A Lutheran Answer to Challenges from Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas
Early Lutheran Theology and Ethics in Dialogue with Present day Post-secularism

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The new traditionalist wave in ecumenical theology

In the introduction of his book *Beyond Fideism*, Finnish systematic theologian Olli-Pekka Vainio discusses the new religious landscape within North America and Europe. Many sociological surveys indicate that different forms of 'conservative' Christianity are growing or at least keeping their positions, while more 'liberal' main-road churches seem to lose ground, sometimes rapidly. With reference to American ethicist Jeffrey Stout, Vainio claims that Alasdair MacIntyre (b 1929), John Milbank (b 1952) and Stanley Hauerwas (b 1940) can be regarded as intellectual leaders of this new wave of 'traditionalism'. Stout sees a growing tension in society, since theologians tend to become more 'Hauerwasian' while lawyers and ethicists become more 'Rawlsian'. The traditionalistic theologians have their sociological ground in communitarianism and their philosophical ground in fideism.[1]

In Sweden, and to some extent all Nordic countries, a so called "New ecumenism" has been formed by individual leaders from the Roman Catholic Church and Pentecostal churches. Sometimes also Eastern Orthodox churches and non-denominational groups have joined this ecumenical movement, which is very much a grass-root level phenomenon. These groups are mutually very different in a number of ways, but they have at least one important thing in common; they all seek the classical theological and spiritual roots of the Church in a way that leads

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[1] Olli-Pekka Vainio, *Beyond Fideism* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), 1-4. The theological communitarianism has of course close connections to

the Post-liberal program that George Lindbeck presented in his book *The Nature of Doctrine The Nature of Doctrine – Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1984). However, Lindbeck had already by the late 1960:s started to suggest a "sectarian" form of ecclesiology as a survival strategy for churches exiting in late modern societies. Lindbeck himself reads Martin Luther from a sectarian perspective in his essay "Modernity and Luther´s teaching of Christian Freedom" in *Martin Luther and the modern mind: freedom, conscience, toleration, rights* (Edited by Manfred Hofmann; New York: E. Mellen Press, 1985).

them to distance themselves from Martin Luther and the Lutheran reformation, as well as the Reformation in its totality. Their way of "making theology" has partial roots in the official ecumenical agreements from the 20th century, but nowadays, the grass-root level, often without any official bonds to particular church bodies, is the most important sphere. Here, people from different traditions meet and find common interest in criticizing main line Lutheran churches and traditions for being "liberal" or unclear in ethical questions which are debated in society and sometimes through theological questions, such as the birth of Jesus and his claims of being *the* way in definite sense.

In summary, the public debate has often only two different positions; the liberal/Lutheran one and the post-liberal/traditionalist one. In this presentation, I will propose another option, where the original Lutheran thinking concerning church and society is used as a way to bridge the gap between liberalism and traditionalism/communitarianism.[2]

[2] In this attempt, I follow one of the theses (No 10) submitted by Niels Henrik Gregersen, professor in systematic theology at the University of Copenhagen, in his introduction to the book *The Gift of Grace – The Future of Lutheran Theology*. This text has the title "Introduction - Ten thesis on the Future of Lutheran Theology", in *The Gift of Grace – The Future of Lutheran Theology* (Edited by Niels Henrik Gregersen *et al*; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005). In thesis No 10, he claims that future Lutheran theology should transcend the unhealthy dichotomies between "liberal" and "conservative", "culture-oriented" and "church-oriented", "modern" and "postmodern". He also claims that the capacity for living with contradiction rather than in neat uniform schemata may be an important stress test for Lutheran spirituality. See Gregersen, 13-14. Theological ethicist Bernd Wannenwetsch has also, in his book *Political Worship – Ethics for Christian citizens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), argued for a middle-ground between liberalism and communitarianism. We will return to Wannenwetsch in the last section of this article.

The post-secular critique of Lutheran tradition

In this article, I will focus on the communitarian programmes of Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas. In my view, many Lutheran theologians have reacted towards this communitarian critique by bringing Lutheran faith in too close relation to liberalism and the ideologies of modernity. For a full description of the post-secular or traditionalist critique of Early Lutheranism in the way it was presented above, one should also pay attention to the radical Orthodoxy programme of John Milbank, Graham Ward and William Cavanaugh.

