Luther's Theology of the Cross

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Luther's Theology of the Cross

Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough

Second Edition

Alister E. McGrath

For Joanna

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Acknowledgments

Luther scholarship is a corporate enterprise, in which each successive study draws increasingly upon the findings of those preceding it. The present study thus owes an incalculable amount to the labors of others. I wish to express particular thanks to those who have helped me at various times and in various ways as I prepared the first edition of this work. That edition, published in 1985, owed much to the advice, encouragement, and criticism of Professor A.G. Dickens, Prof. Dr Leif Grane, Prof. Dr Bengt Hägglund, Prof. Dr Heiko A. Oberman, and especially Professor E. Gordon Rupp.

In revising and rewriting this book a quarter of a century later, I am indebted to the massive body of scholarly literature that has appeared since 1985, which casts valuable light on many of the themes engaged in this study. While many of the conclusions of the original study have been confirmed by more recent studies, this new scholarship has forced revision of some of the arguments and conclusion of the first edition of this work. I am grateful to all working in this field for helping to uncover its complexity, while at the same time illuminating some of its major themes. I hope that this new edition of this work will be judged to reflect accurately our new understanding of this fascinating and tumultuous age, as well as the specific issue on which it focuses – the emergence of Luther's reforming theology over the period 1509–1519, and especially its ''theology of the cross.''

Abbreviations

WA   *D.M. Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (65 vols:
        Weimar: Verlag Hermann Böhlaus Nochfolger, 1883–1966)
WABr   *D.M. Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Briefwechsel*
        (18 vols: Weimar: Verlag Hermann Böhlaus Nochfolger,
        1930–1985)
WADB   *D.M. Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Deutsche Bibel*
        (12 vols: Weimar: Verlag Hermann Böhlaus Nochfolger,
        1906–1961)
WATr   *D.M. Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Tischreden*
        (6 vols: Weimar: Verlag Hermann Böhlaus Nochfolger,
        1912–1921)

Introduction

The years 1517 and 1519 are generally regarded as being of decisive importance in the intellectual development of the Augustinian friar Martin Luther (1483–1546), and the history of the Protestant Reformation as a whole. The first witnessed Luther's posting of the Ninety-Five Theses on Indulgences at Wittenberg, and the second his historic disputation with Johannes Eck at Leipzig. It is all too easy for the historian to pass over the intervening year, 1518, as being little more than an interlude between these two pivotal events, a valley nestling between two mountains. In April of that year, however, at the invitation of his superior within the Augustinian Order,[1] Johannes von Staupitz, Luther presided over the traditional public disputation at the assembly of the Augustinian Congregation at

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[1] We shall use the traditional short form "Augustinian Order" to refer to the *Ordo Eremitarum Sancti Augustini* (originally abbreviated as OESA; now abbreviated as OSA).

Introduction

Heidelberg. In the course of the Heidelberg Disputation,[2] a new phrase was added to the vocabulary of Christendom – the "theology of the cross."

We must immediately be alert to the danger of interpreting the phrase "theology of the cross" in the light of modern western notions of theology as a professionalized academic discipline, focusing on the essentially cognitive question of ideas about God. Recent studies of the Augustinian Order have emphasized its commitment to a practical, affective vision of theology – a *Frömmigkeitstheologie*, a pastoral theology concerned with fostering and sustaining an authentic Christian existence in the world,[3] rather than with purely abstract conceptual reasoning, aimed at an academic audience. Giles of Rome (d.1316), who did much to shape the crystallizing ethos of the Augustinian Order in its early years,[4] argued that theology is fundamentally affective, rather than theoretical or practical.[5] The

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[2] For the historical background to this disputation, see H. Scheible, "Die Universität Heidelberg und Luthers Disputation," *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins* 131 (1983), pp. 309–329; K.H. zur Mühlen, "Die Heidelberger Disputation Martin Luthers vom 26. April 1518," in *Semper Apertus. 600 Jahre Ruprecht-Karl-Universität Heidelberg 1386–1986*, ed. W. Doerr (6 vols; Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1985), vol. 1, pp. 188–212. These studies require supplementation at points – for example, on the theological faculty at Heidelberg, see H. Bornkamm, "Die theologische Fakultät Heidelberg," in *Aus der Geschichte der Universität Heidelberg und ihrer Fakultäten* (Heidelberg: Brausdruck, 1961), pp. 135–154.

[3] A. Angenendt, *Geschichte der Religiosität im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 3rd edn, 2005), pp. 71–75. See further, B. Hamm, *Frömmigkeitstheologie am Anfang des 16. Jahrhunderts: Studien zu Johannes von Paltz und seinem Umkreis* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1982), pp. 132–203. Hamm interprets *Frömmigkeit* as "the practical realization of religion – of modes of believing, proclaiming, teaching, forming ideas, conceiving and articulating values, fears, hopes, etc. – in such a way that daily life is formed and informed by it."

[4] F.X. Martin, *Friar, Reformer, and Renaissance Scholar: Life and Work of Giles of Viterbo, 1469–1532* (Villanova, PA: Augustinian Press, 1992).

[5] M. Schrama, "*Theologia affectiva*. Traces of Monastic Theology in the Theological Prolegomena of Giles of Rome," *Bijdragen. Tijdshrift voor filosofie en theologie* 57 (1996), pp. 381–404. For similar emphases in later theologians of the Order, see M. Schrama, "*Studere debemus eam viriliter et humiliter:* Theologia Affectiva bei Hugolin von Orvieto (d. 1373)," *Bijdragen. Tijdshrift voor filosofie en theologie* 53 (1992), pp. 135–151.

leading works of influential theologians of the Augustinian Order – such as Hermann of Schildesche (d. circa 1290), Henry of Friemar (d. circa 1355), and Jordan of Quedlingburg (d. 1380) – show little interest in the fine details of an Augustinian theology of grace, but focus instead on more pastoral and spiritual issues, such as creating and sustaining the life of faith, coping with doubt and difficulty, and being shaped by the passion of Christ.[6] This *theologia* is not an abstract doctrine of God, but a practical theology of Christian living, patterned after the life and death of Christ, which creates humility, faith, and a love for others. It is a fundamentally anti-speculative, anti-theoretical way of conceiving and shaping the Christian life, which involves the "normative centering" of that life around the cross of Christ.[7] Luther's *theologia crucis* stands firmly within this tradition, even if it reaches beyond it.

I first began to study the origins and development of Luther's reforming theology under the direction of Professor Gordon Rupp (1910–1986) at Cambridge University during the years 1978–1980. Although my initial historical research in the late 1970s and early 1980s focused on the origins of Luther's reforming ideas,[8] it became clear that this required detailed study of the historical development of the notion of "justification by faith,"[9] so central to the Reformation debates, and an understanding of the complex intellectual currents

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[6] E.L. Saak, *High Way to Heaven: The Augustinian Platform between Reform and Reformation, 1292–1524* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 350–355. Although most theologians of the Order emphasized the importance of Augustine of Hippo's theology, their more pastoral writings often show little obvious interest in these themes, tending to be limited to more specifically theological tracts.

[7] For this important notion in its historical context, see B. Hamm, "Reformation als normative Zentrierung von Religion und Gesellschaft," *Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie* 7 (1992), pp. 241–279; idem, "Von der spätmittelalterlichen reformatio zur Reformation: der Prozess normativer Zentrierung von Religion und Gesellschaft in Deutschland," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 84 (1993), pp. 7–82.

[8] See the first edition of this study: Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985).

[9] Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 3rd edn, 2005). The first edition was published in two volumes in 1986.

that shaped the emergence of the ideas of the Protestant Reformation.[10] Further scholarly developments since the publication of the first edition of this work in 1985 have had a significant impact on our understanding of some critical questions of intellectual history relevant to this study, and have led to the production of this new edition.

The present study is an attempt to unfold the intricacies of the development of Luther's developing insights into the justification of humanity *coram Deo* over the formative years 1509–1519. The intellectual and spiritual origins of Luther's reforming theology are of immense intellectual interest and importance, both in terms of the chronology of this process and its theological substance. This work aims to explore Luther's changing views on the acceptance of humanity in the sight of God in the light of the best scholarship, demonstrating how Luther reflects many theological and spiritual debates of the late Middle Ages, particularly those current within his own Augustinian Order.

A fundamental theme of this study is that the emergence of Luther's celebrated "theology of the cross" over the years 1509–1519 is to be understood as an aspect of Luther's changing understanding of how humanity can find acceptance in the sight of a holy and righteous God. Luther's *theologia crucis* emerges within the context of his reflections on the doctrine of justification, particularly his agonized and extended attempt to understand what it means to speak of the "righteousness of God" – a theological leitmotif that plays a leading role in Paul's letter to the Romans. The present study thus offers an extended analysis of Luther's changing views on the doctrine of justification over the period 1509–1519, aiming to offer the best explanation of both the textual and contextual evidence.

This transition can only be understood in the light of the late medieval theological context within which these insights took place.[11] Luther's transition from being a representative theologian

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[10] Alister E. McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2nd edn, 2003). The first edition was published in 1987.

[11] For the importance of this context for the shaping of the modern age, see M.L. Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 400–1400* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 265–350.

of the late Middle Ages to the pioneer of a new reforming theology is a subject of enormous historical and theological interest, whose complexity is more than outweighed by its inherent fascination.[12] The present study is therefore essentially an investigation of the development of Luther's doctrine of justification over the years 1509–1519, viewed in particular relation to his late medieval theological context. In the course of this study, many of the questions that are the subject of continuing debate among Luther scholars – such as the *date* and the *nature* of Luther's theological breakthrough – will be examined and reviewed in the light of the most recent scholarship.

Inevitably, any attempt to clarify the historical development of Luther's theology and identify possible influences encounters serious methodological difficulties, which must be acknowledged even if they cannot entirely be resolved. The most serious of these concerns the relative weighting to be given to Luther's writings and what is known of his historical context. This issue was debated with some passion by Leif Grane (1928–2000) and Heiko Oberman (1930–2001) in the 1970s, and remains disputed. Is scholarship limited to a detailed historico-critical engagement with Luther's texts? Or can these be set against our understanding of their historical background, allowing certain possibilities to be inferred from that context and amplified on its basis, even when they are not absolutely demanded by the texts themselves?[13]

It is important to appreciate here that historical scholarship is a work in progress, subject to revision in the light of new evidence and theoretical development. Luther scholarship may be informed by such developments; it cannot allow itself to be *determined* by them. Every reconstruction of Luther's historical background is provisional, and giving priority to such an historical reconstruction

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[12] For Luther's role in the emergence of modernity, see M.A. Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 101–128.

[13] See L. Grane, *Modus loquendi theologicus: Luthers Kampf um die Erneuerung der Theologie 1515–1518* (Leiden: Brill, 1975); H.A. Oberman, "Reformation: Epoche oder Episode?," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 68 (1977), pp. 56–111, especially pp. 88–109; L. Grane, "Kritische Berichte: Lutherforschung und Geistesgeschichte," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 68 (1977), pp. 302–315.

risks reconstructing both Luther's theological development and its intellectual outcomes in the likeness of prevailing scholarly trends. For example, Oberman's own interpretation of Luther's intellectual development can now be appreciated to be shaped by some assumptions characteristic of that period and school of scholarship, which subsequent research has corrected or challenged. The approach adopted in this study is to give primacy to detailed engagement with Luther's texts, while insisting that these be contextualized and interpreted against the backdrop of what is now known of the theological and religious questions, debates, and trends of that era.

As this study will make clear, recent scholarship has brought about a significant change in our understanding of Luther's late medieval context, especially in relation to the religious and theological trends within his own Augustinian Order. Detailed studies of the distinctive identity and ethos of this Order in the last 25 years have emphasized the distinctiveness of its *spiritual* – rather than merely its more narrowly *theological* – ideas and approaches. The emergence of both Luther's theology of justification and his "theology of the cross" can now be set against a broader spiritual context, grounded in the passion literature of the later medieval era in general, and of the Augustinian Order in particular. Since these developments in Augustinian studies have yet to be adequately assimilated by Luther scholarship, they have not yet been incorporated into accounts of the origins of Luther's theology of justification or his *theologia crucis*. The second edition of this work makes extensive use of such recent studies, clarifying how Luther's distinctive theology both reflects late medieval themes while at the same time departs from them.

We begin our study by reflecting on the fascinating and complex religious and intellectual context within which Luther's theological breakthrough took place.

Part One

The Background

Luther as a Late Medieval Theologian, 1509–1514

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The Dawn of the Reformation at Wittenberg

Our story concerns the intellectual and spiritual development of Martin Luther (1483–1546) during the years 1509–1519 – particularly 1512–1519, which many regard as being a decisive phase in this process. During these critical years, Luther began to inch his way toward his own distinctive understanding of how sinners are able to enter into the presence of a righteous God, classically expressed in the doctrine of justification by faith. While the relationship between the emergence of Luther's theological distinctives and the historical origins of the Reformation as a whole is somewhat more complex than some popular accounts suggest,[1] there is little doubt that Luther's theological breakthrough was one of a number of factors that proved to be of decisive importance in catalyzing the massive

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[1] For comments on German Luther scholarship's occasional tendency to treat Luther as determinative for the Reformation, see J.M. Stayer, *Martin Luther, German Saviour: German Evangelical Theological Factions and the Interpretation of Luther, 1917–1933* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2000).

social, economic, political, and religious transformations of the Protestant Reformation.[2]

This study sets out to analyze the emergence of Luther's understanding of the question of how humanity is justified in the sight of God, focusing especially on his shifting views concerning what it means to speak of God as "righteous." How can a sinner hope to find acceptance in the sight of a righteous God? *Wie kriege ich einen gnädigen Gott?* Luther's changing answers to that central question set the scene for the great upheavals of the Reformation.[3]

Yet a second distinctive feature of Luther's early thought emerges alongside these reflections on the nature of divine righteousness, and how a righteous God could accept and love sinful humanity. Luther's celebrated "theology of the cross" is the outcome of the same process of reflection that led Luther to his doctrine of justification. The two themes are intertwined in his early writings, and can in some ways be seen as two sides of a single, related question – namely, how humanity is to live by faith in the shadowlands of sin and doubt. We shall consider both these major theological themes in this study.

But theological reflection never takes place in a social or cultural vacuum. To tell the story of the development of Luther's ideas, we must explore the situation within which they emerged. We therefore turn immediately to consider the state of late medieval Europe on the eve of the Reformation – especially in Germany, which played a particularly significant role in shaping the contours of late medieval Christianity,[4] as well as laying the foundations for the Protestant

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[2] For some recent attempts by social historians to minimize the importance of religious issues, or even to marginalize Luther's signficance to the Reformation, see M.P. Holt, "The Social History of the Reformation: Recent Trends and Future Agendas," *Journal of Social History* 37 (2003), pp. 133–144.

[3] The relation of the origins of Luther's theology and the origins of the Reformation itself remains imperfectly understood: for an introduction, see H.A. Oberman, "Headwaters of the Reformation: *Initia Lutheri – Initia Reformationis*," in *Luther and the Dawn of the Modern Era. Papers for the Fourth International Congress for Luther Research*, ed. H.A. Oberman (Leiden: Brill, 1974), pp. 40–88.

[4] For the evolution of German Christianity between 376 and 754, see J.C. Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity: A Sociohistorical Approach to Religious Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 107–208.

Reformation. In what follows, we shall consider this context more closely.

The Late Medieval Context

By the end of the Middle Ages, the need for reform and renewal within the Christian church within Germany and elsewhere was so obvious that it could no longer be ignored. The Middle Ages had seen the political power of the church, and particularly that of the papacy, reach previously unknown heights. While the spiritual authority of the pope within the church had long been recognized, the medieval period witnessed the extension of such claims to the secular sphere.[5] Even if the force of the claims made on behalf of the papacy to absolute spiritual and temporal authority was greatly diminished by the absence of effective executive powers by which they might have been enforced, the fact remains that such claims were made and recognized, at least in part.

The political success of the church during the Middle Ages was not, however, without its cost. To the faithful, the Christian church remained the visible embodiment of Christ upon earth; to an increasing number of skeptics, within its ranks as well as outside them, it appeared as a vast legal, judicial, financial, administrative, and diplomatic machine, whose spiritual concerns were frequently judged to be difficult to detect, even to the eye of faith. The secular interests of the clergy, the widespread absence of bishops from their dioceses, and the financial difficulties of the curia are further examples of factors which combined to compromise the moral and spiritual authority of the church at the time in so serious a manner.

There were many within the church at the time who were troubled by the soaring power and influence of the papacy, and sought to confine it within acceptable limits. The Conciliarist movement

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[5] For the development of papal authority in the medieval period, see J. Sayers, *Innocent III, Leader of Europe, 1198–1216* (New York: Longman, 1994); K. Cushing, *Papacy and Law in the Gregorian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

argued that ecclesiastical power should be decentralized. Instead of being concentrated in the hands of a single individual, it should be dispersed within the body of the church as a whole, and entrusted to more representative and accountable "general Councils."[6]

Yet despite these concerns, there is every indication that the church remained deeply embedded in western European culture at this time, with popular piety experiencing a resurgence in the fifteenth century. The church was no abstract theological notion, no peripheral social institution; it stood at the heart of the social, spiritual, and intellectual life of western Europe throughout the Middle Ages, including the Renaissance. The older view, which tended to see the Renaissance as a secular interlude between the medieval "age of faith" and the unruly religious passions unleashed by the Reformation, never really made much sense, and is somewhat difficult to sustain on the basis of the historical evidence.[7] An individual's hope of salvation rested on her being part of the community of saints, whose visible expression was the institution of the church. The church could not be bypassed or marginalized in any account of redemption: there was, as Cyprian of Carthage had so cogently argued in the third century, no salvation outside the church.

Although the fifteenth century was regarded as a period of religious degeneration and spiritual stagnation by an earlier generation of historians, more recent research has decisively overturned this verdict.[8] On the eve of the Reformation, religion was perhaps more firmly rooted in the experience and lives of ordinary people than at any time in the past.[9] Earlier medieval Christianity had been

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[6] J. Ballweg, *Konziliare oder päpstliche Ordensreform: Benedikt XII und die Reformsdiskussion im frühen 14. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2001), pp. 221–320. For its later development, see B.P. McGuire, *Jean Gerson and the Last Medieval Reformation* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2005).

[7] D.S. Peterson, "Out of the Margins: Religion and the Church in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 53 (2000), pp. 835–879.

[8] See, for example, Guy Lobrichon, *La religion des laïcs en Occident, XIe–XVe siècles* (Paris: Hachette, 1994); R.N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215–c. 1515* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[9] A. Angenendt, *Geschichte der Religiosiät im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 3rd edn, 2005).

primarily monastic, focused on the life, worship, and writings of Europe's monasteries and convents. Church-building programs flourished in the later fifteenth century, as did pilgrimages and the vogue for collecting relics. The fifteenth century has been referred to as "the inflation-period of mystic literature," reflecting the growing popular interest in religion. The fifteenth century witnessed a widespread popular appropriation of religious beliefs and practices, not always in orthodox forms.

The phenomenon of "folk religion" often bore a tangential relationship to the more precise yet abstract statements of Christian doctrine that the church preferred – but that many found unintelligible or unattractive.[10] In parts of Europe, popular religious beliefs echoing the notions of classical "fertility cults" emerged, connected and enmeshed with the patterns and concerns of agrarian rural communities.[11] Much popular religion was shaped by a fear of death and hell, often linked with more popular beliefs of fiends and devils lurking in woods and dark places, awaiting their opportunity to snatch unwary souls and take them straight to hell. At times, hints of these popular concerns can be found in Luther's early writings, particularly as he agonized over the implications of his own inability to achieve the holiness that his age regarded as a guarantee of salvation.[12]

It is now clear that there was considerable confusion within the late medieval church, undoubtedly exacerbated by a largely uneducated clergy,[13] on matters of doctrine, and the doctrine of justification in

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[10] As noted by J.C. Schmitt, "Religion populaire et culture folklorique," *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 31 (1976), pp. 785–796.

[11] For a fascinating analysis of peasant beliefs, see C. Ginzburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

[12] A point emphasized by H.A. Oberman, *Luther: Mensch zwischen Gott und Teufel* (Berlin: Severin und Siedler, 1982); J.B. Russell, *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 34.

[13] For the late medieval context, and the Lutheran pedagogical response, see P. Dykema, "Handbooks for Pastors: Late Medieval Manuals for Parish Priests and Conrad Porta's *Pastorale Lutheri*," in *Continuity and Change*, ed. R.J. Bast and A.C. Gow (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 143–162.

particular. It is precisely this widespread confusion at the beginning of the sixteenth century that appeared to have occasioned and catalyzed Luther's theological reflections during the years 1509–1519, with which we are here concerned. As these focus on the concept of "justification," we may pause to consider this idea in more detail.

The Concept of "Justification" in Christian Thought

The importance of the doctrine of justification is best appreciated when the nature of Christianity itself is considered.[14] The central teaching of the Christian faith is that reconciliation has been effected between God and sinful humanity through Jesus Christ, and that this reconciliation is a present actuality for those within the church, and a present possibility for those outside it. The essence of the Christian faith is thus located in the saving action of God toward humanity in Jesus Christ. The Christian doctrine of justification is primarily concerned with the question of how this saving action may be appropriated by the individual – in other words, with the question of what is required of human beings if they are to enter into fellowship with God. The hope of salvation in Christ is a leading characteristic of the faith of the Christian church throughout its entire history, which lends particular urgency to the question posed by the doctrine of justification: what must an individual *do* in order to be saved? The practical importance of this question may be illustrated with reference to the fate of a small group of Italian noblemen, sometimes known as the "Murano Circle," at the beginning of the sixteenth century.[15]

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[14] For full discussion of the development of the Christian doctrine of justification within the western theological tradition, from the earliest times to the present day, see A.E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 3rd edn, 2005).

[15] The evidence for the existence and composition of this group is not as clear as might be hoped: see, for example, the critical comments of E. Massa, *L'eremo, la Bibbia e il medioevo in umanisti Veneti del primo cinquecento* (Naples: Liguori, 1992), pp. 15–23.

In 1510 Paolo Giustiniani, the leader of a small group of Paduan-educated humanists, entered the hermitage of Camaldoli, near Arezzo, soon to be followed by most of the remainder of this circle of humanists.[16] The circle had shared a common concern for personal holiness and ultimate salvation, in common with many of their contemporaries. After intense personal anguish, Giustiniani decided that his only hope for salvation lay in the ascetic monastic life as a means of expiating his sins. Our interest here, however, concerns Gasparo Contarini, one of the members of the circle who chose to remain in the world. In 1957 Hubert Jedin, searching through the archives of the hermitage at Camaldoli, discovered the correspondence between Contarini and Giustiniani during the years 1511–1523,[17] thus enabling us to enter to some extent into the mind of a man who was passionately concerned for his own salvation, and yet unwilling to enter a monastery. It is clear from this correspondence that Contarini went through a period of deep depression after his friends entered the hermitage. The question which appears to have caused Contarini particular anguish was the following: if his friends doubted whether *they* could ever atone for their sins by leading lives of austere piety, what hope could there be for Contarini, who had chosen to avoid such a life by remaining in the world?

On Easter Eve 1511, in near despair, Contarini happened to fall into conversation with a priest, and as a result began to rethink his dilemma. We do not know who this priest was, and cannot be entirely certain of the exact substance of his advice to Contarini. Nevertheless, it is clear that Contarini had now resolved his dilemma.

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[16] On Giustiniani, see S. dall'Aglio, *L'eremita e il sinodo: Paolo Giustiniani e l'offensiva medicea contro Girolamo Savonarola (1516–1517)* (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2006).

[17] H. Jedin, "Contarini und Camaldoli," *Archivio per la storia della pietà* 2 (1959), pp. 51–117. Unfortunately, Giustiniani's replies to Contarini have never been traced, if they survive. For comment on this correspondence in its contemporary religious context, see E. Massa, "Paolo Giustiniani e Gasparo Contarini: la vocazione al bivia del neoplatonismo e della teologica biblica," *Benedictina* 35 (1988), pp. 429–474; E.G. Gleason, *Gasparo Contarini: Venice, Rome, and Reform* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 3–18.

In his mercy, God had permitted his only son, Jesus Christ, to make satisfaction for the sins of the world, so that in Contarini's words:

> Even if I did all the penances possible, and many more besides, they would not be enough to atone for my past sins, let alone to merit my salvation . . . [Christ's] passion is sufficient, and more than sufficient, as a satisfaction for sins committed, to which human weakness is prone. Through this thought, I changed from great fear and anguish to happiness. I began to turn with my whole heart to this greatest good which I saw, for love of me, on the cross, his arms open and his breast opened right up to his heart. Thus I – the wretch who lacked the courage to leave the world and do penance for the satisfaction of my sins! – turned to him, and asked him to allow me to share in the satisfaction which he, the sinless one, had performed for us. He was quick to accept me and to permit his Father to totally cancel the debt which I had contracted, and which I was incapable of satisfying by myself.
>
> Now, since I have such a one to pay my debt, shall I not sleep securely in the midst of the city, even though I have not satisfied the debt which I had contracted? Yes! I shall sleep and wake as securely as if I had spent my entire life in the hermitage![18]

The question with which Contarini and his circle had wrestled, with such a variety of results, lies at the heart of the Christian doctrine of justification: what must I *do* to be saved? Contarini and Giustiniani came to very different conclusions – *but which corresponded to the teaching of the church on the matter?* The simple fact is that there was such confusion at the time that this vital question could not be answered by anyone with any degree of conviction. The Contarini–Giustiniani correspondence is of considerable interest, as it bears witness to a spiritual dilemma which is remarkably similar to that faced by the young Luther,[19] also occasioned at least in part by confusion within the church over the doctrine of justification.

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[18] Jedin, "Contarini und Camaldoli," p. 64.

[19] Jedin elsewhere compares Contarini's experience with the young Luther's "Turmerlebnis": H. Jedin, "Ein Turmerlebnis des jungen Contarinis," in *Kirche des Glaubens – Kirche der Geschichte: Ausgewählte Aufsätze und Vorträge*, 2 vols (Freiburg: Herder, 1966), vol. 1, pp. 167–180.

The doctrine of justification had been the subject of considerable debate within the early western church during the course of the Pelagian controversy.[20] In 418 the Council of Carthage undertook a preliminary clarification of the church's teaching on justification in response to this controversy.[21] Its pronouncements were, however, vague at several points which were to prove of significance, and these were revised at what is generally regarded as being the most important council of the early church to deal with the doctrine of justification – the Second Council of Orange, convened in 529.[22] No other council was convened to discuss the doctrine of justification between that date and 1545, when the Council of Trent assembled to debate that doctrine, among many others. There was thus a period of over a millennium during which the teaching office of the church remained silent on the issue of justification.[23]

This silence serves to further enhance the importance of the pronouncements of the Second Council of Orange on the matter, as these thus come to represent the definitive teaching of the Christian church on the doctrine of justification during the medieval period, before the Council of Trent was convened. Recent scholarship has established that no theologian of the Middle Ages ever cites the decisions of the Second Council of Orange, or shows the slightest awareness of the existence of such decisions. For reasons which we simply do not understand, from the tenth century until the assembly of the Council of Trent in 1545, the theologians of the western church appear to be unaware of the existence of

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[20] For a detailed account of the historical development and theological substance of the Pelagian controversy, see Alister E. McGrath, *Heresy* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2010), pp. 159–170.

[21] H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1991), D. 101–108.

[22] D. 174–200. For the problems raised by the fact that this was a *local*, rather than an *ecumenical*, council, see *Problems of Authority: An Anglo-French Symposium*, ed. J.M. Todd (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964), pp. 63–64.

[23] While no council was ever convened over the specific issue of justification, it may be pointed out that questions relating to the doctrine were occasionally touched upon by other magisterial pronouncements – e.g., in the profession of faith sent by Leo IX to the Bishop of Antioch in 1053 (D. 680–686).

such a council, let alone of its pronouncements.[24] The theologians of the Middle Ages were thus obliged to base their teaching on justification on the canons of the Council of Carthage, which were simply incapable of bearing the strain which came to be placed upon them.[25] The increasing precision of the technical terms employed within the theological schools inevitably led to the somewhat loose terms used by the Council of Carthage being interpreted in a manner quite alien to that intended by those who originally employed them.

For reasons such as these, there was considerable confusion within the later medieval church concerning the doctrine of justification. This confusion undoubtedly did much to prepare the way for the Reformation, in that the church was simply not prepared for a major debate on justification, and was unable to respond to Luther's challenge when it finally came.[26] How can a sinner enter into fellowship with a holy and righteous God? How can the troubled conscience find peace by discovering a gracious God? Luther was not the only one to ask such questions, and was not the only one to find himself confused by the variety of answers given. If not clarity, then at least clarification, was clearly required.

The Reform of the Church and the Renewal of Spirituality

The Catholic system of church order is such that its emphasis upon the *institution* of the church, with its associated ecclesiastical apparatus, means that a prolonged period of spiritual mediocrity or even decline can be sustained without undue damage, to await spiritual renewal and regeneration at a future date. If the lifeblood of the

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[24] This was first pointed out by H. Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce chez Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Aubier, 1944), pp. 99–123. See further M. Seckler, *Instinkt und Glaubenswille nach Thomas von Aquin* (Mainz: Grünewald Verlag, 1961), pp. 90–133.

[25] For example as illustrated by Gabriel Biel's use of Canon 5: A.E. McGrath, "The Anti-Pelagian Structure of 'Nominalist' Doctrines of Justification," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 57 (1981), pp. 107–119.

[26] This point is particularly emphasized by Joseph Lortz, *Die Reformation in Deutschland*, 2 vols (Freiburg: Herder, 4th edn, 1962) vol. 1, pp. 137–138.

Christian faith appeared to cease to flow through her veins, at least the church was able to retain her outward structures for the day when renewed spiritual fervor would revitalize her, raising her from her knees and propelling her forward to meet the challenges and opportunities of a new age. It was this hope that sustained those working for reform and renewal within the late medieval church.

Although earlier popes had occasionally imposed and supervised programs of reform within the church,[27] the dawn of the sixteenth century saw this initiative in the process of passing to numerous small groups and individuals, usually working independently of each other, although with similar objectives. It is becoming increasingly clear that the final decade of the fifteenth century witnessed a remarkable upsurge in reforming and renewing activity within the church, frequently with the approval of, and occasionally even at the instigation of, the institutional church itself. This upsurge in activity gained ground throughout Europe during the first two decades of the sixteenth century, before the specter of a new heresy – Lutheranism – caused a frightened church to begin the systematic suppression of these groups and their ideals during the third and fourth decades of that century. Whatever positive impact Luther's stand at Wittenberg may have had upon the Catholic Church as a whole, it had the universally negative effect of bringing practically all of those working for reform and renewal under suspicion of heresy. Such was the odium which came to be attached to the name of Martin Luther that similarities, however slight, between Luther and contemporary Catholic writers tended to be regarded as evidence of heresy on the part of the latter, rather than orthodoxy on the part of the former.[28]

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[27] C. Schmitt, *Un pape réformateur et un défenseur de l'unité de l'église: Benoit XII et l'Ordre des Frères Mineurs* (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1959).

[28] This was particularly the case in Spain and Italy. See A. Selke de Sánchez, "Algunos datos nuevos los primeros alumbrados: el edicto de 1525 y su relación con el proceso de Alcaraz," *Bulletin Hispanique* 54 (1952), pp. 125–152; O. Ortolani, *Pietro Carnesecchi: Son Estratti dagli Atti del Processo del Santo Officio* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1963); E.L. Gleason, "Sixteenth Century Italian Interpretations of Luther," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 60 (1969), pp. 160–173; J. Wicks, "Roman Reactions to Luther: The First Year (1518)," *Catholic Historical Review* 59 (1983), pp. 521–562.

The revival within the late fifteenth century is particularly associated with Spain, then newly won back from the Moor. The sudden development of Spanish mysticism during the final decade of the century remains unexplained, although the unique character of the Spanish cultural context, enriched by Christian, Muslim, and Jew alike, unquestionably did much to promote and sustain it. The vitality of this movement was harnessed through the Cisnerian reform of the Spanish church, leading to a revival of religious vocations and a new concern for religious education, which found its most concrete and enduring expression in the establishment of the University of Alcalá de Henares.[29] Through Europe, a new interest developed in the writings of St Paul, apparently due at least in part to the considerable influence of the Italian humanism of the *Quattrocento*, with its celebrated intention to return *ad fontes*, to base itself upon the title deeds of Christendom, rather than its later medieval expressions.[30] In England, John Colet drew attention to the Pauline emphasis upon the necessity of a personal encounter of the soul with Christ;[31] in Paris, Lefèvre d'Etaples contemplated Paul's teaching on the supremacy of faith in the spiritual life;[32] in the Lowlands, Erasmus of Rotterdam propounded his *philosophia Christi* as the basis for collective renewal within the church, capturing the hearts as well as the minds of the intellectual élite of Europe as he did so.[33] In Italy itself, the movement usually known as "Evangelism," characterized by its preoccupation

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[29] See S.T. Nalle, *God in La Mancha: Religious Reform and the People of Cuenca, 1500–1650* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp. 3–31; E. Rummel, *Jiménez de Cisneros: On the Threshold of Spain's Golden Age* (Tempe, AZ: Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1999).

[30] For an excellent introduction, see R. Cessi, "Paolinismo preluterano," *Rencorditi dell' Accademia nazionale dei Lincei*, Series 8, 12 (1957), pp. 3–30. See further the following chapter of the present study.

[31] J.B. Gleason, *John Colet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 67–185.

[32] R.M. Cameron, "The Charges of Lutheranism brought against Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples," *Harvard Theological Review* 63 (1970), pp. 119–149.

[33] For Erasmus's *Enchiridion*, see R. Stupperich, "Das Enchiridion Militis Christiani des Erasmus von Rotterdam nach seiner Entstehung, seinem Sinn und Charakter," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 69 (1978), pp. 5–23.

with the question of personal salvation, became highly influential in certain circles: if its allegedly aristocratic bias hindered its progress among the population as a whole, it certainly assisted its progress within the higher echelons of the church.[34] This preoccupation with personal salvation is well illustrated by Contarini's spiritual experience of 1511, noted above. While Luther was still a prisoner within the matrix of late medieval theology, others had already broken free from it, anticipating in many respects his own spiritual breakthrough.

The reform of the church and the renewal of spirituality: these two themes lay at the heart of the rising tide of dissatisfaction on the part of laity and clergy alike over the state of the church of their day. The demands for reform and renewal took many forms, with an equally great variation in the results they achieved. A seemingly insignificant addition to these demands was a list of theses for academic disputation nailed to the main north door of the castle church at Wittenberg at about noon on October 31, 1517.[35] Wittenberg was not

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[34] The original study is that of E.M. Jung, "On the Nature of Evangelism in Sixteenth Century Italy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 14 (1953) pp. 511–527. For more recent studies, see R. Belladonna and A. del Col, "Per una sistemazione critica dell'evangelismo italiano e di un'opera recente," *Critica storica* 17 (1980), pp. 266–276; M. Firpo, *Tra alumbrados e "spirituali": studi su Juan de Valdés e il valdesianesimo nella crisi religiosa del '500 italiano* (Florence: Olschki, 1990).

[35] For the background to this event, see H. Bornkamm, *Luthers geistige Welt* (Gütersloh: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 3rd edn, 1959), pp. 41–57. On the content of the theses, see E. Kähler, "Die 95 Thesen: Inhalt und Bedeutung," *Luther. Zeitschrift der Luther-Gesellschaft* 38 (1967), pp. 114–124. Recently, there has been intensive debate concerning the date on which the theses were posted – and, indeed, whether they were posted at all. Although the majority opinion is that the theses definitely were posted, and that they were posted on October 31, 1517, three important minority opinions must be noted: (1) The theses were posted on November 1, 1517: H. Volz, *Martin Luthers Thesenanschlag und dessen Vorgeschichte* (Weimar: Herman Bohlau, 1959). (2) The theses date from as late as December 1517: K. Honselmann, *Urfassung und Drucke der Ablassthesen Martin Luthers und ihre Veröffentlichung* (Paderborn: Schoningh, 1966). (3) The theses were not posted at all: E. Iserloh, *Luther zwischen Reform und Reformation. Der Thesenanschlag fand nicht statt* (Münster: Aschendorff, 3rd edn, 1968). This opinion is by far the least probable, and does not appear to follow logically from the evidence assembled in its support. For a reliable discussion of these opinions in the light of the best evidence, see H. Bornkamm, "Thesen und Thesenanschlag Luthers," in *Geist und Geschichte der Reformation*, ed. H. Liebing and K. Scholder (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1966), pp. 179–218.

an important university, and Martin Luther was hardly known outside the somewhat restricted university circles of Erfurt and Wittenberg. So why did these Theses have such an impact?

The Ninety-Five Theses

History suggests that great upheavals in human affairs arise out of relatively small matters, even if their ultimate roots lie much deeper. The fuel for the Reformation had been piled up for many years: it happened to be Luther's posting of the ninety-five theses on indulgences that eventually sparked off the conflagration which proved to be the greatest intellectual and spiritual upheaval yet known in Europe. Whereas a reforming ecumenical council could have defused the situation by imposing reform where it was so obviously needed, the absence of any such eventuality led to Luther's protest against the theology of indulgences developing into a serious and a still unresolved schism within the church.

The posting of theses for academic disputation, even where these related to theological matters, was a commonplace in German university life at the time. In October 1514 Johannes Eck – later to be Luther's antagonist at the Leipzig disputation of 1519 – posted a series of theses at Ingolstadt for public academic disputation.[36] These theses related to the vexed question of usury,[37] an issue in many respects more contentious than that of indulgences, and one which certainly aroused passions in ecclesiastical financial circles. It was probably on account of this latter consideration that Gabriel von Eyb,

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[36] H.A. Oberman, *Werden und Wertung der Reformation* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1977), p. 177.

[37] M. Schulze, "Johannes Eck im Kampf gegen Martin Luther," *Luther-Jahrbuch* 63 (1996), pp. 39–68. On the usury issue, see G.F. von Pölnitz, "Die Beziehungen des Johannes Eck zum Augsburger Kapital," *Historisches Jahrbuch der Görresgesellschaft* 60 (1940), pp. 685–706. For useful historical background to the issues involved, see J.T. Noonan, *The Scholastic Analysis of Usury* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957); O. Langholm, *Economics in the Medieval Schools: Wealth, Exchange, Value, Money and Usury according to the Paris Theological Tradition 1200–1350* (Leiden: Brill, 1992).

who then held simultaneously the offices of bishop of Eichstätt and chancellor of the university of Ingolstadt, intervened to prevent the proposed disputation from taking place.[38] Not to be deprived of his disputation, however, Eck referred his theses to the universities of Cologne, Heidelberg, Freiburg, Tübingen, and Mainz, as well as to Ingolstadt,[39] in order that they might receive further consideration.

Such disputations were not unknown at Wittenberg, nor was Luther's without its precedents. On April 26, 1517, less than six months before Luther posted his theses, Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, then dean of the theology faculty at Wittenberg, posted 151 theses for disputation. These theses were of a highly controversial nature, reflecting Karlstadt's own discovery of the *vera theologia* of St Augustine earlier the same year, and chiefly concern the doctrine of justification.[40] In terms of their theological substance, particularly when seen in the light of the then prevailing theology of the *via moderna*, they appear to be of far greater weight than Luther's theses on indulgences. Furthermore, Karlstadt's high standing in the

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[38] Oberman, *Werden und Wertung der Reformation*, p. 184.

[39] von Pölnitz, *Beziehungen des Johannes Eck*, p. 694. Oberman has published the submission to Tübingen, along with other pertinent material: Oberman, *Werden und Wertung der Reformation*, pp. 426–430.

[40] On these theses, see E. Kähler, *Karlstadt und Augustin: Der Kommentar des Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt zu Augustins Schrift De Spiritu et Litera* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1952), pp. 4*–7*. Luther was delighted with these theses, as he made clear in a letter of May 6, 1517 to Christoph Scheurl in Nuremberg: WABr 1.94.16–19. It is clear, however, that Karlstadt's theology of justification is far closer to that of St Augustine than was Luther's. In particular, the following points of difference between the two reformers should be noted: (1) Luther's Christocentrism is absent from Karlstadt's theses: Karlstadt is primarily concerned with a theology of *grace*, not a theology of *Christ*; (2) it is clear that faith does not have the significance for Karlstadt which it so obviously has for Luther; (3) Luther's dialectic between Law and Gospel is absent, being replaced by a dialectic between Letter and Spirit. In every respect, these differences between Karlstadt and Luther reflect identical differences between Augustine and Luther, and indicate Karlstadt's faithfulness to the theology of the great African bishop. These differences, however, do not appear to have been noticed or commented upon at the time – which is hardly surprising, considering the pace at which events began to move that year.

faculty and the university as a whole lent added weight to the challenge directed against the *Gabrielistae*.

What is of particular interest, however, is the occasion on which Karlstadt chose to publish his theses, and the place where they were posted. The castle church at Wittenberg possessed an imposing collection of sacred relics, which were publicly displayed several times during the course of the year. Like many churches at the time, the castle church had been granted the right to bestow a partial or plenary indulgence upon those present at the exhibition of the relics, with the inevitable result that such exhibitions were well attended and the subject of considerable local interest.

It was on the eve of one such display of relics that Karlstadt posted his theses in April 1517. As the main north door of the castle church served as a university notice board, Karlstadt could be sure that his proposed disputation would not pass unnoticed by those who thronged the area that evening and the following morning. Contemporary records, however, indicate that the Feast of All Saints (November 1) was regarded as the most important occasion upon which the Wittenberg relics were displayed.[41] It was on this occasion that Luther posted his theses, in precisely the same manner already employed by Karlstadt, to direct attention to his proposed public disputation on indulgences.

The circumstances which surrounded Luther's posting of the ninety-five theses are, in many respects, comparable to those attending Eck's attempt to provoke a disputation on usury, or Karlstadt's attempt to provoke one on Augustine's doctrine of justification. The revised statutes of the theology faculty at Wittenberg (1508) make it clear that such disputations were a normal part of university life at the time. Such disputations were not restricted to those held on Friday mornings during university terms (*disputationes ordinariae*), intended primarily as a means of theological education, or those stipulated as a necessary ordeal for those intending to proceed to higher degrees. The

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[41] The most important of these is Andreas Meinhardi's *Dialogus illustrate ac augustissime urbis Albiorenae vulgo Vittenberg dicte* (Leipzig, 1508), which describes the events of All Saints' Day at the Castle Church.

exercitia disputationum appears to have been regarded as of such importance as to justify occasional *disputationes quodlibeticae*,[42] which fitted into neither of these categories. In calling for public university disputations upon subjects of their choosing, Luther – and, before him, Eck and Karlstadt – did nothing more than arrange for a perfectly legitimate university disputation, following a well-established procedure. Far from defying the church of his day, Luther merely posted a legitimate university notice in its appropriate place. Those who see the death knell of the medieval church in the hammer blows which resounded on the door of the castle church as Luther posted his theses are, regrettably, substituting romance for history.

Like Eck, Luther failed to provoke a public disputation: all the evidence suggests, however, that this failure reflected an absence of interest in the subject in university circles, rather than any serious attempt on the part of the church authorities to suppress what might have proved to be an embarrassing debate. Indeed, had Luther succeeded in provoking a public disputation on the matter, it would almost certainly have been seen as little more than a local dispute between the Augustinian and Dominican orders over a relatively minor issue, in which both parties had a vested interest.

Luther's theses are actually rather less radical than is frequently imagined. He did not question the authority of the pope or the existence of purgatory, and actually *affirmed* his belief in the notion of apostolic pardons. In a matter surrounded by much theological confusion and considerable popular feeling, most of Luther's theses were quite unexceptionable. Furthermore, a critique of the theology

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[42] See the important study of Ernst Wolf, "Zur wissenschaftsgeschictlichen Bedeutung der Disputationen an der Wittenberger Universität im 16. Jahrhundert," in *Peregrinatio II: Studien zur reformatorischen Theologie, zum Kirchenrecht und zur Sozialethik* (Munich: Kaiser, 1965), pp. 38–51. Further light has been cast upon the role and nature of disputations at Wittenberg at the time by the discovery in 1976 of the protocol to the disputations at Wittenberg between members of the Wittenberg theological faculty and a group of Saxon Franciscans, which took place October 3–4, 1519: G. Hammer, "Militia franciscana seu militia Christi: Das neugefundene Protokoll einer Disputation des sächsischen Franziskaner mit Vertretern der Wittenberger theologischen Fakultät am 3. und 4. Oktober 1519," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 69 (1978), pp. 51–81; 70 (1979), pp. 59–105.

of indulgences which parallels that of Luther in several respects was drawn up by the theology faculty at Paris in May of the following year, without occasioning any serious charge of impropriety, let alone heresy.[43] It may also be pointed out that Luther himself later stated that the whole question of indulgences was quite insignificant in comparison with the greater question of humanity's justification before God,[44] thus suggesting that the posting of the theses on indulgences was *not* the beginning of the Reformation, viewed in terms of the *theological* issues at stake. Nevertheless, the *historical* fact remains that it was out of the aftermath of the posting of these theses that the movement known as the Reformation began, with Martin Luther being widely recognized as its leading figure.

Once the Reformation had begun in earnest, a third demand was added to those already widely in circulation throughout Europe. For Luther, the reformation of morals and the renewal of spirituality, although of importance in themselves, were of secondary significance in relation to the *reformation of Christian doctrine*. Well aware of the frailty of human nature, Luther criticized both Wycliffe and Huss for confining their attacks on the papacy to its moral shortcomings, where they should have attacked the theology on which the papacy was ultimately based. For Luther, a reformation of morals was secondary to a reformation of doctrine.[45] It was clear, of course, that once irreversible schism with the Catholic Church had taken place, the reformers would be obliged to revise the accepted ecclesiologies if they were to avoid the stigma of being branded as schismatics.

Luther himself entertained a profound distaste for schism in the period between the posting of the theses and the Leipzig disputation

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[43] As pointed out, with useful documentation, by Oberman, *Werden und Wertung der Reformation*, p. 192, n. 90.

[44] WA 18.786.28–29. Luther here praises Erasmus for locating the real theological issue at stake (the bondage of the will, a fundamental aspect of Luther's teaching on justification), instead of concentrating upon peripheral matters, such as indulgences.

[45] WATr 1.624: "Doctrina et vita sunt distinguenda. Vita est mala apud nos sicut apud papistas; non igitur dimicamus et damnamus eos. Hoc nesciverunt Wikleff et Hus, qui vitam impugnarunt." WATr 4.4338: "Sed doctrina non reformata frustra fit reformatio morum."

of mid-1519. In early 1519, Luther wrote thus of schism: "If, unfortunately, there are things in Rome which cannot be improved, there is not – nor can there be! – any reason for tearing oneself away from the church in schism. Rather, the worse things become, the more one should help her and stand by her, for by schism and contempt nothing can be mended."[46] Even though the Leipzig disputation would do much to alter Luther's views on the relative demerits of schism, it may be noted that the assumption underlying both the *Confessio Augustana* (1530) and the Colloquy of Regensburg (1541) was that the estrangement of the evangelical faction from the Catholic Church was still to be regarded as temporary.

It was only after the failure of Regensburg that the possibility of a permanent schism within the church became increasingly a probability, so that ecclesiological questions began to come to the fore within the evangelical faction.[47] It is therefore necessary to emphasize that the essential factor which led to this schism in the first place, and thus to the rethinking of the accepted ecclesiologies, was Luther's fundamental conviction that the church of his day had lapsed into some form of Pelagianism, thus compromising the gospel, and that the church itself was not prepared to extricate itself from this situation.

For Luther, the entire gospel could be encapsulated in the Christian article of justification[48] – the affirmation that human beings really can enter into a gracious relationship with God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The sacerdotal and sacramental systems of the church have their proper and legitimate place,

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[46] WA 2.72.35–37. Luther's attitudes to the papacy and schism over the years 1517–1520 are somewhat difficult to follow, apparently being responses to a shifting political context: see S.H. Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy: Stages in a Reformation Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981).

[47] Ecclesiological developments are particularly associated with Martin Bucer: J. Courvoisier, *La notion d'église chez Bucer dans son développement historique* (Paris: Alcan, 1933). For evangelical ecclesiologies in general, see H. Strohl, "La notion d'église chez les réformateurs," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 9 (1936), pp. 265–319.

[48] For a brief introduction to Luther's doctrine of justification and its theological significance, see B. Hägglund, *Was ist mit Luthers "Rechtfertigungs"-Lehre gemeint?* (Ratzeburg: Luther-Akademie-Ratzeburg, 1982).

but cannot be allowed to interpose between believers and the living God who calls them to faith through the Word. For Luther, Jesus Christ is the righteousness of God, revealing at one and the same time God's condemnation of sin and remedy for it. Through the creative power of the Holy Spirit and the hearing of the Word of the gospel, the sinner shares in the divine righteousness through faith.

In comparison with this weighty matter, matters such as the authority of the pope, the nature of purgatory, and the propriety of indulgences were seen by Luther as being quite insignificant and irrelevant. Even as late as 1535, Luther stated unequivocally that he was still prepared to acknowledge the authority of the pope on condition that he acknowledge in turn that the sinner had free forgiveness of sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and not through the observance of the traditions of the church.[49]

Was Luther really stating anything other than the common Christian gospel? Was not the extent of theological diversity within late medieval Catholicism already so great that such opinions could be accommodated without difficulty? Need this have led to irreversible schism? Was the Reformation actually the consequence of a fundamental misunderstanding of Luther's frequently intemperate and occasionally obscure pronouncements?[50] Such questions cannot be answered with any degree of confidence. The fact remains, however, that Luther himself regarded the Reformation as having begun over, and to have chiefly concerned, the correct understanding of the Christian doctrine of justification. This concern is evident in his writings throughout his later career, including

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[49] WA 40 I.357.18–22: "Papa, ego voli tibi osculari pedes teque agnoscere summum pontificem, si adoraveris Christum meum et permiseris, quod per ipsius mortem et resurrectionem habeamus remissionem peccatorum et vitam aeternam, non per observationem tuarum traditionum. Si hoc cesseris, non adimam tibi coronam et potentiam tuam."

[50] The current ecumenical dialogue is obliged to proceed upon this assumption, in one form or another: H. Küng, *Rechtfertigung. Die Lehre Karl Barths und eine katholische Besinnung* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1957). For a critique of Küng's thesis, see A.E. McGrath, "Justification: Barth, Trent and Küng," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 34 (1981), pp. 517–529.

some of the confessional material of the Lutheran church. The Smalkald Articles of 1537 assert that everything in the evangelical struggle against the papacy, the world, and the devil hangs upon the Christian article of justification.[51] Similarly, in that same year Luther prefaced an academic disputation with the assertion that the article of justification was not merely supreme among other Christian doctrines, but that it also upheld and controlled them.[52] In the struggle for the reformation of Christian doctrine, the evangelical case was held to rest entirely upon this single article.

The Importance of the Present Study

It will therefore be clear that a study of the development of Luther's doctrine of justification over the crucial years 1509–1519, culminating in the statement of the *theologia crucis*, is of enormous interest to historians and theologians alike. The importance of the matter to historians will be evident. Given that Luther's understanding of the doctrine of justification is clearly of such fundamental importance in relation to so significant an historical movement as the Reformation, it is obviously of considerable interest to establish how this particular understanding emerged, what factors appear to have been instrumental in effecting it, and how it relates to previous understandings of the same matter. It has always been important for intellectual historians to establish the sources of an author's thought. The character, distinctiveness, and ultimate significance of an intellectual achievement such as that of Luther are invariably better understood when those who have influenced his ideas, either positively or negatively, are identified. Luther cannot be regarded merely as a

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[51] *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1952), 416.22–23: "Et in hoc articulo sita sunt et consistunt omnia, quae contra papam, diabolum et mundum in vita nostra docemus, testamur et agimus."
[52] WA 39 I.205.2–5: "Articulus iustificationis est magister et princeps, dominus, rector et iudex super omnia genera doctrinarum, qui conservat et gubernat omnem doctrinam ecclesiasticam et erigit conscientiam nostram coram Deo." On this, see E. Wolf, "Die Rechtfertigungslehre als Mitte und Grenze reformatorischer Theologie," *Evangelische Theologie* 9 (1949–50), pp. 298–308.

protagonist in German and European history: the ideas which led him to assume this role, their origins and significance, must be taken into account if a proper understanding and evaluation of Luther's historical significance is to emerge.[53] It is understandably difficult for a liberal historian, with a distaste for dogma and theology, and who would much have preferred a reformation of the church along humanist lines, to come to terms with the theological issues at stake in Luther's revolt. Nevertheless, Luther the man cannot be isolated from Luther the theologian, nor can his actions be isolated from the ideas which ultimately inspired them.

The importance of the matter to the theologian is equally clear. It is important to establish precisely what Luther's teaching on justification actually is, and how the various strands of this teaching are woven together in the *theologia crucis*. Furthermore, the historical origins of Luther's views raise a fundamentally theological question. Can the distinctive teachings of the Reformation, and supremely their chief article, that of justification, be considered to be truly Catholic? If it can be shown that the chief teaching of the Reformation, the "article by which the church stands or falls,"[54] was a

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[53] If this is not done, the Reformation will appear as merely one episode in the essentially continuous development of intellectual history in the period 1300–1600, without proper appreciation of its genuinely radical and innovatory character. For an excellent discussion of this important point, see H.A. Oberman, "Reformation: Epoche oder Episode," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 68 (1977), pp. 56–111.

[54] See F. Loofs, "'Der articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae,'" *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 90 (1917), pp. 323–400. In this study, Loofs argues that the phrase, "the article by which the church stands or falls" – referring to the article of justification – only came into use in the eighteenth century. In fact, as we have shown on the basis of an exhaustive analysis of the dogmatic works of the period, the phrase appears to have come into circulation at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and is used by *Reformed*, as well as by *Lutheran*, theologians: McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, p. vii, n. 1. Thus the Reformed theologian J.H. Alsted begins his discussion of the justification of humanity before God with the following statement: "Articulus iustificationis dicitur articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae" (*Theologia scholastica didacta* [Hanover, 1618], p. 711). There is thus every reason to suggest that the phrase represents a common *modus loquendi theologicus* by the beginning of the seventeenth century. Precursors of the phrase can, of course, be found in the writings of Luther himself – e.g., WA 40 III.352.3: "... quia isto articulo stante stat Ecclesia, ruente ruit Ecclesia."

theological novelty, unknown to the Christian church throughout the first 1500 years of her existence, it will be clear that the Protestant claim to have *reformed* the church is open to challenge. This point was made with particular force by the theologians of the Counter-Reformation, such as Jacques Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704):

> The Church's doctrine is always the same ... the Gospel is never different from what it was before. Hence, if at any time someone says that the faith includes something which yesterday was not said to be of the faith, it is always *heterodoxy*, which is any doctrine different from *orthodoxy*. There is no difficulty about recognising false doctrine: there is no argument about it: it is recognised at once, whenever it appears, merely because it is new.[55]

If, on the other hand, it can be shown that Luther restored or recovered an authentically Catholic understanding of justification from the distortions of the later medieval period, the reform of doctrine which he initiated and sustained on the basis of this understanding of justification must be taken with the utmost seriousness. It is therefore of considerable theological importance to establish precisely not only what Luther's developing views on justification, culminating in the theology of the cross, actually were, but also the precise nature of that development, and what factors were instrumental in effecting that development.[56]

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[55] *Première instruction pastorale* xxvii; cited by O. Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman: The Idea of Doctrinal Development* (Cambridge, 1957), p. 17. For the general point at issue, see Alister E. McGrath, "Forerunners of the Reformation? A Critical Examination of the Evidence for Precursors of the Reformation Doctrines of Justification," *Harvard Theological Review* 75 (1982), pp. 219–242.

