

Niels Henrik Gregersen / Bengt Kristensson Ugglå / Trygve Wyller (eds.)

Reformation Theology for a Post-Secular Age: Løgstrup, Prenter, Wingren, and the Future of Scandinavian Creation Theology

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Preface

The aim of the present volume is to offer a concise and multifaceted introduction to the Scandinavian creation theology movement. International Luther scholars and systematic theologians alike will know the names K.E. Løgstrup, Regin Prenter and Gustaf Wingren, if not by having read some of their works themselves, then by having heard others talk about them. In this book, we present their distinctive theologies for an international audience, and in so doing, we hope we will have accomplished three interdependent goals.

The first aim is to offer intellectual portraits and detailed theological interpretations of the three founding figures of Scandinavian creation theology: Løgstrup, Prenter and Wingren. Here, we have focused on their individual contributions to the emergence of Scandinavian creation theology. This movement came about in the mid-twentieth century, was developed in the latter half of that century, and has continued to influence the cultural climate of Scandinavian theology since then. In their own life times, Løgstrup, Prenter, and Wingren were recognized names in Scandinavia as well as in Germany. Due to new American editions, K.E. Løgstrup and Gustaf Wingren are becoming familiar names through the English-speaking world too.

The second aim is to argue that Scandinavian creation theology offers a model for reconfiguring Reformation theology for a post-secular age. “Post-secularity,” in our interpretation, does not mean taking leave of secularity. Rather, a post-secular age is a cultural climate in which the boundaries between what is secular and what is religious have become more porous, so that secular mind-sets and religious affirmations of everyday life may co-exist both in public discourse, and at the level of individual secular-religious commitments. In the context of the 2017 commemorations of the 500 years since the Reformation, we argue that the program of Scandinavian creation theology offers a unique resource for rethinking the Reformation heritage.

Scandinavian creation theology combines seminal insights from the creation theology of Martin Luther (1483–1546) with central aspects of the so-called “Mosaic-Christian view of life” proposed by the Danish theologian N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783–1872). In contrast to Luther, Grundtvig argued that human beings never lost the positive traces of being “created in the image and likeness of God.” Accordingly, the Christian triad of faith, hope and love, can be recognized, appreciated, and to some extent also exercised by non-believers.

With his principle, “human first, then Christian,” Grundtvig argued that a broader understanding and appreciation of naturally lived human experience should be the underlying condition for the Christian way of life, serving as the horizon for understanding the Christian church, its confessions and the sacraments. Christian faith has to be lived in a humane way, in accordance with a shared sense of humanity. Thus, for proponents of Scandinavian creation theology, Grundtvig serves as the mediator and bridge-builder between a premodern Lutheranism and a contemporary secular-religious age. This combination of Luther and Grundtvig, however, does raise a set of significant theological questions. Exactly *how* is the relationship between humanity and the Christian message to be understood? To *what extent* are philosophical arguments viable within Christian theology? And, finally, how does Grundtvig’s motto, “Human first, ...” square with Luther’s principle of *simul justus et peccator*?

The third aim of the present volume is to reconsider the future of Scandinavian creation theology in the light of other contemporary Christian theological trends. In their own time, Løgstrup, Prenter, and Wingren took issue with both the expansiveness of Karl Barth’s church theology, and with Rudolf Bultmann’s more restrictive existentialist theology. We argue that Scandinavian creation theology takes a similar stance vis-à-vis the more expansionist programs of Radical Orthodoxy, and the more internalist views of what it means to be a Christian characteristic of Postliberal Theology and strands similar to it in contemporary theology. Indeed, Scandinavian creation theology stands and falls with the claim that there are shared aspects of human life that offer room for open-minded discussions of how to live the human condition alongside people of other faiths, and with people of no professed faith at all.

Scandinavian creation theology leaves ample room for common sense and common commitments, even where worldviews differ or even drift apart. Everyday life constitutes a third realm between a purely political realm, and a purely religious domain. Accordingly, the role of Christian theology is to keep open the shared horizons of human co-existence, whilst being acutely aware of the particularity of the gospel, which is likewise aimed at all people. Today, new questions challenge Scandinavian creation theology. Needless to say, Scandinavian creation theology is not interested in establishing an ethnic theology for Scandinavians. To the contrary, Scandinavian creation theology is not centered on identity politics, and is sharply critical of self-profiling attitudes within churches or other religious communities wanting to bolster themselves over and against their surrounding cultures. Put simply, we need to examine the relationship between “common sense” and the legitimate concerns expressed in the form of particular communities, where each brings their own visions of “communal sense” into the public discussions. Here, the Scandinavian program raises a new set of questions with respect to its place in the larger theological whole. For example, what are the relationships between Scandinavian creation theology and contemporary trends such as ecotheology, gender theology,

interreligious dialogue, the human rights movements, and so on? All these questions will be considered at length throughout the book.

