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SHORT TITLE: How Luther's Theology Is About Man

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THE HUMAN SUBJECT AS THE OBJECT OF THEOLOGY
LUTHER BY WAY OF BARTH

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
ROBERT W. BERTRAM

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CHAPTER I

LUTHER BY WAY OF BARTH

A Loaded Question

What more innocent way to a man's theology, Luther's included, than to ask outright, What is it all about--or better, Whom is it about? To put the question a bit more technically and au courant, Who is the object of this theology? Either way, the question has a conspicuous virtue. Aside from its sounding up-to-date and hardly at all like obscure Luther research, it appears to be utterly direct, requiring no further clarification, waiting only for the respondent--in this case, Luther--to proceed with his answer forthwith. So it would seem.

In practice the question is not so open-ended as that. It might in fact be loaded, and most loaded, ironically, where the questioner himself is most sober and circumspect. Even to pose the question, Who is Luther's theological object, is already to have some preconception of what it is we are asking. But whose preconception? Luther's own? Or one which is more modern, perchance more moderate? The very term, object of theology, may excite premature expectations concerning the identity of that object. A straw vote might reveal, for example, a strong advance preference for God. But suppose it develops that for Luther the object of theology is man, as alas it seems to be. The reaction in that

case is not hard to imagine: in some quarters disappointment, in others vehement denial. Nor would such reactions be unreasonable. Not necessarily. They may indicate only that what it takes to be the object of theology is not the same for Luther as it is for the one who is asking him.

The one who comes to mind is Karl Barth. Really, it is a euphemism to say Barth has a question _for_ Luther. He has strong questions _about_ Luther, at least about Luther's theological object. Still, there is no harm, and there may be some methodological gain, in preserving the euphemism: Barth as inquirer and Luther as respondent, even though they threaten to talk past each other.

The discrepancy, however, between Barth's question and Luther's answer is not trivial. It involves more by far than a mere difference in words, like Barth's _Objekt_ or _Gegenstand_ versus Luther's _obiectum_. No, the difference lies deeper than words. It concerns what theology is all about and, beyond that, what it means at all for theology to be "about" someone. Finally, it is the question of how someone, be he God or man, can _be_ the sort of object his theological predicates make him out to be. What makes him, grammatically speaking, the subject of his predicates? How are they "his"? For example, if the object whom theology is about is Jesus Christ, both God and man, what does it mean that this Son of God is man? How is his humanity his? Or suppose the object of theology is the Christian, simultaneously sinful and righteous. By virtue of what _is_ he a sinner? By his own doing? But is that also what makes him righteous? If not, and if his righteousness is the doing of another, how can this righteousness be said to be

the Christian's own? The answer to these questions--the question, let us say, of theological predication--has a great deal to do with the status of the theological object. Whom theology is about depends strongly on how theology is about, at all.

For Barth, apparently, theological predicates are about their subject the way achievements are about the one who does them. So theology is about its object the way compliments are about the one who deserves them. Such about-ness is appropriate, of course, when the object it points to is God. "About," in this Barthian context, implies credit due. However, if it is that complimentary sort of about-ness which we have in mind when we examine a theology like Luther's, about man, then wo wonder we wince. To be told by Luther that theology is first and foremost about ourselves as sinners must then sound like a morbid dignifying of evil--like carrying dung in a gold vase, to use his expression. But Luther does insist, repeatedly, that the prior object of theology is the sinner. Even when he says theology is finally about Jesus Christ, he means it is about Christ no less as man than as God, and about Christ only as it is also about ourselves. Yet this only adds scandal to scandal. For if theological about-ness is pre-eminently the divine due, then Luther's preoccupation with man, including the man Jesus, must look like an incipient plot against deity.

Whitehead quipped that Aristotle, for all his empiricism, still dissected fish with Plato's ideas in his head.[1] It is likewise tempting to dissect Luther with Barthian ideas in our heads,

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[1]A. N. Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas (New York: Macmillan Co., 1933), p. 136.

the more so since it is Barth, perhaps more than anyone, who has shaped current thinking about the object of theology. But what happens then is that we inquire for Luther's theological object, all the while meaning by the question what Barth, not Luther, would mean by it. According to the rule, You get what you ask for, the result is a curious distortion. Either Luther emerges, at the hands of his defenders, sounding like a pre-Barth Barthian, as though his theology were all about the self-revealing God. Or his critics, like Barth himself, perceptive enough to recognize Luther's man-centeredness, bemoan it as the first fatal step toward Feuerbach's atheism. The consequent Luther, in either guise, is hard to recognize. That is understandable if, already at the point of interrogation, he was over-asked--or, as it seems to me, under-asked. The original question, after all, was not as unencumbered as it appeared.

Then why, it is only fair to ask, should Luther be bothered with a question which he never bothered to ask himself, never in its Barthian form, and which is apt to extort answers from him which he did not intend? Well, for one thing, Barth's question could still be redefined sufficiently to engage Luther fair and square. And this very process of redefinition might reveal as much about Luther as his own answer would. That is so, and that is in fact the procedure to be employed in the whole first part of this dissertation. But there is another, preliminary consideration. The Barthian question which now returns to haunt Luther may be of Luther's own making, at least posthumously. In that event Barth's question about Luther's theological object presents

Luther with a new responsibility to explain himself, and a new opportunity. We shall return to this point in a moment. First it is instructive to see how Barth for his part traces the current problem of the theological object back to Luther and to his "ingenious overemphasis."

Luther's "Ingenious Overemphasis"

Particularly embarrassing to Barth, as we have anticipated, is Luther's preoccupation with man at the theological expense of God. This preoccupation, Barth finds, came to a dead end in the man-centered theology of the nineteenth century, notoriously in Schleiermacher. But it took the anti-theologian of that period, Ludwig Feuerbach, to blurt out the guilty secret, "Theology has long since become anthropology."[1] So it had, Barth laments, "ever since Protestantism itself, and especially Luther, emphatically shifted the interest from what God is in himself to what God is for man."[2]

Feuerbach, far from displeased by this manward shift, eagerly programmed it into a "theology" of his own. God was explicitly replaced by man. Where traditional theology had employed sentences like "God is infinite" or "God is love," Feuerbach converted the subject of the sentences from God to man and referred the predicates to man. "What in the infinite being can I perceive to be a subject . . . ? Only that which is a predicate, a quality

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[1]Quoted by Barth in "An Introductory Essay" in Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), p. xxi. Hereafter cited as EC.

[2]Ibid., p. xix.

of myself."[1] So man, no longer content to be the theologizing subject, now became also the grammatical subject, the creditable agent of theological predicates--and thereby the object of theology. "Theology is anthropology, that is, in the object of religion which we call Theos in Greek and Gott in German, nothing but the essence of man is expressed."[2]

Notice Feuerbach's assumption, which Barth, significantly, seems to share. All real theological predicates are complimentary, a credit to their subject. But even these may be credited to their subject only if they are that subject's own doing, qualities which he personally presents. Otherwise, presumably, their ascription to him could not be justified, they would not really be about him, he could not rightfully be the theological object. This assumption seems reasonable and certainly moral enough. Yet Luther, as we shall see, though he also shared the assumption, could not do so without qualification, except at jeopardy to "the benefits of Christ."

However, so long as this admittedly moral assumption does go unqualified, Barth's strictures on Luther and, conversely, Feuerbach's exploitation of Luther, are understandable. Luther did assign theological predicates to man, as Feuerbach's abundant Luther quotations testify--and not only uncomplimentary predicates to man the sinner (though these predicates were as real as the complimentary ones) but also divine predicates to the man Jesus and to his undeserving beneficiaries. On the Feuerbachian assump-

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid., p. xv.

tion that divine predicates deserve to accrue to their human subject only if they are his own doing, Feuerbach needed only to replace Luther's passive human subject with an active one--a subject who is object because he objectifies himself. But that subject, as Barth counters (and Luther might have, too)--that subject!--can only be God. However, Feuerbach arrived on the scene before Barth. Theology became anthropology. And in support of his thesis Feuerbach cited no one so ardently as he did Luther.

By today the situation has changed. The man-centered religiousness both of Feuerbach and of his Christian contemporaries has vividly been exposed, thanks largely to Barth himself. Still, Barth cautions, what we have learned to fear from Feuerbach--"whether the theologians of the modern age are not planning on an undercover apotheosis of man"--continues to be a pressing problem. For, as he warns, the same danger continues to lurk, all too embarrassingly, in our common ancestor, Luther. "It is for us Protestant theologians a matter of special concern that Feuerbach for his purposes could readily make use of Luther, and not without every appearance of justice."[1]

Especially misleading in this respect, says Barth, are Luther's doctrines on Christ and the Lord's Supper. "With ingenious overemphasis, Luther himself urged us to seek deity not in heaven but on earth, in man, man, the man Jesus; and for him the bread of the Lord's Supper had to be the glorified body of the Exalted One." "It is certain," Barth concludes, "that Luther and

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[1] Ibid., p. xxii.

the old-Lutherans with their heaven-storming Christology have left their followers in a somewhat exposed and defenseless situation, in face of the speculative anthropological consequences that have irresistibly developed."[1]

Luther's Responsibility and His Opportunity

When Barth recurs to Luther, or to any of the fathers, he does so not at all uncritically but with the predilection of a systematician who has something of his own to say. "Why should he artificially reinterpret [the fathers'] findings until Luther is in agreement with him and says what he himself so badly wants to say?"[2] Still, it has been said of his Kirchliche Dogmatik--"the most impressive Protestant system at least since Schleiermacher, and perhaps since Calvin"[3]--that it may come to be remembered longest and best for its excursions in ten-point type into questions of exegesis and church history, including no doubt its critiques of Luther.[4] For that matter, Barth's attitude toward Luther is not exclusively or even predominantly critical, and it may be diminishingly so. That same Lutheran Christology which

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[1]Ibid., p. xxiii.

[2]Karl Barth, "The Gift of Freedom," The Humanity of God, trans. J. N. Thomas and Thomas Wieser (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1960), p. 94.

[3]Jaroslav Pelikan, in Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics: A Selection, selected and introduced by Helmut Gollwitzer, trans. and ed. G. W. Bromiley (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), on back cover.

[4]Jaroslav Pelikan, "Karl Barth in America," The Christian Century, LXXIX (April 11, 1962), 452.

Barth had once reproached he more recently described, a little less reproachfully, as "the fatal Lutheran doctrine . . . , whose essential aim, however, must at this point not be denied but adopted."[1] More recently still, Barth conceded the feasibility, indeed the necessity, of a "Christian anthropocentrism," albeit with a cautious proviso. And at this point he now faults nineteenth-century theologians for having "hesitated so long to appeal to Luther"--though, as he is careful to specify, "especially the early Luther . . . !"[2]

No matter. Whatever Barth's final estimate of Luther may be, or whether his estimate is correct, is not the question at hand. Our question, though it is from Barth that we borrow it,

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[1]Barth, "The Humanity of God," The Humanity of God, p. 50. The essay "The Humanity of God" is but one of three essays in the book, also entitled The Humanity of God. Hereafter the essay by this title (but not the book as a whole) is cited as HG.

An interesting experience in this connection from the years of the early Barth is recorded in a letter he wrote to his friend Eduard Thurneysen in 1925: "I was in Hannover on May 13. . . . The most notable thing in the discussion was a meeting with Bernhard Dörries who in the name of Lutheranism (!) maintained against me that I give too little place to the true humanity of Christ as the bearer of the fullness of God, while Luther equated not only the humanity of Christ but equally the world in general with the revelation, whereupon I truly could not miss the opportunity of telling . . . that this very thing was the deplorable consequence of the Lutheran doctrine of the Communicatio idiomatum against which our fathers issued a warning already centuries ago." Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen, Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence, trans. James D. Smart (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1964), pp. 222-23.

[2]Barth, "Evangelical Theology in the Nineteenth Century," The Humanity of God, p. 24.

is directed not to Barth but to Luther. Who is the object of Luther's theology? Is it finally man himself? If so, how so? Let it now be Luther's responsibility, not Barth's, to provide an answer. Barth has rendered sufficient service in suggesting a provocative question. Yet is that not the assumption precisely which needs to be challenged? Is there not a real and present danger that, with Barth as provocateur, Luther's theology will be provoked to say things which he could never have intended? That is a risk, and we do well to be reminded of it. Yet despite the risk, Luther has a responsibility, but also an opportunity.

A great theologian, H. R. Mackintosh once said, condemns his descendants to the responsibility of understanding him.[1] But the great theologian also assumes his share of that responsibility. He is likewise condemned to make himself understood to his descendants. In that respect the work of a church father, like the work of a mother, is never ended, not even by death. Indeed, the more richly he provides for his heirs, the more apt he is to provide them with an occasion, if not with just cause, to contest the will. Therefore, though he cannot be on hand to adjudicate their differences, he ought at least to have left them a negotiable instrument. Luther is no exception. He may or may not be a cause of the Feuerbach-Barth controversy, but he is, as literary fact, an occasion for it. That is reason enough for him to explain himself anew, not so much to clear his good name, or to clear away the

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[1]H. R. Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (London: Nisbet and Co., 1937), p. 31.

issues of today, as to clarify for today the original intent of his bequest.

Luther need not have written with one eye always cocked toward posterity. He was too timely and too much a trouble-shooter for that. But he did believe that in his generation the theological troubles of every generation had exposed themselves, classically and perennially, and that he had been blessed with opponents of heroic and timeless proportions[1]--so durably wrong because they were so nearly right--such that the Church's subsequent heresies would be but derivatives of hers then.[2] If so, our current problem concerning the object of theology may be, with due allowance, Luther's original problem meeting itself coming back. About that problem he never denied his duty to be clear.

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[1]Luther offers a similar explanation of the theological success of Augustine by suggesting that Augustine's discovery of the gospel owed much, left-handedly, to the heresy of his opponents: "Augustine would not have understood it if he had not been troubled and provoked by the Pelagians." As for his own reformatory efforts, however, Luther questions whether his reformation of the church's doctrine could ever have succeeded were it not that the papacy's heresy was compounded by its gross immorality, thus securing for Luther a popular support which he would not have enjoyed in times when the papacy was in better moral health. Luther's Works, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (55 vols. planned; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955 ff.), XXVI, 412, 458. Cited hereafter as LW. Also D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1883), XL, Pt. 1, 623, ll. 29-30 and p. 685, l. 26 to p. 686, l. 9. Cited hereafter as WA. For example, WA XL/1, 221, 3-222, 18 refers to Vol. XL, Pt. 1, p. 221, l. 3 to p. 222, l. 18.

[2]LW, XXVI, 45-46, 152, 402. WA, XL/1, 102, 20-104, 19; 263, 16-22; 610, 26-611, 25.

There is another side of the coin: Luther's opportunity as well as his duty. The latter-day question about his theological object, coming as it does after four centuries of the western church's sustained living with his theology, comes not from Luther's first generation students but from his alumni. As such, their question may bring with it accretions and poor memory, to be sure, but also a wealth of reflection and unanticipated testing not available from Luther's contemporaries. The new question, though it runs the admitted danger of over-asking or under-asking him, might also elucidate him. It might be the sort of question for which Luther had to wait four hundred years, as for a delayed cue, in order to make his original meaning clearer than it first was.

Here perhaps is some small comfort for historicism. The questions which the present asks the past are indeed not the past's own questions. But they may be the questions which, just because of their conscious anachronism, now enable the past to amplify its original answers. For example, Luther's whole view of theological predication--his plea for "a new and theological grammar"--gives evidence of his discomfort with the scholastic scheme of substance and quality, though his break with this scheme was not always systematically reasoned and complete. Barth, by now, has made the break and can show his reasons why. In other words, he provides us a clear alternative. But with this new contrast in hand, we can see, perhaps more clearly than before, that Luther's alternative differs not only from the scholastics' but also from Barth's! Luther's past reasons, in consequence, are clarified by an assist

from the present. Such efforts at de-anachronizing might be, for the historian of theology, a methodological application of what we now call the church's "living tradition."[1] At least in the present project, the recent questions which Karl Barth has raised concerning the object of Luther's theology are invoked, not to rescue Luther from his original intention, but as a new and opportune and telltale clue to his intention.

Reformulating Barth's Question

We might at this point simply thank Barth for his services and, without troubling him further, negotiate a transition from his question to Luther's answer. But even for such a transition we still need to inquire of Barth at length (through three more chapters!), if only in the interest of Luther. For, in order to join question to answer--to "correlate" them, if Tillich's term applies--it will be necessary to cross-examine the Barthian question, this time from the standpoint of Luther, in order to isolate that ingredient in Barth's conception of the theological object which is uncongenial to Luther's. That Barthian ingredient, if it were not isolated and suspended, would render Luther's meaning of the theological object inaccessible to our inquiry. Of course the resulting question, thus revised, will no longer be authentically Barth's. That is the point exactly. The very reformulating of Barth's question is already half the way into Luther's answer.

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[1]"The Tradition, according to a useful phrase of Moeller, is a living Tradition." Jean Danielou, God and the Ways of Knowing, trans. Walter Roberts (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), p. 191.

Actually, Barth's view of the theological object differs from Luther's in a variety of ways. But the purpose here is not to subject these two worthies to an exhaustive comparison or, for that matter, to any comparison. The purpose rather is to subject Luther, all over again, to the critical and yet fruitful question of Barth, only this time not in the interest of Barth's dogmatics but in the interest of understanding Luther on his own terms. Even our prior cross-examination of Barth's question will have as its purpose to use what we can of that question for an understanding of Luther. For this limited objective an authentic answer from Luther, it seems to me, requires only that a single basic strain in Barth's question be alleviated (though basic it is!): namely, that the one who is the object of theology, in order for him to be that, must himself be the active and creditable subject of his own predicates. This feature of the object--that he really is what he does--is of course not unique with Barth. He acknowledges, if not his debt, at least his resemblance to others on this score, including Feuerbach. But this is the one feature, perhaps just because it is widespread, about which we shall need to be particularly conscious in Barth if we are finally to come to grips with Luther. And it is with this feature in mind that we shall, first of all, re-examine the Barthian question.

The plan in Part One, that is, in the next three chapters, is to sample three areas in Barth's theology which relate to his doctrine on man: man the sinner, the man Christ Jesus, and man the believer. (Part Three will be a similar sampling of the same three areas in the theology of Luther, preceded by Part Two, a termino-

logical study of Luther's "obiectum" and "subiectum.") In each of the three chapters on Barth we may note how his characteristic view of the theological object, and his corresponding uneasiness with Luther, tend to blur the latter's original intention. And in each chapter we shall be driven back to the prior problem of theological predication. In all candor, some warning should be given about the results which lie ahead. It should become increasingly clear that the question is not merely, Who is the object of Luther's theology? For, although Luther might reply that the object of theology is somehow man, we should still have to reckon with Barth's weighty objection to Luther's answer. And Barth's objection, in turn, invites a counter-question to Barth himself: If man had best not be the object of theology, then why not? To turn the question back upon Barth is not to pass the buck, however. The purpose rather is to uncover that more fundamental question behind the question of the theological object.

For example, with respect to the self-humiliation of Jesus Christ we shall find Barth differing from Luther and saying that, at this important point in Christology, the theological object is Christ as the Son of God, not as the Son of Man. But why not as the Son of Man? Or, as another example, Barth will demur at Luther's "extravagant view" of faith, according to which believers enjoy the very righteousness and life of Christ as their full and present possession and, by virtue of their "happy exchange" with Christ, become with him the ones whom theology is about. And why not? The Barthian answer to this counter-question will reveal a fundamental conception about the personal subject and his

predicates: namely, that his predicates are really "his" only as he himself does them. Therefore, if the gracious condescension of God in Christ is not the doing of the man Jesus, then the latter may hardly be credited with this act. Similarly, the righteousness of Christ may not be credited to his believers, or their sin be debited to him, as really as if this were their and his own doing.

On the other hand, if for Barth the personal subject is what he does, we might expect him to accord theological objecthood at least to man the sinner, as Luther does. For the sinner, certainly, is defined by what he does. Yet Barth does not mean that the subject is characterized by just anything he does, but only by what he does in obedience to God. Sin, consequently, does not qualify as a real predicate of a real subject. Therefore, the sinner is not one whom theology is "really" about. These examples may already be enough to indicate that, for Barth, the sort of doing which entitles a subject to theological predicates is necessarily a commendable, creditable doing. It is on this Barthian assumption, however, that Luther's very different theology appears dangerously anthropocentric. And it is this Barthian assumption, which, from Luther's standpoint in turn, would appear as a moralistic impediment to letting man be the theological object he is, whether as sinner or as righteous. Whomever theology is about, one thing is sure: the important things which are said about him must really be about him, must be his. But what is needed to make them his? So the prior question is not, <u>Whom</u> is theology about, but <u>How</u>?

The Values of Barth's Question

On the positive side, there is something in Barth's question about Luther's theological object which commends that question for a study of Luther. For one thing, Barth calls attention to an "anthropocentrism" which is at least as prominent in Luther as Barth intimates it is, and which for Luther is probably far more essential than the accidental aberration--the "ingenious overemphasis"--which Barth is almost willing to excuse. Of course, it would be all too easy, as more than one line of Luther's descendants have exemplified, to misconstrue this "anthropocentrism" of his. If we are to do even minimal justice to him, we dare never lose sight of the fact that the man whom theology is about is determined throughout by his relationship to God, whether God in his wrath or in his mercy--a God-relationship which in either event is persistently historical and personal. Yet it is exactly because of his relation to God, as we shall see, that the sinner can be the subiectum (that is, the "object") of at least one of Luther's "two theological knowledges," namely, theology under the law. True, in the case of the other "theological knowledge," the gospel, Luther does not say the subiectum is man. It is "the justifying God." Yet by designating God as subiectum of the gospel Luther means only that God is in this case the creditable agent, the one who is characterized by what he does (somewhat in Barth's sense of Subjekt). It is not the believer who does the justifying. Still, even in the gospel, though the believer is not "active" but "passive," there is simply no talking about justification unless this justification--indeed, unless Christ himself--is

predicated of us, as fully and presently ours. In that sense we are the subjects--the passive subjects, but the subjects--of his predicates. It is we who are the justified ones and, in that respect, the ones whom the gospel is about. Anthropocentric? As much so as God's grace is.

In the last analysis, really, it is not the chief concern of this paper to prove that for Luther man is the object of theology. But insofar as he is an object of theology, what is there about him which makes him that? And here we come to a second, even more important, service which is rendered by the Barthian question, namely, Barth's "objectivity." That is to say, Barth has reminded our generation again that the one who is the object of theology becomes that, not first by a "subjective" act of the theologians, but by reason of what he himself "objectively" is and does. Thus the question is not only, How do we come to know him, but also and previously, How does he come to be the one we know? Granted, this very objectivity in Barth, when controlled by the dominant accents of his own theology, tends to locate the object of theology in God and relatively less in man, whereas with Luther the focus shifts markedly toward man. So it does. But with Luther, too, what makes man the object of theology is not first an epistemological circumstance, and surely not the hybris of the theologian who seeks to scrutinize his own navel, whether pessimistically or optimistically. Luther finds the subtlest pride of all is that which rebels at making man the theological object the way the Scriptures do. No, what makes man the object of theology is not merely the fact that this is the way we know him, but rather

that this is the way he is--always of course coram Deo, for that is what he theologically is. Verbally at least, Luther might approve the Barthian theme: the object is always a subject in his own right. And not just an epistemological subject, a knower, but a biographical subject or (for want of a better word) a grammatical subject--the bearer and owner of real predicates, who is known theologically by what he is. Accordingly, throughout the discussion which follows, we shall avoid using wherever we can the term "subject" in its exclusively epistemological sense. The problem of Luther's epistemology is a massive problem in itself and is not the assigrnment before us.

The Sources

A word is in order about our use of the sources. The references to Luther are restricted almost exclusively to two of his works, his On the Bondage of the Will (1525) and his Lectures on Galatians (delivered in 1531, first published in 1535). Accordingly, whenever such locutions are here employed as "Luther says" or "Luther's view is so-and-so," their literal referent is usually only as extensive as the two sources mentioned. For that matter, both documents are lengthy enough (not to say long-winded), and it is no secret that Luther regarded them both with special favor.[1]

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[1]The following three works include helpful historical introductions in English to Luther's Galatians lectures of 1531. Jaroslav Pelikan, "Introduction to Volume 26," LW, XXVI, ix-x. B. A. Gerrish, Grace and Reason: A Study in the Theology of Luther (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), pp. 57-68. Philip S. Watson, "Editor's Preface," A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians . . . by Martin Luther, a revised and completed translation based on the "Middleton" edition of the English version of 1575 (London: James Clarke and Co., 1953), pp. 1-15. Cited

In both instances I have used the editions in the Weimarer Ausgabe.[1] The text of the Galatians lectures poses a problem since the closest thing we have to an original are the classroom notes of Luther's faithful scribe, Georg Rörer (with some help from his fellow-auditors), and the far more scanty notes from Luther's own "homework."[2] So the first published edition, with its full-length prose, is not directly from Luther's own hand,[3] and is

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hereafter as Gal.

A fine historical introduction to Luther's other work appears in the editors' "Historical and Theological Introduction," Martin Luther on the Bondage of the Will, trans. and ed. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (London: James Clarke and Co., 1957), pp. 13-65. Cited hereafter as BoW.

[1]In the Weimarer Ausgabe Luther's De Servo Arbitrio occupies Vol. XVIII, pp. 551-787, and his Galatians lectures of 1531 occupy Vol. XL, Pt. 1, and Vol. XL, Pt. 2, pp. 1-184.

[2]To say that "the text of the Galatians lectures poses a problem" should not obscure our debt to Rörer. For, as Pelikan states,

"For the transcription of these lectures and for their expansion into printed form we are indebted to the tireless devotion of George Rörer, one of the first and certainly one of the best of Luther's editors. . . . His notes have been preserved. . . . Thus we are in the happy position of being able to compare the lectures (i.e., Rörer's Kollegienheft) and the book. . . . By consulting the notes we have been able to determine in several obscure passages what the intent of the printed text probably is. . . . As Luther said in the comments he added to the Lectures . . . , 'I recognize that all the thoughts set down by the brethren with such care in this book are my own.'" LW, XXVI, ix-x.

The fragmentary "Präparationen Luthers zur Galatervorlesung" appear in WA, XL/1, 15-22.

[3]There are two sections in the commentary which are exceptions to this generalization and which did come from Luther's own hand. He wrote a special preface for the printed edition of the lectures. LW, XXVII, 145-49. WA, XL/1, 33-37. Also, in the printed edition, Luther's exposition of Galatians 5:6 is from a sermon of his on "faith active in love." WA, XL/2, 34ff.

usually an expansion and in some few cases a departure from Rörer's shorthand.[1] These departures, by the way, do not always represent more than Luther said, though usually that is the direction in which they tend. In some instances the published text represents less than Luther said, assuming Rörer's manuscript is closer to Luther's ipsissimis verbis.[2] My own quotations are rarely from the text of the manuscript and usually, for the sake of intelligibility, from the printed text--though not from the latter when it seemed to depart from the intention of the former. In the references to Barth there has been no deliberate restriction of the literature, although the very nature of our samplings from him has concentrated relatively more attention on certain volumes of the Church Dogmatics than on his other works.[3]

In the body of the paper, quotations appear mostly in English translation, and in German and Latin only when this seemed essential to the original flavor. For quotations from Barth, I have usually relied on his official translators. Even with the

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[1]In the Weimar edition of the lectures Rörer's class-notes appear on the upper half of the page and are designated by "Hs." (Handschrift), while the corresponding published version of the lectures appears on the lower half of the page and is designated "Dr." (Druck).

[2]One of the rare cases in point, where a passage appears in the Hs. but not in the Dr. is WA, XL/1, 535, 15, a passage which will occupy us at length in chap. x of this dissertation.

[3]Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, trans. G. W. Bromiley, R. H. Fuller, Harold Knight, J. K. S. Reid, and G. T. Thomson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956ff.), Vol. I, Pt. 1 to Vol. IV, Pt. 2. Cited hereafter as CD. KD refers to the original, Die kirchliche Dogmatik (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelisher Verlag, 1939ff.), Vol. I, Pt. 1 to Vol. IV, Pt. 3.

quotationsfrom Luther, the translation is seldom my own. Where it is, special acknowledgments appear. It would have been sheer joy to use the Packer and and Johnston translation of Luther's De Servo Arbitrio without exception, were it not that their sprightly English, as they admit, is sometimes more literate than literally exact[1]--and sometimes better English perhaps than Luther's Latin is Latin. Out of typical scholarly masochism, therefore, I have sometimes had to forego the pleasure and have generously shared the inconvenience with the reader.[2] As for the Galatians commentary, I have used the new translation by Pelikan throughout, a procedure which hardly requires explanation, so consistently has Pelikan captured Luther's theological intention and, stylistically, his elegant plainness.[3] This translation, I venture to predict, is destined to become one of the theological classics of our language. However, even though I have quoted Luther mostly in translation, all references in the footnotes indicate the precise location of the passage in the Latin original.

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[1] BoW, p. 11.

[2] All quotations in English from Luther's De Servo Arbitrio, unless they are cited as BoW, are my translation.

[3] LW, Vols. XXVI and XXVII.

PART I

THE BARTHIAN QUESTION CROSS-EXAMINED

CHAPTER II

WHAT TITANS WE WOULD BE

The Doxological Status of the Object Who Is Subject

As even a very Lutheran critic of Barth concedes, in modern Protestantism prior to Barth

> God and His revelation were no longer the primary and basic topic of theology, but rather the religious man and his experiences. . . . This shift from the object to the subject, . . . was consistently carried out in the theology of the nineteenth century. . . . [Barth] became the chief exponent of the movement which once again shifted the emphasis in evangelical theology back from the subject to the object. . . .[1]

What Sasse here attributes to Barth is true and, for Sasse's purposes, may be enough. But for our purposes, if we are to understand Barth's "shift . . . from the subject to the object," something else must be added. Otherwise we might underestimate what all Barth intends by this shift. We might suppose, mistakenly, that he intends nothing more than to shift the "emphasis" from man to God, to reassert simply with new force that God is still the object and man is still the subject--perhaps merely the subject, but the subject nevertheless. The truth is, though, that Barth is saying a great deal more than this. It is God who is not only object but subject. Indeed, God is the object, Sasse's

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[1]Hermann Sasse, Here We Stand, trans. T. G. Tappert (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1946), pp. 155-56.

"primary and basic topic of theology," precisely because God is first and always the subject.

For Barth the Word of God, though it is there that God is known by men and is known by them objectively, is nevertheless

> God's action from first to last. . . . It is at no point something that man discovers for himself about God, man being, as it were, the subject and God the object. In all the divisions of dogmatics God is the Subject of the action, whatever aspect of this action be the topic of this or that particular section of the Church's con.idered language; whether election, or sanctification, doctrine of God, or doctrine of man, creation, redemption, first or last things.[1]

"This One is God Himself, described by the unanimous testimony of prophets and apostles as the Subject of creation, reconciliation, and redemption, the Lord."[2] True, "He comes as an object before man the subject."[3] Yet "it is not as though God is forced into this relationship. . . . This relationship belongs to the Subject God. . . . We have to do with His free but definitive decision."[4] "In this act God posits Himself as our object and ourselves as those who know Him. . . . It is as this One who acts, however, that He will be known."[5] "In this determination, as carried through by His own decision, God is, therefore, the Subject of everything that is to be received and proclaimed in the Christian Church."[6] "The Subject of revelation is the Subject that remains indissolubly Subject. We cannot get behind this Subject."[7]

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[1]James Brown, Subject and Object in Modern Theology (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1955), p. 144.

[2]CD, II/1,458.

[3]CD, II/1,10.

[4]CD, II/2,6.

[5]CD, II/1,26.

[6]CD, II/2,8.

[7]CD, I/1,438.

It is no exaggeration to say that Barth regards the object of theology doxologically. Because he does, it must seem well-nigh sacrilegious were Luther now to complain that this very doxological regard threatens to be a limitation--and, of all things, a limitation upon the divine glory. Of course, there can be no question, any less for Luther than for Barth, that it is God alone who posits himself, for himself as well as for his creatures, and who posits them, for himself and for one another; and no question about God's deserving sole praise for this his creating and reconciling and redeeming action. But is this what it takes--does it take all this, and is this all it takes--to be the object of theology? Barth does insist, ever so explicitly, that the object of theology is God. But implicitly his insistence assumes something from the outset: to be the object of theology must be up to the object himself and, as this must be his own free and sovereign doing, his becoming that object is necessarily a praiseworthy achievement. Since God alone may be credited with such achievement, therefore the only object of theology, at least its only original object, who deserves that designation is God.

The object is creditable because subjectively he is self-actualizing. Now Barth wants it understood that this conception of subject and object, though it might find intimations among philosophers and non-Christians ("e.g., by the pagan Confucius, the atheist L. Feuerbach and the Jew M. Buber"[1]), is not an importation from outside,[2] nor, for that matter, an importation into

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[1] *CD*, III/2,277.

[2] ". . . There can be no question of an exact correspondence and

the divine object of theology by the human theologian.[1] The very possibility of a self-objectifying subject originates, with Barthian consistency, within the deity: in the eternal life of the Trinity the Father is object to the Son, and the Son to the Father, through the communion of the Holy Spirit.[2]

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coincidence between the Christian statements and these others which rest on very different foundations. We need not be surprised that there are approximations and similarities." CD, III/2,277.

Elsewhere, however, Barth says (about the "free theologian") that "his ontology will be subject to criticism and control by his theology, and not conversely. He will not necessarily feel obligated to the philosophical kairos, the latest prevailing philosophy. And who knows, he may be quite glad to resort at times to an older philosophy, like the ill-famed 'Subject-Object Scheme.' If we visualize for a moment the ideal situation of the free theologian, we may foresee the possibility not of theology recognizing itself in any form of philosophy, but of free philosophy recognizing itself in free theology. Yet the free theologian knows very well that, like a poor wretch, he does not live in this ideal situation." "The Gift of Freedom," The Humanity of God, p. 93.

An instance of the preceding occurs in one of Barth's asides concerning "the theological existentialism of Rudolf Bultmann and his followers":"And what can be the meaning of the 'overcoming of the Subject-Object-Scheme,' recently proclaimed with such special enthusiasm, so long as it is not made clear and guaranteed that this enterprise will not once more lead to the anthropocentric myth and call into question anew the . . . object of theology?" HG, p. 56.

[1]As Barth mentions in connection with another term (not "subject-object"), theologians, in adopting such terms, "do it in the freedom--which is so very necessary and is always enjoyed in dogmatics--to take such terms as are to hand, not allowing ourselves to be bound and fettered by the meaning which they may have acquired from their use elsewhere, but using them in the sense which, when they are applied to the object with which we are concerned, they must derive from this object itself." CD, II/2,513.

[2]"God is Object to His own self-knowledge in the life of the eternal Trinity. . . . God Himself is Subject and Object in relation, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and therein lies the possibility of the divine Subject's making Himself Object to man's faith in the life of the Holy Spirit in man's soul." Brown, p. 141.

"God is objectively immediate to Himself, but to us He is objectively mediate. . . . God does not have to be untrue to Himself . . . in order to become objective to us. . . . For God is objective to Himself. He is immediately objective to Himself--for

It is just because God is the laudable author of his own objecthood, first for himself and then for others, that He must be the one whom theology is all about--and yet not "about," if this implies credit to the theologian. "We cannot think and talk about the revelation of God; we can only reflect on what the Word itself says to us."[1] Theology "can never form a system, comprehending and as it were 'seizing' the object."[2] It is pure grace that God should speak to us at all, whether in wrath or in mercy.[3] Our knowing him is nothing else than our obeying him.[4] And in this

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the Father is object to the Son, and the Son to the Father, without mediation. He is mediately objective to us in His revelation, in which He meets us under the sign and veil of other objects." CD, II/1,16.

[1]Karl Barth, Against the Stream, ed. R. G. Smith (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), p. 215. But of course Barth does not mean to forbid the expression that theology is "about God." He himself uses the expression continually, beginning with the first page of his dogmatics. CD, I/1,1.

[2]CD, III/3,293. However, if Barth is averse to using Luther's word "seize," he is not averse apparently to describing faith with such other Luther-like words as "grasp," "cling," "apprehend." CD, IV/1,630-33, 767.

[3]"The very fact that God speaks to us, that, under all circumstances, is, in itself, grace." Karl Barth, "Gospel and Law," Community, State and Church, with an introduction by Will Herberg (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1960), p. 72. Cited hereafter as GL.

[4]"Knowledge of God is obedience to God. Observe that we do not say that knowledge of God may also be obedience, or that of necessity it has obedience attached to it, or that it is followed by obedience. No; knowledge of God as knowledge of faith is in itself and of essential necessity obedience." CD, II/1,26. "Omnis recta cognitio ab obedientia nascitur, Calvin says. Thus it is with revelation because it is the Word of God." Barth, Against the Stream, p. 216. See also CD, IV/1,761-63.

our obedient knowledge, we ourselves are but "a correspondence,"[1] "the echo and mirror of the divine act."[2] Our knowing God, our faith, though as ours it is an act of genuine subjectivity, ultimately "is bracketed as the predicate of the subject, God, . . . is still only derivable from the Thou of the Subject, God."[3] To be the object of theology, because he has determined himself as such, is God's "right," his "glory," his "honor."

Barth's Sinner Unworthy to Be the Object of Theology

The object of theology, on Barth's assumption, is thus a title of approbation. It is a blessed, a doxological, word. It gives credit to whom credit is due. To assume even thus much, however--this honorific status of the theological object--already makes it ambiguous to ask for the object in the theology of Luther. For Luther contends, on the contrary, that the first object we must know is ourselves, ourselves as sinners. Now our sinnerhood, surely, is very much our own doing, and it is precisely for that reason that Luther views the sinner as the object of theology. The sinner is the subject responsible for making himself the sinful object he is. Predicates like sin and guilt accrue to him because they originate in him, their active subject. But is this not the view of the self-objectifying subject which Barth holds, too? Not really. Of course, Barth knows as well as Luther that

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[1] CD, II/1,26.

[2] Barth, "The Gift of Freedom," The Humanity of God, p. 79.

[3] CD, I/1,281.

sin is the doing, the personal predicate, of the sinner.[1] Curiously enough, Barth is the one who is extremely careful to impute sin to man alone, and in no sense to God,[2] while it is Luther who undertakes to discuss how "God works evil in us."[3] Yes, Barth knows well enough that the responsible subject of sin is the human sinner. Then why is it that Barth, even in his anthropology, rules out the sinner as the object of theology, whereas Luther, even in a treatise so patently de Deo as his Bondage of the Will, repeatedly holds theologians and all other sinners to "knowledge of themselves"?[4]

The reason the sinner does not merit being the object of Barthian theology is, it seems, just that: his sinfulness does not

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[1]"The testimony of the community is addressed to this godless man, this man engaged in this negative act. It does not deny that he does this act; on the contrary, it asserts this. . . . It knows and confronts man--every man--as one who is isolated over against God by his own choice. . . ." CD, II/2,316.

[2]"The fact that the creature can fall away from God and perish does not imply any imperfection on the part of creation or the Creator. . . . But the fault is that of the creature and not of God. In no sense does it follow necessarily from what God is in Himself. Nor does it result from the nature of the creation. It follows inevitably only from the incomprehensible fact that the creature rejects the preserving grace of God. What belongs to the nature of the creature is that it is not physically hindered from doing this. If it was hindered in this way, it could not exist at all as a creature. In that case, grace would not be grace and the creature would inevitably be God Himself. The fact of evil in the world does not cast any shadow on God, as if evil, i.e., opposition to Him, had any place either in Himself or in His being and activity as the Creator." CD, II/1,503-504.

[3]BoW, pp. 203-207. WA, XVIII, 709-10.

[4]BoW, pp. 74-79, 153, 158, 162, 189, 287-88. WA, XVIII, 609-14; 673, 25; 677, 12-16; 679, 26-31; 699, 1-6; 766-67.

merit such prestige. It is unworthy of the honor. Our sinnerhood, though it is very much our own doing, is hardly a laudable achievement. And, according to Barth, we ought not be credited with more success, least of all in our sinning, than we in fact deserve. "For where is [God's] faithfulness if our unfaithfulness has the last word? How can His right be divine if our wrong is allowed and able to maintain itself against Him? What Titans we necessarily are if we can posit ourselves absolutely."[1] The sinner's "self-contradiction . . . is not the last word that is spoken about him. . . . It cannot even be the first word about him. The fact that he became a sinner cannot mean that he has spoken an originally valid word about himself."[2] "It is certainly not the case that the sin of man has shown God to have miscalculated in some way, as though the sin of man had created a new and second order of creation, a new world, the world of the wrath of God."[3] "His sin has not brought to birth a new creation, a similar and rival dominion to the lordship of God."[4] Those who do not acknowledge their divine election

> can, of course, dishonor the divine election of grace; but they cannot overthrow or overturn it. They cannot prevent God from regarding them as from all eternity He has willed to regard and has actually regarded sinful men in His own Son. . . . In all its wickedness and deadliness, their attempt is powerless in the face of God's [gracious] will and decree.[5]

The sinner may pretend he is isolated from God and rejected, but in this pretense he is claiming a prerogative which

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[1] CD, II/2,753. [2] CD, III/2,31. [3] CD, III/2,33.
[4] Ibid. [5] CD, II/2,349.

God has reserved for His own isolated and rejected Son. The sinner "may indeed behave and conduct himself as isolated man, and therefore as the man who is rejected by God. . . . But he has no right to be this man, for in Jesus Christ God has ascribed this [right] to Himself."[1] In face of Christ's gracious power "no flesh, really none, should be able to boast, not even of its non-resistance"![2] So, to construe the sinner as the object of theology, even as the object of theological anthropology, is to arrogate to his sin a "right" and a "boast" which it does not deserve.

For Luther, of course, Barth's argument (if it is to be taken literally and not merely as theological irony) would represent a gross begging of the question. Being made the object of theological attention is not necessarily a distinction at all, especially in view of the grim sort of attention sinners get from the divine Judge. Theological objecthood, for Luther, is not a reward for meritorious service. Barth, lest he dignify sin as a serious competitor of God's sovereign grace, prefers to eliminate the sinner as a real object of theology.[3] For Luther, on the hand, the sinner is the theological object, and an altogether real one, exactly because he deserves to be, though what he deserves and gets in this case is no compliment to him. We are now up

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[1] CD, II/2,316. [2] GL, p. 96.

[3] "Sinful man as such is not the real man. We are not asked to blind ourselves to the fact that he is sinful. The real man is the sinner who participates in the grace of God. . . . The grace of God, the covenant of God with man, is primary. The sin of man is secondary. It is not ultimate, and therefore it is not primary. This excludes the abstraction of man as merely sinful, and implies the pardon of man, who even as a sinner does not cease to be the creature of God." CD, III/2,32.

against that feature in Barth's notion of theological object--namely, the object's worthiness, his right, to be the object--which we shall have to suspend if we are to use Barth's question about the object in the theology of Luther.

Sin as Nothingness

Barth, we said, is loath to construe the sinner as the object of theology lest sin be credited with an efficacy which belongs only to the divine subject. It is much this same concern, though now not only a negative but a positive concern, which inspires Barth's dialectically brilliant definition of sin as nothingness, das Nichtige. Here he is occupied largely with considerations of theodicy. Actually, Barth seldom uses that term and, when he does, he usually disparages it.[1] Still, whether it be theodicy or not, in almost every section of his discussion of nothingness the theme which predominates is that sin, in order not to jeopardize God's sovereign grace, can have no reality apart from that grace. More precisely, sin can have no reality apart from God's wrath. But this wrath is only a function, a "form," of grace. The assumption, presumably, is that unless sin is ultimately derivable

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[1]The theodicy which Barth derogates is the superficial, anticlimactic sort which, contemplating the divine judgment upon the innocent Jesus, puzzles over God's "humiliation and dishonouring . . . of a noble and relatively innocent man." To this comparatively trivial question Barth replies: "The problem posed is not that of a theodicy: How can God will this or permit this in the world which He has created good? It is a matter of the humiliation and dishonouring of God Himself, of the question which makes any question of a theodicy a complete anticlimax; the question whether in willing to let this happen to Him He has not renounced and lost Himself as God, . . . whether He can really die and be dead." CD, IV/1,246. See also CD, III/3,365.

from grace there can be neither real sin nor real grace, hence no real divine honor.[1] But it is unthinkable, at least for Christians, to deny the serious reality of sin, yet even worse, to deny the honor of the gracious God.[2] Therefore?

Barth's solution, therefore, is to describe sin as nothingness. Sin is not nothing. It does exist. But it "is" as nothingness is, as chaos. It "is" only as God in his grace "nothings" it--

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[1]It may seem at first to be a misrepresentation of Barth to say he derives sin ultimately from God's grace. And, unless that statement is read in context of what follows in the dissertation, above, it would be misrepresentation indeed. For Barth's characteristic expression is that sin is the object of God's "jealousy, wrath, and judgment," that which therefore "lacks his grace." Sin is the result of God's opus alienum. But as Barth also insists throughout, God's opus alienum is but the other side of "the opus proprium of His election, of His creation, of His preservation and overruling rule of the creature revealed in the history of His covenant with man, . . . His grace." For Barth, therefore, sin finally derives its character, its "ontic peculiarity," from its relationship to the divine grace. "The grace of God is the basis and norm of all being, the source and criterion of all good. Measured by this standard, as the negation of God's grace, nothingness is intrinsically evil. . . . As it is real only by reason of the opus Dei alienum, the divine negation and rejection, so it can be seen and understood only in the light of the opus Dei proprium, only in relation to the sovereign counter-offensive of God's free grace." CD, III/3,353-54.

Also: "God's Word . . . not only can comfort us, heal us, vivify us, . . . it can also judge us, punish us, kill us, and it actually does all of these things. But let us not overlook . . . : . . . The Word of God [is] . . . , whatever it says, properly and ultimately grace: free, sovereign grace, God's grace, which therefore . . . also means judgment, death, and hell, but grace and nothing else." GL, p. 72.

[2]"Therefore all conceptions and doctrines which view nothingness as an essential and necessary determination of being and existence . . . are untenable from the Christian standpoint . . . on two grounds, first, because they misrepresent the creature and even the Creator Himself, and second, because they . . . are guilty of a drastic minimization of [nothingness]." CD, III/3,350.

from all eternity in his gracious election, historically in his grace incarnate, Jesus Christ. Sin is not, of course, what God wills. But it "is" what he does not will. "What really corresponds to that which God does not will is nothingness."[1] Nothingness is all the reality sin has, but that much reality it has. Thus Barth's solution achieves a double effect, with the result that on both counts the divine glory is enhanced. On the one hand, since sin is not a positive but merely a negative consequence of God's creating grace, God is not in the quandary of having to reject what he elects, of destroying what he creates, and hence of compromising himself.[2] On the other hand, since sin has what reality it has from God alone, his grace remains the sole, creditable ground of all that is, even of what "is" negatively.

There is a presupposition afoot here which is foreign to Luther. He does not assume, as Barth seems to, that God, if he

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[1]The longer passage of which the quoted sentence, above, is the punch-line, reads: "It is only on this basis that nothingness 'is,' but on this basis it really 'is.' . . . It is not a second God, nor self-created. It has no power save that which it is allowed by God. . . . It 'is' problematically because it is only on the left hand of God, under His No. . . . Yet because it is on the left hand of God, it really 'is' in this paradoxical manner. Even on His left hand the activity of God is not in vain. . . . That which God renounces and abandons in virtue of His decision is not merely nothing. It is nothingness, and has as such its own being, albeit malignant and perverse. . . . Nothingness . . . lives by this fact. For not only what God wills, but what He does not will, is potent, and must have a real correspondence. What really corresponds to that which God does not will is nothingness." CD, III/3,351-52.