[56] It is important in this respect to appreciate that by late 1517 Luther was a member of a theological faculty which was dedicated to theological reform, and that Luther insisted not only that other members of that faculty held views on grace and works identical to his own, but that in some cases they had actually held these views before he himself arrived at them: WABr 1.170.20–29 (May 1518). The importance of Karlstadt's conversion to Augustinianism in early 1517, resulting in the posting of the 151 theses of April 1517, is often overlooked, but was actually vital to the initiation of the Reformation, given Karlstadt's position as dean of the faculty at the time.

The present study argues that the genuinely creative and innovative aspects of Luther's *theologia crucis* can only be properly appreciated if Luther is regarded as having begun to teach theology at the University of Wittenberg on October 22, 1512 *as a typical theologian of the later Middle Ages*, and as having begun to break away from this theological matrix over a number of years.[57] There is still a disturbing tendency on the part of some Luther scholars to approach the later medieval period from the standpoint of the later Luther, either projecting Luther's perceived theological concerns and prejudices onto this earlier period, or insisting that Luther provides some kind of hermeneutical key to the controversies and theological preoccupations of an earlier age. Not only does this impede a proper understanding of the theology of the later medieval period; it also prevents a reliable understanding of Luther's own theological development, which can only be properly evaluated in the light of the theological currents prevalent in the later Middle Ages. The tendency to regard the study of the theology of the later medieval period as serving as little more than a prologue to that of the Reformation has recently been reversed, with increasing emphasis being placed upon the importance of the later medieval period as a field of study in its own right. As a consequence, we now possess a far greater understanding of the complexities of the theology of the later medieval period than has ever been possible before, and are thus in a favorable position to attempt an informed evaluation of Luther's initial relationship to this theology, and also the nature of his subsequent break with it.

Luther was not a man without beginnings, a mysterious and lonely figure of destiny who arrived at Wittenberg already in possession of the *vera theologia* which would take the church by storm, and usher in a new era in its history. Although it is tempting to believe that Luther suffered a devastating moment of illumination, in which he

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[57] This assumption is supported by many considerations, as will become clear during the course of this study. For the time being, it is sufficient to recall Luther's celebrated statement: "When I became a doctor [i.e., October 19, 1512], I did not yet know that we cannot expiate our sins" (WA 45.86.18–19).

suddenly became conscious both of the *vera theologia* and of his own divine mission to reform the church on its basis, all the evidence which we possess points to Luther's theological insights arising over a prolonged period at Wittenberg, under the influence of three main currents of thought: local forms of Renaissance humanism, the "nominalism" of the *via moderna*, and the theology of his own Augustinian Order. It is these three currents of thought, in the specific forms which they assumed at Erfurt, and particularly at Wittenberg, that appear to define the confluence from which Luther's *theologia crucis* would emerge.

Although Luther's early theology can be shown to reflect well-established thought patterns of the later medieval period, this serves to emphasize, rather than to detract from, his theological genius. There comes a point at which Luther can no longer be explained on the basis of his origins and his environment, and when he began to pursue a course significantly different from the thought-world of his contemporaries, as the cruciality of the cross of Christ embedded itself more and more deeply in Luther's theological reflections. Whether for good or for ill, the consequences of this break with the past are still with us. The present study is an attempt to gather together the developing strands of the theology of the cross as they make their appearance, setting them in their context, as established by the best recent scholarship, and assessing their historical and theological significance. It is an attempt, not to praise or damn Luther, but simply to understand him.

2

Headwaters of the Reformation at Wittenberg: Humanism, Nominalism, and the Augustinian Tradition

In 1502 Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, founded a university at Wittenberg to rival that of neighboring Leipzig. Unusually, the new university was founded without initial ecclesiastical approval, and hence without access to the traditional sources of income.[1] Where other European universities often had close financial and institutional links with major ecclesiastical foundations,[2] Wittenberg had

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[1] See W. Friedensburg, *Geschichte der Universität Wittenberg* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1917); H. Kathe, *Die Wittenberger philosophische Fakultät 1501–1817* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2002). The University of Leipzig was founded in 1409.

[2] As with the universities of Prague, Vienna, and Heidelberg: see W.E. Wagner, *Universitätsstift und Kollegium in Prag, Wien und Heidelberg: Eine vergleichende Untersuchung spätmittelalterlicher Stiftungen im Spannungsfeld von Herrschaft und Genossenschaft* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999).

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little financial or scholarly endowment or support. Furthermore, while other German universities of this period had high-ranking ecclesiastical dignitaries as their chancellors, Wittenberg had to be content with Goswin of Orsoy, a minor ecclesiastic with an apparent talent for mediocrity. Despite these inauspicious beginnings, the Elector's new university would soon rise from its initial obscurity to attain international fame, although for reasons which Frederick could hardly have foreseen or desired.

All this, however, lay in the future. When Luther returned to Wittenberg in the late summer of 1511, he found an Augustinian priory and a university in which certain currents of later medieval thought were well established. Our concern in this chapter is to clarify the nature of three such streams of thought: humanism, nominalism, and the medieval Augustinian tradition. In the present chapter, we propose to consider these three elements as the background to Luther's theological development, before considering the nature and character of that development itself.

From its foundation, the University of Wittenberg enjoyed particularly close links with the Augustinian Order in general, and the Black Cloister at Wittenberg in particular. At the foundation of the university, Elector Frederick had called Johannes von Staupitz, then prior of the Augustinian Cloister at Munich, to become the first dean of the faculty of theology, and also to take up one of the two chairs which were reserved for members of the Order.[3] Although Staupitz had to relinquish his teaching duties the following year, in order to take up his new responsibilities as vicar-general of his Order,[4] close links between the Order and the university were maintained, with

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[3] One was the chair of biblical studies in the faculty of theology; the other was the chair of moral philosophy in the faculty of arts.

[4] For an excellent introduction to the history of the Order in Germany up to the beginnings of the Reformation, see E. Wolf, "Die Augustiner-Eremiten in Deutschland bis zur Reformation," in *Mittelalterliches Erbe – Evangelische Verantwortung. Vorträge und Ansprachen zum Gedenken der Gründung des Tübinger Augustinerklosters 1262* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1962), pp. 25–44.

over one hundred Augustinians being matriculated, and 17 becoming members of the university teaching staff, during the period in which Staupitz held the office of vicar-general.

Although the Augustinian Order had had a long and distinguished association with the humanist movement in Italy,[5] the driving force in establishing Wittenberg as a center for the *studia humanitatis* was unquestionably the international reputation of its rector, Christoph Scheurl.[6] Following a well-established precedent, Scheurl left his native Germany at the age of 16 to study law at Bologna.[7] While there, it is clear that he took the opportunity to immerse himself in the learning and culture of the late Renaissance, and particularly the art of rhetoric. In 1505 a Saxon was appointed rector of the University of Bologna, and Scheurl used this occasion to deliver an oration in praise of the contributions of his native Germany to human civilization. Although the original version of this oration has not survived, an expanded version of the text was published in 1506 as *Libellus de laudibus Germaniae et ducum Saxoniae*.[8] In style and substance, the work appears to be typical of the humanism of the Quattrocento. Favorable

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[5] See R. Arbesmann, *Der Augustiner-Eremitenorder und der Beginn der humanistischen Bewegung* (Würzburg: Augustinus Verlag, 1965); L. Bourdua and A. Dunlop, eds, *Art and the Augustinian Order in Early Renaissance Italy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). For the role of the religious orders in general in diffusing humanist ideals, see P.O. Kristeller, "The Contribution of Religious Orders to Renaissance Thought and Learning," *American Benedictine Review* 21 (1970), pp. 1–55.

[6] For a biography, see W. Graf, *Doktor Christoph Scheurl von Nürnburg* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1930); C.A. Stumpf, "Scheurl, Christoph," in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2005), vol. 22, pp. 715–716.

[7] For an indication of the popularity of Bologna as a center for German students during the period, see J. Schmutz, *Juristen für das Reich: Die deutschen Rechtsstudenten an der Universität Bologna 1265–1425* (Basel: Schwabe, 2000).

[8] See D. Mertens, "Laudes Germaniae in Bologna und Wittenberg: Zu Christoph Scheurls *Libellus de laudibus Germaniae et Ducum Saxoniae* 1506 und 1508," in *Margarita amicorum: studi di cultura europea per Agostino Sottili*, ed. F. Forner, C.M. Monti, and P. G. Schmidt (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2005), pp. 717–731. The second edition, published in 1508, was dedicated to Frederick the Wise.

reports of the oration were not slow in spreading north of the Alps, and Scheurl soon found himself regarded as a leading figure in the humanist movement.

After receiving his doctorate in law at Bologna in December 1506, Scheurl returned to Saxony to take up a lectureship at Wittenberg, which had been promised to him by the Elector the previous year. The university annals for April 1507 duly record the presence of "Christoferus Scheurl Nurembergen, utriusque Juris Doctor Bononien" among the university teaching faculty.[9] Scheurl's reputation, however, appears to have preceded him to Wittenberg: the next entry in the university annals records his election as rector of Wittenberg university in May 1507, a matter of weeks after his arrival. Under his influence, the university would change direction significantly, with increased emphasis being placed upon the *studia humanitatis* – a characteristic feature of Renaissance humanism.[10]

The personal influence of the early rectors of the university upon the university curriculum is also attested by certain significant alterations to the university statutes in 1508. In the autumn of 1507, Scheurl was succeeded as rector by Jodocus Trutvetter, newly arrived from Erfurt. Although we know little of Trutvetter's early years, it is clear that by 1504 he was regarded by many as being the leading figure, not merely within the theological faculty at Erfurt, but also within the university as a whole. His election as rector of the university immediately after his arrival at Wittenberg parallels that of Scheurl some six months previously, and appears to reflect a desire on the part of the members of the new university to attract attention to it by installing well-known figures as rector.

Scheurl and Trutvetter formed a close attachment, as is evident from their extensive correspondence. Trutvetter, however, brought more than his reputation to Wittenberg: he also brought the new

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[9] Mertens, "Laudes Germaniae in Bologna und Wittenberg," pp. 721–725.

[10] M. Grossmann, *Humanism in Wittenberg 1483–1517* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1975).

philosophy of the *via moderna*. Along with Bartholomäus Arnoldi of Usingen, Trutvetter had been instrumental in fostering the emergence of the *via moderna* at Erfurt.[11] Trutvetter himself singled out Johannes Buridan and Gabriel Biel as his most influential teachers,[12] and this influence can be seen in his extant works.

The *via moderna* and *via antiqua* at Wittenberg

At this point, we must consider the distinction between the *via antiqua* and *via moderna* in more detail. The origin of the "modern way" dates from the second half of the fourteenth century. The former is usually taken to refer to the well-established Thomist and Scotist schools, characterized by their metaphysical realism, while the latter is usually held to refer to the new philosophy associated with scholars such as William of Ockham, Marsilius of Inghen, and Gregory of Rimini, characterized by their metaphysical nominalism.[13] This distinction will be developed later in the present chapter.

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[11] For an excellent analysis of the development of the *via moderna* at Erfurt, see W. Urban, "Die 'via moderna' an der Universität Erfurt am Vorabend der Reformation," in *Gregor von Rimini: Werk und Wirkung bis zur Reformation*, ed. H.A. Oberman (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1981), pp. 311–330. More generally, see S. Lorenz, *Studium Generale Erfordense: Zum Erfurter Schulleben im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1989). For biographies of Arnoldi and Trutvetter, see N. Paulus, *Der Augustiner Bartholomäus Arnoldi von Usingen, Luthers Lehrer und Gegner: Ein Lebensbild* (Freiburg: Herder, 1893); G.L. Plitt, *Jodokus Trutfetter von Eisenach, der Lehrer Luthers in seinem Wirken geschildert* (Erlangen: Deichert, 1876). It is important to appreciate that it was the faculty of *arts*, not *theology*, which was dominated by the *via moderna* at Erfurt – the university records point to a number of Thomists and Scotists present on the theology faculty: see L. Grane, *Contra Gabrielem: Luthers Auseinandersetzung mit Gabriel Biel in der Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam* (Gyldendal, 1962), p. 16, n. 31.

[12] F.W. Kampschulte, *Die Universität Erfurt in ihrem Verhältnis zu dem Humanismus und der Reformation* (Trier: Lintz, 1858), vol. 1, pp. 43–45.

[13] For a good overview of this question, see H.A. Oberman, "Luther and the *Via Moderna*: The Philosophical Backdrop of the Reformation Breakthrough," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 54 (2003), pp. 641–670.

The new way of thinking caused tension within several universities, resulting in the expulsion and migration of both students and faculty to universities more sympathetic to the *via moderna*.[14] Some universities considered it politic to achieve a compromise, allowing both the *via moderna* and *via antiqua* to be taught. As a result, by the end of the fifteenth century several German universities, such as Heidelberg,[15] explicitly permitted both the *via antiqua* and the *via moderna*. Wittenberg, however, appears initially to have taught according to the *via antiqua* alone. It is not clear whether this was a matter of policy, or whether it simply reflected the existing commitments of those available to teach at the new university. For the first five years of its existence, the *via moderna* does not appear to have made any inroads into the curriculum of either the faculty of arts or the faculty of theology at the university of Wittenberg.

For example, in May 1507, Scheurl – then newly elected as rector – published his *Rotulus doctorum Wittemberge profitentum*, in which he catalogued the doctors then teaching at Wittenberg, as well as their subjects and hours of lecturing. Although Scheurl intended the document to publicize the academic excellence of Wittenberg at a time when student members were dangerously low, the document is of particular interest in that it offers us an invaluable insight into the early teaching patterns of the university prior to the reforms of 1508. The lectures offered by the faculty of arts are carefully distinguished, according to whether they are given *secundum viam Thomae* or *secundum viam Scoti*. The following entry is instructive:[16]

At 6.00 a.m:
Master Nicolaus Amsdorff, Bachelor of Theology, *in via Scoti*.

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[14] A.L. Gabriel, "'Via Antiqua' and 'Via Moderna' and the Migration of Paris Students and Masters to the German Universities in the Fifteenth Century," in *Antiqui und Moderni: Traditionsbewußtsein und Fortschrittbewußtsein im späten Mittelalter*, ed. A. Zimmermann (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974), pp. 439–483.

[15] G. Ritter, *Via antiqua und via moderna auf den deutschen Universitäten des XV. Jahrhunderts* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1922).

[16] W. Friedensburg, *Urkundenbuch der Universität Wittenberg, Teil I (1502–1611)* (Magdeburg: Selbstverlag der historischen Kommission für die Provinz Sachsen, 1926), p. 15.

> Master Andreas de Carlstadt, Bachelor of Theology, *in via sancti Thomae.*

As well as introducing us to two names which will feature prominently in any history of the Reformation, and indicating the early start (6 a.m.) to the daily teaching program at Wittenberg, the entry serves to illustrate the careful distinction made between the two schools of the *via antiqua* within the faculty of arts. Nikolaus Amsdorf is introduced as a Scotist, lecturing *in via Scoti*, and Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt as a Thomist, lecturing *in via sancti Thomae*.[17] No other *viae* are noted or referred to within the document, allowing us to conclude with a reasonable degree of certainty that, in its early years, the Wittenberg faculty of theology followed the *via antiqua*.

A New School of Thought? The *via Gregorii* at Wittenberg

Early in 1508 the Elector asked Scheurl, by then dean of the faculty of law, to revise the statutes of the university. Scheurl's final revisions included the establishment of new statutes, not merely for the university as a whole, but for each individual faculty. The new statutes for the faculty of arts reveal a highly significant addition. Originally, members of that faculty had been obliged to teach according to the *via Thomae* or the *via Scoti*: the new *statuta collegii artistarum* oblige members of that faculty to teach according to one of three *viae* – the *via Thomae*, the *via Scoti*, and the *via Gregorii*.[18] What are we to understand by this additional *via Gregorii*? There is no doubt that this is a reference to Gregory of Rimini, who played

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[17] For Karlstadt's Thomism, see D.R. Janz, *Luther on Thomas Aquinas: The Angelic Doctor in the Thought of the Reformer* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1989), pp. 111–122.

[18] *Statuta* cap. 10; *Urkundenbuch*, p. 56: "... Magistri deputentur ad lecciones ordinarias per reformatores indifferenter profiteatur via Thome, Scoti, Gregorii." Cf. *Statuta* cap. 3; *Urkundenbuch*, p. 53: "... incipiendo scilicet ab eo qui primum in senatum est ascriptus, quicumque ille fuerit, seu religiosus seu secularis, Thome, Scotho sive Gregorio mancipatus ..."

an important role in introducing the ideas of English *moderni* to audiences at Paris and elsewhere.[19] Gregory is known to have been familiar with the new ideas of English writers such as Adam Wodeham, Richard Fitzralph, Walter Chatton, and William of Ockham, and appears to have been instrumental in gaining them a hearing in continental European circles. Gregory was a nominalist and applied "Ockham's razor" to a range of philosophical and theological issues.[20] Many philosophers of the later fourteenth century were affected by his ideas, including German opinion makers such as Henry of Langenstein and Marsilius of Inghen. Gregory was also a radical Augustinian in his theology of grace, expressed with particular force in his doctrine of double predestination.[21] This combination of a nominalist epistemology and a radical Augustinian theology of grace did not fit easily into the historical categories characteristic of medieval intellectual historians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, causing considerable confusion over Gregory's position on the landscape of possibilities.

So what does this reference to the *via Gregorii* at the University of Wittenberg tell us about its intellectual commitments at this time? The situation has been somewhat confused by alterations made to one of the original manuscripts of the statutes, where an unknown later writer systematically substituted "Guilelmus" for "Gregorius" at its every occurrence,[22] thus indicating that, in the opinion of

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[19] See P. Bermon, "La Lectura sur les deux premiers livres des Sentences de Grégoire de Rimini O.E.S.A. (1300–1358)," in *Medieval Commentaries on Peter Lombard's Sentences*, ed. G.R. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 2001), vol. 1, pp. 267–285.

[20] S.F. Brown, "Walter Burley, Peter Aureoli, and Gregory of Rimini," in *Medieval Philosophy*, ed. J. Marenbon, (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 368–385.

[21] M. Santos-Noya, *Die Sünden und Gnadenlehre des Gregors von Rimini* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1990).

[22] *Urkundenbuch*, p. 58, note "t." The earlier edition of T. Muther, *Die Wittenberger Universität- und Fakultätstatuten von Jahre MDVIII* (Halle: Thüringisch-Sächsischen Vereins für Erforschung des vaterländischen Altertums, 1867) substituted "Guilelmo" for "Gregorio" at cap. 3 (Muther, p. 41), and "Guilelmi" for "Gregorii" at cap. 10 (Muther, p. 45). Muther's edition, however, was based on only one of the two sources available, and his reconstruction of the statutes is therefore somewhat conjectural. The second source lacks this substitution.

this unknown writer, the *via Gregorii* was none other than the *via moderna*, the school of thought particularly associated with William (Guilelmus) of Ockham, among others, which Gregory of Rimini had championed at the University of Paris in the 1340s.

It is somewhat more difficult to ascertain how Scheurl intended the phrase to be interpreted: all the indications are, however, that it is indeed the *via moderna* which is being referred to. The following considerations indicate this conclusion.

First, it is clear that Scheurl himself knew of one major new school of thought which had secured a following in early sixteenth-century Germany, and that he regarded Jodocus Trutvetter as one of its chief exponents. This is made clear in a letter written by him, dated August 12, 1513, in which he refers to Trutvetter as *modernorum princeps*, using the correct term (*modernus*) for a follower of the *via moderna*.[23] The personal presence of Trutvetter at Wittenberg as rector of the university, and Scheurl's close friendship with him, strongly suggest that this third *via* is intended to correspond to the school of thought of which Trutvetter was a noted representative. If the statutes are thus interpreted from Scheurl's personal perspective, there are excellent reasons for concluding that the *via moderna* is intended.

Secondly, if the *via moderna* is *not* intended, what is? There were only three major schools of thought in early sixteenth-century Germany: the *via Thomae*, the *via Scoti*, and the *via moderna*. It is highly improbable that Scheurl would have altered the statutes to include a previously unrecognized *via* if it did not correspond to the *via* already highly influential in the arts faculties of other universities, such as Paris, Erfurt, and Heidelberg – that is, the *via moderna*. Even if it could be demonstrated that there was a coherent *schola Augustiniana* at Wittenberg at this time, it is highly unlikely that Scheurl would incorporate it into the faculty statutes in preference to the *via moderna*, given the increasing high standing of this *via* within the

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[23] *Christoph Scheurl's Briefbuch*, Vol. I, Letter No. 80, pp. 123–125. Note also the following: "... propterea quod vos qui sectam illam modernam amplectimini ...."

German university context of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. We shall return to this point in a following section.[24]

Thirdly, the *via moderna* was known by various synonyms at the time. Ritter has drawn our attention to the fact that the *via moderna* was known as the *via Marsiliana* at Heidelberg, after Marsilius of Inghen.[25] If the term *via Gregorii* were to have been derived in a similar manner, it would obviously have been named after Gregory of Rimini, the *antesignanus nominalistarum*, as an earlier generation of scholars dubbed him. In terms of his logic and metaphysics, the "standard-bearer of the nominalists" was regarded by his contemporaries and successors as being among the group of personalities particularly associated with the *via moderna*.[26] Of particular interest in this respect is the fact that Marsilius of Inghen – unquestionably a *modernus* – frequently refers to Gregory as *magister noster*,[27] implying a certain degree of continuity between their teachings. Although Gregory's *theology*, particularly his doctrine of predestination, is such as to set him at some distance from Ockham *cum suis*, it must be emphasized that his logic and metaphysics are thoroughly Ockhamist. As we are here dealing with the statutes of the faculty of *arts*, not those of the faculty of *theology*, it is perfectly legitimate to argue that the *metaphysical* school associated with Gregory of Rimini – that is, the *via moderna* – is here designated as

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[24] For further discussion of the idea that the *via Gregorii* represents an Augustinian tradition which impacted significantly on Johannes von Staupitz (and hence possibly Luther), see M. Wriedt, "Via Guilelmi – Via Gregorii: Zur Frage einer Augustinerschule im Gefolge Gregors von Rimini unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Johannes von Staupitz," in *Deutschland und Europa in der Neuzeit*, ed. R. Melville, C. Scharg, M. Vogt, and U. Wengenroth (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 1988), pp. 111–131.

[25] G. Ritter, *Studien zur Spätscholastik I: Marsilius von Inghen und die okkamistische Schule in Deutschland* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1921), p. 46.

[26] The names usually associated with the *Nominalium via et modernorum doctrina* include Marsilius of Inghen, Johannes Buridan, William of Ockham, Robert Holcot, Gregory of Rimini, Pierre d'Ailly, and Gabriel Biel. On this, see R. Paqué, *Das Pariser Nominalistenstatut: Zur Entstehung des Realitätsbegriffs der neuzeitlichen Naturwissenschaft* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1970), p. 22, nn. 13–14.

[27] Ritter, *Marsilius von Inghen*, p. 11, n. 4 ("*frater magister noster*") and p. 38, n. 3 ("*Gregorius magister noster*").

the *via Gregorii*. While it is not at all clear why Scheurl should have chosen the phrase *via Gregorii* in the first place, it seems evident that the *via moderna* is intended.

Yet there is no historical evidence that lectures were ever given at Wittenberg according to the *via Gregorii*.[28] While the university statutes may have permitted such an option, there is no reason to believe that any faculty members actually took this up. There is no further reference to the *via Gregorii* in subsequent archives of the university for the period 1508–1519, even in the one document where such a reference might have been expected. On April 9, 1516 the university, finding itself in an increasingly difficult financial situation, approached Frederick the Wise over the question of placing the university's finances on a more secure footing.[29] In his rather guarded reply to this request, Frederick asked the university to provide him with details of the university teaching staff and their commitments,[30] which the university duly supplied.[31] This latter document is similar in many respects to Scheurl's *Rotulus* of 1507, giving details of lecturers and lectures alike. Amsdorf, we discover, is still lecturing at 6 a.m. *in Scoto*. There is, however, no reference whatsoever to the *via Gregorii*. Three members of the faculty of arts are represented as lecturing *secundum viam Thomae*, and three (including Amsdorf) *secundum viam Scoti*, the remainder of the faculty not being designated as committed to one particular *via*.[32] While it is clear that the absence of any reference to the *via Gregorii* cannot be taken as demonstrating that the *via* was unrepresented on the faculty, such absence certainly indicates that this third possible *via* had failed to gain a status or following comparable to those of the *via antiqua*.

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[28] See H. Scheible, "Aristoteles und die Wittenberg Universitätsreform. Zum Quellenwert von Lutherbriefen," in *Humanismus und Wittenberger Reformation*, ed. M. Beyer and G. Wartenberg (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1996), pp. 123–144.

[29] *Urkundenbuch*, No. 55, pp. 74–76.

[30] *Urkundenbuch*, No. 56, p. 76.

[31] *Urkundenbuch*, No. 57, pp. 76–81. This document is dated September 22, 1517 – i.e., a month before Luther posted the Ninety-Five Theses.

[32] *Urkundenbuch*, No. 57, pp. 77–78.

While the possibility that at least one member of the faculty of arts taught *secundum viam Gregorii* inter alia cannot be excluded totally, it appears certain that no member of that faculty taught *exclusively* according to that *via*. It is therefore clear that the *via Gregorii* – which we here regard as synonymous with the *via moderna* – does not appear to have displaced lecturers from their traditional loyalties within the faculty. Such displacements, it must be emphasized, were not unknown within that faculty: Karlstadt, who in 1507 lectured *secundum viam Thomae*, later became a Scotist,[33] although it may be pointed out that, by doing so, he still remained within the *via antiqua*.

So does the absence of any reference to the *via moderna* within the faculty of arts at this time indicate that Wittenberg was still committed to the *via antiqua*? This is clearly not the case. The lecture list submitted to Frederick by the university indicates that at least one lecturer in the faculty of *theology* was lecturing *secundum viam modernam*. It appears that Amsdorf, in addition to lecturing within the faculty of arts, undertook some lecturing within the faculty of theology *vice* Karlstadt. In a highly significant entry, Amsdorf is represented as lecturing "*in Gabriele*," an unequivocal reference to Gabriel Biel, the then most influential theologian of the *via moderna*.[34] The observation that Amsdorf lectured *secundum viam Scoti* in the faculty of arts, and *secundum viam modernam* in the faculty of theology, suggests that the *via moderna* may have gained a greater following at Wittenberg than might at first appear to be the case.

The relevance of this discussion to our study lies in the fact that the new academic year at Wittenberg in 1508 saw Martin Luther taking

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[33] This is related by Karlstadt himself in the preface to his commentary on Augustine's *de spiritu et litera*. In his dedicatory epistle to Staupitz, Karlstadt relates his intellectual pilgrimage: ". . . quia sectam Capreolinam et Scotisticam manifesta interpretatione successive profitebar . . ." (E. Kähler, *Karlstadt und Augustin: Der Kommentar des Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt zu Augustins Schrift De spiritu et litera* [Halle: Niemeyer, 1951], 3. 19–21). On Capreolus and the neo-Thomist school, to which Karlstadt here refers, see M. Grabmann, "Johannes Capreolous O.P., der 'Princeps Thomistarum', und seine Stellung in der Geschichte der Thomistenschule," in *Mittelalterliches Geistesleben III*, ed. L. Ott (Munich: Hüber, 1956), pp. 370–410.

[34] *Urkundenbuch*, No. 57, p. 77.

up the Augustinian chair of moral philosophy within the faculty of arts. The new statutes of that faculty had then just come into force, and Luther would have been *permitted*, but not *obliged*, to teach according to the *via Gregorii*. Luther was no stranger to the *via moderna*, having been taught by Arnoldi and Trutvetter at Erfurt; furthermore, in 1507, when he began to study theology seriously, he came once more under the influence of the *via moderna*, particularly through Johannes Nathin, his regent of studies at the Erfurt priory, and to a lesser extent through the then prior at Erfurt, Johannes de Paltz.[35] As part of his theological education within the order, he would have read the seminal works of Pierre d'Ailly and William of Ockham, and particularly Gabriel Biel's *Collectorium circa quattuor sententiarum libros*.[36] Luther frequently refers to Ockham with approval, and appears to take a certain delight in calling him *Magister meus*.[37] Furthermore, there are reasons for believing that Trutvetter was implicated in Luther's move from Erfurt to Wittenberg, thus suggesting a certain degree of affinity in outlook between the two men.

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[35] On Paltz, see B. Lohse, *Mönchtum und Reformation: Luthers Auseinandersetzung mit dem Mönchsideal des Mittelalters* (Göttingen, 1963); M. Ferdigg, "Die vita et operibus et doctrina Joannis de Paltz O.E.S.A.," *Analecta Augustiniana* 30 (1967), pp. 210–321; 31 (1968), pp. 155–318. On Nathin, see A. Zumkeller, "Neuentdeckte Schriften des Erfurter Theologieprofessors Johannes Nathin OSA," *Augustiniana* 54 (2004), pp. 653–658.

[36] He would, of course, have studied Biel's *Lectura super canonem missae* while preparing for ordination. In a provocative study, Louis Saint-Blanc argued that d'Ailly mediated the influence of Gregory of Rimini, rather than William of Ockham, to the young Luther: "La théologie de Luther et un noveau Plagiat de Pierre d'Ailly," *Positions Luthériennes* 4 (1956), pp. 61–77. This conclusion has been rejected by H.A. Oberman, who rightly points out that d'Ailly's plagiarism in respect of Gregory of Rimini's *Prologue* is not matched by a rejection of Ockham on the points involved: *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 199–201.

[37] E.g., WA 38.160.3; 39 I.420.27; 30 II.300.10. Luther himself appears to have regarded the terms *moderni* and *Occamistae* as essentially synonymous: cf. WA 1.509.13–14; 5.371.36–37; 6.194.37–195.5 Cf. Grane, *Contra Gabrielem*, pp. 265 and 377, *contra* K. Holl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1928), vol. 1, p. 49, n. 2.

If the distinction between the *via antiqua* and the *via moderna* is held to reside in the epistemological realism of the former and the nominalism of the latter, Luther appears to have remained an adherent of the *via moderna* throughout his life. In its strict epistemological sense, the term "nominalism" refers to the epistemological contention that all things which exist are only particulars – that is, there is no genuine or objective identity in things which are not in themselves identical.[38] Contemporary sources indicate that this position was known as "Terminism" at the beginning of the sixteenth century,[39] and there are good reasons for preferring this term to "Nominalism." In a fragment of Luther's *Table-Talk*, recorded by Lauterbach, the reformer indicated that he wished to be considered *Terminista modernus*.[40] Luther is here represented as arguing that the term *humanitas* does not refer to a "common humanity which exists in all people" (the realist position), but to all people *individually* (the terminist position). Setting aside Ockham's distinction between *terminus conceptus* and *terminus prolatus* as requiring more mental concentration than might normally be possible over a dinner table, Luther's discussion of the differences between the two schools is both accurate and revealing, and prompts the following question: does this evident influence of the *via moderna* extend to Luther's early *theology* as well as to his *epistemology*?

Luther and the Augustinian Order

Before we pursue this question in a later section of this chapter, a third source of influence on the young Luther must be considered. In September 1505 Luther joined the Order of the Hermits of

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[38] D.M. Armstrong, *Nominalism and Realism: Universals and Scientific Realism*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 12–57.
[39] H.A. Oberman, *Werden und Wertung der Reformation* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1977), p. 49, n. 80.
[40] WATr 5.6419. The text is reprinted in Oberman, *Werden und Wertung*, p. 425.

St Augustine, usually referred to simply as the "Augustinian Order." As an Augustinian friar (*frater*), Luther was attached to this Order, while remaining free to carry out his vocation in the secular world. (Popular accounts of Luther's ministry often refer to him as a "monk," which is quite incorrect: monks are committed to a specific place; friars to a specific Order.) As part of his discipline, Luther was obliged to begin serious theological study under the direction of his superiors. Furthermore, during the entire period covered by our study, Luther remained a member of the Augustinian Order, and the definitive statement of the *theologia crucis* of 1518 took place in a disputation conducted by Luther *before members of that same Order*.[41] The question of what influence this Augustinian background had upon Luther's theological development is of considerable interest, particularly in the light of new developments in our understanding of the theological and spiritual currents prevalent within the Augustinian Order in the late Middle Ages.[42]

The modern study of this question dates from the first years of the present century, when Carl Stange argued that the taking of religious vows implied the recognition of the authority of the official doctors of the Order in question. In the case of the Dominicans, Stange argued, this doctor was St Thomas Aquinas; in the case of the Franciscans, Duns Scotus; in the case of the Augustinians, Giles of Rome and Gregory of Rimini.[43] Stange supported this contention by appealing to a remark due to Jerome Dungersheim: *Egydius Rhomanus ordinis heremitarum s. Augustini, quem et Luther professus est*. This Latin phrase

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[41] Note his statement of 1518; WA 2.28.26–27: "ego frater Martinus Lutherus Augustinensis, sacrae theologiae professor eiusdemque in Vuittenbergensi." Cf. WA 2.36.33–34: "ego Frater Martinus Luther Ordinis Eremitarum sancti Augustini, Vuittenbergensis Sacrae theologiae Magister."

[42] See especially E.L. Saak, *High Way to Heaven: The Augustinian Platform between Reform and Reformation, 1292–1524* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 683–735.

[43] C. Stange, "Über Luthers Beziehungen zur Theologie seines Ordens," *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift* 11 (1900), pp. 574–585; "Luther über Gregor von Rimini," *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift* 13 (1902), pp. 721–727.

is ambiguous. Stange interpreted it to mean that Luther had vowed canonical obedience to the teaching of Giles of Rome, of the Order of the Hermits of St Augustine.[44] The relative pronoun *quem* is here understood by Stange to refer to *Egydius Rhomanus*. However, the statement can be interpreted in another, more plausible manner.[45] If the antecedent for *quem* is taken to be *ordo*, the following sense is yielded: Luther vowed canonical obedience to the Order of the Hermits of St Augustine, to which Giles of Rome also belonged – making no reference whatsoever to Luther's having vowed to regard Giles's teaching as authoritative.

Furthermore, there is no evidence to support Stange's general contention concerning the universal magisterial authority of certain doctors within the individual Orders at the time, such as the authority of St Thomas Aquinas within the Dominican, and Duns Scotus within the Franciscan, Orders. As Hermelink correctly observed, the influence of the universities could not be disregarded in this connection. At Cologne, where the *via antiqua* was dominant in university circles, the Dominicans did indeed look to St Thomas as a magisterial authority – but at Vienna and Erfurt, where the *via moderna* was in the ascendancy, the Dominicans regarded William of Ockham as authoritative.[46] Furthermore, as the debates on justification at the Council of Trent made clear,[47] the Franciscans were frequently divided amongst themselves over who the doctor of their Order actually was, and thus tended to divide into two camps: those who regarded Duns Scotus as authoritative, and those who recognized the rival claims of St Bonaventure.

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[44] Stange, "Uber Luthers Beziehungen," p. 578.

[45] H. Hermelink, *Die theologische Fakultät in Tübingen vor der Reformation 1477–1534* (Tübingen: Siebeck, 1906), p. 95, n. 1: "Der Satz des Hieronymus Dungersheim: Egydius Rhomanus ordinis heremitarum s. Augustini, quem et Luther professus est, ist von Stange falsch ausgelegt, denn das Relativepronomen geht auf ordinis."

[46] Hermelink, *Die theologische Fakultät in Tübingen*, pp. 95–96.

[47] A.E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 3rd edn, 2005), pp. 309–337, especially pp. 318–324.

Furthermore, the textual evidence strongly suggests that Luther does not appear to have any significant *direct* knowledge of the theology of Gregory of Rimini until the time of the Leipzig disputation in 1519.[48] If Gregory of Rimini was regarded as one of two doctors whose authority was required to be recognized by members of the Augustinian Order, it is very difficult to explain Luther's evident ignorance concerning him.[49]

A more cautious and reliable judgment would be that Luther was influenced by the personalities and currents of thought associated with the Erfurt and Wittenberg Augustinian priories, which may – or may not! – reflect wider and more general trends within the Augustinian Order itself at the time. Luther's colleagues at the Erfurt priory within the Order, such as Bartholomäus Arnoldi of Usingen or Johannes Nathin, appear to have been, in general, exponents of the *via moderna*. At Wittenberg, however, Luther came under the influence of Johannes von Staupitz, whose associations with the *via moderna* were considerably more distant and complex.[50] By Luther's own testimony, the influence of Staupitz upon his own theological and spiritual development was profound, even if some of Luther's statements regarding his debt to Staupitz must be regarded

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[48] The evidence for this assertion is carefully presented by Leif Grane, "Gregor von Rimini und Luthers Leipziger Disputation," *Studia Theologica* 22 (1968), pp. 29–49. Grane's conclusion now requires careful nuancing in the light of Luther's autograph marginal comments on William of Ockham's *De sacramento altaris*: see J. Matsura, "Restbestände aus der Bibliothek des Erfurter Augustinerklösters zu Luthers Zeit und bisher unbekannte eigenhändige Notizen Luthers," in *Lutheriana: Zum 500. Geburtstag Martin Luthers*, ed. G. Hammer and K.-H. zur Mühlen (Cologne: Böhlau, 1984), pp. 315–330. Matsura's analysis makes it clear that there are several points at which Luther indicates *indirect* knowledge of Gregory, mediated through the works of Gabriel Biel: for analysis and comment, see Saak, *High Way to Heaven*, pp. 705–706, n. 114.

[49] See further C. Burger, "De receptie van Augustinus' genadeleer: Gregorius van Rimini, Hugolinus van Orvieto, Erasmus en Luther (tot 1518)," in *Augustiniana Neerlandica. Aspecten van Augustinus' spiritualiteit en haar doorwerking*, ed. P. van Geest and J. van Oort (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 413–425.

[50] For the best studies, see B. Hamm, "Johann von Staupitz (ca. 1468–1524): spätmittelalterlicher Reformer und 'Vater' der Reformation," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 92 (2001), pp. 6–41; Saak, *High Way to Heaven*, pp. 641–662.

as being quite unrealistic.[51] It is, however, extremely difficult to establish the precise nature of Luther's relationship to Staupitz, for the following reasons.[52]

First, Staupitz's influence upon Luther appears to have been at its greatest during the period prior to 1512, for which we have practically no literary evidence relating to *either* of them.

Secondly, there is no surviving literary evidence that Luther ever heard Staupitz lecture or preach. Whatever influence Staupitz had upon the young Luther was mediated through conversations to which no third party was witness.

Thirdly, much of our evidence concerning their mutual relationship dates from the fourth decade of the century, and derives from the potentially unreliable *Table-Talk*. There is every possibility that this evidence is distorted, either through the effects of the passage of time on Luther's memory of events or his perception of their significance, or through the inherent unreliability of those who jotted down Luther's *dicta* as they ate. The *Table-Talk* can only be allowed to confirm what has already been established by other, more reliable, sources.

Lastly, the possibility that similarities between Luther and Staupitz might reflect Luther's influence upon Staupitz, rather than vice versa, cannot be excluded, and is actually indicated by Staupitz's final letter to Luther.[53] This point serves to emphasize the fundamental difficulty encountered in any attempt to evaluate the nature and extent of influences upon Luther, whether they originate from

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[51] E.g., WATr 2.526, "Staupicius hat die doctrinam angefangen"; WATr 1.173, "Ex Erasmo nihil habeo. Ich hab al mein ding von Doctor Staupitz; der hatt mir occasionem geben." It is possible that Luther is merely referring to the fact that his theological breakthrough came about as a consequence of the biblical studies he was forced to undertake through Staupitz's insistence that he earn his doctor's cap: cf. WATr 1.885; 4.3924; 4.4091; 5.5371.

[52] D.C. Steinmetz, *Luther and Staupitz: An Essay in the Intellectual Origins of the Reformation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1980), pp. 3–34.

[53] This letter is reprinted in T. Kolde, *Die deutsche Augustiner-Congregation und Johannes von Staupitz* (Gotha: Perthes, 1879), pp. 446–447. In this letter, Staupitz refers to himself as *discipulus tuus*.

Staupitz or elsewhere: agreements between Luther and others simply cannot be interpreted uncritically as influence of these latter upon Luther, without additional supporting evidence.

Despite these difficulties, it is clearly of considerable interest to attempt an analysis of the influence of the Augustinian Order upon the development of Luther's *theologia crucis*. One possibility, which we shall consider in detail in the present chapter, is that there existed a "medieval Augustinian tradition" on justification, perhaps in the form of a "modern Augustinian school," which Luther encountered and fashioned into his own particular theology of justification. What is more certain is that Luther would have encountered both the humanist movement and the *via moderna* within the Augustinian Order itself, although in particular forms specific to the Erfurt or Wittenberg priories. Before pursuing this question further, however, it is appropriate to consider each of these three elements individually.

Humanism: The *studia humanitatis* at Wittenberg

Any discussion of the movement usually known as "humanism" must be prefaced by an attempt to clarify precisely what is meant by the term. The term *Humanismus* was coined in 1808 by the German educationalist F.J. Niethammer to express an emphasis upon the Greek and Latin classics in secondary education.[54] Niethammer felt that this emphasis was threatened by the growing demands for a more practical and scientific education for the youth of modern Germany. Since then, the term has developed a number of meanings. In its broadest sense, the term is generally understood to mean the common origins and unity of humanity, linked to an emphasis on the shaping of human mental and moral capacities through literary and philosophical education, and the

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[54] W. Rüegg, *Cicero und der Humanismus* (Zürich: Rhein-Verlag, 1946), pp. 1–4; A. Campana, "The Origin of the Word 'Humanist'," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 9 (1946), pp. 60–73.

recognition of the importance of love of humanity in general.[55] The term is also used in a narrow and polemical sense to designate a worldview which excludes reference to God – which would, of course, involve denying the term to most of the great humanists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, including Erasmus of Rotterdam.[56]

Humanism is widely regarded as the most distinctive characteristic of the Italian Renaissance. The term "humanism" is generally used to refer to the revival of classical studies associated with the Italian Renaissance,[57] and hence, by association, to other such movements in northern Europe. Humanism was a well-established transnational movement by the beginning of the sixteenth century, with a strong sense of its identity. In a careful study of the development of how the corporate identity of the German humanist movement was maintained in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Eckhard Bernstein noted how the movement deliberately cultivated a sense of identity and purpose, comparable to the idea of a religious vocation.[58] Humanists saw themselves as a new "lay order," with the potential to transform European culture, and realized the importance of consolidating the social and intellectual cohesion of the movement.

A number of strategies were devised with this objective in mind – for example, the adoption of Latin or Greek names as signs of having

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[55] As, for example, in J.L. Kraemer: *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The Cultural Revival during the Buyid Age* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986).

[56] This idea can be traced back to Jacob Burckhardt (1818–1897), who saw Italian humanism as an essentially secular movement. For the radical revision of this notion in more recent scholarship, see the review essay of F.C. Cesareo, "The Complex Nature of Catholicism in the Renaissance," *Renaissance Quarterly* 54 (2001), pp. 1561–1573.

[57] C.G. Nauert, *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edn, 2006).

[58] E. Bernstein, "From Outsiders to Insiders: Some Reflections on the Development of a Group Identity of the German Humanists between 1450 and 1530," in *In laudem Caroli: Renaissance and Reformation Studies for Charles G. Nauert*, ed. C.G. Nauert and J.V. Mehl (Kirksville, MO: Society for Sixteenth Century Studies, 1998), pp. 45–64.

been initiated within the "Republic of Letters,"[59] the emphasis upon Latin as the lingua franca of this community, the founding of sodalities, the elevation of the concept of friendship, and the ridicule of those seen as opponents of the movement (perhaps most notably scholastic theologians). In such ways, humanists transformed their perceived status within western culture from being outsiders to insiders, in turn marginalizing those whom they disliked through a rhetoric of scorn and exclusion. Yet the creation of social cohesion presupposes at least some degree of shared values and ideas. So what were the common features of this movement? What united individual humanists into a greater movement, transcending individuals and national boundaries?

It is clear that the humanism of the Renaissance was characterized by the general tendency of the age to attach great importance to classical studies, and, in particular, to consider classical antiquity as the common standard by which all cultural activities were to be judged, and the common norm on which they should be modeled. Renaissance humanism, it must be emphasized, was not a philosophical system, nor was it even characterized by certain philosophical tendencies: it was essentially a cultural program, which laid particular emphasis upon a specific genre of literary studies.

The scholarly understanding of the nature of humanism has undergone considerable change since the introduction of the term. It is widely agreed that the pioneering work of Paul Oskar Kristeller (1905–1999) was of seminal importance in rescuing the term "humanist" as a meaningful historical term. Scholars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries tended to interpret humanism within the categories of German idealism, regarding it as an historical abstraction which was to be interpreted in ideological terms – for example as a philosophy of individualism, as the birth of an historical

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[59] Thus Schwarzerd became *Melanchthon*; Köpfel, *Capito*; Fischer, *Piscator*; Müller, *Molitor*; and Hausschein, *Oecolampadius*. There are obvious parallels here with the initiation of monastic novices, where adopting a new name is seen as a token of becoming a member of a religious order and having died to former modes of life.

outlook, or even as a new philosophy of human nature. Kristeller's massive work on primary sources led him to challenge this stereotype and replace it with an understanding of humanism as a discipline (the so-called *studia humanitatis*) rather than as set of philosophical ideas.[60] He came to the conclusion that the humanists were "no philosophers at all," but better understood as teachers or students of the humanities (defined in the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as grammar, rhetoric, poetry, morals, and history). Kristeller's analysis is now widely accepted, even though it clearly needs modification at certain points.[61]

All the evidence we now possess indicates close links between humanism and the Italian universities,[62] and it is precisely this association which appears to have led to the introduction of the term *humanista*. In contemporary sources, this term is used to designate a professional teacher of the *studia humanitatis*, and appears to have been coined by analogy with *jurista*, *legista*, *artista*, etc., which were used to designate university teachers of the subjects in question. The *studia humanitatis* (or *studia humaniora*) was usually regarded as embracing the disciplines of grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and moral philosophy.[63] Further, as Kristeller has pointed out, the university chairs usually held by men associated with the humanist movement were those of grammar and rhetoric.[64] The humanist

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[60] See especially P.O. Kristeller, *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1956); idem, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanistic Strains* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961). For an assessment of the scholarly evidence that led him to these conclusions, see J. Monfasani, "Toward the Genesis of the Kristeller Thesis of Renaissance Humanism: Four Bibliographical Notes," *Renaissance Quarterly* 53 (2000), pp. 1156–1173.

[61] For the best analysis, see J. Monfasani, ed., *Kristeller Reconsidered: Essays on His Life and Scholarship* (New York: Italica Press, 2006).

[62] See further P.F. Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), pp. 199–248.

[63] See C. Trinkaus, "A Humanist's Image of Humanism. The Inaugural Orations of Bartolommeo della Fonte," *Studies in the Renaissance* 7 (1960), pp. 90–147.

[64] P.O. Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources* (New York, 1979), p. 97. For an assessment of Kristeller's highly influential approach to defining humanism, see Monfasani, *Kristeller Reconsidered*.

movement did not originate in the fields of philosophical or scientific studies, but in the totally distinct and quite unrelated areas of grammatical and rhetorical studies. The humanists continued the earlier medieval tradition in these latter areas, but gave the received tradition a new sense of direction by pointing to classical standards as the end to be achieved, and classical studies as the means by which this end should be pursued. Far from being a philosophy or worldview, humanism is better seen as the "pursuit of eloquence" through the study of the humanities, informed particularly by models deriving from the classical age.[65]

This point is of particular importance in relation to two frequently encountered interpretations of the nature and significance of the humanist movement. According to the first of these, humanism was a movement devoted to classical scholarship and philology. There is, of course, no doubt that such scholarship was a hallmark of Renaissance humanism; nevertheless, it must be pointed out that such scholarship was not regarded as an end in itself, but the means to another end. The further question of *why* the humanists wished to study the classical period cannot be evaded. It may reasonably be pointed out that the writings of the humanists that are devoted to exhibiting or encouraging written or spoken eloquence far exceed in number those devoted to classical scholarship. This interpretation cannot adequately explain the great emphasis upon the *ars dictamini* and *ars arengandi* within contemporary humanist circles.[66] It seems that the humanists of the fifteenth century were first and foremost professional rhetoricians who turned to the classical world of antiquity for inspiration and instruction from acknowledged masters of the past, and were *thence* obliged to study classical literature and philology as

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[65] For recent studies, see C.G. Nauert, *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); R. Witt, *"In the Footsteps of the Ancients": The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

[66] For the documentary evidence, see E.J. Polak, *Medieval and Renaissance Letter Treatises and Form Letters*, 2 vols (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993–1994.)

a means to that end.[67] The rhetorical concerns of the humanists were of paramount importance to them, and their classical learning incidental to them.

The second interpretation of humanism is considerably more ambitious, and correspondingly less convincing. According to this interpretation, humanism was the new philosophy of the Renaissance, which arose in conscious opposition to the scholasticism of the previous period. Historians of western thought have often asserted that the Renaissance was essentially an age of Platonism (whether of Augustinian or neo-Platonist origins), which stood in contrast to the Aristotelianism of the earlier medieval period.[68] This view of humanism cannot be sustained, for a number of reasons. It cannot account for the stubborn persistence of scholastic philosophy during the Italian Renaissance, such as the Aristotelianism associated with Pomponazzi and Zabarella.[69] Furthermore, most Italian humanists showed little interest in philosophical matters in the first place. Thus Cicero was studied as an orator, and not as a philosopher.[70] The wide spectrum of philosophical affinities evident within Italian humanism of the *Quattrocento* is ultimately a reflection of the inescapable fact that philosophical matters were of purely incidental interest to the humanists, whose real interests lay elsewhere.

In dealing with humanism as it influenced or affected Luther, we are primarily concerned with northern European humanism, and its

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[67] E.g., see H.H. Gray, "Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence," in *Renaissance Essays*, ed. P. O. Kristeller and P.P. Wiener (New York: University of Rochester Press, 1992), pp. 199–216. This is *not* to say that humanism made no contribution to philosophy or theology: it is simply to say that the humanists were *primarily* concerned with cultural issues and norms.

[68] S. Gersh, "The Medieval Legacy from Ancient Platonism," in *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages*: *A Doxographic Approach*, ed. S. Gersh and M.J.F.M. Hoenen (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), pp. 3–30.

[69] See E. Garin, "Le traduzioni umanistische di Aristotele nel secolo XV," *Atti e Memorie dell' Accademia Fiorentini di Scienze Morali "La Colombaria"* 16 (1951), pp. 55–104; P.O. Kristeller, "Renaissance Aristotelianism," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 6 (1965), pp. 157–174.

[70] V. Cox and J.O. Ward, *The Rhetoric of Cicero in Its Medieval and Early Renaissance Commentary Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

influence upon the universities of Erfurt and Wittenberg.[71] The question of the origins of German humanism has been one of the most contentious issues in Renaissance scholarship, far surpassing in this respect the related question of its influence upon Luther. It is possible to summarize the available evidence on this former question as follows: although indigenous factors did much to promote and sustain the development of northern European humanism, it is clear that the influence of Italian humanism was of decisive importance at every stage in that development. German interest in, knowledge of, and respect for classical culture and philosophy was largely engendered by the diffusion of Italian humanism north of the Alps.

It is now generally recognized that there were three main channels by which the ideas and values of Italian humanism migrated north of the Alps:[72] First, through the exchange of persons, such as northern European students who studied in Italy before returning home to take up positions of responsibility. Christoph Scheurl is an excellent example of this phenomenon, as it was encountered at Wittenberg. Secondly, through the foreign correspondence of the Italian humanists. The great humanist concern for written, as well as spoken, eloquence led to epistolography assuming the status of an art form, a suitable vehicle for spreading the ideals of humanism abroad. The full extent of this foreign correspondence is only now becoming apparent, as the task of cataloguing and analyzing humanist manuscripts contained in libraries throughout Europe continues. Thirdly, through manuscripts and printed books. An astonishing number of humanist manuscripts found their way north of the Alps, a trend which became even more marked with the introduction of printing. The related practice of dedicating manuscripts or books to wealthy northern patrons greatly assisted in this diffusion. The library at Wittenberg is known to have contained numerous humanist works of this type, frequently dedicated to Frederick the Wise himself.

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[71] For discussion, see A.E. McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2nd edn, 2003), pp. 34–66.
[72] See the classic discussion in P.O. Kristeller, "The European Diffusion of Italian Humanism," *Italica* 39 (1962), pp. 1–20.

It is therefore of particular interest to observe that the most influential humanist writing in circulation in northern Europe during the first decades of the sixteenth century was unquestionably the *Enchiridion Militis Christiani* of Erasmus of Rotterdam, an indigenous product of northern Europe.[73] This work stands in the sharpest of contrasts to the scholasticism of later medieval theology in general. Its thesis, like that of many of Erasmus's early writings, was that the contemporary decay of the church could be remedied by a corporate return *ad fontes* to scripture and the early writings of the fathers. Although the *Enchiridion* appears to have received a cool response initially, it seems to have become astonishingly popular in the years after 1515. In the first 12 years of its existence (1503–1514), it was reprinted only once (1509); in the following six years, it was reprinted 24 times, and translated into several living languages. Erasmus knew that to command the printing presses of Europe was, in effect, to command the intellectual élite of Europe – a fact which Luther would exploit in the period around the Leipzig disputation, when demand for his works became near-insatiable. The proliferation of vernacular editions of the *Enchiridion* indicates how deep a chord of sympathy was struck by Erasmian ideals at the time.

