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Planet Luther

Challenges and Promises for a Lutheran Global Identity

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A new time is dawning on us.

Dawn! That time before sunrise, the twilight, when a change is waiting in the wings; when darkness is about to disappear and the sun getting ready to peek out; when night makes way for the day. The dawn, as we know, announces a new day. What does the new day behold? What are its challenges? What does it promise? It is a new day making its appearance like a new born baby without a name. It is up to us to give it a name—beautiful or . . .

Indeed a new time is dawning on us. The world around us, its aura and terrain, especially in the religious arena, are changing. And with change, invariably, come challenges as well as promises. As far as the Reformation, in general, and Lutheranism, in particular, are concerned the demographics impose contextual challenges and will increasingly do so to Lutheran theology as we have hitherto known it. Most of the traditional confessional families have migrated to the south of the planet. Catholics, Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians already have the majority of its membership outside of their original historical cradle. Lutherans are lagging behind, but already more than 40 percent of Lutherans are south (or in the Far East) of the north Atlantic axis, and growing to soon become in these new environments the majority of world Lutheranism. Luther is becoming planetary. But what seems more important is that this soon to become a majority in the new contexts are there, in these non-traditional settings, as *minorities* surrounded not only by other Christian denominations and independent or

non-denominational churches, but by other religions as well. New questions are being formulated for a theological response that conventional answers can no longer address. Answers to questions copiously present in the West, as the challenge of work righteousness, secularization and so forth, no longer fit the bill. In this chapter I will deal with these issues in two parts. The first is of a polemical nature, the second has a more constructive character.

THE POLEMIC

Luther Research and Lutheran Demographics—the Correlation

A cursory review of publications in Luther research will show that there is no correlation to this change in the demographics of Lutheranism by a long chalk. The authors are with few exceptions from Germany, Scandinavia, and some from the USA. (An exception may be the Lutheran World Federation publication of annals of international conferences.) And if experience is what makes a theologian, as in Luther's Table Talk aphorism,¹ then context matters, for a context demarcates the scope of experiences one has; context challenges and changes texts. As the saying goes, "to each tribe its scribe." In "How Christians Should Regard Moses" (1525) Luther, reacting to some enthusiast preachers, offers the following comment regarding the reading of the Bible and the task of preaching:

One must deal cleanly with the Scriptures. From the very beginning the word has come to us in various ways. It is not enough simply to look and see whether this is God's word, whether God has spoken it; rather we must look and see to whom it has been spoken, whether it fits us. That makes all the difference between night and day. (. . .) The word in Scripture is of two kinds: the first does not pertain or apply to me, the other kind does. (. . .) The false prophets pitch in and say, 'Dear people, this is the word of God.' This is true, we cannot deny it. But we are not the people.²

The same is true where theology is concerned. We need to know the people and the word that speaks to them, the word that pertains to its situation. Obviously this creates a problem for those of us whose job description entails the charge to do systematic theology. And certainly we should apply Luther's advice of how to read the Bible to Luther's own text and say, "yeah, this is Dr. Luther, but you are not the people to whom he is speaking."

1. Luther, *Table Talk*, LW 54, 7.

2. Luther, "How Christians Should Regard Moses," LW 35, 170.

Certainly that has been done in abundance in Luther research, which has the merit of reading Luther as not infallible. Such is the case in regard to Luther's words against the Jews, the Anabaptists, the Turks and so forth that Lutheran researches even within Lutheranism have long decried. Some of these criticisms have been done not only by theologians, but also officially by the LWF or by particular Lutheran churches. There is also a gray area of what is often considered Luther's idiosyncrasies, as it is often the case with his *scatological* (i.e. filthy, excremental, obscene) language, his obsession with the devil, etc. Then there is a third area that is not often touched, like his criticism of usury (particularly in the later works³), or the "third mode" of Christ's presence as formulated in the *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* of 1528 (and quoted at length in articles VII and VIII of the Formula of Concord).⁴

