

# LEIBNIZIAN TRANSFORMATION? RECLAIMING THE THEODICY OF FAITH

*Paul R. Hinlicky*

## I WHICH TRANSFORMATION?

### I.1

A *transformation* in Lutheran theology? A *necessary* transformation? A *Leibnizian* transformation? Objections abound. To begin with: isn't this a road already traveled in idealist philosophy? Can't we already see the beginnings of rationalism in Melancthon, its formal transition to theological philosophy in Leibniz, its transposition in Hegel into some kind of philosophical pantheism wherein Luther's afflicted faith gives way to the serenity of putative comprehension in absolute consciousness? Wasn't all that »immanent optimism of progress« (Elert) dashed by Hitler, Hiroshima and Stalin (if not already by the Lisbon earthquake and Voltaire's bitter parody of Leibniz in the figure of Dr. Pangloss)? Indeed so. But let us ask then what is meant in the first place by »transformation«. Is it that the form of Lutheran theology is antiquated? Or rather that Lutheran theology was somehow originally misbegotten? What further intensifying of this critique of the old form of Lutheran theology is indicated by the adjective, necessary? Is it the necessity of temporal succession, which continually as inexorably antiquates existing forms and demands the birth of new ones? Or is it the necessity rather of a certain progress in theology which, in the specific tradition of Luther, has attained to critical self-knowledge of tragic contradictions in its own formative stage, hence the need today to retrieve what is precious by disowning what is foul?<sup>1</sup> The latter is how I take the task of »transformation«.

<sup>1</sup> I have in mind here Luther's indulgence in apocalyptic invective against theological opponents, not as his personal failing, but as a structural component in his Pauline-jo-

## 2 THE ORIGINAL LUTHERAN CONTRADICTION

### 2.1

The following clarifications, then, are immediately in order: »Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living: tradition is the living faith of the dead« (Pellikan). Theology as a tradition-discourse continually modernizes; this is simply given with human thought's historicity in which theology also participates in handing on the gospel to new epochs and cultures. Take for example the classic Lutheran »exclusive particle« (*Apology* IV: 73-4), as in the well-known slogan: *Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone*. Originally these affirmations were meant to reject the boot-strapping natural theology of the *moderni* and to lift up the Word and sacraments as the means of grace (»... we reject the notion of merit. We do not exclude the Word or sacraments ...«<sup>2</sup>). Yet these affirmations have become highly ambiguous, if not wholly problematic since the Enlightenment. Our knowledge of the world religions today makes the claim for salvation in Christ alone sound like a mean-spirited ethnocentric conceit; in our Darwinian world there are no free lunches, everything must be paid for, there really is only merit; after Hitler, Hiroshima and Stalin, it is a ethical crime against humanity to take things on authority or to affirm without evidence. As for Scripture, after historical criticism »all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty together again«.

### 2.2

Inevitably, we today in Luther's tradition of theology wrestle with religious pluralism, the new cosmology, the ethical-political crises of emerging global civilization and an historical consciousness which makes Biblicism quite impossible for conscientious thinkers.<sup>3</sup> If we think that we can disown all these problems by a return to Luther, or in more sophisticated fashion by re-presenting an untransformed Luther into our deliberations, we deceive our-

hannine theology; see the Appendix, »The Problem of Demonization in Luther's Apocalyptic Theology« in: PAUL R. HIRNICKY, *Luther and the Beloved Community: A Path for Christian Theology after Christendom*, Grand Rapids, Mich. 2010, 379-385.

<sup>2</sup> ROBERT KOLB T IMOTHY J. WENGER (eds.), *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Minneapolis 2000, 132. I will cite the Latin version of the Augsburg Confession.

<sup>3</sup> So also Roger Haight, as cited by PHILIP CLAYTON, *Transforming Christian Theology for Church and Society*, Minneapolis 2010, 31.

selves.<sup>4</sup> Rudolph Bultmann may have been wrong about how theology modernizes, but he was certainly right to insist that no one can choose their own worldview, which is rather given to them by their place in history.<sup>5</sup> Like it or not, we are (to use a vague and confusing designator of our place in history) *post-modern*. I take this designation in Robert Erickson's historically particular sense that we theologians in Luther's tradition today suffer a «double crisis of modernity»<sup>6</sup>, i. e. the rationalist subversion of Europe's antecedent religion and morality (what I inelegantly call *post-Christendom*) and then, at the hands of the children of rationalism, the anti-rationalist subversion of the Tribunal of Reason (the post-modernism of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, today especially Derrida, Lacan and Deleuze).

## 2.3

I have argued in detail elsewhere how Bultmann was wrong to think that modernization as such constitutes the necessary transformation of Lutheran theology, when this task is conceived of as systematic apologetics.<sup>7</sup> Modernization in the general sense of adaption to new cultural situations takes care of itself, since theologians are actually living in the present – even in that strange false consciousness of fundamentalism, i. e., when theologians imagine that they can resist the tide of time by appealing to the paradox of timeless deity's once and for all temporal revelation.<sup>8</sup> Rather, the genuine transformation needed in theology in Luther's tradition is gained by embracing historicity. That would enable the true *semper reformanda*: utilizing Luther's better insights to execute a *self-criticism* which penetrates to the subtle contradictions embedded in the original form of Lutheran theology. That would attain to actual progress in theological knowledge, not mere temporal succession. It would overcome inherited disabilities. It would enable new projects for new times.

<sup>4</sup> This is my methodological criticism of OSWALD BAYER, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp, Grand Rapids, Mich. 2007. The German subtitle reads »Eine Vergegenwärtigung«. See HINLUCKY, *Community*, 5–6.

