

# Lutheran Ethics and the Common Values of Mankind

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## Introduction

Lutheran ethics is a very complex matter having biblical, historical, theological and philosophical dimensions. Different churches, ecumenical organisations, theologians, theological schools and church workers often conceive of it in different ways. On the one hand, the prevailing feeling arising from efforts aimed at working out a clear Lutheran ethic is dissatisfaction. On the other hand, due to different needs, Lutheran ethics is continuously being scholarly enriched with new points of view, so that there is hope to understand it in a more comprehensive way.

During the history of Christianity the Ten Commandments, in different churches often numbered differently, have been the object of people's general instruction. Together with the Three Ecumenical Creeds, particularly *The Apostles' Creed* (*Apost.*) and *The Nicene Creed* (381), these Ten Commandments, formulated in *Ex.20*, have also been an essential part of the Lutheran church tradition. The *Apost.* and the Ten Commandments are contained in Martin Luther's Catechisms from 1529, *The Small Catechism* (*SC*) and *The Large Catechism* (*LC*), which belong to *The Book of Concord* (*BC*, 1580). Since the first Finnish Church Law, which was adopted in 1869, they have been defined as official confessions of the *Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland* (*ELCF*). For centuries and even today — after the acceptance of the new *Catechism* by the Finnish Church Synod<sup>1</sup> — the *SC* has been an important instrument for instructing Christian faith among the

population. The internationally most recognised Lutheran confession, *The Augsburg Confession* (*AC*, 1530), together with the important *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* (*Apol.*, 1531), *The Smalcald Articles* (*SA*, 1538) and *Formula of Concord* (*FC*, 1577), the latter consisting of *The Epitome* (*Ep.*) and *The Solid Declaration* (*SD*) are, too, Lutheran confessions contained in *BC*. With the exception of the *FC* they are mentioned in the introductory parts of the *Ep.* and *SD*. Crowning all is the fundamental significance of Holy Scripture in every definition of Christian faith: «Holy Scripture alone remains the only judge, rule, and guiding principle, according to which, as the only touchstone, all teachings should and must be recognized and judged, whether they are good or evil, correct or incorrect.» (*Ep.*, Introduction 7; see also *SD*, Concerning the Binding Summary).

There are many studies about what is meant by Lutheranism — these including books and articles on Luther and his theology and on the theology of Lutheran orthodoxy as well as later «Lutheran» theologians and their theologies, but in the *Church Law* (*CL*, 1994) and the *Church Order* (*CO*, 1994) of the *ELCF* only Holy Scripture, the Three Ecumenical Creeds and the confessions of the *BC* are mentioned as the basis of Lutheran faith, either as *norma normans* or

<sup>1</sup> In 1999 the Church Synod of the *ELCF* adopted *Katekismus. Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon kristinoppi* (= *Catechism. The Doctrine of the Christian Faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland*) founding, in principle, on Luther's *SC*.

*norma normata*. When turning to *Lutheran ethics* might there be more useful and relevant sources to describe them than the normative documents of a Lutheran church or Lutheran churches?

In order to point to these intertwinings, in my article «Kristillinen etiikka ja globaali etiikka» (= *Christian Ethics and Global Ethics*) in the Synodal Book of the *ELCF*, called *Raamattu ja kirkon usko tänään* (= *The Bible and the Faith of the Church today*) (2004), I pointed to the *CL* and *CO*.

Considering their fundamental ecclesiastical importance it is surprising to note the scarcity of modern articles and studies that relate Lutheran ethics to the normatively fundamental confessional documents included in the *BC*.

In what follows I will therefore explain how Lutheran ethics is embedded in the context of central Lutheran doctrinal decisions. I will focus on three documents: first of all on Luther's *LC* (and *SC*) which contain his explanations of the Ten Commandments and, which throughout the centuries have been, and are, so important to the general spiritual and ethical instruction given by Lutheran churches, and secondly and thirdly on the *AC* and the *Apol*. All these documents are claimed to be writings truly expressing the Christian faith, founded on the Holy Word of God, on the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testament.

After discussing the main elements of Lutheran ethics, I will comment on how it should be assessed in relation to values which are thought to be common to mankind. In this respect the *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*, adopted by the UN, will be taken into consideration. I will also refer to the *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic*, adopted by the Parliament of the World's Religions at the beginning of the nineties. Reference will be made to the proposed new *A Constitution for Europe* (2004), at present sent to the EU member states for approval, rejection, refinements or amendments, and I will comment on the values presented. Also values defended by *Charta Oecumenica. Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe* will be considered.

First, however, something should be said about relatively recent Lutheran ethical thinking

in Sweden and Finland, which are predominantly connected with the thoughts of singular academic theologians, rather than with fundamental official doctrinal declarations by the churches. The reason for this is to do justice to the discussion of what, in the last decades, was generally presented as Lutheran ethics. I will not deal with the results of catechism instruction given by parish ministers.