Alasdair MacIntyre

We find the main source of the `Roman Catholic´ criticism of Alasdair MacIntyre in his book *After Virtue.* According to MacIntyre, the modern-liberal society has lost its comprehensive understanding of morality and as a consequence, we no longer have a clear goal for ethics. He claims that every moral philosophy presumes a sociology, meaning relationships to others are important to identify people. Pre-modern societies were identifying people in substantial, not only accidental, ways through their relationships to others. From this we can learn that Joint catalogues of virtues and vices are necessary, and qualities of character are better than rules to promote virtues. Morality in antiquity required that people were in agreement with the *telos* of the human being. The Christian tradition added the claim that the foundations of ethics also included a divine established law. This belief, that moralities were true or false was, according to MacIntyre, later destroyed by Protestantism, the Jansenist form of Roman Catholicism and their precursors in Late Medieval philosophy. These movements were emphasizing the Fall so thoroughly that human reason was not seen to be able to correct the passions of human beings. According to the scholarly views of their time reason can only calculate on means, but not say anything about the goal of human life.[3]

[3] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue After Virtue – A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame, 1984), 2-39 and 53-55.

Modernity has criticized the Aristotelian way to justify morality. Friedrich Nietzsche claimed that Aristotle was completely wrong and that all forms of rational justifications of morality unavoidably must fail and morality therefore must be understood from the human will. MacIntyre claims that rules have a primary function in the moral life of modernity. He also states that qualities of character, which were emphasized in Aristotelian thinking, now are considered to be secondary to rules. As a consequence, MacIntyre writes that the virtues will fail when it becomes clear that the rules cannot be successfully justified.[4]

The Greek word *dike* referred to the whole order of the world. This implied that the virtue of righteousness was to do what the accepted order required of you. For Plato, being successful as a human being was almost identical to being successful as a citizen. An Aristotelian ethics of virtue assumes that a distinction is made between what is *considered* to be good and what *really* is good. This is the background that explains why law and morality are associated by Aristotle, but not in the modernity.[5]

MacIntyre does not, at least not explicitly, belong to the Thomistic tradition within the Roman-Catholic Church. He even denies that his moral philosophical standpoint is connected to a theological standpoint.[6] At the same time, he openly admits that he is heavily influenced by Aristotle and some other traditions from classical Greek philosophy. MacIntyre says of himself that he should be placed somewhere between 'classical morality' and 'Aristotelianism'. He thinks that Thomas´ commentary of the *Nicomachian Ethics* is unsurpassed, but that this commentary treats the virtues in a way that can be put into question. For example, his view of physical and biological sciences is too individualistic, and his view of the unity of the virtues is unsustainable.[7]

MacIntyre claims that a communally shared view of the *telos* of human life is important in order to establish a narrative that will give every member of the community a personal identity. These traditional patterns of virtue today only survive in small subcultures and MacIntyre, therefore, sees a great risk for 'erosion' of the largest church traditions in the world. The conclusion MacIntyre draws is that we, in modern society, have reached the same point as the citizens of the decaying Roman Empire. We, therefore, have to create local communities, where intellectual and cultural life can be maintained through the dark ages that have begun.[8]

In summary, MacIntyre´s analysis is mostly a critique of modernism and liberalism, but these phenomena are closely connected to the Reformation. He often repeats that Luther regarded all heathen philosophy as works of the devil and that Lutheranism has never been able to assimilate useful insights from extra-Biblical cultural traditions.

Stanley Hauerwas

Stanley Hauerwas speaks about the 'Freely gathered church' as a critique of so called 'Constantine churches' which he refers to as churches that work with (close) connections to secular society. Hauerwas wants to emphasize an ethics of virtue instead of justification by faith since the traditional Lutheran reading of justification is too individualistic and tends to lose the social, eschatological and practical aspects in the justice, and salvific work of God. This redefinition is also visible in his way of handling the Reformation *sola Scriptura* principle; church and Bible, text and interpretation, and discipleship and reading may not be separated. Historically, *sola Scriptura* has been developed in close relation to modern individualism, and this has formed the

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[4] MacIntyre, 116-120.

[5] MacIntyre, 137-153. Perhaps the difference between Aristotle and modernity becomes clearer if we consider what MacIntyre writes on 224-225, namely that Aristotle states that a society without a common understanding of righteousness, *dike*, will lack the necessary basis for political fellowship.

[6] This is in fact the only major difference between MacIntyre and Hauerwas. Accordning to Hauerwas, the theological agenda is always the primary source that has consequences for all other parts of acedemical work, such as interpreting history and present day society.

[7] MacIntyre, 165-168 and 178-181.

