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Theological and Spiritual Influences on Bockmuehl

WHICH THEOLOGIANs AND SPIRITUAL leaders as well as theological and spiritual traditions played a part in molding Bockmuehl's theology and particularly his understanding of the Holy Spirit and Christian ethics? For instance, who does Bockmuehl draw on for support when expounding his key concept of the guidance by the Spirit? These and similar questions we shall explore in this chapter.

The influences on Bockmuehl are catalogued in chronological order as it would be difficult, and somewhat arbitrary, to arrange this chapter according to the importance of the different influences upon him. Furthermore, I will outline not only direct influences but also affinities and casual parallels to Bockmuehl's thought. In fact, similarities cannot always be traced back far enough in order to decide with certainty if there was a direct influence or just a casual parallel. In either case, however, this gives us valuable information about Bockmuehl's theological and spiritual background.

It is characteristic of Bockmuehl that we have to deal with a variety of influences.¹ As well as encountering a number of spiritual leaders and theologians in person, he invested time in reading and examining spiritual and theological traditions. Even though he benefited greatly from several traditions, he was at the same time aware of their limitedness as the following statement by him shows: "In theology (and in the church in general) it is always imperative never to accept anybody's teaching unexamined,

1. It should be noted that the influences we are going to examine in this chapter were not his only ones, though they were the most significant.

never to become anyone's unconditional disciple. All human theology is but a broken, or partial, reflection of God's truth, like a mirror with blind spots, or defects, unevennesses or curvatures which enlarge one part of the mirrored object, and unduly reduce others. In short, theology always gives a rendering that in some way is either defective or out of proportion."²

We may, therefore, conclude that Bockmuehl strove to arrive at his theological stance by testing the various different views according to 1 Thessalonians 5:21: "Test everything. Hold on to the good."³

In turning now to the different influences upon Bockmuehl, we will focus primarily on the main issues that are distinctive in his thought, above all, Christian ethics and the Holy Spirit.

The Church Fathers and Medieval Theologians/Saints

When reading Bockmuehl, it is striking how often he refers to the Church Fathers and medieval theologians/saints. Bockmuehl was clearly influenced by them, particularly with regard to spirituality, including the topics of *love for God* and *guidance by the Holy Spirit*.

When repudiating Luther's contention that *love for God* should be expressed by way of loving one's neighbor, Bockmuehl draws on such Church Fathers and medieval theologians as St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Bernard of Clairvaux for support. In them he finds advocates for his conviction that the double commandment of love, first and foremost direct love for God, yet also love for one's neighbor, should be the central theme of ethics.⁴ When looking at the motivation for doing good works, Bockmuehl refers to Bernard's exposition of the three stances, each representing a different motivation: the slave works out of fear, the mercenary works to gain a reward, and the son acts out of love for his father. He uses the illustration of the son, which he sees reflected in Jesus' own life, to picture the kind of attitude we should have toward God's commission.⁵

2. Bockmuehl, "Karl Barth," 32.

3. Cf. Bockmuehl, "Introduction," 103.

4. Cf. GG, 84, 272, 515. It is striking, when looking at the name index, how often Bockmuehl refers to these three theologians in his book *Gesetz und Geist*; cf. 533–37. See also M. Bockmuehl, "To Love God," 45–46.

5. *LbG*, 29. Bockmuehl, furthermore, agrees with Bernard that the command to love God will always be opposed by some, if not verbally, then by their way of living. Cf. GG, 515.

