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*Reformation, but it reemphasizes the essential link between justification by faith and justice in action.*

Sunand Sumithra p. 280

# **The Significance of Luther's Thought on Nature in the Christian Witness in Asia Today**

Choong Chee Pang

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## **THE WORD OF GOD AND THE WORD OF CREATION**

Heinrich Bornkamm is right when he observes:

In the sixteenth century and its peripheries two genuine revolutions broke through the cover of occidental intellectual life. They were two revolutions. They contributed something new to the history of mankind, and, unlike humanism, they signified more than a return home to ancient wisdom and to the measured and adjusted humanity of bygone ages. The one is the revolution of Christian faith through Luther; the other is a revolution consisting in a new conception of natural science, introduced by Nicholas of Cusa and extending through Paracelsus and Copernicus to Bruno, Kepler, and Galileo.<sup>1</sup>

Luther was basically a man of his time, In his own profound mind the two revolutions could not be entirely divorced from one another. There is undoubtedly in Luther's religious faith and spiritual experience a picture of nature or the created world. This is based on his conviction that it is faith in God the Creator that determines man's understanding of himself, of his existence and salvation. For this reason, Luther can characterize faith in God the Creator as the ultimately decisive truth. In a sermon of 1523 he says:

'I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Creator of heaven and of earth' is, without a doubt, the highest expression of our faith. Whoever genuinely believes this has already been helped, has once again been set right, and arrived at the place from which Adam fell ... For such a man must have died to all things, to good and to evil, to death and to life, to hell and to heaven, and confess from his heart that he is able to do nothing by his own power.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Heinrich Bornkamm. *Luther's World of Thought*. Eng. tr. by Martin H. Bertram (Saint Louis, Missouri, 1965) p.176.

<sup>2</sup> WA 24, 18.

Although Luther's picture of nature was largely informed and shaped by the biblical revelation it also reflects his keen personal observation of nature. It was his strong faculty of observation which enabled him to derive a profusion of metaphors from the realm of nature. For Luther 'All creation is the most beautiful book or Bible; in it p. 281 God has described and portrayed Himself.'<sup>3</sup> May we take this as a very profound Lutheran statement on 'Natural Theology'? If so, there is obviously quite a lot of 'Natural Theology' in Luther's thought.

Reaffirming and elaborating Paul's assertion in [Romans 1:20](#) that God has always been known through His works of creation the Reformer comments:

The veneration of various gods in the idolatrous pagan religions presupposes that men carry within themselves a conceptual notion of God and of the divine being. Without that, it would have been impossible for them to call their idols 'gods', to ascribe divine attributes to them, to worship them, and to pray to them. Men have this idea of God, however, as Paul says, from God himself.<sup>4</sup>

This knowledge covers not only the metaphysical attributes of God but also His moral attributes including the awareness that God is good, gracious, merciful, and generous. However, Luther is also keenly aware of the limits to this knowledge of God: It does not give man certainty concerning his relationship with God, i.e. although man has the idea of God, he has no real experience of Him as his Creator and Saviour. Thus, Luther distinguishes between the general (*generalis*) and the proper (*propria*) knowledge of God. The latter, according to Luther, can only come from the Word of God. In spite of its limitations, it is often in and through the various phenomena of nature that the presence of God is most vividly and intimately felt by Luther. For him, it is often in the ordinary course of nature that the miraculous works of God are clearly perceived rather than in 'extraordinary' events. Thus, the common things in nature are beautiful and precious. The tragic thing is that man has almost lost sight of this, 'We possess such beautiful creatures; but we pay little attention to them, because they are so common,' laments Luther.<sup>5</sup> Being a sensitive observer of nature Luther is able to use even the imagery of sunlight to help explain and justify his belief in the miracle of Christ's presence in the Eucharist.

Luther's use of imageries drawn from nature was simply inexhaustible. This is not only due to his freedom of poetic imagination but also because he is convinced that nature is a clear sign of the hidden wisdom and power of God. As such, nature, in Luther's view, is not to be explored and exploited for its own sake. Rather, it should be regarded as a faithful witness to God. p. 282

Luther's view of nature is a dynamic one. He perceives that there is still 'much secret activity in nature.'<sup>6</sup>

For Luther, creativity belongs to the very nature of God. God is God because He and only He creates.<sup>7</sup> Not only does God create; He also preserves everything:

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<sup>3</sup> WA 48, 201, 5.

