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The Polemical-Historical and Theological Context of Luther's 1520 *On the Freedom of a Christian*

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ABSTRACT. Luther wrote his *On the Freedom of a Christian* at the end of a very turbulent and polemical period of the reformation. In it he puts forward his early, yet sophisticated understanding of justification by faith and contrasts it with the Romanist penitential system. In the accompanying letter to Leo X, Luther states the nature and purpose of his writing and names several of the theological opponents he has in mind during the Freedom Tractate's composition. This essay argues that Luther's *Freedom Tractate* is a refined implicit attack on the works-righteousness of papal scholasticism and at the same time a positive exposition of his reforming views on the nature of genuine Christian freedom. This essay also contends that Luther's views on baptism under gird the whole work as a presuppositional framework. The lack of explicit reference to his understanding of baptism in the *Freedom Tractate*, in our view, is a conscious decision on his part due to the polemical genius of this piece of work. The development of a historical-polemical and theological background to Luther's *Freedom Tractate* provides the necessary material for a felicitous understanding of the many nuances that exist throughout the work and places reasonable emphasis on Luther's use of theological dialectic.

KEY WORDS: freedom, faith, works, baptism, justification

Introduction

Throughout Luther's clearest exposition of biblical freedom, his (1520) *On the Freedom of a Christian*, there runs an anti-text that

serves to underline the polemical nature of the freedom tractate.¹ This anti-text is developed to teach the recipients of the tractate how to discern who the “false teachers” are, what they teach² and how to “boldly resist” them.³ The tractate directly confronts the false teachers and their teaching of its time. They are alluded to more than ninety times in the tractate and accompanying letter to Leo X. For example,

I have, to be sure sharply attacked ungodly doctrines in general, and I have snapped at my opponents.⁴

Many people have considered Christian faith an easy thing, and not a few have given it place among the virtues. They do this because they have not experienced it and have never tasted the great strength there is in faith.⁵

This ignorance and suppression of liberty very many blind pastors take pains to encourage. They stir up and urge on their people in these practices by praising such works, puffing them up with their indulgences, and never teaching faith.⁶

Hence the Christian must take a middle course and face those two classes of men. He will meet first the unyielding, stubborn cere-

¹ Rieger develops the text/anti-text paradigm of the tractate by saying “The anti-text/text will be equally referred to in the first line of the Latin prologue, for it indicates a wrong opinion about the faith. The text carries out a hermeneutical reversal of supposedly understanding the faith through theory and understanding it through living experience” (my translation). See Reinhold Rieger, “Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen, *De libertate Christiana*”, *Kommentare zu Schriften Luthers*, 349, Band 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007). Rieger goes on to say that experience is a crucial element for the correct understanding of faith over against mere historical acceptance of Christ.

² LW 31:372; WA 7:70.

³ LW 31:373, 374; WA 70, 71.

⁴ *Letter to Leo X*, LW 31:335.

⁵ *The Freedom of a Christian* LW 31:343; WA 7:49.

⁶ LW 31:370; WA 7:68.

monialists who like deaf adders are not willing to hear the truth of liberty.⁷

Based on the positive text—Luther's forensic view of justification as an ontology of perfect lordship and servanthood (*Herrnsein und Knechtsein*)—the Christian is freed to resist the false teaching of works-righteous legalism with a pure and clear conscience and to participate in God's good works for this world.

To make the way smoother for the unlearned—for only them do I serve—I shall set down the following two propositions concerning the freedom and the bondage of the spirit: A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.⁸

The tractate contains an explicit response to the legalist's accusation that Luther's understanding of freedom is antinomian and seditious toward the state. In response he clearly defines the proper place for "good works". He is not opposed to works, just the false estimation of works by the legalists.

Our faith in Christ does not free us from works but from false opinions concerning works, that is, from the foolish presumption that justification is acquired by works. Faith redeems, corrects, and preserves our consciences so that we know that righteousness does not consist in works, although works neither can nor ought to be wanting; just as we cannot be without food and drink and all the works of this mortal body, yet our righteousness is not in them, but in faith; and yet those works of the body are not to be despised or neglected on that account.⁹

By being firmly grounded on his doctrine of freedom—his view of the new ontological relationship between God and justified sinners in its indicative and imperative nature—Luther urges

⁷ LW 31:373; WA 7:70.

⁸ LW 31:344; WA 7:49.

⁹ LW 31:372; WA 7:70, 14.

his readers to “boldly resist” false papal heteronomy using his text/anti-text paradigm in the freedom tractate. This chapter will, therefore, outline the major challenges to Luther’s understanding of freedom that lie at the polemical background of the tractate and also develop one of the main theological presuppositions Luther assumes in the tractate, although it is one that he consciously plays down in favor of focusing on the faith-works issue. That presupposition is the declarative and efficacious nature of Christian baptism.

In the Letter to Leo X and the Latin version of the freedom tractate, Luther explicitly confront the opponents of his theology of freedom with a pointed and practical attack against the legalists and libertines within the church, on behalf of and for the weak and unlearned.¹⁰ The appendix continues to expose the challenge by legalism to freedom and pre-empts the abuse of Luther’s theology by antinomians. In this concluding section Luther identifies three groups of people. The first are the despisers (*Verachter*) who embody antinomianism and see in freedom an occasion for licentiousness. The second are the legalists, who invent a compounded system of lawmaking that makes the gospel into another and harsher law than Moses, and the third group, the weak (*Schwach*) of whom Luther is compelled to protect against the legalists, antinomians, and moralists by championing his doctrine of freedom through the *via media* paradigm. Luther knows that some laws and ceremonies are helpful for the weak. He also knows that some boundaries are also necessary for the weak until they reach the stage of maturity where both are no longer necessary. In the freedom tractate Luther upholds a correct use of the law and rebuts the charge of antinomianism.

In fact, Luther anticipates and challenges the antinomianism that comes from an over simplification of the forensic view of

¹⁰ LW 31:372; WA 7:70.

justification and the outright dismissal of good works.¹¹ The false teaching that Luther anticipates here in 1520 came to dramatic historical realization with the 1525 "Peasant's Revolt" and in the controversy with Agricola.¹² The charge of antinomianism was an early accusation that Luther himself had to face from the Papacy.¹³ Luther counters the accusation throughout the second major part of the tractate.

Finally, something must be added for the sake of those for whom nothing can be said so well that they will not spoil it by misunderstanding it. It is questionable whether they will understand even what will be said here.¹⁴

The permissive giving up of Christian imperative for formless and antinomian types of pseudo freedom, are for Luther, not Christian at all.

¹¹ Luther's threefold distinction of the law serves as a corrective to collapsing all law into the *duplexus usus* and then claiming that since Christ has abolished the law; all law is irrelevant for the Christian. Luther's realistic apocalyptic-eschatology, insightfully advocates a nuanced approach to the place of command and promise. See LW 31:371-377; LW 31:372; WA 7:70. Also Rieger's *Anhang*. See Rieger, "Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen, *De libertate Christiana*", 328-348.

¹² *Against the Antinomians*, 1539, LW 47:99-119.

¹³ See correspondence dated March 13 1520, Gabriel Della Volta to John Von Staupitz, "We thought it necessary to write you this letter, to inform you of the enormous evils threatening your congregation and our whole order unless Martin ceases" in P. Smith, *Luther's Correspondence and other Contemporary Letters* (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1913), 297. Also Charles V to Frederick, November 28, 1520, "We should like to put down this movement, from which we fear much disorder and error may arise ..." See P. Smith, *Luther's Correspondence and other Contemporary Letters* (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1913), 398.

¹⁴ LW 31:371; WA 7:69.

There are very many who, when they hear of this freedom of faith, immediately turn it into an occasion for the flesh and think that now all things are allowed them.¹⁵

Here Luther is addressing those that despise ceremonies, traditions and human laws, and he may be thinking of the moral depravity of the Romanists.¹⁶ Rieger says that Luther obviously wanted to make a clarification in the appendix because of a lack of understanding and misunderstandings in regard to the nature of freedom.¹⁷ Those that throw off “reasonable discipline” deny genuine Christian freedom and in so doing drag many into the depths of hell.¹⁸ Hütter calls the denial of reasonable discipline, given in the form of commandment, “negative freedom”.¹⁹ Rieger contends that the view that “all things” are permitted (*omni licere*) is not the result of Christian freedom and does not correspond to—Luther’s understanding of Christian lordship as—the dominion over everything.²⁰ In this regard Pope Leo X could easily have been challenged by Luther and grouped with the antinomian libertines due to his lavish pur-

¹⁵ LW 31:371; WA 7:69, 26.

¹⁶ It is made clear that Luther is not primarily or explicitly concerned with the moral acts of the pope, although we believe he was aware of the immorality propagated by him, which can be discerned implicitly in the Latin letter and tractate (Examples of Luther’s sarcasm LW 31:334, 335, 337, 338, the reference to Leo’s “innate goodness” and Leo’s status as a “demigod” and “lord of the world”, 341). His main concern appears to be the theological practice of the church and its negative consequences on the congregations.

¹⁷ Rieger, “Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen, *De libertate Christiana*”, 335.

¹⁸ LW 31:375; WA 7:71.

¹⁹ “In modern Protestant ethics this is seen in the fact that freedom has come to be understood primarily as negative freedom”. “It is seen as freedom ‘from’ and not freedom ‘for’”. See Reinhard Hütter, “The Twofold Centre of Lutheran Ethics”, *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, 32-33, Karen L. Bloomquist and John R. Stumme eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998).

²⁰ Rieger, “Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen, *De libertate Christiana*”, 336.

suit of all things pleasurable and his self-justified disregard for pastoral and administrative responsibility.²¹

Luther, in the appendix, as in the body of the tractate, opposes the dichotomization of the lord-servant dialectic with his cruciform view of freedom.

Hence, as our heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our aid, we also ought freely to help our neighbor through our body and its works, and each one should become as it were a Christ to the other that we may be Christ's to one another and Christ may be the same in all, that is, that we may be truly Christians.²²

We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor. Yet he always remains in God and in his love, as Christ says in John 1(:51), "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man".²³

The modeling of cruciform freedom consists of the ontological (forensic) freedom of imputed lordship that is bound and compelled to bear the fruit of love, which will, in turn, resist the flesh nature with good works and work for the neighbor.²⁴ According to Luther, the Christian cannot choose to live as a lord

²¹ According to J. L. Allen Jr., "Power, secrecy feed conspiracy theories in Vatican City", *National Catholic Reporter* 34.35 (1998): 1. Giovanni was an "adventurous" homosexual. The lack of bastard children at his coronation ironically seems to support this substantial rumor. Leo is recorded as saying "Let us enjoy the papacy since God has given it to us". This is exactly what he did and according to Löffler he had fully depleted the substantial treasury left to him by Julius II in less than two years. See K. Löffler, "Pope Leo X" *The Catholic Encyclopaedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 2009), 3.

²² LW 31:367; WA 7:66.

²³ LW 31:371; WA 7:69.

²⁴ LW 31:371. To be as another Christ (*alter Christus*) for the neighbor. According to Luther this is a Christian's only work.

or a servant in whatever form they deem fit. For Luther, freedom has a defined boundary.²⁵ Luther's biblical exegesis states that the dichotomization of the lord-servant dialectic is unfaithful, simply because it is a denial of the fullness of Christian ontology. The Christian is called to understand and live its two fold nature (lord and servant).²⁶ The Christian, according to Luther, is called to "the" way. That way is the twofold image of Christ—divine and human—and him crucified; the *Lord* and *Servant* par excellence,

So a Christian, like Christ his head, is filled and made rich by faith and should be content with this form of God which he has obtained by faith; only, as I have said, he should increase this faith until it is made perfect. For this faith is his life, his righteousness, and his salvation: it saves him and makes him acceptable, and bestows upon him all things that are Christ's, as has been said above, and as Paul asserts in Galatians 2(:20) when he says, "And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God". Although the Christian is thus free from all works, he ought in this liberty to empty himself, take upon himself the form of a servant, be made in the likeness of men, be found in human form, and to serve, help, and in every way deal with his neighbor as he sees that God through Christ has dealt and still deals with him. This he should do freely, having regard for nothing but divine approval.²⁷

Luther's doctrine of freedom can and should therefore, be seen in close connection with his dynamic Christology (*communicatio*

²⁵ Luther's realistic view of the now/not-yet eschatological tension recognizes the need for the twofold obligation to work and love. See LW 31:344, 358. Luther's concept of Christian freedom follows a Lord, Love, Servant progression in the tractate.

²⁶ Luther says "Because of this diversity of nature the Scriptures assert contradictory things concerning the same man, since these two men in the same man contradict each other, 'for the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh', according to Galatians 5(:17)". See LW 31:344.

²⁷ LW 31:366; WA 7:65.

idiomatum)²⁸ which serves to embolden his personal, yet rhetorically sarcastic rebuke of the pope because his loyalty lies with Christ first and foremost.²⁹

Luther opens his argument in the freedom tractate by identifying the deplorable situation whereby faith and all it implies had become a merely historical virtue.³⁰ He goes as far as saying that even if Christ is preached, in a merely historical fashion, then it betrays a significant part of the formative (experiential) process.³¹ A purely historical assent is not compatible to the existential power of Luther's understanding of freedom in faith.³² He lays the responsibility for propagating this false faith directly at the feet of the theologians of the Roman curia and indirectly at the pitiful negligence of Leo X himself.³³

Luther says the experience of faith goes well beyond the acknowledgment of it as a historical virtue.³⁴ For him, the tension

²⁸ See especially Luther's use of Philippians 2 in the tractate in LW 31:366.

²⁹ See B. Hamm, "Luther's Freedom of a Christian and the Pope", unpublished article, 2007, 249. See R. Schwarz, *Freiheit und Lebensgestaltung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 41.

³⁰ LW 31:343; WA 7:49.

³¹ LW 31:357; WA 7:58.

³² In particular the *Ex opera operato*, which denies the existential value of justification by faith. By existential we mean—as per Luther—faith derived in the soul (heart) by the external power of the word. See LW 31:343, 345, 356.

³³ Did Luther know the lifestyle of Leo X? We believe he did, See *Babylonian Captivity* in LW 36:58 and *To the German Nobility* in LW 44:142. Luther lets Leo know in the *Open Letter* that he knows what has been going on in Rome (LW 31:336). On this basis, we contend that Luther did not specifically target Leo's morality in the *Freedom Tractate* for political (diplomatic) reasons, but uses discrete, rhetorical genius, to amplify Leo's real nature through sarcastic references to Leo's morality, see in the *Open Letter to Pope Leo X* (LW 31:336). The discussions on the nature of being and act that focus on Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:15-20, highlight the antichristian heart behind the debaucherous lifestyles of the Romanists. "Consequently it is always necessary that the substance or person himself be good before there can be any good works, and that good works follow and proceed from the good person, as Christ also says, 'A good tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit'" (Matthew 7:18) (LW 31:361).

³⁴ LW 31:343; WA 7:49.

that exists within a natural and spiritual ontology must be maintained, for if one denies the real and present dynamic of “Spirit in conflict with flesh” (*Freiheit im Widerspruch*), then one will not “experience the courage which faith gives a person when trials oppress them”.³⁵ It is, therefore, imperative that the evangelical pastor, teacher and theologian be “far seeing” in this regard and intentionally strive to provide members of the church with as free and strong a communicative-experiential process as possible.³⁶ Luther’s freedom tractate is intended to aid this purpose.

What follows in this opening chapter, will be an outline of the polemical context, the main opponents that Luther faced in 1520, and Luther’s Christological response.

The Freedom Tractate’s Polemical Context

Luther, according to some, appears inconsistent and theologically underdeveloped when he lays stress on certain factors while leaving others no real place at all in his argument.³⁷ There is a lack of explicit use of baptismal theology in the tractate despite the fact that it had played such a fundamental role in his 1520 the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*.³⁸ However, it

³⁵ As per the Roman stance on concupiscence which denies the sinful quality of “fleshly desire”. It removes the focus away from the heart and onto specific, concrete acts of sin. Luther re-invokes the moral and theological responsibility of the Romanists by challenging their understanding of concupiscence (LW 31:343; WA 7:49).

³⁶ LW 31:374; WA 7:71.

³⁷ See G. W. Hoyer, “Christianhood, Priesthood and the Pope”, *Accents in Luther’s Theology*, 173, H. O. Kadai ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967). He states that Luther’s semantic and exegetical support for his freedom thesis “reveals a lack of development”. In our opinion Hoyer incorrectly sees this for his struggling to fit his own thesis of “brotherhood” into the tractate and thereby using his own paradigm to judge Luther’s without regard to the polemical and theological context of the tractate.

³⁸ There are several reasons for this according to Trigg. It is our understanding that Luther did not introduce baptismal theology into the freedom tractate because he did not want to give the controversialists a ground on which to justify themselves without faith. He needed to demolish the “second

will be our purpose to show that rather than seeing the tractate as inconsistent and underdeveloped, one should realize that Luther consciously stresses some factors at the expense of others because of his polemical struggle at the time. Some of Luther's presuppositions prior to the tractate and developed in his previous battles with the controversialists, play a key role in discerning his approach in the freedom tractate and its implications. These presuppositions will be defined after we enumerate the actual opponents Luther lists in the Letter to Leo X that accompanied the Latin version of the *Freedom Tractate*.

Luther's letter to Leo X names a number of the "monsters" he had been waging war against over the previous three years.³⁹ In it he also speaks directly to the pope in a sharp and condemnatory manner without actually directly implicating himself. Throughout the letter to Leo, Luther speaks, in our view, with a degree of sarcasm and appears to have already—in mind and method—separated from the Roman way. After all that is said in the letter to Leo, the tractate immediately gives dedication to the unlearned, and states that it is "only" them whom he serves.⁴⁰ We will survey the controversialists and their relationship to Luther and his tractate because there are many points throughout the tractate where Luther is speaking directly against them and their doctrines.

In the Latin proem of the freedom tractate, Luther mentions those who give faith a false virtue, though they have really never experienced it.⁴¹ He calls them "literalists" and "subtle dispu-

plank" theology of penance to reinstate effectual faith, which for Luther, amounted to dynamic baptismal faith.

³⁹ Prierias, *LW* 31:334; Eck, *LW* 31:338; Cajetan, *LW* 31:339.

⁴⁰ *LW* 31:344; *WA* 7:49.

⁴¹ *LW* 31:343; *WA* 7:49. The scholastic emphasis at the time had an overbalanced understanding of faith that didn't involve embodied relationship with Jesus. The emphasis was on the theoretical affirmation of the historical position of the church. See Rieger, "Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen, *De libertate Christiana*", 349. If one accepted these things cognitively then it was seen as a virtuous faith, for the historical position of the church was seen to be authoritative and virtuous. Luther radically calls this into ques-

tants".⁴² He speaks directly against their compounding of human laws⁴³ and their blind and dangerous doctrines that teach works-based righteousness.⁴⁴ The discussion on the Aaronic priesthood is a direct reference to the arguments of the controversialists that support the primacy, lordship and office of the pope⁴⁵ and on the point of the physical power and dominion of the Roman church he says that it is "a madness with which some churchmen are afflicted".⁴⁶ Luther is fully informed of the broad ecclesial disease for which he attributes the pope with direct responsibility.⁴⁷ He is incensed at the suppression of liberty forced upon the people by the practice of false teaching with a direct reference to "their" indulgences that never teach faith.⁴⁸ The tyranny of false doctrine and the resultant oppression of Christian liberty are seen as sheer desire for glory and

tion with his understanding of the performative word and the experience of faith. He placed the existential relationship of faith—as a process that one undergoes as an individual—as the precursor to an understanding of ecclesial and salvific history. See W. von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976), 77ff.

⁴² LW 31:344; WA 7:49.

⁴³ LW 31:345, 350; WA 7:50, 54.

⁴⁴ LW 31:353, 362; WA 7:56, 63.

⁴⁵ LW 31:354; WA 7:56.

⁴⁶ LW 31:354; WA 7:57.

⁴⁷ See LW 31:368; WA 7:66. For a long time it was assumed that Luther's portrayal of the condition in Rome derived from the recollection of his own stay there in 1510-1511. The evidence uncovered by modern research, however, suggests that he drew less upon his own memory than upon the very recent information provided by Reuchlin's lawyer, Johann von der Wiech (*To the Christian Nobility*, 1520, LW 44:121). Luther states in the *Open Letter* that he knew what was going on in Rome "As you well know, there has been flowing from Rome these many years—like a flood covering the world—nothing but a devastation of men's bodies and souls and possessions, the worst examples of the worst of all things" (LW 31:336).

⁴⁸ See LW 31:370; WA 7:68. The accusation by the controversialists', that Luther attacked the authority of the pope as early as 1517, can be inferred from the *Ninety-Five Theses*. See especially theses 77-95 (LW 31:32-33).

the inculcation of greed.⁴⁹ The controversialist teaching on works-righteousness had created a system that craved the domination of society from the cradle to the grave. It also made society pay for the privilege of being dominated. The machinery used by the papacy to enforce this false heteronomy, is found in the theological justification of meritorious works-righteousness. In regard to works-righteousness, Luther emphatically states:

Unless faith is at the same time constantly taught, this justification by work happens easily and defiles a great many, as has been done until now through the pestilent, impious, soul-destroying traditions of our popes and the opinions of our theologians. By these snares numberless souls have been dragged down to hell, so that you might see in this the work of the Antichrist.⁵⁰

This statement is hardly conciliatory, and reveals how Luther avoids direct condemnation of the current pope by owning the popes and theologians of the past.⁵¹ The previous major tracts for the year reveal his exact intention—to speak against the Roman tyranny and its propagators and speak with unequivocal conviction about the genuine freedom of the Christian wrought by faith and faith alone. In my opinion the opponents Luther targets with the polemical interface of the freedom tractate “does” include Pope Leo X, due to his responsibility for the entire administrative system (curia), with which he inherited from a series of corrupt popes.

⁴⁹ Maybe a subtle illusion to Leo's lust for money. See *Open Letter to Leo X* “Would that you (Leo) might discard that which your most profligate enemies boastfully claim to be your glory and might live on a small priestly income of your own or on your family inheritance!” (LW 31:337)

⁵⁰ See LW 31:375; WA 7:71. The Devil and the demonic spiritual battle feature largely in Luther's worldview and theology. The controversialists are often portrayed in terms of the dynamic struggle between good and evil, and as defenders of a system of captivity, they are the main point of contact in Luther's Latin version of the freedom tractate.

⁵¹ It seems that Luther was rhetorically and politically capable.

It was your duty and that of your cardinals to remedy these evils, but the gout of these evils makes a mockery of the healing hand, and neither chariot nor horse responds to the rein.⁵² Moved by this affection for you, I have always been sorry, most excellent Leo, that you were made pope in these times, for you are worthy of being pope in better days. The Roman Curia does not deserve to have you or men like you, but it should have Satan himself as pope, for he now actually rules in that Babylon more than you do.⁵³

The theologians commissioned by the pope to defend this corrupt system are at the forefront of Luther's polemical and pedagogical concern. The importance that faith and works play throughout the Latin version of the freedom tractate reveal how Luther continues to battle at the frontline with the teaching of works-righteousness, a position in direct opposition to the reformers understanding of biblical faith.

Giovanni de Medici

For a Christian, as a free man, will say, "I will fast, pray, do this and that as men command, not because it is necessary to my righteousness or salvation; but that I may show due respect to the pope, the bishop, the community, a magistrate, or my neighbor, and give them an example. I will do and suffer all things, just as Christ did and suffered far more for me, although he needed nothing of it all for himself, and was made under the law for my sake, although he was not under the law". Although tyrants do violence or injustice in making their demands, yet it will do no harm as long as they demand nothing contrary to God.⁵⁴

Luther suffers the pope as Christ suffered the lack of responsibility by the religious leaders of his own time. It has been said that the *Freedom Tractate* was written in the hope that reconcilia-

⁵² Virgil, *Georgics*, i. 514.

⁵³ LW 31:337.

⁵⁴ LW 31:370; WA 7:68.

tion was still possible between the reformer and the pope.⁵⁵ It is seen as a standalone document written in a conciliar and warm tone toward the pope. However, it is our contention that this opinion may not represent the whole truth of the matter.⁵⁶ The history of Luther's struggle throughout 1520 and his intense debate with the controversialists lays the background to his Latin *Freedom Tractate*. On the personal level, it is assumed that Luther appears congenial and pastorally concerned toward the pope, though, in view of this research, it seems the congeniality is more tongue in cheek and filled with sarcastic pity. This study asks the question, was Luther aware of the antics of Leo? It contends that after several years in office, Leo's debaucherous lifestyle would have been widely known and we detect Luther's sarcasm throughout the *Letter to Leo* on several occasions.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ See LW 31:329. See the introduction to the *Freedom Tractate* by Lambert and Grimm (LW 31:329-331).

⁵⁶ Hamm sees the *Letter to Leo X* and the *freedom tractate* as a compositional unity. "In their unity they bring a programmatic message to the Latin and German speaking public, to scholars and the unlearned, to clergy and laity". We want to make the distinction though that the German version had been edited in such a way that it read easily and warmly toward the German laity. The German also had the intention of heading off several of the controversialist's writings that were currently being circulated in German at that time. The Latin version is composed in a more polemical manner and the letter to Leo and various points throughout the tractate make that clear. The Latin version is a lot more detailed than the German, which fits well with our understanding that the Latin has a more polemical focus to it. It is easy to see that Luther had the roman controversialists at the forefront of his Latin version and the German laity in mind for the less detailed German version.

⁵⁷ Leo's personal life can only be eclipsed by his dubious administrative failure. It seems that Luther was well aware of Leo's "selling off" of the Roman offices in his earlier work *To the German Nobility* (LW 44:142). Leo had created an astonishing 2000 more official benefices at twice the usual cost to finance his lavish appetite for pleasure. See J. L. Allen, Jr., "Power, secrecy feed conspiracy theories in Vatican City", *National Catholic Reporter* 34.35 (1998): 1.

At a transpersonal level though, Luther is undiplomatic and uncompromising⁵⁸, for the papacy appears as the antichrist.

Unless faith is at the same time constantly taught, this happens easily and defiles a great many, as has been done until now through the pestilent, impious, soul-destroying traditions of our popes and the opinions of our theologians. By these snares numberless souls have been dragged down to hell, so that you might see in this the work of Antichrist.⁵⁹

In the letter to Leo X Luther says,

As you well know, there has been flowing from Rome these many years—like a flood covering the world—nothing but a devastation of men's bodies and souls and possessions, the worst examples of the worst of all things. All this is clearer than day to all, and the Roman church, once the holiest of all, has become the most licentious den of thieves (Matthew 21:13), the most shameless of all brothels, the kingdom of sin, death, and hell. It is so bad that even Antichrist himself, if he should come, could think of nothing to add to its wickedness.⁶⁰

Hamm proposes a twofold approach to understanding how Luther relates to Leo X.⁶¹ He advocates that Luther attacks the

⁵⁸ B. Hamm, "Luther's Freedom of a Christian and the Pope", unpublished article, 2007, 5.

⁵⁹ LW 31:375; WA 7:71.

⁶⁰ LW 31:336. See also LW 31:343. "If the pope rules, while Christ is absent and does not dwell in his heart, what else is he but a vicar of Christ? What is the church under such a vicar but a mass of people without Christ? Indeed, what is such a vicar but an antichrist and an idol? How much more properly did the apostles call themselves servants of the present Christ and not vicars of an absent Christ?"

⁶¹ Thus Luther differentiates not only between the person of the pope and his "unchristian" dependence on the Roman Curia, but also—what is much more essential—between his person and the authority of his papal office and the abundance of power that comes with it. His own Roman See, the *cathedra Petri*, is the worst 'prison' in which he, as a person is imprisoned. See B.

false and enslaving teaching of the pope and his defenders sharply while holding on to a certain level of pastoral sensitivity. It is true that the papal nuncio Miltitz did play a role in a plea for final reconciliation between Luther and Leo and probably encouraged Luther to put away the polemical axe, though, in our opinion, Luther seems to replace it with the assassin's dagger.⁶² Luther speaks as one in close pastoral relationship to the pope while denouncing his wicked see. It is our intention to show that the freedom tractate has a polemical edge, yet is sophisticated in the sense that Luther does not hang himself politically or doctrinally. Luther is more concerned with those that represent the pope—by directly attacking him—rather than the pope himself and his personal understanding. Yet the pope can be cited as the one ultimately responsible for the collapse of Christian freedom.