## Lutheran Ethics in Sweden and Finland During the Twentieth Century

There are two surveys explicitly dealing with the development of the foundations of Lutheran ethics in Sweden and Finland during the last century, Göran Bexell's study *Teologisk etik i Sverige sedan 1920-talet* (= *Theological Ethics in Sweden since the 1920s*; 1981) and my own study *Etiska grundpositioner och -frågor hos lärare i systematisk teologi vid universitetet i Helsingfors* (= *Fundamental Ethical Positions and Issues Advocated by Teachers of Systematic Theology at the University of Helsinki*; 1980). Without making a detailed comparison it could be said that twentieth century Swedish theology on matters concerning Luther's ethical thinking has to a large extent influenced Finnish theologians working with corresponding matters, whereas nineteenth century work done in Finland (Granfelt) influenced Swedish theological approaches to ethical instruction from the first decades of the twentieth century.

There are, however, a lot of specialised studies and articles on ethical matters in Luther. First and foremost, I would like to mention Herbert Olsson, a Swedish theologian, who in the thirties wrote a dissertation called *Grundproblemet i Luthers socialetik. I* (= *The fundamental problem in Luther's Social Ethics I*) (1934), a study on the foundations of Luther's social ethics. According to Lauri Haikola, ethicist in Helsinki, at the end of the sixties Olsson was still the most competent work on natural law (natural rights) in Luther. In his article «Luther und das Naturrecht» (1969,128) Haikola mentions, that he in *Usus legis* (1958, second ed. 1981), which includes a comparison of Lutheran

orthodoxy with Luther, only gives an account of what Olsson wrote on law. Later on Olsson's longtime thinking on Luther's ethics was summarized in a monumental posthumous work called *Schöpfung, Vernunft und Gesetz in Luthers Theologie* (1971), edited by the Swedish Luther-researcher Ingemar Öberg, a study, that, due to its Swedish origin, has been neglected in German- and English-speaking areas.

Traditionally, the concept of *natural law* has been associated with Stoic philosophers, the representatives of which stressed the need for a life in accordance with <nature>, which, at the same time, meant a unified and integrated life, a good life, intelligible to reason. In *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas defines *law* as being nothing other than a rational order toward the common good, given by the person, who cares for the community and who promulgates the law.<sup>2</sup> Quoting Paul, the apostle, who in Rom. 4,17 speaks of the God, whose command brings into being what did not exist, Thomas understands the eternal concept of a divine law as having the reason of an eternal law, i.e. containing the idea, that every ordinance of God is made in order to govern things beforehand known to him.<sup>3</sup> Thomas calls the participation of the eternal law in rational creatures *lex naturalis*.<sup>4</sup> Pointing to Rom. 2 he stresses, that every activity of the reason and will in human beings is derived from what is in accordance with nature and that every ratiocination is derived from principles known by nature and that the first goal oriented acts of human beings happen through natural law.<sup>5</sup> The first command of the natural law is that good should be sought and evil avoided. All other commands of the natural law, which practical reason by nature apprehends, are based on this.<sup>6</sup> In Thomas' thinking on natural law ancient (Aristotelian) philosophical elements, together with biblical and Christian theological interpretations, form an intellectual mix.

What, then, is, to be said of natural law in Luther? A modern Swedish textbook on theological ethics (Göran Bexell & Carl-Henric Grenholm, *Teologisk etik. En introduktion*, 1997) states, that <natural law> was important to Luther's ethical thinking. However, in regard to that concept Luther was critical of a theology that was influenced by Aristotelian philosophy. Instead, he used biblical arguments in support of his doctrine on natural law. As voluntarist Luther sees natural law as being an expression of God's acts and will. In the textbook Luther's distinction between a worldly and a spiritual kingdom and between human law and divine law, as well as his conception of law as written in the hearts of all human beings, his conception of a political use of the law, his doctrine of vocation and his distinction between <person> and <office> are seen as expressions of, or at least as belonging to, the context of <natural law>.

When Nordic theologians — for example, when Gustaf Wingren in his books on Creation and Law and on Luther's Doctrine on Vocation argues for a humanly anchored <natural law> through pointing to the interconnected relationships of human beings in their social environment and Ragnar Holte in his article on «Human and Christian» in the book *Kristet samhällsansvar* (= *Christian Social Responsibility*; 1975) argues for a humanly founded Social Ethics, and the Dane Knud E. Løgstrup, in his book *Den etiske fordring* (= *The Ethical Demand*) (1956), on the basis of the idea of creation, argues for the non-existence of a special Christian ethics, it is clear that their <referring to> or <developing> the idea <natural law> can only loosely be interpreted as representing Luther's idea of natural law. Here it is enough to recall how Haikola, referring to Olsson's earlier insights and on the basis of writings dating to the reformative Luther, argues for the concept of *natural law* in Luther through pointing to God's commandment in Rom. 2. He argues as follows (transl.): «However, God's command binds the human being also with respect to his innerlife, through his conscience. God's command is written in the heart of the human being. The command demands faith and love [= 1. Commandment] and as such it is identical with the demand of natural service and natural love of one's neigh-

<sup>2</sup> *S.Th.* II,1, q 90, a 4.

