Introduction

Praeterit enim figura huius mundi.
(For the figure of this world passes.)
Ad Corinthios I, 7:31

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The pointed arch, the ribbed vault and the flying buttress, characteristic of Gothic architecture was not any different on that day to the passersby of All Saints Church, known as the Castle Church. The church had become a hub of activity ever since it was commissioned as the chapel of the University of Wittenberg. Students scuttled like squirrels either on the way to classes or for worship. The sound of the pipe organ did not seem to alarm the occasional golden eagle that swooped down to take a swipe at the little birds that fluttered by the doors of the church. Life in and around Wittenberg was mundane.

On that day, October 31, 1517, so goes the legend, a young Augustinian friar, Martin Luther, walked up to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg and nailed a set of theses titled "Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences," which later became the manifesto of the Reformation. If the legend has historical grounds, the young monk would not have done anything extraordinary, for it was the customary way of precipitating an academic debate with social repercussions in those days. However, what ensued was indeed extraordinary and needless to say not so customary. The preceptorial morphed into a revolution! Known as the Ninety-Five Theses, this document and events that followed boosted and buttressed the inception of the Reformation movement. Some three centuries later appeal to the meaning of that event was evoked, but little related to church or theology: "Just as it was once the monk, so is it now the philosopher in whose brain

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the revolution begins."[1] Such is one of the receptions of this Augustinian brother's nailing of the Ninety-Five Theses. For Marx the figure of the Reformer passed on to Hegel.

The nailing incident, in itself not especially unusual, achieved its marked significance only retrospectively, since it was followed by a controversial and prolific career of its main actor. Incendiary pamphlets, provocative sermons, Bible translations, catechisms, treatises, and commentaries, all produced in the juncture of politico-ecclesiastical trials, offered a magnifying glass through which that 31st of October became the emblematic turning point for many dimensions of social existence. Chiefly remembered, however, is the schism it produced in Christianity, the most significant since the split of Eastern and Western Christianity in 1054, and arguably the most noteworthy in the whole of the occidental Christian church. The revolution thus metamorphosed into a religious reformation! But its impact, also in political and economic life, was and continued to be notable. The Reformer's name is frequently evoked as a cipher to name revolutionary moments beyond ecclesiastical and theological bounds. The relationship of God's grace to everyday life in many of its dimensions quivered. Solid institutions smelted. Here the term "revolution," when used in the Copernican sense, applies in describing the dislodging of the gravitational center from institutional sacredness to the presence of that which is unique, alone, sole (*solus*). The *solus Christus*—reappearing in *sola gratia, sola fide, sola scriptura*—was the sun (*sol*) that regimented the orbits of the theological, ecclesial, and political "planets." As Copernicus placed the sun at the center of our gravitational system, so did the Reformer with the *solae* for systems of theology and ecclesial autarchies.

The political meaning of the word "revolution," inherited from astronomy as an analogue, emerged only later and was used in association with the modern idea of freedom. Ernst Bloch in 1921 used the term to describe the erstwhile Luther follower and then his opponent, Thomas Müntzer, as theologian of revolution.[2] However, it has been used as it should be, in my opinion, to frame the figure of the author of *On the Freedom of a Christian*, the third of the major reforming treatises of 1520. To this day ideas of freedom, of protest, dissent, and tenacity are conjured when the name Luther is invoked. The name elicits also images that associate him with socio-political conservativism, theological intransigence, moral prevarications, and ecclesial laxity. Even for contradictory reasons and ambivalent assessment of its accomplishments, the Reformation of the sixteenth century marks a

1. Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," 3:182.
2. Bloch, *Thomas Müntzer als Theologe der Revolution* (1921).

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moment that has been capable of migrating to other times and places. It is invoked in circumstances and contexts that share little with the sixteenth-century Reformation in Saxony, which nonetheless find a point of contact and kindredness. The Reformation reappears in events that appeal to it as warrant or inspiration. In the appeals made to the event a metabolism takes place. There is a yoking of disparate occurrences when the Reformation becomes an insignia for conveying promises associated to it, ideas for which it stood. In return it receives a content that not only enriches but displaces its original context when it emerges in new ones.

