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Martin Luther and the God Who Acts:

Finding Common Ground in the Current Debates on Justification

by

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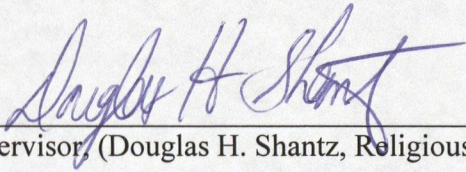
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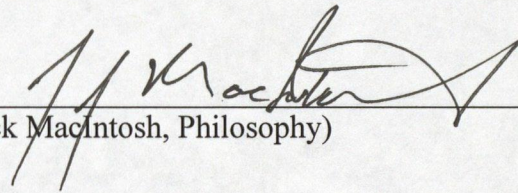
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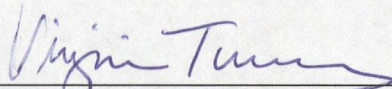
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Martin Luther and the God Who Acts: Finding Common Ground in the Current Debates on Justification" submitted by Tenzan Eaghll in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



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## Abstract

My thesis examines Martin Luther's doctrine of justification by faith in the context of late medieval thought and the scholarly controversy that surrounds this subject. It addresses two central questions pertaining to Luther scholarship: 1) what is the relationship between Luther's theology of justification and the *via moderna*? 2) what is nature of Luther's theology of justification (i.e. is it forensic or does it imply deification)? Succinctly, I will use the historical data, Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation*, and the justification debate to explore these questions. Appealing to the late medieval transition from 'God as being' to 'God who acts in history,' I argue that the proper context to understand Luther's doctrine of justification is his development of the 'God who acts in Christ.'



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## Introduction

Luther begins, when he can, with the human situation before God and describes the event of faith in the historical context of promise and fulfillment. That may not offer a grand enough prospect for more ambitious theologians who chafe and grow irritable when they cannot speculate about the pre-temporal counsels of God, but it is all the prospect Luther wants.<sup>1</sup>

### A. Historiography of Luther and the Justification Debate

The interpretations of Martin Luther (1483-1546) have varied widely over the centuries. Luther's first biographer was the Catholic Johannes Cochlaeus (d. 1552). Cochlaeus was a life long opponent of Luther who denounced him in 1529 in *Septiceps Lutherus*. He described Luther as a seven headed dragon, the spawn of the devil.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, Philipp Melanchthon (d. 1560), Luther's friend and fellow reformer, described Luther at his funeral as a "strict healer" and "God's instrument for renewing the church."<sup>3</sup> Two hundred years later, during the Enlightenment, Voltaire praised Luther for resisting the Roman Catholic Church but bemoaned the misery and wars that followed.<sup>4</sup> The French statesman Francois Guizot saw the Reformation and the acts of Luther as a manifestation of the human desire for freedom. In a similar vein, Heinrich Heine argued that Luther's rejection of the Pope, Robespierre's decapitation of King Louis XVI, and Immanuel Kant's critique of Reason, were all comparable events in the emancipation of western man from tyranny.<sup>5</sup>

Aside from ruminations by popular historical figures and religious polemics, there was no real scholarship on Luther, in its modern sense, until 1908, when Luther's copy of

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<sup>1</sup> David C. Steinmetz, *Luther and Staupitz: An Essay in the intellectual Origins of the Protestant Reformation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1980), 66-67.

<sup>2</sup> Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New York, 1992), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 10. Melanchthon made these claims at Luther's funeral oration.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Thacker, *Voltaire* (London: Routledge, 1971), 50-51.

<sup>5</sup> Lewis W. Spitz, *The Renaissance and Reformation Movements Vol. II*, Revised Ed. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1987), 303-304.

his lectures on Romans (1515-1516) was rediscovered. The Vatican archivist, Heinrich Denifle (d. 1905), proceeded to use these lectures to argue against Luther's theological originality and discredit the validity of Luther's *Turmerlebnis* (Tower Experience).<sup>6</sup> Denifle argued that Luther's story of his theological breakthrough was inconsistent with the fact that he had referenced the merciful justice of God in many documents written before 1519. Denifle's work sparked strong reaction from Protestant theologians, leading to much academic research on Luther in the following decades. This surge in Luther studies is known as the 'Luther Renaissance.'<sup>7</sup>

Luther's *Turmerlebnis* is based on an account he gave in 1545, the year before he died, where he discussed his breakthrough to justification by faith. He described how he had been tormented by the idea of the "righteousness of God," and had believed that this referred to God's punishment of unrighteous sinners. After much consideration and meditation Luther reported that in 1519 his understanding was transformed, as he came to realize that the righteousness of God did not refer to God's judgment but his passive mercy that justifies through faith:<sup>8</sup>

At last, as I meditated day and night on the relation of the words 'the righteousness of God is revealed in it, as it is written, the righteous person shall live by faith', I began to understand that 'righteousness of God' as that by which the righteous person lives by the gift of God (faith); and this sentence 'the righteousness of God is revealed', to refer to a passive righteousness, by which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, 'the righteous person lives by faith'. This immediately made me feel as though I had been born again, and as though I had entered through open gates into paradise itself. From that moment, I saw the whole face of Scripture in a new light... And now, where I had once hated the phrase, 'the righteousness of God,' I began to love and extol it as the

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<sup>6</sup> James M. Stayer, "The Eclipse of Young Man Luther: An Outsider's Perspective on Luther Studies," *Canadian Journal of History*, XIX (1984): 178.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 178.

<sup>8</sup> Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity Vol II, The Reformation to Present Day* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1985), 19.

sweetest of phrases, so that this passage in Paul became the very gate of paradise to me.<sup>9</sup>

Since 1950 scholars have been unable to reach a consensus on the validity, timing, and meaning of this account. They have spent a vast amount of time examining Luther's inheritance from late medieval thought, the nature of justification by faith, and the exact date of his breakthrough; however, there are still many outstanding questions.

In this study, I will address two central questions that pertain to Luther's doctrine of justification. The first question derives from the 'Luther Renaissance' and largely concerns intellectual and cultural historians. This issue concerns the 'when and what' of justification. Was Luther's discovery a result of his training in Augustinianism, or was his concept of *iustitia Dei* a unique discovery that began when he rejected the soteriology of the *via moderna*?<sup>10</sup> To resolve this question, as Alister E. McGrath has noted, it must be proven whether Luther appropriated any elements of the *via moderna* in his mature theology of justification.<sup>11</sup>

The most successful attempt to resolve this issue has come from Heiko A. Oberman (d. 2001). In the last paper he wrote, Oberman argued that the key to understanding Luther's inheritance from the *via moderna* lay in the late medieval transition from 'God as being' to 'God who acts in history.'<sup>12</sup> Locating this transition in

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<sup>9</sup> For a full translation of Luther's account see, Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: American Edition*, 55 volumes, ed. by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman (St. Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955-1986), vol. 34, pp. 336-8. From here on referred to as LW, followed by volume and page number.

<sup>10</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: a history of the Christian doctrine of justification*, 3rd Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 224.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 233.

<sup>12</sup> Heiko A. Oberman, "Luther and the Via Moderna: The Philosophical Backdrop of the Reformation Breakthrough," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 54, no. 4 (2003): 642. Another study that is useful for evaluating Luther is Steven Ozment's *Homo Spiritualis*. See Steven Ozment, *Homo Spiritualis: A comparative study of the anthropology of Johannes Tauler, Jean Gerson and Martin Luther (1509-16) in the Context of Their Theological Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1969).

the nominalist distinction between the *potentia absoluta* and the *potentia ordinata*, Oberman argued that Luther unfolded and redirected a tradition that stretched back to Francis of Assisi. From the *via moderna*, Luther learned how to conceive of the bible as the promise of God. Luther's doctrine of justification was indebted to this inheritance, as was his rejection of the medieval hierarchy.

The second question concerns the 'how' of justification. In what way, according to Luther, is Christ linked to the believer in the process of justification? Are believers changed from within via an active presence of Christ or does Christ's sacrifice merely change God's judgment about the believer's righteousness? As Dennis Bielfeldt phrased it, "is justification analytic or synthetic?"<sup>13</sup>

Scholars who hold that Luther's breakthrough is forensic argue that justification is extrinsic in so far as it is not the property of the believer and does not exist inside them. For Luther, they claim, righteousness is not an internal affair but a purely external phenomenon. This means that righteousness remains alien to the believer and is imputed to them through faith.<sup>14</sup>

Tuomo Mannermaa was the first scholar to propose deification, arguing that Luther's understanding of justification implied that Christ is ontologically present in the process of salvation. He contends that the interpretation of Luther's soteriology as strictly forensic, external, and alien is incorrect. Mannermaa posits that Christ is also

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<sup>13</sup> Dennis Bielfeldt, "Deification as a Motif in Luther's *Dictata super psalterium*," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 28, no. 2 (1997): 402.

<sup>14</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing, 1993), 107.



personally present in the process of salvation, claiming that for Luther, justification is a process of divinization via an ontological connection with Christ.<sup>15</sup>

This is a heated and controversial subject.<sup>16</sup> The main charge of Mannermaa against the forensic interpretation of Luther is that it imposes a Neo-Kantian epistemology upon Luther's work. According to Mannermaa, it is only on the basis of a Neo-Kantian epistemology that a strictly forensic justification can be inferred from Luther's writing. However, Jin-Seop Eom recently made a similar charge against Mannermaa in his dissertation. Eom argues that Mannermaa's reading of the 19<sup>th</sup> thesis of the *Heidelberg Disputation* is both anachronistic and unbiblical; not only does it impose an ethical reading of love upon the text but ignores its near verbatim similarity with Rom 1:20.<sup>17</sup>

In this study, I address both these questions, the historical and the theological, by appealing to what Oberman has called "the momentous paradigm shift from God as being to God as person."<sup>18</sup> By combining the work of historians (the *via moderna* question) and theologians (the deification question), I discuss Luther's work in its historical, literary, and theological context. In this manner, I clarify Luther's relation to the *via*

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<sup>15</sup> See Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005); Simo Peura, *Mehr Als Ein Mensch?: die Vergottlichung als Thema der Theologie Martin Luthers von 1513 bis 1519* (Mainz: Veröffentlichungen des Instituts, 1994); Simo Peura, "What God gives man receives: Luther on Salvation," in *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed. C.E. Braaten & R.W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998); Sammeli Juntunen, "Luther and Metaphysics: What Is The Structure of Being according to Luther," in *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed. by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> For a recent example see Timo Laato, "Justification: The Stumbling Block of the Finnish Luther School," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (2008): 327-346.

<sup>17</sup> Jin-Seop Eom, "Truth and reality in Martin Luther's Heidelberg Disputation (1518) and Operationes in Psalmos (1519-1521)," Th.D. diss., Luther Seminary, In Dissertations & Theses: Full Text [database online]; available from <http://www.proquest.com>, 96.

<sup>18</sup> Oberman, "Luther and the Via Moderna," 641.

*moderna* and demonstrate the future oriented nature of justification for both the forensic and deification readings of Luther's work.

Specifically, this thesis makes three contributions to our knowledge of Martin Luther. First, it clarifies Luther's relation to the *via moderna*, a very controversial aspect of Luther's inheritance.<sup>19</sup> It argues that although Luther rejected the soteriology of the *via moderna* he did not reject the concept of *pactum*, which he inherited from Biel.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, it illustrates how this concept influenced the development of his hermeneutic.

Second, through a close reading of the *Heidelberg Disputation*, it shows that Luther developed an apocalyptic vision of history in which the God who acts became the God who acts in Christ.<sup>21</sup> Luther's rejection of the *theologia gloriae* of scholasticism in favor of a close reading of Paul, reveals his anticipation of the end times. It was for this reason that Luther asked Christians to set aside their vain attempts at knowledge and good works and "be raised up with the Son of man."<sup>22</sup>

Third, it will bring clarity to the justification debate by showing where the two arguments align. As I demonstrate, both the deification and forensic readings agree on Luther's general theological development and his rejection of the Augustinian hierarchy. The only real disagreement is over the nature of Luther's ontology. While both recognize that Luther was guided by Ockham's notion of *creatio continua*, the Finns believe that there is a real-ontic (*esse-in*) change in the believer in the process of justification. However, the Finns do not believe that deification is a static ontological fact. Just as German theologians believe Christians wait *in spe*, the Finns emphasize the partial

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<sup>19</sup> Oberman, "Luther and the Via Moderna," 646. Many scholars have tried to eliminate Luther's connection with the *via moderna* by reducing it to its soteriology.

<sup>20</sup> This idea has been argued before but it remains controversial. See McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 218-235.

<sup>21</sup> Oberman, "Luther and the Via Moderna," 641.

<sup>22</sup> LW 31, 55.

‘presencing’ of Christ in the believer; a presencing that will not be complete until the Eschaton.

The inherent tension in this study lies in trying to account for Luther’s influence from the *via moderna* and at the same time trying to make sense of the justification debate. The claims of the Finnish theologians often appear to stand in contrast to the historical evidence. I will try to show that this is not the case by arguing that Luther’s opposition to the hierarchy of being associated with the *via antiqua* does not necessitate a rejection of the ontological status of relations (*esse-in* and *esse-ad*). What is primary in Luther is not an opposition to realism or metaphysics but the application of these human constructions to divine terms.

## **B. Methodology and Chapter Summary**

The primary questions that guide this study are the following: what is the proper context in which to understand Luther’s doctrine of Justification by faith? What can we actually state about this doctrine in light of the historical data, the primary documents, and the justification debate?

There are two methodological approaches to Luther that have dominated previous research. The first and most popular approach has been that of social and intellectual historians, whereby the development of his early thought has been traced to reveal his successive insights into the evangelical faith. This approach was the most popular throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The second methodological approach has treated topical issues or themes, such as Luther’s doctrine of the two kingdoms or his writings against Erasmus. This method has at times revealed the inconsistency and “developmental” character of Luther’s writings. The new Finnish school of Luther research takes its cue

from this approach by focusing on themes and topics from Luther's works. However, rather than emphasizing the inconsistencies this school has stressed the connections across his wide body of writings, attempting to provide a systematic framework to understand him.<sup>23</sup> In this study, I combine these historical and thematic methodologies, providing an historical account of Luther's intellectual inheritance and revealing the areas of agreement between both the forensic and deification interpretations of justification.

My methodology is interdisciplinary, using historical, thematic, and philosophical/theological analysis. Respectively, this will reflect the developments of the chapters. Whereas chapter one largely employs a historical methodology, chapter two is concerned with thematic analysis of the text, and chapter three with the philosophical/theological arguments used in the justification debate. This will not only clarify Luther's relation to late medieval thought but demonstrate the best way to contextualize the justification debate. Without attempting to nullify difference, this study unites the latest research of historians and theologians, establishing common ground on a controversial subject.

My primary source for this study is the original Latin text of Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation*, as found in the Weimarer Ausgabe.<sup>24</sup> I have chosen the *Heidelberg Disputation* for two reasons: One, it contains a detailed account of Luther's theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*), which many scholars consider to be the center point of Luther's theology. Two, the majority of the scholars in the justification debate have commented on or cited the Weimarer Ausgabe edition of the *Heidelberg Disputation* in

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<sup>23</sup> Scott Hendrix, "Luther," In *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, ed. by David Bagchi and David C. Steinmetz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 40.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. J.F.K. Knaake, G. Kawerau et. Al. (Weimer, 1883- ), vol. 1, 358-374. From here on referred to as WA, followed by volume, page, and line.

defense of their arguments.<sup>25</sup> Occasionally I might need to reference other texts from Luther's large body of work; in these instances, I will either use the Weimarer Ausgabe or the English translation, *Luther's works*.

In chapter one, I discuss the historical context of Luther's development. I begin by laying out the opposing epistemological frameworks of the *via antiqua* and the *via moderna*, discussing Luther's training in the tradition of William of Ockham and Gabriel Biel. Emphasizing the Franciscan foundations of the *via moderna*, I argue that the concept of God as personal Lord and 'covenant maker' (*pactum*), had an impact on Luther. From Luther's training at Erfurt to his discovery at Wittenberg, I explore Luther's break with the soteriology of the *via moderna* and the influence of Augustinianism. Succinctly, I stress that Luther developed an apocalyptic vision of history in which the 'God of Being,' became the 'God who acts in Christ.'<sup>26</sup> Through this development, Luther did not reject but develop and unfold late medieval thought.

In chapter two, I show the textual base for my findings in chapter one by analyzing the *Heidelberg Disputation*. This chapter is broken into two sections, a historical and thematic exploration of the text, and an analysis of Luther's hermeneutic. Exploring the historical context and thematic layout of the text, I analyze Luther's theological development—from his rejection of the Augustinian anthropology, to his Reformation discovery. Discussing the paradoxical nature of the theses, I elaborate on Luther's concept of the 'hiddenness of God.' Moreover, I connect these findings with the

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<sup>25</sup> A new Latin-German edition of the *Heidelberg Disputation* has recently been published. See, Martin Luther, *Martin Luther: Lateinisch-Deutsche Studienausgabe, Band 1: Der Mensch Vor Gott*, Übersetzung: Wilfried Härle (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2006), 35-69. There are very few differences between this new Latin version and the Weimarer Ausgabe. I used the Weimarer Ausgabe because this is the version used by the scholars I am studying. However, I did reference the *Studienausgabe* when composing my translation.

<sup>26</sup> Oberman, "Luther and the Via Moderna," 641.

Pauline basis of the text and emphasize that Luther's rejection of the *theologia gloriae* of the *via antiqua* in favor of a close reading of Paul reveals his apocalyptic mindset. In the second section, I provide an analysis of Luther's hermeneutic. In particular, I discuss how Luther broke with the monastic and scholastic methodologies of medieval hermeneutics in favor of an interpretation of Christ based on proclamation. I argue that this led to a reading of Scripture that stressed the humanity of God. For Luther, God was not disclosed as absolute being. A full translation of Luther's forty theses from the *Heidelberg Disputation* can be found in the appendix.

Chapter three engages the justification debate. I begin by reviewing the case for forensic justification, using the work of Walther von Loewenich (d. 1992) and the 1996 dissertation by Jin-Seop Eom.<sup>27</sup> The work of Tuomo Mannermaa, Sammeli Juntunen, and Simo Peura will be used to analyze the deification argument.<sup>28</sup> Whereas Loewenich and Eom both argue that Luther's theology of the cross, as found in the *Heidelberg Disputation*, is the kernel of Luther's theology and is thoroughly forensic,<sup>29</sup> the Finns argue that it is ontological. After each summary, I provide criticism of these arguments and show the limitations of the respective positions. Finally, in section two, I synthesize

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<sup>27</sup> Eom's dissertation was published in whole, see citation above.

<sup>28</sup> Other sources that are useful for evaluating the deification argument include: Philip Ruge-Jones, *Cross in Tensions: Luther's Theology of the Cross as Theologico-social Critique* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2008); Michael Norris and Basil Kardaras, "A Lutheran Knot: How Literal Is Taking the Role of the 'Other' in the Modern Finnish Interpretation of Luther?" (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Marriott Hotel, Loews Philadelphia Hotel, Philadelphia PA, Aug 12, 2005), [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p21351\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p21351_index.html); Else Marie Pedersen, "Justification and grace: Did Luther discover a new theology or did he discover anew the theology of justification and grace?" *Studia Theologica* 57, no. 2 (2003): 143-161; William T. Cavanaugh, "A Joint Declaration?: Justification as Theosis in Aquinas and Luther" *HeyJ* XLI (2000): 265-280; Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Salvation as Justification and Theosis: The Contribution of the New Finnish Luther Interpretation to Our Ecumenical Future," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 45, no. 1 (2006): 74-82; Dennis Bielfeldt, "Deification as a Motif in Luther's *Dictata super psalterium*."

<sup>29</sup> Loewenich's study on this issue was groundbreaking. See Walther von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976); See also Eom, "Truth and Reality in Luther's Heidelberg Disputation (1518) and Operations in Psalmos (1519-1521)."



the opposing arguments by showing how they agree on the eschatological emphasis in Luther's work.

