Retrieving Martin Luther's Critical Public Theology of Political Authority for Global Civil Society Today

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Ah, you who are wise in their own eyes, shrewd in their own sight!
Isaiah 5:21

Rise up, O God, judge the earth; for all the nations belong to you!
Psalm 82:8

I will also speak of your decrees before kings and shall not be put to shame.
Psalm 119:46

Introduction

Two key aspects of global civil society are solidarity and publicity. In this article, I concentrate on publicity, which should not be mistaken for public relations that aim to manage and manufacture public perceptions of someone or something. Rather, "publicity" refers to making something transparent, accessible and accountable to the wider public. Eleanor Roosevelt, for instance, used the term precisely in this sense when, in 1948, she guided the nations of the world to discern, fashion and underwrite the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

My contention is that Martin Luther's critical theology of political authority can provide the dynamic for theologically imagining publicity in relation to the churches' vocation of being public companions with God in today's global civil society. Luther is deeply interested in how God holds political authority accountable. This we might call "God's publicity." This leaves us with the problem of how to engage Luther on these questions in light of Ernst Troeltsch's and Reinhold Niebuhr's still often cited interpre-
tation of Luther that has rendered Luther useless, even counterproductive, for the kind of theological exploration needed today with regard to global civil society.

In the following, I shall review first the core of the Troeltsch–Niebuhr interpretation of Luther’s approach to political authority; second, key aspects of Luther’s critical theology of political authority; third, Luther’s constructive reflections on God’s publicity in the Western imperial situation of the sixteenth century. On this basis, I contend that the Troeltsch–Niebuhr interpretation of Luther is erroneous, and will briefly suggest how Luther’s theology of God’s publicity might ignite our public vocation and imagination in global civil society.

**The Troeltsch–Niebuhr legacy of Luther interpretation**

Reinhold Niebuhr associated Luther’s political thinking with Thomas Hobbes, viewing them as fathers of “anti-democratic theory.” Niebuhr’s critique of the traditional liberal bias of democracy, in order to vindicate democracy, is persuasive. He staked his claim on the maxim: “Man’s [sic] capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man’s [sic] inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.” While liberalism is “too consistently optimistic” to anchor democracy in the long run, Luther and Hobbes are portrayed in the opposite way. According to Niebuhr, their “error was due to their too consistent pessimism.” In their “purely pessimistic analysis of man’s [sic] nature human desires are regarded as inherently inordinate, and human character is believed to be practically devoid of inner checks upon expansive desires.” Therefore, they “assigned only the negative task of suppression to government; and they failed to provide any checks upon the inordinate ambitions which the community as such, or its rulers, might conceive and thereby imperil the rights and interests of the individual.” Their “pure pessimism” “reveals the moral naïveté of every form of absolutistic political theory.”

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2 Ibid., p. xi.

3 Ibid., p. 44.

4 Ibid., p. 45.
I have no quarrel with the portrayal of Hobbes, but Niebuhr is wrong on Luther. Luther does not, of course, know a democratizing ethos as we have come to know it. His theological reflections on God's publicity, however, offer one key to a contemporary critical theory of democratization, with global civil society as a key component.

As is well known, Niebuhr was drawing on Ernst Troeltsch's interpretation of Luther. Troeltsch claimed that Luther "glorifies power for its own sake." Therefore, "all order and welfare depend upon unconditional obedience towards the authorities which have come into being in the course of the historical process [...]. [and] therefore glorifies whatever authority may be dominant at any given time." "In this glorification of authority," continued Troeltsch, "there were certain resemblances to the doctrine of Machiavelli, which the early Lutherans had already noted [in Luther]."

Troeltsch was rightly fighting the mid-nineteenth-century Lutheran absolute monarchists. "The main features of the conservative doctrine of the State and of Society have been foreshadowed in Luther's theory," said Troeltsch. Unfortunately, Troeltsch far too readily accepted the Lutheran absolutists' interpretation of Luther. In fact, when he did find something in Luther that went against absolutism, as he did in Luther's turn toward resistance theory, he chalked it up to "foreign influence ... [that] did not harmonize either with Luther's [usual] opinions or with his logic." Furthermore, "Wherever the Christian-Social ethic and social policy strikes out in another direction [than absolutism] we may be sure that other influences are at work than those of genuine Lutheranism. As a rule these influences are due to Calvinism [...]."