Events such as the Reformation, and particularly some gestures of its best known protagonist, Martin Luther, inscribe themselves into the inventory of images, projecting figures and sketching profiles that become catalysts for momentous occasions and characters in other times and other places. History offers an array of such reincarnations that regardless of depth and nuances are evoked to shroud with its figures other events. The depth associated with the occasion evoked lends to the new circumstances thickness and endurance; yet the evocation rests in an Archimedean point powerful enough to be the axis around which the event revolves, but sufficiently spongy to absorb variegated contents. Such is the fate of the historical figure of Luther and the Reformation.

To examine this process of reconfiguration of the Reformation in different contexts is not an easy task when we consider it as a disruptive event; and the Reformation was and should be considered a disruptive event! However, grafted in the subconscious of societies affected by it erstwhile, the Reformation hardened into the institutional patterns of European culture and politics. How does an institutionalized reality become an event again? Or to put it bluntly, can and should "orthodoxy" find its "heretical roots" again? And if it were to, how? The tendency to accommodate difference under the guise of inclusivism, dialogue, and ecumenism can indeed become a blinder to deeper rooted fragmentations resilient to assimilation. How to awaken the "heretic" spirit of the Reformation, and indeed of Luther, even when wicked specters will also come along and bring Luther the anti-Semitic and the reactionary repressor of peasants? And, furthermore, how appropriate is the appeal to the Reformation to frame events far removed from its own time and place?

Luther was by and large a parochial character. He had a very limited sense of the wider world at his time. Aware he was that the inhabited world consisted of Europe, Asia, and Africa, the continents that have a shore to the Mediterranean.[3] But that was about it. Of America, whose European

3. WA 31/II, 95, 36: *Sunt 3 mundi parti habitabiles, Asia, Aphrica, Europa*.

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extraordinary landfall was no secret all over Europe, there are some vague references to "islands just found."[4] But these few oblique remarks were only done to address the problem regarding the fulfillment of the great commission to the apostles to go to the whole world. Yet those who were conquering the world the Reformer hardly acknowledged were not so oblivious about Luther. In the second quarter of the sixteenth century, during the time of the Inquisition in the New World, public condemnation and execution of heretics included the reading of the *autos-da-fé* which said, "They left this kingdom to become Lutherans." While this was meant to define the heretics, little did they know about Luther's theology. Luther had indeed become a cipher for freedom and rebellion, a cipher for another "kingdom." But those were the times in which the Reformation territories in Europe served as the measuring stick to define heresy, rebellion, freedom, and nonconformity to the hegemonic Holy Roman Empire.

The Reformer's theology for the last five centuries has been almost exclusively researched and interpreted by German, Scandinavian, and US theologians, while the significance of Luther's theology for the global South is rising in the very proportion to which Lutheranism is migrating *en masse* to the south of the planet.

Lutherans are belated in following other large world Christian communions, as Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Methodists, to find its majority in the south of the planet. In demographics, the other ecumenical communions have already been severely depleted in regions of the world where they constituted themselves originally, mostly the North Atlantic axis, and their presence outside of this axis well surpasses the 50 percent mark. But Lutherans are following suit. Currently about 45 percent of Lutherans are now outside of what the LWF defined, half a century ago, as the three main blocks: Central Europe, Scandinavia, and the United States. One hundred years ago the Lutheran presence outside of the axis was negligible. The statistics are changing so fast as to presume that very soon the majority of Lutherans will be in nontraditional Lutheran territories. How theology will follow this trend and define Lutheranism not only by the letter of the Weimar edition of Luther's works or the Book of Concord, but by the *viva vox* of an *ecclesia semper reformanda*, is a challenge and an opportunity. These Lutheran people in new contexts that the old barely knows have become the "new heretics." There is no *auto-da-fé* being read now, but a condescending attitude that dismisses the theological competence of these new "heretics" prevails among custodians of the heritage. The time is ripe to acknowledge that translating Luther to new contexts involves a process

4. WA 10/III, 139, 20f. See also WA 10/I/i, 20, 16; 53, 169.

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of transfiguration by which the old, relevant as it is in its reappearance, also passes away.

