

## “Christian Identity in a Secular Age: Charles Taylor and Martin Luther on the Authenticity of the Self in Society”

By Joshua Hollmann

“Midway in the journey of our life I found myself in a dark wood.”<sup>1</sup> So begins arguably the greatest midlife crisis of all time: Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. Dante journeys to hell and back to find his identity. Dante remains nameless throughout much of his quest. He is only nominally identified at the end of purgatory. In the dialectic and radiating pull of love he is named by another: Beatrice, his muse and meditator.<sup>2</sup> The nameless Dante represents every person. The named Dante represents the need for human community. “Identity” derives from the Latin for sameness.<sup>3</sup> Dante is the same as us, in need of identity in community. The humanities tie together (human+ties) the universal search for finding one’s self and one’s place in the cosmos.<sup>4</sup> Yet Dante’s world often seems far removed from our own. I teach Dante to students today who often have a difficult time comprehending why Dante begins his masterwork with “in the journey of *our* life.” It is his life, not mine, they respond. My life is mine alone.

We meet Don Draper *in medias res* in season one of the television series *Mad Men*.<sup>5</sup> He is lost in an enigma: an expressive individual making his way through the turbulent 1960s, a self-made advertising guru.<sup>6</sup> Seven seasons unfold Don Draper’s search for who he really is. Identity no longer articulates human sameness. Instead Don Draper’s identity remains perpetually enigmatic and extremely personal. He pitches: “what you call love was invented by guys like me to sell nylons.”<sup>7</sup> The series ends with Don Draper finding himself through the material sameness of Coca Cola, the commercial: “I’d like to buy the world a home and furnish it with love; I’d like to buy the world a coke and keep it company. It’s the real thing.”<sup>8</sup>

I teach theology through encountering Dante and Don Draper. Both frame conceptualizations of human identity or understanding ourselves and our place in the world: Dante and Beatrice as the Platonic ideal of the beautiful and the corporate desire of higher-ordered love, and Don Draper as commodity of consumption and lower level materialism. The former eventually sees God as mirror, the latter sees self as marketing, from *imago Dei* to

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<sup>1</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, Canto I, *The Divine Comedy, Inferno, Italian Text and Translation*, trans. Charles S. Singleton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 2–3.

<sup>2</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, Canto XXX, *The Divine Comedy, Purgatorio, Italian Text and Translation*, trans. Charles S. Singleton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 330–1.

<sup>3</sup> For an etymological and epistemological overview of identity, see Marcel Mauss, “A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person, the Notion of Self” in *Identity: A Reader*, ed. Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans, and Peter Redman (London: Sage, 2000), 325–45.

<sup>4</sup> I am thankful to Rev. Dr. John Nunes, President of Concordia College-New York, for this observation.

<sup>5</sup> On Don Draper’s search for identity in *Mad Men*, see Ada S. Jaarsma, “An Existential Look at *Mad Men*: Don Draper Advertising, and the Promise of Happiness” in *Mad Men and Philosophy: Nothing Is as It Seems*, ed. Rod Carveth and James B. South (Hoboken: Wiley, 2010), 95–109, and John Elia, “Don Draper, on How to Make Oneself” in *Mad Men and Philosophy*, 168–85. For an in-depth overview of the series, see Matt Zoller Seitz, *Mad Men Carousel: The Complete Critical Companion* (New York: Abrams, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> The title of season 1, episode 1 is “Smoke gets in your eyes,” a televised take on smoke and mirrors, illusions and delusions, mass-produced *personas* (masks) and the nakedness of materialism.

<sup>7</sup> *Mad Men*, season 1, episode 1, written by Matthew Weiner.

<sup>8</sup> *Mad Men*, season 7, episode 14, “Person to Person.” For background and credits on the commercial, see Seitz, *Mad Men Carousel*, 418.

