

LUTHER AND RADICAL ORTHODOXY

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For I determined not to know anything among you except
Jesus Christ and Him crucified.¹

I presume that there is a canon of great Christian theologians, a canon which represents what might be called “the Christian tradition.” To speak of a Christian tradition and of such a canon presupposes an inner coherence of this tradition and of these theologians. There might be some differences and controversies between them but, regarded after a longer process of reflection, one would have to agree that the controversies between them concern matters not of the first importance or that they could be intermediated. In such a way this canon of theologians may represent what is Christian and what is true. If someone really drops out of this canon one would have to regard his doctrine as heretic: it would not support the inner coherence of this tradition but would destroy it; it would not give an insight into truth, but it would darken and distort it.

I want to show in my presentation that Martin Luther has to be regarded as a member of this canon of great Christian theologians. For a Protestant theologian

¹ 1 Cor 2:2.

this seems to be self-evident while it might be still questionable for members of other confessions. However, after Vatican II German Roman Catholic theologians have started to regard Luther as such a figure—I want to name Otto Hermann Pesch² and Peter Manns, who called Luther a “father in the faith.”³ I claim that if one is searching “a richer and more coherent Christianity” as the Radical Orthodoxy movement wants to do,⁴ and to gain strength from this in the conflict with modern secularization, one will also have to study Martin Luther and his theology and to acknowledge him as a member of this canon of great Christian theologians together with Athanasius, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, Thomas Aquinas, and so on. I am aware of the critique Radical Orthodoxy has expressed towards him, and I think it is instructive to commit oneself to this critique.

Certainly, Luther’s theology is often formulated in a very provocative way and one has to get provoked by it in a constructive sense.

I. CORE ISSUES AND GENERAL ISSUES OF THEOLOGY

Let us start with Luther’s first statement on theology—and on philosophy—which is found in a private letter to his friend Johannes Braun written in 1509. Luther was a monk in the Augustinian order since 1505, he studied at the University of Wittenberg, and he wrote to his friend: “I am therefore now, as God commands or allows it, in Wittenberg. If you want to know something of how I am doing: I am doing well, by God’s grace, if not my study is so violent, especially in philosophy. I would have changed it already in the beginning for theology, I say,

² Otto Hermann Pesch, *Theologie der Rechtfertigung bei Martin Luther und Thomas von Aquin: Versuch eines systematisch-theologischen Dialogs* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1967).

³ Peter Manns (Ed.), Martin Luther, “Reformator und Vater im Glauben,” *Referate aus der Vortragsreihe des Instituts für europäische Geschichte Mainz* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner Verlag, 1985).

⁴ John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock, Introduction to: *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999), 2.

this theology which explores the kernel of the nut, the core of the wheat and the core of the bones. But God is god, man often, yes, always deceives himself in his judgment. Here there is our God, he may reign us in gentleness and in eternity.”⁵

If someone is committed to the relationship between theology and philosophy, to the conviction “that these two disciplines cannot be adequately understood or further developed, save with reference to each other,”⁶ one might be brought into a light distance by this remark. However, here one would have to start to think about the matter: From *which* philosophy does the young student Luther shrink from? To *which* theology is he attracted? What does he mean by a “theology which explores the kernel of the nut, the core of the wheat and the core of the bones”? To give a very short answer: the philosophy he shrinks from and the theology that does not explore the “kernel of the nut” is that of nominalism, in which he was instructed in Erfurt and Wittenberg.⁷ And the theology “which explores the kernel of the nut, the core of the wheat and the core of the bones” is a theology not situated in the spectrum of the various traditions of scholastic theology, but the theology which has been called “monastic theology.”

⁵ “Sum itaque nunc iubente vel permittente Deo Wittembergae. Quod si statum meum nosse desideres, bene habeo Dei gratia, nisi quod violentum et studium, maxime philosophiae, quam ego ab initio libentissime mutarim theologia, ea inquam theologia, quae nucleum nucis et medullam tritici et medullam ossium scrutatur. Sed Deus est Deus; homo saepe, imo semper fallitur in suo iudicio. Hic est Deus noster, ipse reget nos in suavitate et in saecula.” Luther to Johannes Braun, March 17, 1509, *Weimarer Ausgabe Briefe* (Letters) 1. 17, 39-46, no. 5.

⁶ <http://theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/about/>. Accessed online: October 6, 2015.

⁷ Reinhard Schwarz, *Luther, Die Kirche in ihrer Geschichte* Bd. 3 Lief. I (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 17-19; Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Sein Weg zur Reformation 1483-1521* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1981), 96-101. The issue of nominalism in Luther concerning his use of logic is very thoroughly discussed by Graham White, *Luther as Nominalist: A Study of the Logical Methods used in Martin Luther's disputations in the Light of their Medieval Background* (Helsinki, Schriften der Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft, 1994). See the conclusion of this work, *ibid.*, 344ff: Luther is not a nominalist concerning the question of the universals, but a theologian trained in late medieval logic. He uses it also in his late disputations, e.g., the *Disputatio de divinitate et humanitate Christi* (1540), about which I will speak later in this essay (White writes about it 231-298). The position Luther has in this disputation is not “nominalist” in this more specific sense. It is an explication of the Chalcedonian doctrine, as I shall show below.