You (Leo) would be poisoned before you could begin to issue a decree for the purpose of remedying the situation.⁶³

It is our contention that a failure to recognize these important distinctions about Luther's personal view of the pope, will affect the illocutionary force of his theology and his desired perlocutionary effect for his German Christian audience. Luther

Hamm, "Luther's Freedom of a Christian and the Pope", unpublished article (2007): 6.

⁶² In the period between 1518 and 1525, Luther had up to seventy authors writing against him adding up to approximately 120 separate writings against him at one time. It is in this context that Luther's sharp axe-wielding polemic should be discerned. The difference in the freedom tractate is that Luther is more veiled in his attack on the *terrifica tyrannis* (ecclesial tyranny) of the controversialists, in favor of putting forth his basic reforming views. On Miltitz and Luther see the letter dated August 20, 1520. See P. Smith, *Luther's Correspondence and other Contemporary Letters* (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1913), 348.

⁶³ See LW 31:336. Luther knew about the attempt to poison Leo X in the summer of 1517. Leo's behavior and administrative failure incensed those within his own ranks to turn against him.

wanted to convey a general council against Leo and his administration.

One of the insightful powers of Luther's theology is his radical allegiance to Christ and his Holy Scriptures. When it came to the demand from Rome for Luther to deny Christ's teaching on freedom and to blindly accept the situation for which Leo was responsible, Luther could only follow his scriptural conscience. What may have started as a pastoral concern for Leo X over against his "flatterers" had turned into a sarcastic pity by the latter half of (1520).

Luther's insight into Christian freedom, speaks of God's free and gracious justifying action and the radical freedom imputed and imparted to the Christian in faith. Against the manipulative greed of Leo, this freedom had a real and concrete actuality, based on scriptural faith, which is to be proclaimed and enacted as open for the benefit of all. Leo encouraged his theologians to act against Luther's views of scriptural faith. The first of those directly involved with Luther at the time of his writing the *Freedom Tractate* is Prierias.

Sylvester Mazzolini: *Prierias* (1456-1523)

The first mention of Prierias by Luther in the *Letter to Leo X* reveals the utter contempt with which he is held by the reformer. Prierias is a vain and self-seeking defamer.⁶⁴ The history between Prierias and Luther stretches back to 1517; the full length of the war to date with "the monsters of this age".⁶⁵ Prierias, a Dominican theologian, was called to Rome to teach Thomistic theology, and in late 1515 became "master of the sacred palace", the pope's court theologian.⁶⁶ The archbishop of Mainz, Albrecht of Brandenburg, had a considerable interest in the propagation of indulgences in his territories, for he had incurred

⁶⁴ LW 31:334.

⁶⁵ LW 31:334.

⁶⁶ J. Wicks, "Prierias, Sylvester Mazzolini", *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, H. J. Hillerbrand ed., 341, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

substantial debt with his acquisition of several bishoprics.⁶⁷ In late 1517 he wrote to the pope denouncing Luther's attack on Johann Tetzel's preaching of the saint Peter's indulgence. Prierias was commissioned to examine Luther's 95 theses in response to this letter by Albrecht.⁶⁸

The commissioning of Prierias was the initial step in the canonical procedure against one accused of heresy.⁶⁹ At the time of Prierias' appointment to the papal court he had acquired a considerable reputation; however this reputation had been severely spoiled throughout Germany by a juridical process against Reuchlin.⁷⁰ Luther's first contact with Prierias would already have been shaped by the Reuchlin debacle and after receiving Prierias' response to the 95 theses—a report titled *Dialogus* (1518)—Luther was disgusted to the point of disobeying the summons to Rome that accompanied it. Luther had sixty days to appear before Rome, for Prierias had found several points in the theses in which Luther was accused of heresy.⁷¹

Luther was disgusted by the fact that Prierias had shifted the focus away from an unresolved question—the role and legitimacy of indulgences—to one of papal authority.⁷² In writing the

⁶⁷ See Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther. His Road to Reformation, 1521-1532* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1981), 179.

⁶⁸ See LW 48:45; Brecht, *Martin Luther. His Road to Reformation, 1521-1532*, 190-221; WA, Br, 1:114-115.

⁶⁹ J. Wicks, "Prierias, Sylvester Mazzolini", *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, H. J. Hillerbrand ed., 341, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

⁷⁰ M. Tavuzzi, *Prierias: The Life and Works of Silvestro Mazzolini da Prierio, 1456-1527* (London: Duke University Press, 1997), 104.

⁷¹ Prierias was berated by his contemporaries for overstepping his mark both theologically and diplomatically as opposed to the even-handedness of Cajetan. See David S. Yeago, "Gnosticism, Antinomianism and Reformation Theology", *Pro Ecclesia* 2.1 (1996): 8.

⁷² In our opinion Luther maintained a desire to remain faithful to the Roman church during the publication of the 95 theses. We detect a shift in Luther after the confrontational hearing in Augsburg with Cajetan on October 12-14, 1518. In the letter to Leo X, Luther specifically blames Cajetan for the indulgence debacle and Luther's continued accusation from the Roman court.

theses Luther had assumed the common belief that points of doctrine not fully ratified by council or canon law were open to discussion. Prierias overlooked this and accused Luther of directly challenging the authority and majesty of the pope. Tavuzzi sees this move by Prierias as a sophisticated theological one.⁷³ Wicks on the other hand states that Erasmus “Judged Prierias’ critique of Luther arbitrary and extreme, and saw it occasioning Luther’s reactive first step toward his contestation of Papal authority”.⁷⁴ We agree with Erasmus.

At the time of Luther’s theses on indulgence there was considerable tension within the Roman church in regard to the indulgence. None other than Cardinal Cajetan had expressed his unhappiness with the state of indulgences.⁷⁵ Bagchi cites Dolan as agreeing that “many of the Romanists, such as Cochleus and the early John Eck, were reactionaries whose impact on the reformation period was at best negligible and at worst exaceratory”.⁷⁶ This disagreement among the Romanists places Prierias in a context that was unprepared pastorally and theologically for Luther. Their reaction to find more secure ground for polemic based on papal authority pushed Luther in a direction he

In Luther’s view Cajetan could have put an end to the trouble at Augsburg but failed to do so. Following this there was a gradual and hesitant move away from Rome, yet still a respectful tone toward the pope. It is not until 1520 and the explosive Babylonian Captivity that Luther is finally forced by the views of the controversialists to move explicitly against the pontiff.

⁷³ Tavuzzi, *Prierias: The Life and Works of Silvestro Mazzolini da Prierio, 1456-1527*, 106.

⁷⁴ Wicks, “Prierias, Sylvester Mazzolini”, 341.

⁷⁵ David V. N. Bagchi, *Luther’s Earliest Opponents. Catholic Controversialists, 1518-1525* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 18.

⁷⁶ This thesis is given excellent foundation by David Yeago in his article “The Catholic Luther”, *First Things* 61 (1996):3. In it he says that “On the reading I propose, the Reformation schism was brought about instead by contingent human choices in a confused historical context defined less by clear and principled theological argument (though that of course was present) than by a peculiar and distinctively sixteenth-century combination of overheated and ever-escalating polemics, cold-blooded *Realpolitik*, and fervid apocalyptic dreaming”.

had not foreseen. Yet in making this move they “tragically underestimated their opponents’ positions and were overconfident of their own”.⁷⁷ Posterity seems to view Prierias in the light of Erasmus, who sees Luther driven early to a greater degree of division than he intended. More to the point, Prierias was berated by the Roman court because his *Dialogus* was rushed and full of weakness in contrast to Luther’s theses. Iserloh is more diplomatic:

In his *Dialogus* of 1518, his polemic was frivolous and clumsy. He showed little readiness to take up Luther’s concern but clearly grasped and stressed that the church, in both ecclesiastical and papal authority, was in question.⁷⁸

Luther received the *Dialogus* and citation to appear in Rome in Wittenberg on August 7 and rejoined with his *Responsio*. In it he appealed to the freedom of theologians to debate issues not yet decided by council or pope.⁷⁹ He also discerned in Prierias a vain attempt at grandeur in his move from an issue yet to be consolidated to the charge of contesting papal primacy. Tavuzzi considers this as a ridiculous charge by Luther given that Prierias was 62 and beyond the days of glory seeking.⁸⁰ Bagchi states convincingly that at 62 Prierias would have been at the peak of his career as a theologian and not exempt from the temptation to seek personal glory.⁸¹

The juridical process proceeded into 1520 after a delay attributed to the priority of other matters. During 1520, in particular the months leading up to July, Prierias would have been in-

⁷⁷ Bagchi, *Luther’s Earliest Opponents. Catholic Controversialists, 1518-1525*, 9.

⁷⁸ E. Iserloh, J. Glazik and H. Jedin, *History of the Church*, vol. 5 (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 199. See also Luther’s letter to Sylvester Prierias at Rome, August 10, 1518 in P. Smith, *Luther’s Correspondence and other Contemporary Letters* (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1913), 98.

⁷⁹ WA 1:647.

⁸⁰ Tavuzzi, *Prierias: The Life and Works of Silvestro Mazzolini da Priero, 1456-1527*, 106.

⁸¹ Bagchi, *Luther’s Earliest Opponents. Catholic Controversialists, 1518-1525*, 21.

volved in the consistories that considered Luther's case and eventually drafted the *Exsurge Domine*. Earlier in March 1520 Prierias published his three volume *Errata et argumenta*, and in it he defined several major doctrinal points against the reformers now, more consolidated position. The first point states that the "Pope as the head of the universal church (Roman Church) is the head of all churches".⁸² The second is that the universal church cannot err when it decides on faith and morals, so also for a "true" council, meaning the pope cannot err in his official capacity.⁸³ Third, he who does not hold to the teaching of the Roman Church and the pope as an infallible rule of faith, from which even the Holy Scripture draws its power and authority, is a heretic. Fourth, there follows a corollary that states "He who says in regard to indulgences that the Roman Church cannot do what she has actually done is a heretic".⁸⁴ Prierias' contemporaries viewed this line of argumentation as extremist and denigrating of sacred Scripture.⁸⁵ Yet the main

⁸² Tavuzzi, *Prierias: The Life and Works of Silvestro Mazzolini da Prierio, 1456-1527*, 111.

⁸³ Leo exploits this doctrine; see Pope Leo X to Frederic, July 8 1520. "Having convoked a council of our venerable brothers, and of others, including all who are expert in the Canon Law and the Holy Scripture, after thorough ventilation and discussion of the affair, at last, under the inspiration of the holy Ghost, who in such matters is never absent from the holy see, we issued a decree (*Exsurge Domine*)". See Smith, *Luther's Correspondence and other Contemporary Letters*, 335.

⁸⁴ This type of statement infuriated Luther and for good reason. It is basically saying that every deed of the church is not to be subject to scrutiny and is without accountability. Obviously the conciliar movement at this time had been considerably weakened. Luther's visit to Rome and the continuing reports of extreme debauchery of the popes themselves convinced him that the wool had been pulled over people's eyes. In his work addressing the nobility of the German nation he exposes the fact that the church had robbed the people of its "rod" of accountability. See M. Tavuzzi, *Prierias: The Life and Works of Silvestro Mazzolini da Prierio, 1456-1527* (London: Duke University Press, 1997), 104.

⁸⁵ M. Tavuzzi, *Prierias: The Life and Works of Silvestro Mazzolini da Prierio, 1456-1527*, 112.

controversialists at the time in whom we are interested shared Prierias' convictions, some to a lesser, and some to a greater degree. One of those who shared his convictions to a greater degree was Johann Eck.

Johann Eck (1486-1543)

John Eck belonged to no particular order. He was a German Catholic theologian who had sympathies with the Franciscan school and nominalism, yet he claimed to be well versed in a great variety of schools in general. Luther had been on cordial terms with Eck until he sent Eck a copy of his 95 theses. Upon reading and making certain decisions about the theses Eck published a tract (*Obelisks*) against Luther without informing Luther of his intentions. Luther was appalled and responded with his *Asterixs*.⁸⁶

Eck was an influential theologian and had published prior to the struggle with Luther. His *Chrysopassus* (1514) shows a clear preference for a works-based righteousness with which Luther would later have significant disagreement.⁸⁷ Eck espoused positions on merit and freewill, and held that predestination to rewards and punishments is based on God's foreknowledge of human merits and demerits.⁸⁸ He was involved with Prierias in the drafting of the papal bull *Exsurge Domine*, and was commissioned in 1520 as a special nuncio to publish the bull throughout the empire. In the letter to Leo, Luther says in regard to Eck that "Satan opened his eyes and filled his servant Johann Eck, a notable enemy of Christ, with an insatiable lust for glory".⁸⁹ In

⁸⁶ WA 1:281-314.

⁸⁷ Luther's 1520, *Treatise on Good Works* (LW 44:15-114; WA 6:202-276).

⁸⁸ Wicks, "Eck, Johann", 17.

⁸⁹ LW 31:338. Luther also sees Eck as a boastful braggart, frothing and gnashing, puffed up with the prospect of abusing papal authority (LW 31:338). Another discreet backhand against the pope and his flatterers. The lust for glory that Luther perceived in his opponents would have aggravated his sense of loyalty to his already developed *theologia crucis*. See his 1518 *Heidelberg Disputation* thesis no. 21. "A theologian of glory calls evil good and

connection with Eck, Luther cynically and sarcastically claims that the pope's salvation is in danger⁹⁰ and that he is therefore forced to act as a called servant of the word to inform the pope of the error in his see and that this letter is a public bill of his divorce from Rome.⁹¹ The tension between Eck and Luther was exacerbated when the peace arrangement between them was broken with the Leipzig debate.⁹² What started out as a tractate arm wrestle between Eck and Luther's colleague at the time, Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, was soon to become what Eck admitted to be the aim all along, a public debate with Luther himself. Eck's theological position is well aligned with Prierias', though considerably more sophisticated.

For Eck the Roman church is the bride of Christ, and "if the church was wrong, how could Christ desert his bride for so long? If the church here is called the kingdom of heaven, how could error and falsehood reign in that kingdom for a thousand years?"⁹³ Obviously a particular understanding of the visible kingdom underpins Eck's theology. "The church never errs, because she is always ruled by the teaching authority of the Holy

good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is" (LW 31:40).

⁹⁰ Wicks, "Eck, Johann", 338.

⁹¹ Maybe a veiled allusion to *Exsurge Domine*? See Wicks, "Eck, Johann", 338.

⁹² Miltitz had played the diplomat between the pope, Eck and Luther. After Luther had published his 95 theses Eck had responded and a growing amount of antagonism between them placed Luther under considerable pressure in regard to his loyalty to the church. Miltitz had arranged for Luther to travel to Altenburg on January 4, 1519 to negotiate Luther's position in regard to Tetzel's accusations. Luther conceded that if his opponents would keep silent he would in the future do the same. See Brecht, *Martin Luther. His Road to Reformation, 1521-1532*, 268. Luther held to this position until he was forced to react to Eck's publication of his theses planned for the Leipzig debate. "He believed that he and the university were obliged to respond, even though the subject considered was that of papal authority". See Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 271.

⁹³ J. Eck, *Enchiridion of Commonplaces* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1979), 8.

Spirit".⁹⁴ The church has authority over the Scriptures—against which Luther based his reforming critique and paradigm—because the church is older than scripture, and the Scriptures are not authentic without the church's authority. Eck seems to trump Luther on the basis of authority but Luther replied with erudition and composure. Eck also had recourse to the precedents set by the church in the condemnations of Huss and Wycliffe and charged Luther with the same heresy.⁹⁵ This accusation was considered a joke by Eck's fellow controversialist Emser, and Luther's interpretation of the Bohemian situation was defended as sound.⁹⁶

Inevitably the debate rendered no official decision, for those entrusted with the decision—for either political or theological reasons—could not come to a conclusion.⁹⁷ Regardless though, both sides claimed victory for their respective positions. Eck however enjoyed the spoils of the Leipzig patrons for many days after the debate, including the attentions of the city's women. Luther and his team left with the customary case of

⁹⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁹⁵ Both Wycliffe (1330-1384), and Huss (1372-1415), had challenged the papal authority in regard to the indulgence problem. A problem that should not have been labelled as heretical but still open to debate as with Luther. Wycliffe states 'I confess that the indulgences of the pope, if they are what they are said to be, are a manifest blasphemy, in as much as he claims a power to save men almost without limit. Huss states "In view of these things it is to be held that to rebel against an erring pope is to obey Christ the Lord". See C. Lindberg, *The European Reformations Sourcebook* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 15-16. Luther would surely have been aware of these positions, and cited the condemnation of Huss by the Council of Constance (1414-1418) against papal authority, as a precedent against papal supremacy.

⁹⁶ There were many points in Huss's theology that coincided with Luther's own views. These points were biblically sound and unchallenged by many Roman scholars at the time.

⁹⁷ Those entrusted to render a decision on the debate were the theologians and canon lawyers from Erfurt and Paris. They did not, or could not, reach a conclusion. Duke George forced a response, via bribery, from Louvain and Cologne in favor of Eck. See Brecht, *Martin Luther. His Road to Reformation, 1521-1532*, 338.

wine. Iserloh comments on Eck's approach by saying that "despite an abundance of scriptural citation his encounter with them was not creative. He was unable to make them sufficiently fruitful in a religious and theological sense".⁹⁸ This lack of creativity was probably due his position on biblical authority.⁹⁹

In the struggle with Luther, the debate came to focus sharply on the primacy of the Petrine office. To this Luther focused on the *Sitz im Leben* of the church as a direct and concrete example that spoke against the way the pope had exercised the office of Peter. Luther saw the office to be one of love and self sacrifice, not one of power, greed and immorality.¹⁰⁰ This very theme would be spoken implicitly against the pope in the freedom tractate. In *The Address to the German Nobility* and *The Babylonian Captivity*, Luther explicitly develops his understanding of the gross abuse of the papist system. For Luther it stood in direct opposition to the biblical picture of Peter, a servant of the Servant-Lord. For Luther the church owed its existence solely to Christ its head.¹⁰¹ From this conviction stemmed Luther's growing animosity toward the conception of the Church of Rome as a powerful ecclesiastical estate.¹⁰² He saw Roman power and

⁹⁸ E. Iserloh, J. Glazik and H. Jedin, *History of the Church*, vol. 5 (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 196.

⁹⁹ We mention this as a possible reason for Eck's lack of creativity in the understanding that acceptance of ecclesial authority over the scriptures would force one into acquiescing to the traditional understanding of the texts and their assertions. In fact this is the basis for much of the controversialist approval of sovereign papal authority. Luther on the other hand, under the framework of *oratio, meditatio and tentatio*, had the *Spiritus creator* behind his exposition and application of the biblical texts because of his passive acceptance of the sole authority of Holy Scripture. See Oswald Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, Jeffrey Silcock and Mark C. Mattes trans. and ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2007), 42-65.

¹⁰⁰ Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents. Catholic Controversialists, 1518-1525*, 47.

¹⁰¹ According to Luther the pope could only be the Vicar of Christ if Christ himself was absent (LW 31:342).

¹⁰² LW 44:311.

supremacy derived more from papal decrees and politics than from the Holy Scriptures.

Cardinal Tommaso de Vio Cajetan (1469-1534)

Cajetan was a Dominican theologian with a preference for Thomistic and Aristotelian thought. In 1501 Cajetan was called to Rome to serve as the official Dominican liaison with the *Curia Romana*. From 1508 to 1518 he was master general for his order. While Cajetan has been praised by many for his personal sobriety and scholarly approach he is still to be clearly seen as a staunch defender of Roman papistic teaching.¹⁰³ As early as 1511 we see in his mobilization of the Dominican order against the council of Pisa a clear advocacy for the superiority of the pope over general councils.¹⁰⁴

Having been named cardinal in 1517, he was sent as a papal legate to the imperial diet of Augsburg in mid-1518. It is in Augsburg that Cajetan and Luther first came into contact. Apart from the other purposes at Augsburg, one was the examination of Martin Luther as part of the canonical procedure resting on the accusation of error and heresy.¹⁰⁵ Cajetan examined Luther's writings and arrived at a differentiated judgment, for Cajetan could see much to be commended in the Augustinian monk's theology.

While Cajetan only understood Luther's views imperfectly, and regarded them as temerarious and mistaken, he was ready to recommend that they receive further discussion and discussion before a final judgment was reached.¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, Cajetan defended Luther's opponents in principal, and was therefore compelled to call Luther to account and

¹⁰³ J. Wicks, "Cajetan", *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, H. J. Hillerbrand ed., 234, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ D. S. Yeago, "The Catholic Luther", *First Things* 61 (1996): 8.

subsequently demanded Luther's recantation, which Luther vigorously and famously denied three times.

From this point on, against the advice of his confessor, Staupitz, Luther could not assent to the blind acceptance of scholastic and papal doctrine, and was incensed against Cajetan. Luther had promised to keep silent on the unresolved issues relating to indulgence, but saw Cajetan's examination as going beyond his responsibility as papal legate and forcing him into a defensive position. At the time of his writing to Leo in 1520, Luther would say of Cajetan that he was unwise and unfortunate, unreliable and a seeker of personal glory. In the same letter Luther would explicitly state that all the blame was to be given to Cajetan,

Therefore Luther is not to blame for what followed. All the blame is Cajetan's, who did not permit me to keep silent, as I at the time most earnestly requested him to do.¹⁰⁷

Possibly the blame accorded to Cajetan by Luther lies in the fact that at the time of the Augsburg diet, Cajetan did not put to rest the unjust accusations of heresy and therefore is seen as the official figurehead in the papal controversy. In the near future it would be made clear that Cajetan was a vigorous supporter of papalism.

Augustine Alfeld (b. 1480)

Alfeld joined the battle after the Leipzig debate. As a Franciscan monk in the Leipzig monastery he would have been well aware of the proceedings of the debate. In January 1520 he promised Miltitz that he would write against Luther's teaching although he was advised by his superiors not to get into an argument with Luther. After several delays he published his work *Concerning the apostolic see*. For Alfeld the primacy of the pope was at the heart of the Roman church. Any infringement upon this vital doctrine was absolute heresy. When Luther received Al-

¹⁰⁷ LW 31:339.

feld's work he considered it "so simpleminded, unspiritual, and crude that he would not waste any time in answering it".¹⁰⁸ That task was to fall to Luther's *famulus*, which in itself was an obvious sign of disrespect. Lonicer produced a work in reply that was a "crude, insignificant, beginner's work".¹⁰⁹ It is possible that Luther knew what state Lonicer's reply would take, and if so, would only add to the insult. Luther seems to have been happy to leave it at that until he was informed that Alfeld had published his work in the common German language. Luther was outraged and immediately responded with his *On the Papacy* (June 1520), and then more fully with his *Prelude to the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. Luther was concerned that this "ape-like" book would poison the minds of the laity and he is seen to be justified in his thinking because of statements from Alfeld reflected by the following,

Who needs money if he has the sacraments? Is it not true that the curia is immoral? Yes, but you must do as they say and not as they do.¹¹⁰

The rampant contradiction of this statement apparently flows through the entirety of Alfeld's work and is interspersed with vile seething and personal attack.¹¹¹ The Leipzig academic community was unhappy with Alfeld's writing and was quick to distance itself from him, for Alfeld made assertions about several understandings of church practice that were already being challenged within the Roman church itself and the Leipzig

¹⁰⁸ Brecht, *Martin Luther. His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, 343.

¹⁰⁹ Brecht, *Martin Luther. His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, 344.

¹¹⁰ Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents. Catholic Controversialists, 1518-1525*, 51.

¹¹¹ Brecht comments that Alfeld's attack on Luther was not because of questions of faith, "but because he (Luther) had infringed upon Rome's power and financial interests". See Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, 345. Against this claim of papal power, Luther cited Ulrich von Hutten's publication that exposed Lorenzo Valla's *Donation of Constantine* as a forgery. This document was essential to the papacy's defense of political power. See Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, 346.

community did not want a fight with Luther. Luther's ability to discern how the papal system had created for itself "walls of protection" played a significant role in dismantling the bondage it created for the people.¹¹²

In his *The Babylonian Captivity* Luther reached into the heart of the sacramental system, exposed and dismantled the utter corruption of God's good and free word.

The first captivity of this sacrament,¹¹³ therefore, concerns its substance or completeness, which the tyranny of Rome has wrested from us.¹¹⁴

Luther says the second captivity of the sacrament, referring to transubstantiation, is less grievous to the conscience, but finds its corruption in the penalties for challenging the doctrine of transubstantiation itself. Luther considers it a matter of free choice, not a matter of condemnation and death.¹¹⁵ The mass, as sacrifice, is the most "wicked" abuse in Luther's opinion. "This abuse has brought and endless host of other abuses in its train".¹¹⁶

By the time the freedom tractate was written the stakes were high and "all matters of faith" where on the table for reform. The conflict between Luther and the Roman controversialists reached its climax in the year 1520 with the freedom tractate, for there would be a decisive shift in focus for Luther after the diet of Worms and his subsequent condemnation. Yeago points to the ineptitude of Alfeld and Prierias at this time as provoking Luther's final break with Rome. This is an overstatement, for despite Alfeld's incompetence he still represented a system of thought and practice that for Luther could no longer be tole-

¹¹² In his *Address to the German Nobility*, Luther identified and tore down the three walls that prevented any accountability for the pope and his see (LW 44:120).

¹¹³ Referring to the reception of one or both kinds.

¹¹⁴ LW 36:27.

¹¹⁵ LW 36:28.

¹¹⁶ LW 36:35.

rated. Though Yeago,¹¹⁷ makes an important point about the theological confusion at the time of the church schism, he overstates his passion for the catholic Luther by downplaying the continual spiritual distress Luther had—due to tyrannical Roman practice—that could not be reconciled with his already considerable and growing biblical convictions. That Luther came to a contrasting theological position with the Roman church is comprehensively derived from his intense study of the Holy Scriptures. Broadly speaking, Luther never fit well with the Romanists despite his concern for the universality of the church. One of the key theological understandings of Luther's, that contrasted the legalistic views of the papal controversialists, was his dynamic, threefold view of baptismal faith. We turn now, to Luther's position on baptism, with the intention of highlighting it as an implicit paradigm by which Luther constructs his views of freedom in the tractate both in a negative sense against the papal controversialists and a positive sense, as an expression of genuine Christian freedom.

The Bondage of Spirit and Baptismal Liberation

At the beginning of the Latin version of the freedom tractate, Luther identifies "those" who had not experienced and tasted the courage of genuine Christian faith,

Many people have considered Christian faith an easy thing, and not a few have given it a place among the virtues. They do this because they have not experienced it and have never tasted the great strength there is in faith. It is impossible to write well about it or to understand what has been written about it unless one has at one

¹¹⁷ "On the reading I propose, the Reformation schism was brought about instead by contingent human choices in a confused historical context defined less by clear and principled theological argument". The distress Luther experienced was both personal-existential in the early struggle and social-existential in a theological sense as he became aware of the Romanist abuses and the self-justification for the abuse they championed with blind vigor. I agree with Yeago's emphasis on Luther's Catholic "turn" rather than it being a "sectarian" turn. See Yeago, "The Catholic Luther", 38, 41.

time or another experienced the courage which faith gives a man when trials oppress him.¹¹⁸

“They” are the monsters, the literalists and subtle disputants with whom Luther had been in desperate struggle for nearly three years.¹¹⁹ For Luther, the experience of faith is more than a theoretical additive (or virtue) to the common teaching and practice of the Roman church. He also identifies, in the Latin proem, that his twofold theses on Christian freedom are an implication of how the spirit is conditioned,

I shall set down the following two propositions concerning the freedom and the bondage of the spirit: A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.¹²⁰

Throughout the *Freedom Tractate*, Luther’s distinctions about the condition of the anthropological spirit and the experience of faith are a deeply theological critique of a system that enslaved its participants from birth to the grave via the false theological and ecclesiastical heteronomy championed by scholastic theology.

The controversialists appealed to the scholastic tradition as the only means by which to understand ecclesial doctrine.¹²¹ According to the *via antiqua*, the tradition best represented by Thomas Aquinas, God’s dealings with the human race are totally predictable, and he will act and always act (*de potentia ordinata*) in the ways laid down by scripture, tradition and the sacramental system of the church.¹²² It is, therefore, impossible for any new teaching or practice to be introduced into the church for it stands against God’s predictability. Therefore, any change to the system was seen as outside the predictability of God and

¹¹⁸ LW 31:343; WA 7:49. Another veiled reference to the controversialists.

¹¹⁹ LW 31:234.

¹²⁰ LW 31:344; WA 7:49.