Instagram. Dante and Don Draper explicate extreme cases of identity crises. Yet their searches for self arise from the same Western intellectual ethos: Don Draper actually reads Dante’s *Divine Comedy* in season six of *Mad Men*. To put it in terms of contemporary Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, Dante and Don Draper search for self in relation to moral visions of the good.<sup>9</sup> The frameworks for this search have shifted: from transcendent and enchanted to disenchanting and imminent. Yet, the search for finding one’s self and one’s place in the world continues. What we identify as good has evolved from without to within, yet there remains even in the callous Don Draper an endearing desire for fullness and for what Taylor calls “human flourishing.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed for Taylor, “A secular age is one in which the eclipse of all goals beyond human flourishing becomes conceivable.”<sup>11</sup> While our materialistic, secular age obscures transcendent human flourishing, the impulse to find meaning beyond the here and now endures.

Secularism literally means pertaining to a generation or age.<sup>12</sup> Secularism is focused on the temporal. Taylor’s grand project in *A Secular Age* is to understand secularism in direct relation to the past. Temporal limitations on contextualizing secularism are constructs of negation and deconstructions of past moral visions and affirmations of ordinary life that nonetheless still stubbornly stand in many and various ways. According to Taylor, secularism does not arise from theories of negation: simply subtract God, etc., but rather secularism develops with the fullness of the linger and languor of religion and spirituality and parallels the making of the modern identity.<sup>13</sup> There remains in the contemporary identity a search for fullness and human flourishing. Pascal writes of this fullness when he expresses, “the heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing.” This same search for fullness is evident in Augustine’s restlessness, and the ordinary wonder of Montaigne’s humanness. We encounter it in Dante’s love for Beatrice (self and God). The quest for extensiveness beyond the here and now appears in Malcolm X’s reading of Spinoza’s ethics and the struggle to break the bonds of human defacement. All of these pursuits orbit the expanding secular and motley spiritual universe that is the Western intellectual ethos. The timeless, eclectic human journey toward self-knowledge and expression remains, as we continue to find our place and purpose in the outer and inner spaces of human existence.<sup>14</sup>

In light of this continuing search for human flourishing, the vast majority of my students are also keenly attuned to aspirations of the good life and deciphering one’s relations to the internal

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), x.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard, 2007), 17. For a succinct synopsis of several of the significant ideas of *A Secular Age*, see Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). Observe Don Draper’s repeated attempts to find himself throughout the seven seasons of *Madmen*. In season 7, episode 12, Don Draper is compared to Herman Melville’s Great White Whale, who, in *Moby Dick*, has the last word (or the last splash). Swimmily, Don Draper has the last word (or the last ad) in *Madmen*.

<sup>11</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 19.

<sup>12</sup> The English word secularism is derived from the Latin *saecularis*: worldly, secular, pertaining to a generation or age. In the Medieval West, when applied to clergy, the word denoted priests working in the world.

<sup>13</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 5, 22, 25–7.

<sup>14</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 5. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin, 1995), 127. Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3. Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 2003); see especially Montaigne’s final essay and masterpiece, “On Experience,” 1207–69. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1964), 183–84.

and external world. I have found the writings of Charles Taylor, notably *A Secular Age* and *Sources of the Self*, very helpful in articulating what it means to be human in the present through the conceptualization of the authenticity of the self in society. We will concentrate on Taylor’s central concepts in *A Secular Age* and *Sources of the Self* in order to gain greater insight into articulations of Christian-Lutheran identity in our North American cultural ethos of the authenticity of the self. First, the essay will present Taylor’s account of identity in a secular age. Second, having established how our secular age affects the ageless search for what it means to be human, we will consider Taylor’s understanding of identity as inclusive of the affirmation of the ordinary life and how this relates to the Lutheran teaching of vocation in both the private and public spheres. Third, we will compare Taylor and Martin Luther on identity and vocation and what this means for the contemporary quest to discover one’s self and one’s place in our secular age of authenticity. Finally, in response to Taylor and Luther’s focus on agape and vocation, we will revisit Dante and Don Draper’s search for finding one’s self by observing how the search for authenticity leads to the discovery of human flourishing as experienced in love radiating out to others. While for Socrates the unexamined life is not worth living, for Christians, the unrelated life is not worth living. In the Christian experience, we relate in love to Father (creator), Son (redeemer), and Holy Spirit (sanctifier), and we relate in love to all of our neighbors. This essay is particularly aimed at Christian educators and those striving to teach their students to find themselves in relation with and for God in order that they may live authentic lives of passion and service in relation with and for others. As Christians, our lives in Christ by the Spirit are lived with and for others. Our witness is our with-ness. In this actively shared life we authentically reveal God’s love for creation, and the sameness and dignity of all humanity.