We have many to thank for making this publication possible. The idea for the book itself came from the *Grundtvig Research Centre*, Aarhus University. In collaboration with the three editors, the Director of the *Grundtvig Research Centre*, Dr. Michael Schelde organized an explorative conference on “The Future of Scandinavian Creation Theology: Martin Luther and N.F.S. Grundtvig Revisited,” which took place at *Vartov* in the centre of Copenhagen, August 24–26, 2014. The conference hosted both the authors and other attendants, and produced a very fruitful conference, pointing forward to this publication. Our deep gratitude goes to Dr. Schelde, who has generously supported the present project, both in its initial and later phases, and both in terms of commitment and resources. Also, we gratefully acknowledge the excellent work done by Dr. Harris Wiseman, Cambridge, in improving the language for those of us who are not native English speakers. Dr. Wiseman understood our project, and was able to make our texts more fluid than they might otherwise have been. Any remaining errors lie entirely on the shoulders of the editors. We also thank the *Grundtvig Research Centre* for the permission to reprint an important chapter of A.M. Allchin, *N.F.S. Grundtvig: An Introduction to his Life and Work* (Aarhus University Press 2015), printed here as Chapter 6.

The editors also wish to thank the authors of this book for their patience and attentiveness to all our many requests during the publication process. They have provided excellent and original work, both in analyzing the situation and in their constructive proposals. Warm thanks also go to Søren Frank Jensen, student of theology, who (again) has done a very meticulous job as the copy editor of the book, also providing the book with an index.

We are grateful to the editors of the series “Research in Contemporary Religion” at Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, who have kindly included this book in the RCR series. Particularly, we thank Professor Hans-Günter Heimbrock who has been in charge of the peer review process, and who has offered substantial inputs and guidelines for the book. Finally, we thank Jörg Persch and Moritz Reissing at Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht who have served as editorial directors for the field of theology and religion.

A final practical note: All references to the works of Martin Luther are either to *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe 1–80* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus und Nachfolger), abbreviated as WA, or to *Luther’s Works 1–78* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press/Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House), abbreviated as LW.

Copenhagen–Stockholm–Oslo

September 12, 2016

Niels Henrik Gregersen, Bengt Kristensson Uggla, and Trygve Wyller

Niels Henrik Gregersen, Bengt Kristensson Uggla,
and Trygve Wyller

1. Reconfiguring Reformation Theology: The Program of Scandinavian Creation Theology

1. Introducing the Contexts and Core Topics

2017 marks the passing of 500 years since the Reformation. We find ourselves in a new and radically changed theological landscape as compared to the early years of the Reformation. At that time, the reformers accused the Roman church of sidelining the gospel of grace by faith alone while burdening ordinary Christians with over-complex ecclesiastical regulations. Instead of a common Christian faith founded on grace alone, and a theology interested in caring for the universal aspects of society, the reformers found in the religious situation of their day a narcissistic faith, and a theology focused, above all, on maintaining the hegemony of church rule. Today, the situation is different. For example, the present Pope, Pope Francis, is widely respected for addressing the concerns of all people, such as the global spread of poverty, structures of injustice, migration and climate change. During the time of the Reformation, by contrast, it was the reformers that were proclaiming, against the papacy, that theology had to take leave of the “prisons of Babylon” by attending to the core concerns of Christian faith, whilst tackling the important issues related to ordinary social life.

The central thrust of the present book concerns the argument that any reliable contemporary Reformation theology needs to leave its own Babylon, so to speak, and to enjoy a this-worldly engagement in God’s creation with the best conscience. There is no need for theology to “Christianize” the world. The world is already God’s creation, a reality which should be cared for and enjoyed, for its own sake, by believers and non-believers alike. Thus, if salvation is taken to mean becoming human again, then there can be no sharp opposition between a commitment to the Christian faith, on the one hand, and our embeddedness in the world together with other living creatures, on the other.

Arguments and theological thinking in favor of an affirmation of everyday life are to be considered as distinct contributions of Scandinavian creation theology. Beginning in the 1940s, Lutheran theologians such as K.E. Løgstrup (1905–1981), Regin Prenter (1907–1990), and Gustaf Wingren (1910–2000), criticized both Pietists and Barthians for neglecting the theological significance of creation, whilst arguing, in contrast, that the necessary horizon for understanding the gospel is the human condition shared by all. They fiercely

opposed all theological conceptions of Christian faith that did not take seriously the intrinsic value of the world of creation (often decrying such theologies as Gnostic).

As such, contemporary Reformation theology is confronted with a challenge: how is it possible to proclaim, on the one hand, that embodied existence does not need to be Christianized, whilst simultaneously holding to the basic insights of *sola gratia* and *solo Christo*? The founding figures of Scandinavian creation theology (Løgstrup, Prenter, and Wingren) were convinced that this challenge should be confronted in a manner that preserves both the specific message of the gospel, and the universal horizon of Christian faith. The relation between gospel and creation is not to be comprehended as a zero-sum game. Rather, the particularity of the gospel and the universal aspects of creation are to be seen as interlinked, and are to be mutually defined with respect to each other.

For this reason, we find it appropriate, and important also, to present the program of Scandinavian creation theology as integral to the body of theological reflection on the future shape of reformation theology in commemorating the Reformation's 500 years. Indeed, we are convinced that the impulses from this original interpretation of the Christian faith, developed in a Lutheran context in Scandinavia during half a decennium starting from the 1940s, can still inspire and provide resources for a more courageous Reformation theology in the present. In times of religious fragmentation, there is a strong tendency to neglect and distrust the universality of God's presence in the world of creation, hidden though it may be. Accordingly, there is a tendency to withdraw into spiritual catacombs, focusing solely on what is distinctively Christian, and how that contrasts to a society alien to it. In this situation, a theology of creation, developed through rigorous critical reflection, is very much needed, and today more than ever. The Scandinavian creation theologians claimed that the world is not a strange and alien place—this world is God's own creation, and it is our home.