¹²¹ Bagchi, *Luther’s Earliest Opponents. Catholic Controversialists, 1518-1525*, 34.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 25.

therefore likely to be heresy. The *via moderna* (Ockham school), was in complete opposition to this and stated that God does as he pleases, short of acting contrary to his nature. Luther had deep problems with both points of view. Luther's defiance of the Thomistic bondage of the controversialists is based on his discernment that Thomism—if viewed as the only way to discern Church theology and ethics—is another wall of bondage that dismisses papal accountability. For any other thought than that of the scholastic tradition is seen immediately as heresy and therefore, dismissed.¹²³

Yet, it is Luther's contention that scholasticism's influence on the sacramental system encourages anything but "courageous" and experiential faith. The *Ex opera operato* placed the emphasis on the correct performance of an act of grace already accomplished and finished without reference to any faith or lack of faith on the part of the person for whom it is performed.¹²⁴ The papal system therefore relied on the bondage of conscience to drive its sacrificial greed—via the "second plank" penitential laws—as people paid for the sacrament as an act without genuine faith. In his *Babylonian Captivity* it is the papal law that deprives the conscience of liberty,

I lift my voice simply on behalf of liberty and conscience, and I confidently cry: No law, whether of men or of angels, may rightfully be imposed upon Christians without their consent, for we are free of all laws.¹²⁵

The same is reflected throughout the Freedom Tractate,

On the other hand, use your freedom constantly and consistently in the sight of and despite the tyrants and the stubborn so that

¹²³ Rubeus stated that scholastic authorities were not merely legitimate; they were the only means of presenting a reasoned account of the Christian faith. See Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents. Catholic Controversialists, 1518-1525*, 72.

¹²⁴ LW 36:37.

¹²⁵ LW 36:72.

they also may learn that they are impious, that their laws are of no avail for righteousness, and that they had no right to set them up.¹²⁶

Luther's opponents saw any deviation from the laws championed by scholastic theology as Bohemian;¹²⁷ in fact Prierias identified the source of all Luther's errors in his rejection of Aristotle and also of Aquinas.¹²⁸ In this regard, Bagchi correctly recognizes a fundamental difference in methodological approach between Luther and his opponents.¹²⁹

The controversialists had acquired a long history of synthetically compounding its authoritative theological sources upon one another. They were able to defend their position by moving in degrees. Luther took his analytical-reductionist razor and cut through to the heart of church practice and doctrine with his *Sola scriptura* principle. It is at this point that the controversialists spoke mockingly of Luther's "Pauline theology" and the charge that "all heretics" take the path of scripture alone.¹³⁰ Despite the mockery, Luther's *Scripture alone* principle would become an unshakable foundation for his reforming critique and his alternative positions. The Scripture principle and the efficacy of the "word" are fundamental to his exhortation in the freedom tractate.¹³¹

¹²⁶ LW 31:374; WA 7:71.

¹²⁷ Referring to the condemnation of the Bohemian church and their "Hussite" views, for which Huss had been unjustly condemned and killed. It was later seen as a clear precedent for the disavowal of all thought in opposition to scholastic dogma. Leo X appeals to this precedent as a means of compelling Frederick the wise to capture and deliver Luther to Rome. See Letter from Leo to Frederick July 8, 1520, "(Luther is) moved by ambition to resuscitate the old heresies of the Wyclifites, Hussites and Bohemians". Smith, *Luther's Correspondence and other Contemporary Letters*, 334.

¹²⁸ Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents. Catholic Controversialists, 1518-1525*, 76.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 80.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 90.

¹³¹ LW 31:345; WA 7:50.

At a latter point this research will bring to light the expectation Luther had toward the enactment of genuine Christian freedom; that “being” (substance) determines the integrity of the act. Therefore, the phenomenon of acts—whether good deeds or mortal sins—can reveal something of the nature (integrity) of the heart (the inner person). The freedom tractate is crystal clear that freedom in lordship and servitude express themselves in certain ways.¹³² It is in this light that he sees the monstrosity of the Roman see and their disregard for the spiritual conscience. Its extravagant greed reveals the heart of one that is anti-Christ. When Luther was prompted to act against the poisonous work of the “goat at Leipzig”, he set about addressing the fundamental contradictions between his reading of Holy Scripture and with papal authority. Alfeld had championed the authority of the papal see over both the spiritual and temporal estates and claimed that this authority was divinely given. Luther pointed out that the papacy’s actions betrayed an authority of a more dubious and diabolical nature.¹³³ Simply by pointing out the magnificent money-making machine that had become the Roman church—and the lack of giving it had embraced—convinced Luther that it had long since dismissed its divine and biblical imperative. Luther launches into a well informed account of the many money-making institutions (indulgences being one of many) that exposed the greed and hunger of the papacy and its administrative imposition.¹³⁴

¹³² See exposition of Matthew 7:15-20; *LW* 31:362; *WA* 7:62. It is important to note that Luther has an inner to outer progression on how the soul affects acts. Yet the reversal is not true. Outward acts do not affect the heart (*coram Deo*). The only thing or being capable of external to internal efficacy is the word of God (*LW* 31:345).

¹³³ *LW* 39:59.

¹³⁴ This accounts for the fact that Luther was aware of the abuses of Rome and of Leo X himself. It highlights our point that where some see pastoral concern for Leo by Luther, we see a biting sarcasm directed—although in a veiled way—toward the ridiculous (bordering on absurd) nature of Pope Leo X.

The formal nature of the indulgence controversy was instigated by the bishop of Mainz's lust for power and his acquirement of eight bishop's pallium which cost an exorbitant amount. To pay for this power he asked for an indulgence, which Tetzel was to promote throughout his jurisdiction under an agreement with Leo that was seen apart of the indulgence directed to the building of the Basilica. Luther discerned here the false heteronomy of the clergy over the laity in the sense that the clergy were profiteering for personal gain and the laity were forced to submit to this state of affairs.

Part of the extensive money making machinery of the papacy, in addition to the St. Peter's indulgence, where the papal months, annates, pallium and the creation of multiple appointments, all of which were lucrative for the papacy. On July 31 Leo X created thirty one new cardinals for which he received 300,000 ducats,¹³⁵ and it is in this light that Luther saw the fulfillment of prophecy from Daniel (Daniel 11:39, 43) "The anti-christ must seize the treasures of the earth".¹³⁶ In light of this, the freedom tractate has a twofold edge. First, how the Christian may be free from the dominion of the anti-Christ policies of the papacy, and second, how a correct doctrine of freedom surpasses the papal justification of the controversialists.

On August 18, 1520 Luther published his *Address to the German Nobility*. Primarily in conflict with Prierias, Luther laments "and now farewell, unhappy, hopeless, blasphemous Rome".¹³⁷ Luther had come to the sound resolution that the state had to

¹³⁵ J. L. Allen, Jr. "Power, Secrecy Feed Conspiracy Theories in Vatican City", *National Catholic Reporter* 34.35 (1998): 1, estimates that Leo X spent over 5 million ducats during his 9 year papacy and left it another 1 million ducats in debt. Most of this money was spent on himself with unreserved opulence. For example he would frequently give 65 course meals in which nightingales or naked boys would appear out of puddings. In comparison to his predecessor, Leo created an extra 2150 saleable offices during his term. In comparison, Julian II's creation of 650 offices seems insignificant, yet at the time Julian was deemed "greedy" by his critics.

¹³⁶ *To the German Nobility*, LW 44:141.

¹³⁷ LW 44:118.

intervene in the ecclesiastical abuse of the church, especially since the Germans bore the burden of Leo's expensive habits.¹³⁸ He holds out a reward of sorts by stating that,

When necessity demands it, and the pope is an offence to Christendom, the first man who is able should, as a true member of the whole body, do what he can to bring about a truly free council.¹³⁹

In his appeal for such an intervention, Luther removes the walls that protected the papacy from criticism and reform. The first was the removal of the distinction between clergy and laity. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers placed the entire ecclesial system on the same level as the laity (1 Peter 2:9).¹⁴⁰ The laity was now encouraged to stand as sons and daughters, justified by faith on the basis of Scripture. This appealed to the German nobles for political as well as spiritual reasons, for the *Gravamina* movement had been aware of the unjust state of affairs in regard to its overwhelming financial responsibility to Rome.¹⁴¹ Second, Luther directly challenged the belief that the pope was the only one who could rightly interpret the Scriptures. The priesthood of all believers played a significant role in this as Luther reinterpreted the Petrine succession and the role of the office of the keys. Luther placed biblical interpretation into the hands of the whole church. In doing this Luther was challenged by the papists with the threat that if the scripture were to be placed into the hands of the people, then it would lead directly to increased laxity and immorality. It can be stated

¹³⁸ LW 44:120.

¹³⁹ LW 44:121.

¹⁴⁰ LW 44:127.

¹⁴¹ The *Gravamina nationis Germanicae*, was a list of abuses presented to every diet in the German empire. It was particularly focused on the Roman church where the papacy was seen as an enemy for robbing the German nation of its wealth, freedom and dignity. See Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to his Life and Work* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 10, 127. The burden placed on the German people by the papacy was very heavy and out of proportion to other territories, especially during the papal rule of Leo X.

though that the level of laxity and immorality at the time under the papacy, was at a particularly immoral peak.¹⁴² Third, Luther demolished the understanding that the pope had sole right and authority over church councils. With this authority the pope could dismiss any challenge by a council if it should actually take the risk of convening without his approval.

Luther appeals to the nobility with the accusation that the papacy has cunningly stolen “our” three rods from us that they may go unpunished.¹⁴³ They have therefore taken away our freedom without any proof from Scripture.¹⁴⁴ “We ought not let the Spirit of freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17) to be frightened off by the fabrication of the popes”.¹⁴⁵ Against Prierias’ claim for papistic monarchy and dominion, Luther states that the “pope’s office should be nothing else but to weep and pray for Christendom and to set an example of utter humility”¹⁴⁶ a theme that plays a major role in the freedom tractates discussion of servanthood and the outer man.¹⁴⁷ A woodcut from this time reflects the problem Luther had with the papacy’s doctrines of freedom. One side of the woodcut pictures Christ washing the disciple’s feet, and on the other, the pope on his magnificent throne is having his feet kissed by the kings and princes of the earth.

After Luther demolishes the walls of papal self-protection, he drives at its heart, its sacrificial system. Luther wrote his *Prelude to the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* between four to six

¹⁴² The emphasis given to the free interpretation of the Scriptures did lead to dramatic problems and will be addressed in relation to the radical reform movement. It reveals, what will become, the *Danger of Freedom*.

¹⁴³ LW 44:126.

¹⁴⁴ LW 44:133.

¹⁴⁵ LW 44:135.

¹⁴⁶ LW 44:140.

¹⁴⁷ An interesting sentiment in light of the fact that when an assassination attempt on Leo failed, he hired an assassin himself to exact revenge for the attempt on his life. Allen, “Power, Secrecy Feed Conspiracy Theories in Vatican City”. Ironical given that Leo deemed himself “servant of servants”.

weeks before his freedom tractate.¹⁴⁸ In this work Luther exposes three main points of slavery imposed by the Roman church. First, is its withholding of the cup from the laity, second, the doctrine of transubstantiation, and third, the Mass as a sacrifice. In his critique of the sacramental system he is lenient toward all nonessentials, but inexorable toward everything truly essential, that is, scriptural.¹⁴⁹ Erasmus plainly saw that after the publication of this work the breach with Rome was irreparable.¹⁵⁰ For Luther, the denial of the cup for the laity was wicked, wicked in the sense that it had become an unscriptural law that should have been a matter of free choice and open to discussion. On the basis of his understanding of patience and the weaker brother, Luther proposed that the sacrament of both kinds be open to individual choice, yet for those that forbid the choice nothing is left for them but wrath.¹⁵¹

If they wrest this right from the laity and deny it to them by force, they are tyrants; but the laity are without fault whether they lack one kind or both kinds.¹⁵²

This understanding of choice and force will become more prominent when we discuss Luther's theology of freedom at work in the struggle with the radical reformers. It is helpful to recognize here the early development of the *sine vi sed verbo* which will play a major role in 1522 and 1525.

¹⁴⁸ An interesting irony attached to the background of this work is that when Henry VIII received this work he wrote a book in opposition to it. The book so pleased the pope that he granted ten years indulgence to all who read it (LW 36:9). An interesting illustration justifying Luther's judgment on the pope's flippant manhandling of forgiveness.

¹⁴⁹ LW 36:7. The principle of what is essential and non-essential is well developed and brought to bear on the Wittenberg Iconoclastic crisis of 1522. See *The Eight Wittenberg Sermons*, LW 51:70-100.

¹⁵⁰ LW 36:9.

¹⁵¹ LW 36:27.

¹⁵² LW 36:27.

The problem with transubstantiation is rooted in the denial of the word of promise to the laity. Luther holds the doctrine itself to be a matter of choice¹⁵³ but states his own position against transubstantiation, for it is a figment of the mind that rests neither on the Scripture or reason.¹⁵⁴ The denial of the word of promise stems from the practice of the day where the priest uttered the words of institution in whispers and in high Latin. Behind the doctrine of transubstantiation is a philosophical edifice that speaks of accidents and the like that try to rationalize the actual change from bread and wine into flesh and blood. The communion service was therefore dependent on the papal system and disregarded simple, liberating faith. For Luther, both natures are simply there in their entirety, as per Christ.¹⁵⁵

The Mass as sacrifice is the practice which most grieved Luther and his concepts of liberating reform. Because of the *Ex opera operato*, the mass had been turned into mere merchandise, a market, and a profit-making business.¹⁵⁶ One did not even have to be present at the service to acquire the benefits. One was not even questioned about belief or the lack of it. In fact if you were wealthy enough you could pay in advance and have the priest say mass for you, your family and your deceased relatives without the exercise of, or experience of faith. Luther directly challenged this abuse on the ground that the word of God and his sacramental grace are promises. They are gifts. How then can we offer God anything in regard to his provision except the response of faith? This promise of faith is for Luther a personal and experiential affair,

Therefore, let this irrefutable truth stand fast: where there is a divine promise, there everyone must stand on his own feet, his own

¹⁵³ LW 36:30.

¹⁵⁴ LW 36:31.

¹⁵⁵ LW 36:35.

¹⁵⁶ LW 36:35.

personal faith is demanded; he will give an account for himself and bear his own load (Galatians 6:5).¹⁵⁷

For Luther the doctrine and reality of baptism is the key foundational presupposition to denying the sacrificial mass. He states thankfully that this doctrine had been hardly touched or abused by the papacy, yet needs to outline his understanding of baptism in relation to the Roman sacrificial system.¹⁵⁸ For Luther the enslaving practice of the sacrificial mass placed the laity at the mercy of the Romanist clergy and ultimately gave authority to the pope. The freedom bestowed by baptism is for Luther the real source of Christian dependence and freedom of the conscience, because it does away with the "second plank" penitential system that gave the papacy so much of its control over the conscience of the laity.

Baptism is a life time promise, to be nourished and strengthened until death by continual remembrance. Therefore, when we rise from our sins and repent, we are merely returning to the power and the faith of baptism from which we fell.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ LW 36:49.

¹⁵⁸ The lack of polemical controversy over the doctrine of baptism will presuppose our contention that for Luther it was taken as a given in his freedom tractate. It also has a polemical edge in that he did not want to give the controversialists room to appeal to baptism without recognizing the importance of faith alone. There is an unmistakable lack of explicit baptismal ontology in the freedom tractate that leaves the work as a whole underdeveloped, though underdeveloped for a reason. It will be our intention to bring this important aspect into the discussion of freedom according to Luther.

¹⁵⁹ LW 36:59. In regard to Luther's *reditus baptismus* it is perplexing to read that Althaus has mistakenly created a division between Luther and Paul over the nature of baptism. Althaus thinks Paul has only a past tense view of baptism and that the present continuous and eschatological view of Luther is incorrect. 'I can find no single passage in Luther corresponding to Paul's statement that we have died with Christ in Baptism. See Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 357. Kleinig easily dispatches with Althaus' errant view (J. Kleinig personal e-mail dated

This theology stood against the stranglehold the Roman system had over excommunication and its political and economic leverage. For Luther says,

You see how rich a Christian is, that is, one who has been baptized! Even if he would, he could not lose his salvation, however much he sinned, unless he refused to believe.¹⁶⁰

This understanding of baptismal freedom stood directly against the papal claim to discern a person's salvation or condemnation according to the papal law's systematizing of penance and satisfaction. The liberation of conscience before the mountainous edifice of papal law and intimidation is a decisive ontological presupposition for Luther and his reforming theology. It cuts through the synthetic compounding of laws and loopholes that bind the conscience. Luther's analytical methodology provides a simple and profound freedom that states that "the baptismal vow is the only vow".¹⁶¹ There is no "second plank".¹⁶² In one broad sweep Luther clears the decks of all unnecessary law and bondage and places baptismal union with Christ as the foundation for a life of genuine Christian freedom. Against the power of this restatement of biblical theology, the controversialists would founder upon the question of papal or scriptural authority.

Baptism as the Concrete Ground of Freedom

The Babylonian Captivity was published a month before *The Freedom Tractate*. In it Luther exposes the sacramental system of the Roman church to a scathing critique. One ray of hope shines through when he comes to consider baptism.

21/6/2007). See also T. R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 1998), 298-342.

¹⁶⁰ LW 36:60.

¹⁶¹ LW 36:75.

¹⁶² As per Jerome, see J. D. Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1994), 134-137. See also LW 36:60-62.

Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to the riches of his mercy (Ephesians 1:3, 7) has preserved in his church this sacrament (baptism) at least, untouched and untainted by the ordinances of men, and has made it free to all nations and classes of mankind and has not permitted it to be oppressed by the filthy and godless monsters of greed and superstition.¹⁶³

Luther here is referring to infant baptism in the polemical context against those filthy and godless monsters—the same monsters mentioned in the letter to Leo X accompanying the *Freedom Tractate*.¹⁶⁴ Luther is not so confident in the case of adult baptism though, for he sees it as being “quenched by Satan in adults who do not call to mind their own baptism ... it has been placed in competition with works”.¹⁶⁵ Baptism and its relationship to the faith vs. works battle stands as one of the centerpieces of Luther's arsenal against the controversialists and is a presuppositional framework for his development of Christian liberty in the *Freedom Tractate*.

When Luther came to frame his understanding of baptismal freedom in the tractate, it is clear that it had been well developed in his polemical writings during 1520. The freedom tractate is largely about the relationship of faith and works with faith being mentioned 161 times and works 189 times in contrast to freedom 18 times and servitude 15. At the core of Luther's freedom tractate, in his effort to place faith and works in their right relationship, he exposes a profound understanding of Christian being. He states with great precision that what a Christian is will conform to what a Christian will do. At the beginning of the Latin and German of the freedom tractate Luther

¹⁶³ LW 36:57.

¹⁶⁴ “Living among the monsters of this age with whom I am now for the third year waging war, I am compelled occasionally to look up to you, Leo, most blessed father, and to think of you. Indeed, since you are occasionally regarded as the sole cause of my warfare, I cannot help thinking of you” (LW 31:334).

¹⁶⁵ LW 36:58.

builds on this very understanding. He states that his intention is to reveal thoroughly what a Christian *is*. His famous twofold thesis on freedom is a statement on Christian ontology, what a Christian is,

A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.¹⁶⁶

It is a complex of diversity that goes beyond the normal twofold schema, for a Christian is a free lord and a dutiful servant, yet he/she is also spiritual and bodily, this is what a Christian is.¹⁶⁷ It speaks of a fourfold relationship that includes harmony: lord-servant¹⁶⁸ and conflict: inner-outer.¹⁶⁹ It is our contention that this ontological state of being is in fact derived from Luther's baptismal theology. What seems to stand against this thesis is the fact that baptism is only explicitly mentioned once in the

¹⁶⁶ LW 31:344; WA 7:49.

¹⁶⁷ LW 31:344; WA 7:50.

¹⁶⁸ The reason we see the lord-servant relationship as a harmony is because it is an imputed state of being. It is what a Christian is as specifically defined in Luther's freedom thesis. It therefore belongs to the spiritual person. Lordship and servanthood are not in conflict, otherwise Luther's whole programme of freedom falls to bits. The conflict, *Anfechtung*, comes when the new person as a spiritual lord and servant come to battle the flesh nature of the old person (LW 31:344). This is taken up by Luther in relation to his exposition and application of Galatians 5:17 (LW 31:344). He also appeals to the twofold nature of Christ in Philippians 2:6-7. The form of a servant is not seen as a conflict of nature within Jesus. The new life of the Christian is one of lordship and servanthood in regard to its state of being. As the spirit and word move the Christian in conformity with Christ to resist the flesh nature, the lord-servant paradox will express itself in worship and acts of love. If the lord-servant relationship were to be seen as an antithesis, then the struggle between sonship (perfect lords) and servanthood (perceived as the negative) would imply that servanthood is killed off with the flesh nature in the struggle for the spirit filled life. This is not what Luther is driving at in the freedom tractate. He sees the superabundance of faith dominating the flesh nature to the point that lordship and servanthood become active in sacrificial love.

¹⁶⁹ LW 31:350; WA 7:50.

whole of the tractate.¹⁷⁰ Yet most of the tractate is taken up with what a Christian is. For example the three powers of faith in the section dedicated to the inner life of a Christian speak of the profound ontological union, honor and freedom that come from faith.

From what has been said it is easy to see from what source faith derives such great power and why a good work or all good works together cannot equal it. No good work can rely upon the Word of God or live in the soul, for faith alone and the Word of God rule in the soul. Just as the heated iron glows like fire because of the union of fire with it, so the Word imparts its qualities to the soul.¹⁷¹

When, however, God sees that we consider him truth and by the faith of our heart pay him the great honor which is due him, he does us that great honor of considering us truthful and righteous for the sake of our faith. Faith works truth and righteousness by giving God what belongs to him. Therefore God in turn glorifies our righteousness.¹⁷²

The third incomparable benefit of faith is that it unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. By this mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul become one flesh (Ephesians 5:31–32).¹⁷³

These three passages reflect the baptismal change in a Christian's ontological being. First, faith affects the condition of the soul. Second, God imputes righteousness and third, the soul is united in royal marriage.

The section on the outer life of works that flow from righteousness is derived specifically from Luther's understanding of the superabundance of union with Christ; this union is de-

¹⁷⁰ LW 31:347; WA 7:52.

¹⁷¹ LW 31:349; WA 7:53.

¹⁷² LW 31:351; WA 7:54.

¹⁷³ LW 31:351; WA 7:54.

fined in the *Freedom Tractate* as the faith-baptism relationship.¹⁷⁴ It is my opinion that the lack of a more explicit baptismal theology—as opposed to Luther’s previous writings of 1520—in the tractate, is due to the polemical nature of this writing with the Roman controversialists. For Luther already had at this point a high regard for efficacious nature of baptism, a regard that continued to grow exponentially until his death.

In *The Babylonian Captivity* Luther has already identified one of the poles in his struggle with the defenders of papal supremacy as being the correct recognition and honor paid to the baptismal state of being. Luther says that the controversialists,

With such wicked teaching they delude the world, and not only take captive, but altogether destroy the sacrament of baptism, in which the chief glory of our conscience consists.¹⁷⁵

The papal Magesterium had dogmatized Jerome’s idea of penance as a “second plank” to be travelled in the Christian life and that baptism was relegated to a past event of no real present significance. The papacy could therefore enslave its constituents to a lifetime of being bound to their penitential system. For Luther, a return to a true understanding of baptism does away with the idea of a “second plank” altogether and he states that the first plank or the ship of baptism is sound and seaworthy and in no need of other devices.

Trigg says that “Where baptism is lacking in Luther’s earlier writings it must be assumed”.¹⁷⁶ We agree with Trigg on this point, but why? Jetter in Trigg states he can find no external factor to explain the absence of Luther’s baptismal theology.¹⁷⁷ He

¹⁷⁴ “Therefore true faith in Christ is a treasure beyond comparison which brings with it complete salvation and saves man from every evil, as Christ says in the last chapter of Mark (16:16): ‘He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned’”. See *LW* 31:347.

¹⁷⁵ *LW* 36:60.

¹⁷⁶ Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther*, 78.

¹⁷⁷ Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther*, 124.

lists four tentative possibilities based around Luther's theological upbringing.¹⁷⁸ Trigg however says there are three real possibilities for the absence of explicit baptismal references, first, that Luther was conscious or unconscious about downgrading it in his theological hierarchy¹⁷⁹, second, that baptism is non-controversial and marginalized not because it is peripheral but because it had not yet been questioned¹⁸⁰ and third that Luther's reverence for baptism produced hesitation in making it an object of questioning and debate.¹⁸¹ Trigg has a preference for number two.¹⁸² Number three is obviously wrong; for Luther's reverence for things made him all the more vocal if they were being abused.¹⁸³ Trigg's preference for number two is in my understanding incorrect, because *The Babylonian Captivity* had already—prior to the tractate—brought forward Luther's struggle against the abuse of baptism and laid the responsibility for that abuse directly at the controversialist's (the filthy monsters) feet.¹⁸⁴

However, it is, therefore, my contention that the explicit lack of Luther's baptismal theology in the *Freedom Tractate* is a conscious act on his part (Trigg's number one). Luther does not want to concede polemical ground before the controversialists—with their abuse of the works-faith issue by an appeal to

¹⁷⁸ According to Jetter they are first, that Luther was a nominalist and due to the *potentia ordinata*, could in no way diminish the sacramental tradition; second, that German mysticism is a possible cause of devaluation of the sacraments in the young Luther; third, a disregard for baptism due to the influence of the Brothers of the Common life; and fourth the influence of Luther's confessor and vicar-general, Staupitz. See Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther*, 124-128.

¹⁷⁹ Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther*, 131.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁸³ "Speaking now in behalf of the church's liberty and the glory of baptism, I feel myself duty bound to set forth publicly the counsel I learned under the Spirit's guidance" (LW 36:77).

¹⁸⁴ LW 36:60.

the fact that they also have been baptized and therefore can precede on the basis of a “second plank” theology that majors on penance over against existential faith. That they also have the same benefits and gifts imputed to them through baptism without the need for an active faith. The over abundance of the faith-works issue throughout the tractate on freedom gives clear indication that the matter of faith is still the major point of contention in Luther’s battle against a system that enslaves through its dependence on its penitential system at the expense of the true state of Christian being. Luther had said in the *Babylonian Captivity* that,

Our whole life should be baptism, and the fulfilling of the sign or sacrament of baptism, since we have been set free from all else and given over to baptism alone, that is to death and resurrection.¹⁸⁵

By the time Luther wrote the freedom tractate he was fully aware that to relegate baptism to the past and not have it as a preset continuous factor in the life of a Christian was to undermine the gospel. For Luther there is a direct correlation between baptism and the present-continuous nature of Christian freedom.¹⁸⁶

Above it was stated that the Roman Catholic penitential system had taken spiritual and temporal authoritative control over the whole of human life—from birth to the grave. Luther had stated emphatically—prior to 1520—that the whole of Christian life should be controlled by baptism and the implications for

¹⁸⁵ LW 36:70. The vehemence of his language in 1520 is a sign of a recent discovery of truth, which a few months earlier was only half perceived—the freedom of the sinner justified by God’s grace in Christ is a baptismal freedom. See Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther*, 149.

¹⁸⁶ Trigg says of Luther’s baptismal belief that, “to marginalize baptism by confining it to the past is to destroy the gospel, because the gospel of forgiveness through faith in Christ and the covenant of baptism are one and the same thing”. See Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther*, 149.

that life.¹⁸⁷ The reason we propose for the lack of explicit baptismal reference in the freedom tractate is what we consider to be a profound attack on the papal system in his writing of the freedom tractate in the manner that he does. Although Luther could say in his latter period that God is able to save without baptism, this saying must be seen in relation to how Luther can make distinctions within Christian necessities, "but in the church we must judge and teach, in accordance with God's ordered power, that without baptism no one is saved".¹⁸⁸ This teaching of Luther's stands directly against the "second plank" theology of the Roman theologians, but he did not want to guide the controversialists back to the saving efficacy of baptism without first destroying the "second plank" and reinstating justification by faith as the primary and incontestable necessity for Christian salvific freedom. He therefore refrained from stating explicit baptismal reference in favor of continuing to develop his faith-works reform.