[8] MacIntyre, 201-227 and 253-263.

basis for both fundamentalist and historical-critical readings of the Scripture.[9]

Closely connected to this view is his claim for the visible church and its character as a disciplined community instead of Protestant individualism, where all members can make personal decisions concerning the extent of their Christian involvement. The Bible should, according to Hauerwas, be read within the Christian community, since a narrow-minded principle of *sola scriptura* loses the important context that was an implied component when the ancient church interpreted the Bible. When religion is excluded from public life, it runs the risk of becoming extremist and/or sectarian. However, Hauerwas notes that the main development within Protestant churches is that they are incapable of exercising authority over the lives of the members and that this is a sign of how freedom of religion has resulted in the disruption of Christians. Christians today think that they have a right to 'make independent decisions'. Hauerwas sees a lot of signs of this development even within the Roman-Catholic church. Therefore, no denomination is able to appear as a disciplined people with the capacity to challenge the state.[10]

Hauerwas is a Methodist. He belongs to the Barthian tradition, but calls himself a "high-church Mennonite" with close connections to Anglo-Catholicism. He is against spiritualism, pietism and rationalism, but shares with Lutheranism the accentuation of Eucharist and liturgy. His concept of a "community of virtue" is, of course, heavily influenced by MacIntyre. Hereby, he tries to find a way to counterweigh modern autonomy. It is important that the church maintains the political significance of virtue. He is a typical representative for the ecumenical and eclectic profile of what can be called contemporary Barthian influenced critique against Luther and Lutheranism. Hauerwas himself speaks

about this present situation in the preface of *After Christendom*, where he states that it is typical that theologians such as himself are influenced by a wide diversity of thinkers, such as Alasdair MacIntyre, John Howard Yoder and John Milbank, without even admitting that these influences would likely lead to theological contradictions within the authors´ own positions.[11]

The Lutheran reformation over-personified the Christian faith by separating public and personal morality, thereby strengthening the secular authority as a solution to the political regiment when the political force of the medieval church was to be pressed back. As a consequence, the main development within Protestant churches is that the churches are incapable of exercising authority over the lives of its members. In fact, no denomination is able to appear as a disciplined people with the capacity to challenge the state.[12] This can be seen as an indirect form or a consequence of the phenomenon that MacIntyre calls `erosion´.

Becoming a Christian needs a lot of training. Hauerwas´ strategy to correct this trend is to educate the Christians. He sees a major obstacle to this in the fact that many modern Christians think that you can become a Christian without training. The critical aspect of this mistake is that when it has been established, every other alternative appears authoritative. Here Hauerwas sees an advantage within the Roman-Catholic church that has almost been lost within Protestantism, that is to say the use practices of discernment which situate our lives within the narrative of the church.[13]

The focus of every-day life and family life during the Reformation and in Lutheran theology was the final nail in the coffin for the ethics of Aristotle with his emphasis on theoretical contemplation and political participation. This is

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[9] Arne Rasmusson, *The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1994), 199 and 206.

[10] Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom? – How the Church is to behave if freedom, justice, and a Christian nation are bad ideas* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 81 and 88.

[11] Hauerwas, preface.

[12] Hauerwas, 24-26 and 31.

[13] Hauerwas, 98-99 and 108-110. In this particular book, Hauerwas mainly exemplifies the political practice of the church with the capability as a larger community (not a family in strict biological sense) to have, raise and educate children. Therefore, he stresses that matrimony as an institution must belong to the church, not the state. See also 126-131 for a more thorough explication.

because the sphere of "political" action for the individual believer was so small. The Reformation implied a conception of vocation where secular rulers could determine ethics for the whole society where there was no context from which current honour and duty could be put into question. The appreciation of everyday life that came from the Reformation also implied that Christian concepts of love must suffer from the lack of a Christological centre.[14]

To summarise: Hauerwas develops an "ethics of virtue" that is a reminiscent of some of the main ideas from MacIntyre. However, Hauerwas is an explicit theologian that writes for and within a Christian context. Protestant individualism and freedom of religion has resulted in the disruption of Christians. At the same time, the state is constantly in a potential conflict situation to the Christian people. The church, therefore, has to develop tools that make it possible for believers to co-operate and share their lives together. MacIntyre and Hauerwas are united in their criticism of modern autonomy and human independency, especially in matters concerning sharing faith. They claim that Lutheran theology does not have the tools to correct these problems. I will now try to prove that they are wrong.

