

Weber and “Kulturprotestantismus”

Abstract: Weber and “Kulturprotestantismus”. Max Weber’s *Die protestantische Ethik und der “Geist” des Kapitalismus* is a “classical text” that few read and even fewer understood. Heinz Steinert maintained that the work could be understood only when readers understood its cultural context; that is, understanding what Protestantism meant to Weber and his contemporaries. For many of them Protestantism was superior to Catholicism, a point underscored in the ‘Kulturkampf’ as well as in speeches given in honor of Martin Luther’s 400th birthday. Julius Köstlin, Albrecht Ritschl, Adolf Harnack, and Heinrich Treitschke gave the most important of these, and contributed significantly to Weber’s understanding of, and appreciation for, Protestantism. Steinert may not be totally correct to insist that we read the *protestantische Ethik* as a religious pamphlet, but he is undeniably right to insist that we put ‘protestantische’ back into *Die protestantische Ethik*.

Key Words: Max Weber, Heinz Steinert, “Protestant Ethic”, ‘Kulturprotestantismus’

Weber’s *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* is regarded as a “classical text”. However, Heinz Steinert has observed, “everyone knows it, but nobody reads it.”¹ Steinert insisted that if we do read it, that we will understand it only if we know its historical context.² The historical context of *Die protestantische Ethik* is, as he emphasizes, *protestantisch*. To understand *Die protestantische Ethik* we need to understand what Protestantism was for Weber and for Weber’s Germany. The critical need for this historical understanding of Protestantism is demanded by a reading of the very first pages. The first part is entitled “Das Problem”, but as Steinert observes, Weber does not begin with a statement of a problem; he begins by introducing “doubtful statistics” regarding the economic and social differences between Protestants and Catholics in Germany. These statistics are taken from the

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recent work by Weber's former student Martin Offenbacher regarding the southern German state of Baden and are buttressed by his own, earlier research on East Prussia.³ These statistics are designed to show that Protestants emphasize the ethic of work and that Catholics do not. This belief in the superiority of Protestantism was not peculiar to Weber; rather, it was embedded in German culture throughout most of the nineteenth century. Steinert insists that to comprehend Weber's writing, we need to understand its culture, meaning that we must be familiar with the relevant traditions and controversies. The tradition that Steinert has in mind is 'Kulturprotestantismus' and the controversy that Steinert refers to is the 'Kulturkampf'. 'Kulturprotestantismus' refers to the belief in the greatness of Protestant theology and culture. Weber insisted that he was not religious, but he was well-versed in the culture of German Protestantism. Weber was brought up in a Protestant household and he continued to be interested in Protestant religion and culture. He frequently published his writings in *Die Christliche Welt*, one of the main organs of Protestant political culture. At Heidelberg he was a very close friend and colleague of the Protestant theologian Ernst Troeltsch and he was a member of the Eranos-Kreis, which was devoted to investigating religious questions.⁴ 'Kulturkampf' refers to the great "Protestant offensive" in the struggle between the two Christian Confessions over the issue of authority: State or Church?⁵ While this controversy was more or less confined to the 1870s, its after effects were still apparent when Weber was writing *Die protestantische Ethik*.

Steinert reminds us that while we must accept the edition of *Die protestantische Ethik* that is found in the 1920 edition of the *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* as the "definitive work," we must also remember that it was written as a two-part essay during 1904 and 1905. While Weber made important additions to the 1920 version, it is fundamentally a turn of the century work. Consequently, it predates the First World War, The Russian Revolutions, and the German ones. Steinert also reminds us that it is centered primarily on "Arbeit als Beruf" and insists that the 1920 "Vorbemerkung," with its emphasis on Occidental rationality, "definitively does *not* belong" to *Die protestantische Ethik*.⁶ He maintains that only by recognizing these points and understanding its context can we understand this work. He also insists that Weber's writing may be clothed as a "scholarly investigation" but, is in fact, really a "Kampfschrift". It is not a scientific account but is a religious pamphlet – one designed to show the superiority of Protestantism. Steinert may not be completely correct in this; but he is certainly right to insist that we put 'protestantische' back into *Die protestantische Ethik*.

It is my intention to honor Heinz Steinert by adding to his work which stresses the considerable importance that Kulturprotestantismus had for Max Weber. I will first build upon Steinert's brief treatment of Kulturprotestantismus. Second, I will

add to his short discussion of Bismarck's "Kulturkampf". Third, I will discuss four of the most important and relevant cultural speeches which were given in honor of Luther's 400th birthday. The speeches were given by Julius Köstlin, Albrecht Ritschl, Adolf Harnack, and by Heinrich von Treitschke, one of the greatest Protestant politicians. In the fourth section, I will discuss the impact that Treitschke had on Max Weber. Weber had a very complex reaction to Treitschke as a man and to his thinking. Like his contemporaries, Weber was immersed in the discussions about Protestantism and culture; but for him, Treitschke practically embodied some of the beliefs and values of Protestantism, culture, and politics. Consequently, nineteenth-century German Protestantism is one of the most important keys to unlocking the text of *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*.

