



CHAPTER 40

THE USE OF LUTHER'S  
THOUGHT IN PIETISM AND  
THE ENLIGHTENMENT

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I. THE FOUNDATIONALIST ERA

The Cartesian epoch might better be designated the Foundationalist Era than 'the Enlightenment, i.e., it was the project of grounding knowledge on rationally indubitable foundations, whether empirical or intellectual. In the young Spinoza's words the task was '(1) to put aside all prejudice, (2) to discover the foundations on which everything should be built, (3) to uncover the cause of error, (4) to understand everything clearly and distinctly' (Spinoza 1998: 7). This was an agenda shared also by 'empiricists', who demurred from Descartes' intellectualism; unlike the 'rationalists', who pursued a strategy of intellectual intuition to found knowledge, empiricists looked to rock-bottom sense experience of the external world. In either case, however, the attempt is to know how we know by making time, as it were, stand still. The belief is that we can transcend somehow to see ourselves seeing (or, as in Kantian transcendentalism, to deduce the unconditioned conditions for the possibility of our cognition) and thereby ascertain the universally valid criteria for knowledge as such. So equipped, we would no longer have to 'test the spirits' in the vicissitudes of historical existence nor patiently to work at hermeneutical understanding of others since we would already know in principle what can and cannot be claimed as knowledge. We would be the very Tribunal of Reason (Kant 1979).

It is little wonder, then, that modern scholarship experiences vertigo in trying to define and evaluate this epoch of the pietists and the rationalists with its paradigmatic possibilities for 'continuing' Luther's reformation (Strom 2002; Ward 1993; Weigelt 1970). The early modern age was characterized by the peculiar polarization between



were spent in [nourishing the] Sloth and Luxury [of the clergy], [quickly embraced the opportunity of turning these lazy fat Cattel to Grass].

(Pufendorf, 2007: 126–7; in quoting the early Bohun translation, the modern editors have placed in brackets language added by Bohun for pleonasm, periphrasis, and elaboration)

Pufendorf's witty demythologizing of Lutheranism's sacred narrative of 'the Reformation' concluded with Manzambano's caustic description of its outcome in Lutheran Orthodoxy's Caesaro-papism:

The People [*plebi*] are taught by them to reverence their Magistrates [and Princes], as [the Ministers of God], and [finally] that all the good works expected of them, is to do the Duties of Good men: Nor [am I displeas'd], that they have retained [so much of the Ceremonial Part and the Pomp of Religion, which serves] to divert [guide] the minds of the [simple] People, who have not sense enough to contemplate [the Beauty of] simple, undress'd Piety ... So that it is not possible to imagine a Religion that can be more serviceable and useful to the Princes of Germany, [than that of the Lutherans,] we may from hence conclude, that this is [generally] the best [suited] for a Monarchy than any in the World.

(Pufendorf 2007: 226)

The appearance of early rationalism in Lutheran Germany took this form of political philosophy in a project of secularizing natural law under the auspices of enlightened reason in the aftermath of decades of religious warfare. But as John Witte has shown, the reformation of jurisprudence in the sixteenth century had taken place under the aegis of a dogma of revealed theology: the creation of humankind in the image and likeness of God, on account of which the natural law of God was indelibly inscribed on the human heart (Witte 2002). For the Reformation that meant that law was to be 'secularized' in the sense of removing it from the jurisdiction of the clergy, as in traditional canon law. But it was not at all 'secularized' in the sense of removing the divine-human vocation (Gen. 1:26–28) as the *ratio ultima* of human rights and duties and indeed the basis of criminal justice with its penalties (Gen. 9:4). The political was not abandoned to the Devil; rather, it was to be reformed and renewed. Similarly in this connection Joshua Mitchell has shown how Luther had 're-enchant[ed] the secular by regarding it as the holy time in which service of God and neighbour takes place (Mitchell 1992). But with Pufendorf, this original Reformation-theological basis for a holy secularity came under attack in the name and for the sake of emergent secularism.