These Lutherans in new contexts are becoming the majority of the Lutherans worldwide. However, unlike the ones of the traditional geographical settings of Lutheranism, this upcoming *majority* find themselves in contexts in which they are a *minority* surrounded by other faiths and confessions. And this posits challenges for theology at least as significant as the geographical dislocation alone. The contours of the Reformation now are to be defined over against this new background in which powers and principalities exert control now as they did when the Reformation erupted as a cry for freedom and a call for the gospel. The Reformation defined them then; it is left for us to name them today, yet the spirit is the same.

If the institutional profile of Lutheran identity is one of the significant changes taking place, there is another characteristic that is more salient, and goes beyond identity politics. One thing is to consider Lutheranism in the institutional formation of an identity, but another and entirely different thing is to appeal to the event. Appealing to Lutheranism's emblematic character or characters not for an identity but as occasions that evoke ideas, visions, and inspiration is radically significant. The Reformation and the figure of Luther name events and project characters whose use-value is not subjected to the exchange-value acquired in the controlled economy of the ecclesial and academic market of identity formation. This subversive character to what regulates it and issues the currency for its equivalence is crucial.

When the use-value escapes the control of market-regulated exchange-value the "commodity" is available unleashed, notwithstanding the constant effort to tame it back to a predictable and controllable exchange process regulated either by the academia or the church. With its use-value set free from the market, it is adopted and employed, without having to pay tribute to the curators of the name and the image. The free-floating image henceforth appears in contexts that are not proper to it. In the new contexts these images function without anchorage in conventional academic or ecclesial foundations. These are indeed superficial uses of the image. What matters is precisely the surface in which they appear. Their validity is determined by the use for which they function as apparitions. Such apparitions are banners raised in the name of some ideas, causes, principles, and dispositions the image is endowed with by association. When an image, by virtue of ideals for which it stands, is transferred across borders from remote places and times without customs levies, it is called *figura*. This procedure has been referred to as "figural interpretation" which accounts for the invocation of

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Luther or several Reformation motifs without the slightest intent to engage in identity politics or to build strategic allegiances.

Erich Auerbach[5] studied the use of *figura* as a literary trope in Western literature, particularly its use in the Judeo-Christian scriptures. He offers a suggestive option for framing Reformation studies, and particularly Martin Luther. *Figurae* function as ciphers, which the Arabic root designates as the symbol for zero—0. Ciphers by themselves have no value. Yet when compounded with any value it changes its worth exponentially. From there the word *cipher* assumes the connotation of a key or a code. This key or code allows a given reading of characters, events, and circumstances, casting a new light onto them, setting them into a given perspective, bringing to attention facets and edges otherwise passed unnoticed, in a word, deciphering them. *Figura* functions as a cipher, but adds to it rootedness in an original context situated concretely in space and time. But from its original placing it detaches itself to find a new dwelling in remote characters and events.

Figurae, as a trope, share with analogues elements of resemblance. In both there is a connection between two occasions, and they both lift up similarities in their difference. However, while analogues establish a relationship between two circumstances by comparing the parallelism of a series of elements that unfold a similar pattern in a causal chain, a *figura* is evoked to lift up a punctual feature not dependant on the causal nexus of events in its original historical setting.

Two other tropes bear likeness to the *figura*: the symbol and the allegory. In the case of the symbol, in the classical definition of Goethe, "An appearance is transposed into an idea, the idea into an image, and in such a way that the idea remains always infinitely active and unapproachable in the image."[6] The *figura*, while sharing with the symbol the appearance-idea-image process, parts company with it in keeping the idea attached to the image. While making the image mobile, the *figura* binds the idea to its concrete singularity. If, for instance, freedom is the idea and Luther the image functioning as *figura*, the idea remains connected to particular features associated to the image. A symbol would be represented by the image of, say, an eagle in which the idea of freedom is not rooted in the concrete singularity of the bird depicted in the image.