## I. Identity in our Secular Age

The Reformation of the sixteenth century marks the point of departure for Taylor’s *A Secular Age* and *Sources of the Self*. *A Secular Age* begins with the question: “Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God, in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?”<sup>15</sup> His sprawling book charts the emergence of the secular in dialogue with the sacred. Taylor’s foils are subtraction or negative theories of secularization.<sup>16</sup> Taylor understands the Christian faith and practice as incarnate, where the Christian church is the place in which human beings, in all of their different and disparate itineraries, come together. Indeed, the story of how we arrived at a secular age is inextricably bound up with an account of where we are. In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor charts the course of the idea of the individual in early modernity to the present age of authenticity or the age of finding one’s self. As in *A Secular Age*, where the secular cannot be examined without the sacred, so too the complexity of the concept of the self is properly approached in light of earlier pictures of human identity, what Taylor titles: “inescapable frameworks,” which lead in *A Secular Age* to our contemporary “immanent frame.” These contemporary frameworks cannot escape past imprints of human identity, nor can our age of immanence reduce past inclusions of transcendence.<sup>17</sup> Just as *A Secular Age* begins in the era of the European Reformations, *Sources of the Self* commences with Luther’s personal stand. Taylor writes, “To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications

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<sup>15</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 772.

<sup>16</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 26–7, 427, on religion and secularization.

<sup>17</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, title of chapter 1. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, title of chapter 15.

which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand.”<sup>18</sup> From the ancient age up to the early modern and Enlightenment, Western thinkers perceived the world within and without through differing perspectives on one shared horizon of being and meaning.<sup>19</sup> One orients and originates one’s self in relation and reaction to set forms of meaning. Thus, Taylor notes, “For someone in Luther’s age, the issue of the basic moral frame orienting one’s actions could *only* be put in universal terms. Nothing else made sense.”<sup>20</sup> Now, however, such a universal frame makes no sense to my secular students in our secular age.

According to Taylor, the current state of finding one’s self and one’s place in society is an enigma: discernable in the past, yet distorted today. Taylor has different ways of describing this present puzzle of identity formation: fragility and fragmentation, a pluralist world, in which many forms of belief and unbelief jostle and hence embrittle each other.<sup>21</sup> There arises the corollary desire for grasping our lives in a narrative,<sup>22</sup> the vexing relation of language to the vision of others,<sup>23</sup> and “a common picture of the self, as (at least potentially and ideally) drawing its purposes, goals, and life-plans out of itself, seeking ‘relationships’ only insofar as they are ‘fulfilling’, is largely based on ignoring our embedding in webs of interlocution.”<sup>24</sup> For Taylor, “fragmentation arises when people come to see themselves more and more atomistically, otherwise put, as less and less bound to their fellow citizens in common projects and allegiances.”<sup>25</sup> Taylor also observes that the search for identity cannot be disentangled from the web of the good. Even in our “loss of horizon” and disenchantment, selfhood and the good and selfhood and morality turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes (much like notions of secularism and religion and spirituality).<sup>26</sup> For Taylor, our orientation in relation to the good requires frameworks, which still include higher dimensions of meaning.<sup>27</sup> He also refers to this as “the aspiration to fullness” which can be met by building something into one’s life, some pattern of higher action, or be met by connecting one’s life up with some greater reality or story.<sup>28</sup> In *A Secular Age*, Taylor puts this in terms of the ordinary contemporary aspiration to live a fully satisfying life.<sup>29</sup> In other words, this may be seen in the incessant drive to override the fragility of fragmentation and experience coherent lives of fulfillment. In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor defines the modern identity in relation to the good and the search for fulfillment through

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<sup>18</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 27.

<sup>19</sup> Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 2. Perhaps, this perspective is best expressed by the epitaph on Kant’s grave: “Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more frequently and persistently one’s meditation deals with them: *the starry sky above me and the moral law within me*” (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar [Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002], 203). According to Murdoch, these two sources of wonder were perceived from the ancients through the enlightenment on the same horizon of philosophical possibility (in “metaphysical circularity,” Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 57).