Kulturprotestantismus

The term 'Kulturprotestantismus' is problematic. While most scholars agree that the term is polemical and that it was used to justify the belief in the cultural superiority of Protestantism over Catholicism, 'Kulturprotestantismus' does have many meanings.⁷ There is also some question about how long it has been in use; some trace it back to 1920 while Steinert seems to suggest its origins are more recent. His claim that it is more recent is supported by the fact that in the third edition of the six-volume *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* there is no separate entry for 'Kulturprotestantismus'.⁸ There is also the issue of who coined the term; Friedrich Wilhelm Graf quotes from Manfred Schick's 1970 dissertation that the originator of the term has not yet been discovered.⁹ Finally, there is the question about the beginnings as well as the duration of 'Kulturprotestantismus', with some scholars suggesting that it ranged from 1900 to 1914 while others have insisted that it began about a decade earlier. Still others consider that 'Kulturprotestantismus' began as a movement when the *Protestantenverein* was first formed around 1865 while still others suggest that it covers an epoch; from Schleiermacher to Troeltsch.¹⁰

It is to Schleiermacher's credit that religion was no longer despised by the cultured and the intellectuals and it is to Hegel's credit that theology could be understood historically. It is to the credit of both of them that their students took that positive interest in theology and religion and transformed it from being simply a matter of faith into the subject of serious scholarly concern. This was demonstrated in a number of ways; first, by the new journals that the students of Schleiermacher and Hegel founded. Although the editors and contributors to journals, such as the *Theologische Jahrbücher* and the *Theologische Studien und Kritiken*, held differing viewpoints that represented their schools; they all shared the interest in develop-

ing an historical account of Christianity. Second, this is manifested by a number of historical works, such as *Leben Jesu*, by David Strauß, and the multi-volume history of dogma by F.C. Baur and the massive history of the Church by August Neander. Third, it is shown by the existence of a scholarly encyclopedia; several scholars had this idea and it became the *Real-Encyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*. This eighteen volume work was to have been under the editorship of Matthias Schneckenburger, who figures prominently in *Die protestantische Ethik*; but his early death meant that his influence was restricted primarily to the first volume.¹¹ Fourth, scholars turned their attention to Luther's life and work. According to Adolf Harnack, two of the most important treatments of Luther's biography and theology were the books by Julius Köstlin and Harnack's father Theodosius.¹² According to Theodosius Harnack, Luther had two conceptions of God: the hidden God and the revealed one. The first is the "deus absconditus" that will also be found particularly in Calvin and, by extension, Max Weber. This Deity is the creator God who cannot be fathomed. This is also the Deity that Luther refers to as the "God outside of Christ". This Deity is in contrast to the "God in Christ"; that is, the "Savior God". The first is the God of wrath (Zorn); the second is the God of love (Liebe).¹³ The first God is the God of predestination, who out of wrath has damned people to Hell: He is to be feared. However, Harnack maintains that Luther gave up this unconditional determinism soon after 1525. Instead of maintaining that most people were eternally damned, Luther now believed that God wants all to be saved. Instead of unconditional wrath there is unconditional love. This is Luther's "anti-predestination" doctrine which then lays great weight on the notion of the "eternal, fatherly, grace giving" will.¹⁴

Although Harnack's *Luthers Theologie* was important and influential, the writings by Julius Köstlin were probably more important. Köstlin was partially responsible for the beginning of the Weimar edition of Luther's works as well as the later and much shorter Braunschweig edition.¹⁵ Besides writing all three lengthy entries on Luther for the *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche* he also wrote two massive works on Luther. In his entry on Luther for the first edition Köstlin reasonably complained that no one had yet provided a full scientific account of Luther's theology.¹⁶ Köstlin's entry was scientific and objective; however, despite its 40 pages in length, it was not a full account. The response to this entry was so overwhelming that Köstlin decided to write his biographical and theological works on Luther. It was with some pride and a fair amount of justification that Julius Köstlin could claim to have offered the first complete and scientifically written Luther biography.¹⁷ He was referring to his two volume *Martin Luther, sein Leben und seine Schriften*. Köstlin did not intend his biography to appeal only to other scholars; he wrote it more for popular consumption. However, he intended his two volume work

Luthers Theologie to be read by educated people. This two volume work appeared in 1863 with a second edition in 1883.

Köstlin's *Luthers Theologie* can be said to be divided into three parts. Part one is devoted to setting out Luther's life until approximately 1523; thereby chronicling Luther's early years. These years include his life as a monk and as a professor. And, they especially include his many vigorous fights against the Catholic Church. The second part focuses on Luther's life from roughly 1523 until his death. Köstlin devotes most of this part to discussions concerning Luther's theological disputes with other Reformers. The third part is Köstlin's attempt to provide a systematic discussion of Luther's theology.

In part one, Köstlin shows Luther's 'negative' side. That is, he shows how and why Luther's antagonism towards the Pope and the Church prompted him to insist on its radical reformation. Köstlin aptly demonstrates that Luther's complaint was not with the overall practice of Indulgences; rather, he was concerned with the Pope's own misuse of that practice as well as his countenance of others' abuse of it.¹⁸ This misuse prompted Luther to question the Church's authority, both in the personal form of the Pope and in the institutional form of the Catholic Church. As Köstlin repeatedly stresses, Luther's objections were not capricious but were firmly based upon Scripture. Thus, based upon the Bible, Luther questioned the Catholic account that provided Peter with the sole authority over religious matters. In Luther's opinion, it was bad enough that the Pope claimed control over both churchly and earthly realms. But, it was even worse in that the Pope demanded total "oriental submission". Furthermore, as an institution the Church tried to justify this use of Papal force, which Luther referred to as the "tyranny of the hierarchy". In other passages, Luther is more specific, calling it the "Roman hierarchy".¹⁹ Furthermore, Köstlin shows that Luther had not only a firm understanding of both the Old and the New Testament but of the Church Fathers as well. And, he used that knowledge against the abuses by the Pope and by the Church. Consequently, Luther had considerable respect for Moses and the Law; it is just that Christ and grace replaced them. Furthermore, Köstlin shows how much Luther understood the teachings of the Church Fathers. He shows how much Luther took from Augustine and from other mystics. His latter rejection of mysticism was only partial: he always believed in mystic's sense of Jesus' inner dwelling; he rejected the extreme subjectivity of certain mystically inclined people.²⁰