<sup>4</sup> WA 56, 179; LW 26, 399.

<sup>5</sup> *Table Talk*, 3, 3390.

<sup>6</sup> *Kirchenpostille* (1522): 10, 11; 560, 9 quoted in Bornkamm, p.181.

<sup>7</sup> See Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, Eng. tr. by Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia, 1975), p.105.

He has not created the world as though he were a carpenter: building a house that he could walk away from when finished and let stand the way it is. On the contrary, he remains with and preserves everything he made. Otherwise, it would neither hold up nor endure.<sup>8</sup>

Luther regards the constant preservation of creation by God at every point of space and time as an on-going act of new creation:

Daily we can see the birth into this world of new human beings, young children who were non-existent before; we behold new trees, new animals on the earth, new fish in the water, new birds in the air. And such creation and preservation will continue until the Last Day.<sup>9</sup>

Being fully convinced that God is actively present, working and creating in all reality, Luther is able to describe forcefully the divine presence in the Eucharist:

It is God who creates, effects, and preserves all things through his almighty power and right hand, as our Creed confesses ... If he is to create or preserve it, however, he must be present and must make and preserve his creation both in its innermost and outermost aspects. Therefore, indeed, he himself must be present in every single creature in its innermost and outermost being, on all sides, through and through, below and above, before and behind, so that nothing can be more truly present and within all creatures than God himself with his power.<sup>10</sup>

Although the divine power is actively present in all things it is not consumed in the reality of the world. God and the world are never identical. God continues to transcend the world as its Creator and Preserver.<sup>11</sup> This point is of vital importance in the Asian Context. For Luther's concept of God is radically different from pantheistic and animistic thinking.

For Luther, God's work of creation can never be separated from His [p. 283](#) Word. It is in fact the Divine Word that has brought the world into being. Ultimately, man must search for God where the Word is:

For although He is everywhere, in all creatures, and although I could find Him in stone, in fire, in water, or even in a rope (for He surely is there), still He does not want me to look for Him apart from the Word ... Search for Him where the Word is. There you will surely find Him. Otherwise you only tempt God and establish idolatry.<sup>12</sup>

Not only are all things made through the Word, they are also preserved by the same dynamic Word:

In the doctrine of creation it is of primary importance that we know and believe that God has not withdrawn His sustaining hand from His handiwork. Therefore when St. John declares that everything made was made through the Word, one must also realize that all things created are also preserved by His Word. Otherwise they could not continue to exist very long.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> WA 21, 521; 46, 558.

<sup>9</sup> WA 46, 559; LW 22, 27.

<sup>10</sup> WA 23, 133; LW 37, 57.

<sup>11</sup> WA 23, 133; LW 37, 57; WA 26, 337; LW 37, 228.

<sup>12</sup> *Sermon von dem Sakrament* (1526): 19; 492, 19, quoted in Bornkamm, p.191.

<sup>13</sup> LW 22, 29.

Commenting on [Hebrews 1:3](#) Luther says,

This participle, 'upholding' has special emphasis and is a Hebrew idiom ... What we call 'to preserve', the Hebrews state more suitably with 'to uphold', which expresses a certain tender and, so to speak, motherly care for the things which He created and which should be cherished.<sup>14</sup>

Following the theological tradition of the Church, Luther believes that creating means creating 'out of nothing' (*ex nihilo*):

It is his nature to create all things out of nothing. And it is his own most proper nature that he calls those things into being which do not exist.<sup>15</sup>

But for Luther, it is more than a tradition. It is a vision. It is the very basis of man's hope of salvation, i.e., God takes the man who is actually *nothing* before Him, because of sin and death, and makes him a new creation 'out of nothing' (*ex nihilo*). Luther often expresses this profound truth in his typically paradoxical manner:

The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up.<sup>16</sup>

You (God) give us life when you permit us to be killed.<sup>17</sup>

It is in the context of these characteristics of God's creativity that Luther's doctrine of justification can best be understood. Luther p. 284 expressly includes justification as part of the paradoxical creative activity of God:

God enjoys bringing light out of darkness and making things out of nothing ... Thus he has created all things and thus he helps those who have been abandoned, he justifies the sinners, he gives life to the dead, and he saves the damned.<sup>18</sup>

Luther's doctrine of justification is thus decisively based on his understanding of creation. The justification of the sinner is perhaps the most exciting and glorious of all the specific examples of the way in which God creates out of nothing.