God's Promissio and Luther's Promise

The question then is whether there are promises in Luther's or Lutheran theology that offer resources to face these changes and new challenges originating from new contexts. The word "promise" must be here underlined for it etches itself in God's own *promissio*. It is the word that calls forth a new reality and addresses its creation with a dispatch, an illocutionary speech act (the pragmatic force of an utterance) that calls for a response becoming thus a perlocutionary effect (the effect produced in the one being addressed) that the promise produces in us.⁵ To address the response to Luther's locution, particularly when it comes in languages and pre-understandings far beyond Luther's, his contemporaries, and even present day Luther research, as represented (e.g., in the International Congress for Luther Research) requires new approaches that may not be conventional in most of Luther research. What is being responded to Luther's own promise for us as he translated God's *promissio*, or, in other words, what is the address that evokes a response? Or in other words, what is the illocutionary act that produces a perlocutionary effect. And the answer may lie not only at the deeper levels of Luther research, but also at the surface when we consider the impact of his persona, its emblematic significance.

3. To my knowledge, while almost everything of Luther has been translated into English, his long "Admonition to Pastors to Preach Against Usury" (*An die Pfarrherrn wider den Wucher zu predigen*, WA 51, 331–424) has never been translated. An exception has been the work of Ricardo Rieth, see, e.g. Rieth, "Luther on Greed."

4. Luther, *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*, LW 37, 216ff.

5. Austin, *How to do Things with Words*.

In an article published in 1988, entitled “*Teufelsdreck*,” Heiko Oberman issues the following criticism of the tendency in Luther research to zero in on the nodal point of the reformatory breakthrough going deeper and deeper into a debate that has created factions in European Luther research:

The history of Luther research in this century is the history of concentration by contraction, moving in ever smaller concentric circles from the large grasp of European Reformation history around the turn of the [twentieth] century to an increasing preoccupation with the German Reformation, then with Luther’s thought, and finally with the Reformation breakthrough and the young Luther.⁶

This concentration by contraction is the attempt of locating the illocutionary speech-act that set in motion the reformatory movement and elicited the response that goes by that name. But in the case of the Reformation, as in many other historical events throughout history the response exceeds what is prompted by the communicative act and saturates it with new meanings. Oberman indeed has a point in criticizing the contraction of Reformation studies, but not because it moves “in ever smaller concentric circles,” but simply because it digs too deep. The problem in this shrinkage of the research lies in what is obtained in ever deeper levels of meaning and specialized research, missing the fact that Luther became an emblematic figure to catalyze multifaceted dormant expectations and discontent with the church of Rome and its commerce of indulgences. Robert Scribner may have overdone his case, but he has a point when he argued that the Reformation “attained wider significance because it quickly outran Luther’s ideas, and achieved a near revolutionary impetus of its own.”⁷ To use a contemporary analogy the “near revolutionary impetus” became a sort of an “Occupy Rome” movement.

This dissociation between Luther’s ideas, his prolific theological writings, and the emblematic figure he became is rather important and often missed as a topic in itself to be considered in Luther’s research and the Reformer’s significance as a catalyst of hopes of freedom in many places to this day. And this is the case even when complex and controversial issues in Luther’s and Lutheran theology are paid no heed to.

6. Oberman, “*Teufelsdreck*: Eschatology and Scatology in the ‘Old’ Luther,” 436.

7. Scribner, *The German Reformation*, 24.

Luther, a Figura

An interpretative method developed in literary theory by Erich Auerbach in an influential essay entitled “*Figura*”⁸ will help to explain this often overlooked aspect of the importance of the Reformer. *Figurae*, figures, describe emblematic characters or localized events, which unlike concepts and doctrines that are rooted, belong to a context and are concretely located; they have a genealogy, a place, a time to which they belong. Yet they migrate! According to Auerbach, “a figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons, the first of which signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second encompasses and fulfills the first.”⁹ The figural approach shows not only continuities but how a tradition is owned by incorporating historical circumstances and characters from other times and places. Such procedure appeals to *figurae* in order to establish legitimacy, even when the content and meaning is not the same of the one of the original *typos* (the Greek equivalent of the Latin *figura*).¹⁰ Much of Auerbach’s research on the figural phenomenon was actually developed by considering how Old Testament *figurae* appear in the New Testament, regaining a significance that, in one hand, makes a claim of legitimacy, and, on the other hand, invests it with a new meaning as to bring the old one into completion.