## Chapter One

### The Medieval Origins of Luther's Thought

The Reformation did not emerge *ex nihilo*. The middle ages were a diverse intellectual environment where various schools of thought battled for supremacy. The *pax theologica* that was once assumed to have dominated Europe before the Reformation was an illusion;<sup>30</sup> Christendom may have been sustained by the church but what this implied was constantly under debate. The late middle ages in particular, the period from approximately 1300-1499, was dominated by two opposing philosophical/theological frameworks: the *via antiqua* and the *via moderna*. The *via antiqua*, which had dominated during the high middle ages, witnessed a slow decline during this period. These two schools of thought debated many issues, but chief among their concerns was the relation between man and God. A third school, which will also be discussed, is Augustinianism, a late medieval tradition that opposed the semi-pelagian tendencies in the soteriology of the *via moderna*.

Scholars agree that Luther's concept of justification is indebted to these schools of thought. However, the details are hard to assess because scholars do not agree on the exact details of Luther's theological development. In this chapter I will reference the work of Heiko A. Oberman, William J. Courtenay, Alister E. McGrath, David C. Steinmetz, and Kenneth Hagen in my reconstruction of Luther's inheritance.

The goal of this chapter is to argue that the best platform for understanding Luther's intellectual development is the late medieval transition from God as being to God as person. This will reveal how the necessitarian view of God gave way to a

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<sup>30</sup> Denis R. Janz, "Late medieval theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, ed. David Bagchi and David C. Steinmetz (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5.

covenantal God who acts and show how Luther added a Christological focus to this tradition. It will lay the theoretical and historical foundation for the rest of this study.

### A. From the *Via Moderna* to the *Theologia Crucis*

On September 4, 1517, two months before Luther wrote his *Ninety-Five Theses*, he penned the *Disputatio Contra Scholasticam Theologiam*. The *Disputatio* consisted of ninety-seven theses in which Luther attacked the main tenets of scholastic theology and challenged the way the Bible was understood.<sup>31</sup> Luther condemned the “Pelagians” and all “heretics” by asserting that “man’s inclination” is “captive” and cannot of its volition conform to “correct precept.”<sup>32</sup> Arguing against the positions of Duns Scotus (d. 1308) and Gabriel Biel (d. 1495),<sup>33</sup> Luther stated that “the will is not free to strive toward whatever is declared good.” It is impossible for man to love God of his own volition, “man is by nature unable to want God to be God” and rather “wants himself to be God.” Luther declared that man is inherently sinful and does not contain within himself the means to please God.

The weight of these theses, and those from the *Heidelberg Disputation*, cannot be appreciated without an understanding of late medieval thought. These theses positioned Luther against the Thomistic metaphysic that stood at the foreground of medieval theology,<sup>34</sup> and against the soteriology of the *via moderna*.<sup>35</sup> For instance, in the 17<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> LW 31, 6.

<sup>32</sup> LW 31, 10.

<sup>33</sup> LW 31, 6.

<sup>34</sup> For a survey of the *via antiqua* and the ‘Thomistic’ metaphysic, see Edward P. Mahoney, “Metaphysical foundations of the hierarchy of being according to some late-medieval and Renaissance philosophers,” in *Philosophies of existence, ancient and medieval*, ed. by Parviz Morewedge (New York: Fordham University Press 1982), 165-257.

<sup>35</sup> In the introduction to his “Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses,” Luther summed up his opinion of Aquinas and other scholastics who held questionable opinions:

thesis of the *Disputatio* Luther rejected the philosophical foundations of the *via antiqua*:<sup>36</sup> “No syllogistic form is valid when applied to divine terms.”<sup>37</sup> Similarly, in the 21<sup>st</sup> thesis Luther positioned himself against the soteriology of the *via moderna* by rejecting any natural propensity for salvation: “No act is done according to nature that is not an act of concupiscence against God.”<sup>38</sup>

Although the *via moderna* had been on the rise since the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the immutable philosophy of the *via antiqua* was still popular within the Dominican setting in Luther’s day.<sup>39</sup> The *via antiqua* was not limited to Aquinas but stretched back through the work of Anselm (d. 1109), Augustine, and the Neoplatonic tradition as a whole. It was due to the popularity of Augustine in the western church that Neoplatonism formed the philosophical backdrop of the Middle Ages.<sup>40</sup> Augustine understood justification through a Neoplatonic model. He had a dualistic anthropology, and stressed the antithetical relationship between *caro* and *spiritus*.<sup>41</sup> Augustine argued that man’s status in the order of creation was fractured by the Fall but that through the grace of Christ, man could attain his proper place in the hierarchy of being. This dualistic anthropology was

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I add one consideration and insist upon it according to the right of Christian liberty, that is, that I wish to refute or accept, according to my own judgment, the mere opinions of St. Thomas, Bonaventura, or other scholastics or canonists which are maintained without text or proof. I shall do this according to the advice of Paul to “test everything, hold fast to that which is good” [1 Thess. 5:21]...” (LW 31, 83).

<sup>36</sup> Luther believed that Aquinas was guilty of applying syllogism to divine terms. For him, this was a breach of the divine paradox that must not be sought through reason alone. However, as Denis Janz has argued, Aquinas had a great appreciation for divine paradox and used discrimination when applying syllogism to revelation. For more on this see Denis R. Janz, “Syllogism or Paradox: Aquinas and Luther on theological method,” *Theological Studies* 59 no. 1 (March 1998): 3-21.

<sup>37</sup> LW 31, 12.

<sup>38</sup> LW 31, 10.

<sup>39</sup> Oberman, “Luther and the Via Moderna,” 642.

<sup>40</sup> Works by Psuedo-Dionysius and Boethius (534 C.E) were also influential, imparting a hierarchical and realist conception of the Cosmos.

<sup>41</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 226. *Caro* is the worldly side of being human and *Spiritus* is the godly oriented side.

the basis for medieval gradualism and allowed justification to be understood as a process in which man is made ever ‘more and more’ righteous.<sup>42</sup>

Augustine’s theology advocated the primacy of grace. In *The Spirit and the Letter*, a text that was very influential upon Luther, Augustine argued that man’s ability to turn to the image of Christ is only possible after he has received the grace of Christ. The image of Christ is obscured by sin and its perception is only inspired by the love of God (“which is the Gift of grace”).<sup>43</sup> As McGrath notes, Augustine believed that the “righteousness bestowed upon humans by God in their justification was recognizable as such by humans—in other words, the justified sinner was *iustus coram Deo et coram hominibus*.”<sup>44</sup> This allowed the believer to progress towards ‘total’ righteousness after justification (*the liberum arbitrium captivatum* becomes the *liberum arbitrium liberatum*).

Aquinas’ Neoplatonic model was similar to Augustine’s but his incorporated more of Aristotle’s philosophy. His scheme rested on a hierarchical chain of being in which the ultimate scale was God—*actus infinitus*. As Edward P. Mahoney writes, for Aquinas, “the more a creature approaches (*accedit*) to God, the measure of all beings, the more it has of being (*habet de esse*), while the more it recedes (*recedit*) from him, the more it has of non-being.”<sup>45</sup> Aquinas adopted the same synergistic metaphysics of

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<sup>42</sup> From Augustine’s point of view, faith was secondary to love in justification and after grace human merit played a role in the process of salvation (David C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 12.

<sup>43</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Augustine: Later Works, Volume III*, tr. by John Burnaby (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 189.

<sup>44</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 226.

<sup>45</sup> Mahoney, “Metaphysical Foundations of the Hierarchy of Being According to Some Late-Medieval and Renaissance Philosophers,” 170. Aquinas stresses that there is a limit to this rule of likeness and that an *infinita distantia* always remains between the creature and God, despite *accedit*.

Augustine by emphasizing the infusion of God's justice in the believer,<sup>46</sup> and the notion that moral attainment only follows the gift of grace.<sup>47</sup> He also embraced the idea of salvation as the proper restitution of the universal order.<sup>48</sup> As McGrath notes, on issues pertaining to grace "Thomas remains faithful to the teaching of Augustine."<sup>49</sup>

As will be made clear in this study, Luther opposed the traditional metaphysics of the *via antiqua*. He was a student in the tradition of Gabriel Biel (d. 1495), Pierre d'Ailly (d. 1420), Gregory of Rimini (d. 1358), and William of Ockham (d. 1348); a tradition that tried to redefine the relationship between faith and reason.<sup>50</sup> In opposition to the hierarchy of being associated with the 'Old Way,' scholastics of the *via moderna* were nominalists. In general, Nominalism was a form of logic that attempted to individualize universals.<sup>51</sup> Whereas Aristotle had offered a moderate realist position, asserting that universals are indeed real but located in the individual thing, nominalists argued that only the real thing exists, and that names are merely categories, sounds and marks that signify reality.

This development radically changed the nature of the relationship between man and God by determining the process of salvation *covenantally* rather than *ontologically*. By rejecting the presence of universals, the relationship between man and God was no longer to be conceived as a necessary product of the hierarchy of being but a contingent

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<sup>46</sup> Throughout the middle ages justification and regeneration were intertwined in the same process.

<sup>47</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 66.

<sup>48</sup> Concerning universals, Aquinas believed that they existed within things and that they existed before creation in the mind of God. In general, Aquinas took the middle way in the universal debate. He stressed that: 1) universals exist in the individual thing (*in re*) 2) through the process of abstraction (*in mente*) 3) and in the mind of God (*ante rem*) (Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (London: Yale University Press, 1980), 53).

<sup>49</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 47. See also Pedersen, "Justification and grace."

<sup>50</sup> For more on this see Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and late medieval Nominalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000).

<sup>51</sup> With this assertion, I do not mean to imply that Nominalism was a singular, well-defined movement. See William J. Courtenay, "Nominalism and Late Medieval Religion," ed. by Charles Trinkaus and Heiko A. Oberman, *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 34.



dispensation by God toward mankind. As McGrath notes, with the rise of the *via moderna*, “the habit of created grace in justification is thus to be considered to be radically contingent, a *necessitas consequentiae* rather than a *necessitas consequentis*.”<sup>52</sup> This implied that there was no necessary causal link between the two realms of creation that is inherent in the natural order. Hence, for followers of the *via moderna*, justification did not follow *necessarily* from the order of being but as a result of the covenant established between man and God.<sup>53</sup> However, it is very important to recognize (and central to this study) that this emphasis on the contingent order of creation (emphasized by the *via moderna*) did not do away with ontology all together, believers were still justified via an ontological transformation of a created habit. What changed was the *necessary* nature of this ontological transformation and its association with the hierarchy of being.<sup>54</sup>

William Ockham’s understanding of creation reflected his rejection of the primacy of the first cause, which had dominated in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. As Carol Albright notes, “He argued that in the sequence of generations it was quite natural that the later generation was alive while the former generations were already dead... In order for a new

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<sup>52</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 69. Justification as a necessity of a conditional statement rather than a necessity of the consequent of that statement.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Whereas the early Dominican school conceived of justification ontologically the Franciscans understood it personally. Despite the division between the early and later Franciscan school (the early being intellectualist and the later voluntarist) this personal description of justification (using non-ontological terms) remained consistent (145).

<sup>54</sup> This point is important for our discussion in chapter three because it highlights a subtle distinction that is often glossed over in Luther studies. In an attempt to distinguish Luther from the *via antiqua* scholars often stress that the covenantal framework of the *via moderna* stood in opposition to the ontological framework of the former. Although this is true, it obscures the fact that the thinkers of the *via moderna* still had an ontology (for a brief summary of Ockham’s ontology see Ernest A. Moody, “Some Remarks on the Ontology of Ockham: Comment,” *The Philosophical Review* 63 no. 4 (1954): 574-576). Indeed, it was not until the modern-era that philosophers developed systems that went beyond or were opposed to ontology. As we will see in chapter three, this has often led to confusion regarding Luther’s criticism of metaphysics. Some thinkers have even gone so far as to see Luther as a forerunner to Kant (See Marius Timmann Mjaaland, “Does Modernity Begin With Luther?” *Studia Theologica* 63, no. 1 (2009): 42-66). For more on this see chapter three.

generation to rise, the continuing existence of the first forefather is not required. In the same way, there is no first cause; nor is its continuing existence required in order to account for the rise of new beings in the world.”<sup>55</sup> For Ockham, creation is understood as a “persistent ontological ‘quiddity’ of the human creature received moment to moment as a *creatio continua*.”<sup>56</sup> This ‘quiddity’ stood in contrast to the ‘hecceity’ of an item; implying that its existence was not a positive characteristic ‘in itself.’<sup>57</sup> Followers of the *via antiqua* distinguished between *conservatio* and *creatio*, which implied that once the world was created it conserved itself through its own nature or essence. Ockham believed, in contrast, that creation continuously occurs *ex nihilo* and did away with the essences and formal substances that supported the world of the *via antiqua*. God, without any mediating essences or formal substances, constantly recreates the world.<sup>58</sup>

Before considering the developments of the *via moderna* and its influence on Luther in greater detail, two things should be mentioned. First, the views of Ockham, Biel, and Rimini were largely canonical and supportive of church tradition (as was the early Luther). On issues such as sacrament, Church authority, and ethics the nominalists

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<sup>55</sup> Carol Rausch Albright and Joel Haugen, *Beginning with the End: God, Science, and Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1997), 41.

<sup>56</sup> John A. Maxfield, *Defender of the most holy patriarchs: Martin Luther's Interpretation of the women of Genesis in the Enarrationes in Genesin, 1535-45* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 125.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. Whereas hecceity, which was coined by Duns Scotus, stood for the essence of a particular thing, quiddity referred to the qualities a particular thing shares with other objects of its kind. For Scotus, both these terms referred to an essential quality. For Ockham, quiddity merely referred to shared qualities, not a shared essence. Ockham seems to have had an anti-universalist interpretation of Aristotle's treatment of special substance in the last chapters of Zeta in *The Metaphysics*. For more on Aristotle's discussion of universals see, Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, trans. by Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin Books, 1998).

<sup>58</sup> As noted in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: “Accounts of creation and conservation can be divided roughly into two different camps. The first camp focuses on the transition from non-being to being, attempting first to characterize the notion of creation and then to develop an account of conservation in terms of preservation of being. The second camp focuses... on the notion of ontological dependence itself, attempting to clarify a way in which everything depends on God. This camp, in contrast to the former camp, attempts to honor the idea that there is no fundamental difference between the activity of God in creation and the activity of God in conservation” (Jonathan Kvanvig, “Creation and Conservation.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2008 Edition), ed. by Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/creation-conservation/>>).

were conservative.<sup>59</sup> Second, the innovation of Nominalism cannot be understood in isolation from the Franciscan tradition as a whole. William of Ockham, after all, was not a lone innovator, but built his insights upon the Franciscan tradition started by Francis of Assisi (d. 1226).

Francis initiated several of the theological innovations that were later to be embodied in the *via moderna*, and were going to have a remarkable affect on future theologians. For instance, in his *Opuscula*, Francis repeatedly appeals to God as *Dominus Deus* (Lord God), making no inference to him as the Supreme Being.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, he perceived of the relationship between God and man in terms of a personal covenant.<sup>61</sup> The tradition that followed in his name, Franciscanism,<sup>62</sup> continued to develop this idea of pact, or covenant—“willed verbal agreements.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 423-428.

<sup>60</sup> Oberman, “Luther and the Via Moderna,” 649. See also Francis of Assisi, *Opuscula sancti patris Francisci Assisiensis*, <http://www.franciscanos.org/esfa/omfra.html#offpass>.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. See also *Sacrum commercium S. Francisci cum Domina Paupertate*, ed. PP. Collegium S. Bonaventure, Quaracchi, 1929.

<sup>62</sup> McGrath distinguishes between an early and a later Franciscan school. The early Franciscan school, characterized by Bonaventure, had a ‘psychological’ approach to justification that denied the natural ability of man to prepare for justification. As McGrath notes, in the early Franciscan school: “Human nature is sufficiently frail that it is simply incapable of receiving the gift of sanctifying grace unless it is prepared beforehand. This disposition towards justification is effected with the assistance of prevenient grace, *gratia gratis data*, and cannot be brought about by the unaided free will” (McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 104).

It is interesting to compare this early Franciscan school, which eventually matured into the *via moderna* in its later period, with the early Dominican school. The early Dominican school, characterized by the early work of Thomas Aquinas, taught that there was a natural disposition towards the reception of grace. In his *Commentary on the Sentences* (1254-57), Aquinas argued that the “promotion required for justification as being external and natural” (106). He taught a fourfold process of justification that incorporated the Aristotelian theory of motion: “1) the infusion of grace 2) the movement of the free will directed towards God through faith 3) the movement of the free will directed against sin 4) the remission of sin” (64). The *Summa contra Gentiles* (1258-64) marks the turning point in Aquinas’ thought. In this work, he retained the fourfold approach but argued that humans do not have the natural disposition towards grace, and changed his earlier position. Aquinas wrote: “Matter does not move itself to its own perfection; therefore it must be moved by something else” (106). Justification occurred after the higher nature of man (guided by God) restrained the lower nature of man. Just like in Augustine’s work, it is God who initiates the first steps in healing grace. Moreover, after justification a person can still sin but this potential is lessened. The only real difference is that Aquinas incorporated Aristotle’s idea of motion.

The later medieval period continued to debate whether the disposition towards grace was a natural or a divinely imputed ability. Hence, a major question of concern was *how* humans were disposed towards justification.

Luther's first encounter with Franciscanism was through the stories of saints. At the age of fourteen (1497), he was deeply impressed by the story of Prince William of Anhalt, a Franciscan in Magdeburg<sup>64</sup> who practiced extreme austerity and died in a fit of devotion.<sup>65</sup> A year later, while staying in Eisenach, Luther learned of the visionary Franciscan Johann Hilten, an apocalyptic prophet whose ideas later interested Luther.<sup>66</sup>

The Franciscan stress on eschatology arose from their concept of mission. They believed it was their God given duty to restore humankind in preparation for the coming apocalypse that would end world history.<sup>67</sup> Whereas most theologians attempted to defend and spread Christianity through a rational defense of its principles, the Franciscans sought to embody the personal spiritual perfection of Christ, and convert by example (*imitatio crucis*). This emphasis stressed God as a ruler of history, rather than an unmoved being. Francis wanted his followers to embody the sacrifice and mercy that Christ had demonstrated on the cross. Their only glory was to be the deeds and acts of

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Luther was not aware of the turn in Aquinas' thought. His interpretation of Aquinas was inherited from Biel, who stressed the earlier more pelagian Aquinas. Hence, when Luther attacked scholasticism he could brand both Aquinas and Biel as pelagian. Had Luther been trained at Cologne, rather than Erfurt, Luther's Reformation may never have occurred. At Cologne the theologian John Capreolus (d. 1445) taught an interpretation of Aquinas that stressed his Augustinian roots. For more on this see David C. Steinmetz, "Aquinas for Protestants: What Luther Got Wrong," *The Christian Century* 122, no. 17 (2005): 23-25.

<sup>63</sup> Courtenay, "Nominalism and Late Medieval Religion," 51.

<sup>64</sup> Luther attended school in Magdeburg between 1496-97, and boarded with the Brethren of the Common Life. See Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 13.

<sup>65</sup> WA 38. 105, 8ff; See also Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther, His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1985), 17.

<sup>66</sup> WA 30. 491, 32ff; See also Brecht, *Martin Luther, His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, 19. Hilten lived in Eisenach and died in 1500.

<sup>67</sup> Randolph E. Daniel, *The Franciscan Concept of Mission in the High Middle Ages* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1975), 28.