The French Benedictine and theology historian Jean Leclercq formed the term “monastic theology” in distinction to “scholastic theology” in order to register and to appreciate a broad and essential stream of medieval theology which might easily be overlooked or underestimated by scholars committed to intellectual history. Not only Alexander of Hales or Albert Magnus, Thomas Aquinas or Bonaventure (in his commentary on the Sentences), nor are only John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham worthy to be paid attention to, but also the writings of Benedictine, Cistercian, and Carthusian monks and other ones in their tradition which do not have nor aspire to the intellectual level and the questions of scholastic theology but focus on other themes in a different way. In general one might say that monastic theology is committed to the heart of Christianity: the mystery of salvation, the relationship between God and the soul, the destination of the human: the union of the soul and God. Here monastic theology overlaps with what is called mystical theology or simply mysticism. While the themes might be partially the same as in scholastic theology, the manner in which they are treated is quite different. Monastic theology teaches *how* to go on this way to God, how to deal with difficulties which are obstacles on this way. What’s more, the way in which this theology is taught, read, or heard is already a praxis of the human way to God. The literary forms are prayer and meditation, and this means: a very slow, repeating, ruminating way of exegesis of the Bible, and treatises on practical matters of spiritual life.⁸ The master of monastic theology was Bernard of Clairvaux, who was taught to Luther in his first year in the monastery,⁹ and we also have traces

⁸ Jean Leclercq, “Saint Bernard et la théologie monastique du XII^e siècle,” *Saint Bernard théologien: Actes du Congrès de Dijon 15-19 Septembre 1953*, Analecta Sacri Ordinis Cisterciensis IX/2 (Rome, 1953), 10-16, in a further extense: idem, *L’amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu* (Paris, 1957).

⁹ It was an old monk, probably Johannes von Greffenstein, who consoled Luther by hinting to a thought of Bernard concerning the necessity of “reflexive faith” in *De Annuntiatione Dominica Sermo* I, 1.3f, in: *S. Bernardi Opera*, ed. by Jean Leclercq, H. M. Rochais, and C. H. Talbot, vol. 5 (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1968), 14f; see Melanchthon, in: *Philippi Melanchthonis Opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider, Corpus Reformatorum 6 (Halle: C.A. Schwetschke, 1839), 159; about this: Sven Grosse, *Der junge Luther und die Mystik: Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach dem Werden der reformatorischen Theologie*, in: *Gottes Nähe unmittelbar erfahren: Mystik im Mittelalter und bei Luther*, ed. Berndt Hamm and

of a very early study of John Tauler and John Gerson.¹⁰ In general, one may summarize that Bernard, Tauler, Gerson, Bonaventure—not in his commentary on the Sentences but in his mystical treatises—were usually read by a monk around this time.¹¹

In the late Middle Ages the themes of monastic theology were adopted by what has been called “piety theology.” This theology was not restricted to the monastic milieu, but extended to all members of Christendom who wanted to live a pious life. The most prominent figure of this pious theology was John Gerson.¹²

So while we see that the young monk and student Luther was attracted by this kind of theology and that he wanted to focus on such *core* issues of theology and that he thought that good theology should be focused on these issues, the late Luther gives this definition of theology:

“The subject-matter of theology is the guilty and lost man and the justifying and saving God.”¹³

Volker Leppin, *Spätmittelalter und Reformation. Neue Reihe 36* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2007), 190ff.

¹⁰ Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimar, 1883–2009), 73 vols, here vol. 9, 99f (*Weimar Ausgabe*, hereafter WA); [*Bonner Ausgabe*] *Luthers Werke in Auswahl unter Mitwirkung von Albert Leitzmann*, ed. Otto Clemen (Bonn, 1912–1933; Berlin, 1955–1956), vol. 5, 308 (hereafter BoA).

¹¹ Cf. Karlfried Froehlich, “Pseudo-Dionysius and the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century,” in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. and ed. by Colm Luibheid, et al. (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 41: “Along with Bernhard of Clairvaux, Bonaventure, and more recent authors as John Tauler and Jean Gerson, Dionysius belonged to a serious monk’s spiritual diet.”

¹² Berndt Hamm, *Frömmigkeitstheologie am Anfang des 16. Jahrhunderts: Studien zu Johannes von Paltz und seinem Umkreis* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1982); Sven Grosse, *Heilungswissheit und Scrupulositas im späten Mittelalter: Studien zu Johannes Gerson und Gattungen der Frömmigkeitstheologie seiner Zeit* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1994).

¹³ “Subiectum Theologiae homo reus et perditus et deus iustificans vel salvator.” Martin Luther, *Exposition of Psalm 51* (1532, printed 1538), WA 40 II, 328,1f. Cf. Oswald Bayer, *Theologie*, Handbuch systematischer Theologie 1 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1994), 36ff.

Of course this definition presupposes a series of articles of the Christian doctrine as known and accepted: that there is a God and what or who this God is; that there is man; that he is created as a part of the whole of creation; that there has been the Fall; that every human being is guilty and lost before God; that there is a destination of man to become blessed by the communion with God; that there is the son of God as the second person of the Trinity who becomes man and dies a death of atonement for the sin of mankind.

Luther's definition of the subject-matter of theology is much narrower than that of Aquinas, who says that the subject-matter of theology is God and all things, so far as they have a relation to God as their principle and their destination.¹⁴ However Aquinas does not overlook that theology must have a soteriological use and intensification. He introduces the concept of a theology which is beyond the merely philosophical theology by the necessity that man has to know something about the destination of his being, so that he can adjust his will and his acts according to this destination.¹⁵

Luther stressed the importance of the article of justification as the master and prince over all other kinds of doctrine, as it provides the legitimation in which the human subject of theology speaks about all matters of theology and about the use which all these matters may have for him.¹⁶ On the other hand, he clearly sees that there are matters of theology which presuppose this article of faith, so that one cannot understand this article if one has not understood and accepted the articles concerning these matters. So at the beginning of his Smalcaldean Articles he gives account of the article of the trinity and of God the Son: that he has become man, has died, and is risen and so on (ASm I, 1-4). This is the presupposition of the following article (ASm II,1): that Jesus Christ has died for our sins (Rom 4:25), that this is a completely sufficient sacrifice (Is 53:3; Acts 4:12), and that man is saved by faith in

¹⁴ "Omnia autem tractantur in sacra doctrina sub ratione Dei: vel quia sunt ipse Deus; vel quia habent ordinem ad Deum, ut ad principium et finem" (*ST*, I, q. 1, a. 7 c.).