<sup>3</sup> *S.Th.* II,1, q 91, a 1, ad 1.

<sup>4</sup> *S.Th.* II,1, q 91, a 2.

<sup>5</sup> *S.Th.* II,1, q 91, a 2, ad 2.

<sup>6</sup> *S.Th.* II,1, q 94, a 2.

bour [= the Golden Rule] in natural law.»<sup>7</sup> Eleven years later Haikola states (transl.): «According to Luther there is only one <virtue>, one <work>, which is commanded absolutely: Faith and the trust of the heart. So it is commanded in the *First Commandment*, which is written in the heart of every human being. *The First Commandment as a demand is the content of the natural knowledge of God and of natural law.*» Haikola strongly stresses the will of God in his interpretation of Luther. To put it in another way: According to Haikola Luther's view of God is voluntaristic. Haikola takes a firm stand against the view that general rational ideas of God are sufficient for establishing a union with God.<sup>8</sup> Though rational, also *natural law* is also conceived of in a voluntaristic, not intellectual, way by Luther. — The two first chapters of Olsson's posthumous study to some extent repeatedly and in an exhaustive way discuss these ideas.

Jorma Laulaja's dissertation *Kultaisen säännön etiikka. Lutherin sosiaalietiikan luonnonoikeudellinen perusstruktuuri* (= *The ethics of the Golden Rule. Natural Law as the basic structure of Luther's social ethics*) (1981) makes use of the results concerning natural law reached by Olsson and Haikola and at the same time adds some further comments. Laulaja focuses on the significance of Luther's theological interpretations of the Golden Rule as a way of elucidating the social ethical content of *natural law*. With respect to the question concerning the common values of mankind the result of Laulaja's analyses is interesting: unity and community as the basic meaning of life, the priority of the interests of the whole community, peaceful settlement of disputes, a life of moderation, that is, compromises for the good of the community, with respect to the standard of living and to economic aspirations. The just use of power includes the need for an impartial judge and, in addition, sovereignty, moderation and control.

Laulaja notices, that Luther's applications of the idea of a natural law could be similar to those of the Scholastics. There is, for example,

in both cases a similar interest in seeing the common interest of the community as prior to that of smaller groups. There are also similarities on the unity, universality and reasonableness of the law. Luther's stand on these matters also enabled him to consider non-Christian social ethical views. Also, dissimilarities arising from the difference between *lex aeterna* and *creatio continua* exist, in its turn due to the difference between an intellectualistic and a voluntaristic conception of God and God's creativeness in relationship to man's nature and moral actions. Loving oneself in accordance with Aquinas' instructions was, furthermore, rejected by Luther. — The significance of the concept of a Natural Law for Lutheran ethics was, later on, stressed in Laulaja's book *Elämän oikea ja väärä. Eettiset valinnat tänään* (transl. *The right and wrong of life. The ethical choices of today*) (1994), which was ordered by the Bishops' Conference of the *ELCF*.

In his thesis on *Luther's Golden Rule, Summe des christlichen Lebens. Die «Goldene Regel» als Gesetz der Liebe in der Theologie Martin Luthers von 1510 bis 1527* (1993), Antti Raunio widens and at the same time changes the perspective. He finds that Luther applies the Golden Rule to God, who is love, and the relation to him. Raunio's main point is that, in Luther's theology until 1527, the Golden Rule expresses the law of the divine nature. According to Raunio, this means that the Golden Rule, the Natural Law, demands such a being and such an acting that the divine agape realizes itself. Man has a natural knowledge of God, but has no knowledge of the way in which God remains faithful to his will to be the source and giver of all good. Man's sin has the effect that he is unable to give God what God expects from him. The problem of the Golden Rule can only be solved by God himself. God gets back the properties that man has taken away from him when he paradoxically makes it possible for man to participate in his properties. The Golden Rule is, thus, conceived of as a law demanding what the Gospel gives, as the law of God's nature. Luther calls it «natural law» or «the law of love», «pure Christian doctrine» and «the sum of love». Raunio's study has been positively influenced by the research on Luther done by scholars at the University of

<sup>7</sup> Haikola 1958,94–95.

<sup>8</sup> Haikola 1969,130.

