A REPORT FROM THE FRONT LINES

Conversations on Public Theology

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Robert Benne

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Michael Shahan

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Luther and Liberalism

Paul R. Hinlicky

As Professor Benne is a political *liberal*[1] as well as a theological *Lutheran*,[2] it is fitting to offer an essay on the theme entitled above in celebration of the happy occasion of his seventieth birthday and in commemoration of his many fruitful years of service as a Christian ethicist and public theologian.

Luther's recent biographer, Martin Brecht, called attention to philosopher Herbert Marcuse's attack on Luther for "limiting the concern of freedom to the inward man and thus with diverting the Germans from their true needs for freedom."[3] Marcuse's critique stems woodenly from the early Marx: "Luther, to be sure, vanquished the bondage of devotion when he replaced it with the bondage of conviction. He shattered faith in authority while he restored the authority of faith. He transformed parsons into laymen and laymen into parsons. He freed man from outward religiosity while he made religiosity the innerness of men. He emancipated the body from its chain while he puts chains on the heart."[4] To this criticism Brecht responds: It "begs the fundamental question of how freedom is to be achieved. Lu-

1. "Liberal" in the classic not contemporary, popular sense. I would like to acknowledge my own debt to Benne's seminal work, *The Ethics of Democratic Capitalism: A Moral Reassessment* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981).

2. Among many publications, see Benne's particularly "Lutheran" studies *Ordinary Saints: An Introduction to the Christian Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); and *The Paradoxical Vision: A Public Theology for the Twenty-first Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

3. Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521*, trans. J. L. Schaf (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), p. 409.

4. Karl Marx, *On Religion*, ed. S. K. Padover (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), pp. 36-37.

ther's answer was: by liberation as a gift, not through activistic self-realization." Of course, a gift presupposes a Giver: real freedom consists in humanity's "election to communion with God." This of course *is* a scandal to modern sensibilities, but *not only* to modern ones. Brecht rightly notes: "This understanding was just as contrary to the conventional view of man at [Luther's] time as it is to the modern views of human possibilities."[5]

Eberhard Jüngel has also rejoined the Marx-Marcuse line. Luther in his great treatise, *The Freedom of the Christian,* Jüngel writes, "asserts first of all that the *inner man,* in total contrast to an 'I' shut up in its 'inwardness,' can *allow himself to be called out of himself* and can actually *come out* of himself so as to become a new man."[6] We can be set free from self and become free for others because God is there in the gospel calling us out of ourselves to the *glorious liberty of the children of God* (Romans 8), promising that *we shall be changed* (1 Corinthians 15). For Luther, in faith already now this future of freedom is anticipated as a kind of *rapture* or *ecstasy.* Faith lives outside the self, rejoicing in God's favor and at the same time in the same love descending to the neighbor in need. This rapture or ecstasy of faith is the beginning of *true* freedom, *from* self and *for* God and others. The sticking point is that such change is something that happens to us, something given to us through the call of God in the gospel, in the promise that takes present hold in faith. Thus, for Luther this true freedom is radically, exclusively theological — and so for Marx and Marcuse and many others like them illusory.

If it is not an illusion, if this *change* from bondage to freedom is a reality, Jüngel writes following Luther's famous statement against Erasmus, it is because an *exchange* occurs in faith. Freedom properly is "an exclusively divine predicate,"[7] not ours by nature,[8] but only by grace, as gift, and so *mediated.* In Luther's motif of the *joyful exchange* that transpires between Christ and the believer, Christ takes away sin and death and gives in their place his righteousness and life. The royal freedom of the king and representative offering of great high priest becomes the believer's by grace.[9] "Lords of all subject to none": freed from all the idols and demons that tor-

5. Brecht, *Martin Luther,* p. 409.

6. Eberhard Jüngel, *The Freedom of a Christian: Luther's Significance for Contemporary Theology,* trans. R. A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), p. 63.

7. Jüngel, *The Freedom of a Christian,* p. 69.

8. Jüngel, *The Freedom of a Christian,* pp. 19-27.

9. Jüngel, *The Freedom of a Christian,* pp. 70-87.

ment lost humanity; "servants of all subject to everyone": freed in service to others by the agape love that Christ the servant Lord first brought to us. This in a word is what Luther has to say about freedom: we are not free but in bondage. We are freed; we become free when God in Christ makes us his own.