<sup>5</sup> RUDOLPH BULTMANN / FIVE CRISSES, *Kerygma and Myth*, (ed. H. W. Bartsch), New York 1961, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Chapter 1 in ROBERT B. ERICKSON, *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kretz, Paul Althaus and Emmanuel Hirsch*, New Haven / London 1985, 1–27.

<sup>7</sup> PAUL R. HINLUCKY, *Divine Complexity: The Rise of Creedal Christianity*, Minneapolis 2010, 49–60, 184–93.

<sup>8</sup> I have made this kind of defense for the innovation of the ordination of women in PAUL R. HINLUCKY: *Whose Church? Which Ministry?*, in: *Lutheran Forum* 42 (2008) 4, 48–53.

## 2.4

Consider, for example, the central teaching of the Augsburg Confession and its Apology that the faith which justifies is the one which believes that one is received into mercy on account of Christ (AC IV: 2).<sup>9</sup> The formulation here very precisely weaves together objective and subjective aspects of the event of justification. Faith is not a meritorious work in itself but gives all the glory to Christ the Mediator, on whose account faith justifies, as it believes that He lives and His work is valid for me. Christ embodies the righteousness which comes from outside as help to the helpless and so as truly good news. Consequently faith also believes something about one's own self, namely, that on Christ's account one too is received into mercy. This latter reflects Luther's celebrated *pro me*, which distinguishes justifying faith from that *fides historica* which even the devils have. The Augustana here holds both aspects together, which in the course of Lutheran history came apart into the sibling rivals of orthodoxy and pietism. Hence, Melancthon affirms in the Apology *both* that righteousness is imputed to faith on account of Christ (the objective pole, Christ's work of righteousness not ours) *and* that faith regenerates (receiving the new self-understanding of the justified, the subjective pole). »And because faith receives the forgiveness of sins and reconciles us to God, we are first regarded as righteous by this faith on account of Christ before we love and keep the law, although love necessarily follows. And this faith is no idle knowledge, nor can it coexist with mortal sin; but it is a work of the Holy Spirit that frees us from death and raises and makes alive terrified minds ... on account of Christ and by faith alone we are justified, that is, out of unrighteous people we are made righteous or regenerated« (Apol. IV: 114–5, 117).<sup>10</sup> Thus, the faith to receive the gift of Christ's righteousness is itself gift, the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit's *ubi et quando Deo visum est* (AC V: 3). As we shall see, however, to sustain this unity of objective and subjective poles in justification not only requires such precise Trinitarian parsing, but inevitably raises the neuralgic problem of divine election. And with that we land in a thorny thicket of theodicy.

<sup>9</sup> *Cum credunt se in gratiam recipere et peccata remitti propter Christum* (AC IV). For the full case for the following, see »Luther Tamed: How the Holy Spirit Disappeared in Lutheranism and Never Reappeared in Barth«, ch. 4 in Hinrichy, Paths, 127–176.

<sup>10</sup> Book of Concord, 139. The emphasis on Spirit-given faith as regeneration is not marginal in Apol. IV: see i. a. IV: 12, 48, 45–47, 62–8, 72, 110, 114–118.

## 2.5

Yet the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article III: 19, obscured all this. It launched the career of confessionalized Lutheran orthodoxy when it expressly rejected any notion of justifying faith as regeneration and thus called the plain meaning of the Apology, as just cited. The reasons it did so are complex,<sup>11</sup> but fear of Catholic reform and accommodation of early Lutheranism's critique surely played a role in a process of polemical polarization (as may be seen already in AC XX: 6-7). What had been a matter of bringing to light something obscured (AC XX: 8) became a matter of fixed polemical antithesis (as in the apocalyptic invective in Luther's later Smalcald Articles<sup>12</sup>). The stage was now set for the eventual Pietist reaction, which with evident justice tried to retrieve Luther's *pro me* in the form of the religious experience of the new birth<sup>13</sup> over against the arid and disputatious proclivities of Lutheran orthodoxy. So Philip Jacob Spener concluded in his seminal manifesto, *Pia Desideria*, »Hence it is not enough that we hear the Word with an outward ear, but we must let it penetrate to our heart, so that we may hear the Holy Spirit speak in them, that is, with vibrant emotion and comfort feel the sealing of the Spirit and the power of Word. Nor is it enough to be baptized ... Nor is it enough to have received the Lord's Supper externally ... Nor is it enough to pray outwardly with our mouth ... Nor, again, is it enough to worship God in an external temple ...«<sup>14</sup> *Non satis est* to believe the right doctrines or practice the right sacraments. Spener's justified reaction was not without its own set of problems, to be sure.

## 2.6

As orthodox and pietist began their interminable quarrel, the intellectual world of Euro-America not only grew weary of such contention but experienced profound transformation in worldview. Modern thought overcame the mystification of physical reality in Aristotelian substantial forms<sup>15</sup> by means

<sup>11</sup> Olli-Pekka Vainio, Justification and Participation in Christ: The Development of the Lutheran Doctrine of Justification from Luther to the Formula of Concord (1580), SMRT 130, Leiden/Boston 2008.

<sup>12</sup> But see the careful nuancing provided by William R. Russell, The Schmalkald Articles: Luther's Theological Testament, Minneapolis 1995, 94-95, 115-116.

<sup>13</sup> See Paul R. Hinrichs: The Doctrine of the New Birth. From Bullinger to Edwards, in: *Missio Apostolica* 7 (1999) 2, 102-109.

