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Martin Luther in Karl Marx

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Summary and Keywords

The topic of Luther in Marxism is vast and too diffuse to be useful to define issues and orient future research. However, the more limited topic of Luther in Marx is definite, manageable, and useful. If the framing of the relation between Luther and Müntzer first created by Müntzer and then adopted and popularized by Engels can be bracketed, and if the comparison of Luther and Marx is carefully controlled by Marx's encounter with Luther texts, the result is a tacit but surprising claim by Marx to have found in Luther a predecessor in the analysis of capitalism. This surprise, however, entitles Luther to be heard afresh in his own voice in making his theological-ethical critique of mercantilism and monopoly finance in the 16th century. This new listening to Luther yields a concurrence between Luther and Marx regarding Marx's claim that, in distinction from historical Christianity, the Marxist revolution brings an earthly, not otherworldly salvation; Luther, however, states just this difference differently, in terms of the Augustinian *ordo caritatis*. The double love commandment drives his own analysis of the proper Christian use of temporal goods. Beyond the exposé by Luther's Augustinian theology of the false loves moving the *civitas terrena*, however, we discover the descent of critical social thinking to both Luther and Marx from the apocalyptic tradition of Second Temple Judaism. Recognizing this family resemblance makes visible the messianic divergence between the two. With this divergence clarified, new questions for Luther research arise.

Keywords: Martin Luther, apocalypticism, Marx, Engels, Müntzer, revolution, reform, political sovereignty, two kingdoms doctrine, Peasants' Revolt, political theology

Martin Luther and Karl Marx are beacons of critical social thinking in the European-American tradition. Seeing each in the light of the other is mutually illuminating, in that these two signify alternative resolutions of critical social thinking. This divergence is significant, and possible in the first place, because Luther and Marx are alike heirs of a "rhetoric of apocalyptic"¹ descending from the Scriptures of Israel.² The advantage of our historical distance from Marx and Luther is that it allows a more fruitful investigation in terms of this tradition. Seeing a common tradition but divergent resolution clearly and

with insight reorients Luther research, leading it to reframe familiar topics related to the “social question,” that is, the “labyrinthine”³ topic of the *Zweireichelehre* with its materially ambiguous doctrine of political sovereignty. This needed shift requires, however, a sharp delimitation in scope, if new questions are to arise that succeed in shifting scholarly attention away from sterile opposition as well as from superficial synthesis.

The Scope of the Question

Like Lutheranism, Marxism is today a highly diffused tradition of thought. Even to designate Marxism as a “tradition of thought” reflects a contemporary historical distance from its origins as revolutionary praxis with its dialectically materialist insight into the impending crisis of capitalism in the time of European industrialization.⁴ To call it a “tradition of thought,” let alone to describe it as “highly diffused,” betrays the young Marx’s programmatic stipulation *against* Feuerbach’s merely philosophical strategy of inverting subject and predicate in theology. Feuerbach and left-wing Hegelianism subverted religion, according to Marx, yet at the cost of turning its theism into equally abstract (but still basically philosophical) atheism, as if a change of mind or in worldviews was what mattered. But the more things change in these merely philosophical ways, the historical Marx⁵ maintained, the more they remain the same.

The point for the revolutionary Marx is not merely to understand the world (and religion as the sublime ideology of the world), but to change it by overcoming the conditions of human degradation which make religious consolation and intoxication necessary: the double meaning of calling “the heart of a heartless world and soul of soulless conditions” the “opiate” of the people. Marx’s own Marxism was a 19th-century way of *revolutionary praxis* in the mission of human-species emancipation, catalyzed but not caused by Feuerbach’s philosophical critique of religion. Similarly, Luther’s Lutheranism was less a theoretical theology in the scholastic mode, mimicking the philosophers in worldview construction, than a *reformatory praxis* in the mission to the nations of the gospel of God—in its own way also catalyzed but not caused by a critique of religion. *Prima facie*, then, it should not be surprising to find Luther in Marx, though it has been little noted or attended to by the scholarly community in either Lutheranism or in Marxism.⁶

To clear the ground for investigating Luther in Marx, the scope of the present study must be carefully limited. For if we take Marx *as a philosopher*, even as a principled *scientific* thinker,⁷ the claim that “we are all Marxists now” expresses nothing but the diffusion beyond recognition of his revolutionary stance; at the same time, it misses the ardent

political religionist.⁸ The claim that we all think like Marx now was first made in Zurich at the 1893 International Socialist Congress by Ernest Belfort Bax.⁹ He spoke in reference to “questions of principle” that had been previously debated between reformers and revolutionaries. This debate, Bax averred, is now resolved in favor of the idea of revolution as the theoretically ascertained insight into the inevitable resolution of capitalism’s crisis, the latter welcomed consequently as the birth pangs of socialism. Hence, “we are all Marxists now.”

In further diffusion, Bax’s idea was taken up again and popularized in the latter half of the 20th century by the influential New Deal economist John Kenneth Galbraith. He argued that today’s liberals too are under the influence of Marx’s “system,” in the sense that they had come to recognize that social power and capital cannot be divorced into separate realms, politics and economics, but inform and indeed mutually penetrate one another.¹⁰ So diffuse, then, has Marx’s “thought” become that even progressive capitalists like Galbraith could lay claim to his legacy, albeit in a defanged, even innocuous form.¹¹

If we bracket the developments of Luther in *Lutheranism* for the purposes of ground-clearing, we also set aside the massive developments in *Marxism* since Bax’s time: the predominant line in Bolshevism-Leninism-Stalinism-Maoism,¹² but also the contrasting social-democratic “humanistic Marxism”¹³ that evolved in non-Soviet Europe through Antonio Gramsci in Italy and the Frankfurt School in Germany,¹⁴ up to and including the “Christian-Marxist dialogue” of the 1970s¹⁵ and Liberation Theology.¹⁶ The danger otherwise lies in selective readings of either Luther or Marx, or in turning them into malleable symbols in attempts at contemporary fusion (or, from the opposite direction, woodenly to perpetuate traditional oppositions).

The literature today is as filled with well-meaning, putatively “radical” theology¹⁷ as it is with New Left aspirations for a more holistic and spiritual Marxism.¹⁸ In either case, the historical specificity of each figure is erased in such blending, while the genuine alternatives they mark within a common tradition of critical social thinking goes without sufficient and precise recognition. More interesting, more manageable, and more fruitful is to begin investigation by taking inventory of the surprising appearance of the antirevolutionary reformer Luther in the “mature” Marx’s *Capital*. From there one can proceed to ask how well Marx has read Luther and test the question by a close reading of the Luther texts on usury and trade from which Marx drew. From this probe we will obtain new purchase on the not infrequently observed, but poorly understood, rhetoric of apocalyptic shared by Luther and Marx, as mentioned above, which enables in turn a more precise accounting of the *messianic* divergence between them.

Per hypothesis, then, we inquire into a “family quarrel:” from the perspective of theology in Luther’s tradition, Marxism is a *Christian* heresy,¹⁹ while from Marx’s perspective, Luther’s reformation—in spite of Luther personally—let the genie out of the bottle, who then appeared “ahead of time,” so to speak, in Thomas Müntzer’s consistent revolutionary agitation. It was Luther’s updated critique of usury that exposed the status quo and released the genie, even if Luther personally drew back from its revolutionary implications. To see this clearly, then, we must bracket the predominant picture of the Luther-Marx relation.