The program of Scandinavian creation theology involves more than a naive call for an additive theology, as if to merely say: "we need more creation." Nor does it represent a creation theology linked to a theology of the orders of creation, nor even linked to the idea of particular divine revelations given to particular people (as in the Third Reich). Rather, the Scandinavian critique of the theologies of their day concerned the very core of Christian theology, and articulated itself through the following question: is the language and practice of theology concerned with the Christian church only—or is the theological understanding of the gospel inextricably intertwined with the life worlds and experiences of all human beings? Scandinavian creation theology takes the latter perspective by claiming that a theological interpretation of our lives, as part of a shared humanity in God's creation, is to be considered a prerequisite for any interpretation of the Christian faith, and thus for any viable Reformation theology. Løgstrup, Prenter, and Wingren found this concern

to be at the very heart of Martin Luther's understanding of the Christian faith, and all three of them were inspired by the Danish theologian N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872), who was the creative mediator of this interpretation of Luther.

2. Religion in a Post-Secular Age

In the 21st century, there seems to be a fairly general agreement about a change in the cultural climate often referred to as “the new visibility of religion,” or the “return of religion,” also known as “the re-emergence model.” From the perspective of Scandinavian creation theology, this return is a rather ambiguous return. Too often, the word “return” indicates a disregard for the present world, implying that the world should be “more” Christian, “more” Muslim, “more” spiritual, and so on. This is a negative interpretation of what the return of religion indicates, one based on a world-denying attitude. Within the framework of Christian theology, Scandinavian creation theology represents an early model for how to cope with religion and theology as public phenomena, whilst being oriented within a more world-affirmative approach. Or, to remain within the discourse of the Reformation: the return of religion should be interpreted as a rediscovery of the aspects of faith, hope, and love inherent in all life, regardless of whether they belong to a religious sector, or not. Thus, according to this interpretation, the return of religion may be considered as proffering a new assessment of the relationship between religion and the public realm, based in the recognition of shared aspects of humanity.

We see this tendency in the recent debates surrounding the post-secular. Just as the concept “secular” is ambiguous, so too is the term post-secular. And, in his critical review of this concept, sociologist of religion James A. Beckford has rightly pointed out that the term is used in different ways throughout the relevant literature, ranging from an outright denial of secularization processes, to views recognizing the post-secular as a phenomenon built upon a previous process of secularization. Likewise, the post-secular can be used as an analytic concept referring to the re-enchantment of culture and to the resurgence of religion in the public realm, or as a philosophical interpretation of larger societal trends (Beckford 2012).¹ In the present book, the term post-secular is used to indicate a socio-cultural condition, in which strong secular sectors continue to exist and thrive (state, economy, law, etc.), and in which a secular attitude to many aspects of human

1 Beckford points to six different uses of the term “post-secular”: (1) The post-secular as denying or doubting secularization, (2) post-secularity as building upon the secular, (3) post-secularity as referring to a re-enchantment of culture, (4) and to the public resurgence of religion, (5) post-secularity as referring to the fact that religion re-enters the public sphere, while the state itself remains secular (Habermas), and (6) those who deny that the term post-secular is of any use at all.

life is prevailing, whilst, at the same time, the boundaries between what is secular and what is religious are becoming more porous (especially in public discussions of the values and norms of society, as well as in institutional settings such as governmentally recognized faith-based organizations). In the shared citizenship of (post)secular societies, discussions on what matters in human life do not always presuppose a clear wedge between the secular and the religious. What is of particular interest to Scandinavian creation theology is the awareness of the way in which the secular and the religious are interlaced and overlapping both historically and in everyday life. When carrying and giving birth to a child, for example, taking advice from “secular” medical doctors and other caretakers is interlaced with the “ethical” caring for this particular child as a divine gift, appreciated as part of the larger framework of creation, and received in a “religious” gratitude to God as creator and sustainer of life. In practical life, therefore, these perspectives are overlapping and intertwined, and not to be seen as a “paradoxical unity,” as claimed by the existentialist theologian Rudolf Bultmann and other modernist theologians.

Discussion of the post-secular has been prompted not least by the social philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who has developed new, and less rigid, positions on religion and the secular over the last ten years.² Habermas continues to develop these positions, and when he claims, for example, that religious people can participate in public discourse only by translating their specific language into the common discourse of everyone (2007, 114ff), we can see that he is tacitly presupposing that ordinary language, and the sense of a shared life world, are located outside the area of God. Furthermore, he insists on a prior division between religious and secular people, whilst not realizing that one and the same person may be both religious and secular. Indeed, these two categories may not only co-exist, but often presuppose each other. The “secular” is itself to be considered as a theological construct, a phenomenon produced by late modern religion itself.³

