



## **Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms in the Context of Liberation Theology**

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One way to probe the meaning of "Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms in the context of liberation theology" is to see how one formed by Luther's understanding of the gospel tries to respond theologically to political questions in one country in Latin America, Argentina. The following essay takes this approach.

Liberation theology has rightly stressed the importance of context for theology, and therefore it is fitting to begin with a brief consideration of the political and Protestant situations in Argentina. The writings of liberation theology, translated into English, often describe a continent-wide situation of oppression in general terms. At its worst, this has the unintended consequence of re-enforcing the North American stereotype that all of Latin America is the same. Without denying similarities, one has also to recognize distinctive features of each region and country to understand the "context." In Argentina Christians are not doing theology in a revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situation, but in a place where the revolutionary option of a decade ago has been brutally crushed by a right-wing military dictatorship. While at first glance an article that arises from the Argentine context might appear parochial to English readers in the United States and Canada, it may serve to clarify not only the contextual but also the perennial issues that liberation theology poses.

### I. AN OPTION AND ITS CONTEXT

Argentina's principal problem is to find away for its people to live together politically, away that will permit the search for solutions to its economic, social, cultural, and international questions within a stable structure supported by the consent of its citizens. Its challenge is to break the cycle of political violence that has dominated its public life during the last fifteen years (at least) and decide its future direction within the framework of the National Constitution. Its task is to put an end to the cycle of constitutional government—military government that has characterized its life for fifty years and to establish an open democratic structure that endures and that serves justice. The most promising, viable, and just

path is that of representative democracy. Argentines ought to do whatever is possible now so that in 1990, 2000, and beyond Argentina might have a democracy that functions.

It is my impression that the majority of Argentines agree with this position. They want to end the military dictatorship once and for all and initiate a democratic future. But many, perhaps the majority, do not believe that this is possible. There are strong doubts whether the promised

elections will be held in 1983. Even if the country does not suffer another military coup, its past experience encourages a cynical—or should one say realistic?—attitude toward the possibility that Argentina be democratic, let us say, in 1990. People see a possible repetition of the violent events of the 1970s or something similar to the democratic fraud of the 1930s. Whatever might be the historical and objective reasons, subjectively many want democracy but doubt its possibility to survive. Consequently their commitment to democracy is often without much enthusiasm, a factor which reduces the possibilities to achieve this end.

Certainly the conditions are scarcely ideal for attempting to move once again toward democracy. The deep wounds of the political violence of the last years; the unresolved question of justice in relation to the disappeared and the detained; the fear and the lack of confidence in public life that are sustained by a repressive apparatus that continues to exist; the disastrous consequences of the “process’s” (the name of the military government’s program) political economy, with its destruction of national industry, its gigantic foreign debt, its unemployment, its inflation, its corruption and its economic loss for the majority; the unjust pressures of a world system of power of great inequality which is in crisis; the disproportionate power of some sectors allied with the armed forces; the after-effects of a defeat in war—these factors and others preclude all optimism. The way will be difficult and precarious.

Nevertheless, a pessimistic hope in democracy for Argentina is defensible-pessimistic because the way is full of traps, and there are no guarantees that the goal will be achieved; pessimistic because democracy is not something magic that brings a perfect society; and pessimistic because a democratic system is fragile, easy to break and difficult to maintain. Yet there is hope because democracy offers more possibilities for the active participation of Argentines and a greater chance to achieve relative peace and justice than a government of force. Democracy is the worst form of government that is proposed for Argentina until one considers alternative proposals. This hope is based on faith in Christ, his justice, and his Kingdom insofar as he creates the predisposition to take advantage of what appear to be the best possibilities in an historical situation. And it is based on an interpretation of reality that sees not only that other options are apparently exhausted, but also that there is a living democratic tradition in Argentina—a tradition which is perhaps the only foreseeable point for a basic consensus on the norms for the political process—and that there are resources among the Argentines for its functioning.

## II. THE DIVIDED MIND OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES

Members of the major Protestant churches in Argentina have had different atti-

tudes toward democracy, but it is my nonscientific judgment that historically the predominant tendency has been in favor of democracy. Their churches have been influenced by the democratic experiences of “Protestant” countries in the Northern Hemisphere (by missionaries, literature, theology, personal contacts, etc.); their minority status has given them special reasons for wanting the protection of constitutional government; their members have been part of social groups that have supported democracy; and their own governmental structures have in principle been democratic.