Implied Baptism

There is a compelling correspondence in what Luther says about the power of faith in the *Freedom Tractate* and the significance of baptism. At the beginning of the tractate Luther points out a fourfold distinction in the Christian and when he moves to the more obvious aspect of this state of being, he focuses on the twofold nature of people.¹⁸⁹ In the conflict between the spirit and the flesh (Galatians 5:17) it is what the new person is and

¹⁸⁷ Luther's 1519 *Holy Sacrament of Baptism*, "Therefore the life of a Christian, from baptism to grave, in nothing else than the beginning of a blessed death" (LW 35:31). Schlink adds, "The command to walk in the newness of life does not abrogate the new life which God has created through Baptism, but it asks for the Yea of the baptized to this divine deed. In none of (the) imperatives does God demand anything different from what He has already bestowed in Baptism". See E. Schlink, *The Doctrine of Baptism* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 55.

¹⁸⁸ LW 3:274.

¹⁸⁹ LW 31:344; WA 7:50.

is becoming and will eventually be, that serves as the blueprint for what conformity to Christ and the service to the neighbor look like for Luther. His *simul iustus et peccator* is derived directly from his now/not yet baptismal eschatology with which he had already developed prior to 1520.¹⁹⁰

The acknowledgement of Luther's doctrine of sin—fundamental to Luther's view of freedom—at the front of and woven throughout the *Freedom Tractate*, stands against the idea held by the papacy that innate concupiscence was not really sin.

Let us start, however, with something more remote from our subject, but more obvious. Man has a twofold nature, a spiritual and a bodily one. According to the spiritual nature, which men refer to as the soul, he is called a spiritual, inner, or new man. According to the bodily nature, which men refer to as flesh, he is called a carnal, outward, or old man, of whom the Apostle writes in II Corinthians 4:(16), "Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day". Because of this diversity of nature the Scriptures assert contradictory things concerning the same man, since these two men in the same man contradict each other, "for the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh", according to Galatians 5:(17).¹⁹¹

The Roman view—that *mortals interiora* had no salvific implications after baptism—was eventually made into a decree in 1546 at the council of Trent. It basically posited that there was no such thing as internal sin and sharply focused on the external nature of sinful acts. Luther recognized in this a foundational collapse of a genuinely scriptural theological system. With this over-realized eschatology, the papacy could determine what

¹⁹⁰ "These people err greatly who think that through baptism they have become wholly pure. They go about in their ignorance and do not slay their sin. They simply persist in it, and so make baptism of no effect. They continue to rely on a few external works". See Luther's 1519, *Holy Sacrament of Baptism*, LW 35:36.

¹⁹¹ LW 31:344; WA 7:50.

was and was not actual sin. In doing so it did away with inner *Anfechtung*, which intentionally reveals God's active presence against the flesh nature in the divine act of *conformitas Christi*. Luther says from the outset of his *Freedom Tractate* that,

Many people have considered Christian faith an easy thing, and not a few have given it a place among the virtues. They do this because they have not experienced it and have never tasted the great strength there is in faith. It is impossible to write well about it or to understand what has been written about it unless one has at one time or another experienced the courage which faith gives a man when trials oppress him.¹⁹²

At this early stage, Luther sees that the "only" sure and concrete form of faith in this now/not yet tension—for the struggle between spirit and flesh—is the concrete and existential sacramental observance of baptism. For Luther it is not that we do not sin but that sin and its guilt are no longer imputed to the faithful.¹⁹³ We are freed spiritually inside. The inner man is un-touchable by the external practices of the church.¹⁹⁴ Luther's developed understanding of the declarative and factitive signi-

¹⁹² LW 31:343; WA 7:49.

¹⁹³ Luther held this view throughout his career "After baptism original sin is like a wound which has begun to heal ... it remains in the baptized until their death, although it is in the process of being rooted out. It is rendered harmless, and so it cannot accuse or condemn us". See *Table Talk*, 1531, LW 54:20.

¹⁹⁴ At the time Luther wrote the freedom tractate, the theology contained within it is reflected in his second Psalms lectures at the time. His exposition of Psalm One reflects a direct correlation between his teaching and writing. His emphasis on the experience of faith in the opening of the tractate (LW 31:343) is reflected in his treatment of Psalm 1:3 "I have said that the blessedness of this man is hidden in the spirit, i.e. in God, so that it cannot be known except through faith or experience". See LW 14:298. The same can be said for his use of analogy to express the relationship between being and act. See LW 31:360-361. See also Luther's exposition of Psalm One "A tree represents a man, a good tree a good man, and a bad tree an evil man; as also Christ teaches (Matthew 7:17ff)". See *Operationes Psalmos*, LW 14:299, Psalm 1:3.

ficance of sacramental baptism is paralleled by the antithetical tension between the spirit and flesh in the freedom tractate,

We will take our ease and do no works and be content with faith. I answer: not so, you wicked men, not so. That would indeed be proper if we were wholly inner and perfectly spiritual men. But such we shall be only at the last day, the day of the resurrection of the dead. As long as we live in the flesh we only begin to make some progress in that which shall be perfected in the future life. For this reason the Apostle in Romans 8(:23) calls all that we attain in this life “the first fruits of the Spirit” because we shall indeed receive the greater portion, even the fullness of the Spirit, in the future. This is the place to assert that which was said above, namely, that a Christian is the servant of all and made subject to all. Insofar as he is free he does no works, but insofar as he is a servant he does all kinds of works. How this is possible we shall see.¹⁹⁵

The present-continuous significance of baptism is that the old man is killed (drowned) and the new man is raised daily. This is explicitly stated in the *Freedom Tractate* in that the old nature is wasting away and the inner nature is being renewed every day.¹⁹⁶ The tractate reflects Luther’s conviction about the daily return to baptism (*reditus ad baptismus*). It is in this return to the baptismal vow that God creates what is not found. It is in this struggle between flesh and spirit that baptism stands as a bulwark for the free conscience and defines genuine cruciform struggle.

In Luther’s discussion on what is able to affect the inner man and the total inability of external things or works to affect the state of the inner, we may ask the question of the sacramental use of baptism, is it not just another external thing? The answer is simply, no, it is not. Here we see another profound connection between baptism and freedom for Luther. As he sets up his discussion of the threefold power of faith he lays the foundation for what follows on the word of God. “One thing and only

¹⁹⁵ LW 31:358; WA 7:59.

¹⁹⁶ LW 31:344; WA 7:50.

one thing, is necessary for the Christian life, righteousness and freedom. That one thing is the most holy word of God".¹⁹⁷ If the soul has the word of God it needs nothing more.¹⁹⁸ But it is precisely the word of God, in faith, that affects baptism. As Luther says prior to 1520,

Yet only by lack of faith in its operation is the benefit of baptism cancelled out. Faith in turn, removes the hindrance to the operation of baptism. Thus everything depends on faith.¹⁹⁹

It is in this connection that Luther would fight against the enthusiasts who held to a scholastic view of baptism, which denied its present-continuous, eschatological nature, and deemed it to be a purely past-historical and outward act. For Luther it is the word that creates what it does not find and defines the relationship between faith, water and the sacramental implications.²⁰⁰

Luther's threefold power of faith can be directly related to a baptismal state of being, for in baptism, this union is given a concrete grounding. The first power of faith saves without works and adopts into the family of God.²⁰¹ It is the word of God that effects this adoption. The second power of faith is the

¹⁹⁷ LW 31:345; WA 7:50.

¹⁹⁸ LW 31:345; WA 7:51.

¹⁹⁹ LW 35:38.

²⁰⁰ Luther has a magnificent trust in the efficacy of the word and its ability to create. As early as 1518 at the Heidelberg Disputation this concrete reformation principle is given precise definition: *Die Liebe Gottes findet nicht, sondern schafft, was ihr liebenswerth ist; die Liebe des Menschen aber entsteht aus dem, was ihr liebenswerth ist*, Walch 2, 18-39. The love of God does not find but creates that which is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through that which is pleasing to it (LW 31:41). The word that creates is intrinsic to Luther's understanding of the relationship between faith, water and word. This is why he can be more positively disposed toward baptismal immersion rather than sprinkling, yet hold that the form the sacramental act takes is open to free choice because of the word that creates.

²⁰¹ LW 31:345; WA 7:50.

reciprocal effect of honor.²⁰² As we honor God in faith so he honors us as children.²⁰³ In a sense, the faith and trust a Christian exercises in the return to baptism and the devotion to the single vow of baptism, reflects the respect one pays God in the appeal to baptism in the struggle of life between the Spirit and the flesh. Luther, when continuously pressed into unbelief and despair, appealed to the concrete act of baptism (*vita passiva*). The third power of faith and possibly the most profound for Luther is the power of marital union.²⁰⁴ In faith, what is Christ's becomes the sinner's, and what is the sinner's becomes Christ's. This is the heart of baptismal freedom.

Isn't this now, nothing but a joyous state of affairs, when the rich, noble, godly bridegroom takes the poor, despised, evil whore in marriage, to rid her of all her wickedness and adorn her with all good? It is now not possible for sin to condemn her, for they now lie in Christ and are devoured by him.²⁰⁵

This statement in the freedom tractate reflects what Luther says happens sacramentally at baptism. We are drowned in Christ and Christ is born in us. One of the insightful understandings of Luther's baptismal theology is that it stands against pietistic imitation and complies with the idea that conformity for the new person is actually Christ in us. It is the receptive (*vita passiva*) posture before the God that creates. It stands against works piety, for the life lived in the Spirit against the flesh-nature is the conforming to the presence of Christ in Spirit in us. The wealth of this exchange compels one to serve the neighbor with complete disregard for oneself (over against papal greed) because in this new relationship we have all good things, for all good things are Christ's.²⁰⁶

²⁰² LW 31:350; WA 7:53, 54.

²⁰³ LW 31:351; WA 7:54.

²⁰⁴ LW 31:351; WA 7:54.

²⁰⁵ LW 31:352; WA 7:55.

²⁰⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:14 "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died."

Why should I not therefore freely, joyfully, with all my heart, and with an eager will do all things which I know are pleasing and acceptable to such a Father who has overwhelmed me with his inestimable riches? I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ.²⁰⁷

A further explication of this is that Luther says we are now in fact kings and priests. The acts that flow from this state of being are a profound freedom in service. One does righteous works for one is a free lord and servant. It is in his/her very nature to express the lord-servant paradox for it is part of the new state of being. The new state of being is the actual taking up of residence by Christ "in the Spirit" within the baptized life.²⁰⁸ This state of being is given precise definition in the outer-man section of the tractate's discussion on "being" as the source of genuine act. Luther uses a series of analogies to demonstrate how "being" gives rise to act. And in that sense, this fundamental understanding of "being" has Luther convinced that the papacy—due to its tyrannical acts—has a devious state of being, even to the point of considering that state antichrist. As Luther says with his analogies, "it is always necessary that the substance or person himself be good before there can be any good works, and that good works follow and proceed from the good person, as Christ also says, 'A good tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit'".²⁰⁹

The analogies progress through a discussion of Adam and Eve, the office of Bishop, the tree and its fruit and of trades to clearly show how "being" precedes "act". Baptism theology has

²⁰⁷ LW 31:367; WA 7:65.

²⁰⁸ This realization by Luther that the new person in the Christian is actually Christ is a radical pre-emptive theological block to works righteousness. How can we boast of our works if they are actually Christ's works working through us? We must, therefore, boast of Christ.

²⁰⁹ Matthew 7:18; LW 31:361; WA 7:61.

its firm place here because it makes much of the fact that both being and act for the Christian are works of the creator acting upon his creature.²¹⁰ The controversialists are “blind”²¹¹ if they look to their laws and doctrines about works. “Those that teach works over against baptismal faith are Leviathan”.²¹² They are wicked teachers that have destroyed countless men.²¹³ This language is far from conciliatory and reflects the tractate’s nuanced polemical edge. Luther has found the middle course²¹⁴, and his freedom tractate has given a precise presentation of the insight he has into the human condition and the freedom given it in Christ, the Lord of the *theodidacti*,

Therefore there is need of the prayer that the Lord may give us and make us *theodidacti*, that is, those taught by God (John 6:45), and himself, as he has promised, write his law in our hearts; otherwise there is no hope for us.²¹⁵

Conclusion

An historical and theological context to Luther’s 1520 *Freedom Tractate* provides the reader-interpreter with a solid basis for examination of Luther’s intentional thought process in regard to how he develops a polemical stance on the basis of the new ontology of Christian freedom. It seems to be certain, in our opinion, that Hamm’s distinction between the personal and transpersonal engagement with Leo X, by Luther, is correct. However, we have nuanced this personal-pastoral perspective by highlighting that it is possible to read a certain level of sarcasm into Luther’s congeniality toward Leo X. At the transpersonal level—the polemic directed toward the papal controversialists—Luther is scathing and heavy handed in both the Open

²¹⁰ *Heidelberg Disputation*, thesis 28, LW 31:41.

²¹¹ LW 31:362; WA 7:63.

²¹² LW 31:363; WA 7:63, twisting serpents, see Isaiah 27:1.

²¹³ LW 31:363; WA 7:63.

²¹⁴ LW 31:372; WA 7:70.

²¹⁵ LW 31:376; WA 7:73.

Letter to Pope Leo X and throughout the *Freedom Tractate*. In the *Freedom Tractate* we see a comprehensive, early formulation of evangelical Christian freedom over against the false heteronomy of the Roman curia—in a negative sense—on the one hand and an insightful exposition of the implications of freedom—in a positive sense—on the other. This positive and negative inter-relationship is clearly defined throughout the *Freedom Tractate* using the text/anti-text paradigm described by Rieger.

Where Luther has been criticized for an underdevelopment of certain themes in his exposition of freedom, I have contended for a conscious attempt by Luther to emphasize certain points, at the explicit expense of others, for polemical reasons. This chapter has also developed the view that, although baptism is not explicit in the freedom tractate, it underpins the whole work implicitly and parallels the first major section in the tractate devoted to the ontological reconfiguration of the inner nature, by the efficacious word of God.²¹⁶ The relationship between the ontological state of being and the deeds that flow from that state, find their genesis for Luther, in baptismal faith. One of the profound theological discoveries made by Luther during the year 1520 was the threefold schema intrinsic to baptismal freedom. The past reality of baptism in Christ, the present-continuous nature of baptism as a posture of humility in the *vita passiva*, and the eschatological hope that we have—as we are comforted in freedom of conscience—that we will pass through death into the resurrection of eternal life. This chapter has argued that Luther deliberately avoided using the concrete historical act of baptism in his polemics with the papists because of the priority he wanted to give to the word of faith, and the experience of such faith.

For the faithful, baptism is a concrete sign of the freedom we have been given in the form of the lord-servant nature of spiritual union with Christ. It defies scholasticisms cognitive-theoretical mental gymnastics and comforts the believer with

²¹⁶ See under “first power of faith” in LW 31:344-350.

the concrete fact that baptismal faith in Christ is perfect and conducive to utter salvific certainty (Heilsgewißheit). One simply needs to return to this fact over and over again to receive the comfort of salvation and in this simple movement Luther does away with the entire machinery of “second plank” theology that drove the papacy’s financial endeavors. The freedom this implies is staggering. When pushed to despair by the Roman insistence on works-righteousness, Luther experienced profound comfort in the baptismal promise. In the sense we have argued for, it lays the present-continuous foundation for examining the dialectical nature of Luther’s lord-servant ontology; the subject of our following chapter.

Luther’s baptism song:

The eye alone sees the water
How it is poured by men,
Faith alone understands the power
of the blood of Jesus Christ.

And it is for him a red flood
colored by Christ’s blood,
that heals all the injuries
inherited from Adam,
and also committed by ourselves.²¹⁷

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²¹⁷ H. Sasse, *In Statu Confessionis* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlaghaus, 1996), 95 (my translation).

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David: King, Prophet, Repentant Sinner. Martin Luther's Image of the Son of Jesse

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ABSTRACT. In his preaching and exegetical lectures Martin Luther frequently employed biblical figures as examples of God's action of calling people to repentance and showing them his mercy, and he also used these figures as models for Christian living. In his writings King David appears as the author of psalms that proclaim God's Word and lead his people in praise; an ancestor of Messiah; a classical example of repentance in 2 Samuel 11-12 and Psalm 51; a model for Christian living as a ruler (Psalm 82); an instructor in how to read the Bible (especially in Psalm 119). Luther aimed at cultivating the Christian life of repentance, trust in Christ, David's descendent, and obedience to God's commands and calling by retelling in summary form elements of David's life.

KEY WORDS: Martin Luther, David, narrative, use of repentance (David as example), mirror of princes (David as model ruler)

Martin Luther believed that "the whole life of the Christian is a life of repentance", as he wrote in the first of his *Ninety-five Theses on Indulgences* of 1517.¹ Scholars debate what the words meant in 1517,² but by 1529 he wrote clearly in his *Small Catech-*

¹ WA 1:233, 10-11, LW 31:25.

² Volker Leppin, "'Omnem vitam fidelium penitentiam esse voluit', Zur Aufnahme mystischer Tradition in Luthers erster Ablassthese", *Archiv für Reformationgeschichte* 93 (2003): 7-25, demonstrates that in 1517 Luther was echoing the thirteenth century theologian Johannes Tauler's conviction re-

ism, as he explained how God's baptismal action is repeated in daily repentance, that "the old creature in us with all sins and evil desires is ... drowned and dies through daily contrition and repentance, and on the other hand a new person ... comes forth and rises up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever".³ Luther believed that God's Word actually conveys his power into the lives of his people (Romans 1:17) and that in, its oral, written, and sacramental forms, the gospel of Jesus Christ actually accomplishes God's will in recreating sinners into children of God.⁴

Luther also took very seriously the continuation of sin and evil in the lives of the baptized. Because he did so, he cultivated daily repentance as the believer's way of life. In this kind of life God's prescriptions for the way his children were designed to live—Luther designated this code for human performance as "law"—bring his people to sorrow over their sin, so that they cling to God's word of promise that he would save his people through the atoning work of Jesus Christ—Luther designated this promise in Christ as "gospel". In this way God the Holy Spirit daily draws people away from their sinfulness to himself and into a life of service and love toward him and his creation. God has designed this life, according to Luther, to serve God, above all through hearing and study of his Word as well as praise to his name, and to serve the neighbor, in the context of

garding the continuing necessity of humbling oneself before God; cf. Martin Brecht's response, "Luthers neues Verständnis der Buße und die reformatorische Entdeckung", *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 101 (2004): 281-91.

³ *Small Catechism*, 1529, *Baptism*, 12-14, *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992 (henceforth BSLK), 516-517, *The Book of Concord*, Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 360.

⁴ See Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther, Confessor of the Faith* (Christian Theology in Context series; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 131-151, and idem, with Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology. A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 175-203.

God's callings to support one another in home and economic activities, in society, and in the congregation of believers.⁵

Luther used his podium in the lecture hall and his pulpits in the churches of Wittenberg to deliver the prescription of God's law and the life-restoring word of the gospel. From podium and pulpit he used a number of ways of communicating God's Word to his hearers. Among these ways was the retelling of the biblical stories of the ancient people of God. The reformer recited these stories and his application of them with imagination and theological discipline, in order to cultivate a life of trust in God's gift of forgiveness and life in Christ, repentance for sin, and obedience to God's commands for daily life. Among the figures whose Luther repeated in order to do this for his German contemporaries was King David.

Preachers and professors in the Reformation era and in the period often called "Protestant Orthodoxy" took up themes from David's life often although, apart from studies of their exegesis of the psalms,⁶ not much scholarly discussion of their use of his image has taken place.⁷ Other figures, above all Abraham, also a favorite of Luther and many of his contemporaries, have won some scholarly examination of their roles in the sermons

⁵ Robert Kolb, *Luther, Confessor of the Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 172-196; Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *Genius of Luther's Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker), 58-64.

⁶ In Luther's case this includes studies by Scott H. Hendrix, *Ecclesia in Via. Ecclesiological Developments in the Medieval Psalms Exegesis and the Dictata super Psalterium (1513-1515) of Martin Luther* (Leiden: Brill, 1974); Albert Brandenburg, *Gericht und Evangelium. Zur Worttheologie in Luthers erstern Psalmenvorlesung* (Paderborn: Bonifacius, 1960).

⁷ Two such studies are, on Theodore Beza's treatment of David, Edward A. Gosselin, "David in Tempore Belli: Beza's David in the Service of the Huguenots", *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 7.2 (1976): 31-54, and in a more critical vein, Pierre Bayle, cf. Irene Dingel, "Zwischen Orthodoxie und Aufklärung. Pierre Bayles Historisch-Kritisches Wörterbuch im Umbruch der Epochen", *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 110 (1999): 235-242.

and exegetical lectures of the early modern period.⁸ This essay will survey Luther's use of David and how David appeared in his teaching and preaching as proclaimer of God's Word and a model for Christian repentance and obedience.

The King of Israel whose psalms engaged Luther throughout most of his life had a definite character and definite characteristics in the mind of the Wittenberg reformer. In 1526 he composed a commentary on four psalms of comfort, among them Psalm 62. In its introductory pages David's picture emerged in some detail. He was "a man of considerable training and experience. While he was being brought up and trained at King Saul's court, he had seen much corruption. The nobles at court curried the king's favor for the sake of money and honor ... Therefore David himself had to take many hard knocks from them when they saw that the king was hostile to him and wanted to kill him".⁹ Luther imagined that when David wrote in the first verse of the psalm that God alone was his salvation, he was thinking of his own situation when the stealthy son of Doeg tried to curry his favor (2 Samuel 1:1-10, Luther followed tradition in identifying this anonymous person as Doeg's son) or when Saul's favor turned to hostility (1 Samuel 18). For he knew well how friends could turn away from him, as they did when King Saul's favor vanished, and then could salute him when he assumed power.¹⁰ That sufficed as an application of the psalm's depiction of the king.

Luther's preaching, lecturing, and writing illustrated five themes on the basis of David's life and writings: he appeared there as:

⁸ E.g. Juhani Forsberg, *Das Abrahambild in der Theologie Luthers Pater Fidei Sanctissimus* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1984); David C. Steinmetz, "Abraham and the Reformation", *Luther in Context* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 32-46.

⁹ WA 19:571, 3-9; LW 14:231.

¹⁰ WA 19:523, 6-24, 575, 1-576, 2; LW 14:232-235.

1. The author of psalms that proclaim God's Word and lead his people in praise.
2. An ancestor of Messiah.
3. A classical example of repentance in 2 Samuel 11-12 and Psalm 51.
4. A model for Christian living as a ruler (Psalm 82).
5. An instructor in how to read the Bible (especially in Psalm 119).

Luther had learned the psalms by heart as a monk through the daily repetition of their texts in daily worship. He knew the rhythm of their song of life and incorporated the worldview of the psalmists into his way of thinking. Although he lectured on Genesis, Exodus, and Deuteronomy and on many of the prophetic books of the Old Testament, and preached sermon series on Genesis, he dedicated no lecture series and no sermon entirely to the David stories in 2 Samuel. Nonetheless, he took these stories into account when he focused on David in his treatment of certain psalms and other portions of Scripture.

David, the Author of Psalms

Luther sometimes mentioned David's name as he spoke of the author of a psalm on which he was preaching or lecturing. David served for him as the cantor of God's people, proclaiming God's will and leading his people in praise. Luther's commentary on Psalm 147 of 1531 provides examples of this use, which David appears as no more than the man behind the words on the page.¹¹ In this way David interjected his words of comfort against the fears and assaults which Christian's experience, for example, when Luther preached on John 20:19, as edited in the Church Postil of 1526. The preacher cited Psalm 139:7-10 and Psalm 4:8 to recall how David depicted the faith of God's people, which rests confidently in the protection of their God.¹²

¹¹ WA 31, 1:448, 37-456, 21; LW 14:127-135.

¹² WA 10, 1, 2:20-29.

Luther was convinced that the psalms reflected David's own experience. He told his hearers in 1531 that psalms such as Psalm 89 reflect David's joy and thanks at hearing the prophet Nathan's promise that Christ would be born of his body in addition to God's gift of a dynasty and a kingdom (2 Samuel 7).¹³ Likewise, expressions of his thanks for forgiveness of his sins reflected the king's own experience with the consolation he had received from such forgiveness (2 Samuel 12).¹⁴

In 1530, as the Wittenberg reformer awaited word from the diet of Augsburg, which he could not attend under threat of arrest as a heretic and outlaw, Luther composed a commentary on Psalm 117, where he found several sides of David's piety exhibited. David's life served as an example of the believer's suffering the attacks which Satan lodges against God's kingdom. David's faith was assaulted by the knowledge of the seriousness of his sin and the threat of death and the devil, but he confessed in Psalm 119:92 that because God's law was his delight, he would not perish under such attacks. He also exhibited the concern for the pagans by calling on them to praise the Lord.¹⁵ In his sermon on Christ's ascension into heaven in 1534, Luther reminded his hearers of David's words in Psalm 68 to reinforce the triumph that was proclaimed in Christ's ascending to the right hand of the Father.¹⁶ Luther was grateful for the example of David as the servant of God who proclaimed the Word of the Lord in the midst of the mystery of the continuation of sin and evil in the lives of God's chosen people, in the midst of ordinariness and tawdriness of the reality of daily life.

¹³ WA 22:240, 7-16, *Sermons of Martin Luther* (Luther's Church Postil), John Nicholas Lenker ed. (Grand Rapids: Bakier, 1983), 5:39.

¹⁴ WA 22:246, 13-20, *Sermons of Martin Luther* 5:47.

¹⁵ WA 31:246, 31-248, 16; LW 14:28-30.

¹⁶ WA 37:21-24; cf. *Dr. Martin Luther's sämtliche Werke* 5 (Frankfurt/Main and Erlangen: Heyder and Zimmer, 1865), 5:139-142. Luther's student and editor, Andreas Poach, often elaborates the notes of the amanuensis, Georg Röer, but Poach did know Luther well enough to provide more or less reliable elaborations.

David, Ancestor of the Messiah

Luther was convinced that David knew prophetically that God's deliverance would come through his own descendent, the Messiah. In commenting on Psalm 51 he observed that David did not think of God "vaguely"—in the abstract terms of "Turks, Jews, or papists"—who do not adhere to the external revelation of God's Word, by which God revealed himself in Christ. Therefore, when we lose Christ, we lose God, for "apart from him there is no other God who is to be worshiped or sought".¹⁷

Luther found Christ speaking and spoken of throughout the psalms. One of his favorite psalms was Psalm 110, which he interpreted consistently as a messianic prophecy. In his exposition of verse 1 in 1535, he confessed Christ as "a truly human creature, natural flesh and blood from David, so that David can and must call him his son". This psalm prophesied that the promised Christ was to be of David's seed.¹⁸ But David did not boast of this, Luther asserted. Despite the fact that the king had served his people and God well—he had been "an outstanding hero and warlord, with many victories and successes to his credit"—"he rejoices and glories only in the fact that he has a Lord whom he can call his own Lord in a special sense, because God promised David that this Lord should be one of his descendants. Knowing that all things will be made subject to Christ, David rejoices and is willing to become his subject as well".¹⁹

Luther elaborated on David's praise for the coming Christ, but he particularly admired the king's faith. He forgot about his own royal glory and honor and confessed his Lord. Ignoring his own magnificence and majesty, since it would pass away, David said, in Luther's imagination, "In my flesh and blood, to be born of me, will come he who is the true Son of God, and in this same flesh and blood he will be seated at the right hand of God

¹⁷ WA 40, 2:387, 19-27.

¹⁸ WA 41:83, 28-36; LW 13:231.

¹⁹ WA 41:84, 30-85, 19; LW 13:232.

to be Lord of all". Luther commented that David was "eager to pour out of his heart this kind of joy and boasting, to share it with everyone, so that we may also believe this about this Lord, make the same boast, and become as full of joy as he was in his heart ... If we had David's faith, this joy would surely be in us. With this joy we would have certain comfort and the strength to defy all the attacks of sin, death, the devil, and the world. For whoever believes steadfastly that he has as his Lord the one who sits on high and who is of our flesh and blood, cannot despair or be disheartened by sin".²⁰ Luther wanted to direct David's words to the hearts of his own hearers in Wittenberg.