What has this exclusively theological event to do with the struggle today for human freedom in the world? There have been many, mutually incompatible attempts to assert the relevance of Luther for modern people seeking freedom, just as there are also many conflicting assessments of freedom. I want to sort our way through some of these disputes. The goal is to put the theological Luther for whom freedom is the event of divine liberation in the joyful exchange of Christ and faith into conversation with contemporary political liberalism. Fifteen years ago an American philosopher very foolishly proclaimed that with the fall of communism, the "end of history" had come in the sense that all alternatives to liberalism had collapsed. But today liberalism is again very much in doubt. It is threatened from within by what Reinhold Niebuhr identified in the 1930s as the "naïve cynicism" of moralists and idealists who do not see with Christian realism the moral ambiguity of *any* conceivable exercise of political power in a fallen world and thus the necessity of making hard choices amid greater and lesser evils. Today political liberalism is again confronted from without by powerful critiques of liberty in the name of equality and fraternity, i.e., the rival ideologies which once went by the names of communism and fascism. Names have changed but the ideologies remain. The present effort in Lutheran theology is critically to affirm liberalism as the way between the Scylla and Charybdis of those totalizing modern ideologies.

Pitfalls in the Theme of Luther's Relevance

How is Luther relevant to the cause of liberty in the modern world? What is the relation between the celebrated freedom of the modern world and Martin Luther? The question is hardly new; it has been hotly debated since the American and French revolutions at the turn of the eighteenth century. This debate has witnessed the most varied hypotheses. Traditional Lutherans still remember Luther as the father of their separated church, a memory filtered through the theology of Melanchthon and the post-Reformation polemics of the century-long wars of religion. For many of these traditional Lutherans, Luther is their revered Moses who led them out from the bondage of medieval superstition and papal tyranny. For the early modern liberal, on the other hand, Luther is remembered as the hero of individual conscience who defied the Emperor at the Diet of Worms and set European culture on the path to the separation of church and state and religious tolerance. For the Enlightenment, Luther is the first man who had the courage to think for himself, free from the hallowed prejudice of the past, testing all claims and holding only to what stood the test of Reason. For nineteenth-century Romantics, Luther was the shining beacon of awakening national consciousness, who liberated Germans and their language from Mediterranean cultural superiority. In the realm of modern theology, Luther became for Albrecht Ritschl and his school the discoverer of the simple truth of the loving God, a new image which delivered from medieval superstition about the wrath of God.[10] In the so-called Luther Renaissance of Karl Holl in the Germany of the 1920s, Luther became the "German Saviour," whose religious personality could rally the defeated and discouraged Germans.[11] In the 1930s Luther became for *die deutsche Christen* the religious champion of German liberation from international Jewry.[12]

In all this dubious hero worship of Luther, it is essential to recall that Luther is remembered quite differently in other circles. Jews have remembered him as one who called for synagogues to be burned and the people driven out of the land. The proletariat has remembered him as one who

10. "Ritschl rejected the notion of God's wrath as fundamentally at odds with Luther's anti-juristic outlook, and thus saw it as a relapse into an Anselmic mode of thinking." David Lotz, *Ritschl and Luther: A Fresh Perspective on Albrecht Ritschl's Theology in the Light of His Luther Study* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974), p. 154.

11. Cf., inter alia, John Dillenberger, *God Hidden and Revealed: The Interpretation of Luther's Deus Absconditus and Its Significance for Religious Thought* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1953); James M. Stayer, *Martin Luther, German Saviour: German Evangelical Theological Factions and the Interpretation of Luther, 1917-1933* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2000).

12. None less than Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg published a book, *Protestant Pilgrims to Rome: The Treason against Luther,* which argued that the confessing church was "slowly moving back in the direction of St. Peter. Ignatius Loyola, not Martin Luther, was now being made head of German Protestantism. . . . Sterile dogmatism and clerical infantilism were replacing Luther's fiery spirit of protest 'against Rome and Jerusalem.'" Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity 1919-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 128.

counseled princes to slaughter uprising peasants with a good conscience fulfilling their duty to the Lord. Roman Catholics have remembered Luther not as a liberal but as a libertine who could not discipline his own passions and so unleashed a flood of hedonism, greed, and irreligion which destroyed the unity of the church. All these memories have a grain of truth in them. The attempt to make a hero for modernity out of the historical Martin Luther, it seems to me, is full of pitfalls.