If there did exist a certain unity among Protestants in their support for democracy until

the early 1960s, this consensus was destroyed in the following years. Another vision captured the imagination of an important minority of youth and intellectuals committed to the liberation of Argentina who took the initiative in establishing the agenda for the public testimony of the Protestant churches. The attitude of this vision was decidedly antidemocratic, attacking this form of government as another type of oppression, as a fraud by which the bourgeois class maintained its domination over the proletarian class. It is not possible, in this view, to reform “liberal” and “formal” democracy; rather one has to work to replace it with another form of democracy—with “true” democracy, generally not defined—after the revolution. For these Protestants, the democratic tradition of the evangelical churches had served to justify the domination of one class over another in a bourgeois society, and one of their tasks was to free these churches from their false and reactionary concepts.

Nevertheless, the democratic attitude has continued to exist. I would like to believe that the majority of pastors and leaders of the Protestant churches have shared it. One finds it, for example, in the Declaration of the Seventh General Assembly of the Argentine Evangelical Methodist Church in 1981 which says: “This historic juncture should cause us to reinstall with a firm base and in the shortest lapse possible a state of law and republican institutions, that is, to put into full effect the National Constitution.” When calling for the vigilance of the basic law of the nation, the church is making a long-range commitment to democracy, explicitly rejecting military dictatorship and implicitly rejecting the way of revolution. The democratic position is also expressed in the existence and valuable work of the Ecumenical Movement for Human Rights. Its testimony has coherence only within a commitment to democratic institutions, and its assemblies have expressed a call “to a return to democracy.” Democratic convictions have not died in the Protestant churches.

Besides these two tendencies, there has been another, an attitude which has not arrived at a theoretical expression in the churches but which has been expressed in practice by some Protestants. This position has had the disposition to accept a military government as the lesser evil in face of what has been perceived to be the threat of “chaos” caused by revolutionary forces and even populist ones. The sense of terror before the political violence of the Left has created an inclination to accept tacitly the political violence of the Right. This position has rejected all criticism of the terrorist action of military or paramilitary groups, thinking it to be necessary and that criticism is inspired by anti-democratic and/or anti-Argentine interests. Insofar as it exists, this attitude creates a serious problem in the center of our congregations and demands a pastoral attention of

love, wisdom, and courage. Overcoming this attitude ought to be a priority of the preaching, education and pastoral care of our churches. And this work, to be credible, has to have a clear democratic base.

The existence of these three currents—two of them non-democratic or antidemocratic from opposite political poles, and one democratic—shows the divided mind of the Protestant churches. In this historic moment everyone wants democracy; all are united in their rejection of a *de facto* government. But the basic question remains: On what basis? Is it on the basis of tactical or strategical support necessary for the moment, but conditioned by a commitment to an eventual revolution? Is it on the basis of support strongly conditioned by the disposition to go to the gates

of the barracks in a moment of crisis? Or is it on the basis of a commitment to representative democracy as the best system among the possible alternatives and therefore worthy of a long-term dedication? It is not essential that all Protestants agree in their response to this question; we ought to preserve evangelical freedom in this area. But it is indispensable that we be clear and honest in the question of the framework which we use to support democracy in order that we might have an atmosphere of mutual confidence, which has suffered so much in recent years, and in order that our public testimony might have credibility and integrity. If we do not have this clarity, I doubt that the Protestant churches will make a creative contribution to the present Argentine process. Moreover, support for the Constitution from a basis which at heart is not democratic runs the risk of serving the interests of those who want a military government. The roots of this concern are in the experience of the recent past, but its purpose is to serve the church's mission in Argentina's future.

In a situation of great injustice the most significant alternative to democracy is the option of revolution which proposes the thesis that representative democracy is opposed to the liberation of Argentina. One is dealing here with two options that in essence are mutually exclusive. One who continues opting now for "the total change" of revolution perhaps believes that revolution is not dead in Argentina but is only sleeping; the present, then, would be understood as "a pause" in the historic process, whose function is to prove to the people once again that democracy does not serve their interests; later the people will awake in the mature moment. Or to change the metaphor, democracy perhaps might serve as an instrument for survival in the desert but not as the means to enter the promised land. In view of this alternative, the political question, among others, remains: What is the form of government in the promised land? What is going to replace representative democracy after the revolution? One should not be so naive as to wait until the day after the revolution to receive an answer to the question. It seems to me that the direction taken by those Protestants who have adhered to this position in the past will largely determine the force and creativity of the Protestant contribution to the search for democracy in Argentina in the 1980s, since their passion for justice and their theological and political knowledge are truly admirable. Insofar as an option for revolution exists, the discussion should continue, openly and in mutual respect. It is part of the irony of the situation that such a debate presupposes a democratic setting—a goal, I believe, that we ought to seek in the church and in the country.

