

Den naturlige åbenbaring (Del I): Fornuft og samvittigheden

Natural Revelation (Part I): Reason and the Conscience

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A. Introduction

1. **Reason (fornuft)** and **the conscience (samvittigheden)** are two great gifts from God, but like God's other gifts they often are misunderstood and misused.
 - a. These two gifts are misunderstood and misused by **rationalists** who expect from reason and the conscience **greater certainty** and **greater comfort** than reason or the conscience can provide.
 - b. Reason and the conscience are misunderstood and misused by **postmodernists** who insist that neither reason nor the conscience can point to an **objective reality**.
2. **Lutheran theology** properly understands and appreciates God's gifts of reason and the conscience.
 - a. Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms, 1521: "Unless I am convinced by **Scripture** and **plain reason**—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my **conscience** is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against **conscience** is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen." (Quoted in Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand*.)
 - b. The **Conscience** and **reason** pertain to **natural revelation**, by which all people recognize God's existence, God's moral law (the **natural law**), and human sin.
 - c. **Contrary** to **postmodernists**, Lutherans recognize that the conscience and reason reveal **moral truth**.
 - d. **Contrary** to **rationalists**, Lutherans proclaim that **neither** the conscience **nor** reason can **comfort a soul** that is terrorized by the knowledge of sin.
 - *Lex semper accusat.* (The Law always accuses.)
 - Only the Gospel can console us, and the Gospel does this by pointing *extra nos* (outside ourselves) to a *justitia aliena* (foreign righteousness)—the righteousness of Christ that we receive as our own through faith.

B. Reason and the conscience are gifts from God, recognized by believers and unbelievers alike.

1. "Let Us make man in Our image [Lad os skabe mennesker i vort Billede]." (Genesis 1:26)
 - a. "What else was this image and likeness [of God] than that man was created with wisdom and righteousness so that he could apprehend God and reflect God?" (Apol. II (I), 18–22)
 - b. "Image of God" according to Luther, Melancthon, Chemnitz, Gerhardt, and Pieper:
 - **Narrow definition:** holiness, righteousness, and true knowledge of God—completely corrupted as a result of the fall into sin (F.C. S.D. I, 10–11, 62)
 - **Broad definition:** reason, conscience, dominion over creation—corrupted by sin, but a "dim spark" remains (F.C. S.D. II, 9)
 - c. "I believe that God made me and all creatures, and that He gave me ... my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them." (Luther's Small Catechism, First Article)
 - d. Human reason and free will retain some abilities with respect to "civil righteousness (which we also confess to be subject to reason, and, in a measure, within our power)." (Apol. II (I), 12)
 - e. The human soul "has a rational principle [λόγον ἔχον, *logon echon*]." (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.13, 1102a9)

- f. “The other animals live by images and memories, and have a small share of experience, but the human race lives also by art and reasoning.” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I.1, 980b)
- g. “A human is by nature a political animal.” (Aristotle, *Politics*, I.2, 1253a2)
- 2. “When Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show **the work of the law written in their hearts [den gerning, som loven kræver, skrevet i deres hjerter]**, their **conscience [samvittighed]** also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.” (Romans 2:14–15)
 - a. “Even our first parents before the fall did not live without Law. They had God’s Law written into their hearts, because they were created in God’s image (Genesis 1:26–27; 2:16–17; 3:3).” (F.C. Egit. VI, 2)
 - b. “This is special to humans, in comparison to the other animals, that they alone have perception of the good and the bad, the just and the unjust.” (Aristotle, *Politics*, I.2, 1253a15)
 - c. “No creature apart from man has any conception of God; ... within mankind itself, there is no tribe so civilized or so savage as not to know that it should believe in a god. ... We are born for justice, and what is just is based, not on opinion, but on nature. ... There is one, single, justice. It binds together human society and has been established by one, single, law. That law is right reason in commanding and forbidding.” (Cicero, *Laws*, 1.24,28,42)
- 3. “Within the limitation of human intelligence, it is right for a person to follow the direction of a well-tempered judgment. Whatever is clearly at variance with such judgment is understood to be contrary also to the law of nature, that is, to the nature of man. ... I have made it my concern to refer the proofs of things touching the law of nature to certain fundamental conceptions which are beyond question, so that no one can deny them without doing violence to himself. ... When many philosophers, historians, poets, and orators at different times and in different places affirm the same thing as certain ... the cause ... must be either a correct conclusion drawn from the principles of nature [natural law] or common consent [*jus gentium*, the law of nations].” (Hugo Grotius, *On the Law of War and Peace*, Prologue)
- 4. See also: *Natural Law: A Lutheran Reappraisal*, ed. Robert C. Baker.