According to Scandinavian creation theology, Christians are not to be considered as aliens in the world, nor as pilgrims on their way to another world—and they do not move into a foreign land when speaking the common language of everyone. The world is God’s creation. This is where God has placed us and wants us to be. To live an ordinary human life among other living creatures involves participating in God’s life. Thus, when we speak in religious terms, we use one kind of the God-language dialect, and when speaking in secular terms, we use another. Habermas seems to be on the right track. In accordance with his own German Lutheran tradition, he has re-opened the discussion regarding the public and everyday life, and he considers religion more seriously now than he did in his earlier work, where religion was

2 A helpful overview can be found in Jürgen Habermas’ “Notes on Post-Secular Society” (2008).

3 See R. van den Breemer, J. Casanova J., and T. Wyller (eds.), *Secular and Sacred? The Scandinavian Case of Religion, Human Rights and Space* (2014).

relegated to questions about how to cope with existential contingencies. In this way, he is quite close to the core commitments of Scandinavian creation theology, and acts with a similar ambition as the founding figures of this theological tradition.

The same might be said about Charles Taylor (2007), when he invites religious people to rediscover the hidden spirituality of everyday life. Considering this appeal, Scandinavian creation theologians may respond: “We fully agree, and this is what we have tried to do for a long time!” In the old Lutheran dialect, this is what the *larvae dei* (the masks of God) has always pointed towards: the idea of God acting in the ordinary life shared by all in, between, and behind the face of other human persons. Taylor’s arguments very much echo those made by Scandinavian creation theologians. There is more to divine presence in life, and more life in the world, than a pure atheism or a pure secularism would admit. Accordingly, Taylor criticizes what he calls “the subtraction theory” (Taylor 2007, 26–29), which comes out of the claim of some sociologists that, for example, Scandinavian countries are among the most secular on the globe (in terms of the actual numbers of persons practicing religion), just because few people are regular churchgoers, and few also present themselves as traditional confessors when asked by one-sided polls. Scandinavian creation theology would reject the subtraction theory with similar reflections citing the divine presence in life, but with a stronger theological commitment.

From the perspective of Scandinavian creation theology, the human condition in relation to God is not only a question of available resources for language, personal faith, or personal spirituality, but is the common realm in which God relates and connects to human beings, nature and the social realm. The facts that human beings are living in relations of meaning; and that God creates, sustains, and transforms the world; are to be considered as two sides of the same coin. Yet, Scandinavian creation theology has also elaborated extensively a paradoxical interpretation of life, one that also includes negative life experiences of suffering and loss of meaning, guilt and death, as exemplified in Gustaf Wingren’s “grain of wheat” theology (see Chapter 3).

In this way, Scandinavian creation theology reconfirms basic aspects of Reformation theology. The world outside the churches is not God-less. The world is God-given and imbued with a divine presence, therefore it is religiously valid to approach it from a secular perspective, and one is free to do so. This leads to a reflection on how contemporary religiosity is closely linked to the human awareness of meaning (as well as meaninglessness), and to an inter-human connectedness in a life of creation shared with others. As such, there have always been important connections between phenomenology and Scandinavian creation theology. The social connectedness of all life features centrally in the social phenomenology of Alfred Schütz, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Paul Ricoeur, too.

This affirmation of the secular represents a common ground for Løgstrup and Wingren. Løgstrup famously argued that the mutual ethical responsibility inherent in the everyday life world entails an understanding of life as a gift. Helping the neighbor is not part of a barter deal, in which the helper is to be reciprocated by the helped. The same view is also present in Wingren's theological focus on becoming human again, as a joint process for God as well as humans. According to his investigations of Luther, every human being lives in relations of vocation (*vocatio*), a calling that is present in the workshops, in family life, and is true for neighbors as well as among farmers, sailors, and miners. According to this understanding of Reformation theology, to be called from the silent needs of the other, and the way God reaches out to all people behind the masks of other human persons, are to be considered as two dimensions of one and the same reality.

Of course, this theme of creation theology connects Christian faith with other world religions, and offers an important bridge-building concept for inter-religious dialogue as well. Grundtvig, for example, had already spoken of the "Mosaic-Christian" view of life as common to Judaism and Christianity. Also, he identified deep-seated similarities between Christianity, the old Norse religion, and Hinduism, based on a shared understanding of humanity as an "experiment of dust and spirit" created by God within the wider context of a world likewise created, maintained, and continuously transformed by the Spirit of God.

In the religious context of the present day, it should also be noted that creation faith is a religious commitment shared by Muslims and Christians alike. Here, Scandinavian creation theology may offer a fertile framework for Muslim-Christian dialogues that do not bypass the fact that such dialogue takes place between religiously committed proponents of distinct and distinctive faith traditions—proponents who meet one another, as such, with the understanding that their dialogue partner is a religious Other, whilst at the same time sharing seminal viewpoints concerning the relation between God the creator and the multifarious forms of the world of creation (see Chapter 13). At the same time, such dialogue would presuppose a common acknowledgment of the fact that no Christian is merely Christian, and no Muslim is merely Muslim. Religious communities are always culturally conditioned, just as human persons have multiple identities. Scandinavian creation theology may bring in perspectives of relevance for prospering such interreligious dialogue. The first is the concept of the ethical demand to help others, which (as argued by Løgstrup) is not restricted to the persons with whom we happen to agree with in religious and societal matters. A second avenue for common discussion is the notion of vocation (developed by Wingren), which points beyond the individual sphere towards the social context, in which there are common tasks to be dealt with, say, in the work market, or in the education of citizens. Here, "universal features" of belonging to a common humanity come to the fore, though the ethical demand and the

