LUTHER'S THEOLOGY OF CREATION AND CONTEMPORARY ECOLOGICAL ETHICS

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Abstract

The dissertation examines Martin Luther's theology of creation with a view to ascertaining its capacity to yield a viable contemporary ecological ethic. Today as Christian thinkers struggle to respond to the crisis of creation, many discover that the dominant, "modern" perspectives on nature fail to provide an effective basis for a prophetic critique of our society's despoilation of the environment. The failure of modernity in this as in other respects evokes a renewed interest in pre-modern ways of viewing the world. Luther's nuanced relation to the via antiqua and the via moderna, his teaching on providence and the vocation of humanity within the created order, and his questioning of secular affirmation on account of his understanding of the indirect nature of the divine Word, help to establish Luther's place as a provocative contributor to a responsible theology and ethic of the environment. In particular, his creation-mysticism contains high potential for an alternative conception of humanity's relationship with and responsibility for extrahuman nature.

Résumé

Cette dissertation analyse la theologie de la creation avancée par Martin Luther dans le but de déterminer sa capacité d'offir une éthique écologique contemporaine. Aujourd'hui pendant que les penseurs chrétiens s'appliquent à répondre à la crise de la création, plusieurs d'entre eux éstiment que les façons dominantes, c'est à dire les façons "modernes," de contempler la nature n'offrent pas une critique prophétique de la spoliation de l'environement par notre société. L'échec de la modernité face a cette question évoque un intérêt renouvelé dans les façons pre-modernes de concevoir le monde. Le rapport nuancé de Luther avec la via antiqua et la via moderna, son enseignement sur la providence et à l'égard de la vocation de l'humanité en-dedans de l'ordre crée, et ses questions concernant l'afffirmation du profane dues à sa compréhension de la nature indirecte du Verbe de Dieu, aident à établir la place de Luther comme collaborateur provocateur pour une théologie et éthique responsable de l'environement. En particulier, son mysticisme de la création offre d'excellentes possibilités pour une conception alternative de la relation de l'humanité avec la nature, ainsi que la responsabilité de celle-ci pour la nature au-delà de l'humain.

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INTRODUCTION

CHRISTIANITY AND THE CRISIS OF THE ENVIRONMENT

In the closing decade of the twentieth century, it is no longer necessary to advance a mountain of scientific evidence in order to convince Canadians that there is something terribly amiss with the environment. Even the present generation of Canadian school children knows all too well the meaning of such terms as "greenhouse effect," "acid rain," "deforestation," "toxic contamination," "endangered species," and a host of others. The language and terminology of what has come to be known as the "ecological crisis," at one time heard only in the company of society's romantics and in the minority scholarship of a few scientists and intellectuals, is now a part of mainstream society.

Canadians have responded to the knowledge of the ecological crisis by embracing environmental concern as a dominant societal value. The success of the "blue box" recycling program in most major urban centres stands as a testimony to this concern. Unfortunately, the prevalence of environmental concern as an ethical value, while encouraging, has not radically altered our course of environmental destruction; the movement towards the despoilation and physical death of the world continues. It seems that a fuller conversion towards the well-being of the natural world

is required to meet the challenge of the ecological crisis.

I would suggest that our inability to alter radically the path of environmental destruction, in spite of the great concern, is a reflection in part of the ethical bankruptcy of modern society in its posture towards physical reality. When challenged by the ecological crisis, the same dominant attitudes towards nature which appear to have contributed towards the environmental crisis in the first place -- the total objectification of nature by our empirical and technical reasoning and the "commodification" of nature by an economic system which follows an ethic of maximization of profit and production -- have been expected to provide the basis for an adequate critique. Thus we have ethical concern fueled by pragmatic utilitarianism, on the one hand, and by its antithetical value, a sort of affected sentimentality, on the other. Neither one of these values can provide an adequate ethical basis for critiquing destructive economic structures and detrimental attitudes towards nature.

The trend towards increased consciousness of the ecological crisis in dominant society has been parallelled in the religious and theological community. Prior to Lynn White's watershed article of 1967 entitled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," theologians and ethicists dealing with ecological issues represented a minority voice. Since 1967 and in particular in the last decade, the amount of theological and religious literature addressing the

ecological crisis has dramatically increased.

As in dominant society, the theological community has been faced with the task of developing an ethical response to the crisis. One of the major challenges facing Christian scholars in developing a theologically based, ecological ethic has been to respond to the accusation, forwarded by White and other scholars, that Christianity must share some complicity in creating the environmental crisis. While most Christian scholars have rejected the notion that the exploitation of nature is intrinsic to the Christian faith, they do acknowledge that the Christian faith is in part responsible for the crisis of the environment.[1] There is evidence that the Christian tradition has been used to legitimate human aspirations to control and dominate nature.

The use of Christianity to provide moral justification for human control over nature can be found in the formative years of our modern understanding of nature. This is evidenced by this citation from Francis Bacon:

> The world was made for man, not man for the world. The drive to control nature could readily accomodate itself to the idea that the rest of creation is subordinate to human activity.[2]

By using an example from the emerging scientific rationality of the seventeenth century, I do not wish to suggest that contemporary scientific methods are fully to blame for the ecological crisis nor that our modern attitude towards nature began only some three hundred years ago. This would be a simplistic interpretation which would, on the one hand, be

unfair to science and, on the other hand, divert attention away from other important factors -- particularly economic and social -- in the development of our modern attitude towards nature. I do wish, however, to demonstrate how the Christian tradition has accompanied our human aspirations to understand and control nature through scientific and technical reasoning.

The modern scientific enterprise required a universe which was understandable, controllable and predictable. Part of the Enlightenment project, therefore, was to demystify physical reality and to remove the unwanted variable of a mysterious and potentially capricious God who was active in the physical occurrences of the universe. Given these objectives, the marriage between Christianity and modern scientific rationality at first appears somewhat unlikely. Nevertheless, the undertaking initially utilized the notion of a god in order to explain how the world with its natural laws was started (the first cause) and to explain how repairs were made to the universe (as was evident in later Newtonian science). Once initiated, however, the unfolding of the world was considered to be effectively beyond divine control. God was still understood to be in charge, but the divine being had to rule the world logically according to fixed, orderly and predetermined rules (not through a hierarchy of spiritual beings as was assumed in the Middle Ages).

The scientists of the seventeenth century were quite

eager to adapt the Christian faith to their new scientific amibitions. Their desire to have theological support for their disciplines could probably be attributed to the lesser degree of compartmentalization of life in this epoch into religious and non-religious spheres. It would be less likely that one would enter into an activity, even those which we would now consider to be "secular" pursuits, without some sort of religious justification.

The scientists/theologians of the seventeenth century were also quite effective in adapting the Christian faith to their new scientific project. This occurred, on the one hand, through a change in cosmological assumptions as has been demonstrated in the preceding paragraphs and, on the other hand, through an elevated view of human nature. "Man," by virtue of his reason, was seen to be divinely appointed to be the transformer, the finisher and caretaker of creation. Paracelsus wrote at this time that "God created man to put the finishing touches on nature....It is God's will that we do more than accept nature as we find it. We must investigate it and learn why it has been created."[3] Thus we can see that the Christian faith was important to the beginnings of the modern scientific enterprise for two reasons: it was used to legitimate the basic assumptions of scientific inquiry (a universe knowable through reason and experimentation) and to provide the moral justification for the inquiry (the special place of humanity in the created

order).

Eventually, the category of the transcendent and the idea that the universe exists as God's sacred creation no longer was felt necessary to either the empirical or the applied sciences. Liberal Protestantism, insofar as it represented the religion of this stage of the Enlightenment, supported the demystification of the world by effectively eliminating any operative sense of the transcendent from religious understanding. In many ways, theological liberalism can be seen as a movement which sought to establish the importance of the present and of human responsibility for the world. The danger inherent in liberalism was that human experience came to be the sole judge of truth. The divine came to be equated with the best impulses in human nature and culture. The sort of high evaluation of humanity brought about a correspondingly low conception of divine transcendence. Liberalism eventually came to idolize human experience and thus lost its prophetic voice to critique this same experience.[4]

The deification of humankind was not extended at all to extrahuman nature. To the contrary, in order to accommodate the manipulation of the material world, nature was reduced to the level of the impersonal -- seen to be devoid of any transcendent or spiritual significance. Religion was directed away from the natural world and relegated to the sphere of individual piety and morality. The world was

increasingly believed to exist in two realms: one a spiritual realm for individual, religious concerns and the other a physical realm where economic, scientific and political interest could operate unimpeded by transcendent categories.

Given the objective and spiritless state of the material world and the high estimation of human nature, it is no wonder that most of Western society's attempts to develop an ethical approach to extrahuman nature have been fueled by primarily utilitarian or sentimental concerns. As in dominant society, the Christian faith has been hampered in its attempts to develop an ethical response to our ecological problems. On the one hand, the Christian faith has had to acknowledge its complicity in the ecological crisis. On the other hand, by refraining from identifying the spiritual and transcendent element in the natural world and by its high and uncritical evaluation of human nature, the Christian faith vis-a-vis Liberal Protestantism (although not exclusively) has relinquished any effective basis for a prophetic critique of the situation.

The modern way of viewing nature as an impersonal, objective reality, unpossessed by any transcendent significance, found in both mainstream society and in the Church, cannot provide an adequate background for dealing with the environmental crisis. As long as these attitudes persist, human needs and aspirations will continue to be the

measure and judge of all things and extrahuman nature will be considered "good" only insofar as it is useful to humanity.

If an efficacious ecological ethic is to be developed out of the Christian faith, Christians must take a preliminary step in looking back into the Christian tradition to find alternative ways of viewing the physical world and humanity's relationship with it -- ways which see the sacred inhabiting the secular and affirm the divine governance of the creation. Only when we are able to see the world again in its relationship to the divine, not merely as matter but as God's creation, will we have the basis to support an ecological ethic that goes beyond the implementation of utilitarian concepts or sentimental ideas. This dissertation falls within this line of scholarship in trying to find a theological basis for a new environmental ethic.

Although Luther was never faced with the ecological concerns of modernity, there is evidence in his approach to the natural world (in his theology of creation) that he vigorously opposed such a demystification of the world and its bifurcation into physical and spiritual realms. It seems that Luther was concerned about the degradation of nature. This brings us to the question to be addressed in this dissertation, namely: "Is there a potential in Luther's theology of creation to supply a basis for a modern ecological ethic?"

Luther was not the only person in the sixteenth century

struggling with the theology of creation and its many implications, political and social as well as theological. In fact the theology of creation, the relationship of this world and its activities to the divinity, was arguably the most pressing issue in both Luther's time and for many years preceding and following his era. The roles of faith and reason were being redefined rapidly and radically in light of changing perceptions about the nature of reality. My investigation of Luther's theology of creation will thus begin, in the first chapter, by positing Luther in relationship to two of the sixteenth century's prevalent attitudes towards the physical order: the traditionally sacral, heteronomous interpretation of the created order by medieval scholasticism (the via antiqua) and the more autonomous, secular designation of physical existence by the via moderna and the new rationalism. The tension between an emphasis on the secular nature of existence, on the one hand, and the spiritual significance of creation, on the other hand, will be made evident throughout this dissertation.

In the second and third chapters, I will explore Luther's understanding of the spiritual dimension of the created order. This will occur in the second chapter through a discussion of the providential nature of existence. In conjunction with the discussion on providence, Luther's unique concept of divine ubiquity (finitum capax infiniti) will be introduced.

The exploration of Luther's insight into the transcendent element encountered in creation will occur, in the third chapter, through a discussion of human agency in the world and the role of creation as a transcendent address to humanity. Luther's notion of God's Word will be the central motif of this and also of the subsequent chapter.

In the fourth chapter, the limits which Luther places on nature's spiritual significance will be treated through an analysis of Luther's understanding of the divine Word's indirect nature.

In conclusion, I will ask to what extent Luther provides a basis through his theology of creation for a modern ecological ethic.

Endnotes -- Introduction

[1]See H. Paul Santmire's discussion on the ambiguity of the Christian tradition's approach to nature, The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

[2]Cited by Richard Westfall, Science and Religion in the Seventeenth Century, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), p. 52.

[3]Cited by Clarence J. Glacken, Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the 18th Century, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 464.

[4]One is reminded of H. Richard Niebuhr's now famous description of American Liberal Protestantism as a faith in which "a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgement through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross." The Kingdom of God in America, (Hamden: The Shoe String Press, 1956), p. 193.

CHAPTER I

LUTHER ON FAITH AND REASON IN RELATION TO MEDIEVAL SCHOLASTICISM AND THE EMERGING MODERN RATIONALITY

In the introduction to this dissertation, I suggested that if Christians are to give an efficacious response to the ecological crisis, it will be necessary to go back into the tradition and find alternative ways of viewing the physical world -- ways which emphasize the spiritual dimension of nature. Only when the Christian faith re-embraces an attitude towards nature which challenges our contemporary posture of exploitation will the Christian tradition be able to exercise a prophetic critique.

With this purpose in mind, Luther at first appears to be an unlikely candidate in the search for a "usable past" [Martin Marty]. Luther, as a dominant figure in the Protestant Reformation, is perhaps better remembered as one who fought <u>against</u> the sacral interpretation of reality forwarded by the medieval scholastic thinkers -- a worldview in which there was, in a sense, no distinction between sacred and secular but all of reality was thought to exist in a synthetic relationship. To the extent that he rejected the medieval synthesis, Luther is popularly conceived as one who has contributed to a more modern view of reality rather than as a preserver of an alternate tradition.

In contradistinction to the popularly held assumption

that the Reformation brought about the close of the Middle Ages and the advent of the modern era, many recent scholars have come to see a greater complexity in Reformation thought. In fact, the issue of the Reformation's place in the Western intellectual tradition has been one of the primary issues of Reformation scholarship in the last decades. For instance, while asserting that the Reformation was primarily medieval in character, Hans Rückert has recognized the ambiguity in its thought and has found, especially in Luther, intellectual strains akin to modern forms:

> The tendencies in this direction do not crystallize into theories and programatic assertions; they do not precipitate out into the institutions created by the Reformation or into the dogmatic structure which it erects. In fact, they are to be seen in Luther alone; even his immediate disciples hardly understand them and what little they do accept of them becomes almost unrecognizable in the traditional forms in which they reshape it....One can call them "modern" thoughtforms only with reserve. They are in any case completely non-medieval elements that coincide with certain perspectives in modern thought. But they do not recur in modern times in the same form as in Luther. They are absolutely original and remain unique.[1]

Because of the promise that Luther's thoughtforms were somewhat more complex than either a simple rejection of the medieval synthesis or unqualified support for the new emerging rationality, there seems to be a greater potential for finding an alternative way of viewing nature than is at first apparent.