Toward the end of his own life, in 1543, Luther turned to what he regarded as the "last will and testament" of David, 2 Samuel 23:1-7, as a response particularly to Jewish exegetes' arguments against Christian claims that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of David, who came to deliver his people from sin and death. On the basis of verse one the reformer's argument begins with the observation that David modestly introduces his speech as "the son of Jesse". "He does not boast of his circumcision, nor of his holiness, nor of his kingdom, but he identifies himself simply as the son of Jesse. He is not ashamed of his lowly descent, that he was a shepherd. Yes, what is much more, he confesses his birth, in which he, like all people, came forth full of sin and death, for he wants to speak of other matters, which are so lofty that no nobility or holiness is of use, and no misery, nor sin, nor death, can damage them".²¹

But, Luther commented, David immediately identifies himself further as the person "whose assurance lay in the Messiah of the God of Jacob, who was attractive because of the psalms of Israel". The reformer noted, "Here he exalts himself beyond all limits, but indeed speaking the truth, without any arrogance ... this he did not inherit from his birth nor learn from his father, nor attain through his royal power or wisdom. This was given

²⁰ WA 41:99, 11-14; LW 13:243-244.

²¹ WA 54:31, 10-23; LW 15:271.

him from above, without any merit of his own, and he rejoices in this, praising God and thanking him from the bottom of his heart". For God had promised him that the Messiah would come from his line.²²

David's calling himself a person who was "attractive because of the psalms of Israel" revealed for Luther that he could serve as a model for the Christians of his own day in giving witness to the Messiah. "He did not keep this certain promise of the Messiah to himself, nor for himself. For faith does not sit still, does not take a holiday, but it ventures forth, speaks and proclaims the promise and the grace of God so that other people come to it and participate in it. Indeed, out of his great joy he moves forward: he fashions beautiful, sweet psalms, sings attractive and exuberant songs, so that he can praise and thank God with joy and at the same time attract people for their benefit and teach them".²³ Readers understood that they were to go and do likewise. For David called the psalms attractive and sweet not only because their use of language and music made them artistic successes but because of their theology. It conveyed the consolation found in God's promise of the Messiah. "They bring comfort to all troubled, miserable consciences, which in their sins are caught in anxiety, terror in the face of death, fear, and every kind of distress and wretchedness".²⁴

Luther's fundamental concern for the consolation of stricken consciences informed his exegesis throughout his career. Luther affirmed that David had spoken by the Holy Spirit and that his words in the psalms were channels through which God spoke to his people.²⁵ Then he left the person of David to concentrate on the confession of faith in the coming together of Christ's divine and human natures in the one person of the Messiah, who as God-man delivered his people from their sins.

²² WA 54:31, 10-24, 14; LW 15:271-272.

²³ WA 54:33, 15-22; LW 15:273.

²⁴ WA 54:30-39; LW 15:273-274.

²⁵ WA 54:34, 30-38, 15; LW 15:275-278.

David, a Classic Example of Repentance

David's eating of the consecrated bread reserved for the priests alone (1 Samuel 21:6) served Luther as an illustration that "necessity and love may lift the restrictions of the law", as he said in a sermon from his Church Postil of 1526 on Luke 14:1-11. But most often David embodied the believer who commits grievous sin and is brought to repentance by the Word of the Lord. David's fall into the sins of adultery and murder, and his subsequent repentance when Nathan rebuked him (2 Samuel 11-12), provided Luther with a prime example of his own theology of repentance. David's sin also illustrated, for the Wittenberg reformer, the tyrannous power of sin. He used that point to remind his hearers and readers of the necessity of clinging to Christ and depending on the power of the Holy Spirit. Preaching on Matthew 24:15-28, in 1537, Luther reminded his hearers that David was a great man, but when God removed his support, he fell into sin. That demonstrated the power of Satan.²⁶

Luther regarded Psalm 51 as David's direct reaction to his fall into sin. The reformer could comment on this psalm with hardly a mention of David's adultery and subsequent repentance under the admonition of Nathan.²⁷ In a sermon of 1522 he noted that in Psalm 51 David was saying as much as "Look, I am only flesh and blood, made in this way, which is in and of itself sin and I cannot do anything else but sin. For even if you manage your hands and feet or your tongue, so they do not sin, the tendency and desire remain because blood and flesh is so even if you to go Rome or Saint James".²⁸ He could also use Da-

²⁶ WA 45:262, 19-23.

²⁷ In his treatment of Psalm 51 in 1517, revised in 1525, before his theology focused on the action of law and gospel in producing daily repentance had fully matured, Luther only mentioned his presumption of the association of David's own sin and repentance with the psalm, WA 18:505, 20-23, LW 14:173. His initial lectures on the psalms, 1513-1515, contains a similar mention of David's sin and repentance in connection with this psalm, without any development of the story from 2 Samuel, WA 3:291, 24-28, LW 10:240.

²⁸ WA 10, 1, 2:235, 3-14, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, 2:370.

vid's sin as a reminder of the inevitability of sin, in the lives of all and especially in the lives of those whom God places in positions of political power. As he commented on Psalm 45:6, "the scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness", Luther observed that "David was a holy king, and he ruled by divine aid and favor. Peter declares in Acts (2:25) that he administered his kingdom according to God's will and in (1) Kings (14:8) God says, 'I have found the man who will carry out my every wish'. Yet he was responsible for many injustices, like the case of the miserable orphan Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 16, 19) and the case of Uriah, whom he ordered killed so that he might have his wife (2 Samuel 11:15) ... It is impossible for people in power not to sin; neither are they able to administer justice to everyone. The reason is that the magnitude of affairs and Satan's artfulness exceed their strength. It is enough, however, if they do not sin willfully and intentionally, but have the will to administer their office faithfully. What takes place accidentally other than they intend is wiped out as though by a sponge and absorbed by the remission of sins".²⁹

In his lectures on Psalm 51 in 1532, edited for publication in 1538, Luther made fuller use of the story of David's adultery, his arranging of Uriah's death, and his subsequent repentance under Nathan's rebuke. The story gave concrete meaning to the psalm for his hearers and readers. As he began his exposition Luther expressed his surprise that the scholastic exegetes had concentrated their attention in interpreting the text on David's actual sins of adultery and murder. He pointed out that the text presented the king's acknowledgment of his "external sins but also of his entire sinful nature, the source and origin" of those sins. "The entire psalm speaks of his entire sinfulness or the root of his sin, not only about what he did, but also the fruit born of the tree of sin and its root". The Wittenberg reformer often replaced the Medieval Latin term "original sin" not only with the typical German translation "inherited sin" but also

²⁹ WA 40, 2:524, 40-525, 23; LW 12:237.

with “root sin”. In addition, Luther noted that David not only stood guilty of adultery and Uriah’s murder but also of wanting to appear in public as a holy man who lived the law and justice while at the same time he had arranged for the killing of Uriah, “a good man without doubt, of outstanding trustworthiness in David’s kingdom”. In breaking the fifth and sixth commandments, David had defied and despised the Lord, and thus he had become guilty of blasphemy, against the first commandment. This made David an excellent example of the interconnectedness of sins and their root in rejecting God and doubting his Word. Luther also emphasized the importance of the call to repentance. “If Nathan had not come, David would soon have sinned against the Holy Spirit”.³⁰ Luther applied David’s experience with Uriah, Bathsheba, and Nathan to the lives of his hearers and readers directly. “It is our sin since we are born and conceived in sin. David speaks here of his own experience. Therefore, by definition, ‘sin’ signifies the corruption of all our powers, interior and exterior ... this psalm is a general teaching regarding all the people of God, from the beginning until this day, by which David, or rather the Holy Spirit in David, teaches us to recognize both God and ourselves”.³¹

David recognized both his guilt in the case of Uriah and Bathsheba and, “in the mirror” of these sins, “the impurity of his entire nature, as he thought to himself, ‘Look at me, I, who have governed the state and supported the church and the worship of God, I, who “have guided them with the skill of my hands” Psalm 77 (Ps. 78:72), how could I have fallen into this hideous situation, into so many and such terrible sins?’ For from one sin comes the recognition of all sin, as if he would have said, “if I, the kind of man I am, have fallen as if from heaven into hell, what a huge attestation this fall is to myself and others that nothing good exists in my flesh?” Luther commented, “great is the wisdom that recognizes that we are noth-

³⁰ WA 40, 2:318, 26-321, 16.

³¹ WA 40, 2:325, 32-34, 326, 29-33.

ing else but sin, so that we do not deal lightly with sin, as the teachers of the pope do, who define sin as that which is said, done, or thought contrary to God's law. According to this psalm you must define sin in its totality, which is present when we are born from father and mother, before we reach the age where we are able to say, do, or thinking something. Out of this root nothing good in God's sight can arise from within us. This is the origin of the distinction of two kinds of sin. First of all, the whole nature is corrupt through sin and subject to eternal death. Then other kinds of sin exist, which a person who has the law can recognize, such as, for example, stealing, adultery, murder, etc".³² Throughout the rest of this commentary Luther places the words of the psalm into David's situation as he repented of his adultery and murder, particularly as he treated the "have mercy on me" of verse 3.³³

In addressing David's confession, verse 8, "let the bones you have broken rejoice", Luther returned to the scene in which Nathan rebuked David, and he placed David's repentance there into the context of these words. He noted the necessity of God's promise coming to the contrite heart, which believes that God is the father of mercy and all consolation (2 Corinthians 1:3). "The reliable means of purging, the most effective medicine that is necessary to cleanse the bones and conscience of the sinner came to David, as it came to Paul and Peter", when God brought them to repentance as evil sinners so that they might receive the mercy of God.³⁴ Luther noted in commenting on verse 7 that in 2 Samuel 12, the purging that the king experienced with Nathan's call to repentance led to great joy as he heard the words, "you shall not die".³⁵ David needed to be reduced to his own "purgatory", weighed down by the sorrow over his own sin and God's wrath, to be able to cling to God's

³² WA 40, 2:321, 33-322, 27.

³³ WA 40, 2:330, 22-350, 28.

³⁴ WA 40, 2:415, 24-417, 17.

³⁵ WA 40, 2:409, 35-410, 21.

faithfulness in showing mercy. As he wrote the psalm, David knew that from his own experience he should bring other transgressors to repentance (verse 13).³⁶

David, a Model for Christian Rulers

Luther believed that God has called every human being to take care of the needs of others in the contexts of their home and family life, their economic activities, their place in society, and in the church. He used the stories of biblical figures to offer instruction to hearers and readers, and he did not hesitate to provide guidelines even for temporal rulers on the basis of Scripture. David served as a prime example for him of how those called to exercise temporal authority should actually carry out this assignment from God.

In 1526 Luther had preached on Psalm 112 in the presence of Ernst and Franz, dukes of Lüneburg, who were visiting Wittenberg at the time. This sermon reveals how Luther's presumption that David authored the psalm guided his reading of its comfort for the persecuted faithful of God in the face of the might and repression of tyrants.³⁷ He did not associate words in the psalm often with David's own manner of governing, but on occasion he did. In this case Luther's preface criticized three vices of the rich and powerful: their striving for earthly might, fame, and pleasure. Regarding the second, he commented that "we shall never reach the point at which by our own efforts we will hang onto honors. God cannot tolerate that; he will blow them over ... David and the other patriarchs and prophets

³⁶ WA 40, 2:22-437, 24.

³⁷ Jaroslav Pelikan suggested that the printed version of the psalm contains contradictions due to editors rather than to Luther himself because he labels the psalm a psalm of comfort and consolation at its beginning but later turns to condemnation of the abuses of wealth and power, *LW* 13:xi. Pelikan's suggestion is probably false because it misses a fundamental principle in Luther's preaching, which captured a significant element in the world view of the psalms: that the consolation of the faithful rests in part on calling them as well as their foes to repentance.

sought no honor in this manner”.³⁸ In commenting on verse 2, “His descendents will be powerful on earth. The family of the upright will be blessed”, Luther observed that David knew that the experience of the Jewish nation had confirmed that blessings continue to accompany the faithful. The Jews did “not seek wealth and fame apart from God’s will”. They let God give them honor, and therefore they received his blessing, as David reflected in the text.³⁹ Luther cited David’s reflection in Psalm 37:25, “I was once young and have gotten old and have never seen a righteous person abandoned or his children begging for bread”.⁴⁰ David’s confidence in God’s providence informed Luther’s own faith.

God exalted David from the status of a commoner to being king, Luther pointed out, in an affirmation of God’s control of human history and even the lives of those who exercise earthly power.⁴¹ However, despite David’s avowal that “wealth and riches remain in the house of the upright” (verse 3), David was “driven out of his kingdom by his own son, and other saints have lived in great poverty”. Luther met the challenge: David and others who suffer among the people of God “have their treasury, their cashboxes, their storage cellars with God, in a place where no thief can steal them (Matthew 6:20). They know that they have all they need in God (2 Corinthians 3:5). Although they do not have so much that their money bags bulge and their cashboxes are full, they are certain that God will feed them although they suffer want for a while, and God is testing them, God will indeed not remain far away. They will have something to eat, even if heaven has to rain down bread”.⁴² For Luther David’s life and faith confirmed what the king had written in this text: that God rules the world in the interests of his own chosen people.

³⁸ WA 19:301, 27-31; LW 13:394.

³⁹ WA 19:308, 12-17; LW 13:398.

⁴⁰ WA 19:309, 12-19; LW 13:399.

⁴¹ WA 19:310, 19; LW 13:400.

⁴² WA 19:310, 31-311, 14; LW 13:400.

While at the Coburg castle in 1530, Luther wrote a commentary on Psalm 118. Among his comments on the phrase first expressed in verse 1, “the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever”, he discussed human dependence on God. “Scripture states that God made both, lords and subjects, and temporal government belongs to him”, as David had said in Psalm 18:48 and 144:2. “Here he does not boast of himself, that he wanted to rule his own people with power and wisdom, although he had the most wonderful laws and customs, established by God himself through Moses and the prophets who had anointed and confirmed him as king by God’s command. He had learned by experience what the power and wisdom of kings and princes can do if God himself does not manage the household”. The rebellions of Absalom and Bichri (2 Samuel 15-18, 20) proved to David that God was in ultimate control.⁴³

Twice Luther used the exposition of psalm texts as the occasion for creating what could be viewed as a “mirror of the prince”, an admonition to rulers to rule faithfully as servants of God and their people. In 1530 he did so with a commentary on Psalm 82, and in 1534 he turned to Psalm 101, which he read as David’s own description of himself as king. Luther wrote this commentary, quite likely, as an admonition to his own ruler, Johann Friedrich the Elder, to live more piously.⁴⁴ Luther described the psalm as David’s presentation of “the authentic image of the true ruler”.⁴⁵ Luther worried particularly about the

⁴³ WA 31, 1:81, 8-82, 22; LW 14:53-54.

⁴⁴ Cf. the comments of E. Thiele und O. Brenner WA 51, 198. On Luther’s “mirrors of princes”, see Robert Kolb, “Die Josef-Geschichten als Fürstenspiegel in der Wittenberger Auslegungstradition. ‘Ein verständiger und weiser Mann’ (Genesis 42:33)”, in *Christlicher Glaube und weltliche Herrschaft. Zum Gedenken an Günther Wartenberg*, Michael Beyer, Jonas Flöter, and Markus Hein eds. (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2008), 41-55.

⁴⁵ WA 51, 227, 37-38. This description stems from Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, trans. Eric W. and Rutch C. Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 9. See also Wolfgang Sommer, *Gottesfurcht und Fürstenherrschaft: Studien zum Obrigkeitsverständnis Johann Arndts und lutherischer Hofpre-*

abuse of power by courtiers, in general and at the Saxon court in particular—his disclaimer that he had no experience at court and knew little of the trickery and deception that was practiced there was a pious, rhetorical exaggeration.⁴⁶ In this psalm, Luther explained, “David, who was a king and had to keep servants at his court, cites himself as an example of the way a pious king or prince should treat his personnel”. That message was aimed at his own prince. In the service of his message the commentator also carefully framed his picture of David. Governing officials should particularly “praise and thank God if they have a good organization and upright servants at home or at court. That should teach them to know that it is a special gift of God and not due to their own wisdom or capabilities”.⁴⁷ Though he had forthrightly discussed David’s sin when treating him as a model of repentance, in this commentary he ignored all the vices and transgressions of the king. “Dear David was so highly gifted and such a precious, special hero is not only innocent of all deception and taking of life that took place in his kingdom. Indeed, he also actually opposed such liars and murderers, did not want to tolerate them, and acted against them so that they had to yield”.⁴⁸

In Psalm 101 Luther found the virtues of the ruler and his responsibilities effectively depicted. He employed his own distinction of the two realms of human life to summarize David’s way of ruling. “We hear in this psalm of many fine, princely virtues that David practiced. In this psalm he does not treat how to serve God, as in the first commandment, but how people should behave properly toward their neighbors. For just as the spiritual realm or responsibility shows how people should act properly in relationship to God, so the earthly realm shows how people live in relationship to each other and how

diger zur Zeit der altprotestantischen Orthodoxie (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 23-73.

⁴⁶ WA 51:201, 22-26; LW 13:147.

⁴⁷ WA 51:201, 30-34; LW 13:147.

⁴⁸ WA 51:234, 12-16, 235, 10-16; LW 13:188-189.

they do it in such a way that body, possessions, wife, child, home, land, and material goods remain in peace and security and how they can fare well on this earth".⁴⁹

The psalm reflects David's practice of his powers as ruler, Luther contended. In its first verse the king praised "mercy and justice". These terms are used here in the sense of the horizontal realm of human life. In this instance they do not relate to God's mercy and justice but to that exercised by earthly rulers. He explained that justice is almost always a synonym for punishment in courtly circles. "If there is only mercy and the prince lets everyone milk him and kick him in the mouth and does not punish or express his rage—against wrongdoing—then not only the court but the land itself will be filled with wicked rascals. All discipline and honorable actions will disappear. However, if there is only or too much rage and punishing, tyranny will emerge, and then the upright will not be able to catch their breath because of the constant fear and worry. Even the heathen say this; it is an everyday experience: 'strict justice is the greatest injustice'. But the opposite is said of mercy, 'pure mercy is the most unmerciful thing possible'".⁵⁰

Luther read his convictions concerning good government into David's placing mercy before justice in this passage: "Moderation is good in all things. To achieve it is an art that must be attributed to God's mercy. To get as close to this goal as possible, it is better to give too much mercy than too much justice. That is why David mentions mercy first and then justice. Where this middle way cannot be achieved, it is better to practice mercy than punishment. For in giving mercy a person can draw back and give less, but when punishment is given, it cannot be taken back, particularly where it affects body, life, or limb".⁵¹ David himself, Luther recalled, had practiced this principle with wisdom. The king did not punish his cousin and field

⁴⁹ WA 51, 241, 31-42; LW 13:197.

⁵⁰ WA 51:205, 24-206, 3; LW 13:152-153.

⁵¹ WA 51:206, 7-15; LW 13:152-153.

commander Joab, although Joab had twice committed homicide (2 Samuel 3:27; 20:10). David cursed Joab because he murdered Abner and Amasa, two rival field commanders more upright than he. But the king would have provoked severe dissension within his infant kingdom had he proceeded against Joab, and so he waited and placed the punishment of this wicked servant in the hands of his son Solomon (1 Kings 2:6).⁵²

Luther praised King David's reliance on God alone. "When David wanted to take the life of Goliath, they wanted to give him instructions, put armor on him, and gave him real equipment. Yes, sir! David could not wear the armor and had another instructor in mind, and he struck Goliath before anyone else knew what he was supposed to do. He was not an apprentice who had been trained in this craft. He was a master who had been trained in the craft by God".⁵³

David demonstrated how to rule a kingdom in both dimensions of human life. Verses 2-4 speak of his care and honesty in keeping the kingdom close to God's Word. He had restored divine worship and the ark to its proper place (1 Chronicles 13:3). He obeyed God's command to refrain from building the temple himself (2 Samuel 7:2, 13). In Psalms 60:6 and 108:7 he expressed his delight in the fact that "God speaks in his sanctuary", which Luther interpreted as the king's saying, "In my kingdom I have the true and pure Word of God and irreproachable and forthright teaching. I neither institute nor maintain any idolatry, factions, divisions, or any kind of false teachers",⁵⁴ an obvious application of the verse to the reformers own time and program for public life in Saxony. Following David's example required God's guidance and support, Luther concluded. Among Israel's kings only three at most were highly praised, and "David is the only example which is presented as a model for them all, for the others ruled with idols and false

⁵² WA 51:206-30-207, 11; LW 13:153-154.

⁵³ WA 51:208, 35-40; LW 13:158.

⁵⁴ WA 51:216, 22-34; LW 13:166-167.

prophets, and they persecuted, murdered, the true prophets and condemned God's Word".⁵⁵ God had performed a miracle in giving David the capability of exercising his responsibility beyond even his great intelligence and ability.⁵⁶

Luther's eschatological thinking exhibited itself continuously in his works as he noted how evil rages against God's faithful people, how Satan's deceptions always are attacking God's truth. He therefore was not surprised that "in David's story one can notice that many people were secretly extremely hostile toward him. When they had opportunity, they did their very best to strike out against him, to go after him, to cause him trouble, and to afflict him with every possible kind of suffering. In spite of this he continued to sing his song and ventured everything with God and his Word".⁵⁷

David's relationship with his own courtiers provided example enough of how cautious rulers must be in the choice and use of their advisors. Ahitophel served as David's closest and best adviser but finally tried to undermine and overthrow David's rule. "The young nobles and courtiers want to be free. They want to be lords in the lands themselves ... When they are constrained to do something that they do not want to do, they know how to dissimulate and lie in wait until they see their opportunity. For a time they can hide their shifty eyes and deceiving faces very well". God can even call a David to repentance by letting Ahitophel deceive him, as if he were the voice of God (2 Samuel 16:23). "Thus it is very difficult at court to recognize and control the formidable masks of the devil."⁵⁸

David's assertion that he undertook no wickedness but hated lawbreakers (verse 3) led Luther into another comment on courtiers. David could have easily hated some peasants in the countryside. "But to hate the lords at Jerusalem and in his court of

⁵⁵ WA 51:217, 14-18; LW 13:167.

⁵⁶ WA 51:221, 32-36; LW 13:173.

⁵⁷ WA 51:218, 20-24; LW 13:169.

⁵⁸ WA 51:219, 11-38; LW 13:170-171.

Zion, that was indeed an accomplishment, even for David himself. But he was something more than the David of Bethlehem. He is a hero and an extraordinary man. He cuts through it all and lets God rule and be his Lord. Even if he lost a hundred Ahitophels, he would still prefer to keep his Lord and God, who is called almighty and can create and bestow many, many kingdoms".⁵⁹ Luther may have been hoping that his Saxon readers would take his admonition seriously.

Luther regarded it as truly miraculous that a ruler can recognize the necessity of hating transgressors, spiritual rogues, the saints of Satan, and to "separate them from himself in such a way that they do not stick to him or cling to him or remain in his presence at all". Luther imagined that those surrounding David "sang very sweetly to him, praising one person here, one person there, extolling our cousin here or our brother-in-law there, in the hope of getting them a place in court or a promotion in the administration, regardless of their uprightness ... They succeed, too, unless God gives rulers a spirit like that of David so that they follow his example in constantly knowing how to avoid these false servants of God".⁶⁰

David exercised self-discipline and throughout the psalms repeatedly admonished others to guard themselves against temptation.⁶¹ The king not only exhibited virtues and a freedom from vices in his own person. He publicly waged war against deception and murder and especially false teaching. "David was highly gifted and a precious, special hero". "He sought, demanded, called, ordained and commanded everywhere that the Word of God be preached in its truth and purity and that God be properly worshiped" (1 Chronicles 15). He himself provided leadership for proper worship in composing psalms. He presented himself to all rulers as an example and perfect model

⁵⁹ WA 51:227, 33-42; LW 13:181.

⁶⁰ WA 51:230, 22-36; LW 13:184.

⁶¹ WA 51:225, 27-226, 16; LW 13:178-179.

of the way a person should seek God's rule and righteousness (Matthew 6:33).⁶²

Luther was conscious of the fact that his distinction between the two realms—the vertical, in which the gospel proclaims and enacts God's gift of forgiveness and new life, and the horizontal, in which the law prescribes the life of love toward God's creatures—was governing his interpretation of this psalm, and so he recognized that his critics would say that his treatment of this text violated his own hermeneutic. He imagined that they would say, "David is doing the very thing in this psalm that your interpretation talks about: he mixes the spheres of spiritual and secular authority and wants to exercise both". Luther rejected the criticism, and indeed, from two perspectives. "If a preacher in his official capacity says to kings and princes and to all the world, 'Give thanks to God and fear him, and keep his commandments,' he is not meddling in the affairs of secular government. On the contrary, he is thereby serving and being obedient to the highest ruler. Thus, the entire spiritual government really does nothing else than serve divine authority. That is why they are called servants of God and ministers of Christ in Scripture". Likewise, "if David or a prince teaches or commands fear of God and hearing his Word, he is not acting as a lord of that Word but as an obedient servant. He is not meddling in spiritual or divine rule but remains a humble subordinate and faithful servant".⁶³

Luther's distinction of two realms remained distinct from the institutions that bore responsibility for each in a general sense. His functional understanding of how God works in this world determined how all three of his distinctions—between law and gospel, between passive and active righteousness, and between the vertical and horizontal realms—were used.

David modeled "fine, princely virtues" in the horizontal realm of human life, keeping the people within the law, "each

⁶² WA 51:233, 39-241, 28; LW 13:188-190.

⁶³ WA 51:239, 22-241, 4; LW 13:194-196.

person in relation to his neighbor ... the secular government should direct the people horizontally toward one another, seeing to it that body, property, honor, wife, child, house, home, and all manner of goods remain in peace and security and are blessed on earth". In providing an example of this, "David (is) the best of all".⁶⁴ Nonetheless, Luther recognized that in the horizontal realm of life even those who do not trust God can be blessed by him with secular wisdom and insight into good governmental practices. He urged reading of good pagan authors who wrote on effective administration of society, and he said that rulers such as Augustus and Alexander provided their people with good government.⁶⁵ But David recognized that God alone gives the power to rule well. Whereas the pagan rulers ascribe their success in ruling to "fortune" or "luck", David and other God-fearing rulers have ruled under God's guidance to serve God and the people he entrusts to them.⁶⁶

Luther found David's principles for ruling in the latter half of the psalm. "I destroy him who secretly maligns his neighbor", the psalmist had written. Luther believed that David must have been speaking of courtiers, who, he was certain, generally malign others in their jockeying for power. This was the reformer's way of reading the biblical text into his own situation, applying to the pressing need he was addressing. He commended David for destroying "royal, princely slanderers who sit in government offices, not only at court but also in the country. That is what I call the virtue of a David and an example of princely courage, a special impulse from God".⁶⁷

David further rejected those of "proud demeanor and conceited in spirit". "David is here speaking of the pride of governmental officials in relation to their subjects. He not only prides himself on the fact that he himself has not been proud in

⁶⁴ WA 51:241, 31-42; LW 13:197.

⁶⁵ WA 51:242, 20-243, 9; LW 13:198-199.

⁶⁶ WA 51:244, 18-244, 33; LW 13:200-201.

⁶⁷ WA 51:246, 13-29, 249, 38-250, 15; LW 13:203, 207.

relationship to his subjects—which is itself truly a high, royal virtue—but that he has also not permitted it among those who served at his court”. David provided a sterling example of the godly humility that too seldom graces the lives of ruling officials, as readers of Luther’s commentary were urged to observe by reading his story in the books of Samuel.⁶⁸ Luther drew the contrast between David and Saul, the former who remained humble, the latter who became proud and defied God, as an admonition to his hearers in preaching in Wittenberg in 1532.⁶⁹ The next verse expressed delight in the faithful and in devout servants, and Luther ventured, “Maybe David succeeded, as he boasts here, because he surveyed the entire land, opening his eyes, looking around for faithful, devout people wherever he was able to find them, and selecting without any discrimination among persons”. Just as God had chosen the shepherd boy David, so David managed his kingdom.⁷⁰

David closed the psalm with a vow to destroy the godless in the land. “Just as women are reluctant to hear someone call them whores when that is just what they are, so kings and lords are reluctant, and courtiers are even more reluctant, to hear someone rebuke them and punish them as unrighteous and wicked, because that strikes too close to home. David goes right ahead and minces no words. He does it rudely and indiscreetly enough. He wants to suppress nothing. In fact, he boasts of it as a good deed that he rebukes his own people at court so shamefully and even destroys them”. That, Luther reminded his readers, had happened in relationship to Ahithophel (2 Samuel 17:23), Joab (1 Kings 2:28-34), and others of his officials. “David must have been not only a brave hero with his fist but also an independent fellow with his tongue. It certainly was the same David who tore up the bear and slew the lion (1 Samuel 17:34),

⁶⁸ WA 51:252, 3-14, 253, 20-39; LW 13:209-210, 211-212.

⁶⁹ WA 36:332, 29-333, 14.