Köstlin details Luther's objections against the 'traditional' church practices. Thus, he argues against the church practice of celibacy and its refusal to allow marriage. He also takes it to task for the practices of general Mass and private confession. He condemns the church practices of praying to the Virgin Mary and the saints for protection and intercession. Finally, he argues against the traditional church belief in Purgatory. Köstlin again underscores Luther's contention that his arguments are not

merely his; rather, that they rest upon the authority of Scripture. And, the Catholic Church cannot claim to be a higher authority than the Bible.²¹

In the third part Köstlin discusses Luther's positive theology. Most important is Luther's insistence that the sole authority is the 'Word', that is, Holy Scripture. Köstlin cites Luther's insistence that it is better to have more faith in a lay person who acts in accordance to the Bible than it is to have faith in the Pope who does not. In Luther's view, grace and truth belong to Jesus and not in the hand of any person.²² The Bible is the norm and the source for how a Christian should conduct his or her life. The Bible is, for Luther, the 'objective' word of God and it contains the real truth.²³ The Bible, according to Luther, tells us to have faith in God and that the only way to heaven comes through Jesus Christ. Thus, Luther discounts the importance of the notion of a church and he bases this in part on Jesus' remark that where two or three come together that is where he will be. The church is nothing more or less than the community of the holy ones; that is the community of the believers.²⁴ Köstlin's account of Luther's positive theology lacks some force; Köstlin gives a far better picture of Luther as critic and fighter.

For many German theologians, Köstlin's interpretation of Luther's theology was more influential than that of Harnack. However, Harnack's interpretation seems to have had more of an impact on Troeltsch. It is likely that Max Weber's discussion in the *Die protestantische Ethik* of the two Gods relies on Ernst Troeltsch's recommendation of Harnack's *Luthers Theologie*. In his important contribution on Luther and the modern world in *Das Christentum* from 1908, Troeltsch writes that in his opinion, Harnack's presentation is the best to date.²⁵ What is odd is that Troeltsch had not even mentioned Harnack's work in his discussion of Luther in his 1906 edition of *Protestantisches Christentum und Kirche in der Neuzeit*. If more people had adopted Harnack's views, the 'Kulturkampf' may not have been totally avoided but many of its ugly episodes might have been minimized.

The "Kulturkampf"

Luther's theological concern about religious issues in the sixteenth century had prompted him to take issue with Church authority; by the nineteenth century political issues were beginning to cast doubt on religious authority. While the German revolution of 1848 never materialized, many of the liberal sentiments that underlie it continued for decades. At the beginning of the 1870/1871 War there was an outpouring of national sentiment. Bismarck wished to take advantage of such feelings of unity to extend northern Germany's influence to the south. While the Constitution of 1871 was a compromise of sorts, Bismarck was able to consolidate power

over almost all of Germany. As Nipperdey writes, after 1871, there were two major issues that concerned Germans: One was the extension of the German Constitution from just a document to something more significant which would control peoples' lives.²⁶ The other was the "Kulturkampf". This was a struggle between Protestants and Catholics and has been described as a conflict between state and church.²⁷ It revolved around the issue of authority. Which had the higher authority: the State or the Church? Rudolf Sohm noted that some educated Catholics strongly objected to the Papal claim.²⁸ However, most German Catholics believed that they owed their allegiance not to Germany, but to "over the mountains" – meaning to Rome.

Originally, the term 'Ultramontanism' had only a geographical meaning: "beyond the mountain" and it stemmed from the Middle Ages when German students would go "over the mountains" to study at Bologna and other schools.²⁹ But, by 1871 it had begun to take on political and religious overtones. The origin of the conflict can be centred on the doctrine of Papal infallibility which the Vatican announced in July 1870.³⁰ The doctrine was based upon the "absolute certainty" of the supreme wisdom of the Pope when he spoke "ex cathedra" and therefore demanded "absolute respect".³¹ Furthermore, this demand for absolute obedience was interpreted to mean obedience to the Pope in religious and moral matters, but also in every other matter as well. In short, the "Roman question" had to do with the resurgence in the belief in the Pope's domination of the world.³² Thus, Harnack suggested that on the basis of the Pope's claims, one could choose the year 1870 as the founding of the Papacy. The Pope had ruled over not just the Church but over the entire world in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, so the claim was that the contemporary Pope wanted to do the same.³³

The term 'Kulturkampf' began to circulate in 1872; the high point occurred two years later with assassination attempts on Bismarck's life by Catholic supporters.³⁴ By the late 1870s, however, the liberal era was over and the stridency of the 'Kulturkampf' had ebbed to some degree.³⁵ However, the Bismarckian sense of nation and the belief in progress increased while Catholics continued to believe in internationalism and Papal authority.

Luther's Commemoration

Probably the single most important year for 'Kulturprotestantismus' was 1883, the 400th commemoration of Luther's birth. This celebration was partially a reaction to Catholicism, but more so, it was the outpouring of immense pride in this great German. Celebrations were held everywhere – in large cities and small towns. Virtually every major thinker was asked to give a speech. However, each celebration and every

speech needs to be considered in relation to the 'Kulturkampf'. That is why there is so much emphasis on Luther's enormous contributions to every aspect of German life; not just theologically, but literary, scientifically, and even politically.