It would be my naive dream that the divided mind of Protestantism will be overcome by a consensus on democracy as the framework in which we participate in national life. It would be a living consensus, not imposed, gained by reflection and debate, based on firm convictions and shown in ordinary and bold actions. In this dream we would give our consent to the constitution, we would be a critical voice within democracy, and we would seek the transformation of society by democratic means. It would be a new and critical affirmation of our democratic tradition, matured by hard experience and renewed by the recent discovery of our political responsibility for the least of the brothers and sisters of Jesus. There would still exist issues over which we might disagree.

### III. A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE: NO AND YES TO LUTHER

What has Luther to do with all of this? What has Luther to do with the search for

democracy in Argentina in the 1980s? A good question. And the only possible answer seems to be “not much.” Luther lived in another historical moment and his ideas on politics were conditioned by his situation. He accepted the political system of his day with its princes and emperor as the will of God to maintain order and justice. He did not face modern issues concerning the nation-state, the participation of the people in government, and the options among military dictatorship, revolution, and democracy. His response to the question “Who should govern?” was in the essence “Those who already rule.” And this response does not help us now. The idea that the Christian should simply accept the existing authority as the will of God and obey it is a dangerous concept for us. Because of their historical distance, Luther’s political ideas have little direct validity for us.

Luther was not a democrat. On the one hand, this phrase simply makes a correct historical judgment, saying that his ideas were non-, anti-, or pre-democratic; on the other hand, however, it suggests something about the history of Christianity and democracy. Luther was not a democrat, but neither were Moses, Amos, Paul, Augustine, Thomas, and almost all Christians during the first eighteen centuries of the church’s history. One needs more ingenuity than I have to establish the proposition that Jesus was the first democrat. Moreover, there exists the weight of the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle, who considered democracy as the worst form of government. Luther was in good company in not being a defender of democracy. As a living option on a large scale, democracy is a modern experiment with one or two centuries of life, which, to be sure, has roots in some Christian groups. Historically, nevertheless, the majority of the church has not been married to democracy, a fact which should not be a reason to reject it or to feel superior to our ancestors in the faith.

In dealing with the relation of Luther to our concern, one might adopt another approach, asking whether the influence of his political ideas has helped or hindered the development of democracy. It would not be difficult, for example, to find support for the thesis that Luther’s influence was negative in this respect, underscoring elements such as his deplorable reaction to the peasants’ war, his lack of confidence in the people, his emphasis on obedience and submission to political authorities, his predominantly negative attitude toward the function of politics (a dike against sin), etc. And was not Luther used to

strengthen authoritarian and even a totalitarian government in Germany until 1945? But neither would it be impossible to find elements in his thought that have played a positive role in the development of democracy, such as his struggle for the independence of political authorities in face of the political power of the ecclesiastical authorities, his insistence on the limits of the power of political authorities in questions of faith, his support for popular education, his criticism of the abuses of power, his position that minor authorities have the right to resist a superior authority, etc. And did not Lutheran Scandinavian countries develop admirable democracies?

Luther was not a democrat, but he was a follower of Jesus Christ. He was a professor of the Bible and a preacher, a servant of the Word committed to the renovation of the church on the basis of the gospel. If we want to understand Luther and explore his meaning for us, we have to go to the heart of his faith and theology. This heart is the message that God saves us by grace alone, through faith alone, without human works. It is the promise given without conditions that Christ is sufficient. for the salvation of the world. The slogan for this message is justification by

faith, but one can use other concepts to speak of the same reality, such as the forgiveness of sins, acceptance, peace, reconciliation, freedom, liberation, etc. What is important is not so much the term but rather that salvation be affirmed as a gift given once and for all in the cross of Christ, a gift received in the granting of confidence in the promise. This alone is the source of the new life related to God in faith and to the neighbor in love. Justification by faith is not simply one doctrine among many but the rule to guide the manner in which we speak of the significance of Christ for us.

For Luther the central drama of history is the relation of the human sinner to the holy creator God, and his question is that of salvation and how it is possible that sinners are saved, that is, live in communion with God. Historical distance has not changed the possible positive answers to this question: the human being creates the relation to God by effort, the human being and God do it together, or God does it alone. Luther's proposal is that only the third alternative gives honor to Christ and the security of salvation. This, proposes Luther, is the promise of the gospel. The question remains, what does this message have to do with democracy?