[2]"Creation is not to be undone or to perish. It belongs to its Creator." "He makes Himself responsible for the preservation of being, and in so doing He vindicates His own honour as the Creator." CD, III/2,149.

were to reject what he creates, would thereby impair the honor of his grace. Understandably not, since for Luther the Creator may have other motives for his creativity besides grace, and his creating need not be gracious in order to be real--except for that creation of his which is radically new. That being so, grace also need not be invoked to give reality to sin, even privatively. Quite the contrary, for Luther. The only ontological status which the gracious judgment of God confers upon sin is to render it, not nothingness but nothing, no sin at all.[1] When Luther speaks of sin therefore, he feels no compulsion to demonstrate the divine honor, except by concentrating upon that one on whom God concentrates: the sinner.

In the theology of Barth, however, his hamartiology included, God is sustained as the object throughout. But as we have see, what qualifies the sinner to be the Barthian object is that God, not the sinner, succeeds in being the determinative and thankworthy subject. God is the thankworthy subject of all that is. If all real predicates must ultimately accrue to this gracious subject, then sin too, insofar as it is real, is no exception.

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[1]Whether the unity which Barth insists upon between creation and grace (or redemption) does in fact entail the sort of "acosmism" for which Barth is faulted by the Lutheran Regin Prenter is a different, though related, question. A summary and suggested solution of this controversy appears in G. C. Berkouwer, The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth, trans. Harry R. Boer (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1956), pp. 250-55. Of course, Berkouwer does not necessarily speak for Barth, although neither has Berkouwer's book passed without Barth's favorable notice. (See Barth's contribution in Harold E. Fey [ed.], How My Mind Has Changed [Cleveland, Ohio: Meridian Books, 1961], p. 36.) The matter of Prenter's criticism was raised in a question-and-answer period with Barth on the occasion of his Warfield Lectures at Princeton in 1962. See "A Theological Dialogue," Theology Today, XIX (July 1962), 172.

Apart from the grace of God, finally, sin has no reality. But that is its reality: its apartness from grace. Of that too, therefore, God is the commendable subject and, for that reason, the theological object.[1]

The Seriousness of Sin

Critics of Barth, Reformed as well as Lutheran, fear that his doctrine of nothingness minimizes the seriousness of sin.[2] Whether it does or not, that is surely the reverse of Barth's intention. In fact, a case might be made for the opposite criticism, if one were needed: namely, that Barth takes sin too seriously. (Actually, the two criticisms are not opposites except as opposed sides of the same coin.) Thus it might be argued, from the standpoint of Luther, that Barth so overestimates sin, both its unreality

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[1]"Hence nothingness cannot be an object of the creature's natural knowledge. It is certainly an objective reality for the creature. . . . But it is disclosed to the creature only as God is revealed to the latter in His critical relationship. The creature knows it only as it knows God in His being and attitude against it. It is an element in the history of the relationship between God and the creature in which God precedes the creature in His acts, thus revealing His will to the creature and informing it about Himself." CD, III/3,350. Thus Barth seems to be saying, not only that sin is unknowable apart from divine grace, but also that the reason it is unknowable apart from grace is that it has no being apart from grace--apart, that is, from its relationship to God, which is essentially gracious. The inseparability of being and knowing is axiomatic for Barth's theology. "We can speak about man only by speaking about God. . . . Why deny priority to God in the realm of knowing when it is uncontested in the realm of being? If God is the first reality, how can man be the first truth?" Barth, "The Gift of Freedom," The Humanity of God, p. 70.

[2]As an instance of Lutheran criticism on this point, see Gustaf Wingren, Theology in Conflict, trans. E. H. Wahlstrom (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1958), pp. 36-39. For a Reformed account, see Berkouwer, pp. 215-61.

and its reality, that he underestimates God. As though God in His wrath cannot annul the kind of sin which is fully real, as real as any creature, and still be God. And as though the sin he annuls in his mercy can any longer be real at all, even as real as nothingness.

At any rate, what makes sin serious according to Barth is not that we take it seriously, as though it were a threat primarily to us, as though its defeat depended upon us. Indeed, that self-seriousness is our sin. That is the way in which "nothingness achieves actuality in the creaturely world."[1] The threat, rather, is to God. Sin is serious, therefore, only because he "takes it seriously, who does not deal with it incidentally, but in the fulness of the glory of His deity, . . . involving Himself to the utmost,"[2] taking it so seriously that He takes it away.[3] "From a Christian standpoint 'to be serious' can only mean to take seriously the fact that Jesus is Victor."[4] "God can be so much in earnest against sinful man that He is for him."[5] "The true seriousness of the matter . . . does not finally depend upon pessimistic but upon optimistic thought and speech."[6]

May we conclude, then, from Barth's "optimistic thought and speech," from the fact that Jesus is now Victor over sin, that sin therefore no longer exists--not in us, not at all, not even as

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[1] CD, III/3,350. [2] CD, III/3,349.

[3] "He has Himself borne the consequence of this separation to bear it away." CD, IV/1,247.

[4] CD, III/3,364. [5] CD, IV/1,221.

[6] CD, III/3,364.

the Barthian nothingness? There is much in Bath to confirm that optimism. For example,

> nothingness . . . is consigned to the past in Jesus Christ, in whose death it has received its deserts, being destroyed with this consummation of the positive will of God which is as such the end of his non-willing. Because Jesus is Victor, nothingness is routed and extirpated.[1]

But this optimistic thought, this "one possible answer," presupposes that we look "retrospectively to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and prospectively to His coming again."[2]

Yet that is the very thing, is it not, which we are so reluctant to do? As Barth admits, and with no little seriousness, "It is obvious that in point of fact we do constantly think of [nothingness] . . . with anxious, legalistic, tragic, hesitant, doleful and basically pessimistic thoughts. . . ."[3] "But it is surely evident that when we think in this way it is . . . in breach of the command imposed with our Christian faith."[4] And because such thinking "is a decision against the grace of God, it is a choice of evil."[5] "This negation of His grace is chaos. . . . Nothingness is really privation, the attempt to defraud God of His honour and right. . . . For it is God's honour and right to be gracious, and this is what nothingness contests."[6] But if it does, then do we not, by the very fact of our persistent pessimism, perpetuate nothingness in all its serious reality? Then what has become of the reality and the seriousness of Christ's victory? Is not Barth himself visibly serious, and justly so, not only about

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[1] CD, III/3,363. [2] Ibid. [3] CD, III/3,364.
[4] Ibid. [5] CD, III/3,358. [6] CD, III/3,353.

Jesus' victory over sin, but also about those pessimistic Christians who still take sin too seriously? Yet if it is a serious fact that they do, then is it not true after all that nothingness still is? And must it not follow from Barth's premise that God is defrauded of his grace and therefore of his honor and right?

So it might appear, Barth concedes, but only in "the blindness of our eyes,"[1] only in our consciousness "of the world and of self. . . . But what do we really know of [nothingness] as taught by this consciousness?"[2] Still, that is not the question. There is no need to dispute, at least not where Luther is involved, that our own consciousness of sin may be false and that our eyes really are blind to God's grace. Let that be granted. The point is, if our eyes really are blind and if our consciousness of nothingness really is false, then is not this very delusion of ours exactly what Barth says nothingness "is"--really is and still is, the victory of Christ notwithstanding? Supposedly, our lingering self-deception, our faithlessness, is our sin--our "real" sin, as Barth continues to call it.[3] But on Barth's own terms, can it even "be" that? Dare our unbelief so much as "be," even as the reflex of God's non-willing, if in Christ his non-willing has come to an end? In a word, which is it? Is our faithlessness still real and Christ's forgiveness less than real? Or is the forgiveness of Christ real and our sin therefore nothing--not nothingness but

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[1] *CD*, III/3,367.

[2] *CD*, III/3,363.

[3] *GL*, pp. 95-96.

nothing?[1] For Luther, the answer can be Yes to both questions, simultaneously, but only by distinguishing, as he does, God's law from his gospel. Barth abjures Luther's distinction, lest God appear to contradict himself and "God would not be God."[2] There

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[1]Barth's solution in passages like the following is only an apparent solution. "This is God's grace: that our humanity is, insofar as it is ours, not only condemned and lost because of our sins (our perpetually new sins!) but at the same time, insofar as it is the humanity of Jesus Christ, it is justified by God." GL, p. 74. But it is thematic in Barthian theology that there is no real humanity for us except the humanity of Jesus Christ. If so, then our "humanity" can only be "justified," not at all "condemned and lost," and it is pointless in that case to speak (with exclamation points, at that) about "our perpetually new sins." On the other hand, Barth does have to account for the perpetually new sins. Thus he resorts to "our humanity . . . insofar as it is ours." Does this mean our humanity merely as we see it, not as God sees it? But such humanity would be, from the viewpoint of theology (Barth's most of all), illusory and of no theological interest. Perhaps that is what Barth means by saying such humanity is "condemned and lost." But then the illusion itself must still be a real illusion, real enough to warrant divine condemnation, as real as nothingness ever was. But where, then, is the victory of Christ over this nothingness?

Elsewhere Barth puts the matter this way. "I could even use a more striking illustration. Did you read in the paper recently that two Japanese soldiers were found in the Philippines, who had not yet heard, or did not believe, that the war had ended fourteen years ago? They continue to hide in some jungle and shoot at everybody who dares to approach them. . . . We are such people when we refuse to perceive and hold true what the Easter message declares. . . . Sin and death are conquered." Karl Barth, Deliverance to the Captives, trans. Marguerite Wieser (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), pp. 149-50. But then, if, as Barth says, "sin and death are conquered," doesn't that conquest extend to the sinful fact that we "refuse to perceive and hold true . . . the Easter message?" Or, if we do so refuse, is that refusal still sinful, really sinful?

[2]Barth does speak, at first, of "the fire of [God's] wrath which consumes and destroys" sinners, and he adds that "God would not be God . . . if there could be any escaping this sequence of sin and destruction." However, it must be remembered what it is, according to Barth, which "burns . . . as the fire of His wrath": it is "the love of God." Therefore, Barth concludes: "But again God would not be God if His reaction to wrong-doers could be compared to a mechanism which functions, as it were, independently of His . . . pardon." CD, IV/1,221.

The following statement may not be even a covert reference

is a danger that, on the Barthian alternative, man would not be man, God's man: neither God's real sinner nor God's real saint.

Barth and Luther on Romans 9:19-20

It is instructive in this connection to interrogate Barth from the standpoint of Luther, as Barth exegizes Romans 9:19-20.[1] Paul writes,

> You will say to me then, "Why does [God] still find fault? For who can resist his will?" But who are you, a man, to answer back to God?

Barth answers: The one reason man may not reproach God is that the gracious God already "has taken to Himself every reproach." But then, we might ask, would God still find reason in that case to renew the reproach against man? "Man . . . is justly reproached by

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to the Lutheran distinction of law and gospel, but the concern which the statement expresses typifies a misgiving which Barth occasionally has about Luther, for example, in the latter's failure to assimilate Deus absconditus into a fully Christological doctrine of election. (See, for example, CD, II/1,541-42.) "It is a mark of the divine nature as distinct from that of the creature that in it a conflict with Himself is not merely ruled out, but is inherently impossible. If this were not so, if there did not exist perfect, original, and ultimate peace between the Father and Son by the Holy Spirit, God would not be God. Any God in conflict with Himself is bound to be a false God." CD, II/1,503. As for the unity in Luther's view of God, despite his realistic emphasis upon the divine wrath, see Lennart Pinomaa, Der Zorn Gottes in der Theologie Luthers (Helsinki: Der Finnischen Literaturgesellschaft, 1938).

In the opening paragraph of his "Gospel and Law" Barth warns: ". . . Anyone who really and earnestly would first say Law and only then, presupposing this, say Gospel would not, no matter how good his intention, be speaking of the Law of God and therefore then certainly not of his Gospel." GL, p. 71. The Lutheran replies have been numerous. Berkouwer, p. 319, n. 65. See also Hermann Diem, "'Evangelium und Gesetz' oder 'Gesetz und Evangelium'?" Evangelische Theologie, September 1936, pp. 361-70.

[1] CD, II/2,166. See Luther's very different treatment of the same passage. BoW, pp. 212-19. WA, XVIII, 714-18.

God if he . . . does not live in a state of thankfulness toward God." Yet is that not the very reproach, the reproach of man's unthankfulness, which God took upon himself? Still, "man cannot evade his own responsibility," says Barth, "by complaining that God required too much of him." True, but why not? Because "what God required of Himself on man's behalf is infinitely greater than what He required of man." What did God require of man? Only [sic] that man "should live as the one on whose behalf God required the uttermost of Himself."[1] Only! Is it not that "requirement" exactly, that "demand," against which man complains most grudgingly and, in complaining, becomes all the more unthankful, and all the more "justly reproached by God"?

It is at this point, Luther would say, that a man denies God's reproach against him by arguing that God would not reproach what he himself has created. And it is this sanguine argument from creation, the denial that the Creator could reject his creature, which Paul refutes in the immediate sequel, "Has the potter no right over the clay?" (Rom. 9:21) Or, as Luther also points out, man dodges the reproach by arguing from God's kindness, by protesting that God is too kind to entertain such a reproach, really. Thus the human subject takes the heat off himself, as object, by changing the subject to God. As a result, sin loses its reality and, in the end, so does the victory of Christ.

The Barthian Impediment to Understanding Luther

The purpose at hand is not to belabor Barth with the internal difficulties of his system. (His difficulties are not all

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[1] CD, II/2,166.

of his own making and, insofar as they are not, they are the common lot of every Christian theologian, of Luther too.) Rather, the difficulties Barth incurs, in risking a definition of sin which seems neither rel enough nor forgiven enough, illustrate the difference between his own attitude and Luther's attitude toward the theological object. Only that one may be the real object of theology who deserves credit for actualizing himself as such. This Barthian assumption, we said, Luther might find applicable to his own first object of theology, the sinner, except for one telling difference. After all, is not the sinner, too, a subject who actualizes himself as the sinful object he is? He does so, it is true, with considerable assistance both from the Devil and from God. Nevertheless, the predicates through which he objectifies himself (his disbelieving, his lovelessness, his ingratitude, and all the rest) do accrue to him as their active author and owner. Still, to be the author and owner of such predicates as these is hardly to his credit, only to his discredit.

It is the fact of the sinner's discreditableness, which, although both Barth and Luther insist upon it, nevertheless occasions a telling difference between them on the matter of the theological object. For Barth, not for Luther, the element of creditableness seems to be an indispensable requirement for theological objecthood, because it is an indispensable requirement for real subjectivity. For a subject to actualize himself as object is inherently creditable because it is creative, and because all creation is finally the doing of the creditable, thankworthy God. Here Luther would balk, not at the premises but at the conclusion.

For him, all creation, even the creative self-objectifying of the sinner, is indeed the doing of God. And, as the doing of God, all creation, even the creative self-objectifying of the sinner, is good and is surely no discredit to God--that is, as the doing of God! But not as the doing of the sinner. As the doing of the sinner, his self-objectification is evil. Yet it is no less real as evil than it is real as God's creation. Luther would insist that the sinner's self-objectification, his making himself what he is, though he could not accomplish this without the Creator, is nevertheless assimilated to the sinner by the Creator--by the angry Judge--as the sinner's own doing, expressing as it does his own sinful subjectivity, bearing the undeniable stamp of his own culpable self. Although the unbeliever could not even so much as disbelieve without the enabling energy of the Creator, still it is not the Creator who disbelieves. God "reckons" it as the sinner's action, as sin.[1] Being the sinner's action it is no less the real predicate of a real subject. Hence there is for Luther no impediment to construing the sinner as a real theological object, creditable or not.

But according to Barth, apparently, to be the subject of of real predicates could not possibly be discreditable without reflecting adversely upon God. For God could not discredit what he himself had a hand in creating, except (as Barth seems to think)

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[1]"I say that man without the grace of God nonetheless remains under the general omnipotence of the God who effects, and moves, and impels all things in a necessary, infallible course; But the fact of man's thus being carried along . . . avails nothing in God's sight, nor is reckoned to be anything but sin." BoW, p. 265. WA, XVIII, 752, 12-15.

at the cost of contradicting himself, and at peril to the honor of his grace. Still, as Barth also knows, the predicates of the sinner are a discredit to the sinner in fact. Therefore, the only conclusion seems to be that the sinner's sin may not be allowed to have any creaturely reality. The sinner himself, accordingly, is not a real subject, hence not a real theological object. "Sinful man as such is not the real man."[1] "Only as he gives thanks to God does man . . . distinguish himself as being from non-being. . . . [If he does not do this,] he is not man and therefore nothing (for if he were not man, what else could he be?)."[2] The sinner, qua sinner, dare not be the object of theological knowledge. Not for Barth, that is. It becomes all the more evident, therefore, that Barth's question about the object in the theology of Luther, if it is to engage Luther where he can answer it, will have to be modified. The problem does not arise, either for Barth or for Luther, in thinking of the object of theology as a personal subject of theological predicates--as someone who is this or that. That much is agreeable to both critic and respondent. But that this subject, in order to be the object of theology, must himself be the creditable agent of his predicates--that is another matter. That is a restriction within which Luther could not move.

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[1] CD, III/2,32. [2] CD, III/2,171.

CHAPTER III

MAN, MAN, THE MAN JESUS

God Is Man, not Vice Versa

The question which for pages and pages has been crying to be raised, and which can be silenced no longer, is upon us. Is it at all accurate to say that for Barth the object of theology cannot be man when Barth himself repeatedly says that man is just that? But if that is Barth's view, then what is there within it which makes of Luther's view a dangerous "anthropocentrism," an "ingenious overemphasis"? Is it not Barth who devotes an entire section of his dogmatics to "man as an object of theological knowledge,"[1] Barth who takes it as a "presupposition" that "in God's revelation man is disclosed as well as God,"[2] Barth who finds the term "theology" less adequate to his purpose than the more precise term "theanthropology,"[3] Barth who wins Gollwitzer's praise as "an innovator" by extending his Christological basis not only to God but also to "man and his nature and action"?[4] Then

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[1] CD, III/2,19-54. [2] CD, III/2,26.

[3] Karl Barth, "Evangelical Theology in the Nineteenth Century," The Humanity of God, p. 11.

[4] Barth, Church Dogmatics: A Selection, p. 87. In this connection Barth is entitled to the hearty defense he gets in Robert Hood, "The Thorn of Liberalism in Karl Barth," Anglican Theological Review, XLIV (October 1963), 403-14. Hood regrets the fact that "Barth . . . has been maligned as the most pessimistic of all theologians with regard to man." Ibid., pp. 404-405. It may be a bit strong to say, with Hood, "that Barth is primarily concerned

what could there be in Barth's notion of the theological object which resists Luther's preoccupation with man?

The question brings us to what is, for Luther as well as for Barth, the heart of the matter, to Christology. For the one as for the other, "theology must begin with Jesus Christ, and . . . theology must also end with him."[1] Especially is Jesus Christ, himself true man, the basis of theological anthropology. But this too is Luther's view no less than Barth's, though it is hardly the "innovation" of either. Yet Barth claims (and with good reason) to bring something new to the discussion. And he regards his discovery as an improvement not only over his own earlier position[2]

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with anthropology." Ibid. But there is still room for Hood's exclamation: "What a different point of view from the negative attitude toward man which most of Barth's critics attribute to him!" Ibid., p. 414.

[1]Barth's statement recalls Luther's famous confession in his preface to the 1535 edition of his Galatians lectures: "For the one doctrine which I have supremely at heart, is that of faith in Christ, from whom, through whom and unto whom all my theological thinking flows back and forth day and night." Gal, p. 16. Thus, as Watson here does, it is customary to translate the relative pronouns not as neuter but as personal: ". . . from whom, through whom, and unto whom . . ." Barth, too, translates the passage this way. CD, IV/1,521. A strong case can be made, however, for Pelikan's rendering: "From it, through it, and to it . . ." LW, XXVII, 145. Luther's Latin reads: "Nam in corde meo iste unus regnat articulus, scilicet Fides Christi, ex quo, per quem et in quem." WA, XL/1,33. However, even if Luther's reference is strictly to the antecedent fides, or to articulus, rather than to Christi, the resulting meaning need not be any less "christocentric" when we note (as we shall in chap. xi) that Luther uses propter Christum and propter fidem in Christum interchangeably. The christocentricity of Barth's theology, of course, is evident everywhere, but perhaps nowhere so strikingly as in his doctrine of election. In that context he says: ". . . God will indeed maintain Himself if we will only allow the name of Jesus Christ to be maintained in our thinking as the beginning and the end of all our thoughts." CD, II/2,4-5.

[2]HG, pp. 37-46.

but also over traditional Christologies.[1]

What seems to distinguish Barth's position is the unique way in which he derives anthropology from Christology and, more basically still, the "unusual" way--the "undoubted advantage"[2]--by which he derives the humanity of Christ from his deity, and from his deity alone. For that is what Barth does. The Christological task, he says, is "to derive the knowledge of the humanity of God from the knowledge of his deity"[3]--never vice versa. Nor is this irreversible sequence merely one of knowledge, a knowledge of the one derived from a knowledge of the other. The sequence inheres in God's very being. "It is precisely God's deity which . . . includes his humanity," not the other way around.[4] Peter's confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," is "not a synthetic but an analytic statement."[5] "As the Son of God and not otherwise, Jesus Christ is the Son of Man. This sequence is irreversible."[6]

Jesus Christ is "God Himself become man."[7] But Barth is not one to reverse the relationship and to say also the converse, as Luther does, that in Jesus Christ, "the Man is God."[8] Of course, that Jesus Christ is true man, vere homo as well as vere Deus, Barth insists as vehemently as Luther ever did (though perhaps

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[1] Ibid., p. 49. But for a more explicit statement, see CD, IV/1, 132-35.

[2] CD, IV/1, 132. [3] HG, p. 38. [4] HG, p. 46.

[5] CD, I/1, 463. [6] HG, p. 48.

[7] CD, IV/1, 128.

[8] LW, XXVI, 273. WA, XL/1, 427, 21-22 (Hs.: 427, 4-5).

with less of Luther's realism about Christ's becoming "flesh").[1] And, for that matter, Luther insists no less than Barth that the priority and initiative in the incarnation belonged to the Son of God, not the Son of Man: "It is characteristic of the humanity to have a beginning in time, but it is characteristic of the divinity to be eternal and without a beginning."[2] Yet for Barth to credit the man Christ Jesus with deity, even once the incarnation has begun, and to say with Luther, in the matter of justification "you must know that there is no other God than this Man Christ Jesus,"[3] would be to violate Barth's "irreversible sequence." For Barth, the man Jesus, however high God may exalt him, is not exalted to deity. That, as Barth says reproachfully, would be the "divinization of His humanity,"[4] an "apotheosis of a man."[5] That would mean "that the higher and lower positions, those of God and man, could be reversed," and that "the predicates of the divine glory, omnipotence, omnipresence, eternity, etc., are to be

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[1] In fact, in face of Luther's strongly realistic emphasis upon "the Word made flesh," Barth seems to fear lest, in the process, the deity of the Word be sacrificed. "Flesh means 'like one of us.' God's Word does not transform himself into flesh. How could it be grace if God ceased to be God, even if he could? What kind of mercy would he show us thereby?" GL, p. 73.

[2] LW, XXVI, 273. WA, XL/1,427,17-18.

[3] LW, XXVI, 29. WA, XL/1,78,16.

[4] CD, IV/1,132.

[5] CD, IV/1,162. See also Karl Barth, Protestant Thought from Rousseau to Ritschl, trans. Brian Cozens (New York: Harper and Sons, 1959), p. 359.

attributed to the humanity . . . of Jesus."[1] That would arrogate to the finite a capacity for the infinite.[2]

Even Christ's Humanity Is Originally God's

So the human subject, Jesus, is not to be credited with the predicates of deity. But we might expect, then, that Barth at least credits him with humanity. Yet that is not the case either, except with elaborate qualification. His humanity is originally a divine predicate of the subject, God. "The constitutive feature of His humanity is that He is the Son of God and

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[1] Ibid. The omission in the above quotation, indicated by an ellipse, refers to what for Barth is an important phrase, which I however have omitted in order to obviate from the body of this dissertation a lengthy polemic against Barth's phrase. Without the omission the passage would read: ". . . the predicates of the divine glory, . . . [etc.] are to be attributed to the humanity, as such and in abstracto, of Jesus." That the Lutheran doctrine does not attribute the divine predicates to Jesus' humanity "as such and in abstracto" but to the one indivisible person, who is both God and man, is painstakingly and elaborately emphasized in the "dogma" Barth refers to. See Article VIII, "The Person of Christ," in The Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, The Book of Concord, trans. and ed. Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), pp. 541-610. Barth knows the document well.

A secondary source, valuable for its treatment of the historical background of the dogma in question, is Werner Elert, "Genus Apotelesmaticum," Schrift und Bekenntnis, ed. Volkmar Herntrich und Theodor Knolle (Hamburg: Furche-Verlag, 1950), pp. 25-42. "Es ist aber ein Irrtum, wenn dabei der lutherischen Christologie ein angeblich nur essentielles Verständnis der Zweinaturenlehre untergeschoben wird. Dieses wurde bereits in der Energienlehre des 7. Jahrhunderts durch ein operatives wenn auch nicht ersetzt so doch ergänzt. Es ist die Bedeutung der lutherischen Lehre vom genus apotelesmaticum, dasz sie hieran wieder anknüpfte, zugleich aber das ganze Gewicht von der Zweiheit der Naturen auf die Einheit der Person verlagerte. Sie hat damit der gesamten neueren protestantischen Christologie vorgearbeitet, ohne dabei den Zusammenhang mit der alten Inkarnationschristologie, die uns auch mit der katholischen verbindet, zu verlieren." Ibid., p. 42.

[2] EC, p. xxiii.

as such man."[1] "It is the deity which as such also has the character of humanity."[2] True, the man Jesus is a real human subject, who does what alone constitutes any man a real subject: in perfectly humble obedience he believes.[3] But even then, the sinlessness of his believing is a quality not of his own manhood but, necessarily, of the God who acts in him.[4] "Sinlessness and the power to be sinless are divine qualities."[5] Jesus' real manhood consists in his obedient response to, his being a human counterpart or objectification of, the prior humanity of God.[6] True, though he is a creature, he mysteriously lives "in identity with the divine Subject."[7] But the subject who is pre-eminently and originally human, menschlich, is God. "God in His Son is Himself the person of man."[8] And by electing himself as such, long before the incarnation, God is human from all eternity. "In this divinely free volition and election, in this sovereign decision (the ancients said, in His decree) God is human."[9] So the Son of Man is

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[1] CD, III/2,72.

[2] HG, pp. 45-46. "Our ordinary humanity is not the only humanity, but in Jesus Christ, God's own humanity, . . . his divinity is present for us others." GL, p. 73.

[3] GL, p. 74.

[4] "Even in Him human nature would not have been capable of this of itself. Even in the person of Jesus it might have become a prey to the corruption which was its fate in us. For even in Him it is still creaturely, not creative and divine, and therefore not precluded from sin, as we should have to say of the creative nature of God itself." CD, III/2,51.

[5] CD, III/2,52.

[6] "In the mirror of this humanity of Jesus Christ the humanity of God enclosed in His deity reveals itself." HG, p. 51.

[7] CD, III/2,70. [8] CD, II/2,177. [9] HG, p. 51.

to be credited, not only not with deity, but also not with humanity, except reflexively and sequentially. The creditable subject of his humanity is God, and that humanity is ultimately a divine attribute, a predicate of deity.[1]

Why is it that Barth insists upon crediting humanity ultimately not to man, not even to the man Jesus, but to God? There is no answering this question without being at least minimally clear on what Barth means by humanity, the divine Menschlichkeit. Barth provides a definition.

> His free affirmation of man, His free concern for him, His free substitution for him--this is God's humanity. We recognize it exactly at the point where we also first recognize His deity. . . . [Jesus Christ] perceives that the superior will of God, to which He wholly subordinates Himself, requires that He sacrifice Himself for the human race, and seeks His honor in doing this. In the mirror of this humanity of Jesus Christ the humanity of God enclosed in His deity reveals itself.[2]

The divine humanity which Jesus Christ mirrors is, in a word, "'the fatherly heart of God,' . . . His loving-kindness [Menschenfreundlichkeit] and nothing else."[3] One writer suggests that by the Menschlichkeit of God Barth means God's "humaneness."[4] He does mean by it, at least, God's grace. Incidentally, because the

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[1]"Beyond doubt God's deity is the first and fundamental fact which strikes us when we look at the existence of Jesus Christ as attested in the Holy Scriptures. And God's deity in Jesus Christ consists in the fact that God Himself in Him is the subject who speaks and acts with sovereignty." HG, p. 48. "It is in the light of the fact of His humiliation that . . . all the predicates of His Godhead . . . must be filled out and interpreted. Their positive meaning is lit up only . . . by the fact that in this act He is this God and therefore the true God." CD, IV/1,130.

[2]HG, p. 51. [3]HG, p. 52. See also CD, I/1,443.

[4]Edward H. Schroeder, Review of The Humanity of God, by Karl Barth, The Cresset, XXIV (December 1960), 20.

humanity of God is his grace toward man, and because this grace is the attitude toward man of the triune God, it would seem to follow that the entire Trinity and not only the Second Person is "human."[1] It would seem, moreover, that God did not first become "human" when he became flesh, for the decisive thing about his Menschlichkeit is not his incarnation but his eternal graciousness.[2]

Still, it is immensely important for Barth (as important as the honor of God) that God's gracious Menschlichkeit, far from being confined to his private subjectivity, aloof and timeless and wholly other, must rather be objectified historically in his own menschlich condescension and self-humiliation, through his very concrete suffering and death in the "altogether real man," Jesus Christ.[3] The point is, however, that this divine self-humiliation, though it occurs in personal identity with the man Jesus, must be throughout the creditable doing, not of this man, but of the subject, God. And creditable it is, because, for Barth, it is God's gracious condescension exactly which demonstrates that he is true God, truly "free" and truly "sovereign."

> All the predicates of His Godhead . . . are lit up . . . only by the fact that in this act He is . . . the true God, distinguished from all false gods by the fact that they are not capable of this act, . . . that their supposed glory and

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[1]This is not to say, of course, that the Trinity as such becomes man. See CD, I/2,34ff. But if for God to be "human" means that he is gracious, then his human-ness might well describe the Trinity as such. "This is the will of this Father, of this Son, and of the Holy Spirit. . . . This is how God is God. . . . It is as the eternal and almighty love, which He is actually and visibly in this action of condescension. This One, the One who loves in this way, is the true God." CD, IV/1,129.

[2]CD, II/2,176-77.

[3]HG, p. 46.

> honour and eternity and omnipotence not only do not include but exclude their self-humiliation.[1]

If it were not for God's free and gracious self-humiliation, he would be, presumably, "distant and strange and thus a non-human if not indeed an inhuman God," "lonesome" and "egotistical."[2] But as it is, "God's deity is no prison in which He can exist only in and for Himself. It is rather His freedom to be . . . also with and for us, . . . to be wholly exalted but also completely humble."[3]

What for Barth is significant about Christ's humiliation is that the credit for it accrues, not to a human subject (who is already in a state of humiliation by reason of his manhood) but to God, who freely

> gives Himself to be the humanly acting and suffering person in this occurrence. He Himself is the Subject who in His own freedom becomes in this event the object acting or acted upon. It is not simply the humiliation and dishonouring of a creature.[4]

Yet, by so gloriously risking his own dishonour, God makes his honor secure.[5] ". . . In this humiliation God is supremely God, . . . in this death He is supremely alive."[6] It is not as man, therefore, that Jesus Christ is humiliated. That, for Barth, would be "tautology," since for Jesus Christ to be man means automatically that he is "lowly," in "bondage and suffering."[7] "To

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[1] CD, IV/1,130. [2] HG, pp. 46, 50.

[3] HG, p. 49. [4] CD, IV/1, 246.

[5] "For the sake of this choice and for the sake of man He hazarded Himself wholly and utterly." CD, II/2,164. "In it--from God's standpoint as well as man's--we have to do not merely with something but with everything: . . . it is a matter of His own being or not being, and therefore of His own honour or dishonour in relation to His creation." CD, IV/1,247.

[6] CD, IV/1,246-47. [7] CD, IV/1,134.

say man is to say creature and sin, and this means limitation and suffering"[1]--also for Jesus, who was a man among men. Hence it would be gratuitous to credit Jesus Christ for his humiliation, as man. The accreditation which he does receive, for his humiliation as the Son of God, is to be exalted, but again this exaltation is secured by God.[2] From beginning to end, therefore, it is to the glory of God alone that, in his menschlich deity, he wills his own divine humiliation.

Luther on the Humiliation of Christ

Luther, on the other hand, refuses to withhold from the man Jesus that same credit which is owing to him as the Son of God, for it is as one indivisible person, divine man as well as incarnate God, that he has humbled himself. "The man who is called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has given himself for [our sins]."[3] "We cling to this man Jesus Christ."[4] "Thus He joined God and man in one person."[5] To be sure, "these two natures in Christ are not confused or mixed, and the properties of each must be clearly understood."[6]

> Here creation is attributed solely to the divinity, since the humanity does not create. Nevertheless it is said

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[1] CD, IV/1,131.

[2] "Even Jesus Christ did not secure for Himself His resurrection from the dead. On this side He was a pure recipient." CD, IV/1,556.

[3] LW, XXVI, 32. WA, XL/1,83,24-25. (Italics mine.)

[4] LW, XXVI, 33. WA, XL/1,85,17. (Italics mine.)

[5] LW, XXVI, 290. WA, XL/1,451,17-18.

[6] LW, XXVI, 273. WA, XL/1,427,16-17.

> correctly that "the man created," because the divinity, which alone creates, is incarnate with the humanity, and therefore the humanity participates in the attributes of both predicates.[1]

Hence "it is true to say about Christ the man that He created all things."[2]

Still, to attribute to "Christ the man" the work of creation is not yet the same thing as attributing to him the work of humiliation, both of which Barth declines to do. Luther, however, does not decline. In fact, for Luther, Christ's self-humiliation is not, like his creating is, an "attribute" in which the human Jesus merely "participates" by virtue of his personal identity with the Son of God. Rather, his humiliation is his own direct action, no less as man than as God. For his humiliation does not consist in his humanity as such, since he is still a man today, though no longer a humbled one. He is not lowly, in bondage and suffering, simply by reason of his manhood. Both as "God and man," he is an "altogether pure and innocent Person."[3] But if you know him only as such, says Luther, "you do not yet have Christ, even though you know that He is God and man, . . . this altogether pure and innocent Person."[4]

> You truly have Him only when you believe that this altogether pure and innocent Person, . . . putting off His

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[1] LW, XXVI, 265. WA, XL/1,416,12-15.

[2] LW, XXVI, 266. WA, XL/1,416,24-25.

[3] LW, XXVI, 288. WA, XL/1,448,21-22.

[4] LW, XXVI, 288. WA, XL/1,448,20-21.

> innocence and holiness and putting on your sinful person, . . . bore your sin, death, and curse; He became a sacrifice and a curse for you, in order thus to set you free from the curse of the law.[1]

Accordingly, the self-humiliation of Jesus Christ was, for Luther, the active and creditable doing of the one person, human as well as divine.

Luther pictures Christ as saying: "For My own Person of humanity and divinity, I am blessed and I am in need of nothing whatever. But I shall assume your clothing and mask, and . . . suffer death in order to set you free from death."[2] It is because of this condescension--the innocent Son of God and Son of Man to the person of sinful man--that the creditable subject, and Luther's Christological object, is both God and man. That is why, although "it is characteristic of the humanity to have a beginning in time but . . . of the divinity to be eternal and without a beginning," that Luther yet urges that we must "begin where Christ began--in the Virgin's womb, in the manger, and at His mother's breasts"[3]--who is, moreover, "a sinner, who has and bears . . . all the sins of all men in His body, . . . in order to make satisfaction for them with His own blood."[4]

The Barthian Impediment to Understanding Luther

So up to this point Barth, in his Christology as in his hamartiology, withholds from man, in this case from the man Jesus,

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[1] LW, XXVI, 288. WA, XL/1,448,21-26. (Italics mine.)

[2] LW, XXVI, 284. WA, XL/1,443,26-29.

[3] LW, XXVI, 29. WA, XL/1,77,28-29.

[4] LW, XXVI, 277. WA, XL/1,433,29-434,12.

the role of the theological object. And both in his hamartiology and in his Christology Barth's reasons, though they differ widely, do not differ altogether. As with man the sinner so with the man Jesus, the man before us is not the creditable subject of the decisive theological predicates. To that extent he is not the theological object. Granted, in the case of the sinner it is he and no one else who is the author of his sinful predicates, his disobedience and ingratitude and unbelief. Yet since these actions of his contravene what the sovereign and gracious Creator wills into being, they themselves can have no creaturely being. The sinner whom these actions actualize or objectify is thus not a real, self-creating subject, and hence not a creditable theological object. In Barth's Christology, on the other hand, we found the pertinent theological predicate in what Barth calls Christ's Menschlichkeit, his self-humiliating condescension on man's behalf. Here Barth has no need to employ the ontological involutions of his doctrine on sin. Quite uncomplicatedly, the Son of Man is not to be credited with "humanity," at least in its original form, for the simple reason that that humanity is not his doing, but the Son of God's.

This may explain, in part, why Barth grows impatient with Luther's emphasis on "man, man, the man Jesus," and why Barth's question about Luther's theological object is not suited, except with qualification, to elicit Luther's own best answer. Barth seems to assume that theological predicates, the object which a subject presents, may accrue to the subject only when they are that subject's own doing, directly. On this assumption, Luther

would be unwarranted in crediting the human Jesus with the divine predicate, creation, or with any other divine predicate (for example, omnipresence--"the bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper"[1]). For, since Jesus the son of Mary does not do the creating, he does not, frankly, deserve credit for it. With Luther, on the other hand, considerations of deservedness and creditableness are not decisive, not where the merciful God is involved, who wills only that his gifts be given, if even to the magnanimous limits where "God becomes man, man becomes God."[2]

The act of Christ's humiliation, on the other hand, Luther finds to be the direct doing of Christ's human nature as well as his divine nature, even without recourse to the communicatio idiomatum.[3] Nevertheless, it is this latter doctrine especially, the "fatal" doctrine of the communicatio idiomatum, according to which, as Barth complains,

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[1]LW, XXVII, 36. WA, XL/2,45,25-26. This is not the place to elaborate, or even to guess, what all Barth might say to Luther's "bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper." On the one hand, he can say: "There is obviously no baptism or Lord's Supper without His real presence as very God and very Man, both body and soul; but this presence cannot be regarded as restricted to what were later called the 'sacraments.'" CD, III/2,467. On the other hand, we recall Barth's strong reproach against Luther because, for Luther, "the bread of the Lord's Supper had to be the glorified body of the Exalted One." EC, p.xxiii.

[2]Barth quotes this sentence as a formulation of Feuerbach's: "Feuerbach has laconically restated this Christian doctrine with the formula, 'God becomes man, man becomes God.'" Ibid. Actually, almost the same sentence occurs, much earlier, in the Formula of Concord: "On account of this union and communion God is man and man is God." The Book of Concord, p. 595.

[3]See Barth's discussion of the later Lutherans' polemics against the so-called Extra Calvinisticum. CD, IV/1,181.

> the predicates of the divine majesty really belong to the humanity of Jesus. . . . With great elation people triumphantly turned away (and are still turning away) from the Reformed Finitum non capax infiniti. . . . All this clearly suggests the possibility of an inversion of above and below, of heaven and earth, of God and man--the possibility of forgetting the eschatological limit.[1]

What Luther wishes to forget, as we shall see, is not the "eschatological limit," but the moralistic limit of worthiness and unworthiness, the activistic limit of "achieved" predication, the legalistic limit of suum cuique tribuere--wherever these delimit the reality of the divine boon. If for Luther the finite is capable of the infinite, it is so chiefly because of the unbounded mercy in the God become flesh. In any case, it is Barth's limiting of the theological object to the creditable, self-actualizing subject which we shall have to "forget," for methodological purposes, if we are to understand the human object in the theology of Luther.

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[1] EC, p. xxiii.

CHAPTER IV

THIS EXTRAVAGANT VIEW OF FAITH

Being Is Believing

For Barth, too, however, there is a human object of theology, and this object is not restricted to God, not even to the "human" God. To leave the matter at that would be a gross caricature not only of Barth's anthropology but also of his Christology. With almost every breath, as Barth speaks of God he immediately also speaks of man: our kind of man, the humanity of men, the humanity of the man Jesus and of his followers--the humanity which consists in a man's responding to God's humanity in the grateful obedience of faith. For that above all is what constitutes a man a real man, a free human subject, namely, his faith.[1]

Unless man is a free subject, then, whatever else he may be, he is not a real man.[2] He is a free subject when, in response to God, he lives out and actualizes that self whom God posits him to be. In conformity with the man whom God chooses, he likewise chooses himself to be that man.

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[1]"As faith is oriented and based on [Jesus Christ] as its object, there takes place in it the constitution of the Christian subject." CD, IV/1,749. "In the knowledge of faith [he] has become a new subject." CD, IV/1,775.

[2]"If we are to say subject, we must say man. And if we are to say man, we must unquestionably say subject." CD, III/2,195.

> The choice is right when it corresponds to the free choice of God. The object of this free choice of God is man . . . as the object of His grace. In the free choice of man . . . , it is clear that only thanksgiving to the God of grace and the acceptance of responsibility before Him can be chosen. What does the free man choose? He chooses Himself to fulfill this responsibility.[1]

Accordingly, "in the very fact that man is the object of God, he is also a human subject."[2] Man realizes, subjectively, that possibility, that object whom God appoints. Thus man is. "He is, as he hears [God's] Word, . . . as he raises himself to this Word."[3] He is, as he thanks God.[4] He is, as he believes.[5] For it is as that object, namely as believer, that God has destined him.[6] Therefore, it is as that subject, namely as believer, that man is the human object of theology.[7] He is, as object, what he does as subject.

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[1] CD, III/2.197.

[2] CD, III/2,194. "He is the subject of his history as its divinely posited object." CD, III/2,168.

[3] CD, III/2,165-66. [4] CD, III/2,171.

[5] "Just as the sinful man is what he does as such, so is he what he does when as a sinful man he is awakened to faith and can live by it." CD, IV/1,750.

[6] "If I discover myself as this subject, what can I do but confirm myself as such? What can I do, therefore, but that which is proper to this subject as a member of the world reconciled and the community founded by Him, that is to say, believe?" CD, IV/1, 753.

[7] "Thus through all the centuries theology was, and also today is, given its subject matter. . . . Theology will attempt to see, to understand, and to put into language the intercourse of God with man in which there comes about intercourse of man with God. It means that theology will deal with the word and act of the grace of God and the word and act of the human gratitude challenged, awakened, and nourished through it. The first will not be considered without the second nor the second without the first." HG, pp. 55-56.

In emphasizing that the human object is the subject who

Still, where in all the race of men is there one who can qualify as this perfectly free and obedient subject, this believer, and hence this human object of theology? Where but in the God become man, Christ Jesus. So once again, for Barth, the anthropological question turns upon Christ. True, anthropology is not Christology.[1] Yet it is only as men believe in this perfect believer, who believed for them and in their place, that they can actualize themselves as the believing subjects, and thus as the theological objects, whom God elects them to be. What by themselves they cannot believe is that the divine curse under which they live and die is really and only a form of God's grace toward them. Their condemnation is but the form in which God answers their unbelief, graciously.[2] But they, in their persistent unbelief, refuse to hear God's answer as the gracious thing it is.

Then how are men to believe? "How comes this predicate, this faith, to this subject, the subject, man?"[3] How do men come alive as subjects at all, that is, as believers, and thus come into really human existence?

> This is the proper work of grace, that his eternal Word--by his becoming flesh, by his remaining obedient in the flesh . . . undertook to give the saving answer in our place, . . . and thus to accept the grace of God. . . . He quite simply believed. . . . Jesus Christ--only the eternal Word of God could do this--believed. . . . Therefore, because he took the form of a servant and thus and therein was obedient unto

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believes, we must keep in mind an important Barthian qualification. Faith is not the only distinctively Christian act. "It is the act of the Christian life" only from a particular standpoint. From other standpoints, "the same may be said of love and hope." CD, IV/1,757.

[1] CD, III/2,222. [2] GL, pp. 95-96. [3] CD, I/1,513.

> death, God has exalted him, . . . the one and only person who allowed God's grace validity as grace in the flesh.[1]

In turn, therefore, "this faith of Jesus Christ . . . becomes that form which requires conformity, and therefore the command in all commands. . . . For if Jesus Christ has done _this_ in our place, . . . what should _we_ do then? . . . You shall believe!"[2] You _shall_ believe--it is promise as well as command. "Thus through himself, [Jesus Christ] awakens, to the life of faith in him who justifies us, our very existence."[3] "And this . . . the victory of grace is precisely God's victory over . . . the sin of our _unbelief_."[4] By his own becoming the perfect human subject, the true believer, God presents himself as the object who awakens us in turn to a like subjectivity, an analogous faith. Thus he makes us to be, subjectively, what he had graciously envisioned for us as objects.

Luther Overestimates the Believer

Then what is there in the relation between the believer and Christ, as Barth views it, which renders Luther's alternative view controversial, if not unintelligible? The explanation is not at all obvious, the less so since Barth frequently adopts Luther's categories, arguments, and entire idiom as his own. Yet it will hardly do to complain, on vague hunch, that Barth has all the right words but not the music.

Barth does harbor a definite protest against Luther. And the fact is that his criticisms of Luther, also of Luther's views

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[1] _GL_, pp. 96-97.

[2] _GL_, p. 82.

[3] _GL_, p. 96.

[4] _Ibid_.

on faith in Christ, have not always been confined to polite innuendo. Barth can be polite but also explicit.

> Luther had a peculiar way of speaking about faith as an almost independent appearance and function of the divine hypostasis. Faith is able to do, and does, everything. It not only provides justification, and gives solace; it alone not only brings forth love and good works; it also overcomes sin and death, it blesses and redeems man. Faith and God belong together. As trust of the heart (!) it makes both God and idol, occasionally it can even be said to be a "creator of deity," even though only "within us."[1]

with remarkable self-restraint Barth limits himself to calling Luther's notion of faith "this extravagant view," and adds: "Now, after Feuerbach, one may no longer repeat these things from Luther without some caution."[2] Luther's fault, in other words, is that he credits faith with predicates which its subject, the believer, does not and could not possibly perform. Of course, such predication is not legitimate--that is, not lawful. Not for Luther either, we might interpose, since he saw it as a predication not by the law, not by right, but by grace alone.

Luther's paradigmatic expression is that, for the man who believes in Christ, Christ is his righteousness and life.[3] But does not Barth say as much? Still, Luther does not mean that faith is but an imitatio of Christ's faith. But neither does Barth mean that. For all his emphasis upon the faith of Christ as the "form" with which our faith must be the "conformity," upon

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[1] EC, pp. xxii-xxiii. There is a parallel passage in Protestant Thought from Rousseau to Ritschl, p. 359, where "hypostasis" is mistranslated as "hypothesis."

[2] EC, p. xxiii.

[3] LW, XXVI, 155. WA, XL/1,265,31.

