkable re-envisioning of the true nature of Christian "works". For Catholic works can sometimes be conceived as simply trying to meet an asymptotically receding mark, or as minimally trying to make up for a deficiency. By contrast, Protestant works as "sanctifying" aim towards perfection, as John Wesley later brought out. In this sense, they become more akin to the ongoing deification of the individual person in the Greek Patristic sense. But the Lutheran and later the Puritan Left tended to extend that inheritance towards a perfecting of the social and even the cosmic order – because it often preserved the Renaissance alchemical impulse, alongside the more "materialist" (non Joachite and spiritualising) apocalyptic tradition of the Dominican Savanorola, which intensified and optimised the Augustinian anticipation of a purer Church on the cusp of the *eschaton*, alongside an increased conflict with an increasingly debased world. Since we are already eternally saved in God, we can set about restoring the world in anticipation of the Second Coming of Christ – and a world restored means a world reverted to that Edenic freshness where the first state of goodness was itself the state of the ever-new producing of further gratuitous goods.

In Luther's case, this radicalism is most apparent in his authentically antinomian ethics: we are now to do good, like God, purely creatively and expressively, solely for *the sake* of doing good and not to earn heaven or even to contain a preceding wrong.⁸⁷ As Ronald Thiemann put it, "acts of mercy are now to be directed solely towards the neighbour in need without reference to the consequences of such works for one's own ultimate salvation".⁸⁸ We copy God's unmerited grace in this way and the proud record of Protestant charity would seem to show a significant gain here. Thus the law of the gospel is also the created, *natural* law, and Luther affirms this point more emphatically than Aquinas, who tended to underrate the *imperative* as opposed to motivational innovation of the gospel, just as some theologians before Luther overrated the coincidence of the Old Covenant with the law of nature.⁸⁹ For Luther, in a novel fashion,

⁸⁵ Bayer, Martin Luther's Theology, 50–58.

⁸⁶ Henri de Lubac emphasised that the Florentine prophet did not share the Joachite and Franciscan vision of an increasingly "spiritual" final epoch, surpassing or at least reducing the incarnate character of the era of Christ. See de Lubac, *Joachim de Flore*, 172–173. See also on Augustine's eschatology, Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 132–133. But the whole issue of a typology of eschatologies and apocalyptics in the modern era is highly complex.

⁸⁷ Luther, "Treatise on Good Works", 3, 109; Luther, "Lectures on Galatians", 158–163.

⁸⁸ Thiemann, The Humble Sublime, 3.

⁸⁹ Raunio, "Natural Law and Faith", 96–122; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II.108.2. Raunio extends here the respective existing insights of Gustav Wingren and Oswald Bayer.

all human law-codes, even those of the Old Testament and the Church's canons, are correspondingly regarded with a suspicion that recovers St Paul's antinomian recognition that all human rule-making is as marred by our fallenness, as much or more than transgression of these same regulations. Some English Protestant radicals, culminating with the visionary Romantic poet and painter William Blake, sustained and elaborated this by no means necessarily heterodox recognition.

This is not to deny that there is, in the Reformation legacy, as already noted, and as Blake recognised in his later writings, an undeniable loss of the Catholic sense of charity as mutual, celebratory love and reconciling community, and of the Catholic view that we cannot trust in God's grace if we are not already loving him and actively loving our neighbour. 90 Faith should not displace the primacy of charity if we are really reading St Paul.

But there is a second and equally interesting point to be made about Luther. The unintended secularisation brought about by the Reformation derives, as we have seen, from its instigation of a dualism. God over against the world, grace over nature, faith over reason. As a result of the pious desire for a religious purity, the world, nature and reason are stripped of significance, left to their own sordid devices. However, although the priority of grace and the suspicion of ascesis are linked, these two marks of Protestantism are also in tension with each other.

Grace in opposition to nature, divine action overly contrasted with human, produces duality. Indeed one could argue that the Lutheran theology of anfechtung is a kind of asceticism so extreme that it must refuse asceticism itself as pointless. Comparisons with the Bhagavad-Gita here are by no means entirely far-fetched and there is a road from Luther to Schopenhauer. For Luther carries to an even further extreme the dubious inherited view (clearly rejected by Dante in his account of his love for Beatrice) that one must love God rather than or even "more than" everything and everyone else, as if they truly lay on the same comparative plain. Luther is more extreme here because for him world-refusal includes even all the attempted techniques of world-refusal, and even the relative refusal of the divine Christological gifts granted by God in order to heal the world.⁹¹

Thus Luther says that we must utterly devalue these gifts as compared to the giver. Grace trumps gift, just as forensic imputation assumes priority even over justification. The latter, indeed, is for Luther, in contrast to later simplifications, a seed of real sanctification, but still more drastically both these works within us are effectively cancelled in their primacy by the divine gratuitousness. This is held to be only the true source of a true gift if it is absolutely free and unconstrained. But that implies a chronically bad and incoherent, unilateralist gift-theory: if the content of the gift is subordinate, then how can we identify the giver as such and not rather as forcer and abuser, since the bond he has established with us is but incidental to his nature? Likewise, if the mark of the true giver is that he might not have given, then his giving is a mere whim and he is not really committed to his gift at all. In his refusal of analogy of attribution here and so of paradoxical participation in the imparticipable, Luther simply erects an ontic idol of absolute power, whose supposedly "personal" mark of freedom is actually that of impersonal material unconstraint, in anticipation of Hobbes and Locke.