There were numerous speeches that deserve attention, but here I consider the four given by Köstlin, Ritschl, Harnack, and Treitschke. All four speeches emphasized Luther's greatness and in varying degrees all four included defences against some of the Catholic charges. However, each of the four speakers stressed what he thought most important about Luther and his legacy.

If the other speeches were to emphasize Luther's massive contributions to Germany, Köstlin's speech was intended to provide a far more personal picture of him. Despite having published the massive biography that showed Luther in all his complexities as well as publishing the two-volume work treating Luther's detailed theology, Köstlin took pains in his speech to show that fundamentally Luther was a person who believed in the good and simple German traits and who acted according to the dictates of his conscience. In this, he was going back to his entry on Luther in the first edition of the *Realencyklopädie*.³⁶ Köstlin insisted that despite Luther's education and despite his fame, he never forgot that he was nothing more than a son of a German peasant. Moreover, he never forgot that he was a man of the people.³⁷ He was brought up with the belief that God was loving and merciful and he continued to hold that belief while he pursued his studies in philosophy. He was not very interested in typical disputes and he tended to approve of the values in the new humanism. However, the sudden death of a close friend was such a shock that he temporarily lost that belief and took the vows of a monk. At the Erfurt monastery Luther learned that his early belief in God's love was naïve; instead, God's fundamental essence was power and will.³⁸ Luther's basic hope and faith in God's goodness was replaced by the belief in the Church's form and authority. But, during this time he also began to read the mystic Tauler and while he took from him the mystic's belief in the inner striving for the union with God he rejected the mystic's metaphysical inclinations as empty and abstract. In the same way, Luther objected to scholastic philosophy as being both too abstract and too subtle.³⁹ Köstlin paints Luther's move towards reform as a move away from that which is abstract and foreign to something more simple and innate. That is why Köstlin emphasizes Luther's sense of conscience. When asked to recant, Luther said that he would not; when demanded to desist, Luther maintained that he could not. It was not a matter of external Church authority but was a matter of internal belief formed by his own reading of the Gospel. Furthermore, he rejected the attempt by anyone to substitute Luther's authority for that of the Church: "You must not be Luther's disciple but Christ's."⁴⁰ It was a matter of individual thought and faith, hence he insisted on freedom of conscience – claiming that "thinking is toll free". Because Luther believed

that each person must listen to God, he believed it important to ensure that each person could read the word of God; hence his translation into simple, natural, German.⁴¹ In his simple, truly human manner, Luther represented the simple and truly human German ‘Volk’ – and, this is what Köstlin wished to remind his audience.⁴²

The second speech to be considered was given by Albrecht Ritschl. Despite the great amount that Ritschl wrote on theology, his speech given on November 10, 1883 in Göttingen, was the primary document in which he offered his portrait of Luther.⁴³ It is, in many ways, a true expression of Ritschl: It is powerful and personal; it is positive and critical. It begins, however, in a rather surprising way. Ritschl reminds his audience that there are some who think that Luther was single-handedly responsible for all modern positive developments. He cites a book published 80 years before, in which the author, a Frenchman by the name of Charles Villers, contended that Luther was responsible for modern science and the modern state. Luther was, in Villers’ view, one of the highest scientific authorities. Furthermore, Luther provided the freedom in religion, morals, and history. In fact, for Villers, we have Luther to thank for the entire *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment).⁴⁴

In Ritschl’s opinion, these are great exaggerations, as are many of the Catholic accusations against him. However, Protestants tend to glorify Luther’s heroic character while ignoring his personal flaws. Here, Ritschl would neither defend Luther against the Catholic diatribes nor go into detail over Luther’s personal problems. Instead, he wishes to give an account of Luther’s historical greatness. Luther never wanted to be regarded as a pope nor as a prophet.⁴⁵ And, in regards to modern culture, Luther was not responsible for modern science or for the modern state. In fact, many of the impulses for the ‘revolution’ in the Church came not from Luther, but from the Mendicant Orders (*Bettelorden*) of the Church itself.⁴⁶

Luther’s greatness stems instead from his twin concerns with Christian freedom and Christian morality, both of which are based upon faith. Faith and trust in God were most important, patience and humility were also crucial.⁴⁷ And, Luther’s greatness comes because of two worldly things that he stressed. One, instead of the emphasis on the Catholic doctrine of fleeing the world, Luther insisted on the importance of the world as part of God’s plan. Second, instead of the Catholic doctrine of the two groups – the high group of priests and low group of laymen, Luther emphasized the importance of work. It did not matter whether the person was engaged in the ‘high’ priestly *Beruf* or the ‘low’ *Beruf* of the common people; all were in the service of God.⁴⁸

In much of the second half of the speech Ritschl provides a short account of Church history. He begins by emphasizing that the Reformation did not spring full blown out of the Medieval Church like some Athena. Like Luther himself, many bishops and nobles had for some time objected to the Church’s power and wealth,

and wanted a return to the notions of responsibility and morality. The Reformation was not a total break from the Church. As with the Catholic Church, a number of Lutheran followers believed in the importance of the individual mystical union with God. And, Ritschl objected to this, believing that it meant a return to the world-fleeing, ascetic tendencies of the Catholic Church.⁴⁹

Unfortunately, the Catholic Church, the 'Ultramontanists', had embarked on an intentional overcoming of the Protestant Church. For 40 years, Ritschl insisted, the 'Ultramontanists' had worked to stress their type of piety.⁵⁰ But, Ritschl emphasized that Luther did not believe that true piety was found in the philosophy and rhetoric of the Catholic Church. It is not the knowledge of the visible Church that is important. Instead, what is of foremost importance is one's personal faith and trust in God. Ritschl notes that without understanding this, one cannot understand Luther. Ritschl quotes from Luther: "If God is for us, who is against us?" Ritschl concludes by expressing his fervent conviction that Protestantism will be victorious.⁵¹