Christ as the analogans and the believer as the analogatum, Barth is emphatic in his warning: "We will do well not to try to imitate Jesus in this faith and thus to believe as Jesus believed. . . . We believe in Jesus Christ, we . . . acknowledge his representative faith, which we will never realize, and allow it to count as our life."[1] However, Barth intends, does he not, that by our believing in Christ we shall, if only approximately, come to believe as Christ? Yes, but similar expressions can be found in Luther.[2]

Nor for one moment dare Barth be accused of making faith its own object, as though what the believer believes in is his own believing. If Barth warns against anything, he warns against that.[3] And well he might, since his own view of faith (so subtly different from Luther's) as the "subjective realization" of justification easily conduces to such a misunderstanding. Nonetheless, it is this same Karl Barth who says, "The scarlet thread which runs through . . . Holy Scripture" is the "living Christ--and His righteousness as man's righteousness." This rediscovery, says Barth, was "the strength of the Reformation exposition of righteousness by faith alone."[4]

The real offense in Luther's "extravagant view" of faith is that he describes it, for example, as a "creator of deity within us." His more characteristic, though really not less extravagant, description is that faith "apprehends" Christ and, in

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[1] GL, pp. 82-83.

[2] LW, XXVI, 431. WA, XL/1,650,29-31.

[3] CD, IV/1,416. [4] CD, IV/1,642.

apprehending him, is credited with "the power of justifying." "We must not attribute the power of justifying to a 'form' [sc. charity] . . . ; we must attribute it to faith, which takes hold of Christ the Savior Himself and possesses Him in the heart."[1]

Now the Barthian objections begin to rumble.

> We say too much if we try to deduce from my restoration as it has taken place in Jesus Christ that it has taken place in me. . . . Nothing has taken place or can be perceived in me of the glory of that right and life. . . . It is a bad theology that maintains an exact similarity with Jesus Christ, a false because arbitrary assurance of salvation, in which man wants everything to be different and thinks he can have everything different.[2]

Or as Barth says elsewhere:

> Here Jesus Christ . . . has become a demigod, who imparts pretended powers to them, . . . as their possession, which redounds to their honor before themselves and before others, . . . to justify themselves. . . . Jesus Christ becomes the great creditor who again and again is just good enough to cover the cost of our own ventures in righteousness.[3]

Notice, Barth's chief criticism of this view of faith is, not the familiar objection that such faith encourages a quietistic sloth but, worse yet, that it implements the pride of self-justification. It is made to redound, undeservingly, to the honor of the believing subject. He is credited with predicates--for instance, the predicate of justification--which he himself does not enact.

Is Luther's Happy Exchange Also Too Extravagant?

Granting for a moment that Luther's view of faith is an "extravagant view," we might still question whether this exhausts Barth's grievance against him. For, closely coupled with his view

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[1] LW, XXVI, 137. WA, XL/1,240,14-16. (Italics mine.)

[2] CD, IV/1,773. (Italics mine.) [3] GL, p. 90.

of faith, Luther holds an equally extravagant view of the believed and apprehended Jesus Christ. In this faithful apprehension of him, Christ effects the same feliciter commutans nobiscum as he did in his atonement, so that, in a happy exchange of personal subjects and predicates, "He took upon Himself our sinful person and granted us His innocent and victorious Person."[1] To those who take him on trust Christ is their real and present possession: real, not only promissorily and representatively but biographically, as the personal identity of his believers' entire existence; and present, not only temporally but locally, in his believers' place--that is, in the places of earth where they are stationed and in the places of flesh which they themselves are. This may well be an understanding of the glückliche Wechsel which Barth is unwilling to concede.

Of course, as Barth knows, Luther is acutely aware that believers continue to be sinful and culpable and mortal. Even so, as Luther also insists, they are never that "in Christ." For though they "possess" Christ only in the measure that they succeed in trusting him,[2] they still share the same valued status as Christ himself, thanks to the Father's forgiving imputatio.[3] The temptations to pride and carnality which such a gospel provides, Luther had to reckon with, bitterly, in the defections from his own reform movement.[4] But, for all its risks and extravagance, he

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[1] LW, XXVI, 284. WA, XL/1,443,23-24.

[2] LW, XXVI, 350-51. WA, XL/1,538,19-20.

[3] LW, XXVI, 233. WA, XL/1,369-23-25.

[4] LW, XVIII, 620-30. WA, XL/1,59,31-63,28.

was not willing to temper his gospel just to save it from perversion. For him, though the believer was indeed peccator apart from Christ, he was, in Christ, simultaneously and really iustus--here and now.[1]

For Barth, on the other hand, the positive benefit of the believers' justification still awaits them in the future. The "right" to it and the "freedom" for it they already have. But the "fulfillment" of it--Christ's righteousness as theirs, their faith like his--they now enjoy only as hope, as the yet unattained "whither" toward which they press their daily pilgrimage, their "transition" from death to life, from past to future, from beginning to completion.[2] But in that whither which Luther foresees they will no longer need either faith or justification by faith.[3] In the meantime and place, however, their need and the fulfillment of their need is Jesus Christ, "in whom you believe and who is perfectly righteous. . . . His righteousness is yours; your sin is His."[4] For them no one else but Christ will do, if only for the negative reason that no one else but he, in their person, can refute the law's persistent accusation against them, just as he refuted it on the cross. That he did, not however by "simply believing" the accusation was a form of grace, but by exposing its accusation against him, the Lord of the law, as insubordination.[5] The

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[1] WA, XL/1,367,22-368,14. [2] CD, IV/1,557.

[3] WA, XL/1,428,29-429,14.

[4] LW, XXVI, 233. WA, XL/1,369,24-25.

[5] WA, XL/1,437,18-440,35.

positive gain, says Luther, is that meanwhile we may be sure that, on account of this Christ who unites himself with us, we in our person and works are pleasing to God[1]--a pleasing which Barth hastens to explain in terms of the Christian's "transition" from past to future.[2]

True, the negative pole of justification, the "whence" of the past from which the believers move, Barth sees as already accomplished for them in Christ's suffering their condemnation, once for all.[3] Here, in this view of Christ's substitutionary suffering, Barth probably comes closest to Luther's view of a really gratuitous predication for the human subject. Not only does Barth say, as he does frequently, that Christ bore our need, our cause, our suffering, our death, our rejection, the consequences of our sin. He also says, though perhaps less frequently, that Christ bore our sin. Now it might be tempting to argue that, on the Barthian doctrine of election, none of these evils really belonged to us in the first place since, before they ever were ours, they were Christ's; or that, since Barth characterizes sin primarily as that which God rejects and not primarily as something man does, therefore what Christ bore was not so much our sin as his own re-

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[1] WA, XL/1,575,13-579,24.

[2] After a positively brilliant exegetical excursion into the Psalter and Job and Paul (where "we cannot overlook the fact that . . . we not infrequently hear a voice of extraordinary confidence, in which [the] writers . . . boast of their own righteousness before God and man") Barth quickly reverts to his main argument: "But when we have said this, . . . we have to add that the justification of man is something which takes place . . . [in the] transition . . . from here to there, in which there is a beginning and a completing, a coming and a going, in which man stands under a twofold determination to the extent that he goes forward from the 'before' of his wrong and therefore his death to the 'after' of his right and therefore his life." CD, IV/1,570-73.

[3] CD, IV/1,295-96.

jection. But both arguments, I believe, though they might incriminate Barth's results, misconstrue his intention.

What we do miss in Barth, if we compare him with Luther, is the latter's strong statements to the effect that Christ, since "He bore the person of a sinner and a thief--and not of one but of all sinners and thieves," therefore "He is a sinner."[1] On the Barthian presupposition that a subject is what he does, Barth's caution is understandable. For since Christ "does not sin" (to say that he does would be "the supreme blasphemy"),[2] therefore to say he is a sinner would be--as Barth says in another connection--"like handles without pots or predicates without subjects."[3] With Luther, on the other hand, the very magnitude of Christ's benefits compels us to adjust our presuppositions about subjects and predicates and to adopt, as he sometimes advises, "a new and theological grammar."[4] Following the statement from Corinthians, "He made him to be sin who knew no sin," Luther concludes: "they are as much Christ's own [sins] as if he Himself had committed them, . . . or else we shall perish eternally."[5]

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[1] LW, XXVI, 277. WA, XL/1,433,20-21,29.

[2] CD, IV/1,485. The passage illustrates what Barth regards as the available alternatives. "What is meant to be supreme praise of God can in fact become supreme blasphemy. God . . . does not sin when in unity with the man Jesus He mingles with sinners and takes their place. And when He dies in His unity with this man, death does not gain any power over Him. . . . He makes His own the being of man in contradiction against Him, but He does not make common cause with it. . . . If it were otherwise, if in it He set Himself in contradiction with Himself, how could He reconcile the world with Himself?" It is safe to say that Luther would have to side with Barth, if he were limited to Barth's alternatives--which he was not.

[3] CD, III/2,76. [4] LW, XXVI, 267. WA, XL/1,418,24.

[5] LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1,435,16-19.

The Life I Now Live

The same Barthian reserve appears, again, in face of Luther's doctrine on the indwelling Christ. Barth does write movingly and at length about the Christian's unio cum Christo (not unio mystica!). Yet he warns his readers to "refrain from describing the Christian in relation to his fellows" the way Luther did, as an alter Christus, lest they credit the human subject with prerogatives which do not belong to him but only to Christ.[1] Barth's worry, apparently, is not that in this union Christ might become "localized"[2] (though he doubts that a concern for Christ's local presence is any longer relevant as it was, for instance, with Calvin[3]), but rather that the distinction between the divine subject who summons and the human subject who obeys might be obliterated. "There can be no question whatever of any competition

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[1]"In this perfect fellowship the one Christ as the only original Son of God, besides whom there can be no other, is always the One who gives, commands, and precedes, and the other, the homo christianus, whom He makes His brother and therefore a child of God, is always the one who receives, obeys and follows." Barth, Church Dogmatics: A Selection, p. 252. This quotation and the next one and the second one after that appear in KD, IV/3, which, at the time of the writing of this dissertation was not yet available in a corresponding volume in CD. Some English excerpts, however, from which the above quotations have been taken, appear in Church Dogmatics.

[2]In discussing the biblical phrase, "in Christ," Barth allows that the preposition has "a local signification, . . . that the spatial distance between Christ and the Christian disappears, that Christ is spatially present where Christians are, and that Christians are spatially present where Christ is, and not merely alongside but in exactly the same spot. . . . Yet while this is true, . . . the word 'in' transcends even though it also includes its local signification." Ibid., p. 258.

[3]CD, IV/1,287.

between His person and that of the Christian."[1]

Luther too, however, was zealous to emphasize that Christ and the believer are distinct subjects.[2] Yet this zeal did not prevent him from enjoying the new life and work of the believer as Christ's own, in an exchange far more intimate and consummate than Barth allows. The difference between the two theologians is illustrated by their contrasting interpretations of Galatians 2:20: ". . . it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God."

It is necessary for Barth's exegesis that the phrase, "by faith in the Son of God," as the Revised Standard Version translates it, "should certainly be understood as a subjective genitive" --by the faith of the Son of God.[3] Barth has his reasons. "This is to be understood quite literally: I live . . . in the fact that the Son of God believed!"[4] Barth explains, as Luther surely would agree, that I do not live "somehow in my belief in the Son of God"[5]--as if my believing were its own inspiration, or as if my believing were the source of my life. Yet Barth seems to think, as Luther surely would not, that Paul's "life I now live" means: "what is before us" (as opposed to what is behind us);[6] the everlasting life and resurrection toward which we are "hastening";[7]

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[1]Barth, Church Dogmatics: A Selection, p. 258.

[2]WA, XL/1,282,15-21.

[3]GL, p. 74.

[4]GL, p. 76.

[5]Ibid.

[6]CD, IV/1,503.

[7]GL, p. 76.

the demanded and promised life of "you shall believe, you shall love and fear";[1] "only . . . the promise of what Jesus Christ does for us";[2] "his representative faith, which we will never realize, [but] allow it to count as our life, which we do not have here in our hand and at our disposal but have above, hidden with him in God."[3]

By contrast, Luther's exegesis is extravagant indeed, though the following is but a modest sample.

> This is true faith of Christ and in Christ, through which we become members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. Therefore in Him we live and move and have our being. Hence the speculation of the sectarians is vain when they imagine that Christ is present in us "spiritually," that is speculatively, but is present really in heaven. Christ and faith must be completely joined. We must simply take our place in heaven; and Christ must be, live, and work in us. But he lives and works in us, not speculatively but really, with presence and with power.[4]

In the believer, says Luther, "Christ rules with His Holy Spirit, who now sees, hears, speaks, works, suffers, and does simply everything in him, even though the flesh is still reluctant."[5] Here, once more, is that same happy exchange which prompts Luther to speak of faith as "the divinity of works"[6] or of the believer in Christ as "a completely divine man."[7]

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[1] GL, p. 82. [2] GL, p. 97. [3] GL, p. 83.

[4] LW, XXVI, 357. WA, XL/1,546,21-28.

[5] LW, XXVI, 172. WA, XL/1,290,28-30.

[6] WA, XL/1,417,15-16.

[7] LW, XXVI, 247. WA, XL/1,390,22-23. In HG, p. 60, Barth approvingly quotes Blumhardt's dictum, "You men are gods," although the German reads: "Ihr Menschen seid Gottes." Karl Barth, Die Menschlichkeit Gottes (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1956), p. 23.

The Predication of the Gospel

Barth may well be right if he infers that for Luther the object of theology is man, and not only man the sinner nor only the man Jesus (ac natura Deus) but also the man who is Christ's believer. Yet if the believer is the theological object, he is that for the very reason that the object of faith, obiectum fidei, is not the believer but only Jesus Christ. For as the sole object of faith Christ is always the one who effects the happy exchange. But effect it he does. To have him on any other terms is to "have only a historical faith about Christ, something that even the devil and all the wicked have." "Let us concede," says Luther, "that a man could be found who had such a faith. Even if he had it, he would actually be dead."[1]

Therefore, Luther concludes, it is essential to understand what faith is.

> Namely, that by it you are so cemented to Christ that He and you are as one person, which cannot be separated but remains attached to Him forever and declares: "I am as Christ." And Christ, in turn, says: "I am as that sinner who is attached to Me, and I to him."[2]

Only Christ, therefore, is the object of faith, because he--with his Father and his Spirit--is the creditable subject who alone does all things. But the very thing which he is doing, and with which his believers trustingly credit him, is that feliciter commutans nobiscum. As a result of this happy exchange, his believers likewise become the object of theology, as those subjects of whom he

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[1] LW, XXVI, 168. WA, XL/1,285,20-23.

[2] LW, XXVI, 168. WA, XL/1,285,24-27.

predicates himself--by the fatherly imputatio but also "really, with presence, and with power." Human reason, says Luther, "even though it reads or hears this sentence, 'Who gave Himself for our sins,' . . . does not apply this pronoun 'our' to itself; it applies it to others, who are worthy and holy, and decides to wait until it has been made worthy by its own works."[1] "For we find very often in the Scriptures that their significance consists in the proper application of pronouns"--pro nobis.[2]

This for Luther is the really effectual "preaching of the gospel," the praedicatio evangelii. The discreditable sinful subjects, who are the object of theology as law, Christ displaces by assuming their subjecthood, a sinner, by predicating their sin of himself. In the same felicitous transfer, the very righteousness and life which are his become their own real and present possession by faith. Here is the "evangelical predication" which makes of its believers, who apprehend it in trust and against all odds, the gratuitous but real objects of theology.

The Barthian Impediment to Understanding Luther

Again Barth has advanced our understanding of Luther's theological object, this time by his criticism of the Reformer's "extravagant view" of faith. And again it becomes clear, in order honestly to understand this feature of Luther's theological object, that Barth's own criteria for the object of theology have to be qualified. The particular obstruction, which for purposes of our

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[1] LW, XXVI, 34. WA, XL/1,86,19-22.

[2] LW, XXVI, 33-34. WA, XL/1,85,27-86,8.

Luther research must be kept in abeyance, is the Barthian view of theological predication. For Barth, apparently, the subject who is the object of theology becomes that only as he actualizes himself in predicates of his own doing. When strained through the grid of this Barthian assumption, Luther's admittedly human object of theology, now nearly bereft of its "happy exchange," emerges indeed as an extravagance--though, on second thought, perhaps not nearly as extravagant as Luther intended.

To be sure, Barth also speaks of an "exchange" between God and man. And he does so with an attention to exegetical detail and a homey winsomeness which easily rival Luther's. But that Barth's view is substantially less extravagant appears in the following.

> God puts himself in our place, like a teacher who sits at the desk of a schoolboy and then tells him: "Until now you've been drawing all by yourself; I want now to make your drawing for you." And he begins to draw for him a nice drawing in his schoolboy's exercise book. And the child is at his side and he is looking on. God tells us similarly: "My friend, here I am in your place. Until now you have been quite happy to be there, to live, to mind your business, to be responsible. Move away, that I may set myself to this, and you sit at my side."

Barth draws the moral: "By sitting at the master's side, let us hope that the child will learn something."

Barth even speaks of Christ as the "grammatical subject" of the Christians' lives. But how is he that? As their "representative" believer.[2] In the measure that they are not the correspondingly believing subjects of their own lives, presumably they

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[1]Karl Barth, The Faith of the Church, ed. Jean-Louis Leuba and trans. Gabriel Vahanian (New York: Meridian Books, 1958), p. 157.

[2]GL, p. 76.

are not yet "real" men, not yet those objects of theology which God elected in Christ. "In him I am already the one who will be this righteous man . . . , just as in Him I am still only the unrighteous man, to the extent that I once was this man."[1] "The justification of man begins in his past and it is completed in his future."[2] "There is no place for the new man alongside the old."[3] No wonder Barth finds Luther's view extravagant, and scores that theology "in which man wants everything to be different and thinks that he can have everything different."[4]

Luther's Feuerbach? Or Feuerbach's Luther-- And Barth's?

To Barth's disappointment, Luther's "extravagant view" of faith provided the sorry occasion for "the speculative anthropological consequences that have irresistibly developed," and the sorry occasion for Feuerbach--"and not without every appearance of justice."[5] As a consequence, theologians of the nineteenth century

> were more interested in the Christian faith than in the Christian message, . . . more interested in man's relationship to God than in God's dealings with man, or, to quote the well-known term of Melanchthon, more in the beneficia Christi than in Christ Himself.[6]

Does Barth assume that the beneficia Christi, which was as much Luther's term as Melanchthon's, was by either of them equated with "the Christian faith," with "man's relationship to God" rather

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[1] CD, IV/1,555. (Italics min.)

[2] Ibid., p. 594.

[3] Ibid., p. 557.

[4] Ibid., p. 773.

[5] EC, pp. xxi-xxiii.

[6] Barth, "Evangelical Theology in the Nineteenth Century," The Humanity of God, p. 24.

than "God's dealings with man"?[1] Of course, from Barth's own, much more fideistic standpoint, where the "existence" to which Christ awakens a man seems to be equated with faith, it would be tempting to construe the benefits of Christ as the human response to his benefits. That may explain Barth's vehement insistence that neither he nor the Reformers equate the beneficia Christi with Christology.[2] But the prior question should be, Are Christ's benefits equated with faith? Not by Luther.

Nevertheless, as Barth continues, "the interest of these theologians of the nineteenth century focused on the believing man."[3] "A capacity for the infinite within the finite, faith had no ground, object, or content other than itself."[4] We might add that, if this is what happened, then it did so despite the fact that for Luther faith had no "ground and object" other than Christ --but, by that token, had as its "content," and as the object of theology, also the man who is "exchanged" with Christ by faith. All the same, Barth deplores the results as inevitable.

> How could the truth of the Christian gospel be asserted except by understanding it and interpreting it as a statement, an expression, a predicate . . . of the Christian's inner experience?[5]

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[1] "Christ was given to us to bear both sin and penalty and to destroy the rule of the devil, sin, and death; so we cannot know his blessings unless we recognize our evil." Apology of the Augsburg Confession, The Book of Concord, p. 106. Or, see Luther: ". . . ut Christi beneficia et gloriam illustremus. . . . Nos sola fide in Christum sine operibus iustificari." WA, XL/1,336,15,25.

[2] CD, I/1,480.

[3] Barth, "Evangelical Theology in the Nineteenth Century," The Humanity of God, p. 24.

[4] Ibid., p. 26.

[5] Ibid. (Italics mine.)

How else could the gospel be asserted? By challenging, for one thing, the unlimited view of the human subject as the self-positing agent of his own history, the self who is only what he does, who is deprived of theological objecthood except as he actualizes his own predicates. Yet Barth concludes, "On this ground there was no effective answer to be given to Feuerbach who eagerly invoked Luther's sanction in support of his theory."[1] "On this ground"--that is, on the ground of nineteenth-century anthropocentrism. But is Barth's criticism of that ground altogether on target? He might be standing too close--within range of the ricochet. He might do better to shoot from a position where, at least for Luther, the gospel--just because of its extravagance--is necessarily and properly anthropocentric.

The Cross-Examination Summarized

We have tried to reformulate Barth's question about Luther's theological object, and to do so in a way which alleviates the Barthian impediment to an authentic understanding of Luther. We discovered that impediment in Barth's insistence upon the self-actualizing character of the personal subject. The object of theology, according to Barth, must be a subject whose predicates belong to him, and belong to him commendably, by reason of his doing them. As worthy of theological consideration, he is what he does. What he does, as creditable subject, is what he is, as theological object.

This Barthian assumption about theological predication, and

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[1] Ibid.

hence about the object of theology, would impede our inquiry into Luther, but not because Luther must deny the assumption out of hand. On the contrary, there are large tracts of Luther's theology in which Barth's assumption might be quite at home, if it were not for the limits (shall we say the uncritical limits or the too critical limits?) to which Barth presses his notion. Pressed to its Barthian limits, this view of the self-objectifying subject collides with the theology of Luther both as law and as gospel, and on both counts appears as a moralistic restriction--on the one hand, a restriction upon the divine wrath and, on the other hand, upon God's mercy in Christ. Consequently man, both as peccator and as iustus, is deprived of the full-scale objecthood he receives in the theology of Luther.

In order to understand Luther in his own right, therefore, a revision of Barth's question has been in order. The revision, admittedly, has been radical (in the literal sense of radix, root), and there is no pretense that the result is one which Barth could still acknowledge as his own. But neither, by the way, is there any pretense that, in isolating Barth's notion of theological predication, we have thereby exposed the real nerve of difference between his theology and Luther's. Their profoundest differences, no doubt, lie elsewhere--perhaps in their contrary views of law and gospel, of finite and infinite, of obedience and trust. No, Barth's view of the theological object seems to be but a vehicle for his major themes and, as such, it may sometimes illustrate but it may also conceal his fundamental differences from Luther. Our intention here, somewhat more modestly, has been to appropriate what we

could of Barth's concerns about the human subject as the object of theology, and to apply his concerns, thus distilled, to the study of Luther.

Accordingly, in the preceding chapters we sampled three doctrines related to Barth's anthropology--man the sinner, the man Christ Jesus, man the believer--and noted at each point how Barth's view of the theological object, and his corresponding strictures upon Luther, left the latter's real intention out of reach. First, there was Barth's undeniably "serious" treatment of sin. However, the sinner as such could be no real object of theology (as in Luther's hamartiology he is) except at the risk of dishonoring the divine grace. For, as Barth says, a real subject is what he does. But what a sinner does is sin. To say, however, that that is what he is, in the same sense that any other divine creation "is," would credit the sinner with willing into being the very thing which God in Christ has willed out of being. Such a creditable subject the sinner does not deserve to be. Neither, therefore, may he be a real object of theology. Now to approach Luther's doctrine on sin with the Barthian preconception of creditable subjecthood would leave Luther's sinner looking incongruously like something of a tragic hero. Conversely, from Luther's standpoint, the Barthian sinner would be neither real enough a sinner to account for his fate nor real enough a saint to account for his rescue.

Second, we looked to Barth's Christology, attending particularly to his doctrine on the humanity of Jesus Christ. Barth spares no energy, as we saw, in emphasizing that Jesus Christ is real man, <u>vere homo</u>, and as such a real human subject. Just as

emphatically Barth sees Christ's humanity, in turn, originally as a predicate of the subject, God, but never vice versa. To view the relationship also the other way around, to predicate deity of the subject, Jesus, as Luther does, strikes Barth as a perilous "divinizing" of man. It is the Son of God alone--and not, as with Luther, simultaneously and in the same person the Son of Man--who humiliates himself. For with Barth, though not with Luther, to be man at all is already to be humbled to the conditions of sin. Yet as we noticed, there is in Barth little of Luther's emphasis upon the God-man's becoming and being a sinner. To be a sinner--on the Barthian assumption that a subject is what he does--Christ would have to do what sinners do. For that reason Barth seems to see only a disjunction: Jesus Christ could not be both a sinner and the Son of God. Within those limits, of course, Christians have but one choice. And within those limits Luther's choice looks strangely like an assault upon Christ's deity. Conversely, from the standpoint of Luther, the Barthian Christ is prevented from having effectively destroyed the sin of sinners in their own "person," in their own flesh and blood.

We noted, thirdly, in Barth's understanding of faith, that it is a man's obedient believing which constitutes his newly-awakened "existence," his "reality" as a man, the "subjective realization" or "fulfillment" of his own righteousness, the positive side of his justification (as opposed to the negative side, the remission of his sin). He is what he does, and what he does is believe--and hope and love. But only in the measure that he does these, do the aforementioned predicates accrue to him as their real

subject. Barth is at great pains, understandably, to disclaim faith as its own object. Only Jesus Christ, the representative believer, is the effectual object of the believer's faith. Neither is faith, therefore, an act for which the believer himself may take credit. In that case, of course, it would not be faith. The believer is not the ultimately creditable subject of what he does, and of what he therefore is. But for that very reason, it seems, he may also not be the object of theology, except by analogy--only as a reflection or correspondence--and at that, as a correspondence whose fulfillment waits always in the future. On these terms, Luther's view of faith as a present "apprehending" of Christ by virtue of the "happy exchange" appears to be "extravagant" indeed, the more so since it seems to imply credit to the believing subject himself. Conversely, from the standpoint of Luther, the Barthian view of faith impairs the beneficia Christi, which are not reducible to faith.

In Part III we shall turn the question upon Luther directly, If the object of theology is man, what is there about man in each case--man the sinner, the man Christ Jesus, man the believer--which accounts for his being the one whom theology is about? In the meantime, however, we proceed to Part II and to an investigation of Luther's terms obiectum and subiectum.

PART II

LUTHER'S USE OF OBIECTUM AND SUBIECTUM

CHAPTER V

LUTHER'S OBIECTUM IS REALLY THERE

Biographical Subject, Real Object

Just as we have made no attempt, obviously, to survey the whole of Barth's theology, so also, though perhaps not quite so obviously, we have not attempted to exhaust what all he means by subject and object. Nor is that essential to the project at hand. It has seemed enough, in cross-examining Barth's criticisms of Luther, that we understand how the Barthian object of theology must himself be a real subject of his own predicates. "Subject," in this context, has had a special meaning. Thus we have deliberately ignored another whole sense of the word, subject, namely its epistemological sense. In epistemology nowadays the "subject" is the one who does the knowing, that one by whom the object is known. In this cognitive relationship the subject and the object stand in juxtaposition to each other. They are not identical. Of course, it may be that the one who is known and the one who knows are in some instances one and the same person--that is, when it is himself whom he knows. But that need not be the case, not in the epistemological usage of subject and object. The one who is known, the object, may be someone other than the subject who knows him. Furthermore, when we speak of the object in a strictly epistemological connection, we have not yet said thereby whether

the object really exists as someone in his own right, or whether he is in reality the way he is thought to be. By calling him the object, we might mean merely that such-and-such is the way he is understood. In other words, the object in this connection is defined by his relation to his knower, not necessarily by his relation to what he in fact is.

It is the latter relationship, however, to which we have been attending. We have thought of the theological object, the one who is theologically known, as someone in his own right. We have been regarding the object, so to speak, from his own side, from his self-side. Considering him from that vantage, we have had to refer to him with the same ambiguous word, subject. But in doing so, we have employed the word, subject, not in its epistemological sense but in its grammatical or biographical sense or --as we might say, if we want to live dangerously--in its ontological sense. We have been asking in other words whether the things which theology (in this case, Luther's theology) says about its object (in this case, man) really do belong to him, whether he is indeed the real subject of these predicates. This is a theological form of the problem of predication, a theological problem in ownership. And the biographical or grammatical subject, unlike the epistemological subject, is always numerically the same one who is the "object." The one who as object is known as such-and-such is the selfsame one who, as subject, <u>is</u> such-and-such. Here we recall the Barthian theme: the object is always subject. But even this doctrine of Barth's has been examined here only as it bears upon his criticism of Luther's "anthropocentrism."

As for other features of Barth's subject-object terminology, no better secondary source could be recommended, it seems to me, than James Brown's Croall Lectures of 1953, Subject and Object in Modern Theology.[1] Despite the preliminary and compact nature of his sections on Barth (he could use only the first three part volumes of the Dogmatik), the author admirably and admiringly compares Barth's usage with that of his contemporaries and his immediate predecessors. For the most part, though, Brown's interest in exploring the Barthian subject-object terminology is to assess its implications for epistemology. Especially he argues for the contributions which theology might make among the arts and sciences on the knotty matter of "objective" and "subjective" knowledge.

By contrast, let us say once more, our present interest has led us elsewhere. In referring to the one who is the object of theology, we have had to consider him in another dimension. We have not asked, Under what conditions does he come to be known by his knowers? Rather we have asked, Under what conditions does he come to be the one he is known to be, the one he truly is? By virtue of what do his predicates belong to him as their subject? He is the subject, therefore, in the grammatical or biographical sense of the word, not the epistemological. Whether he happens also to be the subject who knows will vary with the circumstances. As Luther's sinner, for example, he is the grammatical subject of his sinful predicates whether he acknowledges them or not as an epistemological subject. Of course, it is the purpose of theology,

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[1]Brown, passim.

of Luther's theology as law, to press the sinful subject to a recognition of his sin. But it is not his recognition of his sin which makes him the sinner he is. Still, can the same thing be said of him under the gospel? Is he the beneficiary of Christ, the subject of such predicates as Christ's righteousness and life, whether or not he believes that? If not, is it his faith which makes him the justified man he is? Here, admittedly, the epistemological subject and the biographical subject seem almost to merge, not only in the same person but in the same act--if by one and the same act of faith a man both knows he is righteous and becomes righteous. Nevertheless, our original question, which is not strictly epistomological, still stands: by virtue of what (whether by his faith or by something else) is he the biographical, the grammatical subject of those predicates which accrue to him as the object of theology?

To think of the human object of theology, not with reference to the human subject who knows him, but with reference to the human subject he is, presupposes of course that he does have an "objectively" real character of his own--never in isolation, to be sure, but always in intimate relation to others, especially coram deo. This "objectivity" presupposes, in other words, that the human object of theology, or even the divine object, is not just the "subjective," mental projection of theological knowledge --not just the extension, for example, of the theologian's "ingenious overemphasis." By assuming this "objective" status of the theological object, we have of course skirted the epistemological question, of necessity. For our purposes it is enough that this

much "objectivity," at least, is implicit in the theologies both of Barth and of Luther. That that is the case also with Luther should appear from the following analysis of his term, obiectum. For him the term seems always to presuppose that the theological object--even if this be the divine wrath or the present Christ--is "really there" (adest) and is not the sinner's or the believer's mere presentation to himself of a theological construct. On this point Luther is fully as much a realist in his epistemology as Barth is, however much their epistemologies might differ in other respects. And it is just because Luther is the realist he is that we shall be led, once more, to move the question about his theological object beyond epistemological considerations to a consideration of the grammatical or biographical subject, the subiectum theologiae himself.

Already in our introductory chapter, though there we only hinted at the discrepancy between Barth's question and Luther's answer, we anticipated that the discrepancy was more than terminological. That statement now deserves some documentation. The point is not that there are no differences between Barth's Objekt or Gegenstand and Luther's obiectum. Rather, what differences there are, whether or not these are as great as we might expect, simply do not account for Barth's and Luther's conflicting attitudes toward the human subject as the object of theology. True, even in a superficial comparison of Barth's usage with Luther's, what strikes the reader instantly is that Barth, like all of us today, employs the term, object, far more frequently and more dependently than Luther did. That is to be expected when we recall

that between these two theologians, as between two widely differing theological epochs, stand the towering figures of Kant and Kierkegaard--not to mention Hegel and Feuerbach and Marx. Yet at the risk of making Luther out to be more modern than he is, or Barth more medieval, there is reason to believe that their terminological differences do not explain the discrepancy between them which concerns us here. On the contrary, it will be Luther's general resemblance to Barth, respecting their realistic understanding of "object," which will heighten and not diminish Luther's emphasis upon man as the object of theology.

The Realism of the Scholastic Obiectum

Brown, it seems to me, overstates the case when he says, "It comes to us as a surprise to find that the modern use of the terms 'subjective' and 'objective,' deriving from Kant, precisely reverses their original use in the medieval schoolmen."[1] Without wishing to quibble, we might argue that Brown's phrase, "precisely reverses," is a bit strong. But if this is an exaggeration, it is one which goes back at least as far as Carl Prantl's widely accepted but highly biased Geschichte der Logik im Abendlande. Brown bases his observation on a quotation from Rudolf Eucken, who in turn depends on a quotation from Prantl, who describes the scholastic terminology (not without rancor) as follows:

> The word subjective was applied to whatever concerned the subject-matter of the judgment, that is, the concrete objects of thought; on the other hand the term objective referred to that which is contained in the mere obiicere (i.e., in the

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[1] Ibid., p. 19. (Italics mine.)

> presenting of ideas) and hence qualifies the presenting subject.[1]

This statement by Prantl--mild enough when compared with his frequent ridicule of scholastic logic, indeed of almost all logic prior to Kant--could easily mislead.

Consider Prantl's comment about "objective": "that which is contained in the mere obiicere (i.e., in the presenting of ideas)"--"was im blossen obiicere, d.h. in Vorstelligmachen, liegt.[2] From this quotation one might be tempted to conclude, mistakenly, that in scholastic epistemology the obiectum is "merely" the presentation to himself, the mental projection, of the knower ("des Vorstellenden"). And from this fallacy in turn it would be but a short step to a similar misrepresentation of obiectum in Luther, whose usage seems to be generally uniform with that of the later scholastics.[3] This would be a misrepresentation indeed, not only of Luther but of his predecessors as well. Even for Ockham (to whom Luther freely acknowledged his debt in matters logical and epistemological)[4] to have intuitive cognition of an

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[1]Ibid., pp. 19-20. The original passage appears in C. Prantl, Geschichte der Logik im Abendlande (Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck und Verlagsanstalt, 1955), III, 208, n. 105. For a critical discussion of Prantl's work by a historian of logic who in many respects has superseded Prantl (at least as a historian of formal logic, which, Prantl,believed, had no history), see I. M. Bochenski, A History of Formal Logic, trans. and ed. Ivo Thomas (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1961), pp.6-8.

[2]Prantl, III, 208, n. 105.

[3]Prantl makes his generalization in context of his section on Scotus, yet he extends the generalization far beyond Scotus. Ibid.

[4]The whole question of Luther's debt to Ockham and Ockhamism, pro and con, is summarized inGerrish, pp. 43-56.

object which has no independent existence would be impossible, except by divine intervention. Even in that exceptional circumstance God would have to cause directly and supernaturally the cognition which he ordinarily (naturaliter) produces by means of an object (mediante obiecto).

> So far as natural causes are in question, an intuitive cognition cannot be caused or preserved if the object does not exist (obiecto non existente).[1]

For Luther, whose insistence upon external means is hardly a secret, the closest thing to a cognition without a present object is his view of demonic suggestion. And that, by definition, is no cognitio at all but merum ludibrium Satanae.[2] Luther could agree with Ockham that an act of cognition requires the co-operation both of the intellect and the object.[3] To this extent, what Boehner says of Ockham might equally be said of Luther: He "is a realist in his epistemology."[4]

If Luther Were not a Realist

If Luther were not a realist, it might be possible to play off Barth's view of the theological object against Luther's on purely epistemological grounds. For with Barth, as no even cursory reading of him can escape and as Brown conclusively proves, it is

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[1] Ockham: Philosophical Writings, trans. and ed. Philotheus Boehner, O.F.M. (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1957), p. 26.

[2] WA, XL/1,315,31 (Hs. 316, 3).

[3] See, in Luther's discussion of "faith" and "hope," the necessity both of their "subjects" and their "objects." LW, XXVII, 22. WA, XL/2, 26,11-25.

[4] Ockham: Philosophical Writings, p. xxv.

all important that the one who is the object of theology should occasion the knowledge in his knowers by his own, not by their, initiative. True, Barth does at times refer to objects as though they were but the extension of our knowing. But when he does, he does so only to repudiate that notion or to point out that the object is "not merely object" but simultaneously subject. And this is the case whether the object in question be God or Jesus Christ or ordinary men.[1]

If in the face of Barth's "objectivity" Luther were the subjectivist he is sometimes made out to be, then our problem might be quite different. Then we might have to cope with Luther's obiectum as a mere projection of the human knower. In that event an epistemological difference between Luther and Barth might account for their differences also on the object of theology. In one respect, however, Luther's subjectivism (if he were a subjectivist) might actually bring him and Barth closer together. I refer to Luther's first object of theology, the sinner. Suppose that the sinner's knowledge of the divine wrath and his accompanying knowledge of himself, his cognitio suipsius, were nothing but his own terrified view of the matter. Then Luther's position might more nearly resemble Barth's. For Barth does locate the power of sin in "the blindness of our eyes"[2]--our insisting there is sin when there is none, which is itself the great sin. The difference, however, between Barth and Luther (if Luther were a subjectivist) would emerge in Luther's second theological object:

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[1]CD, I/1,438; IV/2,50; III/3,202.

[2]CD, III/3,367.

the justifying Christ. If this object were but the believer's own creation, and in that sense the "creation of deity within us," or if faith were "merely" faith with no more object than that which it hopefully imagines, then Barth might have grounds for his complaint against Luther's "extravagant view."

Still, this is not where the difference lies, since Luther's view of the epistemological object is anything but subjectivist. Obiectum, for him, always presupposes an independently existing reality. True, the obiectum is this reality in its relation to the knower, as known. But what the knower knows is this reality itself. That this is Luther's view is consistently attested, most of all by the requirements of his whole theology, but also by his specific uses of the term obiectum.

An Apparent Exception

However, there are two apparent exceptions, in Luther's Lectures on Galatians, where his use of obiectum seems like anything but realism. A second look, however, reveals the very reverse to be the case. The first exception, or so it seems, appears in connection with Luther's exegesis of Galatians 5:6, where he does battle against the scholastic understanding of "faith working through love."[1] From this passage the schoolmen had concluded, in

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[1] WA, XL/2,34,3-39,15. In the published edition of the lectures, Luther's exegesis of 5:6 is a separate fragment not delivered in class but written by him for another occasion, and inserted by the editor at the time of publication. In the Weimar edition this fragment from Luther's own hand appears on the lower half of the page, and a few of the quotations which follow are taken from this material. Most of the following quotations, however--and all which cite the controversial words, obiective, subiective, obiectivus --are taken from the material at the top of the page, from the classroom notes of Luther's copyists.

effect, that what justifies a believer is not his faith but the charity which graces his faith, and that faith itself is but an empty shell.[1] To this fallacy Luther replies that faith does indeed justify, but that faith in this case is never the idle sluggard which the scholastics imagine--or which hypocritical Christians try to get by with. True faith, on the contrary, is always mightily engaged in the activity of love. But for that reason faith is the power of love, love is not the power of faith. The trouble with the scholastics, explains Luther, is that "they understand [faith] objectively, not subjectively" (obiective non subiective).[2] These are the words which Röhrer took down in his notes. Cruziger, his fellow-auditor at the lectures, is even more explicit: "They speak about a faith objectively which subjectively they have never experienced.[3]

We are reminded of Prantl's earlier statement about the scholastic use of "subjective" and "objective." When we compare his statement with Luther's, we are immediately tempted by two conclusions, both of which turn out to be erroneous: first, that Luther's use of subiective proves Prantl wrong; second, that Luther's use of obiective proves Prantl right. If anything, the truth is just the reverse. Subiective, Prantl says, referred not to the one who makes the judgment, as it does today, but to that reality about which the judgment is made--"to whatever concerned the subject-matter of the judgment, that is, the concrete objects

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[1] WA, XL/2, 35,7. [2] Ibid., l. 9. (Translation mine.)

[3] "Ipsi loquuntur de fide obiective, quam subiective nunquam sensurunt" (marginal addition to ibid.) (Translation mine.)

of thought." Here Prantl seems to be refuted by Luther, but only seems so. Luther seems to be saying, especially in Cruziger's version, that true faith must be experienced "subjectively"--that is, introspectively, by the believing "subject" himself. Now Luther might well talk like that if he were alive today. But if that had been the meaning he actually ascribed to subiective, he would be contradicting, not only the meaning which was current in his day, but also the meaning which he himself employs elsewhere.[1] The fact is that by subiective he was referring not to the one who experiences faith but to that reality--namely faith--which is experienced. It is faith, not the believer, which is in this case the subiectum. Faith is the thing which Luther is here talking about--Prantl's "subject-matter of the judgment, that is, the concrete objects of thought." And Luther is condemning the scholastics for never having experienced that subiectum for what it really is, subiective, in itself. He is not saying that it was their experience which was not "subjective" enough or, as we might say, personal enough. That conclusion of course could follow, and on other occasions Luther does say as much, though in other words. However, that is not his meaning of subiective, and to this extent he corroborates Prantl's generalization.

But Prantl does not fare as well on the second term, obiective, contrary to initial appearances. To be sure, Luther faults the scholastics for understanding faith obiective, and by this he might seem to be saying that the faith which they have in mind is merely that, merely a product of their own minds, with no

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[1]See chap. vi.

independent reality of its own. If that were Luther's meaning of "objective," then Prantl would be correct in thinking that obiective "referred to that which is contained in the mere obiicere (i.e., in the presenting of ideas)." It is true, the faith which the scholastics talk about is not vera fides and, because they pretend it is, they are deluded.[1] But Luther does not deny that there is a kind of faith, a fides hypocritica, which does in fact and "objectively" correspond to their delusion.[2] There may well be, unfortunately, a merely "historical faith," a matter of "letters and syllables," a Thomistic faith which can co-exist with mortal sin and without genuine love.[3] And that faith, all too real, is the object which the scholastics have on their hands. But that of course is not the faith of which Paul is speaking. On the other hand, even when the scholastics do come up against Paul's kind of faith, which is outwardly active in love, they misconstrue it. They mistake its outer operations, its love, for the operator itself.[4] But this is false, says Luther. Such love is not a habitus obiectivus[5]--a kind of independent, self-generating power. The inner force is faith. Conversely, that faith, if it is vera et vivax, never ceases to present itself, objectively, in real extensions of itself in love.[6] Luther's obiectum, in other

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[1]Luther speaks of their "faith," for example, as ficta. WA, XL/2,37,13.

[2]WA, XL/2,34,7; 35,11; 36,2,5.

[3]WA, XL/2,35,17; 38,4; 35,4.

[4]WA, XL/2,36,8-23.

[5]WA, XL/2,38,3.

[6]WA, XL/2,37,14. The form of the Christian life (forma vitae Christianae) is fides et charitas: faith, inwardly toward

words, is not "was im blossen obiicere, d.h. in Vorstelligmachen, liegt."

Another Apparent Exception

There is a second instance in his Galatians lectures where, by obiectum Luther seems to mean "that which is contained in the mere obiicere (i.e., in the presenting of ideas)." But here again the misimpression is dispelled by a close look at the context. In the published version of the lectures (though not in the manuscript) Luther is reported as saying, first that Christ is the object of faith but then, on second thought, that he is not an object after all. And why not? Apparently because, in faith, Christ really is present. But is that the reason, actually, for saying Christ is not an object? Luther seems to say so. The implication, at first glance, is that an obiectum is something less than what is really present. The passage has a modern ring, as though Luther were saying that Christ is "not merely an object"--as though an obiectum would be only what the believer presents to himself, not what is presented to him. Let us see.

The present translation, with Pelikan's addition underlined, reads:

> . . . Christ is the object of faith, or rather not the object, but, so to speak, the One who is present in the the faith itself.[1]

The sixteenth-century translators had omitted ". . . he is not the

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God (intus coram Deo); love, outwardly toward men (foris coram hominibus), toward the neighbor (erga proximum foris). WA, XL/2,37,26-38,5.

[1]LW, XXVI, 129. WA, XL/1,228,34-229,15.

object, but, so to speak . . ." Thus they saved Luther from doing a double-take, if he actually did one. And so if his wording were left as they cut it, our problem would disappear. (It will disappear anyway, but not merely on textual grounds.) Faced with the earlier translator's excision, Pelikan appropriately supplies the omission and so brings the English in line with the Latin, that is, with the printed edition of the Latin:

> Sic ut Christus sit obiectum fidei, imo non obiectum, sed, ut ita dicam, in ipsa fide Christus adest.[1]

Then does Luther, after all, separate the object from what is really there? Of course, as his words manifestly declare (both in the Latin printing and in the Latin class-notes), he insists that in faith Christ adest. On that score alone Luther is more realist than many a theologian would care to be. Still, he does distinguish adest from obiectum. The distinction might suggest that for Luther an obiectum is not what is there but is only the believer's conception of what is there. If that were the case, then the reason Christ is not an object is that he is what objects are not--namely, really present.

But this, on closer inspection, is not Luther's intention. He is not saying that, since Christ is present, he is thus something more than an object. (He is that too, no doubt.) Rather, despite Christ's presence, he is still something less than an object. That is, he is not an object of sight. His presence is not sensed, we do not experience him. Faith sees only a fog. To its eyes Christ is beclouded, just as he once sat in the temple in the

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[1]Ibid. (Italics mine.)

midst of darkness.[1] But for that very reason Luther hastens to assure his students that, nevertheless, Christ really is there. The class-notes do not even mention that Christ is not obiectum. But they do emphasize that, though he is not seen, "Christus adest, . . . adest ipse."[2] In one respect alone (as an object of, shall we say, perception) Christ is not an object--not even an object, perhaps unfortunately not an object. And in that one respect Röhrer was of course justified in having the published Luther say: non obiectum. But in another, most fundamental, respect Christ is what an object is: "tamen praesens est."[3]

The Contrary Object

In fact, according to Luther's usual practice, he does refer to Christ as obiectum, explicitly and without qualifying the term. But before we advance to that consideration, we confront the prior question: Why, if Christ is "objectively" present, is he not an object of experience? Why is it that the faith which "apprehends" him still sees nothing ("nihil videt")?[4] Is all this the fault merely of the believer's subjective insensitivity? Does he really see and feel nothing at all? By no

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[1] "Fides est quaedam cognitio quae nihil videt." WA, XL/1,228,15-229,1. ". . . Christus ist in tenebris et nebula illa." WA, XL/1,229,12. ". . . In istis nubibus sedet . . . , sicut in templo sedebat in medio tenebrarum."

[2] WA, XL/1,229,5-6.

[3] WA, XL/1,229,21 (Hs.: 229,4).

[4] WA, XL/1,229,1.

means. The believer does perceive something indeed, and what he perceives is objectively there. That obiectum is the law, and it is this law which intervenes and diverts men's sight from that other obiectum, Christ. Instead they are curved in upon themselves, yet not merely by force of their own self-concern, for it is that very self-concern which the law legitimates--again, objectively.

Lex is the form which the wrath of God assumes, objectively, in the sphere of our immanence. It is that sovereign, accusatory action in the lives and relations of men which presses them to incessant evaluation of themselves.[1] And this obiectum engages those who are of all men the most sensitive, rationally and morally. "Ratio habet obiectum legem."[2] In the presence of this massive obiectum it is a rational necessity to give account of oneself: "This I have done, this I have not done. . . . Where have I sinned, what have I deserved?"[3] And it is this same obiectum, the all too real and present law of God, which distracts and by the same action separates a man ex isto obiecto: the justifying Christ.[4]

Here a word is in order about Luther's strictures on speculatio. On this matter too he is sometimes interpreted to be less a realist, epistemologically, than he actually is. Why does he abjure speculating about the divine majesty? Is it because, at the far end of the speculative ascent, there is really no divine obiectum to be found but only the fiction of the theologian's own

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[1] LW, XXVI, 309-13. WA, XL/1, 480, 32-486, 16.