The second point we observe is that Bockmuehl's last book, *Listening to the God who Speaks*, in particular, reveals his great indebtedness to the Church Fathers and medieval theologians/saints regarding the topic of *guidance by the Holy Spirit*. Thus, in order to show that God speaks and guides directly through the Holy Spirit, he not only refers to Scripture but also to the "Luminaries in Church History," such as Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi, Patrick, Ansgar, Thomas à Kempis and Johannes Tauler.⁶ Besides examining their writings with regard to guidance, Bockmuehl particularly draws attention to the fact that the lives of these Church Fathers, saints, and missionaries illustrate the variety of ways in which God gives guidance, either through an external voice (e.g., Augustine, Patrick), a dream (e.g., Augustine's mother), a vision (e.g., Francis of Assisi, Patrick, Ansgar), or, most commonly, through an inner voice. An important witness to this inner guidance is Augustine, who Bockmuehl describes as "perhaps the greatest theologian and teacher in the history of the Christian church after apostolic times."⁷ In his *Confessions*, for instance, Augustine reflects upon his experience of inner guidance: "You have walked everywhere at my side, O Truth, teaching me what to seek and what to avoid, whenever I laid before you the things that I was able to see in this world below and asked you to counsel me . . . [F]or you, the Truth, are the unfailing Light from which I sought counsel upon all these things, asking whether they were, what they were, and how they were to be valued. But I heard you teaching me and I heard the commands you gave."⁸ Bockmuehl not only refers to this text in his last book *Listening to the God who Speaks*, but he also uses it in the final chapter of *Law and Spirit (Gesetz und Geist)* as evidence for his conviction that God still speaks today.⁹ Similarly, he draws directly on Augustine's interpretation of Galatians 5:18 for support when linking Christian freedom with the guidance of the Spirit.¹⁰

The other main advocate he mentions with regard to guidance by the Spirit is Bernard of Clairvaux, whom Bockmuehl held in high esteem and whom he considered to have made an invaluable contribution to Christian spirituality. According to Bockmuehl, Bernard regarded the concept of the "inward testimony of the Holy Spirit [*testimonium Spiritus sancti*

6. LG, 101–17; cf. Dietz, "Mystik ist alles," 81–82.

7. LG, 103.

8. Augustine, *Confessions* 10.40 (pp. 248–49); cf. Augustine, *Confessions* 11.3 (p. 256); LG, 105.

9. Cf. GG, 517–18. See also GG, 245, 374.

10. Cf. GG, 526.

internum]"¹¹ to be crucial for the Christian life. He agrees with Bernard that the internal witness of the Holy Spirit is, first of all, the source for the illumination of Scripture by making it personal as well as making it individually relevant and, secondly, the source acting alongside Scripture for concrete, individual commission or instruction concerning our way of living. It is, therefore, rather unfortunate, in Bockmuehl's opinion, that the Reformers reduced the internal witness of the Holy Spirit only to the first source.¹² Consequently, he pleads for a rediscovery of the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit alongside Scripture consonant with Augustine and Bernard.¹³ At the same time, however, he is aware of the danger of overemphasizing the personal inspiration at the expense of Scripture. Significantly, when illustrating the right balance between Scripture and Holy Spirit, Bockmuehl twice cites these words by Augustine with approval: "How we are to please not men, but God, I am being told by Him, from Whom all healthy admonition derives, be they found in Scripture or perceived in the innermost soul."¹⁴ Bockmuehl concludes from this quote that Augustine was aware that these two sources for moral guidance, Scripture and the soul, which Bockmuehl identifies with divine, personal inspiration, do not contradict each other. As a matter of fact, to be "steeped in Scripture"¹⁵ seemed to be an indispensable precondition for the medieval theologians/saints in order to legitimate the received insight and to experience the personal guidance.¹⁶

11. *LG*, 107. However, this term is probably only mentioned explicitly from the time of Protestant orthodox theology onward, though the issue itself can be found much earlier. David Hollatz, for instance, mentions several times "*internum Spiritus Sancti testimonium*" in his chapter on Holy Scripture. (Hollatz, *Examen theologicum acroamaticum*, Q 28, p. 161, Q. 31, pp. 173, 178.) See also references to Johann Gerhard regarding the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit in Kirste, *Das Zeugnis des Geistes*, 203–4.