Luther is neither a dreamer nor a romantic. He is a realist, in the sense that he always looks at things from the perspective of biblical realism. As a biblical realist Luther shares the apostle Paul's agony over the vanity and bondage to which the whole of creation is subject. According to the profound perception of Paul in [Romans 8](#) the vanity and bondage to which nature remains subdued is the sin-laden humanity which nature must serve unwillingly. Luther paints a vivid picture of nature's repeated attempts to shake off this accursed dominion, by means of natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes. On this Bornkamm writes:

In Luther's paean on nature we hear an undertone of sadness—a tone different from that of the contemporary Renaissance mysticism or even of Bruno's new pious religion which jubilantly announces the harmony of the cosmos. Luther's viewpoint does not have a mythological tinge, as some might be tempted to judge; no, it finds its being in a conviction,

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<sup>14</sup> LW 29, 112.

<sup>15</sup> WA 40, 154.

<sup>16</sup> WA 56, 375.

<sup>17</sup> WA 31, 171.

<sup>18</sup> WA 40, 154.

flowing forth with poetical force, of the loneliness and the forsakenness of sinful man in the world.<sup>19</sup>

Luther criticizes the philosophers and metaphysicians for failing to see the reality of nature's agony and predicament on account of the sin of humanity:

For the philosophers so direct their gaze at the present state of things that they speculate only about what things are and what quality they have ...<sup>20</sup>

'You will be the best of philosophers and the best explorers of the nature of things', says Luther, 'if you will learn from the apostle to consider the creation as it waits, groans, and travails.'<sup>21</sup> Luther does not, however, entertain the gnostic idea and speculation about a possible fall of the entire creation. Creation has undoubtedly been subject to abuse, exploitation and disturbance ever since the fall of man. But it is not contaminated by sin. It is still good: 'The nature of animals has remained as it was created.'<sup>22</sup>

Commenting on [Romans 1:20](#) Luther says:

For all the things that God made were 'very good' ([Gen. 1:31](#)) and are still good, as the apostle says in [1 Tim. 4:4](#): 'Everything created by God is good', and in [Titus 1:15](#): 'To the pure all things are pure.' Therefore the creation becomes vain, evil, and harmful from outside itself, and not by its own fault ...<sup>23</sup>

In [Romans 8:18–25](#) the Apostle Paul is concerned with both the salvation of mankind and the liberation of the whole of creation from bondage and decay:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the Sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. ([Romans 8:19–21](#)).

In his profound insight and vision the Apostle sees clearly the vital solidarity between mankind and the whole of creation. If creation has to bear the burden of the sin of fallen humanity it will also share 'the glorious liberty of the children of God'. This eschatological hope is fully shared by Luther whose expectation of the Last Day is concerned not only with the future of the individual, but also with the fact that history and the old world are coming to an end. For Paul, as well as for the great Reformer, this eschatological hope for the salvation of mankind and the liberation of creation is based solidly on the historical resurrection of Christ and the creative power of the Holy Spirit. Eschatological events are actually taking place in the midst of the present. They are existential realities. Luther's dynamic view of eschatology becomes the more impressive in the context of sixteenth century Christendom when the expectation of the Coming Age became less and less intense. Although the traditional belief in the future was still found in Church dogma, the emphasis as well as the vital sense of urgency which was once placed on it were largely lost. The consciousness of history was drastically changed and the understanding of it had become very static. Against the sixteenth century European context Luther's

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<sup>19</sup> Bornkamm, p.192.

<sup>20</sup> LW 25, 360.

<sup>21</sup> LW 25, 361.