[2] WA, XL/1, 164, 6.

[3] LW, XXVI, 88. WA, XL/1, 164, 21-25.

[4] WA, XL/1, 164, 12.

fancy? Is speculatio out of order because it is illusory, in the sense that "nemo enim Deum novit"? These are the words which are put into Luther's mouth by the later editors of his Galatians lectures.[1] What he does say, quoting Exodus 33, is that no man shall see God and live--et vivet.[2] What is illusory in such speculation is the assumption that the God who is to be found there is one with whom a man can somehow come to terms, placare.[3]

The impulse to deal with that God is by no means academic but is, as we might say, existential--the sheer will to survive as man. Under the pressure of the accusing obiectum, the law, men are driven to justify their right to live. To do that, they seek to fathom the secrets of that sovereign power and wisdom with whom their destiny lies--"how he created the world and how he governs it."[4] All this, in the vain hope that that God, thus known, is one with whom they might traffic and find value. That is the fatal illusion: not that there is no divine majesty to be known but that to reckon with him for one's life is intolerabilis.[5] Men who imagine that the divine majesty is not so forbidding as all that are dreamers. And there are the occasions--"si disputandam fuerit cum Iudeis, Turcis, Schwermeris . . ."--when such self-deception requires to be shattered. (Evidently this is how Luther conceived

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[1]See footnote, WA, XL/1,80,31.

[2]WA, XL/1,76,12. (See marginal reference at 76,1.)

[3]WA, XL/1,77,18.

[4]LA, XXVI, 29. WA, XL/1,77,16-17.

[5]WA, XL/1,77,21.

his assignment against Erasmus.)[1] In those polemical circumstances, Luther advises, you must "use all your cleverness and effort and be subtilis et argutus disputator" precisely on the matter of God's wisdom and power.[2] But never when the need is for a man's reconciliation. To know the divine majesty is all too real a knowledge. That is exactly the reason for not pursuing it, since that is the way to mortem and desperationem.[3]

Still, Luther says, for faith the obiectum is Christ, even though he is hidden from sight and feeling by the intervening obiectum, the law--not just by our experience of the law but by that which we do experience objectively, the accusing law of God. Yet that is why Christ is the object of faith, for faith is of things not seen but hidden.[4] And how could this obiectum fidei be more profoundly hidden than under an experience and object which are directly contrary to Christ--"sub contrario obiectu"?[5] But notice, the contrary objects are in both cases the active God, the same God, for

> when God vivifies he does so by killing, when he justifies he does so by making guilty, when he lifts up to heaven he does that by bringing down to hell--as Scripture says: "The Lord kills and brings to life, he brings down to Sheol and raises up."[6]

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[1] BoW, pp. 64-65. WA, XVIII,602,4-37.

[2] LW, XXVI, 30. WA, XL/1,78,28-30.

[3] WA, XL/1,78,1-2.

[4] "Fides est rerum non apparentium; , . . abscondantur." WA, XVIII,633,7-8.

[5] "Non autem remotius absconduntur, quam sub contrario obiectu, sensu, experientia." WA, XVIII,633,8-9.

[6] WA, XVIII,633,9-12. (Translation mine.)

In face of these contrary actions of God, "who saves so few and damns so many," "it is [Luther scarcely needed to add] the highest degree of faith to believe that he is merciful."[1] What we have called Luther's epistemological realism does not waver even in the face of this logical impasse.

Resolving the Conflict Objectively

Then how is this contrariety--all the more oppressive because it is real--to be reconciled? The question is Luther's own: "Quis conciliat illa summe pugnantia?" The antithesis, he says, is as sharp as fire and water, namely,

> that the sin in us is not sin, that he who is damnable will not be damned, that he who is rejected will not be rejected, that he who is worthy of wrath and eternal death will not receive these punishments.[2]

Is it faith which resolves the pugnantia? Does the believer himself mediate the opposites, even if only in his own mind, by sheer dint of trusting to the contrary? No. "Unicus Mediator Dei et hominum, Iesus Christus."[3] Then how is the mediation achieved in Jesus Christ? Is it that he believes, representatively, that which we do not but ought to believe--for example, that the divine wrath is but the form of grace? Hardly, "for God . . . cannot avoid hating sin and sinners; and He does so by necessity, for otherwise He would be unjust and would love sin."[4] Finally, Luther carries the pugnantia all the way to the objective event of the

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[1] WA, XVIII,633,15-16.

[2] LW, XXVI, 235-36. WA, XL/1,373,13-16.

[3] WA, XL/1,373,16-17.

[4] LW, XXVI, 235. WA, XL/1,371,13-372,1.

crucifixion, and into God himself. But there on the cross--where the divine law itself was condemned for overreaching itself and condemning its own Lord--Luther finds the resolution: "Quod Christus pro nobis mortuus sit"--"and that when we believe this we are reckoned as righteous, even though sins, and great ones at that, still remain in us."[1] This is not the sort of solution which is characteristic of a subjectivist.

For Christians, says Luther, it is the nature of their faith to peer through and beyond the contrary obiectum of the law, the still objective reality of their sin, and to apprehend instead that other obiectum in whom alone the law has no reality, Jesus Christ--but always Christ pro nobis. Either we apprehend him as the objective description of ourselves, or we apprehend only ourselves objectively described by the law.

> Human reason has the law as its object. . . . But faith . . . has no other object than Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was put to death for the sins of the world. . . . [Faith] does not look at its love and say, "What have I done, Where have I sinned, what have I deserved?" But it says: "What has Christ done? What has he deserved?" And here the truth of the gospel gives you the answer: "He has redeemed you from sin, from the devil, and from eternal death." Therefore faith acknowledges that in this one Person, Jesus Christ, it has the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.[2]

"Whoever diverts his gaze from this object," Luther continues, ". . . looks away from the promise and at the Law, which terrifies him and drives him to despair."[3]

The righteous and living Christ becomes the objective de-

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[1] LW, XXVI, 234. WA, XL/1,371,24-25 (Hs.: 371,6-7).

[2] LW, XXVI, 88. WA, XL/1,164,21-28.

[3] LW, XXVI, 88. WA, XL/1,164,28-30.

scription of him, when he enacts this exchange in his own history and when his Father so "reckons" it.[1] But the language of reckoning, of imputatio, which Luther here adopts from Paul, and Paul from Genesis,[2] may suggest that the whole transaction transpires apart from any subjective involvement on our part, behind our backs or over our heads. If this were so, the justification of the sinner, though in some sense it might still be his justification, would seem to be his in only a very detached way and without any objective referent in his own life history. But such a suggestion overlooks the fact that the reason the Father reckons us righteous is our faith--our faith in Christ, of course, but our faith.[3] And faith is no small thing, though in itself, subjectively--in face of the tyrannizing reasonableness of the "contrary object"--it is absolutely weak.[4] However, what makes this "little spark" the res omnipotens which it is--the "creatrix divinitatis . . . in nobis"--is not the vigor of its own subjectivity but the glory rather which it gives to its gracious obiectum, precisely by trusting and thus receiving the glorious things which he gives to it.[5] So the justification of the sinner does indeed have an

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[1]"Deus imputet et cognoscat eum iustum qui solum apprehendit filium suum, quem misit, passum." WA, XL/1,370,6-7. See also WA, XL/1,365,30-366,12.

[2]The above paragraph and the one following it are based on Luther's exegesis of Galatians 3:6, where Paul is quoting from Genesis 15:6. WA, XL/1,359,7-373,17.

[3]WA, XL/1,364,26-28.

[4]WA, XL/1,366,16-21. "Fides est adhuc infirma, vix scintilla." WA, XL/1,364,3-4.

[5]WA, XL/2,360,19,5-6.

objective referent within his own biographical existence, namely, his faith. Without faith he is not justified at all.[1] But it is the very nature of that faith, according to Luther, that it entrusts itself entirely--the whole self, also all its sin--to its merciful obiectum, and that the believer therefore is characterized altogether, not by his faith but by the object of his faith.[2] His sole assurance that this is so is that the obiectum to whom he clings is the same obiectum by whom he is evaluated in the "reckoning" of the divine Judge.[3] Thus even faith, for all its unimpressiveness and "ridiculousness" as subjectivity, enjoys the same objective status and value--"inaestimabilis et infinita"--as does its object, Christ.[4]

In speaking this way, Luther does not restrict himself to Pauline terms, not even in his exegesis of imputatio in Galatians. He finds the same truth paralleled, not only in the Old Testament and the Synoptics,[5] but also in John (16:17).[6] Here Christ is quoted as saying, "The Father himself loves you because you have loved me." Luther understands the Father's "love" for the disciples in an earthy, almost Eros sense of the word: namely, that they "please" the Father--because they are "pleased" with his Son.

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[1] WA, XL/1,445,32-34.

[2] WA, Xl/1,285,26.

[3] See the following paragraph, above.

[4] WA, XL/1,370,22; 360,20; 367,26.

[5] For example, WA, XL/1,367,22-24; 366,1-2; 369,19-21.

[6] WA, XL/1,371,7-372,23.

> This obiectum, this "I" [i.e., Christ] sent from the Father into the world, this pleased you. And because you have taken hold of this obiectum, the Father loves you, and you please Him.[1]

That the disciples "please" the Father seems at first to credit the initiative to the believing subject, until we note that it is first of all the Son who pleases the disciples, that pleasing obiectum whom the Father has sent. Moreover, as Luther recalls, these same disciples, so pleasing to the Father, Christ had earlier referred to as "evil" and had commanded them to repent.[2] However, "these two things are diametrically opposed [ex diametro pugnant]: that a Christian is righteous and beloved by God, and yet that he is a sinner at the same time."[3] And diametrically opposed, not just "in our blind eyes," but "objectively"--since God, by nature, must hate both sin and sinners.[4] No wonder the scholastics laugh at this theology.[5] "How can these two contradictory things both be true at the same time?"[6] "Here nothing can intervene except Christ the Mediator."[7] "It is not by mere imputation [as some of the scholasticshad taught],[8] but it involves that faith which apprehends the Christ who has suffered for us--which is no laughing matter."[9] Accordingly, the objective condition of the believers

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[1] LW, XXVI, 234-35. WA, XL/1,371,30-32

[2] WA, XL/1,371,32-33.

[3] LW, XXVI, 235. WA, XL/1,371,33-34.

[4] WA, XL/1,371,34-35.

[5] WA, XL/1,372,7.

[6] WA, XL/1,372,14-15.

[7] WA, XL/1,372,16-17.

[8] Gerrish, pp. 47-48.

[9] WA, XL/1,372,8-9. (The translation is mine, since the original appears in the Handschrift, not in the Druck, and therefore also not in LW, XXVI.)

turns, once more, entirely upon that pleasing obiectum whom they believe.

> The Father does not love you [says Christ] because you are worthy of love but "quia apprehendistis me."[1]

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[1] WA, XL/1,372,2-3. (Translation mine.)

CHAPTER VI

SUBIECTUM THEOLOGIAE

Object of Theology, Subiectum Theologiae

It is sometimes said, and rightly, that today we speak of the "object" of theology where Luther, like his scholastic predecessors, would have spoken of the subiectum of theology. However, this should not be taken to mean that the two terms, our "object of theology" and the older subiectum theologiae, are simply synonymous. Rather, the old word has been replaced, not by a new word with the same meaning, but by a new word with a subtly different meaning. The modern "object of theology" does not perform exactly the same function which subiectum theologiae once performed. It may be that Barth, in stressing that the theological object is himself always a Subjekt, has done much to reverse the trend and to bring our "object of theology" closer to the former subiectum theologiae. It is my impression that he has. However, without Barth's special reminder about the intrinsic subjecthood of the object, our modern "object" tends to obscure an emphasis which was comparatively more prominent in the former term, subiectum--though with what liabilities, we shall see.

By referring to the one whom theology is about as the "object," we call attention directly to his epistemological status. His being, as object, consists in his being known. Whether or not

there is more to him than that is not immediately evident, at least not from his name, "object." As such, he is defined by the position he holds relative to his knowers, the epistemological subjects. He is their concern. In referring to him as subiectum, however, rather than as "object," the earlier theologians were more apt to call attention to that one himself, as someone in his own right. To put the matter crassly--crasse, as Luther would say --the one whom theology was about was seen as a subiectum of his own predicates. His definitive circumstance, under that term, was not his being known but his being who he is and his doing what he does. To be sure, one of the important things he does may be that he makes himself known to others, and he may be who he is always in intimate relation to someone else. (Surely that seems to be the case with the subiectum in the theology of Luther.) But this only focuses once more on who this subiectum really is. And it is that circumstance, before it is the circumstance of our knowing him, which accounts for his position in a theology like Luther's. One of the improvements we need to make upon the theology of the nineteenth century, Barth seems to me to be saying, is that we bear in mind that the one whom theology is about is the "object" he is, not as a function of our theologizing, but as someone with a real and prior identity of his own. That much also seems to be implicit, in his own way, in Luther's use of subiectum theologiae. Still, the question then returns, What is it about this subiectum which makes this theological predicates be about him, in reality his? Luther's answer to this question diverges not only from that of his

contemporaries but also from that of Barth, and not for altogether different reasons.

Not Epistemological but Biographical Subject

If the old *subiectum theologiae* was not quite the same thing as our modern theological "object," it was surely not the same as our modern epistemological "subject." Today, in strictly epistemological terms, the theological "subject" would call to mind the one who does the theological knowing. But the old *subiectum theologiae* did not refer to the theologian, any more than it referred to an object which was defined by his knowing it. Rather the *subiectum theologiae* referred to that one who occasions theological knowledge about himself by reason of his being who he is, the personal source of his own predicates. (But as we shall see, because Luther's *believer* is not the personal source of his own predicates, righteousness and life--though these predicates are truly his--he cannot unambiguously be called their *subiectum*.) In any case, however, the *subiectum theologiae* did refer not to an epistemological but to a biographical subject.

The term *subiectum* is employed in a theological connection already by Albert the Great. He refers to God as *subiectum* on the ground that, of all that concerns sacred doctrine, God is himself the one most worthy.[1] With Albert's illustrious pupil, Thomas Aquinas, the divine *subiectum* becomes the definitive, Aristotelian

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[1]Engelbert Krebs, *Theologie und Wissenschaft nach der Lehre der Hochscholastik* ("Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters," Vol. XI, Nos. 3-4; Münster i. W.: Aschendorff, 1912), p. 55.

basis for making sacred doctrine a *scientia*.[1] Luther also speaks of *subiectum theologiae*. True, he does so sparingly, and then only, it seems, to contrast the scholastics' "subject of theology" with his own. Perhaps his reluctance is due to the associations the term had with the Aristotelian doctrine of substance and quality. (Some of his reasons for this uneasiness will be cited later.) So seldom in fact does Luther use the term *subiectum theologiae* that, in order to find an instance of it, we have to look beyond the two Luther documents to which we have been confining this study. Still, he does employ the term. "Properly the subject of theology [*subiectum theologiae*] is man guilty of sin and condemned, and God the Justifier and Savior of man the sinner."[2] Notice, the two parties to whom Luther applies the term *subiectum theologiae* contrast sharply with the sublime *subiectum* of sholasticism. Still, for Luther too, both "man guilty of sin" and "God the Justifier" might be said to qualify for their theological subjecthood because they are "worthy" of it--the one discreditably, the other creditably. And both the sinner and God (the believer is conspicuously absent) are worthy by reason of what they inherently are and do. To that extent Luther preserves the sense of the scholastic *subiectum*.

In the above quotation Luther's *subiectum theologiae* approaches what we have been calling the grammatical or, better, the biographical subject. Certainly it does not have the epistemological significance which we, in our modern subject-object terminology

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

[2] *LW*, XII, 311. *WA*, XL/2,328,1-2.

ascribe to the "subject" as knower. Our epistemological subject is distinguished primarily by his relation to his object. The older subiectum was distinguished primarily by his relation to his own predicates, to put the matter in grammatical words. But we, too, still preserve this meaning of the word "subject" in our grammars today. By the "subject" of the sentence we do not mean the grammarian who knows the sentence, but rather that word in the sentence which, among other things, is distinguished from its predicate words. In our logic, similarly, the "subject" still refers not to the logician who thinks the proposition but to that proposition's subject-term, as distinguished from its predicate-term. Or in a given science, a body of knowledge, we still speak of the "subject" of that science, or perhaps of its "subject-matter." And by "subject" in that connection we do not mean the scientist who masters the material, but rather that which the material is about. In other words, outside the technical usage of our modern epistemologies, there are still some lively remnants of the older meaning of subiectum.

So with Ockham, for example, subiectum could mean the grammatical subject of a sentence. Or in logic, the same word subiectum referred to the subject-term of a proposition, as distinct from its predicate-term.[1] Subiectum could likewise designate subiectum scientiae, that which the science is about (de quo scitur aliquid).[2] "Subject" did not, however, have the epistemological significance which we give it when we hyphenate it with "object," the knower

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[1] Ockham: Philosophical Writings,

[2] Ibid., p. 9.

juxtaposed to what he knows. Subiectum was more likely to be hyphenated with praedicatum or, as in metaphysics, with qualitas or accidens.[1] True, as Ockham observes, there was even in his day a sense in which subiectum scientiae could refer to the one who does the knowing--more precisely, to the intellect itself (ipsemet intellectus).[2] But even here the knowing intellect is called a subiectum, not by contrast with an object which it knows, but by contrast with its own knowledge.[3] Knowledge, in other words, whether as a habitus ("habitual" knowledge) or as an act, is a qualitas.[4] And the subiectum of that qualitas, of that knowledge, is the intellect--comparably to the way in which fire is the subject in which the quality of heat inheres, or a surface is the subject in which the quality of whiteness inheres.[5] But this brings us to our point.

The same word subiectum, which in grammar referred only to words and in logic only to terms and in science only to its subject-matter,[6] finally referred also to the reality itself, the real one behind the words and the terms and the subject-matter: that subiectum whose heat or whiteness or knowledge is its own--the peccator whose guilt and condemnation are "his," the Deus who

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[1]". . . Ergo in Philosophia prima divisione substantia et accidens distincta sunt." WA, XL/1,424,27-28.

[2]Ockham: Philosophical Writings. [3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid., p. 3. [5]Ibid., p. 9.

[6]But, in this connection, see Ockham's strictures on this usage because of the implications of the term materia. Ibid., p. 8.

is in reality the Justifier and Savior. Even in this respect, however, our own current use of "subject" has not altogether broken with the past. In ordinary language our "subject" may still refer at times to that one who is and has and does, in his own right. Who, for instance, is the "subject" of Sandburg's The Prairie Years? Not the biographer Sandburg, of course, but also not the proper noun "Lincoln," nor even the logical term which Sandburg conceives by that noun, but finally Lincoln himself. Analogously, and because no other suitable term seemed available, we have had to refer to the one whom theology is about--Luther's subiectum theologiae, Barth's object who is always subject--as the biographical subject. But it is just with reference to that subject that the problem of theological predication becomes acute. Do sin and guilt and condemnation really belong to the sinner on the order that whiteness belongs to the wall, or heat to fire? If not, is it sufficient improvement to say that the subject is what he himself does, even what he does rightly and obediently? Doesn't that also distort the way in which, according to Luther, the believer is righteous and alive in Christ? Or the way the man Jesus is the Son of God?

An Apparent Exception

In a moment we shall point out that with Barth, too, for all his affinity with the modern subject-object scheme, his Subjekt usually has at least the force of a grammatical or biographical subject. But first we ought to re-examine our previous claim about Luther: namely, that his subiectum is not defined, as in modern epistemologies, by its juxtaposition as knowing subject

to known object. Ordinarily this claim might seem evident enough, without the tedious elaboration we have been giving it. However, in one passage in Luther's lectures on Galatians he seems to pose an exception. In this passage subiectum appears to mean something very much like our epistemological "subject"--subject as the cognitive counterpoise to its object.

In his exegesis of Galatians 5:5, "By faith we wait for the hope of righteousness," Luther feels constrained to clarify the meaning of faith and hope by itemizing some distinctions between them. They differ, first of all, with respect to their "subjects" ("differunt . . . subiecto"), since faith is in intellectu and hope is in voluntate.[1] So far, of course, there is no hint of a subject-object scheme. However, says Luther, faith and hope seem also to have distinguishable "objects," since the obiectum for faith is veritas et Christus, and for hope, res sperandas.[2] Offhand Luther's terminology gives the impression that he is opposing subject to object in the manner of modern epistemological practice. But he is doing nothing of the kind, as the context quickly reveals. Actually, he distinguishes faith and hope not only on two counts but on five![3] (At that, he seems to complain that he does it all against his better judgment, and

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[1] WA, XL/1,26,1-2. The word subiecto appears also in Luther's preparatory notes for this lecture. WA, XL/2,21,16.

[2] WA, XL/2,26,5,9.

[3] The five distinctions are neatly divided only in the later editions, CDE, referred to at WA, XL/2,26,26-38. However, the substance of all five distinctions appears in the original, both Handschrift and Druck. WA, XL/2,6,26ff. And the five-fold distinction appears explicitly in Luther's preparatory notes. WA, XL/1,21,15-34.

only to correct the superficial distinctions of the scholastics.)[1] Moreover, the two distinctions we have named, with respect to subjects and objects, do not even occur in succession, much less in direct contrast. By obiectum, furthermore, Luther means in this case nothing more than goal or end--somewhat as we might speak of the object or objective of our labors. His other word for "objects" in this context is finibus,[2] and elsewhere in his lectures he places obiectum in apposition with causa finalis.[3] In short, it would be sheer anachronism to infer that, because Luther here happens to use obiectum and subiectum in the same general vicinity, his subiectum must therefore resemble the epistemological subject in our subject-object terminology today.

In Luther's discussion of faith and hope, subiectum means approximately what he otherwise has to refer to, in Aristotelian parlance, as substantia.[4] In fact, in the passage we have quoted, the early translators insert their own explanation of Luther's subiecto: "that is, the ground wherein they [namely, faith and hope] rest."[5] Thus Luther is saying that faith is "in" the intellect and hope is "in" the will comparably to the way a qualitas or accidens inheres in its substantia. Therefore, there is nothing peculiarly epistemological about Luther's reference to intellect and will as subiectum. For, as he knew, in the language of his day the same word could describe fire as the "subject" of its heat

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[1] WA, XL/2,25,12-16,27-32.

[2] WA, XL/2,25,16,33.

[3] WA, XL/1,411,12.

[4] For example, WA, XL/1,280,1; 282,3.

[5] Gal, p. 459.

or a wall as the "subject" of its color. Ockham, as we mentioned, speaks the same way. The term, subject of knowledge, he says, may mean

> that which receives knowledge and has the knowledge in it as in a subject [subiective], just as a body or a surface is the subject of whiteness, and fire the subject of heat. Understood in this sense, the subject of knowledge [subiectum scientiae] is the intellect itself, because any such knowledge is an accident of the intellect.[1]

In a moment we must face the question whether Luther finds the substance-quality relation adequate for his own view of theological predication, and if not, why not. Meanwhile it is enough to bear in mind that, uniformly with the current usage of subiectum and subiective, his subiectum theologiae (though rare in his vocabulary) is set not in the epistemological relation of subject-object but in the relation of a real subject to its own predicates.

Barth's Grammatical Subject

How about Barth's Subjekt? So far as I can tell, Barth has no intention of restricting his term merely to the subject-object relation of knowledge. The Barthian subject is more by far than a knower in relation to the object of his knowing. Whether he is the subject God or the subject man, he is a subject by virtue of his enjoying real predicates of his own. How these predicates become his, is another matter. But that they are his and that he is their grammatical subject, Barth makes clear enough. There is this striking statement by Brown.

> The truth seems to be that Barth's use here of "Subject" . . . combines the grammatical sense of "subject"--the word indicating the actor or active agent in the typical sentence with

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[1] Ockham: Philosophical Writings, p. 9.

> transitive verb predicating action upon the grammatical "object" as the thing acted upon--with the technical use of "Subject" in epistemology.[1]

Indeed, so fully does Barth intend God as the grammatical subject that, as Brown warns, we must not suppose that in faith man himself is not also a subject.[2] Barth does say,

> It is not God but man who believes. But the very fact of a man thus being subject in faith is bracketed as the predicate of the subject, God.[3]

As we noted in a previous quotation, Barth describes Christ as the grammatical subject of the Christian's life.[4] And elsewhere he asserts that "the Christian religion is the predicate of the subject of the name of Jesus Christ."[5] Not only the divine subject, however, but also men in general (insofar as they are real subjects at all) are surely understood by Barth to have more than epistemological status. As our many previous quotations to this effect demonstrated, the human subject not only "posits" himself, but he is at least on the way to actualizing the self he posits. Even in the absence of the explicit adjective, "grammatical," Barth's "real man" is the biographical subject of his own predicates--however he may be bracketed within the prior subjecthood of God.

There is no thought, of course, of equating Barth's "grammatical subject" with the subiectum of the substance-quality scheme. Barth's criticisms of that scheme are too outspoken to be

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[1] Brown, p. 144.

[2] Ibid., p. 145.

[3] CD, I/1, 281.

[4] GL, p. 76.

[5] CD, I/2, 347.

ignored. What is evident, though, is that by "subject" both he and Luther refer to one who is at least in personal possession of his own predicates. This modest similarity between the two theologians now provides a new occasion, and a new urgency, for sharpening the distinctive and controversial feature in Luther's theological predication.

Preliminary Objections to Substantia

When Barth advances his own view of theological predication, he sets it in conscious opposition to the substance-quality scheme. But is that what distinguishes his view from Luther's? Of course, if Luther were committed to a substance-quality type of predication in his theology, then that fact alone might explain the offense he presents for Barth. But that cannot be the explanation. For one thing, Luther himself seems dissatisfied with the substance-quality relationship for some of the same reasons Barth does. Yet that is not all. The very corrective which Barth makes upon the substance-quality doctrine (namely, Barth's insistence upon "activity") is an incipient danger, ironically, which Luther detects already within the substance-quality doctrine itself, and which for purposes of the gospel he abjures. What Barth intends as an advance beyond the old metaphysics is what Luther, in his own way, found to be objectionable right within that metaphysics--objectionable, that is, as a vehicle for evangelical theology. This objection of Luther's, rather than any incidental affinity he may have had with the Aristotelianism of his day, bids fair to explain the disturbance he occasions in Barth. Let it be noted

in advance, however, that where Barth opposes "active" to "static," Luther opposes "active" to "passive." These two oppositions are by no means identical. But more on that in a moment.

If Barth objected to the notion of substance on the ground that it flattens out the important difference between persons and things, then we might recall similar, at least anticipatory, objections by Luther. As early as his lectures on Romans (1515-1516), as Stomps observes, Luther "expressly rejects the scholastic view which characterizes man as a substance with qualities."[1]

> We do not define the essential thing about man if we ask what he *is* the way we ask about a what (*quid*) or a thing (*res*).[2]

One of the depersonalizing effects of the doctrine of substance, we often hear, is that it tends to view the person as isolated and unrelated. If the scholastic "substance" does discourage the importance of relationships, and thereby commits the Whiteheadean "fallacy of misplaced concreteness"[3]--if, as Thomas Aquinas says, "relation has the weakest being of all the categories" and "is not among the things outside the soul but merely in the intellect"[4]--Luther, apparently, has something else to say: "God is to be sought not in the category of substance but of relation."[5] Man

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[1]M. A. H. Stomps, *Die Anthropologie Martin Luthers: Eine Philosophische Untersuchung* (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1935), p. 143.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 15.

[3]Alfred N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (A Pelican Mentor Book; New York: New American Library of World Literature, 1948), p. 52.

[4]Bochenski, p. 154.

[5]Johannes Wallmann, *Der Theologiebegriff bei Johann Gerhard und Georg Calixt* ("Beiträge zur Historischen Theologie,"

too, for Luther, is to be seen always in relation--*coram Deo*, *coram hominibus*. And his relations to others characterize, reflexively, his own most private functions. For example, his *intellectus*, as Luther understands it, is described not so much by its own capabilities as by its relation to the "object"--namely, Christ--whom it *intelligit*.

> "Intellect" takes its name from its object rather than from its own potency (contrary to philosophy).[1]

Or if it was a fault of substance philosophy that it fragmented the person with its psychological distinctions between *sensus*, *voluntas*, and *intellectus*, then

> Luther, by imbuing the old concepts of scholastic psychology with new content, completely altered their character. . . . The boundaries between the concepts have faded.[2]

"Faded," however, not because Luther had no use for distinctions, but because he restored to theological priority those biblical distinctions, for example, flesh versus spirit--which determine the person in his entirety.[3] Or, finally, if the complaint is that substance philosophy conceives of the person as essentially neutral, not either-or, then we need only recall from Luther's *De Servo Arbitrio*, as we shall in the next chapter, how every man's will is a *iumentum* (though always a willing one), ridden either by Satan or by God.[4]

No. 30; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1961), p. 19, n. 3. According to Wallmann, the above quotation is attributed to Luther--specifically, to his commentary on the twenty-sixth chapter of Genesis--by Gerhard. Wallmann, however, has not been able to locate the quotation in the Weimar edition. Neither have I.

[1] Stomps, p. 144. See also *WA*, XL/2,35,5-6.

[2] Stomps, p. 145.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 146.

[4] *WA*, XVIII, 635,17-22.

On the other hand, Luther does continue to employ the idiom of the substance-quality doctrine. He does so, partly because it was the language of his opponents, but by that token it was also the language of the Church, the same Church to which both he and his opponents had a responsibility to make their opposition clear. This explains, partially at least, his continued though ambivalent use of Aristotelian terms. Earlier we noted how he distinguished faith and hope with respect to their substance (subiecto), but we mentioned only parenthetically the discomfort he felt over this undertaking. Actually, as he warned his class, in employing the term he was speaking only crasse.[1] Similarly, when he resorts to such impersonal abstractions as "formal righteousness" or "inherent quality," he does so by way of a polemical pun, to emphasize that the really genuine formalis iustitia of faith is the concrete person, Jesus Christ.[2] Even then, as he invokes this inherited terminology, he carefully inserts "they say" (dicunt),[3] and he explains to his students that "these things are useful to know, to make Paul's argument clearer" (magis perspicua).[4] "It is a good idea for you to know this manner of speaking."[5] No doubt the reminder is still in order from our neo-scholastic brethren that "substance" is applied to persons only analogically and does not refer to an

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[1] WA, XL/2,25,16.

[2] WA, XL/1,225,23-231,19.

[3] WA, XL/1,225,24-25; 227,21.

[4] LW, XXVI, 131. WA, XL/1,231,19.

[5] LW, XXVI, 127. WA, XL/1,225,28-29.

"ontological brick."[1] But Luther, though he was aware of this qualification when he referred to the self as substantia, preferred to make the qualification explicit by adding the word "person," or by replacing substantia with persona altogether.[2]

Luther's Sinner not a "Passive Idler"

Still, it is not just in the interest of personalism, and certainly not in a romanticist feel for selfhood, that Luther opposes the substance-quality scheme. Neither does Barth. "The human subject," Barth says, "is not a substance with certain qualities or functions."[3] Why not? Presumably because such a notion would imply "that man is first a passive idler and then becomes active, as though his life were in the first instance a blank sheet on which is later written what he knows, wills, and does."[4] To think of the self as a substance with qualities is to suggest, apparently, that human freedom is "the mere latent possibility and capacity of man which is then realized in this or that particular use of his freedom.[5]

Against this "passive idler" view of the self as substance,

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[1]However, "one cannot help remarking that the theology of the manuals does not always make a careful distinction between that unique manner of existence which is peculiar to man, and the mode of being, mere objective 'being there,' which is proper to the things of nature." Edward Schillebeeck, O. P., Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God, trans. Paul Barrett, O. P., and others (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), p. 3.

[2]WA, XL/1,279,31-286,21. Luther's use of persona as a description of the self is not directly synonymous with his other use of it, as interchangeable with larva. See WA, XL/1,172,26-179,19.

[3]CD, III/2, 196.

[4]Ibid., p. 195.

[5]Ibid.

Barth advances his own definition of the human subject as that one who is precisely as he actualizes himself--always of course in responsibility to God.

> Man is, as he knows God; he is, as he decides for God; he is, as he asks after God and moves to his judgment. Thus he is, as he lives.[1]

This Barthian subject "does not 'have' a history from which it can be distinguished as a substratum."[2] "Real man is this history, i.e., . . . as it really happens that he fulfills his responsibility before God."[3] Consequently,

> we shall ask in vain to what extent man may be subject unless we have seen this subject at work in its self-positing. The human subject is not a substance with certain qualities or functions. It is the self-moving and self-moved subject in responsibility before God, or it is not a subject at all.[4]

Throughout this Barthian context the acceptable word is "active," and its pejorative opposite is "passive" or what for Barth appears to mean the same thing, "static." "It is not merely a question of man's static but of his active responsibility before God."[5]

If Luther had been restricted to just these two alternatives, he might well have leaned toward Barth's. Indeed, he seems to have had something to do, historically, with producing that alternative. At any rate, Luther does criticize the substance-quality constructs of scholasticism in a manner which strongly resembles Barth's criticism of the "static." The De Servo Arbitrio is replete with passages in which Luther attacks the notion of a human will which, as mere potency and apart from its activity,

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid., p. 159. [3] Ibid., p. 196.
[4] Ibid. [5] Ibid., p. 195. (Italics mine.)

still has positive theological significance. Such a notion, he says, is a merum figmentum Dialecticum.[1] In his exegesis of Psalm 14:3 (quoted in Romans 3:12), "They have all gone astray, they are all alike corrupt," Luther anticipates an objection from the scholastics. The Psalmist's judgment, some "sophist" may reply, is an indictment only of the sinner's acts and not of his latent ability. For, so the objection runs,

> we are able to do many things which in fact we do not do. Hence our dispute is about potency (de vi potentiae) not about the act (non de actu).[2]

Luther replies: "The words of the prophet include both the act and the potency. To say, Man does not seek God, is the same as saying, Man cannot (non potest) seek God."[3] For if there were such human potentiality, God would not allow it to remain idle, and so someone surely would give evidence of actualizing this power. But that is not what the psalm says. Rather, God looks down from heaven and does not see even one who either seeks or tries to seek.[4]

A similar passage in Genesis (6:5) evokes a similar reply from Luther. From this passage Erasmus had concluded: "The proneness to evil (proclivitas ad malum), which is present in most men, does not entirely remove free will."[5] But why, says Luther a bit self-consciously, doesn't Erasmus (from whom Luther himself has learned much about the Scriptures) consult the Hebrew? "Chol Ietzer Mahescheboth libbo rak ra chol ha iom."[6] "That is, 'Every

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[1] WA, XVIII, 670,1. [2] Ibid., p. 762, ll. 17-18.
[3] Ibid., ll. 18-20. (Italics mine.) [4] Ibid., ll. 20-25.
[5] Ibid., p. 736, ll. 8-9. [6] Ibid., ll. 20-22.

imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil every day.'"[1] Where, pray, does Moses say anything about "proneness" (de pronitate)? The depth of man's evil is "that he neither does nor is able to do otherwise."[2] Perhaps Erasmus dreams that, between posse velle bonum and non posse velle bonum, there is some middle ground, namely, willing in the abstract (absolutum velle)--willing, pure and simple (purem et merum velle).[3] In reply to this notion, Luther first of all turns it against Erasmus' own conclusion. Then he observes more generally that the notion of a medium et purum velle

> sprang from an ignorance of realities (rerum) and a preoccupation with vocables--as if reality were always like it is construed in vocables, such as are infinite among the Sophists, The real situation rather is as Christ says, He who is not with me is against me. He does not say, He who is not with me is not against me either, but is somewhere in the middle.[4]

"Neither God nor Satan," Luther concludes, "allows us a merum et purum velle." Rather, "we will sin and evil, we speak sin and evil, we do sin and evil."[5]

It would be difficult, as we recall Barth's criticism of "substance," to conceive a more "active" and less "static" view of the human subject than Luther does of the human sinner. Here is no "passive idler" whose life is "in the first instance a blank sheet on which is later written what he knows, wills, and does." Still, it is right here--that is, with reference to the sinner--that Barth himself demurs. The Barthian sinner, though Barth

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[1] Ibid., ll. 22-23. [2] Ibid., ll. 20-26.

[3] Ibid., p. 669, ll. 20-26. [4] Ibid., p. 670, ll. 2-6.

[5] Ibid., ll. 8-11. (Italics mine.)

could hardly describe him as "static" and "passive" in his sinning, is nevertheless not a "real subject." Because he is a sinner, he is, by definition, not "actively responsible" to God. That is, he does not in actuality know God, obey him, give thanks to him. But is he still responsible, though he may not actualize his responsibility? Is he, as we might say, held responsible even though he is not being responsible? Such a responsibility, Barth seems to be saying, would be a merely "static" responsibility. With Luther, as we shall see again in the next chapter, the sinner is very actively engaged not only in being a sinner but in being the very sinner God wrathfully holds him responsible for being--living out his subjecthood in precise confirmation of the divine judgment against him. But with Barth it is not until, and only insofar as, a man is "actively"--that is, obediently--responsible that he is a real subject. Short of that, what is he? An unactualized substance? A potency not yet realized? No, not if that implies that he possesses a positive, inherent potentiality for actualizing himself in obedience. But neither could the scholastics' sinner do so without the intervention of divine grace.[1] Is Barth's sinner, because he

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[1]However, as Luther observes, there were exceptions. "Others are not even that good, such as Scotus and Occam. They said that this love which is given by God is not necessary to obtain the grace of God, but that even by his own natural powers a man is able to produce a love for God above all things." LW, XXVI, 128. WA, XL/1,226,20-22. Of course, the question for Luther was not primarily whether our righteousness is actualized in us with the divine help, or without it, but rather whether that righteousness, even with the divine help, has anything to do with our justification. Paul "is contrasting the righteousness of faith with the righteousness of the entire Law, with everything that can be done on the basis of the Law, whether by divine power or by human." LW, XXVI, 122. WA, XL/1,218,15-18. "A work performed in accordance with the Law . . .--whether this is done by natural powers or by human strength or by free will or by the gift and power of God--

is less than "active," still less than "real"? But that much, in a way, could be said of that "willing in the abstract" (velle absolutum) which Luther imputed to Erasmus. Is Barth's sinner "nothing"--nihil, as Luther's sinner is, coram Deo? No, not nothing, but neither fully real--not yet. We are reminded of the scholastic view of faith as a blank sheet (tabula) until it becomes active, formaliter and realiter, in grace.[1] It seems, after all, that the Barthian program for replacing a static substance with an active subject does not extend to the sinner. But it does for Luther. That is why, for him, homo peccator can be "properly" a subiectum theologiae.

Luther's Believer as Active Subject

For Luther, moreover, not only man the sinner but also the same man as believer, although in Christ he is emphatically "passive," is simultaneously a believing self in action, an operative subject--"a maker, a worker, a doer."[2] Still, what the believer does, even as believer--whether glorifying God or giving thanks to him or fulfilling the first commandment or loving the neighbor, or believing as such--is not what makes the believer what he is, coram Deo, in his responsibility before God. What he is, responsibly before God, is what Christ does and is, whom the believer receives as a gift, passive.[3] Nevertheless--or rather, for that

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still does not justify." LW, XXVI, 123. WA, XL/1,219,18-21.

[1] WA, XL/2,35,5.

[2] WA, XL/2,36,15-16. (Translation mine.)

[3] LW, XXVI, 348. WA, XL/1,533,29-31.

very reason--the believer is not only passive (which is very different from static) but also intensely active.[1]

Faith, "after it has justified, non stertet ociosa sed est per charitatem operosa."[2] Though the Christian is altogether passive before God, "who does not need our works," yet before his neighbors--"who do not derive any benefit from faith but do derive benefit from works or from our love"--he is energetically engaged in doing good, bearing evil, righting the wrong.[3] And his love is not, as the scholastics dream, the power which activates his faith, as if faith itself were "idle." Rather his love is faith's own doing. Faith, in this relation, is not an idle quality, if indeed it is a quality at all. Rather it is a subject: "an effective and active something, a kind of substance or, as they call it, a 'substantial form.'"[4] This of course does not describe the role faith plays in justification. Justification is by faith alone, that is, by a faith which is sharply distinguished from all "doing," also from faith's own doing.[5] Still, faith in fact is never alone and is never idle.[6] Thus in speaking of faith, we must (as the Holy Spirit himself does) speak "sometimes, if I may speak this way, about an abstract or absolute faith, . . . [as] when Scripture

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[1] LW, XXVI, 269. WA, XL/1,421,6-10.

[2] WA, XL/2,37,24-25.

[3] LW, XXVII, 30. WA, XL/2,37,28-30; 39,1-2.

[4] LW, XXVII, 20. ". . . efficacem et operosam quidditatem ac velut substantiam seu formam (ut vocant) substantialem." WA, XL/2,36,11-12. This passage is from Luther's own hand.

[5] WA, XL/1,426,23-26.

[6] ". . . Non manet sola, id est, otiosa." WA, XL/1,427,11-12.

speaks absolutely about justification." But at other times, as Scripture also does, we must speak of faith as a "concrete, composite, or incarnate faith"[1]--"fides operata et laborans."[2] Faith "always justifies alone. But it is incarnate and becomes man; that is, it neither is nor remains idle or without love."[3]

In fact, even when Luther is speaking of faith as justifying, as the believer's apprehension of Christ, he is careful to point out that that faith too, though entirely passive toward Christ, is not an "idle" thing psychologically. That is what the scholastics had made of faith: "an idle quality or an empty husk in the heart, which may exist in a state of mortal sin until love comes along to make it alive."[4] For the scholastics, by contrast, the really telling quality of the heart was love. Luther, at least for polemical purposes, counters with another qualitas: faith. Psychologically, the believer too can show a "quality and a formal righteousness in corde."[5] Faith is "certa fiducia cordis et firmus assensus." But see how the sentence ends: "quo Christus apprehenditur."[6] The behavioral component of faith is its least important feature. What gives the believer his forma--that is, his real identity--is not what he is doing, even as believer, but the Christ whom he believingly possesses.

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[1] LW, XXVI, 264. WA, XL/1,414,27-415,14.

[2] WA, XL/1,415,7.

[3] LW, XXVI, 272. WA, XL/1,427,13-14.

[4] LW, XXVI, 129. WA, XL/1,228,31-33.

[5] LW, XXVI, 132. WA, XL/1,232,23-25.

[6] WA, XL/1,228,33-34.

> Therefore the Christ who is grasped by faith and who lives in the heart is the true Christian righteousness, on account of which God counts us righteous and grants us eternal life.[1]

What is more, faith seems to be less a qualitas than a subject, a whole new self. When Luther is left alone with the biblical text and is not constrained to burst the scholastic terms with new wine, he marvels at the audacious language of John and Paul.[2] "To all who believed in him he gave power to become children of God" (John 1:12). "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith" (Gal. 3:26). It is not what we do, not our obedience to the divine commands, which defines our rebirth "in novam naturam seu nativitatem."[3] That is achieved only through faith. "Which faith? In Christum."[4] And how radically it is "in Christum" appears from the sequel: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). Now it is a blessed consequence of this baptism, says Luther, that for the baptized person himself "a new will, a new light, a new flame spring up in his heart"--also "timor, fiducia Dei, spes, etc."[5] It is not this, however, which is the secret of his rebirth. What gives him his new identity is that other one whom he puts on. "Putting on," which in this case is not one "of imitation but of birth and of a new creation, means that I put on Christ himself, his very own righteousness, salvation, power, life."[6] Luther, with his fondness for proverbs, could have done much with "Clothes make the man."

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[1] LW, XXVI, 130. WA, XL/1,229,28-30.

[2] WA, XL/1,539,27-32. [3] Ibid., l. 19. [4] Ibid., l. 24.

[5] Ibid., p. 540, ll. 6-7,31. [6] Ibid., ll. 2-3. (Hs.)

Elsewhere Luther finds Paul saying that he no longer lives in his old "I."[1] Still, live he does, and not idly but actively and not as the old "Paulus" but as someone new, "Christianus."[2] But it is not what he does, even as "Christianus," which makes him the "Christianus" he is. Rather it is that other one by whom he is characterized.[3] That is to say, Paul the Christian is not only a subject bracketed within the subjecthood of Christ, nor even a predicate--that is, the doing--of the subject, Christ. More than that (if we may speak crasse), Christ is the predicate of Paul: "Christum, qui solus est iustitia et vita mea."[4] Now this sounds scandalously as though Christ were Paul's own doing, Paul's creation--but only according to that view of predication (whether Barthian or scholastic) whereby the subject is what he does. Yet the biblical predication, at least as Luther sees it, cannot be contained in that exclusively activistic view of the subject. And that may well be why Luther does not refer to the believer as "subiectum theologiae." The believer's decisive theological predicates, unlike those of his sinnerhood, are not his own doing. The believer, on the contrary, is defined not in his relation to his own activity but to his "object." "Hereo intentus in isto obiecto, Christus."[5] It is tempting to suppose, therefore, that a theology like Luther's might have influenced the later shift from subject-predicate to subject-object. Even that, however, would not yet accommodate Luther's view of faith. For, although the believing

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[1] Ibid., p. 283, ll. 19-32.
[2] Ibid., p. 287, l. 31.
[3] Ibid., ll. 31-33.
[4] Ibid., p. 282, l. 28.
[5] Ibid., p. 283, ll. 1-2.

subject is brought into active being by the object whom he believes, still it is not his believing which gives him his identity as subject. His very object, Christ, serves him (so to speak) as his definitive predicate. Hence both the subject-object scheme and the subject-predicate scheme are needed to express the relation of believer to Christ, and yet both schemes, in turn, are inadequate. Both require to be transformed by a "new and theological grammar."

Ea Nostra Non Sunt

So we return, as we anticipated we must, to the problem of theological predication. The problem emerges in Barth's offense at Luther as it did in the scholastics' offense at him. For all their differences (and they are vast), the Barthian critique seems at this point to be only more subtle, though more urbane and good-natured, than that of the scholastics. Erasmus (whom Luther thanked for having at least attacked the real issue of the Reformation)[1] put the matter with eloquent simplicity and without recourse to Aristotelian terms: If the things which Christ ascribes to us are not our own spontaneous doing, then "they are not ours" (ea nostra non sunt).[2]

Luther, as usual, was not at a loss for an answer.

> Are not the things which we ourselves did not produce, but actually received from others, still very properly said to be "ours"? Why then should not works, given to us by God through his Spirit, be called ours? Because we did not

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[1]"Moreover, I give you hearty praise and commendation on this further account--that you alone, in contrast with all others, have attacked the real thing, that is, the essential issue." BoW, p. 319. WA, XVIII,786,26-27.

[2]WA, XVIII, 696,20-22.

> create Christ but only received him, may we not call him ours? Conversely, if we do create those things which are called ours, then it is we who created our eyes for ourselves, we who created our hands for ourselves, we who created our feet for ourselves, unless eyes, hands, and feet are not to be called ours. Rather, as Paul says, What have we that we have not received?[1]

This, to be sure, does not represent the whole of Luther's answer. That requires an examination of his larger theological context, which we shall attempt in our remaining chapters. Meanwhile we might note that, a few lines after his above reply, Luther confronts another passage which Erasmus cites against him. It is the very passage from John (1:12) which we encountered earlier, "To them he have power to become children of God."[2] In reply, Luther borrows a technical term which later, in his Galatians lectures, he will develop into a major theological theme, passive. Here--that is, in the Johannine "transmutation" of the old man into a child of God--

> Man has his self [sese habet] merely passive (as it is said). He does not achieve but altogether becomes something [nec facit quippiam sed fit totus].[3]

Luther's passive, though it is the opposite of active, is anything but idle (otiosa). He speaks of that "heavenly and passive" righteousness by which, although "we do not perform it [but] . . . accept it by faith," we are "made to bear the image of the heavenly" Adam and not "the image of the earthly Adam" (I Cor. 15:49), and by which we are that

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[1] Ibid., ll. 22-29.