This "attachment to the image's particularity"[7] brings it close to the allegory; between *figura* and allegory "the boundary is fluid."[8] In distinction

5. Auerbach, "Figura," in *Scenes from the Drama*, 11–76. See also his classic study of Western literature, *Mimesis*.

6. Goethe, *Maximen und Reflexionen*, 192, my translation.

7. Ibid.

8. Auerbach, "Figura," 47.

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to it, however, *figura* does not allow for the idea to be held in the image alone; its content is bipolar with an oscillating reference to both the original event and its present instantiation. Its resurgence endows it with a content that is infused by its appearance in new contexts, enriching the idea with dimensions that saturate the image. In the *figura* the image is overdetermined by content not adduced entirely in the original. The signifier receives an excess of meaning in the signified. "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 or fulfills the first."[9] The major distinction from the allegory, with which it shares many characteristics, is that, unlike the allegory, in the *figura* both the signifier and the signified are historically anchored. "The two poles of the figure are separate in time, but both, being real events or figures, are within time, within the stream of history."[10]

Luther as *figura*, as a figure, is something to be understood apart from, or before other specialized doctrinal aspects may be scrutinized and discerned. At least it needs to be acknowledged as a dimension of Luther research that in-depth textual and historic-critical analysis often overlooks or simply ignores, leaving unexplained its enduring significance and recurring effects. The *figurae* have *Wirkungsgeschichte*; they work. The more immersed Luther studies become in the profundity of the thought of the Reformer, the more obscure and neglected becomes his figural significance. The call for a closer reading of the text may arrest the inquiring gaze into historical and philological frames of a picture whose "aura"—to use Walter Benjamin's helpful notion—has long taken flight.

This book is about Luther's theology and practice that has inspired so many across confessional and even religious lines worldwide, or else excite those for whom he displays pathetic (and at times pathological) features of a dubious character, displaying even cases of bigotry untamed. Be it as it may, Luther's theology, his understanding of creation and incarnation, the cross, his affirmation of freedom from ecclesial, economic, and political encroachments, and his distinction between the political reality and the economy, or even his atrocious invectives against Jews and Turks (Muslims) are seen in a new light in societies in which modernization does not mean necessarily secularization, and the intellect (*logos*) is not set in dual opposition to things material. The now century-old European dispute about whether Luther is a late medieval theologian or a beacon of modernity is rendered largely superfluous when the Reformer is read and interpreted in contexts (including

9. Ibid., 53.
10. Ibid., 53f.

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to a good extent North America!) that do not share the peculiar cultural and political history of Europe, its orthodoxies, its pietisms, its enlightenments, and its secularisms, which have formed the matrix of so much dispute over Luther's legacy.

The following pages intend to lift up the significance of the Reformer's reception that has not been filtered by the remarkably erudite tradition of Luther research for almost half of a millennium. Certainly the authoritative contributions made by Europe and also North America cannot be bypassed or seen as not deserving utmost deference. However, here is offered a reading of Luther and his legacy that goes beyond, and often sails over, the traditional geopolitics of Luther research, and goes into realities where the Reformer's reception and the latent promise of his theology receive an unsuspected appraisal and a transfigural presence.

The argument that follows is woven, to use a simile, with warps and woofs to produce the fabric, the *texture*, of the contentions. The two strings keep on traversing each other in perpendicular directions finding no resolution, but a text(ure) whose meaning only rests in an irresolute eschatological horizon. The reader is invited to see the meaning in the offing.

These traversing strings of thought, these warps and woofs, can be described as a combination of distinct dimensions of the God-world relation, on the one hand, and by a theologically informed perspectival gaze into human affairs, on the other hand.