The most influential debate in scholarly circles about this began almost one hundred years ago. Liberal theology's greatest representative, Ernst Troeltsch, argued that Luther is so thoroughly a medieval thinker that his theology and ethic are a version of the medieval synthesis of church and state. In other words, Luther sought to reform and renew the Constantinian system. He can therefore have no more than historical meaning for us today who on account of the principle of freedom of conscience reject the political idea that any church can or should play a culturally hegemonic role. It is "simply the medieval idea of the *Corpus Christianum,* within which, in the modern sense of the word, there is, as yet, no separation between Church and State, between sacred and secular. The civil authority and the ecclesiastical authority are two different aspects of the one undivided Christian Society, for which reason the Government and the State have directly Christian aims, and the Church includes the whole of Society."[13] In this forthright call for the disestablishment of the Christian church in European culture, Troeltsch was following the lead of Immanuel Kant, the great philosopher of the Enlightenment and also a nominal Lutheran. In his influential treatise, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone,* Kant argued that with the progress of reason comes freedom from dogma, which dissolves under the acid of criticism. Thus, the ecclesiastical form of faith, under the tutelage of the state, must also dissolve and be replaced by civil society building the kingdom of God on earth. Kant's vision of the end of the church and its assimilation into modern society defined the debate for the century to follow, up through the First World War and Troeltsch's theology.

Karl Holl rose up against Troeltsch. He was a fellow liberal and also follower of Kant, but deeply stricken by the crisis of Kant's project for a modern society wrought by the devastation of the Great War. Holl held

13. Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches,* vol. 2, trans. O. Wyon (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), p. 522.

that the modern world had originated in Luther's revolt against Rome and that the modern world could only rediscover its spiritual basis and recover its orientation by a return to Luther — really to Luther's heroic personal faith, *not* to his dogmatic theology. For Holl, the great thing about Luther's personal faith was that it was "ethical," that is, not superstitious, magical, manipulative, self-serving but a genuine freedom from self for God and others. Thus the so-called Luther Renaissance was born. Holl and his students issued a series of first rate scholarly studies of Luther's vast corpus under the assumption that Luther, properly delivered by historical critical methods from the remnants of medieval superstition, could still inspire modern people to a public faith in the forgiving love of God as a resource for ethical living, thereby securing humanist values and fostering European renewal.

Holl put the question this way: "What do people really look for in religion? Does religion involve a relationship to an Absolute above and beyond oneself, or is it really only a relationship to oneself, to one's own metaphysical ground of being? Is the Ultimate around which religion revolves hidden from us in impenetrable darkness so that the only possibility is a 'silent veneration,' a religion 'as if,' perhaps even a 'religion without God?' Or is it possible for us to approach the deepest mystery, and is there a duty to do so? Is religion, viewed historically, only a carry over from our most primitive stage, a tenaciously maintained residue of prescientific thinking, or is it something that transcends all mere rationality, the concealed motive force for the whole higher development of humanity?" Holl took the position that religion involves a relation to the Absolute, whom we can and indeed must approach. Indeed, this quest for the Absolute is "the concealed motive force" of human progress — a progress, as I mentioned, now in crisis because of the Great War.

Approached this way, Luther is made a representative of a generally human-religious quest for the Absolute. "We do Luther no violence when we try to relate him to these questions. One side of him, it is true, is not at all amenable to this whole approach." That is, we redeem what is valuable in Luther by making him a representative of the generally human-religious quest for the Absolute, and in the process we purge him of what is accidental to his real genius and uncongenial to our sensibilities. What side of Luther is thus to be purged and left behind? This is the Luther who "recognized only one true religion . . . expressed in certain definite statements of faith, transmitted and preserved in a church," i.e., Kant's ecclesiastical form

of faith. Despite such remnants of Catholicism in Luther, Holl argued that "Luther rebuilt from the ground up" by reconceiving God in ethical terms and so "gained his own personal conception of the Christian religion only in a controversy with the Catholic church."[14]