Christ.<sup>68</sup> As Oberman has noted, this was the late medieval precursor to Luther's *theologia crucis*.<sup>69</sup>

Luther's direct influence from Franciscan thought began in 1501—at the age of eighteen—when Luther entered the Faculty of Arts at the University of Erfurt.<sup>70</sup> After the condemnation of the *via moderna* in 1473 at the University of Paris, 'modernists' had disseminated throughout northern Europe. By the time Luther enrolled at Erfurt, the *via moderna* was firmly established in the curriculum.<sup>71</sup>

It was at Erfurt that Luther attained his bachelor degree and became a disciple of Ockham. Even though he would later chide Ockham in *Disputatio* for having pelagian tendencies in matters related to salvation, Luther considered him 'the greatest dialectician.'<sup>72</sup> At Erfurt, he was trained in the 'modernist' tradition of Biel and d'Ailly, but was introduced to other classical sources as well, such as Aristotle and Peter Lombard (d. 1160).<sup>73</sup> His instructors Bartholomäus Arnoldi von Usingen (d. 1532) and Jodocus Trutvetter (d. 1519), taught him to take scripture at its word and critique all scholasticism, no matter how revered.<sup>74</sup> As Martin Brecht noted, through Trutvetter, scripture became Luther's foundational tool for understanding reality.<sup>75</sup> This epistemological chain of knowing led from scripture, to experience, and then to reason,

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>69</sup> Oberman, "Luther and the Via Moderna," 655. This is not to assert that Luther had friendly relations with the Franciscan school itself. During his controversy with Eck, he had debates with its members. See Brecht, *Martin Luther, His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, 328-330.

<sup>70</sup> Oberman, *Luther*, 356.

<sup>71</sup> Oberman, "Luther and the Via Moderna," 651.

<sup>72</sup> Aubrey Gwynn, "The Disintegration of Catholic Europe," review of *A History of the Church. Vol. III. The Revolt against the Church: Aquinas to Luther*, by Philip Hughes, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 36, no. 141 (1947): 1.

<sup>73</sup> Martin Marty, *Martin Luther* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 5.

<sup>74</sup> Oberman, *Luther*, 121.

<sup>75</sup> Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther, His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, 35. By 1518, Luther had gone beyond Trutvetter in his adherence to scripture. As Brecht notes, Trutvetter would not have approved of Luther's *Disputatio*. (The particulars of this disagreement are not entirely clear because a letter sent by Trutvetter to Luther in 1517 has been lost (217).

and never the other way around. It was an “empirical” methodology based upon the particular instances of revelation given by God.<sup>76</sup>

This connection is key for understanding the *Heidelberg Disputation* and the justification debate. As Graham White has argued, at Erfurt Luther learned the rules which govern inferences and propositions (descended from d'Ailly).<sup>77</sup> Luther's academic disputations embodied an “analytical language” (a set of rules for verification and falsification) that he learned from this training. These skills helped him to distinguish between philosophy and theology.<sup>78</sup>

In 1507, Jodocus Trutvetter went to the University of Wittenberg as a professor. Although he only stayed for a year, he imparted the *via moderna* to such a degree that it was formally introduced into the curriculum at Wittenberg the following semester. According to Oberman, Trutvetter established the *via moderna* at Wittenberg in the style of Gregory of Rimini (*via Gregorii*).<sup>79</sup> This fortunate turn of events was key for the Reformation because it ensured that Luther, who became an Augustinian monk in 1505, would be able to rely on the authority of an Augustinian theologian when he arrived at Wittenberg in 1511-12.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, it provided Luther with fellow professors from his

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<sup>76</sup> Oberman, *Luther*, 120.

<sup>77</sup> Graham White (a defender of the deification position) argues that Luther was a nominalist, in all temporal matters. Although he argues that Luther's theology was realist in relation to the word of God, he asserts that Luther remained a nominalist in logic throughout his life. Like Ockham, Luther did not believe that knowledge of the natural world gave any clue into the nature of God or truth (there is no process of analogy as with Aquinas). See Graham White, *Luther as Nominalist* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 1994), 344-348.

<sup>78</sup> Heiko A. Oberman, review of *Luther as Nominalist*, by Graham White, in *Speculum* 70, no. 3 (1995): 697.

<sup>79</sup> Oberman, *Luther*, 122.

<sup>80</sup> Although Luther would later become an Augustinian monk, this in no way implied an allegiance to Augustinian theology. For more on this see, Scott H. Hendrix, “Luther's Loyalties and the Augustinian Order,” in *Augustine, the Harvest, and Theology (1300-1650)*, ed. Kenneth Hagen (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 236-258.



own order to support him when the indulgence controversy erupted in 1517.<sup>81</sup> Oberman perceived the influence of *via Gregorii*<sup>82</sup> and Johann von Staupitz (d.1524), a trained Augustinian and Luther's acting superior,<sup>83</sup> as central to his theological development.<sup>84</sup>

As Luther stated in his table talks, Staupitz was one of the most important influences upon his developing theology: "Staupicius hat die doctrinam angefangen."<sup>85</sup> After all, it was Staupitz who encouraged Luther to get his doctorate in theological studies and who helped protect him when the indulgence controversy broke out in 1517.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, when Luther struggled with a deep and abiding fear of God's judgment he would often turned to Staupitz for help (confessing to him for hours upon hours).

In his bouts with the devil (*Anfechtungen*) Luther felt lost, unable to meet the demands of an overbearing God.<sup>87</sup> His teachers at Erfurt had taught him that if he did his

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<sup>81</sup> Oberman, *Luther*, 356.

<sup>82</sup> The Augustinianism associated with Gregory of Rimini downplayed the *habitus* in favor of a bond of love (*gratia increata*) between the believer and God (Bielfeldt, "Deification as a Motif in Luther's *Dictata super psalterium*," 417).

<sup>83</sup> Staupitz was made Vicar general of the German Congregation of Augustinians in 1503.

<sup>84</sup> This claim is not fully accepted by Alister E. McGrath or David C. Steinmetz. In contrast, they argue that: 1) Staupitz was not a disciple of Gregory 2) Luther's thought contains more originality than Oberman allows 3) Luther's views on Augustine changed drastically between 1513-1518. Whereas Oberman argues that the Augustinian theological tradition was imparted to Luther through John Staupitz, who was himself influenced by Gregory of Rimini (1358), Steinmetz asserts that even if Luther had been influenced by this tradition through Staupitz, we have no evidence that Luther agreed with it (Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, 13). Moreover, Steinmetz argues that Staupitz followed "a more traditional and well marked path established by generations of conservative Augustinian theologians" (Steinmetz, *Luther and Staupitz*, 141).

<sup>85</sup> Cited in Steinmetz, *Luther and Staupitz*, 3. See also, LW 31, 97.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>87</sup> One of Oberman's contributions to Luther scholarship was his emphasis on the medieval character of Luther's world. He stressed that Luther was obsessed with the devil and the coming apocalypse. For instance, in an article titled *Luther against the Devil* he wrote:

Luther's world of thought is wholly distorted and apologetically misconstrued if his conception of the Devil is dismissed as a medieval phenomenon and only his faith in Christ retained as relevant or as the only decisive factor. Christ and the Devil were equally real to him: one was the perpetual intercessor for Christianity, the other a menace to mankind till the end. To argue that Luther never overcame the medieval belief in the Devil says far too little; he even intensified it and lent to it additional urgency: Christ and Satan wage a cosmic war for mastery over church and world. No one can evade involvement in this struggle. Even for the believer there is no refuge -- neither monastery nor the seclusion of the wilderness offer him a chance for escape. The Devil is the omnipresent threat, and exactly for this reason the faithful need the proper weapons for survival (Heiko A. Oberman, "Luther Against the Devil," *Christian Century* 107 no. 3 (1990): 75-76).

best God would not deny him Grace (*Facientibus quod in se est Deus non denegat Gratiā*) but Luther felt unable to meet this requirement.<sup>88</sup> By as early as 1509 he turned to mysticism to seek a solution for his problem. The devotional mysticism of Jean Gerson greatly appealed to him and suited his nominalist training, but mysticism, like scholasticism and monasticism, ultimately failed to provide him with answers.<sup>89</sup> The origin of Luther's Reformation discovery lies in this discontent. His inability to find peace with the soteriology of Ockham and Biel caused a strong reaction in him against this tradition.

Staupitz helped Luther arrive at a new understanding of penance by emphasizing the primacy of God's love. He provided Luther with traditional Augustinian instruction which turned him away from the soteriology of the *via moderna*. As Steinmetz notes:

Staupitz perceived that Luther's psychological anxieties were caused by his bad theology. It was... unresolved problems with his image of God which drove Luther to despair. Staupitz frontally attacked that bad theology and so helped Luther to resolve his anxieties by administering a therapeutic combination of traditional pastoral advice with sound Augustinian theology. The traditional advice helped Luther to perceive the gracious intention of the Church's discipline and the Augustinian theology corrected Luther's nominalist understanding of grace and justification.<sup>90</sup>

Staupitz was Luther's Augustinian influence that helped inspire his criticism of the *via moderna*.

In his early works, such as the *Disputatio Contra scholasticam theologiam*, Luther's disagreement with the *via moderna* lies in Biel's use of Aristotelian tradition to understand the will. By doing what was naturally in oneself (*ex puris naturalibus*), Biel

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<sup>88</sup> Kolb, *Martin Luther*, 16.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 30. For more on this, see my criticism of the deification argument in chapter 3.

<sup>90</sup> Steinmetz, *Luther and Staupitz*, 143.

believed a sinner could win the grace of God. Biel accepted the *acceptatio divina* principle<sup>91</sup> but believed man was able to develop the proper 'habit.'<sup>92</sup>

Importantly, the *via moderna* was not limited to its soteriology. Luther was also influenced by the idea of the *pactum* and the distinction between the *potentia ordinata* and the *potentia absoluta*. Contrary to the scholastics of the *via antiqua*, Ockham had a voluntarist view of God. He believed that God's relationship to creation was established through his own personal decision to have a relationship with humankind. This connection did not depend upon any reasoning ability possessed by man but upon the distinction between the *potentia ordinata* and the *potentia absoluta*.<sup>93</sup> The *potentia absoluta* is the realm of God's infinite power; the space of God's free will in matters of creation and miracles. The *potentia ordinata* signifies God's covenantal relations (*pactum*); the domain of theology and of the promises made in scripture.<sup>94</sup>

When Luther transferred to the Augustinian monastery in Wittenberg in 1512, he still espoused the soteriology of the *via moderna*. After receiving his doctorate and<sup>95</sup> becoming a Professor of Biblical Theology, he began to develop a theology around the idea of humility.<sup>96</sup> However, due to his *Anfechtungen* and his influence from Staupitz, he began to stress the inability of the human will in matters of faith.<sup>97</sup> His early literature includes the lectures on the Psalms (1513-14), Romans (1515-16), and Galatians (1516-

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<sup>91</sup> The idea that God's abundant gift of grace is given without judgment of merit. This idea was first developed by Duns Scotus and was later adopted by the Ockhamists. See Denis R. Janz, "Late medieval theology," 10.

<sup>92</sup> Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 57-89.

<sup>93</sup> For 'modernists,' the *pactum* was no less dependable than the position held by the *via antiqua*. It is just that they stressed the voluntary nature of God's "willed verbal agreements" (Courtenay, "Nominalism and Late Medieval Religion," 51).

<sup>94</sup> Heiko A. Oberman, *The Dawn of The Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 5.

<sup>95</sup> Brecht, *Martin Luther, His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, 121.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 173. A term Brecht uses to define Luther's early work.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. See also WA 9. 90, 32.

1517). In these lectures, Luther emphasized the utter sinfulness of man and began to criticize scholasticism more pointedly. He condemned Scotists and Ockhamists for their disagreements and attacked Biel's ideas as pelagian.<sup>98</sup>

By the time Luther finished his lectures on Romans he had completely rejected the soteriology of Biel. In 1515, he came to the conclusion that all human righteousness was destroyed by the Gospel. As McGrath notes, this development is intertwined with the destruction of all "soteriological resources" in man<sup>99</sup> and is the beginning of Luther's break with tradition. In the lectures on Romans, Luther argues three theological points that confirm this break:

1. Humans are passive in justification
2. The human will is held captive by grace
3. That the principle *quod in se est* is pelagian.<sup>100</sup>

In the lectures on Romans he interprets grace not as a quality at *work* within the human soul, but as the absolute favor of God directed towards the person.<sup>101</sup> In contrast to Augustine's anthropology, Luther had come to believe that sin affected the *totus homo*,<sup>102</sup> and no longer made a division between *caro* and *spiritus*.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 167.

<sup>99</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 227.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 220-221.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 228.

<sup>102</sup> This particular development may precede 1515. Scholars disagree on the exact date because Luther's language is hard to determine in his early writings. At the very least, in 1509-10 Luther was still giving priority to *caritas* over faith. In the medieval tradition, faith was incapable of justifying unless it was "informed by *caritas*" (McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 81).

<sup>103</sup> Loewenich argues that the idea of conscience and understanding only play a role in Luther's early writings. The idea of conscience, which was known as *synteresis*, was derived from Augustine's *Confessions*. It is what the Bible refers to as spirit (Rom. 8:26) and what Jerome described as that "spark of conscience" by which "we know that we sin" (Loewenich, *Luther's theology of the Cross*, 52). Aquinas considers the *synteresis* to be a created *habit* that reminds us, or inclines us towards, natural law. Biel conceived it as a moral ability. *Synteresis* is therefore a capacity for the divine. It implied that even though man is fallen he retains an ethical conscience. Luther would later reject this principle for its pelagian overtones.

The concept of understanding was much more intertwined with Neoplatonism. It implied that there was a portion of our spirit or conscience which was attuned to the spiritual realm. For Augustine, after one had received the grace of Christ they could understand 'higher' things: "one who has the Spirit of Christ attains

It is crucial, however, when assessing this break with the soteriology of the *via moderna* to notice that Luther is not rejecting Nominalism or the concept of *pactum*. As Kenneth Hagen has shown, we should not be too hasty to distance Luther from all elements of the *via moderna*. Even after Luther rejected Biel's emphasis on the will (1515), he continued to develop his doctrine of justification along the lines of the *pactum*.<sup>104</sup> For Luther, the *pactum* referred not only to the inter-dependent relationship between man and God in salvation (which he rejected), but the promises of God associated with scripture and the sacraments.<sup>105</sup> As Luther wrote in 1520, it is the *pactum* that makes the sacrament into a reliable sign:<sup>106</sup> "quo comprehenderet deum, nec vagaretur aut fluctuaret in suis speculationibus... Nec ist periculosius in homine aliquid

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knowledge of the invisible" (Ibid, 60). Understanding was therefore associated with the higher faculties of the soul.

According to Loewenich, with the *theologia crucis* Luther dropped both of these ideas. The *synteresis* is unable to perceive or do good; every act is inherently sinful. Moreover, God is hidden and only faith provides understanding (this is in contrast to various scholastic thinkers). This newfound knowledge is Christocentric and understands theological truth through the actions of Christ (Ibid, 50-65).

These observations are also shared by Ozment. Ozment notes that for Luther the *synteresis* is not capable of appealing to reason and the will to direct the conscience, heart, soul, or mind. Rather, the ability of the believer to turn to God is found in the *intellectus* and *affectus* of faith and hope (Ozment, *Homo Spiritualis*, 150).

<sup>104</sup> This observation is also shared by Kolb: "Luther was very familiar with the concept of God's promise from his scholastic training. Biel had taught that the stability of God's world rested upon his 'pact' or 'covenant', which expressed his utterly reliable assurance that he would manage the world and human life in specific ways. But his promise of salvation was conditional upon human performance. Luther found peace only when he came to understand that God's promise of life and salvation falls upon his chosen children without condition based on their actions. God's covenant is a gift from the sovereign, not a contract between roughly equal partners" (Kolb, *Martin Luther*, 48).

<sup>105</sup> As Hagen writes: "Present and personal certitude of salvation is possible in Luther's theology because of the *testamentum Christi*. In addition to the promise of eternal life, the sole emphasis of medieval exegetes, Luther considers the importance of Christ's testament to be the forgiveness of sin. The sacrament and example of Christ's death give assurance that Christ, the "Träger," is not only the testator but also the one who effects forgiveness of sins. Rather than discuss the Eucharist in the context of the "sacrifice texts," as the medieval exegetes do, Luther discusses the sacrament of the testament of the Christ in terms of the forgiveness of sins and the response of faith made possible by Christ." See Kenneth Hagen, *The Theology of Testament in the young Luther: the lectures on Hebrews* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 117-119.

<sup>106</sup> Oberman, "Luther and the Via Moderna," 668.

ratione, quae pro sua curiositate non potest non evagari': Sermo de Testamento Christi."<sup>107</sup> Luther used the *pactum* to transform his concept of faith.

Evidence for this can also be seen through a comparison of the theology of Luther and his mentor Staupitz. Although Staupitz taught Luther to see justification as God's gift to us, rather than something we attain, Luther developed a unique approach that differed from his mentor. For Staupitz, justification was an execution of God's eternal decrees that are given to the sinner as a gift of love. For Luther, justification was a gift through faith in the received promise of God.<sup>108</sup> Decrees, for Staupitz, unfolded in the drama of creation as predestined by God's ruling hand. In other words, to understand what is happening now Staupitz did not look to the future and its eschatological uncertainty but to God's action in the past and the present reality of grace. As Steinmetz notes, for Staupitz:

History is the plain, straightforward, step-by-step execution in time of decisions made in and by God. The future will unfold, as the past and present have before it, according to exemplars in the mind of God. The future is not a problem, but neither is it a source of consolation or of hope. Staupitz is, in a word, not future oriented. When he feels the need of consolation, he meditates on the past event of the cross or rejoices in the present possession of grace.<sup>109</sup>

Hence, where Staupitz and the medieval tradition as a whole was oriented around the presence of love, Luther came to emphasize faith and hope. He still stressed the centrality of love but associated it with the promise of Christ. This is evident even in 1513 in his lectures on Psalms; Luther used words like "sign," "promise," "testimony," and "hope" to emphasize the dialectical relationship between creation, resurrection, and

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<sup>107</sup> WA 9. 448, 35-449. This implies that the "*pactum* makes the sacrament into a reliable sign" (Oberman, "Luther and the Via Moderna," 668.

<sup>108</sup> Steinmetz, *Luther and Staupitz*, 94.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 66.



future consummation.<sup>110</sup> This subtle emphasis would turn out to be a key element in Luther's Reformation project. Staupitz saw history as the unfolding of God's decreed plan, a plan that he trusted and felt comfortable with, while Luther saw the unfolding of God's plan as more 'open-ended.' He trembled before God and history, anticipating the arrival of the Son of Man. As Steinmetz writes, for Luther: "The faithful synagogue was marked by its expectant longing for the saving act of God in the *res non apparentes* of the cross and resurrection of Jesus."<sup>111</sup>

The *pactum* or *testamentum Christi* was the proclamation of this future fulfillment. By connecting this concept with a Christological focus Luther found answers to his fears and doubts about salvation (*Anfechtungen*). It was a combination of the *via moderna* and his bouts with the devil that led him an apocalyptic understanding of salvation history that stressed the proclamation of the Word. It is telling that in Luther's last letter to Staupitz (1522) he associates his new understanding of justification with the coming apocalypse: "... at ego indies magis provoco Satanam et suas squamas, ut acceleretur dies ille Christi destructurus AntiChristum istum."<sup>112</sup>

Another way to express this transition in Luther's thought is to say that he found comfort in the "*Werde-Charakter*" of Christ. In contrast to Thomas Aquinas, who read Exod. 3:14 as 'ego sum qui sum' (as it was translated in the Latin Vulgate), Luther translated it in the future tense, 'I shall be who I shall be.'<sup>113</sup> This reading stands in opposition to the unmoved mover of the *via antiqua* who actualized his presence in the

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 66-67.

<sup>112</sup> Cited in Heiko A. Oberman, "Eschatology and Scatology in the "Old" Luther," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 19, No. 3 (1988): 450. This statement signifies that the reception of God's grace inspires Satan to fight against it. However, it also signals the coming apocalypse and the destruction of Satan.