<sup>22</sup> *Table Talk*, 1,678.

<sup>23</sup> LW 25, 362.

understanding of history and the future of the world are not only dynamic but also prophetic. In fact authentic prophetism is always dynamic and not static.

For Luther the goal of human history and the future of the entire [p. 286](#) creation are absolutely inseparable. Not only does he expect the individual to continue to live in the future beyond death and that human history will meet its *eschaton* and find its consummation in the Kingdom of God, the entire world, Luther believes, will find its renewal and perfection in God's new creation.<sup>24</sup>

The belief that God does not abandon His creation but transforms, renews, redeems and ultimately glorifies it was a much needed corrective to the prevailing eschatology of the sixteenth century which was often 'worldless' and which excluded all creation apart from the individual.

But like the Apostle Paul, the Reformer has to confess humbly that much of the truth concerning the future of mankind and the entire creation is still hidden and must remain a matter of hope. This is how Luther expresses it when commenting on [Romans 8:24](#), 'Now hope that is seen is not hope':

Thus hope changes the one who hopes into what is hoped for, but what is hoped for does not appear. Therefore hope transfers him into the unknown, the hidden, and the dark shadows, so that he does not even know what he hopes for, and yet he knows what he does not hope for. Thus the soul has become hope and at the same time the thing hoped for, because it resides in that which it does not see, that is, in hope.<sup>25</sup>

There is perhaps hardly a more appropriate way of summing up the great Reformer's thought on the future of nature and redeemed humanity than to quote from his comment on [II Peter 3:13](#), 'But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells':

How this will take place we do not know, except that it is promised that there will be the kind of heaven and earth in which there will be no sins, but that only righteousness and God's Children will dwell there ... Here one may be concerned about whether the blessed will live in heaven or on earth. Here the text gives the impression that they will dwell on earth, so that all heaven and earth will be a new Paradise, in which God resides. For God dwells not only in heaven but everywhere. Therefore the elect will be where He is.<sup>26</sup>

What have been briefly considered so far are only certain aspects of Luther's thought on nature. It is by no means an exhaustive study. Understanding Luther's thought is one thing—which is itself a difficult [p. 287](#) task—considering its relevance and significance in the Christian witness in Asia today is quite another.

## THE NATURALISTIC-MONISTIC THOUGHT OF ASIA

The moment we try to bring Luther's thought to bear upon the Christian witness in Asia, we immediately find ourselves involved in a most delicate and controversial issue, namely, the matter of contextualization and the problem of the communication of the Gospel. The understanding of context is obviously one of the most important prerequisites of contextualization. This in itself is an enormous task. Asia's vastness alone is enough to discourage anyone from attempting seriously to understand the complexity

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<sup>24</sup> WA 37, 68; LW 34, 139.

<sup>25</sup> LW 25, 364.

<sup>26</sup> LW 30, 197–8.



of its socio-political and religious dynamics and realities. Here in Asia there is simply no one homogeneous context but a great multiplicity of contexts. Consequently, there is also no universally accepted norm, standard or methodology by which Asia may be categorically measured, perceived and interpreted.

Apart from the already problematic socio-political, religious and cultural barriers that exist between Luther's Europe and modern Asia, there is also the long time-gap between the age of Luther and that of the contemporary Asian: a gap of about half a millennium. In the light of the foregoing preliminary remarks we must patiently and graciously bear with whatever generalization, misinterpretations, and distortions are bound to occur in our modest attempt to bring Luther's insight on nature to bear upon the Christian witness in Asia today.

Although there is a great variety of religious systems and traditions in Asia, they all seem to have one basic feature in common, that is, they are all nature-conscious; ranging from the most highly developed and sophisticated Taoist-Confucianist system down to the most primitive form of animism. They are nature-conscious in the sense that they all must grapple and wrestle constantly and seriously with nature in their attempt to apprehend the totality of existence. In the end most, if not all of them, have become naturalistic and monistic in character.