12. Cf. *GG*, 245 (Luther); 374–77 (Calvin).

13. Cf. *GG*, 242–5, 417–8; *LG*, 107–9.

14. Augustine, *Letters of Saint Augustine* 22.2.8, as cited by Bockmuehl in *LG*, 106, 147; cf. *GG*, 243.

15. *LG*, 111; cf. *ibid.*, 106 (Augustine), 113 (Patrick), 116 (Thomas à Kempis). Particularly interesting is the fact that Bockmuehl, while lecturing at St. Chrischona, regularly met with one of his friends to read a thorough biography on Augustine and looked up many of the references given. Moreover, he tried to read a passage from Bernard's book *opera omnia* daily during the last ten years of his life. At the same time, he loved to read biographies of saints such as Francis of Assisi or Teresa of Avila. (E. Bockmuehl, interview.)

16. Cf. *LG*, 106, 147; *GG* 243.

When we turn now to the issue of the works of supererogation (*opera supererogationis*), i.e., works that “go beyond the call of duty and commandment,”¹⁷ it is by no means surprising to learn that Bockmuehl frequently draws on Church Fathers such as Ambrosius, Chrysostomos, and Augustine for support, since his concern is to recover this concept after it had been abandoned by the Reformers.¹⁸ It is, furthermore, striking that Bockmuehl outlines the distinct concept of Clement of Alexandria in length, since he agrees with Clement that there are two stages in ethics that can be characterized by the terms “servant” and “friend,” or “law” and “Spirit.” Contrary to most Church Fathers and medieval theologians, whom Bockmuehl criticizes accordingly, Clement does not identify the two stages with two different groups of Christians but wants to see both stages applied in every Christian’s life.¹⁹ Bockmuehl, furthermore, stresses the importance of Clement’s concept because it not only includes tasks related to the sustaining of life but also those related to church-building activities.²⁰

When writing on *ethical topics*, Bockmuehl also refers several times to various Church Fathers and medieval theologians.²¹ His article on the assessment of abortion in the early church, in which he outlines the biblical perspective as well as the testimony of the Church Fathers, is rather uncommon for Protestant ethics. Regarding the view of the Church Fathers, Bockmuehl states that the majority judged abortion to be murder. Only if the life of the mother was in danger did they allow abortion.²² Bockmuehl’s reasoning shows that the testimony of the Church Fathers had normative relevance for him as long as it did not contradict the Bible. Thus, he valued it as a spiritual legacy.

The Reformers

That Bockmuehl pastored a Protestant church for several years itself suggests that the theology of the Reformers entered his theology in some way or other. In this context, it is particularly interesting to discover that the

17. Bockmuehl, “Recovering Vocation,” 96.

18. Cf. GG, 292–94, 304, 308.

19. Cf. GG, 201–94, 294–96.

20. Cf. GG, 296.

21. See, e.g., CW, 11–15; Bockmuehl, “On Wealth and Stewardship,” 50.

22. Cf. Bockmuehl, “Die Beurteilung der Abtreibung,” 63–75; Bockmuehl, “Dogmatisches zur Tauffrage,” 10; CW, 97.

PART ONE—Bockmuehl's Theological Work

Evangelical Church of the Rhineland as well as the Evangelical Church of Baden, in which he served for several years, unites Lutheran and Reformed churches, unlike some other church dioceses in Germany.²³ Thus, Arthur D. Thomas correctly draws attention to the fact that Bockmuehl “claimed both Martin Luther and John Calvin as theological models for his life.”²⁴ And yet, this does not exclude a clear preference for the Reformed tradition, which can be seen by his request that he made in 1961 to be placed in a Reformed church while serving as an assistant pastor.²⁵

Besides this biographical evidence, Bockmuehl's theological work gives further indication of the Reformers' influence upon him. Throughout great parts of his life Bockmuehl was engaged in a study of the writings of the Reformers and the implications of their theology for today. In December 1979, Bockmuehl explicitly mentioned in a circular letter to his friends that he had spent most of the summer of 1978 reading a variety of books written by Luther in order to collect material for a detailed analysis and critical appreciation of the heritage of Protestant ethics.²⁶ He completed this project in 1987 by publishing the aforementioned profound and voluminous treatise *Law and Spirit: A Critical Appreciation of the Heritage of Protestant Ethics*.