Applying the critique on some main Lutheran teachings

From the critical arguments presented above, it is clear that contemporary Lutheran theology has to be able to handle a wider range of Augustinianism and sociological aspects of the Christian faith, where the connections between and within the Christian community to *Civitas Dei* are made more concrete than before. The purpose of my text is two-fold. Firstly, I think that Lutheranism should take the challenges from the "New ecumenism" seriously in order to work as a vital voice in an ecumenical dialogue. Secondly, I think that the critique presented above can be described as a second wave of political theology. This second wave can be seen as making the

aforementioned arguments relevant to Lutheran theology itself. This is vital if Lutheran theology wants to analyse the new religious landscape, in which the (former) Lutheran majority churches can no longer be described as dominating the religious life of society. Two main Lutheran teachings, that are often described as obstacles for entering the sort of dialogue, I wish to promote are the "two kingdoms doctrine" as well as the distinction between law and gospel, at least when this distinction is applied at an individual level. I, therefore, start with a short description of these teachings.[15]

The two kingdom´s doctrine has its background in the thinking of Martin Luther, however Per Frostin claims in his book *Luther´s Two Kingdoms Doctrine – A Critical Study* that this thinking was not formed as a clear doctrine until the 19th century, when the positive view that Aristotle had concerning the state, via Hegel and the Romanticism, was applied to the European national states. Even if Martin Luther often repeated the words of Acts 5:29, that you shall obey God more than humans, the two kingdoms doctrine, at least in Northern Europe, often has been used in order to keep the "secular" regiment free from ecclesial arguments.[16]

The other concept, the distinction between law and gospel, is closely connected to the two kingdoms doctrine, but still not identical with it. This

[15] Many Lutheran theologians have of course tried to summarize the problem for contemporary Lutheran theology. See for example Gregersen, 13f, Tage Kurtén, "Lutheran Moral Thinking: Its Dilemma in a Late Modern Setting" in *Crisis and Change – Religion, Ethics and Theology under Late Modern Conditions* (Edited by Jan-Olav Henriksen and Tage Kurtén; Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scolars Publishing, 2012), Vítor Westhelle, "The Word and the Mask – Revisiting the Two-Kingdoms Doctrine" in *The Gift of Grace – The Future of Lutheran Theology* (Edited by Niels Henrik Gregersen *et al*; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) and Jan-Olav Henriksen, "Pluralism and Identity – The Two-Kingdoms Doctrine Challenged by Secularization and Privatization" in *The Gift of Grace – The Future of Lutheran Theology* (Edited by Niels Henrik Gregersen *et al*; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.

[14] Stanley Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the front – Theological engagements with the secular* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 170-173.

[16] Per Frostin, *Luther´s Two Kingdoms Doctrine – A critical Study* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1994), 166ff.

concept is visible in the Lutheran confessional writings from the 16th century[17], but also here, we deal with a concept that was never fully dogmatized during the reformation and where the clear doctrinal expressions only emerged in the 19th century.[18] Interpreting the word of God as law and gospel highlights salvation of the individual. Luther questioned how he could find a graceful God, this lead to the Reformation break-through. This shows that the salvation of the individual is a natural, almost necessary, starting point for Lutheran theology. God´s law is, more or less, known by all humans. However, only the Gospel can give God´s own righteousness through Jesus Christ to a sinful human being.

In order to keep law and gospel apart a distinction between personal ethics and public ethics/"officeholder" ethics has to be made. According to traditional Lutheran thinking, both of these forms of ethics should be influenced by the faith of the believer, but in two different ways. Personal ethics consist of the believer´s own interpretation of the Christian faith in circumstances where he does not have to fulfil any public duties. The way two neighbours interact can be used as an analogy for this type of ethics. The typical example of officeholder ethics is when a judge has to pass judgment according to current law, even if he feels compassion for those he judges. It has often been very difficult to give public or officeholder ethics a Christian interpretation even if it is obvious that this was the intention of the Lutheran Reformation.

In order to find the basis for such an interpretation, we have to take the Lutheran teaching of three orders into consideration. This thinking is richly illustrated in a number of Luther´s writings[19], but is seen perhaps most clearly in the table of orders at the end of the *Small Catechism.*

The Catechism: A didactic way of interpreting Christian life

My main focus in the reading of early Lutheran texts in this article is the teaching of the three orders or estates. This is a teaching that originally was of great importance within Lutheranism, however it was eventually eroded due to liberalism and industrialism. As shown above, Per Frostin notes that the three orders must be seen as an integral part of traditional Lutheranism, in which the dialectics between law and gospel, worldly and spiritual regiments and the two kingdoms in an Augustinian sense takes place. All these schemes are necessary components of Luther´s teaching on spiritual and temporal matters. Frostin also says that Luther uses the distinction between spiritual and worldly in different ways at different stages of his career. In order to treat both creational and eschatological aspects of Luther´s thinking justly, he agrees with the way Ebeling speaks about a *Zweiforalehre* in order to develop the distinction between *coram deo* and *coram hominibus.* This concept can be used to clarify phenomena that the two kingdoms doctrine cannot give a clear picture of.[20]