In a prefatory epistle, written in 1518 to Paul Volz, a monastic reformer, Erasmus indicated that his intention in publishing the *Enchiridion* was to provide a simple and yet learned *philosophia Christi* for the educated layman.[74] Erasmus directed most of his criticism against scholastic theologians toward the specialized theological language they used, which made their writings unintelligible to the layman. Indeed, it is a hallmark of Erasmus's criticism of scholastic theologians that their verbal formulations are singled out as being of

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[73] See R. Stupperich, "Das Enchiridion Militis Christiani des Erasmus von Rotterdam nach seiner Entstehung, Charakter und Sinn," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 69 (1978), pp. 5–23; A.M. O'Donnell, "Rhetoric and Style in Erasmus' 'Enchiridion militis Christiani'," *Studies in Philology* 77 (1980), pp. 26–49.

[74] P.S. Allen, *Opus Epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, 12 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1906–1958), vol. 3, Letter No. 858.

greater importance than the actual theological substance of these formulations.

In the *Enchiridion*, Erasmus lays great emphasis upon the need to study the scriptures incessantly, and to read commentaries upon them written by the fathers, rather than the schoolmen, as the former were much closer in time to the sources of doctrine than the latter. In general, Erasmus's interest in scripture and the fathers reflects the general humanist desire to return to antiquity, rather than any profound skepticism concerning the orthodoxy of later medieval theology.[75] Although his personal creed remains elusive, Erasmus's method is clear: the Christian church must return to her sources, and break free from the scholasticism which so addled her of late.

With this end in mind, Erasmus himself undertook extensive editorial work, including the publication of the *Novum Instrumentum omne* in 1516. This work not only included the full Greek text of the New Testament, but also a new Latin translation which diverged from that of the Vulgate at points of potential theological significance, along with extensive notes justifying these alterations.[76] Erasmus here drew upon the earlier textual work of the Italian humanist Lorenzo Valla.[77] Yet Erasmus's contribution to the emergence of the Reformation arguably lies as much in his editions of patristic writers as his edition and translation of the New Testament.

Erasmus's editions of patristic texts were notable in two respects. The first is their accuracy and comprehensiveness, which made

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[75] See the discussion in L. Grane, A. Schindler, and M. Wriedt, eds, *Auctoritas Patrum: Zur Rezeption der Kirchenväter im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1993).

[76] For the origins of the Vulgate and its textual history, see P.-M. Bogaert, "La Bible latine des origines au Moyen Âge. Aperçu historique, état des questions," *Revue théologique de Louvain* 19 (1988), pp. 137–154; 276–314.

[77] C.S. Celenza, "Renaissance Humanism and the New Testament: Lorenzo Valla's Annotations to the Vulgate," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 24 (1994), pp. 33–52.

them indispensable to scholars. It is, however, the second respect which particularly claims our attention: the works of St Augustine were not given any pride of place among these texts.[78] This reflects Erasmus's marked preference for Jerome, whom he regarded as the essential embodiment of the ideals of the Renaissance. In a letter of May 21, 1515 to Leo X, Erasmus declared his intention to encourage the re-emergence of Jerome as *the* Christian theologian. As early as that year, Erasmus had defined Jerome, not Augustine, as *summus theologus*.[79] The publication of an edition of Jerome's works which incorporated subtle editorial changes to certain of his writings represented Erasmus's contribution toward both establishing his theological hegemony and redirecting his interpretation.[80] It is often suggested that the western theological tradition is essentially an extended commentary upon the works of St Augustine, particularly with respect to the theological renaissance of the twelfth century. Erasmus effectively called this foundation into question with his predilection for *noster Hieronymus*. The humanist concern for accurate texts was thus not without its theological overtones.

Other humanists, however, had no doubt of the importance of Augustine. The great 11-volume Amerbach edition of Augustine's works, completed on January 22, 1506, is rightly regarded as a landmark in Augustine reception in the west.[81] Augustine was widely seen as articulating a fundamental consensus within western

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[78] For the reception of Augustine in general, see E.L. Saak, "The Reception of Augustine in the Later Middle Ages," in *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West from the Carolingians to the Maurists*, ed. I. Backus (Leiden: Brill, 1997), vol. 1, pp. 367–404.

[79] H.A. Oberman, *Werden und Wertung der Reformation*, pp. 93–95. Oberman's criticism of C. Béné, *Erasme et Saint Augustin ou l'influence de Saint Augustin sur le humanisme d'Erasme* (Geneva: Droz, 1969) is extremely valuable: p. 95, n. 50.

[80] H.M. Pabel, *Herculean Labours: Erasmus and the Editing of St. Jerome's Letters in the Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

[81] This text was published by Johann Amerbach, in collaboration with Johann Froben and Johann Petri. See B.C. Halporn, *The Correspondence of Johann Amerbach: Early Printing in Its Social Context* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2000), pp. 315–333.

Christianity, which could serve as the basis for a reformed Christendom.[82] The importance of the increasing availability of editions of the works of St Augustine to the development of the Reformation at Wittenberg may be illustrated with reference to the career of Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, initially opposed to Luther, and later one of his fiercest defenders. On September 25, 1516 Luther presided over a disputation on the occasion of the promotion of Bartholomäus Bernhardi of Feldkirch, in Schwabia, to the degree of Bachelor of Divinity.[83] Normally Karlstadt, as the dean of the faculty of theology, should have been in the chair: for reasons we do not know, his place was taken on this occasion by Luther. In the course of this disputation, Luther's protégé sharply attacked the teaching that human beings could fulfill the commandments of God by their own reason and strength. This outraged Karlstadt and his Thomist colleague Peter Lupinus (both of whom were present), who refused to believe that Augustine could countenance such a teaching.[84]

On January 13, 1517 Karlstadt set out for Leipzig, determined to equip himself with a copy of Augustine's works in order to refute Luther's claims. The point we wish to make, incidentally, is the long delay occasioned by the absence of readily available editions of Augustine's works, with reference to which Karlstadt could have settled the matter on the spot. The edition which Karlstadt finally managed to purchase (probably the Paris edition of 1515) appears to have convinced him that Luther was indeed right: on April 26 of that year, he defended 151 theses which he had posted on the door of the castle church at Wittenberg. These theses were thoroughly Augustinian in their outlook, and included many already associated with

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[82] Many humanists went further, regarding Augustine's views on language as essential to their literary projects: see, for example, the points made by C.E. Quillen, *Rereading the Renaissance: Petrarch, Augustine, and the Language of Humanism* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998), pp. 19–63.

[83] As Luther made clear, these theses represented his own position: WABr 1.65.18.

[84] WABr 1.65.29–66.1, "At illos implacabiliter offendit, praecipue Doctorem Carlstadium, quod haec sciens negare audeam." It was at this dispute that Luther further outraged Karlstadt by denying that the treatise *de vera et falsa poenitentia* was written by Augustine: WABr 1.65.24–25.

the name of Martin Luther. It is therefore possible to argue that any delay in initiating a reforming program at Wittenberg was partly due to the absence of readily available editions of the works of St Augustine, so that the *vera theologia* could be verified as essentially Augustinian in provenance.

After his enthusiastic discovery of Augustine, Karlstadt lectured to the university on Augustine's *de spiritu et littera*, and took particular delight in pointing out how students now had direct access to the Bible and editions of the fathers:[85] "I congratulate you, fellow-students, that the truth of sacred letters once more shines in our university ... Rejoice that you may hear, learn and understand the true Bible from doctors of the church and from the bible itself, not from the schoolmen or from vanities." Although Karlstadt may be excused for failing to mention it, we must emphasize that the accessibility of the printed text of the Bible and the fathers was almost totally due to the efforts of the humanists. Similarly, the revival in the study of biblical languages, of decisive importance to the Reformation, was nearly totally due to the activity of humanist scholars.

The revival of the study of Hebrew and Greek in Germany is particularly associated with Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522). Although his epitaph exaggerates somewhat when it credits him with having rescued the Hebrew and Greek languages from oblivion,[86] there is no doubt that Reuchlin did much to pave the way for the direct use of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament in biblical exegesis. It may also be noted in passing that Reuchlin illustrates the darker side of humanism: although the movement is usually regarded as encapsulating the higher ideals of humanity, its darker and irrational side can be seen from Reuchlin's obsession with the

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[85] Kähler, *Karlstadt und Augustin*, 9.29–10.5.

[86] *Johannes Reuchlins Briefwechsel*, ed. L. Geiger (Tübingen: Literarischer Verein, 1875), p. 363: "Musas elegantores ... restituit ac hebraicam simul et grecam linguam ab inheritu reduxit ..." For knowledge of Hebrew in western Europe at this time, see C. Zürcher, *Konrad Pellikans Wirken in Zürich 1526–1556* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1975), pp. 153–236; T. Willi, "Der Beitrag des Hebräischen zum Werden der Reformation in Basel," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 35 (1979), pp. 139–154.

cabala, although it is probably better illustrated by the widespread fascination occasioned by the Faust legend.[87]

The first guide to the Hebrew language to be published in northern Europe was Konrad Pellikan's *de modo legendi et intelligendi Hebraeum*, published at Strassburg in 1504, although written several years earlier. This work, a mere 20 pages in length, consisted of a basic Hebrew grammar, a selection of passages for reading and translation, and a brief lexicon.[88] It was superseded by Reuchlin's *de rudimentis Hebraicis*, published in 1506, which was later supplemented by his edition of the seven penitential psalms, published in 1512. The humanist movement thus provided Luther with the tools which he required for his biblical studies, and he appears to have made the most of them.[89]

Luther's knowledge and use of the Hebrew language over the period 1509–1519 has been the subject of intense scrutiny.[90] Although Luther appears to have had initial difficulties with the language, these do not appear to have prevented him from using the Hebrew text of the Old Testament with increasing facility and skill, culminating in his second course of lectures on the Psalter. Luther had purchased Reuchlin's textbook de rudimentis at Erfurt shortly before moving to Wittenberg for the first time, and references to this work can be detected in the *Randbemerkungen* of 1509–1510. On the basis of an exhaustive analysis of this work, Sigmund Raeder

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[87] D. Harmening, "Faust und die Renaissance-Magie: Zum ältesten Faust-Zeugnis (Johannes Trithemius an Johannes Virdung, 1507)," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 55 (1973), pp. 56–79.

[88] S. Raeder, *Die Benutzung des masoretischen Textes bei Luther in der Zeit zwischen der ersten und zweiten Psalmenvorlesung* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1967), pp. 2–3.

[89] Luther's 1517 edition of the "Seven Penitential Psalms" is of interest here, along with the later revisions he made to his text in the light of his improved knowledge of Hebrew: see J.R. Seiling, "The 'Radical' Revisions of the Commentary on the Seven Penitential Psalms: Luther and His 'Enemies' (1517–1525)," *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 8 (2006), pp. 28–47.

[90] See S. Raeder, *Das Hebräische bei Luther untersucht bis zum Ende der ersten Psalmenvorlesung* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1961); idem, *Die Benutzung des masoretischen Textes*; idem, *Grammatica Theologica: Studien zu Luthers Operationes in Psalmos* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1977).

concluded that Luther must have worked his way through the vast bulk of Reuchlin's text.[91]

It is also clear that Luther made extensive use of Lefèvre d'Etaples' *Psalterium Quincuplex* of 1509 during the course of the *Dictata super Psalterium* of 1513–1515.[92] The theological significance of a good knowledge of Hebrew in relation to the doctrine of justification will be considered further in Chapter 4. It may, however, be noted at this point that Luther did not appear to possess such a knowledge as he began to expound the Psalter for the first time in 1513. By the time of the Romans lectures of 1515–1516, it is clear that his knowledge of Hebrew has improved, and he occasionally shows first-hand knowledge of the original Hebrew texts of the Old Testament in connection with passages of theological significance – for example, Romans 4.18.[93] It is probably during the course of these lectures that we find Luther most dependent upon humanist biblical scholarship and philology: not only is he dependent upon humanist learning for his knowledge of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, but his knowledge of the Greek text of the New Testament derives from Lefèvre d'Etaples' *Epistola Divi Pauli* of 1512, which contained sections of the Greek text, and Erasmus's *Novum Instrumentum omne* of 1516, once this appeared.[94] Luther's use of the biblical languages, especially Hebrew, is generally considered to be seen at its best in the Hebrews lectures of 1517–1518.

By late 1518, the influence of humanism at Wittenberg was probably at its peak. Earlier, Luther had written to Johannes Lang in near ecstasy over the changes which he had seen taking place at Wittenberg:[95]

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[91] Raeder, *Das Hebräische bei Luther*, pp. 62–63. Raeder further observes that Luther does not appear to have understood Reuchlin correctly at every point: pp. 59–60.

[92] Raeder, *Das Hebräische bei Luther*, pp. 3–4.

[93] Raeder, *Die Benutzung des masoretischen Textes*, pp. 12–19.

[94] Raeder, *Die Benutzung des masoretischen Textes*, pp. 19–22.

[95] WABr 1.99.8–13. Luther's relationship to Aristotle is more complex than is usually appreciated, although his critique of Aristotle's doctrine of virtue is particularly significant: see T. Dieter, *Der junge Luther und Aristoteles: Eine historisch-systematische Untersuchung zum Verhältnis von Theologie und Philosophie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), pp. 149–251.

> Our theology and St Augustine prosper and, by the work of God, reign
> in our university. Aristotle is in continual decline, perhaps to his
> future permanent ruin. Lectures on the *Sentences* are treated with
> disdain, and nobody can hope for an audience unless they put forward
> this theology, that is, the bible or St Augustine, or some other doctor of
> authority in the church.

Further developments took place in March 1518. When Karlstadt
was won over to the *theologia nova* in early 1517, his influence and
status were such that the entire theology faculty at Wittenberg now
found itself becoming increasingly committed to the program of
theological reform. The priorities of the *vera theologia* were such that
adjustments were required to the university curriculum to accom-
modate this new emphasis upon the Bible and St Augustine.

In March 1518, a conference took place at Karlstadt's lodgings at
which the nature and extent of these adjustments were decided.[96]
Luther reported these alterations as including the introduction of
lectures on Greek and Hebrew, and the abandonment of lectures on
Petrus Hispanicus and Aristotle.[97] In essence, these reforms were
humanist in nature, similar to those already being put into effect at
other European universities at the time, such as Vienna. In terms of
their *motivation*, however, the reforms reflected the theological basis
of the *vera theologia* – the Bible and patristic writers, especially St
Augustine. There were, of course, those who thought they saw the
spirit of the Italian Renaissance in the reforms then taking place
within the theological faculty at Wittenberg, and were thus attracted
there to teach. Their somewhat unfortunate experience serves to
illustrate that the *studia humanitatis* within that faculty was merely a
means for the promotion of the *vera theologia*, rather than an end in itself.

This point is well demonstrated by the brief appearance of
Johannes Böschenstein at Wittenberg in November 1518. Contem-
porary sources indicate that Böschenstein was a typical Renaissance
man of letters, who saw the Hebrew language as an end in itself, and

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[96] WABr 1.153.3–154.1.
[97] WABr 1.155.41–45.

was quite unsympathetic toward those who saw Hebrew as nothing more than a tool for the study of the scriptures. "As if we wanted to turn out orators for the Jews!"[98] Luther's sarcastic comment concerning Böschenstein's motives for teaching Hebrew gives us an invaluable insight into the real reasons for the new emphasis on the *studia humanitatis* at Wittenberg.[99]

By the time of the Leipzig disputation of 1519, it was clear that there were considerable affinities between Luther and the humanist movement, although these affinities often masked profound differences between them.[100] The following points of affinity may be noted:

Firstly, their mutual rejection of scholasticism. For the humanists, the scholastic theologians had made theology unintelligible by their use of arcane language and terms: a *simpler* theology was required. For Luther, the scholastics were perfectly intelligible, but their theology was unacceptable: a *reformation of doctrine* was required.

Secondly, their mutual desire to return to the early fathers of the church. Melanchthon saw the Leipzig disputation as a conflict between the early church and Aristotle,[101] a view which appears to have been common in humanist circles. For the humanists, the early

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[98] WABr 1.288.34. See WABr 1.298 n. 3 for useful background material. Böschenstein's *Hebraicae grammaticae institutiones* was published at Wittenberg in 1519.

[99] The fate of Mosellanus in this respect is instructive: U.M. Kremer, "Mosellanus: Humanist zwischen Kirche und Reformation," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 73 (1982), pp. 20–34.

[100] See B. Moeller, "Die deutschen Humanisten und die Anfänge der Reformation," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 70 (1959), pp. 46–61. The older opinion that the humanists would have nothing to do with Luther until after the Leipzig disputation of 1519 cannot be sustained. In 1518 Bucer remarked that Luther and Erasmus were in agreement on everything, except that Luther made explicit what Erasmus merely hinted at: *Die Reformation in Augenzeugenberichten*, ed. H. Junghans (Munich: Kaiser, 1967), pp. 214–238, especially pp. 214–215. Later, Bucer appears to have become aware of the divergence of opinion between Luther and Erasmus: F. Krüger, *Bucer und Erasmus: Eine Untersuchung zum Einfluß des Erasmus auf die Theologie Martin Bucers* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1970). This awareness thus passes into his doctrine of justification, which is more moralist and pietist in character than Luther's: A.E. McGrath, "Humanist Elements in the Early Reformed Doctrine of Justification," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 73 (1982), pp. 5–20, especially pp. 10–14.

[101] Moeller, *Die deutschen Humanisten*, p. 53.

fathers represented a simple, comprehensible form of Christianity, made respectable by their antiquity, which avoided the pointless speculation and unintelligible Latin of the scholastics. For Luther, the fathers stood for a form of Christianity which had since become corrupted by the accretions and distortions of the medieval period. If the church was to be reformed, a purer form of doctrine was required, and this was to be found in the writings of the fathers. An evident point of difference between the humanists, especially Erasmus, and Luther relates to the perceived status of Augustine. For the humanists in general, the early fathers represented a corporate understanding of the Christian faith: as the authority of the fathers rested in their *antiquity*, none could be regarded as pre-eminent, although it is necessary to note Erasmus's predilection for Jerome as *summus theologus* in this respect. The Wittenberg theology faculty as a whole regarded Augustine as pre-eminent among the fathers, on the basis of the *nature of his theology*, which they regarded, at least initially, as the most faithful to scripture. The thoroughly Augustinian cast of the *vera theologia* at Wittenberg is one of its most characteristic features in the years 1517–1519.

Thirdly, their mutual desire to return to Holy Scripture. The humanists respected scripture on account of its simplicity and antiquity, and interpreted the phrase *sola scriptura* in an inclusive sense, meaning "not without scripture," thus permitting other sources of antiquity to be regarded as authoritative in some meaningful sense of the term. For Luther, scripture was to be respected because through it the theologian had access to the Word of God: the phrase *sola scriptura* was to be interpreted in an exclusive sense, meaning "through scripture, and *through scripture alone*."[102]

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[102] Moeller, *Die deutschen Humanisten*, p. 54. It may be pointed out that it is Karlstadt, rather than Luther, who is associated with the enunciation of the *sola scriptura* principle, which later became the programmatic basis of the Zürich Reformation: see B. Moeller, "Zwinglis Disputationen. Studien zu den Anfängen der Kirchenbildung und des Synodalwesens im Protestantismus," *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte*, Kan. Abt. 56 (1970), pp. 275–324; 60 (1974), pp. 213–364. See further Moeller's later study, "Die Ursprünge der reformierten Kirche," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 100 (1975), pp. 642–653.

Fourthly, their mutual interest in rhetoric. This affinity has only been fully recognized recently.[103] The great humanist emphasis upon eloquence was carried over into the Reformation, through the medium of preaching. The new emphasis upon the preaching of the Word of God, which is characteristic of the Reformation as a whole, led to intense interest on the part of the Reformers in the rhetorical arts. Whereas the humanists regarded eloquence, whether written or spoken, as an end in itself, the Reformers saw such eloquence as an invaluable means to an even greater end – the proclamation of the Word of God.[104] Throughout his life, Luther maintained a highly positive and appreciative attitude to both rhetoric and a theory of language,[105] which he frequently contrasted with the dull dialectic of scholasticism. If the method of dialectic lay at the heart of later medieval theology, that of rhetoric lay close to the heart of the new theology which was being forged at Wittenberg during the second decade of the sixteenth century.

It is clear that the influence of the humanist movement upon the theological development of the Reformation in general, and of the young Luther in particular, was considerable.[106] In the case of Luther, however, this influence relates primarily to the means by which this development took place, rather than to the substance of that development. Without access to the biblical texts in their original languages, without a working knowledge of those languages, and

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[103] W.J. Bouwsma, "Renaissance and Reformation: An Essay in Their Affinities and Connections," in *Luther and the Dawn of the Modern Era. Papers for the Fourth International Congress for Luther Research*, ed. H.A. Oberman (Leiden: Brill, 1974), pp. 127–149.

[104] Note the points in G.W. Locher, "Praedicatio verbi Dei est verbum Dei: Heinrich Bullinger zwischen Luther und Zwingli: Ein Beitrag zu seiner Theologie," *Zwingliana* 10 (1954), pp. 47–57.

[105] See A. Beutel, *In dem Anfang war das Wort: Studien zu Luthers Sprachverständnis* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1991); S. Dähn, *Rede als Text: Rhetorik und Stilistik in Luthers Sakramentssermonen von 1519* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1997).

[106] Moeller, *Die deutschen Humanisten*, p. 59: "Ohne Humanismus, keine Reformation."

without access to the works of St Augustine, the Reformation could never have begun; without the support of the humanists during the fateful period after the Leipzig disputation, the Reformation could never have survived its first years; without attracting leading humanists, such as Melanchthon, Bucer, and Calvin, and without the rhetorical skills to proclaim the new theology and the pedagogical skills to teach it,[107] the Reformation could never have been perpetuated.

In all these respects, the Reformation owed its very existence to the humanist movement. Furthermore, the influence of humanism upon the social and political theology of the churches of the Reformation is universally recognized to be considerable. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Luther exploited the humanist movement for his own ends. While other reformers, such as Melanchthon, maintained cordial links with the movement, Luther distanced himself from it, until he finally broke what links he still had with the movement by publicly criticizing Erasmus in the 1525 treatise *de servo arbitrio*.[108] When considered in relation to its *substance* over the period 1517–1519, the *vera theologia* can be seen to have owed little to humanism; it is therefore somewhat ironical that the Reformation in general, and Luther's theological development in particular, owed so much to *studia humanitatis*.

But what of the relation between Luther and the origins of the Reformation, considered as a broader movement? The relationship between the *initia Lutheri theologiae* and the *initia Reformationis* is notoriously complex,[109] so that what may be true of Luther's *personal* theological development is not necessarily true of that of the Reformation as a whole. Nevertheless, it seems to us that the humanist

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[107] On this specific point, see C. Luke, *Pedagogy, Printing and Protestantism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1989), pp. 83–132.

[108] G. Ebeling, *Luther: Einführung in sein Denken* (Tübingen: Mohr, 5th edn, 2006), pp. 239–258.

[109] For discussion, see A.E. McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2nd edn, 2003), pp. 1–8.

movement can only be seen as the *essential catalyst* for the Reformation, rather than its *cause*. For Luther, the provision of this catalyst was nothing less than providential: God had provided *die Sprachen* through which the Reformation might come about. Nevertheless, the fact remains that, in the formative period under consideration, both in *substance* and in *motivation*, Luther's theology cannot be regarded as characteristically humanist, despite the occasional resonances with typical humanist agendas. There are too many points, such as the doctrine of the *servum arbitrium*, at which Luther's theology must be regarded as diametrically opposed to the spirit of the humanist movement – thus occasioning considerable concern to the more humanist members of the evangelical faction, such as Philip Melanchthon.

Although the tension between the *vera theologia* and humanism would not become evident until the third decade of the sixteenth century, it was already latent within the nature of the young Luther's theological development, both in regard to its substance (for example, the nature of his early difficulties concerning the concept of the "righteousness of God," to be discussed in a later chapter) and its sources (for example, the tension over the status of St Augustine and Holy Scripture). If the *initia Reformationis* are seen to lie in the theological development of the young Luther over the period 1509–1519, we are forced to the following conclusion: *humanism did not father the Reformation – it merely acted as midwife at its birth*. Nevertheless, the precise causal relationship between the *initia theologiae Lutheri* and the *initia Reformationis* is now appreciated to be of such complexity that the riddle of the nature and extent of humanist influence upon the origins of the Reformation may ultimately have to be declared insoluble.

Nominalism: The *via moderna* at Wittenberg

As we have already noted, a sharp distinction began to develop during the later part of the fourteenth century between the realist

epistemology of the *via antiqua* and the nominalist epistemology of the *via moderna*.[110] Although it is correct to refer to the *via moderna* as "nominalist" in relation to its epistemology,[111] the term "nominalist" eventually came to acquire overtones for intellectual historians which far exceeded the somewhat restricted sphere of epistemology. By the middle of the twentieth century, the term "nominalist" had become not so much a *descriptive* as a *perjorative* designation of certain trends in the later Middle Ages. In its proper descriptive sense, the term referred to the denial of the existence of extra-mental universals (that is, "Terminism"); in its perjorative sense, the term referred to a variety of undesirable characteristics which were held to be associated with this denial, including (1) atomism, individualism, or particularism; (2) excessive emphasis upon the omnipotence of God; (3) voluntarism; (4) skepticism; (5) fideism.[112] Nominalism, on this view, was a fundamentally degenerative trend in late medieval thought, eroding the conceptual stability of the earlier Middle Ages, and opening the way to incoherence and fragmentation.

A number of seminal studies since then have made this understanding of "nominalism" quite untenable.[113] The publication of an ever-increasing number of treatises written by *moderni* has made it abundantly clear that a nominalist epistemology (that is, Terminism)

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[110] Ritter, *Via Antiqua und Via Moderna*, p. 17.

[111] There is, in fact, a problem associated with William of Ockham's "nominalism," which is probably better designated as "conceptual realism": G. Leff, *William of Ockham: The Metamorphosis of Scholastic Discourse* (Manchester, 1977), pp. 78–237. For the development of "Terminism" in the earlier medieval period, see L.M. de Rijk, *Logica Modernorum: A Contribution to the History of Early Terminist Logic*, 2 vols (Assen, 1962–1967).

[112] See works such as J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (London: Arnold, 1924); R.M. Torelló, "El Ockhamismo y la decadencia escolástica en el siglo XIV," *Pensamiento* 9 (1953), pp. 199–228; 11 (1955), pp. 171–188; 259–283. For critical comment, see W.J. Courtenay, "Nominalism and Late Medieval Religion," in *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion*, ed. C. Trinkaus and H.A. Oberman (Leiden: Brill, 1974), pp. 26–59; and especially Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, pp. 19–43.

[113] For a list of early challenges to the prevailing consensus, see W.J. Courtenay, "Nominalism and Late Medieval Thought: A Bibliographical Essay," *Theological Studies* 33 (1972), pp. 716–734.

can be associated with any one of an astonishing variety of theological positions, ranging from the ferocious anti-Pelagianism of Gregory of Rimini and Hugolino of Orvieto[114] to the more optimistic (but not, it must be emphasized, Pelagian) estimation of human nature associated with Robert Holcot and Gabriel Biel.[115] A work which played a particularly significant role in bringing about the current rejection of the term "nominalism" to refer to the theology of the *via moderna* was the seminal 1949 essay of Erich Hochstetter.[116] In this study, Hochstetter pointed out that the term "nominalist" was applied to the followers of William of Ockham by their opponents, and was therefore a polemical, rather than scholarly term. Since then, the phrase *via moderna* has gained general acceptance as the most suitable designation for the movement in question, which recognizes the theological and philosophical breadth of the movement while noting its shared assumptions, authorities, and history. This designation will therefore be employed throughout the present study.

During the past 50 years, considerable attention has been paid to the theological framework within which the theologians of the *via moderna* operated, especially their use of the dialectic between the two powers of God and the concept of covenantal causality, which are so characteristic of their doctrines of justification. In the present section, we propose to delineate the main features of the doctrines of justification associated with the *via moderna*, and consider the intensely debated question of whether such doctrines can be said to be "Pelagian."

The most convenient point from which to begin our discussion of such doctrines of justification is the use made by the *moderni* of the

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[114] M. Schüler, *Prädestination, Sünde und Freiheit bei Gregor von Rimini* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1934); A. Zumkeller, "Hugolino von Orvieto über Prädestination, Sünde und Verdienst," *Augustiniana* 4 (1954), pp. 109–156; 5 (1955), pp. 5–51.

[115] P. Molteni, *Roberto Holcot: Dottrina della grazia e della giustificazione* (Pinerola: Alzani, 1968); W. Ernst, *Gott und Mensch am Vorabend der Reformation. Eine Untersuchung zur Moralphilosophie und -theologie bei Gabriel Biel* (Leipzig: St Benno Verlag, 1972).

[116] E. Hochstetter, "Nominalismus?," *Franciscan Studies* 9 (1949), pp. 370–403.

dialectic between the two powers of God. This has been seriously misunderstood in the past,[117] and the present perpetuation of such misunderstandings is a serious obstacle to the correct appreciation of the nature of the theology of the *via moderna*. The distinction between the absolute and ordained powers of God had its origins in early scholasticism, with writers such as Peter Damien and Anselm of Canterbury. St Thomas Aquinas points out that while God is omnipotent, there are many things which God *could* do – but *chooses* not to do. From an initial set of possibilities, limited only by the condition that the outcome must not involve contradiction, God selected a subset for actualization. St Thomas emphasized that God could have selected a different set of possibilities for actualization; however, having now willed to actualize a particular subset of possibilities, God abides by that decision, so that the remaining subset of unwilled possibilities must be set aside as only hypothetically possible.[118] For early scholastic theology, the dialectic between the two powers of God was a convenient means of emphasizing the reliability of the present ecclesial and sacramental dispensation of salvation, without entailing that God was somehow obligated to adopt such an approach by external constraints.

God's absolute power (*potentia Dei absoluta*) refers to the initial set of possibilities open to God, while God's ordained power (*potentia Dei ordinata*) refers to the subset of possibilities which God determined to actualize. Thus God cannot be said to act out of absolute necessity (*necessitas consequentis*), in that God was free to select any desired possibilities subject to the sole condition of non-contradiction (that is, God is unable to construct a triangle with four sides). Nevertheless, having selected which possibilities to actualize, God

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[117] E.g., G.M. Manser, "Drei Zweifler auf dem Kausalitätsprinzip im XIV Jahrhundert," *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und spekulative Theologie* 27 (1912), pp. 291–305. A more recent misunderstanding is due to George Lindbeck, "Nominalism and the Problem of Meaning as Illustrated by Pierre d'Ailly on Predestination and Justification," *Harvard Theological Review* 52 (1959), pp. 43–60.

[118] *Summa Theologiae* 1a q. 25 a.5 c. See further L. Moonan, *Divine Power: The Medieval Power Distinction up to Its Adoption by Albert, Bonaventure and Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 229–295.

chooses to restrict the possibilities open for actualization as a voluntary (not externally constrained or imposed) act of self-limitation. God thus freely chooses to be faithful to a certain ordering or dispensation of salvation. The significance of the distinction between the two powers of God lies in the concept of necessity it articulates. God can thus be said to act *reliably*, without simultaneously asserting that God thus acts out of *necessity*.

The theologians of the *via moderna* used the dialectic between the two powers of God for several purposes, including the defense of the divine freedom in the face of philosophical determinisms, similar to the Averroism against which the device was originally employed.[119] Of these, one of the most important is the attack on the necessity of an infused habit of grace in justification. Although such theologians, particularly Pierre d'Ailly, are often accused of using the dialectic between the two powers of God to undermine the normal channels of justification, it is clear that this judgment cannot be sustained.[120] While the *moderni* upheld the de facto necessity of such habits in justification, they drew attention to the contingent nature of this necessity. Within the framework of God's absolute power, they emphasized that God was at liberty to justify humanity by other means than an infused habit of grace. Although the conditional or de facto necessity of such habits in justification was not called into question, it was stressed that the implication of such habits in justification was the result of the divine decision that they should be thus implicated, rather than because of any natural causal relationship between such habits and justification. Thus while Peter Aureole argued that there was a necessary connection between justification and the possession of a created habit of grace "by the very nature of things" (*ex natura rei*),[121] Ockham argued that no such

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[119] See M. Grabmann, *Der lateinische Averroismus des 13. Jahrhunderts und seine Stellung zur christlichen Weltanschauung* (Munich: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1931).

[120] E.g., W.J. Courtenay, "Covenant and Causality in Pierre d'Ailly," *Speculum* 46 (1971), pp. 94–119.

[121] See P. Vignaux, *Justification et prédestination au XIVe siècle* (Paris: Vrin, 1934), pp. 43–95.

natural connection existed: if the two were related causally, it was because God had ordained that they should be thus related. While Aureole's concept of causality was *ontological*, Ockham's was *covenantal*, and this distinction is of central importance to the theologies of justification associated with the *moderni*. We shall return to this point shortly.

Ockham's use of the dialectic between the two powers of God to demonstrate the radical contingency of created habits in the ordained means of divine acceptation, while not questioning their de facto necessity, was misunderstood at a very early stage. In 1326 a commission of six theologians censured 51 articles culled from Ockham's works. The verdict of this commission has had a considerable effect on modern estimations of Ockham, and the charges of Pelagianism still pressed against him ultimately derive from this fourteenth-century investigation. It has often been suspected that Ockham's condemnation was the consequence of personal malice;[122] it is obvious, however, that the condemnation is the consequence of theological incompetence. This conclusion may be drawn on the basis of the report of the *magistri* involved, which was discovered in MS Vat. lat. 3075.[123] The propositions which particularly concern us are those which are denounced as "Pelagian or worse":[124]

1. *De potentia sua absoluta*: God may accept as meritorious an individual's good use of their will by their purely natural powers.

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[122] C.K. Brampton, "Personalities at the Process against Ockham at Avignon 1324–26," *Franciscan Studies* 25 (1966), pp. 4–25.

[123] A. Pelzer, "Les 51 articles de Guillaume Occam censurés en Avignon en 1326," *Revue d'Histoire Ecclesiastique* 18 (1922), pp. 240–270. For a second version of this list, differing in numeration as well as content, see J. Koch, "Neue Aktenstücke zu demgegen Wilhelm Ockham in Avignon geführten Prozess," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 7 (1935), pp. 353–380; 8 (1936), pp. 79–93, 168–197.

[124] Pelzer, "Les 51 articles," p. 251: "Dicimus quod iste longus processus in predicto articulo contentus est erroneus et sapit Pelagianam vel peius." Cf. Ockham, *In I Sent.* dist. xvii q.2.

2. *De potentia absoluta*: God may accept someone as worthy of eternal life without their possessing a habit of grace, or damn them without their having sinned.
3. *De potentia absoluta*: God can remit sin without the infusion of grace.

These propositions are clearly meant to be understood as hypothetical possibilities *de potentia Dei absoluta*, and do not pertain de facto. However, the *magistri* declined to draw this conclusion, regarding the addition of the phrase "*de potentia Dei absoluta*" as quite irrelevant to the substance of the propositions.[125] It is quite clear that this is incorrect. Ockham merely exploits the tension between what is de facto and what might have been de possibili to demonstrate the radical contingency of the created order. Ockham insists that there is only one power within God[126] – in other words, that God is now committed to only one course of action, whatever the initial possibilities may have been. The charges of Pelagianism against Ockham can only be sustained if, and only if, it can be shown that the possibilities noted above are *present* possibilities – that is, possibilities which pertain *de potentia ordinata*. The inclusion of the phrase "*de potentia absoluta*" in each of the above propositions refers to *discarded hypothetical possibilities*. It is simply impossible to concur with the verdict of the six *magistri*: their condemnation of Ockham, however, demonstrates the caution which must be exercised in discussing the theologies of justification associated with the *via moderna*, if they are to be understood correctly.

Luther himself does not use the dialectic between the two powers of God to any significant extent, although, as we shall argue in the following chapter, he incorporates several consequences of its application into his early theology of justification. One such

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[125] Pelzer, "Les 51 articles," p. 252: "Nec excusari per illam addicionem, quam ponit: de potentia absoluta, quia argumentum suum eque procedit absque illa condicione sicut cum illa. Propositio autem quam assumit, est heretica et conclusio heretica."

[126] *Quodl.* VI q. 1. Cf. K. Bannach, *Die Lehre von der doppelten Machts Gottes bei Wilhelm von Ockham* (Wiesbaden, 1975).

consequence is the notion of a covenant (*pactum* or *testamentum*) between God and humanity, on the basis of which justification takes place.

The notion of covenantal causality

God willed to enter into a "covenant" or "contract" with humanity, and it is this *pactum* which constitutes the fulcrum about which the doctrines of justification associated with the *via moderna* turn.[127] As noted above, the theologians of the *via moderna* adopted a concept of causality which is *covenantal*, rather than *ontological*. According to this understanding of causality, one entity is related to another on the basis of an agreement between contracting parties, rather than on the basis of the entities themselves. Ockham illustrates this type of causality with reference to a small lead coin (*denarium plumbeum*).[128] Consider two different types of economic system. In the one, gold is used as the coinage, having a considerable inherent value in its own right, by its very nature, on the basis of which it is accepted and recognized as currency. In the other system, small lead coins are used, having negligible inherent value. Nevertheless, the king of the country in question, who issued these coins in the first place, has promised to redeem these coins at a much greater value, fixed by him, and on the basis of which they are accepted as currency *with this greater ascribed value*. A similar situation exists today, where paper money, with negligible inherent value, has a much greater ascribed

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[127] Heiko A. Oberman, "Wir sind pettler. Hoc est verum. Bund und Gnade in der Theologie des Mittelalters und Reformation," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 78 (1967), pp. 232–252; M. Greschat, "Der Bundesgedanke in der Theologie des späten Mittelalters," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 81 (1970), pp. 44–63; Courtenay, *Covenant and Causality*; B. Hamm, *Promissio, pactum, ordinatio: Freiheit und Selbstbindung Gottes in der scholastischen Gnadenlehre* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1977), pp. 355–390; McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, pp. 85–92, 150–158, 198–202.

[128] Ockham, *In IV Sent.* q.1 C: "... sicut si rex ordinaret quod quicumque acciperet denarium plumbeum haberet certum donum ..." For the background to this analogy, see W.J. Courtenay, "The King and the Leaden Coin: The Economic Background of 'sine qua non' Causality," *Traditio* 28 (1972), pp. 185–209.

value on account of the covenant made by the issuing agency (such as a bank) to pay the bearer a certain sum in gold on demand.

The two types of causality in question may therefore be illustrated with reference to these analogies as follows. The first corresponds to *ontological* causality, where gold coins purchase goods on account of their very nature, gold being inherently precious. The second corresponds to *covenantal* causality, in that the lead coins, which are inherently valueless, have a much greater value conferred upon them on account of the promise or covenant made by the king. The correlation between the coin and its value within the economic system thus rests upon the ordination of the king, which imposes a much greater ascribed value (*valor impositus*) upon the inherently worthless coin.

It is this principle which governs the thinking of the theologians of the *via moderna* on the causality of justification. Just as a major disparity can arise between the inherent value of a coin (*bonitas intrinseca*) and its ascribed value (*valor impositus*) within an economic system, given a firm and binding contract on the part of the issuing agency (the king or a bank), so a similar disparity can arise between the inherent moral value of human acts and their meritorious value, within the terms of the *pactum* between God and humanity. The *moderni* were able to maintain that human moral acts were inherently of little value on the one hand; yet also that they were nevertheless capable of meriting justification *de congruo* on the other, by using the device of the covenant between God and humanity, by virtue of which God had ordained to accept inherently worthless human moral actions as the means of justification. Thus the *moderni* were able to avoid exalting human works to Pelagian proportions (by insisting that their inherent value was negligible), while still allowing them to bring about justification (by insisting that their ascribed value, under the terms of the *pactum*, was substantially greater, as a result of God's graciousness and generosity). Any possibility that God was to be considered whimsical or capricious with individuals in this matter was pre-empted by insisting that a reliable transvaluative framework was established, which applied equally to all.

The principle of covenantal causality can be seen clearly in the writings of such *moderni* as Ockham,[129] Robert Holcot,[130] Marsilius of Inghen,[131] Pierre d'Ailly,[132] and Gabriel Biel.[133] The particular significance of the *pactum* to our study lies in relation to the interpretation of the celebrated medieval axiom, *facienti quod in se est, Deus non denegat gratiam* – which is probably best translated as "God does not deny grace to those who do their best." For the *moderni*, this meant that God had ordained that the gift of justifying grace was conditional upon a particular response on the part of individual human beings – and once that condition was met, the bestowal of grace followed as a matter of necessity (although it is a *conditional*, not an *absolute*, necessity). As we shall show in the following chapter, the leading themes of this federal theology found their way into the young Luther's discussion of what humanity must do to be justified before God.

The theologies of justification associated with the *via moderna* have frequently been stigmatized as "Pelagian" or "semi-Pelagian." This possibility can only be maintained through the use of later definitions of terms such as "Pelagianism" which were unknown to the fifteenth century.[134] The *pactum* effectively expresses the general medieval conviction that human beings have a positive, although strictly limited, part to play in their own justification, and places this

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[129] *In III Sent.* q. 8 S: "Deus ordinavit, quod aliquando aliquis diligit eum super omnia, quod tunc mereatur habere caritatem infusam et deus sibi infundit."

[130] *(Lectiones) Super Libros Sapientiae* (Hagenau, 1494), lect. 145B: "Sed statuta lege necessario dat gratiam necessitate consequentiae." See H.A. Oberman, "*Facientibus quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam*: Robert Holcot O.P. and the Beginnings of Luther's Theology," *Harvard Theological Review* 55 (1962), pp. 317–342.

[131] *In II Sent.* q. 18 a.3 concl. 2: "Quamvis homo in statu integrae non potuerit gratiam mereri de condigno, potuit tamen ex dispositione dei mereri hanc de congruo."

[132] Courtenay, *Covenant and Causality*, pp. 102–110.

[133] Oberman, *Harvest of Medieval Theology*, pp. 131–145; 160–183.

[134] We have argued this point contra Oberman inter alia: A.E. McGrath, "The Anti-Pelagian Structure of 'Nominalist' Doctrines of Justification," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 57 (1981), pp. 107–119. For the problems in defining "heresy" in general, and "Pelagianism" in particular, see A.E. McGrath, *Heresy* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009), especially pp. 159–170.

conviction on a firmer theological foundation by safeguarding God from the charge of capriciousness. The existence of the *pactum* itself embodies the principle that it is God, and God alone, who takes the initiative in the salvation of humanity, by providing a reliable framework within which the justification of sinners and their ultimate salvation become a real possibility.

The following points should be noted in assessing the alleged "Pelagianism" of the doctrines of justification associated with the *via moderna*, such as that of Gabriel Biel:

First, the western theological tradition as a whole insisted upon the necessity for a human response to the divine initiative in justification. The only essential distinction between the earlier Franciscan tradition and the *via moderna* lies in the use of the *pactum* as the conceptual foundation for this common teaching on justification.[135]

Second, Biel does not hold that human beings remit their own sin by doing *quod in se est*. People are required to desist from consenting to sin, and as a consequence of this, God will remit their sin – which God, and God alone, can do. The link between the human act of declining to consent to sin and the divine act of remission of sin is provided by the *pactum*, by which God has graciously ordained that such an act on the part of human beings will be met with a corresponding act of graciousness.

Third, neither the Pelagian nor the Massilian controversies operated within the context of a federal theology such as that of the *via moderna*.[136] As such, it is historically incorrect to style such a theology "Pelagian" or "semi-Pelagian."

Fourth, Biel's understanding of Pelagianism was based upon the canons of the Council of Carthage (417–418). As we noted in the previous chapter, the decrees of the Second Council of Orange (see pp. 17) were unknown during the medieval period. *By the known*

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[135] Note the points made in D. Ogliari, "Between Traditio and Progressio: Some Remarks on Augustinianism, Pelagianism, Massilianism and the Challenges of an *Et-Et* Theology," *Louvain Studies* 28 (2003), pp. 12–31.

[136] See, for example, D. Ogliari, *Gratia et Certamen: The Relationship between Grace and Free Will in the Discussion of Augustine with the So-Called "Semipelagians"* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), pp. 93–184.

standards of the time, Biel's theology of justification was not Pelagian. Furthermore, Biel's respect for the *determinationes ecclesiae* was such that, had he known of the substance of the decrees of the Second Council of Orange, he would undoubtedly have incorporated it into his theology of justification. If orthodoxy is determined in terms of *known* pronouncements of the teaching office of the church, rather than a later set of standards unknown to him, Biel's doctrine of justification must be regarded as orthodox.

Those who regard Biel's doctrine of justification as being essentially Pelagian, or who find his teaching on justification contradictory, because it is "at once *sola gratia* and *solis operibus*,"[137] must be challenged concerning their conclusions. *Any* theology of justification that permits humanity to have a role, however limited and circumscribed, in its own justification is open to precisely the same criticism. God's gift of grace to those who do *quod in se est* is due to an act of generosity on God's part: God bestows grace *sola liberalitate*, in that it is given under the terms of a covenant which itself originates from and expresses an act of divine compassion. By *grace*, God ordains that anyone who does *quod in se est* may be granted the gift of justifying grace. There is nothing "remarkable" or "Pelagian" about this. It is the inevitable and arguably theologically unproblematic outcome of the transposition of most western theologies of justification into the terms of a covenantal framework, such as that proposed by the *via moderna*.

In practice, the charge of Pelagianism leveled against the *moderni* stands or falls with the definition of "Pelagianism" employed.[138] We therefore wish to reiterate that, *by the generally accepted standards of the time* (that is, in terms of the canons of the Council of Carthage) and *by his own definition of Pelagianism*, Biel's doctrine of justification is not

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[137] Oberman, *Harvest of Medieval Theology*, pp. 176–177: "It is clear that Biel has a remarkable doctrine of justification: seen from different vantage-points, justification is at once *sola gratia* and *solis operibus* . . . *It is therefore evident that Biel's doctrine of justification is essentially Pelagian*."

[138] For the understandings of Pelagianism current at the time of the Reformation, see A.T. Jörgensen, "Was verstand man in der Reformationszeit unter Pelagianismus?," *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 83 (1910), pp. 63–82.

only not Pelagian, nor even semi-Pelagian, but is actually strongly anti-Pelagian.[139]

As will become clear in the following chapter, many aspects of the theology of the *via moderna* can be shown to be present in the young Luther's theology of justification, with the conspicuous exception of the dialectic of the two powers of God. This does not, however, necessarily mean that Luther's thinking on these matters is directly due to the *via moderna*: as we shall indicate in the following section, similar ideas were current within the Augustinian Order during the later medieval period. It is therefore necessary to consider the nature of such theological trends within that order before turning to examine Luther's early theology of justification. In the following section, we are particularly concerned with such trends as they converged on the Augustinian Cloister at Wittenberg, and, to a lesser extent, at Erfurt, at the opening of the sixteenth century.

The Augustinian Tradition: A Modern Augustinian School at Wittenberg?

The importance of clarifying the nature of late medieval Augustinianism, both as an object of interest in its own right and as a means of illuminating the origins of the Reformation and the debates at the Council of Trent, has been appreciated for some time. In the last 20 years, considerable progress has been made in characterizing the theological and spiritual traditions which were characteristic of the Order in the late medieval periods, with an increasing emphasis

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[139] McGrath, *The Anti-Pelagian Structure*, pp. 115–119. Similar criticisms of Oberman were made by Francis Clark, "A New Appraisal of Late Medieval Nominalism," *Gregorianum* 46 (1965), pp. 733–765. It may also be pointed out that Oberman confuses the issue by following Carl Feckes in using terms such as predestination *ante praevisa merita* and *post praevisa merita*, both of which are shaped by the intra-Protestant dogmatic conflicts of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and carry with them overtones and associations which are quite absent from Biel's own thinking: McGrath, *The Anti-Pelagian Structure*, pp. 108–111. Cf. C. Feckes, *Die Rechtfertigungslehre des Gabriel Biel* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1925), p. 88, n. 268; Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, pp. 192–193; 205; 211; 213.

coming to be placed on the importance of a distinct form of pastoral theology, focusing on the passion of Christ.[140] The question of whether, and to what extent, Luther's theological development was catalyzed or shaped by such Augustinian traditions of thought and practice is clearly of considerable importance, and will be considered fully in later chapters of this work. Medieval Augustinian writers argued that they embodied the authentic spirit of Augustine of Hippo, but were careful to understand this in terms of his spirituality as much as his theology.[141]

One possibility that an earlier generation of scholars believed might hold the key to an understanding of Luther's theological development related to the idea of a distinct current of thought, transmitted within the Augustinian Order, which was fundamentally attuned to the anti-Pelagian theology of grace developed by Augustine of Hippo.[142] The term *schola Augustiniana moderna* began to be used to refer to a possible school of thought, which was simultaneously nominalist or terminist in its logic (and thus aligned in this respect with the *via moderna* of William of Ockham), while being radically Augustinian in its understanding of grace, sin, and human nature. Such a position was clearly represented in the writings of the great fourteenth-century Augustinian theologian Gregory of Rimini. So did Luther know of such a tradition? And did it influence him?

To answer this question, it is clearly essential to determine whether there indeed existed a distinct school of theology characteristic of the Augustinian Order, and what its characteristics might be. The first monograph dedicated to the topic appeared in 1883, when Karl

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[140] See Saak, *High Way to Heaven*, pp. 235–583.

[141] See Saak, *High Way to Heaven*, pp. 160–234. For a case study of the iconic expression of such an Augustinian piety in the frescoes of the Augustinian Order, see J. Elliott, "Augustine and the New Augustinianism in the Choir Frescoes of the Eremitani, Padua," in Bourdua and Dunlop, *Art and the Augustinian Order in Early Renaissance Italy*, pp. 99–126.

[142] For reflections, see C. Burger, "De receptie van Augustinus' genadeleer: Gregorius van Rimini, Hugolinus van Orvieto, Erasmus en Luther (tot 1518)," in *Augustiniana Neerlandica. Aspecten van Augustinus' spiritualiteit en haar doorwerking*, ed. P. van Geest and J. van Oort (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 413–425.

Werner argued for the existence of a theological tradition, specific to the Order of the Hermits of St Augustine, based on the ideas of Giles of Rome.[143] For Werner, this order-specific Augustinian tradition was to be distinguished from the growth of anti-Pelagianism in the fourteenth century. Although these two developments might seem to be related, if not virtually identical, Werner insisted that they originated from different ecclesiological addresses. The relevance of this for Luther studies could hardly be overlooked.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, A.V. Müller argued that Luther stood within a school of thought which existed within the Augustinian Order of his day, and whose theology was more "Augustinian" than that of their contemporaries.[144] According to Müller, there existed *una differenza di forma, non di sostanza*, between the theology of the young Luther and that of this school within the Augustinian Order, whose representatives included Simon Fidati of Cassia (d.1348), Hugolino of Orvieto (d.1374), Agostino Favaroni of Rome (d.1443), and Jacobus Perez of Valencia (d.1470). Although Eduard Stakemeier rejected Müller's thesis in its original form as untenable,[145] he argued that the doctrine of "double justification" associated with Giralmo Seripando during the Tridentine proceedings *de iustificatione* could only be properly understood in the light of this late medieval Augustinian school.[146] This thesis has also not stood up to critical examination.[147] Since then, considerable

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[143] K. Werner, *Der Augustinismus in der Scholastik des späteren Mittelalters* (Vienna: Braumüller, 1883). This was the third volume of Werner's series exploring late medieval theological currents.

[144] A.V. Müller, *Luthers theologische Quellen: Seine Verteidigung gegen Denifle und Grisar* (Gießen, 1912); "Agostino Favaroni e la teologia di Lutero," *Bilychnis* 3 (1914), pp. 373–387; "Giacomo Perez di Valenza, Vescovo di Chrysopoli e la teologia di Lutero," *Bilychnis* 9 (1920), pp. 391–403.

[145] E. Stakemeier, *Der Kampf um Augustin: Augustinus und die Augustiner auf dem Tridentinum* (Paderborn: Bonifacius Druckerei, 1937), p. 21. On Seripando and his theological provenance, see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, pp. 318–324.

[146] Stakemeier, *Der Kampf um Augustin*, p. 22.

[147] It was subjected to a devastating review on its appearance by Hubert Jedin: *Theologische Revue* 36 (1937), pp. 425–430. Cf. C. Ocker, "Augustinianism in Fourteenth-Century Theology," *Augustinian Studies* 18 (1987), pp. 81–106.

scholarly attention has been directed toward clarifying the positions of the theologians of the Augustinian Order of the later medieval period,[148] with primary sources being edited and collated, largely through the efforts of members of the Augustinian Order itself. As a result, we are now in a much better position to attempt an evaluation of the thesis of an Augustinian school of theology during the later Middle Ages.

Before beginning such an evaluation, however, it must be pointed out that an astonishing variety of interpretations have been placed upon the term "Augustinian" by historians, with an equally great degree of confusion arising as a result.[149] It is therefore necessary to make it clear that we are dealing with the specific question of whether there existed a distinctive, well-defined school of theology within the Augustinian Order itself, and with the theological characteristics of this putative school, whether or not these happen to correspond to the teachings of St Augustine himself. Several studies of importance have dealt with this question, and we propose to consider their findings.

We have already noted the emergence of the *via moderna* in the German universities of the fourteenth century, characterized by its epistemological nominalism and its logical-critical attitude. In an important study, Damasus Trapp argued that precisely such a polarization between the *via antiqua* and the *via moderna* developed within the Augustinian Order during the fourteenth century.[150] While both *moderni* and *antiqui* placed increasing emphasis upon the importance of accurate citation of St Augustine, the *antiqui* regarded the *moderni* as being eclectic and unduly logico-critical,

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[148] This very substantial body of literature is summarized in a number of places, especially Saak, *High Way to Heaven*, pp. 683–736; McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, pp. 201–207.

[149] Steinmetz distinguishes *five* meanings of the term "Augustinian," and comments on the danger of confusing them: Steinmetz, *Luther and Staupitz*, pp. 13–16.