Setting Engels (and Müntzer) Aside

The proposed investigation has to acknowledge, accordingly, that Frederick Engels very effectively framed our topic as a categorical opposition, “Luther versus Marx”; this opposition persists to the present among Marxist scholars and Christian theologians as a kind of default understanding. Engels accomplished his influential anachronism by superimposing on his account of the Peasants’ Revolt lessons he drew from the failure of the revolution of 1848. He constructed a parallelism between the historical Müntzer-Luther relationship and his own 19th-century polemics against rival socialist reformers from his more radical stance of revolution.²⁰ In so doing, Engels tarred contemporary rivals on the left as “lackeys of the princes” and witless servants of the status quo for their hesitancy regarding revolutionary violence, “the tragicomedy staged in the past three years [Engels is writing in 1850] by the modern petty bourgeoisie under the trade mark of democracy.”²¹

The smear was to paint these reformist rivals in democratic socialism as timid, like Luther, or even reactionary, willing to call the authorities down on revolting workers to avoid the needful violence. Engels’s work is thus an egregious exercise in historical presentism, trying at once to relativize for his contemporaries the French Revolution by discovering a German antecedent and in the process raising up an idealized Müntzer as the revolutionary alternative with which to challenge Luther’s sacrosanct status in German tradition.

Marxist scholars today concede that this little book is “not Engels’s best work” (there may even be a Calvinist animus from Engels’s background against Lutheranism at work in it).²² More importantly, we can see today that Engels has taken over without question Müntzer’s announcement in his *Sermon to the Princes* “that the spirit of God is revealing to many elect and pious men at this time the need for a full and final reformation in the near future.”²³ Engels found in such words the revolutionary alternative to timid reform.

Reinforcing Engels's summons to revolutionary violence was Müntzer's frank announcement in the same sermon that "the godless have no right to live, unless by the sufferance of the elect,"²⁴ and that "the sword was the means" by which God conquered once and conquers still.²⁵

On these suppositions, Engels took over Müntzer's highly tendentious portrait of Luther in his 1524 tract *Vindication and Refutation*:

The poor flatterer [Luther] tries to use Christ to cover himself, adducing a counterfeit type of clemency which is contrary to Paul's text in 1 Timothy 1. In his book about trade, however, he says that princes should not hesitate to join the thieves and robbers in their raids. He suppresses here, however, the basic reason for all theft. He is a herald who hopes to earn gratitude for approving the spilling of people's blood for the sake of their earthly goods . . . Open your eyes! What is the evil brew from which all usury, theft and robbery springs but the assumption of our lords and princes that creatures are their property . . .! God commanded that you should not steal. But it avails them nothing. For while they do violence to everyone, flay and fleece the poor farm worker, tradesman and everything that breaths, Micah 3, yet should any of the latter commit the pettiest crime, he must hang. And Doctor Liar responds, Amen. It is the lords themselves who make the poor man their enemy. If they refuse to do away with the causes of insurrection how can trouble be avoided in the long run? If saying that makes me an inciter to insurrection, so be it!²⁶

Müntzer's allusion here is to Luther's 1524 text *Trade and Usury*, which we will discuss in detail below since it marks in the main the appearance of Luther in Marx's *Capital*; the passage above, from Müntzer in October 1524, is in fact the first external witness to the publication of Luther's *Trade and Usury* of which we are aware.²⁷ The dating before the Peasants' Revolt reflects Luther's own attempt at proactive intervention in lifting up burning grievances regarding economic justice in the hope of persuading princes to reform and peasants to peaceful negotiation.

Comparing Müntzer's account in this passage with Luther's text show Müntzer's characterization of Luther to be remarkable for the malice that turns Luther's manifest meaning on its head.²⁸ Yet, with Luther so inverted, the resulting caricature came to figure centrally as Engels's source for the "lackey of the princes" trope. Equally astonishing, however, is Engels's own lapse of Marxist judgment in valorizing Müntzer's account, as if political sovereignty were the principal cause rather than an effect of systematic "usury, theft and robbery," as claimed in the passage above. Marx reads Luther's text, as we shall see, much more perceptively. Luther too knew how the state can be captured by "usury, theft and robbery."

To blur these now standardized oppositional lines descending from Müntzer's account via Engels is not to deny a crucial differentiation in politics between reform and revolution, but to affirm a rather more complex and salient differentiation for us today, after Lutheranism and after Marxism. Marx's "connection with Luther cuts both ways: it may point out the sublation of theology within Marx's thought, but it also shows that the Reformation may have been a little more revolutionary than he might have thought."²⁹ The historical Luther's repugnance for his renegade student Thomas Müntzer³⁰ is no more to be elided than the historical Marx's repugnance, following Engels, for the Luther who sided against the revolting peasants. Given the blood on the hands of both Luther and Marx, as we at this distance must see without illusion, Engels's influential caricature demands a nuancing that implicates violence in equal measure in all directions and so reopens the agonistic dispute about *morally* justifiable violence.³¹ This moral agony is at the heart of the problem of political sovereignty—Agamben's "state of exception that rules out all other exceptions."³²

Luther's belief, if not confidence, was that according to divine institution it is the task of princes in Christendom to forbid usury and regulate trade for the sake of the common good. This belief in the Christian vocation of the governing authorities³³ has, as Peter Brown has shown, deeper roots in the Latin Christian West than Romans 13 or even Charlemagne's holy reinvention of Roman imperialism: the symbiosis of Christianization and nation building took place in the very formation of Europe during the so-called Dark Ages.³⁴ Thus, Luther's attempt to reform Christendom continues this longstanding project in nation building and civil society; this historical circumstance should not obscure either the passion for justice or the rational insights of Luther's critique, which models itself on the prophetic preaching to royalty in ancient Israel, even as the passing away of the Christendom model (so Bonhoeffer³⁵) in Europe and America ought to awaken today to the better insights on Luther's teaching on the material ambiguity of political sovereignty.

For example, in Luther's *Trade and Usury* we read:

I have already said that Christians are rare people on earth. That is why the world needs a strict, harsh temporal government which compels and constrains the wicked to restrain from theft and robbery, and return what they borrow (although a Christian ought neither to demand nor expect it). This is necessary in order that the world may not become a desert, peace vanish, and men's trade and society be utterly destroyed; all of which would happen if we were to rule the world according to the gospel, rather than driving and compelling the wicked by laws and the use of force to do and to allow what is right.³⁶

Luther is speaking here not of suppressing an insurrection, but of the prior need of the state as the divinely sanctioned legal monopoly on the means of violence to require economic justice, regulate the market, and outlaw usury—precisely to prevent the mayhem of insurrection from developing. Just such blessing, incidentally, of legal coercion in the cause of economic justice, ironically enough, stood behind the rehabilitation of Luther in East Germany during the 1980s.³⁷ The difficulty, then, is that it was Luther's *same* belief, if not confidence in the divine institution of political sovereignty to forbid usury and regulate trade that led him also to exhort the princes to put down the Peasants' Revolt. The appearance of Luther's *Trade and Usury* in Marx thus pleads the need of reevaluating not only Luther's relation to political sovereignty but also the alternative stances toward political sovereignty signified by the slogans, reform and revolution.