¹⁵ "Sacra doctrina," theology beyond philosophical theology, is necessary, "quia homo ordinator a Deo ad quemdam finem qui comprehensionem rationis excedit ... Finem autem oportet esse praecognitum hominibus, qui suas intentiones et actiones debent ordinare in finem. Unde necessarium fuit homini ad salutem, quod ei nota fierent quaedam per revelationem divinam, quae rationem humanam excedunt" (*ST*, I, q. 1, a. 1c.).

¹⁶ *Promotionsdisputation Palladius und Tileman* (1537), WA 39/1, 205, 1-5.

Jesus Christ (Rom 3:28).¹⁷ Certainly, the doctrine of justification cannot be treated in isolation. At first, the deciding matter is not the mere doctrine, but the reality of justification and second, this doctrine has to be regarded as embedded in the web of articles in which the Christian doctrine consists.¹⁸

Let us now give a preliminary comparison between Luther and Radical Orthodoxy. One can distinguish *core issues* and *general issues* in theology. Core issues are concerned with “the kernel of the nut, the core of the wheat and the core of the bones.” This has to do with the way in which God saves the guilty and lost man as well as how therefore man must adjust his mind to God’s work of redemption. The general issues of theology are presuppositions of these core issues. One can imagine here concentric circles of presuppositions. One can step from the core, the center of the circle, to a first circle of presuppositions; these have their own presuppositions and so on. So the more one enters the outer circles, the more general become these presuppositions, so the more abstract they become, also the more distant are they from the core. RO’s reflection on the participation of created being in the being of God, its conceiving of Christ as “gift,” as a maximum degree of the taking part that God grants his creatures, and RO’s proposal for philosophy’s involvement in theology is a movement of the thought to always more outward circles and more general presuppositions.

To say that this movement of thought removes itself from the center does not have to mean that it is wrong to search for more general presuppositions for the Christian doctrine of salvation. That these presuppositions are general means that

¹⁷ Irene Dingel, ed., *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 10th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 414-416 (hereafter BSLK). Luther says that there is no controversy with the Roman magisterium concerning the first two basal articles. The controversy begins the third article (II,1), which he sees questioned by the Roman practice and doctrine of the mess as an atoning sacrifice.

¹⁸ It should be superfluous to say that Luther’s definition of theology by its double subject-matter does not want to replace the creed in its trinitarian structure. In Luther’s catechisms the apostolic creed is the summary of Christian faith; in *Schmalkaldischen Artikel* I,1-4 he follows the Nicaenum, and so on. Luther’s definition has the same status of an intensified concentration as Paul, when he says that “I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). And similar as Anselm of Canterbury claims, that everything in the Old and in the New Testament is contained in the answer to the question, why God has become man (*Cur Deus homo* II, 22), Luther can claim, that everything in theology is contained in his definition of theology.

they are necessary to think and to conceive the Christian proclamation of salvation. It is only important to *relate* them to the core act of salvation: Christ, true God and true man, on the cross, the believing man, the pardoned sinner before him. Two dangers become visible now: in one direction there is a forgetting of this relating, of this tying back. In this case one would forget that the case of Christianity concerns something very concrete: man, who is overwhelmed by the recognition of his sin before God and comforted by the God fixed onto the cross. Luther diagnosis was that Dionysius the Areopagite succumbed to this danger when he wrote:

“In the ‘Mystical Theology’ he is in the highest degree pernicious, he is more dealing Plato’s matter than that of Christ ... You do not learn Christ there, you will even lose him, when you have already known him ... Let us hear Paul, that we learn Christ, and this one as the crucified [1 Cor 2:2]. He is the way, the life, and the truth; this is the ladder by which we come to the Father, as he has said: No one comes to the father if not by me.” [John 14:6]¹⁹ One might perhaps save Dionysius from condemnation by a more cautious and benevolent reading, but one has to admit that a doctrine which does not *lead* to the practical recognition of the crucified Christ does not lead to salvation.”

On the other hand one can imagine an opposite danger. This would consist of forgetting the notional presuppositions, the implications of the Christian core message. Then one would speak only of salvation and sin, but not of creation. One would speak only of the redemption of the individual soul and not of the renewing of the whole creation, the whole society, and the whole nature. One would be sacrificing reflection and the conceptual in favor of proclaiming the gospel in a basic language. I think it is absurd to blame Luther for this tendency, and it is obvious that he did not succumb to this danger. However, it is necessary to state that an isolated focus on the core issues of Christian faith would lead to this danger.

Luther explicitly presupposes the dogmas of the Old Church: the trinity, the two natures of Christ, and the Christological doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* that is handed down by the church fathers. He has also made some

¹⁹“In ‘Theologia’ vero ‘mystica’, [...] etiam pernitiosissimus est, plus platonisans quam Christianisans [...]. Christum ibi adeo non discas, ut, si etiam scias, amittas. [...] Paulum potius audiamus, ut Iesum Christum et hunc crucifixum discamus. Haec est enim via, vita et veritas: haec scala, per quem venitur ad patrem, sicut dicit ‘Nemo venit ad patrem nisi per me’” (*De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium* [1520], WA 6, 562, 8-14).

contributions to the doctrine of creation, on God's immanence in the creation, and the impact of Christian faith on human culture; I will later touch these points. Next, I want to think about his critique of nominalism: did this critique recognize what is pernicious in nominalism? Did his critique help extricate European thinking from the pitfalls of nominalism?