⁷⁰ WA 51:255, 24-256, 5; LW 13:214.

and smote Goliath (1 Samuel 17:50)".⁷¹ Nonetheless, David had to suffer the punishment of God for his own sin, in the defilement of his daughter Tamar by her brother Amnon (2 Samuel 13:1-21), the slaying of Amnon by his brother Absalom (2 Samuel 13:28-33), who in turn drove David into exile (2 Samuel 15:13-37), ravished his wife—in fact, his concubines (2 Samuel 16:22)—and then died of a spear through his heart (2 Samuel 18:1-18). Joab, Ahithophel, and all Israel rebelled against him. Nonetheless, David did repent, and God remained faithful to him. David's rule took its course, and God forgave and blest him.⁷²

For Luther David's trust in God and God's faithfulness to him formed the heart of any story of a successful political ruler. David's story contained many lessons regarding the pitfalls as well as the blessings of the calling of rulers from God, and Luther focused above all on the virtues that David exhibited in giving his readers a picture of the proper way to govern when God entrusts that task to an individual. In so doing the reformer turned his idealized picture of David as king into a pointed critique of Saxon court life, the problem with which he was dealing in his own environment.

David, an Instructor in How to Read the Bible

David also served Luther as a model for immersing himself in the Word of God. In composing the preface for the *Wittenberg* edition of his works in 1539, he turned to the monastic pattern of "reading, praying, meditating" (*lectio, oratio, meditatio*) but revised it to reflect his own experience with Scripture. To preserve the three-fold form of the model, he presumed the reading of the text, and to prayer and meditation he added the spiritual struggles that had accompanied his own life of repentance, with the word *tentatio*—in German *Anfechtung*. He informed his readers, "this is the way taught by holy King David—and doub-

⁷¹ WA 51:261, 34-262, 11; LW 13:221-222.

⁷² WA 51:263, 9-264, 9; LW 13:223-224.

tlessly used also by all the patriarchs and prophets—in Psalm 119. There you will find three rules presented in detail throughout the entire psalm”. Luther continued, “First, you should know that the Holy Scripture is the kind of book which turns the wisdom of all other books into foolishness because only it teaches about eternal life”. Readers could then see “how David continues to pray in this psalm, ‘teach me, Lord, instruct me, lead me, show me,’ and many more words like these”. “Of course, he knew well and daily heard and read the text of Moses and other books, he nonetheless wants to lay hold of the real teacher of Scripture himself, so that he may not pounce upon it with his reason and become his own teacher”. David recognized that reading Scripture is not like reading about the legend of Markolf, a popular German folk tale, or Aesop’s *Fables*, which Luther held in high regard as a source of worldly wisdom.⁷³ David knew that in contrast to such works reading Scripture required the Holy Spirit and prayer, Luther insisted.⁷⁴

David not only prayed over the text of his Bible reading; he meditated on Scripture. Luther commented, “You see in the same psalm how David constantly boasts that he wants to do nothing but speak, write, utter, repeat, sing, hear, and read God’s Word and commandments day and night, at all times. For God does not intend to bestow his Spirit upon you apart from his external Word. Conform yourself to that. He has not given a vacuous command when he commands you to write, preach, read, hear, sing, speak orally and in writing”.⁷⁵ Luther’s trust depended on this “external” Word, and he steadfastly opposed all spiritualists, such as Thomas Müntzer, who believed that they had received an “internal” revelation that could not and dare not be tested against the written Word of God. Luther’s Ockhamist training had led him to believe that God works through the material order he had created and called good in

⁷³ WA 50:440-460.

⁷⁴ WA 50:659, 1-21; LW 34:285-286.

⁷⁵ WA 50:659, 30-35; LW 34:286.

Genesis 1. He believed that God's power to establishing a saving relationship with his chosen people lies in the externally proclaimed gospel (Romans 1:17).

Luther's own experience led him to see that encountering God's Word in Scripture always takes place for believers in the midst of spiritual struggles. He called them the "touchstone" of understanding and experiencing "how correct, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how powerful, how comforting God's Word is". For David "laments so often regarding all kinds of foes, arrogant princes or tyrants, false spirits and factions, whom he must endure because he meditates, that is, continually is occupied with God's Word, as has been mentioned, in all sorts of ways". Luther applied David's experience to his own day. "As soon as God's Word dawns throughout your life, the devil will visit you and make you a real expert (on Scripture)". That Luther had experienced in his own conflicts with the papacy, he observed. He concluded his treatment of "David's rules" by saying that "if you study hard in accord with his example, then you will also sing and boast with him in the psalm 'to me the law from your mouth is preferable to thousands of gold and silver pieces'" (Psalm 119:72).⁷⁶

Luther's assessment of people of God in Scripture was usually forthright and open. He felt no need to mask or conceal their sins since he believed that the whole life of God's faithful people is to be a life of repentance, due to the mystery of the continuation of sin and evil in the lives of his chosen children. So in David the Wittenberg reformer was able to find a model for the believers of his own time, in the king's study of Scripture, his praise of God, and his faithfulness in carrying out his calling as ruler. David also served as a means of proclaiming Christ, as God and human creature, as Lord and Savior. Above all, he served as a model for the life of repentance that confirmed both the power of sin and the greater power of God's Word. David served for Luther as a concrete example of God's

⁷⁶ WA 50:660, 1-19; LW 34:286-287.

faithfulness and of his faithful people's struggles and service in this world.

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Erasmus and Luther on the Freedom of the Will in Their Correspondence

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ABSTRACT. In the first part of this essay is underlined the common interest of Erasmus of Rotterdam and Martin Luther. The items in common are successively another interpretation of the Holy Scripture, another kind of theology, another piety, another Church. The first part closes with bringing to the fore the differences between the two. In the second part of the essay the correspondence between Erasmus and Luther is submitted to a close examination. After a short introduction on writing letters in the 16th century, Erasmus' first acquaintance with Luther through mutual friends is brought up. Formally Luther made the first step. In succession is analyzed the correspondence in the years 1519-1520 (before the condemnation of Luther), from 1521 till the publication of Erasmus' *De libero arbitrio* (September 1524), from September 1524 till the publication of Luther's *De servo arbitrio* (December 1525), and the aftermath from the publication of Erasmus' *Hyperaspistes* I (March 1526) and II (September 1527) till his death. In this last phase Luther did not think it necessary to write again to or against Erasmus. Luther was finished with him.

KEY WORDS: correspondence as a genre in the sixteenth century, *Bonae litterae* (humanism), Erasmus and reform, Luther and the Reformation, Free will or bound will?

Introduction

The disintegration of the "scholastic" paradigm compelled the theologians of the sixteenth century to a new reflection on the method and starting points of theological thinking. Partly it

lead to a “restoration” of the scholastic paradigm, i.e. to a clearer formulation of and clinging on that till then valid, in broad outline accepted frame of interpretation. Partly new formulations of understanding reality and a new expression of faith are brought up, or at least shifts in the meaning of old conceptions. At last this leads to a new, more or less accepted horizon of understanding, in which is room for differences in interpretation of reality. An important component of this new horizon of understanding is the place a human being occupies in respect of God, Church and Tradition.

Between 1510 and 1520 Erasmus was the contested but indisputable exponent of a theology of reform in a Church which had become all the time less Catholic and more Roman. He stood for a kind of catholicity, which was a living synthesis of universal humanity and Evangelical concentration on Christ. He was a representative of loyal Evangelical inclined opposition in the Church. Erasmus and his friends embodied a counterforce against the Roman Church, which was dominated by the Curia.

At the time Martin Luther incited to a radical reformation of the Church in top and members, in doctrine and life, Erasmus got involved in this conflict against his will. He was asked to choose and just that was what Erasmus did not want to do. Luther's excommunication by pope Leo X (1520) did escalate the conflict. Even before the discussion with Luther inside the Catholic Church could be brought up, Luther was condemned as a heretic. As it were Erasmus was compelled to take an ambiguous position between Rome and Wittenberg. Where Luther was in the right according to Erasmus, there Erasmus approved him, but where Luther was not explicitly in the right; there stayed Erasmus rather on the side of pope and emperor. At last this puts an end on the reform theology Erasmus stood for.

On the one hand Erasmus agreed on several points with Luther, on the other hand Erasmus was not willing and not able to

identify himself with Luther.¹ Erasmus saw himself a “the defender of the true freedom Christ brought”.² He was convinced that this was the heart of the biblical testimony. That is why he strived after a renewal of theology, piety and Church based on the Bible; Christianity returning to its original simplicity, a biblical humanism based on reviewing the Holy Scripture and the Fathers of the Church.³

Common Interests

Another Interpretation of the Holy Scripture

For Erasmus in the reform program of this biblical humanism is another way of reading Holy Scripture at stake. Although he made no objections against an allegorical, spiritual sense of the Holy Writ, yet Erasmus takes the line that the starting point of the interpretation of Bible is the literal sense of the text and not the spiritual sense. Luther still uses in his *Dictata super Psalterium* (*Notes on the Psalter*) (1513-1515) the quadruple sense on interpreting the Holy Scripture. In his *Operationes in Psalmos* (*Operations on Psalms*) (1519-1521)⁴ Luther works strictly according to the new hermeneutical principle. From that moment on it was in the first place a question of grammatical sense, for that has already a theological meaning. Instead of multiple quotations of Fathers of the Church now Erasmus and Nicholas of Lyre are cited. “It is not advisable”, Luther writes in his *Operationes in Psalmos*, “to enumerate the (allegorical; D. A.) interpretations of all commentators and also in the multiplicity, I have

¹ Cfr. for example: G. Krodel, “Erasmus-Luther: One Theology, One Method, Two Results” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 41 (1970): 648-667.

² C. Augustijn, *Erasmus von Rotterdam. Leben-Werk-Wirkung* (München: C. H. Beck, 1986), 46.

³ This is also the framework within which has to be placed Erasmus *Instrumentum Novi Testamenti* (the first edition of the New Testament in Greek) and a critical edition of the Vulgate text of the New Testament, in which Erasmus has made a number of corrections (which called on protest on the part of the traditionalists, who appeal to the infallibility of the Church).

⁴ Respectively before and after the publication of Erasmus’ *Instrumentum Novi Testamenti*!

chosen, I am not sure on all points. I am not easy inclined to allegories, especially not when I am searching for the legitimate, proper and original sense, which counts in the fight and strengthens the instruction of faith".⁵

Another Theology

For Erasmus another way of theological thinking is at stake. In his *Moriae encomium id est Stultitiae laus* (*Praise of Folly*) he gives very sneeringly his opinion about the super-subtle theologians, that conceited and thin-skinned kind of people,⁶ which thinks that it can get to the bottom of God's inscrutable secrets and doing so poses the most silly questions like: could God have himself also incarnate in the form of a woman, a devil, an ass, a calabash or a stone?⁷ The Apostles did not know anything about issues as the doctrine of transubstantiation, the Immaculate Conception of Mary and the like, and they knew nothing about scholastic method and scholastic usage of language. Erasmus reproaches the theologians that they arbitrary mould and remould the words of the Holy Scripture, as were they wax. Therefore the adage: "Ad fontes" (back to the sources). It involves a theology, which is based on the norm of the Holy Scripture like in the days of the Apostles and the Fathers of the Church. It involves a theology, which in its interpretation of the Holy Scripture has not centred on scholastic theology but on the Fathers of the Church and which made the original Christian message understandable for Erasmus' contemporaries. Issues which have nothing to do with the Holy Scripture are out of place in theology. Starting point of all theological thinking is reading the Holy Writ and, based upon the Holy Scripture, doctrine, law and practice of the Church must always be re-examined critically, must be liberated of every speculation

⁵ Martin Luther, *Operationes in Psalmos*, 1519-1521, AWA 2, 119, 7-11.

⁶ Desiderius Erasmus, *Moriae Encomium id est Stultitiae laus*. ASD 4.3, 144, 381-146, 385.

⁷ Ibid., 146, 399-148, 404.

about God's secrets and must concentrate on the meaning of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in relation to the way of human being to salvation.⁸ Luther had this criticism in common with Erasmus. In one of his *Tischreden* (*Table-talks*) (February 2, 1538) Luther looks back together with his friend Nicholas of Amsdorf on the theological books of the prior period "when talented people were still occupied with useless studies ... This sophistic nomenclature lies now far behind us. The people of our time consider them as barbaric. Scotus, Bonaventura, Gabriel (Biel; D. A.) and Thomas (Aquinas; D. A.), who lived when the papacy flourished, were extremely conceited men. With so much time available they had to give their fantasy free play. Gabriel wrote a book on the Canon of the Mass, which I in my youth considered the best; when I was reading it, my heart was bleeding. The authority of the Bible was nothing compared with that of Gabriel. I still possess those books with which I struggled so much. Scotus wrote best on the third book of (Peter Lombard's; D. A.) *Sentences*. And Ockham, who specialized in method, was the most subtle and ingenious ... Thomas was the biggest twaddler, because he was distracted by metaphysics. But God has led us away from them in a miraculous way and he has involved me in the play, now already more than twenty years ago, without knowing it".⁹

Another Piety

For Erasmus also another piety is at stake is. His attack on piety is by many, especially priests and monks, seen as disruption of the entire ecclesiastical system. According to Erasmus the theologian's task is to design a theory of piety.¹⁰ Interiorizing and

⁸ In *Moriae Encomium id est Stultitiae laus* many forms of folly are denounced. The final part (ASD 4.3, 178, 904-194, 275) describes the true foolishness, as in Old and New Testament represented to us. "By means of the so-called 'foolish' message we preach, God has decided to save those who believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21).

⁹ Martin Luther, *WATr* 3, no. 3722, 563, 31, 34-564, 13.

¹⁰ Desiderius Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, 46-52.

spiritualizing are the most important characteristics of Erasmus' range of ideas,¹¹ but that did not prevent him to criticize and to strive after reform of the Church in doctrine and above all in life. According to Erasmus piety has to conform to the message of Holy Scripture, which is Jesus. His *Paraphrases* on the New Testament are meant to open laymen the way to understanding of the true Jesus. Luther too wanted to interpret the Bible in the tongue of the common people, his 'raw Saxons'. In his first writing published in German, an interpretation of *Die sieben Busspsalmen* (the Seven Penitential Psalms) (1517) Luther states the man has to be very humble, in order that God can live and work in him.

Another Church

At stake is for Erasmus another Church. Appealing to the same one baptism the difference between clergy and laity has abolished and Erasmus is making a plea for a simple piety concentrated on Christ and applied to everybody.¹² Luther too has the significance of baptism strongly emphasized, and with that the universal priesthood of all believers.¹³ Hardly Erasmus shows the discrepancy between the claims of the bishops hold as "successors of the Apostles" and reality noticing just a little bit of the "vita apostolica" (living like the Apostles). The hierarchy is above all occupied in its own power and glory, in spiritual compulsion by means of Church law, in pomp and circumstance, and especially in money. For Erasmus it become continually clearer, that people instead of being occupied in Church law, the doctrine of the Church and the ecclesiastical system, had to be focussed on the Holy Writ and on Christ, who speaks in the Holy Scripture instead of in artificially con-

¹¹ C. Augustijn, *Erasmus von Rotterdam. Leben-Werk-Wirkung*, 175.

¹² Desiderius Erasmus, *Enchiridion militis christiani*, LBV, 65 C-66 A (H., 135, 4-16).

¹³ Martin Luther, *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation*, 1520, WA 6, 408,11-13. Cfr. here: H. Storck, *Das allgemeine Priestertum bei Luther* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1953).

structed Christology, on which the hierarchy again could base claims. Luther agrees with Erasmus on this matter too.¹⁴ Neither Erasmus' reform program nor Luther's did make it; neither of them succeeded in reforming the existing Church. The sharp theological criticism on the hierarchy based on the Gospel found no echo in the hierarchy itself. With Luther's excommunication in 1520 the rupture of the Church was an accomplished fact. It is no longer a difference of opinion among theologians, but Luther's cause (*causa Lutheri*) had become a struggle between two worlds; the question involved is if the Latin-medieval theological model, with its hierarchy, institutions and sacraments—by Luther called the Babylonian Captivity of the Church—stands firm or has to give way to a new model. Erasmus was convinced that he was right not choosing Luther's side, despite the fact that he took action against abuses in the Church long before Luther and strived after reform and renewal according to the Gospel. For the rest Erasmus refused to conform to the Roman theology of that time, more, he was convinced that Rome was also to blame for the rupture of the Church.¹⁵ But Luther too was to blame according to Erasmus. Luther has formulated his rightful demands unnecessarily sharp. Erasmus subscribes Luther's public protest against unchristian elements in the Roman system as appears from some of his remarks to friends: "I see in the monarchy of the Roman high priest Christianity's plague; the Dominicans flatter him in

¹⁴ Martin Luther, *De Captivitate Babylonica*, 1520, WA 6, 565, 34-566, 3; 32-34.

¹⁵ Desiderius Erasmus, *Spongia adversus aspergines Hutteni*. ASD 9.1, 209, 115-210, 126. In a letter to Zwingli dated August 31, 1523 Erasmus writes, that he, if it would be necessary, would die for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but that he is not prepared to do so for Luther's paradoxes, see Desiderius Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1384, 2-7. The quote from *Spongia* shows that Erasmus also is not prepared to die for "Rome", when just scholastic discussions are at stake and not articles of the faith, which are supported by the *consensus ecclesiae* (consensus of the Church).

all in a shameless way. But", so he adds, "I don't know if it is right to touch that ulcer publicly".¹⁶

Differences

Why has Erasmus in the moment of truth not spoken in love for the Church, and not acted giving himself with the whole heart, such as Luther did? Erasmus was for many people, both in the Roman camp and in the Lutheran, the only one who could have prevented the rupture of the Church, because he had authority on both sides. Should Erasmus not have to be "confessor", what the consequence would have been? For there is in the moment of truth a "status confessionis" (state of confessing) that could no longer be a "casus disputationis" (case of discussion).¹⁷

We have seen that Erasmus and Luther at first glance seem to have a lot in common. Both can be seen as innovators of Church and theology on the plane of fracture between of an "old" and a "new" paradigm. Both of them are departing from (the literal meaning of) the Holy Scripture ("sensus litteralis"), are contrasting to the scholastic method, to certain practices of piety, against abuses in the Church from an interest for the people of their time. On the basis of the interpretation of the Holy Scripture, however, Luther has a different view on God's justice and the original sin than Erasmus: a human being becomes, according Luther, not righteous, because he acts righteously, as Aristotle thought, but only when a human being is justified (which presupposes conversion), one can act righteously.¹⁸ In his *Disputatio contra Scholasticam Theologiam* (*Disputation against the scholastic theology*, 1517) Luther made a frontal attack on the theology of his time and his *Disputatio pro declaratione virtutis indulgentiarum* (the so-called 95 *Theses on the Indulgence*) was an attack on the Catholic system of penitence.

¹⁶ Desiderius Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 3, no. 872, 16-20.

¹⁷ H. Küng, *Theologie im Aufbruch* (München: Piper, 1987), 58.

¹⁸ Martin Luther, *Disputatio Heidelbergae habita*, 1518, WA 1, 364, 1-16.

When Erasmus, after refusing so many years to write against Luther, finally in the autumn of 1524 publishes *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio* (*Diatribe or Collation on the Free Will*) reluctantly, he has already lost all his credits among the “Lutherans”, but he remains also suspicious in the circles, which him suspect of “Lutheran” sympathies.

Erasmus and Luther have contested each other explicitly on the issue of the freedom respectively the bondage of the human will. In Erasmus’ *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio* (*On Free Will*) the issue of the freedom of the will—still an open question under theologians—is brought under discussion in an objective style. Luther, to whom the freedom of the will and the predestination was a very existential question, replied in December 1525 with *De servo arbitrio* (*On the Bondage of the Will*). In most studies on this dispute is stated, that the views of Erasmus and Luther are square with each other. The question seems to be justified whether this dispute necessarily had to be interpreted in this way. The question is whether the views really so much differ. In 1533, eight years after the dispute with Luther, Erasmus writes, that it is sufficient, when one agrees, that the human being out of his own power is capable to nothing, and that a human being what it can do, owes completely to God’s grace.¹⁹ Further is striking that Luther and his followers in the Augsburg Confession speak of the *free* (sic; D. A.) will in the part in which is dealt with the main articles of the Christian faith and not in the part in which is dealt with the abuses.²⁰ Has

¹⁹ Desiderius Erasmus, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, LB 5, 500 BC.

²⁰ *Confessio Augustana*, art. 18. in *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*. Hrsg. im Gedenkjahr der Augsburgischen Konfession 1930. 3. verbesserte Aufl. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956), 73.

Important is here to remember that the *confutatores* (confuters) (the *Confutatio* is the Catholic reply on the *Augsburg Confession* written by a committee of theologians on request of the Emperor) agree in this article, because, according to them, it is becoming for Catholics to go the middle course between Pelagians and Manicheans. Cfr. *Die Confutatio der Confessio Augustana vom 3. August 1530*, Bearbeitet von H. Immenkötter 2, verbesserte Aufl. (Münster: Aschendorff, 1981), 116, 11-18.

Luther really understood Erasmus and has he done him right? Is it not rather so, that Erasmus in his *De libero arbitrio* did not want go further than to describe and compare opinions, while Luther wanted to make assertions. Erasmus and Luther differ clearly in their theological approach. Who of them has the best theological arguments, seems to be still an open question.

The Correspondence between Erasmus and Luther on Closer Examination *On Writing Letters*

There are more than 3100 letters from and to Erasmus preserved. He was in correspondence with princes, bishops, and learned people in the whole of Europe. From and to Luther, there are more than 4300 letters preserved. The correspondence between Erasmus and Luther contains six letters. At least four letters are lost. The correspondence between Erasmus and Luther is more extensive than the letters which they have send to each other. Letters to mutual friends should also be drawn into the analysis, because it is very plausible that Erasmus and Luther have looked into these letters too. Besides they are sometimes also in discussion with each other through their books.

At a time in which no newspapers and magazines publishing news items and the results of learning, were letters indispensable means of communication. Letters were by the addressees often submitted for perusal to others. The sender had to bear in mind this usage of letters. But there were of course also strictly secret or confidential letters, for example when mediation in sensitive matters was involved. But precisely in these letters were others interested and regularly we read complaints about letters delivered with broken seal. So, for example, Erasmus had given a letter for Cardinal Albert of Brandenburg to Ulrich von Hutten, who however did not hand over to the addressee but made sure that the letter was given in print. The cardinal set only eyes on the text of the letter as pamphlet in printed form.

That letters were printed was quite normal at that time. Writing letters was an art which one we could learn. Erasmus published in 1522 to that end a handbook entitled *De conscribendis epistolis* (*On writing letters*). It is clear that during the preparation of the publication of collection of letters corrections could be made. This is the case with the Erasmus' letter to Luther from March 28, 1519. Erasmus has got a little into trouble when the letter by supporters of Luther was published. The Bishop of Liege considered himself compromised, because he was mentioned as sympathizer of Luther. For this reason replaced Erasmus in his own edition of this letter, the words "the Bishop of Liege" by "a high ranking person".

A large part of his letters has Erasmus himself published. The different volumes contain approximately 1200 letters, including a number of which was addressed to him. With the exception of some open letters, Luther did not publish his letters in printed form.

The best guide for Erasmus' personal thoughts are those letters, which he never published in his *Epistolae* (*Letters*). The reason for his concern with Luther's cause is clear from a letter to Spalatinus in March 1523: "If Luther would go down, no God or man could hold against the monks. Moreover, when Luther is destroyed, a large part of the pure Gospel will be destroyed with him".²¹

Erasmus' First Acquaintance with Luther

Already in the autumn of 1516 Luther mentioned by the way in a letter to Spalatinus the subject of the subsequent dispute with Erasmus. Around mid-December 1516 Erasmus received a letter from Georg Spalatinus, chaplain and secretary of Elector Frederick of Saxony. In this letter Luther addressed over a friend to Erasmus for the first time and Erasmus did not hear talk about Luther until now, though still not knowing his name, for Spala-

²¹ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1348, 30-34.

tinus only spoke of “an Augustian priest”.²² This letter from Spalatinus is “very important”,²³ because the theological differences of opinion between the two great men in the history of Christianity in the first half of the 16th century are found already clearly in this letter. After a large number of formal compliments which are fitting to the rhetorical style of that time and which are intended to propitiate Erasmus, finally Luther’s objections on Erasmus’ *Annotationes in epistolam ad Romanos* (*Annotations on the Letter to the Romans*) are brought out. In the first place Luther asks Erasmus to reconsider his limited view of “justice out of the works”. According to Luther Erasmus reduces “the works of the law”, following Jerome, exclusively to the maintenance of external ceremonies.²⁴ According to Luther, “the works of the law” enclose however also the Ten Commandments. According to Luther we are not justified, as Aristotle thought, by doing righteous things, but only he who is justified, acts justly.²⁵ Further he attacks Erasmus’ interpretation of the notorious text in the *Vulgate* “in whom all have sinned” (Romans 5:12). According to Luther Erasmus asserts that Paul does not write clearly about the original sin.²⁶ Luther supposes that these misinterpretations are due to the neglect of the anti-pelagian writings of Augustine, among others *De spiritu et littera* (*On spirit and letter*). When Erasmus would study these writings of Augustine, he would understand Paul’s *Letter to the Romans* correctly, and do more justice to Augustine. Finally is given in Spalatinus’ letter a summary of Luther’s view with regard to “justice out of works” in the line of its own comments on Romans 1:17.²⁷ Luther is afraid that those who feel themselves

²² Ibid., vol. 2, no. 501, 14.

²³ Ibid., 29.

²⁴ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 2, no. 501,48-62; Cfr. Martin Luther, *WABr* 1, Nr 27,4-26.

²⁵ Ibid., no. 501, 65-67; Cfr. Martin Luther, *WABr* 1, no. 27, 17-32.

²⁶ Ibid., 52.

²⁷ Meant here is Martin Luther, *Vorlesungen über den Römerbrief*, 1515.16. *WA* 56.

supported by Erasmus, only focus on the literal (i.e. for Luther the dead) sense of the text.²⁸ Spalatinus passed Luther's criticism on to Erasmus.²⁹

Luther's criticism of Erasmus' way of interpreting the Holy Scripture is still more apparent if we the text of the Luther's original letter to Spalatinus compare with Spalatinus' letter to Erasmus, on top of which is written by Luther "ad usum Erasmi" (for the use of Erasmus)

In the original letter to his friend, we read in addition to respect for Erasmus' erudition, a very great admiration for the spirituality and the sincerity of Faber Stapulensis. This last remark is omitted by Spalatinus in his letter to Erasmus. But this remark makes it clear that Luther saw a difference between two ways of dealing with the Holy Writ, and it is obvious which way Luther preferred. Here already the judgment announces itself, which would be passed in a letter from March 1517 to Johann Lang, prior of the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt: "I read Erasmus, but my reluctance is growing by the day. It is good that he consistently takes in a bright way monks and priests in and disapproves their deeply rooted sleepy feather-brain, but I am afraid that he brings not enough forward Christ and God's grace. In that he is still more ignorant than Faber Stapulensis. The human things overgrow the divine in Erasmus".³⁰ Again the distinction between Erasmus and Luther is translated to the distinction between Jerome and Augustine. There is just simply a difference of opinion between someone who leaves room for a freedom of choice of the human will and another who knows nothing else than God's grace.³¹ Luther keeps these ideas carefully to himself, because he does not want to support those who are with favour of Erasmus.³²

²⁸ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 2, no. 501, 69-71.

²⁹ Ibid., 48-72.

³⁰ Martin Luther, *WABr* 1, no. 35, 15-20.

³¹ Ibid., 20-26.

³² Ibid., 27-28.

This judgment has been confirmed in January 1518, when Luther puts his feeling on Erasmus to Spalatinus into words and warns him for Erasmus: "there is in my opinion to find a great deal in Erasmus writings which is not in line with the knowledge of Christ—but I speak now as a theologian and not from the point of view of grammatical competence".³³

The letter of Spalatinus asked for a response from Erasmus. But that did not come. The initiative to a direct contact came from Luther, undoubtedly at the instigation of Melanchthon and a few others who felt a bound with Erasmus as well as with Luther. Melanchthon took in January 1519 preliminary steps: "Martin Luther, who greatly admires your name, asks your full consent".³⁴ Three months later, on March 28, 1519, Luther wrote his first letter to Erasmus.