Both Niebuhr and Troeltsch were wrong. Luther was more complex than they gave him credit for. He did, however, also change his mind on things and not always in the right direction, most notoriously in the case of the Jewish people.

6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., p. 532.
Key aspects of Luther's critical public theology

We can portray Luther's critical public theology of political authority around thirteen themes, aspects, or components, with divine publicity as the twelfth component. Many of these themes are well known and well contested, and will not be discussed here. Some of these are regularly misconstrued because they are not integrated into a more comprehensive whole. This partially explains why Luther is sometimes classified with Machiavelli or Hobbes.\textsuperscript{10} Also, the occasional nature and situated character of Luther's writings could lend themselves to that kind of one-sided interpretation.

The first six aspects are the best known: (1) law–gospel hermeneutics; (2) the two kingdoms; (3) political authority within creation and law; (4) humanity created in image of God as fallen yet preserved; (5) God's worldly immanence through \textit{larvae Dei}, the masks of God; and (6) the sword of political authority.

First, Luther dealt with God's Word and work by considering the question of the distinction and coordination of law and gospel, or more precisely, law and promise. Second, this leads to Luther's well-known and contested "both kingdoms" teaching regarding God's two ways to rule the one world. Third, political authority comes within the scope of God's left-hand rule of the world and is tethered to God's creative work and the law. Fourth, God creates humans as embodied in the image of God but as sinners we subsequently inherit Adam and Eve's inclination to distrust their Creator. Fifth, Luther had a lively imagination for God's immanence in the world through \textit{larvae Dei}, resulting in ordinances, estates, offices and vocations. His eloquent discussion of Psalm 127 is also reflected in his discussion of the First Commandment in the Large Catechism.

The sixth aspect of Luther's public theology of earthly sovereignty is the sword as one created ordinance and office, and thus a legitimate candidate for Christian vocation. The heart of Luther's reflections on this matter came in 1523, in response to a request from John the Steadfast, who was about to become his prince. Many, but not all, of the key features of Luther's reflections on earthly sovereignty come to the foreground in "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed."\textsuperscript{11} When this is the only

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid., p. 543, n. 257; also see John Figgis, \textit{Studies of Political Thought from Gerson to Grotius} (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 1931, second edition).

text that is read on this topic, however, people get an incomplete portrayal of Luther’s overall critical public theology.

Luther considered only those features that were necessary to address John the Steadfast’s anxieties, now that he had committed himself to the evangelical cause. Luther took up his two-fold critique of vocation, which on the one hand had become captive to monasticism and, on the other, to the Anabaptist tendencies toward moral purity. Subtly, yet significantly, Luther evoked Acts 5:29, in which Peter declares that in the face of conflicting obediences, “We must obey God rather than any human authority.” Hence, Luther’s subtitle, “To What Extent It [Temporal Authority] Should Be Obeyed.” According to Luther, there is no “unconditional obedience” to earthly sovereignty. Though he regularly gave the benefit of the doubt to temporal authority, it is not absolute. This is precisely the point of Luther’s theology of divine publicity. An example of this is Luther’s exhorting selective conscientious objection to an unjust war.12

In a poignant way, Paul John Isaak examines the place of Acts 5:29 within the Augsburg Confession and brings important Lutheran confessional insights to bear on the ongoing contemporary task of forming a postcolonial Namibia.13 He charts a path for the church between a “politicized church,” which conflates religion and religion on the one hand, and the church as a “privatized business,” which completely separates religion and politics, on the other. In Isaak’s analysis, Lutheran insights will take the church into “critical solidarity with the poor and critical participation in the ongoing process of building a more democratic society.” The church’s prophetic witness, therefore, is “simply to tell the truth.”14

Luther, of course, followed medieval Christianity and referred to earthly sovereignty with the synecdoche of “the sword.” Being the rhetorician that he was, Luther invoked this part—the sword—for the whole. But as is the case with synecdoche, and as Luther very well knew, the part is never merely the whole, nor the whole the part. Today it is far too easy to confuse part and whole in a literalistic way when reading Luther’s rhetorical style here.

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14 Ibid., pp. 151-2.
The last seven components of Luther's critical public theology of political authority are less well known and therefore deserve more attention, namely: (1) the scepter of political authority; (2) earthly peace through civic friendship and enjoyment; (3) natural law; (4) reason and wisdom; (5) legitimate resistance of lower magistrates to tyranny; (6) divine publicity; and (7) penultimate pessimism and the question of earthly progress.