This chapter will explore Luther's reaction to the medieval understandings of the relationship between spirit

and matter as expressed in the scholastic synthesis of faith and reason. In Luther's reaction to the synthesis, we find another example of an apparent amalgam of modern and medieval thoughtforms. The task of sorting out and meticulously assigning various strains of Luther's thought to either intellectual tradition is not of primary importance to this study. Rather, the polarity between medieval and modern will be used to help articulate the complexity of Luther's reaction to the medieval synthesis and his own understanding of the roles of faith and reason vis-a-vis the created order.

A. Scholasticism: The "Via Antiqua" and the "Via Moderna"

The hallmark of the Middle Ages was its ability to create a comprehensive worldview, one in which all aspects of life could be brought under the auspices of the Christian faith. The intellectual and philosophical legitimization of such a Weltanschauung was the responsibility of the scholastic thinkers, the schoolmen.

To maintain an all-encompassing view of reality, the schoolmen needed to demonstrate the relationship between revealed and natural truth. They sought to show that the revealed truths of Christianity were consistent with, or at least not directly contradicted by, natural truths and the truths of reason. In other words, they sought to determine the relationship between faith and reason. In face of changing perceptions of reality, Scholasticism had to reconsider continually the structure of the synthesis.

1. Augustinian / Neoplatonic Tradition

In the early Middle Ages the dominant understanding of the relationship between faith and reason came from the Augustinian tradition. Augustine was greatly influenced by Neoplatonic philosophy and felt that one could not come to true wisdom through the evidence of the senses alone.[2] Knowledge gained from external images was held to be somewhat unreliable and untrustworthy.

A more reliable source of wisdom for Augustine came from contemplation. Augustine held that God, through grace, is immediately present to the individual. The search for truth begins not with the external world and not through scientific investigation but with the individual through intuition and contemplative thinking.[3] It was thought that through contemplation, one could come into contact with the universal categories and principles (using Neoplatonic terminology) which transcend physical existence and are at the basis of all reality.

A worldview which holds to the existence of universal principles and essences was known in the Middle Ages as realism. Realism asserts that there exist certain ideas, principles and essences which determine or establish the pattern for reality. There exists not just a particular dog but rather an essence of dog which determines what this particular dog will tend toward as it develops. All of life is an inexorable unfolding and manifestation of the eternal principles and essences.

An assumption of the Augustinian / Neoplatonic approach to reason is that knowledge of God precedes all other knowledge. Only with knowledge of the ultimate principles can truth be found in the empirical world. Since contact with God is the basis and the starting point for all understanding in the Augustinian tradition, "there is no such thing as secular knowledge. All knowledge is in some way rooted in the knowledge of the divine within us."[4] It is from the primary intuitive sense of God that one comes to judge and to understand the empirical world.

2. Thomas Aquinas and Albertus Magnus

In the thirteenth century, Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas were faced with a new problem of maintaining the relationship between faith and reason. Aristotle had been "rediscovered" and with the rediscovery came a whole new way of understanding God's relationship with the world and with the individual.

Whereas in the Augustinian tradition, immediate intuition and contemplation were the starting points for all knowledge, Aquinas removed the immanent presence of God from the human act of knowing. Knowledge does not begin with God but begins by the study of the finite world which the divine being has created. For Aquinas, the sensory world was not as illusory and unreliable as it had been for Augustine.[5] In opposition to Augustine, Aquinas asserted that evidence gained through the scientific investigation of the external world could be used to demonstrate the existence of God.

Using the Aristotelian language of cause and effect, Aquinas would say that it is necessary to start with the effects of the finite world and through reason conclude to the first cause, namely God.

Aquinas did acknowledge that this method of investigation was limited. Through scientific investigation one could not draw conclusions about the precise nature of God, nor could one "know" God; one could only demonstrate that God exists. Certain aspects of God's nature and work (that God has created and redeemed the world) had to be accepted on faith and were not accessible to rationality.

3. Nominalism: The "Via Moderna"

Towards the end of the Middle Ages the synthesis of faith and reason was beginning to disintegrate. It was no longer thought that the conclusions of rationality either had to or could support those of revelation. More and more people came to feel that reason and rationality were unable to uphold the Christian account of reality -- especially where this meant upholding ecclesiastical authority in what were coming to be understood as "secular" matters. The school of thought which attempted to legitimate the Christian faith in light of growing doubts was known as Nominalism or the *via moderna*.

In both the Augustinian and Thomistic traditions, it was believed that humans could reach God cognitively, either because of God's immediate presence in the act of knowing or because God's existence could be demonstrated from the

evidence of the physical world. Contrary to the concept of God's omnipresence in our pursuit for knowledge, early Nominalists, especially Duns Scotus, held that there was an infinite gap between the physical and the metaphysical world. Scotus, in opposition to Aquinas, stated that there existed an epistemological limit which prevented human beings from determining the existence of God based on the divine effects. Reason for Scotus was bound to the earth and could only comprehend particulars, the effects, rather than universals.[6] True knowledge of God could only come about through revelation and the authority of the Church.

Hence, the hallmark of Nominalist thought was its focus on the particular rather than the universal. Later Nominalists, especially William of Occam, went even further than Scotus in asserting the importance of the particular. While Scotus had indicated that there was an epistemological limit which prevented humankind from reaching the eternal essences via particulars, William of Occam denied that the universals existed.[7] There are no universal categories; only individual things are real or have reality. The name given to a particular class of objects does not represent the essence of the objects but is only a name, nomen, which is used for convenience.

4. The Impact of the Split Between Faith and Reason

The assertion that there is a radical discontinuity between the primary cause and the effects had a great impact on the understanding of faith and reason. One result was

that reason was freed to greater scientific inquiry. God was no longer at the centre of all things as was the case in the Augustinian tradition but now God existed apart from physical reality. The removal of God from the world made way for the modern understanding of science. It freed physics from metaphysics, and allowed science to examine the universe through practical reason and sense experience. Oberman writes:

> If there does not exist a metaphysically necessary ladder along which the first cause has to "connect with" the second cause, the laws of nature can be derived no longer from illuminating the physical world from "above," but from this world itself.[8]

Scientific inquiry thus became more autonomous but, at the same time, its scope of inquiry had been greatly limited. No longer could reason be used to express revealed truths.

The separation of physics and metaphysics allowed the Nominalists to take the physicality of the world much more seriously. The world was not seen as a mere reflection of some eternal principle but rather as a full reality, standing on its own apart from metaphysical principles. This placed a greater emphasis on human agency.[9] It was not a necessity that things should happen as they do but the world was now viewed as unpredictable and contingent; human beings could influence its conformation.

The disjunction of physics and metaphysics also had the effect of liberating the divine essence from the nature of the world. In the Thomistic synthesis, the primary characteristic of God was that of intellect. Reality was

considered to be understandable because everything originated from the divine intellect; there existed a strong correlation between the structures of the world and the divine basis of all reality. Because of the correlation, human intellect, by judging the evidence of the earth's configurations, could come to an understanding of God in much the same manner as one would look at a building and speculate about the original blueprint or the intentions of the architect.

For the Nominalists, the primary characteristic of God was no longer intellect but will. They saw that God was not related to the created order by some deterministic causation but by volition. God is free and sovereign in determining God's relation to the world. God could have chosen to create a different world.[10] The earth is not inescapably determined by eternal principles, ideas or essences; rather, it is contingent. Just as one could no longer appeal to divine structures to help explain the pattern of temporal occurences, so too the divine essence cannot be determined from the physical makeup of the world because of God's sovereign will.

5. Negative Consequences of the Split Between Faith and Reason

Tillich notes that another result of the split between faith and reason was the development of two positivisms:

> the religious or ecclesiastical positivism, which means that we must simply accept what is given to us by the church since we cannot reach God cognitively, and the positivism of the empirical method, which means we must discover what is positively given in nature by the methods of induction and abstraction.[11]

Since God could not be reached through reason, religious authority became increasingly important. As religious authority was no longer answerable to reason, however, the authority of the Church often became more arbitrary and even anti-rational. There was no way to judge the validity of revelation by human experience.

The positivism of the empirical method increasingly meant that what was true or had value was what could be measured or weighed and, especially in later centuries, if the knowledge of what was measured and weighed could be used for production (technical reason). Increasingly, those who were responsible for reason no longer felt the need to support the Christian account of reality or to contemplate about some transcendent or undergirding meaning to life. The split between faith and reason had been so great for many people that faith was more and more considered to be an irrelevant category in daily life and secular affairs.

Thus what had begun as an attempt to create a comprehensive worldview, one in which all aspects of life could be brought under the auspices of the Christian faith, had degenerated to the point where the authority of faith was becoming less and less relevant to the workings of human existence. At the heart of the "secularization" of the world lay the belief that natural philosophy and physical existence were no longer capable of defending religious truths. On the one hand, secularization had the positive effect of freeing

the earth and the disciplines which studied it from having continually to produce evidence which would support the views of the Church. On the other hand, since many people saw that the world was no longer a sacral reality of the sort which openly "argued" for the existence of God, the earth was increasingly considered to be a desacralized, autonomous and self-sufficient sphere of human determination where God did not and could not dwell. This did not necessarily mean that people no longer believed in God. God was, however, seen to be such a sovereign, spiritual being that it was inconceivable that such a divinity could be immediately present to humanity in physical existence.

B. Luther's Rejection of Inductive and Speculative Reasoning

From the above discussion we can see that Luther, unlike the manner in which he is often portrayed in popular forms of Lutheranism, was not a David who brought down singlehandedly the Goliath of the medieval ecclesiastical and political structure. Rather, Luther came to the fore on the European scene when the relationship between natural and revealed truth was already in a serious state of decline -- crumbling from within rather than being pushed down by external forces. For many people in the sixteenth century, the way in which the relationship between the structures of the world and the divinity had been previously expressed simply did not make sense any more. The assumptions on which all of life had been based, both sacred and secular, no longer seemed relevant and the arguments demonstrating the relationship

between faith and reason were losing their credibility.

To a great extent, Luther was supportive of the breakdown of the medieval synthesis and of the critique on the limitations of reason forwarded by the Nominalists, the school in which he himself was in part educated.[12] One of the bases for his polemic against the via antiqua was his conviction that natural philosophy and reason could not be used in the employ of theology in order to come to a knowledge of God. Luther's rejection of reason's theological use can better be understood in light of the degenerative state of the Thomistic system in the late Middle Ages. While Aquinas had acknowledged that reason could not determine the nature of God but merely demonstrate the existence of God, later schoolmen afforded little respect to these limitations. What Luther encountered in much of the theology employing the Thomistic interpretation of the Aristotelian method was that the assumptions of the various philosphical methods had usurped the place of God's Self-revelation. No longer was God the free and sovereign Subject of revelation; rather, the divine essence had become the product of human reason and expectations.

For Luther, God's essence could not be determined through reason because he saw that God is not bound by the metaphysical presuppositions of the prevailing school of philosophy. To the contrary, the divine nature is actually hidden from reason's assumptions:

> Reason can not rightly accord him [God] his deity nor attribute it to him as his own, though it rightly belongs to him alone. It knows that God exists. But who or what person it may be who is properly called God, it does not know....Thus, reason plays blindman's bluff with God and makes vain errors and always misses the mark, calling God what is not God, and not calling God what is God...[13]

Luther came to label, pejoratively, such attempts to dictate the nature of God on the basis of either philosophic speculation or inductive reasoning as the theologia gloriae -- the theology of glory.

By trying to discern true knowledge of God based on the glorious works of nature or by positing the necessary characteristics of the "prime mover" through inductive reasoning, Luther found that the philosophers were ignoring the scriptural witness to God's Self-disclosure. They were seeking the divinity in a place where God was not to be found. Nordberg notes that, "According to Luther, the 'proper work' of God (opus proprium), i.e., that which reveals God's true nature and will, is hidden from human reason within a strange or 'alien work' (opus alienum)."[14] The real source of divine Self-disclosure comes not from the glories, strength and power of natural phenomena but it comes from within the suffering, humility and death of the crucified Christ. The approach to revelation which looks to God's Self-revelation on the cross, Luther referred to as the theologia crucis -- the theology of the cross.

Juergen Moltmann has suggested that the heart of

Luther's contempt for theologies of glory lay in their provision of a means for human nature to assert its "inhuman concern for self-deification through knowledge and works."[15] Luther found that the scholastic theologians, in trying to determine the nature of God based on the "good works" of God in creation, did not know the true nature of the "hidden God" (Deus absconditus)[16] on the cross. They created ethical and theological systems on the basis of what they considered to be the good works of God in natural phenomena and then "modelled their own good works after what they rationalistically presumed to be the good works of the creator God."[17] For Luther, the God of revelation was so vastly different from the God of philosophical speculation that he accused the theologies of glory of calling "evil good and good evil."[18] Consequently, he saw in theologies of glory an attempt on the part of schoolmen to overvalue their own works and to even justify the evil of their own actions.

In addition to what Luther perceived to be the hypocrisy and corruption of the scholastic thinkers, his feeling of being personally victimized by the scholastic system contributed to the harshness of his polemic. According to the metaphysical presuppositions of the prevailing philosophical systems in Luther's time, the necessary characteristics of God were considered to be those of omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience. Based on these premises alone, one was led to the conclusion that such an "immutable" God must be necessarily constrained to act as a

wrathful judge against those who transgress the divine will as expressed in the natural law. God was viewed as a tyrant who constantly had to be appeased by "good works" in order to make ammends for human transgressions against the natural law. A system of payments for various sins came to be developed so that the devout could reconcile themselves to God.