This is so, even though Marx himself continued late in life to employ Engels's "lackey of the princes" trope.³⁸ The trope makes for a blind spot in Marxist criticism. For the critique runs the other way as well: "revolution" in Luther's apocalyptic theological perspective appears as the oxymoron of a *secular miracle*, invoking a transcendence (a "utopia") by which the thesis will no longer live on in the antithesis. Such a revolution would indeed be miraculous, the *end of history within history*. In fact, it is the vain but violent hope that the antithesis can be cauterized once and for all with pure, fierce revolutionary murder. From Luther's theological demystification of revolutionary political utopianism, as it appears in Müntzer, it follows that experimental *reform*, not revolution, is what must be done on "the plane of immanence,"³⁹ pending an eschaton of judgment. It is the promise of an eschaton of judgment, at work in the gospel's justification of the ungodly, that constitutes in the interim God's ongoing revolution (Barth)—not to be confused, then, with storming heaven. But let us look and see.

Luther in Marx

In *Capital*, Marx has discovered another Luther than Feuerbach's covert atheist⁴⁰ or Engels's timid lackey. The Luther who appears here is the Luther who was a lifelong preacher against usury, as argued programmatically during the initial years' summoning to reform of church and society in his 1524 treatise *On Trade and Usury*⁴¹ (incorporating earlier interventions from 1520).⁴² Luther's reformatory critique of contemporary finance and mercantilism was reinforced by a renewed exhortation in 1540 to preach against usury, from which Marx also drew.⁴³ Luther's stance on new questions for his times of economic justice was neither short-lived nor incidental to his program of reform for

church and society. Thus Luther's "naïve onslaught against usury"⁴⁴ impressed Marx. Marx lifted up Luther's critique in copious citations as precedent for his own massive and sophisticated exposé of capitalism. Roland Boer goes so far in this connection as to urge that Marx sees himself as the "new Luther."⁴⁵

It is the transformation of money into a commodity in the epoch of mercantilism, Marx writes, that grabs Luther's attention and guides his critique.⁴⁶ Luther's attack on usury—more precisely, his updating of the medieval prohibition of usury to critique mercantile trade, finance, and monopoly—makes him among the first to bear witness against the transformation of money into capital that is going on before his eyes.⁴⁷ Luther's analysis of the evidence available to him makes the 16th-century theologian superior to the 19th-century utopian reformer Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. For Luther's ethical critique of a disguised system of theft is not mere moralizing; it is grounded in the observation that with the rise of mercantilism, money is becoming a commodity, "capital," a "thing" which can itself be bought and sold and so, as accumulated, becomes a treasury of political power.⁴⁸

Money as capital can leverage the future. This transforms money from its traditional use as a legally regulated medium of exchange among products and services into a product that serves capital accumulation for purposes of power to shape the future apart from government's traditional supervision (or, for Luther, God's commandments). Seeing this transformation for what it is, Marx's Luther digs deeper. He grasps that the accumulation of capital (the "creation of wealth") is gained through the theft of labor value. It is labor that performs services or transforms raw materials into useful products; what is accumulated by means of legalized theft, disguised as profit, is the surplus that labor created and thus has earned. Extracted and transformed now into money, which can be sold in turn by the mechanism of interest, this human labor is what ought to be valued monetarily if economic relations were just.⁴⁹ The insidious dynamism of this arrangement is that those with capital continually accumulate by exploiting those without capital by putting them in debt, where usurious interest becomes the perfect instrument for the progressive appropriation of labor value.

Highlighting Luther's dictum that "whoever takes more than he gives is a usurer,"⁵⁰ Marx makes note of broader implications of the analysis articulated by Luther that correspond to his own social theory in *Capital*. Luther sees that mercantile capitalism exploits less-developed societies, promoting unjust luxury at home and pauperization abroad.⁵¹ So he explains the extraordinarily "high profit" of foreign trade ventured by the new finance.⁵² Capturing desire with the lure of luxury, Luther further sees that the new economy is not ethically or religiously neutral, but actively recruits people to the love of mammon and away from Christian solidarity.⁵³ He sees through the marketing of the new economy as

progressive and exposes its alleged virtues as propaganda.⁵⁴ The alleged service provided by the capitalist in financing new and better instruments of production, Marx's Luther sees, could just as well be provided by justly compensated laborers.⁵⁵ Luther already detects the rigged system of *monopolia* in the trade companies and corporations of his time.⁵⁶

The reason for the inordinate concentration of economic and thus also political power in the monopolistic trading companies is that the profit motive is in principle insatiable; it *has* to aspire to monopolization of the market to feed an infinite desire. Marx's Luther sees behind the appearances of productivity and wealth creation a motivating love of power, far from innocent, crystallizing in a new cultural ideal: the ambition to get rich. In Luther's Christian perspective, this desire is perverse; it is the sin of greed making society over into structures of malice and injustice.⁵⁷ It is *civitas terrena*. In this 16th-century analysis, Marx says, Luther is at the vanguard, the "destroyer of medieval thoughtlessness,"⁵⁸ even if his theological thought remains pre-critical and his onslaught against usury "naïve."

Luther's 1524 *Trade and Usury*

We turn now to the central Luther text⁵⁹ that Marx discovered. Luther begins with the announcement of the apocalyptic gospel which brings to light evil works hidden in darkness (245). Because the God of the gospel is a God for the poor (306), the corruption of desire into greed or avarice is brought to light (245, 261, 297) as a sinful power opposing God's reign. The gospel's revaluation of predominant values breaks through by afflicting conscience with this knowledge, yet without supplying pat answers: here, in economic matters, "one can truly give you no instructions but only lay it on your conscience to be careful not to overcharge your neighbor, and to seek a modest living, not the goals of greed" (250). The reason why pat answers are impossible lies in the contingencies of nature and history to which economic exchange is vulnerable. If it is true that exchange is necessary as divinely willed, it is also true that not all wares are alike (249); consequently, there can be no fixed formulas for determining costs that ignore the contingencies of economic activity. These contingencies are, for Luther, "acts of God."

In such a theological construction of reality, what Luther offers in this treatise is often misunderstood as "ethics," as if timeless guidance on the right and the wrong for all under any circumstances were intended. Rather, he speaks like his mentor, the apostle Paul, as a pastor of "consciences" captured now by the Word of God. His audience is those who desire to keep faith with the God who has shown faithfulness to them in Christ.

Luther pastorally counsels Christians involved in trade and finance (246–247, 251, 261) so that they can live and work there conscientiously before God. But pastoral counsel, for Luther, is not foggy; it is clear-eyed analysis that cuts through fogs of obfuscation.