Luther became such a *figura*, not only of David or Paul, but also for many that came after him. This is not meant against Luther scholarship, but as something to be understood before other “deeper” aspects may be scrutinized and discerned. Can we understand that again? What was Luther if not a *figura* in the years that followed 1517, before the pamphlets of 1520 were widely recognized, not to mention before The “Bondage of the Will” of 1525, before the “Confession” of 1528, before his massive writings of the 1530s? The Reformer stood for something that was defined only by bare caricatured lines. But that is what helped decisively to launch a movement called the Reformation, way before any of the substantial issues defining differences between factions the Reformation took place, from the early

8. Auerbach, “*Figura*,” 11–78. The essay was first published in 1944 while Auerbach was in exile in Istanbul, and was then followed and applied in his influential *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, originally published in 1946.

9. Auerbach, “*Figura*,” 53. Auerbach (a persecuted German Jew under Nazism) wrote this essay in the context of the German Christians’ anti-Semitic attempt to dissociate the New Testament from the Old Testament. But figures of the Old Testament are ominous in the New Testament.

10. *Ibid.*, 28, 36–38. *Typos*, *morphe*, or *schema* (1 Cor 7:31) are the Greek words often translated as *figura* as the dominant language of early Christianity was changing from Greek to Latin, starting with Tertullian, one of the earliest Latin Fathers.

1520s on. To read 1517 from the standpoint of 1525 (with the Anabaptist disputes), or 1529 (with Zwingli), or 1530 (with Melancthon in Augsburg and Luther in Coburg), or from 2013, will never get one into some decisive features of the Reformation, because they are figural, and decisively so.

One needs to look at the figure and how it is transfigured. Following are some brief examples that might offer us some food for thought insofar as the figural approach is concerned. Why were the people, condemned as heretics in the West Indies, as they were known in the early 1500 until 1555 (coincidentally or not the year of the Augsburg Peace Settlement), referred to as Lutherans in the *autos-de-fé*, when hardly anything of Luther's theology as such was known in those latitudes?¹¹ Why did Friedrich Engels appeal to Luther's figure to explain the groundbreaking impact of Adam Smith's political economy? For more recent "transfigurations" of Luther, here are a few: Why did Michael King Jr. change his birth certificate in 1957 to officially adopt the name of Martin Luther King Jr.? Why did Eduardo Hoornaert, a Belgian-Brazilian Roman Catholic historian say that Luther was the "theologian that taught the church to think with the people and from the people"?¹² Why did Leonardo Boff call Luther the "precursor of liberation theology"? Why did the Italian Roman Catholic philosopher Gianni Vattimo say in a recent interview that "we need a new Luther"?¹³

The examples can be multiplied, but the answer seems to be a simple one. The Reformer's impact and the Reformation movement as a whole was not read erstwhile starting from the dense texts of a Luther, a Zwingli, a Calvin, a Bucer, etc. Instead, and this is the crux, Luther stood and stands as a *figura* in and through which characters and events manifested themselves in concrete historical circumstances in which the figure of Luther intervenes to magnify the dimensions of characters and events relatively independent from the peculiar content of his theology, and simultaneously ground it contextually in new locations.¹⁴

11. Until 1555, the *autos-de-fé* included this line in the sentencing of heretics: "They left this kingdom to become Lutherans." Bastian, *Protestantismo y Sociedad en México*, 23; Westhelle, *After Heresy: Colonial Practices and Post-Colonial Theologies*, 18–19.