When comparing this late work to some of his earlier articles, for example, “Regarding the Question of the Ethical Authority of the Bible”²⁷ as well as “Concerning the Validity of the Ten Commandments for Today,”²⁸ it is apparent that Bockmuehl became increasingly critical toward the Reformers even though he continued to appreciate their contribution. For instance, in 1966, Bockmuehl still traced the lack of a sound pneumatology in Protestantism—particularly in connection with Christian ethics—back to “specific developments within the second generation of the Reformation,”²⁹ referring to Lutheran Orthodox theologians in particular. Conversely, in his book *Law and Spirit*, he suggests that the origin of the

23. Some provinces belonging to the Evangelical Church in Germany are still purely Lutheran or Reformed. Cf. Hanacek, “Archive,” n.p.

24. Thomas, “Spirituality of Klaus Bockmuehl: Part One,” 2.

25. E. Bockmuehl, interview.

26. Cf. circular letter written by Bockmuehl Dec. 26, 1979, 2.

27. German title: “Zur Frage nach der Maßgeblichkeit der Bibel für die Ethik.” This article is a revised version of a paper that Bockmuehl presented at a conference in Dortmund/Germany in 1966.

28. German title: “Über die Geltung der Zehn Gebote heute.” The first draft of this article is based on a sermon that Bockmuehl preached on Nov. 12, 1966 in Heidelberg.

29. Bockmuehl, “Zur Frage nach der Maßgeblichkeit,” 48.

deficiency can, to a great extent, already be found in the theology of the Reformers.³⁰ Nevertheless, Bockmuehl often refers to the Reformers, in particular to Luther, as his advocate on many different issues.³¹ Yet, concerning his references to Luther, he admits that those citations are not always necessarily Luther's main thrust. Furthermore, he makes it very plain when he differs from Luther or Calvin. This reveals, on the one hand, his enormous admiration for the Reformers and, on the other hand, his recognition of their humanness, i.e., their fallibility. Bockmuehl thus calls for a critical evaluation of one's own confessional position in the light of the biblical text, in order to avoid a naïve identification of one's own confessional position with that of Scripture.³² This is exactly what Bockmuehl endeavors to do, for instance, in his detailed study *Law and Spirit*. In the first volume Bockmuehl analyzes the ethics of the confessional writings of the Reformation; he thus chooses those writings that he regards as being generally recognized by most churches of the Reformation tradition. However, due to illness, he was unfortunately unable to carry out his plan to devote a second volume to the "study of the origins of Protestant ethics in the literature of Martin Luther" and a third to the "outlining of the reception of this heritage in the nineteenth and twentieth century."³³

We now take a closer look at those issues that Bockmuehl advocated strongly and those that he felt urged to engage with critically when turning to the Reformers. This analysis will be limited to an examination of the influence of Luther and Calvin on Bockmuehl, taking into account his own interpretation of the Reformers' theology. It is not our concern in this part of our study to deal with the various confessional theologies within the Reformed and Lutheran traditions that have been generated throughout the last five centuries.

30. Cf. GG, 517–19.

31. Cf. Bockmuehl, "Great Commandment," 13, 22–23; Bockmuehl, "The Ten Commandments," 29, 32, 37.

32. Cf. GG, 530. Similarly, Barth did not shrink from critically evaluating Reformation theology as he states himself: "I have been led to a *critical* (in a better sense of the word) discussion of church tradition, and as well of the Reformers, and especially of Calvin" (Barth, *How I changed*, 43).

33. GG, 26.

Creation Ethics

The first thing to note is that Bockmuehl attaches the greatest significance to the Reformers' emphasis on creation ethics, including the creation and preservation ordinances. In this context, Bockmuehl acknowledges that the Reformers brought about a necessary and invaluable change in ethics.³⁴ Contrary to the conviction of the medieval church that Christian perfection and true Christianity can only be found in monasticism, hence, in the separation of the sacred and the profane, Bockmuehl asserts that "[t]he Reformation refuses to set the sacred apart; it moves into the profane world, declaring all of it sacred, because of its quality of being God's creation."³⁵ This sanctification of the profane had, in Bockmuehl's view, far-reaching consequences for the understanding of ethics.