Helsinki. Through also holding the view that man, on the basis of his nature, has knowledge of the first principles of morals, he, when making use of results reached by Tuomo Mannermaa, at the same time unites the traditions from Olsson, Haikola and Laulaja with later research on Luther done in Helsinki. It is, however, clear that, when the Golden Rule is applied to the relation to God, it cannot primarily be conceived of as a moral rule but as a medium for elucidating God's love. When Christ as present in faith is the basis of good works, loving one's neighbor means to put oneself in the situation of the neighbor.

## Lutheran Ethics — a Confessional Ethic

I think there is some need to emphasize Lutheran ethics as an ecclesiastical and denominational ethic, because ethics even in Lutheran contexts is sometimes treated as being without any religious preconditions. The tight connection between Christian faith and ethics taught by Lutheran churches will emerge from the analysis I will present in the following. Right at the beginning I would like to make a general remark concerning the treatment of ethics on the basis of the Lutheran confessions. Even in such cases where there are no explicit references to natural law in the Lutheran Confessions, such a law can be thought of as presupposed. Only the *Apol.*, in its twentythird article on priests' marriage, contains some clear statements pertaining to natural law. Philipp Melancthon, referring to the first chapter of *Genesis* (1:28) states explicitly: «Because this creation or divine ordinance in the human creature is a natural law, the jurists have accordingly spoken wisely and rightly that the union of male and female is a matter of natural law. However, since natural law is immutable, the right to contract marriages must always remain. For where nature is not changed, it is necessary for that order with which God has endowed nature to remain; it cannot be removed by human laws...Therefore, let this remain the case, both what Scripture teaches and what the jurists wisely have said: the marriage of male and female is a matter of natural right. More-

over, a natural right truly is a divine right, because it is an order divinely stamped upon nature. However, because this right cannot be changed without an extraordinary act of God, the right to contract marriages must of necessity remain, for the natural desire of one sex for the other sex is an ordinance of God in nature.»<sup>9</sup> This passage reveals influence from earlier church thinkers, for example Aquinas, particularly with regard to the conception of natural law as an immutable law, but is still, due to its totally different finalistic context, to be construed as a conception of its own.

In order to understand the Lutheran view of the interconnection between faith and ethics, I will now turn to Luther's explanation of the third article of the Creed in the *LC*. Here he has an idea of man's fundamental position before God. Luther says: «For in all three articles God himself has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of his fatherly heart and his pure, unutterable love. For this very purpose he created us, so that he might redeem us and make us holy...».<sup>10</sup> Luther continues that God, to make us holy, has granted and bestowed upon us everything in heaven and on earth, given us his Son and his Holy Spirit, through whom he brings us to himself. At this point Luther refers to his explanation of the first article. According to him the Creed in its totality can be understood only as a response to the First Commandment. God, in whom the believers believe, is the Father, who has created heaven and earth and who has given human beings their lives and constantly sustains them. God has given human beings their senses, their reason and understanding and the like; their food and drink, clothing, nourishment, spouse and children, houses and farms, etc. He also makes all creation help provide the benefits and necessities of life... Moreover, he gives all physical and temporal blessings — good, peace, security. Nobody receives his life from himself, but only from God.

Obviously, what is given to human beings, is given to them by God, so that they will be able to serve the plan he is implementing concerning

<sup>9</sup> *Apol.* XXIII,9–12; see also XXIII,4,6–7.

<sup>10</sup> *LC* II,64.

man. God wants everyone to be saved and to come to know the truth. Therefore, a quiet and peaceful life is what pleases God, man's Saviour (1 Ti. 2:2–6). According to Luther, every human being is primarily to be seen in the light of God's plan of salvation. Consequently, man's fundamental value as a human being must be interpreted in accordance with that. All man's abilities are given by God. Even his ability to act morally, through God's will, or more precisely, through the commandments of the second tablet, are put into the service of man's fellowman and, thus, into securing a peaceful life for all human beings. And in doing so, they ultimately serve God's plan for man.

Luther's explanation of the First Article of the Creed in the *LC* is, so far as man is concerned, presented in a very realistic manner. Because everything man possesses, and everything in heaven and earth besides, is daily given, sustained and protected by God, it inevitably follows, that we are in duty bound to love, praise and thank him without ceasing and, in short, to devote all these things to his service, as he has required and enjoined in the Ten Commandments. Luther, however, sees, that all men daily sin with eyes, ears, hands, body and soul, money and property, and that man, in a particular sense is a sinner through fighting against the Word of God. Man does not trust in God with his whole heart. Instead, he boasts and brags as if he had life, riches, power, honor, and such things of himself, as if he himself were to be served. According to the *LC* «this is the way the wretched, perverse world acts, drowned in its blindness, misusing all the blessings and gifts of God solely for its own pride, greed, pleasure, and enjoyment, and never once turning to God to thank him or acknowledge him as Lord and Creator». Therefore, if man believed it, the First Article should humble and terrify everyone. Nevertheless, according to the catechism, Christians have the advantage «that they acknowledge that they owe it to God to serve and obey him for all these things.»<sup>11</sup>

