

*[Disclaimer: This is a retyped copy of chapter 10 of Robert Bertram's dissertation entitled "The Human Subject as the Object of Theology: Luther by Way of Barth." The "short" title is "How Luther's Theology is About Man." The dissertation is in our Crossings' library, but when it was transferred into Word Press, the formatting was severely distorted. I have tried to make this chapter readable by taking out the footnotes and re-typing much of it. Nevertheless, mistakes were likely made, as even the original pdf copy I was working from contains errors. I did the best I could, but this is not to be used for official purposes. If you would like to read the pdf copy of the entire dissertation, esp. if you want to see the footnoting, you can find it here:*

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*Chapter 10 begins on page 222. Cathy Lessmann]*

## 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. "My sin and death are damned and abolished in the sin and death of Christ." 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." 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.

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."

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 preeminently 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"—and that, precisely because the gospel is about Christ and because Christ 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, 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.

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. What is ours becomes his and what is his becomes ours. 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.’”

Actually, though, this is not the whole of the problem. The offense of Luther’s anthropocentrism arises, not just with his theology as 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 that 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, *coram deo*, namely, righteous and a Christian? Does the question sound suspiciously Kierkegaardian, like Johannes Climacus’ question in Concluding Unscientific Postscript, What is it to become a Christian? 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? 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? 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 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. 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. "And so a man does not live because of his doing; he lives because of his believing."

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 faith in Christ" is just Luther's way of saying, "for the sake of Christ." For, as everyone knows who has read Luther at all, our faith is but weak and imperfect, and only Christ "is perfectly righteous." 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."

Still, is this the end of the matter? If it is, if Luther 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."

On the other hand, it might be equally tempting so to literalize Luther's "righteousness of faith" that we conclude from it that righteousness means 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, 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.

### *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?

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 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. 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, from the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, not to mention the Apostles' Creed. Furthermore, it was not Paul who said, "Your faith has made you well," to blind Bartimaeus, to the Samaritan leper, to the woman with the hemorrhage; and who said to the woman in Simon's house, "Your faith has saved you." 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."

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 [Greek text, corrupted]: 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? 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 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, through the dialectic of their own historic antitheses, to their final resolution in Christ, "the Author and Lord of Scripture -- but explained themselves, let us 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." 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." 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. '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.'" "You must either take hold of the blessed Offspring . . . or you must have Moses." Either... or, 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*. Georg Rohrer, 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." *Quatenus igitur hoc credis, eatenus habes*. 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." Still, this sort of statement occurs often in Luther, even in his sermons. *Glaubst du, hast du*. And much the same thought is expressed, though usually more guardedly, elsewhere in the course on Galatians. In fact, the very lecture from which Rohrer 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. Also: "To the extent that I take hold of Christ by faith, therefore, to that extent the law has been abrogated for me."

This is risky talk, to be sure, especially when we ponder the ways in which Luther's meaning could be misconstrued. But one misconception, however tempting it might be on ulterior grounds, is too patently erroneous to require serious refutation. That 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 be righteous except in that the believer himself supposed it were. In any 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." But see how that sentence immediately continues and is directly explained: "... because [*quia*] Christ conquered and overcame them in himself."

However, subjectivism aside, there is another misconception 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, 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. 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"? 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*") and not yet ("*nondum*"). 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?"

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 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." 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. 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, 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." 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.

### 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." 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." That is the 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." 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." For faith "there is no law anymore." 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 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." 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." 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.'" "Thus the conscience takes hold of Christ more perfectly day by day." 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*. 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.

### *Cum Accusas Me, Me Consolaris*



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." 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." He even finds the law to be indispensable, "extremely necessary." 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," 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." 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. 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." 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." 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."

After all, then, that "*quantum comprehendo tantum habeo*" is not the decisive measure of the believer's *itia fideiusti*. 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." 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.

when the devil accuses us and says: "You are a sinner, therefore you are damned," then we can answer him and say: "Because 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."

Earlier we quoted Luther as saying, God "is not a Father to me unless I respond to him as a son," 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." Then what is there? "There is only the Father here, promising and calling me his son through Christ." "And I for my part accept, reply with a sigh, and say, "Father." 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." Nevertheless, "this sigh, which seems so meager in the flesh, is a loud cry and a sigh too deep for words." For in truth it is the sigh of none other than the Holy Spirit, a sigh that reaches all 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." "Then the Father says: "I do not hear anything in the whole world except this single sigh." 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." 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, *propter christum*, and not by the quantity of his faith.

Robert W. Bertram