In his own faith struggle, Luther came to despise the wrathful, tyranical divinity and the "righteousness of God" because he found that he could never adequately meet the demands of the natural law in order to be considered righteous. It was only when he came to see God and Christ in an alternative manner -- as "the crucified God" -- that he came to understand God to be gracious and righteousness to be a gift:

> The papists imagine that Christ sits enthroned above just for the purpose of judging and condemning. That is the picture I had of Christ, and you cannot deny that it was also your conception of Christ in the papacy. This image of Christ gave rise to all the good works, cloisters and monastic orders, with which the Judge is to be reconciled....Thus Christ became our Judge, from whom we fled. But Christ is no Judge. He is a Judge only to the guilty....The preachers who thus perverted Christ for us were the penalty for our great ingratitude. They converted light into darkness and changed Christ from a Savior into a tyrant and judge; He wants to help. Therefore you must have a picture of Christ that is different from the one you were taught....[19]

Luther felt that he did not and could not receive the picture of Christ as a helper through the use of reason or on the basis of empirical phenomena. In fact, by the use of

reason and the philosophical systems of the time, one could come only to the picture of Christ as a judge. In terms of a saving knowledge of God, Luther found that reason acts as a false guide and, therefore, he came to dismiss it as the "Devil's whore." For these reasons, Luther supported the separation of faith and reason and came to see, instead, that the nature of God could only be known through God's Self-revelation on the cross.

C. The Jurisdictions of Faith and Reason

Once the use of reason is rejected in theological pursuits and the findings of revealed and natural truths are no longer seen to be mutually supportive, the problem then arises of establishing new jurisdictions of study for both faith and reason. For some of Luther's contemporaries, the problem of the incompatability between the findings of faith and the conclusions of reason was solved by assigning faith and reason to two mutually exclusive spheres of study. Faith was to comment primarily on a metaphysical, spiritual reality, and reason on physical existence. Luther did not accept this sort of dichotomy as he was unwilling to abandon material existence to reason. At the same time, Luther's rejection of reason in the employ of theology did not make him anti-rationalistic. He felt that there was a place for reason and even encouraged its use when it was applied to the appropriate domains.[28] Thus, while Luther was supportive of the separation of the medieval understanding of faith and reason, he also attempted to redefine positive, yet distinct,

roles for faith and reason in their approach to created existence.

Luther based his redefinition on the premise that while there may be only one reality, different disciplines can address different aspects of the same reality. When Luther spoke of creation, he acknowledged that he was looking at the world from a certain perspective, a certain worldview, and that there are other legitimate ways of comprehending existence. The worldview on whose basis Luther approached the subject of creation was a specifically theological one. That is, he looked at the world as the "address" of a gracious God.[21]

Because Luther saw that different disciplines analyze different aspects of the same reality, he could affirm the work and terminology of a variety of disciplines. The findings of one discipline need not invalidate the investigation of another; rather, "every science should make use of its own terminology, and one should not for this reason condemn the other or ridicule it; but one should rather be of use to the other, and they should put their achievements at one another's disposal."[22] If one has a question about causation, it is best to approach the sciences which address such questions. Luther thus accepted the explanation of the philosophers (biologists) concerning, for example, the generation of chickens because this was their area of expertise:

What, then, is the reason for this remarkable

> procreation? The hen lays an egg; this she keeps warm while a living body comes into being in the egg, which the mother later on hatches. The philosophers advance the reason that these events take place through the working of the sun and her belly. I grant this.[23]

Since faith and reason are looking at existence from different perspectives, Luther asserted that, in principle, "No science should stand in the way of another science, but each should continue to have its own mode of procedure and its own terms."[24] He did have a problem, however, if the various disciplines do not acknowledge the limits and the scope of their knowledge. On the one hand, one should not go to a theologian for answers to questions of causation, for example, about the workings of the stars because "the Holy Spirit and Holy Scripture know nothing about those designations and call the entire area above us 'heaven.'"[25] On the other hand, Luther would condemn the natural sciences if they did not recognize the limits of their knowledge and tried to make claims concerning religious truth or the nature of the divine/human relationship based on empirical observations. No such direct liaison can be constructed between the structures of the world and God's inner being. This was the basis of Luther's quarrel with the via antiqua, as has been noted in the above discussion on the theology of glory.

While Luther objected to the use of Aristotelian language in defining the role of theology, he did temporarily employ the terminology of cause and effect in order to

distinguish between the roles of theology and of natural philosophy or the empirical sciences. Since Luther believed that the empirical sciences could not be used to reveal the nature of God or supply an all-encompassing view of existence in the world, he said that these disciplines must be limited to a discussion of "material and formal causes."[26] The scientists thus can "study the immanent materials from which a thing springs into being and the immanent forms that determine the patterned unfolding or development of a being."[27]

Luther also employed Aristotelian language to define the objective or the jurisidiction of theological reflection. In comparison with the natural and empirical sciences which deal with matter and form, theology must approach reality from the perspective of "efficient and final causes."[28] Luther wrote that the theological approach provided a much more comprehensive view of looking at reality in that "this gives information not only about the matter of the entire creation, not only about its form, but also...about the beginning and about the end of all things, about who did the creating and for what purpose He created."[29] Luther here found that created reality has a purpose beyond its individual entities with their characteristics and endowments. There is a dimension of human life which transcends individual entities and cannot be determined through the investigation of them. In his commentary on Romans 8:19-21, Luther reaffirmed the necessity of looking at creation not simply on the level of

appearances but to deal with it in terms of purpose and meaning -- to view creation in a teleological light:

> The apostle philosophizes and thinks about things in a different way than the philosophers and metaphysicians do. For the philosophers so direct their gaze at the present state of things that they speculate only about what things are and what quality they have, but the apostle calls our attention away from a consideration of the present and from the essence and accidents of things and directs us to their future state.[30]

We can see from the above passage that Luther was pushing aside the theological method of the via antiqua which focussed on the link between the divine and created existence in terms of both inductive and deductive reasoning. For Luther, God does not relate to the world in the way that a cause is linked to its effect. Rather, God is related to the creation in terms of will which creates the world in freedom ex nihilo, out of nothing. The earth is not bound to some preset plan but it exists in relation to a willing, active, and creative God.

While rejecting the "sacral" world view of the via antiqua, Luther also found that within a purely empirical approach to existence, if taken as a comprehensive worldview, lay an incipient idolatry of finite, physical existence. In defining the world according to the categories of material and formal causes, both the natural and the social world would be understood in a totally mechanistic fashion. With such a perception of life, there would be no indication that there exists anything which transcends the present state of reality. In such circumstances, where human existence is

viewed as autonomous and nature runs its own independent course, "matter and form" would become "eternal and infinite"[31] -- "i.e. they would exhaustively define what the world can become."[32] The future could be precisely predicted by understanding the latent possibilities (the "form") built into the structures of the world or by determining the various natural and social laws or principles which determine life's activities. Existence becomes an absolute standard unto itself. With regard to the individual, Luther found that such a view leads to an apotheosis of human endowments and characteristics such as the ability to "reason or the ability to understand" or even something as mundane as the ability to walk with the "head erect."[33]

Corresponding to the divinization of physical existence, Luther saw that any attempt to make absolute the norms of created reality resulted in a disregard for the divine governance of creation:

> Therefore the creation becomes vain, evil, and harmful from outside itself, and not by its own fault, namely because it is perverted and regarded as better than it really is by the erroneous thinking and estimation or love and enjoyment of man, while at the same time, man, who has the capacity to lay hold on God and be satisfied with only God alone, as far as the mind and spirit are concerned, is presumptuous enough to think that he has this peace and sufficiently in these created things.[34]

Natural philosophy and the empirical sciences are unable to demonstrate that God is a relevant category to the ongoing development of the world. According to the conclusions of these disciplines, God can at best be viewed as the divine

initiator of the universe who then leaves the world to run on its own. Luther rejected a mechanistic view of the divinity:

> [God is] not like a carpenter or architect, who, after completing a house, a ship, or the like, turns over the house to its owner for his residence or the ship to the boatmen or mariners for sailing, and then goes his way....God proceeds differently.[35]

For Luther, the created order and human understanding of causation should never be considered so autonomous that one neglects issues of divine governance, purpose and meaning.

D. Summary and Conclusions

By demonstrating that revealed and natural truths, faith and reason were mutually supportive, the scholastic project attempted to provide the intellectual legitimation of a comprehensive worldview in which all aspects of life could be brought under the auspices of the Christian faith. By Luther's time, the medieval synthesis was already in a serious state of decline. Faith and reason, instead of being held in a synthetic relationship, were increasingly considered to operate in mutually exclusive realms.

For many of Luther's more "modern" contemporaries, the rejection of the medieval synthesis and the separation of faith and reason meant that God was seen to be increasingly distanced and removed from the activities of daily life. "Secularization," on the one hand, had the positive effect of freeing the world and the disciplines which studied it from having continually to produce evidence which would support the views of the Church. On the other hand, since many

people saw that the world was no longer a sacral reality of the sort which openly bespoke the existence of God, it was increasingly considered to be a secular, autonomous and self-sufficient sphere of human determination where God did not and could not dwell. The belief of some in the total autonomy of the world betrayed the roots of a covert atheism. Of course, overt atheism was not a viable option for most, especially when one is in the employ of the Church or considers oneself to be a Christian. For many Christians who came to accept the metaphysical presuppositions of humanism and the new rationalism, however, God's essence was seen to be of such a spiritual nature that it seemed impossible for God to be present in physical existence (which is arguably reflected in the humanists' view of the sacraments). The divine could not be seen as either immediately or directly related to the stuff of the world because matter did not have that kind of capacity for spirit.

In many ways, Luther was supportive of the more modern attempt to distinguish between the roles of faith and reason because he too saw that nature was not a sacral reality in the sense that it could be used in theological pursuits to define the nature of God. Any use of reason which attempted to determine the nature of God based on natural phenomena or philosophy, Luther labelled pejoratively as a theology of glory. For Luther, God was not to be found through the glories of created existence but in God's Self-disclosure on the cross.

Unlike many of his more "modern" contemporaries, Luther asserted that if nature was not the sort of sacral reality posited by the medieval synthesis, nature, nonetheless, had a spiritual dimension. Luther was, therefore, able to recognize the role of both faith and reason vis-a-vis physical reality. He did so by noting that each has a distinct agenda and that their knowledge is circumscribed. Reason is to look at issues of causation (matter and form) and faith is to look at issues of meaning and purpose (efficient and final causes).

Part of Luther's agenda in asserting that both faith and reason must interpret physical reality is that he saw reason's unchallenged interpretation of physical existence would have theological implications. Reason's findings would become absolute and would lead to a new idolatry of empirical existence and a correspondingly low appreciation of the creation's divine governance. Luther had little patience with his fellow theologians who, having adopted the new rationality, accepted only the empirical understanding of reality and thus seemed to lose their sense of awe for the miraculous basis of all existence. In one such instance he accused Erasmus of staring at the miracles of creation as "a cow stares at a new gate."[38]

It is impossible to arrive at a neat summation of Luther's reaction to the medieval synthesis in terms of defining Luther as either a medieval or a modern thinker; we find elements of both in his thought. For while Luther

accepted that the world could not and should not be expected to evince the nature of the divine essence (a more modern notion), he did not reject the more medieval idea that God was somehow immediately present in the world -- that created existence, properly understood, is imbued with spiritual significance. Luther's precise understanding of creation's spiritual nature will be discussed in the next chapters. For now it is enough to say that since Luther recognized the transcendent significance of reality, he felt that it was appropriate and important for theologians to comment on created existence. He did not see that it was necessary for faith to abandon the world totally to reason and the empirical sciences.

Endnotes -- Chapter I

Abbreviations

LW — Luther's Works -- American Edition, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955 -.

WA — D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgage, Weimar: Boehlaus, 1884 -.

BC — Book of Concord, trans. Theodore G. Tappert, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press,, 1959.

[1]Cited by John M. Tonkin, "Luther's Interpretation of Secular Reality," The Journal of Religious History, 6 (1970), 134.

[2]Henry Chadwick, The Early Church, (London: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 218.

[3]Paul Tillich, A History of Christian Thought, Ed. Carl E. Braaten, (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1967), p. 108.

[4]Ibid., p. 185.

[5]Ibid., p. 184.

[6]William J. Bouwsma, "Renaissance and Reformation: An Essay in Their Affinities and Connections," Luther and the Dawn of the Modern Era, ed. Heiko Oberman, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), p. 133.

[7]Heiko Oberman, The Dawn of the Reformation, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1986), pp. 25-30.

[8]Ibid., p. 28.

[9]Bouwsma, p. 133.

[10]Oberman, pp. 24-26.

[11]Tillich, 187.

[12]See Bengt Haegglund, "Was Luther a Nominalist?" Concordia Theological Monthly, 28 (1957), 441-452.

[13]WA 19.206, 31-33; 207, 3-13 (1526), cited by Gerhard Ebeling, Luther: An Introduction to His Thought, Trans. R. A. Wilson, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. 229.

[14]Thomas G. Nordberg, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Theology and Ethic of the Cross." Unpublished Manuscript, 1988, p. 4.

[15]Juergen Moltmann, The Crucified God, Trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden, (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 71.

[16]LW 31:225.

[17]Nordberg, p. 6.

[18]LW 31:33.

[19]LW 23:335-337.

[20]Gustav Wingren, Luther on Vocation, Trans. Carl C. Rasmussen, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 137.

[21]It must be acknolwedged at this point that the following section is indebted to the scholarly appraisals of Hans-Dittmar Muendel, "Indirect Communication and Christian Education", Unpublished Manuscript, 1981, chapter 1. The concept of creation as an "address" of God will be further discussed in the third chapter.

[22]LW 1:48.

[23]LW 1:53.

[24]LW 1:47

[25]LW 1:47-48.

[26]LW 1:124.

[27]Muendel, "Indirect Communication", p. 15.

[28]LW 1:124.

[29]LW 1:125.

[30]LW 25:360.

[31]LW 1:124.

[32]Muendel, "Indirect Communication", p. 16.

[33]LW 1:124.

[34]LW 25:362-363.

[35]LW 22:26.

[36]Table Talk 1:1166 cited by Heinrich Bornkamm, Luther's Word of Thought, Trans. Martin H. Bertram, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), p. 184.