The first line, the "warps," in keeping the simile, carries the signature notion of the Reformation. It entails all that pertains to the *coram deo* relationship, constituting all that relates to the spiritual regime. The thoughts on justification, the *solae* (*sola gratia, sola fide, sola scriptura, solus Christus*), and the evangelical criterion of what conveys Christ (*was Christum treibet*) belong to it. These entail ultimate concerns. Transversal "woofs" constitute all theological thoughts that are aided by reason and entail questions concerning the *coram mundo* relation; here matters of justice and the proper use of reason for achieving equitable ends prevail. The latter encompass penultimate concerns that relate to the earthly regime. Between the two there is no causal relationship (notwithstanding the occasional use of the fruit–tree metaphor). They are discernable as distinct strands whose importance is not the yarn by itself but the fabric it constitutes.

During the turbulent years of the beginning of the sixteenth century, before the Reformation movement reached its climax, the quest of the young Augustinian friar, Martin Luther, for a merciful God and even the marvelous answer found was still no more than a bundle of yarn. Its paramount significance was not the discovery of its existence as a thread in and of itself. Its momentous magnitude that lent the Reformation its insignia would only

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manifest itself in being woven through the "woofs" of challenges in ordinary earthly existence. There it finds its unique and irreducible dimension; by itself it just spins a yarn. Spinning a yarn instead of weaving a fabric has often been the fate of discourses about justification when done in abstract—fine the string, but missing the texture.

The text that follows is about the fabric, the texture that makes Luther a *figura* that has the quality of being transfigured. The question of justification, this article by which all that merits existence stands or falls, will reveal its color and receive its strength precisely in the fabric into which it is intertwined. So it is of import to say in advance, as clearly as possible, that the teachings on justification belong to the nature of the "warps." However, these started to delineate themselves only in the interlacing of the quest of justification with spheres of earthly existence that provided the occasion for the message of God's sole grace to shine through.

The celebrated nailing of the Ninety-Five Theses not only gave the Reformation momentous significance but it was also portentous. In the texture of its fabric a theological principle was making public inroads.

The theological principle manifested itself in a struggle that was fought mostly in three fronts that exposed the three publics Luther had in mind as constitutive of the worldly order of things, the church institutional, the household/economy, and the politico-civil affairs (*ecclesia*, *oeconomia, politia*). With different theological emphases, each one of these publics displayed fundamental anthropological and sociological dimensions of human earthly existence over against which the message of justification shone. Each one revealed a facet of the scope of oppression of human existence in the world. To the extent that each remains as such into our days, transfiguration shows its effectiveness.

In one way or another, these three publics entered the programmatic agenda of the Reformation opening the fronts by which the Reformation movement defined its most basic social and anthropological agenda. Each one had a significant impact in the theology of the Reformation and its ecclesial and socio-political significance. They represented, in the unfolding of the Reformation, Luther's practical concern with the three basic publics or "orders" of creation for the institutional organization of earthly existence, which roughly correspond to the three basic anthropological faculties since Aristotle—*praxis, poēsis* or productive labor, and *theōria* or intelligible comprehension. However, in the practical articulation of the challenges that they represented, Luther's adoption of the medieval conception of the three orders, or publics (*Dreiständelehre*), showed their interconnectedness and dynamic overlapping features. Each one was a discrete public, and the sphere each public encompasses is unique as to the challenge they represent

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and the procedures with which each operates; these will be defined by the respective anthropological faculty. Each one, therefore, provides an entrance to the others and, even if distinct, cannot be discretely isolated from each other.