<sup>14</sup> Philip Jacob Spener, *Pia Desiderata*trans, trans. T. G. Tappert, Philadelphia 1964), 117.

<sup>15</sup> A process already underway in the school of Melancthon; see Sachiko SUKAWA, The Transformation of Nature Philosophy: The Case of Philipp Melancthon, Cambridge 1995.

of mechanism in the realm of extended things and mentalism in the realm of thinking things.<sup>16</sup> This Cartesian dualism, to be sure, at length became suspect of its own humanocentric mystification in denying that matter can think, in insisting that human minds are ontologically exceptional, and in taking perfect being as the regulative idea of disembodied Mind. In many respects, our confused contemporary post-modernism is simply the demystification in turn of Cartesianism, since we now explain the emergence of intelligent life in terms of the evolution of material forms by natural processes on the »plane of immanence.«<sup>17</sup> So much the worse for the modern theology of liberal Protestantism, which, to meet the intellectual revolution of Cartesianism, hitched its wagon to dualism, that is, to religion as grounding the putative special privileges of human minds over against the threat of sublime nature.<sup>18</sup> In spite of important Lutheran protests in recent times,<sup>19</sup> we have come to a dead end. The necessity of a transformation of Lutheran theology consequently is akin to the need of a resurrection from the dead.

## 2-7

The need for a transformation of theology in the tradition of Luther surely then cannot refer to all the modernizing interpretations of Luther's theological legacy<sup>20</sup> that have taken place and indeed prevailed in this now passing modern period. We need something that genuinely overcomes the debilitating rivalry between the orthodox and the pietist and brings liberal Protestantism back into the ecumenical fold. Materially, this will be something that authentically excavates and delivers the justice of God in the justification of the ungodly as the core message of Christianity. We need not only to modernize Luther, then, but for Luther to criticize modernity, including

<sup>16</sup> LEONARD S. SMITH, *Religion and the Rise of History: Martin Luther and the Cultural Revolution in Germany 1760–1810*, Eugene, Ore. 2009, 35.

<sup>17</sup> GUS DEBEUZE / FELIX GUATTARI, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. H. Tomlinson and G. Burchell, New York 1994, 35–60.

<sup>18</sup> For the full account of these claims, see »Leibniz: A Modern Alternative to Dualism?«, ch. 1 and »After Dualism: Why Spinoza, not Kant, is the True Antagonist of our Story«, ch. 2, in HIRNICKY, *Paths*, 17–42 and 43–86.

<sup>19</sup> HELMUT THIELECKE: *Confrontation of the Basic Types under the Terms Cartesian (Theology A) and Non-Cartesian (Theology B)*, in: *The Evangelical Faith*, vol. 1, trans. G. W. Bromiley Grand Rapids, Mich. 1974, 38–218.

<sup>20</sup> An exemplary dissection of modernizing Luther interpretation is to be found in DAVID LOTZ, *Luther and Ritschl: A Fresh Perspective on Albrecht Ritschl's Theology in the Light of His Luther Study*, Nashville, Tenn. 1974.

Lutheranism. Leibniz, I contend, groped towards that dual discovery when he invented the neologism, *theodicy*. I have proposed then to read Luther *with* Leibniz (*not*, then, with Descartes and Kant) as a helpful challenge today to the imperious pretensions of disintegrating modernity and at the same time as a theological discrimination, indeed defence of its genuine achievements<sup>21</sup> against what I do not shy to name emergent, post-modern barbarisms.<sup>22</sup>

### 3 A LEIBNIZIAN ALTERNATIVE

#### 3.1

Thus we come to the odd thought of a Leibnizian transformation. Note well in light of the foregoing: whether or not this approach to transformation proves viable, it is meant as an alternative to the Cartesianism of modern theology as also to the dysfunctional orthodox-pletist rivalry in Lutheranism's rapidly disintegrating legacy. Hence, the Leibniz in view here is not Kant's Leibniz. He is not the rationalist philosopher who still tried to found natural science on an a priori knowledge of essences. He is not the proto-idealist who made matter into the material of mind's dialectical self-realization. He is not the Platonist theologian who diminished divine omnipotence and freedom in order to save divine goodness and wisdom. The Leibniz in view here is rather a figure that emerges from recent, revisionist scholarship which locates him squarely in the broad Augustinian tradition,<sup>23</sup> yet also more narrowly (and,

<sup>21</sup> See PAUL R. HINLUCKY: Luther and Liberalism in: MICHAEL SHANAN (ed.): A Report from the Front Lines: Conversations on Public Theology. A Festschrift in Honor of Robert Benne, Grand Rapids, Mich. 2009, 89-104.

<sup>22</sup> On post-modern barbarism, see STEVEN E. ASCHEMUM, The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890-1990, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1994. Less cautiously, but worthy of careful study: RICHARD WEIKART, From Hitler to Darwin: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany, New York 2004.