<sup>20</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 28.

<sup>21</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 531.

<sup>22</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 47.

<sup>23</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 37.

<sup>24</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 38–9.

<sup>25</sup> Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity, CBC Massey Lectures* (Toronto: Anansi, 1991), 112–3.

<sup>26</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 19.

<sup>27</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 42.

<sup>28</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 43.

<sup>29</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 7.

three major frameworks: the inner self or inwardness, the affirmation of the ordinary life, and the voice of nature, which implies the expressivist notion of nature as inner moral source.<sup>30</sup>

## II. Christian Identity, Vocation, and the Affirmation of the Ordinary Life in the Private and Public Spheres

In relation to the importance of the Reformation as starting point for Taylor’s *A Secular Age* and *Sources of the Self*, as well as to Luther’s revolutionary understanding of the self in society as corporately lived out in God-given vocations, we shall here focus on Taylor’s second framework, the affirmation of ordinary life in the private and public spheres. Taylor observes that the affirmation of ordinary life finds its origins in Judeo-Christian spirituality, and the particular impetus it receives in the modern era comes, first of all, from the Reformation.<sup>31</sup> Taylor observes that before Luther the Christian was a passenger in the ecclesial ship in its journey to God. “But for Protestantism, there can be no passengers. This is because there is no ship in the Catholic sense, no common movement carrying humans to salvation. Each believer rows her or her own boat.”<sup>32</sup> One rowed one’s boat in the temporal currents of ordinary life: “The repudiation of monasticism was a reaffirmation of lay life as a central locus for the fulfillment of God’s purpose. Luther marks their break in his own life by ceasing to be such a monk and by marrying a former nun.”<sup>33</sup> Taylor’s ideas on the ordinary life are related to two twentieth century German philosophers: Jürgen Habermas and Martin Heidegger. Habermas chronicled the origins of the public square or what we might term, the public sphere of life.<sup>34</sup> This overarchingly concerns the collective intersections of individuals, and public space and institutions. Heidegger favors ontic isolation or what we might call the private sphere wherein one differentiates and develops individual authenticity.<sup>35</sup> The private sphere covers the interior life and includes the family and personal relationships.

Luther revolutionized the life of the individual in both the public and private spheres. According to Luther, one did not have to become a priest to be closer to God. One could fully serve God at home in ordinary family life. And, for Luther, the public realm made extraordinary room to include shared space for the exercise of freedom of conscience as grounded in and guided by the liberty of God’s Word. Luther’s famous paradox of purpose on how to find fulfillment inwardly and outwardly in God and in others can shed some light here. “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”<sup>36</sup> For Luther, this freedom is meant to be experienced in one’s relation to God and neighbor. The reform of Christianity and society revolved from the concentric spheres of Christ and faith: from the believer to the church to society. According to Luther in *The Freedom of a*

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<sup>30</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, x, i.e., the outline of the book.

<sup>31</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 215.

<sup>32</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 217.

<sup>33</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 218.

<sup>34</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

<sup>35</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein and Zeit*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), especially 107–22.

<sup>36</sup> Martin Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian,” *Luther’s Works*, vol. 31, ed. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 344. Hereafter, all references to the American Edition of Luther’s works will be abbreviated LW. For the critical edition of Luther’s works, see the *Weimarer Ausgabe*: WA 7, 49.

*Christian*, passively, the soul is married to Christ. Christ and the soul become one flesh, the most perfect of all marriages.<sup>37</sup> Luther writes, “Christ is full of grace, life and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ’s, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul’s.”<sup>38</sup> Luther continues to explain that just as Christ and the believer are one, so too the believer and his neighbor are one. Thus, the believer is in communion with God and in communion with others in the common modalities of life. Therein the good things of God should flow from one to the other and be common to all, so that everyone should “put on” his or her neighbor.<sup>39</sup> Luther concludes that a Christian lives not in him or herself, but in Christ and in his or her neighbor; otherwise, one is not a Christian.<sup>40</sup>