A number of more recent works seems to indicate that emphasizing the three orders or estates is not only a historically correct way of re-evaluating early Lutheranism, but also a "meeting point with more contemporary communitarian approaches that stress that an ethical judgment remains grounded on a specific community and the individual´s role within it".[21] The doctrine of the three "orders" or "estates" is a hermeneutical key to Martin Luther´s political eth-

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[17] It is discussed explicitly in *Formula of Concord*, art V and VI, but is widely present in many articles within the *Book of Concord,* for example the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*.

[18] See for example Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1929) and Edward A. Engelbrecht, *Friends of the Law – Luther´s Use of the Law for the Christian Life* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011).

[19] See for example vol 44-47 in *Luther´s Works,* American Edition.

[20] Frostin, 168-172.

[21] Direct quote from Heiki Pihljamäki and Risto Saarinen "Luthran Reformation and the Law in Recent Scholarship", 7 in *Lutheran Reformation and the Law* (Edited by Virpi Mäkinen; Leiden: Brill, 2006).

ics, since it shows the connections between God´s commandments and the ethics of worship.[22]

American legal historian John Witte[23] has written extensively about legal teachings during the Lutheran Reformation. They were in line with the original Lutheran message, and Luther´s two kingdoms theory was a rejection of traditional hierarchies of being, authority and society. He also emphasizes the importance of the three estates; they are in a way hierarchical institutions, but their purpose is to make it possible to divide power, labour and competence between three relatively autonomous realms. The ecclesial estate has, through its competence, of course a special responsibility for the spiritual realm. However, family and political authority should not be understood to be secular, since they too are relating and witnessing to God´s work in creating and sustaining the world. In this way, the early Lutherans could promote social reform within state and family quite independently of ecclesiastical considerations. Division of labour and power among the three orders makes each of them more flexible.[24]

Of course, the three order theology has been criticized in a number of ways, most noticeably in feminist readings of Luther.[25] Even if this cri-

tique is taken seriously, it is clear that it does not refer to the three order theology as such, at least not primarily, but rather to the consequences of losing its original purpose when it started to be misused by modern society, which was shaped by enlightenment individualism and market economy in the 19th century.

Let us now turn to the three orders system by Luther and analyse it more concretely[26]. It can be pictured as follows:

	Responsible/ ”Office”	Receiving:
Ecclesia	Teachers	Listeners
Politeia	Rulers	Subjugated
Economia	Heads of Household	Servants

In order to understand this division, it is important to remember that every Christian believer according to Luther has his special duty in all these orders at the same time. At each level, you are either a "responsible" or a "receiver". A normal citizen or a farmer has a receiving duty at the ecclesial and political level, but at the same time, he or she has an office at the economical level and, therefore, has to take responsibility for other people. For example children or (in Luther´s time) servants. All three orders are God´s way of keeping structure in creation. Luther regarded a receiving position as having the same importance as an office-keeping position, since all positions are God´s way of teaching Christians to practice love in concrete deeds. The three orders are, also, of equal weight in God´s continuing perseverance of creation. The history of the world is therefore identical to the history of the three orders.

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[22] Wannenwetsch, 60-61.

[23] See for example John Witte *Law and Protestantism – The Legal Teachings of the Lutheran Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[24] This summary of Witte´s book can be found in Pihljamäki and Saarinen, 5-6, where it is also discussed as a critique against the Troeltschian influence of Lutheran theology. This influence has had the consequence that Lutheran theology has been viewed as quietist in legal and societal questions.

[25] Three feministic and critical examples of how the original Lutheran reformation can be read and reinterpreted, we find in Deanna A. Thompson, *Crossing the Divide – Luther, Feminism, and the Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2004), W. D. James Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther* (Brighton: Harvester, 1984) and Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology – Cartographies of Grace* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2000). Serene Jones is especially interesting, since she gives a clear picture of how even feminst thinking seeks a middle-ground between liberalism and communitarianism. She gives a long list of argu-

ments concerning problems within both of these traditions that a feminist point of view wants to overcome.

[26] See Pihljamäki and Saarinen, 5-7 for a brief overview of important research on the three orders. In an essay, "Luthers Lehre con den drei Ständen und die drei Dimensionen der Ethik" in *Lutherjahrbuch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), Reinhard Schwarz states that Luther´s understanding of the three orders is in line with the catechetical tradition of the Medieval church. This thinking can with this background be regarded as an ecumenical issue.