<sup>23</sup> See especially MARIA ROSA ANTAGNOZZA: The Defense of the Mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation. An Example of Leibniz's Other Reason in: British Journal for the History of Philosophy 9, (2001) 2, 283-309, and more recently her important monograph, MARIA ROSA ANTAGNOZZA, Leibniz on the Trinity and the Incarnation: Reason and Revelation in the Seventeenth Century trans. G. Parks, New Haven / London 2007. See also DIODEGENES ALLEN: The Theological Relevance of Leibniz's Theodicy, in: Studia Leibnitiana. Supplementa 14 (1972), 83-90; NICOLAS JOLLEY: Leibniz on Locke and Socinianism, in: Journal of the History of Ideas 39 (1978), 233-250; MICHAEL LATZER: Leibniz's Reading of Augustine, in: Il Cannocchiale (Roma, Carucci; Jan.-Apr. 1999): 17-33; NICOLAS RASCHER, The Phi-

for our purposes, intriguingly) in the Lutheran theological tradition which descends from Philip Melancthon. As Leonard S. Smith has similarly argued, not only is this Leibniz to be located in ecumenically minded Lutheranism,<sup>24</sup> but he »can be seen as a major figure for the rationalization [i. e., in the Weberian sense; I would prefer here *modernization*] of a specifically Lutheran civilization«<sup>25</sup> by his innovating »a method of social analysis founded on history.«<sup>26</sup> Metaphysically, the monadological vision<sup>27</sup> – of each individual's full and complete concept in the mind of God, at the same time compossible with all other such individuals in the harmony of Trinitarian creation – reflects the anti-Gnostic stance of early Lutheranism's decision against Flacius and the victory in it of Melancthon's theology of humanity made in the image and likeness of God.

### 3.2

In this regard despite his sharp criticism – »Leibniz lived on the optimism of the Lutheran belief in God without being willing to pay the necessary price for it« i. e., in the doctrines of sin and grace – even Werner Eiert could concede to this Leibniz his vital relation to Luther's legacy.<sup>28</sup> But, we may ask, is even Eiert's nuanced verdict on »the immanent optimism of progress,« which locates Leibniz in a direct line running through Kant to Hegel, justified? The more interesting Leibniz is the one who rediscovered the question of theodicy embedded in Luther's most brilliant but also most difficult and vexing text, *De sermo arbitrio* (by no means a text congenial to the »immanent optimism of progress!«). This is the Leibniz who tried (though he failed) to overcome Lutheranism's internal and external dysfunctions on just that basis, i. e., Luther's *vita passiva*.<sup>29</sup> This would be a Leibniz therefore who is significant

losophy of Leibniz, Englewood Cliffs, N. J. 1967; ERWIN SCHADLER: *Monad as a Triadic Structure – Leibniz's Contribution to Post-nihilistic Search for Identity*, in: *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research* 14, 1 (1996), 17–33; IFA F. SCHWERTZ, *The Difference between the Mirror and the One Who Sees: The Theological Anthropology of G. W. Leibniz*, PhD dissertation, University of Chicago 2008.

<sup>24</sup> SMITH, *Religion and the Rise*, 109–111.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> WERNER EIERT, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, trans. W. A. Hansen, St Louis, Mo. 1962, 475.

<sup>29</sup> As Eiert expressly noted: »... in his polemics against the Reformed doctrine of predestination, a relationship even with the Lutheran belief in God« can be seen (*Structure*,



as the last European lay intellectual who labored to re-found divided Europe on humanity *created (vita passiva)* in the image of God and its corresponding divine vocation to make the world the best possible. This is the Leibniz who awoke to the real challenges of the new epoch: totalizing naturalisms on the left and on the right represented by Spinoza and Hobbes respectively, challenges to which the warring parties of orthodoxy and pietism were mindlessly deaf and blind. The orthodox accused Leibniz of syncretism for his labors to heal the 16<sup>th</sup> century breach of the Western church by tackling the problem of compatibilism, an endeavor which made Leibniz appear Catholic and Pelagian in their eyes;<sup>30</sup> the pietists by contrast accused him of crypto-Spinozist determinism ironically enough for recurring to Luther's (not Zwingli's or Beza's) theology of divine election. Trying to sail between Scylla and Charibdis, Leibniz was understood by no one. His path was not taken. With his help can we find our own way forward today?

#### 4 THE THEODICY OF FAITH

##### 4.1

After the century of Hitler, Hiroshima and Stalin, it would seem that the question of theodicy could hardly be evaded. After these disasters of modernity,<sup>31</sup> one might imagine that Christian theology in Euro-America would eagerly be seeking to probe the *actual evil*<sup>32</sup> let loose by means of its own insight

---

474). Compare MARK MATTES'S »Response to Himelicky's *Paths Not Taken*« in the May 2010 edition of the online Journal of Lutheran Ethics on the matter of »compatibilism« and the author's rejoinder, »Response to Mattes' »Response« in the August 2010 edition of the same.

<sup>30</sup> Mark Mattes repeats this line of attack in his »Reponse to *Paths Not Taken*« (see footnote 29 above).

<sup>31</sup> TAMAR ASAD, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Stanford, Calif. 2003. Chapter 2 on the transformation of pain in secularism is particularly significant for the present thesis.

<sup>32</sup> *Actual evil* is a concept I develop in *Paths* to speak about the reality of evil, as personified in the biblical figure of Satan, which both respects the achievement of the Augustinian privative theory as a defense against Gnosticism, yet goes beyond it to think with Karl Barth of evil as actualizing possibilities that God does not will. »For you evil does not exist,« Augustine confesses to his God, »and not only for you but for the whole of your creation as well, because there is nothing outside of it which could invade it and break down the order which you have imposed on it.« AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin,

into the justice of God which justifies the ungodly in Jesus Christ. Nor, one would think, should such a contemporary task be a difficult challenge for Lutheran theology in principle. Contemporary biblical scholarship encourages us, not to abandon, but rather to reorient Luther's existentially focused *die Gerechtigkeit, die vor Gott gilt* in the salvation-bearing righteousness of the God of the prophets of Israel.<sup>33</sup> N. T. Wright accordingly calls attention to the question of theodicy embedded in the cosmic-apocalyptic expectation of the saving righteousness of God.<sup>34</sup> Not by accident, the biblical citation which Paul the Apostle draws from the Scriptures and sets up as a banner over the Epistle to the Romans is Habakkuk's »the just will live by their faith«. A *theodicy of faith* such as we find in Romans 8 is both a task and a possibility intrinsic to Lutheran theology and its classical sources. Yet the possibility of a satisfying theodicy is deeply suspect today: from the buffoon pontificating of Dr. Pangloss,<sup>35</sup> through the penetrating protest of Kant that philosophical theodicy illicitly transcends the limits of reason and pretends to see things *sub specie aeternitatis*,<sup>36</sup> to the haunting words of a fellow prisoner at