Chapter II

PROVIDENCE: CREATION AS GIFT

In the first chapter, it was demonstrated that Luther's position with respect to creation could be characterized neither by the stance of medieval scholasticism with its sacral understanding of the world nor by the new humanism which emphasized the secular nature of existence. In opposition to the Thomistic system, Luther asserted that the purpose of creation and the natural processes is not to provide knowledge about the nature of God. Such an approach leads not only to an abuse of the created order but also to a false and misleading understanding of the divine essence. In opposition to the new rationalism, which emphasized the autonomy of created existence and human activity, Luther again asserted that there was more to reflection upon creation than acquiring and applying knowledge of the natural processes. Hence, while Luther opposed the sacral Weltanschauung of the medieval synthesis, he could not advocate the secular understanding of the new rationalism. He advocated that concrete existence always has a spiritual significance which transcends our rational and empirical cognizance.

In the present chapter, I will explore Luther's

affirmation of the spiritual import of creation under the heading of "Providence: Creation as Gift."

A. Creation and Divine Transcendence

Christian theologians who deal with theologies of nature are often accused of sacrificing God's personal transcendence in their attempt to highlight the transcendent dimension found in nature. We can perhaps locate the source of such an "anti-nature" sentiment in the critique of "natural theology" forwarded by many modern theologians, especially those coming out of a neo-orthodox tradition.[1] Joseph Sittler, a Lutheran theologian, was one pioneer of environmental concern in North American who noted that among some of his European colleagues "'nature' is regarded as a dirty word..."[2]

In the first chapter, there was some indication that Luther too was concerned about assaults on divine freedom and transcendence. In particular, in his opposition to the theologies of glory, it has been noted that Luther was vehemently opposed to human reason and speculation usurping God's sovereign Self-revelation.[3] Again in Luther's qualified support of reason's role vis-a-vis the created order, it has been demonstrated that he objected to empirical and phenomenological understandings of nature being taken as comprehensive worldviews.[4] Such positivism proclaims nature to be self-sufficient and its own ultimate standard, an idol, while losing any sense of the world's divine governance.

In the present chapter, I want to explore how Luther

tries to reconcile his conviction that one must maintain God's personal transcendence over against an idolatrous view of nature with what appears to be his own sense of the dimension of "transcendence" found in nature. I will procede in this discussion by examining more closely Luther's understanding of providence, that is, the dynamic of how a transcendent creator sustains our existence as creatures living within a finite created order. This will set the groundwork for a discussion of Luther's position on divine ubiquity (finitum capax infiniti) and the consequences that this position had for his stance towards the spiritual significance of nature.

B. Creation: God's Preservation of Existence

> You are God's creation, his handiwork, his workmanship. That is, of yourself and in yourself you are nothing, can do nothing, know nothing, are capable of nothing....Therefore you have nothing to boast of before God except that you are nothing and he is your Creator who can annihilate you at any moment.[5]

In this passage we find that Luther's basic characterization of human existence is one of creaturehood. As creatures, we can take no credit for our existence but, as Luther put it, "[we] are capable of nothing." Life always comes eminently from beyond our ability to create or maintain our own being. We do not construct the world out of our own egos nor are we in any way, individually or collectively, self-sufficient in life but it is God who creates and must maintain the creation. In short, Luther would say that we

humans receive our existence; our life in creation is ultimately a gift.

In the same passage, Luther not only outlined our total dependence as creatures but he juxtaposed our dependent nature to the gracious power and transcendence of the Creator -- the whence of our existence:

> But here it is declared and faith affirms that God has created everything out of nothing. Here is the soul's garden of pleasure, along whose paths we enjoy the works of God -- but it would take too long to describe all that. Furthermore, we should give thanks to God that in his kindness he has created us out of nothing and provides for our daily needs out of nothing.[6]

For Luther, it is God who is the source of our being; God is the author of all acts of preservation. The sole initiative of God in the creative act is particularly emphasized in the concept that God creates "out of nothing" -- ex nihilo. God is not dependent on anything for the work of creation nor is God obligated because of some virtue in humanity to maintain existence. Rather, the creation is purely an act of God's grace and providence.

Although Luther emphasized the sole agency of God in the act of creation, he did not neglect nature's role, both human and extrahuman, in providing for our existence. While God is the source of our being, God's work of creation does not come to us in an unmediated, supranatural manner. God's providence comes only through the physical and the created.[7] In Luther's explanation of the first article of the Apostle's creed found in the Large Catechism, he provides a list of the creatures

through which God supplies both "the comforts and necessities of life -- sun, moon, and stars in the heavens, day and night, air, fire, water, the earth and all that it brings forth, birds and fish, beasts, grain and all kinds of produce."[8]

In a similar manner, Luther's emphasis on the recipient-nature of our existence does not mean that humanity is inert or inactive in relation to the created order. While at times the fruits of creation come to us without any work of our own, at other times human beings have a share in this work of preserving and maintaining life. As Wingren explains, "Sometimes the gifts are virtually thrust into our mouths without our having to do anything; sometimes we may be required to put forth a little effort, perhaps a helping hand, or two, or three."[9] The interpretation that Luther gave the "helping hands" which humankind must add to God's gifts was the basis of his doctrine of vocation. God acts through human labour in order to sustain the temporal existence of humanity. The work which people perform in their many callings is actually a conduit through which God's gracious gifts of life may flow. "He gives the wool, but not without our labor. If it is on the sheep, it makes no garment."[10] It is still necessary that the sheep be sheared and wool prepared before clothing can be made. Hence, it is not only through the good gifts of God in nature but also through the labour of other people that God sustains our

existence.

In part, it is the conviction that a gracious creator maintains and sustains the creation indirectly, through the interaction of creatures, that allowed Luther to affirm both divine transcendence and the spiritual significance of nature. God is the transcendent cause insofar as the work of creation occurs out of nothing. Nature too bespeaks a spiritual element both insofar as God uses nature to carry out the work of creating and insofar as we are totally dependent on all aspects of creation for our life and existence (i.e. creation transcends us). As Heinecken writes:

> For Luther the creation as such was good. It is in and through the creation that God comes to man and blesses man. The created world, therefore, is not a lower order of being but is itself the instrument of divine goodness.[11]

The use of nature, however, as a divine tool for the work of creation does not seem to exhaust Luther's understanding of nature's spiritual import.

Luther's emphasis on the agency of God in the act of creation betrays an understanding of God's relationship to nature which surpasses that of a worker's relationship to a tool. Although Luther affirms the role of nature, both human and extrahuman, in the work of creation, again and again he returns to the thesis that God is the author of creation. "A father," may thus be "an instrument of procreation," but "God himself is the source and author of life."[12] In a similar

manner, Luther acknowledged that although God sustains life through finite, created structures of the world and the natural processes, these created things should never be viewed as autonomous or self-sufficient but God is always present in every act of preservation:

> It is God who creates, effects, and preserves all things through his almighty power and right hand, as our Creed confesses. For he dispatches no officials or angels when he creates or preserves something, but all this is the work of his divine power itself.[13]

The incredible sense of the divine presence and power in every act of creation distinguished Luther's doctrine of creation from that of many of his contemporaries. The emphasis on the intimacy of God in nature, for example, could be found neither in the dominant medieval cosmology nor in the emerging scientific rationality. The reference to "officials" and "angels" in the above passage refers to the medieval cosmology which held that God was distanced from the act creation -- creating via a hierarchy of divine beings. Luther would have nothing of the far-off God represented by such a view. In relation to scientific rationality, although Luther could accept causal explanations of the universe, he asserted that the natural processes should never be viewed as autonomous or self-sufficient. Indeed without God's presence, "nothing can prosper or last for any length of time."[14] For Luther, God had to be immediately and "personally" present in every aspect of creation. He thus

viewed every good gift in creation as if it came directly from the hand of God.

The understanding of God's intimate involvement in the act and the life of creation can also be expressed in Luther's sense of divine omnipresence and omnipotence. Because only God can carry out the work of creation, the ubiquity of the divine presence can be understood in terms of the divine creative activity:

> If he [God] is to create or preserve it [creation], however, he must be present and must make and preserve his creation both in its innermost and outermost aspects. Therefore, indeed, he himself must be present in every single creation in its innermost and outermost being, on all sides, through and through, below and above, before and behind, so that nothing can be more truly present and within all creatures than God himself with his power.[15]

Luther's affirmation of God's immanence in creation based on God's continual sustaining work of creation represented a radical departure from scholastic thought.[16] Previously, God was understood to be in heaven and to be separated from the active powers of creation.[17]

In a time when the Aristotelian categories of substances and accidents dominated the theological discussion, Luther found that to think of God in such categories, as a finite substance, was severly limiting. In his view, it was simply absurd that one would try to impose finite categories and limitations on an infinite, transcendent being. God was not such "a vast, immense being that fills the world, pervades it and towers over it, just

like a sack full of straw...."[18] Rather, "God's Word and words do not proceed according to our eyesight, but in a way incomprehensible to all reason even to the angels."[19] When employing the Aristotelian categories to such things as the divine presence in the eucharist, those who thought that God could be immanently present could only do so by saying that the created substance had to be removed in order to make room for the divine substance. Luther opposed the theory of transubstantiation because he saw that it leads to both a simplistic understanding of God and a degradation of creation's essential goodness -- matter had to be removed in order for God to be present.

Since Luther saw that God's grace in creation did not come as a substance but as a deed (that is, as a creating and sustaining gift), he could offer a whole new paradigm for understanding the issue of divine ubiquity.[20] For Luther, <u>God's immanence was understood in light of the knowledge that God was the active, willing subject of all acts of creation</u>.[21] Without God personally sustaining existence, without God's presence, the creation would come to an end.

It is here in Luther's doctrine of ubiquity that we find that he is able to affirm the fullness of nature's religious significance without compromising God's transcendence. Because Luther saw that God's presence in creation came as a gift and deed rather than as a substance, he believed that matter did not lose its material nature in order for God to

be present. On the one hand, this understanding of divine immanence protects the integrity and essential goodness of creation. Luther could affirm, against some of his more Neoplatonic colleagues, that matter does have a capacity for spirit (finitum capax infiniti) and that, excepting human nature, nature does not resist grace but may act as a medium of grace. For Luther, nature had spiritual significance both because God uses matter to provide for our well-being and because God comes to us intimately and personally bound up in these gifts. In other words, existence is God's good creation. On the other hand, although God can be present everywhere, this does not mean that one could idolize or "attribute divinity" to anything created.[22] God's presence is rather indirect and uncircumscribed by anything created. As Luther put it:

> ...there is a difference between his [God's] being present and your touching. He is free and unbound wherever he is, and he does not have to stand there like a rogue set in a pillory...although he is everywhere, he does not permit himself to be so caught and grasped...[23]

Since God's personal transcendence is maintained in God's ubiquitous presence, it is only by faith and not by a direct examination of creation that one can come to know the world as God's creation.

C. Creation as Miracle

Because Luther believed that God acted through and was intimately present in physical existence, he had a great

sense of reverence for creation. Indeed, he considered concrete existence to be nothing less than miraculous. When Luther beheld the simplest things in nature, he would often marvel at them: "how well a little fish multiplies, for one produces probably a thousand!"[24]; or take the miracle of an egg, "If we had never seen such an egg and one were brought from Shangri-la, we'd all be startled and amazed"[25]; and again, "If you really examined a kernel of grain thoroughly, you would die of wonderment."[26] In Luther's eyes, the concrete gifts of existence bore a spiritual depth and meaning which transcended these gifts in their particularity.

In light of God's total graciousness in providing for and maintaining the wondrous creation, Luther again and again reminded his readers that one's initial response to God's providence should be gratitude and praise. He wrote, "We cannot perform a greater or finer deed, or nobler service to God, than to offer thanks, as He Himself tells us."[27] Anyone who does not respond in gratitude must either not comprehend that life is a sheer and undeserved gift or consider that their own efforts are somehow sufficient to sustain life.[28]

Because God's presence in creation can only be comprehended through faith, Luther found that many did not share in his sense of reverence for physical existence. They saw only the external and ordinary forms through which God provided for the life of creation. As Luther considered gratitude and praise to be the most appropriate responses to

God's graciousness, he also considered "ingratitude" to be "the most shameful vice and the greatest contempt of God"[29] and was greatly troubled by how few people acknowledged the miraculous nature of existence as indicated in this commentary to Psalm 111:

> Here the Psalmist indicates how few are the righteous who consider or see these words of the Lord. They neither praise nor give thanks, not even when they say: "Great are the works of the Lord." They are used to them and saturated with them, like an old house with smoke. They use them and root around in them like a hog in a bag of feed. They say: "Oh, is that such a great thing that the sun shines, or fire warms, or water gives fish, or the earth yields grain, or a cow calves, or a woman bears children, or a hen lays eggs? That happens every day!" My dear Mr. Simpleton, is it a small thing just because it happens every day? If the sun did not shine for ten days, then it would be a great thing.[30]

It was precisely what in Luther's eyes made creation so miraculous -- that God would create through the ordinary, mundane and regular occurrences of everyday life rather than bypassing nature -- that caused other people to feel jaded in the presence of creation. He found that to the miracles of concrete existence, people preferred the extraordinary and the sensationalized. In contradistinction, Luther was astonished by the sheer, everyday physicality of existence. He could affirm the essential goodness and the spiritual dimension of creation because he found creation to be a true expression of God's creative will.[31]

Summary

We find that Luther's basic conviction about humanity's

relationship to the created order is that we human beings receive our existence. Our life is by no means sui generis, self-sufficient; it always comes from the transcendent God who preserves, sustains and maintains our existence through the physical and the created. In light of both the providential nature of existence and God's intimate, ubiquitous presence in the ongoing act of creation, Luther looked upon existence with a great sense of awe, mystery and gratitude. He understood that in daily life, we are surrounded by great miracles -- the miracles of concrete existence. Yet, because these miracles are so common, we do not comprehend them. Luther would argue that beyond the appearances of the natural processes operating independently, according to some internal logic, and all claims of human agency and self-sufficiency, the preservation of creation is nothing else than a miraculous gift from God; it is a sign of God's providence.

Endnotes -- Chapter II

[1]See Tillich, p. 537.

[2]Joseph Sittler, "Nature and Grace: Reflections on an Old Rubric," Dialog 3 (1964), p. 256.

[3]See Chapter I, pp. 22-27.

[4]Ibid., pp. 31-33.

[5]LW 43:210

[6]Ibid..

[7]Douglas John Hall, Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship, (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), p. 134.

[8]BC, p. 412.

[9]Wingren, "The Doctrine of Creation: Not an Appendix but the First Article," Word and World, 4 (1984), p. 362.