The result of this process, unsurprisingly, is a thoroughly modernized Luther, unrecognizable historically, recast in Holl's image as the pioneer of liberal religion. John Dillenberger, an American scholar of a half a century ago, described Holl's modernized Luther image this way: "Man, simply because of his limited nature, cannot see the full wonder of God in the world. At most there is the mystery of a God who loves one more than one knows and whose wrath one need not fear. . . . Jesus Christ is the revealer of God. What he reveals is that God will pardon man from his guilt, thereby releasing him for his work in the world. Through this one is elevated as a spiritual and moral person above the world and therefore into fellowship and communion with God."[15] All these features are characteristic of nineteenth-century liberal theology, for which science's uncovering of the natural world threatened to overwhelm human moral purposes and drag human beings down to the behavior of the beasts. In this climate, Luther becomes the discoverer of a divine grace that is not so much opposed to sin (which is forgiven by effortless fiat), nor to the wrath of God (which is ignored, if not discounted), but to vast impersonal nature working blindly and relentlessly.

In this modernized Luther, Jesus is central — but not because of "the unheard miracle of forgiveness in Jesus Christ."[16] Rather, Schleiermacher's Christ is projected back onto Luther: Jesus becomes the man perfectly conscious of the loving God, thus God's human revealer — though not himself the revealed Son of God in the flesh who pays the dear price of forgiveness at the cross and so overcomes the wrath of God, as thought the medieval Luther. Neither is God the mysterious Holy Trinity, nor is faith the rapture in the Holy Spirit. God is the kindly Father of lights, presiding over a universal brotherhood of man; faith is the human decision to believe in one's own moral worth, as revealed by Brother Jesus. The Christian calling is to be a good secular person, building the kingdom of God — *not the church!* — on the earth in a moral society, where each human being is

14. Karl Holl, *What Did Luther Understand by Religion?* trans. F. W. Meuser and W. R. Wietzke (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), p. 16.
15. Dillenberger, *God Hidden and Revealed,* p. 34.
16. Dillenberger, *God Hidden and Revealed,* p. 34.

treated as a person, an end, never as an instrument, a means. Jesus with Luther his best interpreter turns out to be the very best liberal!

I have gone on in some detail about the modernized Luther image created by Karl Holl and his followers to underscore an important point. Even though Holl captures freedom from self for God and others as central in his approach, we no longer recognize the historical Martin Luther in his modernizing portrait. In the process, everything interesting Luther might have to say to us today about human bondage and divine liberation has been washed out of the picture. Troeltsch has the greater historical right in this argument with Holl. Luther simply cannot be recast as the spiritual father of the modern world and its liberal theology without violence to history. Luther's real legacy is *problematic* in important respects. His attacks on Pope, peasants, and Jews as minions of Satan, to mention the most disturbing aspect, betray a superstitious belief in the devil that gave the historical Luther psychological permission to lash out in verbal violence against opponents.[17] Grotesquely there are Lutherans still today who think themselves the most faithful of all when they monkey this vile behavior. In reality we cannot today appropriate Luther's demonizing rhetoric and must rather repudiate it decisively if we are to have any chance at learning anything of theological value from the sixteenth-century reformer. Heaven help us, we don't need Luther to help us demonize opponents! By the same token, we can no longer resort to the convenient device of sweeping under the rug this or that unsavory notion we find in Luther with the simplistic smear that it is a "remnant of Catholicism or of medieval superstition." As the theological liberal Troeltsch knew, also the Incarnation, the Trinity, with all the other mysteries of faith including the canon of Holy Scripture are part and parcel "remnants of Catholicism" which are also swept away

17. Mark U. Edwards Jr. has located Luther's verbal violence against peasant, Pope, Turk, and Jew in his apocalyptic worldview. See "Luther's Polemical Controversies," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther,* ed. D. K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 194. "Luther understood his disagreement with [opponents] in the context of this struggle between God and Satan. Behind them all loomed the figure of the devil, the father of lies. Often Luther directed his attacks not at his human opponents but at the devil whom he saw as their master, and, of course, no language was too harsh when attacking the devil" (p. 195). See also "Supermus: Luther's Own Fanatics," in *Seven-Headed Luther: Essays in Commemoration of a Quincentenary, 1483-1983,* ed. P. N. Brooks (Gloucestershire: Clarendon, 1983), pp. 123-46; *Luther's Last Battles: Politics and Polemics, 1531-46* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).

when we use such a big broom. Luther's theological understanding that true freedom is an event that comes upon us from without, a divine liberation for beings in bondage — this is most centrally what Luther has to say to us today about freedom and it is what most directly challenges contemporary sensibilities.