New York 1986, VII, 13, 148. The metaphysical truth of this as an affirmation against Gnostic dualism is hardly to be doubted; its sufficiency as an account of the actual evils of, e. g., Hitler, Hiroshima and Stalin, is equally dubious. See HINRICKY, Paths, ch. 6.

<sup>33</sup> JOHN REUMANN (with responses by Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Jerome D. Quinn), Righteousness in the New Testament, Philadelphia: New York 1982, is a masterful survey of the question in New Testament scholarship in service of the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue on the doctrine of justification.

<sup>34</sup> »Paul, like all first-century Jews, had a plight, though it is not to be identified with that of the puzzled existentialist, or for that matter that of the conscience-stricken Protestant. The plight consisted of the sorry state of Israel, interpreted as a problem about the covenant faithfulness and justice of the creator God who had called her to be his chosen people. To the extent that this sorry state included the present sinfulness of Jews as individuals, the normal Lutheran reading can be contained within this analysis.« N. T. WRIGHT, The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology, Minneapolis 1992, 261. For the detailed argument, see ch. 6 on the New Perspective on Paul in HINRICKY, Community, 221–257.

<sup>35</sup> VOLTAIRE, Candide and Related Texts, trans. David Wooten, Indianapolis, Ind. 2000, 2. See ch. 15 of ROGER PEARSON, Voltaire Almighty: A Life in Pursuit of Freedom, London 2005, 252–268. »For a skeptical deist and lapsed Optimist like Voltaire such a disaster [the All Saints Day Lisbon Earthquake of 1755] was not only an indictment of Pope and Leibniz, it also represented a tremendous challenge to the dogma and ritual of the Christian Church.« (250).

<sup>36</sup> IMMANUEL KANT: On the miscarriage of all philosophical trials in theodicy (1791),

Auschwitz in Elie Wiesel's memoir *Night* about their God hanging on the Nazi gibbet, dead, murdered, refuted,<sup>37</sup> theodicy seems to be, just as Kant concluded, the painful question we are forced by experience to ask but can never answer. Many theologians in the tradition of Luther have since concurred in Kant's agnosticism, treating the question of theodicy as a speculative stragem prying into the secrets of the divine Majesty, vainly attempting rationally »to map« the *deus absconditus*<sup>38</sup> but in actual danger of falling into an abyss of uncertainty and eventual despair.

## 4-2

When contemporary theologians do engage the problem of theodicy, as Gerhard Forde pointed out some years ago from another angle, they seem rapidly to become undone by it, abandoning creedal convictions about the majestic perfections of the Almighty Father in exchange for the Platonic theodicy of a morally good but limited deity, saving divine goodness by limiting divine power.<sup>39</sup> This move, Forde argues, is but the »vain attempt to assure us that God, of course, has nothing to do with suffering and evil. God is ›good,‹ the rewarder of all our ›good‹ works, the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow of merit. But is this prettified God the God of the Bible? Is it not quite probable that just these attempts to whitewash God are the cause of unbelief? Meanwhile, suffering goes on unabated. If God has nothing to do with suffering, what is he involved with?«<sup>40</sup> In human experience of the uncanny Other which God is, »the attributes of divine majesty keep coming back like a song... even if such attempts were to succeed, theology would only make God ludicrous. For what is God without the attributes of divine majesty?«<sup>41</sup> »Instead of being brought to the praise of God, we bend our efforts to justify

trans. A. W. Wood and G. Di Giovanni, in: *Religion and Rational Theology: The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, Cambridge 2001, 19–38.

<sup>37</sup> Elie Wiesel, *Night*, trans. Stella Rodway, New York 1982, 62.

<sup>38</sup> MARK МАТТЕС, *The Role of Justification in Contemporary Theology*, Lutheran Quarterly Books, Grand Rapids, Mich. 2004.

<sup>39</sup> E. g., РЛАТО, *The Republic*, Book II:378c; ГЕРНАКД О. ГОРДЕ, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation*, 1518, Grand Rapids, Mich. 1997. Theologians, Forde observes, worry about divine »timelessness and immutability« which »seem to cancel out the freedom and responsibility of the creature« and go to work »in some way to explain away the problem of objectionable attributes« of God. (74)

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 85. Forde may be thinking of the acerbic comment of Nietzsche's Zarathustra: »Pity killed God.«

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

him« – but citing Job against theodicy, Forde concludes: »in actual suffering all theorizing is over. One enters into contention with God.«<sup>42</sup>

#### 4.3

Thus, in place of a theoretical theodicy Luther's theology is said to offer us today a »theology of lament« as perhaps the best contemporary theologian of this mind, Oswald Bayer, has argued: a true spiritual engagement, after the model of the biblical Psalms, with the dark riddles and painful enigmas of life that breaks through the hiddenness to the God who is there for us in the darkness, revealed to faith in the manger and at the cross.<sup>43</sup> There is no denying the pastoral wisdom of this counsel nor its roots in Luther's admonition to flee to the revealed God. As with Forde, theology in Luther's tradition cannot and must not, in Bayer's view, try to provide a theoretical account of such evils. Any such theoretical account removes itself from the situation of embattled faith and adopts the alien perspective of a spectator. From this alien perspective, what is theorized inevitably results not in the justification of God but in the justification of the evils as supposedly part of God's plan. Any such explanation never suffices to stifle rational doubts about the alleged wisdom of God to those afflicted. Indeed, it would be spiritually idle, since what we need is assured faith, not some bogus theoretical explanation (which may serve to sanctify the unjust causes of suffering as part of God's plan).