Pufendorf's champion at Leipzig was Christian Thomasius (1655–1728, Leibniz' contemporary there, though Leibniz opposed his and Pufendorf's legal positivism) (see Leibniz' 'Opinion on the Principles of Pufendorf', Riley 2001: 64–75; cf. Riley 1996). Thomasius 'endorsed Pufendorf's secularized political absolutism. In making social peace the goal of politics and the source of its norms, Pufendorf had sought to exclude the church from the political arena...' (Thomasius 2007: xi). In Thomasius' own words, 'the right in religious affairs belongs to the prince as such, not to him as a member of

Lutheran, affirmed this doctrine of grace. 'But Francke had lost the immediate and personal experience of this love. Leibniz on the other hand believes that with the aid of "the light" of science he does possess this experience' (Meyer 1952: 76). Study of Francke's account of his conversion makes it clear that his 'religious dilemma becomes identical with an intellectual dilemma unknown to Luther'. What was this new dilemma brought by a changed horizon? When, in his spiritual anguish, Francke turned to the Bible, it occurred to him 'to wonder whether the Scriptures are truly the Word of God. Do not the Turks make this claim on behalf of their Koran, and the Jews on behalf of the Talmud? And who shall say who is right?' (Meyer 1952: 76). The early modern pietist worries as much about historical relativism as about finding a gracious God. Francke's resolution of this worry is not cognitive; the rational objection is simply overwhelmed by the experience of the New Birth:

So great was his fatherly love that he wished to take me finally, after such doubts and unrest of my heart, so that I might be more convinced that he could satisfy me well, and that my erring reason might be tamed, so as not to move against his power and faithfulness. He immediately heard me. My doubt vanished... I was assured in my heart... Reason stood away; victory was torn from its hands; for the power of God had made it subservient to faith.

('Autobiography' in Erb 1983: 105)

Meyer's parenthetical allusion to Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716) by way of contrast to Francke is glib: Leibniz did not claim for 'natural theology' what Meyer assumes.<sup>1</sup> But a corresponding rationalist foundationalism certainly can be uncovered in early Lutheranism, indeed among Leibniz's contemporaries. Inspired by Hobbes, the motives are in the first place political. Writing in the fictional voice of Monzambano, an Italian observer and interpreter of all things German, Samuel Pufendorf (1632–94) retold the story of 'the Reformation' as a purely secular contest of powers, beginning with 'the inconsiderate rashness and haste of Leo X'. The demystification continued:

For some contemptible [*miselli*] Monks [were] contending with one another, one Party of which was very zealous for Religion, and the other Party no less concerned for their Profit; and at first both of them had the Papal Power in great esteem, [as Sacred]... [But] when Martin Luther saw he could have no Justice done to him [at the Pope's Tribunal], he began to court the Grace and good Opinion of the Laity; and soon after, he positively refused to submit to the Judgment of the Pope... [and] he began to teach, That the Care of the Church belonged to Secular Princes... And they again reflecting, That the great Revenues their Ancestors had given to pious uses,

<sup>1</sup> On Leibniz's apologetic genre, see Antognazza 2007 and Hinicky 2009, especially chapter 5. 'General Pneumatology: The Sublimation of the Spirit into Progressive Christian Culture', 177–222.



an affective 'theology of the heart' (Campbell 1991: 2–3) over against the rationalistic theology of the inerrant Bible in Protestant Scholasticism, increasingly giving way to a rationalistic philosophical theology within the limits of reason alone: what Kant finally named 'ontotheology' (1978: 37–9). The question that arose and dominated research was not, as presently hinted, whether and how these alternatives framed new appropriations of Luther. Rather, assuming the incorrigibility of the foundationalist endeavour, research asked whether and in what way pietism or rationalism arose from Luther: Which is Luther's true legacy? Albrecht Ritschl's late nineteenth-century study of pietism sought to delegitimize its Lutheran credentials (1972: 76; cf. Tillich 1967: 3:241–3, for a critique). Ever since, our topic has been subject to widely varying interpretations, as pietist or rationalist surrogate in a convoluted debate about who truly inherits Luther's mantle. Generally speaking, these rivals have been seen on one side to represent real alternatives to one another, as in Ritschl's disciple, Ernst Troeltsch, who disparaged a compromised, reactionary 'church pietism' in favour of the ethical idealism of neo-Protestantism (Troeltsch 1912–25: 4:488–531; see the trenchant criticism of Troeltsch's artificial schematization by Yeide 1997: 25–7). On the other side, these two apparent rivals have also been seen as siblings, kindred expressions of the same fundamental impulse, as in Karl Barth, who detected the same titanism of 'modern man' at work in both (Barth 1959: 44). Broadly speaking, Barth had the deeper insight (Busch 2004: 269–75). It is imperative to grasp this deeper unity of a shared foundationalism in the age of pietism and the Enlightenment in terms of which rival theologues of the heart and of the head appropriated Luther for their own purposes, even if in either case they drew lines of continuity from Luther as well.