According to Luther sin is, first of all, an offence against the First Commandment, i.e. not

believing and trusting in God. If man could, every commandment would be kept, not only the first, but also the nine other commandments. With respect to the second tablet, the commandments could be conceived of as being only moral norms, and as such may be implemented also only externally (in an outward manner). The commandments are, nevertheless, in both cases God's commandments. Every offence against the commandments, whether the commandments are understood as expressions of God's fundamental will concerning man, or only as such God-given moral norms as may be faithfully or only externally implemented by human beings, requires reconciliation with God. That is possible only by repentance, where God acts by using Law and Gospel. Man, confessing his sins, his trespasses against God and his fellowmen, turns to God, who is merciful, and according to his will, forgives trespasses. In the *BC* the doctrinal issue of repentance is comprehensively treated in the *AC*, article XII, in the *Apol.*, article XII, in the *SA*, III:2–4, in the concluding passage «A Brief Exhortation to Confession» in the *LC*, in the *Ep.*, article V, and in the *SD*, article V.

According to what has been presented above, Lutheran ethics can be treated on three levels. The first one relates the central tenets of Christian faith to Christian Ethics (depth level 1). The second one concerns the fulfilment of the commandments, in so far as it is significant for the implementation of Christian morals (ground level of Christian Ethics or level 2). This level presupposes, that God acts by using Law and Gospel in order to awaken faith. The believer gets new strength and motivation to implement good works directed to his fellowmen. The third one (the level of everyday Christian ethics or level 3) has to do with the external keeping or fulfilment of the commandments.

It can be concluded, that, according to the Lutheran Confessions, faith and ethics are connected and intertwined. There is no such view in the Lutheran Confessions that ethics could be treated autonomously or separately from central faith convictions, this being true even when ethical acts in everyday life do not reveal their religiously motivated background. God has created man with specific abilities, also moral abilities, and man is in a fundamental way included in

<sup>11</sup> *LC* II,9–24.

God's plan until the life of the age to come. The Ten Commandments are written in the hearts of human beings, and so, these are able to distinguish between what is according to God's will and what, in a general sense, is to be held morally right and wrong. What according to revelational belief was given in the creation, the natural law, was later on, because of man's sin, explicitly revealed. God uses Law and Gospel in order to implement his plan concerning man's salvation and with the help of morals and legislation to govern and protect everybody, so that as many as possible would be included in the work the Holy Spirit does when the Gospel is preached in order to lead men to their ultimate goal. When speaking of Lutheran ethics all this is to be kept in mind. The religious bond of Lutheran ethics can, of course, be assessed differently. Compared with non-religiously founded ethical convictions its strength and advantage is that it is not reducible to ideas of anthropocentric human efforts and successes. The believer's experience of being bound to a sovereign authority outside man gives Lutheran ethics — whether it be on creational grounds or on the ground of the gospel — quite specific credibility, including the power to motivate believing persons to act morally. For Lutheran Christians under no circumstances are moral implementations prior to fundamental truths of faith.

## External and Radical Fulfilment of the Law

I will now focus on a distinction important to Lutheran ethics: the distinction between a radical (absolute) fulfilment and an external fulfilment of the Ten Commandments. In the *LC* this issue is treated by Luther and in the *Apol.* by Melancthon. The idea of an external fulfilment of the commandments opens the door to discussions on what unites them with, or distinguishes them, from ethical norms belonging to other contexts.

In the *LC*, in the explanation of the Fourth Commandment, Luther insists that everyone should respect and obey his/her superiors or persons, whose duty is to command and to govern,

and, likewise, obey the civil authority. According to Luther it is through civil rulers, as through parents, that God gives us food, house and home, protection and security and preserves us through them. Therefore it is the duty of those governed to honor and respect them as the most precious treasure and most priceless jewel on earth. Luther continues by saying, that those who are obedient, willing and eager to be of service, know that they please God and receive joy and happiness as their reward. If they do not do so in love, but despise authority, rebel, or cause unrest, they will have no favor or blessing. From this it is clear that the commandment can be kept in an external way — otherwise it would be useless to insist on it as a duty to be fulfilled by subordinates.

The commandments are directed to sinners living in this world. Therefore, due to man's sin and evil will, even the external implementation of the Fourth Commandment remains deficient. However, it will, to a certain degree and occasionally, be fulfilled, particularly when faith and trust in God motivate the Christian to act morally. Even if the Christian, in that case, implements the commandment cheerfully praising God, the giver of all good things, he is, nevertheless, due to sin, unable to fulfill completely the commandment concerning authority.