#### 4.4

As hinted with the reference to Kant, it is important to locate this suspicion about theodicy as a »theoretical« justification of evil in the epoch of Euro-American history which begins with the Enlightenment's epistemological quest for certainty and is now ending. Ironically, since Bayer is a contemporary theologian in Luther's tradition least guilty of putting Luther to work on behalf of modern agendas, I can nevertheless illustrate the problem of unacknowledged and unwarranted modernizing of Luther with a slice of Bayer's work on our neuralgic topic. In echo of Kant, Bayer calls theodicy theology's »open wound,« i. e. a painful, unsolvable problem. Bayer's thus quietly dissolves the historical Luther's Augustinian problem with predestination and, in effect, re-

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 88. But, one may object to Forde, how does one know this uncanny Other, the *deus absconditus*, as God without criteria by which to recognize Him/Her/It? In *Paths Not Taken*, I criticize Forde for unwittingly following an Occamist-Cartesian natural theology of divine voluntarism.

<sup>43</sup> BAYER, Luther's Theology, 201–205.

tools Luther's teaching to address a virtually Pascalian<sup>44</sup> perception<sup>45</sup> of the awful sublimity of nature hiding God's fatherly care for His human children, as the liberal Protestant nineteenth century, following Kant,<sup>46</sup> so often put the matter.<sup>47</sup> This move substitutes a modern experience of insignificance in vast, ancient and impersonal cosmic processes for Luther's own understanding of the scandal occasioned by the light of grace in distinction from the light of nature, namely, that the justifying faith bestowed in the Spirit's free and sovereign election is apparently withheld from some, implying divine reprobation.<sup>48</sup>

#### 4.5

In an exemplary study, Thomas Reinhuber (a theologian in Bayer's own circle) has underscored the very point: »In Luther's doctrine of the Lights [of nature, grace and glory] the concern is less with general knowledge of God as much more with the problem of theodicy and predestination ... both are

<sup>44</sup> »When I consider the brief span of my life absorbed into the eternity which comes before and after - as the remembrance of a guest that tarrieth but a day (Wisdom 5:15) - the small space I occupy and which I see swallowed up in the infinite immensity of spaces of which I know nothing and which I know nothing of me, I take fright and am amazed to see myself here rather than there, now rather than then. Who put me here? By whose command and act were this time place allotted to me?« Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer, London / New York 1995, No. 68; 19. In Lezek Kolakowski's interpretation, Pascal's modernity anticipates Kant's divorce of the spheres of faith and reason; see Lezek Kolakowski, *God Owes Us Nothing: A Brief Remark on Pascal's Religion and on the Spirit of Jansenism*, Chicago 1995, 170-175.

<sup>45</sup> Bayer, *Luther's Theology*, 213, n. 53.

<sup>46</sup> »... though the irresistibility of nature's might makes us, considered as natural beings, recognize our physical impotence, it reveals in us at the same time an ability to judge ourselves independent of nature, and reveals in us a superiority over nature that is the basis of a self-preservation quite different from the one that can be assailed and endangered by nature outside us. This keeps the humanity in our person from being degraded ...« The sublime »is not contained in any thing of nature, but only in our mind, insofar as we can become conscious of our superiority to nature within us, and thereby also to nature outside of us ...« Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. W. S. Pluhar, Indianapolis, Ind. 1987, 123.

<sup>47</sup> On this claim, see Hinrichy, *Paths*, ch. 2, 43-86.

<sup>48</sup> E.g. »It belongs to the same God Incarnate to weep, lament and groan over the perdition of the ungodly, though that will of Majesty purposely leaves and reprobrates some to perish.« Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, Grand Rapids, Mich. 2000, 176.

problems about the righteousness of God ... « Reinhuber explains: the light of nature raises the question of theodicy. Reason is led by the course of events to Epicurus, that is, either to doubt God's existence, that is, divine power, or God's justice, that is, divine goodness.<sup>49</sup> The light of grace provides a »solution« to this question of natural theology in its promise of »eternal life after this temporal life.« But this very answer raises a new problem of theodicy: »why are not all people destined for this eternal life?« Faith cannot answer this question, but only believe in the righteousness of God to be revealed in the light of glory.<sup>50</sup> Hence the particularity of grace resolves one kind of question in theodicy, namely: the assurance to those gifted with faith of God's fatherly care, since faith is union with God's own Son, Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit who bears witness that believers are indeed the children of God (Rom. 8:16). But simultaneously the sovereign Spirit's election to faith evokes a new kind of question in theodicy, the problem of divine justice in the apparent reprobation of those from whom faith is withheld.