<sup>113</sup> Oberman, "Luther and the Via Moderna, 648.

pre-ordained rational unfolding of time. Luther's interpretation is congruent with his *theologia crucis*. It reveals a time bound God whose acts and deeds are the *pactum* of scripture. In his own translation of the Old Testament (*Biblia*), Luther translated Exod. 3:14: "Gott sprach zu Mose: Ich werde sein, der ich sein werde ... Also soltu zu den kindern Israel sagen: Ich werds sein, der hat mich zu euch gesand."<sup>114</sup>

In this manner, eschatology was a constant element of Luther's thought and played a key role in his doctrine of justification. As I will discuss in the following chapter, this is visible in the binary distinction between the *theologia gloriae* and the *theologia crucis*, and in the 'not yet' nature of righteousness (*simul iustus et peccator*). Luther was an end time prophet who stressed the role of God as an actor in history, not as a lofty being grasped by reason.<sup>115</sup> It is for this reason that there are more similarities between the apocalyptic Bohemian Jan Hus (d. 1415) and Luther than there are between Staupitz and Luther.<sup>116</sup> As I will argue in the rest of this study, this is the proper context in which to understand Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation* and the justification debate.

## B. Summary

Luther's development up to 1518 was conditioned by the rise of the *via moderna* and Augustinianism. He was trained in the school of thought that descended from Francis of Assisi and William of Ockham. This school stressed the role of covenant over and above the ontological necessity of God's action in salvation. The soteriology of the *via moderna* stood in contrast to the hierarchy of being taught by the *via antiqua*.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid. Although Luther's New Testament was published in 1522, his complete Bible was not published until 1534. See Oberman, *Luther*, 358-361.

<sup>115</sup> Oberman, "Eschatology and Scatology in the "Old" Luther," 446.

<sup>116</sup> Scott Hendrix, "The Work of Heiko A. Oberman," *Religious Studies Review* 28, No. 2 (2002): 128; See also Heiko A. Oberman, "Hus and Luther: Prophets of a Radical Reformation," in *The Contentious Triangle: Church, State, and University*, ed. by Rodney L. Peterson and Calvin Augustine Pater (Kirksville, MO: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1999).

However, the followers of the *via moderna* still had an ontological account of salvation—the believer was made righteous by an internally created habit. What changed was that the *iustitia* of the *via moderna* no longer followed an ontological necessity, but a covenantal necessity (a *necessitas consequentiae* rather than a *necessitas consequentis*).

Luther rejected the application of syllogism to divine terms associated with the *via antiqua*. Luther also rejected the soteriology of the *via moderna* by rejecting the principle, *facienti quod in se est Deus denegat gratiam*. By using the *pactum* to emphasize the reliability of scripture and the sacrament Luther's soteriology came to stand between the *via moderna* and the Augustinianism of Staupitz. Luther emphasized the primacy of grace by highlighting the impotence of the will before and after justification. He rejected the Neoplatonic (and Augustinian) distinction between the *caro* and the *spiritus*. Rather than stress the importance of God's decrees, as did Staupitz, he emphasized the role of faith and hope. In this manner, Luther combined Augustine's doctrine of grace with a Christological interpretation of an all powerful God who acts in time. In doing so, he unfolded the tradition that was initiated by Francis of Assisi and embraced a realist eschatology. Through the *pactum* (which can also be referred to as *testamentum* or covenant), Luther made the promise of Christ primary. The God who acts, initiated by Francis, became the God who acts in Christ.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Oberman, "Luther and the Via Moderna," 641.

## **Chapter Two** ***The Heidelberg Disputation***

This chapter is broken into two sections, a historical and thematic exploration of the *Heidelberg Disputation*, and an analysis of Luther's hermeneutic. First, I explore the historical context and thematic layout of the text and detail how the text reveals Luther's theological development—from his rejection of the Augustinian anthropology, to his Reformation discovery. I emphasize that Luther wrote these theses after several years of lecturing on the writings of Paul and the Psalms, a concentration that is evident in the text. In the second section, I explore the development of Luther's hermeneutic. I show how Luther's break with medieval hermeneutics—in favor of an interpretation of Christ based on proclamation—led to a reading of Scripture that stressed the humanity of God in act.

### **A. The Historical Context Thematic Layout of the Text**

After the storm of controversy that erupted over the publication of Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* (*Disputatio pro declaratione virtutis indulgentiarum*) on October 31, 1517 a disputation was needed to clarify Luther's evangelical theology. Pope Leo X had asked the general of the Augustinian Eremites to silence Luther's protest. This order was passed on to Staupitz, who was vicar of the German congregation but there is no record of any action that was taken. Instead, it was decided that Luther should present a series of theses to acquaint his brothers with the new evangelical theology. Since the Augustinian chapter typically met on the third Sunday after Easter (Jubilate Sunday), it was agreed that Luther would travel to Heidelberg to take part in the meeting. On April 9 1518, Luther set out on foot for the city of Heidelberg with two fellow monks, Leonard

Beier and the herald Urban.<sup>118</sup> At Würzburg, they joined the Erfurt group (including his former instructor Usingen) who took them the rest of the way in their wagon.<sup>119</sup>

With his *Ninety-Five Theses* Luther challenged the authority of the Archbishop of Mainz and Pope Leo X, calling into question the marketing of indulgences and the authority of the Papacy.<sup>120</sup> At the time of the *Heidelberg Disputation* Luther had not yet been excommunicated, but the political climate was dangerous enough for his fellow monks to warn him not to leave the safety of Wittenberg. Frederick III, Luther's Elector, had given Luther letters of safe conduct and specific instructions on how to travel to Heidelberg.<sup>121</sup> In addition to the indulgence controversy, these cautions reflected Luther's prized status as professor at the University of Wittenberg. Before they departed, Staupitz asked Luther not to debate controversial topics and advised him to prepare theses on sin, free will, and grace. Luther prepared twenty-eight theological and twelve philosophical theses for the debate.<sup>122</sup>

At the meeting, Staupitz was re-elected as vicar of the German congregation and Luther was replaced by Lang as district vicar<sup>123</sup> but there is no record of any discussion of the indulgence controversy.<sup>124</sup> The disputation took place on April 26<sup>th</sup> at the Augustinian convent with Leonard Beier defending the theses and Luther presiding.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Brecht, *Martin Luther, His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, 214.

<sup>119</sup> Martin Luther, *Martin Luther, Studienausgabe, Band 1*, tr. Hans-Ulrich Delius, et al. (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1987), 186-7.

<sup>120</sup> LW 31, 27. Scholars tend to differentiate between the indulgence controversy and the discovery of justification by faith. For instance, Scott Hendrix argues that at this early stage Luther's critique of scholasticism represented his theoretical attack on tradition, whereas his attack on indulgences was driven by practical concerns (Hendrix, "Luther," 42). In agreement, I would argue that each of Luther's writings are situational and that each should be analyzed on its own merits, before being generalized into a overall pattern.

<sup>121</sup> Brecht, *Martin Luther, His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, 215.

<sup>122</sup> LW 31, 37-38.

<sup>123</sup> Brecht, *Martin Luther, His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, 215.

<sup>124</sup> LW 31, 37-38.

<sup>125</sup> Luther, *Martin Luther, Studienausgabe*, 186.

Beier, who had known Luther since coming to the University of Wittenberg in 1514, was a master's student at the time.<sup>126</sup>

The older members of the order found Luther's arguments too radical. In particular, Theologian Georg Niger commented: "If the peasants hear this, they will stone you."<sup>127</sup> Fortunately, the younger men in attendance were deeply impressed by Luther's theses. Notable figures like Martin Bucer were intrigued with his knowledge of the Bible and his frank manner of discussion. Luther's influence upon this younger generation would be pivotal in the coming years as the Reformation quickened.<sup>128</sup>

Luther's theological argument in the *Heidelberg Disputation* can be broken into four parts:<sup>129</sup>

1. The Problem of Good Works (Theses 1-12)
2. The Problem of Will (Thesis 13-18)
3. The Great Divide: The Way of Glory versus the Way of the Cross (Theses 19-24)
4. God's Work in Us: The Righteousness of Faith (Thesis 25-28)<sup>130</sup>

In this single document, Luther unpacked his theological developments of the past ten years, unveiled a new anthropology, a new understanding of scripture, and a re-conceptualization of divine knowledge. Putting together insights that had first appeared in his lectures on Psalms, Luther developed a new theological hermeneutic: *Crux sola est*

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<sup>126</sup> Luther, *Martin Luther, Studienausgabe, Band 1*, 217. Beier (d. 1552), who also accompanied Luther on his way to Augsburg in October of 1518, would later become a Lutheran preacher in Guben (1525). His other contributions to the Reformation include his job as preacher and superintendant in Zwickau (1532-38), Cottbus (1552), and his role as a traveling preacher (1542 and 1544).

<sup>127</sup> Brecht, *Martin Luther, His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, 215-216.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. Bucer, who would later become the leader of the Reformation in Strasbourg, understood Luther in a 'humanistic' sense. He misunderstood the anthropological stress in Luther's theses and did not notice the sharp difference between his evangelical theology and the work of Erasmus (215-216).

<sup>129</sup> Note: The *Heidelberg Disputation* is not the only writing in which Luther develops his theology of the cross. Other key texts include the *The Bondage of the Will* (1525), and lectures on Isaiah (1527-1530), lectures on Romans (1515-1516), lectures on Hebrews (1518).

<sup>130</sup> This four-part division is derived from Gerhard Forde's recent book. See Gerhard Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Cambridge UK, Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), v.

*nostra Theologia*.<sup>131</sup> This was a vision of Christ in act, “who carries the cross from Christmas to Easter.”<sup>132</sup> Robert Kolb argues that this new theology served as Luther’s hermeneutic throughout his career. Although first formulated in 1518, Kolb has found evidence for its presence as late as 1533.<sup>133</sup> Perceiving scripture as a proclamation rather than a salvation history, Luther read and spoke of the Word as a promise. He addressed the people as an Apostle<sup>134</sup> offering not only a critique of the scholastic framework but an explanation for human suffering.<sup>135</sup>

Luther opened the disputation by stating that we are to have no confidence in our own reason and submit to the judgment of the Holy Spirit. He asserted that the law of God and the natural works of man cannot bring one to righteousness. Although the works of man appear righteous, they are in fact grave sins. The works of God, in contrast, appear evil but are in fact eternal merits. This assertion upsets the ordinary conceptions of human achievement, and reveals that Luther’s concept of God stands in contrast to our usual ideas of justice. In fact, any attempt to attain justice through human effort is evil. Even when God acts through us, these acts are not free of sin. When human works are done without fear (i.e. when they are embodied in a pure and evil confidence), then they are mortal sins. He writes that “pride cannot be avoided, or hope of salvation present, unless the judgment of condemnation is feared in every work.” For God, sins are truly pardonable “only when they are feared by men to be mortal sins.”<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> WA 5. 176, 32-3.

<sup>132</sup> Oberman, *Luther and the Via Moderna*, 641.

<sup>133</sup> The majority of Kolb’s paper is spent examining Luther’s lectures on the Psalms of ascent (1532-33). See Robert Kolb, “Luther’s Theology of the Cross Fifteen Years after Heidelberg’ Lectures of the Psalms of Ascent,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 61 (2010): 69-85.

<sup>134</sup> Kolb, *Martin Luther*, 43.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, 56.

<sup>136</sup> WA 1. 353, 15-34; WA 1. 354, 1-5. All translations from the Heidelberg theses are my own.

With theses 1-12, Luther crushed the ideal of human achievement through a rejection of the will and human understanding. He debased the value of man before the hiddenness of God and made a break from the theology of humility that dominated his early career. As Brecht notes, in the *Heidelberg Disputation* Luther re-envisioned his early theology, making it more radical.<sup>137</sup> This radical quality lies in Luther's anthropology.<sup>138</sup>

As discussed above, by 1515 (at the latest) Luther's anthropology became that of *totus homo*. When he refers to the human person he refers to both the *caro* (the fleshy/sensual part of a human) and *spiritus* (the higher reaching, or soul like quality of a human). It is the *totus homo* who suffers and benefits from sin and justification. The law and the Gospel affect the whole person. This means that even after salvation, the believer is still a sinner (*simul iustus et peccator*). Although the gift of righteousness is given now it will not be complete until the Eschaton. Hence, theses 1-12 distinguish Luther from Augustine, who believed that man was made righteous in a gradual process after the reception of grace (*gratia sanans*). As McGrath writes: "Augustine understands *iustitia Dei* to be contiguous with *iustitia hominum* because it underlies human concepts of *iustitia*. For Luther, *iustitia Dei* is revealed only in the cross of Christ, and if anything, contradicts human conceptions of *iustitia*."<sup>139</sup> Man's will therefore remains sinful even after the saving effects of grace.

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<sup>137</sup> Brecht, *Martin Luther, His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, 232.

<sup>138</sup> See McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 41-53. Later in his career, this radical quality would be expressed in his concept of the *servum arbitrium*. Augustine's notion of the bound will was not the same as this radical position. As McGrath has noted, Augustine distinguished between *liberum arbitrium captivatum* (the will before justification) and *liberum arbitrium liberatum* (the will after justification). Luther's doctrine of *servum arbitrium* was more radical because he asserted that even after justification a person cannot will towards the good. In this sense, there may be a connection between Luther's anthropology of the *totus homo* and his later doctrine of the *servum arbitrium*.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, 232.



A perfect example of this point is at the beginning of the second section. In the 13<sup>th</sup> thesis Luther wrote, “after the fall, free will exists by name alone, and as long as it acts through its own ability, it commits a mortal sin.” These theses are examining the anthropology of human action. Luther wrote that free will is not capable of doing good in an active capacity but only by passively allowing God to work through it. By believing that we are able to do good man adds “sin to sin, so that he becomes doubly guilty.” Luther was not trying to give rise to existential despair, but the humility necessary to trust and search out the grace of Christ. He asserted that “man must utterly despair of his own insight before he may receive the grace of Christ.”<sup>140</sup>

With this second section, Luther completely rejected the soteriology of the *via moderna*. Most scholastics had accepted the principle *facienti quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam* (God does not deny grace to one who does what is in his own power).<sup>141</sup> This implied that if the believer did his best God would provide the saving grace of eternal life. To make this assertion theologically acceptable, however, scholastics used several positions. One, a gift of grace is required before humans can do what is in them. Two, the merit people receive for their act is not of equal measure, but has been abundantly and generously given by God (*acceptatio divina*). Three, God’s decision to grant salvation is determined *ante praevisa merita* (prior to his foreknowledge of merit). Gabriel Biel is considered a ‘semi-pelagian’ because he did away with supposition one and three, thereby allowing human action to play a determining role in salvation.<sup>142</sup> Here, Luther abandoned the approach he learned from Biel. As a good student of Staupitz, Luther argued for the primacy of grace.

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<sup>140</sup> WA 1. 354, 5-16.

<sup>141</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 107.

<sup>142</sup> Denis R. Janz, “Late medieval theology,” 12.

Theses 19-24 are largely derived from Paul's epistle to the Romans, and are the most paradoxical of the Heidelberg theses.<sup>143</sup> In thesis 19 Luther wrote, "That man does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened (Rom. 1:20)." A theologian is not supposed to imagine the power of God by looking 'behind' the sacrifice of Christ. Rather, he is to appreciate God in his weakness, suffering, and pain on the cross.

In theses 20 and 21 Luther introduced the most famous terms of the *Heidelberg Disputation*; *theologia crucis* and *theologia gloriae*. Thesis 21 states: "A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls a thing what it is." For Luther, to practice the theology of glory is to believe that the secrets of God's nature can be grasped through reason. To believe this is to be "puffed up, blinded, and hardened." Luther argued that the only way to be free from the law is to be "in Christ" (Rom. 4.15).<sup>144</sup>

Luther stressed the 'hidden' and 'revealed' quality of God. Since God exceeds the capacity of human comprehension, Luther distinguished between that which is given in scripture and that which is beyond our grasp. Kolb notes that this 'hidden God' has three components: the totally unknowable (God's transcendent elements), that which is mysterious (miracles and parables), and the way he appears as opposite (as shame and weakness on the cross).<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these theses received attention from a wide variety of thinkers, including notable philosophers like Heidegger. See John Van Buren, *The Young Heidegger: Rumor of a Hidden King* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).

<sup>144</sup> WA 1. 354, 17-28.

<sup>145</sup> Kolb, *Martin Luther*, 57.

As we will see in the next chapter, how theologians, historians, scholars, etc., read theses 19-24 determines how they understand the whole of Luther's theology. This is slightly ironic because, as Brecht notes, they are not very original.<sup>146</sup> On the surface, they merely assert that Christ is the source of all goodness and that he is to be understood through his sacrifice on the cross. However, due to their paradoxical quality, theologians argue that they have epistemological and ontological significance (see chapter 3).<sup>147</sup>

Despite the importance of theses 19-24, it is only in theses 25-28 that Luther provided evidence of his theological breakthrough.<sup>148</sup> Here, the negative works of man are placed in opposition to the creative aspects of God. Up to this point, man had been discussed in relation to his sinful nature, but now the creative capacity of Christ is also emphasized. Luther asserted that although the law is never fulfilled, through Christ, all is fulfilled. In us, God creates what is pleasing to himself: "He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ."<sup>149</sup> In this manner, Luther connects the identity of Christ with that of the believer. As Brecht wrote, for Luther, "Christ works in him [the believer], and his work is one that is worked by Christ and therefore pleasing to God."<sup>150</sup> Here, the theme of the disputation—justification via the theology of the cross—is contextualized in relation to human action.

This Christocentric focus in his doctrine of justification sets Luther apart from tradition. For Augustine, justification was similar to a process of infusion that instilled

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<sup>146</sup> Brecht, *Martin Luther, His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, 234.

<sup>147</sup> See below.

<sup>148</sup> This is not meant to imply that this is the first place in Luther's writings where he gives evidence of his breakthrough.

<sup>149</sup> WA 1. 354, 29-36.

<sup>150</sup> Brecht, *Martin Luther, His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, 234.

qualities in the human being.<sup>151</sup> We are saved *propter fidem*. In Luther's mature theology, we are saved *propter Christi*; Christ is the source of salvation and the regeneration.<sup>152</sup> As McGrath notes, Luther's argument can be reduced to three points:

1. Righteousness is a gift from God
2. This gift is revealed through Christ on the cross
3. This righteousness contradicts human reason.<sup>153</sup>

The first point is congruent with Augustine's theology. Righteousness is not a judgment but a gift bestowed. The last two points demonstrate the Christological nature of Luther's mature anthropology. Moreover, it is these last two points which distinguish the *theologia crucis* from the *theologia gloriae*. The *theologia gloriae* uses the gift of righteousness to grab hold of God and perceive him through philosophical systemization. Luther argued that this is not only impossible but a sin. Christ is revealed through the cross and this event is the opposite of human *gloriae*.

Theses 29-40 are twelve philosophical theses. With these arguments, Luther criticized Aristotle outright and stated that man is only able to philosophize well if he is a Christian, "thoroughly foolish in Christ." Surprisingly, Luther wrote the ideas of Plato are better than the ideas of Aristotle. He also expressed an affinity for Parmenides idea of oneness and Anaxagoras' notion of infinity as a pretext for form.<sup>154</sup>

The distinction in Luther's work between philosophy and theology is very subtle. Scholars once assumed that his argument in these theses was an outright rejection of philosophy and scholasticism but now a more sophisticated reading predominates. Although Luther railed against the supremacy of philosophy, scholars recognize that he

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<sup>151</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 59. As McGrath notes, justification was understood throughout the middle ages to be the gradual becoming righteous of the Christian that occurred via a created habit of righteousness.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>154</sup> WA 1. 355, 2-25.

did not reject it completely. As a gift from God, he saw philosophy as a useful tool in life. As Kolb remarks, even when it came to the work of Aristotle, Luther appreciated his “works when used for specific purposes.”<sup>155</sup>

In conclusion, the Pauline concentration of these theses must be emphasized. Luther wrote these theses after his lectures on Romans (1515-1516), and Galatians (1516-1517). This Pauline concentration had an impact upon this text. In particular, theses 19-24 developed from his reading of 1 Corinthians (1-2) and Romans 1:21.<sup>156</sup> In total, the *Heidelberg Disputation* theses and proofs contain almost thirty citations from the epistles of Paul, more than any other biblical source (including all the Old Testament citations combined).