sense of vocation is always refracted by present-day social conditions, and the values and norms that religious proponents bring into the common discussion (see Chapter 2). Interestingly, the issue of secularity faces important challenges when Islam becomes part of the discussion, and this needs to be addressed by Scandinavian creation theology. The anthropologist Talal Asad (2003) has claimed that the whole concept of the secular is a Western concept in the sense that Western scholars tend to view the Orient as strange because it is not thoroughly secular. There is much to learn from these discussions. By its non-binary view of the secular-sacred distinction, Scandinavian creation theology may strike a middle chord between an aggressive secularism (following the French model of *laïcité*), and the tendency in particular strands of contemporary Islam that work for a reconstruction of a classical binary position by arguing that all social institutions should be shaped with an emphatic Islamic profile. How to develop a non-binary view of the secular/sacred distinction in this context remains one of the future challenges for a Reformation theology shaped by Scandinavian creation theology.

3. Reformation theology, the welfare state, and political critique

This non-binary approach to the secular/sacred distinction also impacts what we would today call political theology. The catastrophe of the German theology of the orders of creation (*Ordnungstheologie*) of the 1930s and 1940s was never part of the Scandinavian experience. In post-World War II Scandinavia, the possibility of developing a non-Christocentric theology of the political realm remained open, and also in the 1960s, when theological radicalism often took a strong Christocentric strand. None of the three leading figures were involved in any kind of political activism (the late Wingren being an exception, but this was not the case before he retired from the university), and they took divergent political positions in response to their contemporary political landscape. In the setting of the discussions in the Western European context, formed by the dialectical theology of the 1920s and 1930s, Scandinavian creation theology appeared to many German theologians as a strange cousin. The main project of their theology was neither to Christianize nor to “churchify” the world. The responsibility of theology was considered to be part of the common public discourse and practice in order to improve society, as one among many partners, motivated by the conviction that creation and law point to realities shared by all human beings.

Taking a longer historical perspective, Scandinavian creation theology must be viewed as an interpretation of the Christian view of faith and life, which originates from almost five hundred years of continued Lutheranism in the Scandinavian countries. Considering the Reformation from a political

point of view, one can hardly overestimate the impact coming from the shift of political power from the ecclesial to the monarchical, especially in the kingdom of Denmark-Norway. It is possible to acknowledge the Reformation as a theologically motivated secularization process, where a wide spectrum of operations were gradually separated from the church and yet still comprehended as part of God's work and life.

Martin Luther's Wittenberger colleagues, such as Johannes Bugenhagen, travelled to all cities and nations that wanted to be part of the Reformation by forming so-called Church Ordinances. These ordinances dealt with social, educational, and political issues no less than with issues of faith. Hereby, religious and societal questions belonged to the same theological discourse, thus avoiding standard dichotomies between the religious and the secular. The tasks of a genuinely Lutheran-evangelical church could not be fulfilled apart from the political context. And the opposite was true also: the political did not have an independent status, but was part of a non-binary theology.

This historical context may, in part, explain why it is not convincing to pursue the secular/sacred binary in the context of Reformation theology. The non-binary is thus an important part of Scandinavian creation theology, but the roots of its basic concerns originate into the first years of the Reformation itself. One of the core elements in the Lutheran tradition is the teaching on the two Kingdoms of God (*Zweireiche-Lehre*). God reigns in both these areas, the spiritual/ecclesial and the terrestrial/political. In the ecclesial realm, the gospel is offered to the believers, in the terrestrial/political sphere we have a political sense of justice and order (*usus politicus legis*), which is open for all and everyone, since it is based on considerations of fairness and natural law (*lex naturalis*). Certainly, this view may have paved the road to secularism by disconnecting the spiritual/ecclesial and the terrestrial sectors. However, an ideological secularism (presupposing that it is only secular in nature), differs from a positive view of secularity, which uses human resources to deal with ethical reasoning.

Over the last decades, however, prominent Luther scholars have presented a more nuanced picture than the dichotomy of the secular versus the religious (Honecker 1999, Bayer 2007). Honecker argues, for example, that the so called *Ständelehre*, the teaching of the three estates (*status economicus, politicus, ecclesiasticus*), was more prominent in Reformation times than was the teaching of the two kingdoms. The social doctrine of the three estates was aimed at distinguishing between the ecclesial and the non-ecclesial parts of human social life, such as family and education. In this manner, the political and the civil realms are not disconnected from the Christian message of love. As stated in the Augsburg Confession Article 16, "In the meantime the gospel does not overthrow secular government, public order, and marriage but instead intends that a person keep all this as a true order of God and demonstrate in these walks of life Christian love and true good works according to each person's calling" (Kolb and Wengert 2000, 49–50).

According to Luther, the political and the civil are considered as two areas of God's creation, but they are always mediated by the third space of the civil realm of everyday life, or the "household" (*oikonomia*, or *status economicus*). This civil realm contains the universal aspect of Christianity, to use Løgstrup's terminology. The care for creation and the love of God is part of all these three life orders. To describe two of them (the worldly government and the household) as being purely secular, or rather, as God-less, is not accurate, and fails to adequately describe the intentions of the Reformers. In the program of Scandinavian creation theology we find elaborated an argument for a strong and affirmative view of everyday life as the third space of society, mediating between the political government and the particular life of the church.