First of all, it brought the cultural mandate back into focus along with the "tasks of stewardship in creation"³⁶—e.g., preserving the life of one's neighbor and of community. According to Bockmuehl, this, in turn, reveals the central role that the neighbor plays in Reformation ethics, thereby conforming with biblical ethics.³⁷ The second consequence of the sanctification of the profane was, what Bockmuehl calls, an "ethics for the layperson" (*Laisierung der Ethik*)³⁸ due to the Reformers' dismissal of the medieval belief of an elite-ethics for the few. Hence, not only the monk but even the lay person in the profane world was expected to, and was deemed to be capable of, living a Christian lifestyle and could thus be called a saint. They were, however, expected to fulfill their duties according to their civil vocation or "station in life."³⁹ This brings us to the third consequence: the unequaled honoring of the civil vocation or station in life by the Reformers. It was their conviction that true Christian service did not consist of withdrawing from secular stations in life and vocations but rather of serving God precisely in the different stations in life such as in the family, e.g., as a parent, in the society, and in the state.⁴⁰ Despite

34. Cf. GG, 209–10, 214.

35. Bockmuehl, "Secularism and Theology," 50; cf. Bockmuehl, "Recovering Vocation," 88–90; Bockmuehl, "Secularization and Secularism," 55.

36. Bockmuehl, "Recovering Vocation," 95. Bockmuehl greatly appreciated the Reformers' unique recapturing of "the biblical domestic ethos in its time" (GG, 527).

37. Cf. CW, 25; GG, 81, 93.

38. GG, 210.

39. Bockmuehl, "Recovering Vocation," 91; cf. *ibid.*, 90; GG, 210; Althaus, *Ethics*, 38–39.

40. Bockmuehl, "Recovering Vocation," 90–91; Althaus, *Ethics*, 38–41. We are

the fact that, as we shall see later, Bockmuehl criticizes “a narrowness of the term of (civil) vocation”⁴¹ and the exclusiveness of the civil vocation as the only principle for differentiation and individualization of ethics, he approves of the Reformers’ recovery of the civil vocation for ethics.⁴²

The Significance of the Law

Besides the fact, as we have just seen, that “Luther’s ethics is an ethics of station and vocation,”⁴³ Bockmuehl also mentions the great significance of the law, particularly the Decalogue, for Reformation ethics: “That Christian ethics has its foundation in the Ten Commandments is in my opinion set forth convincingly by Luther. One will certainly complete one’s study of the first chapter of the Large Catechism with the utmost respect, indeed, with admiration, satisfaction, acclaim, and gratitude.”⁴⁴ According to Bockmuehl, the Reformers not only recovered the Decalogue for ethics in a comprehensive way, writing numerous expositions of it, but also defended the validity and importance of the law for the believer.⁴⁵

In this context, Bockmuehl points to Calvin’s *Institutes* that distinguishes between three main functions of the law: first, the accusing function (*usus elencticus legis*), i.e., exposing sin (“mirror”), secondly, the civil function (*usus politicus*), i.e., preserving civic peace (“halter”/“bridle”) and, thirdly, the function for the regenerated (*usus legis in renatis*), i.e., instructing the Christian about good works (“rule”).⁴⁶ Particularly with view to antinomians, Calvin emphasized strongly that Christ, despite the fact that he abolished the curse of the law, did not remove or change the content of the law. Instead, through regeneration, the believer is freed to

aware that there are differences between Luther’s and Calvin’s concept of vocation. However, since the main thrust of their concepts is very similar, as Bockmuehl points out, a more detailed analysis is not necessary for our purposes. Cf. GG, 211–13, 335–38.