The speech that Adolf Harnack gave in Gießen on November 10, 1883 would not have drawn as much attention as the one by Köstlin and Ritschl because he was not yet as famous as the others. He had yet to publish his *Dogmengeschichte* nor his *Das Wesen des Christentums*, but he had already made enough of a name for himself that his speech was bound to draw considerable interest. Like Harnack's earlier work, the title of his Luther speech indicates his scientific concern with history: "Martin Luther, in seiner Bedeutung für die Geschichte der Wissenschaft und der Bildung". As with Ritschl, Harnack contends that Luther's significance in science and education was great. Harnack counts Luther as an incomparable man and one of the very few people who have changed history in general and Germany in particular. Harnack claims that as Germans, "we speak with his words, judge by his standards, and we find the power of his spirit in our excellence as well as our failures."⁵² In spite of this, Harnack asks, how well do we really know him? Is he not too great for us? Is he not too distant from us? Is he not too resolute for us? How can we know this man who was both as powerful as a hero and yet as simple as a child? Only a master could answer these questions; Harnack restricts himself to sketching Luther's significance in culture. Yet, even here there are difficulties: Luther had not discovered something important, like the laws of gravitation. Nor, can one point to a single work and say, here is Luther, in the sense that one can consider that the *Divine Comedy* is Dante or perhaps *Faust* is Goethe. Only when we consider Luther in light of his religious convictions can one begin to understand him. His religious beliefs were the secrets and the strengths of his life. This meant dealing with the questions concerning the purpose and the goal of human life.⁵³

For Harnack, Luther's impact on science was only indirect; but, that is not to say that it was minimal. In fact, Harnack insists that it was maximal. To show this,

Harnack suggests that we look back to the beginning of the Fifteenth century. At that time the Church was the fundamental power ruling almost everything. For almost a thousand years the “dogmatic system” had scarcely changed. As Augustine had taught, so it remained. Theology was primary and all else was subservient, including science. Augustine taught a two-world doctrine: there is the sensible world and there is the spiritual one. And, while the Church maintained dominance in this world, it did so mostly because of its emphasis on a “world-fleeing metaphysic”. This particular type of metaphysic impeded all science.⁵⁴

As there was a doctrine of two worlds there was also a doctrine of two truths. One truth was valid for theology and the other was valid for philosophy. But, the philosophical ‘truth’ was mostly a weak protest against the “irrationality of Church dogma”. As things had been, so they seemed destined to be forever. Harnack suggests that someone might wish to object to this picture because it appears to ignore the role of the Renaissance. But, he addresses this: while the Renaissance gave us the Humanists and rediscovery of antiquity, it did not give us a way to a newly powerful morality or a means to discover the boundary lines between faith and knowledge, between spirit and nature, and between beauty and truth.⁵⁵

It was Martin Luther who gave us these; he rejected the philosophical and mystical conceptions of God, and he embraced the notion of the living God. No manner of Churchly asceticism could lead us to God; instead, it was a matter of free, individual faith. However, this freedom was not an “empty emancipation” or a freedom for some ‘subjectivity’. Rather, it was the recognition of our subservience to God and with that a freedom from all earthly laws. In the love of God we find the highest law and the meaning of our lives.⁵⁶

With Luther’s rejection of Church dogma and his demonstration that the Church was not infallible, it appeared that the foundation of civilization was foundering. This was enormously significant, because it meant not only the break with the Church of the Middle Ages, but it also meant a return to the source. Instead of placing his trust in the Church, Luther placed his faith in the Word of God. That had additional implications: this knowledge of God and Christ was not based upon some empty letters, but upon the living Gospel. It also meant certainty for the worldly orders of marriage, family, state and *Beruf*.⁵⁷ It now meant that religious authority was not something external and that the state was no longer to be regarded as a necessary form of force. Quoting Goethe, it meant that “we have again the courage to stand with firm feet on God’s earth”.⁵⁸ Finally, it meant that we have freedom and responsibility in our *Beruf*, no matter what it is. Luther’s clear and living convictions mandated a whole range of new ideas: his people, his church, his education. For Harnack, Luther was not merely a man; “He was the Reformation”. In Harnack’s clos-

ing remarks, he insisted that Luther was the personal embodiment of all that is great and powerful and enduring and that Luther will remain the ideal for all time.⁵⁹