Luther understood that Paul’s vision of history was distinct from the scholastic rationalism that had consumed the theology of the *via antiqua*. Paul spoke of history in its becoming and its anxiety, not in its fulfillment and completion. He stressed that Jesus lived in the historical unfolding of time and will return someday in the future to fulfill God’s promise. This sense of time stands in contrast to the understanding of truth presented by Aristotle and the followers of the *via antiqua*. Luther rejected the timeless presentation of ideas in favor of this messianic vision of time and fulfillment. As Luther wrote in his lectures on Romans:

Alas, how deeply and disastrously we are ensnared in discussions about categories and essential determinations; in how many stupid metaphysical questions are we involved... But the Apostle philosophizes and thinks about the world in another way than the philosophers and metaphysicians... [Y]ou will be the best philosophers and the best investigators of the world if you learn with the apostle

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<sup>155</sup> Kolb, *Martin Luther*, 34. See also LW 31, 70.

<sup>156</sup> LW 31, 40-41.

to consider creation as it waits, sighs, and travails... in “anxious expectation” of the coming age.<sup>157</sup>

Luther’s rejection of the *theologia gloriae* of scholasticism in favor of a close reading of Paul, reveals his anticipation of Christ’s future glory. Luther did not believe that this arrival can be determined through our innate reasoning power; as he wrote in his commentary on the 20<sup>th</sup> thesis: “Since man abused the knowledge of God through works, God wished [again] to be understood through the passion of the cross...”<sup>158</sup>

This is also what Luther meant in his lectures on Hebrews (1518) when he wrote, “I am suspended in faith, alone, between life in the world and eternal life.”<sup>159</sup> Luther was affirming that by faith he awaits in expectation for what is to come without attempting to uncover the full presence of God. It is for this reason that Luther does not seek the glory of philosophy because, as Paul warned, it is then that “destruction will come” (1 Thes. 5:3). Rather, we are to await our future resurrection in Christ. As he wrote in his commentary on the 16<sup>th</sup> thesis:

Now you may say: What therefore should we do? Should we be indifferent because we can do nothing but sin? I would reply: Of course not, rather, having heard this fall down and pray for grace and place all your hope in Christ, in whom lies our salvation, life, and resurrection.<sup>160</sup>

Paul asserted that God always comes to tear down the constructions of glory that men make in “their futile speculations” (Rom 1:21). Luther, for this reason, asked Christians to set aside their vain attempts at theological knowledge (and good works) and await the

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<sup>157</sup> LW 25, 360-362.

<sup>158</sup> WA 1. 362, 4-9.

<sup>159</sup> In his lectures on Hebrews Luther described himself as a man in expectation, who like the saints, awaits God’s righteousness: “The world is a house... but I am outside the house, on the roof, not yet in heaven, but also not in the world. I have the world beneath me, and the heavens above me, and so I am suspended in faith, alone, between life in the world and eternal life” (WA 1. 199, 3. Cited in Gordon Rupp, *The Righteousness of God* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1953), 223). In this fascinating passage, Luther stated that he is caught between the earthly and the spiritual, between God and the Devil. He exists in the middle of the spiritual redemption offered by Christ and the sin of the law.

<sup>160</sup> WA 1. 360, 34-37.

Son of man: “This is what Christ says in John 3:7, “you must be born anew.” To be born anew one must die and be raised up by the son of man.”<sup>161</sup>

## B. Luther’s Hermeneutic

The language in the *Heidelberg Disputation* represents a radical revision of medieval hermeneutics. The origin of this new hermeneutic was Luther’s turn to scripture, which occurred between 1515-18. In this section, I will discuss this development by referencing the work of Gerhard Ebeling (d. 2001) and Robert Kolb.

Beginning early in his career, around 1505, Luther began an intense study of the Bible.<sup>162</sup> Perhaps inspired by his inability to find a solution to his *Anfechtungen*, Luther read the Bible repeatedly, sometimes twice a year.<sup>163</sup> During this time, Luther worked towards a “new hermeneutics” that would be central to his Reformation discovery.<sup>164</sup>

This development was gradual, and even during his lectures on Psalms (1513-15) he continued to apply the *Quadrige*. Though not limited to this fourfold scheme, medieval exegetes were often guided by the principle of analogy upon which it was based.<sup>165</sup> The *Quadrige* consisted of the literal (*sensus historicus*), the allegorical (*sensus allegoricus*), the tropological (*sensus tropologicus*), and the anagogical (*sensus anagogicus*).<sup>166</sup> In practice, the literal sense referred to the ‘actuality’ of the events

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<sup>161</sup> WA 1. 363, 35-37

<sup>162</sup> Brecht, *Martin Luther, His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, 83.

<sup>163</sup> LW 54, 165; 361

<sup>164</sup> Gerhard Ebeling, “The New Hermeneutics of the Early Luther,” *Theology Today* 21, no. 1 (1964), <http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/apr1964/v21-1-1-article3.htm>, 36.

<sup>165</sup> For a detailed account of the various approaches to medieval exegesis see, Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher Limited, 1983); see also, S. Preus, *From Shadow to Promise, Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to the Young Luther* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1969).

<sup>166</sup> Ebeling, “The New Hermeneutics of the Early Luther,” 36. For example, take a reference to the city of Babylon. In the literal sense this meant the physical city of Babylon. Morally it could represent the evil in the world, and in the soul of man. Allegorically it could be used to represent the presence of the devil in the world. Finally, anagogically, it could be referring the end of the world (as found in Revelation).

described in scripture. For instance, in Luther's lectures on Psalms he believed the Psalms to be the actual prayers of Christ.<sup>167</sup> The allegorical sense concerned the text's relationship to Church dogma. The tropological reading referred to the gracious work of God in the believer (often understood through morality). And lastly, the analogical referred to the metaphysical and eschatological secrets that were revealed by the text.<sup>168</sup>

The twofold scheme of analogy descended from Origen's interpretation of 2 Cor. 3:6: "The letter kills; but the spirit gives life."<sup>169</sup> In this manner, the literal and the three spiritual readings are reflections of the realistic element of the *via antiqua*, which stressed the accessibility of the spiritual reality behind all physical things. Thomas Aquinas took this approach even further; arguing that the words are signs of things and the things are also signs (the principle of analogy).<sup>170</sup> The social hierarchy upheld by scholasticism reflected this principle of analogy. As Ebeling noted, "The medieval form of the doctrine of the two kingdoms is to a certain extent the institutionalization of the twofold sense of Scriptures, i.e., the sociological aspect of that particular hermeneutics."<sup>171</sup>

Luther's transformation of this hermeneutic began around 1514, when he started to stress the literal and the Christological basis of scripture. With this literal emphasis and Christological emphasis, Luther was building upon the work of Hugh of St. Victor. (d. 1141) and Paul of Burgos (d. 1453), respectively. As Smalley notes, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century "Hugh of St. Victor had taught exegetes to distinguish carefully between the literal and spiritual exposition, not to begin on the second until they had considered the first.

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<sup>167</sup> As Bielfeldt notes, "the historical sense was determined by the person of Christ" (Bielfeldt, "*Deification Motif in Luther's Dictata*," 407)

<sup>168</sup> Ebeling, "The New Hermeneutics of the Early Luther," 38.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 43.



Neither expositors nor glossators had been as alive to the distinction between the letter and the spirit as Hugh”<sup>172</sup> Similarly, in his critique of Nicholas of Lyra (d. 1341), Paul of Burgos had argued that “Christ alone establishes the Bible’s literal meaning.”<sup>173</sup> Luther built upon the foundations laid by these medieval exegetes, he understood the Old Testament as a prophetic guide to the arrival of Christ.

Luther’s application of the *sensus literalis* in a Christological sense placed emphasis not on the gradualism of *caritas* but on the “coming” of Christ into the soul of the believer (it was less anthropocentric and more Christocentric). The stress was no longer on the spiritual transformation of man but the way scripture speaks in the “word-event” of Christ’s act.<sup>174</sup> This development rendered the fourfold sense obsolete because it made scripture into a proclamation of Christ in faith.<sup>175</sup>

By the time Luther gave his lectures on Galatians (1517), he could boldly state that he was not using the *Quadrigena* because the apostles had not used it.<sup>176</sup> Luther had come to the conclusion that the purpose of scripture was not to illuminate hidden (allegorical) meaning but to affect him directly through testimony. The letter was not a sign to a more real thing behind it (as with Aquinas), but the “word-event” itself that affects believers.<sup>177</sup> As Kolb has written, Luther “proposed that the story of God’s creation, redemption, and sanctification of fallen humankind proceeds out of Scripture and into the life of the congregation through the use of its message.”<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 230-31.

<sup>173</sup> Kolb, *Martin Luther*, 45

<sup>174</sup> Ebeling, “The New Hermeneutics of the Early Luther,” 46.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>176</sup> Kolb, *Martin Luther*, 46; see also WA 2. 550, 8-552.

<sup>177</sup> The justification debate hinges on the exact nature of this effect.

<sup>178</sup> Kolb, *Martin Luther*, 46. This message was not merely textual but had oral and sacramental components.

Luther, therefore, not only reinterpreted the fourfold methodology but the twofold approach as well. He no longer understood 2 Cor. 3:6 as a disclosure of allegorical hiddenness, but a revelation of God in hiddenness under his opposite (i.e. the cross).<sup>179</sup> Hence, Luther's language in the *Heidelberg Disputation* stressed the hiddenness of God, but this does not arise from an allegorical reading of scripture, rather, it was meant as a representation of man's situation before God. Luther's tropological interpretation of Christ led to a reading of Scripture that stressed the humanity of God. God is not disclosed as absolute being but as one who acts in time (who "carries the cross from Christmas to Easter"<sup>180</sup>). With this certainty, Luther can emphatically state, *Crux sola est nostra Theologia!*<sup>181</sup> From 1518 onwards, Luther explored the substance of scripture to derive this principle through exegesis.<sup>182</sup> As he wrote in 1519, "the cross of Christ is the only instruction in the Word of God there is, the purest theology."<sup>183</sup>

It is important to notice that Luther's development of this new hermeneutic was intertwined with a particular reading of the *pactum*. Luther transformed this concept from the way Biel had used it—as a contract between partners—to a sign of covenant and proclamation. The Word was the means by which God condemns sin and promises salvation (the law and the gospel). This was a vision of God who acts in creation through the Word.<sup>184</sup> As Kolb notes:

Luther was no longer seeking the substance (*res*) behind the sign (*signum*) in God's use of human language. He took the material, created order ever more seriously as God's good gift for humankind, believing that God revealed himself

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<sup>179</sup> As Ebeling writes, "Scripture is concerned with the theology of the cross as the substance of Holy Scriptures, the significance of which must be established through exegesis" (Ebeling, "The New Hermeneutics of the Early Luther," 44).

<sup>180</sup> Oberman, "Luther and the Via Moderna," 655.

<sup>181</sup> WA 5. 176, 32-3.

<sup>182</sup> Ebeling, "The New Hermeneutics of the Early Luther," 44.

<sup>183</sup> Cited in Kolb, *Martin Luther*, 58.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid*, 47-48.

and performed his will through selected elements of that created order. Therefore, human language functions as God's re-creating Word because his promise not only teaches but also actually performs or executes his saving will. The promise delivers Christ, that is, the benefits of his death and resurrection, when it is preached or bestowed in sacramental form. This new perspective brought him to view his own exegetical activity differently: no longer as scholarly mastery of the text but rather as the occasion for delivering God's action.<sup>185</sup>

Luther came to see the *pactum* as the promise of Christ that is enacted in the word-event.

Importantly, the *theologia crucis* is this promise, is the *pactum*. In Luther's hermeneutical approach to scripture, these terms are practically synonymous because they refer to the passion of Christ which establishes the meaning of both the Old and the New Testament.<sup>186</sup> As Hagen has argued, Luther's *theologia crucis* derives from a theology of testament that understands scripture through the passion of Christ:

Luther identifies "*testamentum dei*" as "the law which testifies to future grace in faith or to the law of Christ." Law equals testament. Testament is constant. In his Lectures on Galatians 3, 17, Luther draws on Ps. 80, 9 and Heb. 9, 17 to show that in Scripture promise, testament, *pactum* all refer to *passio Dei*—all refer to the death of the God-man which confirms or validates the testament. The *testamentum Christi* is the promise or testament of God (law as well as gospel) that the death of Christ is to demonstrate (*exhibito*) the faithfulness of God. Luther's *theologia crucis* is a *theologia testamenti*.<sup>187</sup>

In summary, Luther's hermeneutic reversed the principle of analogy by spiritualizing the letter (instead of abstracting the letter to a higher spiritual truth). He asserted that it was not the spiritualized content that stands beyond the Word that matters, but the prophecies contained within it. Luther understood the Word as God's powerful instrument to create trust through the Holy Spirit. For Luther, all scripture points to the passion of God on the cross.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> WA 3. 552, 5-6.

<sup>187</sup> Hagen, *A Theology of Testament in the Young Luther*, 67-68.

<sup>188</sup> WA 57. II. 82, 2-15.

### Chapter Three

#### The Justification Debate and the Theologia Crucis

In this chapter, I will discuss how Luther's *theologia crucis* has been interpreted by theologians. This is relevant because theology plays an integral role in Luther studies. Since many of Luther's writings were critical of philosophical and scholastic metaphysics, the mainline theological interpretation has classified him as 'anti-ontological.' This opinion has dominated not only theology but Luther scholarship in general. In the past fifty years, influential scholars like McGrath,<sup>189</sup> Oberman,<sup>190</sup> and Steven Ozment have defended versions of this position.<sup>191</sup> The majority of theologians and historians have accepted this position because they believe the key characteristic of Luther's theology is its extrinsic quality. They have made this assertion by pointing to Luther's rejection of the ontological necessity between God and man (the *via antiqua*) that he inherited from the *via moderna*, and by stressing his reliance on faith as an external declaration. In contrast to this mainline/German interpretation, a group of Finnish theologians have countered that Luther's theology, in addition to being forensic, also teaches the real ontological connection between Christ and the believer.

Since 1970, the Department of Systematic Theology at the University of Helsinki has been developing an ontological account of Luther's doctrine of justification by understanding it as an argument for deification. This effort began when a group of students began to study Luther's idea of 'the presence of Christ in faith.' They sought to

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<sup>189</sup> For a detailed account of McGrath's reading of justification see, McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 218-235.

<sup>190</sup> See Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation*, 151. Oberman openly asserts that "forensic" justification cannot do justice to Luther's notion of justification; however, he also writes that the righteousness of Christ does "not mean an ontological transformation but a transformation of *affectus* and *fiducia*, of our love and trust." Note how Oberman's assertion of an affect theology confirms Mannermaa criticism of the Luther Renaissance descended from Holl. Although Oberman offers a qualified position on this matter he is more influenced by the mainline interpretation of Luther, as his heavy citations of Gerhard Ebeling demonstrate.

<sup>191</sup> See Ozment, *Homo Spiritualis*, 121. In this comprehensive study, Ozment provides a non-ontological account of Luther's doctrine of justification (i.e. faith as present *in fide* and *spe* but not *in re*).

increase ecumenical dialogue between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>192</sup> These students came to believe that there was a parallel between the Lutheran idea of the indwelling of Christ and the Orthodox doctrine of *theosis*.<sup>193</sup> They concluded that “the very idea of a divine life in Christ who is really present in faith lies at the very center of the theology of the Reformer.”<sup>194</sup>

Currently, the leading scholar of the Finnish school is Tuomo Mannermaa;<sup>195</sup> however, many of his students have also produced impressive work. The dissertation of Risto Saarinen *Gottes Wirken auf uns. Die transzendente Deutung des Gegenwart-Christi-Motivs in der Lutherforschung* (1989), argues that traditional Luther scholarship has epistemological and ontological assumptions that misconstrue Luther’s work. With this effort, Saarinen laid the philosophical groundwork for divinization. Simo Peura’s dissertation *Mehr als ein Mensch?* (1994), analyzes the early theological development of Luther. For Peura, divinization is a common theme throughout Luther’s writing, from his lectures on Psalms to the *Heidelberg Disputation*. A third dissertation by Sammeli Juntunen *Der Begriff des Nichts bei Luther in den Jahren 1510 bis 1523* (1996), argues that Luther’s concept of *nihil* actually provides insight into his ontology. Each of these works relate back to Luther’s theology of the cross, in one way or another. In particular,

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<sup>192</sup> Tuomo Mannermaa, “Why Is Luther So Fascinating? Modern Finnish Luther Research,” in *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed. by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 1.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 1-3. *Theosis* is the process of ‘likeness’ with Christ (divinization) that is accepted by the Eastern Orthodox Church. It is seen as a final stage in a mystical process of transformation; purification, illumination, and deification. Mannermaa describes it in the following manner:

*Theosis* is based causally on the divinity of God. According to Luther, the divinity of the triune God consists in that “He gives.” And what he gives, ultimately, is himself. The essence of God, then, is identical with the essential divine properties in which he gives of himself, called “names” of God: Word, justice, truth, wisdom, love, goodness, eternal life, and so forth. The *theosis* of the believer is initiated when God bestows on the believer God’s essential properties; that is, what God gives of himself to humans is nothing separate from God himself (10).

<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>195</sup> See Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther’s view of Justification*.

Juntunen, Peura, and Mannermaa, have specifically referenced the *Heidelberg Disputation*.<sup>196</sup>

Fundamental to these Finnish arguments is the idea that in addition to the extrinsic emphasis in Luther's soteriology there is also an intrinsic element. As Mannermaa writes:

As is well known, Luther emphasizes vigorously that Christ is really present in faith. What is the ontological status, then, of this 'being' of Christ and/or the "being" of God in the Christian faith? What philosophical assumptions have been employed in defining more precisely the sense of God's "being present"?<sup>197</sup>

Finnish theologians draw attention to those parts of the *Heidelberg Disputation* (and Luther's corpus in general) that affirm an internal transformation of the believer. For instance, in his commentary on the 26<sup>th</sup> thesis Luther wrote: "For through faith Christ is in us, indeed, one with us."<sup>198</sup> And in thesis 27, "Christ lives in us through faith."<sup>199</sup> Finnish theologians argue that these statements show that Luther's doctrine of justification implies the real participation of Christ in the believer. Moreover, they assert that this 'participation' can be understood the best through the language of deification.

Scholars who argue for a forensic reading of justification have fought back hard on this point. Notable figures like Klaus Schwarzwäller and Robert Kolb<sup>200</sup> argue that the entire Finnish project is flawed. Kolb asserts that the Finnish arguments are historically, literary-linguistically, and theologically inaccurate. In particular, he argues

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<sup>196</sup> Mannermaa, "Why Is Luther So Fascinating? Modern Finnish Luther Research," 3.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>198</sup> LW 31, 56.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Robert Kolb, review of *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification*, by Tuomo Mannermaa, *Interpretation* 61, no. 1 (2007), 103.

that their use of the word 'ontology' is vague and carries Neoplatonic overtones that are not present in Luther's work.<sup>201</sup>

In this chapter, I will address this topic with an amiable tone, discussing how the positions differ and how they agree. This will demonstrate that the Finnish argument does not completely upset the anti-realist reading of Luther, as discussed in chapter one and two. Moreover, it will clarify the opposing arguments by showing that there is an eschatological emphasis in both readings of Luther's work, and that the primary disagreement concerns the existence of an *esse-in* and *esse-ad* quality to Luther's understanding of relational ontology.