12. Hoornaert, "Matim Lutero: Um Teólogo que Pensa a Partir do Povo," 9–17.

13. The Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo said this in Buenos Aires when inaugurating a new chair in Ethics and Cultural Studies at TEATRO PRESIDENTE ALVEAR in April 2006.

14. Not only is the figure of the person, but the legendary event of nailing 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg also the occasion for figural representation. At the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, the place I have been teaching for the last two decades, there is a very militant group of students that defend the cause of LGBT people that is called "Thesis 96."

Yet the figural approach is not phrenology, the analysis of the shape of the skull to determine the content of the mind—ridiculed by Hegel, but still held with respect by Goethe. The reason why the figure becomes so relevant is because there is some density underneath the surface that propelled the *figura* to appear. There is something more than Luther's silhouette profusely drawn in the legendary drawings and paintings of the nailing of the "95 Theses," or his seclusion in the Wartburg Castle. These portrayals and representations of Luther are not something like Andy Warhol's "Campbell's Soup Cans" painting, and his future was something more than "being worldwide famous for 15 minutes," as the painter's celebrated catchphrase goes. There was indeed something deeper that prompted the figure to emerge, which is as important as the figure itself is; *figurae* are not figments.

THE CONSTRUAL

This is not to suggest that the surface analysis of the figural approach is the only thing that is left of Luther that is significant for Luther's planetary phenomenon as much as my intention to call attention to the figural importance and relevance. I, therefore, introduce some areas in which Luther's in-depth theological contribution might still, or again, have some relevance, even, and most importantly, in contexts outside of the ones directly and historically linked to the Reformation heritage.

Freedom

If there is one motif that has characterized the insurgence of theologies shaped in the so-called Global South, since the second half of the twentieth century, it is the one of postcolonial freedom and liberation.¹⁵ Luther's often cited opening theses in the treatise *The Freedom of a Christian* is commonly regarded as a paradox. A Christian person is free from all and simultaneously indebted to all. The supposed paradox is an illusion of modern Western imagination nurtured by highly mobile class societies in which freedom and duty or obligation are always relative categories, insofar as one prevails, the other is diminished. To understand the significance of Luther's theses in his treatise it is important to remember that it emerged in the context of a medieval society's rigidity as to one's social location in estamental societies. Freedom was understood as that which one had toward those underneath, while duty was due to those above. Read with this key in mind, freedom means the liberation from those above in the social scale in the higher estaments. Duty, in turn, is due to those below. There is no paradox. There is

15. See Westhelle, *After Heresy: Colonial Practices and Post-Colonial Theologies*.

only subversion of the order of things. Freedom means obligation toward the downtrodden, and simultaneously liberation from those who oppress from above.

One has to remember that the Western understanding of freedom has been indelibly influenced by the Scottish Enlightenment and then, particularly, by John Stuart Mill (whose father, James Mill, was a significant figure of the Scottish Enlightenment). This is overwhelmingly a negative concept, or, to phrase it simply, it is “freedom from.” To read this retrospectively into Luther is an anachronism. The second thesis of his treatise, that one is dutiful to all means not that he is leaving the topic of freedom, but that he is understanding freedom also in a positive sense, as a “freedom for,” to bring about freedom. In other words, it is the basic theme of liberation theologies: to set the captives free. What Luther said about freedom is rather close to the liberation motif that has grown in the Third World and has defined its theology to a large extent, a third world that is now globalized