41. GG, 233.

42. Cf. GG, 211–12, 214, 217.

43. Althaus, *Ethics*, 41.

44. GG, 111; cf. *ibid.*, 119; Bockmuehl, “Gebote, Zehn,” 188.

45. Cf. GG, 323; CW, 16. Bockmuehl contends that despite the fact that the Decalogue did already gain some importance from the thirteenth century onward, it was due to the Reformation that the Decalogue was recovered again. Cf. GG, 210.

46. Calvin, *Institutes* 2.7.7, 10/11, 13; cf. 2.7.6–17; GG, 323–24; Leith, *John Calvin’s Doctrine*, 49–50.

obey the law willingly and is provided with the necessary ability to keep it. Hence, Calvin viewed the third use of the law to be the main one.⁴⁷

Regarding Luther's understanding of the third use of the law, the later Bockmuehl asserts that, though Luther did not use the same terminology as Calvin, the subject matter itself can be found in his works.⁴⁸ This was and still is a contested issue among Lutheran scholars. However, according to Engelbrecht, the scholarly consensus throughout the second half of the twentieth century has been that Luther did not teach the third use of the law.⁴⁹ Bockmuehl himself, in his early article "Revolution of Ethics" (1971), argues that "Luther himself had never spoken of any such 'third use' of the Law. It was the Holy Spirit who was the teacher and would tell the believers all the time what to do in the actual application of the commandments."⁵⁰ Later, however, Bockmuehl takes it for granted that the subject matter of the "third use" can already be found in Luther. For instance, he points out that for Luther, according to his *Thesis concerning Faith and Law* (1535), only those who are perfectly filled with the Holy Spirit will be able to discern everything correctly and thus be able to create new Decalogues.⁵¹ Yet, because every Christian remains constantly *simul justus et peccator* and cannot therefore claim not to err, contrary to the apostles, it is better to adhere to the commandments.⁵² Bockmuehl concludes that, for Luther, the law continues to play a role in the life of the Christian.⁵³ That this role was not only negative, i.e., exposing sin, but also positive, i.e., leading the believer, can best be seen, according to Bockmuehl, in the following quotation in Luther's commentary on Galatians written in 1519: "[T]he Commandments are necessary, not in order that we may be justified by doing the works they enjoin, but in order that as

47. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 2.7.12; GG, 323–24; Leith, *John Calvin's Doctrine*, 48–49.

48. Cf. Bockmuehl, "Protestant Ethics," 105; GG, 55.

49. Cf. Engelbrecht, *Friends*, xiii–xiv; GG, 455–8; Bockmuehl, "Der Streit," 96, 100–101.

50. Bockmuehl, "Revolution," 57.

51. Cf. Bockmuehl, "Der Streit," 100–101; Bockmuehl, "Ten Commandments," 135–36; GG, 317.

52. Cf. Luther, "Theses concerning Faith and Law," 112–13; Bockmuehl, "Der Streit," 100; CW, 135–36.

53. It is worth quoting Bernhard Lohse who holds a similar view to Bockmuehl's with regard to Luther's understanding of the law: "Luther actually assumed a persistence of the law into eternity . . . The law is and remains God's Word" (Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 275).

persons who are already righteous we may know how our spirit should crucify the flesh and direct us in the affairs of this life.”⁵⁴

Hence, when arguing against antinomistic tendencies in contemporary Christian ethics, it should not be surprising to discover that Bockmuehl refers regularly to the Reformers in order to strengthen his argument regarding the continuing validity of the law for the believer.⁵⁵

Such observations indicate clearly that, “[a]s one who belonged to both the Reformed and Lutheran traditions, Bockmuehl inherited Calvin’s teaching of ‘the third use of the law,’”⁵⁶ as Arthur D. Thomas asserts. Thus, the great value that Bockmuehl attached to the Ten Commandments for Christian ethics, apparent when looking at his lecture notes published in the book *The Christian Way of Living: An Ethics of the Ten Commandments*, can be traced back to the influence of the Reformers. This is confirmed by the fact that Luther and Calvin are the two theologians he most frequently refers to.⁵⁷ Furthermore, according to Neuer, it is especially Bockmuehl’s seminal work *Law and Spirit* that best reflects Bockmuehl’s conviction that “the return to the Reformation ethics of the Decalogue would demonstrate an essential and inevitable step toward the renewal of Protestant theology for which he was striving.”⁵⁸