C. Reason and the conscience are misunderstood and misused by rationalists who elevate reason above God and His Word.

- 1. **Aristotle** (Greece, 4th century B.C.) asserted that a man who seeks wisdom can achieve virtue; his philosophy is often insightful for our relationships with our neighbors (*coram hominibus*), but Aristotle imposes a burden that we never can carry in our relationship with God (*coram Deo*).
 - a. “Justice is complete virtue ... in relation to one’s neighbor.” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, V.1, 1129b26)
 - b. “Justice is the state that makes a just person do just deeds out of choice.” (V.6, 1134a2)
 - c. “Both the reasoning must be true and the desire must be right.” (VI.2, 1139a23)
 - d. “Wisdom is a reasoned and correct capacity for action in the sphere of things that are good for humans.” (VI.6, 1140b2)
 - e. “It is not possible to be truly good without wisdom, nor wise without moral virtue. ... No choice will be right without both wisdom and virtue.” (VI.13, 1144b30, 1145a4)

2. **Thomas Aquinas** (France, 13th century A.D.) emphasized the role of the **natural law** in providing people with **knowledge** of the moral law. Following Aristotle's lead, and failing to recognize the severity of original sin, Aquinas was confident that those who **know** the law can **do** the law, especially with divinely infused grace.
 - a. "The first precept of the natural law is that we should do and seek good, and shun evil. ... Reason by nature understands to be good all the things for which human beings have a natural inclination: ... 1) to preserve oneself ... 2) the sexual union of male and female, and the upbringing of children ... 3) know truths about God and live in society with other human beings." (*Summa Theologica*, I–II.94.2)
 - b. "The natural law regarding general first principles is the same for all persons both as to the principles' rectitude and as to knowledge of them." (94.4)
 - c. "The natural law is altogether immutable as to its first principles." (94.5)
 - d. "Regarding the general principles, the natural law in general can in no way be excised from the hearts of human beings." (94.6)
 - e. Aquinas offers much wisdom in understanding the moral law, but because he views grace as an **infused** quality, rather than an **imputed righteousness**, he leaves consciences burdened with an impossible struggle to overcome sin. This is the "scholastic error" that the Augsburg Confession and Apology repeatedly correct.
3. **Immanuel Kant** (Prussia, 18th century) rejected both **divine command morality** (the Ten Commandments) and **the natural law tradition**, seeking instead a moral philosophy conforming to **Enlightenment** (Oplysningstiden) ideals: autonomous reason determines our duties to one another.
 - a. "When it comes to moral matters, human reason even with the least sophisticated understanding can easily be brought to a high degree of correctness and accuracy." (*Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Akademie, 4:391)
 - b. "Act only on a maxim that you can also will to become a universal law." (4:421)
 - c. "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or anyone else's, never merely as a means, but also always as an end." (4:429)
 - This sounds like Christ: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 19:19)
 - But Kant rejects Christ's authority and seeks a rationalistic morality.
 - d. Reason is Kant's god: "The principle of humanity and of every rational nature as such, as an end itself ... is the supreme limiting condition of the freedom of action of every human being." (4:431)
 - e. "Faith alone" is replaced by "reason alone": "Reason must regard itself as the author of its own principles, independently of an alien influence." (4:448)

D. Reason and the conscience are misunderstood and misused by postmodernists who reject objective reality.

1. "Statements of value ... are simply expressions of emotion which can be neither true nor false." (A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, 1936)
2. "There is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. ... Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself." (Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism Is a Humanism," 1945)
3. "There are no objective values. ... Values ... [including] rightness and wrongness, duty, obligation, [and] an action's being rotten and contemptible ... are not objective, are not part of the fabric of the world." (John Mackie, *Ethics*, 1977)
4. "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life." (U.S. Supreme Court, *Planned*

E. Lutheran theology properly understands and appreciates God's gifts of reason and the conscience.

1. *Against Postmodernism*: Lutherans agree with Aristotle, Cicero, and Aquinas that the natural law is **known** by everyone and **applies** to everyone for civil righteousness.
2. *Against Rationalists*: Lutherans teach that such knowledge of the law **terrorizes the conscience**, until the **Gospel** brings **peace**.
3. The conscience judges a person on the basis of law.
 - a. God's moral law has three "uses" (*usus*) or "offices" (*officia*):
 - *Usus Politicus* (Political Use, or Curb: preventing gross sin)
 - *Usus Theologicus* (Theological Use, or Mirror: showing us our sin and our need for the Savior)
 - *Usus Tertius* (Third Use, or Guide: encouraging sanctified living among believers who now delight in God's Law, usually called *mandatum*, not *lex*, by Luther)
 - b. The conscience judges a person legitimately according to:
 - the moral law as written in the heart and revealed in Scripture (curb, mirror, or guide); or,
 - the civil law as legislated by God's ordinance of civil government (curb).
 - c. The conscience judges a person *illegitimately* according to:
 - impostor "laws" imposed by tyrants in the church (e.g., Pharisees, Papists); or,
 - impostor "laws" imposed by tyrants in the state (i.e., "unjust laws").
4. Scripture and right reason condemn the illegitimate uses of the law:
 - a. Consciences should not regret breaking human laws that are themselves contrary to divine law. For example, the monastic prohibitions of marriage should not burden consciences. Such vows are invalid and should be broken. (AC XXVII)
 - b. Consciences should not regret breaking civil laws that are themselves unjust, such as when the Leipzig Interim required Lutheran churches to follow Roman Catholic doctrines and practices rather than permitting them to teach the Gospel in its truth and purity and administer the sacraments properly (cf. AC VII).
 - Political resistance is moral when tyranny rises to the level of forcing people to sin, and when a person's vocation requires resistance on behalf of those people.
 - Following Luther and Melancthon, the Magdeburg Confession (1550) said:
 - Pastors should preach against tyrants in church or state.
 - Lesser magistrates should interpose to protect people against tyrants.
 - Common people should not revolt, but may defend themselves.
 - See "The Magdeburg Interpretation of Romans 13: A Lutheran Justification for Political Resistance," <https://www.hausvater.org/articles/336>.