[2] Ibid., p. 697, l. 21.

[3] Ibid., ll. 27-28. (Italics mine.)

> new man in a new world, where there is no Law, no sin, no conscience, no death, but perfect joy, righteousness, grace, peace, life, salvation, and glory.[1]

Passive, literally, may describe the way a thing takes its identity from the "form" which inheres in it. But when Luther employs this usage to describe Christ's relation to the believer, he strains the terminology beyond its capacity--and he knows that he does. Christ, he says,

> is my forma, gracing my faith [fidem ornans] as color or light graces the wall. (So crassly must I describe the matter. For we cannot grasp spiritually that Christ inheres and abides in us so closely and intimately as light or whiteness inheres in the wall.)[2]

Luther is not describing the passivity of the mystic. He is speaking only from faith and strictly "de iustificatione."[3] But precisely when the concern is with justification, when the law summons a sinner to "active responsibility" before God, then he must know how to be the passive beneficiary of another's predicates--and, conversely, how to be that other one's predicates.

> Therefore the one and only way to avoid the curse is to believe and to say with sure confidence: "Thou, O Christ, art my sin and my curse"; or rather: "I am Thy sin, Thy curse, Thy death, Thy wrath of God, Thy hell. But Thou art my Righteousness, Blessing, Life, Grace of God, and Heaven."[4]

The same passive predication applies whether the beneficiary is the individual Christian or the one holy Church. The Church, too, is not holy formaliter, in the way a white wall is white inhaerente. Her inherent holiness "ist zu infirma." Yet "where this inherent

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[1] LW, XXVI, 8. WA, XL/1,46,28-47,14.

[2] WA, XL/1,283,26-29. (Translation mine.)

[3] WA, XL/1,284,21; 285,15.

[4] WA, XL/1,454,19-23.

holiness is not enough, Christ is."[1]

What may encourage the impression that Luther's passive is essentially "static" is his recurrent use of abstract nouns like righteousness and life. Iustitia and vita, even though they be God's, suggest timeless and impersonal universals, without any intrinsic reference to historical action. However, even without invoking Luther's "nominalistic" attitude toward universals, we need only the reminder that for him the iustitia Dei, which now accrues to the believer as his very own, is inseparable from Jesus Christ[2]--and always that historic and living Christ, than whom Luther knows no other: "filius Dei ac virginis, traditus et mortuus pro peccatis nostris."[3] And there is nothing inactive about him. True, in his role as sin-bearer, as that one condemned by the law in our stead, Christ was passive non active.[4] But by this passive Luther hardly had in mind something "static." It meant, rather, to "bear the judgment and curse of the Law, sin, death."[5] And this "passion" was all in the interest of a project altogether active: "ideo passus legem, ut mea redimeret."[6] Christ is "passive" as the bearer of our sin and death, and we are "passive" as bearers of his righteousness and life. Both ways, the predication, though gratuitous, is real. "Whatever sins I, you, and all of us have committed or may commit in the future,

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[1] LW, XXVI, 109. WA, XL/1,197,25-198,14 (Hs.: 197,7-198,2).

[2] WA, XL/1,373,16-17.

[3] WA, XL/1,90,26-27.

[4] WA, XL/1,568,22.

[5] LW, XXVI, 372. WA, XL/1,568,19-20.

[6] WA, XL/1, 568,7 (Hs.).

they are as much Christ's own as if He Himself had committed them. . . . Or we shall perish eternally."[1] It is this "true knowledge of Christ" which the scholastics are said to have "obscured."[2]

They obscured it, Luther charged, with their image of Christ as a new lawgiver and with their insistence upon a righteousness which, in order to qualify as a man's own, must be activa. This scholastic insistence, by whatever name, had a long and varied history behind it. And we are indebted to Paul Vignaux for his concise but illuminating recounting of that history.[3] According to Peter Lombard, the Master of the Sentences, faith and hope were "qualities in the soul," but charity, by contrast, was not. Charity--since "God is love"--was not only a gift of God but was God himself giving himself to the soul. Thomas Aquinas later rejected Peter Lombard's position at this point. For, as Thomas argued,

> if an act of loving were to proceed only from the divine Spirit, the human soul would find itself moved but would not itself be the source of the action. What would then become of spontaneity, a constitutive part of voluntary action, of the will as the source of merit?[4]

On the other hand, if charity is a habitus, as Thomas argued it was, then,

> when once received, we have it, it belongs to us; a created form, it enters into our composition and is united with our substance.[5]

Thus the scholastic doctrine of merit was preserved intact. But

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[1] LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1,435,16-19.

[2] LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1,435,20.

[3] Paul Vignaux, Philosophy in the Middle Ages, trans. E. C. Hall (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), pp. 207-10.

[4] Ibid., p. 208.

[5] Ibid., p. 209.

it seems to me what was once a concern for "merit" might, in more modern and secular language, be put another way. M. D. Chenu, remarks Vignaux, "has expressed this [namely, Thomas' view] very well: from the Thomistic point of view, he says, 'the charity of Peter Lombard was not our love of God in the full sense of a human possession.'"[1]

Here is much the same concern which prompted Erasmus' complaint against Luther, "ea nostra non sunt." The gifts of God to us, in order for them rightfully to become "ours," must be actualized by us in our own actions. These gifts do not describe what we are, as real predicates of us as their subjects, except as we do them. As we mentioned earlier, the very feature with which Barth seeks to correct the substance-quality scheme--namely, his insistence that the subject is a subject only by virtue of his own active responsibility, or else is not a subject at all--curiously resembles that feature which Luther detects already within the substance-quality scheme and which, for theological purposes, repudiates. Luther sees in the scholastic charitas, that infused and effectual quality in the soul, an attempt to exploit the divine grace for the Roman doctrine of meritorious work. Luther's objection to this charitas, in other words, was not merely that it implied a static conception of selfhood but, on the contrary, that it supposedly enabled the self to find its responsible being before God in its own actualization of his grace, thus destroying the benefits of Christ.[2]

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[1] Ibid. [2] WA, XL/1,230,17-231,19.

Later on, therefore, in the Tridentine counterattack upon Luther's doctrine, it became important for the Roman theologians to distinguish sharply between the righteousness of the Christian and the righteousness of Christ.

> Why is this differentiation between the righteousness of the Christian and that of Christ so important to the Council of Trent? Why is it so important to characterize this righteousness as one's own, inherent righteousness? The reason was advanced in the Council's discussion of this subject: Because, otherwise, merit would be eliminated, that is, the possibility of assigning salvation to man in genuine recognition of his own renewed being and the works issuing from this renewed being.[1]

This is not the place to review the more recent Roman attitudes toward merit, nor Hans Küng's Roman appreciation of Barth's doctrine of justification--and certainly not to suggest that the doctrine of merit is revived by Barth.

However, it is at least a considerable question whether Barth's objections to Luther at this point are not analogous to those he incurred from his scholastic critics. For one thing, Luther would still have to reckon with Barth's criticism of those "who want everything different and think they can have everything different."[2] And it is not hard to imagine that Luther's "new and theological grammar" might well antagonize the Barthian doctrine that the subject is what he obediently does. Similarly, Barth refuses to make man the sort of theological object Luther makes of him, but refuses for fear that man would then be credited with a status he does not deserve. Yet this very assumption of a deserving, creditable subject (who as such therefore must be restricted

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[1]Wilfried Joest, "The Doctrine of Justification of the Council of Trent," Lutheran World, IX, No. 3 (July, 1962), 208.

[2]CD, IV/1, 773.

to the "real man" and to God) has far less affinity with Luther than with Feuerbach, and with the perennial moralism which Luther regarded as a principal obstacle to the gospel. In his critique of Barth, Gustav Wingren argues that, since Barth is preoccupied with revelation as knowledge and sin as ignorance, he misses the fundamental problem of the Reformation and of the Bible.[1] Yet, Wingren's criticism apart, it may be that at another level in Barthian theology the fundamental problem of the Reformation does reassert itself--as a problem. At any rate, it is with that problem before us that we now encounter, frontally and no longer obliquely, Luther's treatment of man as the object of theology.

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[1]Wingren, pp. 23, 26-27, 44.

PART III

HOW LUTHER'S THEOLOGY IS ABOUT MAN

CHAPTER VII

MAN THE SINNER

Duae Theologicae Cognitiones

As we quoted earlier, Luther designates a twofold subiectum theologiae: "The proper subject of theology is man guilty of sin and condemned, and God the Justifier and Savior of man the sinner."[1] That Luther seriously intends theological knowledge as twofold is a plain fact, although this fact is not as clearly recognized by all his commentators. For instance, in Johannes Wallmann's otherwise excellent study of John Gerhard and George Calixt, the author recurs to this same quotation from Luther.[2] What Wallmann concludes from the passage, however, is that here Luther is emphasizing the relational character of the theological subject. That is, the subject is God and man not separately but in a unitary relationship with each other: the relation of justification. To that end Wallmann underscores "the little word 'and' in Luther's formula about the sinful man andthe justifying God."[3]

> The little word "et" in the formula, "homo peccati reus ac perditus et Deus instificans," does not at all function as an enumeration or copulative between two objective magnitudes, in the way in which we might speak of a table and a cabinet. Rather this "et" takes God and man together in what becomes thematic for theology, the unity of the event of justification.[4]

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[1] LW, XII, 311. WA, XL/2,328,17-18.

[2] Wallmann, pp. 18-19. [3] Ibid., p. 60. [4] Ibid., pp.60-61.

With this "and," says Wallmann, theology abandons the metaphysical thought-world of substantial objects and becomes instead theology of history. For in history what is real is not things (res) but the interpersonal event.[1]

Let us admit, not grudgingly but gratefully, that Wallmann's conclusion has much to be said for it, though it is hardly that conclusion which Luther intends in the quotation at hand. Surely Luther does mean, here and elsewhere, that the subject of theology is always God and man not as isolated entities but in their personal, historical relations. And if, as Wallmann proceeds to show, Gerhard later initiates a separation between the divine and human subjects, then Gerhard is no doubt guilty of the "de-historizing" with which Wallmann charges him. But Luther, especially in the passage under consideration, means to emphasize that these admittedly personal, historical relations between God and man are not always the same kind. They are two distinctly different, yes, "contrary," relations.[2] And unless their contrariety is assiduously observed, what suffers is exactly "the unity of the event of justification."

That is why Luther prefaces his statement by saying, "Hae sunt istae duae Theologicae cognitiones."[3] The first "theological cognition," he says, is about man (cognitio hominis) and the other is about God (cognitio Dei). But Luther does not mean, of course, that in the one case man is known apart from God, and in the other, God is known apart from man. If man is singled out in the first

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[1] Ibid. [2] WA, XL/2,328,32.

[3] WA, XL/2,327,35.

instance and God in the second, it is because they are, respectively, the active subjects, the agents responsible for what in each case is said about the divine-human relationship. In the cognitio hominis man is the one who sins, not God. In the cognitio Dei God is the one who saves, not man. Yet in both cognitions, vastly different though the two cognitions are, man and God are known in intimate relation to each other. The cognitio hominis Theologica refers not to man alone but to man in his relationship, albeit his intolerabilis relationship, to God. "It means to feel and to experience the intolerable burden of the wrath of God."[1] The cognitio Dei Theologica likewise means knowing not only God but man, so that the sinner may say of himself:

> Though I am a sinner in myself, I am not a sinner in Christ, who has been made Righteousness for us (I Cor. 1:30). I am righteous and justified through Christ, who is and is called the Justifier because He belongs to sinners and was sent for sinners.[2]

These are the "duae Theologicae cognitiones": "A man should know himself, should know, feel, and experience that he is guilty of sin and subject to death; but he should also know the opposite [contrarium], that God is the Justifier and Redeemer of a man who knows himself this way."[3]

The present chapter is an example of the first cognitio Theologica, the sinner's cognitio suipsius, drawn mostly from Luther's De Servo Arbitrio. In the remaining chapters we return to the "contrary" cognitio, by way of Luther's understanding of

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[1] LW, XII, 310. WA, XL/2,327,14.

[2] LW, XII, 311. WA, XL/2,327,31-35.

[3] LW, XII, 311-12. WA, XL/2,328,30-33.

the man Christ Jesus and of man the believer in Christ. It would be misleading, however, were this division to suggest that Luther separates the two cognitiones as two chapters in a book, as though, when a man proceeds to the second, the first is over and done with. The justified man continues to be, always and simultaneously, a sinner. And he knows himself as both, contrarily though not contradictorily, for he is not both sinful and righteous under the same circumstance. It is true--for Luther, shockingly true--that most men never advance beyond the knowledge of themselves as sinners, and not even very far within this knowledge. And the pity of it is, their wretched condition obtains despite their inability to recognize it. So the first truth about men, that they are the condemned enemies of God, has a grim and conclusive validity independently of any second truth about them. But it is not the case, the other way around, that men may know themselves justified who do not know their own sin and lostness. Indeed, how abjectly lost they are does not fully come home to them until they discover the wondrous ends to which the merciful God has gone to effect their rescue. The first cognitio persists as a built-in presupposition of the second--although then only as a presupposition and no longer as the last word.

Ira Dei

The De Servo Arbitrio reveals how personally and historically related to God a man is, not only in "the event of justification," but also in his knowing himself a sinner. And not only in his knowing his sin but in his being a sinner. For that, let us repeat, is the issue before us. Not: how do we know we are

sinners. But: how <u>are</u> we the sinners we know? How is this sin in reality ours? Luther could not begin to answer the question without direct and essential reference to God. Sinners we are because God knows we are, and his judgment is unerring. But if that were all--and it might be more tolerable if it were--God's transcendent judgment need involve no particularly personal and historical relation with the sinner himself. But it is just such a relation which is at work, with oppressive immanence, not only in the sinner's self-knowledge but in his very sin. According to the Scriptures and his own and others' substantiating experience, Luther finds the sinner face to face with a God who is actively implementing his angry judgment within the sinner's life, rather in his death, fixing him in his sin, solidifying the hostility between them, and thus destroying the only real self the sinner has. And if such a God is a scandalous offense to everything a man holds reasonable and right (as he was also to Luther), then that very offense is but further confirmation of the fatal truth.

It is this unbearable fact, that a man dies of sin under a God he finds hateful and yet irrefutable, which explains Luther's previous, apparently subjective talk about "feeling" and "experiencing" sin and wrath. Luther is not out to induce a mood of depression, or to invite others to experiment with its effects upon themselves. Moreover, when a human self is perishing, what point is there in distinguishing nicely between his experience of dying and the fact of it? "This knowledge of sin," Luther explains, "is not some sort of speculation or an idea which the mind thinks up for itself. . . . It does not mean, as the pope taught, to call to

mind what one has done and what one has failed to do."[1] Rather it is the horrifying discovery a man makes whose despair of God and of himself "casts him into hell" ["in infernum deiicit"]:

> In the face of a righteous God, what shall a man do who knows that his whole nature has been crushed by sin and that there is nothing left on which he can rely, but that his righteousness has been reduced to exactly nothing?[2]

His cognitio peccati, therefore, is "verus sensus, vera experientia et gravissimum certamen cordis."[3] The gravity of the sinner's experience, in other words, lies not in the intensity of his despair but in its veracity, which is verified by the ira Dei.[4]

The desperateness of the sinner's self-knowledge may seem at first to be belied by the level tone in which Luther announces his project in the De Servo Arbitrio. His critic, Erasmus, had virtually dismissed the questions of free-will and divine foreknowledge as unessential to the Christian life. To say that, Luther replies, is like the poet or the farmer or the soldier who undertakes his life's work without asking in advance whether he has the necessary competence for it.[5] So far, Luther's cognitio suipsius seems little more than a prudent act of personal stock-taking. It was somewhat in this prudential spirit, we recall, that a cautious self-assessment was advised, in their epistemo-

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[1] LW, XII, 310. WA, XL/2,326,34-327,13.

[2] LW, XII, 311. WA, XL/2,327,23-26.

[3] WA, XL/2, 326, 35-36. (Italics mine.)

[4] WA, XL/2,327,14.

[5] WA, XVIII, 611,26-612,11.

logical inquiries, by John Locke and Immanuel Kant.[1]

But Luther wastes no time in assuring Erasmus that the latter's "moderate, skeptical theology" is worse by far than "imprudent." It is "psychotic" (insania).[2] To keep men in the dark about what is and what is not within their power, says Luther, is to hide from them the life-and-death necessity to repent. "Impenitence, however, is the unforgivable sin."[3] "Cognitio suipsius, cognitio et gloria Dei" are at stake here--and, with that, man's eternal destiny.[4] Erasmus' prescription is suicidal "folly."[5] Reinhold Niebuhr, also on the issue of human destiny, has given us a household word: "Nothing is incredible as an answer to an unasked question."[6] For Luther, the cognitio suipsius is the putting of that question, and he has his own stock of epigrams for this: "Hunger is the best cook," "Dry earth covets

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[1]"After we had awhile puzzled ourselves, without coming any nearer a resolution of those doubts which perplexed us, it came into my thoughts that we took a wrong course; and that before we set ourselves upon inquiries of that nature, it was necessary to examine our own abilities, and see what objects our understandings were, or were not, fitted to deal with." John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, in Locke: Selections, ed. S. P. Lamprecht (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), p. 85.

"My purpose is to convince all those who find it worth their while to occupy themselves with metaphysics: that it is absolutely necessary to suspend their work for the present, to regard everything that has happened hitherto as not having happened, and before all else first to raise the question: 'whether such a thing as metaphysics is possible at all.'" Immanuel Kant, Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, trans. and ed. Peter G. Lucas (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1953), p. 3.

[2]WA, XVIII, 613, 3,7. [3]Ibid., l. 23.

[4]Ibid., p. 614, l.18; p. 613,l.19. [5]Ibid., ll. 15,19.

[6]Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), II, 6.

rain," etc.[1] But the question does not originate with the sinner himself, nor is it thrust upon him merely by the contradictions of his own existence. He is subjected to the question by a God who contradicts his own creatures, and apparently his own goodness, and by this contradiction impels sinners to their death. Luther's cognitio suipsius is not only, as in John Osborne's Luther it sometimes seems to be, a modern man's search for his own identity.[2] Rather it is that self-knowledge to which a sinner is driven by a God who in his holy fury refuses the sinner the comfort even of his self-knowledge.

A first glance at the De Servo Arbitrio might leave the impression that Luther, simply by showing the utter dependence of man upon the prior decision of God, intends this as the ground of the gospel. Far from it. A presupposition of the gospel, yes. But not a sufficient reason. True, Luther does argue that, unless everything comes to pass as God intends, there is no relying upon his gracious promises.[3] And Luther repeatedly scores Erasmus for betraying this prerequisite of the Christian faith. But the bare truth of God's necessitating foreknowledge, and there is such a bare truth, is the truth about the bare God (Deus nudus), bared of

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[1] WA, XL/1,509,23-24.

[2] Osborne sees "in Luther's problem not so much a sexual crisis as an 'identity crisis.' Who am I? was his basic question. How can I find and grasp a reliable meaning for my life? But this is rather different from Luther's actual question: 'How can I find a gracious God?' And just there lies the most subtle yet most pervasive modernization in the play--the shift that Paul Tillich has identified as the transition from the problem of 'guilt and condemnation' in the Reformation era to the problem of 'emptiness and meaninglessness' in our own time." Franklin Sherman, Review of Luther by John Osborne, The Christian Century, LXXVII (December 27, 1961), p. 1562.

[3] WA, XVIII,619,1-5.

all forgiving mercy.[1] Nor does Luther mean, when he speaks of God's "clothing" himself in the mercy of Christ, that this "wrapping" is but an earthly extension or disclosure of God in his naked majesty. The God who wills all men to be saved is God only as he is in Jesus Christ. As such, he does not simply continue but opposes himself as the one who, in his terrifying majesty, "saves so few and damns so many."[2] To appeal to the latter as though he were "kindness itself" is to fly in the face of the facts, sanguinely and irrationally, but worse than that: it is to call God a liar.[3] Yet even that blasphemy could not occur without his insistent, inescapable co-operation.

Deus mala per malos faciat

Now the protest is irrepressible: How can God, a just God, work evil in men? Luther replies that, for his part, it should be enough to take God's word for it and not to press the question. Nevertheless, "in deference to reason--to human foolishness, that is--I am willing to try aping its stupidity and folly if by that means we can budge it."[4] Even then, Luther makes no attempt to explain why God works evil in men--why God hardened Pharaoh, why he hated Esau before he was born, why the potter rejects his own handiwork (all passages which Erasmus had quoted and then figuratively explained away)--for that Why is the very mystery God has forbidden us to search.[5] Luther's deliberate "folly" is meant

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[1] WA, XVIII, 684,32-686,13.

[2] BoW, p. 101. WA, XVIII, 633, 16.

[3] WA, XVIII,609,15-614,26; 618,19-619,15.

[4] Ibid., p. 709, ll. 8-9. [5] Ibid., p. 684, ll. 32-40.

only to illustrate how God works evil, in order to reassert that he does.

God drives a man in his evil, first of all, from within.[1] The God of the Scriptures is no languid spectator but the omnipotent, ceaselessly active, all-effective Creator.[2] Satan himself, and the compliant sinners he "rides," do not for a moment escape God's impelling operation upon them.[3] If they could, they would be "nothing," which they are not, and God would not be the almighty Creator Scripture everywhere attests.[4] As God sweeps men relentlessly onward in their sin, they would like to alibi (perhaps heroically, perhaps in self-pity) that in that case they are not responsible subjects but mere automata, and that their sin is finally God's doing.[5] But their evasion is groundless, for God only takes them as the willing subjects they are, by nature self-centered and opposed to him.[6] And, willing as they inevitably and universally do, he rushes them on--"allowing none of them to keep holiday"--to actualize the hostile and justly hated selves they are.[7] As nothing less than willing subjects does God treat them when, secondly, he confronts them from without, with his word, whether law or gospel.[8] But this word, again, only evokes from them (as God foreknew and willed it should) their fury or scorn or

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[1] Ibid., p. 712, ll. 6-7. [2] Ibid., ll. 19-24.

[3] Ibid., p. 709, ll. 12-28. [4] Ibid., ll. 15-21.

[5] WA, XVIII,720,28-722,29; 729,7-731,13.

[6] Ibid., p. 709, ll. 28-36.

[7] BoW. p. 206. WA, XVIII, 710,37-711,1.

[8] Ibid., p. 712, ll. 7-8.

indifference which is characteristic of their being.[1] So it is that God works evil in men. But to blame our evil on him only reiterates how effectual in us his wrath really is.

Comes a new objection: To say of God that he is wrathful or, worse, that he hates is to make him out to be arbitrary and irrational.[2] His judgments, if they are to be divine and not erratically human, must be occasioned by some reason--namely the deservedness or undeservedness of man. Luther, however, does not claim credit for inventing the language of divine hatred.[3] Didn't Erasmus agree to be bound by Scripture?[4] Furthermore, the whole point in the biblical view of God's hatred (for example, that he hated Esau before he was born) is that his hatred is anything but impulsive, as ours is. That, precisely, is the awful truth of the matter. God's hatred is altogether according to plan, rooted in his precedent, eternal, unwavering decision.[5] If the historical Esau subsequently proved to be deserving of God's hatred, that was, so to speak, after the fact.[6] The truth is that man does not make the rules of the game and that God, who does, deals with no one unjustly.[7] He violates no promises, and his eternal rejection of

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[1] Ibid., ll. 10-19.

[2] WA, XVIII, 639,6-12; 729,7-731,13; 724,27-725,6.

[3] Ibid., p. 639, ll. 6-12.

[4] WA, XVIII, 737,3-4; 639,13-14.

[5] WA, XVIII, 615,18-30; 724,32-725,6. [6] Ibid., p.725,ll.6-28.

[7] Men are commanded "to revere the majesty of God's power and will, against which we have no rights, but which has full rights against us to do what It pleases. No injustice is done to us, for God owes us nothing. He has received nothing from us, and He has promised us nothing but what He pleased and willed." BoW, p. 216. WA, XVIII, 717,35-39.

those he hates is invariably fulfilled by their rejection--their spontaneous rejection--of him, completely consistent with his previous decision.[1] To complain because he does not save everyone is to beg the question. The prior mystery is, Why does he save anyone?[2] And to protest his hatred is to exemplify it.

Lex

But exemplify his hatred we do. Witness the universal violation of the divine law. Yet here, in the relation which Luther finds between sin and wrath and the law, it is easy to lose him. For instance, it might seem that man's violation of the law is what sin is, essentially and by definition, and that it is the sinner's breaching of the law which in turn prompts God's wrath against him. For Luther, however, this would seem to be only an external, phenomenological description of sin.[3] In fact, if pressed to its moralistic conclusions, this view of sin would contradict that antecedent character of the divine wrath which Luther is urging against Erasmus.[4] Rather it is by means of the law that

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[1] Ibid., p. 634, ll. 14-36. [2] Ibid., p. 730, ll. 16-22.

[3] However, just as Luther does not equate sin with sinful actions, neither does he equate it with God's transcendent, condemnatory judgment. "Neither should we sin or be condemned by reason of the single offence of Adam, if that offence were not our own; who could be condemned for another's offence, especially in the sight of God? But his offence becomes ours; not by imitation, nor by any act on our part (for then it would not be the single offence of Adam, since we should have committed it, not he), but it becomes ours by birth. . . . Original sin itself, then, does not allow 'free-will' any power at all except to sin and incur condemnation." BoW, pp. 297-98. WA, XVIII, 773, 12-18.

[4] WA, XVIII, 724,27-725,6.

the sinner is exposed as the sinner he already is, law or no law; namely, as that rebel against God whom God eternally anticipated and whom God now proceeds to identify, historically and biographically, through the law's incriminating demands upon him.

"Through the law comes knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20).[1] "I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet'" (Rom. 7:7).[2] "The law was added because of transgressions" (Gal. 3:19)--

> not indeed to restrain them, as Jerome dreams, (for Paul is arguing that the promise to a future offspring was that sins would be removed and restrained by righteousness as a gift) but to increase transgressions. As he says in Romans 5, "Law came in, in order that sin might abound."[3]

It is this angry function of the law, to force into the open men's concealed contempt for God as proof of God's wrath against them, which Luther finds throughout the Psalter and notably in the giving of the law at Sinai.[4] The people of Israel had confidently declared, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Ex. 19:8; 24:3,7). But what the Lord had spoken, to "prove" them (Ex. 20:20), quickly revealed their contempt of him and his wrath against them (Ex. 32: 9,10).[5] Yet even when men resist the law's exposure of them, as usually they do, they still remain consistent with themselves ("manent semper sui similes")[6]--and consistent with the selves God had decided they would be.

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[1] WA, XVIII, 766,8-767,18. [2] Ibid., p. 767, 11.12-13.

[3] WA, XVIII, 766,38-767,1.

[4] WA, XL/1,499,13-15; 520,13-17; 592,15-18.

[5] WA, XL/1,483,20-500,34; 517,24-25.

[6] WA, XL/1,485,21.

It may seem enough, theoretically, to define the law as the transcendent, eternal will of God and to define the sinner as the opposite of that will. Still, that he opposes that will at all, though always willingly (and therefore as his evil, not God's), is itself the will of God. Because it is and because the divine will never goes unfulfilled, God executes his verdict against the sinner through a law which is altogether near at hand, immanently active within human existence, confronting men everywhere. God's special revelations of his law, for instance at Sinai, are meant only to sharpen what ought to be inescapably clear in every life and history if men but had the humble sense to see it.[1] It is the ubiquitous demand which operates in all their dealings with one another, the divine imperative which God has to add to his otherwise good creation, to enforce at least minimal responsibility between them all and himself.[2] Perhaps this same divine law is at work in the polemical give and take between scholars, by which an Erasmus is exposed for violating the orders of reason or the "grammar and uses of speech which God creates among men"[3]--falsifying imperatives as indicatives, fabricating terms without

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[1] WA, XVIII, 766,8-10.

[2] WA, XL/1,479,17-480,31.

[3] WA, XVIII, 700,34-35. We had best not press this point too far, however, since Luther elsewhere mentions--with tongue in cheek, no doubt--that even "the Holy Spirit does not observe this strict rule of grammar." LW, XXVI, 139. WA, XL/1,244,12-13. Of course, the real charge against Erasmus' violations of logic and grammar is that these violations are perpetrated in the cause of his destructive skepticism. But "the Holy Spirit is no sceptic." WA, XVIII, 605, 32.

referents[1]--or by which a Luther is exposed in his prolixity or his ill-will.[2] The divine law, Luther observes, make use even of the universal order of cause and effect, employing it as an order of retribution, presenting sinful men with the necessary consequences of what they are--but not with the ability to make themselves over.[3]

Luther seems to put the matter even more strongly. Not only is the law immanent. It is so intimately interactive with the order of things that men cannot live without it--though neither can they live with it. Thus men hate the very thing on which they have to depend, and thus the law proves how inescapably they corroborate the ira Dei against them. Although the hostile relation between God and sinners is ever so personal, it is not for that reason a merely private encounter, some immediate mystique without any rational relation to the surrounding, supportive order of things. The hatred of God toward the sinner, though always directly on target, is deployed against him mediately, through those orderly relations which sustain his existence and without which he could not survive: food, money, "the judge, the emperor, the king, the prince, the lawyer, the professor, the preacher, the schoolteacher, the student, the father, the mother, the master, the

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[1] WA, XVIII, 677,24-31; 670,2-6.

[2] Luther's De Servo Arbitrio "was four times the length of the Diatribe and strongly controversial in tone, considerably blunter than Erasmus had been." "Erasmus called [the De Servo Arbitrio] ingens volumen (a huge book)." BoW, p. 39.

[3] WA, XVIII, 693,30-36; 694,39-695,4.

servant"--"universa creatura."[1] These are the very structures which afford a man's life its rationality and stability and safety --and which in the end, with the same orderliness, dispose of him in death. And in each relationship he is continually evaluated: for his lovelessness, his ambition, his idolatry, his fear.[2] Without such evaluation human life would perish--as it does, with the evaluation.

Not that there is a neat balance between each human sin and each divine punishment, tit for tat, as though a man's sin were but a collection of discrete sins. Indeed, he may flatter himself that that is the case and may protest when the world is not governed accordingly, "grumbling and angry at God because he obstructs our plans and desires and does not instantly punish the impious and the scorners."[3] However, God's wrath is not episodic but comprehensive, and his law claims a man's life whole and entire, not divisibly but like a "punctum mathematicum"[4]: topographically, all his heart and soul and mind, and chronologically, from birth to death. And in conformity with that total claim, the divine wrath does respond consistently, with a man's death. And this rule of death is as orderly and universal as anything could be, "killing kings and princes and all men altogether."[5] But the way

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[1] WA, XL/1.174,3,5-6; 175,17-18.

[2] Ibid., p. 175, ll. 17-22.

[3] Ibid., p. 526, ll. 23-25. (Translation mine.)

[4] Ibid., p. 292, l. 12; XL/2,46,26, 75,22-23. XVIII, 760, 38-39.

[5] WA, XL/1, 439,28-29.

a man faces his death is likewise evaluated. He "cannot bear the judgment of God, his own death, and damnation, and yet he cannot escape them. Here he necessarily falls to hating and blaspheming God."[1]

That, however, is the story of a man's whole life. Inherently he hates the law, though he cannot do without it, and in hating the law he hates the law's Author.[2] How astonishing, Luther exclaims, that a man "cannot abide his own protection: 'You shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal.' For by these words God has, as with a rampart, fortified and defended your life, your wife, your property against every violence and in- and insult by evil men."[3] But ungrateful is what the sinner is, and his ingratitude is only intensified, as God foreknew it must be, by the always accusing law[4]--the good and holy law of God.[5] So "the ungodly man sins against God, whether he eats or drinks or whatever he does, because he abuses God's creation by his ungodliness and persistent ingratitude, and does not from his heart give glory to God for a single moment."[6]

But suppose that men acknowledge, as the best of them do, that they are ungrateful and do not give glory to God. Isn't there virtue in their acknowledging that? Even that, Luther

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[1] Ibid., p. 487, ll. 19-22.

[2] WA, XL/1, 505,22-23; 497,27-28.

[3] Ibid., p. 506, ll. 13-19.

[4] WA, XVIII, 725,28-726,4.

[5] WA, XL/1, 498,22-23.

[6] BoW, p. 290. WA, XVIII, 768,24-26.

replies, is turned against them. Take the term, "the glory of God" (in Rom. 3:23, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"). And take it not as the Latin but as the Hebrew idiom it is: not the glory God enjoys before us but the glory we enjoy before him (coram Deo). (Similarly, "the faith of Christ" or "the righteousness of God" denote in Latin the faith which Christ has or the righteousness which God has, but as Hebraisms they denote the faith we have in Christ and the righteousness we have from God.) "Now he who glories in God is he who knows for sure that God looks on him with favor and deigns to regard him kindly, so that what he does is pleasing in God's sight."[1] But of all the champions of free will, show me one, says Luther, who "seriously and from his heart can say of any of his efforts and endeavors: I know that this pleases God."[2] And it is certain that he does not please God if he cannot believe that he does. Still, that he must believe that is precisely what God demands of him. "This is the very sin of unbelief, to doubt the favor of God, who wants his favor believed with the most certain trust."[3] But that is an incredible, an impossible demand! Exactly.

Nihil

Before this "hidden God," who perpetuates within us the very antagonism which he forbids from without, and yet trumps every insinuation of his injustice--before him, the human subject

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[1] BoW, p. 291. WA, XVIII, 769,4-6.

[2] Ibid., ll. 14-15.

[3] Ibid., ll. 19-20.

turns to ashes.[1] This is not merely a death in the undertaker's or even in the psychologist's sense of the word, though it has strong implications for both.[2] But here, if we are to grasp Luther's meaning at all, we must keep steadfastly in mind the presupposition which for him seemed almost self-evident, at least biblically self-evident. "He who . . . is righteous shall live" (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11). "We do not achieve life unless we have righteousness first."[3] And there is no such righteousness, and so no life, without the favor of God.[4] Unless he has the assurance of real value before God, a man cannot live but dies. Yet it is just that favor Dei which the Deus absconditus refuses to the sinner. What is "abscondite" about this God is not that we can know nothing about him. On the contrary, what we can know of him is all too much: that he demands from us what he withholds from us the power to be. But why? Indeed, that is the very question we are forbidden to raise. "Who are you, a man, to answer back to God" (Rom. 9:20)? Still, the forbidden answer will not be put down: Such a God is manifestly unjust. And with that ultimate blasphemy the sinner betrays his perversity and his perdition.[5]

Rather than allow this judgment to fall upon them and to despair of themselves, men will twist and turn to evade it, as if for dear life. They may prove that such desperatio sui is but the

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[1] WA, XL/1,497,18-21.

[2] Ibid., p. 260, ll.15-24; p. 320, ll. 25-29.

[3] Ibid., p. 612, ll. 28-29. [4] Ibid., p. 510, ll. 16-20.

[5] WA, XVIII, 631,32-632,2,8-11.

exceptional experience of a scrupulous few. But that is admitted, yet the admission only raises the question anew: Why does God abandon the rest to their darkness.[1] Or, instead of conceding that God could "harden " a sinner and still be just, they may piously change the subject--literally, "change the persons"--from God to the sinner, and may reason that it is the sinner who hardens himself; thus they mean to clear God of blame on the ground that he could not destroy what he has created.[2] But here the most elementary grammar intervenes to return the subject, as Scripture does, back to God--even though the final aim is to expose that subiectum theologiae who is the peccator himself. Or, when the human subject does come under scrutiny, the plea is raised that the numerous commandments which are addressed to him in Scripture must surely imply his ability to fulfill them. Still, even without invoking the biblical context of these passages, one must see, surely, that an imperative is not an indicative.[3] And it is significant that the objectors themselves do not claim that the first and great commandment implies ability.[4]

Or, renewed attempts may be made to scale down the divine demands to a level where man can succeed at them, at least a little. But how shamefully inferior such semi-pelagianism is in comparison with the original heresy. The original pelagians at least came out for free-will frankly and flat-footedly and did not cheapen the high price which God demands of a man.[5] Or, once more,

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[1] Ibid., p. 486, ll. 32-37. [2] Ibid., p. 703, ll. 30-36.
[3] Ibid., p. 677, ll. 24-31. [4] Ibid., p. 681, ll. 12-34.
[5] Ibid., p. 778, ll. 1-3.

the objection is advanced that, if God foreknew all things necessarily, men would sin by external "compulsion" and would no longer be men. Hardly, for it is the very fact that men are willingly the sinners they are which God foreknows necessarily and which is so ingredient in his hatred of them.[1] Or it is argued that, in face of the divine judgment, some part of man must be exempted and intact: his moral self, his "reason and will," his controlling ego (egomonica), perhaps at least his future.[2] But what an unbiblical scorn this betrays toward the body, not to mention what ignorance of the biblical meaning of "flesh"--all of which is as grass.[3] Or, as one last complaint: If all this is so, then at that rate who will ever do good, who will repent, who can believe? At that rate, no one.[4] But then a man must be nothing. Still, even that is an evasion.[5]

To be sure, there is a very drastic sense in which, as Luther repeatedly says, a sinner is nothing (nihil). He is nothing God-pleasing.[6] Or as an earlier quotation put it, "his righteousness has been reduced to exactly nothing," and "his whole nature nas been crushed by sin" since "there is nothing left on which he can rely."[7] However, it does not follow from this that the sinner

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[1] Ibid., p. 634, ll. 14-36.

[2] Ibid., p. 742, ll. 12-21; XL/1,489,21-26.

[3] WA, XVIII, 740,1-6; 744,6-18; 780,35-781,1.

[4] Ibid., p. 632, 3-26.

[5] WA, XVIII, 709,12-18; 748,8-753,11.

[6] Ibid., p. 752,12-20.

[7] LW, XII, 311. WA, XL/2,327,23-26.

has therefore escaped the whole realm of creaturely being and has extracted himself from the clutch of his Maker. This may seem to be a way out, as it did to Judas, and like Job sinners may imagine they can elude their guilty fate and the wrath of God: "for now I shall lie in the earth; thou wilt seek me, but I shall not be."[1] But much as he may wish the opposite, the sinful creature cannot be nothing, any more than Satan himself can. "Their will and nature, thus turned from God, are not for that reason nothing."[2]

Neither, therefore, could the sinner weaken the divine judgment upon him by supposing that man, without God's enabling grace, is as yet only intermediate between being and nothing--"the 'chaos' of Plato or the 'vacuum' of Leucippus or the 'infinite' of Aristotle or some other nothing . . . , which by a gift from heaven might eventually become a something."[3] Man "is certainly something already."[4] He "already has eyes, nose, ears, mouth, hands, mind, will, reason, and all that is in man."[5] "We know," says Luther, "that man was made lord over the things which are subordinate to him, among which he has jurisdiction and free will, so that they might obey and do what he wills and thinks."[6] Moreover, since "God did not make heaven for geese," it is not plants and animals but man "who has been created for eternal life--or eternal death."[7]

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[1] Job 7:21. [2] WA, XVIII, 709,15-16.

[3] Ibid., p. 752, ll. 27-28.

[4] BoW, p. 266. WA, XVIII, 752,21-22.

[5] BoW, p. 266. WA, XVIII, 752,24-25.

[6] Ibid., p. 781, ll. 8-10. [7] Ibid., p. 636, ll.17-18,21-22.

"An ungodly will is something and no mere nothing."[1]

The sinner, therefore,

> as a creature and work of God, is no less subject to divine omnipotence and action than all God's other creatures and works. Since God moves and works all in all, he necessarily moves and works also in Satan and the ungodly man. But he works in them as what they are, and as what he finds them to be.[2]

"Hence it is that the ungodly man is never able not to err and sin, because under the impulse of divine power he is not allowed to be idle, but wills, desires, and acts as what he himself is."[3] His sinning, therefore, is as really a predicate of this subject as anything of his could be--"really," because it is impelled into being by divine creation, and "his" because it is characterized by the self he is ("taliter qualis ipse est").[4] Indeed, that is the only way hypocrites themselves will allow their righteousness to be called "theirs"--only when it is somehow, the divine assistance notwithstanding, their own subjective doing.[5] For how else can it be the righteousness which the divine law demands of them, and for which alone it promises life? "He who does [the works of the law] shall live by them" (Gal. 3:12).[6] But as the law makes equally clear, even though the sinner's doing is dragged out of him by the divine omnipotence: "what a man thus does . . . is nothing, that is, nothing of value to God [nihil valere coram Deo], nor does it count as anything but sin."[7] This judgment makes a man furious.

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[1] Ibid., p. 751, 11.39-40.
[2] Ibid., p. 709, 11.19-23.
[3] Ibid., 11. 34-35.
[4] Ibid., 11.35-36.
[5] Ibid., p. 696, 11.22-29.
[6] WA, X/1,425,26-432,16.
[7] WA, XVIII, 752,14-15.

However, "he can no more restrain his fury than he can stop his self-seeking, and he can no more stop his self-seeking than he can stop existing--for he is still a creature of God, though a spoiled one."[1]

At the core of the sinner's being is his "presumption of righteousness" (opinio iustitiae), his ingrained insistence upon a righteousness of his own by which and off which he can survive as a man and can justify his existence. But because of his opinio iustitiae he is unwilling to be the sinner he is, "impure, miserable, and damned," and so he refuses to let God--the Deus incarnatus --accomplish his "proper work" (opus proprium), the sinner's salvation. Therefore, it is necessary that God employ the "hammer" of the law to "shatter . . . and to reduce this monster to nothing." "For God is the God of the humble, the miserable, the afflicted, the oppressed, the despairing, and those who have been reduced to nothing." And it is the nature of God, the Deus incarnatus, "to exalt the humble, to feed the hungry, to give sight to the blind, to comfort the miserable and afflicted, to justify sinners, to vivify the dead, to save the desperate and damned." For, as Luther explains, God "is an omnipotent Creator, making all things from nothing."[2]

As Luther assures Erasmus,

> Doubtless it gives the greatest possible offence to common sense or natural reason, that God, Who is proclaimed as being full of mercy and goodness, and so on, should of his own mere will abandon, harden, and damn men, as though [as

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[1] BoW, p. 205. WA, XVIII, 710,16-18.

[2] WA, XL/1,488,15-24. (Translation mine.)

> Erasmus had charged] He delighted in the sins and great eternal torments of such poor wretches. It seems an iniquitous, cruel, intolerable thought to think of God; and it is this that has been a stumbling block to so many great men down the ages. And who would not stumble at it? I have stumbled at it myself more than once, down to the deepest pit of despair, so that I wished I had never been made a man.[1]

But that, as Luther adds, "was before I knew how health-giving that despair was, and how close to grace."[2]

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[1] BoW, p. 217. WA, XVIII, 719,4-12.

[2] Ibid.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MAN CHRIST JESUS

Iste Humanus Deus

"Man's failure to grasp God's words," Luther tells Erasmus, "does not spring from weakness of understanding, as you would suggest; indeed, there is nothing better adapted for grasping God's words than weakness of understanding, for it was for the weak and to the weak that Christ came."[1] Was he not sent "to preach the gospel to the poor and to heal the broken-hearted"? This "God is proclaimed with mighty praise throughout the scripture as being near to the broken-hearted."[2] Here is Deus praedicatus, Deus incarnatus, not God hidden in his own nature and majesty. "God hidden in majesty neither deplores nor takes away death, but works life and death and all in all; nor has he set bounds to himself by His word, but has kept himself free over all things."[3] God incarnate, however, "does deplore the death which he finds in his people. . . . God preached works to the end that sin and death may be taken away and we may be saved."[4]

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[1] BoW, pp. 133-34. WA, XVIII, 659,27-30.

[2] BoW, p. 162. WA, XVIII, 679,29-31.

[3] BoW, p. 170. WA, XVIII, 685,21-23.

[4] Ibid., ll. 19-20.

True, even God as incarnate still "offends many who, being abandoned or hardened by God's secret will of majesty, do not receive him thus willing, speaking, doing, and offering." Even though it is characteristic of "God incarnate to weep, lament, and groan over the perdition of the ungodly," still his other "will of Majesty purposely leaves and reprobates some to perish. Nor is it for us to ask why he does so, but to stand in awe of God."[1] Luther is well aware of the objection this invites. The objector will reply:

> This is a nice way out that you have invented--that, whenever [you] are hard pressed by force of arguments, [you] run back to that dreadful will of Majesty and reduce [your] adversary to silence when he becomes troublesome, in the manner of the astrologers who, by inventing their "epicycles," dodge all questions about the movement of the heavens as a whole.[2]

By way of defense Luther can only plead, "This is not my invention but a command grounded on the divine scriptures," and he cites again the warning of Isaiah and Paul's warning in Romans.[3] Yet, as often as not, the warning goes unheeded. Consequently the very command to be quiet, which is intended by Deus praedicatus to silence men so that they may hear the word of reconciliation, becomes instead a new occasion for their protest, and a further confirmation of the Divine Majesty's "dreadful will" against them. If they persist, there is nothing left but to let them "go on and, like the giants, fight with God."[4] As for the outcome of such titanism,

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[1] BoW, p. 176. WA, XVIII, 689,28-690,1.

[2] Ibid., p. 690, ll. 9-13.

[3] BoW, p. 177. WA, XVIII, 690,13-19.

[4] BoW, p. 177. WA, XVIII, 690,23-26.

which spurns a God who comes only to the weak and the mute, there can be no doubt.[1]

But this is not the will of Deus incarnatus. He wills rather that he, "in his own nature and majesty, is to be left alone; in this regard we have nothing to do with him, nor does he wish us to deal with him" in the nakedness of his majesty. "We have to do with him as clothed and displayed in his Word, by which he presents himself to us."[2] So "let man occupy himself with God incarnate, that is, with Jesus crucified, in whom, as Paul says, are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."[3] "In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col. 2,9).[4] "The world does not see this, because it looks at him only as a man in his weakness." But "you must pay attention only to this man, who presents himself to us as the Mediator and says: 'Come to me, all who labor.'" Then, says Luther, "when you do this, you will see the love, the goodness, and the sweetness of God. You will see his wisdom, his power, and his majesty sweetened and mitigated to your ability to stand it."[5]

"You must pay attention only to this man." When the concern is for a man's justification, "then you must know that there is no other God than this man, Jesus Christ. . . . We must look at no other God than this incarnate and human God."[6] In these expressions

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[1] Ibid., ll. 26-30. [2] BoW, p. 170. WA, XVIII, 685,14-16.

[3] BoW, p. 176. WA, XVIII, 689,22-24.

[4] LW, XXVI, 30. WA, XL/1,79,21-22.

[5] LW, XXVI, 30. WA, XL/1,79,16-20.