It is for this reason that Hobbes can see his state *Leviathan* as standing in the image of God insofar as it can only deal with fallen depravity and the irremediable selfishness and ignorance of pure nature through a monopolisation of power at the centre. Thus however always qualified by an (over) organised charity, Lutheranism has always encouraged political absolutism, whether in the case of Scandinavia (from monarchic through to social democratic control) or of Prussia. In the latter case, much of Germany's modern woes are ultimately traceable to the attempt to substitute for the confessionally plural and yet still Christian and sacral Holy Roman Empire a confessionally unified Prussian-based nation state. 2 If one doubts this, then visit the Catholic Rhineland and note the alien fir trees and Lutheran churches planted by Prussian outsiders during the Nineteenth Century kulturkampf, or look at the statistics which significantly link Nazi affiliation to Lutheranism rather than to Catholicism or Calvinism.

⁹⁰ See Milbank, "The Ethics of Honour and the Possibility of Promise".

⁹¹ See Alfsvåg, What No Mind Has Conceived, 226-236.

⁹² Brady, German Histories, 405–421; Hawes, The Shortest History of Germany.

And yet the theoretical and practical suspicion of *ascesis* can also result in an opposite and genuine anti rather than ultra *ascesis*. It can rather encourage the view that there should be *no* secular/religious divide at all. That the fully religious life can be lived, as Luther and Calvin argued, and as Meister Eckhart and Johannes Tauler had already taught, in any ordinary worldly vocation, if it be honourable and honourably undertaken. Likewise, we can praise God in the vernacular and we can be as fully Christian as sexual partners and parents as we can as celibate people – even if that vocation becomes unnecessarily undervalued.

The trouble, of course, is that a spiritual vocation undertaken in a disenchanted world tends to undo itself and not really to figure as a role within the Church – such that, as many scholars have noted, the ecclesial participation of the laity was often *reduced* in the Protestant Church, compared with the medieval one (even if the familial, domestic sphere became more of a site of piety and care). And the Calvinist version of redeeming the world through a Church polity, though much stronger than the Lutheran one which had handed Church jurisdiction over to the secular arm, was conceived too much in terms of Old Testament law and a chain of obedient command.

Nevertheless, in the Lutheran sense of a Christian social practice beyond the law lay the seeds of a more transformative vision. Above all, Luther had a perhaps unprecedented and intense vision of the goodness of matter and the degree to which, as of itself blameless, it had remained uncorrupted by the Fall. It is considerably for this reason that he sees the Incarnation and the Eucharist as necessary sources of uncontaminated grace, ineluctable promise and reciprocal gift, perpetually linking heaven to earth. And this vision encourages a later possibility of extending the importance of a purification of matter and of the human benefits thereby gained. It is in this regard that one can reconsider the Lutheran emphasis upon a theology of descent: the *theologia gloriae* is refused as the false aspiration of ascending *ascesis*; instead we are to consider and receive the divine *kenosis* in the stable, on the Cross and in the Bread and Wine. Thus an element in Luther points to a "left" Lutheranism that would no longer sunder grace from gift, *kenosis* from ineffable height and the divine Unity from an eternal emanative othering in the act of creation, whereby Creation's own nullity is ontologically exceeded by the eternal divine Trinitarian embrace of this "is not" as the possibility of difference, after Plato's *Sophist* and *Seventh Letter*, rather than the *Parmenides*.

This contrast can bring a seemingly bizarre parallel to mind: namely the contrast between a Plotinian neoplatonism of psychic ascent to the One and the theurgic neoplatonism of Iamblichus (and then Proclus and Damascius) which stressed in addition, and in accord with the paradox of participated imparticipability, the descent of divine powers towards us in ritual acts – a perspective whose Christian variant is found in Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor.

Yet not so bizarre after all. Because the Lutheran left, beginning with Paracelsus, was precisely fusing a Lutheran descent with a theurgic one, under both neoplatonic and Hermetic influences. It is also such a fusion which allows descent to become more synergic and more merged with human action and working, in an, as it were "alchemical" expansion of the priestly action of the eucharist.