[10]WA 19, 655-656 cited by Wingren, "The Doctrine of Creation," p. 362.

[11]Martin J. Heinecken, "Luther and the 'Orders of Creation' in Relation to a Doctrine of Work and Vocation," The Lutheran Quarterly, 4 (1952), p. 396.

[12]WA 40. III. 210ff. cited by Wingren, Luther On Vocation, p. 9.

[13]LW 37:57

[14]BC, p. 431, see also LW 22:26.

[15]LW 37:57

[16]In saying that Luther's thought was a radical departure from scholastic thought, I do not wish to suggest that Luther's ideas arose in an ideological vaccuum. Indeed, Luther's critique of the via antiqua seems to be dependent in part upon the critique of reason's limitations forwarded by the Nominalists. Much recent scholarship has been devoted to the study of the relationship between Luther and the thought systems of both the via moderna and the new rationalism. See for examples: Heiko Oberman, The Dawn of the Reformation, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., (1986).; Lewis W. Spitz, "Luther, Humanism and the Word," Lutheran Theological Seminary Bulletin, 65 (1985), 3-24.; and the essays in the

edited collection of Gerhard Dunnhaupt, The Martin Luther Quincentennial, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985). While Nominalism appears to have been a major source of Luther's critique of the Thomistic synthesis, there appear to be other sources, especially in the tradition of the mystics, for Luther's more constructive work of articulating the nature of the world's relationship to the divine. A brief discussion of these sources will appear in the fourth chapter.

[17]Tillich p. 374.

[18]LW 36:227.

[19]LW 36: 207-208.

[20]Hall, p. 99.

[21]Yoshikazu Tokuzen, "Nature and Natural in Luther's Thought," East Asia Journal of Theology, 1 (1970), 133-150.

[22]LW 26:95.

[23]LW 37:68.

[24]LW 54:200

[25]Ibid..

[26]WA 19:46, 11, cited by Bornkamm, p. 182.

[27]LW 14:51.

[28]See LW 14:122-123.

[29]LW 14:51

[30]LW 13:366-367

[31]In the history of Christian thought, an unbalanced emphasis on God's sovereignty in the sustenance of a totally dependent humanity has often resulted in sort of a fatalistic determinism and an uncritical acceptance of the status quo. Luther's social ethic, which was largely influenced by his strong feeling for God's providence in creation, has been widely critiqued because he did not escape this attendant pitfall to the notion of providence. Given that the purpose of this dissertation is to try to determine if Luther's theology of creation is appropriate as a "usable past" in light of the modern ecological crisis, the abuse of the "two realms" doctrine, which finds its basis in the notion of providence, encourages a somewhat cautious approach.

Chapter III

Creation as Divine Address to Humanity

In the discussion of creation as God's providence, there were already indications in Luther's writings that the category of providence did not exhaust his understanding of humanity's relationship to the created order. For Luther, the story of creation goes beyond that of a sovereign and omnipresent God sustaining the existence of a totally dependent humanity. Rather, he saw that we exist in a dialectical relationship with creation. For while we receive our existence from outside of ourselves, we are also capable of activity which influences and affects creation. Not only are we capable of such action, but we can also be held responsible for our actions because, while existence shapes our various responses to life, our actions are not totally predetermined.[1] Human beings are called to take part in the creative act.[2]

Luther's idea that involvement in the creation is an intrinsic part of the Christian life represented a radical departure from some forms of medieval piety. A dominant attitude of Luther's time was that one's personal holiness was directly related to the degree in which one could be removed from earthly, physical life. Indeed, a cloistered life in which there was an absence of "unholy" work, worldly pleasures and physical comforts was considered to be the

height of true spirituality. By distinction, it was considered unlikely that many of those left to toil in the world outside religious orders could obtain salvation. The physical world was considered to be an impediment in the quest for salvation.

In opposition, Luther asserted that God's grace should lead one into greater activity in God's creation. Based on his own experience, Luther found "justification by grace through faith" to express a power which transformed his life and created in him a greater appreciation of the world. God's Word, for Luther, brought him out of the monastery and into a life in the world, assuming responsibility in both the natural and social world which Luther understood to be God's creation.[3] Tonkin describes the movement from the cloister to the world one in which "Christian discipleship became flesh in the context of ordinary human life. Secular vocation acquired a new dignity. Radical commitment to God no longer precluded but implied radical involvement in the world."[4]

Unfortunately, later generations of Lutherans often lost contact with Luther's notion that God's Word must be understood in the context of creation.[5] The transformative, world-affirming power of God's Word which Luther experienced can readily be juxtaposed to the tendency of Lutheran orthodoxy to use the principle of justification by grace through faith as a legitimation for indifference to the

created world. Against the world-indifference of scholastic Lutheranism[6] and the world-rejection of some popular forms of medieval piety,[7] Luther stands as one who saw that creation is neither a hurdle to be overcome in search of true spiritual fulfillment nor is it a mere backdrop for salvation; rather, creation exists as a true and authentic home for God's creatures living in response to God's will and Word.

Through his approach to revelation, Luther tried to hold in tension the notion that along with God's sovereignty, human participation and agency is also a necessary and authentic part of the created order. In Luther's view, God not only provides for our existence through creation but through the same creation God is also communicating to humanity and human beings are capable of responding to the communication. In other words, creation exists as a medium of God's Word. For Luther, God's communication to humanity -- God's Word -- does not remove Christians from the world but rather leads to an affirmation of creation's goodness and a fuller participation in the world.

In this chapter I will explore Luther's understanding of God's Word. I will carry out this exploration by first examining what Luther thought was the nature of God's message to humanity in existence. Then I will look into Luther's concept of how God communicates to humankind the divine, gracious intention for creation.

existence.

It is not possible, then, from the perspective of theology to speak about the creation unless it is in reference to this "communicational web"[10] between God and humanity. Luther saw creation, even the lowliest creatures, as a medium of God's will:

> ...[the birds are] our schoolmasters and teachers. It is a great and abiding disgrace to us that in the Gospel a helpless sparrow should become a theologian and preacher to the wisest of men, and daily should emphasize this to our eyes and ears...Their living example is an embarrassment to us.[11]

B. The Word "Clothed" in Creation

It is the address of God to humanity through creation which makes possible full human participation in the created order. Luther distinguishes between two types of words which God speaks to us: the Word "clothed" in creation and the preached Word. We have already discussed the former in part because the Word in creation is simply another name that Luther gives to God's providential presence in creation. God's providential presence in creation, by maintaining physical existence, acts as God's communication or "word" to humanity. Beyond gratitude and praise, Luther understood that God's Word in creation evokes an active response from humanity as it confronts us with certain tasks and responsibilities in life.

These tasks and responsibilities combined with our

both natural and social creation. Luther understood that we live our lives not as isolated individuals; rather, we are enmeshed in many multiple levels of relationships which exist to promote the well-being of creation.[13] These relationships form an integral part of who we are and are essential aspects of our human nature.[14] The meaning of human existence for Luther cannot be found by analyzing the human person in isolation nor can it be found by speculating about an abstract or ideal humanity; rather the human person can only be understood in the context of the many complex levels of relationships.[15] As creatures we are intended to live in relationship. God's purpose for our life lies within our responses in our multiple interactions with other creatures.

While Luther does deal with our responsibilities and relationships in nature, Luther's primary concern is with our social interactions. Luther calls these relationships our "vocations" or "stations."[16] Muendel describes the complexity of these relationships:

> Any person lives in many of these vocations at the same time. The same person is, e.g., the father of his children, the husband of his wife, an employee related to employer and fellow workers, a citizen related both the political process and to fellow citizens.[17]

It is in these many levels of relationships that God confronts us with the command to provide for the welfare of our neighbours -- to love and act justly towards them. Luther illustrates the command that we encounter in our social relationships, particularly in the economic world, in

his discussion on how God preaches to us in the workshop:

> If you are a manual laborer, you find that the Bible has been put into your workshop, into your hand, into your heart. It teaches and preaches how you should treat your neighbor. Just look at your tools...and you will read this statement inscribed on them. Everywhere you look, it stares at you. Nothing that you handle every day is so tiny that it does not continually tell you this, if you will only listen. Indeed, there is no shortage of preaching. You have as many preachers as you have transactions, goods, tools, and equipment in your house and home...[18]

Luther uses the term "natural law" -- lex naturae[19]-- to describe the command from God which comes through all of creation. There is no crass determinism or fatalistic tendencies behind Luther's concept of the natural law. Rather, human beings are capable of responding and intended to respond to the call in freedom. In creation -- particularly through our social, economic and familial relationships -- we human beings not only receive our existence but God challenges us to serve others.

The assertion that God confronts us through all of creation with certain demands and responsibilities gave Luther an interesting insight into the nature of morality. Since he saw that God's will is ubiquitious in all of creation -- in both the natural biological realm and in our social relationships -- all of our interactions in existence have moral significance. As Muendel notes, "Morality is not the skill of applying some timeless moral principles to a series of moral dilemmas."[20] Rather, to do God's will is to

be responsive to what the Creator gives to us and asks of us in all of creation.[21] In this sense, there are no aspects of our existence which escape the realm of morality -- no dimensions of existence which are not "religious." All of our activities, whether very basic natural functions such as eating, sleeping, and walking or our social activities such as working, studying and enjoying the company of friends are all ways in which we respond, positively or negatively, to God's will or commands in creation.[22]

Because of the Fall, we human beings no longer respond in freedom to the calling to love in our multiple levels of relationships. Instead of cooperating with God's work of giving, Luther finds that we desire to possess, to control our existence, to live as autonomous self-sufficient beings instead of in relationship.[23] We mistrust the Creator-God and, therefore, do not believe in the providential nature of the commands written into daily life. Because we do not trust in the good intentions behind the commands to live in relationship, we will try to ignore or oppose the commands.

Luther very firmly stated that it is the opposition to God's commands that is to blame for the problems in the creation. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve recognized their limits as creatures of the Creator. They trusted that God was gracious. Living in a right relationship with the Creator, they correctly used the many gifts which God poured upon them freely in creation and obeyed God's commands to

care for the earth. Adam and Eve, however, came to mistrust God's good intentions for them, to mistrust the Word and chose instead to place their trust in created, temporal things and in themselves. It is the mistrust of the Word, not the act of picking the fruit, which brought about the Fall. Luther writes:

> He [Satan] does not immediately try to allure Eve by means of the loveliness of the fruit. He first attacks man's greatest strength, faith in the Word. Therefore the root and source of sin is unbelief and turning away from God...[24]

The falling into unbelief affected Adam and Eve's physical and spiritual endowments. In fact, there was no part of their being which was saved from the existential distortion of sin. In Luther's words, "In Adam there was an enlightened reason, a true knowledge of God, and a most sincere desire to love God and his neighbor, so that Adam embraced Eve and at once acknowledged her to be his own flesh."[26] All this was lost after the Fall. These human attributes were not lost, however, in the sense that humanity no longer had the capability to think or reason but in the sense that <u>our estranged relationship to the source of life brought about distortion in all of our relationships</u>. "The nature indeed remains; but it is corrupted in many respects, inasmuch as confidence toward God has been lost and the heart is full of distrust, fear, and shame."[28] With regard to the physical attributes of Adam and his relationship with the rest of the created realm, Luther too believed that the Fall

brought about serious distortion. "I am fully convinced that before Adam's sin his eyes were so sharp and clear that they surpassed those of the lynx and eagle. He was stronger than the lions and the bears, whose strength is very great; and he handled them the way we handle puppies."[27] "But through sin and the Fall we men have been so weakened, tainted, and corrupted in body, soul, eyes, ears,....Our body is unclean, foul, and leprous..."[28]

The Fall not only affected the body and soul of the human but it had disastrous effects on the rest of creation as well. While Luther felt a certain sense of awe at the wonders of creation, he was also well aware of the hostile forces found in nature as a result of the Fall.[29] Luther writes:

> I hold that before sin the sun was brighter, the water purer, the trees more fruitful, and the fields more fertile. But through sin and the awful fall not only our flesh is disfigured by the leprosy of sin, but everything we use in the life has become corrupt...[30]

Because humankind did not trust the providence of existence and no longer felt grateful for God's good gifts, it came to misuse the gifts which were intended for the neighbour. To mistrust and ingratitude, Luther attributes all the economic injustice and oppression in the world:

> How much trouble there now is in the world simply on account of false coinage, yes, on account of daily exploitations and usury in public business, trading and labor on the point of those who wantonly oppress the poor and deprive them of their daily bread![31]

Because our mistrust of God's providence affects not only the divine-human relationship but also brings about distortion in nature, human sin occurs both against God and against all of the created order.[32] It is our relationship with the source of life, the Creator, which determines how we are able to interact with the rest of creation.

C. Preached Word

Luther acknowledges that if we are to respond obediently to the callings to love, then we must trust that it is a God of a good and gracious nature who confronts us with our many relationships. As Muendel puts it, "...if we are to be free and willing to respond to these challenges, demands and realities, we must trust the 'providence' that puts them in our way."[33] Or in Wingren's words, "Man has to accept life from God's hands, for it is definitely God who stands behind all that different times bring him. Man is at the mercy of this almighty God."[34]

God's sustaining presence in creation does not necessarily lead one to the conclusion that it is a gracious God who stands behind what life brings. Indeed, the vicissitudes of life -- especially in times of death, sickness and injustice -- often speak against the thesis that creation is a good gift from a gracious God. "Just see!" writes Luther, "God so governs this physical world in outward affairs that, if you regard and follow the judgment of human reason, you are compelled to say either that there is no God

or that God is unjust."[35] We are not able to perceive directly that it is a good and loving God who stands behind all that existence brings us. What is needed if one is to perceive that it is such a God who is sustaining the creation is a dimension of the human being which can relate to the hidden Will of God in existence. This part of the human being Luther refers to as the "heart."[36] The heart is the central dimension of a human being which always relies on some value to give the whole person meaning and purpose in life. In opposition to the mind, the heart does not try to grasp God as a principle or a concept but God, in Christ, exists for the heart as a living reality and the source of all confidence.[37] It is the source of the heart's confidence which determines how a person will respond to God's address in creation. Or in Luther's words, "Whatever face he [the human being] has inwardly towards God, he shows outwardly."[38]

Because of the endowment of the heart, human beings are potentially capable of making true responses to the address of God in existent realities. Responding to God's will in creation is not a matter of being passively immersed in the natural and social processes of creation nor is it a matter of following some predetermined responses to life. Rather, we human beings, while being confronted with realities which transcend us, are capable of taking responsibility for the world and responding to God's will in freedom and creativity. As Muendel puts it, "man is <u>a response-able creature</u>."[39] It

is the confidence of the human heart in the creative will behind all of existence which is source of our freedom to act and create.