Cross and Christ's Presence

Crux sola est nostra theologia. The celebrated phrase of the early Luther (1518) has been explored and expanded to countless books on Luther's theology of the Cross. But if this Cross of Christ is identical to the cross we carry (as Regin Prenter argued persuasively¹⁶), what has been lifted up is not only its individual importance to our own condition. It has social and also ecological significance as well. God is there identified with suffering of the human and of the earth, and indeed with death itself. “There is one Cross. And it is plural.”¹⁷ This cannot be dissociated from Luther's understanding of the modes of Christ's real presence as we have it in his *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* (1528). As the argument goes, the first mode of presence refers to the historical Jesus which was not a matter of contention by any party at the time of the Reformation (would only become such after Reimarus and Lessing more than two centuries later). The second mode of presence was the one that prompted Luther's “Confession.” It was about Christ's real presence (instead of “representation” functioning as a symbolic remembrance) in the bread and the cup, the point of dispute with the likes of Karlstadt, Zwingli and Oecolampadius. But the third mode is the one that comes as a truly theological unexpected move, but logically coherent with the argument hitherto developed. If Christ is truly God according to his humanity, and if he is one with God, and God is everywhere (as in Luther's

16. Prenter, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*.

17. I am indebted to Neal Anthony former student and currently Senior Pastor at United Lutheran Church, Ponca, NE for this expression.

interpretation of the creedal placing of Christ at the “right hand” of God as being everywhere), then Christ is everywhere present. So this is Luther’s conclusion written one year before his dispute with Zwingli in Marburg: “since he is a man (. . .) and apart from this man there is no God, it must follow that (. . .) everything is full of Christ through and through, even according to his humanity.”¹⁸ “Even according to his humanity” is the crucial point here. There is no presence without materiality, without something that has mass and body.

This “third mode of presence” follows logically from what precedes. It did not need to be there for he had taken care of the argument of his antagonists with the “second mode” over more than 200 pages. But it is this “third mode of presence” that makes possible for a theology in a planetary perspective. Christ is everywhere, not spiritually as would be easy to assume, but according to his humanity, according to matter, to embodied humanity, that, finally for Luther, is what matters. There, where the world’s crucible is, God is in the flesh, in the rock, in the tree, wherever pain and death are at stake and the resurrection is a promise, a new creation. And this makes it imperative the usage of the word “planet,” for unlike “global” that refers to a self-contained totality, “planet” refers to a little piece of a stellar system, called the Sun, which in turn is a tiny piece of what is called a constellation, which is small part of the dimensionless universe. Theodor Adorno might have learned something from his Lutheran mentor in Frankfurt, Paul Tillich, when he said that only a materialist can believe in the resurrection of the body.¹⁹ Of course, he went beyond Tillich, who with his rounded-up system would never go so far, and be so faithful to this bold affirmation of someone who did not even confess the Christian faith (for he was a secular Jew). Or in the words of the Reformer himself: “No, comrade, wherever you place God for me, you must also place the humanity for me.”²⁰

Ecclesiology

In the Genesis lectures of 1535 and 1536 Luther offers a vision of the church that also entails promises. He discusses it in the context of the institution of the “orders.” The first of them is the *ecclesia* which is instituted with the establishment of the Shabbat. Since it precedes the *oeconomia* and the *politia*, Luther’s image of the church is one, as he says, “without walls and without any pomp.”²¹ Some of Luther’s speculations in his creative interpretation of

18. Luther, *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper*, LW 37, 218.

19. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 401.

20. Luther, *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper*, LW 37, 219.

21. Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* 1–5, LW 1, 103.

the text are beyond anything that a contemporary critical reading of the text would allow.²² And yet his imaginative reading underscores a theological vision of the church highly relevant for an ecclesiology today. The church established in Paradise is an apophatic church. It is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which Luther equates with the tree of life (*arbor-vitae*). This was “Adam’s church altar and pulpit.”²³ But what is interesting in Luther’s reading is an implicit ecumenical vision when Luther says that “it does not appear preposterous that ... there stood several trees of the species *arborvitae*.”²⁴ So these trees “would have been the church at which Adam, together with his descendants, would have gathered on the Sabbath day.”²⁵ This vision of a multiplicity of trees for the worship of the descendants of Adam suggests first that there is not a single center to identify the true church. But even more, it implies also that the descendants of Adam are from all religions on the planet. Or to phrase it aphoristically: to each religious creed, its tree.