#### 4.6

In Luther's forthright, even abrasive language from *De seruo arbitrio*: »faith and the Spirit judge otherwise [than natural reason], believing that God is good even though he should destroy all men«<sup>51</sup> – the logical point under the harsh paradox being that it is question-begging to set up another authority over God, who asserts divine authority precisely by free election to faith.<sup>52</sup> Hence Luther goes on the offense in his theodicy, trying to show that in protesting about the injustice of God's sovereign choosing it is *fallen* reason that asserts *hostility* at the very thought of reprobation and in just this way *confirms* its *corruption*. The corruption of fallen reason is exposed in that it does not protest the good luck of grace and mercy, betraying that it secretly considers such luck as its own well-merited reward. Reason only protests the bad luck of reprobation: »because this is against its interest, it finds the action iniquitous and intolerable ... [it does] not judge in this matter according

<sup>49</sup> See forthcoming PAUL R. HINLUCKY: Luther's Atheism, in: JENNIFER HOCKENBERRY (ed.): When Reason is a Whore: The Dilemma of the Lutheran Philosopher, Minneapolis 2011.

<sup>50</sup> THOMAS REINHUBER, Kämpfer der Glaube: Studien zu Luthers Bekenntnis am Ende von *De seruo arbitrio*, TWT 104, Berlin / New York 2000, 199, my translations.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>52</sup> »God is He for Whose will no cause or ground may be laid down as its rule or standard ... Causes and grounds are laid down for the will of the creature, but not for the will of the Creator – unless you set another Creator over him!« LUTHER, Bondage, 209.

to equity, but according to passionate regard for its own interest.<sup>53</sup> Reinhuber is certainly correct then to maintain that Luther »mistrusts« any theodicy of reason,<sup>54</sup> but for exactly the same cause that Luther otherwise distrusts reason as the »hochste hur, die der Teufel hat.«<sup>55</sup> In other words, then, it is not theodicy but reason which Luther mistrusts. Luther trusts according to the theodicy of faith given in Romans 8.

#### 4-7

Having shown that human reason is not neutral in disputing about God's justice, but rather a covert combatant in the apocalyptic battle, Luther is eager to concede that it is incomprehensible also to believing reason how it is just on God's part to crown some who are unworthy with saving grace, but then to abandon to punishment those who are no more unworthy. But believing reason, he says, trusts on the basis of the mercy revealed in Christ what it cannot yet comprehend; incomprehension will give way to understanding God's justice when faith gives way to sight.<sup>56</sup> Thus Luther summons his readers to trust in the future revelation of the »God whose justice is most righteous and most evident« – a trust whose good reason in the present is the *deus revelatus in Christo*.<sup>57</sup> In the light of glory the presently perceived contradiction between faith and experience will be resolved. That's the gist of Luther's eschatological theodicy of the just who live now by embattled faith, following Paul: »the sufferings of this present age are not worthy to be compared to the glory to be revealed ...« (Rom. 8: 18).

#### 4-8

It was Leibniz who actually grasped this Pauline-Augustinian particularity of Luther's theodicy and made it central to his own multifaceted project. In the *Theodicy*, Leibniz had early on described the issue under consideration this way:

But the difficulty is great, above all, in relation to God's dispositions for the salvation of men. There are few saved or chosen; therefore the choice of many is not God's decreed will. And since it is admitted that those whom he has chosen

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>54</sup> REINHUBER, Glaube, 185.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>56</sup> LUTHER, Bondage, 234.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

deserve it no more than the rest, and are not even fundamentally less evil, the goodness which they have coming only from the gift of God, the difficulty is increased. Where is, then, his justice (people will say), or at least, where is his goodness? Partiality, or respect of persons, goes against justice, and he who without cause sets bounds to his goodness cannot have it in sufficient measure. It is true that those who are not chosen are lost by their own fault: they lack good will or living faith; but it rested with God alone to grant it them ... [so] there remains the question why God does not deliver all – why he delivers the lesser number and why some in preference to others. He is in truth their master, but he is a good and just master; his power is absolute, but his wisdom permits not that he exercise that power in an arbitrary and despotic way, which would be tyrannous in-deed.<sup>58</sup>

As God is »the master of wills, the king of hearts,« so »there always remains a great difficulty concerning God, since it rested with him to give [the wicked] the same good will.«<sup>59</sup>

#### 4.9

No doubt there are other things going on in Leibniz's great but perplexing book besides his specific appeal to and appropriation of Luther's scandal of electing grace, not all of it worthy of our admiration or emulation.<sup>60</sup> But this claims attention: what theodicy is and how it justifies God in His judgment turns on the *perspectival* conflict between the Pauline powers of flesh and Spirit, just as Luther argued against Erasmus in finally distinguishing the lights of nature, grace and glory. Or, in another, earlier formulation, it turns on the epistemic conflict between the wisdom of the flesh and the wisdom of the Spirit,<sup>61</sup> or in yet another formulation from later in life, between the old language/grammar of philosophy and the new theological language/grammar of the Spirit.<sup>62</sup> In all such formulations, Luther underscores what I have else-

<sup>58</sup> GOTTFRIED LEIBNIZ, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*, trans. E. M. Huggard, Chicago / La Salle, Ill. 1998, 59–60, see also 61–62, 125–126.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 178. Further, see HINLUCKY, Paths, 89–95, 274–282.

<sup>60</sup> HINLUCKY, Paths, ch. 6, 223–282.

<sup>61</sup> *prudentia carnis*; MARTIN LUTHER, »Commentary on Romans 8:3,« in LW 25:344–350.