2. LUTHER AND NOMINALISM

Luther's focus on core issues of theology is also apparent in the fact, that he never—as far as I know—dedicated himself to the problem that game nominalism its name: the problem of universals. Nor did he write—as far as I know—anything on the univocity of being or analogous speech concerning God. He addressed nominalism from quite a different side: the one concerning the doctrines of sin and of grace—typical for a theologian who focused on the core issues in the tradition of monastic theology and the theology of piety.

His *Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam* from September 4, 1517 is actually not against scholastic theology in general but against both the Ockamist Gabriel Biel and John Duns Scotus.

Appealing to Augustine in his work against the Pelagians, Luther writes about the human nature after the Fall. He says that it is completely absurd to draw the following conclusion: erring man can love the creature over everything, *therefore* he can also love God over everything (Thesis 13). Rather, the truth is: Man by means of his nature cannot desire that God is God. Rather, he wants to be God and that God is not God (Thesis 17). Luther says that it is a fiction that man after the Fall can love God over everything (Thesis 18).²⁰ It is obvious that he

²⁰ Th. 13: "Absurdissima est consequentia: 'homo errans potest diligere creaturam super omnia', 'ergo et deum'"; Th. 17: "Non 'potest homo naturaliter velle deum esse deum', Immo vellet se esse deum et deum non esse deum"; Th. 18: "'Diligere deum uper omnia naturaliter' Est terminus fictus, sicut Chimera" (WA 1, 224f. / BoA 5, 321). Thesis 13 is expressively against Scotus and Gabriel Biel. The references are: Biel, *In Sent. III*, d. 27, q. un. a. 3 dub. and Scotus, *In Sent. III*, d. 27, q. un. n. 13. 15. 21. For Biel, see *Collectorium circa quattor libros Sententiarum*, ed. Wilfried Werbeck and Udo Hofmann, Bd.3 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1979),

charges Biel, Scotus, and other scholastic theologians to be Pelagians. I want to touch only a little bit on what Biel and his master William of Ockham have said. They state that man is able to achieve a meritorious act without grace and that God is able to accept such an act and to give man eternal beatitude. Biel and Ockham stress that God *can* do so. Actually, they add, God has decided in his *potentia ordinata* to give eternal beatitude only to those men who are formed by sacramental grace. Biel and Ockham obviously know that they can be charged with Pelagianism. They reject this allegation by saying that according to Pelagius God has to give someone eternal life not because of grace, but because of a morally good act. They however teach that it is God's absolute power which makes a human act meritorious.²¹

Surely, the construction of a decision of God to give eternal life only to those to whom he has given sacramental grace protects Ockham and Biel against the charge of Pelagianism. The question is whether or not it is right to say that man can love God over everything by pure nature and that it is only God's arbitrary decision, according to which this love is not sufficient to grant man eternal life. Luther's horror at such a theology is founded on the conviction that man after the Fall is not able to love God over everything. *Therefore, if* man is to be saved, he can only be saved by *grace*. Luther is shocked that one can speak of God's grace as just God's decision without being aware of the reality of sin which can only be healed by grace.

Luther's critique of nominalism is related to the doctrines of grace and sin and these are core issues of theology. However, embedded in this statement is also a reference to the global issues of theology. Luther protests against a theology that overlooks the reality of man and therefore also the reality of God. He criticizes a theology which is satisfied with intellectual constructions, by which the necessity

503-507, esp. 504,23f: "Viatoris voluntas humana ex suis naturalibus potest diligere Deum super omnia." Biel appeals to Ockham, Scotus, and Pierre d'Alli.

²¹ Gabriel Biel, *In Sent I*, d. 17, q.1: *Collectorium*, Bd.1, (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1973), 413-425, cf. Ockham, *Quodlibeta* VI.1: William of Ockham, *Quodlibetal Questions*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso and Francis E. Kelley, Vol. 2, (New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 1991), 491-494.

of grace is proved and is not aware of the reality of sin and sin-healing grace. He hits upon feature of nominalism that exists in the realm of global issues: the conviction that the relation between God and man can only be regarded according to a conceptual construction and not in reference to reality itself.

3. LUTHER AND CHALCEDON: THE DOCTRINE OF *COMMUNICATIO IDIOMATUM*

Luther adopts the doctrine of Chalcedon and develops it in the doctrine of *communicatio idiomatum*. Human and divine nature both consist in Christ, not mixed, not transformed, not separated, not divided. As they are unified in one person, the qualities of each nature are transferred to the person in acts which are originally an exclusive feature of the other nature. Luther exposes this in this way that what is human is now truly said of God and what is divine is now truly said of man.²² By this communications of idioms, the words used in relation to Christ receive a new signification. In the old language used prior to the incarnation, "creature" means a being which is, before any other relation, infinitely separated from the divine. But in the new language used in relation to Christ, it means a being which is in the divinity unseparatedly united to one and the same person.²³ So the words "creature," "man," "humanity," "suffered," etc., receive a new meaning in Christ. However, this is an extension of what created nature is. It is not a transformation from human nature to divine nature. The

²² Thesis 1: "Fides catholica haec est, ut unum dominum Christum confiteamur verum Deum et hominem"; Th. 2: "Ex hac veritate geminae substantiae et unitate personae sequitur illa, quae dicitur, communicatio idiomatum"; Th. 3: "Ut ea, quae sunt hominis, recte de Deo et e contra, quae Dei sunt, de homine dicantur"; Th. 4: "Vere dicitur: Iste homo creavit mundum et Deus iste est passus, mortuus, sepultus etc" (*Disputatio de divinitate et humanitate Christi* [1540], WA 39/II, 93, 2-9).