This threefold thinking of orders starts to influence Lutheran theology heavily during the 1520s. We find it in the tables of duties within *Small Catechism* and in *Confessio Augustana,* art XVI, but also in many hymns and prayers, and in the way the commandments of God were interpreted. For example, how one should interpret personal and officeholder ethics. This thinking makes it possible to interpret a long list of paragraphs within the New Testament that have historically had a problematic reception, but at the same time seem to have had a central role for the New Testament writers. Let us study some examples of this.

A Lutheran reading of the New Testament on human community life

My purpose here is not to prove that Lutheran theology is "the" correct interpretation of the New Testament in a historical critical sense. My purpose is neither to show how the early Lutherans interpreted the Bible in these matters. Instead I want to show that it is possible to use the Lutheran standpoints above in order to find nuances in the Greek terminology of the New Testament that later interpretations and translations have lost. If this attempt is successful it also indicates that the criticism of MacIntyre and Hauerwas is incorrect and that early Lutheran thinking has valuable tools that can help present day theology to answer challenges that are brought up by the Late modern changes in society.

In Ephesians 5:21, the introduction to a paragraph with housetable exhortations, Paul writes: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ". A Lutheran interpretation of this verse claims that it is a privilege to be served, to be a "receiver". This is something that all Christians need to be trained in. Therefore, no person may be "responsible" in all three orders. You have to be subjugated in at least one order if you shall have this Christian training in human community life. Many passages in early Lutheran writings about the secular and the spiritual forbade ecclesial ministers from having a political office or even supporting themselves by trading. At the same time, political rulers were forbidden from executing ecclesial power and entering the office of the church. The submission to fellow believers is for Luther such an important thing, since we otherwise risk losing the reverence for Christ.

As a second example, we notice that in the New Testament, many passages turn immediately from mystical ecclesiology (Body of Christ) to concrete exhortations in worldly matters, for example the table of orders. Romans 12-13 is the main evidence for this but, also Eph 4-5, 1 Pet 2, Col 2-3 and 1 Cor 12 can be studied in this way. In these passages, mystical ecclesiology is abruptly and unexpectedly accompanied by exhortations that contain human hierarchies and divergent responsibilities. The Christian subjection to secular rulers is in itself a way of living in the body of Christ and letting this have concrete consequences. It is also a practice of the congregation as a social and visible unit. The fact that even secular living is interpreted theologically also sets a clear limit for what a Christian can do in a social context where sin is constantly present. You shall obey God more than men (Acts 5:29), and when a ruler, whether economic, political *or* ecclesial (!), demands something that is contrary to God´s own will, the Christian shall of course obey God.

As a third and final example of how the three orders can be used to interpret the Bible and at the same time bridge a too narrow reading of law and gospel or secular and spiritual, I will highlight the fact that there are many examples of words in the New Testament that we today find "secular", even if they were originally used to name different Church institutions or gifts within the body of Christ. At the same time, the total opposite is also true; many originally "worldly" words are nowadays interpreted as thoroughly ecclesial. The word *diakonos* reflects this; it has its background in the way a servant served at the dinner table in Ancient homes, but in the New Testament it has a clear congregational base, even if it often deals with worldly matters. This "fluctuate phenomenon" does not have to be interpreted as a weakness or a obscurity in ancient Christian writings; a more plausible interpretation is that the first generations of Christian believers, just like early Lutheranism, were open for using secular terms and fields in order to practice Christian faith.

The New Testament´s use of words like *oikos*, *politeuomai* and *liturgia* can also be used to show how the three aspects of Christian living should be unified in one single Christian existence within the Body of Christ. In New Testament, *politeuomai* means to be a citizen, not only to live in general. This is the Ancient Christian way of giving all Christians the right and status that only free men had in the Roman Empire. At the same time, this citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20) and it is something that unifies Christians: "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens (*sympolitai*) with God´s people and also members (*oikeioi*) of his household" (Eph 2:19). Here we see a how a well-known "ecclesial" paragraph in the New Testament uses both political, *sympolitai,* and economical, *oikeioi,* terms when the visibility of the Christian community is described.

Even if I could give a lot of more examples from the New Testament, I think the ones given show clearly that a Lutheran thinking of three orders can work as a useful tool in order to interpret what Christian existence is about. This Lutheran way of analyzing seems to be even more pertinent in a post- or late-modern society, when all social units that were formed during the modern era are exposed to explicit criticism or slow erosion.