This Lutheran affirmation of ordinary life coincides with the scientific revolution and the advancement of science for the betterment of all. Taylor writes that in early modernity “Science is not a higher activity which ordinary life should subserve; on the contrary, science should benefit ordinary life.”<sup>41</sup> Taylor connects this scientific benefit with the Christian calling for the overall betterment of society, “With the affirmation of ordinary life, *agape* is integrated in a new way into an ethic of everyday existence. My work in my calling ought to be for the general good.”<sup>42</sup> Taylor, citing Joseph Hall, observes that for the Puritans, “God loveth adverbs; and cares not how good, but how well.”<sup>43</sup> Christians are to live for God and for others in ordinary ways done extraordinarily well. This impetus for excellence eventually morphs into what Taylor calls in *A Secular Age*, “the age of mobilization” and “designates a process whereby people are persuaded, pushed, dragooned or bullied into new forms of society, church, association.”<sup>44</sup> Taylor goes on, “whatever political, social, ecclesial structures to which we aspire now have to be mobilized into existence.”<sup>45</sup> For example, to take the cosmos and cosmology, there was a shift from the enchanted world to a cosmos conceived in conformity with post-Newtonian science, in which there is absolutely no question of higher meanings being expressed in the universe around us. The commodification of time and demarcation of the metaphysical correlates with the rise of the self-reasoning and self-existing person as promoted by the enlightenment and eventually develops into what Taylor titles “the buffered self,” the interiorization of individual identity.<sup>46</sup>

### III. Finding our Place in Society: Charles Taylor and Martin Luther on Christian Identity and Vocation in an Age of Authenticity

All of this leads to today, where, according to Taylor, we find ourselves in an age of authenticity. “It appears,” reasons Taylor, “that something has happened in the last half-century,

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<sup>37</sup> LW 31, 351. WA 7, 54.

<sup>38</sup> LW 31, 351. WA 7, 54–5.

<sup>39</sup> LW 31, 371. WA 7, 69.

<sup>40</sup> LW 31, 371. WA 7, 69.

<sup>41</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 213.

<sup>42</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 258.

<sup>43</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 224. Joseph Hall quoted in: Charles H. George, and Katherine George, *The Protestant Mind of English Reformation, 1570-1640* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 139.

<sup>44</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 445.

<sup>45</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 445.

<sup>46</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 37–41.

perhaps even less, which has profoundly altered the conditions of belief in our societies.”<sup>47</sup> The meta-projects of the age of mobilization: nationalism, Marxism, idealism, etc., have fragmented and no longer compel mass adherence. A life well lived is now a life well experienced. Taylor goes on, “This is a culture informed by an ethic of authenticity. I have to discover my route to wholeness and spiritual depth. The focus is on the individual, and on his/her experience. Spirituality must speak to this experience. The basic mode of spiritual life is thus the quest. . . It is a quest which can’t start with a priori exclusions or inescapable starting points, which could pre-empt this experience.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, in teaching students theology today, instructors would be wise to begin with the experiences of their students. Articulating identity includes the experiences of finding identity. For Christians, identity is centered in the self-giving love of God and found in Christ who finds us by the Spirit where we are. Thus, Christians affirm the search for finding ourselves in relation to human flourishing. For Luther, human flourishing means living in service for others. In this age of authenticity, Taylor holds out hope for societal transformation through Christians participating in the love (*agape*) of God, “which is by definition a love which goes way beyond any possible mutuality, a self-giving love not bounded by some measure of fairness” but open to limitless self-giving.<sup>49</sup> This self-giving love of God overpowers the separation anxiety of sin that stalks contemporary searches for the self. For Christians, the authenticity of the self is experienced in the affirmation of living ordinary lives for others extraordinarily well.