Knowing that Christians are members, if not citizens, of two kingdoms (247, 249, 258, 263–264, 270–272), and thus both sinners and righteous at the same time (250), Luther counsels regarding specific possibilities of economic exchange (257) available to them. This counsel is possible because, without doubt, exchange is necessary (246); the circulation of goods and services enables life, which is God's creative will. By the same token, then, economy is under both the natural law to do no harm and the divine law of love (248, 287, 292, 296) to do good to others. Whereas civil or positive law in the fallen and not yet redeemed world permits much that is intolerable to the conscience captive to God's love revealed in Christ, Christian conscience is bound by the command to love (277, 279, 293–294), also in matters economic. In the light of the gospel, moreover, Christian conscience knows what works are truly good because divinely commanded by the Creator for the good of the creation (294). Economy as free and equitable circulation of temporal goods and services is an arena for truly good works, a way of socially structuring love.

Luther thus discusses four ways of economic exchange possible for Christians, in descending order from the perfect love enacted in the divine economy of Christ. The first way, he says, is to give up one's property to injustice as Jesus commands in the Sermon on the Mount (274). By no means is this commandment to be spiritualized away into no more than an inner attitude of detachment from possessions (276–277), though detachment in fact brings peace and contentment (279). The command literally to "give up one's cloak" binds the consciences of those bound to Christ, who put off divine majesty and put on the form of sinful humanity to suffer injustice not of his own making. That is the perfect love of Christ at work also in his believers when economic injustice befalls them. Second, they may freely give of their surplus to those in need (256), citing Jesus' admonition to "give to them who cannot repay" in Luke 14. Third, Christians may lend, that is, give with the understanding that the gift will be returned in equal value. Charging interest beyond this equal return, however, is usury (257), which is not a Christian possibility since it makes neither a true gift nor is it satisfied with an equitable return. Lending of goods, like freely giving to those in need, is due first of all to one's own dependents; beyond that, one's surplus is owed to those who, having need, ask for such help (259). For Luther, it is God who puts the wounded man on your path for you to help.

The fourth economic possibility for the Christian obligated to love is buying and selling (259). This possibility, the market, elicits from Luther the longest and most detailed account, in which he draws a difficult line in the matters of trade and finance between ambition and greed on the one side, and divine vocation on the other. The line is murky

because every Christian, sinner and righteous simultaneously, is a concrete tangle of ambition and vocation. Ever freshly drawn though this concrete line must be, Luther emphasizes the difference as crucial. It is the difference in human subjectivity worked by the divine economy of human salvation; this Luther explains as follows:

It would also be impossible for us to become cleansed of our attachment to temporal goods if God did not ordain that we should suffer unjust losses, and thereby be trained to turn our hearts away from the false temporal goods of this world, letting them go in peace, and pinning our hopes on invisible and eternal goods. Hence, he who demands that which is his, and does not let the cloak go with the coat [Matt. 5:40], is resisting his own cleansing and the hope of eternal salvation, toward which God would train and drive him by means of such a commandment and unjust treatment . . . In short, such commandments are intended to detach us from the world and make us desirous of heaven. Therefore, we ought freely and joyfully to accept God's faithful counsel, for if he did not give it, and did not let us experience injustice and trouble, the human heart could not maintain itself; it becomes too deeply enmeshed in temporal things and too firmly attached to them. The result is satiety, and disregard for the eternal goods of heaven. (280)

The counsel to Christians in trade and finance is to learn *there* "the art of trusting," which is also the art of giving: "You shall open wide your hand to your poor and needy brother and give to him" (281, citing Deut. 15:11). The obedience of *faith* teaches trust in the God who promises daily bread; the *obedience* of faith consists therefore in love for those in need, as well as *patience* in one's own suffering, also of economic injustice.

God's command, and the divine permission of injustice as experienced by those obedient to God's command, work to "detach us from the world and make us desirous of heaven" (280). Luther's deployment of the Augustinian *ordo caritatis* reveals the theological motor running the treatise on *Trade and Usury*. The move here, however, is not toward an apolitical cultivation of individual virtue or escape to an otherworldly salve. The same reasoning may be seen in the treatise's chief political proposal for reforming the emerging market economy: creditors should be made to share equally in risk with debtors, for such shared sacrifice requires that both "would have to look to God" (309). That "looking to God" for Luther is not pious window dressing; it is the premise on which the analysis of the evidence and call for economic reform hang. Sharing risk puts creditor and borrower alike under the divine law of love (299, 302-303), which extracts a trust from those who obey, mortifying the old Adam "who wants to be God and does not want God to be God."⁶⁰

All goods and hoped-for gain are subject to risk. What is required is constant attention to just compensation (249), proportionate to the risks assumed and labors undertaken. Just compensation will be a modest one, however, since the Christian knows that goods and services are given through economic structures which the Creator mandates for love of one's neighbor and the common good; thus the Christian makes her own participation in the market a calling to work for the common good and is content with daily bread. A market mechanism can, with government supervision, achieve a rough justice here (250). What corrupts just exchange of goods and circulation of services, however, is the greedy desire to manipulate the market by removing one's own risk by offloading it onto others (252-253). This desire for risk-free accumulation, overlooking the advantage it takes of the risk-bearing ventures of others, replaces trust in God and love for the neighbor (252-253). The very notion of risk-free profit, thus, is idolatrous presumption (254-255). This inordinate and unjust desire, looking solely for profit maximization (247-248) no matter what the cost to others, gains filthy lucre by fraud and monopoly (262, 270).

So Luther focuses attention on a "slippery and newly invented business" of "get[ting] rich without worry or effort" and even "without sin" in the emerging mercantile monopolies. In ways that anticipate Marx's concept of ideology, he focuses on the "pretty pretense" of profit maximization (295). This new form of finance "very frequently makes itself an upright and loyal protector of damnable greed and usury" (295). This pretense to virtue (268, 273, 292, 295-297) "accomplishes exactly the same thing that usury accomplishes, that is, it lays burdens upon all lands, cities, lords, and people, sucks them dry, and brings them to ruin as no usury could have done" (297). For the pretense to virtue claimed for the new creation of wealth in fact covers up the "cruel game" (276) of the commodification of money (299-300). Interest on principal (291, 295) expropriates (297) the labor value (251) of the borrower, and in the worst excess, takes the debtor as collateral against default on the loan (302).

Going back to the Reformation's opening assault on the sale of indulgences, Luther had seen such a "cruel game" going on in the business of religion (284, 288-289, 306); the abuses of the religion business sensitized him to what today is called "white-collar crime" in the secular economy (308). So pervasive is the corruption in the economy and so feckless is the performance of political sovereignty which ought to forbid the worst excesses that Luther marvels at the delay of divine punishment, which he then describes in terms foreshadowing Marx's "crisis of capitalism" (260, 272, 304).

Marx may be said to have read Luther well in claiming him as a "naïve" source for his own critique of capitalism. If, as argued above, the Augustinian *ordo caritatis* is the theological motor running Luther's *Trade and Usury*, the question may then be asked whether there is an equivalent in Marx to this theology of the "one, true God," God the giver (*esse Deum dare*), since this knowledge of God is what orders desire in Luther's

analysis. There is in Marx (as in Paul and Luther) what may be called a “positive dialectic”⁶¹ of “love that is against what is against love” (Tillich). But to see this sublimated theology in Marx requires a specific differentiation from Hegel’s “negative dialectic,” to which will we point in conclusion. In the interim, however, our investigation turns to the shared framework and rhetoric of apocalyptic in order to understand precisely the actual divergence between Luther and Marx.