We have good reason to believe that even after thirty-three years of Communist rule—whether it is in the form of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy, Maoist Revisionism, or Post-Gang of Four heterodoxy—traditional Taoist-Confucianist thinking still has a very strong hold on the mind of the Chinese. And this represents a quarter of the human race! Following the 'open-door' policy of the present Chinese regime in recent years there are clear indications and signs of a resurgence of Confucianism, Taoism and other religio-philosophical systems in the p. 288 Chinese mainland. In Taiwan, both Orthodox Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism are still very influential systems to be seriously reckoned with. This phenomenon, in varying degrees, is also to be found in other parts of East Asia including Japan and Korea. As recently as February of this year, the Singapore government decided to include Confucianism in its wholesale effort to promote moral and religious education in Singapore.<sup>27</sup>

As long as the Taoist-Confucianist apprehension of the totality of life is based on naturalism, monism and humanism it will continue to pose a challenge to the Christian faith, which is essentially a witness to the living and personal God who is the Creator of the universe and Lord of history. It is precisely here that Luther's thought on nature becomes immediately significant and relevant, especially with its emphasis and paradoxical affirmation on the immanence as well as the transcendence of God. Ultimately, it is the personal and divine will of the Creator that must be constantly sought and not the harmony between man and his universe. Because it is God alone who is the Author as well as the Sustainer of harmony.

What has been said about the Taoist-Confucianist tradition is also, to a considerable extent true of Hinduism although the latter may express itself in many diverse forms: in theism, polytheism, pantheism, atheism and materialism. Thus, it is often said to be impossible to define or understand Hinduism, and rightly so. Yet, even in this vast religio-philosophical jungle of Hinduism the discerning mind can still perceive some of those main features which make Hinduism Hindu. For example, its naturalistic monism upon which the whole of existence is apprehended and its innate assumption that man is essentially one with Nature. In the mighty ocean of naturalistic monism every form of expression is possible and legitimate. There is thus in Hinduism a most impressive but

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<sup>27</sup> See *The Straits Times* on Thursday, February 4, 1982, front page.



ever intriguing hospitality that seems absolutely inexhaustible. In this sense Hinduism knows no criterion, and cannot possibly have one when it comes to the vital matter of truth.

Naturalistic monism finds its fullest expression in the concept of *moksha*, which means salvation or deliverance. *Moksha*, to put it simply in Hindu thinking, means 'absolute separateness from all duality or plurality of existence and a return to the primordial Oneness of Totality.'<sup>28</sup> A closer look at the diverse religious phenomena in Asia will reveal that this deep-rooted desire to return to the 'primordial Oneness of Totality' is not peculiar to Hinduism and other highly p. 289 developed religious systems of Asia, it is also a dominant idea in many less sophisticated forms of tribal and animistic religions, whether in Asia or in many other parts of the world. Again, the primary concern here is not that of man's relationship with God, the Creator personally conceived, but with an abstract, impersonal and mysterious Idea.

Unlike the Confucianist tradition where there is a clear focus on man as a social and political being and man is thus given a recognized place in society so that he serves a useful function within the social order, Hinduism has never succeeded in liberating itself from its caste-ridden bondage. As long as its deep-seated idea of *dharma* is upheld, Hinduism will have no chance of setting itself free from its abhorrent caste-system, because it is *dharma* which gives the Hindu caste-system its divine sanction. Precisely because this system is a divinely sanctioned social order, the individual is obliged to live according to the *dharma* of his caste. So the vicious circle goes on forever. The challenge that the whole caste-system poses before the Christian witness in Asia is an enormous one. Enormous because it has to do with the biblical view of man, especially his dignity, honour, and worth in the world and before God (*Coram Deo*). And the Christian view of man is solidly based on the biblical doctrine of creation, especially on the clear notion that all human beings are created equally by God who shows no partiality. Luther clearly has a great deal to say on this. From the view-point of Christian witness, the concern here is not only with the religious aspect of the doctrine but its sociopolitical and ethical implications as well.