While Bockmuehl’s criticism of the Reformers’ ethics will be examined in more depth at the beginning of Part Two, it is worth mentioning the greatest charge he brings against the Reformers, namely, the charge to have reduced Christian ethics merely to vocation and the Decalogue. Instead, as Bockmuehl points out, Christian ethics should also comprise specific Christian actions such as love toward God, spirituality, church-building activities—including evangelism, teaching, and service (*diakonia*)—and “differential ethics,” in particular the guidance of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁹

54. Luther, “Galatians—1519,” 232. Bockmuehl cites this quotation in GG 55. Cf. CW, 22; GG, 317.

55. Cf. Bockmuehl, “Ten Commandments,” 131, 133, 135–36; Bockmuehl, “Der Streit,” 100; Bockmuehl, “Zur Frage nach der Maßgeblichkeit,” 45; SU, 24–29; Bockmuehl, “Problem der Ethik,” 77–78. Bockmuehl even points out that “[d]uring the last decade of his life, Luther himself battled with all his might against those theologians who denied the need for holiness, whom he called ‘the antinomians’” (Bockmuehl, “Keeping His Commandments,” 95).

56. Thomas, “Spirituality of Klaus Bockmuehl: Part Two,” 30.

57. Cf. CW, 137–38.

58. Neuer, “Weite,” 3.

59. Cf. GG, 514; see also 25, 217, 287, 513; CM, 115–16; Bockmuehl, “Recovering Vocation,” 83–87.

Love for God

Regarding the issue *love for God*, we discover that Bockmuehl identifies love for God with love for one's neighbor in one of his earliest publications, his doctoral thesis. In the second edition twenty years later, however, he describes this identification, which in his view stemmed from Luther, as a gross error and a distortion of the Christian message.⁶⁰ Bockmuehl expounds Luther's position in more detail in his book *Law and Spirit*, drawing attention to the fact that Luther and Melancthon mainly focused on loving one's neighbor while neglecting direct love for God. This he considers to be a reaction "to the medieval linking of God's love with the doctrine of justification. As the Reformation lets go of one it also loses the other."⁶¹ Despite the fact that Luther rightly rejected the medieval doctrine of justification, Bockmuehl believes that Luther's negligence of love for God as the central theme of theology and ethics was an invalid overreaction.⁶²

Significantly, it is where Bockmuehl judges Luther to have been over-cautious of avoiding the medieval position, and thereby misinterpreting Scripture, that he feels unable to follow him.

As far as the Reformed tradition is concerned, the assessment turns out to be quite the opposite. Bockmuehl, in fact, praises the Reformed tradition for their recovery of the central position of the double commandment of love for Christian ethics. He even declares that "love for God, namely, as the intention to direct one's whole life toward the honor of God, becomes virtually the characteristic feature of the Reformed lifestyle."⁶³ Accordingly, Bockmuehl holds Calvin in high esteem for re-gaining a horizon, a goal for Christian ethics—to exalt God's glory.⁶⁴ Thus, there can be no doubt in this respect as to the great influence of the Reformed tradition on Bockmuehl.

60. Cf. "Nachwort," *LuG*, 288–89.

61. *GG*, 275; cf. Bockmuehl, "Aktualität," 304–5.

62. Cf. *GG*, 84, 109; Bockmuehl, "Great Commandment," 11, 17; *GiE*, 162.

63. *GG*, 353, cf. *ibid.*, 319, 357–60.

64. Cf. *GG*, 360–61. Bockmuehl clearly sympathizes with Calvin's "horizon of eternity," thus emphasizing the eschatological character of ethics. Circular letter written by Bockmuehl June 29, 1985, 3; *LbG*, 34.