Luther and the early Lutherans were fully convinced that the three orders were supposed to exist as long as the world remains. The church, understood as ecclesia, does not have to be visible in a sociological-political sense. The Church, understood as the Body of Christ, in early Lutheran thinking primarily becomes visible by *politia* and *economia*, just as we have seen above in Eph 2:19, where the spiritual temple-building is expressed in political and economic terms.[27]

In normal cases, the three orders were supposed to take responsibility for their own domains. At the same time, there are some definite exceptions from this rule.

For example, Luther urged the political authorities to intervene and force parents to send their children to school. This occurred after the early Lutheran school reforms did not show a satisfactory outcome. This is an example of how "family life", in Hauerwas´ terms, was limited by a comprehensive theological agenda where the needs of the church, understood as the Body of Christ, had the top priority. The modern emphasis on family life is obviously not a "Lutheran" invention.

In this three order thinking Luther is probably trying to combine his Augustinianism (*Civitas Dei*) with an Aristotelian tri-partition of ethics in political ethics, personal ethics and household ethics. This means that Aristotelian personal ethics are replaced with ecclesial ethics, where the individual´s appropriation of the Christian faith, through law and gospel, is the central aspect. That Lutheran faith sometimes, when it is about the "ecclesial" part of the Christian existence, speaks to people as individuals should not be seen as a weakness. The New Testament often speaks about individuals at the moment of conversion.[28]

Early Lutheranism here makes conciliar thinking from the high middle ages concrete, combining the best parts of the Aristotelian concepts monarchy, aristocracy and democracy.[29] At the same time, the Lutheran division of two regiments and three orders is fully compatible with the Augustinian division between *Civitas Dei* and *Civitas Terrena* that Luther as an Augustinian monk of course wanted to use in his own way of interpreting church and society theologically. The concept of "regiment" shows in itself that all parts of the Christian existence are included in the battle that God and his Church have to fight against the evil.

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[27] When the visibility of the church in Lutheran thinking is spoken of, we shall of course mention the seven signs of the church that Luther highlights in his book *On the Councils and the Church* (the word of God, the baptism, the Lord´s supper, the office of the keys, the ecclesial ministry, public prayer and thanksgiving and lastly, the sacred cross/suffering. The last two signs especially show a clear connection to the three order thinking that this article is highlighting, but if the task were to write a Lutheran ecclesiology on its own terms, these seven signs would of course be the central focus.

[28] See for example John 3:16 and Acts 16:30.

[29] Pihljamäki and Saarinen*,* 6. See also Brian Tierney, *Religion, Law, and the Growth of Constitutional Thought 1100-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 80-102.

Making Early Lutheranism work today: Between (and beyond!) liberalism and communitarianism

From Luther´s own point of view, the combined thinking of two regiments and three orders was regarded as a natural way of interpreting secular law and the Christian living in general. It also made the two-fold interpretation of God´s word as law and gospel possible. This is an important basis for the Lutheran view of justification. Against this background, I claim that the original Lutheran intention of using the two regiments in order to break with the hierarchical thinking within the western church at the beginning of the 16th century should be regarded as an abiding heritage that Lutheran churches should cherish, although we can see that different societal conditions require different ways of making the two regiment thinking work.

The two regiments are always combined with the three orders. This shall be used as a tool for the Christian body, understood as the totality of the three orders, to always be flexible and adjust to new or changed contexts. One purpose of the three orders is to divide power, labour and competence between three relatively autonomous realms of life. Of course, defining the dividing line between these areas will often lead the Christian body into internal and perhaps even external conflicts. This is not necessarily a weakness, seeing that the problems that the conflicts bring to light can be seen as reminders of the constant need of re-interpreting the tradition in the meeting with new contexts.

In this way, the Lutheran concepts both define tradition (the communitarian matter) and open up for a critical re-evaluation of this tradition (the liberal matter). Both aspects are of great importance. In a Nordic context, even this Lutheran "middle-ground", will probably be *described* as a communitarian alternative to the main-road liberal agenda of the Lutheran majority churches, since it is in line with way MacIntyre and Hauerwas stress the importance of definite groups sharing a common and explicit faith together. Nevertheless, it shares with liberalism the concern for critical debate where also secular concepts can be used and secular experiences can be incorporated into the community of the Church, since the Christian believers share the political and economic worlds with people that do not belong to the Christian faith.