After the Fall, the Spirit uses the preached Word to communicate to our hearts that it is a good and gracious God who confronts us with the commands in existent realities. Luther writes:

> He is there for you when he adds his Word [to his presence in creation] and binds himself, saying, "Here you are to find me." Now when you have the Word you can grasp and have him with certainty and say, "Here I have thee, according to thy Word."[40]

Like all human spiritual endowments, the heart has been affected by the existential distorion of sin and exists in a state of rebellion and mistrust towards God. In order for the human heart to have confidence in the creative will behind all of existence, it must be transformed. It is the Holy Spirit which brings about the metanoia, the transformation, of the heart by putting to death the false confidences of the heart and by making Christ, the new confidence of the heart, a living reality to the individual.[41] Without faith in the Word, we cannot know that it is God who is present in creation and we cannot freely respond to our many callings to love.

Luther sees that the preached Word does not to give us any information or knowledge about creation beyond what we experience in our everyday existence. What faith in the Word, in Christ, does do is to help us to perceive

differently what our outer body experiences. Luther writes: "Thus, all that our body does outwardly and physically, if God's Word is added to it and it is done through faith, is in reality and in name done spiritually."[42] Through the workings of the Spirit, we come to see that creation is the address of a gracious God and that the many tasks and responsibilities in life are indeed "good" for us.

For Luther, the concept of nature and creation thus belongs both to the realm of dogmatics and to the realm of ethics. As Wingren notes, "What God's work in creation demands of us is not first action, but faith."[43] It is faith which teaches us how to love the neighbour. "Faith gives us the freedom from self-concern so that we are free to be genuinely attentive to the needs of others and to the tasks at hand."[44] "Thus a Christian man," according to Luther, "who lives in this confidence toward God knows all things, can do all things, ventures everything that needs to be done, and does everything gladly and willingly...because it is a pleasure for him to please God in doing these things."[45] While faith may teach one how to respond to God's call in creation, faith does not create its own works or its own law. Faith merely responds to the natural law which has always been present in the created order. Faith also recognizes that the works done on earth are not directed towards God, nor are they a way to prove ourselves; rather, we recognize in them "a way of participating in God's good will toward

humans."[46] Through faith we come to recognize both the gracious nature of existence and the many commands written into our daily existence.

In his article "Understanding and Communicating the Word of Grace," Muendel outlines the implications of the relationship between God's presence in creation for our "outer persons" and God's Word-presence for our "inner persons":

> ...the word of grace is never in a vacuum. It always 'frames' or provides the context for, concrete realities, which include the commands written into creation. The Word that God created the heavens and the earth, e.g., makes creation of spiritual use to a person. Life now becomes the point of encounter with the Creator. Similarly the Word 'frames' or is 'added to' such 'outward things' as our vocations, so they are not only a moral challenge but a call to trust the Creator...Thus when the Word presents a commandment it calls for faith and obedience at the same time. Our obedience shows our trust in God's gracious intentions. Our faith in God's grace leads us to obey the concrete command to serve.[47]

Thus in Luther's understanding of the Word, we find that there is no true separation of theology and ethics but God's Word in creation calls forth both trust and response at the same time.

Summary

We can see from the above discussion that God's Word in creation, rather than removing Christians from reality, actually works to affirm the created order. This happens by virtue of the fact that God's Word in creation, which maintains and sustains our being, also confronts us with

certain tasks and responsibilities in life, namely to care for the welfare of the creation. Because the call to relationship and responsibility is ubiquitous in all of creation, all of life has moral significance. Everything we do represents either a positive or negative response to the will of the Creator. When we do not heed God's commands because we are turned in upon ourselves (homo incurvatus in se) the Holy Spirit, working through the preached Word, must put to death the false confidences of our hearts.

The Spirit is able to create human hearts which trust in the Word rather than in anything created and temporal. Only when human beings are confident in the providential nature of creation, can they be free to respond to the many callings to love which confront them in existence. The Spirit, using as its instrument the preached Word, does not remove human anxiety by abolishing the natural law. Rather, faith in God's Word helps us to interpret our lives and the commands. In other words, God's Word does not remove humanity from concern about worldly things but it places human beings back in the world with a new vision -- the understanding that God is gracious and the world is God's good creation.

Endnotes -- Chapter 3

[1]Hans-Dittmar Muendel, "Luther: The Moral and The Religious," Religious Education, 76 (1981), p. 89. Much of this chapter is indebted to the scholarly appraisals of Muendel. I must also acknowledge that his writings have provided me with an invaluable, albeit indirect, insight into the Germanic literature on Luther's theology of creation, especially that of Nilsson, Loefgren, Iwand and Toernvall.

[2]The ability to create, in a strict theological sense, is not a characteristic which can be attributed to humankind. As was indicated in the previous chapter, it is God alone who creates "out of nothing." Nonetheless, Luther affirms that humanity does have an active role in the life of creation. Wingren correctly reminds us that while the concept of human co-operation in creation implies that the human is "an independent ethical subject with a certain amount of free and unshackled activity," yet, "the idea of co-operation grows up directly and simultaneously out of Luther's believe in the bondange of the will before God." [Vocation, pp. 124-125]

[3]Hans-Dittmar Muendel, "Understanding and Communicating the Word of Grace," Consensus, 9 (1983), p. 10.

[4]Tonkin, p. 145.

[5]Muendel, "Understanding and Communicating," p. 12.

[6]Tillich, p. 284.

[7]Bornkamm, p. 2.

[8]Muendel, "Indirect Communication," p. 17.

[9]LW 1:21.

[10]Muendel, "Indirect Communication," p. 17.

[11]cited by Tokuzen, p. 43.

[12]The following paragraph is indebted to the scholarly appraisals of Muendel, "Indirect Communication," pp. 17-21.

[13]Wingren, Vocation, p. 5.

[14]Hall, pp 131-134.

[15]Muendel, "Indirect Communication," pp. 18.

[16]The best analysis of Luther's doctrine of vocation is that of Wingren, Luther on Vocation.

[17]Muendel, "Understanding and Communicating," p. 13.

[18]WA 32, 495-496. cited by Wingren, Vocation, p. 72.

[19]Wingren, Vocation, p. 5.

[20]Muendel, "The Moral and the Religious," p. 88.

[21]Wingren, Vocation, p. 220.

[22]Muendel, "The Moral and the Religious," pp. 88-89.

[23]Wingren, "The Doctrine of Creation," p. 363.

[24]LW 1:162.

[25]LW 1:63.

[26]LW 1:167.

[27]LW 1:62.

[28]LW 12:119.

[29]Santmire correctly notes, "In this respect, for Luther, nature clearly was not a milieu for communion with God, as it was, for example, for Francis. Nor did Luther generally see the great cosmic harmonies as Augustine did. Luther often tended to see nature as a concatenation of hostile energies -- above all the insects! -- which motivate the desparing soul to seek out and cling to `the right hand of God.'" p. 125. Santmire's distinction between the "focal" and the "circumferential" aspects of Luther's theology is also important for this study. He finds that Luther cannot be interpreted unambiguously as a sixteenth century "environmentalist"; the reformer's concerns are primarily theanthropocentric in nature. Nonetheless, there is a strong secondary concern for both the divine and human engagement with nature. See Santmire pp. 127-131.

[30]LW 1:64.

[31]BC, pp. 431-432.

[32]Tokuzen, p. 44.

[33]Muendel, "Understanding and Communicating," p. 13.

[34]Wingren, Vocation, p. 21.

[35]WA 18.784.36, cited by Brian Gerrish, "To the Unkown God': Luther and Calvin on the Hiddennness of God," Journal of Religion, 53, p. 276.

[36]LW 37:88-89.

[37]Muendel, "Understanding and Communicating," p. 11.

[38]WA 10 (111). 180.13, cited by Tonkin, p. 144.

[39]Muendel, "Understanding and Communicating," p. 13.

[40]LW 37:68.

[41]Regin Prenter, Spiritus Creator, trans. John M. Jensen, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press), pp. 10-11.

[42]LW 37:92. Luther also writes concerning the restoration of our relationship with extrahuman nature: "We are not living in the dawn of the future life; for we are beginning to regain a knowledge of the creation, a knowledge forfeited by the fall of Adam. Now we have a correct view of the creatures, more so, I suppose, than they have in the papacy. Erasmus does not concern himself with this; it interest him little how the fetus is made in the womb....But by God's mercy we can begin to recognize His wonderful works and wonders also in flowers when we ponder his might and goodness." WA 1:1160 cited by Bornkamm, p. 184.

[43]Wingren, Vocation, p. 363.

[44]Muendel, "Understanding and Communicating," p. 14.

[45]LW 44:27.

[46]Muendel, "Understanding and Communicating," p. 14.

[47]Ibid., p. 15.

Chapter IV

Indirect Communication: Limits of Secular Affirmation

In the third chapter, I discussed the spiritual import of human participation in the created order. For Luther, God's Word not only provides for our existence through creation but it also calls forth human responsibility in the world. The Spirit, working through the preached Word, transforms the human heart in order to help human beings to respond and to interpret God's Word as it comes clothed in creation. Since Luther understood God's Word to be ubiquitous in all of creation, all of our actions have moral implications.

Having discussed the spiritual dimension of creation -- both in terms of its providential nature and in terms of creation as God's Word or address to humanity -- I will try to define the limits which Luther places on creation's spiritual significance. For while he emphasized the spiritual implications of creation because of the Word's presence in the created order, Luther also asserted that one cannot identify anything created with God's will. God's presence in creation always remains indirect. Luther's more nuanced understanding of the spiritual dimension of nature thus occurs between his continual affirmation of the finite, creaturely and indeed even "secular" nature of the world on

the one side, and on the other side his belief that one encounters God and the divine will in the particular circumstances of everyday life. In the pursuit of trying to define the parameters of nature's significance for faith, I will first explore more fully the indirect nature of divine revelation. Next, I will discuss what Luther felt were the two necessary consequences of God's indirect presence in the world, namely (1) that creation always exists under a sign of finitude, and (2) that we only encounter God in particularities. Finally, in conjunction with these discussions, I will explore what Luther saw to be the ethical implications of a more nuanced understanding of nature's spiritual dimension. For Luther, one's response to God's address in creation must occur in a creative tension between God's immanence and transcendence.

A. Indirect Communication and the Word

Luther believed that the indirect communication of God's Word was a necessary and intrinsic aspect of creaturely existence.[1] Our existence, in Luther's eyes, was necessarily bounded by time and space. As beings of time and space, Homo sapiens cannot know what lies beyond the created sphere because "our mind cannot grasp what lies outside time."[2] Luther thus emphasized the absurdity of trying to reach beyond creation to the "naked God"[3] or God's divine pure essence because, in an attempt to transcend created limits, one would "get into an area where there is no

measure, no space, no time, and into the merest nothing, concerning which, according to the philosopher [Aristotle], there can be no knowledge."[4] By the same token, Luther was highly critical of those who claimed to be able to obtain direct, unmediated revelation from God:

> But what happens when I bring Christ into the heart? Does it come about, as the fanatics imagine, that Christ descends on a ladder and climbs back up again.[5]

In recognizing our epistemological limits as creatures, then, we find that we cannot have any access to a God who, in Luther's words, "is above body, above spirit, above everything man can say or hear or think..."[6] Not only is God's essence beyond our comprehension, but the eternal will of God defies reduction to a body of moral principles.

Although we are unable to learn about God directly, Luther believed that God does communicate to humanity. Because of our creaturely limitations, however, God's revelation must come through the medium of something created or temporal. Luther referred to the created coverings through which God comes to us as the "mask," "wrapper" or "veil" of God.[7]

The purpose of indirect revelation has already been covered in the discussion on the necessity of trust being present in order for humans to respond to God's commands in creation.[8] While God's revelation does not provide us with any technical or scientific information on how creation is structured or operates, it does give us a "<u>new way of</u>

assessing, and responding to, our concrete existence in time."[9] Through such revelation we find out that the power behind the universe is gracious and intends good towards us. Luther also understood that indirect communication should not be viewed as a poor substitute for direct communication nor has it been made necessary by the Fall; rather, indirect communication is a part of God's authentic creation. It is only through indirect communication that human beings can live in a trust relationship with the transcendent Creator and not place absolute trust in finite, created things. Indirect communication allows us to encounter the otherwise ungraspable divine will. Or as Luther put it, "the works of God are set before us so that we can grasp them."[10]

Luther was adamant that although God creates and is present in all of creation, this presence is always indirect. The indirect nature of the divine presence is attributable to the fact that even with the presence of the Word in creation, God continues to transcend divine Self-revelation. Even in Christ, the height of God's Self-disclosure, we still cannot lay hold of, or have an objective knowledge of, the naked divine essence or will.[11] Muendel argues that the essence of indirect communication works against laying hold of the naked God:

> It is the notion that God creates and is clothed in time which militates against any knowledge-approach to discerning the divine or absolute. Knowledge by its nature attempts to abstract the lasting from the temporal. For knowledge to be useful to humans, it must give information which is

> applicable to a variety of situations and times. But the God-dimension of existence -- both in its religious and moral aspects -- is present for us only in time [and space], in the particular, and not in the timeless and general.[12]

God's transcendence thus is maintained even in God's ubiquitous Self-revelation.