This perspective of divinely imparted transformation coordinates with Luther’s concentration on the personal faith of the Christian believer as lived out in his or her baptismal and societal calling, and the infinite possibilities this opens for transforming self and society. When I teach Luther’s theology, I often incorporate Martin Luther King Jr.’s (named by his father after Martin Luther) sermon, “The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life” (1960), which echoes Martin Luther’s sermon “On the Three Kinds of the Good Life” (1521). Luther’s sermon proclaims the good life as radiating out to others from the center of justification by faith in Christ. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s sermon puts Luther’s dictum of passive and active righteousness or being free from all, subject to none and being a servant of all, subject to all, in contemporary and vocational terms. For Martin Luther King, Jr., “There are three dimensions of any complete life . . . length, breadth and height. Now the length of life . . . is not its duration . . . it is the push of a life forward to achieve its inner power and ambitions. The breadth of life is the outreach, the outward concern for the welfare of others, and the height of life is the upward reach for God.”<sup>50</sup> Proclaiming Luther’s understanding of vocation as a full or complete three-dimensional life, Martin Luther King, Jr. preaches, “When you discover your life’s worth (*All right*), set out to do it so well that the living, the dead, or the unborn (*Oh Lord*) couldn’t do it better (*Praise the Lord, Yes, Amen*). And no matter what it is, never consider it insignificant because if it is for the upbuilding of humanity (*Yes*) it has cosmic significance.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, Martin Luther King, Jr. presses

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<sup>47</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 473. On living well in an age of authenticity, as well as sources of the making of our age of authenticity, see also: Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

<sup>48</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 507–8.

<sup>49</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 430.

<sup>50</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life,” sermon delivered at Friendship Baptist Church, Pasadena, California, 28 February 1960, in *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project, Volume VI: Advocate of the Social Gospel, September 1948–March 1963*, ed. Clayborne Carson, Susan Carson, Susan Englander, Troy Jackson, and Gerald L. Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 397. The text is taken from an audio recording of the service.

<sup>51</sup> King, “The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life,” 398.

on: “And so if it falls your lot to be a street sweeper (*That’s it, Well*), sweep streets like Rafael painted pictures. Sweep streets like Michelangelo carved marble (*Amen, Well*). Sweep streets like Beethoven composed music (*Oh yeah, Have mercy*). Sweep streets (*Amen*) like Shakespeare wrote poetry.”<sup>52</sup> Here, we behold a beautiful affirmation of the ordinary life. Here, too, as in Luther’s “Sermon on The Two Kinds of Righteousness” (1519), most of the focus is given to the active realm or actively living out the faith in one’s particular duty in life. For Luther and Martin Luther King, Jr., vocation includes the struggle for God’s justice in the face of human injustice. Today, as Taylor shows, belief in God is no longer axiomatic. Social justice may or may not include divine justice. There are alternatives to belief.<sup>53</sup> Revealed faith is still an option, but contested. Instead of rowing our own boats, more and more humanity willingly embarks as passengers on tech-driven devices floating along the non-linear, shallow ocean of what the French philosopher Luc Ferry titles the shift “from science to technology, the disappearance of ends and the triumph of means.”<sup>54</sup>

Amidst the aimlessness, Luther is still read and taught. Martin Luther King, Jr. still inspires action for the welfare of others. This leads us back to teaching Luther’s theology on the self in society for students striving to be themselves in the twenty-first century. From the start, the living Lutheran tradition has accentuated and actualized the concordance of scholarship and Christ-centered vocations of grace, contemplation and action.<sup>55</sup> My students and I explore the convergences of faith and reason, theology and the humanities and professional studies. Following Aristotle’s lead, we are dedicated to the pursuit of academic excellence in the spirit of discovery and the desire to know and delight in the findings of reason and the grounding of faith.<sup>56</sup> As a professor of theology, I seek to inspire students, who come from various backgrounds and contexts, to live lives with meaning and purpose. In other words, this means teaching Luther on the self and society in experiential ways to students living in an age of authenticity. Furthermore, this requires patience and open space for students to search for their identities in relation to God’s identity. And in our increasingly politically polarized world, this search especially includes Martin Luther King, Jr. on vocation, justice, and the struggle to live meaningful lives for the welfare of the marginalized. As Taylor rightly notes, Luther’s crisis was not one of meaning (the meaning of life was all too unquestionable to an Augustinian monk and to his whole age). “The existential predicament in which one fears condemnation is quite different from the one where one fears, above all, meaninglessness,” which, as Paul Tillich explores in *The Courage To Be*, “perhaps defines our age.”<sup>57</sup> Even so, the path to discovering meaning in our age of authenticity traverses the affirmation of the ordinary and finding

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<sup>52</sup> King, “The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life,” 398.