The explanation of the Fifth Commandment demonstrates that the commandment is given to man as a daily exhortation not to kill. The occasion and need for the commandment is the evil world and the life of misery, within which human beings are living. Through the commandment God wants to separate good and evil. The meaning of the commandment is that no one should harm another person for any evil deed. Because murder is forbidden, everything that may lead to murder is also forbidden. According to the explanation, the commandment «not to kill» means that one should not harm anyone, either by hand or deed, and that one should not use one's tongue to advocate or advise harming anyone. Furthermore, one should neither use nor sanction any means or methods whereby anyone may be mistreated.

What is presented above indicates undoubtedly that an external fulfilment of the Fifth Commandment is possible, though, due to the

sin, not always. By giving man faith God endows him with the power necessary for a moral fulfilment of the commandments. Nevertheless, man is never able to fulfil the commandment in that radical manner God requests of him. Man is not able in every situation to do good to his neighbors and to prevent, protect, and save them from suffering bodily harm or injury. He does not always act for the good of his neighbor, even if it would be possible for him (cf. Mt. 25:42–44). When it according to the *LC* it is right to call all persons murderers, who do not even offer counsel or assistance to those in need and peril of body and life, there is a good reason to ask, whether an external or moral implementation of the commandment is enough to carry out the commandment radically, that is in accordance with what God really wants.

This holds, *mutatis mutandis*, true of all other commandments of the second tablet and partly also of the first tablet. Here, it is enough to confirm, that, according to the *LC*, an external fulfilment of the commandments is possible.<sup>12</sup> Luther stresses, however, man's inability to fulfil the commandments in the radical way God wants them be fulfilled. So, the distinction between an external and a radical fulfilment points to what God, due to man's sin, does by using law and gospel, that is, to the depth level of Lutheran ethics.

I would also like to point out another distinction: that between the areas of validity of the Fourth and the Fifth Commandments. Because God, according to the explanation of the Fourth Commandment, has delegated his authority to punish evildoers to the civil authorities, the Fifth Commandment, which restricts an individual in his relationship to another individual, does not apply to the civil government.<sup>13</sup>

The *CA* reveals the same ethical levels as does the *LC*. Human will has some freedom to produce civil righteousness, but it does not have the power to produce the righteousness of God, or enable human beings to begin anything that

pertains to God. It is only able to perform the good or evil deeds of this life.<sup>14</sup> There is free will in all human beings. All have a natural, innate mind and reason. Their freedom is, however, confined to choose good or evil only in the external works of this life.<sup>15</sup> Concerning public order and secular government it is taught that all political authority, orderly government, laws, and good order are created and instituted by God, and that Christians may exercise political authority, be judges, pass sentences and administer justice according to imperial and other existing laws, punish evildoers with the sword, wage just wars, serve as soldiers, and take required oaths, etc. Christians are obliged to be subject to political authority and to obey its commands and laws in all that may be done without sin. One must still obey God rather than any human being.<sup>16</sup>

Also in the *Apol.* it is maintained, that human beings by using their free will, to some extent can produce civil righteousness. Human beings are able to obey rulers and parents. By choice human beings can keep back the hand from murder, adultery, and theft. Human nature still retains reason and judgment concerning things subject to the senses and also the ability to choose in such matters. Scripture calls this «the righteousness of the flesh». People, who outside grace perform works prescribed by the law, still do sin. It is, nevertheless admitted that free will has freedom and power to perform external works of the law. However, to free will cannot be ascribed capacities such as true fear of God, true faith in God. Spiritual righteousness is outside its range. Due to sin, even civil righteousness, which people can produce, is rare among human beings.<sup>17</sup>

According to the Lutheran Confessions ethics is instructed primarily with reference to what God has ordered in the Ten Commandments, which are expressions of the natural law. The Ten Commandments are written in the hearts of

<sup>14</sup> *CA* XVIII,1–2,4.

<sup>15</sup> *CA* XVIII,4–5, German text.

<sup>16</sup> *CA* XVI,1–2,5–7, German text; *Acts* 5:29; see also the *SC*, The Preface 13,18; *SD* II,26,31.

<sup>17</sup> *Apol.* XVIII,4–6,9.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Haikola 1958,90,100. Die moralische Verantwortlichkeit des Menschen gründet sich in seiner Fähigkeit, frei zu wählen. Haikola 1958,93.

<sup>13</sup> *LC* I,181.



human beings, but the Ten Commandments, due to the sin, do not succeed in making us Christians. Without Christ and the Holy Spirit nobody can fulfil the law.<sup>18</sup>

## The Common Values of Mankind

When Lutheran Churches have to take a stand on the common values of mankind their point of departure cannot be anything other than their general conception of how ethics is intertwined with the central truths of faith. When faith expresses itself as trust in God, who creates, redeems and makes holy, the fundamental and practical moral contentions that are connected with the faith and the creed of the Lutheran churches, are anchored in a source of power, which influences Christians so that they receive a personal motivation to act morally that corresponds to their faith. In a world, in which there are differently motivated moral contentions, a motivation of this kind naturally inspires and increases man to act morally.