#### IV. TOWARD A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON DEMOCRACY

Democracy refers to that form of government in which the sovereignty of the people is expressed according to a representative system and the principle of majority rule (with protection of minority rights). Citizens' representatives, elected by and responsible to the people, decide the community's laws in agreement with the society's basic law. In a representative democracy, no one has all the power, and all in authority have to respond before the law and the rest of the citizens. Democracy is characterized by attributing the state's power to the people under the observance of the principles of constitutional law, personal freedom and the political equality of its citizens. Democracy refers not only to a formal political structure but also to a way of life which implies an ethical option by the people in favor of democratic principles.

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page 429

If we are democrats—and especially in this moment when, we hope, Argentina begins a new experiment with democracy—we ought to give a defense of our position that is at the same time constructive and critical, that is, that gives a basis to affirm it and to maintain a healthy distance from it. Criticism without affirmation is destructive, and affirmation without criticism is unfaithful to our calling. What follows is a brief and incomplete example of the type of reflection which ought to be a part of our consideration of democracy. I intend to place it in a theological perspective. I take as a point of departure some central affirmations of Luther (although obviously there are other theological influences), using as a “test” two parts of his explanation of the Apostles' Creed in his Small Catechism.

1. *Democracy as Salvation?* In some circles democracy has been presented as “the wave of the future,” as an irresistible movement that will bring progress, prosperity, intelligence, peace, and freedom with justice to all the earth. It is simply a question of the time when the backward peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America will realize the inexhaustible benefits of democracy. There have also been Christians—many times those most committed to social issues—who have seen in democracy the earthly realization of the Kingdom of God. Other persons have thought that this religious justification does not add anything to what “modern man” is doing on his own, and therefore they have liberated themselves from the heavy baggage

of religion to construct their brilliant future alone. In one or another form democracy has come to be a doctrine of salvation, a belief that promises full life for all.

Luther speaks differently about salvation in his explanation of the second article of the Creed:

I believe that Jesus Christ—true God, Son of the Father from eternity, and true man, born of the Virgin Mary—is my Lord.

He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, saved me at great cost from sin, death, and the power of the devil—not with silver or gold, but with his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death.

All this he has done that I may be his own, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally.

We are faced with two doctrines of salvation: one sees the human being as lord of his or her own destiny, and the other as a “man lost and condemned”; one understands that the human being saves himself or herself, and the other that salvation comes from outside the self; one believes that salvation is a future human project, and the other finds salvation in a divine event of the past, which makes possible what salvation is now and will be; one proposes that salvation is human happiness in an historical paradise, and the other believes that salvation is belonging to the Lord in life and death; one tends to find the Messiah in “the people,” and the other says that the Messiah was an historical person; one thinks that salvation is gained by means of historical processes, and the other affirms that it is gained “not with silver and gold, but with his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death”; one believes that the obstacles to be overcome are ignorance and irrationality, and the other sees the enemy as

sin, death, and the power of the devil. These two doctrines of salvation are opposed and force us to decide in favor of one and against the other.

For those who confess that Jesus Christ is the only savior, democracy as salvation is another false god of humanity’s self-redemption. This doctrine does not capture the depth of human alienation and the inevitable inclination to make ourselves the center of all, with its disastrous consequences. In fact, this idea of self-redemption expresses sin, the lack of confidence in the promise of the cross, because it refuses to accept what God gives in Christ. In refusing to accept the gift of God, it makes itself its own god, and worships its own concepts and constructions as if they were God. We ought to recognize that the temptation to idolatry comes from what is considered the best of the human, not the common or the bad. Therefore it is necessary to distinguish the salvation given in Christ also from the most elevated human aspirations, so that the human might remain human and so that we might worship Christ and not our own image. Idolatry produces injustice, and in this image of democracy it is not difficult to see the expectations of a triumphant social group, projecting its ideas on the whole world and making its interests identical with those of everyone. History—or the wrath of God—has the habit of being cruel to such illusions, and the past is littered with the corpses of optimistic utopias. This cosmic vision is condemned to fail, but its principal problem is that it does not

leave space for Christ. Faced with its claims, Christians cry with Mary Magdalene, “they have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have placed him” (John 20:13). Because of Christ, therefore, we should reject the messianic pretensions of democracy or any political system. In affirming democracy we should be clear that we are not seeking that which we can find in Christ alone.