<sup>53</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

<sup>54</sup> Luc Ferry, *A Brief History of Thought: A Philosophical Guide to Living*, trans. Theo Cuffe (New York: Harper, 2011), 211.

<sup>55</sup> In the Catholic medieval theological tradition (from which the Lutheran church and confessional movement arises), contemplation is coupled with action as faith is expressed in the charity of the Christian life. See, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIæ, qs. 179–82. Christian identity includes matters of the heart and forming habits of virtue and service.

<sup>56</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I (A), 1 in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, The Revised Oxford Translation*, vol. 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1552. Compare Luther’s explanation to the first article of the Apostles’ Creed in *The Small Catechism* in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 354–5.

<sup>57</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952). See, especially, the anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness, 46–51. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 18.



fulfillment in quotidian occupations. This journey of identity is defined by determining what is good and fulfilling, the horizon within which we are capable of taking a stand for what is just and right.

How, then, does Luther’s understanding of the freedom of the self in society elucidate Taylor’s ideas of the authentic-secular self? Luther’s transcendent-imminent concept of the self as expounded in *The Freedom of a Christian* and experienced in vocation comply and clarify Taylor’s formularies of the buffered self, the imminent frame and the social imaginary. *A Secular Age* details the development of modern social imaginaries from their origins in the Reformation: how we see ourselves in relation to others and how our contemporaries imagine the societies they inhabit and sustain. According to Taylor, the imminent frames how the self becomes articulated in our age of authenticity. According to Luther, the freedom of the believer coincides with freedom for our neighbors in the emerging public sphere. Both Luther and Taylor seek to understand how one finds his or her place in society. In framing together the ideas of self and society in Luther and Taylor, we see the abiding influence of the Reformation’s focus on personal faith and interpersonal vocation as extended today in the search for personal fulfillment in our interconnected and secular age.

#### IV. Conclusion: Christian Identity as With-Ness

In summation of Taylor and Luther’s focus on agape and vocation, we conclude by revisiting Dante and Don Draper’s search for finding one’s self and one’s place in the world. The recurring ideas of Dante and Don Draper on self and society reappear in the thought of two contemporary Canadian thinkers and psychologists: Jordan Peterson and Steven Pinker. Peterson has penned the popular *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*, where he maps meaning from pagan and Abrahamic religions.<sup>58</sup> The integrated self, according to Peterson, charts rules for abating the dark wood of chaos, and, like Dante, traverses from hell and back. In *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*, Pinker elucidates and expands Immanuel Kant’s famous dictum of the enlightenment project: “Dare to know!” (*Sapere aude!*)<sup>59</sup> Pinker projects: look how far we have developed. Pinker purports: stay the course contra the obfuscation of unenlightened human nature. Pinker propounds: behold, there appears no limit to human advancement. Perhaps, the success of the enigmatic persona of ingenuity that characterizes Don Draper transmits the broadcast of the future.

Taylor guides us to see that the Western quest for human flourishing moves between these two moral visions of life in relation to the good (be it immaterial or material, inner or outer): an antidote to chaos and the advancement of human reason. Adding to this polarity, we also consider Raymond Klibansky who argued for continuity in the Western intellectual tradition

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<sup>58</sup> Jordan B. Peterson, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2018). For a fuller theoretical and in-depth background study of the briefer twelve rules, see Jordan B. Peterson, *Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>59</sup> Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment” (1784) in *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader*, edited by Paul Hyland (London: Routledge, 2003), 54. Steven Pinker, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* (New York: Viking, 2018). Pinker advocates against “Enlightenolatry” and posits how the enlightenment proceeds to progress all aspects of human flourishing (Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, 14). For a classic but eccentric critique of the enlightenment, see Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 2016), especially on Kant, 81–119.

through Plato’s dialectic of the one and the many in *Parmenides*, and the human attempt to square the circle of self and society, immanence and transcendence, reality and ideas.<sup>60</sup> Klibansky was a Jewish scholar forced to flee Hitler’s Germany. His research on continuity in the Western philosophical tradition was in part a response to the Nazi attack on Western civilization and a war ravaged world in chaos. In a world threatened with the chaos of nuclear annihilation, Klibansky’s call to the stability of intellectual continuity still matters. Klibansky’s Platonic points verge with Taylor’s chronological continuity of western thought from the sacred to the secular and provide insight on how the ideas of the past still matter in the contemporary clash of chaos and progress. The present search for finding one’s self and one’s place in the world cannot be separated from past conceptions of what it means to human.