Luther's First Letter to Erasmus

Luther's impulses to the reformation of doctrine and life of the Church are particularly welcomed promptly in humanist circles. Martin Bucer, who in 1518 was present at the Heidelberg disputation, where Luther his views put in paradox formulations, wrote that Luther agreed in every way with Erasmus, although he seems to exceed Erasmus at one point, namely what Erasmus had taught only in veiled terms, Luther had taught openly and unrestrictedly.³⁵ Many young in the humanistic way formed theologians of that time saw in the theology of Luther a deepening of the ideas of Erasmus. They saw Luther as like-minded: Luther was bracketed together with Erasmus.³⁶

³³ Martin Luther, *WABr* 1, no. 57, 21-23.

³⁴ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 3, no. 910, 468, 22.

³⁵ (Martin Bucer), *Correspondance de Martin Bucer*, Tome 1 (jusqu'en 1524) (Leiden: J. Rott, 1979), 54-56. The letter was dated May 1, 1518, a few days after Luther defended his theses in Heidelberg.

³⁶ Cfr. M. Richter, *Die Stellung des Erasmus zu Luther und zur Reformation in den Jahren 1516-1524* (Leipzig: Druck von B. Georgi, 1904); E. W. Kohls, "Erasmus und die werdende evangelische Bewegung des 16. Jahrhunderts" *Scrinium Erasmianum*, vol. 1, 203-219 (Leiden: Brill Archive, 1969); J. Beumer,

It seems like Erasmus (initially) shared this vision.³⁷ But Erasmus was also afraid of commotion. He let Wolfgang Capito know, that he can agree with Luther's theses on the indulgence,³⁸ but asks him to convey to Luther to be cautious³⁹ and not to express any insults to the address of the Pope.⁴⁰ Although he thus could appreciate in these years Luther's writings with respect to the content on the one hand, on the other he took offence from the very beginning at the way in which Luther disguised his criticism.

More and more involved in the religious conflict Luther was in search of support. The agreement of Erasmus and of the humanists could greatly influence the balance of power. Tactical considerations determine the tone of the letter. Luther's letter ends in a ode on Erasmus' intellectual greatness, accompanied by a critical remark about the scholastic theologians, the enemies of the *bonae litterae*⁴¹: "How often am I, in fact, not talking anymore with you and are you not talking with me, dear Erasmus, jewel of us all and our hope. Indeed we have never got to know each other—that is a disgrace. Who is not moved in the bottom of his heart by Erasmus, who is not a pupil of Erasmus, who is not dominated by his influence? I speak here of them who were on the right way gaining more knowledge in linguistics and literature. For me it is always gratifying that among the gifts of grace also had to be counted the fact that one disap-

"Erasmus von Rotterdam und sein Verhältnis zu dem deutschen Humanismus mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die konfessionellen Gegensätze" *Scrinium Erasmianum*, vol. 1, 165-201 (Leiden: Brill Archive, 1969).

³⁷ Erasmus writes for example to Johann Lang, that everyone is highly pleased with Luther's arguments on the indulgences, except a few on the purgatory. Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 3, no. 872, 12-16.

³⁸ Martin Luther, *WABr* 1, no. 91, 1-3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴¹ The term *bonae litterae* is normally used to describe the scholarly and educational field that we nowadays call humanism.

proves many people, because just on this way the gifts of God's grace are distinguished from those of his anger".⁴²

But why did Luther so long hesitate to express his admiration? Luther's answer is: "I have not learned, after I have been such a long time between the Sophists (scholastic theologians; D. A.), how one has to pay one's respect to a man of learning".⁴³ And he adds in a bantering tone: "But now I have understood that my name is familiar to you from the fuss on the indulgence. The foreword to the last edition of your *Enchiridion* (Handbook of a Christian soldier) proves that you not only have seen my ideas, but also approves them and that compels me—albeit in simple terms—to show me personally grateful for the spiritual enrichment you gave me and many others ... For this reason, good Erasmus, I hope that you too will be prepared to acknowledge this small brother in Christ, who is very dedicated to you but hardly in a position to assist you further".⁴⁴

When Luther had hoped with his letter to get the explicit support of Erasmus for the Evangelical cause, then he was not successful. Erasmus' answer to Luther, dated May 30, 1519, is very polite, but in fact he refuses to take sides. He sets the matter of the *bonae litterae* alongside the ideas which are defended by Luther and unjustly have been fused by the theologians of Louvain with his own ideas: it is impossible to make them understand that he is not the standard-bearer of Luther's party.⁴⁵ According to Erasmus the theologians of Louvain see this as a good reason "to obliterate firstly the *bonae litterae*, and then to destroy himself".⁴⁶

⁴² Luther, *WABr* 1, no. 163, 9.

⁴³ Martin Luther, *WABr* 1, no. 163, 15-16.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 19-23; 31-33.

⁴⁵ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 3, no. 980, 6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 980, 6-9.

The Correspondence between Erasmus and Luther in the Years 1519-1520

To track the development of the correspondence between Erasmus and Luther during the important years 1519-1524 is difficult. Unfortunately we have only the disposal of scattered allusions in the correspondence of Erasmus. What can we infer from these scraps?

In the first place we can deduce, that Luther in the autumn of 1519, according to a letter from Luther to Erasmus, which has been lost,⁴⁷ appears to have deplored in general terms the publication of the response of Erasmus on his first letter.

The earliest statement of Erasmus which shows evidently an appreciation of Luther's views, is found in a letter from May 1519 to Justus Jonas. Jonas had brought Erasmus the (partial) edition of the *Operationes in Psalmos*, and Erasmus was very impressed. In subsequent letters he eulogized, above all, the *Operationes in Psalmos* and some writings on piety, which Luther had written before the violence of his enemies had put him up to unreasonable utterances.⁴⁸ Although Erasmus has read with pleasure the *Operationes in Psalmos*, and even though he knows that Luther has a good reputation among a number of important persons in England and the Low Countries, he is not prepared to unbend his reserve: "I stay neutral as long as I can".⁴⁹ And he continues: "With this advices I do not mean to say what you should do, but you must continue to do what you are doing".⁵⁰

On the other hand Erasmus' letters speak of finding an entirely different spirit in writings as *De captivitate babilonica ecclesiae* (*On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*), *Assertio omnium articulorum* (*Assertion of all the Articles Condemned*) and *De abro-*

⁴⁷ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 4, no. 1041, 46. See the note there.

⁴⁸ Cfr. J. D. Tracy, *Erasmus: The Growth of a Mind* (Geneva: Droz), 1972, 181-182.

⁴⁹ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 3, no. 980, 37.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, no. 980, 52.

gatione missae (*On the Abolition of the Mass*).⁵¹ Up to now, he writes, the majority was favorable of Luther, but now many people have turned their backs on him, because this polemical writings are an apple of discord, which Luther had thrown in the world, which made it impossible to find a peaceful solution in an increasingly dangerous battle.⁵² Although Erasmus not earlier criticized Luther's writings not to evoke his anger, he now had a touchstone with which he could convince his Catholic friends, that his case and that of Luther were really not the same: "where do I say that all what we are doing, is sin?"⁵³

Although Erasmus' life in these few years is highly affected by Luther's cause, he rarely speaks on the teaching of Luther. He writes rather tauntingly about the fierce fighting against quite a number of minor issues.⁵⁴ But what Erasmus calls a minor issue, that is, that the best works of the man are sins too, is for Luther on the contrary a central sentence of the faith.

In the course of 1519 Erasmus got into trouble, because he was accused of cooperating with Luther. The suspicion was not justified, but understandable. Erasmus and Luther had both sharp criticism on the scholastic theology and were both looking for a reformation of the Church. Erasmus has always argued in favor of a thorough investigation of Luther's writings, before a condemnation could be the case. Erasmus took Luther under his protection, because Luther's fall could have consequences for the flourishing of the *bonae litterae*.⁵⁵

In spring and summer of 1520 is once again an exchange of letters between Erasmus and Luther. On a letter from Luther, sent around the middle of March, Erasmus answers August 1, 1520 with the purpose to withhold Luther to mention in his writings the name of Erasmus and his friends, as Luther had done in his answer to the condemnation of the universities of

⁵¹ Ibid., vol. 5, no. 1342, 747-760.

⁵² Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 4, no. 1228, 25-25.

⁵³ Ibid., vol. 4, no. 1195, 62-66.

⁵⁴ Ibid., no. 1225, 332-336.

⁵⁵ Ibid., no. 1141, 11-14.

Louvain and Cologne. He ends the letter with the exclamation: "Oh, what if Luther could interpret the Holy Scripture without anger".⁵⁶

From a letter of Luther to Lazarus Spengler, dated November 17, 1520, one could conjecture that Luther has given Erasmus the assurance that he would not mention his name, even though he did not like it at all. From that moment on, there is a kind of an armed peace. Luther writes for example in the letter to Lazarus Spengler: "Erasmus, God beware him, and I, we remain connected. It is true that I often debated in secret with Philip Melanchthon the question how close to or far from the road Erasmus was ... I will not attack anybody as first; for me it is sufficient to defend myself, when I am attacked".⁵⁷

On November 7, 1519, the University of Louvain has condemned a number of statements by Luther. Previously the University of Cologne had done something like that. Six of Luther's statements criticized by the University of Louvain would turn up in the end literally in the bull *Exsurge Domine* (*Arise, O Lord, and Judge Your Cause*), which bull after the necessary preparatory drafts was promulgated on June 15, 1520. Erasmus was very unhappy with the bull. He believed that those who welcomed the bull would not rest, before they have destroyed the *bonae litterae*. He regrets the fact that this tragedy is being used to bury the message of the Gospel.⁵⁸ In an attempt still to stop the matter Erasmus wrote a letter to Pope Leo X on September, 13, 1520. He makes no disguise of his judgment of the Papal bull. They had to refute Luther, and only when he did not want to concede, they had to pass on a condemnation.⁵⁹ He speaks approving about Luther, but says that he himself has nothing to do with Luther's cause.⁶⁰ He could not else, because he himself was under fire.

⁵⁶ Ibid., vol. 8, no. 1127a, 94-95.

⁵⁷ Martin Luther, *WABr* 2, no. 353, 18-22.

⁵⁸ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 4, no. 1141, 20-33.

⁵⁹ Ibid., no. 1143, 65-76.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 8-11.

On October 8, 1520, two days before the bull *Exsurge Domine* reached Luther, Luther's books were solemnly burnt in Louvain. The following day the Carmelite friar Nicholas van Egmond—as well as Erasmus connected to the University of Louvain—preached in St. Peter's Church. When he saw Erasmus in the midst of the public, he deviated from the theme—according to Erasmus it was about the love—and called him in public a Lutheran.⁶¹ At a meeting, at the request of the Erasmus organized by the Rector of the University, Godescalc Rosemondt, Nicholas van Egmond laid no better proof on the table for his accusation, than that Erasmus not had written against Luther.⁶²

From a number of letters, dated in the years 1519-1520, it appears that Erasmus had adopted a cautious and balanced attitude in the face of what he called the "Lutheran tragedy",⁶³ the "Lutheran disease" or simply "Luther's cause".⁶⁴ He writes that he does not know Luther personally, and that he is not responsible for Luther's writings, which he cannot defend nor condemn, because he glanced through those just cursorily.⁶⁵ On the one hand Luther is called "a marvelous tool to trumpet forth the truth of the Gospel",⁶⁶ and someone who is very well suited to interpret the Holy Scripture in the way of the Fathers of the Church and to fan the spark of the message of the Gospel.⁶⁷ But on the other hand, Luther was a drag on Erasmus and the new theology. He cast a slur on the *bonae litterae*. The enemies of erudition used "Luther's cause" to attack Erasmus, by which they suggested a link between erudition and heresy. Aversion

⁶¹ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 4, no. 1153, 15-21.

⁶² A comprehensive report of this conversation is found in a letter from Erasmus to Thomas More. Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 4, no. 1162, 12-228; cfr. also no. 1173, 26-98.

⁶³ Ibid., no. 1141, 30-31.

⁶⁴ Ibid., no. 1033, 34-35.

⁶⁵ Ibid., vol. 3, no. 939, 66-69; cf. vol. 4, no. 1143, 13-18 and no. 1167, 124-143.

⁶⁶ Ibid., no. 1139, 86-89.

⁶⁷ Ibid., no. 1167, 124-128. Nota bene in a letter to a member of the Roman Curia, Lorenzo Cardinal Campeggio, dated December 6, 1520, therefore after the bull *Exsurge Domine* has already been promulgated.

from the *bonae litterae* surely played a part.⁶⁸ That is why he draws the attention of Albert of Brandenburg, the Bishop of Mainz on the backgrounds of the Luther's cause, because the enemies of the *bonae litterae* used his authority as a pretext to attack the *bonae litterae*.⁶⁹ In a letter to Luther Erasmus evaluates his own position as follows: for my part, I remain neutral as far as possible in order to be more useful for the revival of learning.⁷⁰

Erasmus wanted to be more a spectator than an actor in the tragedy.⁷¹ However, he could not ignore the Lutheran movement, not only because of the attempt to bring him in discredit in connection with it,⁷² but also because of the revival of learning used for the reformation of the Church.⁷³ Erasmus had written against abuses in the Church long before he knew of Luther's existence and he had admitted in more than one occasion, that he in a sense had hastened a large part of that reformation.⁷⁴ Therefore in the letters of 1519-1520 he adhered to the glaring need for reform. Erasmus states that he has found no fault with Luther's reputation and he still maintains the demand not to deal rudely with Luther.

Even at the start of "Luther's cause" Erasmus suspected that the thoughtless responses not only came on the part of Luther's opponents, whom he urged to stand out against Luther with the pen and not with slander and heated discussions.⁷⁵ Also

⁶⁸ Ibid., no. 1033, 195-199; cf. no. 1141, 25-26.

⁶⁹ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 4, no. 1033, 260-263.

⁷⁰ Ibid., vol. 3, no. 980, 37-38. Erasmus admits that he, out of concern for the *bonae litterae*, did not do Luther completely right, and that he did not want to pass judgement on the writings of such a great man. Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 3, no. 967, 89-93.

⁷¹ Ibid., vol. 4, no. 1155, 8.

⁷² Ibid., 18-20.

⁷³ Cfr. H. Holeczek, "Erasmus' Stellung zur Reformation: Studia humanitas und Kirchenreform", *Renaissance—Reformation. Gegensätze und Gemeinsamkeiten* (Wiesbaden: Hg. von A. Buck, 1984), 181-195.

⁷⁴ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1352, 91-93.

⁷⁵ Ibid., vol. 3, no. 939, 77-78.

Luther's fierceness was a problem, which by his natural drift and impatience the reformation could transform into chaos and discord.⁷⁶ Moreover Luther made a public matter of issues which should be dealt with more tactfully.⁷⁷ According to Erasmus Luther too did no good to the cause of learning and Erasmus constantly called to mind the advice which he gave to Froben not to print Luther's writings⁷⁸; in short, the threat (for the *bonae litterae*) was that Luther's cause would lead to "Lutheran" tumult.⁷⁹

Between the end of October and early November 1520 Erasmus made an attempt of conciliation in Cologne. The gap could still be bridged over, provided that, in the light of Erasmus, three conditions were fulfilled. In the first place Luther would have to speak more moderate and his greatest opponents would be opposed silence by the civil and religious authorities. Further one had to be prepared to admit that Luther's adherents and those of the old faith had different views on ecclesiastical rules and non-essential theological views, to which in any case, according to Erasmus also belonged issues such as the predestination and the Papal teaching authority, not fundamental Christian dogmas. Finally, people's thirst for piety at least had to be quenched by preaching the Gospel and by softening some of the tyrannical ecclesiastical rules. If these conditions were fulfilled, all other issues should be submitted to a group of impartial experts, such as outlined in the *Consilium Cujusdam* (*Somebody's Advice*), which Erasmus, together with Johann Faber, had written in Cologne.⁸⁰ But already by December 1520 disillusionment is heard in a letter. In a world that thirsts for the pure living water of Evangelists and the Apostles, Luther seemed to be extremely appropriate.⁸¹ But the aggressiveness of

⁷⁶ Ibid., vol. 4, no. 1120, 26-41.

⁷⁷ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 4, no. 1202, 56-62.

⁷⁸ Ibid., no. 1143, 20-22; Cfr. vol. 5, no. 1526, 34-37.

⁷⁹ Ibid., vol. 3, no. 983, 14-15.

⁸⁰ J. D. Tracy, *Erasmus. The Growth of a Mind*, 188-189.

⁸¹ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 4, no. 1167, 137-141.

his writings was not a reflection of the gentleness of the apostolic spirit.⁸² In the spring of 1521, little was left of the optimism arising out of the mediation efforts in Cologne. The burning of the Ecclesiastical Laws by Luther, the publication of *De Captivitate Babylonica*, and the in Erasmus' eyes exaggerated *Assertio omnium Articulorum* had made the disease, as it seemed, incurable.⁸³ Luther's enemies helped Erasmus, for this reason Erasmus helped them.⁸⁴ He hopes for an intervention from the top.⁸⁵ Erasmus begins at this time to emphasize the differences between Luther and himself.

Where Erasmus was afraid of, happened: Luther's cause raised revolt and Luther's medicine was worse than the disease.⁸⁶ Also at the Diet of Worms (1521) Erasmus could not reconcile with his conscience to make a stand against Luther. In any case he did not want, that, together with Luther, good things were going downhill, which in his view may not be lost.⁸⁷ He played the role of Gamaliel, who in the Sanhedrin advised not to prosecute the first Christians, but to wait until the time would learn it whether God was on their side was (Acts 5:33-39).⁸⁸ Although he was of the opinion that it was wise, both Luther and his opponents to muzzle, he continued to warn against excessive rigidity.⁸⁹ Broadly the same advice he gave two years later Pope Adrian VI. While he was recommending the restriction of the freedom of the press and reserve with regard to new developments, which promote earlier discord than

⁸² Ibid., no. 1167, 155-58.

⁸³ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 4, no. 1203, 24-26.

⁸⁴ Ibid., no. 1195, 32-34.

⁸⁵ Ibid., no. 1199, 5-7; Cf. no. 1218, 1-2.

⁸⁶ Ibid., no. 1202, 31-37; 128-133. Erasmus could ask even after the publication of *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio*, whether God perhaps tried to cure the Church by Luther's bitter and powerful medicine. Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1495, 7-11; Cf. no. 1497, 1-2 and no. 1523, 137-41.

⁸⁷ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1313, 12-17.

⁸⁸ Cfr. C. Augustijn, *Erasmus von Rotterdam. Leben-Werk-Wirkung* (München: C. H. Beck, 1986), 114.

⁸⁹ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 4, no. 1192, 57-68.

piety, Erasmus advocated genuine reforms and amnesty for the errors committed in the past. "For this is the way God deals with us every day. He will forgive us our offences". The source of the disease should be examined and cured. Erasmus proposed a committee of calm and highly respected men.⁹⁰

The Correspondence From 1521 Untill the Publication of *De libero arbitrio*

For his part Erasmus remained loyal to the tacit non-aggression treaty, refusing, as he mentions on several occasions, to write for or against Luther, despite Luther's ever more pronounced doctrinal positions, despite his more and more destroying acts, despite his excommunication in January 1521 in the Papal Bull *Decet romanum pontificem* (It pleases the Roman Pontiff), in spite of the ban of the Empire imposed on him in May 1521 by the Diet of Worms.

The continual complaint of Erasmus was that nobody seemed to be willing to take the pen in his hand against Luther and to refute him without willing to insult and destroy him.⁹¹ His friends agreed with it and thought that Erasmus would take up the pen against Luther. In the beginning, he said that he had no time, and that he lacked the talent to help them.⁹² At a certain point he decides to write on unity, but not against Luther. However, this plan was dropped, because the atmosphere was too fierce.⁹³ In the end, Erasmus conceded under pressure.⁹⁴ In particular, Princes like Emperor Charles V and King Henry VIII of England⁹⁵ and the Popes Leo X and Adrian VI

⁹⁰ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1352, 171-91.

⁹¹ Ibid., vol. 4, no. 1192, 19-21.

⁹² Ibid., no. 1217, 138-41; Cf. no. 1225, 239-42.

⁹³ Ibid., no. 1268, 79-81.

⁹⁴ Ibid., vol. 5, no. 1408, 21-23; cf. no. 1415, 54-55.

⁹⁵ Cfr. G. Krodel, "Luther, Erasmus and Henry VIII", *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 52 (1962): 60-78.

have prompted Erasmus to take the pen up against Luther.⁹⁶ That Erasmus finally did concede is the consequence of the fact that he wanted to prevent the suspicion to support Luther secretly. An attack on the part of Luther's adherents made no doubt that the decision was easier. Ulrich von Hutten wrote an *Expostulatio* (*Expostulation*) in which he reproached Erasmus, that he, as a scared cat, hides his sympathy for the reformation. Erasmus replied this attack with his *Spongia adversus Aspergines Hutteni* (*Sponge against Hutten's Aspersions*).

Erasmus was summoned by friends and protectors⁹⁷ to settle with the heretic.⁹⁸ Erasmus, however, did not speak of heresy, but rather of "discord", "tragedy" and "tumult".⁹⁹ In a letter to Zwingli from August 1523 Erasmus made his reservations about Luther. The matters in dispute are not the articles of faith, but issues, which usually are discussed in the schools. He was surprised about the determination of the people, who were no prepared to give their lives for an article of faith but very much for Luther's paradoxes. For those Erasmus himself does not like to die, because he does not understand them. The background of Erasmus' thinking of martyrdom is that the first "Lutherans", who died for their faith, shortly before were burned in Brussels (July 1, 1523).¹⁰⁰ Then he gives an enumeration of the apparent-

⁹⁶ Detailed reports in: A. Freitag, (*Historische Einleitung zu*) *De servo arbitrio*. 1525. WA 18, 559-597 and K. Zickendraht, *Der Streit zwischen Erasmus und Luther über die Willensfreiheit* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1909), 1-25.

⁹⁷ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1411, 23-25.

⁹⁸ Amongst others Pope Adrian VI writes so to Erasmus: Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1324, 22-25 and also Cuthbert Tunstall, Bishop of London: Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1367, 25-28.

⁹⁹ Desiderius Erasmus. *Spongia adversus aspergines Hutteni*, ASD 9.1, 172, 159-163.

¹⁰⁰ Luther wrote with reference to this event a Letter of comfort to the Christian in the Low countries and wrote a flaming protest song *Ein neues lied wir heben an* (A new song we raise) in which he gives an account of their martyr death. Erasmus' reaction on this event is conspicuous cool; he does not know whether he had to deplore their death, because they should have died for Luther's paradoxes and not so much for Christ. Cfr. here: D. Akerboom, "'A

ly absurd enigmas, which Luther has propounded: that all of the works of the Saints are sins, that the free will is an empty concept, that man is justified by faith alone, that the works have nothing to do with it.¹⁰¹ "Nonetheless" he continued, "I am firmly determined either not to write against Luther, or to write so, that I am not pleasing the 'Pharisees'".¹⁰² Erasmus notes that he does not understand what the benefit is to dispute about what Luther can mean with those riddles. He suggests even, that he almost everything, which Luther learns, himself has learned, only not so sharp and that he always has avoided those enigmas and paradoxes.¹⁰³

Erasmus has never given his protectors what they wanted, because he did not consider the matter as heresy.¹⁰⁴ But his judgment on this issue is at the same time miles apart from Luther's. He considered it not worth arguing about, not to mention dying the martyr death. What was it worth? A good, polite discussion. The issue, so dear to Luther, was well suited for Erasmus' intentions: it was adequate to show the distance to Luther, but in no way required a total breach of relations. It enabled Erasmus to be what he always had been facing Luther: not hesitant, but very ambivalent. He denied the allegation, that he was a "Lutheran" and wanted still to stay on speaking terms with Wittenberg.

In 1524, the year in which *De libero arbitrio* appears, according to Erasmus a moderate formulation of a conflict that was present in the background from the beginning, it came into a clash in a letter from Luther of mid-April 1524. In that letter Luther tried to prevent the outbreak of a public quarrel, but achieved the opposite, because the letter was brought into pub-

new song we raise ...' On the First Martyrs of the Reformation and the Origin of Martin Luther's First Hymn" *Perichoresis* 4 (2006): 53-77.

¹⁰¹ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1384, 2-14. Indeed these are essential elements of Luther's doctrine of the justification of the sinner.

¹⁰² Ibid., no. 1384, 43-47.

¹⁰³ Ibid., no. 1384, 89-91.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., vol. 4, no. 1033, 219-241.

licity. Erasmus had then to take side. In a tone, completely opposite to the somewhat submissive style of his first letter Luther tries to eliminate Erasmus finally by seducing him to a mutual non-aggression treaty. Besides anger and contempt one finds in Luther's letter some of the objections, which existed already in veiled terms in the letter to Spalatinus of 1516, objections which can be summed up in one sentence: Erasmus' Christendom is nothing more than philology. "Although we can see that the Lord has not given you the courage and even not the sense to resist freely and with certainty against us or against those, who we consider as monsters, we do not dare however to require from you, what exceeds your strengths and your size".¹⁰⁵

Von Hutten and a few others, Luther acknowledges, have tried to force Erasmus to give in his adhesion to the cause of the Gospel. He would like to see that the old Erasmus will pass away in the Lord's peace, but he ends with a defiant warning: "If you can do nothing else, I call upon you just to stay spectator of our tragedy, and, above all, not to publish books against me, In turn I shall abandon to do something similar against you".¹⁰⁶ Erasmus replied on May 8¹⁰⁷ in three points, "polite as it should be", as he writes to his friend Pirckheimer.¹⁰⁸ Luther and his friends do not have the monopoly of the fight for the purity of the Gospel. The supposed weakness of Erasmus is nothing else than bewilderment, because there are certain texts of Luther, from which arise legitimate doubts. People can also trace in the facts that in the name of the Gospel uprising and uproar arises. And, to finish this first point, he concludes: "I see, that it is an imminent danger that the *bonae litterae* and learning get lost".¹⁰⁹ "So far" Erasmus writes, "I have nothing written against you, and I have been content to denounce the alleged clashes between us". But then follows a barely veiled an-

¹⁰⁵ Martin Luther, *WABr* 3, no. 729, 8-11.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 59-62.

¹⁰⁷ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1445.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 1452, 13.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 1445, 11.

nouncement of the publication of *De libero arbitrio*: "Erasmus, who writes against you, serves the Gospel maybe more than the idiots who write in favor of you. For the sake of them one cannot be a spectator of the tragedy".¹¹⁰ The third point is a very lengthy justification for his actions in relation to Von Hutten. Not Erasmus' *Spongia* has lack of measurement, but Von Hutten and his protectors are the people who overindulge themselves in excessive anger against Erasmus.

Four months later on September 6, 1524 the *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio* was published, which brought the rupture into publicity.

Erasmus' *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio*

Erasmus says to have written *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio* in a few days,¹¹¹ but the preparation took much more time. One had supposed that Erasmus had already in mind the base of the strategy, which he would follow in *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive collatio*, even before he was convinced that he had to join issue with Luther to keep his credibility with his Catholic patrons. He would attack Luther's paradoxes, but not the evangelical core of his teaching.¹¹²

Before he focused on the issue of the free will, he had the intention to write a book on calming down the Lutheran cause,¹¹³ using the literary form of a dialogue, more than a "collatio" (collation; a comparison of texts) than a "disputatio" (dispute). In a public letter addressed to J. Botzheim, dated January 30, 1523, which has been given the title *Catalogus omnium Erasmi Lucubrationum* (*Catalogue of all Erasmus' Lucubrations*) Erasmus unfolds his plans. His original plan was a series of three dialogues, in which two persons, Trasymachus (Luther), and Eubulus (an opponent of Luther), under the leadership of Philalethes

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 26-28.

¹¹¹ Desiderius Erasmus, *Hyperaspistes I*, LB 10, 1274 CD.

¹¹² J. D. Tracy, "Two Erasmuses, Two Luthers: Erasmus' Strategy Defense of 'De Libero Arbitrio'" *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 78 (1987): 41.

¹¹³ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1275, 20-21.

(possibly Erasmus himself) should occupy themselves successively in the first place with Luther's way of dealing with the matter, namely whether or not he has dealt with the issue wisely, even if everything he says, is true, secondly with some of his "dogmas" and thirdly with Erasmus' advice to calm down the unrest.¹¹⁴ Erasmus did not carry to execution this original plan.¹¹⁵ We may assume that to these "dogmas" also belongs the doctrine on the free will, the more so because the intended content of the first dialogue goes about what Erasmus also deals with in the introduction of *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio*. Maybe there can be found traces of this framework in a letter to Laurinus, which is written between the original design and the final result: it contains an imaginary dialogue with a "Lutheran" and shows that Erasmus pays attention to the issue of free will.¹¹⁶ One of the reasons why Erasmus occupies him-

¹¹⁴ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 1, no. 1: 34, 22-29. Vgl. ook: Desiderius Erasmus, *Spongia adversus aspergines Hutteni*, ASD 9.1, 164, 1000-3.