The engagement in the political front can be represented by the fierce debate and tragic outcome of the Peasant Revolt and its subsequent suppression. The struggle led by enthusiast leaders had several aspects. An important one, the dispute over hermeneutics, has been discussed at length in Protestant research focusing mainly on the theology of Thomas Müntzer and Karlstadt. But from the peasants' standpoint, if we take it from the "Twelve Articles" of the peasants, what is by far more decisive is the access to land for hunting, fishing, collecting wood, the demands for fair taxes and rents, and for the abolition of the "death clause" (by which a widow would lose her husband's right to the land upon his death). It was a cry for a vital space in a late feudal society. Luther, who was first called upon by the peasants themselves as a witness to their plea, later supported the repression launched against them. And the reason, in the Reformer's view, is that competencies were being violated. The Word of God was recruited to legislate over "matters for the lawyers to discuss."[11] Implicitly recognizing the justice of the peasants' claims, Luther even counseled them to suffer martyrdom. The miner's son would not recognize in the peasants' protest the struggle to preserve and conquer the basic means of life and work. It was a protest against the world and its injustices for the right of labor and the vital space that ensured it. The peasants' demands were not a "class struggle"; their revolt was against the world as it stood.[12] Luther's insistence on keeping competencies apart has led both to some of the sharpest criticisms he has ever received, as well as praise for an austere modern realism that could have prevented even greater bloodshed.

A second front of the Reformation movement was connected with the emergence of financial capitalism and the practice of usury. Here the Reformation took some ambiguous positions in relation to the official stance of the late medieval Roman Catholic Church. If Calvin condoned usury within certain interest restrictions, the Roman theologians had a legalistic interpretation of Aristotle's notion of the sterility of money, but creatively reinterpreted it to justify interest on the basis of the risk to the lender, and for the maintenance of banking institutions. But Luther, even if not thoroughly

11. LW 46:39; WA 18, 337, 13f.

12. Commenting on the characteristics of peasants' revolts as a protest, not against a class, but against the whole "world," Ianni (*Dialética e Capitalismo*, 110) says, "The struggle for land is always also a struggle for the preservation, the conquest . . . of a mode of living and working." See also for the same argument Paz, *Posdata*, 87–92.

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consistent, would argue theologically against the exploitation of the poor that usury caused. Accused of revealing only a profound frustration[13] or producing "occasional explosions of a capricious volcano,"[14] the Reformer has indeed revealed a theological concern and rage against the oppression caused by usurers. Usurers are robbers of the means for the sustenance of life, demonic explorers of labor and family. Here Luther's voice in defense of the created goodness of this order is emphatically affirmed.

These two fronts are complemented by a third one, in which the Reformation was most successful and in which Luther had a particular important role to play. He was, first and foremost, the reformer of the church in its earthly (!) task of being an instrument of the Word of God in both its vocal (*viva vox*) and visible (sacraments) form. If the first front represented a cry for a vital space and the second for just social and economic relations for the sustenance of life and biological reproduction, the third opened space in the search for a viable realm of communication between the Word of God and the language(s) of the people to whom, in whom, and through whom the Word communes.

These three fronts that displayed the public engagement of the Reformer, as reflected thorough his life and writings, are one aspect of Luther's theology that refer to and constitute the earthly régime. This régime is juxtaposed by what is called the spiritual régime. But the two are not symmetrical. They entailed discontinuities. The earthly régime involves realities that are posited, institutional apparatuses that imply some permanence. In it reason operates and ethical responsibilities are called for to provide stability. The spiritual régime, however, has an eventual character. While the spiritual dimension refers to presence, the earthly implies *re*-presentation. One encompasses all that pertains to justification; the other is about justice and fairness (equity). While one refers to an event that is ultimately apophatic, the other describes an embodied reality that needs to be cared for and reasoned about even as they pass away.

Luther's thoughts about the two régimes (normally referred to as the two kingdoms doctrine) is what makes his theology at once fascinating, but also disconcerting for some paroxysms it incurs. They are not complementary realities, but they overlap each other without one displacing the other. The relation is somehow analogous to the light that allows us to see colors and discern objects, yet the light as such is not "seen." The genius of the Reformer was to sustain, through and through, a communication between

13. Nelson, *Idea of Usury*, 46.

14. The expression is R. H. Tawney's, cited in Preston, *Religion and the Ambiguities*, 141.

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presence and representation, between event and institution, between heaven and earth, between passivity and activity, justification and justice. But the trick lies in the irreducible mystery of the communication between the two. Phrasing it by one of Luther's favorite metaphors, there is an organic connection between the right and the left hand of the one God, but without a causal relation between them, so as if the left hand knows not what the right is doing.