4. An Alternative Program for a Reformation Theology for the 21st Century

Due to their interest being focused on what it means to be human, the founding figures of Scandinavian creation theology have sometimes been critically termed "humanists." Moreover, Scandinavian creation theology has also been accused of being just another kind of "liberal theology," due to their critical stance towards Barthian theology. Others regard them as "conservatives," due to their focus on creation and their "orthodox" interest in traditional theological issues. How can we, from this variety of opinions, determine the genuine and distinctive status of Scandinavian creation theology?

In order to understand the historical preconditions for the founding figures, we need to remind ourselves that Scandinavian creation theology emerged in the context of the breakdown of the grand liberal theological paradigm of the 19th century. This was concurrent with the breakdown of the foundations of modern humanism. In this sense, the general conditions for doing theology during the last century may be termed "post-liberal" (in the broad sense of this term).

In contemporary theology, we find new attempts to respond to this state of affairs in those various theologies profiling the Christian faith and church in opposition to its surrounding cultures. In the wake of Karl Barth, the emergence of theological schools such as postliberal theology (Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, Stanley Hauerwas, and others), and radical orthodoxy (John Millbank, Graham Ward, Catherine Pickstock, and others). This has, in many ways, aggravated the anthropological deficit of contemporary theology, and exacerbated the risk of losing sight of human concerns that are shared, more or less, by all people, regardless of their particular stance vis-à-vis the Christian tradition. We claim that the self-profiling attitude in postliberal theologies (in

the narrower sense of the term) makes it difficult for theology to become partners with other seekers of truth and justice in contemporary societies, and unnecessarily so. In this context, Scandinavian creation theology constitutes an attempt to talk about a shared citizenship in communication with other believers as well as unbelievers. In a post liberal and post-humanist context, Scandinavian creation theology promotes a kind of humanism of the other person, elaborating on what it means to be human from a decentered self, attentive to the other person.⁴ In Reformation theology, the experience of the gospel as a liberating message of joy from an external Word of God “outside myself” is inextricably connected to the interpretation of life as a gift, and to the universal aspects of the law, understood as a radical calling from the other. In this view, all the most important things are located outside myself, and all human effort is founded in a gift. In this sense, Scandinavian creation theology opens up the possibility of a theology on post-secular conditions. Yet, in contrast to (American) postliberals and (British) radical orthodox theologians, this theological enterprise offers an alternative strategy to cope with the post-secular conditions of theology by resisting a separation from the society, and claiming never to speak ill about the human life that we all share. The founding figures, for example, speak of the vulnerability of the other person in terms of an experience of holding “something of the other’s life in my hand” (Løgstrup). Accordingly, salvation is interpreted as “regeneration” (Prenter), or in terms of “becoming human again” (Wingren).

5. What does it mean to say that there are universal aspects of creation?

It should go without saying that the search for universality cannot fit together with any claim that creation theology is an “ethnic” theology particular to Scandinavians. Indeed, from the perspective of Scandinavian creation theology, there can only be a secondary interest in promoting any particular “identity theology.” Certainly, all human beings come from different cultural and linguistic horizons. We belong to a particular country (or combinations thereof); each of us has a particular sexual orientation (or combinations thereof). Likewise, human beings pursue particular goals and identities (or combinations thereof), and they do so in allegiance to, or against, inherited norms and values. All this being so, according to the three founding figures, there are also shared aspects of human existence, and these need to be taken seriously.

⁴ In this respect, there are similarities between Scandinavian creation theology and the ethical phenomenology of Emmanuel Lévinas, *Humanism of the Other* (2003). See also Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (1993).

Yet, just as Scandinavian creation theologians are not interested in describing Scandinavia in particular, they are not interested only in generic features of humanity either. Rather, their theological concern is the shared conditions of human life. We are all born, and we will all die. We all need food for nourishment, and the company of others. Though there are unfortunate exceptions, parents do care for their children, and all children continue to play, wherever they can. Likewise, teenagers and grown-ups alike continue to long for recognition, and prefer to be welcomed rather than to be expelled. Human beings—of whatever religious or non-religious orientation—know about the pains of being ashamed and being found guilty, even if cultural codes differ. Likewise all grown-ups confronting labor markets know the social in-fighting for power, influence, and status, regardless of what counts as status. We are all embodied persons, even if our bodies look different. We always live together with other persons, who appeal to us for help, and whom we ourselves seek help from.

According to Scandinavian creation theology, we always live in networks of deep interdependence. Therefore, we also know what it means to transgress the “zone of inviolability” (Løgstrup) of another person (and to our own violations too). We share the same planet, and therefore unavoidably live at the expense of other life-forms, and repeatedly do so at the expense of others. These are universal aspects of all human life, and these aspects are religiously significant in their own right even though these phenomena have a secular status. On the prior assumption that God is present in the multifarious world of creation, there is no need necessarily to translate common concerns into a highly loaded religious language. Paradoxically, any forced religious language leads to the emptying of the religious importance of such shared terms, because the importance is connected to the everyday expressions of experienced meaning.