²³ Ibid., Th. 21: "Nam creatura veteris linguae usu et in aliis rebus significat rem a divinitate separatam infinitis modis"; Th. 22: "Novae linguae usu significat rem cum divinitate inseparabiliter in eandem personam ineffabilius modis coniunctam" (WA 39/II, 94, 19-22).

human in Christ remains human but it is now something which includes divine features. Therefore, Luther expressively rejects Eutchyches.²⁴

Luther models a series of theological doctrines around the structure of *communicatio idiomatum*.²⁵ So, in the *admirabile commercium* (the “wonderful change”), the whole of humanity receives Christ’s immaculate righteousness (see 2 Cor 5:21) while still remaining human and does not become God.²⁶ The distinction between what is God and what is human is always preserved in the communication. Nature receives an ability to say something about the history of salvation in a parable, in an emblem, an ability which it would not have without the fact of salvation history. On the other hand, it always remains nature; the certitude of salvation which is provided by these parables or emblems does not have the same level as the certitude contained in the proclamation of the gospel.²⁷

In a similar way, Luther thinks about the use of images, the figural exegesis of the Bible, the virgin Mary, and the use of examples taken from general history. Images do not have an inherent or a direct relation to divine grace, nor do they have the power to deliver grace. But in communication with the word which preaches Christ, they receive this power and take part in the work of salvation.²⁸ The figural exegesis takes part in the validity of the literal sense, insofar it is based on it.²⁹

²⁴ Ibid., Th. 31: “Sed occultus Eutyches habitat in talibus haereticis, negare paratis aliquando, verbum esse carnem factum” (WA 39/II, 95,1f) – The theses are against the doctrine of Schwenckfeldt, who taught that after the glorification Christ’s humanity was no longer a creature.

²⁵ See Johann Anselm Steiger, *Fünf Zentralthemen der Theologie Luthers und seiner Erben: Communicatio–Imago–Figura–Maria–Exempla*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought 104 (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

²⁶ Ibid., 10-15.

²⁷ Ibid., 23-51.

²⁸ Ibid., 105-143.

²⁹ Ibid., 145-179.

The virgin Mary is a purely human creature but by her faith she takes—*per analogiam*—part in the two natures of Christ. This means that she becomes the highest jewel in Christendom—after Christ himself—but she is also humiliated to the state of a whore.³⁰ Finally, examples taken not only from the post-Christ history of the church, but also from general history can be used to say something about the events of the history of salvation and by this way participate in the power of this history.³¹

One can foresee that by this use of the doctrine of the communication of idioms all productions of man—let us say: human culture—can become involved in the work of salvation.

4. LUTHER'S HERMENEUTICS OF SCRIPTURE

The insight the young Luther received in his first time in a monastery by way a hint from Bernard of Clairvaux, concerned the soteriological relevance of the right understanding of the Bible. Referring to Romans 8:16, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God," Bernard says that this testimony of the Holy Spirit contains the forgiving of sin, the doing of good works, and the gift of eternal life, and that they are only by the grace of God. However, this description of the Spirit's testimony is insufficient: the Spirit also witnesses to the fact that *your* sins are forgiven, etc. So, every believer has to believe that his *own* sins are forgiven, or else he rejects the witness of the Spirit and does not receive forgiveness of sins.³² I want to call such a faith a *reflexive faith*—"reflexive" not because there is a self-introspection by the human mind, using its own power, but because the faith of the believer believes something

³⁰ Ibid., 243-248, in the context of 217-249.

³¹ Ibid., 251-267.

³² Bernard of Clairvaux, *De Annuntiatione Dominica Sermo Primus*. De versu Psalmi: Ut inhabitet gloria in terra nostra, 1.3f., in: *S. Bernardi Opera*, 14, 22-15, 2: "[...] sed adde adhuc ut et hoc credas, quia per ipsum tibi peccata donantur. Haec est testimonium quod perhibet in corde nostro Spiritus sanctus, dicens: Dimissa sunt tibi peccata tua. Sic enim arbitratur Apostolus hominem iustificari gratis per fidem."

about himself which the Spirit by the word says to him. In his later study of Scripture Luther found the basis of the necessity of reflexive faith in words in which Jesus praised or demanded the faith of those people from whom he healed.³³ Luther consequently developed the insight that every theological proposition has to include a relation to that one who speaks it. The article of creation, for instance, he formulates thus: “I believe that God has created *me* together with all creatures,” etc.³⁴

This structure can be regarded in two directions. The first one: the subjectivity of man may not be neglected but must always be involved in all theological propositions, not as the basis of them but as something to which the intention of the divine word is directed to: the “me“ of man may not be kept outside.

The other direction: If the “me“ of everyone who speaks a theological proposition has to be included in this proposition also, his whole story is involved as well. As the Bible is the foundation of all true theological propositions, the Bible can only be adequately understood if the reader—or hearer—of the biblical text includes himself and his story in the biblical narrative. He understands the Bible only then in a full sense when he understands *himself* as the receiver of the divine promises that are pronounced in the Bible.

So on the one hand the Bible is a book distinct from all other books—and all other texts—of humankind. It is distinct from them and superior to them—or else it would not be the sacred book, the *scripturae sacrae*. On the other hand, *because* the Bible is this only holy book, it incorporates in itself all human stories, all other possible human books, identifying every human being with his story as a receiver of God’s judgment and of God’s acquittal.

³³ Matthew 5:28; 9:28f, 8:8; John 4:50, in a long list of biblical arguments, *Acta Augustana* (1518), WA 2, 14, 13-29.

³⁴ Small Catechism, BSLK 510,33f.