Heinrich von Treitschke's speech was entitled "Luther und die deutsche Nation" and on first glance it may not seem as focused on religion as the other three. However, he speaks just as passionately as the others about Luther's religion, comparing Luther's conversion to Paul's 'metanoia' and he regards Luther's theological conflicts with the Church as parallel to those of Jesus against the Pharisees.⁶⁰ He underscores Luther's fight against the Church's rigidity, its false dogma, and the numerous abuses by the Church. He praises Luther's commonsense and his belief in the goodness of the world and the work of the common man.⁶¹ He focuses on Luther's relation to God and claimed that with "childlike trust" he built his belief on the power of God's word alone. Treitschke also emphasizes Luther's Germanness in quoting his claim "For my Germans am I born, they I wish to serve" (*für meine Deutschen bin ich geboren, ihnen will ich dienen.*)⁶² This is also indicated by Luther's determination to have God speak to Germans in German.⁶² Treitschke places most of his emphasis on Luther's importance in history and culture; it was Luther who introduced modernity, not the Italian poets and painters. It was Luther who was responsible for the modern German state. Although Luther was not a politician, he was politically astute enough to help bring about the German nation in a manner that was more peaceful and required less force than anywhere else.⁶³ This he did by helping to break the state away from the Church's dominance and by supporting the sovereignty of the state. It was a matter for the state to determine laws, to regulate loans, and to care for the poor. These were political duties and no longer fell under the province of the Church. The individual was also freed from Church authority; for Luther, one obeyed one's own conscience. Treitschke pays special tribute to Luther's demand for the "autonomy of conscience", and this was in keeping with the recent emphasis by Protestant theologians on the moral imperative for freedom of conscience.⁶⁴ As Treitschke noted, it was unfortunate that not every German could participate in this celebration of Luther: Catholics will not, and could not, grasp the greatness of Luther's spirit, a spirit which fills the air of the State, society, home, and science. Treitschke contrasts the freedom to think and decide for one's self with the stifling stench that comes out of the *Lügenstübchen* of the Vatican.⁶⁵ Treitschke does have hope – German Catholics are still German and they share many of the fundamental traits and virtues of all Germans. In this respect they are far closer to the German Protestants than they are to their fellow Spanish believers. And, he believes that the day will come when all Germans will honor Martin Luther, Germany's hero and teacher.⁶⁶

Weber and Treitschke

There are many reasons to link Weber and Treitschke: Treitschke was a frequent visitor to the Weber house in Berlin, when Max was young. Max often mentioned him in his letters to his cousin, Otto Baumgarten. Otto's own father had been on close terms with Treitschke before breaking with him. Later, Max attended Treitschke's lectures in Berlin.⁶⁷ Then there are the similar traits: the love of scholarship and the passion for nationalism. It would not be a great exaggeration to suggest that, with the exception of Bismarck himself, Treitschke represented the best and the worst of German nationalism and its connection to German Protestantism. Given these reasons, it seems odd and even unfortunate that we lack a serious study comparing Weber and Treitschke: two German giants.

What we do have is mostly psychological speculation. Arthur Mitzman suggested that Treitschke was like a father figure, against whom young Max rebelled. Mitzman argues that Max fought against the "cynical ruthlessness" of those two 'despots': Max Sr. and Treitschke.⁶⁸ More recently, Joachim Radkau suggested that there was a connection between Treitschke and Weber's uncle Adolf Hausrath. Like Weber Sr., Hausrath defended Treitschke and they all seemed to express German chauvinism.⁶⁹ While studying in Heidelberg Max would occasionally visit his uncle, but relations between the two never seemed to be very good.

We know from Weber's early letters that he had a mixed opinion of Treitschke. On the one hand, in a letter to his cousin Fritz Baumgarten Weber wrote that Treitschke's *Deutsche Geschichte* was a "true joy" and, in a later letter to his mother he expressed his anticipation of the second volume.⁷⁰ On the other hand, he was concerned about Treitschke's lack of scholarly objectivity; as indicated in a letter that Max wrote to Hermann Baumgarten.⁷¹ Baumgarten was a critical influence on the young Weber, with Radkau going so far as referring to him as Weber's political mentor. Radkau also suggests that Weber's emphasis on separating politics from scholarship has its origins in Baumgarten's writings.⁷² After volume two of Treitschke's *Deutsche Geschichte* appeared Baumgarten published a short and highly critical work called *Treitschkes Deutsche Geschichte*. Baumgarten objects to Treitschke's pronounced subjectivity and his political activity. For Treitschke, history is not a goal but is simply a means to win over the reader to his specific view of the present. For Treitschke is not an historian, but a party man and publicist, so truth and objectivity do not matter. Baumgarten believes that nothing worse could happen to German education than if this attempt to draw students into the party struggles of the day becomes widespread.⁷³ Marianne Weber wrote how as a student Weber witnessed first-hand the enormous power that Treitschke's demagoguery had on young

people. Weber was twenty-three years old when he listened to Treitschke as he tried to politicize his listeners and to persuade them of Bismarck's greatness and to warn them about the influence of the Jews.⁷⁴ In this conflict between Baumgarten and Treitschke, Weber sided with Baumgarten. In a letter to his father, Max recounted a visit where Hausrath attacked Baumgarten, insisting that one could make dozens of Baumgartens out of one Treitschke. Max wrote how he attempted to defend his uncle Hermann from his uncle Adolf, but that he was fearful that Adolf was going to turn his attack totally on him.⁷⁵ Like Baumgarten, Weber objected to Treitschke's blurring the line between scholarship and partisanship – in his lectures on state and church he propagandized for his values. Marianne wrote how Weber learned from that experience; he resolved never to allow himself to blur the lines between politics and scholarship and that he would refrain from substituting subjective values for objective facts. In *Wissenschaft als Beruf* Weber objects to those who bring their values into the lecture hall, where there is no possibility of criticism. The ones who do are not teachers, but demagogues; people who want to be leaders.⁷⁶ When he said that, Weber was likely remembering Treitschke. For Treitschke, there was nothing wrong in what he did; he condemned what he called "bloodless objectivity" and he objected to the misuse of the stance "Sine ira et studio."⁷⁷ In contrast, Weber makes much of the importance of "sine ira et studio" in scholarship. In fact, it ranks among his fundamental principles of scholarship. This does not mean that Weber always followed his own advice. Anyone reading his speeches recognizes that he is prone to overstep his distinction between facts and values. An example of this is his Freiburg *Antrittsrede*, where his passionate nationalism overshadows his cool scholarship.⁷⁸ Anyone reading his writings will also notice that he often exaggerates his thesis and overstates his case. Examples of this can be found in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* where he announces the difference and then concedes that it is not as hard and fast as he had first indicated.⁷⁹ Maybe the differences between Weber and Treitschke are not as pronounced as Weber might have liked. But, one could claim that Treitschke represented one part of the legacy of 'Kulturprotestantismus', the side that was subjective, and idealized German culture and tradition. One could insist further that Weber represented the other side, the side that valued scholarship, progress, and tolerance. There is no doubting though that Treitschke thought there was absolutely nothing wrong in misusing scholarship in the service of Germany. And, there is certainly no question that Weber believed that this practice was intellectually dishonest and that it was morally reprehensible to do.