In section one, I summarize the arguments of the German and Finnish theologians on Luther's doctrine of justification, using the work of Loewenich, Eom, Juntunen, Peura, and Mannermaa. Additionally, I provide criticism of these arguments and show the limitations of the respective positions. Finally, in section two, I synthesize the opposing arguments by showing how they agree on the eschatological emphasis in Luther's work. The goal of this comparison is to go to the heart of Luther studies and reveal the how theologians understand how the believer is transformed by the saving act of Christ.

## **A. Arguments and Criticism**

### **I. The Forensic Interpretation**

Walther von Loewenich was the first scholar to offer an analysis of Luther's theology of the cross in light of Luther's whole corpus. His study, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (1976), argued that the theology of the cross is the decisive element in Luther's

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid, 104.

theology.<sup>202</sup> In fact, it was his work that made the term '*theologia crucis*' a code word for Luther's hermeneutic.<sup>203</sup> Moreover, he argued that the *Heidelberg Disputation* contains an element of Luther's mature theology<sup>204</sup> and stressed the Pauline basis of the text:

It follows then that in Luther's theology of the cross we are not dealing with paraphrases of the monkish ideal of humility, but with a distinctive principle of theological knowledge that corresponds exactly with the apostle Paul's theology of the cross.<sup>205</sup>

Central to Loewenich's study is the argument that Luther's theology of the cross is an epistemological statement about theological knowledge: "It is the aim of our investigation to trace the significance of this principle of knowledge";<sup>206</sup> or again, "The goal of my investigation was to show that the theology of the cross was a theological principle of knowledge for Luther."<sup>207</sup> For Loewenich, the *Heidelberg Disputation* is primarily a rejection of realism. He argued that "the cross cannot be disposed of in an upper story of the structure of thought,"<sup>208</sup> and "only becomes visible as [God] conceals himself..."<sup>209</sup> This reveals a hiddenness to God that is not the opposite of revelation but the nature of revelation itself: "A theologian of the cross is one who speaks of the crucified and hidden God."<sup>210</sup> Loewenich noted the connection between the 'hidden

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<sup>202</sup> Ruge-Jones, *Cross in Tensions*, 1.

<sup>203</sup> Kolb, "Luther's Theology of the Cross Fifteen Years after Heidelberg" *Lectures of the Psalms of Ascent*, 70.

<sup>204</sup> By 'mature theology' I am merely referring to Luther's theology of the cross. Kolb, Loewenich, and Mannerman argue that the theology of cross is present in Luther's later career, 1533 and beyond. Hence, even though the *Heidelberg Disputation* was written in his early career, it reflects a 'mature element' of his thought.

<sup>205</sup> Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 13.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 30. Loewenich's understanding of the *Heidelberg Disputation* is also shared by Jürgen Moltmann. Moltmann notes that Luther changed the theology of the cross from a theology of mysticism (as practiced in the middle ages) to "a new principle of theological epistemology." For Luther, the *theologia crucis* is not a path of suffering that leads to union with God but "the visible revelation of God's being for man in the reality of the world." Moltmann understands the *Heidelberg Disputation* as "an exegesis of Psalm



God' and the *theologia crucis*. He argued that the theology of the cross, as a theology of revelation, is opposed to speculative reason. Theology is not to be revealed through active works or knowledge, but through the passion of the cross.<sup>211</sup>

This reading of Luther is anti-realist because it emphasizes that faith cannot be understood as divine illumination (as in the work of Augustine). Faith, alongside righteousness remains incomprehensible because the crucifixion reversed the assumed order of all relationships (i.e the hierarchy of being). Faith re-orders human understanding by negating its possibility, and therefore giving way to its realization. The theology of glory ignores the suffering of human experience by building a hierarchical model of the universe; however, the theology of the cross destroys this corrupt wisdom, leaving both suffering and human experience to be actualized.<sup>212</sup>

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22..." and "as the climax of his decision for Reformation... its theoretical basis." Boldly, Moltmann asserts that the theology of the cross "begins a new relationship to reality itself" (Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, tr. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1973), 208).

Moltmann links this new epistemology with a rejection of the natural theology of the *via antiqua*. (as held by Peter Lombard). This old theology viewed the entire universe as "permeated by the divine Logos and its rationality corresponds to that of the divine being itself" (209). In the *Heidelberg Disputation*, Luther does not dispute "the possibility of natural knowledge of God, but he does dispute its reality" (211). Moltmann asserts that for Luther this knowledge is useless (not to mention dangerous) and that this is why he advocates the theology of revelation.

<sup>211</sup> Rupp, *The Righteousness of God*, 223.

<sup>212</sup> Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 75. The observation that Luther's work is an epistemological statement about theological knowledge is based on the understanding that for nominalists the relationship between morality and merit is contingent on the will of God. In Aquinas, will and intellect are merged (in God) so a believer can have an understanding of the meritorious value of a moral action through the 'likeness' of an act to the Supreme Good. Following Duns Scotus, Franciscans stressed that the will proceeded the intellect in God; an emphasis that stressed the power of God and the contingent nature of merit (McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 145). Luther's theses in the *Heidelberg Disputation* have typically been interpreted in this light. They have been understood as a rejection of the realistic correspondence between the believer and God (the logos). However, this might be assuming too much because many of Luther's statements were reflections of medieval logic and cannot be translated into modern epistemological terms. This is the position of Graham White (who defends the deification position), he argues that Luther believed in the direct non-mediated participation in the God's truth via the Word. Luther's project, he argues, is about letting God be God and not limiting him to *a priori* truths which conform to our experience of material objects. It is not about reducing or limiting the theological implications that can be derived from the Bible. In discussing the theology of the cross, White notes: "Thus, these themes from the theology of the cross can be described in terms of access to ourselves, to God, and to the things of this world: this

The majority of Loewenich's book on the theology of the cross focuses on faith, but he also emphasizes the existential or lived reality of the cross. If, he argued, we were to only stress the hiddenness of God in faith and the reordering of creation through the revelation of the cross, we would be misrepresenting it as a theoretical affair. For Luther, justification was a very personal experience that must be lived, and it is in this context that we must understand the theology of the cross. Paraphrasing theses 19 and 20, Loewenich wrote, "The theologian of the cross does not confront the cross of Christ as a spectator, but is himself drawn into this event. He knows that God can be found only in cross and suffering... For that reason he does not, like the theologian of glory, shun suffering..."<sup>213</sup>

This existential reading produced a forensic interpretation of justification because it assumed that being is found only in our relation to God. God is not an intrinsic substance to be grasped in this life but found only through the cross. We only have God through faith, not through the synergistic or speculative means advocated by the *via antiqua* or the *via moderna* (the soteriology of Biel). A life lived under the cross is one in which humanity is unable to ascend to the goodness of God but remains immersed in suffering (*Anfechtung*), where righteousness is gifted by God but only *in spe*.

Jin-Seop Eom provides a similar reading of the *Heidelberg Disputation* in his dissertation (1996). He argues that Luther's doctrine of justification is forensic by linking the idea of 'the cross' with 'reality' (or truth). As discussed in the first chapter, the *via antiqua* proposed a hierarchical model of the cosmos where being was associated with likeness to God. According to Eom, however, Luther finds being in the cross; the

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access may not be like vision, but nevertheless, the fundamental problem is whether one gets through to the things themselves, or only deals with their outer appearance" (White, *Luther as Nominalist*, 330-331; 347).

<sup>213</sup> Ibid 113.

cross signifies the only relation to “reality.”<sup>214</sup> Eom agrees with Loewenich and other German theologians like Albrecht Ritschl—he argues that the theology of the cross is an epistemological claim that determines the nature of the relationship between man and God.<sup>215</sup> For instance, Eom claims that before holding to the cross in faith, one does not have being (does not even have reality) but only sin:

Martin Luther is best known for his phrase, “justification by faith alone.” This exclusive concentration on faith was made because he believed that it not only pointed at truth and reality, but actually gave them. Truth is established in man when he acknowledges the truth of himself, i.e., that he is a liar and a sinner. When he confesses his sins before God, the truths of God and himself are established.<sup>216</sup>

This rather abstract argument attempts to establish the nature of the connection between God and man by emphasizing the connection to Christ via relation, not being in itself. This implies, as the German Theologian Karl Holl argued, that the sinner exists *in re* but is righteous *in spe*.<sup>217</sup>

Eom argues that in the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> theses Luther drew a distinction between the *visibilia* and the *invisibilia* to attack the Neoplatonic thrust in the *via antiqua* and condemn the theology of glory. Writes Eom, “According to the theology of glory, what is poor, ugly, bad, etc., does not exist.”<sup>218</sup> It associates reality with good qualities and denies the bad: “The theologian of glory tries to look at the *invisibilia*, which he imagines would be power, goodness, wisdom, etc., while he actually cannot see the *visibilia*” (ie.

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<sup>214</sup> Eom, “Truth and Reality in Martin Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation (1518) and Operationes in Psalmos (1519-1521),” 4.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid. See also Sammeli Juntunen, “Luther and Metaphysics: What Is The Structure of Being according to Luther,” 129-130.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>217</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 225. See also Karl Holl, *What did Luther Understand by Religion?* trans. by Fred W. Meuser and Walter R. Wietzke (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

<sup>218</sup> Eom, “Truth and Reality in Martin Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation (1518) and Operationes in Psalmos (1519-1521),” 97.

the cross).<sup>219</sup> Eom supports this interpretation by using the 28<sup>th</sup> thesis: “the intellect cannot by nature comprehend an object which does not exist, that is the poor and needy person, but only a thing which does exist, that is the true and good.”<sup>220</sup> For Eom, God’s revelation on the cross destroys the order of being that permits things to be known through their nature (through the principle of analogy); God and truth have been turned upside down. In Luther’s work, Christ is the only barometer of truth and identity; “God cannot be seen and found outside of the crucified Christ.”<sup>221</sup> To back up this observation he points to the 21<sup>st</sup> thesis. Here, Luther connected the reality of Christ with truth in general, asserting that a thing should be called what it actually is (*dicit id quod res est*).<sup>222</sup> Eom understands this assertion as a denial of the essences that stand above material reality (i.e. the hierarchy of being).

Like Loewenich, Eom understands theses 19-24 as Luther’s epistemological answer to the “question of knowledge of God in relation to the question of reality.”<sup>223</sup> With his doctrine of justification by faith, Luther has argued that the nature of the relationship between man and God is merely relational, *through* faith; identity is not determined by one’s essential connection to God but his contingent relation to Christ on the cross. As Luther argued, we are not to be “puffed up” by our faulty wisdom—the way of the theologian of glory—but to be “destroyed” by suffering and sin until we know

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid, 97-98.

<sup>220</sup> LW 31, 57.

<sup>221</sup> Eom, “Truth and Reality in Martin Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation (1518) and Operationes in Psalmos (1519-1521),” 99.

<sup>222</sup> WA 1, 379. 6.

<sup>223</sup> Eom, “Truth and Reality in Martin Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation (1518) and Operationes in Psalmos (1519-1521),” 100.

that we can do nothing to save ourselves—the way of the theologian of the cross—and give all praise to God.<sup>224</sup>

## II. Critiquing the Forensic Argument

The main argument against the forensic reading of Luther is that it is loaded with epistemological and ontological assumptions. As Tuomo Mannermaa argues, the real problem with the mainline reading of Luther is that it “can hardly make anything of those passages in Luther that speak of real participation in God.”<sup>225</sup>

Mannermaa asserts that the German interpretation of Luther has a Neo-Kantian foundation that began with the work of Hermann Lotze (d. 1881), Albrecht Ritschl, and Karl Holl. For these theologians, being is not a thing in itself but a relational effect. According to Lotze, the world is composed not of independent self-subsisting things but of a series of mutually effecting relationships.<sup>226</sup> Being, in this view, is a result of relation (a transcendental effect) and does not exist independently. Albrecht Ritschl expressed similar presuppositions when he wrote, “In theology we cannot assume the isolated existence of things. Right theological knowledge is ... transcendental, in the sense that only the effects of God’s action in the world, not his being in itself, are accessible to us.”<sup>227</sup>

Mannermaa argues that this Neo-Kantian bias in Luther scholarship is responsible for the strict forensic reading of justification and that this emphasis is absent from Luther’s writing.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> LW 31, 53.

<sup>225</sup> Mannermaa, “Why Is Luther so Fascinating? Modern Finnish Luther Research,” 4.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>227</sup> Ritschl, quoted in Mannermaa, “Why Is Luther so Fascinating? Modern Finnish Luther Research,” 7.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid, 6. Mannermaa argues that despite his Nominalism, Luther held to a realist epistemology. As an example, he cites WA 1. 29, 26-27: “Thus the righteousness of Christ becomes our righteousness through

In Luther research a long tradition to this day stands in solving the problem of the presence-of-Christ motif with the help of this notion of *transcendental effect*. Many contemporary German Luther scholars, for example, owe a great deal to this concept. On the basis of this tradition, however, one can make hardly anything of those passages in Luther that speak of real participation in God.<sup>229</sup> [my emphasis]

Hence, for the scholars of the Luther Renaissance, Christ is the means by which God establishes his transcendental effect, but this effect stands in opposition to the metaphysical substance orientation.<sup>230</sup> In other words, there is no foundation for justification, no ground of being, besides faith itself.

As I will show below, the Finnish theologians have a far different understanding of Luther's ontology.

### III. The Deification Interpretation

In a recent essay titled "Luther and Metaphysics: What Is The Structure of Being according to Luther," Sammeli Juntunen summarizes the Finnish argument for deification and argues against a strictly forensic interpretation of Luther. He begins by challenging the German scholars and theologians such as Albrecht Ritschl (d. 1889) and Karl Holl (d. 1926).<sup>231</sup> Juntunen asserts that although Luther is somewhat anti-metaphysical, it is not because he rejected the concept of being, rather, it is because he proposed a unique understanding of love. Referencing the 28<sup>th</sup> thesis of the *Heidelberg Disputation*, Juntunen argues that for Luther divine love (*amor dei*) is creative and selfless, giving of itself to humanity and thereby making people good. Human love (*amor hominis*) is the opposite of God's love, seeking only its own benefit and *summon bonum*.

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faith in Christ, and everything that is his, even he himself, becomes ours... and he who believes in Christ clings to Christ and is one with Christ and has the same righteousness with him."

<sup>229</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>231</sup> Juntunen, "Luther and Metaphysics," 129-130.

For Juntunen, what Luther meant by the term '*theologia gloriae*' was that all too often theologians pursue not God, but their own egoistic desires. A person may believe he is seeking the *summum bonum*—God—but in actuality, he is seeking his own glory and benefit. Referencing the 19<sup>th</sup> thesis of the *Heidelberg Disputation*, Juntunen wrote that the desire to possess God is really the desire “to set oneself as God, as someone who is ultimately wise and possesses the final truth.”<sup>232</sup> Hence, Luther does not assert that the *summum bonum* is not equivalent to God’s being: “As far as I understand Luther, he does not deny the analogy of being and goodness between God and the world.”<sup>233</sup> Rather, Luther was commenting on man’s ability to know this good, not the relation to the good itself. He asserted that the *amor hominis* completely determines the nature of humanity and that man is unable to escape its sinful grasp. Hence, in contrast to the reading of Loewenich and Eom discussed above, Juntunen argues that Luther is not rejecting realism but the vanity of man.<sup>234</sup>

According to Juntunen’s reading, God refuses to act as a medium for human selfishness and the theology of the cross is the solution. Through the cross, God has made himself available to humanity in exactly the opposite of what the *amor hominis* desires, namely wisdom, elegance, and beauty: “The *homo naturalis* can in no way accept a God who works against everything understood to be good and noble.”<sup>235</sup> Hence, the appearance in Luther’s work that God is not the *summum bonum* is merely a result of the sin Luther associates with natural man (*homo naturalis*). The fault of the theologian of

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid, 132.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> By arguing that Luther has not completely rejected realism the Finns are able to assert that when the believer resides “in Christ” they not only are declared righteousness but partake of God’s qualities. In this manner, through justification one participates in the divinity of God (deification). See Bielfeldt, “Deification as a Motif in Luther’s *Dictata super psalterium*,” 413-416.

<sup>235</sup> Juntunen, “Luther and Metaphysics,” 132.

glory, according to Luther, is to assume that one can transform into a God like creature through wisdom and reflection. All glory belongs to God alone, man is nothing in the process of salvation. This, argues Juntunen, is the purpose of the *theologia crucis*, to completely destroy the *amor hominis*.

Peura's interpretation of the *Heidelberg Disputation* concurs with Juntunen's.<sup>236</sup> He uses the 19<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> theses to affirm that the theology of glory results from people trying to raise themselves toward God in egoistic fashion. A person must be reduced to *nihil* by the creative love of God before they can be raised anew via deification:

According to Luther, the *theologia gloriae* leads inevitably to the false striving of the person to deify himself. This way of thinking rests upon assumptions of natural human capacity and finally on the idea of *liberum arbitrium*. Thus Luther sees in the *theologia gloriae* an intensification of human sin, because, at base, it would like to realize its own egoistic, self-willed aspiration to divinity.

In this manner, Peura argues that Luther's argument is not anti-metaphysical in a strict sense. Rather, Luther is reversing the usual order of syllogistic determinism by critiquing its prideful foundations, and opting for an understanding of justification that is based on love:

By no means does it follow from this criticism of the *theologia gloriae* that Luther also rejects the true deification of the person as willed by God. On the contrary, over and against his criticism of the metaphysical basis for the theology of the love held to by the Aristotelian scholasticism, he demonstrates that true deification (in the sense of ontological transformation of the person) is the *conditio sine qua non* for true love.<sup>237</sup>

As Ruge-Jones noted in *Cross in Tensions*, Peura's interpretation reveals two things about the Finnish interpretation. One, it is God alone who justifies via the grace

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<sup>236</sup> Peura's argument for deification begins with the assertion that Luther's work contains a strong distinction between the grace (*gratia*) and the gift (*bonum*) of Christ. This implies that there are two benefits that God offers in Christ, the grace (whereby God declares the sinner just) and the gift (whereby God becomes ontologically present in the believer) (Ruge-Jones, *Cross in Tensions*, 26-27). Like Juntunen, Peura is able to make this claim because he believes that Luther has not abandoned ontology. However, he does not go into the same ontological analysis as Juntunen.

<sup>237</sup> Peura, cited and translated in Ruge-Jones, *Cross in Tensions*, 29.



and the gift. Two, the human subject is not the agent who brings about deification.<sup>238</sup> In the words of Peura, it is an “ontology under the cross,” and it affirms the hidden reality of God while also affirming that the believer is a sinner.<sup>239</sup>

The primary distinction between the Finnish reading of the *Heidelberg Disputation*, and the mainline reading offered by Loewenich and Eom, is that the Finns do not see Luther’s argument as completely opposed to the metaphysics of realism.<sup>240</sup> As noted, they see it as a rejection of the self-indulgent love of man (*amor hominis*). They are arguing that in theses 19-24 and in thesis 28, Luther condemns the vain attempts that are made by man to understand the Supreme Being through syllogism, but does not deny the ontological connection between God and man.

Despite this deviation from the mainline interpretation, the Finns still agree that Luther’s theology of justification implies a rejection of Augustine’s dualistic anthropology (the split between the *caro* and the *spiritus*). By emphasizing the nothingness of man in the process of salvation, they concur with the historical evidence that Luther’s anthropology is that of the *totus homo*. Moreover, with this emphasis on the nothingness of man in the process of salvation, they have also agreed that Luther has rejected the gradualism of medieval soteriology in all its forms; from Augustine’s *liberum arbitrium liberatum* to Biel’s understanding of the will. Like Eom and Loewenich, for the Finns, Christ is the central element of Luther’s theology. After the

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>239</sup> Peura, *Mehr als ein Mensch?*, 302. “Ontologie unter dem Kreuz.”