B. Creation Under a Sign of Finitude

The first consequence for Luther of God's presence remaining indirect even in revelation is that one cannot apotheosize the created order through which we learn about God's will. Luther writes:

> God wants us to respect and acknowledge them [the external masks] as His creatures, which are a necessity for this life. But He does not want us to attribute divinity to them, that is, to fear and respect them in such a way that we trust them and forget Him.[13]

For Luther, creation always remains creaturely even though it is a medium of revelation. There is nothing about creation itself which is divine or in that sense "sacred." Therefore, no parts of creation, not the natural processes nor some social order nor various "distinct" human attributes, are worthy of absolute and unconditional esteem. In viewing the creation as sacred, one would transform the created "masks" of God into a divine direct presence.[14]

One example of the extent to which Luther emphasized the finite, limited character of existence can be found in his writings and comments on the Apocalypse. Luther took many of the occurrences of his day as signs and symbols that the last days and God's judgment were about to befall the

earth. In a letter to Nicholas Hausmann in October 1526, Luther compared the world to a dilapidated, decaying old house. "All things," he wrote, "are boiling, burning, moving, falling, sinking, groaning."[15] Even more so than natural occurrences, Luther took the struggles in the Church to be a portent of an immanent eschaton:

> I hold that judgement day is not far away. I say this because the drive of the Gospel is now at its height. And the Gospel acts like a light. When it is about to go out, it flares up as if it still wanted to burn for a long time, and so it is extinguished.[16]

Directly related to the apocalyptic expectation is Luther's belief that the "eschaton," the fulfillment of God's kingdom, would occur in the vertical dimension, outside of the temporal order, rather than in the horizontal, historical dimension. For Luther, there could be no direct manifestation of God's will and Word in time. He did not believe that there would be a progression of either the Church or society towards the new heaven or the new earth in history. Rather, he felt that the world would end in the dissolution of the Apocalypse. The new order would be made out of the destruction of the old. "On the last day, there will be great destruction, when all the elements will be reduced to ashes, and the whole world will return to its original chaos. Then a new heaven and earth, and we shall all be changed."[17] Again in reference to Pslam 101 verse 8 Luther writes:

> But our Lord God's suggestion is the best. He proposes knocking over heaven and earth onto one heap and making another, a new world. For this world is no good. There are too many rascals and too few pious people in it. It will not, and cannot, continue anywhere.[18]

Luther's apocalyptic understanding also found a correlation in his understanding of the spiritual development of the individual. He did not believe that the transformative power of the gospel was such that it would lead to Christian perfection on earth. In contrast, he held that the Christian remained both a saint and a sinner at the same time, simul justus et peccator. The righteousness of a Christian is always an alien righteousness. It is not something which the Christian can possess but a characteristic which is imputed to man by grace through faith for Christ's sake.[19] In more concrete terms, what this means is that our callings continue to challenge us to see whether we will respond out of trust in the God of creation or out of trust in some other god. Justification by grace does not change one into a totally different person but rather law and grace, flesh and spirit, the worldly kingdom and the spiritual kingdom continue to operate in the life of the Christian.[20]

The conviction that the Kingdom of God would not reach completion in history but only after history did not necessarily make Luther otherworldly. We have already indicated the great extent of Luther's worldly affirmation.

To the contrary, Luther's apocalyptic understanding helped him to define the limits of secular affirmation. The Christian is called to participate fully in secular life and to take responsibility in the world but the Christian's heart or spirit may not place ultimate trust in the created, temporal order. To do so would be to try to claim a direct presence of God -- to turn creation into an idol.

C. Attentiveness to Particularities

The second consequence of the indirect nature of God's presence is that Christians must necessarily be attentive to the particular, everyday existence in this world. Although creation is not worthy of our absolute trust nor does it have any intrinsic, divine qualities, nevertheless, creation does have high theological significance. It is a true home for humanity living in response to the Word-presence in existence. Existence has significance for faith when we approach it as God's address or divine "words" to humanity. Or as Muendel puts it:

> The divinity of creation lies in its function to be the concrete address of an otherwise ungraspable divine will. God's presence in existence is thus "indirect," because one cannot discern anything divine in existence unless one responds to existence as God's address. God is present for us only in concrete interactions.[21]

In other words, creation's spiritual significance does not come from making creation into an idol nor does it come from transforming ourselves into gods but the spiritual dimension of creation is to be found even in its finite, creaturely

nature. It is only when we respond to and participate in concrete, limited existence as finite creatures living in response to God's will and Word do we encounter creation's true spiritual import.

Luther's spiritual attentiveness to particularities has been described as a sort of mysticism.[22] It is not an abstract mysticism in which one avoids everyday existence in a quest to encounter God in some special, otherworldly realm but it is, using Tillich's terminology, a concrete Christ-mysticism.[23]

We have already touched on the subject of Luther's mysticism in the second chapter of this dissertation. His absorption into particularities can be understood, in part, from his sense of the divine agency in every act of creation. Because it is the Creator-God who preserves and maintains all of existence, Luther felt that such a divinity must be immanently and "personally" present in the world:

> If he [God] is to create or preserve it [creation], however, he must be present and must make and preserve his creation both in its innermost and outermost aspects. Therefore, indeed, he himself must be present in every single creation in its innermost and outermost being, on all sides, through and through, below and above, before and behind, so that nothing can be more truly present and within all creatures than God himself with his power.[24]

The incredible sense of the divine presence and power in every act of creation was a distinguishing trait of Luther's approach to creation. For Luther, the finite has the capacity for the infinite -- finitum capax infiniti -- and

thus all creatures and created things can exist for us as the "masks" of God:

> Then if his power and Spirit are present everywhere and in all things to the innermost and outermost degree, through and through, as it must be if he is to make and preserve all things everywhere, then his divine right hand, nature and majesty must also be everywhere.[25]

Because Luther believed that God acted through and was intimately present in the particularities of the world, he considered the daily, natural occurences of creation to be nothing less than miraculous. "He [Luther] had a rose in his hand and marveled at it. 'A glorious work of art by God,' he said. "If a man had the capacity to make just one rose he would be given an empire!'"[26] For Luther, existence represented so much more than mere matter; it was nothing less than the divine creation.

As was mentioned previously, Luther was not an "environmentalist" in our contemporary sense of the world. While he demonstrated an incredible sense of reverence for extrahuman nature, his primary ethical concern was for the neighbour. Thus beyond his awful sense of God's immanent providential presence in all of creation, Luther's concrete Christ-mysticism can be more fully understood in light of his emphasis on the incarnation and the presense of the "little Christ" in the neighbour. Luther insisted, as was pointed out in his critique of medieval scholasticism, that one cannot come to a saving knowledge of God based upon God's work in creation. It is only in Christ, in God's Word

incarnate, that we can truly come to know and experience God. Because of our inability to encounter God beyond any creative covering, Luther found the incarnation to to be the ultimate expression of God's love for the world. He wrote in his oft-cited Christmas sermon:

> Let us, then, meditate upon the Nativity just as we see it happening in our own babies. I would not have you contemplate the deity of Christ but rather his flesh. Look upon the Baby Jesus. Divinity may terrify man. Inexpressable majesty will crush him. That is why Christ took on our humanity, save for our sin, that he should not terrify us but rather with love and favor he should confirm and console.[27]

At the same time, the presence of the Word in creation does not overwhelm, negate or destroy the significance of the finite and the particular. The incarnation of the Word does not transform the world into a transhistorical, supranatural, or sacral reality but the earth is preserved in its finitude and secularity. The incarnation is an affirmation of the created order because God chose as the means of divine Self-revelation not to bypass created existence but to enter into the heart of our temporal world. God is present to us in the particular -- in the "Baby Jesus."

Luther believed that the significance of the incarnation was not simply relegated to a distant, historical event but that Christ continues to be a living reality in the life of the Christian. Unlike the more abstract varieties of mysticism, Luther's concrete Christ-mysticism could be described as a type of spirituality in which "the soul, being

grasped by the Spirit of God, does not go beyond itself into the abyss of the divine, but the Logos, the concreteness of the divine comes into the soul."[28] The particularity of life and the individual is not destroyed in the mystical union with Christ but it is preserved and maintained. It is in the concrete that we encounter the divine presence.

For Luther, it is only in particularities, in time and space, that one comes into contact with God's will. Revelation about the Creator/Redeemer-God never comes to us as a body of abstract truths nor as some divine information about supranatural matters. Revelation is never general or abstract but it has a particular, concrete intention; it has an existential impact on our lives. The only way we can come to "know" and encounter God then is to respond as God addresses us and meets us in our existence. In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "I never experience the reality of God without the reality of the world or the reality of the world without the reality of God."[29] To use a metaphor from the world of sports, it is impossible to do an "end run" around existence in order to meet God. There are no great spiritual highs which ignore concrete reality; rather, our spiritual experience must necessarily be bound up in the created which we encounter: one's spouse, the poor and marginalized, students, colleagues, co-workers, and, in keeping with the topic of this dissertation, the whole physical and biological realm.

Luther also understood that one's meeting with the God-presence in existence is not a one-time event. To the contrary, creation is "ongoing," creatio continua, in the sense that God continues to confront us in our many relationships. Every occurrence and every new reality gives us a new opportunity to encounter God and to respond to the divine will in creation. Our callings incessantly challenge us to see whether we will respond out of trust in the God of creation or out of trust in some other god. Creation is also "ongoing" in the sense that God does not meet us only in some ideal social or natural order but confronts us in everyday, existent reality.

For Luther, one of the ethical implications of responding to God's address in the particular is that all things created -- all knowledge, principles, ideologies and social and political structures -- are revealed to be ambiguous and conditional. One cannot take certain timeless truths or moral principles and use them as adequate moral and religious guides in life. Such an approach would negate the address-response nature of creation. God is not present to us in the timeless and the universal but is present in time and the particular. Our relationship to the divine presence in particularities, however, is not as such a relationship in which we get to know "more and more about God or about his eternal plans.....Concrete words are 'spoken' to us by God, not so that we should use them to 'figure out' the Speaker,

but so that we respond to them."[30] True attentiveness to God's Word-presence as it manifests itself in the everchanging needs of others requires that we respond not according to certain moral principles or guidelines but rather out of freedom and responsibility. Being bound to an ideology rather than being attentive to God's command is a form of bondage to the law. It is a sign of "works righteousness" in which we substitute some principle for God's will instead of being attentive to God's ongoing Word-presence in creation.[31]

Approaching the subject from another angle, the Word-presence in creation does not give any specific instructions to our hearts as to how we are to respond to the many callings of our various vocations. Luther writes, "Maybe you ask now what good works you are to do for your neighbor. The answer is that they cannot be named."[32] God's Word does not come as such a determinate body of commands; rather, one must be attentive to the specific needs of the neighbour. In our responses and interactions it is still necessary to collect the relevant information, to think, to study and gather the appropriate skills in order to do the work. We must attempt to tailor our responses to the particular situation. Existence is, in this sense, still a secular reality inasmuch as it is a sphere for rational and creative human activity. God's love is not manifested directly in the world but is to be expressed creatively

through Christian vocation.

Although Luther did not judge the world according to some ideal principle or set of absolute standards, this did not mean that he accepted the status quo unconditionally. Muendel notes that Luther is able to maintain both a prophetic critique and affirm the goodness of particularities by employing an alternative to the Platonic paradigm:

> Rather than using the schema of "ideal versus real" which cannot adequately affirm the "goodness" of time and the particular, Luther uses the schema of proper use and egocentric abuse to critically appraise created orders. With this schema, Luther can affirm the "goodness" of a whole range of different social, political, economic, familial, and religious orders that have arisen in history -- as "faces" or "instruments" of God's will -- and at the same time critique these orders when they become objects of worship and no longer serve the welfare of the neighbor.[33]

Attentiveness to particularities thus does not necessarily lead to a positivistic interpretation of existence. Rather, confidence in the creative will which transcends creation in its particularity allows human beings to exercise a prophetic critique.

Conclusion

From Luther's notion of the indirect nature of God's communication, we can see how he was able to establish the limits of creation's spiritual significance while at the same time promoting creation as the true and authentic realm of Christian discipleship. Because God transcends even divine Self-revelation, the Christian cannot attribute divinity to anything finite and created. In fact, appreciation of the

world's true secularity can only be maintained through a notion of divine transcendence. Because Luther saw that God's revelation was always indirect, he opposed, as was indicated in the first chapter, the sort of sacral interpretation of reality by the via antiqua. In opposition to medieval scholasticism, Luther sought to depopulate the world of its gods and demons. By the same token, he also opposed the new rationalism, which took the secularity of the world to an extreme by ignoring the issue of the divine governance of creation. Empirical and phenomenological positivism can be viewed as much a form of idolatry as the worship of inanimate objects.

Although Luther opposed such absolute and idolatrous attachments to physical existence, this did not lead him to a position of world-denial or of indifference towards the created order. To the contrary, Luther found that the indirect nature of God's Word allowed him to be more attentive to the particular circumstances of creation. The Word liberated the world for Luther from being a sacral reality and allowed it to be a sphere of human activity in which human beings could exist simply as creatures encountering the divine will through their fellow creatures. John M. Tonkin perhaps best summarizes Luther's interpretation of existence:

> If Luther's world is not a sacral reality impregnated with divine substance, it is nevertheless precisely in its secular character, a manifestation of the divine glory. If human

society is a sphere for creative and rational human activity, it neverthelss runs its course within the limits of a divinely appointed destiny. That is to say, the autonomy and independence which Luther accords to the secular order is real, but not absolute. Indeed, it is real precisely because it is not absolute, then the world would no longer be a free, open, neutral sphere of human activity but a religious reality, an idol. Luther's unequivocal acknowledgement of the transcendence of God and the thorougly contingent character of the secular order is, therefore, iconoclastic in intent -- it frees secular life both from a heteronomous sacral framework of understanding and from the incipient idolatry of naked secularism.[34]

Endnotes -- Chapter IV

[1]It must be acknowledged at this point that the following section is indebted to the scholarly appraisals of Muendel, "Indirect Communication", chapter 1.

[2]LW 1:11.

[3]LW 1:13.

[4]LW 1:11.

[5]LW 36:340.

[6]LW 37:60.

[7]LW 26:95.

[8]See Chapter III, pp. 67-70.

[9]Muendel, "Indirect Communication", p. 22.

[10]LW 1:15.

[11]Kazuo Muto, "'Immanent Transcendence' in Religion", trans. J. Van Bragt, Japanese Religions, 12 (1981), 1-20.

[12]Muendel, "Indirect Communication", p. 25.

[13]LW 26:95.

[14]Muendel, "Indirect Communication", p. 26

[15]WA.Briefe 4, 122.8 (No. 1042) cited by Tonkin, p. 137. The following two citations are also by Tonkin.

[16]WA.TR 5.184 (No. 5488), p. 138.

[17]WA.Tr 3.655.10 (No. 3861), p. 139.