In these respects, one can argue that there have also been positive consequences of the Reformation, at first unintended, but later intended, albeit by a minority, all the way from Paracelsus to William Blake, Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel. In rather broader terms, while one can deplore indeed the loss of the human cycle of fasting and feasting, at the same time there is a sense in which it took Protestants to be yet more radically non-dualist and so more fully *Catholic* than earlier Catholic tradition. If there was a final abandonment of the theophanic image and the sacramental, then, in compensation, both could now be more radically envisaged as arising everywhere, as even the poetry of John Milton shows.⁹⁵ Thus the Anglican Thomas Traherne celebrated the abiding sacrality of the cosmos in a new way; Anglican poets and prose-writers celebrated nature for what she was in herself as well as for what she symbolised of the transcendent. Similarly, art and aesthetic theory by no means always confined art within the

⁹³ See Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars.

⁹⁴ Juntunen, "Luther and Metaphysics", 151; Gillespie, The Theological Origins of Modernity, 125–127.

⁹⁵ See Schwartz, Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism.

bounds of the divertingly beautiful, with transcendence negatively confined to the terrifying sublime, but sometimes (from the "picturesque" to the early Romantic) now intimated a sacramental glory as breaking through all beautiful artefacts. Already indeed, the death of the icon was balanced in the Seventeenth Century by the rise of the enigmatic emblem, expanding the metaphoric word in the direction of the disclosively symbolic.96

Equally, Lutherans like Herder and Hegel allowed the lost authority of time to return by rediscovering the Biblical sacrality of the historical process and the event, as opposed to the ascetic focus on the liberation of the individual soul. Other Lutherans, like Jacobi and Hamann and the originally Anglican John Henry Newman realised anew that all reason needs faith and all faith reasoning. The Danish Lutheran Søren Kierkegaard produced the beautifully non-snobbish picture of the new Abraham as a plump Copenhagen Burgher, strolling through the park on Sunday afternoon but renouncing everything in his heart just so that he may re-receive it and enjoy it as pure non-reactive gift, in a manner that perfectly fuses the Catholic with the Lutheran attitude.

Modern Catholic thought and practice has recognised all this and learnt in the end from Protestants - including the significantly once Anglican Newman, as likewise G.K. Chesterton. It has renounced Baroque neo-scholastic decadence by re-integrating nature and grace, faith and reason. It has embraced the vernacular and married life more fully. It has learnt from Protestant poetry and landscape art; it has grown tired of Cartesian mechanism and dualism in a way partially indebted to the integrating attitudes of the Puritan Cambridge Platonists and then to various Protestant German and British Romantic Protestant philosophers.

We need, therefore, an ecumenical and long-term approach when we assess the legacy of the Reformation and its relation to secularisation. A great deal of the dualism that marks Protestantism was taken over from late Mediaeval thought and was sustained as much by Counter-Reformation as by Protestant thinkers. Similarly, while the Reformation and its legacy was in some ways a disaster that broke Europe apart, as it today incipiently remains, and blinded us to nature's real enchantment, at the same time and from the outset, it pointed in an opposite way towards a more radical cure of a much older disease and so to a more authentic mode of the Catholic.

In short, to a way of being Christian in the ordinary. Of course asceticism is required in the Christian life. But it took Protestants fully to see that individual asceticism could become another sort of idol. If God is truly the transcendent God, then he is not an ontic alternative to the world that he has made, including the pervasive sexuality of all life, as if we had to choose between the two, or love creatures less by loving God exclusively, 97 any more than created being can be redeemed if individual souls alone are rescued, without the rescue also of their fellow creatures and all the linkages between them. To go up to God is to go simultaneously outwards to the cosmos, which persists, but is transfigured, as Traherne saw. "Further up" is also "further in", as another Protestant writer, C. S Lewis put in, in the course of offering a Christian and Platonic vision also to children and on children's terms – yet another way in which the Protestant legacy has helped to enrich our understanding and enactment of the Catholic gospel. 98

In short, a radicalised Orthodoxy of the future should cleave to Catholic tradition, yet learn also from the more transformative works envisaged by Protestantism, especially in its more exotic varieties.99

⁹⁶ See Warburg, Atlas Menmosyne.

⁹⁷ In some passages of Dante's Commedia it is already clear that the poet's love of Beatrice is regarded as being as equally absolute as his love for God. One can construe this as meaning that the greater our love for God, who is all in all, then the greater and less qualified become all our loves (in their differentiating intensities, since we are limited creatures) for creatures. On the occasion when I delivered this paper at Westfield House, Cambridge (18 May 2017), Slavoj Žižek in his own paper rightly described as "obscene" the common notion that our love for creatures should be but "partial" when compared to our absolute love of God. But (against Žižek's unqualifiedly pro-Protestant position) one could say that an iconoclastic attitude tends to intensify such an obscene stance (the lover should supposedly not "idolize" the beloved etc), whereas a radically incarnational one refuses it. Again, Protestantism points in two opposite directions here.

⁹⁸ Lewis, The Last Battle.

⁹⁹ Preliminary version of this article has been published as Milbank, The Reformation at 500: Is There Any Cause for Celebrations?

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