[6] LW, XXVI, 29. WA, XL/1,78,15-26.

and others like them Luther betrays that accent in his theology which Karl Barth criticizes as an excessive preoccupation with "man, man, the man Jesus."[1] So our recurrent question returns, How is Luther's theology about man, this time about the man Christ Jesus? More specifically, how are the assertions of Christ's deity ascribable to him as a man? Our question is not, just as it previously was not, primarily an epistemological question: How do we know "no other God than this man"? The question is rather (dare we say?) an ontological one. If Christ is, as Luther says, true God ("Christus est verus Deus")[2] then by reason of what, we ask, is he that? Or, to see it as a problem of meaning: If "it follows that Christ is truly God by nature" ("sequitur eum esse vero et natura Deum"),[3] what is the meaningful function of esse? How does the predicate, "est verus Deus," really belong to the subject, "iste homo"? We have been referring to this as a problem in theological predication. The double meaning of the Latin praedicare --to predicate, but also to preach--suggests a (perhaps esoteric) pun. If Deus praedicatus, God preached, is in reality "Jesus crucified," then how is deity predicable of him, preachable of him, as truly his? If the theology about the man Christ Jesus is that he is simultaneously God, then how is this logos tou Theou about him? Indeed, how is he this Word of God, verbum Dei?[4]

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[1] EC, p. xxiii.

[2] WA, XL/1,80,18. See also XL/1,81,22; 82,25,29; 297,29.

[3] Ibid., p. 81, l. 22.

[4] WA, XVIII, 685,26.

Sequitur eum natura Deum

That Jesus is true God is presupposed by what he did. So Luther, at least, sees the matter. What it means for Jesus to be God follows from the why, the gracious purpose for which, he had to be that. His deity is necessitated by the redemptive action which prompted him and which he accomplished. As Luther puts it,

> Here you see how necessary it is to believe and confess the doctrine of the divinity of Christ. When Arius denied this, it was necessary also for him to deny the doctrine of redemption. For to conquer the sin of the world, death, the curse and the wrath of God in himself--this is the work, not of any creature but of the divine power.[1]

So pervasively does Luther orient Christ's person to his work that it would be tempting at this point to invoke a Barthianism and to say that Jesus Christ is as he does--that is, that he is verus Deus as he does what only God could do.

Yet this dare not be understood as though the man Jesus somehow became God, was somehow exalted to deity, in return for the godlike things he did. No, here Luther is quite willing to employ the metaphysical language of pre-existent "nature" and "essence." He says of Christ that "he himself is life, righteousness, and blessing, that is, God by nature and in essence."[2] Still, that "he should be true God by nature" is "necessary" (necesse) in view of what he had to accomplish.

> For in opposition to this mighty power--sin, death, and the curse--which of itself reigns in the whole world and in the entire creation, it is necessary to set an even higher power, which cannot be found and does not exist apart from the divine

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[1] LW, XXVI, 282. WA, XL/1,441,14-18.

[2] LW, XXVI, 282. WA, XL/1,441,19-25.

> power. Therefore to abolish sin, to destroy death, to remove the curse in himself, to grant righteousness, to bring life to light, and to bring the blessing in himself, that is, to annihilate these things and to create those--all these are works solely of the divine power.[1]

What it is about Christ's work which necessitates his deity is revealed finally in the little prepositional phrase "in himself." "To remove the curse in himself," "to bring the blessing in himself," is precisely the thing which no power in earth or heaven, except the divine power itself, could achieve. More on that later. Meanwhile it is enough to notice that the deity of Christ, though it is his by nature, is itself demanded by the magnitude of his redemptive action. "Therefore it was necessary that he who was to conquer these in himself should be true God by nature."[2]

Another way of saying the same thing is to note how, in Luther's theological reasoning, faith is first of all a faith in Christ's beneficial work (else it would not be faith) and only for that reason, as if by necessary inference, a faith in Christ's deity. That Christ has graciously justified us is, for faith, the given. That in order for him to justify us as he has he must be God, follows from faith tautologously, as an indispensable presupposition, an analytic statement. Faith always begins with Christ's merciful achievement in its biblical concreteness. Divorced from that, faith in Christ's deity is a vulnerable abstraction, actually a fiction, mere fides historica.[3] The Devil, too, may believe that Christ is God, but that hardly qualifies him as a believer. Indeed,

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[1] LW, XXVI, 282. WA, XL/1,441,19-25.

[2] LW, XXVI, 282. WA, XL/1,441,18-19.

[3] LW, XXVI, 168. WA, XL/1,285,22.

one of his wiliest tricks is to come looking like Christ, not "the entire Christ, . . . only a part of him, namely, that he is the Son of God and man born of a virgin." So far the devil's Christology seems orthodox enough. But "eventually he attaches something else to this, some saying in which Christ terrifies sinners." The Christ who is thus presented to us is not "the pleasant sight of Christ, our high-priest and mediator," but a new lawgiver and a tormentor.[1] "No," Luther says,

> grasp the true definition of him, namely, that Christ, the Son of God and of the Virgin, is not one who terrifies, troubles, condemns us sinners or calls us to account for our evil past but one who has taken away the sins of the whole world, nailing them to the cross and driving them all the way out by himself.[2]

"For you do not yet have Christ, even though you know that he is God and man." Rather, says Luther, "you truly have him only when you believe that . . . [he] has been granted to you by the Father as your High-Priest and Redeemer, yes, as your Slave."[3] "This very good and true definition of Christ" is always dominated by what he has mercifully done.[4]

Luther's Christological reasoning, in other words, does not proceed along the lines of a cur Deus homo which begins by believing obediently that this man is God and then advances to "understanding" in terms of a theory of atonement. Rather the Incarnation only validates what faith believes from the outset, "that men are justified through Christ and that Christ is victor."

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[1] LW, XXVI, 39. WA, XL/1,92,24-93,17.

[2] LW, XXVI, 37-38. WA, XL/1,91,11-15.

[3] LW, XXVI, 288. WA, XL/1,448,20-23.

[4] LW, XXVI, 37. WA, XL/1,90,25-26.

> As I often warn, therefore, the doctrine of justification must be learned diligently. For in it are included all the other doctrines of our faith; and if it is sound, all the others are sound as well. Therefore when we teach that men are justified through Christ and that Christ is the victor over sin, death, and the eternal curse, we are testifying at the same time that he is God by nature.[1]

Doesn't Paul in his greeting to the Galatians wish grace and peace not only from "God the Father" but also from "our Lord Jesus Christ"? Hence

> the true deity of Christ is proved by this conclusion: Paul attributes to him the ability to grant the very same things that the Father does. . . . This would be illegitimate, in fact, sacrilegious, if Christ were not true God. For no one grants peace unless he himself has it in his hands.[2]

Therefore, Luther concludes, by way of what a logician may disapprove as petitio principii or a Tillich may approve as the circularity of faith: "It follows necessarily that Christ is truly God by nature."[3] If the question is, How can Jesus be God, Luther's reply could only be that of a question-begging faith: If Jesus were not God, he could not have replaced the curse with the blessing as he did.

Communicatio Idiomatum

There is still another way to illustrate how Luther conceives Christ's person in terms of his work, his incarnate deity in terms of his accomplished purpose: namely, Luther's treatment of the notorious communicatio idiomatum. This is the "Lutheran" doctrine according to which, as Barth complains, the divine and

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[1] LW, XXVI, 283. WA, XL/1,441,29-33.

[2] LW, XXVI, 31. WA, XL/1,80,25-81,13.

[3] LW, XXVI, 31. WA, XL/1,81,22.

human natures of Christ are described *in abstracto*.[1] Luther does admit, rather he insists, that there is that in Christ's work which could be done only by the divine nature, by Christ's *divinitas*.[2] But notice what it is that could be done by his "divinity alone": Christ had to "conquer sin and death." And he conquered them not merely by the fact, as Barth might say, that "he believed, he quite simply believed"--"only the eternal Word of God could do that."[3] That much, Luther might say, could have been done by Jesus as man. Rather, to conquer sin and death Christ had "to remove the curse in himself, . . . to bring blessing in himself."[4] (This is a theme, as we said, to which we shall return shortly.)

But what is more, Luther makes a point of arguing that Christ's divinity is not in concrete fact separable from his humanity and that his conquest of sin and death, even though strictly the act of his deity, does in truth characterize his whole person, both human and divine. The full rationale for this assertion must wait until a later section in our discussion, where Christ is described as victor not only in his own person, "in himself," but in the person of sinners as well. At the moment we need only to show that, for Luther, not only is Christ's divinity not to be abstracted from his humanity but neither of them together, in the unity of Christ's person, is to be abstracted from his divine work. This would mean, in the stilted language of the old dogmaticians, that the *genus maiestaticum* can have meaning only in terms of the

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[1] *EC*, p. xxiii. [2] *LW*, XXVI, 267. *WA*, XL/1,417,29-418,1.

[3] *LG*, p. 74. [4] *LW*, XXVI, 282. *WA*, XL/1,441,22-24.

genus apotelesmaticum--the unity of Christ's person only in terms of his redemptive mission. This compels Luther, of course, to depart from the usual law-bound mode of personal predication, for the sake of the gospel. But that is his point exactly.

Sometimes, as Luther observes, Scripture speaks of the two natures of Christ separately, but then it is speaking of him "abstractly" (absolute).[1] On the other hand, when Scripture "speaks about the divine nature united with the human in one person, then it is speaking of Christ as composite and incarnate." Then "it speaks about his whole person."[2] And when it does, it speaks of his whole person as the doer of the divine deed, even though, abstractly speaking, the deed is the doing only of his divinity.

> The humanity would not have accomplished anything by itself; but the divinity, joined with the humanity, did it alone, and the humanity did it on account of the divinity.[3]

Note the prominence of the action verbs "accomplished" and "did." What is "communicated" to, predicated of, Christ's humanity is not just his divinity as such, as an abstract "nature," but the divine saving deed, as really as if the man Jesus had done it himself.

Normally, where the norm is the law, the ideal of moral predication may well be the predicate of personal achievement. The predicate belongs to a personal subject only if it is his own doing. But so real is the incarnation, so real the wholeness of

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[1] LW, XXVI, 265. WA, XL/1,415,30.

[2] LW, XXVI, 265. WA, XL/1,415,28-31.

[3] LW, XXVI, 267. WA, XL/1,417,33-418,1.

Christ's person, and so necessary for his saving work, that even though "creation is attributed solely to the divinity, since the humanity does not create,"

> neverthless it is said correctly that "the man created," because the divinity, which alone creates, is incarnate with the humanity, and therefore the humanity participates in the attributes of both predicates.[1]

"In this sense," says Luther, "I can truly say: The infant lying in the lap of his mother created heaven and earth, and is the Lord of the angels."[2]

However, the word "man" in this context is an instance of Luther's "new and theological grammar."[3] ". . . 'Man' in this proposition is obviously a new word and, as the sophists themselves say, stands for the divinity."[4] Whether this "new" predication is absolutely unique with theology, as distinguished from all other fields of experience, is not important here. Luther does find (at least rhetorical) analogies to it, as the ancient fathers did, in the physical world. "Anyone who touches the heat in the heated iron touches the iron; and whoever has touched the skin of Christ has actually touched God."[5] What does mark the newness of such predication is that it supersedes the sort of moralism, based upon the divine law itself, which will credit no one with predicates which he himself has not enacted. It is this same moralistic

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[1] LW, XXVI, 265. WA, XL/1,416,12-15.

[2] LW, XXVI, 265. WA, XL/1,415,31-416,10.

[3] LW, XXVI, 267. WA, XL/1,418,24.

[4] LW, XXVI, 265. WA, XL/1,416,10-12.

[5] LW, XXVI, 266. WA, XL/1,417,17-18.

predication which refuses to ascribe divine value to faith except as faith is actualized in the believer's own work. Instead, says Luther, "in theology let faith always be the divinity of works, diffused throughout the works in the same way that the divinity is throughout the humanity of Christ."[1] So the old and legal grammar must yield to the grammar which is "new and theological," to take account of what God was doing in Christ graciously.

Luther was careful to preserve the distinctions of Chalcedon and of the tradition he inherited of the communicatio idiomatum,[2] but not to the point of abstracting the two natures from each other at the price of Christ's personal unity, nor of abstracting his person from that which he did. "I am obliged to distinguish between the humanity and the divinity, and to say: The humanity is not the divinity." This distinction, Luther agrees, is inviolable. "And yet," he continues, "the man is God."[3]

> Thus Christ, according to his divinity, is a divine and eternal essence or nature, without a beginning; but his humanity is a nature created in time. These two natures in Christ are not confused or mixed, and the properties of each must be clearly understood. It is characteristic of the humanity to have a beginning in time, but it is characteristic of the divinity to be eternal and without a beginning.

"Nevertheless," Luther adds, "the two are combined, and the divinity

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[1] LW, XXVI, 266. WA, XL/1,417,15-17.

[2] The following sentence does not appear in the 1535 edition of the lectures, but it does appear in the 1538 edition, on which the following English translation is based. "There is a common rule among the schoolmen of the communication of the properties, when the properties belonging to the divinity of Christ are attributed to the humanity: which we may see everywhere in the Scriptures." Gal, pp. 256-57. WA, XL/1,415,34-36.

[3] LW, XXVI, 273. WA, XL/1,427,21-22 (Hs.: 427,5).

without a beginning is incorporated into the humanity with a beginning."[1] "Thus it is said: The man Jesus led Israel out of Egypt, struck down Pharaoh, and did all the things that belong to God."[2]

If Luther's "very good and true definition of . . . the Son of God and of the Virgin" is determined by what Christ graciously did, then the question is now upon us: What is that redemptive action of Christ which necessitated his being true God? Specifically, what was required for Christ to abolish the curse in himself and to bring the blessing in himself? It is to that question that we turn next.

Mirabile Duellum

In the course of his exegesis upon Galatians 4:5, "to redeem those who were under the law," Luther pauses to ask: "But in what manner or way has Christ redeemed us?" Finding us "confined and constrained under the law," as he did, "what did he do"?[3] Briefly, he did this: he allowed the law to accuse him, who was himself the righteous lord over the law, and thereby he incriminated the law as insubordinate and despoiled the law of its authority. This would have been impossible, of course, had he not been the law's own lord, the Son of God. "He himself is Lord of the law; therefore the law has no jurisdiction over him and cannot accuse him, because he is the Son of God."[4]

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[1] LW, XXVI, 272-73. WA, XL/1,427,14-20.

[2] LW, XXVI, 265. WA, XL/1,416,15-17.

[3] LW, XXVI, 369. WA, XL/1,564,26-29.

[4] LW, XXVI, 369-70. WA, XL/1,564,29-30.

Still, "he who was not under the law subjected himself voluntarily to the law."[1] That Christ did this "voluntarily" (sponte) is, as we shall see, extremely important for Luther's Christology. But in the passage before us Luther seems more intent upon emphasizing the initiative taken by the law, the more to emphasize the law's culpability.

> The law did everything to him that it did to us. . . . But Christ "committed no sin, and no guile was found on his lips." Therefore he owed nothing to the law. And yet against him--so holy, righteous, and blessed--the law raged as much as it does against us accursed and condemned sinners, and even more fiercely.[2]

It would not have been enough for Luther's purposes to say that Christ was accused by the Sanhedrin or Pilate or by false witnesses, lest this suggest a law whose accusations would not extend to us. No, Christ's accuser was the same law which accuses every man, and does so by authorization from God. It was this universally valid law of God which

> accused him of blasphemy and sedition; it found him guilty in the sight of God of all the sins of the entire world; finally it so saddened him and frightened him that he sweat blood; and eventually it sentenced him to death, even death on a cross.[3]

"This was truly," in one of Luther's favorite phrases, "a remarkable duel" (mirabile duellum).[4] "The law, a creature, came into conflict with the Creator, exceeding its every jurisdiction to vex

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[1] LW, XXVI, 370. WA, XL/1,564,30-31.

[2] LW, XXVI, 370. WA, XL/1,564,31-565,14.

[3] LW, XXVI, 370. WA, XL/1,565,14-17.

[4] LW, XXVI, 370. WA, XL/1,565,18.

the Son of God with the same tyranny with which it vexed us, the sons of wrath."[1]

Next, Luther imagines a courtroom scene in which the law, having over-reached its authority, is brought to trial. Isn't it noteworthy that in the usual forensic picture of the atonement, where it is the law which demands its due and gets "satisfaction," this very different feature which Luther introduces into the drama is likely to be missing: the law itself is the culprit?

> Because the law has sinned so horribly and wickedly against its God, it is summoned to court and accused. Here Christ says: "Lady Law, you empress, you cruel and powerful tyrant over the whole human race, what did I commit that you accused, intimidated, and condemned me in my innocence?" Here the law, which once condemned and killed all men, has nothing with which to defend or cleanse itself. Therefore, it in turn is condemned and killed, so that it loses its jurisdiction . . . over Christ--whom it attacked and killed without any right.[2]

Isn't it noteworthy that in the Christus Victor Christologies the dynamic-dramatic element of conflict is supposed to supplant the forensic preoccupation with legality, whereas Luther mounts the very climax of Christ's victory on a question of legality? The law stands convicted on its own terms, as unlawful. The law, whose own first and great demand has been for love toward God with all one's heart and soul and mind, has now by its condemnation of that God been hoist on its own petard, and all very legally.

So far in our description of Luther's mirable duellum we have deliberately abstracted from it, for reasons of analysis, ingredients which Luther would not have thought of omitting. These

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[1] LW, XXVI, 370. WA, XL/1,565,18-20.

[2] LW, XXVI, 370. WA, XL/1,565,20-27.

ingredients may be added as we are ready for them. Meanwhile we ought at least note what they are, so as not to mistake our abstract analysis for Luther's synthetic concreteness. For one, Christ's "wondrous conflict" is meaningless if it is abstracted from the sinners for whose sake he waged it. The law

> loses its jurisdiction not only over Christ . . . but also over all who believe in him. Here Christ says: "Come unto me, all who labor under the yoke of the law. I could have overcome the law by my supreme authority, without any injury to me. . . . But for the sake of you, who were under the law, I assumed your flesh and subjected myself to the law. . . . Therefore I have conquered the law by a double claim: first, as the Son of God, the Lord of the law; secondly, in your person, which is tantamount to your having conquered the law yourselves."[1]

It is for the sake of these sinners, moreover, that the concrete imagery of a duel is employed at all. Paul "usually portrays the law by personification as some sort of powerful person who condemned and killed Christ--and why, except "to make the subject more joyful and clear" for us?[2]

Nor dare we abstract Christ's conquest from its theological antithesis, that heretical contrary which Luther is opposing: namely, the notion that the law is somehow to be overcome by man's fulfillment of it. It is a ground-rule of Luther-research, just as Luther saw it as a ground-rule of biblical exegesis, to see every theological assertion in the light of its relevant antithesis.[3] And the antithesis which Luther steadfastly holds in view as he portrays the mirabile duellum, and without which antithesis

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[1] LW, XXVI, 370-71. WA, XL/1, 565, 26-566, 17.

[2] LW, XXVI, 371, 162. WA, XL/1, 566, 18-19; 277, 21-29.

[3] LW, XXVI, 248. WA, XL/1, 391, 17-20.

his portrayal becomes pointless, is the contrary Christology of his opponents. When Christ is defined as a lawgiver rather than as one who undergoes the law, or when he is seen as obeying the law "actively" rather than "passively" as its victim, then the synergistic distortion is near at hand. The immense power of the law is under-rated, and the "divine power they have attributed to our own works."[1] "In this way they have made us true God by nature."[2] It is only in face of this falsely optimistic, man-exalting antithesis that Luther's mirabile duellum, waged by God himself, is understood in its polemical concreteness. "He himself had to remove the curse . . . , but he could not remove it through the law, because the curse is only increased by this."[3] "Therefore, there has to be another righteousness, one that far surpasses the righteousness of the law."[4] "So what did he do? . . . He concealed his blessing in our sin, death, and curse, which condemned and killed him. But because he was the Son of God, . . . he conquered them and triumphed over them."[5]

"Therefore, it is Christ's true and proper function to struggle with the law, sin, and death . . . , and to struggle in such a way that he undergoes them, but, by undergoing them, conquers them."[6] Only the Son of God could conquer in such a struggle,

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[1] LW, XXVI, 283. WA, XL/1,442,22-23.

[2] LW, XXVI, 283. WA, XL/1,442,24.

[3] LW, XXVI, 289. WA, XL/1,451,13.

[4] LW, XXVI, 289, 372. WA, XL/1,450,28-29; 567,24-568,24.

[5] LW, XXVI, 289-90. WA, XL/1,451,14-22.

[6] LW, XXVI, 373. WA, XL/1,569,18-21.

since it was only because the law here contended against its own lord that it could be condemned. "Therefore the law is guilty of stealing, of sacrilege, and of the murder of the Son of God. It loses its rights and deserves to be damned."[1] Therefore,

> since Christ has conquered the law in his own person, it necessarily follows that he is God by nature. For except for God no one, neither a man nor an angel, is above the law. But Christ is above the law, because he has conquered and strangled it.

"Therefore," Luther concludes, "he is the Son of God, and God by nature."[2]

Verus homo

On the strength of what we have heard from Luther so far we might be tempted to protest that, while the one who conquered the law may well have had to be God, it is hard to see why the same person needed simultaneously to be man. In other words, it might appear that the very Luther who insisted upon "man, man, the man Jesus" did so merely out of "ingenious overemphasis" but had little need, in his systematic Christology, for anything more than a docetic Christ. If it is true that "except for God no one, neither a man nor an angel, is above the law" and that Christ, because he is above the law, is "God by nature,"[3] then what need is there for this God to be man? Can Luther at all mean what he says, therefore, when he says "the man is God"?[4] Isn't this only a

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[1] LW, XXVI, 371. WA, XL/1,567,17-18.

[2] LW, XXVI, 373. WA, XL/1,569,25-28.

[3] Ibid.

[4] LW, XXVI, 273. WA, XL/1,427,21-22.

disguised way of saying God is God? Is the predicate, after all, really about the subject, "this man"? If so, how human actually is this one who in his selfsame person is divine?

To answer the question we could, once more, simply repeat Luther's previous discussion of the communicatio idiomatum: because Christ is one "whole person," indivisibly human and divine, the action of his deity must be credited to him also as man, though "man" in this connection then becomes a "new and theological" word.[1] But to say only that much would ignore what it was about the work of this person which required that he be man at all. Or we might content ourselves with the reminder, given previously, that Luther always proceeded from Christ's redemptive achievement as a concrete, biblical given, and that the biblical picture simply presupposed not only Christ's deity but even more so his humanity. Certainly that is true, and that could have been reason enough for Luther, with his biblical realism, to accept Christ's real manhood. But Luther also finds that, right within the scriptures, Christ's humanity is required for his mission by an inner necessity--that is, by his redemptive purpose. Or for that matter in our very search for that redemptive purpose, we might suppose, prematurely, that the purpose for which God became man (according to Luther) was that God might thus reveal himself to man, that "he might present himself to our sight." Luther does talk like that sometimes.

> Begin where Christ began--in the Virgin's womb, in the manger, and at his mother's breasts. For this purpose he came

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[1] LW, XXVI, 265. WA, XL/1,416,10-11.

> down, was born, lived among men, . . . so that in every possible way he might present himself to our sight.[1]

But does this revelational purpose of Christ say all that Luther means to say, even pastorally, when he speaks of Christ's humanity? Not nearly.

Luther has not yet said all that he needs to say about Christ's humanity until he has said with Paul that "for our sake God made Christ to be sin."[2] Still, as we must quickly add, Luther does not equate Christ's manhood with his sinnerhood. Christ is not a sinner merely by virtue of his being human. "For Christ is innocent so far as his own person is concerned,"[3] and by "his own person" Luther clearly means Christ's "whole person," human as well as divine. It was this person, both God and man, "which was righteous and invincible and therefore could not become guilty."[4] "The person is made up of the divine and the human nature, . . . true God and true man," and he "himself was made a true man by birth from the female sex."[5] Yet his incarnation as such is not his accursedness, his poverty, his humiliation. Luther pictures Christ as saying, "For my own person of humanity and divinity I am blessed, and I am in need of nothing whatever, but I shall empty myself; and I shall assume your clothing and mask."[6]

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[1] LW, XXVI, 29. WA, XL/1,77,28-78,11.

[2] LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1,434,36-435,11.

[3] LW, XXVI, 277. WA, XL/1,433,17-18.

[4] LW, XXVI, 284. WA, XL/1,443,21-22.

[5] LW, XXVI, 367. WA, XL/1,560,25-27; 561,22-23.

[6] LW, XXVI, 284. WA, XL/1,443,26-28. (Italics mine.)

Which clothing and mask? "The mask of the sinner, . . . [the] vestige of death."[1] But "as an innocent and private person, . . . it is of course true that Christ is the purest of persons, . . . God and man."[2]

It is only fair to admit, however, that these quotations from Luther about Christ's sinless humanity have been pieced together from passages which stress, more emphatically still, that Christ "is a sinner."[3] Thereby hangs a lesson, the same lesson which we have observed previously; namely, that the descriptions of who Christ is derive their determinative significance from what he did. What he did, as Luther repeatedly quotes, was that for our sake he was made to be sin who knew no sin that we might become the righteousness of God. But from the very fact that he was made sin and, beyond that, was able to overcome sin, it follows necessarily for Luther that Christ is first a pure and innocent person, both as God and as man. For, if he were not, how could he have taken "upon himself our sinful person and granted us his innocent and victorious person"?[4] If Christ's being man meant eo ipso his being a sinner, then how could we, who are as human as he was and is, now be as sinless as he is? For "just as in his person there is no longer the mask of the sinner or any vestige of death, so this is no longer in our person, since he has done everything for us."[5]

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[1] LW, XXVI, 284. WA, XL/1,444,17-18.

[2] LW, XXVI, 287-88. WA, XL/1,448,17-21.

[3] LW, XXVI, 277. WA, XL/1,433,29.

[4] LW, XXVI, 284. WA, XL/1,443,23-24.

[5] LW, XXVI, 284. WA, XL/1,444,17-18.

Although Christ's becoming man is not yet the same thing as his becoming a sinner, this does not seem to imply for Luther two chronologically separate stages in Christ's incarnation. Still, whether they began simultaneously or not, the first (Christ's divine-human sinlessness) always continued as an abiding presupposition of the second (his assumed sin).[1] But neither does it follow that, because in his own person the God-man was sinless, he was for that reason any less human. Actually, for Luther it seems to be the mark of all genuine humanity, of all that men are meant to be, that they are not only sinless but the very righteousness of God,[2] that they are above the law,[3] lords of heaven and earth,[4] that they live forever,[5] changed from sons of Adam into sons of God[6]--"born of God,"[7] also bodily[8]--and yet are all this as men.

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[1]There are passages in which Luther's language seems to suggest that, when Christ assumed our sin, he shed his own sinlessness. But these passages must be read in context, specifically in connection with Luther's description of Christ's blessedness as being hidden, clothed, dressed in sin. For example, Luther can say of Christ, "Now he is not the Son of God, born of the Virgin, but he is a sinner." Yet this sentence is preceded by: "He is not acting in his own person now." And it is followed by the qualification: "although he was innocent so far as his own person was concerned." LW, XXVI, 277. WA, XL/1,433,28-434,13. Again: "Putting off his innocence and holiness and putting on your sinful person, he bore your sin." But this follows right after the sentence: "As an innocent and private person . . . it is of course true that Christ is the purest of persons." LW, XXVI, 287-88. WA, XL/1,448,17-24.

[2]LW, XXVI, 160. WA, XL/1,273,23.

[3]LW, XXVI, 156. WA, XL/1,268,19.

[4]LW, XXVI, 352. WA, XL/1,539,31.

[5]LW, XXVI, 134. WA, XL/1,236,3-32.

[6]LW, XXVI, 8. WA, XL/1,46,31-47,12.

[7]WA, XVIII, 777, 3.

[8]WA, XL/1,48,19-20; 538,25-26.

In a theology like Luther's, in which the incommensurability of finite and infinite does not speak the last word, it is not inconceivable for an Abraham to be "a completely divine man, a son of God, the inheritor of the universe"[1] (or even to be made God![2]) without ceasing to be man.

On the contrary, it is the Manichaeans who, because they equate humanity with sinfulness, shrink from letting God become truly human.

> The Manichaeans . . . say that Christ is not truly man, but a phantom who passed through the Virgin like a ray of light passed through glass, and then fell, and so was crucified.[3]

As Luther exclaims, "This would be a fine way for us to handle the scriptures!"[4] He frankly admits that "it is the highest absurdity by far--foolishness to the Gentiles and a stumbling-block to the Jews . . . --that God should be man, a virgin's son, crucified, sitting at the Father's right hand."[5] Yet if this Jesus Christ were not as sinlessly human as he is sinlessly divine, and as bodily incarnate in his present glory as he was in his previous lowliness, then it could not be said of him that "sin and death have been abolished by this one man";[6] "that the grace of God is

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[1] LW, XXVI, 247. WA, XL/1,390,23.

[2] WA, XL/1,182,15. [3] WA, XVIII, 707,29-31.

[4] Ibid. "When God's relation to the world is that of the infinite to the finite, finitude invariably carries a stigma. One is ashamed of finitude, regarding it as a blemish, a mark of inferiority, a cause for disgust." E. LaB. Cherbonnier, "The Logic of Biblical Anthropomorphism," The Harvard Theological Review, LV (July, 1962), 205-206.

[5] WA, XVIII, 707, 25-27.

[6] LW, XXVI, 280. WA, XL/1,438,15-16. (Italics mine.)

. . . given us only in and through the grace of this one great man";[1] "that through him the whole creation was to be renewed";[2] "that in the Lord's Supper the body and the blood of Christ are presented"[3]--"so that the Son of God might be glorified through us, and the Father through him";[4] "that through this man Christ everything was to be changed, renewed, and put in order."[5] In other words, if for him to be man meant automatically that he was a sinner, then we could not cease being sinners unless we ceased to be men. But the truth, for Luther, is the other way around. In order for us men to have become true men who, in Christ, are no longer evil or worthy of death, it first has to be the case that this "man has never committed anything evil or worthy of death."[6]

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[1] BoW, p. 304. WA, XVIII, 777,3-34. (Italics mine.)

[2] LW, XXVI, 282. WA, XL/1,440,29-30. (Italics mine.)

[3] LW, XXVI, 227-28. WA, XL/1,361,21-22. (Italics mine.)

[4] WA, XL/2,136,24-25.

[5] LW, XXVI, 293. WA, XL/1,456,19-21. (Italics mine.)

[6] LW, XXVI, 277-28. WA, XL/1,434,15-16.

CHAPTER IX

THE MAN CHRIST JESUS

(CONTINUED)

Peccator Peccatorum

The sinlessness of Christ, indispensable as this was for Luther's Christology, was still not the main point at issue. In fact, Christ's innocence, readily enough accepted by Luther's opponents, threatened to overshadow what was equally essential to Christ's redemptive achievement: that "for our sake God made Christ to be sin,"[1] "a curse for us,"[2] or, in the words of Isaiah, "numbered among the thieves."[3] In Luther's own words, Christ "has sinned or has sins,"[4] he was "a sinner of sinners,"[5] indeed "the highest, the greatest, and the only sinner."[6]

Again, therefore, we confront a problem in predication. How can the theological predicate, *est peccator*, really and significantly be about the subject, this *purissima persona, deus et homo*? By reason of what can he be both the sinless God-man and at the same time a sinner? And again we encounter Luther's charac-

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[1] *LW*, XXVI, 278. *WA*, XL/1,434,36-435,11.

[2] *LW*, XXVI, 276. *WA*, XL/1,432,17-18.

[3] *LW*, XXVI, 277. *WA*, XL/1,433,25.

[4] *LW*, XXVI, 279. *WA*, XL/1,436,13.

[5] *LW*, XXVI, 278. *WA*, XL/1,434,35.

[6] *LW*, XXVI, 281. *WA*, XL/1,439,13.

teristic solution. What finally makes the predication meaningful and real is that it is soteriologically necessary. Unless Christ was our sinner, we ourselves must be; but since through him we are not sinners, it follows that he was a sinner and had to be. "Our sin must be Christ's own sin, or we shall perish eternally."[1] "If he is innocent and does not carry our sins, then we carry them and shall die and be damned in them. 'But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!' Amen."[2]

Cernere Antitheses

As we observed before, Luther's positive assertions are unintelligible apart from the antitheses they negate. "When two opposites are placed side by side, they become more evident."[3] It is important "to discern the antitheses,"[4] and not only for polemical reasons--to "drag them into the light, in order that the doctrine of justification, like the sun, may reveal their infamy and shame"[5]--but also for affirmative reasons. The unevangelical antitheses

> should not be lightly dismissed or consigned to oblivion but should be diligently considered. And this, by contrast, serves to magnify the grace of God and the blessings of Christ.[6]

Presumably, then, if the opponents deny that Christ is a sinner,

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[1] LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1,435,18.

[2] LW, XXVI, 280. WA, CL/1,438,30-31.

[3] LW, XXVI, 124. WA, XL/1,220,18-19.

[4] LW, XXVI, 248. WA, XL/1,391,18-19.

[5] LW, XXVI, 136. WA, XL/1,238,24-26.

[6] LW, XXVI, 135. WA, XL/1,237,34-238,13.

Luther's polemic must serve both a negative and a constructive function. First, he must reveal the "infamy and the shame" of their antitheses. But that still leaves the second, the constructive question. What is there about their false antithesis by contrast with which, and only by contrast with which, Christ's sinnerhood takes on its fully positive meaning? Offhand, the opponents' reverent insistence upon Christ's sinlessness would seem to be by far the more positive of the two Christologies. It is not immediately apparent how Luther can exploit that antithesis in the interest of his own contrary and apparently pessimistic insistence upon Christ's sin, and how in the bargain Christ's sinnerhood can be "magnified" into, as Luther calls it, our "most delightful comfort."[1] Still, as we shall see, unless Christ's sinnerhood does appear as "delightful" as that, it has no warrant as a predicate of its subject--that is, as the real sin of a really sinless God-man.

What actually is the antithesis to saying that Christ is a sinner? One would think it is the simple counter-assertion, Christ is not a sinner. Still, that is not the extent of the opposition. Just as Luther's affirming Christ's sinnerhood is necessitated by soteriological, not only christological, considerations, so the opponents' denying Christ's sinnerhood is likewise inspired by their contrary soteriology. And there, for Luther, lies their "infamy and shame." The papists' real motive for clearing Christ of sin, Luther claims, is not to honor Christ, as they would pretend, but

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[1] LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1,434,21.

rather to promote "justification by works."[1] "They want . . . to unwrap Christ and to unclothe him from our sins." However, "to make him innocent" is "to burden and overwhelm ourselves with our own sins, and to behold them not in Christ but in ourselves."[2] And the reason the papists do this is that they prefer to have their sins removed and replaced, not in Christ, but within their own selves--"by some opposing motivations, namely, by love,"[3] or by the sort of faith which is actualized in love.[4] It is this wish of theirs to be valuable inherently and biographically which prompts them to protest, with such deceptive reverence for Christ, that he "is not a criminal and a thief but righteous and holy,"[5] or that "it is highly absurd and insulting to call the Son of God a sinner and a curse."[6] "Perhaps," Luther shrugs, "this may impress the inexperienced, for they suppose that the sophists are . . . defending the honor of Christ and are religiously admonishing all Christians not to suppose wickedly that Christ was a curse."[7] Yet if the sophists had their way, if it were true that Christ "is innocent and does not carry our sins, then we carry them and shall die and be damned in them."[8] But, says Luther,

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[1] LW, XXVI, 279. WA, XL/1,436,27.

[2] LW, XXVI, 279. WA, XL/1,436,29-31.

[3] LW, XXVI, 286. WA, XL/1,445,28-29.

[4] LW, XXVI, 279. WA, XL/1,436,24-31.

[5] LW, XXVI, 277. WA, XL/1/432,33

[6] LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1,434,29-30.

[7] LW, XXVI, 277. WA, XL/1,432-33-433,12.

[8] LW, XXVI, 280. WA, XL/1,438,29-31.

"this is to abolish Christ and make him useless."[1] That is the "shame and infamy" of denying Christ's sinnerhood.

Then how does the sophists' denial, their divesting Christ of our sins, now provide the foil for Luther's positive thrust--serving, "by contrast, to magnify the grace of God and the blessings of Christ?"[2] Ironically, it was the scholastics' (and the Scriptures') whole profound understanding of moral predication, that same grammar of legality which insures that our sins are ours and no one else's and least of all the Son of God's, which now furnishes Luther with the very key for discovering the ways in which sin, our sin, belonged instead fo the Son of God. True, our sins did not belong to him in the sense that he committed them. Still, it is that kind of culpability, a guilt by active commission, to which Luther appeals for a comparison to underscore how real a sinner Christ was. Our sins "are as much Christ's own as if he himself had committed them."[3]

How much our sins truly are "Christ's own" Luther elaborates in half a dozen ways, recalling strangely the very ways in which our sin ought ordinarily be <u>our</u> own. These half dozen variations on how our sin is rightfully and culpably predicated of Christ (culminating in the reminder that his guilt was after all intentional) will occupy us in the next six sections of this chapter. Then, in the chapter's concluding section, we shall note how it was precisely this recourse to moral predication in his portrayal

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[1] <u>LW</u>, XXVI, 279. <u>WA</u>, XL/1,436,31.

[2] <u>LW</u>, XXVI, 135. <u>WA</u>, XL/1,238,12-13.

[3] <u>LW</u>, XXVI, 278. <u>WA</u>, XL/1,435,17.

of Christ's sinnerhood which enables Luther finally to explode that type of predication in his discussion of Christ's surprise victory. In other words, it was just because Christ "was made under the law" that he could be the death of it--the law and its whole tyrannizing mode of predication. For, in the end, his intentional self-incrimination, which rightfully rendered him guilty before the law, was the selfsame intention which in turn incriminated and annihilated the law--his intention, namely, of invincible divine mercy. Here, in the selfsameness of Christ's loving will, willing to be a sinner in order to be a Redeemer, Luther finds the secret bond which unites the personal subject with its paradoxical predicate, the sinless God-man with the sins of all men. Nevertheless, their sins are Christ's own, not simply by a fiat of his will, but in much the same way that those sins are ours--that is, "as if he himself had committed them."

Sub lege, ergo peccator

For example, first of all, our sins are so much Christ's own that we dare not say he bore merely our punishment. What he bore was our sin. If he did not, the law had no reason to punish him. Luther refuses to explain away Paul's statement that Christ was made a curse for us, or that he was made sin for us, by so diluting "sin" and "curse" that they mean merely the consequences of sin.[1] Such an exegetical tour de force, Luther argues, would be an evasion of the clear meaning of the text--and, let us note, not only of the text's words but also of the text's purpose, its

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[1] LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1,434,29-435,13.

native reasons. The critics who "want to deny that [Christ] is a sinner and a curse" prefer to say rather that he "underwent the torments of sin and death."[1] But that is not all that Paul says, and "surely these words of Paul are not without purpose."[2] Neither are the words of John the Baptist, about "the Lamb of God." Nor the cries of the psalmist: "My iniquities have overtaken me"; "Heal me, for I have sinned against thee"; "O God, thou knowest my folly." ("In these psalms the Holy Spirit is speaking in the person of Christ and testifying in clear words that he has sinned or has sins.")[3] These "clear words" are all to some purpose, testifying as they do to the real sin, and not merely to the suffering, of Christ. And remember the way Isaiah speaks of Christ, "God has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Of course, for Christ to bear iniquities, Luther agrees, does include his bearing our punishment. "But why is Christ punished? Is it not because he has sin and bears sins?"[4] That must be Paul's reason, too, for applying to Christ the passage from Deuteronomy, "Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree," the disclaimers of Jerome to the contrary notwithstanding.[5]

For what is it that causes the law, the whole retributive order of things, to retaliate with punishment at all? What else but the culprit's sin and accursedness? If our sin had not really

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[1] LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1,434,32-34. (Italics mine.)

[2] LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1,434,36.

[3] LW, XXVI, 279. WA, XL/1,435,31-436,13.

[4] LW, XXVI, 279. WA, XL/1,435,27. (Italics mine.)

[5] LW, XXVI, 276, 287. WA, XL/1,432,18-24; 448,17-19.

been Christ's, he could not have been liable to punishment, he could not have been killed. "For unless he had taken upon himself [our] sins, . . . the law would have had no right over him, since it condemns only sinners and holds only them under a curse, . . . since the cause of the curse and of death is sin." It is for that reason that the law says to Christ,

> Let every sinner die! And therefore, Christ, if you want to reply that you are guilty and that you bear the punishment, you must bear the sin and the curse as well.[1]

For that reason, accordingly, Paul was correct in applying to Christ "this general law from Moses."[2] To predicate sin and accursedness of Christ is lawful and rational: "Christ hung on a tree, therefore Christ is a curse of God"[3]-a lawfully accursed sinner, not merely the innocent bearer of sin's punishments.

Socius Peccatorum

Second, our sins are so much Christ's own that, when he fraternized with sinners, he himself stood condemned for the company he kept. And rightly so. For, says Luther, "a magistrate regards someone as a criminal and punishes him if he catches him among thieves, even though the man has never committed anything evil."[4] "Among thieves," indeed. Jesus was consorting with the enemies of God. He was a socius peccatorum.[5]

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[1] LW, XXVI, 279. WA, XL/1,436,16-20.

[2] LW, XXVI, 279. WA, XL/1,436,21.

[3] LW, XXVI, 279. WA, XL/1,436,22-23.

[4] LW, XXVI, 277-78. WA, XL/1,434,14-16.

[5] LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1,434,17.

Of this Christ, Luther complains, "the sophists deprive us when they segregate Christ from sins and from sinners and set him forth to us only as an example to be imitated."[1] They err in their too aloof definition of Christ, but also in their too sanguine definition of "the world," in which Christ dwelt. For, says Luther, what is required here is that "you have two definitions, of 'world' and of 'Christ.'"[2] That is to say, we must remember that Christ delivered us, "not only from this world but from this 'evil world,'"[3] "from this evil age, which is an obedient servant and a willing follower of its god, the devil."[4] What links sinner to sinner in this worldwide syndicate of evil is not merely that they all misbehave in the same way, or even that they all aid and abet one another. Rather they are all under the tyrannical jurisdiction of a demonic lord, so that, whatever their efforts at good behavior, "the definition still stands: You are still in the present evil age."[5] What makes it evil is that "whatever is in this age is subject to the evil of the devil, who rules the entire world."[6] The company of sinners is a kingdom, a realm, of evil.

This realm, being under divine curse, is off-limits. Yet it is into this realm that Christ came. "He joined himself to the company of the accursed."[7] "And being joined with us who were

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[1] LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1,434,22-24.

[2] LW, XXVI, 42. WA, XL/1,97,26.

[3] LW, XXVI, 42. WA, XL/1,97,24-25.

[4] LW, XXVI, 41. WA, XL/1,96,17-18.

[5] LW, XXVI, 40. WA, XL/1,95,12-13.

[6] LW, XXVI, 39. WA, XL/1,94,16-17.

[7] Gal, p. 281. WA, XL/1,451,14.

accursed, he became a curse for us."[1] "Therefore when the law found him among thieves, it condemned and executed him as a thief."[2]

Ego commisi peccata mundi

Third, our sins are so much Christ's own that, no matter who committed them originally, all of them have now been committed, in effect, by Jesus Christ personally. The sins he bore, as John says, are nothing less than "the sins of the world."[3] And "the sin of the world," as Luther understands the phrase, is not sin in general. It is no abstract universal. It is exhaustive of every actual sinner and sin in history: "not only my sins and yours, but the sins of the entire world, past, present, and future."[4] Luther represents Christ as saying, "I have committed the sins that all men have committed"[5]--"the sin of Paul, the former blasphemer, . . . of Peter, who denied Christ, of David, . . . an adulterer and a murderer and who caused the Gentiles to blaspheme the name of the Lord."[6]

Still, even in the face of such specific enumerations, we in our false humility are wont to exempt Christ from our sins, at least from those sins of ours which seem to us more than Christ should be expected to bear and which, alas, we alone must bear.

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[1] LW, XXVI, 290. WA, XL/1,451,18-19.

[2] LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1,434,19-20.

[3] LW, XXVI, 151. WA, XL/1,261,20.

[4] LW, XXVI, 281. WA, XL/1,438,33-34.

[5] LW, XXVI, 283-84. WA, XL/1,442,34-443,14.

[6] LW, XXVI, 277. WA, XL/1,433,29-31.

> It is easy for you to say and believe that Christ, the Son of God, was given for the sins of Peter, Paul, and other saints, who seem to us to have been worthy of this grace. But it is very hard for you, who regard yourself as unworthy of this grace, to say and believe from your heart that Christ was given for your many great sins.[1]

But false humility is what this is, and disdain for Christ. Luther shows small sympathy for the neo-pharisaic pseudo-publican who prays, "God be merciful to me a sinner," and yet who means no more by "sinner" than the doer of trivial sins, "an imitation and counterfeit sinner."[2] "Christ was given, not for sham or counterfeit sins, nor yet for small sins, but for great and huge sins, not for one or two sins but for all sins."[3] "And unless you are part of the company of those who say 'our sins,' . . . there is no salvation for you."[4]

Conversely, it is only because "the sin of the world" is no mere abstraction but an enumerative totality of every real sin and sinner that Luther can perform the inference he repeatedly does: Christ is "the one who took away the sins of the world; if the sin of the world is taken away, then it is taken away also from me."[5] Accordingly, Luther describes the Father sending his Son: "Be Peter the denier, Paul the persecutor, . . . David the adulterer, the sinner who ate the apple in Paradise, the thief on the cross; in short, be the person . . . who had committed the sins of all men."[6]

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[1] LW, XXVI, 34. WA, XL/1,86,9-13.
[2] LW, XXVI, 34. WA, XL/1,86,26-30.
[3] LW, XXVI, 35. WA, XL/1,87,25-27.
[4] LW, XXVI, 35. WA, XL/1,87,29-31.
[5] LW, XXVI, 151. WA, XL/1,261,20-21.
[6] LW, XXVI, 280. WA, XL/1,437,23-26.

Ipsum Peccatum

Fourth, our sins are so much Christ's own that, by his acknowledging them as his, he himself--not only the sins he bore, but he who bore them--becomes a sin and a curse. This drastic conclusion is suggested by Paul's strong use of "curse" in its substantive rather than its adjectival sense. Christ is said to have been made a curse and not merely accursed, not just a sinner but sin itself. And isn't this the way it is, Luther recalls, whenever "a sinner really comes to a knowledge of himself?" He can no longer distinguish nicely between his sin, on the one hand, and himself, on the other, as though the two were still separable. "That is, he seems to himself to be not only miserable but misery itself; not only a sinner and an accursed one, but sin and the curse itself."[1] And not only is that what he seems to be. A man who feels these things in earnest really becomes (fit plane) sin, death, and the curse itself."[2]

This recalls our earlier chapter on man the sinner, as Luther pursued that matter against Erasmus. When a man knows himself a sinner, he becomes in that act a sinner all the more. For to know that I am a sinner is to know, by verus sensus and at least by definition, that I anger God. Yet if I believe that I anger God, then of course I am disbelieving that I delight God. Still, as Luther reminds Erasmus, that is exactly the impossible thing which God demands: that we who do indeed anger him must

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[1] LW, XXVI, 288. WA, XL/1,449,14-15.

[2] LW, XXVI, 288. WA, XL/1,449,18. (Italics mine.)

nevertheless believe we please him. So the more certainly a man recognizes he is a sinner, under the divine curse, and forsaken of God, the more certainly his sin is "magnified"--his sin of unbelief. Although the sinner admits his sin (and it is right and true that he should), yet he does not by that act become right and true himself. By repudiating the sins which God repudiates, the penitent does not thereby extricate himself from his sins, as though the sins which he repudiates were one thing and the self which does the repudiating were something else, something creditable; as though the predicates were separable from their subject. And the reason they are not separable is that the subject, the very self, who confesses his accursedness (and rightly so) thereby incriminates himself anew by denying (contrary to God's command) that he pleases God. That is why "a man who feels these things in earnest really becomes sin, death, and the curse itself"--"not only . . . adjectively but . . . substantively."[1]

Luther is all but saying the same thing of Christ. Although Christ himself did not commit sin, yet he so acknowledged our sins as his own and himself accursed because of them that this very acknowledgment alienates God and makes Christ a sinner, not only adjectivally but substantively.