[150] D. Trapp, "Augustinian Theology of the Fourteenth Century: Notes on Editions, Marginalia, Opinions and Book-Lore," *Augustiniana* 6 (1956), pp. 147–265. Trapp made the important point (p. 151) that no Augustinian theologians can be called logico-critical extremists. In their use of the dialectic between the two powers of God, these theologians avoided the unorthodox speculation associated with John of Mirecourt and Nicholas of Autrecourt, as well as of the English theologians Nicholas of Aston and Ulcredus of Durham.

while the *moderni* considered that they were under obligation to correct the errors of the past, using "modern" conceptual tools such as the dialectic between the two powers of God. Trapp thus divides Augustinian theology into two periods: the first, which encompasses the period between Giles of Rome and Thomas of Strassburg; and the second, which began with Gregory of Rimini. The earlier period is heavily influenced by Giles of Rome, and includes such theologians as James of Viterbo, Alexander of San Elpido, Robert Cowton, and William of Ware.[151] As Trapp has shown, Giles of Rome was cited with sufficient frequency by his fellow Augustinians during this period to indicate that he was regarded as a theological authority, thus justifying those who dubbed this earlier period of Augustinian theology as the *schola Aegidiana*. Giles, it may be noted, is generally regarded as a student of St Augustine who displays Thomist tendencies at points, rather than as a Thomist with an unusual interest in the theology of St Augustine.[152] The stamp of the authentic theology of St Augustine, particularly in relation to the theology of grace, may therefore be regarded as having been placed upon the early Augustinian school.

Adolar Zumkeller argued that the early Augustinian school was characterized by its Aristotelian–Thomist foundations (such as the important distinction between *essentia* and *existentia*), coupled with certain distinctively Augustinian elements.[153] It is significant that Zumkeller locates most of these elements in areas which fall within the scope of the doctrine of justification – for example, the emphasis upon the primacy of love and the primacy of grace, both authentic elements of St Augustine's own teaching on justification. Zumkeller points out that these elements, already present in the early Augustinian school, are intensified in the period after Gregory of Rimini,

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[151] Trapp, "Augustinian Theology," p. 265.
[152] See J. Beumer, "Augustinismus und Thomismus in der theologischen Prinzipienlehre des Aegidius Romanus," *Scholastik* 32 (1957), pp. 542–560.
[153] A. Zumkeller, "Die Augustinerschule des Mittelalters: Vertreter und philosophisch-theologische Lehre," *Analecta Augustiniana* 27 (1964), pp. 167–262, especially pp. 193–195. For an excellent register of the major theologians of the Augustinian Order during the period, see pp. 174–176.

with an increasing emphasis upon the personal presence of the Holy Spirit in believers. Furthermore, Zumkeller points out that the later Augustinians appear to draw directly upon St Augustine, rather than indirectly through the writings of Giles of Rome, reflecting the outcome of intense source-critical studies carried out within the Order.[154] There are thus excellent grounds for suggesting that a characteristic theology of justification, approximating to that of St Augustine himself, became current within sections of the Augustinian Order during the early fifteenth century.

In a study of the doctrines of justification associated with the theologians of the Augustinian Order during the later medieval period, we showed that there was considerable diversity of opinion within the Order on the question of the formal (that is, the immediate) cause of justification.[155] The earlier theologians of the *schola Aegidiana* followed St Thomas Aquinas and Giles of Rome in teaching that the formal cause of justification was a created habit of grace within the soul. This opinion can be shown to be prevalent within the Order up to the time of Thomas of Strassburg, although some later theologians of the Order, such as Johannes von Retz, continued this teaching after it had been abandoned elsewhere. However, beginning with Gregory of Rimini, an increasing emphasis came to be placed upon the role of uncreated grace – the personal presence of the Holy Spirit within the believer – in justification. This move toward a more personalist concept of grace began with Gregory of Rimini, Hugolino of Orvieto, and Dionysius of Montina, and was developed by later theologians of the Order, such as Alphonsus of Toledo, Johannes Klenkok, and Johannes Hiltalingen of Basel. The particular emphasis placed by Johannes von Staupitz on the role of uncreated grace in justification thus appears to reflect a well-established theological tradition within the Augustinian Order of the later Middle

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[154] This point was developed and confirmed with particular reference to Gregory of Rimini by Oberman, *Werden und Wertung der Reformation*, pp. 82–140.

[155] A.E. McGrath, "'Augustinianism'? A Critical Assessment of the So-called 'Medieval Augustinian Tradition' on Justification," *Augustiniana* 31 (1981) pp. 247–267.

[156] For this emphasis, see Steinmetz, *Misericordia Dei*, pp. 105–108.

Ages.[156] In this, and in other respects, there appears to have been a move on the part of the theologians of the Augustinian Order away from the theology of the early Dominican school toward that of the later Franciscan school.[157] For example, the earlier Augustinian theologians followed Giles of Rome and St Thomas Aquinas in rejecting the doctrine of the immaculate conception, whereas its later theologians followed Duns Scotus in adopting a strongly immaculist position.[158]

The essential point which we wish to make is that, by the time of Luther, a theology of justification had developed within certain sections of the Augustinian Order which can only be regarded as a hybrid species, incorporating much of the authentic theology of St Augustine (for instance, the emphasis upon the depravity of human nature, the priority of grace and love, and the necessity of grace for morally good acts), whilst simultaneously including the results of the application of logico-critical methods, such as the dialectic of the two powers of God, associated with the *via moderna* (for example, the critique of the role of supernatural habits in justification, and the concepts of *necessitas consequentis* and *necessitas consequentiae*, as expressed in the *pactum* theology). More significantly, a degree of divergence is evident at a number of points, suggesting that the Augustinian Order was more theologically heterogeneous than might have been thought.[159] As the best recent analysis makes clear, "one can no longer speak of a unified theological Augustinianism inside – or outside – the Augustinian Order in the later Middle Ages."[160]

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[157] For characterization of these schools, see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, pp. 186–207.

[158] McGrath, *Augustinianism*, p. 259. It is interesting to note that Gregory of Rimini, who was otherwise instrumental in effecting most of the changes associated with the later Augustinian school, appears to have been opposed to the immaculist position.

[159] Note in particular Adolar Zumkeller's concession of this point, having earlier argued for the fundamental unity of the theological position of the Order: A. Zumkeller, *Erbsünde, Gnade, Rechtfertigung und Verdienst nach der Lehre der Erfurter Augustinertheologen des Spätmittelalters* (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1984), pp. 437–440.

[160] Saak, *High Way to Heaven*, p. 691.

Certain aspects of the characteristic theologies of justification associated with the *via moderna* thus came to be associated with the theologians of the Augustinian Order during the later Middle Ages – and yet were linked to other teachings on justification (such as man's total depravity) which set them apart from the *via moderna*. Verbal similarities between the theologians of the *via moderna* and of the Augustinian Order must therefore be treated with the greatest caution, as they frequently mask profound conceptual differences. This point also serves to emphasize the total futility of attempting to draw a sharp distinction between "Nominalism" and "Augustinianism" during the later medieval period. Not only did many "Augustinian" theologians adopt a nominalist epistemology (for example, Gregory of Rimini, Hugolino of Orvieto); they also incorporated aspects of "Nominalist" teaching into their doctrines of justification. Indeed, it is precisely this variation between individual "Augustinian" theologians in respect to the extent to which they adopted elements of "Nominalism" which caused so much of the confusion currently surrounding the characteristics of a putative "Augustinian" school of theology.

So what was the influence of this "modern Augustinian school" at Wittenberg? Before considering this point, it must be made clear that the term "school" must be understood in a somewhat loose sense: Trapp reminds us that, when dealing with the theologians of the Augustinian Order, one should speak "cautiously of attitudes, not schools."[161] It is clear, however, that a distinctive attitude toward theological sources and methods came to be associated with many theologians of the Order during the period, even if it is not appropriate to speak of a "school" in the strictest of senses. One can certainly speak of certain theological "tendencies" within the Order; it is, however, clear that the Order was doctrinally diverse on the eve of the Reformation. Yet it remains questionable whether one should expect the Order to be characterized by a distinct *theological* stance. Monastic orders were, after all, places of piety, concerned with fostering spirituality. What if the distinctiveness of the Augustinian

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[161] Trapp, "Augustinian Theology," p. 150.

Order were related to a form of affective spirituality, rather than cognitive theology?

During the 1970s, Heiko Oberman developed an ambitious understanding of Luther's relationship with late medieval Augustinianism, based on his interpretation of the theological schools present at Wittenberg during Luther's formative years. In an essay of 1974,[162] Oberman argued that the statutes of the University of Wittenberg established the presence of the *schola Augustiniana moderna* within the faculty of arts, shaped by a set of theological distinctives. We have already noted how the revised statutes of 1508 permitted members of that faculty to teach *secundum viam Gregorii*, and have stated the reasons for which the scholarly community now generally agrees that the *via Gregorii* is synonymous with the *via moderna*. Oberman, however, declared that the *via Gregorii* was synonymous with the *schola Augustiniana moderna*, which he took to have been initiated by Gregory of Rimini.[163] For Oberman, this Augustinian school provided the historical context which catalyzed the emergence of, and molded the shape of, the reforming theology which emerged at Wittenberg:[164]

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[162] H.A. Oberman, "Headwaters of the Reformation: *Initia Lutheri – Initia Reformationis*," in *Luther and the Dawn of the Modern Era*, ed. H.A. Oberman (Leiden: Brill, 1974), pp. 40–88.

[163] Oberman, "Headwaters," pp. 77; 79–82. See also his *Werden und Wertung*, pp. 131–132, where he points to the influence of Gregory on Wendelin Steinbach as evidence for his suggestion. Oberman's thesis is defended in the study of M. Schulze, "'Via Gregorii' in Forschung und Quellen," in *Gregor von Rimini*, pp. 1–126, especially pp. 25–64. While Schulze's arguments go some way toward confirming that there was a loose school of *theological* opinion, of basically Augustinian provenance, associated with Gregory of Rimini in the later Middle Ages, the fact remains that we are not dealing with the statutes of the faculty of *theology*, but with those of the faculty of *arts*. In terms of the disciplines associated with this latter faculty at Wittenberg, the positions of Gregory of Rimini and other *moderni* (such as Buridan, Ockham, and Biel) are essentially the same, as recent studies have confirmed.

[164] Oberman, "Headwaters of the Reformation," p. 82. For a more general critique of this conclusion, see Alister E. McGrath, "Forerunners of the Reformation: A Critical Examination of the Evidence for Precursors of the Reformation Doctrines of Justification," *Harvard Theological Review* (1982), pp. 219–242, especially pp. 236–241.

> We can point to the *schola Augustiniana moderna*, initiated by Gregory
> of Rimini, reflected by Hugolin of Orvieto, apparently spiritually alive
> in the Erfurt Augustinian monastery, and transformed into a pastoral
> reform-theology by Staupitz, as the *occasio proxima* – not the *causa*! – for
> the inception of the *vera theologia* at Wittenberg.

Unfortunately, Oberman's evidence for this ambitious conclusion
is purely circumstantial, and fails to take account of the fact that the
three Augustinian theologians who exercised the greatest influence
over Luther (Nathin, Arnoldi, and Staupitz) cannot be regarded as
representatives of the alleged "school" to which Oberman refers.[165]
There can be no doubt that Luther was influenced by theological
currents and methods associated with his Order – but he appears to
have encountered these in the form of specific personalities within
that Order, both at Erfurt and Wittenberg, and there appear to be
excellent grounds for suggesting that these personalities were sim-
ply not typical of the school of thought which some scholars have
identified within the Order during the later Middle Ages.

Although Oberman's suggestion was regarded as interesting at
the time, it is now generally considered that the evidence that
Oberman presents in support of his contention is somewhat circum-
stantial. References to the *via Gregorii* are now held to be best
interpreted as a local or regional manner of designating the *via
moderna*. Viewed in terms of the *mens auctoris* (that is, Christoph
Scheurl), there is every reason to suppose that the statutes refer to
the *via* then associated with Jodocus Trutvetter – the *via moderna*.
There are thus no substantial grounds for concluding that the
schola Augustiniana moderna was represented at the University of
Wittenberg in the early sixteenth century. But what of the Augustinian
Cloisters at Erfurt and Wittenberg?

Unfortunately, we do not have sufficient evidence to draw reliable
conclusions on this question. We can, however, draw such conclu-
sions concerning those theologians of the Augustinian Order who

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[165] See, for example, A. Zumkeller, *Johannes von Staupitz und seine christliche Heilslehre*
(Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1994).

exerted significant influence upon the young Luther – which is more significant from the standpoint of the present study. We have already pointed out the general tendency of the later theologians of the Order to adopt elements of the doctrines of justification associated with the *via moderna*, and the tendency on the part of theologians of religious orders to align themselves with the *via* (*via antiqua* or *via moderna*) prevalent at their local university. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that the two Erfurt Augustinians who exerted the greatest influence over the young Luther appear to have been followers of the *via moderna*, rather than members of the *schola Augustiniana moderna*. Johannes Nathin and Bartholomäus Arnoldi of Usingen were both noted *moderni*, and Arnoldi's doctrine of justification in particular is practically indistinguishable from that of Gabriel Biel.[166] The fact that Luther began his theological studies under the auspices of the Augustinian Order cannot, therefore, be assumed to imply that he was taught according to the *schola Augustiniana moderna*, originating from Gregory of Rimini. The relatively firm textual evidence indicating that Luther does not appear to have come across Gregory of Rimini directly until 1519,[167] when linked with his frequently repeated praise of Ockham, suggests that Luther, during his Erfurt days, belonged to that school of thought within the Augustinian Order which approximated most closely to the *via moderna*. The Erfurt priory may well have been exceptional in its affinity with the *via moderna*, but it was at this priory that Luther began his study of theology, and we must confront the specifics of this situation.

There are therefore excellent reasons for suggesting that Luther's relationship to the *schola Augustiniana moderna* is considerably more

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[166] See Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, pp. 178–181. It may also be pointed out that Johannes de Paltz, who was then at the Erfurt priory, was also no follower of Gregory of Rimini: Oberman, *Werden und Wertung*, p. 131, n. 172. It may be pointed out that Oberman does not consider the "*via Gregorii*" (in his sense) to represent the theology of the Augustinian Order *as a whole*.

[167] L. Grane, "Gregor von Rimini und Luthers Leipziger Disputation," *Studia Theologica* 22 (1968), pp. 29–49.

complex than might at first be thought. If the case can be made that a distinctive school of thought existed within the Augustinian Order during the later medieval period, whose adherents followed Augustine in stressing the primacy of grace and love, it would appear that Luther did not encounter such a school during his time at Erfurt. It is much more plausible that Luther encountered some local variant or embodiment of such a school of thought at the Augustinian Cloister at Wittenberg, at least during his conversations with Johannes von Staupitz. Nevertheless, a critical examination of the sources which Staupitz employs suggests that he cannot be regarded as a member of the *schola Augustiniana moderna*. Staupitz does not refer to any theologians usually held to be associated with this school – such as its founding member, Gregory of Rimini.[168] Indeed, where he does refer to Augustinian theologians, it is clear that he regards himself as a representative of the *schola Aegidiana*, rather than the *schola Augustiniana moderna*.[169]

The case for the existence of a specific school of Augustinian theology at Wittenberg is weak, and can only be sustained with difficulty. Furthermore, there is little textual evidence suggesting that Luther was influenced by such a school of theology, if it could be shown to exist. As we shall show through a detailed engagement with the theological framework of divine acceptation found within Luther's *Dictata super Psalterium* (1513–1515), Luther clearly operated initially within a theological framework which is recognizably that of the *via moderna*. Yet this leaves open the question of whether Luther was aware of a deeper spiritual tradition within the Augustinian Order, and absorbed at least something of this in his spirituality. As we shall see presently, there are indeed reasons for believing that this is the case, even though the outcome takes us in a direction somewhat different from that envisaged by Oberman.

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[168] See the excellent analysis of these sources presented by Ernst Wolf, *Staupitz und Luther. Ein Beitrag zur Theologie des Johannes von Staupitz und deren Bedeutung für Luthers theologischen Werdegang* (Leipzig: Hensius, 1929), pp. 23–25.

[169] See Steinmetz, *Misericordia Dei*, pp. 22–28; idem, *Luther and Staupitz*, pp. 27–31.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have considered the complex interactions of the intellectual currents of the later Middle Ages, as they converged on the University of Wittenberg in the first two decades of the sixteenth century. We must now turn to Luther himself, and begin a detailed systematic engagement with the core texts relating to the period of his theological development. What do these texts disclose about his theological concerns? And about his changing approaches to core questions? First, we must set Luther in his context, and consider how he relates to the social and intellectual world of religious life in late medieval Germany.

3

Luther as a Late Medieval Theologian

In the previous chapter, we outlined the intellectual context within which Luther's early theological opinions are thought to have developed, focusing particularly on three currents of thought which are known to have been prevalent at Erfurt and Wittenberg, even if the manner of their interaction remains elusive. Humanism, the *via moderna*, and a form of late Augustinian theology, perhaps more pastoral than academic in nature, constitute the socially embodied "habits of thought" against which the emergence of Luther's theology took place.[1] It remains to be clarified how that process of theological evolution happened.

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[1] The sociological embeddedness of late medieval currents of theological and spiritual opinion was emphasized by Herbert Grundmann, who insisted that religious movements of the age should be recognized as *Lebensformen*, rather than socially detached ideas: see H. Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter* (Berlin: Verlag E. Ebering, 1935). For the problem of the relation of intellectual currents of the early sixteenth century and their social means of transmission, see A.E. McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2nd edn, 2003), pp. 11–32.

In the present chapter we propose to demonstrate that, between 1509 and early 1514, Luther's own writings strongly suggest that his theology in general, and his theology of justification in particular, was typical of the later medieval period, particularly that of the *via moderna*. There is a strong degree of theological resonance between Luther's early views and those of his influential contemporaries. This conclusion is not based on sociological patterns of institutional or social embeddedness, but on the habits of thought disclosed by Luther's theological writings of the period.

This suggestion is not, of course, new. In his celebrated critique of the reformer, Heinrich Denifle argued that Luther's rejection of Catholic theology was ultimately an indication of the particular type of "Catholic" theology with which Luther was familiar. For Denifle, Luther was only familiar with the "unsound" theology of the later medieval period,[2] such as that of Gabriel Biel, and not with the Catholic theology of St Thomas Aquinas or Bonaventure.

Perhaps surprisingly, modern Luther scholarship has tended to endorse Denifle's judgment: whereas Luther frequently demonstrates first-hand knowledge of the writings of the leading theologians of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, such as Pierre d'Ailly and Gabriel Biel, such direct knowledge is conspicuously absent in

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[2] H. Denifle, *Luther und Luthertum* (Mainz: Kirchheim, 2nd edn, 1906), vol. 2, pp. 535–536. The substance of Denifle's argument is that Luther's knowledge of medieval theology is mediated through the historical sections of Biel's *Collectorium*. As Biel gave a totally distorted version of the theology of the earlier medieval period, frequently citing its representatives at second or third hand, it was inevitable that this perverted impression would prejudice Luther's attitude toward "Catholic" theology as a whole. Scheel also draws our attention to the perverted "Geschichtsbild seiner Erfurter Lehrer" in evaluating Luther's relationship to the theology of the Middle Ages as a whole: O. Scheel, *Martin Luther: Vom Katholizismus zur Reformation*, 2 vols (Tübingen: Mohr, 1921), vol. 2, p. 163. For a similar estimation of Biel, see C. Feckes, *Die Rechtfertigungslehre des Gabriel Biel und ihre Stellung innerhalb der nominalistischen Schule* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1925), pp. 25–26; 86.

the case of earlier medieval theologians, such as St Thomas Aquinas.[3] It must, of course, be pointed out that this is precisely what is to be expected, if Luther was educated within the *via moderna*, character- ized by its logico-critical attitudes and an epistemological nominal- ism: the great theologians of the thirteenth century belonged to the *via antiqua*, characterized by an epistemological realism, from which Luther would have been taught to distance himself by his mentors at Erfurt.

Nevertheless, when Luther's knowledge of *spiritual* writings is analyzed, it again becomes clear that he is most familiar with those of the later medieval period:[4] indeed, if the influence of earlier spiritual writings, such as those of Bernard of Clairvaux,[5] can be demonstrated, it is possible to argue that this influence is mediated directly through those later medieval spiritual treatises with which Luther can be shown to have been familiar.[6] In particular, Luther

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[3] Otto Pesch argues that Luther knew and understood Aquinas better than some allow: O.H. Pesch, Martin Luther, *Thomas von Aquin und die reformatorische Kritik an der Scholastik: zur Geschichte und Wirkungsgeschichte eines Missverständnisses mit weltgeschichtlichen Folgen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), p. 49. Luther's early writings during the period covered by this study do not support this generous conclusion. The suggestion that Luther knew Aquinas indirectly (for example, through Karlstadt or Cajetan) is entirely plausible: see D.R. Janz, *Luther on Thomas Aquinas: The Angelic Doctor in the Thought of the Reformer* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1989), pp. 111–153.

[4] See the excellent study of M. Elze, "Züge spätmittelalterlicher Frömmigkeit in Luthers Theologie," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* (1965), pp. 381–402; T. Bell, "Luther en Bernardus van Clairvaux: Tussen mystiek en scholastiek," *Bijdragen* 63 (2002), pp. 253–280. For an excellent study of the spiritual tradition at the Erfurt Augustinian Cloister, as exemplified by Johannes de Paltz, see B. Hamm, *Frömmig- keitstheologie am Anfang des 16. Jahrhunderts: Studien zu Johannes von Paltz und seinem Umkreis* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1982).

[5] Theo Bell suggests that Luther cited directly and indirectly 125 times from Bernard's sermons on the Song of Songs: see T. Bell, *Divus Bernhardus Bernhard von Clairvaux in Martin Luthers Schriften* (Mainz: von Zabern, 1993), p. 361.

[6] E.g., Bernard's *Sermo in Cant.* 43,4 is cited frequently in later medieval spiritual writings: see Elze, "Züge spätmittelalterlicher Frömmigkeit," p. 396, n. 55. See further pp. 394–397.

seems to have absorbed much of the distinctive spiritual emphases characteristic of the Augustinian Order of the late Middle Ages, much of which crystallized in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.[7]

Luther began his theological career at Wittenberg in 1512 steeped in both the methods and the presuppositions of late medieval theology and, as we shall see, acutely aware of at least some of its problems. It must therefore be regarded as methodologically unacceptable to attempt to study Luther's theological development in isolation from, or with purely incidental reference to, this context. Although there is undoubtedly some truth in the frequently encountered statement that the whole of Luther's later theology is present in the *Dictata super Psalterium*, there is even greater truth in the much less frequently encountered observation that many elements of the entire late medieval theological spectrum are also present. It is the precise relationship between the received tradition and Luther's own developing theological insights which must form the subject of any study of Luther's theological development over the period 1509–1519.[8] The present chapter is therefore concerned with establishing the *terminus a quo*, and demonstrating its late medieval provenance.

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[7] E.L. Saak, *High Way to Heaven: The Augustinian Platform between Reform and Reformation, 1292–1524* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 345–466.

[8] Hendrix's comment on the development of Luther's ecclesiology is illuminating: "We cannot be content with maintaining that there are both traditional and new elements in Luther's ecclesiology in the *Dictata* . . . Luther's new ecclesiology in its essence is already present in his first lectures on the Psalms. The new elements which make up this essence remain individual rivulets in the *Dictata*; they have not yet merged into the navigable stream of Luther's mature ecclesiology." S. Hendrix, *Ecclesia in via: Ecclesiological Developments in the Medieval Psalms Exegesis and the Dictata super Psalterium of Martin Luther* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), p. 286.

The *Dictata super Psalterium*

The most important source for our study of Luther's early theological development is his first course of lectures on the Psalter, the *Dictata super Psalterium*.[9] On July 8, 1513 Johannes Grünenberg published an edition of the Psalter with particularly wide margins, suitable for both marginal and interlinear glossing. Luther had this edition reprinted for the use of his students, and in his own copy entered his comments (usually of a grammatical or philological nature) in the ample space available. It is these notes which are referred to as *glosses*. The glossing of a biblical text was standard practice in the medieval period, the most familiar examples being the *Glossa ordinaria* and the *Glossa interlinearis*.[10] In addition to these brief notes, Luther prepared much more detailed and wider treatments of the overall text of each psalm, relating it to matters of spiritual or theological interest. These more extended notes are referred to as *scholia*.[11] The original manuscript copies of both the glosses and scholia are preserved, and the original Weimar edition of the *Dictata* has recently been corrected from them.[12] Luther would retain the practice of providing glosses and scholia in his Romans lectures of 1515–1516.[13]

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[9] For an excellent introduction, see G. Ebeling, "Luthers Psalterdrück vom Jahre 1513," in *Lutherstudien I* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1971), pp. 69–131. Böhmer suggests that Luther began to lecture on the Psalter for the first time at 6 a.m. on August 16, 1513, and ended on October 20, 1515: H. Böhmer, *Luthers erste Vorlesung* (Leipzig: Teubner Verlag, 1924), p. 5.

[10] See B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970), pp. 46–66.

[11] The singular term *scholion* or *scholium* is hardly ever encountered.

[12] The original edition is contained in volumes 3 and 4; the later edition in volume 55. K.A. Meissinger reported finding more than 1400 important textual misreadings in volume 3 alone. The policy adopted in the present study is to refer to volume 55, with the corresponding reference to the earlier edition in parentheses.

[13] For the importance of this Pauline epistle to Luther's theological development, see B. Kaiser, *Luther und die Auslegung des Römerbriefes: Eine theologisch-geschichtliche Beurteilung* (Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 1995).

The chief difficulty in using the *Dictata* as a source for the study of Luther's early theology relates to the dating of Luther's comments on individual psalms. The following points are of particular importance in this respect.

First, Luther appears to have glossed psalms in advance of delivering his lectures, so that there is a discrepancy between the dates of the gloss and the scholion on most of the psalms. The practice of the editors of the first Weimar editions of the *Dictata* in printing the gloss and scholion together as if they were written consecutively, to yield a complete commentary upon each psalm, must therefore be regarded as potentially misleading, implying a closer chronological connection between the two than is probably the case.

Secondly, Luther revised his material for publication, probably between 1515 and 1516. His practice of leaving ample space at the end of each psalm for further comments at a later date doubtless facilitated this process, and certainly adds to the confusion surrounding the dating of Luther's comments. On the basis of a careful study of paper and ink types, it is possible to show that Luther's comments on the first four psalms, while containing much material which may be dated from 1513, also contain material which appears to date from 1516.[14]

Thirdly, there is a difficulty relating to the manuscript source of the *Dictata*. The Dresdener Psalter, the important manuscript which includes the text of Luther's scholia, appears to include leaves which were bound into the work at a later date.[15] This makes the dating of certain passages problematic at certain points of critical importance.

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[14] Böhmer, *Luthers erste Vorlesung*, passim.

[15] H. Wendorf, "Der Durchbruch der neuen Erkenntnis Luthers im Lichte der handschriftlichen Überlieferung," *Historische Vierteljahrschrift* 27 (1932), pp. 124–144; 285–324; 134–142; The most serious difficulty relates to folio 103 of the handwritten manuscript, which appears to have been bound the wrong way round – i.e., fol. 103a is actually fol. 103b, and vice versa – as well as having been added later. Thus WA 3.461.20–463.37 appears to be a later addition, which interposes between Luther's exposition of Psalm 71 (= Psalm 72, Vulgate) on folios 102 and 104. On this vexed problem, see H. Bornkamm, "Iustitia Dei beim jungen Luther," in *Der Durchbruch der reformatorischen Erkenntnis bei Luther*, ed. B. Lohse (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), pp. 289–383; 292–299.

In the present chapter, we shall examine certain key aspects of Luther's early understanding of the doctrine of justification, and indicate how they are characteristic of the theology of the later medieval period. Before doing this, however, it is necessary to consider Luther's biblical hermeneutic.

Luther's Biblical Hermeneutic, 1513–1514

Luther's theological breakthrough took place during the course of a prolonged series of lectures on biblical material, and is clearly intimately associated with the substance of this material. The biblical texts on which Luther was then commenting may have, in some way, shaped his breakthrough; equally, they may have constrained its development, or influenced the manner of its expression and formulation – for example, through the biblical language and conceptualities which Luther uses in expressing his changing views.

In the previous chapter, we indicated the importance of humanist biblical scholarship in making these texts available in their original languages, along with the necessary apparatus to translate them more accurately. It must be emphasized, however, that the problem of the proper interpretation of scripture concerns far more than the mere accurate translation of the original texts. If scripture is to be the foundation of theology, a valid and universally recognized means of interpreting it must be established, thus bringing the question of biblical hermeneutics to the forefront of our study,[16] in that hermeneutical presuppositions inevitably shape theological conclusions. Indeed, the "*sola scriptura*" principle[17] is rendered potentially meaningless without agreement on the question of how scripture should be interpreted, once its authority is conceded. It is therefore of enormous interest to observe that Luther's biblical

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[16] See the invaluable study of H. Feld, *Die Anfänge der modernen biblischen Hermenutik in der spätmittelalterlichen Theologie* (Wiesbaden: Steiner Verlag, 1977).

[17] On this, see the classic (if now rather dated) study of E. Egli, "Zur Einführung des Schriftprinzips in der Schweiz," *Zwingliana* 1 (1903), pp. 332–339.

hermeneutic up to 1515 is characteristic of the later medieval period, although containing a Christological emphasis which foreshadows much of his later theology.

The early controversies within the Christian church, particularly those concerning Gnosticism, made it necessary to distinguish between the *literal* and the *spiritual* sense of scripture. Although this device was originally polemical, it soon became clear that it was capable of being exploited by theologians to expose a deeper spiritual significance to an otherwise unedifying text. Thus Augustine of Hippo, finding himself quite unable to detect anything particularly edifying or illuminating in the literal sense of Exodus 23.19 ("You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk"), chose to interpret it allegorically, in terms of a prophecy that Christ should not himself perish in the slaughter of the innocents.[18] By the thirteenth century, three quite distinct spiritual senses of scripture had been established in addition to the literal sense: the allegorical, the tropological or moral, and the anagogical. This fourfold scheme for establishing the sense of scripture became known as the *Quadriga*,[19] and was summarized in the famous verse penned by the Dominican writer Augustine of Denmark (d.1285):[20]

> Littera gesta docet; quid credas allegoria,
> Moralis quid agas; quo tendis, anagoria.

A literal English translation of these words is: "The letter teaches the actions; the allegorical what you believe; the moral how you act; the anagogical where you are going."

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[18] Augustine, *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* ii, 90. See Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, pp. 281–308.

[19] H. de Lubac, *Histoire et Esprit: l'intelligence de l'Ecriture d'après Origène* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2002) provides an excellent introduction. For the best study, see his classic work, *Exégèse médiévale: les quatres sens de l'Ecriture,* 4 vols (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1993).

[20] See S.A. Walz, "Des Aage von Dänemark 'Rotulus pugillaris' im Lichte der dominikanischen Kontroverstheologie," *Classica et Mediaevalia* (Copenhagen) 15 (1954), pp. 198–252; 16 (1955), pp. 136–194.

The application of this fourfold scheme to the interpretation of scripture may be illustrated from one of the most important works on theological method from the period of High Scholasticism, the *Breviloquium* of Bonaventure:

> The depth of scripture consists in a multiplicity of mystical interpretations. Besides the literal sense, some passages have to be interpreted in three different manners, namely allegorically, morally and tropologically. There is *allegory*, when one fact points to another, by reference to which one should believe. There is *tropology* or *morality*, when facts make us understand rules of conduct. There is *anagogy* or elevation of the mind towards the eternal felicity of the saints.[21]

It was, of course, evident that a considerable degree of restriction had to be placed upon the use of the spiritual senses of scripture, if biblical exegesis was to avoid becoming mere subjective flights of fancy. The fundamental principle established during the earlier medieval period to avoid this development was the following: *the literal sense of scripture must always be regarded as the most fundamental, and nothing may be believed on the basis of a spiritual sense of scripture unless it has first been established on the basis of the literal sense.* This principle can be illustrated from medieval theologians as diverse as

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[21] Bonaventure, *Breviloquium* prol. 4, 1. Cf. *Collationes in Hexaemeron* xiii, 11: "Allegory concerns what is to be believed; anagogy concerns what is to be hoped for; tropology concerns what is to be done." See G.H. Tavard, *Transiency and Permanence: The Nature of Theology according to St Bonaventure* (New York: Franciscan Institute, 1954), pp. 31–55, for an excellent discussion.

St Thomas Aquinas,[22] Jean Gerson,[23] and Wendelin Steinbach.[24] Furthermore, there was general agreement that the exegesis of scripture was a public event – in other words, the individual's personal exegesis of particular biblical passages was subject to the corporate exegesis of the church as a whole.[25]

At the same time as Luther began to lecture on the Psalter for the first time, Wendelin Steinbach (1454–1519) began to lecture at Tübingen on Paul's letter to the Galatians.[26] These lectures are of particular interest, as they exemplify the methods of biblical exegesis as the end of an era drew near,[27] and, when studied in conjunction with his Hebrews lectures of 1517, the lectures give invaluable insight into the tensions arising when a theologian of the *via moderna*

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[22] *In I Sent.* Prol. q. 1 a. 5: "Ad destructionem autem errorum non proceditur nisi per sensum litteralem, eo quod sensus sint per similitudines accepti, et ex similitudinaris locutionibus non potest sumi argumentatio." Cf. *In I Sent.* Prol. q. 1 a. 7: "Ad secundum de occasione erroris, dicendum quod ex multiplicitate sensuum nulla datur errandi occasio: quia ut Augustinus dicit in libro de doctrina christiana: 'Nihil secundum spiritualem sensum est in scriptura exponendum, quod alibi secundum sensum litteralem manifeste non exprimatur.' Unde et sensus spiritualis non est idoneus ad aliquid confirmandum, nisi sensu litterali fulciatur." See A. Haufnagel, "Wort Gottes: Sinn und Bedeutung nach Thomas von Aquin," in *Wort Gottes in der Zeit: Festschrift Karl Hermann Schelkle zum 65. Geburtstag,* ed. H. Feld and J. Nolte (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1973), pp. 236–256; P. Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God: Place and Function of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), pp. 8–52.

[23] See F. Hahn, "Zur Hermeneutik Gersons," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 51 (1954), pp. 34–50.

[24] See Feld, *Anfänge der modernen biblischen Hermeneutik,* pp. 70–83.

[25] This point is made by most theologians of the period, but is stated with particular force by Gerson – cf. *De sensu literali sacrae scripturae,* cited Feld, *Anfänge der modernen biblischen Hermeneutik,* p. 57, n. 117: "Sensus scripturae literalis judicandus est prout Ecclesia Spiritu Sancto inspirata et gubernata determinavit et non ad cuiuslibet arbitrium et interpretationem."

[26] The edition we have used is that edited by H. Feld, *Wendelini Steinbach Opera Exegetica quae supersunt omnia I* (Wiesbaden: Steiner Verlag, 1976).

[27] We refer not merely to the end of the Middle Ages, but to the end of the Bielian ascendancy at Tübingen: in 1517, after he finished his lectures on Hebrews, Steinbach was evicted from his lodgings, along with other members of the Brethren of the Common Life: see H. Feld, *Martin Luthers und Wendelin Steinbachs Vorlesungen über den Hebräerbrief* (Wiesbaden: Steiner Verlag, 1971), pp. 4–18.

encounters the thought of St Paul.[28] Steinbach does not use the hermeneutical framework of the *Quadriga* extensively, preferring to concentrate upon the literal sense of his text.[29] Of particular interest in this respect is his leading hermeneutical principle: that the Old Testament, *in its literal sense*, must be regarded as referring to Christ and his church.[30]

Oberman has helpfully drawn attention to a feature of Steinbach's exegesis which is of significance in relation to the *via moderna* – the need to contextualize the *modus loquendi* of the New Testament writers, and particularly St Paul. Thus, for example, the Pauline emphasis upon the priority of faith – which Steinbach, interestingly, summarizes in terms of the slogan *sola fides sufficiat* – must be understood in terms of the apostle's polemic against those who maintained that human nature, given proper instruction, could attain salvation unaided.[31] Steinbach allows that *sola fides sufficiat* – but insists that this is an appropriate *modus loquendi* only for those who have just begun the Christian life: those who are more versed in its principles know that faith cannot save unless it is accompanied and informed by a habit of charity.[32] Indeed, Steinbach interprets Abraham's response of faith as an illustration of the general maxim "God will not deny his grace to those who do *quod in se est*."[33]

Even though Steinbach is commenting upon the very epistle which Luther would later indicate to be his particular favorite, and even though he concedes that Paul speaks of justification *sola fide*, the Tübingen exegete is still able to derive and support the leading features of the doctrine of justification associated with the *via moderna* from his text. This fact serves to emphasize the point which we made earlier: the hermeneutical presuppositions with which exegetes

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[28] For an excellent discussion, see H.A. Oberman, *Werden und Wertung der Reformation* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1977), pp. 118–140.

[29] Feld, *Vorlesungen über den Hebräerbrief*, pp. 145–152.

[30] Feld, *Vorlesungen über den Hebräerbrief*, pp. 146–147.

[31] Steinbach, *Opera exegetica I* (see n. 22) lect. III cap. 17; 132.19–133.1.

[32] Steinbach, *Opera exegetica I* lect. III cap. 17; 134.12–17; lect. III cap. 16; 131.11–18; lect. III cap. 17; 136.22–137.2. Cf. Oberman, *Werden und Wertung*, p. 127.

[33] Steinbach, *Opera exegetica I* lect. III cap. 19; 152.7–9; lect. II cap. 12; 97.1–4.

approach scripture effectively determine their conclusions. With this point in mind, we now turn to consider Luther's hermeneutical presuppositions implicit in his exposition of the Psalter, 1513–1515.

Luther's *Dictata super Psalterium* are an outstanding example of late medieval biblical exegesis, illustrating brilliantly the features which we have identified as characteristic of the period. Luther employs the *Quadriga* with an enthusiasm and brilliance which must have captivated his audience. Even as late as 1519, Luther conceded that, provided it was not abused, the *Quadriga* was a valuable exegetical aid.[34] The fourfold exegetical scheme dominates Luther's exposition of the Psalter.[35] Luther is careful, following the standard guidelines, to subordinate the three spiritual senses of scripture to the literal (or historical) sense, expressly stating that nothing can be held on the basis of the allegorical, tropological, or anagogical senses unless it can first be shown to be explicitly stated in the literal sense.[36] It is the literal sense of scripture which is the most fundamental, and to which the other three are subordinate.[37]

Luther makes an important distinction between the *literal-historical* meaning of his Old Testament text (that is, the literal meaning of the text, as determined by its historical context), and its *literal-prophetic* sense (that is, the meaning of the text, as interpreted as referring to the coming of Christ and the establishment of his church). The Christological concentration, which is so characteristic a feature of Luther's *Dictata*, is achieved by placing emphasis upon the *literal-prophetic* rather than the *literal-historic* sense of scripture. In this manner, Luther is able to maintain that Christ is the *sensus principalis*

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[34] WA 2.550.17–34.

[35] A point emphasized by K. Holl, "Luthers Bedeutung für den Fortschritt der Auslegungskunst," in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte I: Luther* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1948), pp. 544–582, especially pp. 545–550; H. Bornkamm, *Luther und das Alte Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1948).

[36] WA 55 I.4.20–22 (= 3.11.33–5): "In Scripturis . . . nulla valet allegoria, tropologia, anagoge, nisi alibi hystorice idem expresse dicatur. Alioquin ludibrium fieret Scriptura."

[37] WA 4.305.6–8: "Quod inde puto venire, quia propheticum, id est literalem, primo non quesierunt: qui est fundamentum ceterorum, magister et lux et author et fons atque origo."

of scripture.[38] Once this Christological hermeneutical principle is conceded, the four senses of scripture form a common confluence, testifying to the coming of Christ and the benefits which this confers upon believers.[39] In an important essay, Gerhard Ebeling pointed out how Luther appears to combine the traditional medieval *Quadriga* with Lefèvre d'Etaples' Christological exegesis of the Psalter, referring the literal sense of scripture to Christ and his church, rather than the historical situation of Israel at the time.[40] Yet the subsequent publication of Steinbach's lectures on Galatians and Hebrews, dating from precisely the same time as Luther's *Dictata*, permits us to call the novelty of this approach into question, as it appears to have been a commonplace for later medieval exegetes to refer the literal sense of the Old Testament to Christ, so that the Old Testament *histories* – and not just the prophecies – must be seen as statements concerning Christ and his church.

As is well known, Luther's biblical hermeneutic underwent a decisive change in the period immediately following the *Dictata*,[41]

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[38] G. Ebeling, "Die Anfänge von Luthers Hermeneutik," in *Lutherstudien I* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1971), pp. 1–68; p. 61.

[39] WA 55 II.63.10–11 (= 3.46.28–29): "Et hoc modo omnes quatuor sensus Scripture in unum confluunt amplissimum flumen"; WA 3.369.6: "Hec omnia Christussimul."

[40] Ebeling, "Anfänge von Luthers Hermeneutik," pp. 54–61.

[41] As noted by Holl, *Luthers Bedeutung*; E. Hirsch, "Initium theologiae Lutheri," in *Der Durchbruch der reformatorischen Erkenntnis bei Luther*, pp. 64–95, especially 93–95; E. Vogelsang, *Die Anfänge von Luthers Christologie nach der ersten Psalmenvorlesung* (Berlin/Leipzig, 1929), pp. 16–30; 40–61; E. Seeberg, "Die Anfänge der Theologie Luthers," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 53 (1934), pp. 229–241. The suggestion by K. Bauer (*Die Wittenberger Universitätstheologie und die Anfänge der deutschen Reformation* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1928], pp. 145–147) that Luther's later hermeneutic is due to the influence of Johannes von Staupitz has been adequately refuted: see D.C. Steinmetz, *Luther and Staupitz: An Essay in the Intellectual Origins of the Protestant Reformation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1980), pp. 35–67, especially pp. 65–67.

although elements of this shift can be argued to be latent within the *Dictata*.[42] Nevertheless, it seems to us that the Christological concentration, so characteristic a feature of the *Dictata*, and so significant in relation to Luther's theological breakthrough, cannot be regarded as constituting an *innovation* on Luther's part. Even on this point, Luther must be regarded as standing within a late medieval hermeneutical tradition. The totally medieval character of the hermeneutic employed within the *Dictata* is confirmed by the observation that Luther insists that the interpretation of scripture is a public event, which takes place within the body of the church.[43] The church is the portal of salvation,[44] outside of which there is no true knowledge of God.[45] Furthermore, following Gerson, Luther explicitly states that the church's rule of faith must be regarded as a hermeneutical canon, which defines the area within which the exegesis of scripture may be legitimately pursued.[46] Those familiar only with the later Luther may find this assertion surprising – but the fact remains that the young Luther was, in this respect as in so many others, thoroughly medieval.

The medieval character of Luther's theology is, of course, at its most evident in the his marginal comments on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* (the *Randbemerkungen* of 1509–1510). Following the medieval Augustinian emphasis upon the priority of *caritas* over *fides*,[47] Luther insists that faith alone cannot justify: although faith may be regarded as directing the individual believer toward invisible

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[42] Particular attention is usually directed toward the increasing importance which Luther came to attach to the tropological sense of scripture. The theory of J.S. Preus, *From Shadow to Promise: Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to the Young Luther* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969) – that this *hindered* rather than *assisted* Luther's breakthrough – is quite untenable: see E.G. Rupp's review of this work in *Journal of Theological Studies* 23 (1972), pp. 276–278; Hendrix, *Ecclesia in via*, pp. 263–287.

[43] This is not to say that scripture is totally subject to the church: WA 3.516.40–517.4; 4.318.3–6.

[44] WA 4.25.12–17.

[45] WA 3.268.37–38: "Extra enim Ecclesiam non est cognitio vera Dei."

[46] WA 3.517.33–40.

[47] On this, see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, pp. 38–53.

realities, it is incapable of justifying that individual unless it is informed by *caritas*.[48] The most significant point of contact with the theology of justification of the later medieval period relates to his critique of the role of created habits in justification. Although an earlier generation of scholars regarded this as marking a complete break with the medieval tradition, it is becoming increasingly clear that this is simply not the case. Luther is quite easily located within the spectrum of theological possibilities known to have been characteristic of German theology during the 1510s.

During the thirteenth century the concept of a created habit of grace or charity had become inextricably linked with the discussion of the mode of the justification of sinners before God. The concept appeared to provide a solution to a dilemma which the theological renaissance of the twelfth century had highlighted: in what manner can God be said to dwell in the souls of the justified?[49] It was clearly necessary to distinguish the mode of the human and divine union in this instance from the unique case of the hypostatic union. The unique case of Jesus Christ as God incarnated clearly needed to be distinguished from the more general case of the presence of God in the believer.[50] However, a satisfactory conceptual framework by which this distinction might be made and sustained was not then available. Peter Lombard attempted to resolve the problem by directly equating the *caritas* which is infused into the human soul

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[48] WA 9.72.4: "*fides enim qua iustificatus es:* Talis fides non est sine charitate"; WA 9.72.11–12: "hic non simpliciter fides dicitur, sed per dilectionem operatur vel qua iustificati sumus"; WA 9.90.32: "charitas facit totam personam gratam."

[49] For this question, see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, pp. 128–138. See also: Z. Alszeghy, *Nova Creatura: la nozione della grazia nei commentari medievali di S. Paolo* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1956); B. Gillon, "La grâce incréée chez quelques théologiens du XIVᵉ siècle," *Divinitas* 11 (1967), pp. 671–680; B. Stoeckle, "*Gratia supponit naturam*". *Geschichte und Analyse eines theologischen Axioms* (Rome: Herder, 1962).

[50] For the case of Ebionitism, which treated the relation of humanity and divinity in Christ as analogous to that in charismatic believers, see R. Bauckham, "The Origin of the Ebionites," in *The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature*, ed. P.J. Tomson and D. Lambers-Petry (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), pp. 162–181.

in justification with the person of the Holy Spirit.[51] This solution, however, was regarded with suspicion by his successors. For Thomas Aquinas, the union of the uncreated Holy Spirit with the created human soul was quite incompatible with the ontological distinction it was necessary to maintain between them. St Thomas therefore located the solution to the problem as lying in the concept of a created habit which, although essentially indistinguishable from God, nevertheless remains an entity that is divinely created within the human soul.[52] The created habit was thus understood as a hybrid species, interposed as a created intermediate between God and humanity, whose presence determines whether or not an individual is justified.

Underlying the implication of a created habit of grace in justification is a particular concept of causality. For Thomas Aquinas, Peter Aureole, and others,[53] the nature of grace, sin, and divine acceptation were such that a created habit of grace was necessary in justification by the very nature of things (*ex natura rei*). When this concept of causality was called into question by Duns Scotus, the role of created habits in justification appeared increasingly uncertain. For Scotus, the relationship between grace, sin, and divine acceptation was purely contingent, depending upon divine ordination rather than the nature of the entities themselves.[54] It is this concept of causality, usually referred to as *covenantal* or *sine qua non* causality, and discussed at length in the previous chapter, which is characteristic of the *via moderna*. During the later fourteenth century, it also became highly influential within certain sections of the Augustinian Order.

Although the theologians of the Augustinian Order were initially faithful to the teaching of Giles of Rome on the necessity of created habits in justification, the role of such habits was increasingly called

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[51] Peter Lombard, *I Sent.* dist. xvii. For an extremely helpful survey of the points at issue in the medieval discussion of this distinction, see W. Dettloff, *Die Entwicklung der Akzeptations-und Verdienstlehre von Duns Skotus bis Luther* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1963).

[52] Thomas Aquinas, *In I Sent.* dist. xvii q. 1 a. 1.

[53] See McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, pp. 176–186, for further details.

[54] W. Dettloff, *Die Lehre von der Acceptatio Dei bei Johannes Duns Skotus* (Werl: Dietrich-Coelde-Verlag, 1954).

into question from the time of Gregory of Rimini onwards. For Thomas of Strassburg, the last theologian of the earlier Augustinian school, the axiom which determined the necessity of created habits in justification was *nullus potest esse formaliter Deo gratus nisi sit informatus gratia a Deo creato* ("nobody can be formally acceptable to God unless they are informed by the grace created by God");[55] for Gregory of Rimini, usually regarded as the first representative of the *schola Augustiniana moderna*, the axiom which called the necessity of such habits into question was Scotus's maxim *nihil creatum potest esse ratio actus divini* ("nothing that is created can be the reason for a divine act").[56]

As we have shown elsewhere, there was a substantial body of opinion within the Augustinian Order during the later Middle Ages which shared the misgivings of the *via moderna* concerning the logical necessity of created habits in justification. Beginning with Gregory of Rimini, criticism of the role of created habits in justification became a commonplace within the Order, being associated with such theologians as Hugolino of Orvieto, Dionysius of Montina, Alphonsus of Toledo, Johannes Klenkok and Johannes Hiltalingen of Basel.[57] Although the de facto necessity of such habits was not actually denied, justification came to be seen as a direct, personal act of God, which need not involve any created intermediates *ex natura rei*.

By the end of the medieval period, two factors had combined to make created habits unnecessary hypotheses in relation to justification. The first of these was the conclusive demonstration by the theologians of the *via moderna* that there was no logical necessity for such habits in justification. Applying the general principle of conceptual parsimony famously set out in "Ockham's razor" – *Quia frustra fit per plura quod potest equaliter fieri per pauciora*[58] – their

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[55] Duns Scotus, *In II Sent.* dist. xxvi, xxvii, a. 1 q.1.

[56] E.g., as used by Gabriel Biel, among countless others of the period: Biel, *In I Sent.* dist. xvii q.3 a.3 dub. 2.

[57] A.E. McGrath, "'Augustinianism?' A Critical Assessment of the so-called 'Medieval Augustinian Tradition' on Justification," *Augustiniana* 31 (1981), pp. 247–267; McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, pp. 202–207.

[58] Ockham, *In II Sent.* qq. 14–15; O.

existence was deemed irrelevant, if they existed at all. Secondly, the tendency within the modern Augustinian school to emphasize the personal nature of the divine action within man inevitably led to emphasis being shifted from the concept of *created* grace to that of *uncreated* grace – away from the concept of the habit, toward the Holy Spirit himself. The interpretation of the Holy Spirit as the bond of love which unites Father and Son, the Godhead and the believer, which is ultimately due to St Augustine himself, thus came to assume a new significance. This emphasis upon the primacy of *gratia increata* over *gratia creata* can be particularly well illustrated from Staupitz's Tübingen sermons of 1497–1498.[59] In view of this consensus within the theological traditions which the young Luther encountered during his years at Erfurt (1505–1508) and his first Wittenberg period (1508–1509), it would not be surprising if he incorporated the substance of this consensus into his marginal comments to Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. An examination of these comments indicates that this is the case.

In his marginal comments to the *Sentences*, we find Luther expressing precisely the same sentiments concerning created habits as those we noted above, although it is not clear which of the two considerations we noted above was the more influential upon his deliberations.[60] Luther's study of Augustine's *de Trinitate*, which dates from this period, clearly made a deep impression upon him, particularly in connection with the relationship between *dilectio* (or *caritas*) and the Holy Spirit. For Luther, the concept of a created habit caused more problems than it solved, and he therefore attempts to resolve the dilemma on the basis of the lines indicated by Augustine himself. Setting aside hypothetical speculation *de potentia Dei absoluta* – the traditional method of demonstrating the radical

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[59] D.C. Steinmetz, *Misericordia Dei: The Theology of Johannes von Staupitz in Its Late Medieval Setting* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), pp. 106–107.

[60] For an excellent, although now somewhat dated, discussion, see P. Vignaux, *Luther Commentateur des Sentences (Livre I, Distinction XVII)* (Paris: Leroux, 1935), pp. 5–44. Vignaux relates Luther's *habitus* critique to the prevailing theology of the *via moderna*; modern scholarship of medieval Augustinian theology has indicated the necessity to modify this thesis somewhat in the light of recently published sources.

contingency of the role of created habits – Luther argues that de facto it is impossible to separate the gifts of *caritas* and the Holy Spirit: both are given simultaneously and in conjunction with one another.[61]

To illustrate the essential relationship between the concepts, Luther alludes to 1 Corinthians 1.30: "Christ is our faith, righteousness, grace and our sanctification." Although Luther's discussion of this point is intensely compressed, the point he is making is clear: the relationship between *caritas* and the Holy Spirit is to be regarded as analogous to that between *iustitia* and Christ. Although the seeds of Luther's mature thought of the nature of justification are contained within these terse statements, they are not developed further. Luther confines himself to arguing that the Holy Spirit is *caritas*,[62] just as he would later argue that Christ is the righteousness of faith.[63] For Luther, the concept of the *habitus* is quite unhelpful and unnecessary: if the term must be used, it should be used in an Augustinian, and not in an Aristotelian, sense, referring to the bond of love which unites human beings to God, rather than a created intermediate interposed between them. Luther's meditation upon Augustine's *de Trinitate*, with its characteristic emphasis upon the Holy Spirit as the bond of love which unites Father and Son, the Godhead and the believer, has evidently found its expression in a criticism of the *habitus* doctrine which is as penetrating as it is condensed. If Augustine's soteriology is understood to underlie Peter Lombard's remarks on the relationship between the Holy Spirit and *caritas* or *dilectio*, Luther observes that the Master of the Sentences came close to the truth: *habitus autem adhuc est spiritus sanctus*.[64]

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[61] WA 9.42.35–38. On Augustine's approach, see J. Arnold, "Begriff und heilsökonomische Bedeutung der göttlichen Sendungen in Augustinus *De Trinitate*," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 25 (1991), pp. 3–69.

[62] WA 9.42.39–43.6.

[63] WA 40 I.229.28.

[64] WA 9.44.1–4: "Ad hanc authoritatem quae expressa nimis est: quia deo conjungi per charitatem est quasi per medium ad objectum, diceret Magister, quod Augustinus hic loquitur de actu charitatis qui nos deo jungit, habitus autem est spiritus sanctus." The same conclusion is implicit earlier in his discussion: WA 9.43.2–8.

Luther here reproduces an authentically Augustinian theme which had assumed increasing importance in later medieval theology – the conviction that justification involves a direct personal encounter between the Holy Spirit and individuals. Although Luther explicitly rejects one medieval tradition on the nature of the grace of justification, it is only to adopt another. Far from breaking free from the medieval tradition at this point, Luther merely shifts his position within it.

The most characteristic feature of the late medieval discussion of the doctrine of justification to be found in the *Dictata super Psalterium* is that of a *pactum* between God and humanity, on the basis of which God is able to justify the sinner. This theme is particularly associated with the *via moderna*, and has been discussed in the previous chapter, to which the reader is referred (pp. 71–83). As medieval theological scholarship has now established with confidence,[65] the idea of a self-imposed limitation upon the divine activity was a commonplace from the twelfth century onward. Broadly speaking, God was understood to have sworn to justify humanity, provided individuals first fulfilled a certain minimum requirement on their part. It is this fundamental principle which underlies the celebrated scholastic maxim *facienti quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam* ("God will not deny grace to those who do what lies within them").[66] The basic principle expressed here is that when someone fulfills their obligations to God (by doing "what lies within them," *quod in se est*), God will respond by bestowing the gift of justifying grace. The use of this principle is as characteristic of the early Dominican and Franciscan schools as it is of the later Franciscan school and the *via moderna*.[67] There was, of course, considerable divergence of opinion within the schools concerning the precise *nature* of human obligations to God; whether individuals could fulfill these unaided (*ex puris naturalibus*)

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[65] The best study remains the richly documented investigation of B. Hamm, *Promissio, Pactum, Ordinatio: Freiheit und Selbstbindung in der scholastischen Gnadenlehre* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1977). The reader who is not familiar with this concept should read this work before proceeding further.