## II. CHANGED HORIZONS

The desire to ground Christian faith in the *experienced* reality of the New Birth may thus be seen as a kind of empiricist foundationalism within the more rationalistic milieu of the Continent, also, if not especially, in Lutheranism (Frank 2003). Philip Jacob Spener (1635–1705) posited it in his manifesto: 'Hence it is not enough that we hear the Word with the outward ear, but we must let it penetrate to our heart, so that we may hear the Holy Spirit speak there, that is, with vibrant emotion and comfort feel the sealing of the Spirit and the power of the Word' (Spener 1964: 117). Luther can readily be quoted to the same effect, and Spener did so—copiously. But the motives subtly diverge. R. W. Meyer called attention to this difference between Luther and Spener's disciple, August Hermann Francke (1663–1727): 'There is little in common between Francke's and Luther's experience of the religious crisis' (Meyer 1952: 76. Stoeffler 1973: 7–23 and Brown 1996 give a sympathetic account of Francke's Lutheranism; cf. sources in translation, Lund 2002: chapter 8). Luther sought assurance of grace as a troubled penitent; Francke, as an orthodox



the church' (Thomasius 2007: 84, a critical reference to Luther's rationale for the emergency custodianship of the church by the secular princes; cf. *To the Christian Nobility*, WA6.404–469; LW44.115–217)—exactly *not* the rationale Luther had given for <sup>the</sup> duty of the nobility as lay leaders to reform the church in the emergency situation of apostate bishops. In Thomasius the same motif hinted at in Pufendorf emerges: the 'encouragement of a non-doctrinal inward Protestantism... a style of piety that was sceptical of the "visible" church with its creeds, sacraments and rituals; mute regarding the afterlife; and focused on the achievement of inner peace through a calming of the passions and desires'. The parallel with the contemporaneous emergence of the 'religion of the heart' is unmistakable.<sup>2</sup> Thomasius likewise anticipated the pietist repudiation of disputational theology with the same parody as in Pufendorf:

[B]y means of Platonic, and then Aristotelian arts of disputation... [it] was thought that if the denunciation of heretics did not proceed apace, then the professors would have nothing to dispute about at the universities. Polemical theology would thus fall by the way-side, and the cost of maintaining theology professors would be in vain. This restless and factious theology served to perpetuate the quarrel between the two Protestant churches.

(Thomasius 2007: 40)<sup>3</sup>

First for the political philosophers of the early Enlightenment, then increasingly for their pietist cohorts, Luther's reform as a result no longer consisted in Luther's doctrine, but in his example. The pan-Protestant political example of reform that he was said to provide is separation from the papacy in all its works and ways and the corresponding restoration of authority to reason and the secular sovereign. 'The disciples of Luther should follow his example, not defend his deeds and his sayings and confuse consciences' (Thomasius 2007: 121–3). Thomasius may thus be said to foreshadow the cultural synthesis of Halle pietism and Prussian absolutism in the eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

Apparently polarizing theologues of the heart and of the head may thus collaborate, then, even synthesize in a cultural truce according to a certain division of labour. This tenuous

<sup>2</sup> Thomasius (2007: 40) recalls Luther's republication of Tautler's *Theologia deutsch*. He repeats Pufendorf's analysis verbatim in discounting the historical dispute between Luther and Zwingli as a quarrel over (Christological) non-essentials, a scandalous obstacle to a pan-Protestant alliance against the pope under the leadership of the secular prince (60). But the ubiquity of Christ's glorified body is the basis for Luther's assertion of religious authority.