5. THE INTO-EACH-OTHER AND AGAINST-EACH-OTHER OF DIVINE AND HUMAN ACTION

The relation between God's acting and man's acting is regarded by Luther in a twofold way. On the one hand, he regards them as something interwoven into each other. God acts in that way that man—or more generally: creature—acts something. "All creatures are God's masks. He makes them work with him and help to do many things that he also could do without their cooperation and actually does without them."³⁵ In this fashion God is in all his creatures, more interior than themselves but he cannot be confined by them.³⁶

When God acts in this way, the acting of the creature and God's own acting are in the same proportion to each other. When a creature does something, God does it as well, and reverse. So the more the creature does it, God does it, too. This is a relation between divine acting and human acting which we can find in Aquinas as well.³⁷

At the same time, God is also able to act in quite a different way. There he acts quite alone and his acting is hidden; it can only be seen by the eyes of faith which look into that which is hidden. Luther calls this type of act one of "God's arms." In his exposition of the 'Magnificat' when he meditates on the verse that reads "He has shown strength with His arm" (Luke 1:51a), he brings out the features of this way of God's acting.³⁸ This kind of divine act is only a reference to the distinction between the pious and the evil ones. Here there is a reverse proportion between divine acting and human acting. In the pious, God makes

³⁵ "Alle creaturen sind Gottes larven und mumereyen, die er will lassen mit yhm wircken und helffen allerley schaffen, das er doch sonst on yhr mitwircken thun kan und auch thut" (*Fastenpostille 1525*, Sermon on Matthew 4:1ff [WA 17/II, 192, 28-30], cf. *Der 127. Psalm ausgelegt für die Christen zu Riga in Liefland* (1524) [WA 15, 373,8]).

³⁶ Daß diese Wort Christi 'Das ist mein leib' noch fest stehen (1527) (WA 23, 133,21f; 23, 137, 31-35).

³⁷ See *STI*, q. 22, a. 4; q. 103, a. 5-8.

³⁸ "Gottis arm wirt in der schrifft genennet sein eygen gewalt, damit er on mittel der creaturn wirkt, dasselb geht stil und heymlich zu, das sein niemant gewar wirt, bisw das geschehen ist" (*Das Magnificat verdeutschet und ausgelegt* (1521) [WA 7, 585,23-25]). [Das andere Werk Gottes. Geistliche Hoffahrt zerstören]

their own acting to nothing and is acting alone. In the acts of the evil ones, God withdraws his own action and lets them act alone. Luther's deliberations are led by the meditation on God's action in the crucifixion of Christ and on Paul's words when he says, "when I am weak, I am strong," for God's strength is powerful in the weak (2 Cor 12:9f.).

While in the first kind of divine action one can easily see that God is acting, as his action is in proportion to the acting of the creatures which is visible, it is hidden in the second case because, what one sees is only the misery of Christ at the cross or the weakness of Paul and not the power of God in them. Therefore, only faith can become aware of this divine power.

One would misunderstand this twofold determination of the relationship between divine and human action if one thinks that they would be set on the same level of thinking. Already Luther's restriction that the second determination is only accessible by faith should preserve from this implication. In the first determination, Luther stands in for what one can call a metaphysics of participation: God is in all his creatures, they can only act by him being in them and so on. There is no room where two players can meet on the same univocal field and one occupies a bigger part of this field than the other. In the level of thinking in which we have to set the second determination there is a personal encounter between God and man and therefore they meet on the same field. Surely this can only happen by a condescension of God. This kind of relationship has an existential character, and this is specific for monastic theology or a theology of piety.

I think these deliberations grant access to Luther's doctrine of the unfree will. Luther has developed this doctrine on the basis of biblical passages in conjunction with Augustine.³⁹ The first reason Luther gives as to why this doctrine has to be promulgated is the humiliation of human pride and the recognition of God's grace. He explains:

³⁹ Luther takes the title of his writing 'De servo arbitrio' from Augustine in *Contra Iulianum* II, 8,23: "... et non libero, vel potius servo proprie voluntatis arbitrio..." Augustine's—and Luther's—position should not be considered as something against the Roman magisterium since the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification of 1999.

God has promised certainly His grace to the humbled: that is, to the self-deploring and despairing. But a man cannot be thoroughly humbled, until he comes to know that his salvation is utterly beyond his own powers, counsel, endeavours, will, and works, and absolutely depending on the will, counsel, pleasure, and work of another, that is, of God only. For if, as long as he has any persuasion that he can do even the least thing himself towards his own salvation, he retain a confidence in himself and do not utterly despair in himself, so long he is not humbled before God; but he proposes to himself some place, some time, or some work, whereby he may at length attain unto salvation. But he who hesitates not to depend wholly upon the goodwill of God, he totally despairs in himself, chooses nothing for himself, but waits for God to work in him; and such an one, is the nearest unto grace, that he might be saved.⁴⁰

In such a man, his own action has come to an end, while God's act reaches a maximum. This is true when one regards the act of God and the act of man at odds with one another, in the personal encounter of both. One can think of the man Paul speaks about in Romans 9:19, who complains: who is able to resist God's will? On the other hand, one can regard this constellation also as an into-each-other of divine action and human action: The man who still "waits for the work of God" is not fatalistic but ready to trust in God's promise to save him. There is no salvation without faith. Faith, however, is an act of man—and in the same time an act of God who acts in the human soul.

⁴⁰ "Primum, Deus certo promisit humiliatis, id est, deploratis et desperatis, gratiam suam. Humiliari vero penitus non potest homo, donec sciat, prorsus extra suas vires, consilia, studia, voluntatem, opera, omnino ex alterius consilio, voluntate, opere suam pendere salutem, nempe Dei solius. Siquidem, quamdiu persuasus fuerit, sese vel tantulum posse pro salute sua, manet in fiducia sui, nec de se penitus desperat, ideo non humiliatur coram Deo, sed locum, tempus, opus aliquod sibi praesumit vel sperat vel optat saltem, quod tandem perveniat ad salutem. Qui vero nihil dubitat, totum in voluntate Dei pendere, is prorsus de se desperat, nihil eligit, sed expectat operantem Deum, is proximus est gratiae, ut salvus fiat" (WA 18, 632,29 – 633,1 / BoA 3, 123,35–124,9). English translation from Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will: Written in Answer to the Diatribe of Erasmus on Free-Will*, trans. Henry Cole (London: T. Bentley, 1823), §24

6. TWO WAYS BY WHICH THE CHURCH CAN BECOME LIKE THE WORLD

A chief motive of Radical Orthodoxy is its rejection of secularism and its concomitant critique theologies that supports secularism. There may not remain any space in which God is *not* present; there may not exist anything which can be thought without God. Has the Reformation of the 16th century to be regarded as a movement that worked for or against secularization? Or did it want to work against it but did not succeed in doing so?