<sup>62</sup> As in the 1540 *Disputation concerning the Divinity and Humanity of Christ*, translated from the Latin text of WA 39/2, 92–121 by Christopher B. Brown for *Project Wittenberg*. The translation may be found at [www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-home.html](http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-home.html).



where described as the »unavoidable equivocation«<sup>63</sup> that transpires when the gospel captures and reutilizes familiar forms of human or philosophical discourse for its own divine and saving purposes. Consequently what philosophy would think constitutes the justification of God and what theology thinks such justification to be are linked by their sharing of a common world of language but are also as sharply differentiated as speaking of One who had been crucified as now risen, vindicated, exalted, and present to reign in the just who walk by faith. Building on Luther's perspectivalism, Leibniz argued for the harmony of »true« faith and »true« reason in his *Theodicy*, each of which respectively is a true perspective *critically*, i. e., by seeing *past* ego-centric experience, or limited appearance, to the reality of things. But does not such new and critical use of reason in accord with faith make Leibniz a theologian in Luther's sense?

#### 4.10

In any case, several things follow from the foregoing. First, it is wrong to say without qualification that Luther has no interest in questions of theodicy.<sup>64</sup> It is more precise to say for Luther that, while philosophical theodicy leads to an abyss of doubt and finally to blasphemy or atheism,<sup>65</sup> there is, following Paul's discussion in Romans 8, a theodicy of faith, since faith is belief in divine righteousness, revealed in the resurrection of the crucified Christ. Moreover, in justification this righteousness appropriated in a judgment about the empirical self, thence claiming all of history, indeed the cosmos for God's Reign.<sup>66</sup> Second, as Leibniz laboured to explain, such theodicy of faith has cognitive purchase. It renders an account of evil (i. e. the distinctions between metaphysical, physical and moral evils) even as it knows divine justice

<sup>63</sup> PAUL R. HINRICKY: Luther's Anti-Deceitism in the Disputatio de divinitate et humanitate Christi (1540), in: OSWALD BAYER / BENJAMIN GREED (eds.): *Creator est creatura: Luthers Christologie als Lehre von der Idiomenkommunikation*, Berlin / New York 2007, 169–177.

<sup>64</sup> AS KLAUS SCHWARZWAJLLER does categorically in: Sibboleth: Die Interpretation von Luthers Schrift *De servo arbitrio* seit Theodosius Harnack. Ein systematisch-kritischer Überblick, in: *Theologische Existenz heute* 153 (1969) 12.

<sup>65</sup> »Behold! God governs the external affairs of the world in such a way that, if you regard and follow the judgments of human reason, you are forced to say, either that there is no God, or that God is unjust...« LUTHER, Bondage, 315.

<sup>66</sup> »*There is a life after this life, and all that is not punished and repaid here will be punished and repaid there; for this life is nothing more than a precursor, or, rather, a beginning, of the life that is to come.*« Ibid., 316 (emphasis in original).

in Christ.<sup>67</sup> The cognitive as well as prophetic point of theodicy will then be to provide an account of the 'actual evil' against which the God of the gospel contends, such that believers can know and recognize it, resist and endure, even overcome it (not then the complacent rationalization of evil attributed to Leibniz<sup>68</sup>).

## 5 TOWARDS CRITICAL DOGMATICS

5.1

No mortal thinking can make an absolute principle of the *Novum*. What is new in history is new only in respect to the tradition in which it lives – or perhaps repudiates and leaves behind. I have underscored to the historical particularity of Luther's acute formulation of the problem of theodicy in the light of the Spirit's sovereign grace in the historical act of election to faith, for this represents on the level of individual existence in history the line of demarcation between the *civitas dei* and the *civitas terrena*. To be sure, as I have argued in *Paths Not Taken*, we today should follow the revision of the doctrine of election pioneered by Gottfried Leibniz and taken forward by Karl Barth, so that in the clear light of the universal atonement in Christ, the possibility of reprobation would appear at the margin of the church's proclamation, as the ultimate, impossible possibility of knowing, willful refusal of mercy, the final actual evil. For all its capacity to entertain paradox as the rhetorical form of the gospel, however, modern Lutheran theology has preferred the existentialist-individualist reduction of Luther's understanding of faith to the *pro me* decision of faith. To this has corresponded as a consequence thinking about the community of faith, not as harbinger of the Beloved Community, but as an elite society of religiously authentic souls. These modernizing moves not

<sup>67</sup> Whether theory or explanation are the best concepts to use for this theological knowledge of evil as the evil against which divine righteousness comes and asserts itself is another question beyond the scope of this paper. I am inclined toward some version of perspectivalism or pragmatism in understanding theological claims to knowledge. See PAUL R. HINRICKY: *The New Language of the Spirit: Critical Dogmatics in the Tradition of Luther*, ch. 3 in: DENNIS BIELEFELD et al.: *The Substance of the Faith: Luther's Doctrinal Theology for Today*, Minneapolis 2008, 131–190. In *Beloved Community*, I experiment with Josiah Royce's notion of interpretation as a form of cognition that synthesizes perception and conception in the on-going act of making sense of something to others.

<sup>68</sup> E.g. the influential treatment of Leibniz in JOHN HICK, *Evil and the God of Love*, New York 1966, 160–172; see the critique of Hick in HINRICKY, *Paths*, 89–92.

only Flatten out Luther's meaning in the direction of liberal Protestantism, as I have shown in the preceding. More gravely, they lose sight of the paradox that the promise of a truly universal form of human community bound together in and by the self-donating love of the Trinity is born within, and in embattled history must ever be borne by, a particular community of *disciplined belief* which manifests this very love in which it believes only in broken fragments, as Augustine said, its righteousness for the most part consisting in the forgiveness of sins. Because the conflict between the two cities continues in ever new ways, also within the sphere of religion, the needed transformation of Lutheran theology is that itself be *re-formed* as critical dogmatics (not confessional apologetics): Which Christ (Mark 13:5)? What gospel (Gal. 1:6-9, 6:15-16)? Whose Spirit (1 John 4:1-3)?