Running the risk of becoming too allegorical, the metaphor of the tree is for several reasons quite fitting for the church or the religious factor as such. Consider the following characteristics. Trees are free standing organisms grounded on the earth. Among the living organisms they live the longest and grow the tallest always in search for light. They adapt to scarcity of space and through photosynthesis they transform carbon dioxide into oxygen, which after all is that which we require to be alive. Hence we have the importance of trees for the ecosystem. Not by chance has deforestation been emblematic to exemplify our sinful condition. Of course, this idyllic vision of such apophatic church disappears with the fall, which in Luther’s speculation happens on that first Shabbat. But it still remains in Luther’s mind as an ideal of which the church, now with walls, policies and pomp, dimly mirror itself. Yet “the origin is the goal,” in the celebrated expression of Karl Kraus. The difference that the fall represents is that now the church has to borrow from the spheres of the *oeconomia* and *politia* its specific functions to build and organize itself, and with them come along also the shortcomings that the fall impinged upon these institutions. And trees keep falling.

22. I am not considering here the thesis of Peter Meinhold about glosses in the text added by a second generation of editors influenced by the emerging Lutheran orthodoxy. The concern here is about the imagery used and not with the dogmatic formulae that sometimes is of dubious origin as the discussion of the loss of the *imago* that sounds as if coming from Flacius Illyricus. Ibid., LW 1, 60.

23. Ibid., LW 1, 95.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., LW 1, 105.

Between Economy and Politics

The cultural anthropologist Roberto DaMatta offers a terminology that is useful in reading Luther's view of the church as this place gripped between the other two institutional spheres. The terms "economy" and "politics" in their modern Western connotations really do not convey what Luther, following a long medieval tradition, called *oeconomia* and *politia*. The modern Western concepts of "economy" and "politics" have different connotations. Since the industrial revolution the concept of economy dissociates what in antiquity and medieval times was still housed in the domestic sphere, namely, production for the sustenance of life and its sexual reproduction. And since the American and French revolutions, politics gained emancipation from a set order of flux of authority represented by monarchies in which the ruler is only bound to the rules he himself establishes.²⁶ Hence the coinage of the modern expression: "political economy" is a notion unconceivable in earlier times. But outside of the modern West there still remains a distinction of these domains even as modernization is a planetary phenomenon. This is why I believe the distinction DaMatta makes, in discussing Brazilian society, between "house" and "street," is important to understand *oeconomia* and *politia*. The house is seen as a realm that controls the domains in which much of sexual reproduction takes place, and significant amount of production of goods is allocated there. The street, on the other hand, serves as a metaphor for the space in which public affairs take place and human inter-subjective matters are administered.²⁷

This terminology seems to address rather well the way to understand Luther's distinction between *oeconomia* and *politia*, but also to address worldwide contexts in which the space of intimacy, sexuality, and often also of production for the sustenance of life, are protected from the public sphere, even architecturally so. The domestic space in those latitudes is often the space that in the modern West takes the form of health insurance and retirement pension. But such is not the case in many other contexts where "health insurance" and "pension" is still a matter of the household. This helps to explain, for example, the dissention taken by some African churches of the Anglican and the Lutheran communions over the way the West takes its own position on question of human sexuality and homo-affectivity. Even if morality plays a role in opposing the "liberal" Western position, it is not the primary cause of the strife; it is a question of how to keep the house in order, the *oiko-nomos*, and make it sustainable for generations to come. And this is done also by keeping one protected from what happens in the "street," in the

26. Morse, *New World Soundings: Culture and Ideology in the Americas*.

27. DaMatta, *A Casa e a Rua: Espaço, Cidadania, Mulher e Morte no Brasil*.

public domain, often inimical, in some contexts, to the domain of intimacy, the domestic.