For a fair assessment of these questions one has to look for the motives of the reformation—or better, the reformations, because it is more adequate so speak of several distinct movements with the intention to reform the church, although they certainly had many things in common.

Deliberating upon which dangers exist for the church, a main danger is surely that it becomes “like the world,” a danger of which Paul warns in Romans 12:2. The church can, however, succumb to this danger in a twofold way. There may be a religious and a secularist becoming-like-the-world. To understand the first way one has to define what “religious” means. I presuppose here the definition of Karl Barth, who, very typical for the Reformed tradition, says: the realm of the human attempts to justify and to sanctify himself before an image of God which is designed by himself in a stubborn and unauthorized way.⁴¹

So what is believed to be beyond the world by the religious man is actually designed by this man himself. This man is the creator of what he believes, that it is independent of him and outside of this world. By this approach the world does prolong itself into the transcendent. The religious man outstretches himself in a desire to touch something that is not of this world, but what he touches is an echo or a mirror image of his world. Regarded in this way, religion is something very worldly.

So the church can become like the world when it becomes religious in this way. It is obvious that it can keep all its symbols when it becomes religious and loses its

⁴¹ Religion ist der Bereich “der Versuche des Menschen, sich vor einem eigensinnig und eigenmächtig entworfenen Bilde Gottes selber zu rechtfertigen und zu heiligen” (Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* I/2, 304, Thesis to § 17).

identity. It can also keep its structure. It can also keep its doctrines to some extent, however, they are changed in a certain way.

In a classical manner, the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli has criticized a church which has succumbed to this danger, in his "Commentary on the true and the false religion," in the tract on the Eucharist, that "we"—he turns his view critically back toward the past—"intended to touch holy things or to be with holy things, instead of being holy ourselves." He continues:

Now we are all bent upon handling holy things, or upon having them about us—yea, I will say it plainly, upon making holy by our own merit, forsooth, things that perhaps are not holy [...]—rather than upon making ourselves holy. The result is that we worship with embraces and kisses wood, stones, earth, dust, shoes, [and so on], and anything that pious men have ever handled. And (most foolish thing of all) we think ourselves distinctly blessed if we have got just a look at any such thing; we promise ourselves the remission of our sins, prosperous fortune, and the whole world. But true piety, which is nothing else than blamelessness preserved through love and fear of God, we have abandoned so completely that not even among infidels do we see ordinary, that is, human righteousness so utterly prostrate among us Christians.⁴²

⁴² "Nunc, quum omnes ad hoc intenti fuimus, ut sancta potius atrectaremus, aut circum nos haberemus, quin palam dicam, sancta faceremus, nostra virtute scilicet, quae fortasse sancta non erant (nemo enim ignorat, quantum sit in ossa piorum, ut adoratur etiam insumptum!), quam ut ipse sancti fieremus, factum est, ut lignum, lapides, terram, pulverem, soleas, vestes, annulos, galeas, cingula, ossa, dentes, pilos, lac, panem, quadras, tabulas, vinum, cultros, amphoras et quicquid unquam atrectarunt pii homines, adoraverimus amplectendo, osculando; et quod stultissimum erat, nos plane beatos existimabamus, si quid talium solummodo aspexissemus. Promittebamus nobis ipsis abolita esse peccata, propiciam fortunam ac mundum totum. Veram autem pietatem, quae niil aliud est, quam ex amore timoreque dei servata innocentia, sic deseruimus, ut communem iusticiam, hoc est: humanam, ne apud infideles quidem sic frigere videamus, ut apud Christianos." *De vera ac falsa religione commentarius* [18], *Huldreich Zwingli's sämtliche Werke*, ed. Emil Egli, Georg Finsler, and Walther Köhler, Vol. 3, Leipzig 1914 (=Corpus Reformatorum 90), 774,27-775,7. The passage is in modern German translation in: Huldrych Zwingli, *Schriften*, ed. Thomas Brunnschweiler and Samuel Lutz, Vol. 3 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1995), 254f. English translation here is from Ulrich Zwingli, *Commentary on the True and False Religion*, eds. Samuel Macauley Jackson and Clarence Nevin Heller, trans. Henry Preble (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 199.

So much for Zwingli. I think these words illuminate both the situation of the church on the eve of the Reformation and the intention of a good part of the reformers very well.

The situation is a very religious one. The problems is not a lack, but a too much of religion or of what is believed to be God's presence. Man himself creates the presence of God. Man can keep on producing holy things. Like producing money by the note press one can produce holy things—the result is an inflation of the religious.

The remedy of this disease of the church was for Zwingli and many other reformers,

(a) to ask for the true authorization of what is called holy in the church, for instance, to ask for the divine institution of the Eucharist.

(b) it was stressing the difference between God and the creature. The creature is not divine, it is not to be adored. The transcendence of God is stressed. The things in this world lost their divine quality. The omnipresence of the holy, by which man was surrounded, was diminished.

(c) instead of the presence of holy things, the moral responsibility of man was stressed. If a man behaves morally, that is, if he obeys God's commandments, he submits—by God's grace—his life and the world to God's will.

One sees the consequences of this evaluation in Zwingli's doctrine of the Eucharist: the Eucharistic species are nothing but symbols. They are only something created without any divine presence. God must be searched and found within the transcendent.