[18]LW 13:221.

[19]A good interpretation of Luther's understanding of righteousness is that of Gerhard Ebeling, Luther -- An Introduction to His Thought, trans. R. A. Wilson, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), chapter 9.

[20]LW 26:340-343.

[21]Muendel, "Indirect Communication", p. 26.

[22]There exists some debate and speculation about the various tributaries to Luther's sense of divine ubiquity and his spiritual attentiveness to particularities. In the second chapter (endnote 14) I argued that Nominalism may have been in part an influence in this area, especially in Luther's critique of the via antiqua, but to the extent that Nominalism was the product of the medieval worldview which was no longer adequate, Nominalism could not provide the basis for a constructive articulation of this world's relationship to the divine. Luther rather appealed to Augustine as a traditional root for his constructive alternative to Scholasticism. Luther's concrete Christ-mysticism, however, must be differentiated from Augustininian / Neo-Platonic tradition. Muendel correctly notes that Luther's understanding of the indirect Word presence in creation is unlike the Logos theologies which suggest that there is an immanent link between creation and the Word which creates (Muendel, "Indirect Communication", p. 25.). For Luther, there was no direct link between the Word and creation but rather the Word's presence remains indirect (See LW 1:19). Tillich has noted that Luther's formulations for the divine presence in the sacraments is similar to that of Nicholas of Cusa but admits that it is doubtful that Luther was aquainted with the writings of Nicholas (Tillich, A History of Christian Thought, p. 373.). Bengt Hoffman in his work Luther and the Mystics (Minneapolis: Augusburg Publishing House, 1976) has done a detailed study on Luther's relationship to the German mystics, especially Tauler and Eckhart. This, in my opinion, seems to be the most likely root for Luther's attentiveness to the particular. Unfortunately, Hoffman's definition of German mysticism focuses more on the individual's experience of salvific grace rather than on creation mysticism. Hall also supports the theory that it was the German mystics who influenced Luther's understanding of the divine presence in creation (p. 221) and in addition posits Luther's attentiveness to the particular in his "peasant sensibility," and "German rootedness in the world," (pp. 114-115).

[23]Tillich, p. 173.

[24]LW 36:342.

[25]LW 36:61.

[26]LW 54:355-356.

[27]W. L. Jenkins, The Martin Luther Christmas Book, trans. Roland Bainton, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1948), p. 40.

[29]Tillich, p. 63.

[30]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics, ed. E. Bethge, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1955), p. 195. Wingren puts it this way, "God does not come to man in thoughts and feelings which well up in him when he isolates himself from the world, but rather in what happens to man in the external and tangible events which take place about him." Luther on Vocation, p. 117.

[31]Muendel, "Indirect Communication", p. 26.

[32]See Wingren, Luther on Vocation, p. 227.

[33]WA 10 I, 2, 38. cited by Wingren, Vocation, p. 48. Wingren adds in note 92 on page 49, "This passage has doubtless suffered redaction, but the thought about love's unnamed works fits very well with genuine Luther sources."

[34]Muendel, "Indirect Communication", p. 29.

[35]Tonkin, p. 148.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this dissertation, I suggested that if Christians are to make an efficacious response to the ecological crisis, it would be necessary to look back into the Christian tradition in order to find alternative ways of viewing the created realm -- ways which imbue nature with spiritual significance. Only when the Christian tradition reembraces and reformulates an attitude towards nature which challenges the dominant, exploitative attitude will the church be able to exercise a prophetic critique in the area of ecological ethics. Luther was not concerned with the environmental issues of our contemporary era; he cannot be interpreted as speaking directly to us as if with some great insight into our current problems. Nonetheless, I believe that his theology of creation can contribute in the search for an alternative tradition. It has the potentiality to provide not only the basis for a prophetic critique of our modern stance towards nature but also a positive articulation of humanity's responsibility for the created order.

Based on the discussions in this dissertation, I will now argue that there are three primary aspects of Luther's theology of creation which could provide a basis for a modern ecological ethic: (A) Luther's approach to nature represents not only an alternative to the dominant, modern understanding but also a tradition which could be viable in our context,

(B) Luther's emphasis on the spiritual import of nature provides the basis for a prophetic critique against our contemporary approach towards nature and, (C) Luther's understanding of the limits of nature's spiritual significance (his affirmation of divine transcendence) guards against the dangers inherent in nature-romanticism.

A. Luther's Theology of Creation as a Viable Alternative

In the first chapter of this dissertation, it was established that Luther's theology of creation did represent an alternative to the two dominant interpretations of reality in the sixteenth century: that of the via antiqua and that of the emerging rationality of the via moderna and the new humanism. In opposition to the former view of the world, Luther saw that nature was not such a sacral reality that it could be used in theological pursuits to define the nature of God. For Luther, God was not to be found through the glories of created existence but in God's Self-revelation on the cross.

Luther's opposition to the medieval synthesis, however, does not make him a contributor to a more modern view of reality. In opposition to the secular understanding of the world forwarded by some of Luther's contemporaries, he argued that God is not so removed from creation that the world no longer has spiritual import.

In terms of the contemporary usefulness of Luther's understanding of reality, it is fortunate that Luther stood

apart both from medieval scholasticism and the emerging modern rationality. For while there are actually many alternative ways of viewing nature in the Christian tradition which would be critical of our present understanding, it must be maintained that not all would be equally useful in the modern context. For example, I would argue that the traditionally sacral, heteronomous interpretation of reality present in the via antiqua would not be viable in our epoch because it is difficult for our contemporaries to identify with the project of trying to maintain both the sacred and the secular in a synthetic relationship. There is no longer the anticipation among those who have inherited the Enlightenment tradition and values that the world will continue to provide evidence to support the existence of God. Luther, in this sense, could be viewed as a more "modern" thinker insofar as he held that one should not have to be dishonest about the nature of existence in order to believe in God. Luther's position -- that the divine essence cannot be determined from nature -- gives persons of our age a point of commonality with him.

Luther's rejection of the medieval synthesis, however, cannot be interpreted as unqualified support for the "modern" interpretation of the world. He found that within a purely empirical approach to existence, if taken as a comprehensive worldview, lay an incipient idolatry of finite, physical existence. While the position of the via moderna and the

emerging rationality of the sixteenth century cannot be precisely equated with our contemporary way of approaching the world, both positions, nonetheless, have the tendency to interpret existence as a purely secular sphere -- devoid of any theological significance. In Luther's opposition to the emerging rationality of the sixteenth century, we find that he opposed such a one-dimensional interpretation of reality. Luther's theology of creation thus represents a viable alternative tradition in two ways: it is sufficiently like our contemporary understanding of the world so that we can, in some way, identify with Luther and, simultaneously, it is sufficiently unlike the dominant, modern way of viewing reality with its inherent disrespect for creation so that we can establish a critical distance from our contemporary worldview.

B. The Spiritual Significance of Creation

In the second and third chapters, I explored more fully Luther's understanding of the "goodness" and the spiritual dimension of the created order. For Luther, nature has spiritual significance because it is through the physical and the created that God maintains our existence. He affirmed that God not only sustains our existence through creation but God also comes intimately and personally bound up in these gifts. It is here that Luther's creation-mysticism (finitum capax infiniti) and his understanding of divine ubiquity was first discussed. God's immanence was understood by Luther in

the light of the knowledge that God was the active, willing, subject of all acts of creation. Without God personally sustaining existence, without the ongoing divine presence, the creation would come to an end.

It is in the emphasis on the spiritual significance of nature that Luther provides his most significant contribution to a modern ecological ethic, namely, the basis for a prophetic critique of our dominant societal values and structures. Unlike our contemporary manner of seeing nature as unpossessed by a spiritual dimension, Luther emphasized that there exists in creation a depth and meaning which transcends nature in its particularity. Because there exists a transcendent/spiritual dimension in creation, we cannot treat nature with any sort of sovereign freedom but our interactions with physical existence have ethical significance. In other words, Luther emphasizes that nature is not mere matter but that it is creation -- a sign both of God's graciousness and intimate presence in the world. Applied to the modern context, the belief that nature exists as creation implies that our treatment of nature must go beyond a quest for causation, production, and technique; it must go beyond a treatment of nature as a mere commodity and once again be concerned with issues of purpose and meaning.

In the third chapter, I dealt with the spiritual significance of creation in terms of creation's role in communicating God's will to others. For Luther, God's

creation not only provides for our existence but we also, inescapably, experience God's address to us through all of existence. In other words, creation exists as a Word of God. The Word in creation works to affirm reality and the created order by confronting us with certain tasks and responsibilities in life, namely to care for the welfare of creation.

Luther's concept that creation exists as a medium of God's Word calls forth both human participation in, and responsibility for, the world. While Luther sees God as the subject and author of all of creation, his approach to creation is not one of fatalistic determination. We are not passively immersed in the natural and social processes, nor are there predetermined responses to life; rather, we are capable of participation in the whole created order. In other words, we human beings are invited and urged to participate in the divine governance of creation -- something of creation is left up to us.

Luther's sense that God's grace is experienced only through the concrete (his creation-mysticism) further works to emphasize human responsibility for the world. Because Luther sees the locus of divine activity, not primarily in ideas or cerebral ratiocination or abstracted faith or principles, but as a concrete address in existence, he works to restore the priority of the world to theology. Faith is lived, not in abstraction from the world nor as a flight from

creation, but as a concrete decision to respond in trust to God's Word-presence as it confronts us in all of existential reality. The Gospel does not shield us from the imperative to care for creation but it opens up this imperative for the very first time. It is only when we see existence as God's creation and comprehend that it is good for us to be burdened with the many tasks and responsibilities in life that we can be free to respond to God's commands.

What the restoration of the world to theology means in the search for a modern, ecological ethic is that environmental concern cannot be seen merely as a peripheral, ethical concern but rather as a fundamental outgrowth of evangelical faith and commitment. We modern Christians can no longer continue to act as if there were no spiritual import to our interactions with nature. Because God confronts us and is present in all of existence, all of life has moral and spiritual significance. To claim neutrality in our interactions with nature is to side with death and destruction. In the world, when all life in the biosphere is threatened from so many directions, we are becoming increasingly aware of the necessity to affirm life on this planet and its existence. We are called to wrest from technocracy's distortion and abuse of the world God's good intentions for preserving life.

C. A Sense of Divine Transcendence

While the second and third chapters dealt with the

spiritual significance of creation -- both in terms of its providential nature and in terms of creation as God's Word or address to humanity -- in the fourth chapter, I defined the limits Luther places on this spiritual dimension. For Luther, creation always remains creaturely; it exists under the sign of finitude even though creation is a medium of divine revelation. There is nothing about creation itself which is divine or eternal and therefore creation is not worthy of our absolute trust. Nevertheless, creation does have spiritual significance because it is in concrete, everyday, ordinary, existent reality that we encounter God's will and Word.

While Luther's theology of creation contributes to a modern, ecological ethic in that it proclaims the spiritual import of nature, its capacity to maintain a sense of divine transcendence in this immanent presence is also significant in the contemporary search for an ecological ethic. Luther asserted that because of the indirect nature of God's presence in creation, one cannot sacralize the created order. The notion that God continues to transcend even divine Self-revelation, however, reveals all things created -- all knowledge, principles, ideologies and social and political structures -- to be ambiguous and conditional. What the reclamation of a sense of divine transcendence provides in a search for an ecological ethic is, firstly, a basis on which

to critique human experience and aspirations. Human nature and needs are not the judge of all things and extrahuman nature does have a value beyond its utility for humans. Secondly, a contemporary, ecological ethic cannot be based on some notion of an ideal or original created order. Such unbridled nature-romanticism or idealistic utopianism would be equivalent to claiming a direct, divine presence in the created order. In recent years Christian theologians with an emancipatory commitment, in response to the increased interest in theologies of nature, have articulated how romantic images of nature work to legitimate the oppression of the poor and marginalized.[1]

In addition, Luther's insistence that Christians must be attentive to the particular in which we encounter God also has implications for ecological ethics. Just as there are no great spiritual experiences which, from the perspective of Luther's concrete Christ-mysticism, bypass created reality, so too there can be no Christian, ecological ethic which is done in a vaccuum or is abstracted from the concrete realities of everday existence. This, as Gregory Baum has noted, means that a Christian ecological ethic must always be developed in the context of our human interaction with creation and, particularly, in the context of our contemporary means of production.[2] Or, in Luther's Words: "What love is must show itself in relation to time and place."[3]

Martin Luther's theology of creation represents an attempt to articulate the relationship of the world and its activities to the divinity which takes into consideration both the divine immanence and transcendence. Luther does not provide an environmental ethic as such. He was more concerned about issues of human salvation than the well-being of extrahuman nature. Luther does, however, provide a method and a basis for approaching environmental concern in his understanding of the relationship of the world to the divinity. In my estimation, the potential in Luther's theology of creation to contribute to a modern ecological ethic is great, providing as it does both a way in which to assess critically the dominant, exploitative approach to nature and a positive articulation of humanity's responsibility for the created order.

For Luther, creation does have spiritual significance; hence, in contradistinction to our contemporary, exploitative stance towards nature, human interactions with nature must be concerned with issues of purpose and meaning. At the same time, creation is not such a sacral reality that one can discern God's nature and will from the created order. It is only in God's Self-revelation -- in Christ -- that we can come to know God. Thus on the one hand, Luther challenges the dominant modern assumptions that the Christian faith and human activity in the world exist in mutually exclusive realms. In opposition to these views, through his

creation-mysticism, Luther urges human responsibility for the world and a radical commitment to care for the well-being of the created order. On the other hand, he insists that our attachment to the world must not be absolute. This opposition to an idolatrous attachment to creation liberates the world from a sacral, heteronomous framework and it opens the world to be a sphere of human activity in which one can exist simply as a creature encountering the divine will through the rest of creation. While Luther was not faced with the ecological concerns of our epoch, there exists, in his theology of creation, a potentiality for a contemporary, ecological ethic which occurs in a creative tension between God's immanent presence in and transcendence of the created order.

Endnotes -- Conclusion

[1]See Freda Rajote, "Creation Theology at the W.C.C." The Ecumenist, 26 (1988), 85-89.

[2]Gregory Baum, "Work, Nature and Religion," Arc, 18 (1990), 5-9.

[3]WA 56. 511, cited by Wingren, Vocation, p. 118.

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