Instead of miraculous stories about saints that dominated Late Medieval spirituality, the simple catechetical teachings during the Reformation era had a threefold interpretation of the Christian existence as its main goal. We have seen that this opens up the reading of paragraphs in New Testament to be used as a tool for interpreting the dignity and special vocation of every member of the church even in our late-modern context. If such a process were to begin, there is, of course, a risk of "ecclesial triumphalism"; that the church becomes introverted and starts to develop oppressive mechanisms against its own members. In one sense, I would say that all organisations constantly run this risk. In the "best case scenario", the threefold ethics of Lutheran ecclesial thinking could work as a safeguard against such a triumphalism. On the other hand, the reception history of the New Testament table of orders as a whole (not only the Lutheran one!) indicates that theology has to develop forums where ecclesial processes can be illuminated and critically investigated by external secular traditions and ideologies that are compatible with the heavenly goal for Christian living.

These forums have at least two main purposes. Firstly, they will highlight the fact that no church, not even a church that takes the concerns from post-secular theology seriously, wants to dismiss the modernity in its entirety with its liberalism, individualism and human emancipation. On the contrary, many modern phenomena have obvious Christian roots that both Church and society have to be reminded of. We can take the New Testament concept of "member" as an example. This is one of Paul´s favourite words, and he often uses it (Rom 6:13 and 19, Rom 12:4-5, 1 Cor 6:15, Eph 4:25 and Col 3:15) to combine an individual exhortation about human freedom and responsibility ("liberalism") with a concern for the whole Christian body ("communitarianism"). Secondly, forums for investigating internal ecclesial processes with secular means are also a way for the church to come into contact with people and institutions that do not share the Christian faith. By doing this the church meets

some of the needs of the world and gets ideas for its life in intercession and mission.

The people that represent the church body in these forums can be called the "political office-holders" when applied to the language from the three orders. When we speak about *politeia*, it is important to keep in mind that this is primarily a level within the Christian body, not a secular force. Of course in many democracies the church can acknowledge secular authorities to a large extent. This is because those authorities do what, according to Romans 13, they are supposed to do. At the same time, not even in democracies with a strong Christian heritage, can the state be expected to carry the whole burden of *politeia*, seeing that the small Ancient political units had the ability to form political goals that were much more concrete and precise than the goals formed within modern states. The "political officehold-ers" can therefore be said to have a two-fold task; they shall make sure that church is critical-ly investigated by secular means, also they shall, themselves, investigate the secular with the criti-cal perspective of the Christian faith.

As mentioned above, my attempt to bridge the gap between communitarianism and liberalism is heavily influenced by theological ethicist Bernd Wannenwetsch.[30] In his book, he joins the anti-Kantian trend to contextualize ethics and picture it as embedded in different life-forms. At the same time he stresses that the correctly asking for the will of God also leads to ethical mind-sets that cross different communities.[31] The teaching of the Catechism is according to Wan-nenwetsch one of the most important forums for members within the Christian body to find their own *charismata*. This teaching process is like a laboratory where each individual, while in a community of fellow believers, can discover his or her political existence whilst contemplating the mysterious ways by which God works. At the same time, this is also a way of indirectly, via Christ, discovering the true needs of your neighbour.[32] In this catechetical context, the in-dividual application of the Lutheran teaching of justification, that is to say that the single believer in the eyes of God is recognised with the right-eousness of Christ, is combined with a reading of God´s word as law and gospel, interpreted by a community of fellow believers.

Summary

The new traditionalist wave in ecumenical theology (for example Hauerwas, MacIntyre and Milbank) gives little and often even negative attention to Early Reformation thoughts. Lutheran theology is often depicted as a platonic ecclesiology where the ethics and politics of the "secular" society is accepted automatically also with-in the church. The article presents some of the main critical questions to Early Lutheran thinking from con-temporary theology. Then, a short historical investigation follows on some Lutheran concepts, like the "Two kingdoms doctrine" and "The three orders". I use a heavily discussed topics within Lutheran tradition, the "Table of duties" within the Catechism, to show that at least historically, Early Lutheranism can give a com-prehensive response to post-secular critics. The critique against Lutheranism in contemporary theology is not correct if the writings from Early Lutheranism (Martin Luther and the Book of Concord) are studied closely.
Then, the hermeneutical question, how to deal with this historical knowledge today, remains. I claim for a middle-way between liberalism and communitarianism, that will make it possible for a wide range of interpre-tations concerning Christianity and culture in our multi-cultural society. ¨

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[30] See Wannenwetsch.

[31] Bernd Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship – Ethics for Christian Citizens*, 1-4.

[32] Bernd Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship – Ethics for Christian Citizens,* 329-340.