The Perils of Liberalism

But what, on the other hand, is liberalism? I take it that liberalism is a species of modernism, one of its forms of political economy. Since 1989 it has appeared as the predominant one, so far as free market economics and democratic polities have advanced. Yet here too we find a wide variety of theses, so that one man's liberalism is another's conservatism (or worse). The word "liberalism" derives from the Latin *libertas,* the freedom of a released slave; as a political philosophy, liberalism is that set of convictions about the organization of modern society which seeks to maximize the freedom of individuals and limit concentrations of power, especially, of the modern State. It is important, I think, to recall that liberalism is only one of several possible forms of modern political philosophy. If we take the threefold slogan of the French Revolution, *liberty, equality, fraternity* as guide to the quintessentially modern values, it is easy to see how liberalism takes up liberty and makes it the leading value in preference to the other two. In comparison, Marxism took up the value of equality and fascism the value of fraternity as guiding motives respectively. These three great modern political values have vied for dominance since the French Revolution. The legacy of none is without blemish, so much so that whatever else today's skeptical mood of so-called post-modernism may indicate, it is kind of a disgust and disillusionment with the grand dramatic political dreams of liberty, equality, fraternity in whose name so much blood has been shed in the past two centuries. One might think that the trick is to put the three values back together, as social democracy in Europe tries to do. But the tensions among these values are real. Any case for liberalism, I think, demands sober recognition of why this is so.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer analyzed the problem this way: "The American democracy is not founded upon the emancipated man but, quite the contrary, upon the kingdom of God and the limitation of all earthly powers by the sovereignty of God. It is indeed significant when, in contrast to the

[French Revolution's] *Declaration of the Rights of Man*, American historians can say that the federal constitution was written by men who were conscious of original sin and the wickedness of the human heart. Earthly wielders of authority, and also the people, are directed into their proper bounds, in due consideration of man's innate longing for power and of the fact that power pertains only to God."[18] Bonhoeffer has in mind Anglo-American thinkers like John Locke,[19] James Madison, and Abraham Lincoln,[20] all in the Calvinist tradition, whose liberalism was profoundly informed by the need to constrain human depravity in humble acknowledgement of divine sovereignty. For them, liberty comes, as Mary sings in the Magnificat, when in the course of human events the sovereign God "casts down the mighty from their thrones and exalts them of low degree" (Luke 1).

Put more mundanely: liberalism as a political philosophy is based upon bitter providential lessons about the tendency of political power to oppress those it pretends to serve and protect, especially under the banner of those other important values of equality and fraternity. When Stalin decided to starve the Kulaks in Ukraine in order to collectivize agriculture and smash the power of traditional farming communities, he is said to have cited the precedent of Napoleon Bonaparte: "We will drive the people to happiness with an iron fist!"[21] When Lincoln refused to support the immediate, violent end to the slave system advocated by the abolitionists, and worked instead for a gradual political and economic solution, it was because he rejected Bonapartism.[22] The roots of liberalism of course lie

18. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. E. Bethge (New York: Macmillan Paperback Edition, 1975), pp. 102, 104.

19. On Locke, see Paul R. Hinlicky, "The Future of Tolerance," in *All Theology Is Christology: Essays in Honor of David P. Scaer*, ed. Dean O. Wenthe et al. (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2000), pp. 375-89.

20. See Paul R. Hinlicky, "Lincoln's Theology of the Republic According to the Second Inaugural Address," *The Cresset* 65, no. 6 (May 2002): 7-14.

21. Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), pp. 272-324. Also, Stephen Lukes, *Marxism and Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 100-138.