Closely allied to the foregoing ideas of the Oneness of Totality, *moksha* and *dharma* are Hindu understandings of *Atman* according to which the existence of the individual and personal being is a mere illusion. Stretched to its logical conclusion this line of thinking cannot possibly admit any notion of individual responsibility and accountability. The socio-political and ethical implications of this doctrine are simply inconceivable. If individuality is denied, no real distinction can possibly be made between God, man and things of the world. Moreover, the Hindu doctrine of *maya*, whether it is represented by Upanishadic philosophy or the *advaita* of Sankara, virtually denies the reality of the created world. When the reality of the created world is denied it will be very difficult to conceive of any possibility of responsible participation in the things of the world. This can only lead to either passive world-denying or thoroughgoing materialism. The absence of an adequate doctrine of creation in Hinduism also gives rise to pantheistic thinking which makes the world indistinguishable from Brahman. Although ideas or conceptions of God or the Divine p. 290 are forever present in Hinduism, its monistic and pantheistic tendencies are so steeped in an atmosphere of immanence that there is virtually no room for real transcendence. Only Luther's paradoxical approach which is solidly based on biblical revelation on creation can do real justice to divine immanence and transcendence.

If the reality of the created world is denied, history, which can only occur within the time and space of the created order, cannot be taken seriously either. Thus the Hindu

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<sup>28</sup> Hendrik Kraemer *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, (Grand Rapids 1969) p.161

world-view evolves around an endless cycle. *Karma* and redemption are conceived within this frame of mind. The cyclic view of life knows no real history and eschatology. By a striking contrast there is much dynamism in Luther's view of history and eschatology which is based on an equally dynamic understanding of creation. This point is of vital importance for authentic Christian witness in Asia. Asia has indeed reached a crucial point of decision. Asian people must be awakened to face the reality of the *eschaton*. They are in desperate need of a real sense of urgency. The whole of existence must no longer be conceived in endless cyclical terms but in linear terms; in terms of the entire creation moving towards its final goal. In view of the impending judgement of God even a linear understanding of history and eschatology is not enough. Time must be perceived not only in terms of *Chronos* but also in terms of *Kairos*. It is the *Kairos* of God that creates a crisis situation for man. And a crisis situation always demands a clear-cut choice of either/or from man. Only this dynamic and existential perception of history can do real justice to the biblical view of creation. It is here that Luther's thought on nature once again finds its immediate relevance for the Christian witness in Asia today. There is hardly any other area of concern that is more urgent than this in Asia today. For time is really running out for Asia eschatologically speaking. People here are indeed living on 'borrowed time'.

## BIBLICAL VIEW OF MAN AND NATURE

In the naturalistic-monistic system there is undoubtedly much concern with man's relation to nature. There is, however, hardly any religio-philosophical system which expresses and affirms the sense of solidarity between man and nature more clearly and consistently than the biblical revelation. This sense of solidarity is taken most seriously in Luther's thought on man and nature, as has been the case in his commentary on [Romans 8:18-25](#) as well as in many other contexts. However, solidarity here does not mean identification so that man and nature become indistinguishable. It is used here as a relational term **P. 291** with the emphasis on man's divinely ordained stewardship in the world, especially on man's divine responsibility for the created order as God's faithful agent. One of the major crises in the world today is precisely the loss of this sense of stewardship. The deplorable pollution of the environment; the relentless exploitation of nature; the irresponsible use and abuse of nature resources; the lack of any sense of equality and proportion in the distribution of wealth derived from natural resources, together with a host of other ecological concerns are no longer confined to Asia. They are also global issues. These issues must seriously and be thoroughly dealt with in the whole context of man's stewardship, responsibility and accountability before God. This is ultimately a *theological* issue.

God's original creation is characterized by order and harmony. But order and harmony have been disrupted by man's rebellion against God, the Creator. Man's rebellious act has resulted in strained relations on different levels: the relation between man and God, the relation between man and nature, and the relation between man and his neighbour. The ground is said to have been 'cursed' on account of man's sin. That the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament has faithfully and consistently preserved this profound sense of solidarity between man and nature is clear from passages such as [Isaiah 24:3-6](#):

The earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled; for the Lord has spoken this word. The earth mourns and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left.

It is with the same sense of solidarity that the Apostle Paul expresses himself with such a profound insight and vision concerning the future of man and the whole of creation in [Romans 8:18–25](#). No wonder the great Reformer finds the passage so exciting and challenging. It is, however, significant to observe that both in [Isaiah 24](#) and [Romans 8](#) the pollution and the decay of nature are set against the context of man's relation to God. In [Isaiah 24:5, 6](#):

The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth ...