The Ten Commandments, revealed by God and written in the hearts of all human beings, are global in that they, according to the Lutheran conviction concerning creation, are believed to be significant for all human beings and their fields of influence. Lutherans see in them norms and values that may be thought and experienced to be common to every human community, such as promoting what is good for fellowmen, obeying civil authorities in order to secure peace, not killing, not committing adultery, not stealing, not lying and not envying the wealth of your fellowman. Consequently, there is, from the Lutheran point of view, also a remarkable openness toward the moral convictions of other religions.

In his article «Universalism in ethics and Cultural Diversity»<sup>19</sup> Göran Bexell notes, that in the great world religions there is, in fact, moral

agreement about many basic norms, values and virtues. According to him, there is particularly a profound moral agreement on what he terms «an anti-egoistic norm». Individuals' own interests should be restrained by a broader social consideration. In Islam's «sharia», in Judaism's «Torah» and in Hinduism's «dharma» he sees a prevailing agreement on the indivisible combination of personal ethics and social ethics. To him, the Golden Rule also serves as an example of what is widely accepted by many world religions. Bexell widens the perspective to include the role of religions in giving motivation, education, social traditions, practices and rituals to uphold and inspire everyone to do what is right, to be good people. He even thinks, that this is the most important ethical function of the religions. Bexell proposes a normative aim that is a combination of universalism and cultural diversity. According to him a well-balanced universalism in ethics should base its normative statements on the thick moral traditions and the diversities of many cultures. At the end of his article he warns about two risks, the first the risk that highly esteemed cultural diversity is used as a hidden political argument against universalism in ethics and against universally accepted moral values, norms and virtues, like human rights. The second risk is that universalism is a hidden political argument against the richness of cultural diversity, because of the threat of diversity against the expansion of ones own culture, economy, ideology. Bexell states that this risk, the risk of elevated particularism, is real for all-powerful cultures, like Western cultures.<sup>20</sup>

The idea of a universal ethic is fascinating because of its capacity to catch what might be common values in ethics, despite all the disagreements of human ethical experience. It might also be very useful to refer to such an ethic in a world divided by different religious traditions, views of life, conflicts and political ideologies. Despite its attractions there are problems due to its intellectual nature. My first question focuses on the connotations of the concept of agreement. In many cases, what is agreed upon are only stipulations of agreements or

<sup>18</sup> *Apol.* IV,269, Latin text; XVIII,6,9; *LC* II,68.

<sup>19</sup> In: Göran Bexell & Dan-Erik Andersson (eds.), *Universal ethics. Perspectives and Proposals from Scandinavian Scholars*, The Raoul Wallenberg Institute Human Rights Library Volume 11, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers. The Hague/London/New York 2002,3–13.

<sup>20</sup> Bexell 2002,7–8,12–13.

agreements in a formal sense, with the omission of the needed substantial definitions of the concepts in their broader morally motivating contexts. Here, I would like to point to what I have said about anchoring Lutheran ethics in central Lutheran views of belief. But, even within Lutheranism, not to mention Christendom, religious ethical traditions differ, sometimes even considerably. There are differences depending on the connotations of the concepts in their connected contexts, for example the connotations of the concept of the Golden Rule. The concepts of tradition differ, but also, to mention a few, the larger theological contexts of the ethical assessments of marriage, fertilisation, justice, natural law and human rights. Including non-Christian religions in your analysis makes the situation even much more difficult.

Nevertheless, there are admirable efforts to unite people and nations through accepting common values. One is the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, adopted and proclaimed by the UN General Assembly on December, 10th, 1948. In the UN discussions prior to the adoption of the declaration Catholic Christians strongly defended religious interpretations as arguments, for example, that the inherent dignity, and the equal and inalienable rights of all human beings, are founded on the divine origin and destination of man to immortality. Or, that all human beings in creation have got their intrinsic value, because they were created in the image and likeness of God. Delegates particularly delegates from the Netherlands, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Bolivia and Lebanon argued along such lines. Opposite reactions came particularly from the Soviet Union. The political situation at that time did not allow explicit mentions of God and natural law in the adopted declaration, but the previous debate on the foundation of human rights was totally concentrated on the question of the significance of Christianity for that foundation. In the end, there was no decision by the UN about the foundation, in principle, of the human rights. Still, in a pre-version of the text the preparatory commission, appointed by the UN, proposed that human beings «by nature» were endowed with reason and conscience. In the final text it is stated that all human beings are «born» free and equal in

dignity and rights and that they are endowed with reason and conscience.<sup>21</sup>

Agreed common values of the declaration are, for example, the right to life, liberty and security of person, no subjection to torture or to cruel, inhuman treatment or punishment, equality before the law, entitlement without any discrimination to equal protection of the law, effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted by the constitution or by law, no arbitrary arrest, detention or exile, entitlement in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of rights and obligations and of any criminal charge, freedom of movement and residence, seeking and enjoying asylum from persecution, entering into marriage only with the free and full consent of the intending persons, no arbitrary deprivation of one's property, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including manifestation of one's religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work, to free choice of employment, the right to rest and leisure, the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of oneself and one's family, the right to free education.