The seventh aspect of Luther's public theology of earthly sovereignty is the scepter, or to use Luther's synecdoche from the fourth petition in the Large Catechism, the bread loaf. He notes, there, that it would be "fitting if the coat of arms of every upright prince were emblazoned with a loaf of bread instead of a lion or a wreath of rue, or if a loaf of bread were stamped on coins." The scepter as the synecdoche for the authority of distributive justice takes its place alongside the sword, as can be seen in Psalm 45. Unfortunately, in Western Christendom, the scepter has usually given way to the sword as the chief synecdoche for political authority. This accounts for why Niebuhr, for instance, thinks that Luther assigned only the negative task of suppression to government. Luther contributed to this low esteem for the scepter within God's law when he summarized the law as only a dike against sin.

Still, Luther undeniably assigned government the positive task of promoting the commonwealth:

The second virtue of a prince [after allowing free course for proclaiming the gospel] is to help the poor, the orphans, and the widows to justice, and to further their cause. But, again, who can tell all the virtues that follow from this one? For this virtue includes all the works of righteousness [...] 17

He used the image of a great hospital, which provides both palliative and preventive care, to talk about distributive justice and the prince as just peacemaker.

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[It is to be] a general, true, princely, indeed, a heavenly and divine hospital. [It will serve] especially the really poor ... [though] it preserves rich or poor, his living and his goods for everyone, so that he does not have to become a beggar or a poor man.\textsuperscript{18}

There are many who are not beggars and do not become beggars. For them the overlord is providing in this hospital. For so to help a man that he does not need to become a beggar is just as much of a good work and a virtue and an alms as to give to a man and to help a man who has already become a beggar.\textsuperscript{19}

Luther often addressed those in political authority regarding their responsibilities for distributive justice. Here, the bread loaf better symbolizes that ruler's vocation, within which the sword still has a rightful, necessary place. Without an encircling bread loaf, the sword, too, readily is tempted by wantonness, tyranny and totalitarianism. The tradition of just war reflection, for instance, seeks to keep just war within the wider circumference of a vigorous and vigilant just peacemaking ethos. The larger arc of just peacemaking guards against just war reflection from degenerating into a more imperial war realism, which happened under the Bush doctrine after 9/11.\textsuperscript{20}

The eighth aspect continues to remain a far too hidden gem in Luther. He considered earthly peace in relation to civic friendship, solidarity and enjoyment. As he developed the conditions for earthly peace, he approvingly referred to Terence and then Aristotle. “Whoever thinks that a dominion is better maintained by force than by friendship is sadly in error [...] [For] whatever is maintained by force cannot last.”\textsuperscript{21}

Luther raised the question of enjoyment throughout his work; he focused on this especially in the fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer in the Large Catechism.\textsuperscript{22} He always coupled the use of daily bread with its enjoyment.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 54.


\textsuperscript{22} “The Large Catechism,” op. cit. (note 16), pp. 449-52.
What God hath joined together let no one rend asunder, which Luther applied even to his great teacher Augustine. Augustine contrasted use and enjoyment (uti et frui). Therefore, “the peace which we enjoy in this life […] is rather the solace of our misery than the positive enjoyment of felicity.” Luther decisively went against Augustine and the effects of his thought, which also colored how he understood earthly sovereignty.

The ninth, tenth and eleventh components of Luther’s public theology of earthly sovereignty are natural law, reason and wisdom, and political resistance. I offer only a brief glimpse into Luther on natural reason:

God is a gentle and wealthy Lord. He casts much gold, silver, wealth, dominions, and kingdoms among the godless, as though it were chaff or sand. Thus He casts great intelligence, wisdom, languages, and oratorical ability among them, too, so that His dear Christians look like mere children, fools, and beggars by comparison […].

The relationship between critical reason and natural law remains a crucial ongoing task for contemporary Lutheran theological ethics for the twenty-first century, and for the practice of prophetic resistance. Over the last two decades of his life, Luther’s ethical thinking about the political resistance of lesser magistrates, over and against higher political authorities, developed in three stages. This deserves attention for the development of prophetic witness. These ninth, tenth, and eleventh components also bear on the thirteenth aspect of his critical public theology, his penultimate pessimism and the question of earthly progress.

