SUMMARY

While having dinner in an American restaurant, a group of Christian ethicists, some of whom were Lutherans, were addressed by a woman. Upon hearing the profession of the group, she replied, "Well, I'm a Lutheran, so I don't know anything about Christian Ethics." This article
intends to explore in what sense the woman might have been correct. In order to do this, I argue that the realm of "the ethical" comprises at least three characteristics: universalisability, prescriptivity, and a reference to a conception of the highest good (or of the good life). After this, it is argued that, as a consequence of Luther's reference to God as the highest good, the so-called political use of the law (*usus politicus legis*) can be seen as strongly ethical and Christian at the same time. The Christian element lies, however, not so much in the designation of what values ought to be pursued, i. e., in the field of *normative ethics*, since the law in its political interpretation may be known by, and is applicable, to all people, believers and nonbelievers alike. Rather, the contribution of Christianity to ethics lies on two other levels of ethics: first, on the level of *metaethics* (including the reference to God as the highest Good, the importance of the doctrine of human sinfulness); and, second, because of Luther's stress on human freedom as a consequence of salvation, on the level of the *realisation of the good*. Finally, it is argued that Luther's theological use of the law as well as his doctrine of human freedom (which, in a sense, equates Calvin's third use of the law) can hardly be conceived as ethics, due to the absence of the characteristics of universalisability and prescriptivity. By some, this may be considered as a flaw, but the criticism might also go in the other direction: to Luther, there is more to the good life than prescriptivity and universalisability alone.