6. What, then, is Scandinavian Creation Theology?

Let us now review the principal resources of Scandinavian creation theology: the roots in Martin Luther; the mediation of these thoughts through N.F.S Grundtvig; and the main representatives of this tradition in 20th century Scandinavian theology: K.E. Løgstrup, Regin Prenter, and Gustaf Wingren.

Scandinavian creation theologians hold the view that the doctrine of creation is not just another theological locus to be followed by other loci, such as justification and fulfillment. Rather, creation constitutes the universal horizon for any Christian theologizing regarding Christ and church, baptism and salvation. For this reason, Scandinavian creation theologians are sometimes polemically (and wrongly) called “first-article theologians”—even though none of them have ever argued that Christian thinking is about the first

article only. Their main driving force was to contribute to what they thought to be the core issue of Christian faith from a Reformation perspective. That is, bringing theology and faith out of its “Babylonian imprisonment,” while recognizing the full impact of what the reformers once called the priesthood of all believers. Salvation means becoming human again, and not becoming something more than or different from being human. This view reflects the strong influence from the theology of Irenaeus that can be discerned in this Scandinavian branch of Reformation theology.

As such, Reformation theology aspires towards carrying out a re-conquest of the body, of neighborhoods, and of social commitments, interpreted as spaces where God’s action is inherently present—even if traditional religious discourse is absent. When the reformers proclaimed *sola fide* and *sola gratia* in relation to God, one could say, metaphorically, that the Scandinavian creation theologians walk the same road, but adding “sola everyday” and “sola vocation” in worldly affairs. Even before encountering the grace of God in the Word and forgiveness of sins, God is already present in the gift of life and in the vocation to human coexistence. In this view, you don’t go to church in order to meet God for the first time, but to be released, forgiven and restored as a human being among other human beings.

For this reason, there is no contradiction in the idea that the founding figures of Scandinavian creation theology also considered themselves to be kerygmatic theologians. Following the common pathways of the kerygmatic theology of their day, they emphasized that the preaching of the gospel inevitably goes beyond human experience and expectation, but insisted that even in the world of creation God continues to contravene the painful experiences of death and evil. Faith concerns what cannot be seen by the naked eye, while recognizing the intrinsic value of any human experience of overcoming evil, if only sporadically. Similarly, the tension between the beautiful, but also cruel, world of creation and the kingdom of God cannot be overcome by pure speculation. No easy mediation is possible here. Accordingly, a profound theology of creation does not mean being committed to a program of natural theology in the sense of offering intellectual proofs for the existence and the nature of God. Both Prenter and Wingren were fully-fledged systematic theologians and unwavering as trinitarian thinkers. Working dialectically with the fundamental Lutheran distinction between law and gospel, they both emphasized that creation does not only speak of law, just as the preaching of the gospel story of Jesus does not concern eternal salvation only. Instead, what is temporal and what is spiritual are entangled in one another. Neither can be reduced to the other. There is indeed, as argued by Prenter in his dogmatics, *Creation and Redemption* (1967), a gospel of divine benevolence in the midst of the ambivalent world of creation (Prenter 1967, 208–216). But also hardship, injustice, and guilt are inevitable parts of the human condition. Therefore, the preaching of the gospel is necessary to elicit faith and trust in God’s love, and to restore God’s creation.

Moreover, the gospel has something to say about what it means to live together in everyday life. Accordingly, law and gospel are not two different domains, and neither are creation and new creation. As pointed out by Wingren: “The life which Christ gives to the world through His victory (Rom 5:15.17) is the life which Adam lost (Gen 2:17; 3:7–9)” (Wingren 1958/1961, 34–35). Here, it should become obvious that our relationship to God is not something that starts when we enter the church or a presumed religious territory, but a reality always already given in and with life itself, which can only be lived in fellowship with God:

To live means to receive life from outside oneself. As soon as we are cut off from these external sources, life is extinguished. The resurrection life is the receiving of life from an external source, from which even now in faith man draws his sustenance. But the same thing holds good even now of the bodily life, and not just that of believers, but of all bodily life (Wingren 1958/1961, 18).

In contrast to Prenter and Wingren, Løgstrup was an ethicist and philosopher of religion, who never used trinitarian language, and generally eschewed any reference to inherited doctrinal categories. Working as a phenomenological philosopher, he appears to be the most secular of the three founding figures, arguing that the ethical demand, expressed in the religious teaching of Jesus, can be given “a definition in strictly human terms” (Løgstrup 1997, 1). This view, set forward in *The Ethical Demand* (in Danish 1956), also influenced Wingren and contributed to a demythologization and secularization of his own “later” systematic theology (Wingren 1974/1981). Human ethics are neither a social construction nor dependent on religious values, but are founded in the experience of the call from the other as a given reality. Thus, the ethical demand is based on the prior fact that human beings are social beings that always live in asymmetrical relations of interdependence. Hence, we are called to take care of what is laid in our hands by vulnerable other persons.