**Political authority and God’s publicity**

The twelfth component of Luther’s critical theology of political authority is God’s publicity. God’s publicity is key in the face of empire and for the development of a Lutheran theological theory of global civil society, with an ethic of deliberative democracy, universal human rights and global governance. Luther took up the question of political publicity in his spring 1530
"Commentary on Psalm 82," just as the Diet of Augsburg was convening.²⁵ He wrote this commentary as a “mirror of the prince”—speculum principi—a familiar genre in Western civilization. He wrote this in light of his recent return from the Saxon Visitations and just prior to his departure for the Coburg Castle, where he waited out the Diet. Luther’s reflections in the commentary have their theological place within the orbit of Article XVI of the Augsburg Confession. Indeed, it is conceivable to consider Psalm 82 as the middle term between Romans 13:1–4 and Acts 5:29, which serve as the biblical bookends of Augustana’s Article XVI.

In a speculum principi, a wise and respected person like a theologian would write a treatise for a prince or other political official. Upon rising each morning, the prince was to recall the treatise, that is, to gaze on this “mirror” to discern what a righteous prince was to be like, and then go and do likewise. Both Erasmus and Machiavelli wrote mirrors for the prince during this same period, although Luther’s mirror was not for any particular prince. Verses 1 and 2 of Psalm 82 read: “God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment: ‘How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?’”

First of all, like others before him, Luther interpreted the first verse to refer to earthly sovereignty in the polis. The gods are all the offices of government, which stand under God’s ordinance, as Paul notes in Romans 13. The “congregation of God” is the earthly city, not the congregation gathered around Word and sacrament. Luther stressed that earthly cities are “God’s own” and God “accepts them as God’s own work.” Interestingly, Luther’s example is wicked Nineveh. He is lyrical about God’s creativity and care for the city, thus heightening the urgency for good government. “For this ‘congregation of God,’” says Luther, “is a precious word.”

For He has made, and makes, all communities. He still brings them together, feeds them, lets them grow, blesses and preserves them, gives them fields and meadows, cattle, water, air, sun and moon, and everything they have, even body and life, as it is written (Gen. 1:29). For what have we, and what has all the world, that does not come unceasingly from Him?²⁶

Such communities are God’s work, which He daily creates, supports, and increases, so that they can sit at home and beget children and educate them.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 46.
Therefore this word is, in the first place, a great and pleasant comfort to all those who find themselves situated in such a community. It assures them that God accepts them as His work and His creation, cares for them and protects and supports them, as we can, in fact, see with our own eyes.27

After noting that the purpose of law and sword is to “keep down the disorder of the rabble,” Luther stressed that God also “keeps down the rulers, so that they do not abuse His majesty and power according to their own self-will but use them for that peace for which He has appointed and preserves them.”28 In this regard, Luther, along with Calvin, combined the Romans 13 text with 2 Chronicles 19:6-7. “Now, let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take care what you do, for there is no perversion of justice with the Lord our God, or partiality, or taking of bribes.” Here King Jehoshaphat warns the officials under him to be sure to judge rightly because they are the earthly masks or media of God’s judging. They will exercise wise and just judgment to the degree that they live within the fear of the Lord. This is the hallmark of all biblical wisdom literature: “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” The biblical “fear of the Lord” emphasizes accountability to God and is thus the biblical trope for divine publicity, the third structural pillar along with the scepter and the sword for nations and for a civic international order.

Luther, of course, did not have in mind what we associate today with democratic citizenship or the consent of the governed. Nevertheless, he did recognize the problem of the accountability of political authority, which itself is significant. He upbraided princes who “will not allow [anyone] to rebuke their wickedness and self-will.” Such princes have “now discovered a new device, and declare that whoever rebukes them is seditious, rebels against the authority ordained by God, and defames their honor.” Their “ultimate desire is to be able to do whatever they wish, without hindrance or rebuke, without shame or fear, and with honor and glory, so that they become that noble, praiseworthy folk” described in 2 Peter “who live according to their own self-will and do what they please.” “Against these squires the psalm is written.”29

Luther went on to note that princes are not gods in the polis

27 Ibid., p. 47.
28 Ibid., p. 45.
29 Ibid., p. 43.
[...] in such a way that they have this position all to themselves and can do as they like. Not so! God Himself is there also. He will judge, punish and correct them; and if they do not obey, they will not escape. "He stands in His congregation," for the congregation is also His; and "He judges the gods," for the rulers, too, are His. And because both [the polis and the rulers] are His, it is right for Him to take the part of both.30