[66] See McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, pp. 107–116, for an analysis of the various interpretations placed upon this maxim in the period.

[67] See McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, pp. 186–201, for discussion.

or required the assistance of prevenient grace; and whether this "preparation" or "disposition" for justification could be considered to be meritorious *de congruo*. Nevertheless, practically the entire medieval theological tradition from the end of the twelfth century to the beginning of the sixteenth assumed that justification proceeded within this general framework.

The distinctive approach to this principle associated with the *via moderna* concerns the way in which justification is understood to take place. The earlier medieval tradition had insisted that God was under a self-imposed obligation to bestow grace upon anyone who did *quod in se est*, and had no qualms about employing terms such as *obligatio* or *debitum* to refer to this obligation upon the part of God. The theologians of the *via moderna* correlated this idea of a divine obligation with the newly emerging economic and political ideas of covenants or contracts, and thus came to speak of a covenant or contract (*pactum*) between God and humanity, on the basis of which God had promised to bestow grace upon individuals, provided they fulfilled certain basic conditions.[68] This conceptual device served to emphasize the divine reliability: once individual human beings had fulfilled their part of the covenant, they could rest assured that God would bestow justifying grace upon them.

It must be emphasized here that the introduction of the *pactum* motif does not represent an *alteration* of the common medieval teaching on the divine obligation to justify humanity, but represents a technical refinement of the notion. The conditions under which God will bestow justifying grace are defined by the terms of the *pactum*, and once individuals have fulfilled those conditions, God is under obligation (by a *necessitas coactionis* or *necessitas consequentiae*) to fulfill the divine side of the covenant. While other late medieval theologians, such as Staupitz, might wish to avoid using the concept of the *pactum*, and might have their reservations about the interpretation placed upon the conditions for justification by the *moderni*, they still worked within essentially the same conceptual framework.[69]

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[68] See pp. 141–150 of the present study for further details.
[69] Steinmetz, *Misericordia Dei*, pp. 93–97.

Precisely this general principle, and also the same technical vocabulary, is employed by Luther in the *Dictata*. Luther uses the terms *pactum* and *testamentum* interchangeably, although at a later date he would begin to distinguish between them.[70] The following passage illustrates this point particularly clearly:

> God has made himself a debtor to us through the promise of the one who is merciful, not through the dignity of the human nature of the one who merits. God required nothing except preparation, in order that we might be capable of receiving this gift, just as if a prince or king of the earth would promise a robber or a murderer one hundred florins, providing he awaited him at a specified time and place. Thus it is clear that the king would be a debtor through his gratuitous promise and mercy without that person's merit; nor would the king deny what he had promised on account of that person's demerit.[71]

This passage clearly and succinctly sets out the characteristic teaching of the medieval period on the necessity of a human preparation for justification, as well as demonstrating the general principle of a self-imposed divine obligation to bestow grace, upon the fulfillment of certain minimum conditions (in this case, turning up to receive the gift at a specified time and place). The following points of contact with the teaching of the *via moderna* may be noted:

1. The emphasis that the gift is bestowed through the divine liberality, and not through human merit: the play on the words *miserentis* and *merentis* is significant.

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[70] E.g., in the Galatians lectures of 1517 (WA 57 II.82.1–15) and the Galatians commentary of 1519 (WA 2.521.25–37). For an excellent discussion of the *pactum* motif in the young Luther, see O. Bayer, *Promissio. Geschichte der reformatorischen Wende in Luthers Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), pp. 119–123; 313–317; Hamm, *Promissio, Pactum, Ordinatio*, pp. 377–390. Luther later tended to associate *pactum* with life, and *testamentum* with death: cf. WA 6.514.7–10: "Deus testatus est, ideo necesse fuit eum mori: mori autem non potuit, nisi esset homo: ita in eodem testamenti vocabulo compendiosissime et incarnatio et mors Christi comprehensa est."
[71] WA 4.261.32–39.

2. The specification of a minimum condition for justification (that is, defining precisely what is meant by *quod in se est*). An abstract theological notion is thus operationalized, being expressed in terms of a specified human response.
3. The invocation of the principle that God is under an obligation to bestow grace once this minimum condition is met, irrespective of the merit or demerit of the *viator*.
4. The use of the image of a king, which was commonly used by the *moderni* to illustrate the principle of covenantal causality, which underlies this analogy.[72]
5. The use of the principle of covenantal causality itself, characteristic of the *via moderna*: what determines the relationship between the robber's receiving one hundred florins and his turning up at a specified time and place is not any inherent ontological connection between the two, but merely the king's promise that these two are thus to be correlated. Their relationship thus lies in the will of the king that it shall exist, rather than in some existing natural connection between them. The notion of covenantal causality is well illustrated by the analogy of turning up at the specified time and place as the *conditio* sine qua non for receiving the gift. There is no intrinsic link between occasion and gift, other than the stipulation of the one who promises that this gift will be bestowed if the one to whom the promise is made fulfills this specific condition.

The principle of covenantal causality lies at the center of Luther's doctrine of justification, as expounded in the *Dictata*. As Luther makes it clear, the way in which grace and faith are involved in justification is itself a consequence of the divine covenant (*pactum*) and not a consequence of their essential natures:

> Even grace and faith, through which we are justified today, would not justify us of themselves [*ex seipsis*], without God's covenant. It is

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[72] See the classic study of W.J. Courtenay, "The King and the Leaden Coin: The Economic Background to Sine Qua Non Causality," *Traditio* 28 (1971), pp. 185–209.

precisely for this reason that we are saved: God has made a testament [*testamentum*] and covenant [*pactum*] with us, so that whoever believes and is baptised will be saved. In this covenant God is truthful and faithful, and is bound by what has been promised.[73]

This important passage not merely illustrates the concept of covenantal causality with some brilliance: it also allows us to understand Luther's early appeal to his being baptized as a source of comfort during his spiritual struggles. *Ego baptisatus sum!* Since Luther *was* baptized, the concept of covenantal causality enabled him to rely upon the divine faithfulness in his time of distress. Luther had done what was required of him; he could not rely upon God to fulfill the covenant and come to his aid. Furthermore, the similarity between Luther and Steinbach on *fides* as an individual doing *quod in se est* will be evident.

From this analysis, it is clear that Luther operates with an essentially covenantal concept of causality in respect to justification at this early stage in his theological development. So what does Luther understand the minimum condition required for justification to be? *Homini facienti quod in se est Deus infallibiliter dat gratiam*, as Luther reminds his hearers. But what is to be understood by "*quod in se est*"? For Luther, the basic condition which individuals must meet in order to be justified appears to be a recognition of the need for grace, and an appeal to God to bestow it. This is indicated by Luther's discussion of faith and humility, to which we shall shortly return, but also by his frequent use of verbs such as "cry out,"[74] "ask," "seek," and "knock," as in the following crucial passage:

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[73] WA 3.289.1–5. Bayer points out how Luther uses the terminology associated with the *pactum* motif frequently elsewhere in the *Dictata* (e.g., *dispositio, facere quod in se est, paratus esse, meritum de congruo, capax esse*): Bayer, *Promissio*, p. 140. The suggestion that there is a fundamental semantic difference between Luther and the later medieval tradition here cannot be sustained: Hamm, *Promissio, Pactum, Ordinatio*, p. 384.

[74] WA 4.375.16–30.

> "Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and it shall
> be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, etc." (Matthew
> 7.7–8). Hence the doctors rightly say that God infallibly gives grace
> without fail to those who do what lies within them [*homini facienti quod
> in se est Deus infalliliter dat gratiam*], and though they could not
> prepare themselves for grace in a manner which is meritorious *de
> condigno*, they may do so in a manner which is meritorious *de congruo*
> on account of this promise of God and the covenant of mercy [*pactum
> misericordiae*].[75]

As Oswald Bayer points out, God gives grace *per definitionem* only to
those who ask for it.[76] More significantly, Luther here reproduces the
substance of Lection 59 of Gabriel Biel's commentary on the text of
the Mass,[77] a textbook which he himself studied as a student, thus
further confirming that the origins of his opinions lie with the
via moderna.

The Debate Over the Date of Luther's
Theological Breakthrough

In 1958, Ernst Bizer caused a storm in the world of Reformation
scholarship by arguing that Luther's theological breakthrough must
have taken place in the winter of 1517–1518.[78] If this were the case,
Luther's doctrine of justification in the *Dictata* of 1513–1515 would

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[75] WA 4.262.2–7. Luther abbreviates phrases such as "mereri de congruo" to "de
congruo."

[76] Bayer, *Promissio*, p. 128.

[77] Bayer, *Promissio*, pp. 129–132, with documentation from the original sources. In
the Romans lectures of 1515–1516, Luther again reproduces this characteristic feature
of the later medieval theological tradition, when commenting on Romans 4.7: see
Bayer, *Promissio*, pp. 137–143. Bayer's use of J.L. Austin's notion of "performative
speech act" in his analysis of Luther is potentially misleading, as pointed out by D.-M.
Grube, "Luthers reformatorischer Durchbruch. Zur Auseinandersetzung mit
Oswald Bayers Promissio-Verständnis," *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie
und Religionsphilosophie* 48 (2006), pp. 33–50.

[78] E. Bizer, *Fides ex auditu. Eine Untersuchung über die Entdeckung der Gerechtigkeit
Gottes durch Martin Luther* (Neukirchen: Neukirchner Verlag, 3rd edn, 1966), p. 165.

have to be regarded as medieval, rather than "reforming." Further-more, Luther would not have been in full possession of his "reforming" insights when he posted the Ninety-Five Theses in October 1517. One of the factors which led Bizer to this conclusion was his analysis of Luther's teaching in the *Dictata* on the proper disposition for justification: God gives grace to the humble.[79]

While we do not agree with Bizer's conclusions concerning the dating of Luther's theological breakthrough, it nevertheless seems to us that he has made a telling point concerning Luther's attitude to the relationship between justification and humility, at least in the years 1513–1514. Luther's use of terms such as *accusatio sui* and *iudicium* is usually, although not invariably, related to human awareness of one's own spiritual poverty and emptiness *coram Deo*, which moti-vates people to cry out to God for grace. This conclusion is suggested by a number of converging themes in the *Dictata*:

1. *Iudicium* is sometimes used to refer to the judgment of God.[80] When this sense is employed, the judgment which God pro-nounces upon humanity through the Word is that human beings are sinners. If individuals reject this judgment, they make God out to be a liar.[81]
2. *Iudicium* is usually the sinner's admission of sinfulness, worthy of punishment and death.[82] By admitting this, individuals have prepared themselves to receive the gift of justifying grace from God, and thus avoid final judgment.[83]
3. Luther frequently states that humility is the necessary precondi-tion for the reception of grace. Once sinners recognize the reality of their situation, they are moved to confess their sin, and praise God for being merciful.[84] By this *duplex confessio*, sinners

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[79] Bizer, *Fides ex auditu*, p. 19.
[80] E.g., WA 3.368.3–5.
[81] E.g., WA 3.288.8–12.
[82] E.g., WA 55 II.32.18–20.
[83] E.g., WA 4.198.19–21.
[84] E.g., WA 4.91.4–5; 4.111.33–37; 3.124.12–14. For *accusatio sui* as that precondition, see WA 3.288.30–32; 3.370.18. On the *duplex confessio*, see WA 4.239.1–3.

demonstrate that they have fully appreciated their hopelessness before God.

4. Luther excludes the possibility that sinful humanity can be justified by works of the law,[85] essentially because of the pride this engenders. Luther notes the importance of the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18.9–14) in this regard.[86] The righteousness of God excludes human righteousness,[87] so that God, in effect, justifies the humble and not the proud.[88]

These themes are clearly convergent. Luther's basic theme is that the Word of God forces sinful human beings, despite their outward morality, to recognize their emptiness and thus to turn to God, crying out for the gift of grace which they now recognize that they need. Christians, in other words, are spiritual beggars, who can do nothing except cry out for the salvation which is offered in Christ.[89] Once they do this, they have fulfilled the condition necessary for the bestowal of grace by the terms of the divine *pactum*, and the divine gift of grace follows as a matter of course. While Luther's understanding of what individuals must do in order to receive grace differs from Biel's in its emphasis, the theological framework within which both operate is essentially the same – that of a covenant, which imposes obligations upon God and humanity alike, which *both* must meet if justification is to take place. Even if Luther grafted an essentially Augustinian spiritual emphasis upon humility onto the covenant theology of the

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[85] WA 3.170.33–34; 3.172.30–36; 55 II.92.17–19.

[86] Luther's discussion of this parable in the *Dictata* fits comfortably within medieval traditions of interpretation. On the late medieval interpretation of this parable, see A. Zumkeller, "Das Ungenügen der menschlichen Werke bei den deutschen Predigern des Spätmittelalters," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 81 (1959), pp. 265–305, especially p. 305.

[87] E.g., WA 3.154.32–34.

[88] E.g., WA 4.344.24–27.

[89] For an extremely helpful analysis, see H.A. Oberman, "Wir sind Pettler. Hoc est verum. Bunde und Gnade in der Theologie des Mittelalters und der Reformation," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 78 (1967), pp. 232–252. Oberman conclusively rejects the opinion that the *humilitas* in question was understood by Luther to be a monastic virtue.

via moderna in the *Dictata*, this is to be seen as the modification of this framework, not its replacement with an essentially Augustinian theology of grace. The sections of the *Dictata* which date up to the end of the year 1514 suggest that Luther has not yet broken free from the covenantal theology of the *via moderna*, even if he may have introduced some modifications, particularly some reflecting the distinctive spiritual emphases of the Augustinian order.[90]

In 1514 Luther held a doctrine of justification which was firmly set within a well-established medieval theological tradition. All that was required of sinners was that they humbled themselves before God, in order that they might receive the gift of grace which God would then bestow upon them. If Luther's early theology of justification is approached from the standpoint of the later medieval period, rather than from that of the later Luther himself, this theology fits naturally into place within the overall development of the doctrine within this period. The fact that Luther displays clear continuity with this later medieval tradition serves to emphasize the significance of his break from it, rather than to detract from it. It is the nature and development of this break, which finally led to the formulation of the *theologia crucis*, that forms the subject of the second part of this study. That break appears to have come about through Luther's prolonged meditation upon a concept which he had frequently encountered during his exegesis of the Psalter – that of *iustitia Dei*, "the righteousness of God." The origins of the theology of the cross lie in Luther's initial difficulty in seeing how the idea of a righteous God could conceivably be good news for sinful humanity. It is to the question of the nature and date of Luther's discovery of his new understanding of the "righteousness of God," probably one of the most tantalizing aspects of modern Luther scholarship, that we now turn.[91]

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[90] Grane correctly concludes: "daß hier ein Theologe der via moderna spricht": L. Grane, *Contra Gabrielem: Luthers Auseinandersetzung mit Gabriel Biel in der Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1962), p. 309; Hamm, *Promissio, Pactum, Ordinatio*, p. 377.

[91] For a brief introduction to the issue and its importance, see B. Lohse, *Luthers Theologie in ihrer historischen Entwicklung und in ihrem systematischen Zusammenhang* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), pp. 80–110.

Part Two

The Breakthrough

Luther in Transition, 1514–1519

4

Mira et nova diffinitio iustitiae: Luther's Discovery of the Righteousness of God

In 1545, the year before Luther's death, an edition of his works was published at Wittenberg. Luther, then an old man, contributed a preface to the first volume of this edition, during the course of which he took the opportunity to reflect upon his early career at Wittenberg. This "autobiographical fragment" has come to play a major role in scholarly reflection on the nature and date of Luther's theological breakthrough. At one point in this preface, in a remarkable piece of sustained theological analysis, Luther reflected upon the theological problem which had, he alleges, been troubling him for some considerable period of time – the idea of the "righteousness of God." How could the revelation of this righteousness be good news for sinners, such as himself?

In view of the importance of this passage, we shall cite it in full, both in the original Latin and in a reliable English translation.[1] Having described the origins and development of the indulgences controversy of 1519 and the doomed attempt of the papal representative Karl von Miltitz to resolve the controversy, Luther then turns to consider some of the theological issues which concerned him at this time, as follows.

Interim eo anno iam redieram ad Psalterium denuo interpretandum, fretus eo, quod exercitatior essem, postquam S. Pauli Epistolas ad Romanos, ad Galatas, et eam, quae est ad Ebraeos, tractassem in scholis. Miro certe ardore captus fueram cognoscendi Pauli in epistola ad Rom., sed obstiterat hactenus non frigidus circum praecordia sanguis, sed unicum vocabulum, quod est Cap. 1: Iustitia Dei revelatur in illo. Oderam enim vocabulum istud "Iustitia Dei," quod usu et consuetudine omnium doctorum doctus eram philosophice intelligere de iustitia (ut vocant) formali seu activa, qua Deus est iustus, et peccatores iniustosque punit.

Meanwhile in that year [1519], I had returned to interpreting the Psalter again, relying on the fact that I was more practiced after having treated the letters of St Paul to the Romans and the Galatians, and the letter to the Hebrews in the schools. I had been overcome with a wonderful and certain desire to understand St Paul in his letter to the Romans, but what had hindered me thus far was not any "coldness of the blood"[2] so much as that one phrase in the first chapter: "The righteousness of God is revealed in it." For I had hated that phrase "the righteousness of God" which, according to the use and custom of all the doctors, I had been taught

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[1] German-speaking scholars have often commented on the curious and rather stilted manner in which English scholars have translated this passage in the past (e.g., J. Mackinnon, *Luther and the Reformation* [London: Longman, 1925], p. 153; E.G. Rupp, *The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies* [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1953], pp. 121–122): see, for example, G. Pfeiffer, "Das Ringen Luthers um die Gerechtigkeit Gottes," in *Der Durchbruch der reformatorischen Erkenntnis bei Luther*, ed. B. Lohse (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), pp. 163–202; p. 180, n. 79.

[2] The phrase comes from Virgil's *Georgics*, 2.484: "frigidus obstiterit circum praecordia sanguis." For comment, see C. Nappa, "Cold-Blooded Virgil: Bilingual Wordplay at *Georgics* 2.483–9," *Classical Quarterly* 52 (2002), pp. 617–620.

to understand philosophically, in the sense of the formal or active righteousness (as they termed it), by which God is righteous, and punishes unrighteous sinners.

Ego autem, qui me, utcunque irreprehensibilis monachus vivebam, sentirem coram Deo esse peccatorem inquietissimae conscientiae, nec mea satisfactione placatum confidere possem, non amabam, imo odiebam iustum et punientem peccatores Deum, tacitaque si non blasphemia, certe ingenti murmuratione indignabar Deo, dicens: quasi vero non satis sit, miseros peccatores et aeternaliter perditos peccato originali omni genere calamitatis oppressos esse per legem decalogi, nisi Deus per euangelium dolorem dolori adderet, et etiam per euangelium nobis iustitiam et iram suam intentaret. Furebam ita saeva et perturbata conscientia, pulsabam tamen importunus eo loco Paulum, ardentissime sitiens scire, quid S. Paulus vellet.

Although I lived blamelessly as a monk, I felt that I was a sinner with an uneasy conscience before God; nor was I able to trust that I had pleased him by my satisfaction. I did not love – in fact, I hated – this righteous God who punished sinners, if not with silent blasphemy, then I was certainly angry with God with much grumbling, saying "As if it were not really enough that miserable sinners should be eternally damned through original sin, with all kinds of misfortunes laid upon them by the Old Testament law, and yet God adds sorrow upon sorrow through the gospel, and even brings his wrath and righteousness to bear upon us through it!" Thus I raged with a savage and disturbed conscience,[3] persistently pounding upon Paul in this passage, eagerly desiring to know what he meant.

Dxonec miserente Deo meditabundus dies et noctes connexionem verborum attenderem, nempe: Iustitia Dei revelatur in illo, sicut scriptum est: Iustus ex fide vivit, ibi iustitiam Dei

At last, God being merciful, by meditating day and night on the connection of the words "the righteousness of God is revealed in it, as it is written: the righteous

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[3] Luther here alludes to the Vulgate translation of Wisdom 17.10: "semper enim praesumit saeva conturbata conscientia." Compare Luther: "saeva et perturbata conscientia."

coepi intelligere eam, qua iustus dono Dei vivit, nempe ex fide, et esse hanc sententiam, revelari per euangelium iustitiam Dei, scilicet passivam, qua nos Deus misericors iustificat per fidem, sicut scriptum est: Iustus ex fide vivit. Hic me prorsus renatum esse sensi, et apertis portis in ipsam paradisum intrasse. Ibi continuo alia mihi facies totius scripturae apparuit. Discurrebam deinde per scripturas, ut habebat memoria, et colligebam etiam in aliis vocabulis analogiam, ut opus Dei, id est, quod operatur in nobis Deus, virtus Dei, qua nos potentes facit, sapientia Dei, qua nos sapientes facit, fortitudo Dei, salus Dei, gloria Dei.

Iam quanto odio vocabulum "iustitia Dei" oderam ante, tanto amore dulcissimum mihi vocabulum extollebam, ita mihi iste locus Pauli fuit vere porta paradisi. Postea legebam Augustinum de spiritu et litera, ubi praeter spem offendi, quod et ipse iustitiam Dei similiter interpretatur: qua nos Deus induit, dum nos iustificat. Et quamquam imperfecte hoc adhuc sit dictum, ac

shall live by faith," I began to understand that "righteousness of God" as that by which the righteous lives by the gift of God, namely by faith, and this sentence, "the righteousness of God is revealed," to refer to a passive righteousness, by which a merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "The righteous lives by faith." This immediately made me feel as though I had been born again, and as though I had entered through open gates into paradise itself. From that moment, the whole face of scripture appeared to me in a different light. Afterwards, I ran through the scriptures, as from memory, and found the same analogy in other phrases such as the "work of God" (that which God works within us), the "power of God" (by which he makes us strong), the "wisdom of God" (by which he makes us wise), the "strength of God," the "salvation of God," and the "glory of God."

And now, to the extent that I had earlier hated the phrase "the righteousness of God," I began to exalt it with that same degree of affection as the sweetest of words, so that this passage in Paul truly became the gate of paradise for me. Afterwards, I read Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Letter*, where I found that he too, beyond my expectation, interpreted "the

de imputatione non clare omnia explicet, placuit tamen iustitiam Dei doceri, qua nos iustificemur.	righteousness of God" in the same way – as that which God bestows upon us, when he justifies us. And although this is expressed somewhat imperfectly, and he does not explain everything about imputation clearly, it was nevertheless pleasing to find that he taught that the "righteousness of God" is that, by which we are justified.
Istis cogitationibus armatior factus coepi Psalterium secundo interpretari.	Excited by these thoughts, I began to interpret the Psalter for the second time.[4]

While the reminiscences of old age are not always especially reliable, Luther's account of his early years appears to be surprisingly accurate,[5] encouraging a positive appraisal of the section of the preface in which Luther reflects on his personal journey of theological discovery and illumination. Yet the passage bristles with interpretative difficulties and questions. Why, for example, does Luther refer to himself as a "monk" (*monachus*), when he had actually been a "friar" (*frater*)? Perhaps the answer lies in the use of the term *utcunque*, which could be argued to imply parallels, but not identity, with the life of someone in a strictly monastic order.

And why is this passage so saturated with the language of rage and anger?[6] Luther's use of emotive language has often been noted,[7] and

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[4] WA 54.185.12–186.21.

[5] E.g., E. Stracke, *Luthers großes Selbstzeugnis 1545 über seine Entwicklung zum Reformator historisch-kritisch untersucht* (Leipzig: Heinsius Nachfolger, 1926), pp. 112–128.

[6] A point raised by M.H. Jung, *Frömmigkeit und Theologie bei Philipp Melanchthon: Das Gebet im Leben und in der Lehre des Reformators* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1998), pp. 15–16. Note especially the phrases "non amabam, imo odiebam," "sentirem," "indignabar," and "furebam."

[7] B. Stolt, *Martin Luthers Rhetorik des Herzens* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2000), p. 49.

contrasted with the more rational and emotionally disengaged style of other early Protestant writers. In part, the answer may lie in the deep terror Luther experienced as he reflected on his sin and guilt, and his inability to discern a credible theological solution to his dilemma. As has often been noted, the late medieval and early modern era witnessed high levels of existential anxiety in western Europe, often focused on the predicament of human guilt.[8] Luther's deeply disturbed conscience fits easily into what is now known of this religious and cultural context.

The imagery deployed here by Luther also needs much further exploration. For example, his reference to opening the "gates of paradise" (*porta paradise*) resonates strongly with some themes in late medieval thought – for example, Marian devotion, certain forms of eroticism, and popular understandings of the structure of the cosmos.[9] The language, when properly contextualized, hints at the discovery of an intimate and transformative secret, previously hidden in the depths of the earth, or entering into a hitherto mysterious and forbidden world.

Yet the most important question relates to the possibility that Luther, in his old age, may have psychologically contracted the time scale during which his reflections upon the meaning of *iustitia Dei* took place,[10] so that insights which actually accumulated over a number of years are presented as if they occurred in a devastating moment of illumination. It is quite possible that Luther may have unconsciously modeled his account of his own theological breakthrough upon that of St Augustine, as it is recounted in the eighth book of the African bishop's *Confessions*. Luther frequently refers to

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[8] As noted by J. Delumeau, *Le péché et la peur: la culpabilisation en Occident, XIIIe–XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Fayard, 1983).

[9] On this final point, see D. Birkholz, "Mapping Medieval Utopia: Exercises in Restraint," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 36 (2006), pp. 585–616, especially pp. 590–596.

[10] Or *justitia Dei*. The Weimar edition of Luther's works tends to use the orthography *iustitia Dei* (occasionally *iusticia Dei*), and we shall follow this practice throughout this work.

this passage in the course of the *Dictata*,[11] indicating that he is aware of its significance in this respect. Is, some wonder, Luther's account of his own religious transformation an indirect witness to that of Augustine, especially in his emphasis upon reading Paul's letters as a gateway to a sudden and catastrophic theological illumination?

A more tantalizing difficulty relates to the material upon which we are obliged to base our assessment of the theological reliability of the autobiographical fragment. As we shall indicate later, the textual evidence clearly suggests that Luther's discovery of the "new" meaning of the "righteousness of God" took place at some point during the year 1515, possibly while he was still delivering his first course of lectures upon the Psalter. So can we map the theological trajectory set out in the 1545 narrative onto the biblical expositions of 1515? Should we expect to find resonance between them, thus confirming this analysis?

It is improbable, however, that we shall find the theological anxieties and personal ruminations of the autobiographical fragment openly expressed in the *Dictata*. As noted in the previous chapter, the young Luther regarded the exposition and interpretation of scripture as a *public*, rather than a *private* event, so that it is unlikely that he would incorporate accounts of his own personal doubts and anxieties into the substance of his public lectures. Public lectures on the part of a theological professor were not the place for the expression of personal existential concerns and doubts. Nevertheless, if Luther's understanding of the concept of the "righteousness of God" underwent such a dramatic alteration during the period covered by the *Dictata*, it should be possible to detect clear, if possibly *indirect*,

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[11] E.g., WA 3.169.28–34; 3.535.20–22; 3.549.26–32. See A. Hamel, *Der junge Luther und Augustin*, 2 vols (Gütersloh: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1934–1935), vol. 1, pp. 157–162. Augustine's conversion narrative emphasizes the importance of reading and the role of Pauline material in bringing about this conversion: see, for example, L.C. Ferrari, "Paul at the Conversion of Augustine (*Conf.* VIII, 12,29–30)," *Augustinian Studies* 9 (1980), pp. 43–54; B. Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 75–110. There are obvious parallels here with Luther's account of his own breakthrough.

evidence of this change in the substance of these lectures – as, in fact, turns out to be the case.

There has been considerable disagreement on the part of Luther scholars concerning the precise nature of Luther's theological breakthrough, and the date to which it may be assigned. Indeed, the date assigned to the breakthrough is itself generally determined by the prior decision on the part of the scholar as to the precise nature of Luther's discovery. Nevertheless, there still appears to be a clear distinction between approaches based upon an analysis of the 1545 autobiographical fragment, which tend to date the breakthrough in the winter of 1518–1519, and those based upon an analysis of Luther's early works, particularly the *Dictata*, which generally place the breakthrough in the year 1514 or 1515. The force of the arguments adduced in favor of the former by Bizer,[12] and the latter by Bornkamm,[13] suggests that the nature of the discovery is actually considerably more complex than might at first appear to be the case. In the present study, we propose to argue the case for what we regard as the most satisfactory solution to the problem.

The present study argues for the following interpretation of the available textual and contextual evidence for the development of Luther's theology from 1509 to 1518. Initially, Luther's understanding of *iustitia Dei* and cognate concepts was essentially that of the *via moderna*. However, over a period of time, Luther broke free from this matrix, eventually offering a clear statement of his own position in the *theologia crucis* of 1518. The formulation of this *theologia crucis* took place over a period of several years, and was catalyzed by Luther's initial difficulties concerning the question of what was meant by the "righteousness of God." As a consequence of Luther's "new" answer to this question, the entire substance of his theology had to be reworked, leading eventually to the theology of the cross. As we

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[12] E. Bizer, *Fides ex auditu: Eine Untersuchung über die Entdeckung der Gerechtigkeit Gottes durch Martin Luther* (Neukirchen: Neukirchner Verlag, 3rd edn, 1966).
[13] H. Bornkamm, "Zur Frage der Iustitia Dei beim jungen Luther," in *Der Durchbruch der reformatorischen Erkenntnis*, pp. 289–383.

shall show, the leading features of the theology of the cross are present in Luther's discovery of the true meaning of *iustitia Dei*.

In other words, Luther's discovery of the righteousness of God is but one step in the process leading to the theology of the cross – but it is nevertheless the decisive catalytic step, which forced Luther to reconsider the theological matrix within which this concept was set. The old wineskins of the theology of the *via moderna* were simply incapable of containing the new wine which Luther thereby introduced. Indeed, Luther's passing reference to his rethinking of the meaning of terms such as *potentia Dei*, *sapientia Dei*, *fortitudo Dei*, and *gloria Dei* is practically a programmatic description of the development of the *theologia crucis*.

In the remainder of this study, we shall demonstrate how Luther's discovery of the new meaning of *iustitia Dei* necessitated a complete re-examination of his theology of justification, eventually forcing Luther to the theology of the cross. The development of Luther's theology of justification over the years 1514–1519 is not a series of isolated and unrelated episodes, but is an essentially unitary process by which Luther incorporated the consequences of his theological breakthrough into his theology of justification with a logical rigor normally associated with Calvin. Before documenting and analyzing this development, however, we propose to demonstrate how Luther's initial difficulties are the consequence of, and must be understood in the light of, the covenant theology of the *via moderna*.

Luther's Difficulties in the Light of Late Medieval Theology

If *iustitia* means rendering good for good and evil for evil, how can God justify sinful humanity? How can God, being righteous, render good for evil? Underlying the question of what is meant by the "righteousness of God," *iustitia Dei*, is the deeper question of what is meant by *iustitia* itself. It is a well-established fact that the vocabulary of Christian theology contains a number of important concepts which originate from a Hebraic context, and whose transference to

that of western Europe results in shifts of meaning which have quite unacceptable theological consequences. The Hebrew terms *sdq* and *sdqh* – which underlie the Vulgate's references to *iustitia* – provide an excellent example of this phenomenon.[14] The Hebrew root-morpheme *sdq* is a theological rather than a secular term, which frequently assumes strongly soteriological overtones that simply cannot be conveyed by the mere substitution of *iustitia* at its every occurrence – a point which is particularly evident when the difficulties faced by the Septuagint translators in dealing with *sdq* or *sdqh* are considered.[15] *Iustitia* is a Latin term derived from Roman secular use, and thus cannot be directly correlated with the Hebrew use of the term, which clearly has strong theological connotations quite absent from the history of the Latin term. Both *sdq* and *sdqh* can be argued to be grounded in the notion of the covenant between God and Israel, indicating that they ultimately have a theological rather than secular meaning. The most appropriate designation of the Hebrew terms *sdq* or *sdqh* is perhaps "a saving righteousness," *iustitia salutifera*.[16] God acts in righteousness to redeem and sustain Israel against her enemies, or individuals against their oppressors. The Hebrew terms simply cannot bear the meaning, characteristic of western thought, of *iustitia distributiva*, as it is encapsulated in the Ciceronian definition of justice as "giving to each person what they are entitled to" in order to preserve communal identity and integrity: *iustitia est habitus animi, communi utilitate conservata, suam cuique tribuens dignitatem*.[17] It is for this reason that the question of Luther's

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[14] On this whole question, see A.E. McGrath, "Justice and Justification: Semantic and Juristic Aspects of the Christian Doctrine of Justification," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 35 (1982), pp. 403–418.

[15] McGrath, "Justice and Justification," pp. 405–413. The problem is further discussed in McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 3rd edn, 2005), pp. 6–21.

[16] This term was coined at the end of the nineteenth century: see H. Cremer, *Die paulinische Rechtfertigungslehre im Zusammenhang ihrer geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen* (Gütersloh: Kessinger, 1899).

[17] Cicero, *Rhetoricum libri duo qui sunt de inventione rhetorica* lib. II cap. 53; cf. Justinian, *Institutiones* I, i: "Iustitia est constans et perpetua voluntas suum unicuique ius tribuens."

knowledge of Hebrew at the time of the first course of lectures of the Psalter becomes so significant: had he a good working knowledge of this biblical language, the strongly soteriological connotations of *iustitia Dei* would have impressed themselves upon him. However, although Luther's knowledge of Hebrew was such that, by the time of the *second* course of lectures on the Psalter (1518–1521), he appears to have fully appreciated this semantic point,[18] there is no compelling evidence to suggest he knew of it earlier.

The influence of Roman law over the world in which the early theology of the Latin-speaking church was forged made it inevitable that Roman understandings of the *nature* of justice would be projected on to the term as and when it occurred in Holy Scripture.[19] This was not a deliberate matter of theological polity; it was a basically a happenstance – though arguably a predictable happenstance – arising from the transference of Roman contexts of usage for the term *iustitia* to its theological equivalent, thus unintentionally secularizing its meaning. In effect, the Hebrew notion of divine justice was assimilated to prevailing secular notions of entitlement. The inevitable outcome was the gradual emergence of a belief that God, when acting righteously, rewarded people with what they were entitled to – in other words, to a covert notion of justification by achievements, merit, or works, rather than the Pauline notion of justification by faith, or the justification of the ungodly.

The first significant critique of this tendency occurred during the course of the Pelagian controversy of the early fifth century, in the

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[18] S. Raeder, *Grammatica Theologica: Studien zu Luthers Operationes in Psalmos* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1977), pp. 119–131 (with respect to Psalm 5.9); pp. 209–214 (with respect to Psalm 17.1). It seems to us that it is not possible to conclude that Luther's new understanding of *iustitia Dei* is influenced by his knowledge of Hebrew: cf. pp. 305–307.

[19] For the use of the Ciceronian sense of *iustitia* in the earlier western tradition, up to the thirteenth century, see O. Lottin, "Le concept de justice chez les théologiens du Moyen Age avant l'introduction d'Aristôte," *Revue Thomiste* 44 (1938), pp. 511–521. See also A. Beck, *Römisches Recht bei Tertullian und Cyprian: Eine Studie zur frühen Kirchenrechtsgeschichte* (Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1967); V. Vitton, *I concetti giuridici nelle opere di Tertulliano* (Rome: Bretschneider, 1972), pp. 50–54.

exchange between Julian of Eclanum and Augustine of Hippo.[20] According to Julian, God deals with humanity in justice and in equity, rendering to individuals that to which they are entitled as a result of merit, without reference to their persons. Julian tends to model God on the Roman state, understanding that God judges people equitably and justly in accordance with general principles in response to their achievements and faults.[21] The Ciceronian idea of *reddens unicuique quod suum est* permeates his discussion of what it means to state that God is *iustus* and deals with humanity according to *iustitia*. How could God act in a manner that was arbitrary or capricious, or failed to live up to Roman notions of righteousness and fairness?

For Augustine, however, the divine justice cannot be equated with human justice in this manner, as the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard illustrates. God's righteousness is expressed and demonstrated in faithfulness to the divine promises and covenants, irrespective of the merit of those to whom the promise is made. On the basis of Julian's understanding of *iustitia Dei*, it is simply impossible for God to justify the *un*godly. It is one of the more remarkable aspects of Augustine's theology of justification that he appears to discern intuitively, rather than analytically, the basic sense of the Hebrew term *sdqh*, despite the prevailing tendency to interpret this in a Ciceronian sense.[22]

A similar critique of the application of secular concepts of *iustitia* to characterize the divine dispensation toward humanity is due to

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[20] A.E. McGrath, "Divine Justice and Divine Equity in the Controversy between Augustine and Julian of Eclanum," *Downside Review* 101 (1983), pp. 312–319; J. Lössl, *Julian von Aeclanum: Studien zu seinem Leben, seinem Werk, seiner Lehre und ihrer Überlieferung* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 201–245.

[21] For the attitudes of the Roman aristocracy to the Pelagian controversy, see P. Brown, "The Patrons of Pelagius: The Roman Aristocracy between East and West," *Journal of Theological Studies* 21 (1970), pp. 56–72.

[22] A.E. McGrath, "'The Righteousness of God' from Augustine to Luther," *Studia Theologica* 36 (1982), pp. 63–78. This article is of particular relevance to the present section.

Anselm of Canterbury in the eleventh century.[23] Once more, the Ciceronian understanding of *iustitia* is considered as a possible means of articulating the relationship between God and humanity, only for it to be rejected. For Anselm, it is simply not possible to explain how God acted to redeem the world in Christ in terms of the Ciceronian understanding of justice as *reddens unicuique quod suum est*.

A similar difficulty lies at the heart of a vernacular poem, *The Pearl*, probably written *c*.1370 by a member of the household of John of Gaunt. Here the question of the meaning of the "righteousness of God" is explored with reference to the fate of a dead infant. How can an allegedly righteous God bestow salvation upon someone who died so young, and thus had done nothing which could be said to merit such a reward?[24] The poet's initial delight at finding his infant daughter in paradise gives way to a radical questioning of how God can justly reward her in such a manner. The dead infant, whose theological acumen belies her tender age, effectively reproduces Augustine's critique of Julian of Eclanum's understanding of the righteousness of God (which is remarkably similar to her father's), before clinching her case by appealing to the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard.

How can the idea of a righteous God be good news for sinful humanity? It is this question, which had clearly troubled others before him, which would so concern the young Luther. Numerous examples, from every period of his life from 1516 to 1545, may be given to illustrate how he frequently returns to his deeply ingrained memory of his early hatred for the idea of a "righteous God."[25] Who,

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[23] A.E. McGrath, "Rectitude: The Moral Foundation of Anselm of Canterbury's Soteriology," *Downside Review* 99 (1981), pp. 204–213. Our interpretation of this aspect of Anselm's theology is supported by G. Söhngen, "Rectitudo bei Anselm von Canterbury als Oberbegriff von Wahrheit und Gerechtigkeit," in *Sola Ratione: Anselm-Studien*, ed. H. Kohlenberger (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1970), pp. 71–77.

[24] A.D. Horgan, "Justice in *The Pearl*," *Review of English Studies* 33 (1981), pp. 173–180; McGrath, "The Righteousness of God," pp. 70–71; McGrath, "Divine Justice and Divine Equity," pp. 317–318.

[25] E.g., WATr 4.4007; 5.5247; 5.5553.

he asked in 1538, can love a God who wants to deal with sinners according to justice?[26] The essential point which we wish to make here before proceeding further is this: Luther's distress over the concept of *iustitia Dei* was not a difficulty of Luther's own invention, but a genuine theological *crux* involving the tension between two rival concepts of *iustitia*, which had not merely attracted the attention of the great doctors of the church before him, but which had even found its way into the vernacular religious literature. Even those who find it difficult to sympathize with Luther's difficulties at this point will concede that these difficulties represent a real theological problem which had preoccupied others before him. Although it is conceivable that Luther's troubled conscience may have exacerbated the difficulties involved, they remain real and existentially significant nonetheless.

It may, of course, be argued that, if Luther's difficulty represented a problem which had been adequately discussed within the earlier western theological tradition, it remains to be explained why Luther appears to have been quite unaware of the established solutions to this problem. A similar issue was raised in the early 1900s by Heinrich Denifle, who argued that Luther had misrepresented the western theological tradition as a whole.[27] According to Denifle, not a single writer in the western church, from Ambrosiaster to the time of Luther himself, understood *iustitia Dei* in the sense which Luther noted.

Yet both these objections are based upon the problematic assumption that Luther was directly familiar with the earlier western theological tradition on the interpretation of this theological notion – which, as we emphasized earlier, appears not to have been the case.

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[26] WA 40 II.445.24–29, following the printed version of 1538: "Porro hoc vocabulum Iusticiae magno sudore mihi consistit; sic enim fere exponebant, Iusticiam esse veritatem, qua Deus pro merito damnat seu iudicat male meritos. Et opponebant iusticiae misericordiam, qua salvantur credentes. Haec expositio periculosissima est, praeterquam quod vana est, concitat enim occultum odium contra Deum et eius iusticiam. Quis enim eum potest amare, qui secundum iusticiam cum peccatoribus vult agere?"

[27] H. Denifle, *Luther und Luthertum* (Mainz: Kirchheim, 2nd edn, 1904).

Luther is only familiar with the theology of the *moderni*, such as William of Ockham, Pierre d'Ailly, and Gabriel Biel, at first hand, and shows little familiarity with other theologians. Indeed, where such familiarity can be demonstrated, there are usually grounds for suspecting that he has encountered them indirectly, at second hand.[28] Denifle, as was quickly pointed out,[29] did not consider the writings of the *moderni* in his criticism of Luther. Furthermore, it is perfectly obvious that Luther's references in the autobiographical fragment to his having been taught, by the use and consent of all doctors (*usu et consuetudine omnium doctorum doctus eram*), to understand *iustitia Dei* as the formal justice of God implies a reference to his early days at Erfurt, as he began his theological studies under the supervision of the various *moderni* to whom we have already referred in an earlier chapter. The question with which we are therefore concerned is this: in what sense was *iustitia Dei* understood by the theologians of the *via moderna*?[30]

As noted in the previous chapter, the soteriology of the *via moderna* is closely linked with the concept of covenantal causality. This has as its fundamental presupposition the axiom that God has entered into a self-imposed limitation upon divine actions, in that God is committed to reward humans with grace upon the fulfillment of certain specified conditions. God's promise of grace is thus understood to be conditional upon sinners meeting certain requirements; as noted earlier, the concept of covenantal or sine qua non causality is such that these requirements need have no inherent connection with the nature of grace or of sin – all that is necessary is that they are specified as constituting the precondition for the bestowal of grace.

In the case of Gabriel Biel, this may be summarized as follows: God, acting according to mercy and liberality, ordained to enter into

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[28] For example, his knowledge of Gregory of Rimini is clearly derived from extracts included in the writings of Gabriel Biel: see p. 50, n. 93.

[29] E.g., E. Hirsch, "Initium Theologiae Lutheri," in *Der Durchbruch der reformatorischen Erkenntnis*, pp. 64–95.

[30] On this, see Alister E. McGrath, "Mira et nova diffinitio iustitiae. Luther and Scholastic Doctrines of Justification," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 74 (1983), pp. 37–60.

a *pactum* with humanity, by which God is prepared to ascribe a much greater value to human acts than they are inherently worth. Thus although someone who does *quod in se est* has done nothing of any particular inherent value, God accords it a much greater value within the terms of the *pactum*, allowing it to function as the contracted link between the natural human state and the state of grace. The present order of salvation, although the consequence of radically contingent decisions upon the part of God, must now be regarded as strictly immutable[31] – and hence as utterly reliable. God, having freely determined to enter into such a *pactum* with humanity according to which anyone who does *quod in se est* will be rewarded with grace, is now obliged to respect the terms of this covenant – even though God imposed them in the first place. *Deus dat gratiam facienti quod in se est necessitate immutabilitatis et ex suppositione quia disposuit dare immutabiliter gratiam facienti quod in se est.*[32]

As has often been pointed out,[33] the notion of a contracted obligation, such as that defined by the *pactum*, can be expressed particularly well in terms such as those deriving from Roman or canonical law. Indeed, practically all the terms used by the theologians of the *via moderna* to express the notion of a binding self-limitation upon the part of God can be shown to have their origins in the Roman emperor Justinian's *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, drawn up between 529 and 534.[34] Underlying the Ciceronian (and hence Justinian) concept of justice, and hence ultimately that of canon law, is the notion of a consensus concerning what rights and obligations are placed upon each member of the contracting political community – in other words, the idea of the *iuris consensus*. The difficulty facing earlier western theologians as they attempted to adapt the Ciceronian concept of *iustitia* as *reddens unicuique quod suum est* within a

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[31] Biel, *In I Sent.* dist. xli. q. unica a.3 dub. 3 summ.3; *Collectorium circa quattuor libros sententiarum*, ed. W. Werbeck and U. Hofmann, 4 vols (Tübingen: Mohr, 1973–1977), 1.732. 16–18.

[32] Biel, *In II Sent.* dist. xxvii q. unica a.3 dub. 4 O: 2.253.7–9.

[33] See B. Hamm, *Promissio, Pactum, Ordinatio: Freiheit und Selbstbindung Gottes in der scholastischen Gnadenlehre* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1977), pp. 462–466.

[34] For a list, see Hamm, *Promissio, Pactum, Ordinatio*, p. 463.

theological context was that there existed no obvious theological equivalent to this *iuris consensus*. This fundamental difficulty was overcome by the theologians of the *via moderna*, who, by analogy with the economic and political covenant models of their day, were able to employ the *pactum* in precisely this manner. The *pactum* thus defines a reliable framework within which the mutual rights and obligations of God and humanity have their context, so that what is "just" may be specified in each case.

As used by the theologians of the *via moderna*, the phrase *iustitia Dei* thus comes to refer to the divine faithfulness within the context of the ordained order of salvation. In effect, Biel is able to apply the Ciceronian or Aristotelian concept of distributive justice directly to God, avoiding contravening Duns Scotus's principle of the univocity of *iustitia* and similar terms.[35] God is *iustus* in giving to people what is their due (*quod suum est*) under the terms of the *pactum*. Thus someone who does *quod in se est* is rewarded with grace and eternal life; anyone who does not is punished. Therefore *iustitia Dei*, the "righteousness of God," can refer to *either* the righteousness by which God justifies sinners *or* to the righteousness by which they are punished. As Scotus insisted, there is only one righteousness of God, and the different consequences in each case reflect differences on the part of the sinners, and not any difference or internal contradiction within the mind of God. God considers only the acts and motives of individuals in determining what their reward or punishment shall be.[36] It is up to the individual, knowing the divine will, to conform to it in order to be rewarded with grace.[37] Any failure on the part of God to abide by the terms of the *pactum* would be understood as amounting to an injustice on the part of God, which is quite unthinkable: *ita etiam quod stante sua promissione qua pollicitus*

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[35] Scotus, *In IV sent.* dist. xlvi q.1 nn. 2–7. See especially n. 7: "In deo non est nisi unica iustitia . . . Nullam iustitiam habet nisi ad reddendum suae bonitati vel voluntati, quod eam condecet." On the concept of univocity, see M.C. Menges, *The Concept of Univocity regarding the Predication of God and Creatures according to William of Ockham* (New York: Franciscan Institute, 1952).

[36] Biel, *In II Sent.* dist. xxvii q. unica a.1 nota 3 C; 2.510.4–6.

[37] Biel, *In II Sent.* dist. xxxvi q. unica a.1 nota 3 C; 2.622.5–633.10.

est dare vitam eternam servantibus sua mandata non posset sine iniusticia subtrahere eis premia repromissa.[38]

It is therefore evident that Biel regards *iustitia Dei* as referring to the general principle that God is faithful and equitable within the context of the *pactum*, bestowing the gift of grace upon those who have fulfilled the conditions laid down, irrespective of who they are, and punishing those who do not. This being the case, two related though divergent aspects of this understanding of *iustitia Dei* may be distinguished.

The "Righteousness of God" as God's faithfulness to promises of mercy and grace

On this understanding of things, God is righteous, in remaining faithful to the promises of grace which are incorporated within the *pactum*. In many respects, this understanding of *iustitia Dei* is similar to that which goes back to Ambrosiaster in the patristic era: a righteous God gives people what has been promised. *Iustitia est Dei quia quod promisit dedit.*[39] The introduction of the conceptual framework of the *pactum* allows this understanding of the "righteousness of God" to be placed upon a firmer conceptual foundation, ensuring a contracted (rather than arbitrary) link to be established between the promise and its reward. The soteriology of the *via moderna*, as we have already observed, is based upon the presupposition that God's promises of grace are *conditional*: God has promised to bestow grace upon people upon condition that they do *quod in se est*. If someone fails to meet this condition, God is under no obligation to give them grace.

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[38] Biel, *Sacri canonis missae expositio* (Basel, 1510) lection 59 S. See also lect. 59 N: "Meritum condigni super rationem meriti addit debitum reddendi premium secundum iusticiam."

[39] Ambrosiaster, *Comm. in Rom.* 3.3; MPL 17.56B. On this, see K. Holl, "Die iustitia Dei in der vorlutherischen Bibelauslegung des Abendlandes," in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, 3 vols (Tübingen: Mohr, 4th edn, 1928), vol. 3, pp. 171–188; H. Bornkamm, "Iustitia Dei in der Scholastik und bei Luther," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 39 (1942), pp. 1–46; McGrath, "The Righteousness of God."

The young Luther faithfully reproduces this aspect of the theology of the *via moderna* during the course of the *Dictata*. As we have already noted, Luther's understanding of the condition which man must meet if he is to be justified can be defined in terms of self-abasement and crying out to God for grace. Righteousness is about God giving grace to anyone who recognizes their own unrighteousness, and is thus humble in the sight of God.[40] One can, however, observe several significant differences between Luther's understanding of this aspect of *iustitia Dei* and that of the *via moderna*. Of these, the most significant is that Luther interprets *iustitia* Christologically, arguing that God's righteousness, understood as divine promissory faithfulness, is manifested and confirmed in the incarnation and death of the Son of God.[41] It is, however, the second aspect of *iustitia Dei* which is of particular significance, and to which we now turn.

The "Righteousness of God" as God's rendering to each their due (*reddens unicuique quod suum est*)

As we saw earlier, the concept of *iustitia Dei* which emerged within the context of the *pactum* theology of the *via moderna* was that of God giving everyone that to which they are entitled by their merits or demerits. A very similar idea is associated with the Pelagian writer Julian of Eclanum in the fifth century. However, theologians of the *via moderna* were able to avoid being tainted with the charge of Pelagianism by arguing that the framework which permitted human achievements to be considered as worthy of divine justification was an act of grace, not justice. The *pactum* expressed the grace of God on the one hand, while functioning as the theological equivalent of the secular notion of *iuris consensus* on the other, thus allowing the Ciceronian sense of *iustitia* as *reddens unicuique quod suum est* to be applied directly and appropriately to God's dealings with humanity.

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[40] WA 3.462.37–38: "Et sic fit iustitia. Quia qui sibi iniustus est et ita coram Deo humilis, huic dat Deus gratiam suam."

[41] A point emphasized by O. Bayer, *Promissio: Geschichte der reformatorische Wende in Luthers Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), pp. 115–118. Cf. WA 4.17.33–39.

But what of the related idea of equity? At several points in his discussion of the basis of justification, Luther insists that God is "fair" (*equus*) to all, in that no favor is shown to anyone. The criterion of justification is whether the sinner has turned away from sin and toward God. Luther reproduces the Bielian understanding of *iustitia Dei* in his 1513 comments upon Psalm 9 (10). 9,[42] as the following extract makes clear:

> Equity [*aequitas*] and justice [*iustitia*] are usually distinguished in the Scriptures, in that equity is concerned with persons, while justice deals with causes. Someone who is fair [*aequus*] is the same towards all and behaves fairly, and is not influenced in favour of one rather than another, neither on account of hatred or love, riches or poverty. Thus God is said to be fair, because God offers his grace to everyone . . . God is the same for everyone, of the same severity and leniency, and for no one more or less . . . "Justice", however, is said to be rendering to each person their due [*"Iustitia" autem dicitur redditio unicuique quod suum est*]. Thus equity comes before justice, and is, as it were, its prerequisite. Equity distinguishes merits, while justice renders rewards. Thus the Lord "judges the world in equity" (in that God is the same towards all people, and wishes them all to be saved), and God "judges in justice", in that God gives to each person their reward [*reddit uniquique suum premium*].[43]

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[42] For those unfamiliar with this method of referring to the Psalm numbers in Luther's *Dictata*, the following explanation may be given. The numbering of the Hebrew and Latin Psalters differs significantly between Psalms 9 and 147: see O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), pp. 445–446 for details. As Luther used the Vulgate numeration, and modern readers use that of the Massoretic text, it is clear that considerable confusion could result. The universally recognized solution to this problem is to refer to the Vulgate number, with that of the Massoretic text – if it is different – immediately following this in parentheses. Thus a reference to Psalm 9 (10). 9 should be read as: Psalm 9.9 following the Vulgate numeration, as used by Luther himself; Psalm 10.9, using the numeration familiar to modern readers.

[43] WA 55 II.108.15–109.11 (scholion) (= 3.91.1–14). See also the gloss to this verse, WA 55 I.70.9–11 (= 3.84.18–20): "*Et ipse iudicabit orbem terrae in aequitate* i.e. sine acceptione personarum, est idem et equus omnibus: *iudicabit populos in iusticia* reddens unicuique quod suum est" Cf. WA 3.77.14–17.

Before analyzing the theological significance of this early passage, we may consider the concept of *equitas* which Luther employs in this passage. The general sense of the term "equity," as used by the canon lawyers, bears little, if any, resemblance to this.[44] In general, the term is used to refer to the paradox that justice is impossible on the basis of the strict application of written law.[45] Luther, however, uses the term primarily in the sense of an "absence of partiality" – God judges in equity in that it is an agent's *deeds*, not the agent's *identity*, which is subjected to moral or theological evaluation. This is the sense of the term as it is used by Julian of Eclanum in his controversy with Augustine, where it is understood to mean *sine acceptione personarum*.[46] There are, however, several medieval texts which indicate that, in the opinion of at least some canon lawyers, *aequitas* and *aequalitas* are practically synonymous,[47] and it is possible that Luther may have encountered these during his brief period spent training as a lawyer at Erfurt.