Man's behaviour in the world has a direct bearing on his environment. The pollution of the earth is believed to have been caused by the religious and moral acts of man. In [Romans 8:18–25](#) the liberation of creation [p. 292](#) from bondage is inseparable from the ultimate redemption of the children of God. Therefore, 'the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the Sons of God' (v. [19](#)). It has become sufficiently clear that while the naturalistic-monistic tradition is more concerned with man's relation to the whole cosmos than with his relation to God, the biblical tradition which Luther faithfully follows gives primary importance to man's reconciliation with God. Only the reconciled can become the reconciler. Only those who have peace with God can play the role of a peace-maker. St. Paul must have clearly perceived this great truth when he says in [II Corinthians 5:17–19](#):

Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ([II Corinthians 5:17–19](#)).

In Asia today there is much craving for advance in science and technology and for modernization in order to solve the problems of food and a host of other bare necessities created by Asia's ever-increasing population. Unless this craving, however legitimate it may appear, is being effectively checked, the problem of pollution and other related ecological issues will continue to be aggravated. When it comes to the matter of tapping of natural resources it is very difficult to know if those measures taken are actually justifiable and are eventually benefiting the needy Asians or whether they are simply relentless means of satisfying the greed of the exploiters who are neither concerned with the welfare of the needy nor with the sanctity of nature itself. The tragic and undeniable fact is that in many parts of Asia today the earth, the forest and the beach etc., often lie polluted because men have 'transgressed the laws'.

Luther has a particular fondness for God's common creatures, whether they are young children, animals, trees, flowers or plants. To him the common and the ordinary are beautiful and precious. 'We possess such beautiful creatures; but we pay little attention to them, because they are so common', Luther complains.<sup>29</sup>

Although many exciting and extraordinary things are found in Asia, she remains largely a land of the common and ordinary, especially common and ordinary people. Overwhelmed by the ever-growing sea of humanity in Asia it is almost impossible to think or believe that individuals still count or that they are still precious. Asian Christians [p. 293](#) must continue to bear witness to the sanctity of human life and human existence, especially to the honour, glory and dignity which God the Creator and Father of all mankind has bestowed upon all His Children. What God has created, man must not call

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<sup>29</sup> Table Talk, 5, 5539.

common or profane ([Acts 10:15](#)). Luther seems to have seen this point clearly in his exegesis on [John 1:14](#) 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth'. In the flesh which is a 'common' creation of God Luther sees the incarnate Christ identifying himself with sinful humanity and draws great comfort from it:

Thus the most precious treasure and the strongest consolation we Christians have is this: that the Word, the true and natural Son of God, became man, with flesh and blood like that of any other human; that He became incarnate for our sakes in order that we might enter into great glory ...<sup>30</sup>

Having become a true and natural man Christ 'dwelt among us':

He did not withdraw from people, retire into some shelter, escape into the desert, where no one could hear, see, or touch Him. But he appeared publicly, preaching and performing miracles, thereby enabling all the people who were about Him, among whom He moved and lived, to hear and touch Him.<sup>31</sup>

It is this incarnate Christ whom we must proclaim in Asia today. For Christ alone is the hope for Asia.

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# The Two Governments and the Two Kingdoms

John R. Stephenson

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The facet of his thought commonly referred to as the doctrine of the two kingdoms has provoked some of the most intractable confusion and bitter controversy in post-war continental Luther scholarship, and the ripples of this debate which reached these shores have all too often amounted to a litany of sweeping statements which have done nothing to enhance the Reformer's reputation in England. Yet even before Hitler's war Luther had endured a century of disfavour among the leading academic and ecclesiastical circles on this side of the Channel. So marked was British—more particularly, English—distaste for Luther in the opening years of this century that the American church historian Preserved Smith devoted an article to the subject in 1917, listing Anglo-Catholicism, rationalism, socialism and—since 1914—visceral hostility to all things German as four factors which

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<sup>30</sup> LW 22, 110.

<sup>31</sup> LW 22, 112.