Apocalyptic

While Heiko Oberman’s seminal study has made Luther’s apocalyptic better known,⁶² Marx’s debt to this tradition is less understood or even acknowledged. We shall shortly consider Marx’s “rhetoric of apocalyptic.” For the present, it suffices to note with Rotstein that in “a strictly rhetorical sense, ‘antithesis’ plays the same role for Marx that it plays in Paul’s designation of man’s two opposing natures, and in Luther’s elaboration of Pauline theology. Once again, it proves to be the starting point for the unfolding of the rhetoric of transfiguration moving to its apocalyptic climax.”⁶³ Apocalyptic is not Platonism, which understands “man’s two opposing natures” in an ontologically fixed way between opposing faculties, animal and divine, rather than in a historical-dramatic way.⁶⁴ Apocalyptic is a theology of living justly by faith, pending a promised eschaton of judgment (cf. Romans 1:17). It has several salient features that fund critical social thinking⁶⁵ in addition to the dramatic rhetoric of antithesis (or “dialectic”) which Rotstein lifts up; these features too evoke a highly charged movement through conflicted reality toward a salutary resolution.

First, apocalyptic theology holds, in Luther’s theological terms, that “inherited sin has caused such a deep, evil corruption of nature that reason does not comprehend it; rather, it must be believed on the basis of the revelation in the Scriptures.”⁶⁶ As sin is *inherited*, it is manifest in the deeds and failures of individuals that violate the human equality and neighborly love commanded under the reign of the Creator God; yet it exists as an enveloping social condition—*civitas terrena, regnum diaboli*—that forms human subjectivity in structures of malice and injustice prior to conscious choices. Sin exists as this pervasive and formative captivation of desire. Sin is an apocalyptic power that overwhelms even would-be resistance, making lines of flight in moral and religious choices under its thrall expressions of the corruption of desire rather than alternatives to it. From the sin of origin, human innocence has been lost (even as the divine gift of life continues).

Moreover, as human reason is not a spirit floating free above the bodily machine, but follows the desires of the heart allied with others of its kind to rationalize social struggles in the natural world, naïve thinking or consciousness (whether concrete common sense or abstract philosophizing) is an epiphenomenon of these material relations and social struggles. Genuinely critical reason consequently is not a freestanding causal power, as Kant imagined, which can arise by dint of sheer willpower to cast off self-caused immaturity. As such, reason cannot actually be the free and fair tribunal adjudicating claims to truth and assigning claimants to their proper spheres in trying to impose a secular peace. Reason in its many permutations instead follows the historical development of humanity in its fundamental economic negotiation with the natural world and the social struggles that arise from these negotiations. In following, captivated reason rationalizes its own captivated desire. Pretensions aside, the state of society is dark and conflicted; partisans in these conflicts cannot transcend their partisanship to see clearly and think honestly *sub specie aeternitatis*. They remain *interested*, even (if not especially) when adopting the pretension of neutrality in philosophical detachment or scientific objectivity.

This historicity of reason in bondage to material conditions and social conflict begs for a narrative of the passage, as in Genesis, from the state of nature to the state of society. The biblical text takes this passage not as an ascent from bestiality to civilization (so Hobbes), but as a fall from the *shalom* of the origin into violence (so Paul, followed by Augustine followed by Luther).⁶⁷ Here, in a human social habitat stamped by the curses of Genesis 3 (so Luther), or by the primal division of labor (so Marx), genuinely critical knowledge of the natural world and the human passage in it *comes* as a *breakthrough* (Luther: a “revelation,” the meaning of the term “apocalyptic,” as in Romans 1:17), *causing* humans to think past the surface appearances in order to penetrate to the inner connections of apparent things. Genuinely critical thinking is not free thinking but freed thinking. This breakthrough to knowledge of what is really going on behind the scenes is the leitmotif of apocalyptic in the Bible, in Luther, and in Marx.

So, second, the epistemic event needed to break through the fog of false consciousness riding on the surface, mistaking appearance for reality (but also, in philosophy, substituting abstraction for insight), must take place within the same natural and social world. Since reason does not transcend, but dwells wholly within “a plane of immanence,” human reason is imprisoned in its naïve self-certainty, as per the pungent parable of Jesus: “No one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered” (Mark 3:27). The violent break-in recounted in Jesus’ apocalyptic parable, telling of the in-breaking reign of God as this violence against violence, is also an inalienable feature of apocalyptic.⁶⁸ In apocalyptic, love is militant; it *hates* what is evil. One cannot tell of the

New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven without also telling of the fall of Babylon. One cannot proclaim the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel without also telling of the wickedness of this age which crucified the Lord of Glory. Such is the dramatic logic of conflict and resolution that attends the rhetoric of apocalyptic.

To analyze the Luther-Marx relation in terms of this “rhetoric of apocalyptic” is tacitly to argue that what accounts for Marx’s enormous historical appeal has not been his (quickly outmoded) claim to scientific insight into communism as the key to the riddle of history, transposed from his early philosophical writings into the supposedly scientific theorizing of his mature work. Certainly Marx’s empirical investigations set a precedent that should continue, just as Marx admired Luther’s analysis of mercantilism. But it was the “rhetoric” of apocalyptic that lent orientation to his analysis of capital, which otherwise would be indistinguishable from Smith and Ricardo; just this rhetoric appealed to the emotional intelligence of millions because it signaled a moral core in Marx which exposed legalized robbery gilded by pretenses to personal virtue and social benevolence. This moral core drew upon the biblical narrative of redemption latent in Western consciousness, with its positive dialectic of love opposing what is opposed to love.

Marx thus provided for the secular mind of modernity a secular miracle: the revolution. Citing from the “well-known passage from the Communist Manifesto” about the withering away of the state with the disappearance of its basis in class oppression, Rotstein alerts us to Marx’s transparently eschatological culmination: the victorious proletariat, having abolished class differences by way of the revolutionary seizure of power, will “thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.” Rotstein writes:

The German text of this last clause reads: “hebt . . . damit seine eigene Herrschaft als Klasse auf.” Compare this with Paul’s prescription for the kingdom of God when Christ “shall have put down all rule and all authority and power (I Corinthians 15:24). In Luther’s translation (1546), “Wenn es aufheben wird alle Herrschaft, und alle Oberkeit und Gewalt.” The comparison reveals the common culmination of the apocalyptic vision. In its rhetorical structure, Marx’ socialism is as comprehensive and all-embracing a vision of community as the “holy nation” of the Old Testament, as the totus Christus of the New Testament, as Luther’s kingdom of God or Hegel’s ideal Protestant state.⁶⁹

This presence of Luther’s apocalyptic theology as sublimated in Marx’s rhetoric, if not in his scientific pretensions, makes a difference for those who would continue by way of a critical retrieval of Marx from the unhappy vicissitudes of his tradition in “real existing socialism” (a phrase of Leonid Brezhnev).