Notes

- 1 Heinz Steinert might have been inclined to exaggeration in his assessments of Max Weber's *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*. He might not be completely convincing in his discussions of what he took to be its flaws. However, there can be no doubt that after reading *Max Webers unwiderlegbare Fehlkonstruktionen* no one will read Weber's work the same way again. Steinert has proven that we simply cannot be content to regard this work as a classic and cannot try to honor Weber by making the obligatory references to 'Geist', 'Arbeit', or 'Kapitalismus'. Steinert has shown that we must learn to read this work carefully and this is accomplished by recapturing its historical context. In my tribute to Steinert, I have tried to recapture the historical context of 'Kulturprotestantismus'; and I have done so out of respect for both Max Weber and Heinz Steinert.
Heinz Steinert, *Max Webers unwiderlegbare Fehlkonstruktionen. Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, Frankfurt am Main 2010, 11.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 13, 16–17, 31.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 42.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 51.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 27.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 30.
- 7 Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, *Kulturprotestantismus. Zur Begriffsgeschichte einer theologiepolitischen Chiffre*, in: *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*, Band XXVIII, 1984, 214–215; Gangolf Hübinger, *Kulturprotestantismus und Politik*, Tübingen 1994, 7.
- 8 Graf, *Kulturprotestantismus*, 214; Steinert, *Max Webers Unwiderlegbare Fehlkonstruktionen*, 27; *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Tübingen 1957–1962.
- 9 Graf, *Kulturprotestantismus*, 214.
- 10 See *ibid.*, 214–215; Hübinger, *Kulturprotestantismus*, 26.
- 11 Karl Bernhard Hundeshagen, Matthias Schneckenburger, in: *Real-Encyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, Band 13, Gotha 1860, 618; Friedrich Sieffert, Johann Jakob Herzog, in: *Real-Encyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, Band 7, 3. Auflage, Leipzig 1899, 786.
- 12 Adolf Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte. Zweiter Band. Die Entwicklung des Kirchlichen Dogmas II und III, Freiburg im Breisgau 1890*, 700 note 2.
- 13 Theodios Harnack, *Luthers Theologie. Mit besonderer Beziehung auf seine Versöhnungs- und Erlösungslehre*, München 1927 [1862/1886]. Band I, 85–87, 93, 94, 96, 102–103.
- 14 Harnack, *Luthers Theologie*, Band I, 111–112, 136, 145, 166–168, 178–179.
- 15 Samuel Eck, Köstlin, Julius, in: *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Band III, Tübingen 1912, 1580.
- 16 Julius Köstlin, Luther, in: *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, Band 8, Stuttgart/Hamburg 1857, 617.
- 17 Julius Köstlin, Luther, in: *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, Band 9, Leipzig 1881, 74.
- 18 Julius Köstlin, *Luthers Theologie. In ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung und ihrem inneren Zusammenhang*, 1883, I, 180–247.
- 19 *Ibid.*, Band I, 212, 253–259, 267–271. See also 342–346.
- 20 *Ibid.*, Band I, 139–140, 145, 153, and II, 75, 243, 259–263. The question of Luther's mysticism in general and his use of Tauler in particular, are crucial issues for Max Weber.
- 21 Köstlin, *Luthers Theologie*, Band II, 4–33, 59.
- 22 *Ibid.*, Band I, 246, 277, 281.
- 23 *Ibid.*, Band I, 249, 252–255, 286.
- 24 *Ibid.*, Band II, 434–436, 444, 534–536.
- 25 Ernst Troeltsch, *Das Christentum*, 1908, 161.
- 26 Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866–1918*, München 1998, 75, 85.
- 27 Hartmann Tyrell, *Max Weber, Bismarck und der Kulturkampf*, in: Volker Krech/Hartmann Tyrell, Hg., *Religionssoziologie um 1900*, Würzburg 1995, 365.