The sharp contrast between these two salvation doctrines and the protest of one against the other are essential elements not only to give honor to Christ alone, but also to preserve the good and the appropriate in democracy. In taking from democracy the possibility to save us, we are able to see it not as “the wave of the future” but as a vital option for living together politically in the present. In denying that democracy can support the weight of giving meaning to life we can understand it in the human dimension to which it corresponds. In refusing to identify it with the promise of the gospel or to call it the Christian system, we can understand it as an historical form of government and judge its possibilities and its limits according to the best political and ethical norms of our situation. In believing that the redemption of the world is already in good hands, we can see democracy as a structure worthy of our commitment insofar as it serves the neighbor. Faith in Christ as the Savior gives a perspective to act within the relativities and the ambiguities of politics with a critical attitude in face of tendencies to absolutize one’s own position and to convert political conflicts into holy wars. Given that the justification of our lives is already given, we are free from the obsession of justifying them with political action (which generally produces bad politics), and we are free to respond to the needs of others.

In his Small Catechism Luther emphasizes the gospel’s personal character (“my” Lord, etc.). We all know the great individualistic distortions in Protestant traditions and we ought to combat them, but not at the cost of removing the personal target of the gospel: the announcement of the precision of God’s love for

each person. The only way that the sinner enters into God’s Kingdom is through God’s forgiveness. The insistence on “faith alone” means that the gospel is also a personal message. One is saved by faith alone, but faith is always accompanied by love and hope (Bonhoeffer). A faith that does not produce works is as dead as a tree that does not produce fruits. Therefore Luther says that Jesus Christ did all “that I might be his own, and live under him in his Kingdom and serve him in justice, innocence and blessedness forever.” The action of God results in a new life with a new Lord, who is to be served in all. Our call is to serve him in fidelity, and this call includes our political life. Our motivation to commit ourselves to democracy does not have its base in a project of human self-redemption but in the grace of God. It is as faithful persons who already participate in salvation that we ought to seek democracy.

2. *Democracy Is Not for a Community of Gods.* Lutherans are often accused of ignoring the doctrine of creation. It is said that they speak so much about sin that it appears creation in itself is evil. Unfortunately this judgment is often right. I hope it is a problem only for Lutherans. The result is not only that “the world” appears to be totally negative and therefore Christians ought to avoid it, but also that the message of salvation sounds abstract and individualistic, divorced from daily realities, and directed to an interior part of the listener and nothing more. Neither has contemporary theology emphasized the theme of creation much, preferring rather to respond to the question of the “world” with a dynamic concept of the Kingdom of God in relation



to history or with a focus on the human Jesus.

Luther makes this comment on the first article of the Creed:

I believe that God has created me and all that exists, He has given me and still preserves my body and soul with all their powers.

He provides me with food and clothing, home and family, daily work, and all I need from day to day. God also protects me in time of danger and guards me from every evil.

All this he does out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, though I do not deserve it. Therefore I surely ought to thank and praise, serve and obey him.

If one thing ought to be beyond dispute, it is that we are not gods, neither as individuals nor as humanity. We are finite and radically dependent on nature, history, society, family, and finally that almighty benevolent power which is the source of all good. The message of creation is not principally that of human creativity but rather that God is God, and we are not gods, but creatures who receive our life from outside us, from the creator, who alone deserves our full adoration and confidence. We are not pure possibility without limits nor being totally determined, but free persons who are finite and dependent. For the Christian the search to escape from finitude is not salvation but sin. When we confess, “I believe that God has created me,” we recognize that our finitude is not a divine error but that it is the will of God, that it is part of the good news of creation.

That persons are free and dependent is not only the truth of creation but also an essential presupposition for democracy. Surely the angels and archangels have found another form of government, but democracy fits well with

this perception of the human as an historical being. No one is omnipotent, and all are responsible and able to share the task of governing in concrete situations. The human dignity, liberty, equality, and solidarity of our experience and hope have theological roots in the message that God has created us.

It is noteworthy that Luther speaks of creation as a present action of God. He says nothing of the beginning of the world, but describes what God does now. God has created me, has given, preserves, provides, protects, and guards me—all active verbs with reference to the present. God did not simply create the world at one time and then leave it, but creates it now. In believing that he “has created me,” we also confess that he is the origin of “all that exists” in the past, present, and future. God is creating and ordering in all the continuities and changes in nature and history with the intention of providing the necessary conditions for life: clothing, food, house, family, and “all goods,” including “good government, peace and security” (Luther’s Large Catechism). The scope of the creating will is both nature as well as “the second nature,” human culture, that which the human does with nature. God is not absent but present in all of life, even in social, economic, and political institutions in which we try to improve human conditions and respect nature.