The secularist who is becoming-like-the-world goes in the opposite direction of the religious one. Here the "world" clearly confesses that it is something which does not want to depend on God. Secularism is the fixing or establishing of human expectations and acts in something *in* the world—in the capacity of human understanding, in human will, and in the possibilities of a world that are self-sufficient.

We can recognize three features of secularism where it adopts, extends, and transforms the three features of the Reformed tradition. The main feature of secularization is the diminishing of the religious elements in society and in personal life, a process that tends toward their total extinction. This process is critical to any religious convictions (a). The transcendence of God is exaggerated in such a way that he cannot take part and is not present in the things of daily human life (b). Man is morally responsible for his world (c).

To be fair, one cannot blame Zwingli or the other reformers who thought like him for having prepared the secularization that began in the 18th century.⁴³ A Protestant of this kind would not be skeptical or reject *all* religious convictions. He would not stress God's transcendence in such a way that God is banned from the world, and he would always maintain that man is morally responsible *before God*—and not solely before anything within the world.

In the course of history it is always an art to avoid the extremes. In the 16th century it was the church's task to avoid the extreme of a religious becoming-like-the-world. Now, secularism poses the opposite danger. What can be said against the "Reformed" line of the Reformation and its descendants is that they often had and have an idiosyncratic blindness against the danger from the other side. But when we turn again to Luther, we see that he had an awareness of a twofold danger from opposite sides and therefore designed something like a *via media*. This issue is also linked to his critique of Zwingli with regards to the

⁴³ What follows, is said also in response to Brad S. Gregory's *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012). I do not want to enter a closer discussion of Gregory here. However I want to indicate that there are very grave historical misunderstandings and errors in Gregory's book. E.g., the confrontation of different doctrines which all claim to be based on the principle of *sola scriptura* does not necessarily lead to "Relativizing doctrines", as ch.1 claims. This is a conclusion, only few thinkers of the reformation era drew (Sebastian Franck, Sebastian Castellio) and surely many modern thinkers do so, but there are better alternatives to it. Also Luther's doctrine in 'On Secular Authority' does not intend to surrender the soul also to the state ("For there were no disembodied souls on earth ...", Gregory, 148), but it was an effective limitation of the state's power in affairs on the conscience and a repudiation of the medieval state's law concerning heretics.

sacraments, especially the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Eucharist.

In his *Von den Konziliis und Kirchen* (*On the Councils and the Churches*) from 1539, Luther gives a brief history of the Reformation up until this date. In the beginning, he says, Christendom was deceived by a number of things, which seemed to be something like a sacrament, but did not have the power to give salvation: holy water was believed to cleanse from sins, similar qualities were accredited to holy salt, the ringing of bells, blessed herbage, special blessings, and so on.⁴⁴ Luther said that he started to teach that such external things did not deliver grace but were mere creatures. The devil however changed his strategy to deceive Christians. He turned to the opposite extreme and made the people believe that *no any* external thing was able to deliver grace, that baptism was nothing but external water, the word nothing but external human speech, the Scripture nothing but external letter made of ink, the bread—of the Eucharist—something baked by the baker and nothing else; they were all external, perishable things. People cry now: “Spirit, spirit, the spirit must do it, the letter kills.”⁴⁵

This dispute about the use of corporeal things—*do* they, *can* they deliver grace and cleanse from sins? (a place where decisions are made)—is about how close God can be to the human creature and to which extent God can be present in life.

Luther decided against too simplistic a solution in response to this question: neither a withdrawal of the divine into a spiritual transcendence nor a binding of the cleansing and justifying presence of God to everything or everything human

⁴⁴ WA 50, 644,12 – 646,8.

⁴⁵ “Da wir durchs Evangelion anfiengen zu leren, das solch eusserlich ding nicht selig machen kündte, weil es schlechte, leibliche Creaturn weren, und der Teuffel offte zur zeitüberey gebrauchte, fielen die Leute, auch gros und gelerte Leute, dahin, das die Tauffe als ein eusserlich wasser, das Wort als ein eusserlich Menschliche rede, die Schrift als ein eusserlicher buchstabe von tinten gemacht, das Brot und Wein als vom Becker gebacken, solten schlecht nichts sein, denn es weren eusserliche vergengliche ding. Also gerieten sie auff das geschrey: Geist, Geist, der geist mus thun, ,der Buchstabe tödtet” (WA 50, 646, 25-33).

tradition has regarded as holy. God's cleansing and justifying presence is where he has decided to be: in Scripture, in the preached word, in the word of absolution, in baptism and in the Eucharist. In this way Luther also takes a middle stance between a religious and a secularist becoming-like-the-world of the church.

I come to an end: I think, Radical Orthodoxy and Luther's theology can get into a constructive relationship when some misunderstandings of Luther are overcome. There are agreements, complementary areas, and constructive critique, where RO can learn from Luther. Acknowledged as a member of the canon of great Christian theologians, Luther shows his power of inspiration as a theologian, who

1. Referred everything in theology to the core issue: Christ, the crucified.
2. Criticized all theology, which deviated from reality, which was revealed in Christ, and therefore repudiated nominalism.
3. As he regarded the incarnation of the Word as the center of God's presence in the world, he tried to conceive every human act as something that participates in it by the communication of idioms, without losing its identity as something creaturely, which cannot contribute anything to the salvation.
4. Just because the Holy Scripture is holy—and this means separate from all other human texts—it demands the submission and inclusion of the human self and all human narratives in it.
5. Divine and human action are interwoven into each other, and at the same time, God's saving action comes to its perfection, when man acknowledges that his will is nothing before God.
6. The right way of the church is one between two extremes: a) a separation of the world from God—and an actual annihilation of God in the world, and b) an arbitrary acting of man, who pretends to make "God" present in his world.