The theological significance of this passage will be clear. God judges in equity and in righteousness. According to Luther, this means that God judges people solely on the basis of their deeds,

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[44] On this important point, see E. Wohlhaupter, *Aequitas Canonica: Eine Studie aus dem kanonischen Recht* (Paderborn: Schoningh, 1931); H. Lange, "Die Wörter aequitas und Iustitia auf römischen Münzen," *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte*, Romanistische Abteilung, 52 (1932), pp. 296–314; G. Zanetti, "Iustitia, Aequitas ed Ius nell'allegoria delle 'Quaestiones de iuris subtilitatibus,'" *Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e Lettere*, Classe di Lettere 83 (1950), pp. 85–123; C. Lefebvre, "Le rôle de l'équité en droit canonique," *Ephemerides Iuris Canonici* 7 (1951), pp. 137–153. On the concept of *aequitas* in particular, see G. Kisch, *Erasmus und die Jurisprudenz seiner Zeit* (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1960), especially pp. 14–49. On the concept as used by Philip Melanchthon, see G. Kisch, *Melanchthons Rechts-und Soziallehre* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967), pp. 168–184. More generally, see G. Hager, "Flexibilität und Rigidität in Recht," in *Brücken für die Rechtsvergleichung*, ed. O. Werner et al. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1998), pp. 1–16.

[45] E.g., see *Codex Iustinianus* III.i.8: "Placuit in omnibus rebus praecipuam esse iustitiae aequitatisque quam stricti iuris rationem." On this, see H. Lange, "Ius aequum und ius strictum bei den Glossatoren," *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte*, Romanistische Abteilung, 71 (1954), pp. 211–244.

[46] See McGrath, "Divine Justice and Divine Equity," pp. 314–315.

[47] E.g., Kisch, *Erasmus und die Jurisprudenz*, pp. 31–36.

without respect of their person (for example, whether they are Jews or Gentiles, rich or poor). There is no partiality in the manner in which God deals with humanity – exactly the same severity or leniency is shown toward everyone. On what basis, then, does divine judgment take place? What criteria does God take into account in passing judgment? It will be obvious that if God rewards humanity with salvation in equity (*sine acceptione personarum*) and in justice (*reddens unicuique quod suum est*), it necessarily follows that there must be some quality about sinners who are justified which permits God to justify them in the first place. In other words, it seems that justification can only be based upon merit: *Et equitas merita distinguit, iustitia premia reddit.*[48]

Before going any further, we must note that the concept of "merit" in question requires careful elaboration, as it is clear that Luther is referring to the concept of *congruous* merit.[49] As we have pointed out above, the theologians of the *via moderna* recognized congruous merit as the contracted link between the natural state of humanity and its state of grace, in that God was obliged, *ex sua iustitia*, to reward anyone who did *quod in se est* with grace. As Luther points out in the above passage, God, wishing everyone to be saved, offers grace to all people. This necessarily implies that he shows the same degree of severity or leniency to everyone – and hence that the same standard is demanded of everyone if they are to be justified (namely, that they do *quod in se est*).

The concept of *iustitia* as *reddens unicuique quod suum est*, as found in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*,[50] Cicero's legal and political works, and the body of canon law, was thus found by Luther to have deeply disturbing theological ramifications when applied analogically to

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[48] WA 55 II.109.9 (= 3.91.12).

[49] See further S.E. Ozment, *Homo Spiritualis. A Comparative Study of the Anthropology of Johannes Tauler, Jean Gerson and Martin Luther (1509–16) in the Context of Their Theological Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), pp. 159–183.

[50] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* V 1129^{a-b}. On Aristotle's concept of justice, see W.D. Ross, *Aristotle* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), pp. 209–213; F.D. Miller, *Nature, Justice and Rights in Aristotle's Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 67–86.

God, in that it led to a doctrine of the justification of the *godly*. As Luther remarked in 1532, he could not see how the idea of a righteous God was good news. Who could love a God who wanted to deal with sinners on the basis of justice?[51]

Throughout Luther's later criticisms of the concept of "righteousness" he had himself adopted as a younger man, we find recurring reference to the idea of *iustitia* as *reddens unicuique quod suum est*. For example, during the course of the Galatians lectures of October 27, 1516 to March 13, 1517,[52] Luther makes his underlying criticism of the application of this concept of "righteousness" within a *theological* context perfectly clear. When commenting on Galatians 2.16, Luther exclaims, with reference to Cicero's definition of righteousness:

> A wonderful new definition of righteousness! This is usually described thus: "Righteousness is a virtue which renders to each person according to their due" [*iustitia est virtus reddens unicuique quod suum est*]. But here it says: "Righteousness is faith in Jesus Christ" [*fides Jhesu Christi*]![53]

In another passage dating from the year 1516, Luther again contrasts the Aristotelian–Ciceronian interpretation of *iustitia* with that which he found in scripture. Commenting upon Psalm 22 (23). 3 – "God leads me in the paths of righteousness" – Luther remarks that this is not the notion of righteousness found in the fifth book of Aristotle's *Ethics*; rather, it has to do with the justifying faith or grace

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[51] WA 40 II.445.24, following the printed version of 1538.

[52] These *lectures* must not be confused with the Galatians *Commentary* of 1519! These lectures are preserved in the form of two students' notes, and were initially edited by Hans von Schubert, and published by the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences in 1918. These lectures have now been published as volume 57 of the Weimar edition. The commentary on Galatians may be found in WA 2.436–618, and although it is clearly based upon Luther's notes for his earlier lectures, there are significant points of difference.

[53] WA 57.69.14–16. A similar passage may be found in the Galatians commentary of 1519, WA 2.503.34–36.

of Christ.[54] Indeed, in the years 1515–1517, Luther frequently refers to his intense distaste for the concept of *iustitia* which he had accepted earlier. For example, while commenting upon Romans 4.7 in 1515, Luther insisted upon a careful distinction between human and divine righteousness: "Scripture uses the terms 'righteousness' and 'unrighteousness' very differently from the philosophers and lawyers."[55] Indeed, as we shall demonstrate later, Luther's criticism of the application of Aristotle's *Ethics* in a theological context is ultimately an expression of his total rejection of the Aristotelian–Ciceronian concept of *iustitia distributiva* to characterize God's dealings with sinners.

From the beginning of Luther's lectures on Romans (1515–1516) onwards, a sustained critique of *iustitia* as *virtus reddens unicuique quod suum est* is encountered. Yet, as Luther glossed Psalm 61 (62). 12 in late 1514, he was still working with precisely this concept of *iustitia*.[56] The obvious question which we must now consider is this: what happened to make Luther change his mind? In attempting to answer this question, we must turn to a consideration of the concept of *iustitia fidei*, "the righteousness of faith," which comes to play so important a role in Luther's theology of justification.

The Theological *pactum* and Existential Anxiety

But first, we must consider, however briefly, an issue that arises directly from the analysis thus far, with clear relevance to Luther's theological development. How can anyone know whether they have, in fact, done *quod in se est*? If doing this prescribed minimum constitutes the sole condition for justification, it is

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[54] WA 31 I.456.36. "Iustitia autem ista non est ea, de qua Aristoteles 5. Ethicorum vel iurisperiti agunt, sed fides seu gratia Christi iustificans." The text's reference to "*3. Ethicorum*" is clearly incorrect.

[55] WA 56.287.16–17.

[56] WA 3.354.5–8: "*Duo haec audivi, quia potestas Dei est* ad puniendum tanquam Domini. *Et tibi Domine misericordia*, gratia ad praemiandum tanquam patris: *quia tu reddes unìcuique secundum opera sua*, pro bonis bona, pro malis mala."

clearly of enormous importance for people to know whether they have in fact fulfilled the condition for the bestowal of grace. It is here that we encounter a major difficulty in the soteriology of the *via moderna*. According to Gabriel Biel, the *viator* cannot know for certain whether he or she has done *quod in se est*.[57] In this, Biel faithfully reproduces the medieval theological tradition, which was virtually unanimous concerning this point: nobody can know with certainty whether they are worthy of hate or love by God.[58]

The relevance of this observation to Luther's early theology of justification – and his ensuing spiritual difficulties – will be clear: if people cannot know whether they fulfilled the condition laid down for their justification, they cannot know whether God will justify or condemn them. The "righteousness of God" thus remains an unknown quantity, the impersonal attribute of an utterly impartial and scrupulously just judge, which stands over and against humanity, and ultimately justifies or condemns them on the basis of a totally unknown quality – and is thus the cause of much *Anfechtung*! To someone such as Luther, who appears to have become increasingly uncertain about his own moral qualities as the *Dictata* progressed, it

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[57] Biel, *In II Sent.* dist. xxvii q. unica a.3 dub.5 O; 2.525.11–526.17. "Homo non potest evidenter scire se facere quod in se est, quia hoc facere includit in se proponere oboedere deo propter deum tanquam ultimum et principalem finem quod exigit dilectionem dei super omnia quam ex naturalis suis homo potest elicere. Haec enim est proxima dispositio ad gratiae infusionem, qua existente, certissime infunditur gratia. Difficulum autem est scire se habere illam dilectionem quia etsi scire possumus nos diligere deum, non tamen evidenter scire possumus illam circumstantiam 'super omnia.'"

[58] On this question in the early sixteenth century, see V. Beltran de Heredia, "Controversia de certitudine gratiae entre Domingo de Soto y Ambrosio Catarino," *Ciencia Tomista* 62 (1941), pp. 133–162; M. Guerards des Lauriers, "Saint Augustin et la question de la certitude de la grâce au Concile de Trente," *Augustinus Magister* (Paris, 1954), vol. II, pp. 1057–1069; V. Heynck, "A Controversy at the Council of Trent Concerning the Doctrine of Duns Scotus," *Franciscan Studies* 9 (1949), pp. 181–258; idem, "Zur Kontroverse über die Gnadengewissheit auf dem Konzil von Trient," *Franziskanische Studien* 37 (1955), pp. 1–17; 161–188. The Council of Trent may be regarded as endorsing the earlier medieval tradition upon this point.

must have seemed inevitable that a righteous God would condemn him. It is thus perhaps no accident that Luther appears to be so preoccupied with the theme of the "wrath of God" in the *Dictata*.[59]

We have already noted the important Christological dimensions of Luther's emerging notion of the "righteousness of God." Luther appeals to the fulfillment of the divine promises in the coming of Christ as a demonstration of the "righteousness of God," understood in its first sense. The theologians of the *via moderna*, however, regarded Christ as *Legislator* rather than *Salvator*.[60] Christ is the one who maps out and exemplifies the contours of the Christian life. In his early years, Luther appears to have regarded Christ as the embodiment of *iustitia Dei*, an idea which is probably reflected in his exegesis of Psalm 30 (31).

In later years Luther often spoke of his early difficulties arising from his conception of Christ as the righteous judge of sinners: "I knew Christ as a stern judge, from whose face I wished to run away, and yet could not."[61] On the basis of passages such as these, it appears that Luther initially regarded Christ as embodying the righteousness of God, containing in his own person the terrifying standard which the Christian was required to attain. Christ was *legislator* and *iudex*, who judged people impartially according to the extent to which the Christologically disclosed norms were observed and enacted. Luther's recollections are certainly consistent with changes in iconography around the year 1500. Earlier pictures of Christ as the dreadful "Judge of the World" who inspired terror gave way to a more pastoral image of the crucified Christ as the grounds of divine mercy. Christ was

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[59] See L. Pinomaa, *Der Zorn Gottes in der Theologie Luthers* (Helsinki: Akateeminen Kirjakauppa, 1938). His later study, *Der existentielle Charakter der Theologie Luthers* (Helsinki: Akateeminen Kirjakauppa, 1940), takes up this theme. See also G. Rost, "Der Zorn Gottes in Luthers Theologie', *Lutherischer Rundblick* (1961), pp. 1–32.

[60] As noted by H.A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 117.

[61] WA 38.148.12. See also: 40 I.298.9; 40 I.326.1; 41.653.41; 45.482.16; 47.590.1.

increasingly seen as the compassionate intercessor for sinners, rather than the harsh judge of sinners.[62]

Whatever evidential value these later passages may have, it is certainly true that the theologians of the *via moderna* seemed unable to fit Christ satisfactorily into their scheme of salvation. In effect, there is a Christological lacuna in the soteriology of the *via moderna*: Christ can only assist humanity externally, by means of his example and instruction, to perform the demands of the law. Under the Old and New dispensations alike, the demand made of people if they are to be justified remains the same: they must do *quod in se est* – an ill-defined, and ultimately an unverifiable, demand. Perhaps we ought not to be surprised that Luther recalled so vividly being driven to despair and existential anxiety over the fundamental question about which he sought reassurance: have I actually been saved?

"The Righteousness of God" and "The Righteousness of Faith"

In the earlier part of the *Dictata*, Luther displays a tendency to gloss the term *iustitia* with *fidei* at certain points. For example, Psalm 35 (36). 7 refers to *iusticia tua*: Luther glosses this as follows: "*Iusticia fidei tua* qua coram te iusti sumus" – "*your righteousness* of faith by which we are righteous before you."[63] (We here follow the conventional practice of printing the text of the Psalm itself in italics, and Luther's glosses in Roman type.) In every case, the reference is to a righteousness by which the individual becomes righteous in the face

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[62] W. Haug and B. Wachinger, eds, *Die Passion Christi in Literatur und Kunst des Spätmittelalters* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993); P. Seegets, *Passionstheologie und Passionsfrömmigkeit im ausgehenden Mittelalter: Der Nürnberger Franziskaner Stephan Fridolin (gest. 1498) zwischen Kloster und Stadt* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), pp. 232–286.

[63] WA 3.199.18. Cf. WA 3.200.18–19 (On Psalm 35 (36). 11): "*Et iusticiam tuam* fidei, qua iustus fiant"; 3.269.21 (On Psalm 47 (48). 11): "*Iusticia* fidei, que coram Deo facit iustos."

of God, as summarized in the formula: *iustitia fidei, qua coram deo iusti fiunt*. The Latin term *iustitia fidei* is open to multiple interpretations: assuming a genitive of identity, it should be translated as "the righteousness which is faith"; assuming a genitive of origin, it could be rendered as "the righteousness which comes from faith." So how did this notion of *iustitia fidei* emerge?

In an important study, Vogelsang argued that Luther here reproduced the essential features of Augustine of Hippo's understanding of *iustitia Dei* as a righteousness which *comes from* God, which God gives to people in order that they might be justified.[64] Vogelsang is here dependent upon Karl Holl's seminal essay of 1921, in which he explored the understandings of *iustitia Dei* in the pre-Lutheran works of biblical exegesis.[65] In particular, Holl drew attention to three loci from Augustine's *De spiritu et littera*, particularly: *iustitia Dei non qua deus iustus est, sed qua induit hominem* ("the righteousness of God, not by which God is righteous, but with which he endows people").[66] There are, however, certain difficulties attending Vogelsang's contention that Luther's concept of *iustitia fidei* is an allusion to Augustine's concept of *iustitia Dei*. First, it can be shown that Luther probably would not have encountered this work of Augustine at this stage in his career.[67] Further, the remaining references in the works of St Augustine in which Holl locates a clear statement of his understanding of *iustitia Dei* are found in a work[68] which Luther hardly knew, and which is never cited in the course of the *Dictata*.[69] In addition to this, Luther's understanding of *iustitia fidei* appears to have forensic overtones, however underdeveloped,

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[64] E. Vogelsang, *Die Anfänge von Luthers Christologie nach der ersten Psalmenvorlesung* (Berlin/Leipzig: de Gruyter, 1929), pp. 45–46.

[65] K. Holl, "Die iustitia dei in der vorlutherischen Bibelauslegung des Abendlandes," in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, 3 vols (Tübingen: Mohr, 4th edn, 1928), vol. 3, pp. 171–188.

[66] Holl, "Die iustitia Dei," p. 175.

[67] Hamel, *Der junge Luther und Augustin*, vol. 1, pp. 9–11.

[68] *In Joh. Ev. tract.* 26,1: cf. Holl, "Die iustitia Dei," p. 175.

[69] Hamel, *Der junge Luther und Augustin*, vol. 1, pp. 31–32.

which are quite absent from Augustine's concept of *iustitia Dei*. Luther generally links the phrase *iustitia fidei* with *coram Deo*,[70] suggesting that he is referring to a righteousness which is sui generis, valid before God but not corresponding directly to secular human standards of righteousness – as, for example, in Aristotle's *Ethics*, Cicero's legal works, the code of Justinian, or medieval canon law.

Luther's use of the phrase *iustitia fidei* in the earlier parts of the *Dictata* was closely examined by Hirsch,[71] among others, and on the basis of this, a consensus began to emerge that the concept possesses three characteristic features of the concept. This "righteousness of faith" is:

1. A righteousness which is *a gift from God*, rather than a righteousness *which belongs to God*.
2. A righteousness which is valid *coram Deo*, although not *coram hominibus*.
3. A righteousness which is itself *fides Christi*.

These conclusions seem to be well justified on the basis of the textual evidence, although it is perhaps wise to leave open the question of whether *iustitia fidei* is more appropriately translated as "a righteousness which *is* faith," or "a righteousness which *comes from* faith."

The importance of faith in this connection is well illustrated by Luther's early comments upon Psalm 7. After emphasizing that God judges in equity (*equus*) – which Luther explicitly defines as "being the same toward all without regard for or discrimination

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[70] There are passages in which *iustitia fidei* is not specifically linked with the phrase *coram Deo* – e.g., WA 3.200.18–19; 3.414.23–24. It seems to us that Gordon Rupp has put his finger unerringly upon a central theme of the young Luther's theological preoccupations when he entitled the second part of his magnum opus, dealing with Luther's development from 1509 to 1521, "coram Deo": E.G. Rupp, *The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1953), pp. 81–256.

[71] E. Hirsch, "Initium Theologiae Lutheri," in *Der Durchbruch der reformatorischen Erkenntnis*, pp. 64–95; 87–93.

of persons"[72] – Luther moves on to consider the basis of the divine judgment. This, he argues, is located in whether or not these persons believe. In his gloss to verse 9 (*dominos iudicat populos*), Luther emphasizes that God will save those who believe.[73]

It seems that Luther here understands God's judgment to be universal rather than particular, based upon a general condition which must be fulfilled. The only righteousness which has any soteriological traction in the sight of God is *iustitia fidei*, the "righteousness of faith." This may appear to be totally inappropriate by human standards of justice, but it remains the Christologically disclosed criterion by which God will judge humanity. This point is made with particular force in Luther's comments upon Psalm 49 (50). 6: *Coeli annunciant iustitiam Dei: quoniam Deus iudex est*. Luther glosses this verse as follows: ". . . *iusticiam*, fidem, scil. Dei reddentis unicuique quod suum meritum: *quoniam Deus* Ihesus Christus *iudex est*."[74] Two points may be noted here. First, *iustitia* is identified with "faith" – but the "faith" in question is still faith in a God who rewards according to an individual's merit, using the Ciceronian understanding of *iustitia Dei* as *reddens unicuique quod suum est*. Second, Christ is here understood to function *qua Deus* as the divine judge of humanity. Christ is not primarily understood as a savior, but as a judge or arbiter of whether a given individual has indeed met the minimum precondition to be saved.

This statement closely parallels those passages we noted above, dating from later in Luther's career, in which he referred to his early tendency to regard Christ solely as a stern judge. The *novum verbum* of the gospel is that God himself will judge humanity in Christ on the basis of the criterion of possession of *iustitia fidei*. Human righteousness is not sufficient to secure acceptance; something further is required. This point is further developed in the scholion to the same verse:

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[72] WA 55 II.95.5–96.1 (= 3.77.14–16): "Et hoc nomen Equitas illud significat. Quia scilicet sine acceptione et differentia personarum omnibus idem est, qui equus est."
[73] WA 55 I.52.27–28 (= 3.75.30–31): "Non enim emit in sacco nec in confuso omnia, sed iudicat et discernit. Qui crediderit salvus erit."
[74] WA 3.278.11–12.

> *The heavens declare the righteousness of God, for God is judge*. The apostles
> have declared this new word, that God himself – and not a human
> being in his place – will one day judge. It is therefore necessary that this
> judgement be universal and all-inclusive, as it is the judgement of God
> ... Therefore to declare that God is judge is to declare a universal
> judgement, and that someone's righteousness in the eyes of other
> people [*coram hominibus*] is not sufficient. The righteousness of God is
> required, so that the individual might be righteous in the sight of God
> [*coram Deo*]. And this is required because this person will be judged,
> not by other human beings, but by God: *for God is judge*.[75]

Luther's basic intention seems perfectly clear. God intends to judge
the world in Christ, and the criterion upon which this judgment will
be based is the "righteousness of faith." As this judgment is univer-
sal, and as God will judge *in equity* (that is, without respect of
persons, treating everyone equally) and *in justice* (giving each what
is due to them), the only basis upon which judgment can proceed is
the universal norm encapsulated in the concept of *iustitia fidei*. But
how are we to make sense of this concept?

One possible solution is that Luther understands *iustitia fidei* to be
the divine gift of faith, given to sinners irrespective of their merit or
demerit, on the basis of which they can be accounted righteous before
God. Attractive though this possibility may appear, there is every
reason to suppose that Luther's intention here is rather different. His
vocabulary and theological framework reflect the *pactum* theology of
the *via moderna*. For example, in his exposition of the psalm imme-
diately following that cited above, Luther indicates how faith can be
said to justify man *coram Deo*:

> Even grace and faith, through which we are justified today, would not
> justify us of themselves, without God's covenant. It is precisely for this
> reason that we are saved: God has made a testament and covenant with us,
> so that whoever believes and is baptised shall be saved. In this covenant
> God is truthful and faithful and is bound by what God has promised.[76]

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[75] WA 3.283.31–39.
[76] WA 3.289.1–5.

We have already indicated in the previous chapter how the *pactum* theology of the *via moderna* permeates the bulk of the *Dictata*, and how the concept of covenantal or sine qua non causality underlies Luther's early discussion of justification. It is within this theological context that Luther's discussion of *iustitia fidei* must be set. Once this point is conceded, the relationship between *iustitia Dei* and *iustitia fidei* becomes reasonably clear. In the previous chapter, we pointed out how Luther tended to interpret the minimal precondition for justification, as required by the soteriology of the *via moderna* (specifically, *facere quod in se est*) in terms of *humility*. One of the most controverted areas of Luther scholarship relates to the question of how the young Luther, at the time of the Romans lectures (1515–1516), understood the relationship between *fides* and *humilitas*. The difficulty is that they are clearly closely associated – but which is, so to speak, prior to the other? The intense controversy between Bizer and Bornkamm over this issue[77] has served to demonstrate how intimately the two concepts are linked, rather than to resolve the question. Faith and humility are inseparable: indeed, they may even be linked as the *humilitas fidei*.[78] In the case of the *Dictata*, Bizer argues, this relationship is even more intimate: "*Fides* is merely another way of saying *humilitas*."[79]

While we take Bornkamm's criticism of Bizer with the utmost seriousness, it nevertheless seems to us that Bizer's assertion of the near-identity of *humilitas* and *fides* in Luther's analysis at this point is difficult to contest. Bizer may well have been corrected by later studies in some respects, but he most emphatically has not been refuted, at least on this specific point. All the evidence suggests that, at least during the course of the *Dictata*, Luther regards humility as

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[77] Bizer, *Fides ex auditu*, pp. 29–39; 193–203; Bornkamm, "Zur Frage der Iustitia Dei beim jungen Luther," pp. 306–345.

[78] WA 56.282.9–13. The phrase occurs frequently in the *Dictata*: e.g., WA 3.588.8; 4.127.10; 4.231.7. Note also the statement at WA 56.449.8 "Universalis ergo iustitia est humilitas." Cf. WA 56.199.30.

[79] Bizer, *Fides ex auditu*, pp. 19–21. Cf. WA 56.471.17. For these themes in the 1520s, see V. Stolle, "Taufe und Buße. Luthers Interpretation von Röm 6, 3–11," *Kerygma und Dogma* 53 (2007), pp. 2–33.

the necessary consequence of faith, and the equally necessary pre-condition for justification. It is therefore clear that, linking Luther's statements concerning the role of humility in justification with those concerning faith, *iustitia fidei* is nothing more and nothing less than the necessary precondition for justification on the basis of the *pactum* theology which underlies Luther's theology at this point. Whether justification is understood to be effected by grace, faith, or humility, the ultimate cause is the divine *pactum* which underlies the estab-lished order of salvation. *Homini facienti quod in se est Deus infallibiliter dat gratiam.*[80] For Luther, *iustitia fidei* is that righteousness which arises through someone doing *quod in se est*.

It may be objected at this point that our interpretation of Luther's statements concerning *iustitia fidei* does not account for Luther's insistence that the righteousness in question originates from God. This is, in fact, not the case. As was emphasized earlier (pp. 141–150), on the basis of the *pactum* theology of the *via moderna*, which Luther expounds so ably in the *Dictata*, there exists a radical discrepancy between the inherent value of human moral acts and their much greater ascribed value within the terms of the *pactum*. How can God accept so trivial a thing as faith as worthy of such a great honor as the justification of humanity? The answer is simple: viewed *coram hominibus*, it cannot, as the inherent value of faith is so little; viewed *coram Deo*, however, it has a much greater contracted value, in that God is prepared to accept it *ex pacto suo* as being of sufficient value to merit justification, not because of its inherent worth, but because of the much greater value in which God has chosen to hold it.

The radical dichotomy between human and divine estimations of righteousness is a frequent theme in the *Dictata*, and it is entirely understandable that most commentators should concentrate their attention on Luther's rejection of the worth of human righteousness *coram Deo*. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that Luther is equally insistent that people are unable to discern the worth of *divine* concepts of righteousness. The radical dichotomy between the moral

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[80] For this quotation from Luther in its proper context, see the previous chapter (p. 120).

and meritorious realms is one of the most characteristic features of the theology of the *via moderna*.[81] To unbelievers, it may appear ridiculous to assert *iustitia est credere deo*.[82] Nevertheless, within the context of a *pactum* theology this assertion makes perfect sense. As the *pactum* is itself a free divine gift to humanity, and is ultimately an expression of the divine generosity and liberality, the fact that faith may be reckoned as *iustitia* on its basis and upon its terms must be itself regarded as a consequence of, and an expression of, this divine gift.

Iustitia fidei is thus only *iustitia* on account of the prior gift and decision of God. *Credere Deo* represents the inherent value of faith, while *iustitia* represents its ascribed value, within the context of the *pactum*. *Iustitia fidei* is therefore a righteousness which originates from God, in that *fides* would not be *iustitia coram Deo* were it not for the divine *pactum* which transforms its *bonitas intrinseca* (= *credere Deo*) into its *valor impositus* (= *iustitia fidei*). In that God has provided the sole means by which this transformation may take place, *iustitia fidei* must be recognized as a general divine gift to humanity, which originates from God. God graciously establishes a new order of value, in which faith itself becomes righteousness within this divinely ordained realm of transvaluation.

If it is accepted that the *pactum* theology of the *via moderna* underlies Luther's discussion of both *iustitia Dei* and *iustitia fidei* in the earlier parts of the *Dictata*, the general relationship between *iustitia Dei* and *iustitia fidei* becomes clear. *Iustitia fidei* is the precondition of justification. In other words, for someone to become righteous *coram Deo*, "the righteousness of God" demands that this person should possess "the righteousness of faith." The two concepts are not identical,[83] but they are clearly closely related, in that their common denominator is the *pactum*. By virtue of that covenant, God accepts a

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[81] This distinction can be argued to lie in William of Ockham's argument that the root of morality lies in the divine will, not in the natural order: see M.M. Adams, "The Structure of Ockham's Moral Theory," *Franciscan Studies* 46 (1986), pp. 1–35.

[82] WA 3.331.3.

[83] E.g., Hirsch, "Initium theologiae Lutheri," pp. 88–89: "Die iustitia fidei qua iustificati sumus, das ist die iustitia dei."

person's faith as the righteousness required for their justification *coram Deo*.

Some scholars have argued that Luther's understanding of the nature and relationship of *iustitia Dei* and *iustitia fidei* underwent a dramatic alteration during the course of his exposition of Psalms 70 (71) and 71 (72), thus placing the date of Luther's discovery of the new meaning of the "righteousness of God" in the winter of 1514. In view of the importance of this theory, we propose to examine it in some detail.

Luther's Exposition of Psalms 70 (71) and 71 (72)

"When I became a doctor, I did not yet know that we cannot make satisfaction for our sins."[84] The historical accuracy of this statement is generally conceded. Luther became a Doctor of Divinity on October 19, 1512, and began expounding the Psalter the following year. It has therefore been generally assumed, particularly by an earlier generation of Luther scholars, that Luther's theological discovery must have taken place at some time during the course of the *Dictata*.

An excellent example of this is found in the work of Emmanuel Hirsch, who argued that a "new" understanding of *iustitia Dei* was apparent in Luther's exposition of Psalms 30 (31) and 31 (32).[85] This conclusion was, however, challenged by Erich Vogelsang, in one of the most seminal essays of modern Luther scholarship.[86] In this essay, Vogelsang argued that Luther's discovery of the "new" meaning of *iustitia Dei* must have taken place shortly before, or possibly even during, his exposition of Psalms 70 (71) and 71 (72). This thesis has proved to be of continuing significance today, particularly in the light of Regin Prenter's careful examination of the exegesis of Psalm 70 (71). 2 in the *Dictata*.[87] Before we can even

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[84] WA 45.86.18.

[85] Hirsch, "Initium Theologiae Lutheri."

[86] Vogelsang, *Die Anfänge von Luthers Christologie.*

[87] R. Prenter, *Der barmherzige Richter: Iustitia Dei passiva in Luthers Dictata super Psalterium* (Copenhagen: Munksgard, 1961), pp. 94–121.

begin to consider the theological issues involved, it is necessary to return to a difficulty with the source material which we noted briefly in the previous chapter, arising from the manner in which the Dresdener Psalter, containing the scholia, is bound.

The text of the scholia to Psalms 70 (71) and 71 (72) includes page 103 of the Dresdener Psalter. Not only was this page bound into that Psalter at a later date – it also appears to have been bound the wrong way round. The second side of the page (103b) was clearly written before the first (103a). It is not easy to see how this mistake arose, although Wendorf has some helpful suggestions to make.[88] But what are the consequences of this mistake?

The text on page 103 gives little indication of whether the material which it contains may be assigned to Luther's comments upon Psalm 70 (71) or Psalm 71 (72). The simplest means of reconstructing the text is that favored by Prenter, and proceeds as follows. The Weimar edition, it is argued, assumes that the correct sequence of sides is 102b–103a–103b–104a, whereas the correct sequence is 102b–103b–103a–104a. After making the necessary contextual adjustments, the text of the Weimar edition can then be rearranged as follows: after 3.458.7 (the end of 102b), insert 462.15–463.37 (103b), followed by 458.8–11 and 461.20–462.14 (103a). This assumes that the material found on page 103 is a continuation of the comments on the themes of *iudicium* and *iustitia* found in the scholion to Psalm 70 (71), and which therefore prepares the ground for the scholion to Psalm 71 (72).

Vogelsang, however, has a rather different understanding of how the necessary rearrangement of the text should be carried out, upon which his theory of the nature and date of Luther's discovery of the new meaning of *iustitia Dei* ultimately depends. Vogelsang argues that the material contained on page 103 is part of the scholion on Psalm 71 (72), taking page 103b to be a continuation of the marginal

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[88] H. Wendorf, "Der Durchbruch der neuen Erkenntnis Luthers im Lichte der hand-schriftlichen Überlieferung," *Historische Vierteljahrschrift* 27 (1932), pp. 124–144; 285–327; especially pp. 134–142. For a general overview of the Dresdener Psalter, see R. Schwarz, "Beschreibung der Dresdener Scholien-Handschrift von Luthers 1. Psalmen-Vorlesung," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 18 (1971), pp. 65–93.

gloss of page 104a (that is, WA 3.464.20–37).[89] In this, he is followed
by Bornkamm,[90] who points out that the arguments on page 104 (that
is, 464.1–467.4) prepare the ground for those on page 103. Never-
theless, the force of Prenter's arguments against this construction[91]
must serve to warn us that we simply do not know for certain which
of the two possible contexts for the comments of page 103 is correct.
Any conclusion based on strict textual analysis faces a serious
problem at this point, which at present seems insuperable.

In a previous chapter, we considered Luther's hermeneutics, and
particularly his use of the *Quadriga*, in the *Dictata*. The distinction
between the literal and the spiritual senses of scripture is of partic-
ular importance in relation to the question of the date and nature of
Luther's discovery of the righteousness of God. When Luther refers
to the literal sense of scripture, he actually intends us to understand
an essentially prophetic sense of the text, as it refers to Jesus Christ.[92]
In its allegorical sense, scripture refers to Christ's aid to his church; in
its tropological sense, it refers to the work of Christ as it benefits the
Church and individual believers; in its anagogical sense, it refers to
the completion of that work in the future.[93]

Luther's increasing emphasis upon the *tropological* sense of scrip-
ture is one of the characteristic features of the later parts of the
Dictata, and is of particular significance in relation to the two psalms
under consideration. Luther ends his comments on Psalm 70 (71)
with the following words:

> *And your righteousness, O God, even unto the highest*. In this verse the
> correct distinction between divine and human righteousness is de-
> scribed at last. For the righteousness of God reaches up to the highest
> of heavens, and causes us to reach there. It is righteousness even to
> the highest, namely, of reaching the highest: human righteousness,

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[89] Vogelsang, *Die Anfänge von Luthers Christologie*, p. 49, n. 2.

[90] Bornkamm, "Zur Frage der Iustitia Dei beim jungen Luther," pp. 292–294.

[91] Prenter, *Der barmherzige Richter*, pp. 97–104.

[92] E.g., WA 4.305.6–12. Cf. WA 55 I.8.8–11.

[93] For this distinction, the reader is referred to the discussion and references in the
previous chapter.

however, is not so, but rather reaches down to the depths. And this is so, because those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. But now the entire righteousness of God is this [*iustitia Dei est tota haec*]: viz., to humble oneself into the depth. Anyone who does this comes to the highest, because they first went down into the lowest depth. And here he rightly refers to Christ, who is the power of God and the righteousness of God through the greatest and deepest humility. Therefore he is now in the highest through supreme glory.

The Weimar edition then continues with the following final paragraph:

Therefore, whoever wants to understand the apostle and other Scriptures wisely must understand everything tropologically: truth, wisdom, strength, salvation, righteousness, namely, that by which God makes us strong, safe, righteous, wise, etc. So it is with all the works of God and the ways of God: every one of them is Christ literally, and faith in him [*fides eius*] morally.[94]

As noted in the previous chapter, the *moral* sense of scripture is a conventional synonym for the *tropological* sense. It is therefore clear that Luther singles out the literal and tropological senses of scripture as being of paramount importance: the first sense refers to Christ, and the second to his reception and appropriation by faith. Nevertheless, the textual problem noted above is of relevance here, as it is almost certain that the second paragraph quoted above has its place in the scholion on Psalm 71 (72), so that Luther's comments upon Psalm 70 (71) should be understood to end with "... through supreme glory."[95] This being the case, it is important to appreciate precisely what Luther is saying in this final paragraph.

Luther appears to be doing nothing fundamentally new at this point, essentially restating the *humilitas* theology we noted earlier.

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[94] WA 3.457.38–458.11.
[95] See the way in which the text is laid out in *Der Durchbruch der reformatorischen Erkenntnis bei Luther*, pp. 506–512.

He reiterates his basic point that the righteousness which is valid *coram Deo* (that is, *iustitia ad altissima*) can only be attained through the total humiliation of the individual, following the example set in Christ.[96] By the *pactum*, God has ordained to accept *humilitas* or *humiliatio* as *iustitia fidei*, the covenantal righteousness which alone is valid in his sight, despite being insignificant *coram hominibus. Et sic fit iustitia. Quia qui sibi iniustus est et ita coram Deo humilis, huic dat Deus gratiam suam*.[97] Luther here appears to construct his statement as a parallel to the celebrated maxim of the *via moderna: Facienti quod in se est dat Deus gratiam suam*.[98] What must someone do in order to receive the grace of God? What is to be understood by doing *quod in se est*? Luther's reply to this question is stated with the utmost clarity in the earlier part of this citation: *facere quod in se est* is to be understood as synonymous with *esse sibi iniustus et ita coram Deo humilis*. The covenantal framework of Luther's theology of justification makes it clear that Luther here states precisely the same relationship between *iustitia Dei* and *iustitia fidei* as we noted earlier in the *Dictata*. But does it remain thus in the course of the exposition of the following psalm?

Luther begins his exposition of Psalm 71 (72) by drawing attention to the contrast between the judgment (*iudicium*) of humanity on the one hand, and of God on the other. After noting the anagogical and allegorical senses of *iudicium Dei*, Luther passes on to consider its tropological sense:

> This is its most frequent use in Scripture. This is that by which God himself condemns, and also causes us to condemn, whatever we have of ourselves, the whole old person [*totum veterem hominem*] and actions. This is properly humility and even humiliation. For it is not those who reckon themselves to be humble who are righteous, but those who consider themselves to be detestable and damnable in their own eyes. . . . Scripture uses this word "Judgement" to express the true

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[96] The implicit reference to Philippians 2.8–9 should not be overlooked.

[97] WA 3.462.37–38.

[98] The maxim can, of course, be stated in a number of forms, including that noted here. For Luther's own statement of the maxim, see WA 4.262.2–7.

nature of humility, which is the vilification and contempt and com-
plete damnation of oneself. . . . This is called the "Judgement of God"
[*Iudicium Dei*], like the righteousness or the strength or the wisdom of
God. It is that by which we are wise, strong, righteous and humble, or
by which we are judged.[99]

It is thus only by being forced into recognizing one's total
unworthiness – even to the point of total contempt and hatred
of oneself – that justification comes about. For Luther, a prayer to
God for judgment is a prayer for total humiliation, that by
plunging into the depths one might be raised, through the merciful
promises of God in his covenant, into the highest of heavens.[100] It
is by lowering oneself into the depths that one is raised by God
into the heights, just as Christ's self-humiliation led to his glori-
fication. Luther's phrase *iusti et humiles vel iudicati sumus* brings out
the close connection between righteousness, humility, and judg-
ment: by the terms of the ordained order of salvation (the *pactum*
or *testamentum dei*), *humilitas* is reckoned as *iustitia coram Deo*. It is
clear that there is a close link between *humilitas* and *fides* which is
paralleled by that between *iudicium* and *iustitia Dei*: God's *iudicium*
forces us to recognize our *humilitas*, which God accepts as the
iustitia fidei.

   Luther's interpretation of *iustitia Dei* reaches a crucial stage in the
exposition of Psalm 71 (72). The passage which follows is generally
regarded as a *crux interpretativum*:

In the same way, the "righteousness of God" is also threefold.
Tropologically it is faith in Christ (*fides Christi*). Romans 1.17: "For

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[99] WA 3.465.1–35.
[100] E.g., WA 3.466.36–37: ". . . ut sit sensus, Iudica me Domine, id est, da mihi veram
humilitatem et carnis meae mortificationem meiipsius damnationem, ut sic per te
salver in spiritu"; WA 3.462.29–31: "Et ita qui ei per fidem adhaeret, necessario sibi
vilis et nihil, abominabilis et damnabilis efficitur. Quae est vera humilitas. Unde et
isto vocabulo aptissime natura et proprietas humilitatis exprimitur." Cf. A. Gyl-
lenkrok, *Rechtfertigung und Heiligung in der frühen evangelischen Theologie Luthers*
(Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1952), pp. 20–31.

the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel from faith to faith."
And this is its most frequent use in scripture.[101]

But is Luther actually saying anything *new* here? It seems to us that
Prenter is correct when he states that this scholion does not contain
any ideas not already present in the scholion to the previous
psalm.[102] Luther draws attention to the fact that the terms *iudicium*
and *iustitia* have negative and positive overtones, in that the former
relates to damnation, the latter to salvation: *quia iudicium in damna-
tionem, sicut iustitia in salvationem sonat.*[103] Yet, as he points out, it is by
damning *ourselves* that we are saved *by God*. Luther appears to use the
terms *fides* and *humilitas* interchangeably at points as he attempts to
spell out the nature of the righteousness of believers:

> Any word of God whatever is judgement. God judges, however, in a
> threefold manner. First, tropologically, in condemning the works of
> the flesh and the world. God shows that everything in us and in the
> world is abominable and damnable in the sight of God [*coram Deo*].
> Therefore whoever clings to God by faith necessarily becomes vile and
> nothing to themselves, abominable and damnable. And that is true
> humility. ... Consequently, the scourging and the crucifixion of the
> flesh and the condemnation of all that is in the world are the judge-
> ments of God. God carries out these things through judgement
> through the gospel and grace. And so righteousness comes about.
> For to the person who is unrighteous to themselves and is thus humble
> before God, God gives grace. And in this way it is most frequently
> accepted in Scripture. Thus "righteousness" in its tropological sense is
> faith in Christ [*fides Christi*].[104]

Considered tropologically, *iustitia Dei* refers to that righteousness
which has a direct bearing upon individual believers – the righ-
teousness by which they are accepted *coram Deo*, which is *iustitia fidei*.
There is, however, nothing new here concerning the relationship

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[101] WA 3.466.26–28.
[102] Prenter, *Der barmherzige Richter*, pp. 120–121, n. 107.
[103] WA 3.466.31–32.
[104] WA 3.462.25–463.1.

between *iustitia fidei* and *iustitia dei*, nor are there any new statements concerning their relationship to *iudicium dei* or *humilitas*. God gives his grace to the humble. A new term has indeed been introduced (*iustitia tropologice*) – but its content is substantially identical to that of *iustitia fidei*. It may be that we have some breakthrough here – but this can only be maintained if it can be shown that the concept of *fides Christi* is something which is radically different from *humilitas*. As the preceding extract indicates, there is every reason to suppose that *fides Christi* is once more treated as being equivalent to *sibi iniustus esse et ita coram Deo humilis*.

By the end of the scholion on Psalm 71 (72), it is clear that Luther has identified the tropological aspect of *iustitia Dei* as *fides Christi*. While there may have been a certain degree of conceptual clarification involved in this identification, it is not clear that any significant theological advance has been made. Vogelsang summarizes the theological substance of the scholion as follows: "*Opus dei: iustitia dei, iudicium dei etc. est Christus (literaliter), id est fides Christi (tropologice), qua – iudicati – iustificamur, per quam in nobis regnat.*"[105] Nevertheless, all that Luther has done is to clarify the nature of the various *iustitiae* implicated in the justification of man: there is no shift in their fundamental point of reference. The basic question which remains to be answered is this: how does *fides Christi* arise in the individual? We may concede immediately that Christ cannot justify unless he is effective within human nature – but how is this effectiveness achieved?[106] Does humility arise through a person's self-humiliation – or is it effected within that person by God, as a divine work effected without human cooperation? It is this problem which remains to be resolved.

Later in the *Dictata*, Luther indicated that the basic condition which we are required to meet in order to be justified is by doing

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[105] Vogelsang, *Die Anfänge von Luthers Christologie*, p. 55.
[106] WA 4.19.37–39: "Quocirca Christus non dicitur iustitia, pax, misericordia, salus nostra in persona sua nisi effective. Sed fides Christi, qua iustificamur, pacificamur, per quam in nobis regnat."

quod in se est. Having humbled ourselves, we are driven to ask God for the gift which we now recognize that we need:

> "Ask and you shall receive; seek and you will find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, etc." (Matthew 7. 7–8). Hence the doctors rightly say that God gives grace without fail to anyone who does *quod in se est*, and though they could not prepare themselves for grace in a manner which is meritorious *de condigno*, they may do so in a manner which is meritorious *de congruo* on account of this promise of God and the covenant of mercy.[107]

The distinction Luther makes between merit *de congruo* and merit *de condigno* is characteristic of medieval theology, both within the *via antiqua* and *via moderna*.[108] *Meritum de condigno* refers to merit in the strict sense of the term – that is, a human moral act which is performed in a state of grace, and which is worthy of divine acceptation on a *quid pro quo* basis. *Meritum de congruo*, in contrast, is merit in a weak sense of the term. Most medieval writers understood this to refer to a human moral act which is performed outside a state of grace which, although not meritorious in the strict sense of the term, is nevertheless deemed "appropriate" or "congruous" by God in relation to the bestowal of the first (i.e., justifying) grace. Within the context of the theology of the *via moderna*, a person's doing *quod in se est* is regarded as meritorious *de congruo*, under the terms of the *pactum*, so that the notion of congruous merit provides the link between the moral and meritorious realms.

The theology Luther sets out above fits naturally within that associated with the Middle Ages in general, and the *via moderna* particularly. This evidently raises the question of the nature of the human response to the *pactum*, in that the *moderni* understood the *pactum* to provide the contractual basis by which the transition from the moral to the meritorious, from the realm of nature to that of grace, might be effected. Is Luther therefore stating that a human disposition for grace (whether this is defined as *humilitas* or *fides*) is a

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[107] WA 4.262.2–7.
[108] McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, pp. 138–150, especially pp. 140–144.

natural human act? Luther certainly taught – even at this late stage in the *Dictata* – that we have a free choice in our salvation,[109] and that our free will is involved in our justification. Luther operates within the theological framework established by the theologians of the *via moderna* at this point – namely, that the proper disposition for justification must be considered to be a natural human work unaided by any special divine grace. Luther's insistence upon the divine equity, which is so characteristic of the *Dictata*, precludes the implication of special grace in the salvation of humanity. God takes the initiative in the salvation of humanity by means of the *pactum*, which offers grace upon condition that human beings humble themselves to receive it.

While some have seen in Luther's statements at this point "a complete break" with the theology of the *via moderna*,[110] it is clear that this conclusion cannot really be sustained on the basis of the evidence available. Once more, it is necessary to point out that it is not acceptable to approach the Luther of the *Dictata* from the standpoint of his mature theology, attempting to detect traces of this later theology in his earlier work. Rather, one must approach the *Dictata* from the standpoint of later medieval theology in general, with all its presuppositions and limitations, and from that of the *via moderna* in particular. When this latter approach is adopted, Luther's use of terms such as *facere quod in se est*, *meritum de congruo* etc., are found to fit easily into a well-established theological context. It is not merely the theological vocabulary of the *via moderna* which we encounter in the *Dictata*, but also the theological

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[109] WA 4.295.19–35: "*Anima mea in manibus meis semper . . .* Anima mea est in potestate mea et in libertate arbitrii possum eam perdere vel salvare eligendo vel reprobando legem tuam, q.d. licet ego sum liber ad utrunque, tamen legam tuam non sum oblitus. Et hec glosa melior est . . ." Cf. WA 3.331.17–25.

[110] E.g., L. Grane, *Contra Gabrielem: Luthers Auseinandersetztung mit Gabriel Biel in der Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam 1517* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1962), pp. 299–302. Cf. A. Brandenburg, *Gericht und Evangelium: Zur Worttheologie in Luthers erste Psalmenvorlesung* (Paderborn: Bonifacius-Druckerei, 1960), pp. 59–69.

framework within which they were traditionally employed – that of the *pactum*.

However, there is good reason to think that Luther was about to make a decisive break with this well-established theological framework. As we have stressed, the covenant theology of the *via moderna* is based upon the presupposition that human beings are capable of doing *quod in se est* without the special assistance of grace. *Fides Christi = humilitas* is understood as a human disposition toward grace. But what happens to this theological framework if *fides Christi* is understood as a divine gift to humanity, something which people cannot effect by themselves? As we shall suggest, Luther appears to have moved toward this latter position, which is characteristic of his later theology, at some point during the final months of his exposition of the Psalter. It is a development of decisive importance to his theology of justification,[111] as will become clear in the section that follows.

Luther's Break with the Soteriology of the *via moderna* (1515)

At several points during the final parts of the *Dictata*, Luther appears to suggest that the human preparation or disposition for the reception of grace is itself a work of grace.[112] For example, while commenting on Psalm 118 (119). 11, Luther states:

> *I have hidden your words in my heart, that I may not sin* against you. This means: "I have decided to serve you with my whole heart. Therefore I have written your words on my heart, in order that I may no longer sin against them, as I did formerly." Therefore he rightly asks for the

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[111] Cf. Karl Holl's famous comment: "Gott schenkt nicht Gnade … an seiner Gerechtigkeit vorbei … sondern durch seine Gerechtigkeit hindurch." K. Holl, "Die iustitia Dei," p. 188.

[112] See H. Bandt, *Luthers Lehre vom verborgenen Gott: Eine Untersuchung zu dem offenbarungsgeschichtlichen Ansatz seiner Theologie* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1958), pp. 62–63.

> assistance of grace before he proposes. First he says, "Do not drive me away," and then, "because I have hidden and set forth your words." For what we propose is nothing, unless the grace of God disposes it.[113]

It is, however, impossible to conclude that Luther has decisively altered his mind on this matter at this stage. Nevertheless, passages such as this are straws in the wind, hinting at a shift in thinking which locates divine involvement in human justification beyond the establishment of a generalized covenantal framework within which justification takes place to a more direct engagement with individuals.

There are indications that, by the end of his lectures on the Psalter, Luther had distanced himself, and possibly even rejected, the presupposition upon which the soteriology of the *via moderna* was based. Whereas Luther initially understood *humilitas* to be the human response to God, he now appears to hold that it is God, *and God alone*, who moves people to repentance and to a humble acceptance of the divine judgment. The evidence within the *Dictata* is suggestive, but not decisive. We are speaking more of a change of mood than a precisely and explicitly stated change in Luther's theological trajectory. It is therefore important to appreciate that we have corroboration of this conclusion from other sources.

In 1514, a new edition of the collected works of Gabriel Biel was published at Lyons. A copy of this edition found its way to Wittenberg. Luther himself read it, and scribbled some comments – often quite detailed – in its margins. From these marginal comments, which cannot be dated with total confidence, it is clear that Luther no longer accepts the basic presupposition of the soteriology of the *via moderna* – that human beings can do *quod in se est* without the assistance of special grace. For example, commenting upon Biel's statement that people can love God above everything else by their own natural unaided powers, Luther remarks: "As a result the will is

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[113] WA 4.309.6–11. For the theocentricity which begins to become apparent in Luther's understanding of *humilitas* at this point, see M. Kroeger, *Rechtfertigung und Gesetz: Studien zur Entwicklung der Rechtfertigungslehre beim jungen Luther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), p. 33, n. 39.

neither sick, nor does it need the grace of God. All of this is based upon the stupid principle of free will – as if the free will could, by its own power, choose to follow opposite paths, when it is prone only to evil."[114] In other words, Luther's emerging conviction that humanity is naturally prone to evil calls into question whether human beings are naturally able to make the necessary response to the divine initiative, expressed in the *pactum*. Luther no longer believes that humanity is capable of the true humility required in order to receive the gift of grace; rather, grace is *required* in order to achieve this true humility in the first place. We shall develop the consequences of this insight later.

So when did Luther come to this conclusion? It is not clear when Luther entered his marginal comments in the Lyons edition of Biel's *Collectorium*. Although there is some evidence to suggest that they range from the beginning of 1515 to May 1516, it seems that a more probable dating is from the end of 1516 to the summer of 1517.[115] If this later date is accepted, we are brought very close to the date of the *Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam* – by which time Luther has indeed broken totally with the *via moderna*.[116] Nevertheless, there are good reasons for supposing that this insight dates from 1515, in that the Romans lectures of 1515–1516 are permeated with a sustained critique of the soteriology of the *via moderna* on precisely this point.

Three significant changes in Luther's teaching on this matter can be detected as having taken place during or before the Romans lectures:

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[114] Text as established by Grane, *Contra Gabrielem*, p. 359, based on that of Degering. For an excellent study of the development of Luther's views on the relationship of the free will and grace over the period 1513–1517, see H.J. McSorley, *Luther, Right or Wrong? An Ecumenical-Theological Study of Luther's Major Work, The Bondage of the Will* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969), pp. 218–243.

[115] See H. Volz, "Luthers Randbemerkungen zu zwei Schriften Gabriel Biels: Kritische Anmerkungen zu Hermann Degerings Publikation," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 81 (1970), pp. 207–219. Cf. Grane, *Contra Gabrielem*, pp. 299–300, n. 43; 348–349; 368. McSorley, *Luther*, pp. 224–225, assumes they date from 1515.

[116] See Grane, *Contra Gabrielem*, pp. 369–385.

1. *Humanity is now understood to be passive toward the divine action of justification.* Luther now adopts the Augustinian concept of operative grace,[117] and insists that human beings are essentially passive toward the first grace, just as a woman is when she conceives.[118] Grace is not actively appropriated, but is passively received by humanity.[119] It is clear that Luther does not understand this emphasis on divine action to exclude all human activity from justification, in that he formulates this in essentially Augustinian terms.[120] Nevertheless, Luther's changing views on human agency represent a significant divergence from the teaching of the *via moderna* on the matter.

2. *Luther states that the human free will is held captive by sin, and is incapable of attaining righteousness unaided by grace.* It is at this point that Luther first makes reference to the idea of the *servum arbitrium*, an idea which dominates his anti-Erasmian polemic of 1525.

   > Free will apart from the influence of grace has no capacity whatsoever to attain righteousness, but is necessarily in sin. Hence Augustine is right when, in his book against Julian, he calls it "the *enslaved* rather than the *free* will" [*servum potius quam liberum arbitrium*] . . . since it is held captive in sin and thus cannot choose the good according to God.[121]

3. *The idea that human beings can do "quod in se est" is denounced as Pelagian.* This development is of particular significance, in view of the fact that Luther himself based his earlier soteriology upon the presupposition that humanity could do *quod in se est*, as noted above. The following passage is of particular importance:

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[117] WA 56.379.13–15.

[118] WA 56.379.1–2: "Ad primam gratiam sicut et ad gloriam semper nos habemus passive sicut mulier ad conceptum."

[119] WA 56.379.2–6.

[120] See W. Joest, *Gesetz und Freiheit: Das Problem des tertius usus legis bei Luther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 3rd edn, 1961), pp. 218–219; McSorley, *Luther*, p. 238.

[121] WA 56.385.15–22. On *de servo arbitrio*, see McSorley, *Luther*, pp. 297–353.