This communication between these different qualities is predicated on a reading of the Councils of Constantinople (381) and Chalcedon (451) and the formulation of the doctrine regarding the *communicatio idiomatum*, or the communication of properties or qualities. The concept of the incarnation and its implication lie at the core of Luther's theology. Subsequent Lutheranism organized the Reformer's rendition of the *communicatio* more systematically saying that it included the transmission of divine and infinite qualities to the carnal and finite (*genus majestaticum*), which implies as well the reverse transference of the finite to the infinite (*genus tapeinoticum*). This has been correctly pointed out to be the axial point of Luther's theology, its motor.[15]

However, if this is the point, it beams beyond itself into a horizon that the early sixteenth-century Reformer could hardly envision. If the limit of one's language is the limit of one's world (Wittgenstein), Luther, in the cage of medieval ecclesiastical Latin, had few options to venture beyond into new vistas. Yet, he dared breaking with the conventional use of academic Latin, making incursions into the vernacular, to the point of being acclaimed as the father of modern German language. However, many of his texts blend Latin and German, often inserting also Hebrew and Greek expressions, creating thus a truly hybrid text of a unique character. All this was done as an attempt to get beyond the boundaries of his own language, his own world whose limits he could only scratch the surface, but in so doing he acknowledged the limit as a threshold and not an impervious capsule. Justification is the name he gave to this threshold that is crossed from outside as a light illuminating the earthly régime with its legal institutions, rationalities, and all that results from laborious production that throws their shadows. The light as such cannot be seen, but it can be inferred by the shadows it casts. In this respect traces of Augustine's suggested "ontological argument" for God's existence (and further elaborated by medieval Franciscans) are lurking in the work of Luther. It is through the shadows cast that the light can be discerned, that the infinite reveals its presence in the mere finite. And only

15. See Steiger, "The *communicatio idiomatum* as the Axle and Motor of Luther's Theology," 125–58.

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there is it given for our inquiry; only in representation is presence given for human scrutiny *a posteriori*.

This book is divided into four parts. In each the weaving is taken up from different perspectives. There is an order in their progression, yet each part offers a different angle from which Luther's *figura* may be observed. It is as if the four parts form quadrants of the same circumference, bidding different watching stations. Most certainly other positions could be taken but these are the ones that in the author's judgment offer decidedly pertinent perspectives and distinctly privileged standpoints. These parts are not lined up like beads on a string but arrayed like a constellation that can simultaneously be observed from different vantage points. From each perspective new light is projected onto the whole, which inevitably will result in overlaps and repetitions. But as to them remains valid the old lesson: *repetitio mater studiorum est*.

Part One deals with Luther's use of language and how he dealt with the letter of the Scriptures. The spirit gives itself as letter; the living voice, *viva vox*, casting its shadow in the written text (*scriptura*). If Part One dwells in the frozen crust of the surface of the "depth of riches" (Rom 11:33), Part Two delves into some of the "riches" even as inscrutable as they remain. The doctrine of justification is examined as the description of an event which can only be addressed in the mirror of its representations. At the core of it lies the examination of the person of Christ as it fully manifests itself in the cross that inculcates itself into the profundity of this natural world revealing its entrails as the "apocalypse of Jesus Christ" (Rev 1:1). Part Three offers an overview of the challenges and the actuality of Luther's transfiguration as it makes its appearance and offers its promises for the planetary challenges of the day. The final part deals specifically with the contributions a Lutheran informed theology makes in framing the contemporary challenges faced by the economic order, or the management of the *oikos*, on the one hand, and the trials of the city, or the ruling of the *polis*, on the other. Luther's incisive distinction of these two dimensions (to which the church comes as the third) is one of the most relevant, if not unique, insights the Reformer offers to a theologically responsible and relevant social ethics for today.

Luther is believed to have said, "One Book is enough, but a thousand books are not too many!" Well, many a book it might take to decipher Luther's theology, but suffice it is to say that the time has come to follow his figure as it is passed on, transfigured. To that end I offer the pages that follow.

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