In some sense a religious counterpart to the declaration is the *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic* adopted by 6500 representatives of a lot of different religions assembling at a meeting arranged by the Parliament of the World's religions in Chicago, 1993. This declaration also contains the idea that every human being must be treated humanly. Four commitments form its irrevocable directives. These are a commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life, a commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order, a commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness, a commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership

<sup>21</sup> See Carl-Gustaf Andrén, «De mänskliga rättigheternas religiösa och rättsliga bakgrund. Debatten inom Förenta nationerna och Europarådet i slutet på 1940-talet» (= «The Religious and Juridical Background of Human Rights. The UN and Council of Europe debate at the end of the 1940s»), *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 4/1975, 158–166, esp. 160–163.

between men and women. The explanation of the last commitment contains a passage on marriage. It is underlined that marriage, despite all its cultural and religious variety, is characterized by love, loyalty, and permanence. All cultures should develop economic and social relationships in order to enable marriage and family life worthy of human beings, especially for older people.

I would, further, like to point to two European documents, one of which is the called *A Constitution for Europe* adopted by the Heads of State and Government in June, 2004, but rejected by referenda in France and Holland, the other being a religious counterpart to it called *Charta Oecumenica. Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation Among the Churches in Europe* adopted by the Conference of European Churches and the Council of the European Bishops' Conferences in Strasbourg, 2001.

The first part of the European Constitution contains statements about the Union's values. Article 1–2 enumerates them as follows: respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. It is said that these values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail. Article 1–3 defines the Union's aim, which is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples. More objectives are offering its citizens an area of freedom, security and justice and an internal market where competition is free and undistorted. Other values are the development of a sustainable Europe, balanced economic growth, a highly competitive social market aiming at full employment and social progress, a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment, and scientific and technological advance. The EU shall combat social exclusion and discrimination, promote social justice and protection and the rights of the child. It shall respect cultural and linguistic diversity. The Charter of Fundamental rights of the Union (part II) reaffirms, with due regard to the principle of subsidiarity, the rights as they result, in particular, from the constitutional traditions and international

obligations common to the Member States. In that spirit, under five titles, it deals with dignity, freedoms, equality, solidarity, citizen's rights and justice. Citizen's rights include, for example, the rights to vote and to stand as a candidate at municipal elections, and the right to good administration. In the third part of the Constitution, under the title concerning the Union's external action, section 2, in article III-309, the military relevant tasks of the Union are mentioned. Such tasks shall include joint disarmament operations, humanitarian and rescue tasks, military advice and assistance tasks, conflict prevention and peace-keeping tasks, tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peace-making and post-conflict stabilisation. The tasks mentioned may contribute to the fight against terrorism, including the support of third countries in combatting terrorism in their territories. As generally known, the EU has, on the basis of current legislation, already taken some concrete measures of crisis management.

The *Charta Oecumenica*, in its third chapter, contains some commitments which, from our point of view, are relevant. There is a strong emphasis on the integration of the European continent and on common values and unity necessary for endurance. The spiritual heritage of Christianity, it is said, constitutes an empowering source of inspiration and enrichment for Europe. The churches work towards a humane, socially conscious Europe, in which human rights and the basic values of peace, freedom, tolerance, participation and solidarity prevail, and they insist on the reverence for life, the value of marriage and the family, the preferential option for the poor. They commit themselves to social responsibility, to defend basic values against infringements of every kind, to resist any attempt to misuse religion and the church for ethnic or nationalist purposes. Furthermore, there are commitments to strengthen the position and equal rights of women in all areas of life, to strive to adopt a lifestyle free of consumerism and a quality of life informed by accountability and sustainability. Strengthening community with Judaism and cultivating relations with Islam are underscored, and, generally, freedom of religion and conscience.

From the above will be discerned many similarities concerning common values, but also dissimilarities. According to its emphasis on the Ten Commandments and their openminded implementation in this world with the help of reason and free will the role of Lutheran ethics in these and other contexts of mankind's values is to reflect on the extent to which it is possible for Lutheran Christians to participate in common political or religious endeavours to promote peace, freedom and justice in the world.

There are no definite moral solutions in respect of the needed motivations and applications. In accordance with the Lutheran explanations of the Ten Commandments it can be said, that it is the task of Lutheran Christians to promote good for one's fellowmen, particularly to protect their lives, but Lutherans always stress God's plan and his sovereign will concerning man. That is, ultimately, the motivation of their churches in questions concerning the common values of mankind.