<sup>3</sup> In a fictional dialogue between an Orthodox and a Christian, Luther is made to redefine heresy as factionalism (180), and thus the true Christian is able to rebuke the Orthodox: 'You have converted the faith of the heart into a thing of the intellect' when in truth you are the true heretic, 'a man full of hatred for dissenters' (183).

<sup>4</sup> Thomasius 2007: 104. On the Halle-Prussia synthesis, see Gritsch 2002: 149–50, 171. Israel 2001: 654 notes Thomasius' criticisms of the more radical, more consistent Spinozist, Theodor Ludwig Lau (1670–1740). Likewise, Gritsch 2002: 142 underscores Spener's functional agreement with Thomasius when he reports how Spener at first supported orthodox laws compelling attendance of Sunday worship and catechetical instruction. But he was soon convinced that legal force would never instill the kind of piety that Arndt had advocated.



alliance is possible because of the underlying unity in foundationalism. The rival designations—‘empiricist’, ‘rationalist’, ‘pietist’, ‘*Aufklärer*’—obscure what unites all these rivals in the quest for foundations after the trauma of confessional warfare and in face of the rise of modern science, including historical science and its application to Scripture, and the concomitant discovery by European colonialism of the world religions. Such rivalries in foundationalism had to render Luther into a man who misunderstood himself, remaining half-way tangled in papist error, failing to complete what he had begun. Only so could both pietist and rationalist employ Luther in their service, each claiming to complete his work. With no little textual justification pietism appropriated Luther in service of a theology of the affects; but rationalists too could appeal to Luther’s way of distinguishing theology from philosophy to constrict faith to the realm of interiority for the sake of secularist politics under the sole dominion of enlightened Reason. Yet this dualism of the head and the heart is a new Platonism. Such appropriations of Luther could be made only at the cost of re-Platonizing (or Cartesianizing, or Kantianizing) Luther’s Pauline–Johannine apocalyptic battle of the Spirit by the Word against the flesh with its vain imaginations.<sup>5</sup>

What pietist and rationalist indisputably shared was a changed historical horizon over against Luther. The historical Luther’s horizon, as Heiko Oberman demonstrated (1969), was an apocalyptic eschatology, requiring church and theology to keep ‘the gospel afloat in the world’s last, ravaged hour’ (Oberman 1984: 122). But pietist and rationalist think quite otherwise about human prospects. The world has not ended; nature is opening up to scientific investigations. Commerce is bringing home the discovery of new peoples in new lands. After the Thirty Years religious war had ceased there was new hope in this world for this world, whether it be Spener’s ‘better times for the church’ (Spener correctly sensed that the times had changed. The ministry of his day did not have to deal with people who wanted to be blessed from good works but with people who regarded them as unnecessary and impossible; Brown 1996: 107) or Kant’s dream of the maturation of the enlightened human race progressing onward towards perpetual peace. Accordingly, our epoch thinks in terms of ‘completing’ the reformation of religion which Luther began with a reformation of life. When we bear in mind this shift in historical horizon, at least one aspect of the scholarly ferment about claims to Luther’s mantle can be clarified.

### III. THE SCHOLARLY QUANDARY

As mentioned above, Albrecht Ritschl influentially portrayed spiritually egoistic, ‘world-denying’ pietism as a foreign development on the soil of Luther’s Reformation,

<sup>5</sup> Luther thought that this exegetical discovery had liberated him from traditions which obscured the Spirit’s vital role in bringing the *Verbum externum*. See Luther’s *On Bound Choice*, WA18, 735, 20–736, 5, 742, 3–21, 756, 24–761, 37, 765, 2–766, 7, 780, 48–781, 3, 781, 29–782, 11, LW 33, 215, 224–225, 246–254, 259–261, 283–284, 285–286.



a recrudescence of the medieval ascetic and mystical spirituality of ‘monastics who live a life free from cares’ by flight from the world and mystical ascent to God. How different for the socially responsible ‘protestant Christians who remain within the midst of their secular conditions of life and who must stand the test of their faith within the inescapable cares of those conditions[!]’ (Ritschl 1972: 105). But Oberman, who has done so much to relocate Luther in the context of late medieval Catholicism (2000), argued that the medieval mystical legacy is integral to Luther’s ‘chief’ doctrine:

If future research confirms my suggestions that Luther’s concept ‘extra nos’ [outside the self] is related to [mystical] *raptus* [rapture], one of the major arguments for a forensic interpretation of Luther’s doctrine of justification has been preempted. Though we have no claim to the *iustitia Christi* which is not our ‘property’ (*proprietas*), it is granted to us as a present possession (*possessio*). *Extra nos* and *raptus* indicate that the *iustitia Christi*—and not our own powers—is the source and resource for our righteousness. Epithets such as ‘external’ and ‘forensic’ righteousness cannot do justice to Luther’s doctrine of justification.

(Oberman 1986: 150–1)

Oberman’s claim here has been extended in recent years by the Finnish scholar Tuomo Mannerna (1989) and his students, though others have independently made the same kind of critique of the Ritschl paradigm (Lotz 1974; Bielfeldt et al. 2008).

One effect of Oberman’s historiography is to lend credence to the reclaiming of medieval spiritual theology by Johann Arndt (1555–1621) at the wellspring of Lutheran pietism, on the model of Luther’s own publication of the 1516 *Theologia deutsch*. What Arndt appropriated, as Luther before him, and Spener afterwards (‘Resignation’, in Erb 1983: 83–7), is the theme of resignation, the Gethsemane of the soul, the *theologia crucis*: ‘a pure simple suffering of the divine will; man allows God to work all things in him and does not hinder God with his own will or strive against God’ (Arndt 1979: 30–1). Thus, as Oberman commented, ‘Albrecht Ritschl was not completely wrong in tracing Arndt’s lineage back to medieval and mystical traditions; it is the value judgement that went with Ritschl’s work that deserves reconsideration... the learned theology of the schools was [to be] complemented by an affective theology accessible as well to the simple and unlettered.’ Indeed, Oberman claims, Arndt proves in this ‘to be a true disciple of Luther’, a ‘second Luther, Luther *redivivus*’, in articulating the paradox of the *simul iustus et peccator* precisely by means of the ‘mystical’ rapture of encounter with the Christ who comes to unite with the self from outside of the self, as in Luther’s celebrated ‘joyful exchange’ (Oberman’s preface to Arndt 1979: xvi). Gritsch (2002: 145) concurs: ‘Spener cited numerous texts from Luther and orthodox theologians that true theology could not be based on natural, rational power but only on the gift of the Holy Spirit.’ Luther’s own theology of ‘true faith, that gift of the Holy Spirit’ (WA39.1.44.4; LW34.109) and of justification correspondingly as a ‘joyful exchange’ at a wedding feast (WABr.35.15–36–45; LW48.12–13), then, are indisputable sources of pietism’s Bridegroom of the Soul. The latter for its part, to be sure, is not an unproblematic development of these resources.





In an influential article in the 1957 *Lutherjahrbuch* Martin Schmidt did not reject, but sharply qualified, the continuity which Oberman detects from medieval spiritual theologians like Tauler and Bernard, whom Luther knew and drew upon, on through Arndt to Spener and Francke. He patiently dissected the relationship of justification and regeneration in Spener in terms of the latter's new, more optimistic eschatology. On this basis Schmidt developed a sympathetic and convincing sketch of Spener's theological innovation over against Luther (Schmidt 1957). Sanctification, in short, became the programme of optimistic living in this world after and on the basis of justification. Justification here becomes a past event, the believer's secured possession. God's free grace becomes a presupposition for what truly matters existentially, the believer's new life progressing forward. For the historical Luther, by contrast, the movement in Christian life remains the triune God's, the Spirit by the Word apocalyptically breaking into the closed system of this world to justify the ungodly, who remain *simul iustus et peccator* until the eschaton completes the coming of the Beloved Community.