The insight here is that so far as Marx is represented as a philosopher or theorist, so that Marxism continues to think of itself as the science of society, like the natural sciences,

the apocalyptic with its moral core and theological invocation in the critique of economic exploitation is systematically obscured. More insidiously, the cost of this lack of theological self-knowledge is that so far as Marxism continues to take itself as a “science,” it *must* take the passage through capitalism as the *necessary* precondition in wealth creation funding the conquest of nature by technology for the construction of socialism.⁷⁰ Ironically, this makes Marx into a theoretical capitalist and abstract ally of bourgeois progressivism. Attempts by Lenin and Mao to force-march an entire epoch from feudalism to socialism under the leadership of the theoretical elites of the vanguard Communist Party proved humanly disastrous, while the revolution Marx predicted in Europe never came as it was supposed to. If we abandon the still Hegelian teleology, better, then, is a return to the theological source. “Communists took it upon themselves to realise heaven on earth through transforming violence: that exercise in regrettable but necessary killing which would murder eighty or a hundred million people in the twentieth century.”⁷¹

The presence of Luther in Marx also makes a difference for those who would continue by way of a critical retrieval of Luther from the vicissitudes of Lutheranism, in which the alliance of throne and altar under the settlements of the Wars of Religion in historical fact often turned Luther’s manifest meaning on its head. The price of this retrieval is to give Marx his due in understanding how sinful greed is not solely or even primarily an individual vice, but a power that captivates desire to construct systems of malice and injustice, including systems of political sovereignty. The alternative here is that so long as Luther is taken only as a preacher fogging consciences with consolations, and not also a researcher and teacher warranting what he preaches through a cogent analysis of society that shows the power of the apocalyptic discipline to expose works done in darkness under the ideological cover of covert theologies (e.g., the “revolution,” the “hidden hand,” “manifest destiny,” “the new world order,” etc.), theology in Luther’s tradition will be nothing more than an existential gloss on the real world, providing a chaplaincy of solace within the juggernaut but never protests, “poking a stick into the spokes of the wheel” (in the phrase of Dietrich Bonhoeffer).

We come to the juncture between Marx and Luther. In view of their shared apocalypticism, it is a *messianic* divergence. For Marx, the event that breaks through to freed thinking is the rise of the revolutionary proletariat, which has been stripped by savage capitalism of all vestiges of belonging, having nothing to lose now but its chains, yet just so purged of compromising partial loyalties; thus purified, the proletariat can emerge as the universal class, harbinger of the new humanity. Marx’s critical social thinking arises with this specter haunting 19th-century Europe; it is the thinking of it. For Luther, the event that breaks through to create freed thinking is the putatively divine proclamation of the resurrection of the crucified Jew Jesus, who now works in the

proclamation as the Risen One to exchange without limit his victory for human loss, glory for disgrace, righteousness for sin, life for death. Luther's critical social thinking arises with this mission of the gospel to the nations and is the thinking of it. The *unconditional* and *limitless* exchange here *promised* requires of Luther eschatologically *theological* exposition; the finite and secular revolution, if it is to be *conclusive and universal*, requires of Marx *dialectical materialism*. Thus these two ways of critical social thinking indeed diverge.

Yet a complication in regard to this divergence is that, for Luther, most forms of religion or theism are also idolatrous, including Marx's sublimated theology: "Man as the *highest being* for man" along with its "categorical imperative" to overthrow all conditions of dehumanization is still a theology, albeit a curious one; and for Luther in any case, it is a false one that will end up making some "more equal than others," as denizens of "real existing socialism" mocked. Yet complicating Luther's Augustinian claim for theology of the "one, true God"⁷² is the widely acknowledged fact today that it is not founded on an obvious revelation, as Protestant biblicism held. The apocalypse Luther invokes is a putative one, and highly paradoxical at that: Paul's "Christ crucified." Thus Luther and Marx diverge in ways that challenge each other. For Luther, they diverge over the saving significance of the cross of the Messiah; for Marx, over the cross's dilution of messianic expectation with the passivity of patience in suffering injustice that it nurtures. In either case, for both as apocalyptic thinkers, thought is not leisurely speculation but earnest, earthbound struggle for clarity of action and in suffering, as entailed by a fateful subjectivity that befalls one, quite apart from conscious choice.

New Questions

New questions for Luther research arise upon this clarification of messianic divergence. What really is the status of political sovereignty in Luther? Is it a continuation of Adam's primeval parenting with Eve, in the dominion granted in the garden (Genesis 1:26-28)? Or is it a postlapsarian monopoly on the means of violence with which legally to suppress violence (Genesis 3:14-19)? Is the state a passing "emergency order," *Notordnung*, destined to wither away, or is it a parable of the reign of God? Does Luther in fact reject "spiritualizing" the radical demands of the Sermon on the Mount into a mere inward disposition? If so, is Marx right to see in Luther a precedent for his analysis of capital as sophisticated theft? If Marx roots his insight into economic exchange all the way down, so to speak, in a virtually metaphysical *Stoffwechsel*,⁷³ how can this connect with the motifs of exchange in Luther's *fröhliche Wechsel* (*commercium admirabile*) and more broadly with the Trinitarian *perichoresis*? Can a parallelism between Luther and Marx in "positive

dialectic,” over against the negative dialectic of Hegel, be discovered and further explored?⁷⁴ What is the political meaning of the Body of Christ, if indeed, as Bonhoeffer suggested, after Christendom the *corpus christianum* resolves again into its (biblical) components, the *corpus Christi* and this passing epoch, “this world?” If “ethics” cannot be the issuing of fixed rules in a creation being created daily, how can the divine mandates of Genesis 1:26–28 nevertheless order life to its redemption in Christ and fulfillment by the Spirit? If “conscience” is the relation to God where such discernment takes place, how can conscience avoid the temptation to mere inwardness and instead become socially insightful and thus also powerful, as seen in Luther’s *Trade and Usury*?

Further Reading

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Notes:

(1.) Abraham Rotstein, "Lordship and Bondage in Luther and Marx," *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 8.1 (1979): 75-110.

(2.) The literature on apocalyptic is large and growing. For a useful introduction to the current discussion, see Joshua B. Davis and Douglas Herink, eds., *Apocalyptic and the Future of Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012).

(3.) Johannes Heckel, *Lex Charitatis: Juristic Disquisition on Law in the Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Gottfried G. Krodel (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

(4.) Alberto Toscano, "Beyond Abstraction: Marx and the Critique of the Critique of Religion," *Historical Materialism* 18 (2010): 3-29, esp. 3-6.

(5.) For excellent historical critical biography and context see Jonathan Sperber, *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth Century Life* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2013).

(6.) Speaking on behalf of contemporary Reformation history scholarship, H. C. Erik Midelfort notes the appearance of Luther in *Capital*, but concludes from it that Marx “showed no sustained interest in the Reformation, unlike Friedrich Engels . . .”; Midelfort, “The Reformation and the Early Social Sciences,” in *Politics and Reformations: Histories and Reformations, Essays in Honor of Thomas A. Brady, Jr.* ed. Christopher Ocker et al. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 39. It is true, as we shall see, that Engels took an interest in Thomas Müntzer. Marx’s interest in Luther is, just so, all the more surprising and interesting.