F. Reason and the conscience provide no comfort to a soul that is terrorized by the knowledge of sin.

1. The conscience's appeal to God's moral law more often condemns (*Usus Theologicus*, mirror) than guides (*Usus Tertius*, guide or rule).
2. The conscience sometimes judges us in our relations to our neighbors on the basis of the First Use of the Law (*Usus Politicus*, curb).
3. But the conscience especially judges us in our relations to both God and to our neighbors on the basis of the Second Use of the Law (*Usus Theologicus*, mirror).
4. "Paul says in Romans 4:15: 'The Law brings wrath.' He does not say that by the Law people merit forgiveness of sins. For the Law always accuses and terrifies consciences.

Therefore it does not justify, because a conscience terrified by the Law runs from God's judgment. They err who assume that by the Law—by their own works—they merit forgiveness of sins.” (Apol. IV (II), 38)

5. The Law condemns so harshly that some Lutherans have questioned whether there can be a “Third Use” of the Law (guide). See: “A Lutheran View of the Third Use of the Law,” <https://www.ryanmacpherson.com/26/73>.
 - a. Lutherans sometimes number two, three, or four “uses” of the law.
 - b. Luther’s “command and promise” theme in the Large Catechism includes the third use: for example, we pray both because God commands it and because He promises to hear us.
 - c. Luther’s doctrine of vocation teaches that God blesses the people entrusted to our care through our sanctified works as guided by His holy law. (*More in Part II.*)
 - d. Believers live *simul justus et peccator* (at the same time, a saint and a sinner), and so the same law by which our conscience may guide us so quickly becomes a means by which our conscience will condemn us.
 - e. As we daily remember our Baptism: “the old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sin and evil lusts; and ... a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” (Small Catechism, Baptism)

G. Only the Gospel can console a troubled conscience, and only the Means of Grace can bring the Gospel to us.

1. The **Gospel** of forgiveness in Christ soothes consciences that are troubled over sin.
2. The **Means of Grace** brings that Gospel to us: Holy Baptism, Holy Scripture, and the Holy Supper. (*Jan Bygstad will explain these matters....*)
3. Magnus Brostrup Landstad, “Jeg staar for Gud, som al Ting veed”:

Jeg staar for Gud, som al Ting veed,
Og slaar mit Øie skamfuld ned,
Jeg ser min Synd, at den er stor
I Tanker, Gjerninger og Ord,
Det mig igjennem Hjertet skjær;
O Gud, mig Synder naadig vær!

O Herre Gud, hvad har jeg gjort,
Kast mig ei fra dit Aasyn bort,
Tag ei din Helligaand fra mig,
Men lad ham drage mig til dig,
Den rette Angers Vei mig lær;
O Gud, mig Synder naadig vær!

O Jesus, lad dit Blod, din Død
Mig redde ud af Syndens Nød,
Forstød mig ei, hjælp, at jeg maa
Retfærdiggjort ved dig faa gaa
Ned til mit Hus og glædes der;
O Gud, mig Synder naadig vær!

Before Thee, God, who knowest all,
With grief and shame I prostrate fall.
I see my sins against Thee, Lord,
The sins of thought, of deed, and word.
They press me sore; I cry to Thee:
O God, be merciful to me!

O Lord, my God, to Thee I pray:
O cast me not in wrath away.
Let Thy good Spirit ne'er depart,
But let Him draw to Thee my heart
That truly penitent I be:
O God, be merciful to me!

O Jesus, let Thy precious blood
Be to my soul a cleansing flood.
Turn not, O Lord, Thy guest away,
But grant that justified I may
Go to my house with peace from Thee:
O God, be merciful to me!

	<u>Book of Concord (1580)</u>	<u>Konkordiebogen</u>
SC	Small Catechism (1529)	Luthers lille Katekismus
LC	Large Catechism (1529)	Luthers store Katekismus
AC	Augsburg Confession (1530)	den augsburgske Bekendelse
Apol.	Apology of the Augsburg Confession (1531)	apologi for denne
SA	Smalcald Articles (1537)	schmalkaldiske Artikler
FC Epit.	Formula of Concord, Epitome (1577)	Konkordieformlen, Kort Forklaring
FC SD	Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration (1577)	Konkordieformlen, Stort Forklaring

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