> All our evils . . . overwhelmed him once, for a brief time, and flooded in over his head, as in Psalm 88:7 and 16 the prophet laments in Christ's name when he says: "Thy wrath lies heavy upon me and thou dost overwhelm me with all thy waves," and: "Thy wrath has swept over me, thy dread assaults destroy me."[2]

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[1] LW, XXVI, 288. WA, XL/1,448,35-449,19.

[2] LW, XXVI, 290. WA, XL/1,452,12-20.

Luther can even say of Christ: "He is not acting in his own person now; now he is not the Son of God, born of the virgin, but he is a sinner."[1] For that is the way it is with the law. "All it does is to increase sin, accuse, frighten, threaten with death, and disclose God as a wrathful Judge who damns sinners."[2] And "where terror and a sense of sin, death, and the wrath of God are present, there is certainly no righteousness, nothing heavenly, and no God."[3] In the case of Christ, the law raged even more fiercely than it does against us. "It accused him of blasphemy and sedition."[4] "It frightened him so horribly that he experienced greater anguish than any man has ever experienced."[5] Witness his "bloody sweat, the comfort of the angel, his solemn prayer in the garden, and finally . . . that cry of misery on the cross, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'"[6] "A man who feels these things in earnest really becomes sin, death, and the curse itself."[7]

In Corpore Suo

Fifth, our sins are so much Christ's own that he bore them not only psychologically but also, as we do, bodily--"in his body." That prepositional phrase, sometimes quoted directly from I Peter

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[1] LW, XXVI, 277. WA, XL/1,433,28-29.

[2] LW, XXVI, 365. WA, XL/1,558,18-20.

[3] LW, XXVI, 363. WA, XL/1,554,24-555,13.

[4] LW, XXVI, 370. WA, XL/1,565,14.

[5] LW, XXVI, 372. WA, XL/1,567,27-28.

[6] LW, XXVI, 372. WA, XL/1,567,3-31.

[7] LW, XXVI, 288. WA, XL/1,449,18-19.

2:24, occurs so often and so habitually in Luther's Christological discussions that its very frequency demonstrates how somatically Luther conceived of sin, whether ours or Christ's.

What precisely Luther understood the connection to be between sin and bodily existence (if indeed he did understand the connection precisely) is well-nigh impossible to determine from the two documents of his which we are considering. For that matter, whatever understanding Luther did have of this connection might well prove unintelligible to an age like ours which, for all its appreciation of psychosomatic man, still inclines to spiritualize sin, and death as "the wage of sin." What we can say about Luther, at the very least, is that he would have found it hard to speak of our sin as really ours, and hence of our sin as really Christ's, apart from the bodies in which our sin rages and, in Christ's body, is destroyed. Of course, such expressions as "the body of sin" and "in his body on the tree" were not original with Luther but came to him on rather high recommendation.

It is true, Luther has been commended for not succumbing to the gnostic temptation, as some theologians have, of equating the New Testament "flesh" with sins merely of the body. That Luther does warn against this error we have already seen from his arguments against Erasmus.[1] In his Galatians lectures, likewise, he reminds his students: "Now in Paul 'flesh' does not, as the sophists suppose, mean crass sins. . . . 'Flesh' means the entire nature of man, with reason and all his powers."[2] Neither are crass,

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[1] WA, XVIII, 742,12-21; 740,1-6; 744,6-18; 780,35-781,1.

[2] LW, XXVI, 139. WA, XL/1,244,14-17. See also WA, XL/1, 348,14-17.

bodily sins, just because they are more obvious, for that reason more culpable than the sins of the spirit. On the contrary, the sins against the first table are more to be feared than the sins against the second table,[1] the "white devil" more than the "black devil."[2] Nor could Luther, any more than he could say all sin is of the body, say that all bodily existence is sinful. We need only to recall that the Son of God, by being "made a true man by birth from the female sex," was not by that token a sinner.[3]

Nevertheless, Luther seems equally sure that there is for Christ no bearing of our sins without his doing so "in his body." Why? In one passage, and perhaps no oftener than that, Luther seems to explain Christ's bodily bearing of our sins in terms of a theory of "satisfaction." Christ, he says, "took these sins, committed by us, upon his own body, in order to make satisfaction for them with his own blood."[4] Yet the theme of satisfaction--a term which Luther seldom uses and, when he does, tends to use disparagingly[5]--is not characteristic of his Christological language, even when he speaks of Christ's "blood" (which is usually coupled with the language of redemption and sacrifice and not of satisfaction).[6]

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[1] LW, XXVI, 36. WA, XL/1,88,18-19.

[2] LW, XXVI, 41, 49. WA, XL/1,96,10; 108,18-22.

[3] LW, XXVI, 367. WA, XL/1,561,22-23.

[4] LW, XXVI,277. WA, XL/1,433,33-434,12.

[5] LW, XXVI, 23, 132, 180, 411. WA, XL/1,83,30; 84,13-14; 85,22; 232,30-33; 301,34; 623,18-21.

[6] LW, XXVI, 33, 99, 132, 175, 176, 296, 360. WA, XL/1, 84,12-15; 181,18-19; 232,33-233,14; 295,25-28, 33; 305,25-29; 458,23-33; 550,23-26.

No, the function which Luther most usually ascribes to Christ's bearing our sins "in his body" is that, by his bodily dying, he put those sins in his body to death. "He bore and sustained them in his own body,"[1] where, by his death and apparent defeat, they were exterminated. Or, in Luther's own strong and variegated language, they were "destroyed," "conquered," "removed," "annihilated," "purged," "expiated," "abolished," "killed," "buried," "damned," "devoured,"[2] Christ "conquers and destroys these monsters--sin, death, and the curse--without weapons or battle, in his own body and in himself, as Paul enjoys saying (Col. 2:15): 'He disarmed the principalities and powers, triumphing over them in him.'"[3] "All these things happen . . . through Christ the crucified, on whose shoulders lie all the evils of the human race--. . . all of which die in him, because by his death he kills them."[4]

Something else remains to be said. Christ bears our sins in his body, not only because they are thereby destroyed, but also because they are ours. There is no question in Luther's mind that Christ could have vanquished the tyrants without submitting to the cross, by an outright exercise of his divine sovereignty. But such an alternative completely overlooks how intimately his victory was to be ours, and how it was therefore to be achieved "in our sinful person."[5] Luther has Christ saying,

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[1]LW, XXVI, 288-89. WA, XL/1,449,31-32.

[2]LW, XXVI, 159, 280, 281, 282. WA, XL/1, 273,21; 438,14; 439,26-27; 441,22-25.

[3]LW, XXVI, 282. WA, XL/1,440,24-25.

[4]LW, XXVI, 160. WA, XL/1,273,26-29.

[5]LW, XXVI, 284. WA, XL/1,443,23-24.

> I could have overcome the law by my supreme authority, without any injury to me; . . . but for the sake of you, who were under the law, I assumed your flesh; . . . I went down into the same imprisonment . . . under which you were serving as captives.[1]

That is why "all men, even the apostles or prophets or patriarchs, would have remained under the curse [1] if Christ had not put himself in opposition to sin, death, the curse . . . , and [2] if he had not overcome them in his own body."[2] For, as Luther seems to see it, Christ does not bear our sin as ours unless he assumes "our sinful person," and our sinful person is inseparable from our bodies.[3] "The old man . . . is born of flesh and blood."[4] John Osborne has captured a characteristic insight of Luther's in the line, spoken by Hans to his son: "You can't ever get away from your body because that's what you live in, and it's all you've got to die in."[5]

Therefore, even though Christ in his incarnation through the Virgin was the purest of persons, and even though since his resurrection "there is no longer the mask of the sinner or any vestige of death" in him,[6] still, as he describes his historic

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[1] LW, XXVI, 370. WA, XL/1, 565,27-566,13.

[2] LW, XXVI, 287. WA, XL/1, 447,29-33. (The bracketed numbers and italics are mine.)

[3] See how, in connection with Gal. 2:20, Luther understands persona (WA, XL/1,281-82) as inseparable from being "present in the flesh, living your familiar life, having five senses, and doing everything in this physical life that any other man does." LW, XXVI, 170ff. WA, XL/1,288,20ff.

[4] LW, XXVI, 7. WA, XL/1,45,28.

[5] John Osborne, Luther (New York: The New American Library of American Literature, 1963), p. 50.

[6] LW, XXVI, 284. WA, XL/1,444,17-18.

mission, "I shall empty myself, I shall assume your clothing and mask, and in this I shall walk about and suffer death, in order to set you free from death."[1] So "even though you know that he is God and man," "you do not yet have Christ" until you know that "putting off his innocence and holiness and putting on your sinful person, he bore your sin."[2] "He attached himself to those who were accursed, [not only by occupying the same world with them, nor only by fraternizing with them, but by] assuming their flesh and blood."[3] Nor dare his assumption of our flesh be understood merely as a sinless incarnation, "in a purely physical way."[4] Rather "he took along with him whatever clung to the flesh that he had assumed for our sake."[5] Granted that this mystery "is impossible to understand and to believe fully, because all this is so contradictory to human reason."[6] Nonetheless, the whole thrust of the mystery is clear: "Just as Christ is wrapped up in our flesh and blood, so we must . . . know him to be wrapped up in our sins."[7]

Sponte

Sixth, our sin is so much Christ's own that, since it is his by choice, it incriminates his very motives, his innermost self. Because he attached himself to our sins "willingly" (sponte),

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[1] LW, XXVI, 284. WA, XL/1,443,27-29. (Italics mine.)
[2] LW, XXVI, 288. WA, XL/1,448,23-26.
[3] LW, XXVI, 289. WA, XL/1,451,14-15.
[4] LW, XXVI, 290. WA, XL/1,452,8.
[5] LW, XXVI, 290. WA, XL/1,451,22-23.
[6] LW, XXVI, 290. WA, XL/1,452,10-11.
[7] LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1,434,26-27.

he has only himself to thank for the fact that he is liable for them. "Because he took upon himself our sins, not by compulsion but by his own free will, it was right for him to bear the punishment and the wrath of God."[1]

The deliberate, intentional character of Christ's sinnerhood seems to illustrate most graphically for Luther how truly Christ bore our sin "in himself." And it may be that at this pcint Luther's meaning comes closest to being intelligible to an age like our own, with its definitions of selfhood in terms of "responsibility" and "decision." "Modern man," Bultmann reminds us, "bears the responsibility for his own thinking, willing, and doing."[2] We are reminded once more of Luther's exchange with "the modern man," Erasmus. Even though sinners are like compliant beasts ridden by their rider, the devil, or like evil seeds who are never free from the pressures of the Creator to produce their evil fruit, still what identifies their sin as characteristically their own is that it always expresses what they themselves will and are. It is exactly as the ones who will and think as they do that God "necessarily foreknows" them as sinners. So understood, Luther is even willing to grant Erasmus that the determinative function of the human ego is "the throne of will and reason," "his rational and truly human part."[3] Similarly, in his lectures on Galatians, Luther can agree with the moral philosophers that what character-

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[1] LW, XXVI, 284. WA, XL/1,443,19-21.

[2] H. W. Bartsch (ed.), Kerygma and Myth, trans. Reginald H. Fuller (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1957), p. 6.

[3] BoW, pp. 308-309. WA, XVIII, 780,18-19, 37-38.

izes a man's actions as really and personally his is the ethical quality of his motives, his rational will.[1]

It is against this background that we might appreciate the intensive emphasis which Luther gives to the fact that Christ bore our sin "willingly."[2] In an earlier quote we heard Luther speak of Christ as a socius peccatorum, and heard him explain, "Thus a magistrate regards someone as a criminal and punishes him if he catches him among thieves, even though the man has never committed anything evil."[3] But in the case of Christ this was no arbitrary guilt by association. Christ could not plead that, though he was indeed among sinners, he was there in innocent ignorance or against his will. For, as Luther adds immediately, "Christ was not only found among simmers; but of his own free will . . . he wanted to be an associate of sinners."[4] Accordingly, "the law came and said: 'Christ if you want to reply that you are guilty and that you bear the punishment, you must bear the sin and the curse as well."[5]

Ex Magna Charitate

It was not for nothing that Luther invoked every biblical description of Christ's sinnerhood which would show that, according to the moral grammar of predication, Christ was rightfully and legally subject to the law's condemnation, that our sins "are as

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[1] LW, XXVI, 256ff. WA, XL/1,402-403.

[2] LW, XXVI, 284, 292, 370. WA, XL/1,443,25 (volens); 455, 12 (libens); 564,31 (sponte).

[3] LW, XXVI, 277-78. WA, XL/1,434,14-16.

[4] LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1,434,16-17. (Italics mine.)

[5] LW, XXVI, 279. WA, XL/1,436,19-20.

much Christ's own as if he himself had committed them."[1] For, by granting the legal order its maximum due, it is now drawn into the fray, not at its worst--not as the emasculated legalism of the scholastics, not as some miscarriage of justice by the Sanhedrin--but at its best. As a consequence, it is the divine law in its own holy integrity--that is, as it justly condemns every sinner, no matter how pious, as the enemy of God--which now does what it has to do to this peccator peccatorum. And it is this same law at its holiest and best which, in the mirabile duellum which ensues, is eternally discredited. The other antagonists as well--sin, devil, curse, wrath, death--are present not as caricatures but at the height of their power.

It is only because the enemies involved are the real enemies--the ones, in other words, with whom men have to reckon for life and death before God--that the mirabile duellum becomes indeed a "very joyous duel," iucundissimum duellum.[2] Here we find Luther applying his own hermeneutical rule, exploiting the antithesis of the opponents (and doing so even more trenchantly than he did in his dialectical display against Erasmus) in order not only to "reveal their infamy and shame"[3] but to celebrate in turn our "knowledge of Christ and most delightful comfort."[4] The whole legal mode of predication, so elaborately employed for what seemed a merely negative detailing of Christ's sinnerhood, now "by

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[1] LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1,435,17.

[2] LW, XXVI, 164. WA, XL/1,279,25.

[3] LW, XXVI, 136. WA, XL/1,238,25-26.

[4] LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1,434,21.

contrast serves to magnify the grace of God and the blessings of Christ."[1]

The grace of God and the blessings of Christ"--that is the secret of the iucundissimum duellum. Or rather what is the secret is that this divine grace, "the blessing," is locked in mortal combat with the curse "in this one person." "Now let us see," asks Luther, "how two such extremely contrary things come together in one person."[2] The answer, as might be expected, is that when they do come together it is the divine powers--divine righteousness, life, and blessing--which of course prevail over their lesser contraries, sin and death and the curse.[3] But the secret, indeed the prerequisite, of the victory is that it all occurs "in his own body and in himself."[4] Both sets of contraries are really his. If the sin had not been his, as truly as the righteousness was, the law could easily have avoided its blasphemy against him by cursing only the one and not the other. However, "he joined God and man in one person. And being joined with us who were accursed, he became a curse for us; and he concealed his blessing in our sin, death, and curse, which condemned and killed him."[5] His intentional self-incrimination, his personal decision to attach himself to the enemies of God--the very reason he was cursed, and

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[1] LW, XXVI, 135. WA, XL/1,238,12-123.

[2] LW, XXVI, 280-81. WA, XL/1,438,32-33.

[3] "For if the blessing in Christ could be conquered, then God himself would be conquered. But this is impossible." LW, XXVI, 282. WA, XL/1,440,19-21.

[4] LW, XXVI, 282. WA, XL/1,440,23.

[5] LW, XXVI, 290. WA, XL/1,451,20.

rightfully--was the selfsame decision of the selfsame person (the merciful decision of the divine person) which to curse was sheer blasphemy. The wonder, therefore, is not just that the curse was conquered by the blessing. The prior wonder is, Why should the curse want to attack the blessing in the first place? Luther's answer is that, because God's blessing and our sin were so intimately joined in this one person (as intimately as the "person" and his "work"[1]), therefore the curse, which had no choice but to condemn our sin, necessarily condemned the divine blessing as well. "This circumstance, 'in himself,' makes the duel more amazing and outstanding; for it shows that such great things were to be achieved in the one and only person of Christ."[2]

We began the chapter by asking, as a problem in theological predication, By reason of what can such a contradictory predicate as sin, our sin at that, really and meaningfully belong to Christ, this "purest of persons, . . . God and man?"[3] Luther's answer must finally be, by reason of Christ's love. He "did this because of his great love; for Paul says [of Christ, in Gal. 2:20]: 'who loved me.'"[4] In the last analysis, the explanation of Christ's paradoxical sinnerhood is simply that "he is nothing but sheer, infinite mercy, which gives and is given";[5] "the kind of lover who

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[1] LW, XXVI, 367. WA, XL/1,560,24-28.

[2] LW, XXVI, 282. WA, XL/1,440,26-27.

[3] LW, XXVI, 287-88. WA, XL/1,448,19-20.

[4] LW, XXVI, 177. WA, XL/1,297,14.

[5] LW, XXVI, 178. WA, XL/1,298,20-21.

gives himself for us and . . . who interposes himself as the Mediator between God and us miserable sinners."[1]

Yet to speak of Christ as the "Mediator between God and us miserable sinners" seems to suggest that, while Christ may lovingly have predicated our sins of himself, "God" (perhaps the first person of the Trinity) may not so spontaneously concur in this predication but prefers to reserve judgment. For Luther this would be tantamount to saying that the ultimate and terrifying truth about the Divine Majesty is that he is our judge and that the whole project of overcoming his judgment and abolishing our sin must be achieved "in the person" of someone other than himself, finally in our own persons. And that is exactly the fatal heresy, Luther would say, of those who prefer to speculate about the Divine Majesty apart from Christ, and who prefer to do so just because they suppose they can face his judgment on the strength of whatever behavioral transformations occur within their own persons.

But this is to deny what Luther, as we saw previously, so vigorously affirmed: namely, that "to conquer the sin of the world, . . . and the wrath of God in himself--this is the work, not of any creature but of the divine power."[2] "Therefore when we teach that men are justified through Christ and that Christ is the victor over sin, . . . we are testifying at the same time that he is God by nature."[3]

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[1] LW, XXVI, 178-79. WA, XL/1,299,24-26.

[2] LW, XXVI, 282. WA, XL/1,440,17-18.

[3] LW, XXVI, 283. WA, XL/1,441,31-33.

Accordingly, the final explanation which really and meaningfully predicates our sin of Christ is that same loving will which he who "is God by nature" shares with his Father. "The indescribable and inestimable mercy and love of God," who saw "that we were being held under a curse and that we could not be liberated from it, . . . heaped all the sins of all men upon him."[1] The culpable decision by which Christ attached himself to the enemies of God is simultaneously the decision of this very God. "Of his own free will and by the will of the Father he wanted to be an associate of sinners."[2] Indeed, it is "only by taking hold of Christ, who, by the will of the Father, has given himself into death for our sins," that we are "drawn and carried directly to the Father."[3] The only alternative is to withdraw our sins from Christ, hoping wanly that God might enable us to remove and replace them in our own persons, and thus to be left alone with the mortifying "majesty of God."[4]

Yet even the Divine Majesty, the very name by which Luther had described the hidden and intolerable God of the De Servo Arbitrio, becomes for believers the same God who lovingly destroys our sin in the person of his Son. "For this is a work that is appropriate only to the Divine Majesty and is not within the power of either man or angel--namely, that Christ has abolished sin."[5]

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[1] LW, XXVI, 280. WA, XL/1,437,19-22.

[2] LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1,434,17-18.

[3] LW, XXVI, 42. WA, XL/1,99,10-13.

[4] LW, XXVI, 42. WA, XL/1,99,17.

[5] LW, XXVI, 41. WA, XL/1,96,15-16.

"The Divine Majesty did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all."[1] The maiestas Dei, before whose inscrutable depths and dreadful judgments the sinner was forbidden to ask Why, now, in Christ, provides the sinner with new depths of mystery and perhaps even an answer to his question, but of an altogether different order.

> The human heart is too limited to comprehend, much less to describe, the great depths and burning passion of divine love toward us. Indeed, the very greatness of divine mercy produces not only difficulty in believing but incredulity. Not only do I hear that God Almighty, the Creator of all, is good and merciful; but I hear that the Supreme Majesty cared so much for me . . . that he did not spare his own Son, . . . in order that he might hang in the midst of thieves and become sin and a curse for me, the sinner and accursed one, and in order that I might be made righteous, blessed, and a son and heir of God. Who can adequately proclaim this goodness of God? Not even all the angels.[2]

By reason of what, then, is our sin Christ's own? "By divine love sin was laid upon him."[3]

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[1] LW, XXVI, 182. WA, XL/1,303,30-31.

[2] LW, XXVI, 292. WA, XL/1,455,17-27.

[3] LW, XXVI, 279. WA, XL/1,436,18.

CHAPTER X

MAN THE BELIEVER

Theologia De Nobis

The other side of the truth that Christ conquered our sin in his own person is that the sin which he conquered, "having put on our person," really was our sin, and that his triumph, therefore, is no less ours than his.[1] "My sin and death are damned and abolished in the sin and death of Christ."[2] As we saw, Luther could say, on the one hand, that our sins "are as much Christ's own as if he himself had committed them."[3] But he could also say, or could represent Christ as saying, to us, "Therefore I have conquered the law . . . in your person, which is tantamount to your having conquered the law yourselves." It is no less a one than the harassed sinner himself who now stands up to the divine law.

> Law, what is it to me if you make me guilty and convict me of having committed many sins? In fact, I am still committing many sins every day. This does not affect me; I am deaf and do not hear you. . . . For I am dead to you; I now live to Christ.[5]

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[1] LW, XXVI, 371. WA, XL/1,566,16-567,12.

[2] LW, XXVI, 160. WA, XL/1,273,31-32.

[3] LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1,435,17.

[4] LW, XXVI, 370-71. WA, XL/1,566,14-17.

[5] LW, XXVI, 158. WA, XL/1,271,23-29.

Not only does Christ say, "I am as that sinner who is attached to me . . . ," but the believer also says in turn, "I am as Christ."[1]

If, in view of such extravagant predicates about man, someone should charge Luther with having made the human subject into the object of theology--not only the human sinner as the object of the law, but also the human believer as the object of the gospel--it would be difficult to refute that charge. Nor, it seems to me, would a refutation be particularly necessary. Not as long as we keep in mind that for Luther the one subject whom the gospel is pre-eminently and consistently about is the Deus iustificans in Jesus Christ--"from whom, through whom and unto whom all my theological thinking flows, back and forth, day and night"[2]--and that, precisely because the gospel is about Christ and because Christ is about us, Luther's theology is therefore about us.

So it is. In a quotation like the following it is simply impossible to deny the persistent references to the human subject, the believing "I," even to the point of his being the subject syntactically of every one of the sentences--but notice, only because he is the beneficiary of Christ.

> Although I am a sinner according to the law, . . . nevertheless I do not despair. I do not die, because Christ lives who is my righteousness and my eternal and heavenly life. In that righteousness and life I have no sin, conscience, and death. I am indeed a sinner according to the present life and its righteousness, as a son of Adam where the law accuses me, death reigns and devours me. But above this life I have another righteousness, another life, which is Christ,

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[1] LW, XXVI, 168. WA, XL/1,205,26-27.

[2] See p. 48, n. 1.

> the Son of God, who does not know sin and death but is righteousness and eternal life. For his sake this body of mine will be raised from the dead and delivered from the slavery of the law and sin, and will be sanctified together with the Spirit.[1]

It might just be then that the gospel as Luther understands it is indeed about man the believer, if we mean that what is true of Christ is, by happy exchange, true of his believers. "By this fortunate exchange with us he took upon himself our sinful person and granted us his innocent and victorious person."[2] "What is ours becomes his and what is his becomes ours."[3] Abraham's promised "offspring" is of course Christ but, for that very reason, the offspring includes us. "Although it was not promised to us, it was promised about us; for we were named in the promise, 'In your Offspring, etc.'"[4]

Actually, though, this is not the whole of the problem. The offense of Luther's anthropocentrism arises, not just with his theology's being about man, but presumably with its being about man as a subject--that is, as a doer, or at least as a believer, as one who is what he is because of what he believes and does. Is Luther's theology about <u>that</u> man? If his theology, also as gospel, is about man, is it about man in his subjectivity? How does he become what he most definitively is, <u>coram deo</u>, namely, righteous and a Christian? Does the question sound suspiciously Kierkegaardian, like Johannes Climacus' question in <u>Concluding</u>

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[1] <u>LW</u>, XXVI, 9. <u>WA</u>, XL/1,47,30-48,20.

[2] <u>LW</u>, XXVI, 284. <u>WA</u>, XL/1,443,23-24.

[3] <u>LW</u>, XXVI, 292. <u>WA</u>, XL/1,454,32-33.

[4] <u>LW</u>, XXVI, 358. <u>WA</u>, XL/1,547,22.

Unscientific Postscript, What is it to become a Christian?[1] Really the question is almost identical, at least verbally, with the one which Luther poses for himself and Erasmus: "Our question is . . . , how may we become good men and Christians?"[2] And how, according to Luther, do we become Christians? By means of a Christian subjectivity? So, even if we concede that Luther's determinative evangelical predicates do finally describe man, we still face this new question, Do they describe him in terms of what he subjectively does?

The answer to that question, at least at first glance, must be an emphatic No, in view of Luther's constitutive denial of all justification by "works." But it takes only a second thought to recall that Luther just as emphatically insisted that that by which we are justified is our faith. And surely faith is, if anything is, a function of the Christian subject--without ceasing to be, of course, simultaneously the work of the Holy Spirit. Isn't it that, then, namely the faith of the believing subject, which accounts for his theological status, his righteousness--"the righteousness of faith," as Luther calls it?[3] Isn't it this one feature of his subjectivity, not his "works" but his faith, which defines him as Christian? "Therefore we define a Christian as follows: . . . He is someone to whom, because of his faith in Christ, God

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[1]"To put it quite simply: How may I, Johannes Climacus, participate in the happiness promised by Christianity?" Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 20.

[2]BoW, p. 86. WA, XVIII, 620,35.

[3]LW, XXVI, 122. WA, XL/1,218,7.

does not impute his sin." "But," as Luther adds, "I purposely said, 'To the extent that he is a Christian' . . . ; that is, to the extent that he has his conscience . . . enriched by this faith, . . . which cannot be exalted and praised enough, since it makes men sons and heirs of God."[1] Is it therefore because of this one righteous thing which they do, namely that they believe, that Christians are righteous? Luther does say, "If you believe, you are righteous."[2] "And so a man does not live because of his doing; he lives because of his believing."[3]

It must be apparent by now that the way we have framed the question is deliberately naive. For how could we overlook what Luther says everywhere, that faith justifies only because it is faith in Jesus Christ, who alone is our justification? Obviously, "for the sake of our faithin Christ" is just Luther's way of saying, "for the sake of Christ."[4] For, as everyone knows who has read Luther at all, our faith is but weak and imperfect, and only Christ "is perfectly righteous."[5] Accordingly, "because faith is weak, as I have said, therefore God's imputation has to be added, . . . not for our sakes or for the sake of our worthiness or works but for the sake of Christ himself."[6]

Still, is this the end of the matter? If it is, if Luther

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[1] LW, XXVI, 133, 134. WA, XL/1,235,15-236,16.

[2] LW, XXVI, 233. WA, XL/1,369,21.

[3] LW, XXVI, 274. WA, XL/1,428,21.

[4] LW, XXVI, 233. WA, XL/1,369,24.

[5] LW, XXVI, 233. WA, XL/1,369,24.

[6] LW, XXVI, 232. WA, XL/1,368,21-25.

has said all he means to say when he says simply that our righteousness is Christ alone, then why should he complicate that simplicity by saying in addition such exalted things about faith? Wouldn't it have been enough in that case to oppose justification by works with justification by Christ alone or with justification by grace alone, without further encumbering his case (and embarrassing his descendants) with justification by faith alone? That that has been an alluring way out of the difficulty the subsequent history of Protestant theology amply demonstrates. Of course, the plea might still be made that Luther himself would have underplayed his emphasis upon the "righteousness of faith" if he could have anticipated, say, the Osiandrian heresy or the fideism of the pietists. That is only a conjecture. The fact, in any case, is that in his own time and place he clearly regarded it as indispensable to the gospel to say, "Faith alone justifies."[1]

On the other hand, it might be equally tempting so to literalize Luther's "righteousness of faith" that we conclude from it that righteousness <u>means</u> faith. On this view, then, the believer would have only so much righteousness as he has faith. His believing would be the measure of his actual value before God. Then faith is as righteous as faith does. In that case the Christian, since his faith is less than perfect, is something less than really righteous. While his sin may be forgiven as a negative benefit, he does not yet enjoy the gift of righteousness as positively his own. But this tack, if it intends to represent Luther,

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[1]<u>LW</u>, XXVI, 372. <u>WA</u>, XL/1,567,13.

conveniently skirts the "paradox" which Luther himself was unable to skirt, namely that "a Christian man is righteous and a sinner at the same time," and that righteousness in this case means "perfect righteousness," and that that which is perfectly righteous is "faith, however imperfect it may be."[1]

Iustitia Fidei

The problem we confront, therefore, is but one more variation of the one which has occupied us from the beginning, the problem of Luther's theological predication. It is not just a matter of affirming or denying that his theology is about man, even about man in his subjectivity as believer. Beyond that looms a prior question. Why is it that faith, the faith of a sinner, can be called that sinner's righteousness? By reason of what, according to Luther, do such lofty predicates as "justify," "makes men sons and heirs of God," "makes a man God," apply to such a lowly subject as faith--to the faith, that is, of men who otherwise are anything but God's sons and in fact are his enemies?[2]

The answer to that question, at least the first obvious answer, is that in assigning such paradoxical predicates to faith Luther was only following the lead of Scripture. No doubt that is true. And incidentally, whatever misgivings we may have about Luther's biblical warrant at this point, one hoary criticism which ought not be perpetuated is that the sources of his view of faith are narrowly Pauline. Even if they were, one reason the Pauline

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[1] LW, XXVI, 232, 234. WA, XL/1,368,26-27, 371,20-21.

[2] LW, XXVI, 100. WA, XL/1,182,15.

sources so captivated Luther was Paul's remarkable insight into the prior sources of the Old Testament--of which Luther, after all a doctor of Old Testament Scripture, knew something, sometimes even without Paul's help.[1] Still, granted that much of Luther's doctrine concerning faith is unabashedly and cheerfully Pauline, the truth is that some of his most enthusiastic claims for faith are drawn from non-Pauline sources: from the Book of Acts,[2] from the eleventh chapter of Hebrews,[3] not to mention the Apostles' Creed.[4] Furthermore, it was not Paul who said, "Your faith has made you well," to blind Bartimaeus,[5], to the Samaritan leper,[6] to the woman with the hemorrhage;[7] and who said to the woman in Simon's house, "Your faith has saved you."[8] Certainly one of Luther's favorite quotations which best described his high estimate of faith, even within his lectures on Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, was not from Paul but from John: "This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith."[9]

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[1]For example, LW, XXVI, 289, 226, 438, 210, 211-12. WA, XL/1,449,3; 359,32; 660,26-661,19; 338,31-33; 341,22-25.

[2]LW, XXVI, 205ff. WA, XL/1,333ff.

[3]LW, XXVI, 263, 264, 294. WA, XL/1, 412,25-27; 413,34-414, 9; 414,14-20; 457,28-29.

[4]For example, WA, XVIII, 650,3-651,30.

[5]Mark 10:52; Luke 18:42. [6]Luke 17:19.

[7]Mark 5:34; Matthew 9:22; Luke 8:48. See LW, XXVI, 404. WA, XL/1,614,27-28.

[8]Luke 7:50. See WA, XVIII,747,13-14.

[9]I John 5:4. LW, XXVI, 31, 162, 282, 369. WA, XL/1, 80,23; 277,13-14; 444,34-35; 564,15.

But if our victory is now identified with our faith, then why did Luther previously identify it so exclusively with the work of that other subject, Christ? Wasn't his victory already ours? Wasn't Luther's whole point precisely this, that Christ conquered the law not only in his own person but also in our persons, so that that was already tantamount to our having conquered the law ourselves? Wasn't that Luther's fundamental understanding of Paul's ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν: not just that Christ conquered for our sakes or for our benefit, not just that he conquered instead of us, but that he conquered "in our persons," as really as if we ourselves had?[1] Yes, that was the point. Then why does Christ's once-for-all victory, in order to be subjectively ours, still have to be actualized in our subjectivity?

"Have to be actualized," indeed! To put the question that way is to beg it. That seems to assume that, until we make the victory our own by faith, the victory is in suspense--a real victory perhaps but not really ours, achieved but as yet anonymous and unspecified. That is an assumption which, so far as I can tell, Luther does not share. For him the question might better read, not why does Christ's victory have to be actualized in our subjectivity, but why does it get to be actualized? Better yet: Not why does it get to be actualized in our subjectivity--for it was actualized already in Christ, also as ours--but why does it get to be identified with our subjectivity, that is, with our faith? Luther's answer would seem to be, as the sequel should show, that Christ's victory is identified with our faith exactly

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[1] LW, XXVI, 370-71. WA, XL/1,566,14-17.

because his victory was, from the beginning, a victory "in our person." But because it was, any denying that his original victory was already ours is to deny not just his victory in general but our own victory, and thus to identify ourselves not with those who conquered in his person but with those whom he defeated. Conversely, it is not that Christ's victory first becomes ours as and when we proceed to believe it, but rather that our believing it only confirms that those who now believe are the same ones in whose person he conquered originally, and ever since. Because they are the same ones, therefore their believing, "however imperfect it may be," is the believing of those who triumphed perfectly in Christ, who are free to disown whatever of theirs he defeated and to own whatever of his he won.

At any rate, it is in quest of some such theological explanation as this that we shall now attempt to see how Luther resolves the knotty problem of predication posed by the "righteousness of faith." In pursuing an "explanation," a rationale as it were, there is no intention of minimizing Luther's frank biblicism. That we have cordially admitted. Still, given the Scriptures, Luther seemed all the more bent on discovering by what internal logic the Scriptures explained themselves--all the way from the native intention of their authors,[1] through the dialectic of their own historic antitheses, to their final resolution in Christ, "the Author and Lord of Scripture"[2]--but explained themselves, let us

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[1]See how, in this connection, Luther appeals to the authority of Hilary. WA, XVIII,728,14-17.

[2]LW, XXVI, 295. WA, XL/1,458,33-34

add, always as resources for Luther's own day. Moreover, in pursuing an explanation which is theological, we shall be proceeding differently from the way we did in Chapter VI. There, even though we traversed some of the same material on the righteousness of faith, we did so in the interest of Luther's understanding of subiectum, an issue which was only tangential to his theological purposes.

Quantum Comprehendo, Tantum Habeo

"The highest learning and even theology," says Luther, "even God and Christ, are of no avail without faith."[1] How very closely the believer's victory or, what amounts to the same thing, his justification is linked to his faith will appear from disjunctive statements like these. "Wherever there is faith in Christ, there sin has in fact been abolished. . . . But where there is no faith in Christ, there sin remains."[2] God "is not a father to me unless I respond to him as a son. First the Father offers me grace and fatherhood by means of his promises; all that remains is that I accept it."[3] "But where Christ is not known, there these things remain [namely, sin, death, and curse]. And so all who do not believe lack this blessing and this victory. 'For this,' as John says, 'is our victory, faith.'"[4] "You must either take hold of the blessed Offspring . . . or you must have Moses."[5] Either . . . or,

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[1]LW, XXVI, 114,122. WA, XL/1,205,24-25; 217,23-24.

[2]LW, XXVI, 286. WA, XL/1,445,32-34.

[3]LW, XXVI, 390. WA, XL/1,593,20-22.

[4]LW, XXVI, 282. WA, XL/1,440,33-35.

[5]LW, XXVI, 324. WA, XL/1,502,12-15.

aut . . . aut. Either faith and therefore victory, or no faith and so defeat.

In addition to this either-or disjunction between faith and no faith, Luther seems to distinguish degrees of victory within faith itself, "partim . . . partim," so that even the Christian is more righteous or less righteous depending on the measure of his faith. In one of Luther's lectures on Galatians (October 9, 1531), when he is contrasting the perfect victory of Christ with the still unfinished victory of our weak faith, he makes the startling statement, "As much as I grasp, that much I have." Quantum comprehendo, tantum habeo.[1] Georg Röhrer, though he copied the statement into his class notes, evidently saw fit to keep it out of the published edition, with the result that the statement also does not appear in the later translations. Earlier in the course, one month before, Luther had told his class essentially the same thing, "To the extent that you believe this, to that extent you have it."[2] Quatenus igitur hoc credis, eatenus habes.[3] This time the sentence did get into the printed text, but the early English translations domesticated it somewhat. Instead of "to that extent you have it," they read "so much dost thou enjoy it."[4] Still, this sort of statement occurs often in Luther, even in his sermons. Glaubst du, hast du.[5] And much the same thought is expressed, though usually more

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[1] WA, XL/1,535,18. [2] LW, XXVI, 284.

[3] WA, XL/1,444,14 (Hs.: 444,1-2). [4] Gal, p. 276.

[5] A similar statement occurs in the De Servo Arbitrio: "And as they believe, so it is unto them." BoW, p. 305. WA, XVIII, 778, 13-14.

guardedly, elsewhere in the course on Galatians.[1] In fact, the very lecture from which Röhrer withheld the statement, "quantum comprehendo tantum habeo," does include, also in its published version, similar statements which are hardly less drastic. Referring to the sins which believers continue to experience in themselves, Luther says, "To the extent that these are present, Christ is absent; or if he is present, he is present weakly."[2] Also: "To the extent that I take hold of Christ by faith, therefore, to that extent the law has been abrogated for me."[3]

This is risky talk, to be sure, especially when we ponder the ways in which Luther's meaning could be misconstrued. But one misconstruction, however tempting it might be on ulterior grounds, is too patently erroneous to require serious refutation. That is the notion that Luther, in expressions like those we have quoted, is advocating the sort of blatant subjectivism in which "believing makes it so." Faith in that case would amount to little more than auto-suggestion, and the benefits of Christ to little more than pious self-assurance. Of course, if this actually were Luther's view of the matter, the whole problem of predication which emerges from the "righteousness of faith" could easily be solved. Better than that, it could be obviated. Faith would not <u>be</u> righteous except in that the believer himself supposed it were. In any

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[1]For example, <u>WA</u>, XL/1,438,16-17. Here, too, however, the dependence upon faith is slightly more forthright in Röhrer's <u>Handschrift</u> text (438, 3) than in the printed text. See also <u>WA</u>, XL/1,440,31-33; 566,34-567,11.

[2]<u>LW</u>, XXVI, 350. <u>WA</u>, XL/1,537,28-29. But this printed version, again, is more qualified and careful than the blunt, categorical assertion in the <u>Handschrift: Quia nondum ibi Christus</u> (537,8).

[3]<u>LW</u>, XXVI, 350-51. <u>WA</u>, XL/1,538,19-20.

realistic sense, the "righteousness of faith" would then be a wishful illusion, and there would be no need to deal with the tension between a really sinful subject and a really righteous predicate. That that interpretation of Luther is quite groundless was clear even from our modest word-study of Luther's use of obiectum--that is, from the all-important "objectivity" of the Christ of faith. Perhaps isolated statements, torn from their contexts, could be exploited in favor of a theory of subjectivism. For example, "If you believe that sin, death, and the curse have been abolished, they have been abolished."[1] But see how that sentence immediately continues and is directly explained: ". . . because [quia] Christ conquered and overcame them in himself."[2]

However, subjectivism aside, there is another misconstruction of Luther's intention which is not immediately transparent and which, let us admit, finds much to recommend it on the basis of Luther's own assertions--at least, at first glance. Luther's provocative "quantum comprehendo tantum habeo," and other like expressions, may sound like so much fideism. They seem to suggest, in other words, that for Luther the iustitia fidei refers to that righteousness which faith has inherently, as an active fulfilling of the divine demand, as a right and lawful thing to do. Such a fideist interpretation of Luther might even concede, without being inconsistent, that it needs to guard against its own distortions. For instance, as even the fideist might admit, it could easily degenerate into a faith in faith itself. But Luther's fideism,

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[1] LW, XXVI, 284. WA, XL/1,444,14-16.

[2] Ibid.

supposing that that is what it is, would also be thought to provide its own safeguards. We would only have to remind ourselves that a faith which looks to itself is not at all what Luther means by faith, and that for him faith is by definition a looking only to Christ--with the fideistic result that only such Christ-centered faith is sufficiently unselfconscious to satisfy, say, the First Commandment. Again, lest faith become proud, we could quickly quote Luther to the effect that the believer, after all, has not created his own faith but is entirely indebted for it to the Creator Spirit--with the fideistic result that the believer is righteous only in the measure that he assigns all glory to God. Finally, to insure that this fideism does not become self-confident, we could always insist that, exactly because righteousness is believing, no one yet believes righteously enough to qualify as already righteous--assuming that it really is the iustitia fidei which Luther is talking about in his "quantum comprehendo tantum habeo." But dare we assume that, namely, that the righteousness which characterizes faith according to the gospel (Luther's iustitia fidei) is the same righteousness which characterizes it according to the law, as though iustitia fidei itself were only "quantum . . . tantum"?

Quid Facit Lex in Iustificatis?

For all its apparent fidelity to Luther's words, this fideism misses his actual meaning already at the point of his diagnosis of the problem, and all the more so at the point of his solution. The problem, in his lecture on October ninth, is a problem

posed by the law: The law continues to accuse even Christians.[1] But how can this be, since "Christ came once for all at one time, abrogated the law with all its effects, and by his death delivered the entire human race from sin and eternal death"?[2] If such comprehensive claims are to be made for the victory of Christ (that he abrogated the law "cum omnibus effectibus suis" and delivered from sin the "totum genus humanum") then how are we to explain that the very law which Christ abrogated can still declare our victory to be only partial ("partim . . . partim")[3] and not yet ("nondum")?[4] The problem, as Doctor Luther assures his class, is far from academic. He has in mind the people in the churches who quite practically object: "'All right, Christ has come into the world and abolished our sins once for all. . . . Then why should we listen to the Gospel? What need is there of the Sacrament and of absolution?'"[5]

So when Luther now adds, "quantum comprehendo tantum habeo," he is not yet solving the problem. He is only dividing the question, thus bringing new clarity to the painful diagnosis. For if we have only so much of Christ's victory as we grasp by faith, then, however complete Christ's victory may have been for him, it is hardly complete for us, and hardly our victory at all. But if so, that in

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[1]This section of the lecture is prefaced by an explicit announcement of the problem which is before the house: "But what does the law do in those who have been justified through Christ?" LW, XXVI, 348. WA, XL/1,534,31-32.

[2]LW, XXVI, 349. WA, XL/1,535,19-22.

[3]WA, XL/1,536,11.

[4]WA, XL/1,538,15.

[5]LW, XXVI, 350. WA, XL/1,537,35-538,14.

turn reflects adversely on the once for all character of Christ's own achievement, his conquering "in our person." Of course, one way to solve the problem (a way which would be open to a fideistic interpretation) might be to distinguish between the victory which was Christ's and the victory (at best, a very tenuous victory) which is ours. At first, that is what Luther himself seems to be doing when he draws the distinction: "The defect is not in Christ, it is in us."[1] It might seem to have the advantage at least of exonerating Christ, to say: "If we could perfectly take hold of Christ, who has abrogated the law and reconciled us sinners to the Father by his death, then that custodian would have no jurisdiction whatever over us."[2] If we could! But it is exactly because we cannot "perfectly take hold of Christ" that the law still does have jurisdiction over us. Then what becomes of Luther's claim that Christ "has abrogated the law," not for himself but for us? Luther explicitly says: "He truly abolished the entire law; but now that the law has been abolished, we are no longer held in custody under its tyranny; but we live securely and happily with Christ, who now reigns sweetly in us by his Spirit."[3] Clearly then, by his "quantum comprehendo tantum habeo," Luther does not mean that the victory of Christ is "totus" only for Christ but merely "quantum . . . tantum" for us. Yet that still leaves us with the problem, not the solution.

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[1] LW, XXVI, 349. WA, XL/1,535,30-31.

[2] LW, XXVI, 349. WA, XL/1,535,26-29.

[3] LW, XXVI, 349. WA, XL/1,535,23-26. (Italics mine.)

Si Christum Inspicio, Totus Sanctus Sum

The first step toward a solution (a second and third will follow) comes in the form of a very different distinction. It is not the distinction between Christ's total victory and our partial one, but the distinction rather between our own total victory, which we find only in Christ, and our partial victory, which we find in ourselves. The situation in either case is ours, in the one case faltering and vulnerable, in the other case secure and triumphant. But the difference between our two situations depends altogether on where we find them, in ourselves or in Christ. The difference does not depend on how intently and faithfully we believe, even in Christ. For if that is the measure, the verdict is always ambiguous--"quantum . . . tantum," "partim . . . partim," "nondum"--and always incriminating and deadly. To put it in other words, iustitia fidei is not determined by the subjectivity of the believing subject but by the obiectum, Jesus Christ, whom the believing subject believes. In Christ there is no defectus, of course, but in him there is also none in us. "But if I look at my flesh [and it is the law's business to see that I do], I feel greed, sexual desire, anger, pride, the terror of death, sadness, fear, hate, grumbling, and impatience against God."[1] It is from these clues within the believer himself that the law draws its stern inference: "To the extent that these are present, Christ is absent; or if he is present, he is present weakly."[2] That is the

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[1] LW, XXVI, 350. WA, XL/1,537,26-28.

[2] LW, XXVI, 350. WA, XL/1,537,28-29.

case "if I look at my flesh." But "if I look at Christ, I am completely holy and pure, and I know nothing at all about the law."[1] That is why the Christian is to listen to the gospel, for it is there that he listens, not to his own heart and the law, but to the victory of Christ, and his own victory.

Ut Fides Crescat et Lex Minuatur

A second step in the solution is that, as the believer finds his victory in the once for all achievement of Christ, his own Christian subjectivity also matures. As he listens to the gospel, that very "quantum" of faith which is measured strictly by the law, and which the law disparages for its meagerness, grows from less to more. But surely this new interest in the "more and more" of faith sounds like fideism if anything does. Not really. Fideism it would be, no doubt, if faith had to answer to the law, if the real value of the Christian's faith depended upon his believing as righteously as the law demands he should. But that, for Luther, is exactly what faith is not; faith is not accountable to the law. On the contrary, faith is dead to the law, "as dead to the law as a virgin is toward a man."[2] For faith "there is no law anymore."[3] And the reason there is no law for faith is not that, with an increase in faith, the law is more and more fulfilled. True, it does happen that, as faith grows and the flesh

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[1] LW, XXVI, 350. WA, XL/1,537,24-25.

[2] LW, XXVI, 349. WA, XL/1,536,18-20.

[3] LW, XXVI, 349. WA, XL/1, 535,23. Luther has developed this point even more graphically and at greater length in his exegesis of Galatians 2:19, on August fourteenth. WA, XL/1,266ff.

diminishes, the law has less right to complain. But that process is always only becoming--only "beginning," as Luther says--and will not be completed until the resurrection.[1] Moreover, it is not really the nature of the law to be satisfied; its nature is rather to accuse and terrify, not only the flesh but even the believing "conscience," over which it has no "jurisdiction."[2] No, the reason that faith is not accountable to the law, and "that according to our conscience we are completely free of the law," is simply this: "Christ the crucified . . . abolished all the claims of the law upon the conscience, 'having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands.'"[3] "Thus the conscience takes hold of Christ more perfectly day by day."[4] And what does this "more perfectly day by day," this growth in Christian subjectivity, entail for the law? "Just as Christ came once physically, according to time, abrogating the entire law, abolishing sin, and destroying death and hell, so he comes to us spiritually without interruption and continually smothers and kills these things in us" --also the totam legem.[5] More and more, faith grows free from the law, not because it is more and more fulfilling the law, but because more and more it realizes that the law has nothing to say to it at all.