Schmidt's analysis, however, produces a quandary for theology in Luther's tradition. How could one ever adjudicate such a shift in horizon? Perhaps a deeper self-examination among those claiming Luther's mantle is required. If Ernst Stoeffler was right to raise the important question about impulses from Puritanism and Dutch Calvinism in the formation of Spener's programme (1965: 231–2; others, e.g., Max Weber 2002: 83–9, have rightly stressed the differences between Reformed and Lutheran pietism) while at the same time documenting an indigenous Lutheran reform party bridging the time between Arndt and Spener (Stoeffler 1965: 187–228). More importantly, Stoeffler pointed out that with Spener 'the reform party within seventeenth century Lutheranism had moved from sincere but indiscriminate criticism to a plan of action' (1965: 235). The programmatic action announced in *Pia Desideria* was the provocation that ignited conflict since it implied that Luther's Reformation itself needed reform. While Arndtian reform literature had been theologically challenged by Lutheran Orthodoxy from the beginning regarding its understanding of the relation of imputative justification to regeneration, it was acting on the Arndtian understanding of regeneration that threatened the hegemony of confessionally Lutheran Orthodoxy. Bible study threatened the dogmatic method; small groups of laity gathered for prayer and edification threatened the rule of the clergy; and optimistic eschatology threatened its closed-ranks battlefield mentality. For such reasons, Stoeffler observes, 'the printed announcement of [Spener's] platform, which today seems so eminently sane, sensible and moderate, became the center of one of the most bitter theological debates in the history of Protestantism' (1965: 235). In some ways the battle has never ceased. Stoeffler himself, however, wondered whether there was a Lutheran contradiction, so to say, at the root of the bitter incomprehension that arose between Orthodox and Pietist. He suggested that it was the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, quite in tension with Luther's notion of living, active, justifying faith. The inner contradiction virtually required an eventual parting of the ways (Stoeffler 1965: 242). There is indeed a 'Lutheran contradiction' at the root of things, but Stoeffler's suggestion here does not quite lay it bare.





#### IV. THE LUTHERAN CONTRADICTION AND ITS (POSSIBLE) POSTMODERN RESOLUTION

Baptismal regeneration is not an unintelligible assertion of magic when regeneration is understood as the social event of adoption into the family of God, not an invisible miracle supposedly instantaneously transforming an infant's interior (Hinlicky 1999). Here, too, the work of the Spirit proceeds from the outside according to Luther's teaching on the *Verbum externum*. Yet Lutheran Orthodoxy, in its confused reaction against Osiander's teaching of infused divine righteousness, contradicted the Augsburg Confession's teaching that justifying faith, *fiducia ex corde*, is the regenerating work of the Spirit *per Verbum* (cf. FC, SD III:19 to Ap IV:12, 45–8, 62–8, 72, 110, 114–18, cf. Hinlicky 2012), i.e. that justification by faith is regeneration, that faith is the Spirit's gift and sanctification, because it is God's movement *into* the world, not the believer's movement out of it. Pietism was not wrong to insist on *fiducia ex corde*: it went wrong in viewing this gift as a private event within the safe ghetto of modern interiority; a 'new birth' there over against the public and external, the audible and sacramental. Here it became the secured property of the believer as its datable past event rather than Oberman's ever-renewed 'capture' of faith in Luther's encounter with Christ by the joyful exchange in Word and sacrament.

Something in parallel may be said regarding faith and reason. We have learned since the passing of 'the' Enlightenment of the profound historicity of reason. There is no Reason transcending time and able therefore to impose order on the flux of becoming once and for all. The conceit of this supposition has been made manifest in exposing Reason's rationalizations (i.e. Luther's 'whoredom' [Dragseth 2011]) of the imperialism of post-Christian Euro-American political sovereignty in all its various forms: fascism, communism and also capitalism/colonialism. May it be then that Luther's (not Kant's) critique of reason finally comes into its own in our 'postmodern' times? For Luther, the reasons of the heart are also reason's reasons since human creatures are psychosomatic wholes created for the Beloved Community, not coalitions of parts to be organized hierarchically from above or magically from within. What matters to such somatic selves both intellectually and affectively is *which* light it is in which they are to be enlightened. There are no foundations, but there are events of light shining in the darkness which for good or for ill capture hearts and illumine minds and demand loyalty. Paul and John understood this, and Luther did after them, as today do some from surprising quarters (Badiou 2003; Agamben 2005; Adkins and Hinlicky 2013). But theology in their train must test the spirits.

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