The inference which we should draw from this is important. Our attitude toward politics should be affirmative. Political action which serves life is within God’s creative will and

participates in some way in his creative action to preserve and sustain human good. God's ways are not our ways, and he has his own "hands"; nevertheless, it is also by means of us that he wants to give us "good government, peace and security." Politics is not fully appreciated when it is considered simply as something "evil," "bad," or "dirty," since this ignores that God also acts in this area of his world. For Luther creation is good, and one can even speak of the "grace of creation" in his theology, for God does "all of this out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, though I do not deserve it." It is for this reason that "I surely ought to thank and praise, serve and obey him."

The message of creation offers reasons of the mind and heart for avocation of participation in politics. As persons transformed by the gospel, we are called to be faithful to the Lord also in political institutions. This vocation is crucial for the democratic option, since participation is the living blood of democracy. Democracy is more than elections; it means that people become responsible for the direction of the country through multiple forms of participation, from the development of a personal political perspective that is informed and critical to militancy in a party and to the assumption of public responsibilities. Oh that there might be a flowering of voluntary groups in Argentina which would mediate the interests of the people to the government and protect the people from the government! "Don't get involved" should change into the exhortation, "Participate, participate."

The most common defense of democracy is based in an optimistic concept of human beings that understands them as basically good and rational with the capacity to resolve the differences by means of discussion. This concept is too optimistic; nevertheless, it expresses a partially valid intuition. Human beings can—at times and in part—recognize the rights of others, understand the

perspectives and interests of other groups in society, find responses to conflicts of interest by debate and without having to kill those who might have opposite opinions, obey the law even when they do not like it, etc. Even in a world of sin, the creating will of God gives resources that can reduce violence, injustice, and lies. On the basis of our faith that God creates now, we can have a relative confidence in others and affirm the possibility of the democratic experiment. Luther mentions "reason" as part of God's good creation and considered it a precious gift of God for humans living together. We too should evaluate reason, imagination, the sense of justice, and other gifts as vital resources and take advantage of them for democratic life. Thanks to God, the human being is not totally a wolf to other humans. The creator makes democracy possible.

And sin makes it necessary. A democratic theory that does not take into account that the creature is a sinner in a distorted and alienated world does not help in practice. It is not necessary to prove the existence of radical evil in the most bloody century in history. We know "what is in" the human being when we look within and outside us. The perversion of the human will is structured into human institutions, and individual sin is compounded in social collectives. The will to live is easily converted into the will to dominate, and powerful groups act according to their own interests and to the detriment of other groups while claiming that their decisions represent the common good. This shadow remains in politics, and no proposal from the Enlightenment has eliminated it. The existence of sin does not mean the impossibility of democracy (but, yes, the incoherence of some of its philosophies), but its necessity. All should govern,

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since total power should not be confided to any sector. Because of sin one needs legal and popular controls on the exercising of power. In this relative lack of confidence rests democracy's necessity.

As an anthropological base for democracy, the aphorism of Reinhold Niebuhr (1943) is still valid: "The capacity of the human for justice makes democracy possible; but the inclination of the human to injustice makes democracy necessary." Democracy is not for gods but for finite sinful creatures. Utopianism does not admit human perversion and authoritarianism does not admit human possibilities, while democracy intends to incorporate both. The critical democrat recognizes egoism, pride, and deception in political groups and seeks to reduce them and channel them with the human capacities given by God. He or she does not wait for perfection but is prepared to work for more justice within the ambiguities of the real world. Support for and participation in democracy are formed by a sense of profundity of sin and by a sense of the amplitude of the possibilities for good, which in history are always mixed. This is the perspective of a pessimistic hope.

All of us recognize the importance of human equality for Christian faith and for democracy. Before God we are all equal as his creatures, in the solidarity of sin and in the hope of salvation. It is an important accomplishment of democracy that it recognizes equality in giving equal rights to all. But this political equality does not mean real equality in the sharing of power, although the "line" of the leading classes is that it in fact exists. The Christian should not only criticize the deception of the powerful, but also support efforts of marginal groups to gain more power in society. Justice cannot exist where there are glaring inequalities of power, and the Christian has a clear criterion to judge society by what it does to those at its edges and a mandate to aid groups with less influence. A test for democracy in Argentina will be its capacity to change power relations in the direction of more equality.

Luther was not a democrat, but he was a follower of Christ. I hope that in our following of Christ we may learn to be creative and critical democrats.