(7.) This was in large part an image of Marx of the mature Marx’s own making, who argued that the dialectical materialism of *Capital* was science, not mythmaking nor idealist philosophy. For an insightful defense of this account of Marx’s Marxism as science against the interpretation of it as “political religion” see Toscano, “Beyond Abstraction.” The historical fact should certainly be conceded to Toscano that Marx personally was generally antireligious and specifically anti-Christian, and that for him concessions to bourgeois freedom of conscience or of religion indulged retrogressive phenomena. The alternative interpretation of Marxism as a secular or “civil” (Rousseau) religion, which provides for “the moral unification of society,” is represented by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. See Walter Luiz Adamson, “Gramsci, Catholicism and Secular Religion,” *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 14.4 (2013): 481. Adamson’s insightful analysis points out how little troubled Gramsci was with Mussolini’s fascism, in that he took it as a stage on the way toward the secular religion that Marxism would bring. This point is underscored by the fierce denunciation Gramsci reserved for the regressive compromises with the Roman Catholic Church made by Mussolini. Adamson identifies the “main problem” in Gramsci’s vision with the lack of specificity about the actual entailments of a Marxist secular religion, except that “the modern ‘Prince’ takes the place, in people’s consciousness, of the divinity and of the categorical imperative; it becomes the basis of a modern secularism and of a complete secularization of life and of all customary relations” (481)—rather a perfect sketch of contemporary North Korea. There is a temptation among theologians in the tradition of Luther to latch onto Gramsci’s positive evaluation of the Reformation for subverting the hegemony of the medieval Roman Catholic Church. For example, Nathan Montover, “The Revolutionary Luther: A Gramscian Analysis of Luther’s Universal Priesthood,” *Dialog* 49.1 (2010): 70–78, turns the tragic necessity of Luther’s surrender of church reform to political sovereignty in Luther’s 1521 tract *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, into the virtue of something “radical and revolutionary”: political sovereignty in place of papal hegemony (73; the irony is worth noting that just this turn to political sovereignty-cum-

nationalism was the device by which ideologues in the former German Democratic Republic rehabilitated Luther around the time of his 500th birth anniversary in 1983). It is, however, inconsequential to stop here with a Marxist approbation of the Reformation, in that Gramsci sees Marxism as the supersession of Protestantism just as Protestantism had been the supersession of Catholicism. While it is true that Gramsci was the postwar darling of the Western left for offering an alternative to Bolshevik Marxism (71), what is missed in Montover's appropriation is something that Gramsci took note of: the feudal synthesis of Christian monasticism with European nation building (see n. 34), which can be meaningfully designated "Christendom." It is "Christendom" that stands in the background of Luther's appeal to the "Christian" nobility to undertake reform of the church; remove the presupposition of baptism as conferring the dignity of citizenship in Christendom, and Luther's take on political sovereignty, wishful thinking in any case, necessarily collapses.

(8.) Michael Burleigh, *Earthly Powers: The Clash of Religion and Politics in Europe, from the French Revolution to the Great War* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 242-252.

(9.) "The resolutions on the agenda paper of the International Socialist Congress to be held at Zurich, in August, certainly have the merit of striking at the root of the social question, and of embodying some of the fundamental principles of Social-Democracy. In this respect we see a distinct advance on the congresses of the old International. The controversies on questions of principle between Proudhonists and Marxists have long since passed away. We are all Marxists now, to this sense of the word. The emancipated and class-conscious workers of every country now all admit the fundamental theses laid down in the Communist Manifesto of 1847." Ernest Belfort Bax, "The Zurich Resolutions, Justice," May 13, 1893, p. 6, transcribed by Ted Crawford.

(10.) "In the assumption that power belongs as a matter of course to capital, all economists are Marxians." John Kenneth Galbraith, *The New Industrial State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967), 49.

(11.) "Marx profoundly affected those who did not accept his system. His influence extended to those who least supposed they were subject to it." John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1998), 59.

(12.) Paul R. Hinlicky, *Luther and the Beloved Community: A Path for Christian Theology after Christendom*, with a Foreword by Mickey L. Mattox (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 308-330.

(13.) Thomas A. Brady, Jr., "Marxist Evaluations of Luther's Thought," in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, eds. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel and Ľubomir Batka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 573-583.

- (14.) Gary M. Simpson, *Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002).
- (15.) Paul Mojzes, *Christian Marxist Dialogue in Eastern Europe* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981).
- (16.) Walter Altmann, *Luther and Liberation: A Latin American Perspective*, trans. Mary M. Solberg (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000).
- (17.) For a recent example, see Guillermo Hansen, "Contours for a Public Lutheran Theology in the Face of Empire," *Dialog* 49.2 (2010): 96–107.
- (18.) For a recent example, see James Luchte, "Marx and the Sacred," *Journal of Church and State* 51.3 (2009): 413–437.
- (19.) Hinlicky, *Luther and the Beloved Community*, 323–331.
- (20.) Frederick Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany* (3d ed.; New York: International Publishers, 2006). See further Michael G. Baylor, *The German Reformation and the Peasants' War: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012); and Lowell H. Zuck, ed., *Christianity and Revolution: Radical Christian Testimonies 1520–1650* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1975).
- (21.) Engels, *Peasant War*, 9.
- (22.) Roland Boer, "Reformation and Revolution: Concerning the Interpretation of Luther in Marx and Engels," *Sino-Christian Studies* 11 (2011): 45–72.
- (23.) *The Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, translated and edited by Peter Matheson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 244.
- (24.) *Ibid.*, 251.
- (25.) *Ibid.*, 250.
- (26.) *Ibid.*, 335.
- (27.) LW 45:243.
- (28.) Matheson, the editor of *The Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, notes that "in fact, Luther was critical of the princes failure to see that the peace is kept" by addressing the legitimate grievances of the peasants (335, n. 114).
- (29.) Boer, *Reformation and Revolution*, 63.

(30.) Marius Timmann Mjaaland, "Apocalypse and the Spirit of Revolution: The Political Legacy of the Early Reformation," *Political Theology* 14.2 (2013): 155–173. On Luther's early patronage of Müntzer, see Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521–1532*, trans. J. L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 146–157.

(31.) Steven Lukes, *Marxism and Morality* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) is a sobering study of the atrocities rationalized under the manifesto, "The revolution is our highest good."

(32.) Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. D. Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

(33.) Christiane Frey, "κλήσις/Beruf: Luther, Weber, Agamben," *New German Critique* 35.3 (2008): 35–56, explores from a Barthian perspective this ambiguity in Luther whether in political service the state is transformed or the Christian conformed.

(34.) Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity A.D. 200–1000* (2d ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).

(35.) In the section "Inheritance and Decay" of his posthumously published *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer wrote: "The *corpus christianum* is resolved into its true constituents, the *corpus Christi*, and the world. In His Church Christ rules not by the sword but solely with His Word. Unity of faith exists only in obedience to the true word of Jesus Christ. But the sword is the property of the secular government, which in its own way, in the proper discharge of its office, also serves the same Jesus Christ." In this succinct statement, Bonhoeffer at once repudiates yearning "for the lost western Empire, the *corpus christianum*, in which Emperor and Pope were together the defenders of the unity of the Christian west" and retrieves Luther's distinction between the two kingdoms from paternalistic analogizing of the state's coercive function. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. N. H. Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1978), 94–95.