Christians articulate the lived tension between chaos and progress in terms of nature and grace. Identity is baptismally given and realized in the day-to-day struggle of living out what it means to be baptized. Followers of Christ live *in medias res*, in continuity in, with, and under Christ their fulfillment, yet they live in creative struggle on this side of paradise where they walk by faith and not by sight, knowing now in an enigma but then fully as they will be fully known.<sup>61</sup> In this journey of faith, witness proliferates in with-ness: Christians walk by faith together with fellow searchers for human flourishing from before and with seekers here and now. Somehow, somehow, even my secular students, who initially judge Augustine to be preachy, connect with his mystical vision at Ostia with Monica his mother. Augustine, like Dante, is named by another in the pull of love and thereby experiences the feeling of wholeness followed by the rude return to reality “where a sentence has both a beginning and an ending.”<sup>62</sup> Taylor teaches us that acknowledging and articulating identity in relation to the good is complicated and requires two large tomes (*A Secular Age* and *Sources of the Self*) comprised of many sentences to only begin to understand the self in relation to our secular age as a cohesive whole. For Taylor the sources of the self steer the affirmation of ordinary life: rightly navigating our vocations from Dante and the love of God to Don Draper and all the ambivalence that authenticity allows. *In medias res*, in between Christ who rose and Christ who will come again, the Holy Spirit calls us by the Gospel to fulfillment in the way of Christ. While Taylor reminds us that we cannot go back to the past, neither, as his endeavors exhibit, should we forget previous searches for human identity. Even though we search for identity and fulfillment in an immanent frame, cross pressures still push us in and out: to the interior memory, which connects past in the present, and to the persistence of transcendent traditions of future hope. Here Taylor constructively offers: “The fading contact of many with the traditional languages of faith seems to presage a declining future. But the very intensity of the search for adequate forms of spiritual life that this loss occasions may be full of promise.”<sup>63</sup> He goes on, “We could say that this is a world in which the fate of belief depends much more than before on powerful intuitions of individuals, radiating out to others.”<sup>64</sup> Luther teaches that the sameness of individual- Christ-imputed-identity invokes the inherent impulse to live radiating outside of ourselves: in and for God, and in the putting on of our neighbors for the

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<sup>60</sup> Raymond Klibansky, *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition During the Middle Ages, with a New Preface and Four Supplementary Chapters, and Plato’s Parmenides in the Middle Ages and The Renaissance with a New Introductory Preface* (München: Kraus International Publications, 1981). Klibansky charts the Platonic tradition as a whole during the Middle Ages through three main currents: the Arabic, the Byzantine, and the Latin.

<sup>61</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:7. 1 Corinthians 13:12.

<sup>62</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 171, (Book IX).

<sup>63</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 533.

<sup>64</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 531.

wellbeing of the other.<sup>65</sup> Dante radiating out to Beatrice. Augustine radiating out to Monica. Beatrice and Monica radiating out of God. Ordinary Christians radiating out to others in the extraordinary love of the Holy Spirit. Transforming my life into *our* life. “The heart has its reasons,” Pascal pondered in early modernity, “of which reason knows nothing.” My students still feel it in a thousand things, just as Pascal affected: the infinite pulse radiating whatever is good and commendable, noble and true, praiseworthy and lovely.<sup>66</sup>

*Joshua Hollmann is Associate Professor of Theology and Chair of the Theology Department at Concordia College–New York. He earned his PhD from McGill University and is author of The Religious Concordance: Nicholas of Cusa and Christian-Muslim Dialogue (Brill, 2017).*

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<sup>65</sup> LW 31, 371. WA 7, 69.

<sup>66</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, 127: “The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing: we feel this in countless ways.” “Le cœur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connaît point; on le sait en mille choses.” Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. Marc Escola (Paris: Flammarion, 2015), 144. Philippians 4:8.