> They know that humanity cannot do anything by itself (*ex se*).
> Hence it is totally absurd (and also strongly Pelagian!) to hold the
> view summed up in the well-known statement: "God infallibly
> infuses grace in the one who does *quod in se est*" [*facienti quod in se
> est, infallibiliter Deus infundit gratiam*] if the phrase *facere quod in se
> est* is to be understood as meaning "to do or to be capable of doing
> something" [*aliquid facere vel posse*]. Hence it is not a matter for
> surprise that practically the whole church is subverted on account
> of the confidence that this statement expresses.[122]

Luther now explicitly rejects the opinion that salvation is dependent
upon a decision of the human will, adding that he once held this
opinion himself.[123]

It is clear that Luther's definitive teaching on faith as a divine gift is
expressed within the pages of the Romans lectures of 1515–1516.[124] It
is God, and God alone, who moves humanity to repentance and to
the humble acknowledgment of the divine judgment which finds its
proper expression in faith. Although Luther continued[125] to under-
stand *fides* in terms of *humilitas* for some time to come, it is clear that a
decisive break with his earlier understanding of the concept has
taken place. A continuity of conceptualities is initially maintained,
alongside a significant shift in the context within which they are
embedded. Inevitably, this change in context precipitated a change
in those concepts themselves. This process of conceptual recalibra-
tion appears to have taken place gradually in 1515, as Luther began to

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[122] WA 56.502.32–503.5.

[123] WA 56.382.26–27: "... quod nostro arbitrio fiat vel non fiat salus. Sic enim ego
aliquando intellexi."

[124] Frey argued that Luther's concept of faith involved a tension between faith
understood as a work of God within human nature, and faith understood as a human
work: F. Frey, *Luthers Glaubensbegriff: Gottesgabe und Menschentat in ihrer Polarität*
(Leipzig: Klotz, 1939). This view has been refuted by M. Schloenbach, *Glaube als
Geschenk Gottes* (Stuttgart, 1962), pp. 46–54. Cf. WA 10 III.286.7–10: WADB 7.8.30–39.
This latter text was that which, in English translation, "strangely warmed" the heart
of John Wesley.

[125] As pointed out by Bizer, *Fides ex auditu*, pp. 29–39.

think through the implications of his changed understanding of God's priority in the bestowal of grace.

It is impossible to read Luther's 1515–1516 lectures on Romans, and particularly his comments on Romans 3.22, 4.7, 7.17, 7.25, and 10.6,[126] without noticing that he appears to be in possession of some new insight into the nature of justifying faith. The theological mood has changed. That insight, as we have argued above, initially relates not so much to the *character* of faith as to the *mode by which it comes about*. What, then, are the consequences of this insight for Luther's understanding of the "righteousness of God"?

As we noted earlier, Luther came to regard the "righteousness of God," when understood tropologically, to refer to *fides Christi*. This, as we emphasized, did not represent a breakthrough of any sort, but was essentially a conceptual clarification. The individual, when confronted with the judgment of God, is moved to repentance and humility – and this response is the precondition which is necessary in order for this individual to be justified. In other words, *fides Christi* was initially understood as the *quod in se est* required of humanity within the terms of the *pactum* theology upon which Luther's early soteriology was so clearly based. At this stage, *fides Christi* is still understood as an essentially human act, arising from natural human abilities without the special assistance of grace. God provides the transvaluative context of the *pactum*, which allows this essentially human action to merit justification. Once an individual is moved to repent and believe, God bestows the gift of grace in consequence. Such was Luther's understanding of the "righteousness of God" up to the beginning of 1515.

By the end of 1515, all this has changed. *Fides Christi* is now understood as the work of God within humanity, and most emphatically *not* as a response which human beings are capable of making to God by means of their purely natural capacities. Whereas Luther had earlier regarded *fides Christi* as an *indirect* gift of God, in that God was understood to have established the theological framework within

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[126] As pointed out by Bornkamm, "Zur Frage der Iustitia Dei beim jungen Luther," pp. 306–337.

which a believer's faith could be reckoned as worthy of justification, it is now regarded as a *direct* gift of God to the believer. Earlier, *fides Christi* had been understood as a *general* gift of God, in that, the general framework having been established, it was up to the individual to make the necessary response to the divine initiative in the *pactum*; now it is understood as the *specific* gift of God to the individual. It is therefore clear that Luther's exposition of *iustitia Dei* as *fides Christi* at Psalms 70 (71) and 71 (72), while not in itself constituting a theological breakthrough, nevertheless prepared the way for that breakthrough when it finally came. The righteousness which God required of humanity as the precondition of justification was now to be understood as a divine gift which God himself bestowed upon individuals.

The intense personal distress which Luther recorded in 1545 over his earlier wrestling with the meaning of *iustitia Dei* is readily understood in the light of our observations. Any attempt to interpret *iustitia Dei* in terms of *reddens unicuique quod suum est* could only lead to such distress upon the part of the sinners as they realized how there was nothing within them which could lead to their justification on this basis. Not only that: if it were possible for people to do *quod in se est*, they could still never know for certain whether they had, in fact, achieved this, due to the rejection of certainty on this point by the theologians of the *via moderna*. Luther's personal dilemma would therefore have been abundantly and happily resolved by the "wonderful new definition of righteousness" at which he arrived at some point during the year 1515. It may also be pointed out that Luther was certainly familiar with Augustine's *de spiritu et littera* by late 1515,[127] so that this date is compatible with the autobiographical fragment of 1545 at this point. It is, of course, clear that we shall have to return to a re-examination of that fragment later in the present study. However, another question claims our attention first.

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[127] C. Boyer, "Luther et le 'De spiritu et littera' de Saint Augustin," *Doctor Communis* 21 (1968), pp. 167–187; L. Grane, *Modus loquendi theologicus: Luthers Kampf um die Erneuerung der Theologie (1515–1518)* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), pp. 65–66. Cf. WA 56.36.11; 172.5.

As we have indicated, Luther can be shown to have decisively broken with the soteriology of the *via moderna* by the end of 1515. But what position did he assume as a consequence? Did he merely revert to an Augustinian theology of justification, similar to that of his mentor Johannes von Staupitz? There are certainly reasons for supposing that Luther's understanding of justification at this stage stands at some distance from the explicitly forensic notions of justification initially associated with Philip Melanchthon, and subsequently with Lutheranism as a whole, particularly after the controversies with Andreas Osiander.[128] Osiander's transformist notion of justification was initially seen as unproblematic by his colleagues,[129] before the politics of theological polemics within Lutheranism forced a radical review of this position in the 1540s.

At this stage in his development, Luther's understanding of justification is transformational, rather than forensic, reflecting an essentially Augustinian concept of justification as spiritual and moral renewal and regeneration, embracing what later Lutheranism would later distinguish as "justification" (a forensic declaration of righteousness in the sight of God) and sanctification (an inner renewal, wrought by the Holy Spirit, by which the believer becomes righteous).[130] Luther's language and imagery in the *Dictata super Psalterium* strongly points to justification being understood as a process of transformation and healing, and can be interpreted in both ontological and relational terms.

This transformational approach to justification remains integral to Luther's thinking in his 1515–1516 lectures on Romans, and is clearly brought out in his essentially Augustinian account of the sanative dimensions of justification:

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[128] For the points at issue, see W. Niesel, "Calvin wider Osianders Rechtfertigungslehre," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 46 (1928), pp. 410–430; McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, pp. 241–243.

[129] G. Zimmermann, "Calvins Auseinandersetzung mit Osianders Rechtfertigungslehre," *Kerygma und Dogma* 35 (1989), pp. 236–256.

[130] McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, pp. 235–248, especially pp. 238–241. For the formalization of this notion in the thought of John Calvin, see *Iustitia Dei*, pp. 253–257.

> It is like the case of a man who is ill, who trusts the doctor who promises him a certain recovery and in the meantime obeys the doctor's instructions, abstaining from what has been forbidden to him, in the hope of the promised recovery [*in spe promissae sanitatis*], so that he does not do anything to hinder this promised recovery . . . Now this man who is ill, is he healthy? The fact is that he is a man who is both ill and healthy at the same time [*immo aegrotus simul et sanus*]. As a matter of fact, he is ill; but he is healthy on account of the certain promise of the doctor, whom he trusts and who reckons him as healthy already, because he is sure that he will cure him. Indeed, he has already begun to cure him, and no longer regards him as having a terminal illness. In the same way, our Samaritan, Christ, has brought this ill man to the inn to be cared for, and has begun to cure him, having promised him the most certain cure leading to eternal life . . . Now is this man perfectly righteous? No. But he is at one and the same time a sinner and a righteous person [*simul iustus et peccator*]. He is a sinner in fact, but a righteous person by the sure reckoning and promise of God that he will continue to deliver him from sin until he has completely cured him. And so he is totally healthy in hope, but is a sinner in fact [*sanus perfecte est in spe, in re autem peccator*]. He has the beginning of righteousness, and so always continues more and more to seek it, while realizing that he is always unrighteous.

Luther's explicit reference to the Parable of the Good Samaritan is significant, not least in that it underlies several of Augustine of Hippo's more significant elaborations of the Christian life as a process of healing, the church as a hospital, and grace as medicinal.[131]

Fieri est iustificatio:[132] justification is about *becoming*. Luther's assertion at this point is linked with his critique of Aristotelian approaches to justification based on the acquisition of a habit of righteousness. For Luther, justification is not about a state; it is a

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[131] R.J. Teske, "St. Augustine's View of the Human Condition in *De Genesi Contra Manichaeos*," *Augustinian Studies* 22 (1991), pp. 141–155; D.C. Alexander, *Augustine's Early Theology of the Church: Emergence and Implications, 386–391* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

[132] WA 56.442.3.

process of transformation. Indeed, at several points in the *Dictata*, Luther appears to express the nature of this transformation using language that is more associated with the notion of deification than justification.[133] This aspect of Luther's thought has been emphasized by recent Finnish Lutheran scholarship, and its implications for ecumenical relations with Orthodoxy noted.[134] Luther's thinking on the ontological nature of the believer's relationship with Christ is clearly in the process of development at this stage. Such hints of *theosis* are better understood as one among several positions within the spectrum of theological possibilities used by Luther at this time to express the transformed relationship between the believer and Christ.

Yet this transformational or sanative understanding of justification does not prevent Luther from speaking of a change in the way in which believers are regarded by God. Justification may indeed bring about a change within the believer; it also brings about a change in the believer's status *coram Deo*. Luther clearly holds together the notions of an intrinsic change within the believer's nature and an extrinsic change in the believer's status *coram Deo*, apparently seeing them at this stage as two sides of the same coin. Thus in his lectures on Romans, Luther argues that believers are "reckoned" or "accounted" as righteous by God on account of their confession of their sin and desire to be righteous. This is consistent with his argument that human beings must first confess their unrighteousness, and then humble themselves before God in order that they may be renewed and exalted.

> Since the saints are always conscious of their sin, and seek righteousness from God in accordance with his mercy, they are always reckoned

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[133] T. Mannermaa, "Theosis also Thema der finnischen Lutherforschung," in *Luther und Theosis: Vergöttlichung als Thema der abendländischen Theologie*, ed. S. Peura and A. Raunio (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft, 1990), pp. 11–26.

[134] See D. Bielfeldt, "Deification as a Motif in Luther's *Dictata Super Psalterium*," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28 (1997), pp. 401–420; V.-M. Kärkkäinen, "Salvation as Justification and Theosis: The Contribution of the New Finnish Luther Interpretation to Our Ecumenical Future," *Dialog* 45 (2006), pp. 74–82.

as righteous by God [*semper quoque iusti a Deo reputantur*]. Thus in their own eyes, and as a matter of fact, they are unrighteous. But God reckons them as righteous on account of their confession of their sin. In fact, they are sinners; however, they are righteous by the reckoning of a merciful God [*re vera peccatores, sed reputatione miserentis Dei iusti*]. Without knowing it, they are righteous; knowing it, they are unrighteous. They are sinners in fact, but righteous in hope [*peccatores in re, iusti autem in spe*].[135]

Although this passage can be interpreted as pointing toward a notion of forensic justification, it can more plausibly be interpreted within the context of a modified transvaluative *pactum* theology, such as that of the *via moderna*. Luther's point is that the believer really is a sinner, and knows this; within the context of the *pactum*, this allows God to treat the believer as righteous proleptically, in anticipation of the final outcome of the process of transformation. God's judgment thus anticipates a state of perfection which God would achieve within the believer following an extended process of making them righteous.[136] *Fieri est iustificatio!*

Luther's understanding of the nature of justification, then, can be regarded as *essentially* (if not *totally*) Augustinian at this point, even though his growing emphasis upon the status of humanity *coram Deo* is clearly freighted with potentially declaratory or evaluative concepts of divine acceptation, ultimately laying the foundations for more forensic approaches to justification. Yet this is not the whole story. There is more to Luther's views on justification than his understanding of its nature. What of the *process* by which it takes place?

There are two good reasons for suggesting that Luther does not remain within the shared theological matrix of his age, developing

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[135] WA 56.269.25–30.

[136] This view is set out in K. Holl, "Die Rechtfertigungslehre in Luther's Vorlesung uber den Romerbrief mit besonderer Rucksicht auf die Frage der Heilsgewissheit," in *Gesammelte Aufsatze zur Kirchengaschichte*, 3 vols (Tübingen: Mohr, 1928), vol. 1, pp. 111–154. Although Holl overstates his case at points, he is quite correct to challenge any attempt to read back later forensic notions of justification into Luther's thought of 1513–1517.

instead a theology of justification which can only be described as Luther's own creation. The first of these reasons relates to Luther's espousal of the *servum arbitrium*, which goes far beyond Augustine's statements on the incapacitation of the human free will by sin.[137] The second, and more significant, relates to the development of the concept of *iustitia Christi aliena*, unquestionably one of the most original and creative aspects of Luther's mature doctrine of justification. This concept first makes its appearance in the Romans lectures of 1515–1516, and we turn now to consider its significance.

The origins of Luther's concept of the "alien righteousness of Christ" must be considered to lie in his holistic understanding of human nature. In particular, Luther argues that "flesh" (*caro*) and "spirit" (*spiritus*) are not to be regarded as the lower and higher human faculties, but are rather to be understood as descriptions of the whole person considered under different aspects. Thus *caro* does not designate the lower nature of humanity, but is rather to be understood as humanity as a totality (*totus homo*), when considered as turned in upon itself (*homo incurvatus in se*) in its irrepressible egoism and its radical alienation from God.[138] Similarly, *spiritus* is to be understood as referring to humanity as a totality in its openness to God and the divine promises. For Luther, justification relates to the entire person, both flesh and spirit: although the individual comes to put his trust in the promises of God, he nevertheless remains a sinner.[139] The *totus homo* cannot be partially righteous *coram Deo*. Once this point is appreciated, Luther's views on justifying righteousness easily fall into place. God accepts humanity in its totality – not some aspect of human nature. The *totus homo* is thus *iustus*

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[137] McSorley, *Luther*, pp. 224–273; 297–353.

[138] WA 56.342.33–343.2; 356.4–6. See E. Schott, *Fleisch und Geist nach Luthers Lehre, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Begriffs "Totus Homo"* (Leipzig: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1930). For his later anthropology, see W. Joest, *Ontologie der Person bei Luther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967); H.-M. Barth, "Martin Luther disputiert über den Menschen: Ein Beitrag zu Luthers Anthropologie," *Kerygma und Dogma* 27 (1981), pp. 154–166.

[139] WA 56.351.23–352.7.

et peccator simul – a sinner inwardly, and yet righteous in the sight of God.[140]

Luther's characteristic insight that believers are at one and the same time righteous and sinners arises directly from his theology of the *totus homo*, which can be viewed *coram Deo* and *coram hominibus*. The believer is righteous *coram Deo*, even though this righteousness cannot be detected empirically. The Christian is thus a sinner *in re*, and yet righteous *in spe*.[141] Justification is about the initiation of a transformative process, whose ultimate end provides the basis for the proleptic divine judgment on which it is based.

Luther therefore draws the conclusion that justifying righteousness must be alien and extrinsic to believers. It is a righteousness which is in no sense part of their person, or which can in any way be said to belong to them. This consideration underlies the concept of *iustitia Christi aliena*. As Oberman points out,[142] the concept is of decisive importance in distinguishing Luther's theology of justification from that of Staupitz: for the latter, justifying righteousness is a righteousness which is inherent to humanity, *iustitia in nobis*, which, although originating from God, may be regarded as part of the person of the believer; for the former, justifying righteousness is a righteousness which is alien to humanity, *iustitia extra nos*, which can never be said to belong to the person of the believer. Luther uses familiar images such as Boaz covering Ruth with his cloak (Ruth 3.9), or a mother hen covering her chicks with her wing (Luke 13.34), to illustrate how God clothes the sinner with the alien righteousness of Christ. Extrinsically, the believer is righteous, through the alien righteousness of Christ; intrinsically, the believer is – and will remain

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[140] WA 56.270.9–11; 343.16–23; 351.23–352.7. See further R. Hermann, *Luthers These "Gerecht und Sünder zugleich"* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 2nd edn, 1960); W.-D. Hauschild, "Die Formel Gerecht und Sünder zugleich als Element der reformatorischen Rechtfertigungslehre – eine Entdeckung des 20. Jahrhunderts," in *Gerecht und Sünder zugleich? Ökumenische Klärungen*, ed. T. Schneider and G. Wenz (Freiburg: Herder 2001), pp. 303–349.

[141] WA 56.269.27–30; 272.17–21.

[142] H.A. Oberman, *Werden und Wertung der Reformation* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1977), pp. 110–112.

– a sinner. This concept of justifying righteousness differs radically and fundamentally from that of St Augustine, as Luther himself fully appreciates.[143] This element of Luther's thought would be developed by Melanchthon into a doctrine of forensic justification, which would become normative for Protestant understandings of justification.[144] Luther does not himself develop such a doctrine here, although it is clear that he lays the foundation for anyone who might care to undertake such a development subsequently.[145]

It is clear that Luther understands there to be a radical dichotomy between human and divine concepts of *iustitia*. For Augustine, the verb *iustificare* was equivalent to *iustum facere*,[146] so that believers could be said to "become righteous" as a consequence of the operation of grace within them. Luther, however, refused to allow that believers could be said to *become* righteous in justification: if anything, they merely became increasingly aware of their *unrighteousness*, and were thus driven back to the cross to seek forgiveness. The believer is *semper peccator, semper penitens, semper iustus*.[147] Whereas Augustine saw the *vestigiae supernae iustitiae* in human laws,[148] Luther saw nothing in human concepts of *iustitia* which

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[143] For a full discussion of this point, see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, pp. 229–233.

[144] See Alister E. McGrath, "Forerunners of the Reformation? A Critical Examination of the Evidence for Precursors of the Reformation Doctrines of Justification," *Harvard Theological Review* 75 (1982), pp. 219–242.

[145] See A.E. McGrath, "Humanist Elements in the Early Reformed Doctrine of Justification," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 73 (1982), pp. 5–20, for a discussion of the origins of the concept of forensic justification. For its broader implications, see V. Pfnür, "Die Verwerfungen der Confessio Augustana, der Apologie und der Schmalkaldischen Artikel hinsichtlich der Rechtfertigungslehre," in *Lehrverurteilungen – kirchentrennend? II: Materialien zu den Lehrverurteilungen und zur Theologie der Rechtfertigung*, ed. K. Lehmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), pp. 191–209.

[146] E.g., *Exp. quar. prop. ex Ep. ad Rom.* 22; *Ad Simplicianum* I, ii, 3; *Serm.* CCXCII, 6; CXXXI, 9; *Epist.* CXL, xxi, 52; *de grat. et lib. arb.* vi, 13.

[147] WA 56.442.17.

[148] On this whole question, see P.S. Schubert, *Augustins Lex-Aeterna-Lehre nach Inhalt und Quellen* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1924). Cf. W. von Löwenich, "Zur Gnadenlehre bei Augustin und Luther," *Von Augustin zu Luther* (Witten: Luther Verlag, 1959), pp. 75–87; p. 83.

corresponded to *iustitia Dei*. The righteousness which God demands is faith, and that righteousness is only known to faith. In effect, Luther's understanding of *iustitia Dei* involves a hermeneutical circle – a circle outside of which Luther himself once stood.

For Luther, Paul's letter to the Romans represented a programmatic critique of human preconceptions of righteousness,[149] in order that humanity might become conscious of its need for another, strange righteousness – the *iustitia Christi aliena* – and thus turn to God in the humility of faith to receive this righteousness, which alone is valid *coram Deo*. People must learn to distinguish human and divine concepts of *iustitia*:

> Scripture uses the term "righteousness" and "unrighteousness" very differently from the philosophers and lawyers. For they consider them to be a quality of the soul, but in the scriptures "righteousness" [*iustitia*] depends more upon the imputation of God than upon the essence of the thing itself. For those who have only a quality do not have righteousness – indeed, they are actually sinners and unrighteous. The only ones who are righteous are those who God, in his mercy, regards as righteous before him, on account of their confession of their own unrighteousness and their prayer for the righteousness of God. Thus we are all born and die in iniquity, that is, in unrighteousness, and we are righteous only by the reckoning of a merciful God through faith in his word [*sola autem reputatione miserentis Dei per fidem verbi eius iusti sumus*].[150]

In effect, Luther is here mounting a sustained polemic against human preconceptions of what precisely is entailed by the "righteousness of God." For Luther, there is an ever-present danger that *iustitia Dei* will be interpreted in terms of a secular model, which is not capable of rendering the soteriological intentions of its divine counterpart. To define God's righteousness in human terms as "giving someone their due," *reddens unicuique quod suum est* – an interpretation which he

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[149] WA 56.3.6–7: "Summa et intentio Apostoli in ista Epistola est omnem iustitiam et sapientiam propriam destruere."
[150] WA 56.287.16–21.

himself had earlier adopted, and which stood in the way of his theological breakthrough – fundamentally distorts the Christian proclamation. If *iustitia Dei* is interpreted on the basis of the Aristotelian–Ciceronian concept of *iustitia*, sinners will be tempted to think that they can attain justification by their moral efforts, on the basis of a righteousness which lies within their own grasp.

As Luther emphasizes throughout his lectures on Romans, it is only when the total inadequacy of human concepts of righteousness *coram Deo* is recognized that people are driven to look for the one righteousness which has any value *coram Deo* – the alien righteousness of Christ. It is on the basis of this insight that we may understand Luther's critique of Aristotle, which has frequently been misunderstood. In the following section, we propose to demonstrate that Luther's revolt against reason in general, and Aristotle in particular, is directly related to his discovery of the true meaning of the "righteousness of God."

The Nature and Significance of Luther's Critique of Aristotle

On May 20, 1505 Luther began his study of law. He would have become familiar with what is now known as the *Codex Iuris Civilis*, the code of law drawn up by the Roman emperor Justinian in the period 529–534, and especially its underlying concept of *iustitia*. In 1508, as professor appointed by the Augustinian Order, Luther lectured on Aristotle's *Ethics* at Wittenberg. The text of these lectures, unfortunately, has not survived. We have already noted the concept of *iustitia* associated with the *Codex* and with Book V of the *Ethics*. Furthermore, precisely this concept of *iustitia* is that demanded by reason – that of an impartial judge who dispenses justice according to the merits of the individual. When Julian of Eclanum defended this understanding of *iustitia Dei*, he concluded his argument thus: *non ego, sed ratio concludit*.[151] As Karl Holl pointed out, the God who

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[151] Augustine, *Opus imperfectum contra Iulianum* I, 60.

answered to reason could never be anything other than the God of a "works-righteousness" (*Werkgerechtigkeit*), who rewarded humanity for their actions and merits on a *quid pro quo* basis.[152]

For Luther, however, justification is to be regarded as contradicting common sense, in that God justifies *sinners*.[153] As the justification of sinners is so evidently contrary to reason, Luther argued that the role of reason in matters of theology must be called into question. The context in which Luther's critique of reason must be set is *soteriological*, applying "primarily, if not exclusively, to the matter of justification."[154] In this respect, Luther's affirmation of faith in the face of reason is quite distinct from that of William of Ockham, despite the similarities often noted between their positions.[155] Luther made a careful distinction between two realms of human existence in his discussion of the capacity of human reason, which is self-sufficient in relation to *das irdische Reich*, the *regnum rationis*, but is unable to make sense of the *regnum Christi*, particularly the justification of the sinner.[156] Luther's "evangelical irrationalism" is not directly a protest against human reason, but is rather concerned at reason's inability to comprehend the fundamental notion of the "justification of the ungodly," which it regards as a contradiction in terms.

In the present section, we wish to develop these observations further, particularly in the light of some trends in later medieval theology. Much confusion has been occasioned by the fact that Luther was intensely critical of Aristotle from 1509 onwards, so that his criticism of the Greek philosopher has not been regarded as

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[152] K. Holl, "Was verstand Luther unter Religion?," in *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, 3 vols (Tübingen: Mohr, 1928), vol. 1, pp. 1–110: p. 37.

[153] Holl, "Was verstand Luther unter Religion?," p. 77.

[154] E.M. Carlson, *The Reinterpretation of Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1948), p. 127.

[155] Cf. the problematic study of H.A. Oberman, "Facientibus quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam: Robert Holcot O.P. and the Beginnings of Luther's Theology," *Harvard Theological Review* 55 (1962), pp. 317–342.

[156] B.A. Gerrish, *Grace and Reason: A Study in the Theology of Martin Luther* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962). See also B. Lohse, *Ratio und Fides: Eine Untersuchung über die Ratio in der Theologie Luthers* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958), pp. 82–86.

specifically linked with his theological breakthrough. What has not been fully appreciated, however, is that Luther's reasons for criticizing Aristotle underwent a radical change in late 1515, and that the nature of this change is immediately explicable in the light of this breakthrough.

Since the period of High Scholasticism, Aristotelian categories had been employed in theological discourse, with results which were often valuable. The use of Aristotle in this respect, however, was regarded with intense distrust by several theologians of the later medieval period, such as Luther's fellow Augustinian Hugolino of Orvieto. Hugolino mounted what is probably the most ferocious attack on the intrusion of Aristotle into theology ever to be encountered in the Middle Ages, being particularly critical of the use made of Aristotle's *Ethics* on the part of certain unnamed theologians.[157] In particular, Hugolino drew attention to the inevitable intrusion into theology of false concepts of God which resulted from this practice. It is quite probable that Luther encountered Hugolino's criticisms of Aristotle by 1514 at the latest,[158] a fact which may well be reflected in several comments he makes in his earlier works.[159] Luther's criticism of Aristotle, as encountered in the 1509–1510 *Randbemerkungen*, is directed against the incompatibility of theology and philosophy.[160] Theology is concerned with the affairs of heaven and philosophy with those of earth: for theologians to become philosophers is comparable to the birds of the air becoming the fishes of the sea.[161] In other words, the two disciplines are to be distinguished on the

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[157] Hugolino of Orvieto, *Commentarius in Quattuor libros Sententiarum*, ed. W. Eckermann (Würzburg: Augustinus Verlag, 1980), Vol. I. *In I Sent.* prol. q.5 a.1; 140.191–192: "Similiter ethica Aristotelis et tota philosophia moralis superflueret." *In I Sent.* prol. q.5 a.3; 151.72–152.73: "Hoc totum ignorat ethica Aristotelis."

[158] A. Zumkeller, "Die Augustinertheologen Simon Fidati von Cascia und Hugolin von Orvieto und Martin Luthers Kritik an Aristoteles," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 54 (1963), pp. 15–37; 27–28.

[159] WA 9.23.7; 43.5. See F. Nitzsch, *Luther und Aristoteles* (Kiel: Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1883). WA 1.28.19–20 should also be noted in this respect.

[160] See W. Link, *Das Ringen Luthers um die Freiheit der Theologie von Philosophie* (Munich: Kaiser, 2nd edn, 1955), pp. 160–163.

[161] WA 9.65.12–19.

basis of their subject matter. While Aristotle is singled out for particular criticism, Luther's comments are nevertheless directed against philosophy in general.[162]

By 1517, however, all this has changed: Luther's wrath is now directed against Aristotle's *Ethics*, along with certain other entities. Luther's attacks on the "enemies of the gospel" frequently involve the linking together of *ratio, lex*, Aristotle, and the Jurists in what seems, at first sight, to be a somewhat implausible alliance of forces against the gospel.[163] Nevertheless, upon closer examination, all these have one factor in common which is immediately significant in the light of our earlier discussion of the nature of Luther's theological breakthrough: all define *iustitia* as *reddens unicuique quod suum est*. It was precisely this definition of righteousness as "rendering to someone their due" which so appalled the young Luther as he struggled to make sense of how the idea of a "righteous God" could conceivably be gospel. Furthermore, Aristotle's equation of *ho dikaios* and *ho nominos*[164] inevitably means that the righteous person is understood to be one who keeps the law – an opinion which Luther later attributes to reason: *ratio . . . docet; si vis vivere Deo, oportet te legem servare*.[165] Similarly, the Aristotelian *dictum* that someone becomes righteous by performing righteous deeds is rejected by Luther: it is only when someone is justified (*iustus coram Deo*) that they become capable of performing good deeds.[166] Underlying this criticism of Aristotle is Luther's basic conviction that humanity is naturally incapable of performing anything which is good *coram Deo*, and which could be regarded as effecting their justification.

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[162] E.g., his castigation of the "faex philosophiae" (WA 9.43.42) or the "larvae philosophorum" (WA 9.74.10). Note also the manner in which "philosophers" and "lawyers" are linked together at WA 56.287.16–17. For Luther's relation to Aristotle's theory of knowledge, see T. Dieter, *Der junge Luther und Aristoteles: Eine historisch-systematische Untersuchung zum Verhältnis von Theologie und Philosophie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), pp. 257–275.

[163] E.g., WA 40 I.204.11; 31.456.36.

[164] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* V 1129[a–b].

[165] WA 40 I.268.13.

[166] See the excellent study of E. Jüngel, "Die Welt als Wirklichkeit und Möglichkeit," in *Unterwegs zur Sache* (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1972), pp. 206–231.

For Luther, *ratio* and its associated concept of *iustitia* (as used by Aristotle and the jurists) had its proper place in the ordering of civil affairs. Luther's theological criticism of reason relates to his soteriology, particularly to the definition of *iustitia Dei*, which is of central importance to his theology as a whole. The concept of *iustitia* which Luther rejected in this context is none other than that of Aristotle's *Ethics*, which had been taken up by the medieval canonists and jurists, which had found its way into the soteriology of the *via moderna*, and which corresponded to a secular, common-sense understanding of justice in terms of a *quid pro quo* morality, whose validity was immediately apparent to reason.[167]

A similar issue arose earlier in the later stages of the Pelagian controversy. The Pelagian writer Julian of Eclanum had insisted that God judged people *rationabiliter*, which he took to be equivalent to *iuste*,[168] and had therefore applied a common-sense concept of *iustitia* by a process of analogical predication to God. God rewards each according to merit, which may be defined in terms of whether a person has lived well by the standards set out in the law.[169] A similar interpretation of *iustitia Dei* can be derived by direct analogical predication of the Aristotelian understanding of *iustitia*, linked with the associated interpretation of the relationship between *iustita* and *lex*, to God. The young Luther appears to have adopted precisely such a concept of *iustitia* in his early attempt to expound the Psalter: indeed, it is of particular significance that Luther should choose Psalm 9 (10). 9 to expound the relationship between *iustitia* and *equitas* in the divine judgment, as Julian of Eclanum had earlier used exactly the same passage to demonstrate the divine equity in dealing with people directly according to their merit.[170] It was against this understanding of *iustitia*, as applied to God (but not as applied to

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[167] For reflections on Luther's views on *iustitia* to more recent concerns, see A. von Scheliha, "Gerechtigkeit und ihre transzendenten Wurzeln: Theologische Überlegungen zur religiösen Dimension eines aktuellen Begriffs," *Osnabrücker Jahrbuch Frieden und Wissenschaft* 9 (2002), pp. 181–195.

[168] Augustine, *Opus imperfectum contra Iulianum* III, 6.

[169] Augustine, *Opus imperfectum contra Iulianum* I, 60.

[170] See McGrath, "Divine Justice and Divine Equity."

civil affairs), that Luther rebelled when he discovered the "wonderful new definition of righteousness [*mira et nova diffinitio iustitiae*],"[171] with such momentous results for his theology.

Luther's revolt against reason is indeed occasioned by his soteriology – but in a far more specific manner than appears to have been generally realized. Whilst it cannot be proved that Luther appreciated the theological ramifications of everything he read in Book V of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, it is beyond dispute that he recognized that its concept of *iustitia*, if applied analogically to God, had unacceptable theological consequences for sinners: it was the "worst enemy of grace."[172] Luther's joy at his discovery of the new definition of *iustitia* reflects his realization that God loves and forgives sinners, and that the *iustitia* of *iustitia Dei* is not to be understood *qua philosophi et iuriste accipiunt*, but *qua in scriptura accipitur*. This resonates with the strongly soteriological orientation of the Old Testament understanding of the "righteousness of God," noted earlier (pp. 136–137), and lends weight to Luther's own belief that he was essentially returning to a biblical – as opposed to a rationalist or secular – notion of righteousness in relation to God's dealings with people.

Luther's vitriolic attacks against Aristotle, reason, the jurists, the law, and the *Sautheologen* of the *via moderna* reflect his basic conviction that all these employed a concept of *iustitia* which, when applied to God, destroyed the gospel message of the free forgiveness of sinners. Luther's "evangelical irrationalism" is closely correlated with his discovery of the righteousness of God: if reason and its allies were unable to comprehend the mystery of the justification of the ungodly, then so much the worse for them. Reason has its role to play in civil affairs, as in so many other spheres – but when faced with the justification of sinners, the central feature of the gospel proclamation, it collapses, unable to comprehend the mystery with which it is confronted.

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[171] WA 57.69.14–15.

[172] Thesis 41, *Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam*: WA 1.266.10: "Tota fere Aristotelis Ethica pessima est gratiae inimica."

For Luther, the word of the gospel, upon which all theological speculation was ultimately based, was that of a righteous God who justified those worthy of death: if reason was unable to comprehend this fundamental aspect of the gospel, it had forfeited its right to have any say in theology as a whole. In Luther's opinion, reason was not neutral in this matter: according to reason, God should only justify those whose deeds made them worthy of such a reward: *itaque caro est ipsa iustitia, sapientia carnis ac cogitatio rationis, quae per legem vult iustificari.*[173] Human wisdom and human concepts of righteousness are inextricably linked – and, as Luther emphasized, both were called into question by the fact that a righteous God could justify sinners. It is clear that this critique of human wisdom, which is ultimately based upon Luther's deliberations upon the concept of the "righteousness of God," foreshadows the *theologia crucis* of 1518 in a number of respects. Before moving on to consider the nature of the theology of the cross, however, it may be helpful to summarize our conclusions concerning the nature and the date of Luther's theological breakthrough.

The Nature and Date of Luther's Theological Breakthrough

In a fragment of the *Table-Talk* dating from 1532, Luther refers to his theological insight concerning the true meaning of the "righteousness of God" as having taken place "in this tower and heated room" (*in hac turri et hypocausto*).[174] On the basis of this

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[173] WA 40 I.347.27. In view of Luther's misgivings concerning the use of Aristotle in matters theological in general, and in relation to the doctrine of justification in particular, it is somewhat ironical that later Lutheran theologians employed Aristotelian metaphysics extensively in precisely such contexts: see R. Schröder, *Johann Gerhards lutherische Christologie und die aristotelische Metaphysik* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1983), pp. 69–97.

[174] On this, see A. Peters, "Luthers Turmerlebnis," in *Der Durchbruch der reformatorischen Erkenntnis*, pp. 243–288, esp. p. 243, n. 2.

account, Grisar referred to Luther's breakthrough as the "Tower Experience" (*Turmerlebnis*), thus coining a term which has become a commonplace in modern Luther scholarship until quite recently.[175] More generally, Luther's theological breakthrough is often referred to by German-speaking scholars as his *reformatorische Entdeckung*, or *reformatorische Erkenntnis*.[176] It seems to us that both these practices are unjustifiable. The manuscript evidence used to support the term *Turmerlebnis* is far from unequivocal, some texts omitting reference to a "tower" altogether.[177] Furthermore, it is questionable whether Luther's insight concerning the "righteousness of God" can in any sense be designated as his "reformation discovery," in that it is not rigorously linked to the historical origins of the Reformation movement *as a whole*.

As we made clear in the opening chapter of this study, the Reformation must be regarded as having been initiated by the Wittenberg theological faculty as a whole, rather than by Luther as an individual, so that a careful distinction must be drawn between the *initia Reformationis* and the *initia theologiae Lutheri*. The two cannot be considered to be equivalent, although it is clear that they are somehow related. By referring to "Luthers reformatorische Entdeckung," a closer relationship is implied between Luther's insight concerning the meaning of the "righteousness of God" and the dawn of his own vocation as a Reformer – not to mention that of the Reformation as a whole! – than the present state of Luther scholarship permits us to recognize as legitimate.[178] For this reason, we prefer to refer merely to "Luther's theological break-through," and leave open the greater question of the precise

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[175] E.g., see H. Jedin, "Luthers Turmerlebnis in neuer Sicht," *Catholica* 12 (1958), pp. 203–236.
[176] E.g., the title of the collection of essays to which we have frequently referred: *Der Durchbruch der reformatorischen Erkenntnis bei Luther*.
[177] E.g., WATr 2.1681, where Aurifaber's printed version of the conversation in question omits any reference to a "Tower."
[178] For the limits of the term "reformatorisch," see V. Leppin, "Wie reformatorisch war die Reformation?," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 99 (2002), pp. 162–176.

relationship between the *initium theologiae Lutheri* and the *initium Reformationis*.

The dating of Luther's theological breakthrough has proved to be a matter of some controversy.[179] Practically every date between 1505 and 1519 has been suggested at some point during the past century as marking the point at which Luther's thought underwent decisive alteration. The older view, that Luther's theological breakthrough dates from his Erfurt or first Wittenberg period of 1508–1509,[180] was generally discredited through the publication of numerous studies dealing with the newly published lectures on Romans and the *Dictata*. This led to increased interest in the period 1513–1516. Loofs argued that the breakthrough must have taken place before the *Dictata*, perhaps in the winter of 1512–1513,[181] while an increasing number of scholars pointed to the year 1513 itself as marking the transition from Luther's "pre-reformation" to "reformation" thought.[182] Hirsch saw the transition as taking place during the course of the *Dictata*, during the course of the exposition of Psalm 30 (31),[183] while Vogelsang saw it as taking place, or already having taken place, at the exposition of Psalm 70 (71).[184] Although Bornkamm's argument that the transition must be dated from the

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[179] The most significant modern study is that of Otto Pesch, "Zur Frage nach Luthers reformatorischer Wende," in *Der Durchbruch der reformatorischen Erkenntnis*, pp. 445–505. Cf. R. Schäfer, "Zur Datierung von Luthers reformatorischer Erkenntnis," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 66 (1969), pp. 151–170.

[180] K. Benrath, *Luther im Kloster 1505–1525. Zum Verständnis und zur Abwehr* (Halle: Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, 1905), p. 57; H. Böhmer, *Luther im Licht der neueren Forschung* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1906), p. 32.

[181] F. Loofs, "Der articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae," *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 90 (1917), pp. 323–400; 352.

[182] E.g., Stracke, *Luthers großes Selbstzeugnis*, p. 125; Wendorf, "Der Durchbruch der neuen Erkenntnis Luthers," pp. 316–317. The distinction between "reformation" and "pre-reformation" elements in Luther's thought must be treated with the utmost caution: see Grane, *Modus loquendi theologicus*, pp. 11–12.

[183] Hirsch, "Initium Theologiae Lutheri," passim.

[184] Vogelsang, *Die Anfänge von Luthers Christologie*, p. 59. Cf. Rupp, *The Righteousness of God*, pp. 136–137.

beginning of the lectures on Romans (1515) won some support,[185] Vogelsang's thesis appears to have gained general acceptance until 1958.

The challenge to this prevailing consensus on the dating of Luther's breakthrough dates from 1951, when the Finnish historian Uuras Saarnivaara argued that Luther did not develop the distinctive features of his doctrine of justification until as late as 1518–1519.[186] Although this conclusion rested upon questionable presuppositions concerning the nature of Luther's mature doctrine of justification,[187] it posed a very real challenge to the received view. Apparently unaware of this study, Bizer also argued for the later date of 1518–1519, not only on the basis of the dating indicated by the autobiographical fragment of 1545, but also on the basis of a careful examination on the role of *humilitas* in Luther's theology of justification over the period 1513–1519.[188] It is therefore clear that there is a real division of opinion on this matter within contemporary Luther scholarship, with two distinct datings being advocated for the breakthrough: 1513–1515 and 1518–1519. Only if the remarkably clumsy solution of *two* moments of illumination, which later coalesced in Luther's memory, is adopted can these two positions be reconciled.[189]

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[185] H. Bornkamm, "Luthers Bericht über seine Entdeckung der Iustitia Dei," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 37 (1940), pp. 117–128; p. 127. In his later study, "Iustitia Dei in der Scholastik und bei Luther," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 39 (1942), pp. 1–46, Bornkamm advanced the date of the discovery to coincide with that advocated by Vogelsang. Although this thesis is modified in a later study, his overall agreement with Vogelsang is still evident: Bornkamm, "Zur Frage der Iustitia Dei beim jungen Luther," p. 299.

[186] U. Saarnivaara, *Luther Discovers the Gospel: New Light upon Luther's Way from Medieval Catholicism to Evangelical Faith* (St Louis, MO; Concordia, 1951), pp. 74–87. The Finnish original was published in 1947 under the title *Syntisen tie vanhurskauteen ja pyhyyteen Lutherin mukaan.*

[187] Cf. Bornkamm, "Zur Frage der Iustitia Dei beim jungen Luther," pp. 369–370.

[188] Bizer, *Fides ex auditu*, pp. 172–178.

[189] See W.D.J. Cargill Thompson, "The Problem of Luther's 'Tower Experience' and Its Place in His Intellectual Development," in *Studies in the Reformation: Luther to Hooker* (London: Athlone Press, 1980), pp. 60–80; pp. 79–80. Cargill Thompson does not appear to take his own suggestion with much seriousness.

It is, of course, possible to argue that both Saarnivaara and Bizer base their case upon mistaken dogmatic presuppositions. This, however, does not explain the apparent reference to 1519 as the year of Luther's discovery in the autobiographical fragment itself. If Luther's words are taken at their face value, the chronology of the fragment clearly implies that his breakthrough took place in 1519. It has been suggested, nevertheless, that the unusual use of the so-called "double" pluperfect tense at the beginning of the text (*captus fueram* where *captus eram* would be expected) indicates that the passage should be regarded as a digression from the main course of the narrative, so that an earlier period in Luther's career is being indicated and described.[190] This is somewhat more convincing than the suggestion that Luther confused his second course of lectures on the Psalter (the *Operationes in Psalmos*) with his first (the *Dictata super Psalterium*),[191] although it cannot be regarded as totally persuading. Nevertheless, Luther's sudden use of this tense is clearly laden with chronological significance, and the simplest explanation of the use of the tense is unquestionably to imply a chronological discontinuity within an otherwise continuous narrative.

It is almost certain that the autobiographical fragment has been subject to considerable over-interpretation by Luther scholars. It must be remembered that the fragment forms part of a preface, addressed to the *pius lector* who is about to read the first volume of Luther's collected Latin works. What would Luther wish such a reader to know? It is clear that Luther's object in writing the preface is to acquaint readers with the *historia negotii evangelici* of 1517–1519, in order that they may more fully appreciate the significance of what follows within the main body of the work itself. The readers in question may well have been unfamiliar with Luther's background, and thus unable to appreciate the context within which Luther's theology emerged.

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[190] Stracke, *Luthers großes Selbstzeugnis*, pp. 122–123.
[191] F. Loofs, *Leitfaden zum Studium der Dogmengeschichte* (Halle: Niemeyer, 4th edn, 1906), p. 689.

The purpose of the preface is thus to explain to readers that the writer was once himself a monk and a "papist," who came to have profound theological misgivings concerning the accepted theology of his day. Luther wishes his readers to appreciate that, in the course of his biblical exposition, he came to acquire new insights which were essentially complete by the time he began to expound the Psalter for the second time. A stumbling block to this development was encountered in the phrase "the righteousness of God": Luther explains briefly, without adequate documentation, the nature of that difficulty before outlining, with equal brevity, the nature of his solution to this problem, and indicating its Augustinian provenance. In other words, Luther intends the reader to understand that by the end of the period covered by the *historia negotii evangelici* (in other words, by 1519), he was in full possession of the new theology upon which his subsequent actions and publications were based.

A close reading of this preface makes it clear that it does not demand the conclusion that Luther's new theological insights *took place* in 1519, although it does clearly imply that they *were complete* by that date, and that they are incorporated into the substance of the *Operationes in Psalmos*. The *Operationes* do indeed contain his "new" understanding of *iustitia Dei* – but their leading feature is their exposition of the *theologia crucis*, which, as we shall argue, encapsulates the *cogitationes* which Luther describes in the autobiographical fragment. It is clear that Luther regarded his initial difficulties over *iustitia Dei* as cathartic, and his solution to those difficulties as paradigmatic. In other words, although Luther's discovery of the "wonderful new definition of righteousness" cannot in any way be regarded as exhausting his early theological insights, it was of decisive importance precisely because the manner in which Luther interpreted the concept was immediately applicable to other related concepts, as the autobiographical fragment indicates, thus providing the model on which his programmatic reinterpretation of such concepts could proceed. As we shall argue in the following chapter, the leading features of the theology of the cross are foreshadowed in this earlier phase of his development.

Luther's thought over the period 1513–1519 demonstrates every evidence of continuous development, rather than cataclysmic alteration. There is no single point at which a dramatic alteration in his theological outlook may be detected. Although this absence is at least partly due to the nature of the material upon which Luther was lecturing at the time, and partly due to Luther's early views on the public nature of scriptural exegesis, it cannot be totally explained upon this basis. The autobiographical fragment indicates that Luther experienced, or at least remembered experiencing, a theological breakthrough in relation to his interpretation of *iustitia Dei*. The evidence unquestionably demonstrates that Luther's interpretation of this concept underwent a radical alteration over the period 1513–1516, although in a number of stages. Which, then, of these stages corresponds most closely to Luther's own account of his initial difficulties, and their resolution through his discovery of the *mira et nova diffinitio iustitiae*?

On the basis of his analysis of Luther's discussion of *iustitia Dei* in the *Dictata*, Vogelsang concluded that Luther's discovery must have taken place in 1514, at – or perhaps shortly before – his exposition of Psalm 70 (71). Although this undoubtedly corresponds to a stage in the development of Luther's thinking on the matter, it does not appear to us to represent a breakthrough in any significant sense. When viewed in the light of the soteriology of the *via moderna*, it becomes clear that the alteration which Vogelsang detects, while representing a real development in Luther's thought, must nevertheless be regarded as nothing more than a significant terminological or conceptual clarification within the *existing* framework of his thought. The concept of *iustitia fidei* only resolves Luther's difficulties, as they are stated in the autobiographical fragment, if, *and only if*, faith is understood to be a divine work within humanity, rather than a human work or activity in itself, unaided by grace – and *this* vital development took place at some point in 1515. Luther's theological breakthrough is indeed related to the realization that the righteousness which God requires of people is faith – but this fails to resolve his dilemma, *unless* that faith is recognized as originating from God, rather than from humanity. We therefore conclude that the

theological breakthrough in relation to the "righteousness of God" took place at some point in 1515, possibly having taken place during the final stages of the *Dictata*.

It is our opinion that this breakthrough represents the beginning, rather than the end, of Luther's early theological development, in that it is on the basis of his new understanding of *iustitia Dei* that Luther was obliged to begin the long and painful process of revising his understanding of the manner in which God deals with sinful humanity in a sinful world. A good case can be made for suggesting that this process of development was essentially complete by the beginning of 1519, and can be seen clearly stated in Luther's *Acta Augustana* of October 1518.[192] Here we find an explicit statement that faith alone justifies – *fides sola justificat!*[193] – without any indication that this "faith" is to be understood as humility.[194]

> This truth is infallible, that nobody is righteous except for those who believe in God [*nullus est iustus nisis qui credit in Deum*]. As Romans 1 says, "The righteous lives from faith." So if someone should not believe, they are judged and dead. Therefore the righteousness of the righteous and their life is their faith [*Igitur iusticia iusti et vita eius est fides eius*].

For Luther, this faith is a response to the promises of God, focused in and through Jesus Christ. "Only faith in the word of Christ justifies, makes alive, makes worthy, and prepares; without which everything else is an exercise in either presumption or despair."[195] Even here, faith is understood primarily in terms of healing or personal trans-

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[192] As argued by Bizer, *Fides ex auditu*, pp. 97–105.

[193] WA 2.14.5–6. Luther's frequent use of the term *sola* has been shown to have direct parallels in the writings of Johannes von Staupitz: see B. Hamm, "Von der spätmittelalterlichen reformatio zur Reformation: der Prozess normativer Zentrierung von Religion und Gesellschaft in Deutschland," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 84 (1993), pp. 7–82, especially pp. 40–41.

[194] WA 2.13.12–15.

[195] WA 2.14.6–8. "Quia sola fides verbi Christi iustificat, vivificat, dignificat, praeparat, sine qua omnia alia vel sunt praesumptionis vel desperationis studia."

formation, rather than in terms of a changed legal status.[196] Yet there is a shift in emphasis, in that Luther's constant use of the *present* tense in delineating the outcomes of faith points to his growing tendency to emphasize the benefits of faith *in the present*, rather than seeing these as future developments, which are to be awaited in hope.

Luther's insight into the true nature of the "righteousness of God" represents far more than a mere terminological clarification: latent within it is a new concept of God. Who is this God who deals thus with humanity? Luther's answer to this question, as it developed over the years 1513–1519, can be summarized in one of his most daring phrases: the God who deals with sinful humanity in this astonishing way is none other than the "crucified and hidden God" (*Deus crucifixus et absconditus*)[197] – the God of the *theologia crucis*. How Luther developed his fundamental insight into the true nature of the "righteousness of God" into the *theologia crucis*, with all that this entails, is the subject of the following chapter.

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[196] The nine biblical examples of the results of faith noted here by Luther include the healing of blind people, sick children, and servants: see WA 2.14.14–15.27.

[197] The phrase dates from 1518, and may be found in the *Resolutiones disputationum de indulgentiarum virtute*, WA 1.613.23–28: "Theologus crucis (id est de *deo crucifixo et abscondito* loquens) poenas, cruces, mortem docet esse thezaurum omnium preciosissimum et reliquias sacratissimas, quas ipsemet dominus huius theologiae consecravit benedixitque non solum tactu suae sanctissimae carnis, sed et amplexu suae supersanctae et divinae voluntatis, easque hic reliquit vere osculandas, quaerendas, amplexandas" (our italics). For an excellent discussion of this aspect of Luther's theology, see P. Bühler, *Kreuz und Eschatologie. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit der politischen Theologie, im Anschluß an Luthers theologia crucis* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1981), pp. 91–132.

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Crux sola est nostra theologia: The Emergence of the Theology of the Cross, 1514–1519

Up to this point, we have been concerned to clarify the development of Luther's theology of justification, set against the background of late medieval theological currents of thought and debate. This is a question of major scholarly importance in its own right. Yet our analysis suggests that Luther's conclusions concerning the nature of the "righteousness of God" are ultimately *programmatic* as much as they are *substantial*, reflecting a general approach to divine attributes such as righteousness, wisdom, and power. Luther's approach thus has relevance beyond his specific concerns with the doctrine of justification, and extends to include how God's attributes are to be known and understood. This leads to the realization that Luther's celebrated "theology of the cross" is best seen, not as an independent aspect of his early thought, but as the outcome of substantially the same trajectory of thought that led to his theological breakthrough concerning the "righteousness of God." Luther's doctrine of justification by faith and his theology of the cross are best understood as parallel outcomes from the same theological fountainhead.

So what are the main themes of this "theology of the cross," neglected for generations after Luther's death, yet which has proved so significant for many writers since World War II? What are Luther's central ideas? How did they arise? And what is their significance? We begin by considering the core themes of Luther's *theologia crucis*, as they are set out in the Heidelberg Disputation.

The Heidelberg Disputation (1518) and the "Theology of the Cross"

On April 26, 1518 Luther presided over the opening disputation of the chapter of the Augustinian Order at Heidelberg.[1] This disputation concerned a series of theses which Luther had drawn up for the occasion at the invitation of his colleague and superior Johannes von Staupitz. In the course of these theses, the main elements of Luther's emerging *theologia crucis* become clear.[2] The most significant statements relating to this theology are to be found in Theses 19 and 20. I have translated them here with some care, to bring out the core theological points:

> 19. Anyone who observes the invisible things of God, understood through those things that are created, does not deserve to be called a theologian. [*Non ille dignus theologus dicitur, qui invisibilia Dei per ea, quae facta sunt, intellecta conspicit.*]

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[1] See J.E. Vercruysse, "Luther's Theology of the Cross at the Time of the Heidelberg Disputation," *Gregorianum* 57 (1976), pp. 532–548; M. Plathow, "Crux probat omnia. Aspekte zu Martin Luthers Kreuzestheologie heute," in *Freiheit und Verantwortung: Aufsätze zu Martin Luther im heutigen Kontext* (Erlangen: Martin-Luther-Verlag, 1996), pp. 351–374.

[2] For an excellent if slightly dated study, see W. von Löwenich, *Luthers Theologia Crucis* (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 4th edn, 1954), pp. 11–20. The important older study of Eduard Ellwein should also be noted: E. Ellwein, "Die Entfaltung der theologia crucis in Luthers Hebräerbriefvorlesung," in *Theologische Aufsätze. Karl Barth zum 50. Geburtstag*, ed. E. Wolf (Munich: Kaiser, 1936), pp. 382–404, especially pp. 398–401.

20. But anyone who understands the visible rearward parts of God as observed in suffering and the cross does deserve to be called a theologian. [*Sed qui visibilia et posteriora Dei per passiones et crucem conspecta intelligit.*][3]

For Luther, the sole authentic *locus* of human knowledge of God is the cross of Christ, in which God is to be found revealed, and yet paradoxically hidden in that very same revelation. Luther's language about the way in which God is disclosed through the cross takes the self-disclosure of God to Moses as paradigmatic:

> Moses said, "Show me your glory, I pray." And God said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you. . . . But you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live." And the Lord continued, "See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen" (Exodus 33.18–23).

Moses's request to see the glory of God is denied; instead, he is constrained by God, denied a full disclosure of the divine glory or any direct sight of God's face. All that Moses is permitted to see is the passing of God, catching a glimpse of God's back as God strides into the distance.[4] The language and imagery is that of transience and liminality. Revelation constitutes but a fleeting glimpse of God.

Luther's reference to the *posteriora Dei* in Thesis 20 serves to emphasize that, like Moses, we can only see God from the rear: we are denied a direct knowledge of God, or a vision of God's face (cf. Exodus 33.23, "you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen," in the Vulgate translation familiar to Luther: *videbis posteriora mea, faciem autem meam videre non poteris*). The cross does indeed reveal God – but that revelation is of the *posteriora Dei*. The revelation here

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[3] WA 1.354.17–21. For the use of "conspector" to refer to "someone who sees," see Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum libri duo*, II.13: "Deus conspector est cordis."

