

According to Gogarten (*Luthers Theologie*: 51),

... das Erste Gebot, wie Luther es versteht, [ist] nicht ein Gebot wie alle anderen. Denn der, der in ihm spricht, ist nicht nur und durchaus nicht in erster Linie einer, der gebietet, sondern der, der gibt, und zwar sich selbst, indem er sich mit seinem schöpferischen Wort und darum in der Fülle seines göttlichen Wesens dem Menschen zuwendet. Das meint Luther, wenn er in einer Glosse zu dem Ersten Gebot aus dem Jahre 1530 höchst paradox sagt, dieses sei insofern recht eigentlich das Erste Gebot, weil nichts in ihm geboten werde. Es sei die Verheißung, die die Quelle aller Verheißungen ist und das Haupt aller Religionen und aller Weisheit, und es begreife das Evangelium und Christus in sich ([WA] 30 II, 358, 2).

But if the promise that is "the source of all promises," and so on, is God's promise in the First Commandment, "I am the Lord your God"; and if this promise already belongs to, because the First Commandment is constitutive of, the *lex naturalis/lex naturæ*, then every human being has always already received this primal promise in standing under the natural law. But, then, are we not to infer that what Luther expressly says of the promise made in baptism already applies, and has to apply, to this primal promise?

[J]ust as the truth of this divine promise, once promised over us, continues until death, so our faith in it ought never to cease, but to be nourished and strengthened until death by the continual remembrance of this promise made to us in baptism. . . . [T]he truth of the promise once made remains steadfast, always ready to receive us back with open arms when we return (*LW*, 36: 59).

It seems ever clearer to me that what Luther says already in his Lectures on Romans—that even the heathen would have been saved had they simply stayed with and worshiped God as God had manifested Godself to them and to all human beings— is anything but an isolated statement that can be safely ignored. It is, in fact, an early statement of a view that comes to expression again and again, attesting the extent to which Luther, in his way, understood the Christian understanding of human existence in something like what Maurice would call its full "length and breadth."

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