Psalms 82 is

[...] a terrible and threatening word against the wicked and self-willed gods or rulers [...] when they think that no one is to judge them or rebuke them without being called a rebel, a little peg is driven into them, and a club is laid beside the dog. Thus they are properly rebuked, boldly spoken to, and threatened sharply and hard, as this psalm does. For it says here: "God stands in His congregation and judges the gods"; that is, He rebukes them.31

Luther was quite clear about the necessity for publicity, and he certainly did not tolerate political absolutism. He was also equally clear that God is the ultimate source of publicity. He was convinced that, while publicity’s rebuke comes from God, God does not work immediately, but rather through earthly means. God rebukes “mediatedly.” In this sense, publicity is the vehicle that instills the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom and wise politics.

Luther, therefore, asked quite bluntly, “Where, then, is God? Or how do we become sure that there is a God who thus rebukes?”32 As he scanned the late medieval landscape there were not many good options for earthly agents. One possible agent that he considered already back in 1523 were the commoners, the peasants.

The common man is learning to think [...]. Men will not, men cannot, men refuse to endure your [princely] tyranny and wantonness much longer[...]. The world is no longer what it once was, when you hunted and drove the people like game.33

30 Ibid., pp. 45-46.
31 Ibid., pp. 47-48.
32 Ibid., p. 49.
Note how Luther used political and moral categories—“tyranny” and “wantonness”—to characterize commoners’ critical reflection on the aristocratic ethos. Still, he could not imagine commoners having an office and calling for the emerging public use of their reason. Drawing on Psalm 107:40, he designated their emerging critical reflection as the contemptum super principes—God’s scourge of the princes. While Luther originally took up the just cause of the peasants, he later thought of them as an instance of God using one scoundrel to discipline another scoundrel. The disastrous slaughter of the peasants took place under Luther’s urging. Tragically, in 1523, he had not yet developed an adequate theory of resistance.

Luther’s search for earthly agents of God’s publicity took a turn in the early 1530s, when he began looking toward the lesser magistrates to hold at least the emperor accountable to standards of justice. At this time, he also noted a third kind of earthly agent of God’s publicity. God raises up special stars, extraordinary leaders and prophetic heroes of justice, not merely within Christendom but also among those he referred to as “the heathen.”

In Luther’s 1530 mirror of the prince, he identified a fourth earthly agent: preachers. For there in the city, God “has His appointed priests and preachers, to whom He has committed the duty of teaching, exhorting, rebuking, comforting, in a word, of preaching the Word of God.” During the Saxon Visitations, Luther had been amazed how miserably the preachers and bishops understood and exercised their office. He thereby exhorted them.

Observe, however, that a preacher by whom God rebukes the gods is to “stand in the congregation.” He is to “stand”: that is, he is to be firm and confident and deal uprightly and honestly with it; and “in the congregation,” that is, openly and boldly before God and people.

In October 1530, just six months after his Psalm 82 mirror and on the occasion of the failure of the Diet of Augsburg, Luther wrote “Dr Martin Luther’s Warning to My Dear German People,” which deepened and ex-


36 Ibid., p. 49.
panded his notion of publicity with its open, bold and vigilant transparency, accessibility and accountability. Here publicity takes the form of a critical theology of confessing. This critical theology of confessing would eventually take Lutheran confessional shape in 1577 as Article X of the Formula of Concord. From there, times for confessing—tempus confessionis—would eventually become the heart and center of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s thinking and life. Luther himself had already suggested the biblical text that heads up the Augsburg Confession, Psalm 119:46, “I will also speak of your decrees before kings and shall not be put to shame.”

Returning to Luther’s Psalm 82 mirror of the prince, when preachers stand up boldly and openly before God and all people—coram Deo, coram hominibus—this is to prevent the sins of unfaithfulness and of backbiting. At this point, Luther is both brilliant as a theological and political ethicist and just plain fun as a rhetorician. In the art of rhetoric, unfaithfulness goes to the character—the ethos—of the pastoral office. The positive side of this is that preachers and bishops are called “to stand up.” In addressing backbiting, Luther dealt with the audience and their emotions—with pathos. Positioned between ethos and pathos is logos: a persuasive appeal using logical or reasonable argument. Here, Luther appealed to the Psalm’s rationale about the substance of the prince’s office, which focuses on distributive justice for the most vulnerable, and for all of us in our vulnerability.