(36.) LW 45:258.

(37.) For instructive and salutary counsel against the centuries old German habit of politically instrumentalizing the Luther icon, including the surprising story of Luther's rehabilitation as a progressive in the late German Democratic Republic, see Jan Herman Brinks, "Luther and the German State," *Heythrop Journal* 39 (1998): 1–17; see also James M. Stayer, *Martin Luther, German Saviour: German Evangelical Theological Factions and the Interpretation of Luther, 1917–1933* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2000), for helpful disentanglement of the politics of the Luther Renaissance which still influence contemporary Luther research in subterranean ways.

(38.) The “princes’ servant Luther” from “Notes on the Protestant Reformation” (c. 1880) in *Karl Marx on Religion*, ed. Saul K. Padover (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), 158–159.

(39.) Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* trans. H. Tomlinson and G. Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 35–60.

(40.) See Paul R. Hinlicky, “Luther’s Atheism” in *The Devil’s Whore: Reason and Philosophy in the Lutheran Tradition*, ed. Jennifer Hockenbery Drageseth (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 53–60.

(41.) LW 45:231–310; WA 15:279–322. The excellent Introduction by Walther I. Brandt in LW 45:233–243 explains the technical terminology regarding the *Zins* and *Zinskaufe*, *Rente* and *Rentekaufe* “which simply have no equivalent in modern English because the practice to which it refers no longer exists.” Brandt is justified in this light to deny a binary: “Luther was neither the reactionary who suppressed the peasants nor the prophetic protagonist of modern capitalism” (239). Yet it could be, as I will suggest, that, Brandt’s prejudicial adjectives aside, Luther was *both*.

(42.) WA 6:1–8 and 6:33–60.

(43.) WA 51:325–424. This lengthy treatise has (by 2015) not been translated into English and is worthy of careful study in the context of the older Luther’s polemical writings.

(44.) Karl Marx, *Capital*, in *Karl Marx Frederick Engels: Collected Works* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996), vols. 35–37; here 37:391–392.

(45.) Boer, *Reformation and Revolution*, 57–59.

(46.) Marx, *Capital* 37:391–392.

(47.) *Ibid.*, 37: 392; cf. 595.

(48.) *Ibid.*, 37: 345.

(49.) *Ibid.*, 37: 391–392.

(50.) *Ibid.*, 35: 203.

(51.) *Ibid.*, 37: 329.

(52.) *Ibid.*, 37: 889.

(53.) *Ibid.*, 37: 595.

(54.) *Ibid.*, 37: 615–616.

(55.) Ibid., 35:203.

(56.) Ibid., 37: 889; 35: 314, 741.

(57.) Ibid., 35: 741.

(58.) Ibid., 36: 66.

(59.) Page references to text in LW 45: 231–310 are provided in parentheses in this section.

(60.) LW 31: 10. See Paul R. Hinlicky, *Beloved Community: Critical Dogmatics after Christendom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 108–135.

(61.) On Paul, see Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. P. Dailey (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 95, 114, 118. Rotstein, “Lordship and Bondage,” at the conclusion of this seminal study argues that Luther and Marx share a positive dialectic over against the negative dialectic of Hegel. For Marx, “man exists as a member of a species and asserts that existence directly in his activity and in the objects he creates: ‘he can only express his life in real, sensuous objects.’ The object is the direct embodiment of his individuality.” Objective self-expression in creative labor is empowered by a mandate, we might say from Luther’s perspective, at the center of creation: “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over it.” *Lebensäusserung*, then, “is the positive expression or manifestation of life, while *Lebensentäusserung*, the alienation or estrangement of life” is caused by impositions “foreign to the human condition in a social or institutional sense.” If that is so, the “Lutheran and Marxian usage stand once more, back to back or in mirror image.” What funds apocalyptic resistance to the juggernaut is not need, envy and greed, but the divine gift of life that goes on in spite of alienation imposed from without.

(62.) Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, trans. E. Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

(63.) Rotstein, “Lordship and Bondage,” 86.

(64.) Luther’s chief brief against Erasmus in his treatise on bound choice is that Erasmus platonizes Paul, failing to understand the dualism in human nature of flesh and spirit as apocalyptic antinomies (J. L. Martyn) rather than natural faculties: “And doubtless that ignorance and contempt [of God] are not seated in the flesh in the sense of the lower and grosser affections, but in the highest and most excellent powers of man, in which righteousness, godliness, and knowledge and reverence of God, should reign—that is, in

reason and will, and so in the very power of 'free-will', in the very seed of uprightness, the most excellent thing in man!" Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 2000), 280.

(65.) Kirsi Stjerrna and Deanna A. Thompson, eds., *On the Apocalyptic and Human Agency: Conversations with Augustine of Hippo and Martin Luther* (Newcastle, U.K.: Cambridge Scholars, 2014).

(66.) Martin Luther, The Smalcald Articles, III/1/3 in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, eds. Robert Kolb & Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 311.

(67.) John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford, U.K. and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997).

(68.) Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics and the Modern West* (New York: Vintage, 2007), has seen this violence with great clarity in this essay written in defense of muddling secularism against the recovery of apocalyptic theology in Karl Barth and his movement, broadly taken. Lilla rightly worries that it is dangerous to speak of God apocalyptically in contrast to the benign deity of liberal Protestantism, his "stillborn God."

(69.) Rotstein, "Lordship and Bondage," 88.

(70.) On Marx's theoretical capitalism dependent on Smith and Ricardo, but reframed by Marx's tacit apocalypticism, see Sperber, *Marx*, 419-420. Galbraith, *Affluent Society*, also emphasizes Marx's reliance upon Ricardo; see chap. 6, "The Marxian Pall."

(71.) Burleigh, *Earthly Powers*, 251.

(72.) See Luther's commentary on the First Commandment in his Large Catechism in Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 386-392.

(73.) On *Stoffwechsel*, see David S. Pena, "Marx and Engels on Religion: A Reply to Ishay Landa," *Nature, Society and Thought* 20.1 (2007): 91-108. This fascinating essay attempts to relativize the status of theoretical atheism in Marxism, as if it were the *sine qua non* of revolution; to the contrary, Pena argues that it is the abolition of private property that "leads to an unequivocal rejection of the commodification of nature," so that "humanity participates in maintaining nature as a system capable of continued metabolic interaction with humankind." Thus a contemporary eco-Marxism, he argues, is not "far-fetched" but a legitimate "extrapolation" if we translate, as we ought, Marx's term *Stoffwechsel* as "metabolic exchange" rather than as "material reactions" (108-

109). In this connection, Pena observes that “Marx shows little recognition of religion’s dialectical nature, particularly the tensions between the faith of the oppressors and that of the oppressed” (99). Burleigh points to the suppressed religiosity of Marx (Burleigh, *Earthy Powers*, 247–248), though doubtless Marx was not sufficiently aware of the apocalyptic tradition out of which he thought.

(74.) Brent Adkins and Paul R. Hinlicky, *Rethinking Philosophy and Theology with Deleuze: A New Cartography* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 179–186.

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