[4] For this theme in Jewish mysticism, see J. Gorsky, "Elie Wiesel, Hasidism and the Hiddenness of God," *New Blackfriars* 85, no. 996 (2004), pp. 133–143.

disclosed is that of a God whose hand prevents the observer from fully seeing what is happening; a God who passes by, but does not stop; a God who is seen from the back, but whose face cannot be seen. In that it is the *posteriora Dei* which are made visible, this revelation of God must therefore be regarded as an *indirect* revelation of God – but a genuine revelation nonetheless.

Sed qui visibilia et posteriora Dei per passiones et crucem conspecta intelligit. Thesis 20 of the Heidelberg Disputation is ineptly translated in the standard American edition of Luther's works as: "He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross."[5] This translation is linguistically and theologically indefensible: *posteriora Dei* is there incompetently and incomprehensibly rendered as "the manifest things of God," which is a flagrant mistranslation that makes no sense within the context of Luther's emerging "theology of the cross." Not only is the critically important allusion to Exodus 33.23 overlooked: on the basis of this translation, it is impossible to speak of the *hiddenness* of God's revelation – yet it is clear that this is precisely what Luther intended to convey by the phrase.

The specific Latin terms used by Luther at this point need further comment, in that there is a clear distinction implied between essentially *rational* and *visual* engagements with the cross. Difficulties in translating Luther's Latin have often led English-speaking scholars to overlook the significance of the dialectic which Luther proposes between two modes of theological engagement: *intellecta conspicit – conspecta intelligit*.[6] Luther goes on to draw a distinction between a "theology of glory" and a "theology of the cross." His argument is that a theologian of glory "observes what is understood." A theologian of the cross, however, "understands what is seen" (*conspecta intelligit*).

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[5] Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann, eds, *Luther's Works*, 55 vols (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955–1986), vol. 31, pp. 39–40. The translation of Thesis 19 is also open to criticism, not least because it is inattentive to the deeper sense of the Latin phrases used.

[6] I freely admit that I failed to appreciate this point myself in the 1985 edition of this work, and am delighted to correct it in this new edition. It is reflected in the altered translations of Thesis 19 and 20 which I provide.

What is the point that Luther is making here? Two fundamental notions lie at the heart of the theological approach embedded within Luther's *theologia crucis*. First, Luther develops the idea of the "normative centering" of Christian thought on the cross of Christ,[7] which becomes the focus and foundation of authentically Christian ways of understanding the enigmas of the world. Although the notion of "normative centering" refers to the coalescence of society around certain social norms, symbols or institutions, it can also be interpreted in terms of controlling or organizing images, which come to achieve a symbolic role, both intellectually and institutionally.[8] Luther's understanding of the cross as the iconic and symbolic center of Christian theology, worship, and spirituality clearly fits into this pattern. The cross of Christ is "visible," the subject of multiple verbal and iconic depictions in the devotional literature of the church, and especially of the later Middle Ages.

Second, Luther insists that theology must learn to discern and accommodate the logic of the "crucified and hidden God," rather than begin from rational starting points or secular presuppositions of its own choosing. These merely hinder an engagement with the mystery of the cross, and must be discarded or destroyed before an authentically Christian "map of meaning" can be developed. This notion of a "map of meaning," a settled intellectual framework, which determines how we view and understand the world,[9] needs

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[7] For this theme in recent Reformation scholarship, see O. Mörke, *Die Reformation: Voraussetzungen und Durchsetzung* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2005), pp. 83–87. For this theme in the earlier medieval period, see F. Eisermann, "*Diversae et plurimae materiae in diversiis capitulis*. Der 'Stimula Amoris' als literarische Dokument der normative Zentrierung," *Frühmitteralterliche Studien* 31 (1997), pp. 214–232.

[8] As noted by B. Hamm, "'Normative Zentrierung': Eine gemeinsame Vision von Malern und Literaten im Zeitalter der Renaissance," in *Künstler und Literat: Schrift- und Buchkultur in der europäischen Renaissance*, ed. B. Guthmüller, B. Hamm, and A. Tönnesmann (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), pp. 47–74.

[9] Substantially the same notion is expressed in the modern idea of "theory-laden observation": see M. Adam, *Theoriebeladenheit und Objektivität. Zur Rolle von Beobachtungen in den Naturwissenschafte* (Frankfurt am Main: Ontos Verlag, 2002).

further comment. Luther's argument is that a "theology of glory" involves seeing the cross through a filter of a predetermined set of ideas, reflecting prevailing philosophical or cultural norms,[10] which determines how the cross is interpreted. The cross is thus forced into an alien interpretative framework, not of its own devising, which it is not permitted to challenge. Something else is allowed to become the foundation and criterion of theology, and thus shapes the manner in which the cross is interpreted. We therefore "see" what our theoretical precommitments allow us to see, and consequently fail to engage with the cross as it actually is.

At first sight, Luther might seem to understand a "theology of the cross" to be essentially a restatement of the common Christian belief that the cross of Christ provides both a symbolic focus and theological foundation for Christian life and thought.[11] Yet a closer reading of Luther's terse statements of this theology soon indicates that he has developed a more radical approach, seeing the "theology of the cross" as mounting a full-scale assault on human preconceptions of God and the conditions under which humanity finds acceptance in the sight of God. Luther retains the traditional emphasis upon the cross as a symbolic focus of the Christian faith,[12] seeing it as a lens through which the enigmas of faith may be brought into focus. Yet Luther understands the cross as far more than an instrument of theological illumination, linking it with the deep existential anxieties of humanity in the face of suffering, the radical ambiguity of a shadowy world, and above all the fear of death and damnation. The cross breaks down our inadequate and misleading

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[10] Luther's critique of Aristotle is easily accommodated within this conceptual framework.

[11] See, for example, U. Luz, "Theologia crucis als Mitte der Theologie im Neuen Testament," *Evangelische Theologie* 34 (1974), pp. 141–175; C.B. Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1990), pp. 1–24; T. Knöppler, *Die theologia crucis des Johannesevangeliums: Das Verständnis des Todes Jesu im Rahmen der johanneischen Inkarnations- und Erhöhungschristologie* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1994), pp. 3–32.

[12] See the essays gathered together in E. Dinkler, *Im Zeichen des Kreuzes: Aufsätze* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1992).

prejudices and presuppositions, so that a "true theology" can emerge in their place.

For Luther, the cross must be allowed to determine its own conceptual framework. Theology begins at the foot of the cross of the crucified Christ; it does not begin somewhere else, and then proceed to assimilate the cross into its predetermined categories. More importantly, a "theology of glory" proceeds by prioritizing the rational – what the human mind can cope with. Where a theology of the glory depends upon the human capacity to *understand*, the theology of the cross depends on the human capacity to *perceive* – to observe what is happening, and reflect on its deeper significance, even when this cannot be fully grasped. A "theology of the cross" thus gives priority to what is experienced. As Luther famously put it, "only experience makes a theologian."[13] The empirical observation of the cross takes precedence over theoretical speculation; otherwise, the cross is reified or translated into abstract ideas, losing its deep visual and symbolic power. To use the Augustinian phrase that so clearly lies behind Luther's approach, the crucified Christ is to be seen with the "eyes of the heart."

For Luther, true theology begins through beholding the crucified Christ. We are called upon to engage with the cross, not simply by that process of intellectual dissection which leads to those theological abstractions often designated as "theories of the atonement," but also through the human imagination and emotions. To use Augustine's celebrated phrase, which had such a deep impact on late medieval Augustinian spirituality, we must see with the "eye of the heart."[14] These themes were deeply embedded within the Augustinian *Frömmigkeitstheologie* of that age, which offered a

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[13] *Martin Luthers Werke: Tischreden*, 1.16: "Sola autem experientia facit theologum."

[14] Augustine, *Sermo* 88, 5. For discussion of this theme, which underlies some core aspects of Luther's *theologia crucis*, see R.J. Hardy, *Actualité de la révélation divine: une étude des "Tractatus in evangelium Ioannis" de Saint Augustin* (Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1974), pp. 60–68; R.J. Teske, "Augustine of Hippo on Seeing with the Eyes of the Mind," in *Ambiguity in the Western Mind*, ed. C.J.N. de Paulo, P. Messina, and M. Stier (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 72–87.

powerful corrective to certain more abstract and conceptual ratio-
nalizations of theology.[15] Drawing on such currents of thought,
Luther tends to use the phrase "theology of the cross" to designate,
not a systematic theology which articulates the meaning of the
cross, but rather a way of "seeing" the world, of doing theology,
and of living the Christian life that recognizes the profound ambi-
guities of faith. It rejects any attempt to "reify" God's revelation, and
above all demands a constant return to its origin and foundation
for refreshment and renewal. The contemplation of the passion
of Christ is seen as the source of a true understanding of the nature
of things.

The cross, for Luther, is thus the foundation and criterion of an
authentically Christian theology, illuminating how the believer must
exist in a shadowy world of sin and doubt, and challenging natural
human preconceptions of what God is like, and how God should
act. The *theologia crucis* stands opposed to any notion of theology as
intellectual speculation, or an attempt to make cognitive sense of
things. It recognizes the essential fragility and elusiveness of our
knowledge of God, and its resistance to systematization or reifica-
tion. Instead, Luther offers a vision of how the Christian is to exist in
the dark wastelands of a fallen world, and cope with the deep anxiety
of existential and metaphysical uncertainty.

Luther's emphasis upon the cross as a theological criterion and
foundation arises from and within a tradition of meditation upon the
sufferings of Christ, characteristic of late medieval spirituality.[16]
Theology is about the cultivation of a habit of attentiveness to the

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[15] See especially F.O. Schuppisser, "Schauen mit den Augen des Herzens: Zur
Methodik der spätmittelalterlichen Passionsmeditationen, besonders in der Devotio
Moderna und bei den Augustinern," in *Die Passion Christi in Literatur und Kunst des
Spätmittelalters*, ed. W. Haug and B. Wachtinger (Tübingen: Mohr, 1993), pp. 169–210.
[16] M. Elze, "Das Verständnis der Passion Jesu im ausgehenden Mittelalter und bei
Luther," in *Geist und Geschichte der Reformation*, ed. K. Scholder (Berlin: Walter de
Gruyter, 1966), pp. 127–151. On Bernard of Clairvaux's theology of the cross,
see U. Köpf, "Schriftauslegung als Ort der Kreuzestheologie," in *Bernhard von
Clairvaux und der Beginn der Moderne*, ed. D.R. Bauer and Gotthard Fuchs (Innsbruck:
Tyrolia Verlag, 1996), pp. 194–213.

crucified Christ, focusing and concentrating on what is to be known about God through this specific historical event and spiritual image. We must learn to *see* the cross, to picture this historical event, in our minds, allowing its pain, distress, and violence to impact upon us. We simply cannot be allowed to sanitize or domesticate the brutality and horror of the cross in our headlong rush to extract some abstract, sanitized theological principles from the historical carnage and brutality of Good Friday.

Two major general approaches to the cross of Christ can be identified in the later medieval period. First, there is an essentially cognitive approach, often designated as "theories of the atonement." These set out to identify theological explanatory mechanisms by which a connection may be established between the death of Christ on the cross and the possibility of human redemption. The late Middle Ages witnessed extensive discussion of this question at both the academic and popular level, with the latter often focusing on the notion of God deceiving Satan.[17]

The second approach focuses more upon the ethical and spiritual impact of the cross of Christ upon the believer.[18] The emphasis here falls upon the use of the imagination and the emotions of the believer to grasp the extent of human sin and the generosity of divine redemption. Such devotional approaches to the cross often develop sequential modes of engagement with the cross of Christ, inviting believers to enter into an increasingly intimate relationship with the crucified Christ. When set against the context of the emotional intensity of the "new piety" of the later Middle Ages,[19] such approaches often have a powerful impact on believers, not least in generating feelings of guilt and a desire for confession.

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[17] J.A. Alford, "Jesus the Jouster: The Christ-Knight and Medieval Theories of Atonement in Piers Plowman and the 'Round Table' Sermons," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 10 (1996), pp. 129–143.

[18] See, for example, the approach set out in the writings of Johannes von Paltz: B. Hamm, *Frömmigkeitstheologie am Anfang des 16. Jahrhunderts: Studien zu Johannes von Paltz und seinem Umkreis* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1982), pp. 138–175.

[19] On which see M. Derwich and M. Staub, eds, *Die "Neue Frömmigkeit" in Europa im Spätmittelalter* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004).

Luther himself was perfectly familiar with both traditions of thought, which are reflected throughout his writings.[20] Luther's emphasis tends to fall on the latter, rather than the former. For example, in a sermon of 1519, Luther emphasized how the passion of Christ could – and should – have a transformative impact on believers: "The proper and natural work of the passion of Christ is that it makes us conform to the likeness of Christ. In that Christ was horribly martyred in body and soul for our sins, so must we be martyred for him in the knowledge of our sins."[21]

However, Luther's theology of the cross is neither a theology of atonement, nor what Berndt Hamm terms a *Frömmigkeitstheologie*. It is a form of theology which is both cognitive and affective, clarifying both the existential and perceptual aspects of faith using the cross of Christ as the supreme paradigm of divine self-disclosure, and emphasizing the manner in which it challenges natural human judgments about God, revelation, and justification. Faith and doubt, righteousness and sin, are disclosed as correlates which are intrinsic to the identity of the *totus homo*. In other words, humanity exists under such conditions that believers cannot be other than both sinners and righteous, believing and doubting – because that is the reality of the situation. It may be theologically messy and existentially distressing – but that is just the way things are. Just as the believer is *simul iustus et peccator*, so the believer is also caught up in the dialectic between faith and *Anfechtung*, a dialectic which will never be resolved in this life.[22] It is little wonder that Luther insisted that the real theologian is someone who has experienced this despair and anguish: "By living, even by dying and being

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[20] For Luther's approach to atonement, see O. Tiililä, *Das Strafleiden Christi: Beitrag zur Diskussion über die Typeneinteilung der Versöhnungsmotive* (Helsinki: Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae, 1941); M. Lienhard, *Luther, témoin de Jésus-Christ: les étapes et les thèmes de la christologie du réformateur* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1973), pp. 197–260.

[21] WA 2.138.19–21.

[22] See H. Beintker, *Die Überwindung der Anfechtung bei Luther: Eine Studie zu seiner Theologie nach den Operationes in Psalmos 1519–1521* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1954), pp. 181–195, especially pp. 192–195, for an excellent discussion.

damned, make someone a theologian, not by understanding, reading and speculating."[23]

The Leading Themes of Luther's "Theology of the Cross"

A close reading of Luther's writings around the period 1517–1520 suggests that the emerging "theology of the cross" is not a systematic approach to theology, but is rather to be understood as a means of gaining one's existential bearings in an ambiguous world of shadows and sin. It is a compass, rather than a map; critical, rather than substantial. Yet it is possible to identify the leading motifs of this approach to theology reasonably clearly. We may summarize the leading features of Luther's *theologia crucis* in terms of five themes:[24]

1. The *theologia crucis* is a theology of revelation, which stands in sharp contrast to speculation. Those who speculate on those things that are "understood" (*intellecta*) through the created order (*ea quae facta sunt*) have, in effect, forfeited their right to be called "theologians." God has chosen to self-disclose through an observable medium in a certain manner, place, and time, and it is the task of Christian theologians to concern themselves with the specifics of this self-disclosure, instead of constructing preconceived notions of God which ultimately must be broken down, in that they are essentially barriers to the true knowledge of God.

2. This revelation of God must be regarded as indirect and concealed. This is one of the most difficult aspects of the *theologia crucis* to grasp: how can one speak of a *concealed* revelation? Luther's allusion to Exodus 33.23 in Thesis 20 is the key to understanding this fundamental point. Although it is indeed God who is revealed in the passion and the cross of Christ, this

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[23] WA 5.163.28–29: "Vivendo, immo moriendo et damnando fit theologus, non intelligendo, legendo aut speculando."
[24] Cf. von Löwenich, *Luthers Theologia Crucis*, p. 18.

"self-revelation" is not immediately recognizable *as a disclosure of God*. God stands revealed in the "humility and shame of the cross."[25] Although the cross is empirically observable, its deeper significance is veiled and concealed, partly on account of human preconceptions about the manner and nature of divine self-revelation, which prevent this event from being *seen* as revelatory.

Those who expect a direct revelation of the face of God are thus unable to discern the divine presence in this revelation, precisely because it is the *posteriora Dei* which are made visible in this revelation. In that it is God who is made known in the passion and cross of Christ, it is *revelation*; in that this revelation can only be discerned by the eye of faith, it is *concealed*. The "friends of the cross" know that beneath the humility and shame of the cross lie concealed the power and the glory of God – but to others, this insight is denied.

So how does the point about the "hidden" revelation of God relate to Luther's emphasis upon the clarity and reliability of scripture as a source of the knowledge of God?[26] How does the *claritas Scripturae* relate to Luther's strong statements about the hidden nature of God's self-disclosure? It is important to appreciate here that Luther's insistence on the clarity of scripture is not inconsistent with the notion of "hiddenness."[27] Although Luther's discussion of this point is not entirely clear, he appears to regard the "hiddenness" of the proper meaning of scripture as arising from human weakness and failing, rather than as being intrinsic to the text itself. In the end, Luther's sophisticated discussion of means of discerning the meaning of scripture can be seen as overcoming human frailty and interpretative pre-commitments.[28] Just as human preconceptions about the nature and form of divine revelation prevent God from being seen in the

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[25] WA 1.362.12–13.

[26] The best study remains F. Beisser, *Claritas Scripturae bei Martin Luther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966).

[27] As noted by Beisser, *Claritas Scripturae bei Martin Luther*, pp. 120–122.

[28] Beisser, *Claritas Scripturae bei Martin Luther*, pp. 137–189.

cross, so those same precommitments veil the true meaning of scripture.

3. God's self-revelation is to be sought primarily in the sufferings and the cross of Christ, rather than in human moral activity or the structures of the created order. Both the moralist and the rationalist expect to find God through intelligent reflection upon the nature of the human moral sense or the patterns of the created order: for Luther, "true theology and knowledge of God are found in Christ crucified." The cross shatters human illusions concerning the capacity of human reason to discern God in this manner.[29]

4. This knowledge of God who is hidden in his revelation is thus a matter of faith. Faith alone recognizes the veiled disclosure of the *posteriora Dei* as a revelation *of God*. Luther illustrates this point with reference to John 14.8. Philip here asks Jesus to show him the Father – which, according to Luther, makes him a "theologian of glory," in that he considers that God may be found and known apart from Christ. Jesus then explains to him that there is no knowledge of God other than that which may be found in his own person: "Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father" (John 14.9). For Luther, the "theologian of the cross" is one who, through faith, discerns the presence of the hidden God in the sufferings and cross of Christ – and who is thus able to acknowledge the truth of Isaiah's dictum: "Truly you are a hidden God!"[30] The concept of a hidden God (*absconditus Deus*) lies at the center of the theology of the cross: *vivimus in abscondito Dei, id est, in nuda fiducia misericordiae eius*.[31] For Luther, Philip represents the tendency of the *theologia gloriae* to seek for God

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[29] WA 1.362.30–31: "Per crucem destruuntur opera et crucifigitur Adam, qui per opera potius aedificatur." Cf. P. Althaus, "Theologie des Glaubens," *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* 2 (1924), pp. 281–322.

[30] WA 1.362.14: "Vere absconditus tu es Deus." The reference is to Isaiah 45.15. See further R. Kolb, "Deus revelatus – Homo revelatus: Luthers theologia crucis für das 21. Jahrhundert," in *Gottes Wort vom Kreuz: Luthers Theologie als Kritische Theologie*, ed. R. Kolb and C. Neddens (Oberursel: Lutherische Theologische Hochschule, 2001), pp. 13–34.

[31] WA 1.357.3–4.

apart from Christ, unaware that God is revealed in him, although concealed in that revelation.

5. God is particularly known through suffering. Luther here reflects the *Frömmigkeitstheologie* of the Augustinian tradition, which placed such an emphasis upon an imaginative and empathetic engagement with the suffering of Christ. Yet a far deeper spiritual truth is involved: a fundamental contention of the *theologia crucis* is not merely that God is known *through* suffering (whether that of Christ or of the individual), but that God *chooses to be known* through suffering. For Luther, God is active in this matter, rather than passive, in that suffering and temptation are seen as means by which God breaks down barriers of pride and ignorance, which inhibit people from discerning the divine presence and purpose.

These, then, are the main features of the *theologia crucis* as they are developed in the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518, and the *Operationes* of 1518–1521. So what considerations led Luther to formulate such an approach? What catalyzed the emergence of this way of conceiving the focus and limits of theology? In what follows, we shall develop the thesis set out earlier in this study: namely, that the main features of the *theologia crucis* are foreshadowed in Luther's resolution of his earlier difficulties concerning the "righteousness of God."

The "Righteousness of God" and the "Theology of the Cross"

As we indicated in the previous chapter, there are two aspects to Luther's discovery of the "righteousness of God." The first relates to the *nature* of this righteousness: Luther discovered what he termed a "wonderful new definition of righteousness" which stood in diametrical opposition to understandings of *iustitia* drawn from human social and legal contexts. The second relates to the *mode* by which this righteousness comes about within the individual: humanity cannot perform good works which are capable of earning justification on a

quid pro quo basis, but they can receive the gift of justifying righteousness, which is appropriated by faith. Any theology of justification or divine acceptation which is grounded in human notions of *iustitia* – such as Cicero's notion of "rendering to each their due" – compromises the essence of the Christian faith.

For Luther, a central theological task is that of negating and uprooting theologically unacceptable notions of righteousness, and replacing them with concepts more properly grounded in divine self-revelation. This is perhaps most clearly stated in the opening of the scholia of his lectures on Romans, in which Luther sets out his fundamental conviction that Paul's letter represents a programmatic assault upon human preconceptions of wisdom and righteousness:

> The purpose of this letter is to break down, to uproot and to destroy all the wisdom and righteousness of the flesh, no matter how great it may be in our own sight or that of other people, and no matter how sincere or heartfelt it may be; and to implant, establish and magnify sin, no matter how much we may insist that it does not exist, or fail to recognise its existence.[32]

Luther thus presupposes a radical dichotomy between human and divine conceptions of *iustitia*. Indeed, as we saw earlier (pp. 153–160), it was Luther's earlier failure to recognize this dichotomy which led to his difficulties over the phrase "the righteousness of God." The basis of the fundamental analogy between human and divine righteousness is called into question. For Luther, the essence of *fides Christi* (the only *iustitia* which he recognizes as being valid *coram Deo*) is the sinners' recognition of their total *un*righteousness. As Vogelsang has correctly noted, Luther arrived at this insight concerning the nature of the righteousness which is required of humanity by God during, or possibly before, his exposition of Psalm 71 (72). In the course of that exposition, he not merely elaborates on the contrast between human and divine judgment, but also indicates where the latter may be found:

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[32] WA 56.157.2–6; cf. WA 56.3.6–13.

> It is therefore called the judgement of God [*iudicium Dei*], because it is contrary to the judgement of human beings [*contrarium est iudicio hominum*], condemning what we choose, and choosing what we condemn. And this judgement has been shown to us in the cross of Christ [*hoc iudicium est in cruce Christi nobis ostensum*].[33]

So how is this judgment revealed in the cross? Luther points to the suffering of Christ upon the cross, and his apparent abandonment by God, and argues that in the weakness, the folly, and the injustice of this appalling spectacle, the judgment of God against human understandings of strength, wisdom, and justice may be discerned. It is through suffering (*passio*) such as that of Christ upon the cross that we are brought to realize the seriousness of our predicament: through realizing the force of the divine judgment passed against us, we are saved. Illness, suffering, the cross, and persecution alike are the means by which God judges and saves us.[34] The dialectic between the *opus alienum* and *opus proprium* has its focal point in the cross of Christ. Nevertheless, this dialectic is only discernible to faith: the unbeliever misinterprets the *opus alienum* as the *opus proprium*, unable to distinguish *ira severitatis* and *ira misericordiae*.

Just as God cannot be discerned empirically or by the powers of human reason in the human figure of Jesus,[35] but is only discerned there by faith, so human reason is outraged and confounded by the *iustitia*, *sapientia*, and *virtus* revealed in the cross of Christ. It is only when we have been totally humiliated that we learn to recognize the futility of our own powers of reason in matters of faith,[36] and so turn to the cross of Christ.

With these considerations in mind, let us return to the *crux interpretativum* with which Luther had such difficulty. As the autobiographical fragment of 1545 indicates, Luther found (or at least

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[33] WA 3.463.15–18. Cf. WA 5.168.25.
[34] WA 3.301.36–37: "Infirmitas, passio, crux, persecutio, etc. Hec sunt arma Dei, hec virtutes et potentiae, per que nos salvat et iudicat."
[35] WA 3.124.33–35; 4.6.40–7.3.
[36] WA 4.83.3–9. Cf. WA 3.548.6–9; 4.82.37–83.2.

remembered finding) Romans 1.17 a stumbling block: "The righteousness of God is revealed in it." In the previous chapter, we considered at some length the difficulties Luther encountered with the first part of this sentence, *iustitia Dei*. But what of the second part of the sentence, *revelatur in illo*? In what sense is the "righteousness of God" (however this may be interpreted) *revealed in the gospel*? It will be clear that Luther's theological breakthrough is intimately related to the idea of a *hidden* revelation – a "righteousness of God" that really is revealed in the cross of Christ, but which can only be discerned by the eye of faith. It is revealed in a manner similar to the *posteriora Dei*, as described in Thesis 20 of the Heidelberg Disputation: though an authentic revelation of God, it is nevertheless not immediately recognizable as a revelation of *God*, because it contradicts preconceptions of what form that revelation should take. God's self-revelation seems opaque, hidden in half-light and shadows, because our fallen human preconceptions about the *form* and *location* of that revelation prevent us from seeing it when it happens.

Similar remarks apply to the hidden revelation of the wisdom, the strength, the glory, and the salvation of God, as described in the autobiographical fragment: all *really* are revealed – but they are revealed *sub contrariis*. In this sense, as we noted in the previous chapter, Luther's comments concerning these amount to a programmatic description of the *theologia crucis*. It is not enough to recognize that all these *come from* God: it is necessary to appreciate that all are revealed *abscondita sub contrariis*. In the injustice, the shame, the weakness, the folly, and the condemnation of the cross are revealed, and yet hidden, the righteousness, the glory, the wisdom, the strength, and the salvation of God.

The "Theology of the Cross" as a Critique of Analogical Language About God

Underlying the *theologia crucis* and the discovery of the "righteousness of God" is thus a radical critique of the analogical

nature of theological language.[37] Within the earlier medieval period in general, the concept of *iustitia Dei* had been constructed on the assumption that it was analogous to *iustitia hominum*. While the difficulties encountered in transferring the term *iustus* from a *human* context (as in the statement, "Socrates is righteous") to a *divine* context (as in the statement, "God is righteous") were fully appreciated,[38] it was nevertheless assumed that the term bore a related meaning in each of these contexts. Although the epistemological presuppositions of the concept were greatly weakened in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries through the critique of Henry of Ghent's theory of the divine attributes, initially by Godfrey of Fontaines, and subsequently (and more radically) by William of Ockham,[39] the essentially analogical relationship between *iustitia Dei* and *iustitia hominum* was upheld. Similarly, although the theologians of the *via moderna* emphasized the contingency of the established order of salvation (and hence of the analogical nature of theological language in general), the analogy between human and divine concepts of *iustitia* was upheld. Although there was clearly a disparity between the human and divine understandings of terms such as *iustitia*, *sapientia*, *virtus*, etc., there remained an essential underlying continuity.

The *theologia crucis* represents a programmatic critique of the analogical nature of theological language. The concept of *absconditas sub contrario*, which is an essential feature of both the *theologia crucis* and the earlier theological breakthrough, amounts to a radical

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[37] Bizer has drawn attention to a passage in the *Operationes* which closely parallels the 1545 autobiographical fragment, and which explicitly states the problem of analogy which is at issue: WA 5.144.1–22. See further A.E. McGrath, "'The Righteousness of God' from Augustine to Luther," *Studia Theologica* 36 (1982), pp. 63–78; also "Divine Justice and Divine Equity in the Controversy between Augustine and Julian of Eclanum," *Downside Review* 101 (1983), pp. 312–319.

[38] E.g., Alan of Lille, *Theologicae Regulae* 26; MPL 210.633D: "'Deus est iustus.' Hoc nomen 'iustus' transfertur a sua propria significatione ad hoc ut conveniat Deo, sed res nominis non attribuitur Deo." See G.R. Evans, "The Borrowed Meaning: Grammar, Logic and the Problem of Theological Language in Twelfth-Century Schools," *Downside Review* 96 (1978), pp. 165–175.

[39] McGrath, "The Righteousness of God," pp. 69–70.

critique of the principle of analogy in theological discourse, and parallels at this point the origins of dialectical theology in the early twentieth century.[40] Luther insists that the word to which all theology must be related is the word of the cross. *Crux probat omnia!*[41] All responsible Christian discourse about God must be based upon the cross, and must be subject to criticism upon this basis.[42]

For Luther, the rejection of the analogical nature of theological language represents an admission that humanity dwells in a theological twilight, in a world of half-light and half-truths. Our preconceptions of God in general, and God's righteousness in particular, are unreliable and confused and, like a broken bone which has set incorrectly, must be broken before they can be healed. The word of the cross reveals the gulf between the preconceived and the revealed God, and forces us to abandon our theological preconceptions if we are to be "theologians of the cross." While this insight is initially associated with Luther's early difficulties concerning the predication of human concepts of righteousness to God, his resolution of these difficulties is essentially methodological, and thus comes to be extended to *every* divine attribute. Luther's critique of the analogical predication of human concepts of *iustitia* in particular to God foreshadows his critique of the predication of human concepts of qualities in general – and thus anticipates the *theologia crucis* in this vital respect.

The "Crucified and Hidden God"

God is revealed in the cross of Christ. Yet, as Christians contemplate the appalling spectacle of Christ dying upon the cross, they are forced to concede that God does not appear to be revealed there at all.

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[40] See Karl Barth's remarkable essay of 1916, "Die Gerechtigkeit Gottes," originally published in *Neue Wege* 10 (1916), pp. 143–154; reprinted in *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie: Gesammelte Vorträge* (Munich, 1929), pp. 5–17.

[41] WA 5.179.31.

[42] See especially the brilliant exposition of Jürgen Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott: Das Kreuz Christi als Grund und Kritik christlicher Theologie* (Munich, 4th edn, 1981).

This insight is fundamental to a correct appreciation of the significance of Luther's theology of the cross, and underlies his references to a "crucified and hidden God [*Deus crucifixus et absconditus*]."[43] The God who is crucified is a God whose nature and presence are veiled in that moment of revelation. Any attempt to seek God elsewhere than in the cross of Christ is to be rejected out of hand as idle speculation: the theologian is forced, perhaps unwillingly, to come to terms with the riddle of the crucified and hidden God. "Truly you are a hidden God" (Isaiah 45.15).

Luther openly speaks of the hiddenness of God in the *theologia crucis*, while understanding that "hiddenness" is to be understood in several different ways. Luther tends to use the term *Deus absconditus* in two main senses, which have little in common apart from the general idea of "hiddenness."[44]

1. *Deus absconditus* is the God who is hidden *in* revelation. The revelation of God in the cross lies *abscondita sub contrario*, so that God's strength is revealed under apparent weakness, and God's wisdom under apparent folly. We have already discussed this theme at some length in the present chapter, and do not propose to repeat what has already been said. Nevertheless, it must be appreciated that this understanding of the "hiddenness" of divine revelation means that *Deus absconditus* and *Deus revelatus* are identical.[45] In the single event of revelation, the eye of faith discerns the *Deus revelatus*, where sense perception can only find the *Deus absconditus*. Both the *Deus absconditus* and *Deus revelatus* are to be found in precisely the same event of revelation: which of the two is recognized depends upon the perceiver. For example, consider the wrath of God revealed in the cross. To reason, God

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[43] WA 1.613.23–24.

[44] See H. Bandt, *Luthers Lehre vom verborgenen Gott. Eine Untersuchung zu dem offenbarungsgeschichtlichen Ansatz seiner Theologie* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1958), pp. 19–23; K. Zwanepol, "Zur Diskussion um Gottes Verborgenheit," *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 48 (2006), pp. 51–59.

[45] F. Kattenbusch, "Deus absconditus bei Luther," in *Festgabe für D. Dr. Julius Kaftan zu seinem 70. Geburtstag* (Tübingen: Siebeck, 1920), pp. 170–214; p. 204.

thus appears wrathful; to faith, God's mercy is revealed in this wrath. There is no question of God's mercy being revealed independently of his wrath, or of an additional and subsequent revelation of God's mercy which contradicts that of his wrath. In the one unitary event of revelation in the cross, God's wrath and mercy are revealed simultaneously – but only faith is able to recognize the *opus proprium* as it lies hidden under the *opus alienum*; only faith discerns the merciful intention which underlies the revealed wrath; only faith perceives the real situation which underlies the apparent situation.

2. *Deus absconditus* is the God who is hidden *behind* revelation. This understanding of the hiddenness of God becomes increasingly significant in Luther's later controversy with Erasmus in *de servo arbitrio* (1525),[46] where it appears to function as a purely polemical device to discredit Erasmus's apparently legitimate exegesis of scripture, with important results for any discussion of the nature of the "righteousness of God."[47] Thus when Erasmus states that God does not desire the death of a sinner, Luther counters by arguing that while this may be true of the *revealed* God, it is not necessarily true of the *hidden* God. "God does not will the death of a sinner *in God's Word* – but God does it by that inscrutable will."[48] This argument inevitably makes theology an irrelevancy, in that any statements which can be made on the basis of divine revelation may be refuted by appealing to a hidden and inscrutable God, whose will probably contradicts that of the revealed God. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Luther's polemical stance has led him to make overstatements that lead directly into a theological dead end. Perhaps it is little wonder that Erasmus shrewdly suggested that Luther's

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[46] See E. Grislis, "Martin Luther's View of the Hidden God. The Problem of the *Deus Absconditus* in Luther's Treatise *De servo arbitrio*," *McCormick Quarterly* 21 (1967), pp. 81–94; K. Schwarzwäller, *Theologia Crucis: Luthers Lehre von Prädestination nach De servo arbitrio 1525* (Munich: Kaiser, 1970).

[47] A point emphasized by T. Reinhuber, *Kämpfender Glaube: Studien zu Luthers Bekenntnis am Ende von De servo arbitrio* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), pp. 82–85.

[48] WA 18.685.28–29.

> honorific title should be *doctor hyperbolicus* – the "doctor of overstatement."[49]

Luther here suggests that we must recognize that there are certain aspects of God's being which will always remain hidden from us. The *Deus absconditus* is thus understood as the God who will forever remain unknown to us, a mysterious and sinister being whose intentions remain concealed from us. This understanding of the "hiddenness of God" is closely linked to the riddle of divine predestination, where faith is forced to concede the existence of a concealed (*occulta*) will of God. Beginning from the plausible premise that there is much more to God than we can ever know from his self-revelation, Luther draws a distinction between the God who is known through his self-revelation (*Deus revelatus*) and the God who is permanently hidden from us (*Deus absconditus*). There is thus a serious tension between the *Deus revelatus* and the *Deus absconditus*: indeed, on the basis of some of Luther's ominous hints, the two may even stand in total antithesis. Although Luther concedes that this problem may well be noetic rather than ontic (that is, corresponding to our perception of the situation, rather than the situation itself), he is nevertheless forced to concede that behind the merciful God who is revealed in the cross of Christ there may well be a hidden God whose intentions are diametrically opposite.

In the present study, we are concerned with Luther's development up to the year 1519, when this second understanding of *Deus absconditus* has yet to make its explicit appearance. For the purposes of our study, we can agree with Bandt when he states that, "in the final analysis, there is no hiddenness of God for Luther other than the hidden form of his revelation."[50] Nevertheless, by 1525 this conclusion is somewhat more difficult to maintain. Luther seems to hold that

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[49] Erasmus of Rotterdam, *Opera Omnia*, ed. J. Le Clerc, 10 vols (Leiden: Van der Aa, 1703–1706), vol. 10, p. 1345. However, recent studies have emphasized the importance of understanding Luther's statements in the light of rhetorical theory: see, for example, B. Stolt, *Martin Luthers Rhetorik des Herzens* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2000), p. 33.
[50] Bandt, *Luthers Lehre vom verborgenen Gott*, p. 94.

God wills many things which are not made known to us,[51] and there is every reason to suppose that the hidden and inscrutable will of God may at points stand in contradiction to what has been revealed. The later Luther seemed to posit a hidden revelation of God which contradicted any revelation given in scripture, raising formidable theological difficulties. Luther suggests that the *Deus incarnatus* must be reduced to tears when the *Deus absconditus* consigns people to perdition.[52] But what is the theological basis of such assertions? Not only do such statements suggest that Luther has abandoned his earlier principle of deriving theology solely on the basis of the cross: they also suggest that the cross is not the final word of God about anything. While we cannot pursue the question of the origins of this second understanding of the *Deus absconditus*, it seems clear that it is not a *necessary* consequence of the first, discussed above.

Faith, Doubt, and *Anfechtung*

In the *Dictata*, we find Luther emphasizing that faith finds itself in tension with the perception of the senses.[53] Basing himself upon Hebrews 11.1, Luther insists that faith is characterized by its ability to see past *visibilia* and recognize the *invisibilia* which lie behind them. Empirical verification of the conclusions reached by faith is utterly impossible, in that sense perception necessarily contradicts it.[54] God's revelation in the cross of Christ must be regarded as a hidden revelation, which defies the attempts of reason to master it: "the wisdom of the cross is hidden today in a profound mystery."[55] Whereas worldly wisdom deals with visible things – and hence can

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[51] WA 18.685.27–28: "Multa quoque vult, quae verbo suo non ostendit nobis."

[52] WA 18.689.32–33.

[53] WA 3.474.14–19. For an excellent discussion of Luther's doctrine of faith, see von Löwenich, *Luthers Theologia Crucis*, pp. 54–147.

[54] WA 56.48.18–24.

[55] WA 5.84.40: "crucis sapientia nimis hodie est abscondita in mysterio profundo." For a useful discussion, see E.G. Rupp, *The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1953), pp. 227–241.

call upon the evidence of sense perception in support of its conclusions – faith is denied this possibility.[56] In a remarkable sermon, delivered on November 30, 1516, Luther points to the crucifixion as a paradigm for the relation between faith and sense perception: just as Christ was raised up from the ground upon the cross, so that his feet did not rest upon the earth, so the faith of the Christian is denied any foothold in experience.[57]

Although an earlier generation of theologians detected a hidden neo-Platonism behind Luther's statements on faith, this opinion is no longer taken seriously. Luther's doctrine of faith does not concern a hidden metaphysical realm concealed under that of the senses, but concerns the manner in which God is at work in the world, which is crystallized, concentrated, and focused on the death of Christ on the cross. It is clear that Luther's dialectic between the worlds of sense perception and faith is intended to convey his basic conviction that God is at work in the world, and supremely in the cross of Christ – but that this work lies concealed from the senses. It is faith, and faith alone, which recognizes the *posteriora Dei* for what they are, having abandoned any hope of knowing God through the unaided power of reason. Reason can only confuse the *opus alienum* with the *opus proprium*, the *Deus absconditus* with the *Deus revelatus*, failing to recognize that the latter lies hidden beneath the former. The Christian life is thus characterized by an unending and ultimately irresolvable tension between faith and experience.

The existential nature of Luther's concept of faith has frequently been emphasized,[58] and is particularly associated with the notion of *Anfechtung*. This German term is not easy to translate, partly because of the overtones now associated with it: "assault" is probably more illuminating than "temptation," although the latter is more accurate verbally. The terms which Luther himself uses when discussing *Anfechtung* illuminate the various aspects of the concept: it is a form

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[56] WA 56.543.12–14; 463.3–5.

[57] WA 1.102.39–41.

[58] One of the best studies is L. Pinomaa, *Der existentielle Charakter der Theologie Luthers* (Helsinki: Akateeminen Kirjakauppa, 1940).

of temptation (*tentatio*),[59] which takes place through an assault upon believers (*impugnatio*),[60] which is intended to put them to the test (*probatio*).[61] For Luther, death, the devil, the world, and Hell combine in a terrifying assault upon believers,[62] reducing them to a state of doubt and despair.[63] *Anfechtung* is thus a state of hopelessness and helplessness,[64] having strong affinities with the concept of *Angst*.[65] Luther does not regard *Anfechtung* as a purely subjective state of the individual. It consists of two elements: an *objective* assault of spiritual forces upon believers, and a *subjective* anxiety and doubt which arise within them as a consequence of these assaults.

At this point, we must note the important dialectic between the *opus proprium Dei* and the *opus alienum Dei* – the "proper" and "strange" works of God – which Luther introduces in his *Dictata super Psalterium*. Luther uses the notions of God's "strange work" (*opus alienum*) and God's "proper work" (*opus proprium*) to deal with the paradox by which condemnation leads to salvation.[66] "An action which is alien to God's nature [*opus alienum Dei*] results in an action

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[59] See Beintker, *Die Überwindung der Anfechtung bei Luther*, pp. 58–60.

[60] WA 5.381.18–19; 619.27.

[61] WA 5.470.10, 33. Cf. 5.203.35. Other terms are also used: e.g., *persecutio*, *tribulatio*, *percussio*, *mortificatio*, *perditio*, etc. For a useful discussion, see Beintker, *Die Überwindung der Anfechtung bei Luther*, pp. 64–66.

[62] P.T. Bühler, *Die Anfechtung bei Martin Luther* (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1944), pp. 1–2.

[63] Bühler, *Anfechtung bei Luther*, p. 79.

[64] Bühler, *Anfechtung bei Luther*, p. 89. Cf. H. Appel, *Anfechtung und Trost im Spätmittelalter und bei Luther* (Leipzig: SVRG, 1938); F.K. Schumann, *Gottesglaube und Anfechtung bei Luther* (Leipzig: Deichert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1938).

[65] E. Vogelsang, *Der angefochtene Christus bei Luther* (Berlin/Leipzig: de Gruyter, 1932), pp. 7, 15, 18. The existential interpretation of *Anfechtung* in relation to Luther's doctrine of justification can, however, be misleading: see R. Lorenz, *Die unvollendete Befreiung vom Nominalismus: Martin Luther und die Grenzen hermeneutischer Theologie bei Gerhard Ebeling* (Gütersloh: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973), pp. 131–144. The study of G. Ebeling, "Gewissheit und Zweifel: Die Situation des Glaubens im Zeitalter nach Luther und Descartes," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 64 (1967), pp. 282–324, is important in this connection.

[66] WA 3.246.19–20; 4.87.22–25. For a useful discussion, see Bandt, *Luthers Lehre vom verborgenen Gott*, pp. 54–82.

which belongs to that very nature [*opus proprium Dei*]: God makes a person a sinner in order to make them righteous." The *opus alienum* is thus conceived as a means leading to the end of the *opus proprium*. God does something which seems strange or bewildering to us, in order to achieve something that seems appropriate to us. Yet this distinction lies in our preconceptions, not in the being or will of God. Whether God's actions seem "strange" or "appropriate" depends on our preconceptions of the manner in which God ought to behave – preconceptions which Luther believes need to be uprooted and reconstructed.

For Luther, God must be recognized as the ultimate source of *Anfechtung*: it is the "strange work of God," the *opus alienum*, which is intended to destroy human self-confidence and complacency, and induce a state of utter despair and humiliation which, by removing all means of support and deliverance, forces people to seek and find the mercy of God. Believers, recognizing the merciful intention which underlies *Anfechtung*, rejoice in such assaults, seeing in them the means by which God indirectly effects and ensures their salvation. It is for this reason that Luther is able to refer to *Anfechtung* as a "delicious despair." The fundamental insight, recognized by faith alone, is that wrath is God's penultimate, not final, word.

There is clearly a direct relationship between *Anfechtung* and the hiddenness of God's self-revelation, in either of the two meanings of the term noted earlier. If God is understood to be hidden *in* revelation, the believer will always be prone to doubt as to whether the *opus proprium* really does lie behind the *opus alienum*, or whether God really is hidden, and not simply absent altogether. Is an apparent absence really a hidden presence? The possibility of *Anfechtung* is, however, enormously increased if God is understood to be hidden *behind revelation*. Although Luther insisted that the object of faith is always the word of God, by 1525 he had perhaps unwisely argued that God might not have spoken a final word in Christ.[67] The notion of a hidden and inscrutable God, who predestines people to death

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[67] W. Pannenberg, "Der Einfluß der Anfechtungserfahrung auf den Prädestinationsbegriff Luthers," *Kerygma und Dogma* 3 (1954), pp. 109–139.

without cause, looms large in the 1525 treatise *de servo arbitrio*. Precisely because the 1525 Luther permitted no solution to the riddle of predestination, there was no means available to the believer by which his *Anfechtung* could be relieved. This development, however, dates from after the period covered by our study, and we do not propose to consider it further here.

So how is this crisis of *Anfechtung* resolved?[68] For Luther, the solution lies in the crucified Christ, who suffered precisely the same *Anfechtung* on our behalf. Christ became sin on our behalf, in order that his righteousness might become our righteousness.[69] We have already noted the concept of *iustitia Christi aliena*, which is so central a feature of Luther's teaching on justification from 1515 onwards, in the previous chapter. Underlying this "marvellous exchange" (*commercium admirabile*) is a well-established late medieval Augustinian tradition, exemplified in the writings of Johannes von Staupitz (*c*.1460–1524) and Johannes von Paltz (*c*.1445–1511).[70] The importance of the forms of devotion to the passion of Christ embedded within the Augustinian Order has been the subject of much recent scholarly attention,[71] which has drawn attention to a significant tradition of interpretation and appropriation of the passion of Christ of direct relevance to the emergence of Luther's *theologia crucis*.

Only those who have faith understand the true meaning of the cross, which is otherwise shrouded in darkness and shadow.[72] Those

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[68] This question is, in fact, too complex to discuss in the very limited space available. The reader is referred to the excellent discussion in Beintker, *Die Überwindung der Anfechtung bei Luther*, pp. 115–178.

[69] WA 5.607.32–37.

[70] On the importance of this *Frömmigkeitstheologie*, see M. Wriedt, "Via Guilelmi – Via Gregorii: Zur Frage einer Augustinerschule im Gefolge Gregors von Rimini unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Johannes von Staupitz," in *Deutschland und Europa in der Neuzeit*, ed. R. Melville, C. Scharg, M. Vogt, and U. Wengenroth (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 1988), pp. 111–131.

[71] The best study is E.L. Saak, *High Way to Heaven: The Augustinian Platform between Reform and Reformation, 1292–1524* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 467–561.

[72] M. Korthaus, *Kreuzestheologie: Geschichte und Gestalt eines Programmbegriffs in der evangelischen Theologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

who expect a full and glorious disclosure of a recognizable face of God are bewildered by the fleeting glimpse of God, seen from the back, moving into the shadows. The *theologia crucis* demands realism about what can be known about God in this world of darkness and sin. Where the unbeliever sees nothing but the helplessness and hopelessness of an abandoned man dying upon a cross, the theologian of the cross (*theologus crucis*) recognizes the veiled – but real! – presence and activity of the "crucified and hidden God" (*Deus crucifixus et absconditus*),[73] who is not merely present in human suffering, but actively works through it. It is with *this* God, and none other, that Christian theology must come to terms. As Luther himself emphasized, faith is the only key by which the hidden mystery of the cross may be unlocked: "The cross is the safest of all things. Blessed is anyone who understands this."[74]

Luther's Theological Development, 1509–1519: A Summary

The essential thesis of the present study is that Luther's theological development over the period 1509–1519 is a continuous process, rather than a series of isolated and fragmented episodes, and that one aspect of this development – namely, his discovery of the "righteousness of God" – is of fundamental importance within this overall process. The question of the true meaning of the "righteousness of God" is an essential aspect of the Christian doctrine of justification, and it is evident that there was widespread confusion within the later medieval church on precisely this doctrine. Luther's early difficulties over this doctrine reflect a general

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[73] WA 1.613.23–24.
[74] WA 5.84.39–40.

lack of clarity on the matter at the time, and cannot be taken as an indication of his theological incompetence or ignorance. The question then arises as to the nature of Luther's early understanding of justification. The conclusion of the present investigation is that up to 1514 Luther must be regarded as holding a doctrine of justification which, in all its essential features, corresponds to the teaching of the *via moderna*. This conclusion is dictated by two convergent lines of evidence.

Historically, there is sufficient circumstantial evidence to warrant the conclusion that Luther was initially a representative of the *via moderna* (see Chapter 2 in particular). Thus his teachers at Erfurt were all noted representatives of this school, and the texts which he was obliged to study also originated from this school. It is significant in this connection that Luther does not demonstrate first-hand knowledge of theologians of the *via antiqua*. Of course, if it could be shown that Luther had been influenced by the *schola Augustiniana moderna*, deriving from Gregory of Rimini, this conclusion would have to be radically revised. Nevertheless, there is no convincing evidence of such influence. Luther was not directly familiar with the works of Gregory of Rimini until 1519. Nor can a good case be made for suggesting that some kind of "modern Augustinian school" was present at the University of Wittenberg during Luther's time there.

Theologically, there is every indication that Luther remained a faithful adherent of the *via moderna* up to 1514, particularly in relation to the doctrine of justification (see Chapters 3 and 4). Of decisive importance in this respect is his use of the concept of *covenantal causality*, characteristic of the *via moderna*. Luther's early discussion of the axiom *facientibus quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam* reproduces the characteristic features of this theology of justification, as do the analogies he employs to explain it. Most significantly, Luther's early difficulties concerning the "righteousness of God" are immediately explicable in the light of the covenant theology of the *via moderna*, whereas they can only be explained with difficulty if it is assumed that Luther is familiar with other theological systems (see Chapter 4). It is interesting to

note that, in the Romans lectures of 1515–1516, Luther frequently criticizes positions (such as the axiom *facientibus quod in se est*) which he himself had held several years earlier, while attributing them to theologians of the *via moderna*.

The evidence and discussion of earlier chapters thus indicates that there is sufficient evidence, historical and theological, to permit us to state that at the beginning of the period covered by the present study Luther was a theologian of the *via moderna*, at least in his theology of justification. This brings us to the question of the nature and significance of Luther's discovery of the righteousness of God, probably one of the most vexed areas of Luther scholarship. In the present chapter, we argued that Luther's theological breakthrough is essentially *methodological* in character, and is thus capable of being applied to divine attributes other than righteousness, as Luther himself indicates in the 1545 autobiographical fragment. Furthermore, an analysis of the nature of Luther's insights concerning the true nature of *iustitia Dei* shows that, in every respect, the *theologia crucis* is foreshadowed. In other words, Luther's theological breakthrough – which we date in 1515 – contains within itself the germs of the theology of the cross. During the period between 1515 and 1518 Luther explored the consequences of his new understanding of *iustitia Dei*, one outcome of which was the emergence of the *theologia crucis*.

This approach to the matter remains faithful to the autobiographical fragment of 1545, and casts further light upon it. It allows the "theological" approach to the discovery (which places the breakthrough in 1514–1515) to be reconciled with the "historical" (which places it in 1518–1519). The former is thus understood to refer to the decisive and catalytic step, and the latter to the *terminus* of the process of theological reflection and analysis thus initiated. Far from representing a "pre-reformation" element in Luther's thought,[75] the *theologia crucis* can thus be argued to encapsulate the essence of his "reformation" thought.

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[75] As suggested by O. Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1912), pp. 40–84.

So what of the value of Luther's theology of the cross? For the theologians of the liberal Protestant era, it had little, if any significance,[76] being seen as little more than an ascetical or ethical principle,[77] a relic of a bygone age. Today, few would echo that judgment. Luther's powerful affirmation of the presence of God in a world of shadows, pain, confusion, and distress speaks to many who would otherwise be driven to disbelief on account of the tension between theory and experience.[78] As Jürgen Moltmann commented on his own experience as a theologian, emerging from a prison camp after the horrors of World War II, only a theology of the cross could speak meaningfully and compellingly to his generation. "Shattered and broken, the survivors of my generation were then returning from camps and hospitals to the lecture room. A theology which did not speak of God in terms of the abandoned and crucified one would not have got through to us then."[79] Though neglected for 400 years after its formulation, Luther's "theology of the cross" had now come of age.

"A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it."[80] These words of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) are a fitting conclusion to our study. For Luther, and the Augustinian tradition of pastoral theology which he knew and represented, the cross of Christ was the central *observable* image of the Christian

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[76] Thus T. Harnack, *Luthers Theologie mit besonderer Beziehung auf seine Versöhnungs- und Erlösungslehre*, 2 vols (Erlangen, 1862–1868).

[77] Thus H. Hering, *Die Mystik Luthers im Zusammenhang seiner Theologie* (Leipzig: Hinsius, 1879), pp. 86–90; A.W. Dieckhoff, *Luthers Lehre in ihrer ersten Gestalt* (Rostok: Stiller, 1887).

[78] A point emphasized with reference to the Nazi era by J. Richter, "Luthers 'Deus absconditus' – Zuflucht oder Ausflucht?," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 7 (1955), pp. 289–303.

[79] J. Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott. Das Kreuz Christi als Grund und Kritik christlicher Theologie* (Munich: Kaiser, 4th edn, 1981), p. 7. See his further comments in his autobiography: J. Moltmann, *Weiter Raum: Eine Lebensgeschichte* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006), pp. 183–193. Cf. the famous comment of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Widerstand und Ergebung* (Munich: Kaiser, 1970), p. 394: "Die Bibel weist den Menschen an die Ohnmacht und das Leiden Gottes; nur der leidende Gott kann helfen."

[80] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 41.

faith – inexhaustible in its spiritual and theological potential, with the capacity to illuminate and engage the hopes and fears of humanity.[81] Luther's own reflections on that picture merit close attention, and this short study has tried to advance discussion of his specific approach. Yet that process of engagement carries on, as each generation finds that this picture continues to illuminate the shadows of human existence, and to point to the possible resolution of its enigmas.[82]

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[81] S. Rolf, "Crux sola est nostra theologia. Die Bedeutung der Kreuzestheologie für die Theodizeefrage," *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 49 (2007), pp. 223–240.

[82] For one such study, see A.E. McGrath, "The Cross, Suffering and Theological Bewilderment: Reflections on Martin Luther and C.S. Lewis," in *Mere Theology* (London: SPCK, 2010), pp. 39–50.

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