<sup>240</sup> This claim allows them to assert that Luther held a realist conception of knowledge (for theological terms). As Mannermaa notes, “Luther expresses a realist conception of knowledge according to which knowledge brings about a real participation in the object that is known. Thus Luther teaches by means of philosophical analogy that the essence of the relationship to God is a community of being” (Mannermaa, “Why Is Luther so Fascinating? Modern Finnish Luther Research,” 6).

destruction of the *amor hominis* it is Christ alone who saves the believer. As Juntunen notes:

In the wretchedness of his self-revelation and in the anguish that is inevitably present in the faith of everyone who believes in him, God destroys *amor hominis* in the believer at the same time that he gives Christ as the new principle of spiritual being (*opus alienum—opus proprium*).<sup>241</sup>

Though Juntunen agrees with these elements of the mainline interpretation—that Luther’s argument implies a rejection of the Augustinian *ordo charitatis*-scheme associated with the hierarchical order of being—he argues that this does not imply a rejection of ontology. This fundamental distinction implies that Luther abandoned the idea of doing good in relation to hierarchical order of being but that Luther did not reject being itself. He merely asserted that the *summum bonum* was inverted to human notions of *iustitia*.

With the term ‘being,’ Juntunen is not referring to the Neoplatonic framework of Augustine but a special understanding of Ockham’s concept *creatio continua*. As Juntunen notes, Luther was influenced by the work of Ockham and did not hold to the traditional distinction between *conservatio* and *creatio*.<sup>242</sup> In traditional metaphysics, God established this world as a natural order that is conserved through some kind of ontological mediation (such as *essentia*, *forma substantialis*, or the *ordo naturae*).<sup>243</sup> In contrast to this position, Ockham held that all creation is continually created by God *ex nihilo*, the idea of *creatio continua*. For Ockham the natural world is continuously

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<sup>241</sup> Juntunen, “Luther and Metaphysics.” 134.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, 149. As Juntunen argues: “For Ockham no ontological principles of existence lurk behind the concrete individual substance. God’s absolute will alone is able to bring into existence the individual substance as such. To say that an individual is created does not imply the being of anything other than the individual and God, who will it to be.”

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, 138-139.

dependent upon the *potentia absoluta* of God.<sup>244</sup> Luther adopted this Ockhamist view of being but rejected the concept of ‘quiddity’ upon which it was based; the essential ‘whatness’ of an object (*ens per se*). He argued, in his lectures on Psalms, that in the Bible substance did not refer to the ‘whatness’ of an object but “what stands under and supports it.”<sup>245</sup> As Juntunen notes:

For him a creature is not *ens per se*, as he learned in the nominalist studybooks of natural philosophy. The extrinsic character, which belongs to every created being (i.e., its continuous dependence on the gifts of god, which it must receive in itself from outside of itself in order to remain in existence), makes it impossible for Luther to consider a creature as *substantia* or as *quidditas*, as something that has its principles of existence (*ens per se*).<sup>246</sup>

For Luther, this support does not derive from ‘quiddity’ but from the love of God, which manifests as creation itself. Luther believed that without God, man and the world are nothing (*nihil*); natural states (*esse naturae*) and the state of Grace (*esse gratiae*) are provided and given by God in love.<sup>247</sup> This understanding of being is active and dynamic, as Juntunen argues:

In this sense it is legitimate to speak about the actualizing, nonstatic understanding of being in the Reformer. For Luther being is not a static being-in-itself, Being is a matter of continuous reception of being from God.<sup>248</sup>

Similar to the phrasing of the Nicene Creed, Luther understood creation and grace as eternally begotten from the Father: “The *esse gratiae* of a person, like the *esse naturae*, is a continuous reception of the gifts of God, namely, the *dona gratiae*, the “*sacramenta et bona ecclesiae*” in which Christ himself is present and is given to the

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<sup>244</sup> For more in this see Jonathan Kvanvig, “Creation and Conservation.”

<sup>245</sup> Steinmetz, “Aquinas for Protestants: What Luther Got Wrong,” 23.

<sup>246</sup> Juntunen, “Luther and Metaphysics,” 141. See also WA 3. 419, 25-38.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid, 139. See also WA 3. 429, 19-22. This distinction between *esse naturae* and *esse gratiae* is unique to Juntunen’s work. It is criticized by Bielfeldt as too “forced.” See Dennis Bielfeldt, “Response to Sammeli Juntunen, “Luther and Metaphysics,” In *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*. Edited by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, 161-166. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998: 165.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

Christian.”<sup>249</sup> For this reason, according to Juntunen, when Luther criticizes Aristotle (as he did in the 29<sup>th</sup> thesis), or the notion of a created habit in the believer, he is doing so because form and substance are not self-subsisting entities. Everything in the world is *creatio continua*, existing not *ens per se* (in and through its ‘whatness’) but through *coram Deo* (the love of God).<sup>250</sup>

Ebeling and the founding thinkers of the Luther Renaissance would not disagree that Luther was influenced by Ockham’s ontology;<sup>251</sup> however, they would contend that Luther understood *creatio continua* as completely future oriented and therefore without foundation. Due to their Neo-kantian bias, they emphasize the anti-metaphysical quality of Luther’s doctrine of justification and stress that ‘being’ is an effect. Following Ritschl, they take the relational aspect of Luther’s theology (between the believer and Christ) and apply it to existence in general. This creates an existential reading by making God the constitutive element of identity that is completely external. For instance, Ebeling denies the intrinsic character of being in Luther’s theology, arguing that being is completely future oriented through Christ.<sup>252</sup> He believes that this future oriented nature of being, the “*Werde-Charakter*,” makes impossible its present reality (a “*Sein-Charakter*”).

Faith, in this reading, is an external relation that lacks form (*forma*); it is an “actualistic” happening that has no internal element. A Christian is therefore always on the way to

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid, 140. Juntunen argues that for Luther, “The *esse gratiae* is a participation in Christ, who comes into very intense union with the believer but who nonetheless remains his own substantial reality without becoming part of the essence of the believer or being reduced to an accident in this essence. In the *esse naturae* God is also present in his *dona naturalia*, but not in the same way as he is in the *dona spiritualia*. The *dona naturalia* do make God present in such a strong way in those who receive them, as in those who receive the *dona gratiae* (155).

<sup>250</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>251</sup> For more on Ockham’s ontology See M.G. Henninger, *Relations, Medieval Theories 1250-1325* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 119-1149; 180-181.

<sup>252</sup> Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: an introduction to his thought*, trans. by R. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 173-174; 175-177.

*forma* but does not possess it presently. Justification has no internal characteristics and is granted only as a promise that will not be complete until the Eschaton.<sup>253</sup>

Juntunen disagrees slightly with this reading because he believes Luther's ontology; in addition to being forensic and future oriented, also has an *esse-in* quality.<sup>254</sup>

As Juntunen notes:

Ebeling's notion of the actualizing and relational character of Luther's ontology is in some sense correct. Still, he errs in stating that the implication of this dynamic character is that Luther denies the intrinsic character of being altogether, that he claims that the "*Werde-Charakter*" of existence makes impossible a "*Seins-Charakter*."<sup>255</sup>

Juntunen's proof for the present indwelling being of Christ (an implicit "*Sein-Charakter*"), rests upon the distinction between *esse-in* and *esse-ad* in medieval philosophy, which he believes Luther applied.<sup>256</sup> He makes his case by noting that there is a relational aspect to medieval theology that is mind independent.<sup>257</sup> In the middle

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<sup>253</sup> Juntunen, "Luther and Metaphysics," 137. See also Ebeling, *Luther*, 226-238; 196-197.

<sup>254</sup> Juntunen agrees with Ebeling that Luther's self understanding is characterized by a relation to Christ and partially existential; however, he argues that the love of God is a foundation that does not simply effect identity, but gives it.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid 142. Juntunen cites WA 3, 154. 3-13. In this passage, Luther divides the actions of God into two categories, *acta* and *facta*. Writes Juntunen: "The first is God's *acta*: these are acts that God, the *actus primus* of all that happens in creation, produces through creatures. Creatures are only *causae secundae* of their works, since they are in their existence and in their causal power totally dependent on God's desire that they exist and that he works as the *causa prima* of their actions... The second category is God's *facta*: God's creation of a *factum*, an existing thing, which possesses some intrinsic being and duration (*facta praestant*), even though it is nonetheless totally dependent on God's continuous causal sustenance" (142-43).

<sup>256</sup> As Henninger notes, late medieval thinkers were concerned with the ontological status of relations: "In the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries many thinkers argued for different theories concerning the ontological status of relations, for relations were of prime theological and philosophical importance. The doctrine of the trinity is the most outstanding theological example. Christian thinkers followed Augustine in speaking of the three divine persons as constituted in some way by their relations to one another. As the writings of Aristotle became available to the West in the thirteenth century, many sought to understand more clearly the doctrine of the Trinity by adapting some of Aristotle's thoughts on relations. In addition, this theological doctrine reinforced a realism in some philosophical theories of relation: the belief that the Trinity of persons, constituted by relations, is real and not simply a product of our mind persuaded some that more mundane relations, as colour similarity and equality in height, are not reducible simply to our way of comparing things related" (Henninger, *Relations*, 1).

<sup>257</sup> Although it is true that the majority of thinkers in the high middle ages stressed that relations were mind independent, by Luther's time this had begun to change. Juntunen fails to note that Henninger's study

ages, ontology had two relational aspects: “(1) ‘being in’ (*esse-in*) and (2) its ‘being-toward’ (*esse-ad*).”<sup>258</sup> Juntunen believes that both aspects of this being were present in Luther’s theology. He notes that in Luther’s work, “the person’s natural relation to God (i.e., createdness) as well as one’s spiritual relation to God (ie., the *esse gratiae*) both have extrinsic (*esse-ad*) and intrinsic (*esse-in*) aspects.”<sup>259</sup> This *esse-in* quality is not accidental (as in the work of Aquinas)<sup>260</sup> but a relation that arises from the act of creation. Juntunen finds evidence for this intrinsic element in several aspects of Luther’s theology; from Luther’s constant stress on the omnipresence of God<sup>261</sup> to his preference for Plato over Aristotle in the philosophical portion of the *Heidelberg Disputation*.<sup>262</sup> Juntunen sees this relational ground as creative love of God that provides man with all that he is: “The relation in question is that of being created, and it gives to persons more than mere accidents; it gives them all they are or ever can be.”<sup>263</sup> As it states in the 28<sup>th</sup> thesis of the *Heidelberg Disputation*, “The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it....”<sup>264</sup>

This is the theoretical basis for the Finnish condemnation of the forensic reading of Luther. They argue that the intrinsic aspect to Luther’s theology (the *esse-in* quality of being) implies that the believer participates in the being of Christ in the continuous creation of reality.

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argues that thinkers such as Ockham and Peter Aureoli (d. 1322) conceived of relations as mind *dependent*. Henninger asserts that these thinkers were less medieval because, like early modern philosophers, they began to stress that the foundation of a relation was an idea. Although more research will have to be done, this may prove significant for the justification debate (Henninger, *Relations*, 174-186).

<sup>258</sup> Juntunen, “Luther and Metaphysics,” 146. This is working definition of ontology in this study. As Juntunen notes, between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century this distinction went through various revisions.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>260</sup> Henninger, *Relations*, 176.

<sup>261</sup> WA 3. 407, 22-29; WA 4. 225, 19-23; WA 23. 133-36.

<sup>262</sup> WA 1. 355, 16-17.

<sup>263</sup> Juntunen, “Luther and Metaphysics,” 147.

<sup>264</sup> WA 1. 354, 35-36.

#### IV. Critiquing the Deification Argument

The Finnish project has not escaped criticism. In a paper published in 1995, Klaus Schwarzwäller presented a five-point critique of the Finnish project:

1. *Is it not methodologically and hermeneutically suspect to use deification as the "structuring idea" by which to interpret Luther?* Since the texts do not explicitly recognize divinization as their "organizing center," is it not possible that the interpreter's own projection is responsible for finding it there?<sup>265</sup>
2. *Are the Finns sometimes guilty of an interpretation of passages that contradicts the "immanent dynamic" of the texts themselves?* Was Luther as systematically precise in his distinctions as Mannermaa and Peura suggest? For instance, is Luther really interested in the distinction they find him making between God's favor (*gratia*) and his gift (*donum*)?<sup>266</sup>
3. *Do the Finns sometimes confuse the relation of identity with that of biconditionality?* Just because God's being is in some sense identical to Jesus Christ, which is in some sense identical to the being of faith, it does not follow that God's being is present if and only if the being of faith is present. For this to be true would require a "mathematical," not a "doxological" sense of identity, and it is precisely this former "logical" sense which is of concern to ontology.<sup>267</sup>
4. *Do the Finns sometimes interpret Luther's idiomatic expressions too literally, or take them as metaphors which themselves sustain ontological translation?* Luther certainly did use different idiomatic expressions to speak about proximity between the Christian and Christ but does this prove the presence of ontology? For instance, "Greta gives herself in love to Hans" would not normally be interpreted as "Greta gives to Hans her being," or "Greta participates in the being of Hans."<sup>268</sup>
5. *It is theologically justified to employ a univocal category of being when talking about God and the world?*<sup>269</sup>

All of Schwarzwäller's points are insightful, but number four is particularly damaging. As Oberman noted, the mystical elements in Luther's writing (which affirm a oneness with Christ) may not be evidence of a mystical theology but the

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<sup>265</sup> Klaus Schwarzwäller cited and translated in Bielfeldt, "Deification as a Motif in Luther's *Dictata super psalterium*," 417.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid, 418.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Klaus Schwarzwäller's five points also cited and translated in Bielfeldt, "Response to Sammeli Juntunen, 'Luther and Metaphysics,'" 166.

“democratization of mysticism in late medieval devotional literature.”<sup>270</sup> According to Oberman, although Luther retained some of the language of the mystical *affectus*, he rejected both the synergistic and speculative elements of mysticism, the *via antiqua*, and the *via moderna*. Luther, in this light, retained the piety of Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153) and Johannes Tauler (d. 1361) but not their mysticism.<sup>271</sup> This argument, which is also supported by Brecht<sup>272</sup> and Ozment,<sup>273</sup> would explain Luther’s writings that seem to imply a *real* union with Christ.

As Brecht notes, in 1517 Luther turned to the work of Tauler to help him with his *Anfechtungen*. However, Luther ignored aspects of mysticism that could not be reconciled with his theology, “such as the concept of union with God.”<sup>274</sup> Mystics like Eckhart and Tauler believed in the essential and or accidental transformation of the believer.<sup>275</sup> Brecht argues that Luther’s Nominalism forced him to abandon this form of high mysticism.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation*, 140.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Brecht, *Martin Luther, His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, 137-144.

<sup>273</sup> Ozment, *Homo Spiritualis*, 8. Ozment argues that “We find positive points of contact between Luther’s theology and late medieval mysticism where this literature emphasizes the centrality of Augustinian motifs; the concern for self-resignation, humility and spiritual temptation; the significance of mystical vocabulary and imagery; the importance of inward, personal experience; and the role which theological methods of thought play.”

<sup>274</sup> Brecht, *Martin Luther, His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, 139.

<sup>275</sup> The mysticism of Jean Gerson (1429) represents a stream of mysticism that did not negate the divide between God and creation. This form of “penitential mysticism” crosses the divide via God’s “inscrutable will.” Gerson’s type of mysticism (which was also shared by Gabriel Biel) has not been associated with deification because of its emphasis on the gap between creation and God (Bielfeldt, “Deification as a Motif in Luther’s *Dictata super psalterium*,” 419).

<sup>276</sup> As Oberman notes in his study on Biel, the “typical nominalistic use of the distinction between God’s *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata* provides a structure within which there is no place for a contemplative life understood as the ascent to a vision of the highest truth” (Oberman, *Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 330).



A second valid critique of the Finnish argument is that they attempt to systematize Luther's works.<sup>277</sup> As Schwarzwäller's notes, "Since the texts do not explicitly recognize divinization as their "organizing center," is it not possible that the interpreter's own projection is responsible for finding it there?"<sup>278</sup> When Walther von Loewenich wrote his first edition of *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, he made the same mistake. He attempted to formulate a broad-ranging positive theology that spanned Luther's career, from the *Heidelberg Disputation* to his *Lectures on Genesis*.<sup>279</sup> In the first several editions of this project, Loewenich argued that the apparent contradictions in Luther's work could be systematized in theological harmony.<sup>280</sup> However, by the fourth edition of this publication Loewenich began to express doubts that this harmony could be achieved. He asserted that if he were to write his book today (1954) portions would be "formulated differently."<sup>281</sup> Moreover, he admitted that some of his conclusions were "too pointed in a systematic way." Wrote Loewenich, "The drawing of systematic boundaries has its value but it does not comprehend the ultimate."<sup>282</sup> Unfortunately, Loewenich's observations are not shared by Mannermaa, Peura, and Juntunen. The Finns are guilty of trying to reach across Luther's wide body of writings—which are often 'situational'—and formulate a systematic interpretation. This is a risky task when assessing historical data because it applies an abstract rule to contextual evidence. As Ozment notes:

[T]here are problems and concerns which can only be clarified and appreciated as they are seen within the historical context of each man's thought. To abstract

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<sup>277</sup> By 'systematic' I am referring to the creation of a 'centre' to Luther's thought; a foundational idea of coherence or a summarizing principle that would hold in all instances.

<sup>278</sup> Klaus Schwarzwäller cited and translated in Bielfeldt, "Deification as a Motif in Luther's *Dictata super psalterium*," 417.

<sup>279</sup> Before Loewenich's work, Luther's theology of the Cross was understood in the context of his pre-Reformation theology. See Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 12.

<sup>280</sup> Ruge-Jones, *Cross in Tensions*, 1.

<sup>281</sup> Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 220.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid*, 221.

from these historical periods and to attempt systematic comparisons above these periods is a quite questionable undertaking, congenial perhaps to polemic (or reconciling 'ecumenical') concerns, but certainly not contributive to that degree of objectivity and comprehensiveness which historical understanding rightfully demands.<sup>283</sup>

While I welcome the deification reading of Luther, and agree with many of their points, I think the Finns go too far in the general scope of their project. After all, Luther may not have explicitly rejected ontology but he surely never endorsed the orthodox view of *Theosis*.<sup>284</sup> Moreover, as Juntunen himself notes, there has never been a serious study of Luther's understanding of relations (the *esse-in* and *esse-ad* characteristics of ontology).<sup>285</sup>

The Finnish observation that German theologians have been influenced by a Neo-Kantian epistemology is well taken, but isn't it equally problematic for the Finns to pick and choose from Luther's vast corpus to prove the presence of deification as a systematic element of his theology? This observation is also shared by Dennis Bielfeldt:

The Finns are adept at discovering key passages (often from the early Luther), and ingenious in interpreting them in support of a comprehensive systematic theological vision built around deification. While this certainly has its theological benefits (especially for ecumenical work), I sometimes am disquieted by the thought that the results of their research may reflect their own presuppositions almost as much as the findings of the neo-Kantian Luther scholars obviously reflected theirs.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Ozment, *Homo Spiritualis*, 8. In this quote, Ozment is referring to the study of history in general, not the justification debate.

<sup>284</sup> In fact, there is only one mention of deification by Luther. See WA 39. 389, 10.

<sup>285</sup> Juntunen, "Luther and Metaphysics," 147. Moody argues that this is also true of Ockham. See Moody, "Some Remarks on the Ontology of Ockham: Comment," 575-576.

<sup>286</sup> Bielfeldt, "Response to Sammeli Juntunen, 'Luther and Metaphysics,'" 163. Regarding the specifics of deification Bielfeldt notes: "If divinization requires that humans have a substantive (or essential) unity with the uncreated creator, then Luther does not seem to have taught the doctrine either in the *Dictata* or elsewhere. (Tauler, however, does seem to have advocated it.) If, on the other hand, deification is a presence of *gratia increata* in the believer effecting a sanctifying, transformative "just making," then Luther did teach it in the *Dictata*. (Of course, one could then say the same thing about a number of theologians of the *schola Augustiniana Moderna*, the later Franciscan school, and the *via moderna*.)" (Bielfeldt, "Deification as a Motif in Luther's *Dictata super psalterium*," 419).