Luther used emotionally charged language, relevant to both princes and pastors, because he imagined a multilayered audience. Here we quote him at length, first, regarding unfaithfulness:

There are many bishops and preachers in this ministry, but they do not “stand” and serve God faithfully. On the contrary, they lie down or otherwise play with their office. These are the lazy and worthless preachers who do not tell the princes and lords their sins. They lie down and snore in their office and do nothing that pertains to it except that, like swine, they take up room where good preachers should stand. These form the great majority. Others, however, play the hypocrite and flatter the wicked gods and strengthen them in their self-will [...]. Still others fear for their skins and are afraid that they must lose life and goods. All these do not “stand” and are not faithful to Christ.

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Luther’s critique of the sin of backbiting is particularly crucial for a theological theory of publicity and global civil society. Backbiting is the privatized opposite of standing up in public.

The whole world is full in every corner of preachers and laymen who bandy evil words about their gods, i.e., princes and lords, curse them, and call them names, though not boldly in the open, but in corners and in their own sects. But this accomplishes nothing except to make the evil worse [...]. If you are in the ministry and you are not willing to rebuke your gods openly and publicly, as your office demands, at least leave off your private backbiting, calling of names, criticizing, and complaining, or go hang [yourself]! [...]

So, then, this first verse teaches that to rebuke rulers is not seditious, provided that it is done in the way here described: namely, by the office to which God has committed that duty, and through God’s Word spoken publicly, boldly, and honestly. To rebuke rulers in this way is, on the contrary a praiseworthy, noble, and rare virtue, and a particularly great service to God, as the psalm here proves. It would be far more seditious if a preacher did not rebuke the sins of rulers; for then he makes people angry and sullen, strengthens the wickedness of rulers, becomes a partaker in it, and bears responsibility for it. 39

Luther did glorify power but, quite contrary to Troeltsch and Niebuhr, not “for its own sake” or “on its own.” First, Luther tethered power tightly to distributive justice—the bread loaf—for the common good and especially for the well-being of the vulnerable. Within this, power was also tied to retributive justice—the sword. Secondly, Luther imagined that, through earthly “offices” of publicity, God holds rulers accountable for maintaining this tight tether between power and justice. The majesty or prestige of the ruler then is doubly dependent on connecting power and justice. Because bold and open rebuke is such a “rare virtue” in individual preachers and bishops, as Luther noted, this makes it even more necessary to develop possibilities for publicity in and among nations. That is precisely what the emergence of global civil society is all about, and its connection with democratization. 40

39 Ibid, pp., 49–50. This can be seen as support for what Paul Isaak in his article proposes as “critical participation in transforming social, economic and political realities is essential to the church’s prophetic witness and service” within a postcolonial Namibia. Isaak, op. cit. (note 13), p. 145.

40 For a theological and sociological account of global civil society, see Gary M. Simpson, “God in Global Civil Society: Vocational Imagination, Spiritual Presence, and Ecclesial Discernment,” in Gary M.
One final rhetorical flourish from Luther.

In a word, after the Gospel or the ministry, there is on earth no better jewel, no greater treasure, nor richer alms, no fairer endowment, no finer possession than a ruler who makes and preserves just laws. Such people are rightly called gods. These are the virtues, the profit, the fruits, and the good works that God appointed to this rank in life. It is not for nothing that He has called them gods; and it is not His will that it shall be a lazy, empty, idle estate, in which men seek only honor, power, luxury, selfish profit, and self-will. He would have them full of great, innumerable, unspeakable good works, so that they may be partakers of His divine majesty and help Him to do divine and superhuman works. 41

A concluding proposal

Publicity together with solidarity form the core dynamic of the emerging age of global civil society and its democratizing ethos relative to both the political state and the market economy. According to the social philosopher, Anthony Giddens, “The emergence of a global civil society is perhaps one of the most momentous developments taking place in the world today, and its exploration one of the major challenges for the social sciences in the years to come.” 42

Luther’s critical public theology of God’s publicity might just help us today to imagine global civil society as God’s preferential arena for prophetic speech, sapiential reflection and pacific action, and for the church’s public vocation to be public companions with God in global civil society. Will Lutherans around the world, each in their particular God-given location, take up Giddens’s challenge to explore this new reality within God’s ongoing creating of the world?

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