22. Harry V. Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom: Abraham Lincoln and the Coming of the Civil War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), p. 116. Again Bonhoeffer: "The emancipation of the masses leads to the reign of terror and guillotine. Nationalism leads inevitably to war. The liberation of man as an absolute ideal leads only to man's self-destruction. At the end of the path which was first trodden in the French Revolution there is nihilism. The new unity which the French Revolution brought to Europe — and what we are

deeper in history than reaction against the disastrous precedent set by Napoleon's campaign to spread the blessings of the revolution by force. Just a decade or so before Napoleon, the English liberal Edmund Burke in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* had prophesied the coming bloodshed unleashed by the Jacobin reign of terror. Burke had supported the American Revolution against the British crown; ironically today he is remembered as the father of "conservatism" in Anglo-American history. This is quite confused,[23] since Burke distrusted the paternalistic claims of the revolution for the same reason he distrusted the paternalistic claims of the crown. Burke in other words distrusted paternalism. He had learned this distrust of political power pretending to be our loving Father from John Locke, one of many early modern thinkers struggling to deliver Europe from the grip of the religious wars unleashed after the Reformation and to re-establish public life on a surer, more scientific basis than competing claims of Protestants and Catholics to divine authority. Locke is principally remembered for his theory that all knowledge derives from the individual's sensory experience, a theory which undergirds the liberal belief that nothing is to be taken on authority that cannot be tested in one's own experience.

But Locke's influential *Second Treatise of Government* argued in quite a different way than just mentioned. It is ostensibly directed against "the divine right of kings" theory of the monarchists but more interestingly it can be read as directed "between the lines" against a fellow modernist of the previous generation, Thomas Hobbes.[24] Hobbes's solution to the anarchy of religious war raging in England was the social contract theory: warring individuals abandon the miserable state of nature by banding together for collective security and ceding the sword to an absolute sovereign. Thus we pass from the state of nature to civil society. Hobbes thus presupposed a state of nature in which individuals driven by the natural law of self-preservation do all for gain or glory. He was able in this way to depict hu-

experiencing today in the crisis of this unity [i.e. under Hitlerism] — is therefore western godlessness . . . not the theoretical denial of the existence of God. It is itself a religion, a religion of hostility to God." Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 104.

23. No less a "progressive" than Jonathan Schell in his anti-nuclear treatise, *The Fate of the Earth*, invokes Burke's "covenant of the generations" as the fulcrum of moral responsibility. See Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982).

24. Nicholas Jolley, *Locke: His Philosophical Thought* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 196.

man progress as an advance from a brutal state of nature to civil peace. There comes a point in the *bellum omnes contra omnem* when, led by the same law of self-preservation seeking gain and glory, we recognize the advantages of peace. Human beings are not, the Hobbesian claims, fallen angels but rising beasts. Progress comes by the mechanism of enlightened self-interest.

There is a cost, however. The price we pay for the advantages of peace and social progress is the modern emergence of *Leviathan,* as he named his book after the biblical sea-monster: a metaphor for a king or absolute dictator reigning as a god on the earth. *Leviathan* is the first theory of modern totalitarianism; it is also a work of (anti-)theology, specifically, a radically anti-Augustinian case for the city of man against the city of God, the church. Thus *Leviathan* labors to turn upside down the biblical narrative of creation and fall, as I mentioned: no longer are we fallen sinners redeemed in Christ. Now we are beasts rising by enlightened self-interest to civilized existence. In the process, Hobbes's scheme makes human community something unnatural, artificial, conventional, and contractual, even as the *Leviathan* of the totalizing secular state is in turn made necessary to fend off the war of all against all. It is crucial to see then how Hobbes ignored forms of community life in the antecedent state of nature: marriage, family or tribe, forms of common economic life like hunting, gathering, and agriculture (rather than rape and pillage) based on the bounty of the earth, and forms of common religious life expressed in gratitude and respect for life as the property of the common Creator, as we might read in the Bible and its interpreters.[25] But Hobbes writes: "in the state of mere nature . . . there are supposed no laws of matrimony, no laws for the education of children, but the law of nature, and the natural inclination of the sexes, one to another, and to their children."[26]

25. The *Ought* of duty is grounded in the *Is* of community. This interpretation of natural law lies at the font of Western, Latin civilization; in the words of Lactantius (250-330 CE), the "Christian Cicero" who tutored the children of Constantine: "Therefore kindness is the greatest bond of human society; and he who has broken this is to be deemed impious, and a parricide. For if we all derive our origin from one man, whom God created, we are plainly of one blood; and therefore, it must be considered the greatest wickedness to hate a man, *even though guilty.*" Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes* 6:10, trans. W. Fletcher, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers,* vol. 7, emphasis added.

26. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan,* with selected variants from the Latin edition of 1668, ed. E. M. Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), p. 129.

Locke restored just these missing elements of community life to his account of the state of nature: "Paternal or parental power is nothing but that which parents have over their children, to govern them for the children's good, till they come to the use of reason . . . [and] live as freemen. . . . The affection and tenderness which God hath planted in the breast of parents toward their children, makes it evident, that this is not intended to be a severe arbitrary government, but only for the help, instruction and preservation of their offspring. . . . [T]he paternal is a natural government," which terminates when the child becomes an adult.[27] What difference does this account of community in the state of nature make? Locke in short will not need a paternal state — really a dictatorship pretending to care for us as did Papa Stalin — because God has already established parenthood in the state of nature. Consequently, he argued that only limited rights connected with security were ceded to the sovereign in the social contract; the people retain to themselves all other natural rights of family, economy, and religion. Should the social covenant be broken, i.e., should the state fail to maintain peace or protect natural rights, the people retain the right of what Locke called, after the Bible, "an appeal to heaven," i.e., the right to armed revolt. (This is the thinking on the right to revolution which stands behind the American Declaration of Independence.) Locke in these ways sought to retrieve the biblical account of a fall from the peace of Paradise and exile into the wilderness of sin, waiting for the coming of a true Prince of Peace, the Messiah of the Lord; in the meantime, the power of the sword is fraught with moral ambiguity, at once necessary yet full of danger: it must constrain the sinner — yet those who constrain are themselves also sinners. This sober biblical realism recognizes that the state, any state, even the democratic state, is as such a monopoly of coercive power, both necessary (Romans 13) and dangerous (Revelation 13).

In America, it was Reinhold Niebuhr in the middle of the last century, along with his conversation partner from Germany, the previously cited Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who more than any other modern Lutheran[28] retrieved

27. John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government,* ed. C. B. Macpherson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), pp. 88-89.

28. Niebuhr was a member of the Union church, the German Evangelical and Reformed Synod. Although he frequently criticized Luther's conservatism, quietism, and paternalism along the lines of Troeltsch's critique, which he often uncritically relied on, in his theological appropriation of freedom as forgiveness and renewal given by God, he is "Lutheran" in the sense that this lecture deems relevant.

Locke's suspicion and critique of state paternalism with the Christian doctrine of original sin. The state is necessary because: (1) the sinful temptation to exalt oneself at the expense of others infects all people; (2) as a matter of conscience (Rom. 13:5) this universal propensity of pride to resort to violence must be forcibly as well as lawfully constrained. Yet the State is dangerous, because the state which enforces this minimum of justice on behalf of God is itself populated by self-interested sinners, who find it all too easy to rationalize oppression of others, when they tell themselves that it is for their own good. In a classical discussion of the self-deceptions of collective egoism on the level of the modern state, Niebuhr put it this way: "Nations may fight for 'liberty' and 'democracy' but they do not do so until their vital interests are imperiled. They may refuse to fight and claim that their refusal is prompted by their desire to 'preserve civilization.' Neutral nations are not less sinful than belligerent ones in their effort to hide their partial interests behind their devotion to 'civilization.' . . . This does not mean that men may not have to make fateful decisions between types of civilization in mortal combat. The moralists who contend that the imperfections of all civilizations negate every obligation to preserve any of them suffer from a naïve cynicism. Relative distinctions must always be made in history [even though] the collective life of man . . . is invariably involved in the sin of pride."[29] Thus there must be a coercive state in a fallen and sinful world to curb violence; at the same time, the state must be held in check by popular sovereignty and a constitutional law based upon inviolable civil liberties. Thus in liberalism *liberty is secured as the minimum basis* for civilized life and the prospect of progress on the other values of equality and fraternity.