The Third Space

The way in which the economy became so much intertwined with politics is what accounts for a particular phenomenon characteristic of the West, called secularism. Secularism can be defined, to use the terminology I have suggested, as the street invading the house, or the other way around, the house invading the street. What disappears then is this “third space” that Luther called *ecclesia*, the church that keeps the economy and politics in relation, but still distinctly apart. Arguably no one understood this better than Walter Benjamin in his discussion of Parisian galleries, arcades, or *passages*. These are the architectural expression of the mingling of house and street, of economy and politics. In describing these recently created arcades, Benjamin offers the following comment:

Already the inscriptions and signs on the entranceways (one can just as well say “exits,” since with these peculiar hybrid forms of house and street every gate is simultaneously entrance and exit), already the inscription which multiply along the walls within (. . .) have about them something enigmatic.²⁸

The recent instantiations of those early modern galleries are today’s shopping centers and malls. Not by chance they have become the *ersatz* of the church for secularized societies.

Luther’s distinction of the orders or “spheres of promises” (Elisabeth Gerle and Hans Jonas) is no longer descriptive of modern and secularized Western societies, but it is a diagnostic tool to understand the Western peculiarity and, most importantly, other societies where Lutheranism is growing and in which even as modernization took place secularism has not taken hold; the “house” and the “street” remain as discreet dimensions, and religion, to use a more generic word for *ecclesia*, is a space in-between, something like what that Victor Turner called “betwixt and between”²⁹ and Homi Bhabha defined as a third space. It is an “interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative” space which blurs the limitations of traditional boundaries.³⁰ It is a hybrid space, which is not a result of two essences that combined to form a third. It is like a suspension and disruption, not a synthesis; something that is neither in nor out but both at the same time.

28. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 871.

29. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, 93–99.

30. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.

These three then, *oeconomia*, *politia*, and *ecclesia* remain as foundational institutional realities that Aristotle, in the *Metaphysics* VI, described as the basic and discrete human faculties (*dianoia*): *poiesis* as the practice that creates objective realities defines the order of the *oeconomia*; *praxis* as the inter-subjective communicative action with no material result corresponds to *politia*; and *theoria*, the passive enduring of being an observant, defines the *ecclesia* or religious observance in general.

If the three spheres have been corrupted by the fall (the first to be corrupted, according to Luther, was the church for the origin of sin took place in the first Shabbat³¹) they remain as divinely instituted as spheres of promise in which sanctification or holiness takes place. Luther stresses that with great emphasis when he distinguishes between being holy (*heilig*) and being blessed or saved (*selig*). “For to be holy and to be saved [or blessed] are two entirely different things. We are saved through Christ alone; but we become holy both through this faith and through these divine foundations and orders.”³² Now, if we connect this to Luther’s third mode of presence, blessedness or salvation can be everywhere for Christ may, according to his humanity, be there. It is not confined to a region or a particular religion, but embraces the entire planet. Sanctification, being holy, however, is the labor of love in the instituted spheres that everyone is called to serve in.

THE TREE—A PLANETARY METAPHOR IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

The importance of seeing blessedness or salvation embracing the entire planet: this is the reason why for Luther the tree or trees in paradise were the fit metaphor for the church. And the metaphor is even more fitting as the tree, as it grows in the front yard, or in a park, stands between the house and the street. The church’s ultimate goal is observant receptivity, which is proper to translate literally *theoria*. But after the fall the church needs to borrow from the *oeconomia* its buildings and all the objective realities that make it up, and from the *politia* the rules of inter-subjective actions that establish the liturgy as well as other inter-personal functions such as counseling, parish counsel and committee meetings. As an instituted reality it is dependent on the *oeconomia* and *politia*. This is why the church has this hybrid character and can be said to exist only as an event; it happens. It is not of our doing. It is only apt to end with some lines of a poem, a *poiema* by Joyce Kilmer entitled “Trees”:

31. Luther, *Lecture on Genesis 1–5*, LW 1, 70.

32. Luther, *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper*, LW 37, 365.

I think that I shall never see
 A poem lovely as a tree.
 (...)

 A tree that looks at God all day,
 And lifts her leafy arms to pray
 (...)

 Poems are made by fools like me,
 But only God can make a tree.³³

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