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[1] LW, XXVI, 350, 351. WA, XL/1,537,22; 538,23-26.

[2] LW, XXVI, 349. WA, XL/1,536,23-25, 13-16; 535,28.

[3] LW, XXVI, 349. WA, XL/1,536,13-14, 16-18.

[4] LW, XXVI, 350. WA, XL/1,536,28-29.

[5] LW, XXVI, 350. WA, XL/1,537,31-34. (Italics mine.)

This is not to say, however, that the law's nagging discriminations of more and less, "quantum . . . tantum," "nondum," are useless. In fact, for Luther, the matter stands quite the other way around. That brings us to a third stage in his solution. For Luther to have denied the law any hearing at all would amount to backing away from the problem. The larger problem which occasioned his lecture still remains: Doesn't it continue to be a reflection on Christ's once for all abrogation of the law if that same law is still abroad, accusing the very ones whom Christ claimed to have liberated? Of course, one way to resolve that dilemma would be to deny one of its horns--for example, by insisting that the law, the law of God, is not really accusing at all. But that is not Luther's way. Not only does he concede the fact of the law's accusations--"the law, the custodian who continually terrifies and distresses the conscience with his demonstrations of sin and his threats of death."[1] Not only does he make the law inescapable, by linking it causally with other concomitant facts--"So long as the flesh remains, there remains the law."[2] He even finds the law to be indispensible, "extremely necessary."[3] And with this stroke, astonishingly, Luther (really Paul) finds the way to resolve that dilemma which had seemed to threaten the victory of Christ. By its very accusations the law is made to serve a "need,"

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[1] LW, XXVI, 349. WA, XL/1,536,23-25.

[2] LW, XXVI, 349. WA, XL/1,536,23-24.

[3] LW, XXVI, 348. WA, XL/1,534,29.

which is nothing less than the victorious, saving purpose of Christ. "The need for a custodian," says Luther, is "to discipline and torment the flesh, that powerful jackass, so that by this discipline sins may be diminished and the way prepared for Christ."[1] The law with its insinuating "quantum comprehendo tantum habeo," now in the service of its victor, is but "performing its function, . . . not to harm but to save."[2] All this it does, not by ceasing to be an accuser, but by being just that, the diametric opposite of the gospel. But then right on the heels of its accusations, with "the way prepared for Christ," along comes Christ, whose coming "spiritually every day . . . through the Word of the gospel," is as real and triumphant as when "he once came into the world at a specific time to redeem us from the harsh dominion of our custodian."[3] Each day over, therefore, the once for all victory over the law is renewed. Before the superior presence of Christ's daily, spiritual coming through the gospel, before the presence of faith which locates its own victory in Christ's, "our custodian, with his gloomy and grievous task, is also forced to yield."[4] So the law's accusations do not deny but only confirm, and confirm in action, that Christ is victor still, "'the same yesterday and today and forever.'"[5]

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[1] LW, XXVI, 350. WA, XL/1,537,29-31.

[2] LW, XXVI, 350. WA, XL/1,537,17-18.

[3] LW, XXVI, 351, 349-50. WA, XL/1,538,30-31; 536,26-27.

[4] LW, XXVI, 351. WA, XL/1,538,32-33.

[5] Hebrews 13:8. (LW, XXVI, 351, inadvertently cites the passage as Hebrews 13:4.) WA, XL/1,538,27.

After all, then, that "quantum comprehendo tantum habeo" is not the decisive measure of the believer's iustitia fidei. His righteousness does not depend on how righteously he believes. So Luther's provocative formula is not the embarrassing thing it at first seemed to be. Or rather it is embarrassing, but therein lies its distinct advantage. The law, with its continuing exposures of the "partim . . . partim," "nondum," meagerness of our personal victories, does indeed embarrass and discourage and mortify. But with that, with "the daily mortification of the flesh, the reason, and our powers," comes "the renewal of our mind," the growing "in faith and in our knowledge of him" in whom "I am completely holy and pure, and I know nothing at all about the law."[1] The humiliating "quantum comprehendo tantum habeo," in its strange and daily dialectic with the gospel, is actually employed to refute itself in favor of the "totus sanctus et purus sum." Frequently, in Luther's lectures, this dialectic is acted out in direct dialogue between the believer and the law. The fact that the following sample (which might serve as a paradigm for all the rest) casts the antagonist in the role of the devil, rather than the law, is incidental. Elsewhere Luther records the same sort of give-and-take with the law.[2]

> When the devil accuses us and says: "You are a sinner, therefore you are damned," then we can answer him and say: "Because

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[1] LW, XXVI, 350. WA, XL/1,537,18-20; 536,28; 537,24-25.

[2] For example, in a later lecture much the same "iucundissimum duellum" (WA, XL/1,279,25) occurs seven times: once with the devil (276,24-277,15), once with death (276,20-23), and five times with the law (275,23-276,12; 276,15-20; 277,25-29; 277,34-278,12; 278,34-279,18).

> you say that I am a sinner, therefore I shall be righteous and be saved." "No," says the devil, "you will be damned." "No," I say, "for I take refuge in Christ, who has given himself for my sins. . . . In fact, when you say that I am a sinner, you provide me with armor and weapons against yourself. . . . You are reminding me of the blessing of Christ my Redeemer. On his shoulders, not on mine, lie all my sins. . . . Therefore when you say that I am a sinner, you do not frighten me; but you bring me immense consolation."[1]

Earlier we quoted Luther as saying, God "is not a Father to me unless I respond to him as a son,"[2] leaving the impression perhaps that the Christian pleases the Father only in the measure that he responds to the demand for faith. Really, that is not what Luther says. He says, "There is no demand here."[3] Then what is there? "There is only the Father here, promising and calling me his son through Christ."[4] "And I for my part accept, reply with a sigh, and say, 'Father,'"[5] Yet this sigh, "Abba, Father," is the most meager quantum of faith, "so faint that it can hardly be felt," for it is all but drowned out by the "terrors of the law, thunderclaps of sin, tremors of death, and roarings of the devil."[6] Nevertheless, "this sight, which seems so meager in the flesh, is a loud cry and a sigh too deep for words."[7] For in truth it is the sigh of none other than the Holy Spirit, a sigh that "reaches all

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[1] LW, XXVI, 36-37. WA, XL/1,89,19-90,13.

[2] LW, XXVI, 390. WA, XL/1,593,20.

[3] LW, XXVI, 390. WA, XL/1,593,29,25.

[4] LW, XXVI, 390. WA, XL/1,593,24-27.

[5] LW, XXVI, 390. WA, XL/1,593,28.

[6] LW, XXVI, 389, 381. WA, XL/1,592,11; 580,25-26.

[7] LW, XXVI, 382. WA, XL/1,582,28-29.

the way to the ears of God," "that fills heaven and earth," "so loudly that the angels suppose that they cannot hear anything except this cry."[1] "Then the Father says: 'I do not hear anything in the whole world except this single sigh."[2] And all this with the help, left-handedly, of the terrifying law. Here again is that same dialectic from "quantum . . . tantum" to "totum." God is "nearest to us when we are at our weakest."[3] The Christian has only "this faint sigh and this tiny faith," and yet "what a Christian has is in fact something very large and infinite": a Father who is delighted with him for one reason, proper christum, and not by the quantity of his faith.[4]

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[1] LW, XXVI, 381, 382. WA, XL/1,581,10,29-30; 582,33.

[2] LW, XXVI, 384. WA, XL/1,585,28-29.

[3] LW, XXVI, 384. WA, XL/1,584,24-25.

[4] LW, XXVI, 391, 388-89. WA, XL/1,596,19,21-22; 591,28-30.

CHAPTER XI

MAN THE BELIEVER

(CONTINUED)

Fides Imputatur Ad Iustitiam

Fideism, by measuring the believer's righteousness in proportion to his faith, interprets Luther one-sidedly. But so does that opposite interpretation which, perhaps in reaction to the fideistic distortion, fixes so exclusively upon the "objective," trans-subjective accents in Luther that it fails to account for the importance of faith, which Luther everywhere extols. But here again, just as with Luther's apparent fideism, the interpretation in question is an attractive one because it seems at first to be well attested by Luther's own statements, particularly by what he says on the matter of divine imputation. Accordingly, his doctrine of imputation can hardly be ignored. The weakness of a one-sided imputationist view of Luther, however, is that it interposes a false separation between the righteousness which God imputes and the righteousness of the believing heart. But neither do we solve our problem, namely the problem of how faith is righteous, by judicious compromise, by steering a middle course between the two extremes of fideism and, shall we say, imputationism. Luther's own procedure, characteristically, is more dialectical than that, and puts the doctrine of imputation to fullest use. But by just

that dialectic he accounts for and safeguards--and, more than that, finds cause for joy in--the iustitia fidei.

A good place to look for a sample is Luther's lectures on the twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth of August, 1531. He is taking his students--"students of the sacred scriptures," as he calls them[1]--through an exegesis of Galatians 3:6, "Thus Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." In the course of the two lectures on this verse Luther uses "reckon" (reputare) interchangeably with "impute" (imputare).[2] Our question is this: Is a man justified so exclusively by that righteousness which God imputes to him that he is not justified at all by his righteous faith? It is possible, at least in one instance in these lectures, to find an isolated statement which seems to make for an exclusive imputationism. "Righteousness is not in us in a formal sense, as Aristotle maintains, but is outside us, solely in the grace of God and in his imputation."[3] So exclusively does this statement seem to locate righteousness "outside us," solely in the divine imputation, that it makes faith almost superfluous. At the very least, it makes the "righteousness of faith" completely unintelligible. Of course we could still argue that faith is indeed righteous but that its only righteousness is that which God imputes to it. Still, is that the only kind of righteousness Luther means faith to have?

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[1] LW, XXVI, 231. WA, XL/1,366,23.

[2] "Which faith is imputed [imputatur] as righteousness. . . . God reckons [reputat] this imperfect faith as perfect righteousness." LW, XXVII, 231. WA, XL/1,366,26-30.

[3] LW, XXVI, 234. WA, XL/1,370,27-30.

Emphatically not. Earlier in these two lectures we find Luther at the very opposite extreme, playing the rhetorician--the Rhetor, as he says--in praise of faith and apotheosizing it in terms which are usually reserved only for deity.[1]

> Paul makes faith in God the supreme worship, the supreme allegiance, the supreme obedience, and the supreme sacrifice. . . . Faith is something omnipotent . . . its power is inestimable and infinite; for it attributes glory to God, which is the highest thing that can be attributed to him. To attribute glory to God is . . . , in short, to acknowledge him as the author and donor of every good. Reason does not do this, but faith does. It consummates the deity; and, if I may put it this way, it is the creator of the deity, not in the substance of God but in us. For without faith God loses his glory in us. . . . Nor does God require anything greater of man than . . . that he regard him, not as an idol but as God, who has regard for him, listens to him, shows mercy to him, helps him, etc.[2]

"To be able to attribute such glory to God," Luther concludes, "is wisdom beyond wisdom, righteousness beyond righteousness, religion beyond religion, and sacrifice beyond sacrifice."[3]

This "sacrificium sacrificiorum," which is faith, gives glory to God not only by believing him, but, in that very act, by slaying that beast which disbelieves him, the beast Ratio. "For what is more ridiculous . . . than when God says to Abraham that he is to get a son from the body of Sarah, which is barren and already dead?"[4]

> It does indeed seem ridiculous and absurd to reason that in the Lord's Supper the body and the blood of Christ are presented, that Baptism is "the washing of regeneration and

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[1] LW, XXVI, 227. WA, XL/1,360,18.

[2] LW, XXVI, 227. WA, XL/1,360,17-27.

[3] LW, XXVI, 227. WA, XL/1,360,33-34.

[4] LW, XXVI, 227. WA, XL/1,361,16-18.

> renewal in the Holy Spirit," that Christ the Son of God was conceived and carried in the womb of the Virgin, that he was born, that he suffered the most ignominious of deaths on the cross, that he was raised again, that he is now sitting at the right hand of the Father, and that he now has "authority in heaven and on earth."[1]

But perhaps the beastliest thing about Ratio is its assumption that good work and personal devotion and self-sacrifice, especially if these are distinguished by originality and sincerity, are what justify a man's existence.[2] On this assumption, of course, it is altogether reasonable to construe "the word of the cross" as absurd, "as heresy and as the word of the devil."[3] On this assumption it is only reasonable to be offended and say: "Then are good works nothing? Have I toiled and borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat for nothing?"[4] No wonder, then, since "the whole world and all the creatures cannot kill" this beast, but only faith can, by sacrificing it to the gracious word of God in Christ--no wonder that this priestly action of faith constitutes "any Christian . . . a supreme pontiff."[5]

It should be clear from all this that Luther does understand faith to be righteous, not just because God reckons it so, but because of what faith does. It slays the enemy of God in us and gives all glory to him by trusting his grace. Yet this still leaves another possible objection to be reckoned with. That is, it might be argued that, even though Luther does grant that faith

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[1] LW, XXVI, 227-28. WA, XL/1,361,20-25.

[2] LW, XXVI, 228. WA, XL/1,361,29-362,12.

[3] LW, XXVI, 228. WA, XL/1,361,26; 362,12-13.

[4] LW, XXVI, 231. WA, XL/1,366,16-18.

[5] LW, XXVI, 228, 233. WA, XL/1,362,15-16; 370,12.

is righteous because of what faith does, it need not follow from this that that is the righteousness which justifies. Let us see. We have heard Luther say of faith that it is "righteousness beyond righteousness." And it was his express purpose at this point in the lecture to show "what great righteousness faith is."[1] He even invokes the Aristotelian term iustitia formalis--which in a previous quotation he seemed to locate "outside us, solely in the grace of God and in his imputation"--and now refers that term to faith. "Faith is indeed a formal righteousness."[2] In other words, faith is righteous in actual reality and not just by imputation, and it identifies its owner, the believer, as himself righteous. That righteousness is "in us" in the same way that faith is in us. Fides in corde is iustitia cordis.[3] But the question still stands: Is this the same righteousness which is designated in the term iustitia fidei? Is this, in other words, the faith which justifies? Luther says in so many words, both in Röhrer's class-notes and in the published edition: "Therefore faith justifies because it renders to God what is due him; whoever does this is righteous."[4]

But, alas, this seems to separate the righteousness of believing from the righteousness of imputation altogether, even more drastically than an imputationist theory might separate them. Indeed, rather than a mere separation, this seems to present an outright opposition. It might have been better, after all, to skirt

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[1] LW, XXVI, 227. WA, XL/1,360,34.

[2] LW, XXVI, 229. WA, XL/1,364,12.

[3] LW, XXVI, 234, 226. WA, XL/1,370,30; 366,28; 358,33.

[4] LW, XXVI, 227. WA, XL/1,361,12-13 (Hs.: 360,11-361,1).

this opposition (assuming that is what it is) by minimizing the righteousness which God imputes. But it is too late for that. There is no pretending, for example, that Luther means the one righteousness to be somehow less real, or less actual historically, than the other righteousness. For both of them Luther uses the strongest language he can borrow from the metaphysicians, formalis, and, if that is too weak, the language of the rhetoricians. Most of all, though, it is the language of theology which he employs when he says, again of both kinds of righteousness, that they "justify." Nor, at least as far as I read the texts at hand, does Luther employ the later Protestant distinction between justification and sanctification, as though it were only the imputed righteousness which justifies and the righteousness of the believing heart which only sanctifies. "Therefore faith justifies because it renders to God what is due him."[1] Both kinds of righteousness are for Luther essential ingredients of what he calls iustitia Christiana. And he is content to include them side by side: "For Christian righteousness consists in two things, namely, faith in the heart and the imputation of God."[2] The separation which we feared from an exclusive imputationism seems now to have worsened into an unresolvable tension.

Quis Conciliat illa Summe Pugnantia?

The truth is, we have been misled by our question. We have created an opposition where Luther intended no opposition at

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[1] LW, XXVI, 227. WA, XL/1,361,12.

[2] LW, XXVI, 229. WA, XL/1,364,11-12. See also LW, XXVI, 232. WA, XL/1,368,19-21.

all, only because we began by looking for statements of his which might counter his apparent imputationism. And of course, by assuming an opposition from the outset, we found him providing plenty of ammunition for both sides of the conflict. But not only does Luther not see the two kinds of righteousness, the righteousness of the believing heart and the righteousness which God graciously imputes, as opposed. He sees them rather as complementing each other. The righteousness of the Christian's believing, since in this life it is only beginning, is in the meantime completed--or, as Luther says, is "perfected"--by the righteousness which God graciously imputes. It is not that faith is not righteous, or that God must reckon faith to be righteous when in fact it is not. "Faith is indeed a formal righteousness; but this does not suffice, for after faith there still remain remnants of sin in the flesh. The sacrifice of faith began in Abraham, but it was finally consummated only in death."[1] "Faith does not give enough to God formally . . . ; it is barely a little spark of faith. . . . Lust, wrath, impatience, and other fruits of the flesh and of unbelief still remain in us, . . . even [in] the more perfect saints."[2] "Hence faith begins righteousness, but imputation perfects it until the day of Christ."[3] "Otherwise no one could be saved."[4]

It is true, Luther did say, "Righteousness is not in us in a formal sense, as Aristotle maintains, but is outside us, solely in the grace of God and in his imputation." However, as the con-

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[1] LW, XXVI, 229. WA, XL/1,364,12-14.

[2] LW, XXVI, 229-30. WA, XL/1,364,16-20.

[3] LW, XXVI, 230. WA, XL/1,364,27-28.

[4] LW, XXVI, 230. WA, XL/1,364,23-24.

text of this sentence reveals, the word "solely" is not meant to exclude faith (which "is indeed a formal righteousness") but is meant to exclude the scholastics, who insist grandly on a righteousness of the whole soul and who "laugh" at Luther's imputatio as an easy way out, as "trivial" and "meager."[1] Moreover, we have not yet quoted the entire sentence. The rest of it reads, "In us there is nothing of the form or of the righteousness except that weak faith or the first fruits of faith by which we have begun to take hold of Christ."[2] Finally, when Luther says that God "reckons this imperfect faith as perfect righteousness," he does not mean that this faith, because it is "imperfect," is for that reason not righteous.[3] For in the next breath he can speak of it not as "imperfect faith" but as "imperfect righteousness."[4] So the two kinds of righteousness are far from opposed. Rather the one, being so tiny and beleagured and vulnerable, is graciously "perfected" by the other, as though the first were whole and entire.

But that does bring us to a genuine opposition--to a "paradox," (contraria) as Luther calls it.[5] God reckons "sin as not sin, even though it really is sin."[6] Notice, once more, what the opposition is not. It is not faith which is covered by God's imputation. But sin is. Faith is not sin. But sin "really is

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[1] LW, XXVI, 233-34. WA, XL/1,370,21-371,18.

[2] LW, XXVI, 234. WA, XL/1,370,30-31. (Italics mine.)

[3] LW, XXVI, 231. WA, XL/1,366,29-30.

[4] LW, XXVI, 232. WA, XL/1,367,19-20. (Italics mine.)

[5] LW, XXVI, 232. WA, XL/1,368,27.

[6] LW, XXVI, 232. WA, XL/1,367,20-21.

sin." There is the real paradox: "God overlooks all sins and wants them to be covered as though they were not sins."[1] Faith is not the sin which is covered, yet faith does not live in a vacuum, amidst a merely neutral absence of faith. It is surrounded and riddled by its opposite. "My flesh distrusts God, is angry with him, does not rejoice in him, etc. But God overlooks these sins, and in his sight they are as though they were not sins."[2] It was not to Abraham's faith that God reckoned righteousness, but to Abraham: The faith with which "Abraham believed God . . . was reckoned to him as righteousness." And "him" encompasses the Abraham who "before God . . . has sin and wrath."[3]

That this is a real and not a trumped-up paradox, Luther will not let his students forget.

> These two things are diametrically opposed: That a Christian is righteous and beloved by God, and yet that he is a sinner at the same time. For God cannot deny his own nature. That is, he cannot avoid hating sin and sinners; and he does so by necessity, for otherwise he would be unjust and would love sin. Then how can these two contradictory things both be true at the same time, that I am a sinner and deserve divine wrath and hate, and that the Father loves me?[4]

"Who will reconcile those utterly conflicting statements?"[5]

Who will? Surely not the believer, by somehow joining them in the pathos of his own subjectivity. Yet it is the righteous mark of his faith that he knows who does reconcile them:

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[1] LW, XXVI, 232. WA, XL/1,367,27-28.

[2] LW, XXVI, 232. WA, XL/1,367,27-29.

[3] LW, XXVI, 226. WA, XL/1,359,29.

[4] LW, XXVI, 235. WA, XL/1,371,33-372,16.

[5] LW, XXVI, 235. WA, XL/1,373,13-14.

"Only the Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ." To this quotation (I Timothy 2:5) Luther immediately adds another (Rom. 8:1): "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."[1] With that Luther brings his lecture on Galatians 3:6 to a climax and a close. Only at the last moment has he disclosed where the one real conflict emerges when God reckons the righteousness of faith as the righteousness of sinners. It is not a conflict between the righteousness of their faith and their righteousness which God graciously imputes (for these are inseparable), but a conflict rather between their righteousness (whether of the heart or imputed), on the one hand, and their sin, on the other hand. And only at the very end does Luther identify the one in whom alone, and in fact, their conflict was fought out and reconciled: "unicus Mediator Dei et hominum Iesus Christus."

Iustitia Christi Est Tua

Now that we have seen all the way to the end we are in a fair way to begin again at the beginning and to retrace the steps of Luther's lecture, only this time in full knowledge of his solution: namely, the mediatorial achievement of Christ, which is his righteousness for sinners--the righteousness, let us say it now, of their faith. So we ask our original question, What is it about faith that is righteous, righteous enough to justify the one who has it? The answer, as we have now discovered at the end of Luther's argument, is simply Jesus Christ, "the only Mediator between God and man." "Christ, in whom you believe, . . . is

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[1] LW, XXVI, 236. WA, XL/1,373,16-17.

perfectly righteous in a formal sense. His righteousness is yours."[1]

Still, remarkable as this answer is, it hardly seems to answer our question. The question is, What is it about faith that is righteous? How is it that a man is justified by faith? If it is Christ who is our righteousness, then isn't it superfluous for Luther to speak of the righteousness of faith and to say that faith justifies? Yet Luther does say just that. Indeed, he makes all too plain that a man is not justified, does not enjoy the righteousness of Christ, unless he believes. So we ask again: What is it then that justifies a man, the righteousness of his faith or the righteousness of Christ? But here, as before, the fallacy lies in the way we ask the question. Before we assumed a disjunction where Luther does not, between the righteousness of the believing heart and the righteousness which God imputes. Now we subtly equate that imputed righteousness with the righteousness of Christ and assume, all over again, that it must be disjoined from the righteousness of faith. Luther, however, does nothing of the kind. For him, on the contrary, these two righteousnesses seem to be one and the same. Accordingly, if we ask, What is it about faith that is justifyingly righteous, Luther's answer seems clear: It is exactly the righteousness of Christ which is justifyingly righteous about faith.

To say that, however, postpones the difficulty only momentarily. For the obvious question immediately arises, How can the righteousness of Christ be the righteousness of faith? But here,

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[1] LW, XXVI, 233. WA, XL/1,369,24-25.

before we proceed any farther, we must be clear about what the difficulty really is, at least as the difficulty is seen by Luther. Unless we are careful, we might, as we did before, create a problem prematurely. We might, for example, locate Luther's problem (as he does not) in an opposition between subject and object: as though Christ is prevented from being the righteousness of faith by the fact that he is object and faith is subject; as though he could not be the righteousness of faith by being its object but only by being somehow its subject; as though our believing the object is never the same as realizing that object as our own; as though our believing, subjectively, that Christ is our righteousness, objectively, could not be the very way in which we <u>are</u> righteous; as though merely trusting his benefits could not itself be the way to <u>have</u> his benefits; as though <u>that</u> problem, the opposition between subject and object, were the problem which engages Luther. But it is not.

However, this disclaimer is not easy to prove. For, even for Luther, faith does involve a juxtaposition of subject to object. Christ's giving himself to us and for us is not identical with our believing he does. Our faith as such is not our righteousness, but Christ is. And Christ is not our faith. True, our faith is righteous because Christ is the righteousness of that faith. But he is that precisely by being faith's object, not by somehow becoming its subject--not, for example, by being the enabling subject behind our believing,[1] nor by his believing through

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[1]Christ is that, to be sure, but that does not seem to be the role in which Luther sees him as the righteousness of faith. For Luther, for example, what distinguishes the righteousness of

our believing,[1] nor by his believing for us as we, analogously or imitatively, ought to believe. This is the sort of fideism, as we saw, for which Luther leaves little room. Christ, as Luther explicitly says, is obiectum fidei, and the terms Luther uses to describe how we believing subjects relate to that object are terms which are common to the subject-object relation, the relation of knower to known: "comprehend," "apprehend," "grasp," "seize."

Still, what is noteworthy here is that Luther brings to these terms a force and a realism which is altogether uncommon in ordinary epistemological usage. We might say, for instance, "Do you grasp what all they have done for you?" But we hardly mean that "what all they have done for you," now that you "grasp" it, thereby becomes in effect your own doing. Rather, as we are wont to use the terms, presupposing an antithesis between subject and object, the subject's "grasp" of the object hardly resolves the disparity between them except in a noetic way. This may explain why it is tempting to construe Luther's doctrine of justification exclusively in terms of imputation--though I suspect it is prompted even more by a fear of fideism, whose basic subject-object antithesis the imputationist seems to share--as though we can "grasp"

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faith from the righteousness of works is not that the former is wrought in man by God while the latter is wrought by man himself. See WA, XL/1,218,17-18; 219,18-21.

[2]That Christ does live in the believer is, again, of course true, as Luther vividly portrays in his exegesis of Galatians 2:20. However, throughout this exegesis, what it is about the indwelling Christ which justifies the believer is not that through him, Christ is believing righteously, but rather that in him lives the righteous Christ in whom he believes. Notice the sentence with which Luther introduces his long exegesis of 2:20. "But the inner man . . . is a living, righteous, and holy person--not of himself or in his own substance but in Christ, because he believes in him, as now follows." LW, XXVI, 164. WA, XL/1,279,34-280,12.

Christ's righteousness merely in a noetic way but can really "have" it as our own only by imputation.

Veritas Cordis

What seems to be called for at this point, therefore, is a brief excursion into Luther's view of faith as "truth," according to which "the truth about God" becomes, in faith, "the truth of the heart."[1] Thus the object, without ceasing to be that, determinatively characterizes and belongs to the subject. In the second class-period of that same two-session lecture which we have been analyzing, namely on August twenty-ninth, Luther takes pains to prove that "truth is faith itself."[2] Some of Luther's critics (possibly Johannes Cochlaeus) had argued "that the Hebrew term means 'truth,' not 'faith,'" "that the vocable 'faith' means 'truth' in Hebrew, and that therefore it is being misapplied" when Luther translates it as "faith."[3] Luther denies that the two terms pose any real difference. On the contrary, "Veritas est ipsa fides."[4] "Faith is nothing else but the truth of the heart."[5]

Of course, this statement could just tempt us to reintroduce a subtler version of the subject-object antithesis, to suppose that by "the truth of the heart" Luther intends some brand of "truth as subjectivity," in the superficial sense that faith is

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[1] LW, XXVI, 238. WA, XL/1,376,27,23-24.

[2] LW, XXVI, 238. WA, XL/1,377,13-14.

[3] LW, XXVI, 238. WA, XL/1,376,16; 375,30-31.

[4] LW, XXVI, 238. WA, XL/1,377,13-14.

[5] LW, XXVI, 238. WA, XL/1,376,23-24.

true when it is subjectively heartfelt. But that, as the context quickly proves, is not Luther's meaning. That "faith is . . . the truth of the heart" he immediately explains: "that is, the right knowledge of the heart about God."[1] Faith is right, or true, only when it is right about its object. Similarly, when Luther speaks, as he did the week before, of faith as "obeying the truth," he does not mean that faith is true when it conforms psychologically or ethically to some norm for obedient behavior. No, men "disobey" the truth when they falsify the object ("Christ Jesus . . . portrayed before their eyes"), when they are "bewitched, deceived, . . . by erroneous opinions," when they are "concerned how to resist the truth and how to evade the arguments and passages of Scripture."[2] For a man to have faith is to "think correctly about God, . . . [to] have the truth about God, . . . [to] think or judge correctly about him, . . . [to] have a true idea about God."[3] Notice, in the following quotation, the determinative force of the object.

> Thus truth is faith itself, which judges correctly about God, namely, that God does not look at our works and our righteousness, since we are unclean, but that he wants to be merciful to us, to look at us, to accept us, to justify us, and to save us if we believe in His Son, whom he has sent to be the expiation for the sins of the whole world. This is the true idea about God, and it is really nothing other than faith itself.[4]

A moment before, Luther had been making much the same point with a

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[1] LW, XXVI, 238. WA, XL/1,376,24. (Italics mine.)

[2] LW, XXVI, 198. WA, XL/1,323,33-34; 324,11; 323,25-26.

[3] LW, XXVI, 238. WA, XL/1,376,24-377,13. (Italics mine.)

[4] LW, XXVI, 238. WA, XL/1,377,13-18.

paraphrase of John 16:27. Christ says to the disciples about himself--about "this object, this 'I' sent from the Father into the world": "Because you have taken hold of this object, the Father loves you, and you please him."[1]

Faith is right when it is right about its object. What is right about faith is not that it is from the heart. That much can be said of unbelief, "the inner disease of the heart, such as unbelief, doubt, contempt and hate for God."[2] The "heart" can just as easily be the throne of the beast ratio. Faith is in the heart, of course; it is fides in corde. Where else could it displace the hostile ratio? But the way faith does that, the way it performs its righteous sacrifice, is by believing what and whom it does, "the gospel of Christ the crucified."[3] The opposition here between faith and reason is not that the one is from the heart and the other is from the head. No, what is wrong about ratio is that it is wrong about its object, God. It "cannot think or judge correctly about him. Thus when a monk supposes that [his works] . . . make him acceptable, . . . he does not have a true idea about God; he has an idea that is wicked and a lie."[4] Therefore, if faith is only as right as its object, namely the God whom it believes, then the righteousness of faith hinges altogether on whether that God, so believed, is righteous indeed.

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[1] LW, XXVI, 234-35. WA, XL/1,371,30-33.

[2] LW, XXVI, 230. WA, XL/1,364,31-365,13.

[3] LW, XXVI, 228. WA, XL/1,361,26.

[4] LW, XXVI, 238. WA, XL/1,376,28-377,13.

However, the very purpose which prompted our excursion into Luther's equation of faith with "truth" was to avoid that opposite danger, the sort of preoccupation with the object, the truth-about, which neglects the subject, the truth-in. Much as Luther's faith depends for its truth on the object it believes, nevertheless the "truth" in this case--that is, the Hebrew "truth" which Luther equates with faith--characterizes not only the object but the subject as well. Truth in this sense is not outside of or separate from the believer. "Truth," as Luther says, "is faith itself."[1] So here again we may not superimpose upon Luther an alien subject-object antithesis, not even at the expense of the subject. "Faith is nothing else but the truth of the heart."[2] Truth in this context is not just about an objective, separate reality. Truth is that reality believed--believed and realized. Truth is the real situation in the form of its being believed. Granted, as we did, Luther speaks also of "truth" in a more objective sense--"the truth about God," veritas de deo--but he does so with reference to the unbeliever, who "does not have the truth about God."[3] Faith, on the other hand, is not only truth-about. But simultaneously, exactly because it is the believer's "true idea about God," (vera cogitatio) his "right knowledge of the heart about God," therefore faith is also a truth-in or a truth-of: "truth of the heart."[4] "Having" the truth is itself truth.

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[1] LW, XXVI, 238. WA, XL/1,377,13-14.

[2] LW, XXVI, 238. WA, XL/1,376,23-24.

[3] LW, XXVI, 238. WA, XL/1,376,27. (Italics mine.)

[4] LW, XXVI, 238. WA, XL/1,376,23-24.

Elsewhere Luther even intimates that there is a difference between "having the gospel" and "having the truth of the gospel." Unfortunately, "many have the gospel but not the truth of the gospel."[1] For example, the inconstant Peter before the Judaizers at Antioch, though he certainly had the gospel and had been preaching it and "knew the doctrine of justification better than we do," nevertheless had "to be accused by Paul of failing and of swerving from the truth of the gospel."[2] To have the truth of the gospel is, not only to have its words, but so clearly to have it in head and heart that it can be distinguished from the law in face of even the direst personal temptations to the contrary.[3] "Truth is faith itself," the truth about the object as well as the truth _of_ the believing subject.

Forma Christi, Iustitia Fidei

Accordingly, just as faith is itself characterized as "truth" by the truth which it believes, so it is likewise characterized (or "formed") as _righteous_ by that righteousness which it believes. Faith is righteous not by means of an external, over-arching imputation, but by means of a subject-to-object "grasping" of the graciously offered Christ--offered, of course, always and only through the Word. It is by that grasping of Christ in the Word that the righteousness of Christ is the "righteousness of the heart."

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[1] _LW_, XXVI, 115. _WA_, XL/1,207,11.

[2] _LW_, XXVI, 112, 115. _WA_, XL/1,202,23-24; 206,27-28.

[3] _LW_, XXVI, 113. _WA_, XL/1,204,11ff.

> Therefore we, too, acknowledge a quality and a formal righteousness in the heart; but we do not mean love, as the sophists do, but faith, because the heart must behold and grasp nothing but Christ the Savior.[1]

"Those who believe this are like God," not in this instance because God transcendently "reckons" them so, but rather because they actually "think of God altogether as he feels in his heart, and they have the same form in their mind [eandem formam in animo] that God or Christ has."[2]

True, they have that same form in animo--that is, not as doers who are re-formed by enacting the form in their behavior, but as believing subjects who apprehend the form as object--"being renewed in knowledge after the image of their creator" (Col. 3:10).[3] Yet it is they themselves who are characterized by what they believe and think. "They feel, think, and want exactly what God does." And what is that? "That we obtain the forgiveness of sins and eternal life through Jesus Christ, His Son, . . ."[4] "This form of Christ" ("so that in everything you feel as Christ himself feels") is the putting on of the new nature (Eph. 4:24).[5] It is not a putting on by imitation of Christ's "virtues" (his "patience, gentleness, and love . . ."). Better than that, it is the putting on of "a new creation": "an inestimable gift, namely, the forgiveness of sins, righteousness, peace, comfort, joy in the Holy Spirit,

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[1] LW, XXVI, 132. WA, XL/1,232,23-26.

[2] LW, XXVI, 431. WA, XL/1,650,29-31.

[3] LW, XXVI, 431. WA, XL/1,650,21-22.

[4] LW, XXVI, 431. WA, XL/1,650,24-26.

[5] LW, XXVI, 431. WA, XL/1,650,31-32.

salvation, life, and Christ himself."[1] So "the form of the Christian mind is faith, the trust of the heart, which takes hold of Christ. . . . A heart which is equipped with such confidence has the true form of Christ."[2] Again, this form takes shape, not according to the law, not as right actions rectify their agent, but according to the gospel, "through the ministry of the word," as the hearkening subject rightly trusts the proclaimed object. "For the word proceeds from the mouth of the apostle and reaches the heart of the hearer, there the Holy Spirit . . . impresses that word on the heart, so that it is heard"--literally, "so that it sounds" (ut sonat).[3]

And as it is the word that does the sounding, so it happens that "our knowing is more passive than active, . . . more a matter of being known than of knowing."[4] Yet it is this very "faith in the heart, which is a divinely granted gift and which formally believes in Christ," of which Luther could say, in his elaborate encomium on faith, that it "justifies because it renders to God what is due him," it is "righteousness beyond righteousness."[5] Moreover, "it consummates the Deity; and, if I may put it this way, it is the creator of the Deity, not in the substance of God but in us." For, "in us," to accept the gift of God's Son by faith is the only appropriate mode of having his righteousness and

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[1] LW, XXVI, 352-53. WA, XL/1,540,13-18; 541,18-20.

[2] LW, XXVI, 430. WA, XL/1,649,21-23.

[3] LW, XXVI, 430. WA, XL/1,649,21-23,27-29.

[4] LW, XXVI, 401. WA, XL/1,610,15-17.

[5] LW, XXVI, 231, 227. WA, XL/1,366,27-29; 361,12; 360,33.

the only appropriate mode, in us, of giving God glory. In that way alone, but in that way, God "has whatever a believing heart is able to attribute to him."[1]

Alioqui Deus Iniustus Esset

Therefore, as our digression into faith as "truth" ought to have illustrated, Luther is not prevented from equating the righteousness of the heart and the righteousness of Christ by a premature antithesis between subject and object. For him that is not where the conflict emerges. But a conflict there is, and right within faith's object, in the very thing which faith believes--which to believe would be altogether unrighteous, unless the opposition can be resolved. The really drastic opposition for Luther is between "those utterly conflicting statements, that the sin in us is not sin, that he who is damnable will not be damned," that "a Christian man is righteous and a sinner at the same time, holy and profane, an enemy of God and a child of God."[2]

This opposition is posed precisely by the fact of God's gracious imputation, that "God reckons imperfect righteousness as perfect righteousness and sin as not sin, even though it really is sin."[3] For the hard fact is that, however righteous faith may be, however justifying it may be, there is far too little of that faith and it is all but swamped in us by its opposite, an unbelief which is more than sufficient to damn us. Still, "God overlooks

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[1] LW, XXVI, 227. WA, XL/1,360,31-32.

[2] LW, XXVI, 235, 232. WA, XL/1,373,13-15; 368,26-27.

[3] LW, XXVI, 232. WA, XL/1,367,19-21.

these sins, and in his sight they are as though they were no sins. This is accomplished by imputation on account of . . . faith."[1] That, however, does not solve the problem. Quite the reverse, that is the problem.

> For God cannot deny his own nature. That is, he cannot avoid hating sin and sinners; and he does so by necessity, for otherwise he would be unjust and would love sin. Then how can these two contradictory things both be true at the same time, that I am a sinner and deserve divine wrath and hate, and that the Father loves me?[2]

But this is the very "paradox," the scandalous *contraria*, which faith believes. Because it does, and exactly because its own righteousness depends entirely on whether that which it believes is itself righteous, there is simply no talking about a "righteousness of faith" unless this paradox can be reconciled--for otherwise the God whom faith believes "would be unjust and would love sin."

In order for faith to be righteous, then, the paradox of the "unjust" God must be reconciled in faith's object, by a God who is himself righteous. The paradox is not reconciled by faith, however flattering to the believer such an alternative may be. For example, it might seem at first that Luther locates the righteousness of faith in the very fact that faith is capable of believing the impossible: "things that are impossible, untrue, foolish, weak, absurd, abominable, heretical, and diabolical." But what faith believes is as "absurd" as all this, Luther immediately adds,

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[1] *LW*, XXVI, 232. *WA*, XL/1,367,17-19.

[2] *LW*, XXVI, 235. *WA*, XL/1, 371,34-372,16.

only "if you consult reason."[1] What faith believes is of course "'the word of the cross' and 'the folly of preaching.'" And it is right for faith to slay *ratio* by means of this "folly," but not because it really is folly; it is that only to "foolish reason."[2] That other "paradox," however, which confronts not only reason but faith, involves a tension within God himself: "God cannot deny his own nature." Thus, it is not for faith but for God to reconcile this paradox, else faith would be as unrighteous as that "unjust" God would be in whom it believes.

Or, again, the righteousness of faith may seem to be this, that faith believes what God says, whatever he says. Of course, faith does say, "I believe thee, God, when thou dost speak."[3] But does Luther mean by this that whenever a man believes God, no matter what God says, the man is righteous for believing that? How about the man who believes God's condemnation of him as a sinner? True, Luther can say of such a man, who "confesses . . . he deserves death and eternal damnation," that "he justifies God in his word."[4] And true, this is the same bold expression with which Luther consoles the sinner who runs "to Christ, the physician": "You justify and praise God." Neither is the action of the first man to be minimized, for "it is one step toward health when a sick man admits and confesses his disease." But it is only a step

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[1] *LW*, XXVI, 227. *WA*, XL/1,361,15-16.

[2] *LW*, XXVI, 228. *WA*, XL/1,361,26-27; 362,24.

[3] *LW*, XXVI, 227. *WA*, XL/1,361,14.

[4] *LW*, XXVI, 126. *WA*, XL/1,224,17-18.

toward health. As that man is still left asking, "How will I be liberated from sin?" If believing God in the one case, while it may justify God, does not yet justify the sinner but leaves him in his sin, why should believing God in the other case be different? The difference is that, in the second case, what God says to the sinner is different: "You are righteous."[1] But that only re-introduces the problem, not only for faith but apparently also for the God whom faith believes: "Who will reconcile those utterly conflicting statements?"[2]

Propter Christum

Here, as Luther finally explains, "nothing can intervene except Christ the Mediator."[3] It is in him alone that God reconciles the paradox righteously. But that is also the one thing that is righteous about faith: Not that it believes God loves sinners and regards them as righteous--believing that, by itself, would be unrighteous and a denial of God's nature--but that it believes God loves sinners propter Christum. The Christian knows "that there is sin in him and that on this account he is worthy of wrath." Still, "he believes that he is loved by the Father." But that is precisely the rub, if we are going to represent Luther, where the righteousness of faith comes into question. How can it be righteous for a man to believe that? Only because "he believes he is loved by the Father, not for his own sake but

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[1] LW, XXVI, 233. WA, XL/1,369,18-22.

[2] LW, XXVI, 235. WA, XL/1,373,13-14.

[3] LW, XXVI, 235. WA, XL/1,372,16-17.

for the sake of Christ, the Beloved."[1] The scandalous thing about the righteousness of a Christian's faith is not just that he manages so little of it but rather that, despite its littleness, it is said to count for him before God as righteousness perfect and complete. But believing that, surely, must be not righteous but unrighteous, were it not that the one from whom faith takes its righteousness is Jesus Christ. Believing what he does for the reason he does, propter Christum, explains why the Christian's faith is righteous. The Christian believes vastly more righteousness than he presents when he believes that God reckons him, sins and all, as righteous. This would indeed be, as the sophists complain, laughable and mere "playing," to put it mildly. But what is "not easy or trivial" is that "Christ who is given to us and whom we apprehend by faith has not done something meager for us and has not been playing. . . . He 'loved us and gave himself for us'; and 'he became a curse for us.'"[2] After all, then, God does not "deny his own nature," he does not "avoid hating sin and sinners," "he does so by necessity." But in pity he bears that hatred himself, in his Son, "in his own body on the tree."

So if Luther acknowledges a difficulty in speaking of faith as righteous, the difficulty is not that the righteousness of faith competes with the righteousness which is imputed but, on the contrary, that faith believes exactly in the paradox of imputation, so apparently "unjust," and yet qualifies as righteous faith in

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[1] LW, XXVI, 235. WA, XL/1,372,19-20.

[2] LW, XXVI, 234. WA, XL/1,370,32-371,17.

the process--which difficulty is reconciled only by the mediation of Christ, on whose account alone it is righteous to trust what faith does. "If you feel your sins, do not consider them." That much advice, by itself, would be monstrous. But, as it is, "do not consider them in yourself but remember that they have been transferred to Christ, 'with whose stripes you are healed.'" "Therefore we, too, acknowledge a quality and formal righteousness in the heart . . . [namely] faith, because the heart must behold and grasp nothing but Christ the Savior." "Therefore it is something great to take hold, by faith, of Christ, who bears the sins of the world."

Propter Christum vel propter fidem

"And this faith alone," as Luther continues, "is counted for righteousness"--for the righteousness, that is, of the whole man, the whole sinner.[2] So not only is his faith itself righteous, formaliter, who accepts the iustitia reputata. But, conversely, he himself, as sinner, is reckoned as righteous because of the righteousness of his faith. "On account of this faith in Christ God does not see the sin that still remains in me."[3] "Because we take hold of him by faith, all our sins are sins no longer."[4] "Whoever is found having this faith in the Christ who is grasped

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[1] LW, XXVI, 132. WA, XL/1,232,18-20, 23-26; 234,14-15.

[2] LW, XXVI, 132. WA, XL/1,233,15.

[3] LW, XXVI, 231. WA, XL/1,367,11-12.

[4] LW, XXVI, 133. WA, XL/1,234,14-15.

in the heart, him God accounts as righteous."[1]

However, what is it about that faith in the heart which, otherwise so weak and imperfect, prompts God to count it as the perfect righteousness of the whole sinner? It is the same feature which shaped that faith, however imperfect it may be, as righteous in the first place, formaliter, namely, Jesus Christ.

> Here it is to be noted that these three things are joined together: faith, Christ, and . . . imputation. Faith takes hold of Christ and has him present, enclosing him as the ring encloses the gem. . . . Thus God accepts you or accepts you or accounts you righteous only on account of Christ, in whom you believe.[2]

Actually, Luther can use "for the sake of Christ" or "for the sake of our faith in Christ" interchangeably, not as alternatives, of course, but in apposition. "Christian righteousness . . . is a divine imputation . . . propter fidem in Christum vel propter Christum."[3] "To take hold of the Son and to believe in him with the heart as the gift of God causes God to reckon that faith, however imperfect it may be, as perfect righteousness."[4]

Non Moralis aut Theologica sed Coelestis

This is the recurrent answer which Luther would give to the problem with which we began, the problem of his theological predication: Why is it that faith, the faith of a sinner, can be called that sinner's righteousness? By reason of what, according

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[1] LW, XXVI, 132. WA, XL/1,233,18-19.

[2] LW, XXVI, 132. WA, XL/1,233,16-24.

[3] LW, XXVI, 233. WA, XL/1,370,19-21.

[4] LW, XXVI, 234. WA, XL/1,371,18-21.

to Luther, do such lofty predicates as "justify," "makes men sons and heirs of God," "makes a man God," apply to such a lowly subject as faith--to the faith, that is, of men who otherwise are nothing of the kind? Luther's predication, also in this case, follows "not the moral but the theological grammar."[1]

> Here we are in an altogether different world--a world that is outside reason. Here the issue is not what we ought to do. . . . No, here we are in a divine theology, where we hear the gospel that Christ died for us and that when we believe this we are reckoned as righteous, even though sins, and great ones at that, still remain in us.[2]

Sins still remain in us, that is, until--"until you are completely absolved from them by death," "until the day of Christ," "until the body of sin is abolished and we are raised up as new beings on that day."[3] In the meantime faith and imputation continue, though only as merciful makeshifts, as interim arrangements.

> In the life to come believing will cease . . . It will be replaced by glory, by means of which we shall see God as he is. There will be a true and perfect knowledge of God, . . . neither moral nor theological but heavenly, divine, and eternal. Meanwhile we must persevere here in faith that has the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of righteousness through Christ.[4]

"For our blessing has not yet been revealed. But meanwhile we await it in patience and yet already possess it certainly through faith.[5]

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[1] LW, XXVI, 294. WA, XL/1,457,20.

[2] LW, XXVI, 234. WA, XL/1,371,21-25.

[3] LW, XXVI, 232, 230, 235. WA, XL/1,368,14; 364,27-28; 372,29-30.

[4] LW, XXVI, 274. WA, XL/1,428,29-429,16.

[5] LW, XXVI, 453. WA, XL/1,679,17-19.

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