Løgstrup, however, increasingly came to emphasize the need for a religious interpretation of everyday life. As such, he followed a double track in his theological thinking. In a response to Prenter, he pointed to the two tasks for theology in a secular age. First, we have the task of translating the central concerns of the Christian message into a proto-religious language. Second, we have the task of explicating the contents of Christian beliefs within an understanding of human existence that makes a religious interpretation of reality a live option, a reasonable decision of faith (Løgstrup 1963, 165). In his later work, especially in *Creation and Annihilation* from 1978 (Løgstrup 1995, vol. 1), Løgstrup even argued that a religious interpretation of reality is a preferable option to a nihilistic view that understands social existence merely as a social construction of reality.

Obviously, there are differences in style and the modes of reasoning used by these three founding figures of Scandinavian creation theology. Nonetheless, Løgstrup, Prenter, and Wingren were all distinctly Lutheran theologians.

Løgstrup continuously taught Luther's social ethics, and Luther features prominently in his philosophical work too. Prenter and Wingren were internationally well-known Luther scholars. Wingren's *Luthers lära om kallelsten* written in 1942 (published in four editions, the latest in 1993), was translated into English as *Luther on Vocation* (1957), but also appeared in German and Finnish. Prenter's *Spiritus Creator* from 1944 was subsequently translated into German, English, and Japanese. Both doctoral dissertations dealt with Luther's creation theology from a historical and textual perspective. Yet, soon it became clear that Wingren and Prenter did not study Luther's theology for solely historical reasons, but used his texts to present a theology that could speak to their contemporaries too.

In Scandinavia, the general expectation for theologians has been, and remains, that theology should be able to mediate between the living Christian tradition of the church and the contemporary culture in all its facets: philosophy, arts, political and natural. Thus, theology is expected to have relevance for both believers and sceptics, the sceptics often designated as "cultural Christians." This model presupposes what may be termed a "loose coupling" between theology and church, but it also presupposes an ecclesiology characterized by openness and inclusiveness. In Scandinavia, no institutional or confessional ties are placed on theologians working at theological faculties. Yet, one must take seriously the facts that Christianity is a lived religion (in which the majority of the population contribute financially to the Lutheran majority churches), and that academic theologians learn and teach in countries with a high degree of cultural belonging, a lower degree of believing (ca. 40–50 %), and an even lower degree of practicing (in Denmark, about 2–3 % go to church on Sundays).⁵

This pattern is no doubt specific to Scandinavian countries. The particular Scandinavian context of national churches, the so-called folk churches, has provided "the context of discovery," to use Karl Popper's term, for Scandinavian creation theology. But in no way does this particular Scandinavian context provide the "context of justification" for developing the concerns of a creation theology for today. The epithet "Scandinavian" should therefore not be seen as a geographical orientation, but rather as an indication of the importance of a mediation of the Lutheran heritage (via Grundtvig) and the variety of perspectives among the founding figures—thus, as a starting-point for moving forward in terms of developing new means for re-contextualizing the core matters.

5 From January 1, 2016, between 63.2 % (Sweden) and 76.9 % (Denmark) of the respective populations were tax-paying members of the Lutheran majority churches.

7. The Influence from Martin Luther's Theology of Creation

There can be no doubt that the topos of what the Reformers called “the doctrine of the justification by faith alone” expresses a central tenet of Martin Luther's theology, and the other Reformers too. What recent historical scholarship has shown, however, is that Martin Luther's early theology was not only about finding a new “doctrine” of divine justice for the justification of the sinner, but also a new emphasis on what it means to be a Christian in terms of spiritual and social life. Luther began his reform of the church with a call to penitence. He soon gained the insight, however, that penitence is not something to be exercised only in the secluded lives of monks and nuns, but rather it is to be done through the variety of callings given in everyday life. As Luther asserted in the very first of his *Explanations of the Ninety Five Theses* on indulgence from October 31, 1517: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” [Matt. 4:17], he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” A Christian is one called by the Word of the gospel, but a Christian is also one called to live an everyday life in God's grand world of creation.

The grandeur of the universe is only one aspect of Luther's creation theology. Similarly important is the life world of human beings, filled, as it is, with reciprocal ties and obligations to other human beings (and non-human creatures). To be a human means to belong to God's own world, being sensitive to the needs of other people in God's creation, whilst also discovering other persons as “masks” (*larvae*) of divine callings. This insight is much more than being raw material for moral or religious speculation. In brief, the world of creation is a divine gift and a constant source of surprise—it is not just something only given as “out there.”

Every Reformation scholar knows about the central place of creation in the theology of Martin Luther. For him, creation was not primarily a question of the remote beginnings of the universe, nor about maintaining a status quo in the social order. Indeed, for Luther the vast universe is created by God from its beginnings, and society is constituted as a living network of creatures to be guarded from the chaos of selfishness, and continuously maintained and upheld. But at its deepest level, creation is taking place at every moment, and is much more about newness than maintenance: *creare est semper novum facere*—to create is always to make something new (WA 1, 563).

Moreover, since God is creatively present in this world of creation, God is continuously addressing his creatures and Luther termed his creatures “words of God.” In his *Lectures on Genesis*, Luther states this point very clearly. God does not speak grammatical words like professors, pastors and other speakers do. God is rather speaking with sounds of silence so that eventually new beings and relations come forth: “sun, moon, heaven, earth, Peter, Paul, I, you etc.—we are all words of God, in fact only a single syllable or letter by comparison with the entire creation” (LW 1,22–23; WA 42, 17).