- 28 Rudolf Sohm, *Kirchengeschichte im Grundriß*, Leipzig 1888, 179; Hermann Mulert gives a short account of the Catholic opposition in Germany; Hermann Mulert, *Ultramontanismus*, in: *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Band V, Tübingen 1913, 1432–1434.
- 29 Karl Beurath, *Ultramontanismus*, in: *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, Band 20, 3. Auflage, Leipzig 1908, 215 and Mulert, *Ultramontanismus*, in: *ibid.*, Band 1, 1430.
- 30 This was the latest in a series of controversial decrees; the first was the decree regarding the Virgin birth in 1854, which was followed by the one rejecting modern principles ten years later; see Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte*, 428.
- 31 Walther Köhler, *Ex Kathedra*, in: *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Band II, Tübingen 1910, 782.
- 32 Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte*, 364–365, 370; Beurath, *Ultramontanismus*, Band 20, 217.
- 33 Adolf Harnack, *Aus Wissenschaft und Leben*, Gießen 1911, 213; Sohm, *Kirchengeschichte*, 89, 178.
- 34 D. Foerster, *Kulturkampf*, in: *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Band VI, Tübingen 1912, 1810.
- 35 While there was considerable resistance by numerous Catholic teachers and officials, Nipperdey insists that the ‘Ultramontanists’ won. They rejected the progress of the modern world and the “god of the people”, and instead embraced tradition and the hierarchical authority of the Church; s. Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte* 428, 431, 436.
- 36 Köstlin, *Luther*, Band 8, 576.
- 37 Julius Köstlin, *Martin Luther, der deutsche Reformator. Festschrift zur Feier des 400-jährigen Geburtstags Martin Luthers*, Halle an der Saale 1883, 3, 4, 72.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 5–9, 15.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 19–20, 16, 61, 65.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 23–25, 30, 34, 38, 42, 55.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 43, 53, 57, 70–71.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 4, 75.
- 43 Otto Ritschl, *Ritschl, Albrecht Benjamin*, in: *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, Band 17, 3. Auflage, Leipzig 1906, 25.
- 44 Albrecht Ritschl, *Drei Akademische Reden*, Bonn 1887, 5–6.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 6, 7.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 9. The “Bettelorden” stem from the 13th Century; s. Karl Heussi, *Mönchtum*, in: *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Band IV, Tübingen 1913, 441. They include the Franciscans, Dominicans, and certain groups of Augustinians, among others; s. Albert Hauck, *Bettelmönche*, in: *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, Leipzig 1897, Band 2, 671. Catholics tended to glorify these Orders for their lives dedicated to simplicity and poverty while minimizing the fact that these Orders grew out of the rejection of the Church’s power and wealth. Joseph Burg, *Kontrovers-Lexikon. Die Konfessionellen Streitfragen zwischen Katholiken und Protestanten*, Essen-Ruhr 1905, 67–68. Harnack offers an excellent but short account of their history and importance. Before the Thirteenth century monasteries were primarily filled with the sons of the nobility. But, because of the influence of St. Francis and others the poor as well as the rich went to live and study there. Harnack also credits the Bettelorden for the great scholastics as well as for the inspiration for the great artists of that century; s. Adolf Harnack, *Das Mönchtum. Seine Ideale und seine Geschichte*, in: *Adolf Harnack, Aufsätze und Reden*, Gieszen 1904 [1880], 128–132.
- 47 Ritschl, *Reden*, 7, 9–10; Ritschl acknowledged that these were the virtues of the Stoics, but he stressed their importance for Christians; s. Ritschl, *Reden*, 11–14.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 15–16.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 17–22.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 23–26.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 28–29.
- 52 Adolf Harnack, *Martin Luther, in seiner Bedeutung für Geschichte der Wissenschaft und der Bildung*, in: *Adolf Harnack, Reden und Aufsätze*, Band I, Gieszen 1904, 143–144.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 144–146.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 146–150.
- 55 *Ibid.*, 150–153.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 155.

- 57 Ibid., 158–159, 160.
- 58 Ibid., 164.
- 59 Ibid., 168–169.
- 60 Heinrich von Treitschke, *Luther und die deutsche Nation*, in: Treitschke, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, Band I, 4. Auflage, Leipzig 1908, 143.
- 61 Ibid., 141, 143.
- 62 Ibid., 140, 151.
- 63 Ibid., 146, 149.
- 64 Ibid., 138, 143, 153. See also Christopher Adair-Toteff, *Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Politics: Weber on Conscience, Conviction and Conflict*, in: *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 24, no. 1, 21–24.
- 65 Treitschke, *Luther und die deutsche Nation*, 142, 143, 156.
- 66 Ibid., 141, 157.
- 67 Wolfgang Mommsen argued that Weber heard not only Treitschke's lectures on "Staat und Kirche" but also his "Politik". Mommsen notes that Weber never listed him as his academic teacher. S. Wolfgang Mommsen, *Max Weber und die deutsche Politik, 1890–1920*, Tübingen 1974, 10 and note 38.
- 68 Arthur Mitzman, *The Iron Cage. An Historical Interpretation of Max Weber*, New York 1970. 24, 36, 51, 61, 150.
- 69 Joachim Radkau, *Max Weber. Die Leidenschaft des Denkens*, München 2005, 131, 209, 607.
- 70 Max Weber, *Jugendbriefe*, Tübingen N.d., 74.29, 64.
- 71 Weber, *Jugendbriefe*, 175; Marianne Weber, *Max Weber. Ein Lebensbild*, Tübingen 1926, 80, 331.
- 72 Mommsen, *Max Weber*, 7; Radkau, *Max Weber*, 38–39.
- 73 Hermann Baumgarten, *Treitschkes Deutsche Geschichte*, Straßburg 1883. V, 5–6, 59.
- 74 Marianne Weber, *Max Weber*, 102, 127.
- 75 Max Weber, *Jugendbriefe*, 74.
- 76 Max Weber, *Wissenschaft als Beruf*, in: ders., *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, Tübingen 1922, 582–613.
- 77 A. Barth, *Von Treitschke*, in: *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Tübingen 1913, Band V, 1327.
- 78 Max Weber, *Der Nationalstaat und die Volkswirtschaftspolitik*, in: Max Weber, *Gesammelte politische Schriften*, München 1921; see Mommsen's comments about Weber's passionate remarks in this speech with his later denunciation "Von allen Arten der Prophetie" and his banning of practical values; s. Mommsen, *Max Weber*, 39.
- 79 See Weber's treatment *Die Typen der Herrschaft*, in: Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie*, Tübingen 1922, 5., revidierte Auflage, besorgt von Johannes Winckelmann. Studienausgabe, Tübingen 1972, 122–176.