Let us frankly acknowledge what this decision for the primacy of civil liberty means. The liberal state does not as such secure the values either of equality or fraternity. It leaves a value like fraternity to other forms of association than the state, and indeed rejects as fascist any call to forge an organic society backed by the coercive power of the state. Like Lincoln, it leaves even a value like equality to social evolution through the democratic political process. The American Revolution left the morally abhorrent inequality of the slave system intact (in the case of Thomas Jefferson against his own conscience),[30] for the most part blinded to this evil by the collective egoism of white racism. It took the breakdown of civil war and then another century of social struggle to advance that cause of human equality. Marxist opponents of liberalism have always been able to attack the hypocrisy of bourgeois liberty for such grievous failures; but the liberal way in turn rejects Marxist or fascist Bonapartism. Self-governing people have themselves to change and be changed by the process of democratic debate and political decision in all its sharpness and confusion and sometimes even breakdown, if values like equality and forms of fraternal community are to advance and evolve. When the American Revolution institutionally separated church and state, it left the pursuit of happiness and the formation of fraternal community to individual decision and voluntary association. The liberal public is cold *Gesellschaft,* not warm *Gemeinschaft,* and this gives the impression today of Western godlessness, especially in the eyes of Islam.[31] Attacks on liberal democracy have always been able to point to the anomie, the fragmentation and isolation experienced under liberalism.[32] The liberal way rejects the false promise of solidarity. Under liberalism people must find fraternity in communities *disarmed,* lest holy war, crusade, and/or jihad resume and we all return to the darkness of those wars of religion out of which liberalism emerged.

29. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man,* vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), pp. 213-14.

30. "[King George] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation hither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of INFIDEL powers, is the warfare of the CHRISTIAN king of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce. . . ." Jefferson's Draft of the Declaration excised by the Constitutional Assembly, in *The Portable Thomas Jefferson,* ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 239.

31. In May of 2006, for recent example, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad wrote an open letter to U.S. President Bush. It is in many ways a poignant case for progress on social equality in the world that many of us would endorse. But his case turns on the loss of fraternity in liberal societies: "The people of many countries are angry about the attacks on their cultural foundations and the disintegration of families. They are equally dismayed with the fading of care and compassion. . . . Liberalism and Western style democracy have not been able to help realize the ideals of humanity. Today these two concepts have failed. Those with insight can already hear the sounds of the shattering and fall of the ideology and thoughts of the Liberal democratic systems." So Ahmadinejad's letter concludes with a summons to Islamic revolution, which will restore the lost fraternity.

32. As Max Weber analyzed so presciently in his 1919 lecture "Politics as Vocation." Max Weber, "Politik als Beruf," in *Gesammelte Politische Schriften* (Munich: Dunker & Humboldt, 1919); now available in English translation on *Wikipedia.*

Conclusion

All the same, we are spiritually dying in the West today for lack of fraternity, *Gemeinschaft*, solidarity, what Josiah Royce once named the "Beloved Community."[33] In so far as we are and must be liberals who patiently work for greater equality in society, however, we must recognize that we cannot get fraternity from politics and we must be deeply suspicious of those who so desire. Liberal politics can and must work for greater equality but cannot claim fraternity without jeopardizing the freedom of conscience, the freedom to criticize, the freedom of dissent, the freedom of association. We have to embrace this dilemma. If we do that, I submit, we might learn again from Martin Luther that *the church* in gospel essence *is* and *ought to become again* amid these ruins the brotherhood-sisterhood, the fraternity-sorority, the *Gemeinschaft*, the holy community of those crying out for the glorious liberty of the children of God *because* in Christ they have already now been *changed*, really *ex-changed* to faith: "I believe that there is on this earth a holy little flock and community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, and yet is united in love without sect or schism. Of this community I also am a part and member, a participant and co-partner in all the blessings it possesses."[34] The *event* on the earth of divine liberation from bondage to self communicated in the gospel takes place as this *communio*, or it does not take place at all.

33. Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), pp. 75-98.

34. "The Large Catechism," in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Charles P. Arand, Timothy J. Wengert, Robert Kolb (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), pp. 437-38.