Nevertheless, we should not be too hasty in our critique. The forensic and deification readings of Luther's theology share a key point of contact with the historical and textual data.

## **B. Synthesis**

### **I. The 'Not Yet' Nature of Justification**

So far, we have discussed the differences between the deification and justification readings of Luther's theology of the cross. In this section, I will highlight the similarities and try to synthesize the two readings by showing how they agree on the eschatological element in Luther's thought. Although different in kind, both share a similar emphasis on the time bound nature of justification. This insight arises from three sources; Karl Holl's notion of *reale Gerechtmachung*,<sup>287</sup> Loewenich's idea of hope in faith, and Peura's understanding of future consummation.<sup>288</sup>

According to Karl Holl's interpretation of Luther's doctrine of justification, the key to Luther's thought lay in a proleptic understanding of the "analytic divine judgment implicit in the process of justification."<sup>289</sup> Unlike others before him, Holl did not juxtapose justification and righteousness but understood the whole process as the unfinished work of God. This implied that justification is not based upon the present sanctification of believers but God's anticipation of their future righteousness. Like a painter who can see the work in his mind's eye before it is complete, God grants us justification before we are made righteous. In this manner, we are sinners *in re* but righteous *in spe*.

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<sup>287</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 224.

<sup>288</sup> Bielfeldt, "Deification as a Motif in Luther's *Dictata super psalterium*," 406.

<sup>289</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 225.

Loewenich takes a similar approach to Luther's concept of faith, but includes more psychological factors in his analysis. After demonstrating that Luther's concept of faith implies a delimitation of conscience, understanding, and experience, he argued that "faith has a strong eschatological character."<sup>290</sup> By noting that Luther's use of the term 'faith' does not involve the restoration of understanding (in a Neoplatonic sense), he asserted that it is an instance of "not-seeing." Faith is directed, therefore, to the "light of glory," its historical *telos*. Knowledge, for Luther, stands in disjunctive relationship to the faith promised in scripture (*res* and *spe* stand in contrast to one another). The believer does not know reality and awaits the Eschaton for its final glory to be revealed.<sup>291</sup>

With this account, Loewenich argued that in Luther's work faith and hope are practically identical. The Christian must await in anxious expectation of the arrival of the son of man. As stated, *re* stands in contrast to *spe*. We do not have the fullness of righteousness in the present. To quote from Luther, "Our righteousness does not yet exist in fact, but it still exists in hope."<sup>292</sup>

Similarly, for the Finnish school of Luther studies, deification is also not a static ontological fact. Demonstrating the link between Ockham's understanding of *creatio continua* and Luther's theology of the cross, the Finns argue that there is both a *esse-in* and an *esse-ad* in his ontology. Although there is a "real-ontic change" in the believer, he neither "loses his created substance nor the Trinitarian God his uncreated nature."<sup>293</sup> In this manner, there is a 'not yet' quality to their understanding of justification as well. Just

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<sup>290</sup> Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 88.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid, 89. To support his conclusions Loewenich draws from Luther's lectures on Hebrews and Romans.

<sup>292</sup> LW 27, 21; See also, WA 3. 389, 34.

<sup>293</sup> Bielfeldt, "Deification as a Motif in Luther's *Dictata super psalterium*," 403.

as Holl believed Christians wait *in spe*, so Mannermaa used the term “real-ontic” in combination with Luther’s “dynamic understanding of being.”<sup>294</sup>

In Bielfeldt’s study on the Finnish school, he summarized Peura’s argument for Deification in ten points, highlighting its eschatological character. These points are derived from Peura’s analysis of Luther’s lectures on Psalms:

1. God’s essence is identical to his properties.
2. The divine properties are present in the Christian in faith
3. God Himself is present to the Christian in faith.
4. The presence of the divine is mostly hidden in this life, but it is nonetheless accessible through the Word.
5. Faith is a necessary condition for hearing (and thus receiving) this Word.
6. Faith arises through the performance of God’s alien work of making the believer humble
7. The condition for the possibility of the presence of the divine in the believer is the becoming human of God in Christ.
8. The divine presence in the believer is a unity of love in which there is effected a conformity between the believer and the image of Christ.
9. The believer’s conformity to Christ constitutes “justification,” for the divine righteousness is identical to the righteousness humans are granted, a righteousness which actually transforms the being of the believer.
10. Although the “being righteous” effected by deification is a real ontological transformation, the believer is always on the way to a righteousness which will be consummated only in the future.<sup>295</sup>

Point ten is the most relevant to my argument. It demonstrates that this “real-ontic” transformation is classified as “on the way to” consummation. The incarnation of God has restored us through the spirit of Christ; however, the historical event of Christ’s death provides only a dim comprehension of Christ glory. Christ’s presence is now only partially available, but in the future he will be fully present.<sup>296</sup> Just as Loewenich, Peura has understood the terms ‘faith’ and ‘hope’ to be practically synonymous. In this world

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<sup>294</sup> Juntunen, “Luther and Metaphysics,” 130; 138.

<sup>295</sup> Bielfeldt, “Deification as a Motif in Luther’s *Dictata super psalterium*,” 405-406; See also Peura, *Mehr als ein Mensch?*, 48-85.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 411. See also WA 4. 8, 30-36.

the call of God is barely audible and is given through the word of faith—a faith that is future directed and naked “*nuda spe*.”<sup>297</sup>

As Bielfeldt argues, the ontological claim of the Finnish school is best understood as an assertion of divine presence in the believer. Despite their assertions of ontic unity between believer and Christ the Finns argue that this does not imply a Neoplatonic ontology.<sup>298</sup> The imagery used by the Finns implies that justification is the “presencing” of Christ in the believer,<sup>299</sup> a presencing that is not complete until the Eschaton. Hence, the Finnish argument does not completely upset the anti-realist reading of Luther’s work, which has been the backbone of the forensic argument, but merely qualifies its findings by demonstrating that there was still a trace of realism in Luther’s thought.

Mannermaa also emphasizes the eschatological elements of deification. He asserts that participation can only be understood through the passion of God which will not be complete until the Eschaton. In a recent article, Mannermaa connects *theosis*, the theology of the cross, and eschatology:

Luther’s concept of *theosis*, then, is understood correctly only in connection with his theology of the cross. The participation that is a real part of his theology is hidden under its opposite. The *passio* through which one is emptied. It is not grasped in rational knowledge but only in faith, and the grasp that faith has of it in this life is still only the beginning of a much greater participation that awaits in eschatological fulfillment.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> WA 3. 410, 16-20.

<sup>298</sup> Bielfeldt, “Deification as a Motif in Luther’s *Dictata super psalterium*,” 413.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid, 414. Bielfeldt notes: “That there is a semantic difference between participation and presence is witnessed by the fact that “Christ’s Body is really present in the bread” is regarded as proper (at least by Lutherans), while “this bread participates in the Body of Christ” is not. Accordingly, just as one could say that the Body is really present in the bread (without the bread ontologically participating in the Body), so might one allege that Christ is really present in the Christian (without the Christian ontologically participating in Christ).” It is on this basis the Bielfeldt advocates the notion of *perichoresis* over participation.

<sup>300</sup> Mannermaa, “Why Is Luther So Fascinating? Modern Finnish Luther Research,” 10.

From Karl Holl and the beginnings of the Luther Renaissance to Loewenich and the theology of the cross, faith and hope have played an integral role in interpreting justification. This is mirrored in the work of the Finnish school of Luther studies. Despite the fundamental differences between these two readings of Luther both acknowledge the eschatological dimension of justification, regardless of the ontological dimensions.

#### **D. Summary**

Helmut T. Lehmann notes that “the study of Luther presents us with a Herculean task and makes it exceedingly difficult to suggest ways of studying him that are not one-sided.”<sup>301</sup> This is especially true in the justification debate. Nevertheless, synthesizing aspects of the forensic and deification readings is not as difficult as it appears. Both agree that Luther has rejected the Augustinian *ordo charitatis*-scheme associated with the hierarchical order of being—the idea of ascending to God through human works and concepts—and both stress the nothingness of man in the process of justification. In this manner, they agree that Luther has abandoned the Neoplatonism of the *via antiqua*, the soteriology of the *via moderna*, and Augustine’s anthropology. Moreover, the ontological connection between Christ and the believer advocated by the Finns does not change the fact that the believer is saved *propter Christum* (not *propter fidem*); they agree that Luther has rejected medieval gradualism.

The only real disagreement regards ontology. As we have seen, however, when this is qualified by the observation that the Finns do not believe that Luther retained the

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<sup>301</sup> Helmut T. Lehmann, “Luther on the Study of Luther,” *Word & World* 3, no. 4 (1983): 399.

Neoplatonic hierarchy, the disagreement is weakened. Both readings try to account for Luther's understanding of being by appealing to its active and dynamic quality. Ebeling argues that it is completely future oriented, the "*Werde-Charakter*" making impossible a "*Sein-Charakter*." The imagery used by the Finns implies that justification is the "presencing" of Christ in the believer, a presencing that is not complete until the Eschaton. Juntunen argues that Luther's use of Ockham's *creatio continua* had an implicit *esse-in* quality. He asserts that Christ is ontologically present in the believer in a non-accidental manner through the continuous reception of grace.

Given the current state of scholarship, it is not possible to state unequivocally which reading is correct. More research will have to be done to determine how Luther understood the *esse-in* and *esse-ad* aspects of relational ontology. By Juntunen's own admission, there has never been an in depth study of the concept of relations in Luther's work: "Luther's notion of the concept of relation has not so far been studied. I think that Luther has not been very explicit on this subject thus making it a very difficult theme to explore."<sup>302</sup>

At this point, since both readings agree that the "*Werde Charakter*" is an integral aspect of Luther's theology, we can safely assume that Luther had a dynamic and active ontology that is, at the very least, future oriented. In Luther's work, the hierarchical God of being who could be known through reason became the God who acts in Christ, a promise revealed in *theologia crucis*. Despite the theoretical disagreements, this is a minimalist position that is confirmed by current scholarship. To quote again from Steinmetz:

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<sup>302</sup> Juntunen, "Luther and Metaphysics," 147.



Luther begins, when he can, with the human situation before God and describes the event of faith in the historical context of promise and fulfillment. That may not offer a grand enough prospect for more ambitious theologians who chafe and grow irritable when they cannot speculate about the pre-temporal counsels of God, but it is all the prospect Luther wants.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Steinmetz, *Luther and Staupitz*, 66-67.

## Conclusion

The Luther renaissance began as a response to the controversial work of Denifle in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and revealed the complex web of influences that contributed to Luther's discovery of justification by faith. Over the past fifty-years, scholars have debated these influences intensely without coming to unanimous consent on all issues. In this study, I stated my intention to address two central questions pertaining to Luther scholarship: 1) what is the relationship between Luther's theology of justification and the *via moderna*? 2) what is the nature of Luther's theology of justification (i.e. is it forensic or does it imply deification)? I have used the historical data, Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation*, and the justification debate to explore these questions. Succinctly, by appealing to the late medieval transition from 'God as being' to 'God who acts in history,' I have argued that the proper context in which to understand Luther's doctrine of justification is his development of the 'God who acts in Christ.'

Luther's training in the *via moderna* conditioned his early development. He was instructed in the Nominalism and logic from the school of Gabriel Biel and Pierre d'Ailly. This training situated him in opposition to the *via antiqua* associated with Thomas Aquinas. However, Luther also became dissatisfied with the soteriology of Biel and rejected the notion of an indwelling habit or any natural propensity for the reception of grace.

Luther's continuing influence from the *via moderna* lay in its stress on the covenantal relationship between man and God. As early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Franciscans had come to stress importance of this covenant in the process of salvation over and above the ontological connection between man and God. For followers of the *via moderna*,

salvation was a *necessitas consequentiae* of the *pactum* rather than a *necessitas consequentis* of ontology. Luther's condemnation of scholastic theology in the *Heidelberg Disputation* was directed against this ontological necessity (of the *via antiqua*) and the vain attempts by man to ascend to God through reason. This fact has often been confused in Luther scholarship by associating Luther's condemnation of the *via antiqua* with a rejection of metaphysics and ontology in general. As Mannermaa argues, this reflects a Neo-Kantian bias in Luther scholarship that has misconstrued Luther's work as forensic. The value of Finnish scholarship has been to bring attention to this bias and argue that nowhere in Luther's work does he completely reject the relational aspects of ontology.

Due to the Neo-Kantian bias, the traditional interpretation of Luther's doctrine of justification has been that it is completely external. This reading allowed some theologians, such as Eom and Ebeling, to argue for an existential reading of Luther in which justification is an effect of the cross. In contrast, the Finnish school of Luther studies argues that in Luther's work Christ is not merely external and forensic in justification but really present via an ontological connection. They contend that justification is not simply an effect of God's promise but signals the presence of Christ's love in an intrinsic manner. The Finns have used this argument to assert that Luther held a version of the doctrine of *theosis* (divinization), as taught by the Eastern Orthodox Church.

In this study, I have taken a middle position between the strictly forensic reading offered by German theologians and the notion of deification argued for by the Finns. Although I agree that Luther never rejected ontology, I reject their attempt to systematize

his doctrine of justification as a process of deification. More research is needed to demonstrate the nature of Luther ontology but his argument in thesis 19-24 of the *Heidelberg Disputation* should not be construed as a flat-out rejection of the *esse-in* and *esse-ad* dimensions of medieval relations, or of the connection between the *summon bonum* and God. However, Finnish scholars must also recognize that Luther was not a systematic thinker and that many of his writings were situational. Luther may have had metaphysical elements in his theology (as Juntunen argues) but he refused to comment on the nature of the connection between man and God. He believed in the real presence of Christ but did not comment on *how* Christ was present. As Luther wrote in his Lectures on Galatians, “But how He is present—this is beyond our thought; for there is darkness.”<sup>304</sup>

It is for this reason that this study has argued that the proper context to understand Luther is his emphasis on the God who acts in Christ. Through this development, Luther rejected any attempt to systematize theology into a philosophical system. Influenced by the *pactum*, Luther grounded his theology on the acts of God. The *theologia crucis* was his hermeneutical tool that structured his interpretation of the bible and guided his doctrine of justification. This emphasis had an eschatological stress that Luther articulated by valuing the passion of God as the *axis mundi* of scripture. This provides the proper context to approach Luther’s work and clarifies his relation to the *via moderna* by showing how he incorporated and unfolded the covenantal tradition that stretches back to Francis of Assisi.

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<sup>304</sup> WA 40. 1. 229, 22-25.

## Appendix: Luther's Theses for the *Heidelberg Disputation*

### The Heidelberg Disputation<sup>305</sup>

Brother Martin Luther, Master of Sacred Theology, will lead, and Brother Leonhard Beier, Master of Arts and Philosophy, will respond, before the Augustinians in the celebrated city of Heidelberg, in this customary location. The month of May, 1518.<sup>306</sup>

#### Theological Theses

Having no confidence in our own knowledge, according to that council of the Holy Spirit, "Do not rely on your own understanding" [Prov. 3:5], we offer to everyone who wishes to be present, these Theological Paradoxes, in order that it might be apparent whether these theses have been deduced well or poorly from the divine St. Paul, the specially elected vessel and instrument of Christ, and from St. Augustine, Christ's most faithful interpreter.

1. The Law of God, the most salubrious doctrine of life, cannot promote man to righteousness, rather, it works against him.
2. Much less are the works of man, which are frequently repeated with the help of natural ends, able to promote him to righteousness.
3. The works of Man, although they appear attractive and good, are nevertheless likely to be grave sins.
4. The works of God, although they always appear foul and evil, are nevertheless truly eternal merits.
5. The works of men, it follows, are not mortal sins (we speak of those works which appear to be good), as if they were crimes.
6. The works of God, it follows, are not merits (we speak of that which God does through man), as if they were without sin.
7. The works of the righteous would be mortal sins, if the righteous themselves did not fear them as mortal sins, out of pious fear of God.
8. Many more human works are mortal sins when they are done without fear, in a pure and evil confidence.
9. To say that works without Christ are dead, but not mortal, seems to be a treacherous defeat of the fear of God.

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<sup>305</sup> The following translation is based on the Latin edition as found in the Weimarer Ausgabe. See WA 1. 358-374. I have chosen the Weimarer Ausgabe because this is the version used by the scholars I am studying. However, I have crosschecked my translation with the recently published Latin-German edition of the *Heidelberg Disputation* and the English translation, as found in *Luther's Works*. See, Luther, *Martin Luther: Lateinisch-Deutsche Studienausgabe, Band 1*, 35-69; LW 31, 39-70. There are very few differences between the Weimarer Ausgabe and the recent Latin edition. The *Lateinisch-Deutsche Studienausgabe* merely adds clarification to the document by separating pronouns from conjunctions and adding commas.

<sup>306</sup> The disputation occurred on April 29, 1518. May is an approximate date. See LW 31, 39.

10. Indeed, it is very difficult to understand how a work can be dead and not also be a dangerous mortal sin.
11. Pride cannot be avoided, or true hope present, unless the judgment of condemnation is feared in every work.
12. For God, sins are truly pardonable only when they are feared by men to be mortal sins.
13. After the fall, free will exists by name alone, and as long as it acts through its own ability, it commits a mortal sin.
14. After the fall, free will has the potential to do good only passively, but it is always able to commit evil in an active capacity.
15. Neither can free will remain in a state of innocence, or accomplish good in an active capacity, but only in a passive capacity is it able to do good.
16. Man, thinking he can attain grace by doing what is in him, adds sin to sin, so that he becomes doubly guilty.
17. Speaking in this manner does not give cause for despair, but for humility and the desire to seek the grace of Christ.
18. It is certain, man must utterly despair of his own insight before he may receive the grace of Christ.
19. That man does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened [Rom. 1:20].
20. However, he who clearly perceives the visible and manifest things of God through suffering and the cross, deserves to be called a theologian.
21. A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls a thing what it is.
22. That wisdom, which perceives the invisible things of God in works, as understood by man, is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened.
23. The law brings the wrath of God, kills, reviles, accuses, judges, and condemns everything that is not in Christ [Rom. 4:15].
24. The wisdom of the law, however, is not evil and should not be evaded; but without the theology of the cross man makes use of the best in the worst manner.
25. He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ.
26. The law says, "do this," and it is never done. Grace says, "believe in this," and everything is already done.
27. It is proper to call the work of Christ an acting work and our work an accomplished work, and thus an accomplished work pleasing to God by the grace of an acting work.
28. The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. The love of man creates according to what is pleasing to it.

### **Philosophical Theses**

29. He who wishes to use Aristotle's philosophy without danger to his soul must first become thoroughly foolish in Christ.
30. Just as a man does not use the evil of passion well unless he is married, so no man philosophizes well unless foolish, that is, a Christian.
31. It was easy for Aristotle to hold the opinion that the world was eternal, since he thought that the human soul was mortal.
32. After it was agreed that there are as many material forms that exist as created things, it was necessary to accept that they are all material.
33. Nothing in the world becomes something of necessity; nevertheless, that which comes forth from matter by necessity, comes into being naturally.
34. If Aristotle had recognized the absolute power of God, then he would have asserted that it is impossible for matter to stand by itself.
35. According to Aristotle, no action is infinite; Nevertheless, the power and matter in which things are composed is comparable to the infinite.
36. Aristotle incorrectly blames and derides the ideas of Plato, which are actually better than his own philosophy.
37. The numerical order of things is ingeniously asserted by Pythagoras, but more ingenious is the interaction of ideas put forth by Plato.
38. The disputation of Aristotle 'lashes out' against Parmenides' idea of oneness (which is permissible for a Christian) in an empty attack.
39. If Anaxagoras placed infinity before form, as it appears he did, then he is the most useful of the philosophers, even if Aristotle was unwilling to acknowledge this.
40. In the writing of Aristotle privation, matter, form, change, motionlessness, power, etc. appear to be the same.

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