

Significantly, no other than Martin Luther urges the necessity and importance of something very like what Habermas means by "discourse."

Discussing the indispensable role of faith in relation to the sacrament, Luther writes:

There is no doubt . . . that whoever observes mass the best he knows how, without this faith we have just described, benefits neither himself nor anyone else. For the sacrament in itself, without faith, does nothing. Yes, God himself, who indeed does all things, does and can do good to no one who does not firmly believe in him; how much less can the sacrament. It is easy to say that a mass is effective whether it be performed by a pious or a wicked priest, that it is acceptable *opere operati*, not *opere operantis*. But to produce no other argument except that many people say this, and that this has become the custom, is poor proof of its correctness. Many have praised pleasures and riches and have grown accustomed to them, yet this does not make them right. We should adduce arguments from [s]cripture or reason as well. Therefore let us be careful not to take the matter lightly. I cannot conceive that the institution of so many masses and requiems can be without abuse, especially since all this is done as good works and sacrifices by which to recompense God, whereas in the mass there is nothing else than the reception and enjoyment of divine grace, promised and given us in his testament and sacrament (LW 35:102).

Obviously, for us today, to adduce arguments from scripture is logically of a piece with simply appealing to custom and what many people say. But the situation was radically otherwise for Luther as well as for most other Christians and theologians right up to the present. For them, scripture was (or is) *eo ipso* divine revelation and, as such, in a class by itself, or, perhaps better, in the same class as "reason." But once allowing this, we can say that Luther here insists that, if we are not to take the matter lightly, but are rather to critically validate our theological positions with respect to it, we have no choice but to move from the primary level of self-understanding and life-praxis to the secondary level of critical reflection and proper theory. To this extent, he confirms the need for "discourse" in Habermas's sense of the term, or for what I mean by "critical reflection" and, especially, "critical validation."

The passage is arresting for other reasons as well. Not only is it a *locus classicus* for the dictum *nulla sacramentum sine fide*, but it is also noteworthy for its blunt assertion that even the God who does all things cannot do good to one who does not believe in him. Of course, what it means, or even could mean, to say this is not clarified. But Luther could hardly be clearer that, without faith on the part of a woman or a man, not even God can effect ultimate transformation.

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