¹¹⁵ Thompson presumes that the *Inquisitio de Fide*, which was published in March 1524 (after writing but before the publication of *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio*) is an abbreviated version of one of the planned dialogues. *Inquisitio de Fide. A Colloquy by Desiderius Erasmus Roterdamus 1524*, C. R. Thompson ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), 37. In the context of our research is interesting, that in this dialogue Aulus (Erasmus) is debating with Barbatius (Luther) about the Christian faith. Because he was told, that Barbatius has been condemned as heretic, Aulus examines his teaching point by point on the basis of the Apostles' creed, and discovers that Barbatius is completely orthodox. This seems very conciliatory, but in fact Erasmus is, despite all appearances, very polemical. For the *Apostles' Creed* says nothing about the issue, which was to be discussed: the freedom or bondage of the will of the human being in relation to his salvation. It speaks on what to Erasmus is the essence of the Christian doctrine, namely, the Trinity, the incarnation of Christ, the Church, the resurrection and the last judgement, universal Christian doctrines, on which Luther also held.

¹¹⁶ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1342, 926-58. We find here a number of arguments, which we will also encounter in *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio*. The design of the whole dialogue is found in Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1342, 733-1021.

self with the free will is that he was attacked by the Lutherans on his views about the free will.¹¹⁷

The publication of *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio* was for a long time in coming. The book was published until long after Erasmus had decided to write it.¹¹⁸ On the one hand this long time is explained by the fact that Erasmus had to study many writings (again) in order to compose his book. In the first place, of course, Luther's *Assertio omnium articulorum*, but also the writings of Melancthon and Karlstadt, who also are combated in *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio*. Besides, it is likely that he has read again (parts of) the works of Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus.¹¹⁹ And finally, he had to look at the newer literature, in particular John Fisher's *Assertionis Lutheranae Confutatio*.¹²⁰ Probably in the winter of 1523, he reluctantly has written in five days a first draft. Erasmus sent the draft to Louis Baer for expert theological advice.¹²¹ A second copy of this first draft was sent to King Henry VIII. If the King could assent to

¹¹⁷ Letters from spring 1522 show, that Luther's followers accused Erasmus of Pelagianism, due to a number of comments in his *Paraphrase in Pauli Epistolas* (on Romans 9), because he would learn that the human being in virtue of his own free will would be able to accept or reject God's grace. Cfr. Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1268, 81-85 and no. 1275, 24-28. For the Lutheran party this was the worst to be accused of.

¹¹⁸ See, for example, a letter to King Henry VIII of September 4, 1523: Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1385, 11; a letter to Johannes Faber dated November 21, 1523: Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1397, 14; a letter to Paulus Bombasius dated Januari 19, 1524: Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1411, 21-25. So the delay arose partly from the fear just to increase the tumult.

¹¹⁹ Cfr. also: Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1386, 21-23.

¹²⁰ Cfr. B. Lohse, "Marginalien zum Streit zwischen Erasmus und Luther", *Luther* 46 (1975): 13-16. See for the importance of John Fisher as a theologian: R. Rex, *The Theology of John Fisher. A Study in the Intellectual Origins of the Counter-Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹²¹ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1419, 1-5. Baer replied with a notice about the distinction between "necessitas consequentiae" and "necessitas consequentis". Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1420, 1-51.

the draft, Erasmus would finish the book and let it print.¹²² Further delay was possibly caused because Erasmus was troubled by a well-intentioned, but offensive letter of Luther,¹²³ who offered him a truce.¹²⁴ Erasmus pretends that he still has not written against Luther and adds, that it does not matter him, that Luther is writing against him.¹²⁵ Finally, Erasmus himself decided to do the first move. It was well known that he was preparing a book against Luther. Erasmus was of the view that he had handled the issue so modestly that even Luther could not be discontented with it.¹²⁶ At the end of August 1524 the book was printed in Basel and it was distributed in September.¹²⁷ Erasmus expected a sharp reaction from Wittenberg, maybe from Luther himself.

De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio embodies many topics which often are found quite literally in Erasmus' letters from the years 1518 to 1524. So Erasmus writes that one of Luther's doctrines is under discussion.¹²⁸ Nowhere Erasmus calls the teachings of Luther heretical.¹²⁹ But this one "dogma" that is here under debate, is a shameful exaggeration, a paradox (in the negative sense): Wycliffe's thesis, that all things—both be-

¹²² Ibid., no. 1430, 12-20.

¹²³ Luther, *WABr* 3, no. 729, 4-12.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 59-62.

¹²⁵ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1445, 16-22.

¹²⁶ Ibid., no. 1466, 58-60; cf. no. 1470, 46-47.

¹²⁷ See for example the letter to Haio Hermann, dated Augustus 31, 1524: Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1479, 182-85. See also the letter to Thomas Wolsey from September 2, 1524: Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1486, 1-3.

¹²⁸ Desiderius Erasmus, *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio*, LB 9, 1215 C (W. 3, 3-7).

¹²⁹ In his *Adversus calumniosissimam epistolam Martini Lutheri* (1534) Erasmus states explicitly, that he nowhere in his writings Luther's doctrine calls a heresy: Desiderius Erasmus, *Adversus calumniosissimam epistolam Martini Lutheri*, LB 10, 1537 D.

fore and after the gift of grace, both good and evil, and even neutral things—are done out of pure necessity.¹³⁰

Luther concurs explicitly in his *Assertio omnium articulorum* with the view that all things are done out of pure necessity and that human beings therefore are merely an instrument of God, as a tool in the hand of an artisan.¹³¹ The problem is therefore whether the human will can be described as “free”, that is to say is able to choose between alternatives.¹³² More precisely, such as Erasmus’ definition of the free will suggests, is the problem, whether a person has a free will in respect of salvation: “further we understand by free will, a power of the human will, so that people can turn to those things, which leads to salvation, or turn away”.¹³³

Erasmus’ way of argumentation in *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio* is to undo this idea of the “mera necessitas” (pure necessity), and the several related paradoxes (such as Luther’s “immense exaggeration” of the consequences of original sin¹³⁴) from those things, that Luther has taught in a pious and Christian way, that is, to scrap all confidence in one’s own merits and power, and to put all trust in God and his promises.¹³⁵ Repeatedly Erasmus argues that this trust in God’s promises has to be learned by carefully listening to the Holy Scripture without reading in it the paradoxes Luther learns.¹³⁶ For Luther himself attributed in the past, so Erasmus, a little to the free will, but was made by the heat of the battle to remove it entirely.¹³⁷

¹³⁰ Erasmus, *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio*, LB 9, 1217 E (W. 9, 20-10, 2).

¹³¹ Ibid., 1229 E-F (W. 45, 28-46,14).

¹³² Although “*liberum arbitrium*” literally better can be translated as freedom of choice, is here nevertheless followed the common translation of “free will”.

¹³³ Erasmus, *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio*, LB 9, 1220 F-1221 A (W. 19, 7-10).

¹³⁴ Ibid., 1246 BC (W. 87, 10-25).

¹³⁵ Ibid., 1248 C (W. 91, 12-18).

¹³⁶ Cfr. for example: Erasmus, *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio*, LB 9, 1239 F-1240 A (W. 73, 4-12).

¹³⁷ Ibid., 1244 A (W. 82,20-24).

Erasmus does not mention the writings in which Luther would have assigned a part to the free will, but this statement from *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio* is not the first time, that he is making a distinction between what he seems to regard as the core of Luther's doctrine and its subsequent paradoxes.

As in September 1524 *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio* was published, Erasmus did know that it was the definitive rupture with Luther. On September 6, 1524 he writes to King Henry VIII of England: "the die is cast: the booklet on the free will has seen the light".¹³⁸

After the publication of *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio* in September Erasmus waited during the last months of 1524 in tense for the responses his *Diatribe* would evoke.¹³⁹ The reactions from "Catholic" quarters were in the first instance fairly positive.¹⁴⁰ But in some of the letters doubts are raised about the impact of the *Diatribe* on the opponents.¹⁴¹ In addition, Erasmus was reproached that he indeed had condemned Luther's way of taking action several times, but that in his writings from before 1524 not sufficiently was brought out that Erasmus has rejected what Luther taught. When Erasmus had written earlier against Luther, the "Lutherans" would never be able to appeal to him.¹⁴²

The reaction to the publication of *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio* on the part of Luther and his followers was quite resigned. Melanchthon informed Erasmus, that the book was received in Wittenberg very calmly. In particular Melanchthon liked very much the very moderate tone. He does Erasmus

¹³⁸ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1493, 4-7.

¹³⁹ Much more detailed is the genesis of Erasmus' *Hyperaspistes Diatribae adversus Seruum arbitrium Martini Lutheri* described in C. Augustijn, *Erasmus en de Reformatie. Een onderzoek naar de houding die Erasmus ten opzichte van de Reformatie heeft aangenomen* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1962), 186-210.

¹⁴⁰ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1526, 227-229.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, no. 1503, 1-8.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, no. 1520, 18-33.

know that Luther is favorably disposed towards him and that he has promised that his answer will be written in the same moderate tone. Maybe in this way an investigation into the free will is not such a bad idea.¹⁴³ But at the same time the position of Melancthon, is clear: he agrees with Luther for the “dogmas” on the basis of the Holy Scripture.¹⁴⁴

In the winter of 1524/1525 however a growing polarization was displayed. By both sides Erasmus was plucked, and by both sides he was attacked. What he had fought for many years, faded completely in the background, because the only thing left was the question whether people was in favour of or against Luther. The risk to the *bonae litterae* could, according to Erasmus, only be warded off, when peace and quiet would be restored.¹⁴⁵ The ordinary medicine, namely suppression of aberrant opinions by violence, did not work well in this case, according to Erasmus.¹⁴⁶ One had to try something else.¹⁴⁷ Erasmus did feel quit not well in this situation. He felt frustrated by Luther’s opponents, who took offence at him, in his opinion unjustly, because he, unlike them, had written against Luther. But he was also irritated by the “Lutherans”.¹⁴⁸ Erasmus realized that when Luther would go down, the violence on the part of his opponents would only increase. He has not affiliated to any of the parties, but remained consistently going his own (middle) course.¹⁴⁹

In 1525 Erasmus was waiting in great tension for Luther’s response to *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio*. Luther was a mystery for Erasmus. He wondered whether Luther was not two different persons; sometimes he seems to write out of an apostolic spirit, than he writes full of sarcasm. On the one hand

¹⁴³ Ibid., no. 1500, 42-54.

¹⁴⁴ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1500, 37-39.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., no. 1514, 3-5; cf. vol. 6, no. 1564, 32-34.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., vol. 5, no. 1515, 37-40; cf. vol. 5, no. 1526, 172-177.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., vol. 5, no. 1534, 23-27.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., vol. 6, no. 1603, 1-6.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., no. 1578, 22-27.

he contemns emperors and popes and on the other he can to react with anger without distinction to the gossip of unimportant and not particularly respectable people.¹⁵⁰ He complains about Luther's short-tempered character.¹⁵¹ He reproaches Luther, that he does not know when to stop and that he makes an issue of everything. Moreover it is not clear to him what Luther really wants; where Luther wanted to come to, Erasmus did not know.¹⁵²

Luther's *De servo arbitrio*

Luther has responded late. As *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio* was published, he was working at *Wider die himmlischen Propheten* (*Against the Heavenly Prophets*) and *Adnotationes ad Deuteronomium Mose* (*Annotations on Deuteronomy*). Then he became involved in the Peasants War. It was not until September 1525—one year after the publication of *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio*—we read in a letter to Nicholas Hausmann that Luther spends all his time rebutting Erasmus.¹⁵³ Luther denies however that this was the reason of its late answer: Luther took offence at *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio*.¹⁵⁴ Luther's reply was published in December 1525, under the title *De servo arbitrio* which he derived from Augustine's *Contra Iulianum* (*Against Julian*). In contrast to Erasmus, who in his *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio* as little as possible would like to irritate, is Luther not afraid of the controversy and his tone is often mordant and sharp. This would for Erasmus lead to write a justification, called *Hyperaspistes* (Shield above the *Diatribe* against Martin Luther's (book) *On the Bondage of the Will*).

From the above we must conclude that *De servo arbitrio* certainly was not hasty work. One may certain exaggerations in *De servo arbitrio* not soften by bringing forward in excuse that the

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., no. 1678, 26-32.

¹⁵¹ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 5, no. 1523, 167-174.

¹⁵² Ibid., no. 1523, 23-34.

¹⁵³ Martin Luther, *WABr* 3, no. 926, 5.

¹⁵⁴ Martin Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, 1525, *WA* 18, 601, 29-32.

book is written in a tearing hurry and out of a controversy. Moreover Luther himself denies that his doctrine of the bound will is originated from anger about *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio*.¹⁵⁵

Not only because Luther here talks about what he calls the heart of the matter,¹⁵⁶ is *De servo arbitrio* a undeniable rich book, but above all because Luther here bring issues on the carpet such as the relation between faith and reason, the doctrine of the Holy Scripture, his thoughts about the Church, his views on the hidden and revealed (will of) God, the doctrine of predestination, and the distinction between Law and Gospel in the context of his doctrine of the bound will.

After Luther's *De servo arbitrio* was published at the end of December 1525, it last until February 1526 before Erasmus got a copy in hand. Erasmus presumed that this was deliberately, because in this way the answer of Erasmus would not appear before the autumn market in Frankfurt.¹⁵⁷

Erasmus was very shocked when he read the book: he thought that *De servo arbitrio* was an impertinent book, full of sneering comments and defamation. According to Erasmus the most disturbing is that he by Luther is abused to be an atheist like Lucian, because he would not believe that there is a God, a pig from the herd of Epicure, because he would not believe that God has the affairs of the common mortals at heart, a despiser of the Holy Scripture, to be someone who has rejected the

¹⁵⁵ Martin Luther, *De servo arbitrio*. 1525, WA 18, 756, 1-9. According to Erasmus Luther had been seduced, departing from a justified criticism on the much too high value which was ascribed to the good works in the practice of confession and indulgence, to deny all merits of the saints and the good works, see Desiderius Erasmus, *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio*, LB 9, 1246 F; W. 88, 23-32, then to reject confession and purgatory and to assert that the sentences of Popes, Councils and Bishops are heretical. See Desiderius Erasmus, *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio*, LB 9, 1246 F-1247 A; W. 88, 32-89, 15.

¹⁵⁶ Luther, *De servo arbitrio*. 1525, WA 18, 786, 30.

¹⁵⁷ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 6, no. 1678, 16-20. Cfr. vol. 6, no. 1679, 74-78; no. 1667, 4-13; no. 1683, 12-15.

Christian religion, an enemy of Christendom, a felonious hypocrite.¹⁵⁸ Erasmus had little congeniality with the content of *De servo arbitrio*. In the letters he nowhere takes notice of the content. He complains that the argumentation is scholastic and presumes that Luther did use this argumentation on purpose, because Erasmus was not well trained in the scholastic method.¹⁵⁹

When writing *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio* Erasmus still hoped that the fight would remain restricted to a purely theoretical struggle. In *De servo arbitrio* Luther makes clear that he does not convey the issue of the free will as a noncommittal problem. This means that the intention which Erasmus had when writing the *Diatribe*, was not achieved. Luther did not want an open discussion. Erasmus cannot understand that Luther in such a way took action against him.

Even more as by the amount of insults which were thrown at him in *De servo arbitrio*, Erasmus was run down in Luther letter from April 1526. In this letter, which, unfortunately, has been lost,¹⁶⁰ written immediately after the publication of *De servo arbitrio*, Luther rubs further salt into the wounds. One can derive the contents from the summary Erasmus has made in a letter to Cardinal Wolsey, dated April 25, 1526.¹⁶¹ Firstly he mentions the circumstances in which Luther has composed his book. Writing about the marriage of Luther, which took place in June 1525, he points out: "I once¹⁶² have written that he is just a wild beast, so untamed, that a woman is unable to tame them. But I

¹⁵⁸ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 6, no. 1670, 24-36. Repeatedly appears from Erasmus' letters how deeply Luther has hurt him. Cfr. vol. 6, no. 1672, 114-115; no. 1677, 7-8; no. 1678, 9-10; no. 1679, 71-73; no. 1686, 30-32; no. 1687, 39-41; no. 1688, 12-16; no. 1690, 18-22; no. 1697, 8-11; no. 1704, 14-15; no. 1716, 27; no. 1717, 42-43; no. 1719, 22-23; vol. 7, no. 1891, 212; no. 1987, 12-14.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 6, no. 1679, 80-82.

¹⁶⁰ Preserved is yet Erasmus' reply. Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 6, no. 1688.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., no. 1697.

¹⁶² Ibid., no. 1653, 9-10.

was totally mistaken, because it is precisely during his honeymoon that Luther has composed that book so devoid of any leniency. This is not a problem. He imagines that he is moderate. "In fact", Erasmus continues: "Luther is asking me almost to thank him for the sensitivity he has shown in many places and for the sake of our friendship; and he assures me, and would like to convince me from his complete correctness in the face of me. So has a woman tamed our man?"¹⁶³ Further Luther has written, that he has dealt with Erasmus kindly and that he otherwise would have written, if he had to do with an enemy.

Erasmus has immediately responded to Luther's letter, as is proved by the end of his letter: "Basel, 1526, 11 April, the day on which your letter is handed to me".¹⁶⁴ "Your letter came too late—to obstruct the publication of *Hyperaspistes I*: D. A.—and even if it would have been in time, it would not have undermined in any way to my determination".¹⁶⁵ In his answer to Luther Erasmus complains on the personal and insulting tone of *De servo arbitrio*. He reproaches Luther, that his arrogant, defiant and rebellious tone brings the whole world in the lime-light, brings the *bonae litterae* at risk and that Luther gives weapons for riot to those who long for reform.¹⁶⁶ Erasmus' indignation turns into a complaint: why are Luther's irascible temperament, which he uses as an argument to justify himself, and his malicious rage, only aimed at Erasmus, whose *Diatribes* is a polite discussion, whereas the controversial-theologians Johannes Cochlaeus and John Fischer in particular have attacked Luther? Especially the constant accusations of atheism, skepticism and blasphemy do not bring the debate a step forward.

The second part of the letter is more of a declaration of war: "You think you have disarmed me. I have more supporters than you think".¹⁶⁷ He wants not to focus on the personal aspects of

¹⁶³ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 6, no. 1697, 12-16.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 28-34.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 30-33.

this tragedy. "But what me and any decent person hurts, is that you with your brutal, arrogant, and riotous character the whole world throws in a deadly mischief, that you decent men and devotees of the *bonae litterae* hand over to the rage of some of the Pharisees, villains and revolutionaries arms for uprising, that you in short, so look after the cause of the Gospel, that you the sacred and profane completely confuse".¹⁶⁸ Luther is trying to destroy what Erasmus always has been trying to build: "what hurts me is the disastrous state of the society and the incurable confusion in which everything is moving, which simply and solely is to due to your uncontrolled character, which is not admissible for good advice of friends, but is extremely pliable for certain worthless and obscure figures ... I would wish you a better disposition, was it not that you like yours so much. You may wish me what you want, but not if it is your disposition—unless the Lord has changed it".¹⁶⁹

Erasmus' *Hyperaspistes*

Erasmus could not and would not leave unanswered Luther's attack on his *Diatribes*. He had to work quickly to ensure, that his answer still was to obtain on Frankfurt's autumn market.¹⁷⁰ He wanted to ensure that to prevent, that people would think that he is knuckling under.¹⁷¹ Early March 1526, less than two weeks, after Erasmus was handed Luther's *De servo arbitrio*, his reply was printed and ready for shipment.¹⁷² This answer, which Erasmus had given the title *Hyperaspistes Diatribae adver-*

¹⁶⁸ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 6, no. 1688, 30-33.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 37-42.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., no. 1683, 12-17; cfr. also: vol. 6, no. 1674, 33-34; no. 1678, 16-20; no. 1679, 74-78.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., no. 1697, 16-18.

¹⁷² Ibid., no. 1667, 9-14; vergelijk ook: vol. 6, no. 1674, 33-34; no. 1678, 16-20; no. 1679, 74-76; no. 1683, 12-17.

sus Servum Arbitrium Martini Lutheri, Liber I,¹⁷³ was only a response to the first part of *De servo arbitrio*.

In *De servo arbitrio* Luther had provoked Erasmus to defend his own position and not to hide himself behind the opinions of others. Luther's blunt attack in the foreword of *De servo arbitrio*, in which he described Erasmus as an atheist or Epicurean, did Erasmus boiling with anger. In *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio* Erasmus has chosen to defend for the sake of the unity of the faith just the view, which he thought was that of Augustine. If he would be forced to choose between the theological opinions, which oppose each other, then—says Erasmus in *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio*—he would prefer Augustine's view, that the fallen will of the human being had to be freed by God's grace, before he is free to choose the right (because this view is sufficiently probable).¹⁷⁴ The Augustinian expression in *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio* can largely be attributed to Erasmus' willingness to give in as far as possible for the sake of the unity of the faith Luther's view, namely that the human being not could trust in his own power. Where Erasmus himself stands, is not clear.

It would take until September 1527 before Erasmus' reply on the rest of Luther's *De servo arbitrio* was published under the title *Hyperaspistes Diatribae adversus Servum Arbitrium Martini Lutheri, Liber II*. That it took so long till the publication of the second part of the *Hyperaspistes*, is connected with the fact that

¹⁷³ There is relatively little literature on Erasmus' *Hyperaspistes Diatribae adversus Servum arbitrium Martini Lutheri*. For a first introduction I would refer to the following: K. Zickendraht, *Der Streit zwischen Erasmus und Luther über die Willensfreiheit* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1909), 155-179; H. Humbertclaude, *Erasme et Luther. Leur Polémique sur le Libre Arbitre* (Paris: Bloud, 1909), 178-260; O. J. Mehl, "Erasmus' Streitschrift gegen Luther: *Hyperaspistes*" *Zeitschrift für Religions und Geistesgeschichte* 12 (1960): 137-146; G. Chantraine, *Erasme et Luther, libre et serf arbitre. Etude historique et theologique* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1981), 191-263.

¹⁷⁴ Desiderius Erasmus, *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive collatio*, LB 9, 1224 BC. "Satis probabilis" is the highest form of certainty which could be achieved on earth with respect to the heavenly matters.

Erasmus' attention was compelled by other things. He has immediately after the publication of *Hyperaspistes I* started in February 1526 writing *Hyperaspistes II*.¹⁷⁵ He hoped to wind up the book before August 1526.¹⁷⁶ But in June 1526 he had to endure attacks from Paris on the part of Noël Bede and Peter Sutor, and he was sick to make matters worse. As a result, the completion of *Hyperaspistes II* was postponed. Soon, again the rumor was that knuckled under.¹⁷⁷ In particular, Thomas More¹⁷⁸ and Cuthbert Tunstall¹⁷⁹ urged him to keep his promise. Jerome Emser finds it suspicious, that the publication of *Hyperaspistes II* is still pending and writes Erasmus that it is for the best to meet his promise to write the remaining part of *Hyperaspistes*.¹⁸⁰

Erasmus had therefore to continue, although he did not see the good of it at some stage. In a detailed reply to a letter of Thomas More, which was written to find out, why *Hyperaspistes II*, in which Erasmus would refute Luther's arguments for the "necessitas absoluta" (absolute necessity), still not yet was published, Erasmus give several insignificant reasons for the delay. But the main reason was that it was not easy to find a good strategy for continuation of the debate with Luther. Luther would simply just become more irritated.¹⁸¹ Moreover, there is according to Erasmus no point to dispute with someone, who recognizes only the Holy Scripture, but interprets it in accordance with its own measure.¹⁸² Further Erasmus had given offence to both parties by publication of the *Diatribes*. When Erasmus would write now in the spirit of the monks and the theologians, who ascribe too much to the free will, because it is to

¹⁷⁵ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 6, no. 1683, 55-56.

¹⁷⁶ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 6, no. 1723, 63-64.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., no. 1853, 34-47; cfr. vol. 6, no. 1770, 23-26; vol. 7, no. 1804, 47-48; no. 1815, 56-58.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., no. 1770, 12-16.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., vol. 7, no. 1804, 1-2. Tunstall's letter is not preserved.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., vol. 6, no. 1773, 14-25.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., vol. 7, no. 1804, 5-7.

¹⁸² Ibid., no. 1804, 55-56.

their benefit, he would go against his conscience and deliberately darken the honour of Christ. If he only ascribes a little bit to the free will, and many to God's grace, he would only irritate both sides, as has happened with *De libero arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio*. When he finally would follow Paul and Augustine, there would be left very little of the free will: for in the two books which Augustine wrote at the end of his life to Valentine, he adhered to the free will, but he has magnified God's grace so much, that Erasmus does not see, what is left over for the free will to do. If he would ascribe all to God's grace, it would promote the spiritual laxity. But in spite of that, the promise had to be fulfilled to complete *Hyperaspistes*.¹⁸³

In the foreword of *Hyperaspistes II* Erasmus writes that he did not enjoy working on the publication of *Hyperaspistes II*.¹⁸⁴ He rather had not dealt with an opponent, who did not want to listen to the Fathers of the Church, the decisions of the Councils and the unanimous Tradition, who did interpret the Holy Scripture at his discretion, who did every time surprise with new words, statements, concepts and paradoxes and who, moreover, wrote so scornfully.¹⁸⁵ But Erasmus wanted to reply Luther, because some people thought that his fight with Luther was just a game.¹⁸⁶ Luther did not think it necessary to formulate a further response to the *Hyperaspistes*. Luther was finished with Erasmus.

¹⁸³ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 7, no. 1804, 75-102.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, no. 1853, 1-6.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 6-18.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 19-33.

Last Remarks

A final reaction must be mentioned. In response to a “furious letter” from Luther to Amsdorf, full of insults meant for Erasmus, Erasmus wrote *Purgatio adversus epistolam non sobriam Martini Lutheri* (*Purgation against Martin Luther’s not sober letter*, 1534). After reading the pamphlet Johann Koler (Choler) writes on May 25, 1534 to Erasmus, that he was far too lenient. “But what I particularly regret in your *Purgatio* is to see you write that you never have quit loving Luther. How is it possible for you to love Luther, who made you always so many terrible and offensive blames ...? I am not going so far in my Christian attitude; I am very much exceeded with your patience”.¹⁸⁷

With regard to Luther, he has until the end of his life uttered insults to the address of Erasmus. The *Tischreden* contain many insults. “Erasmus of Rotterdam wrote many excellent things because he had talent and leisure, was without worries and official duties, didn’t preach or lecture, and was no businessman. In his manner of life he was without God, lived with a sense of great security, and died the same way. When he was in the agony of death he didn’t ask for a minister of the Word or for the sacraments. It’s a fabrication that in the agony of death he may have spoken these words of confession, ‘O Son of God, have mercy on me!’”¹⁸⁸ But there are also more moderate utterances which are attributed to Luther and are doing more justice to Erasmus: “Erasmus is an eel; no one can grasp, except Christ alone”.¹⁸⁹

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¹⁸⁷ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 6, no. 2937, 15-18; 34-35.

¹⁸⁸ Martin Luther, *WATr.* 4, no. 4028, 87, 15-20.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 1, no. 131, 55, 32-33.

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The Eucharist in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin

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ABSTRACT. Several, divergent interpretations of the Eucharist had been circulating even before the Reformation. Yet, it was with the advent of the writings of Martin Luther, John Calvin and other reformers that the subject of the Eucharist—and of Sacraments in general—was given a special attention. The following study reviews the main aspects of the theology of the Eucharist in the writings of Luther and Calvin. The study attempts to analyze the degree to which their writings were grounded in the Scriptures and/or influenced by other theologians. It also sets the two authors in the context of their time, by analyzing the different sources that influenced the two and helped shape their theology of the Eucharist. In this sense, the study also takes into account the views of Thomas Aquinas and Zwingli, two of the main actors whose views must be taken into account if one wishes to understand the views of Luther and Calvin.

KEY WORDS: Lord's Supper, Scholasticism, Eucharistic Controversy, Martin Luther, John Calvin

Introduction

The following article reviews and evaluates the theology of the Eucharist in the thought of Martin Luther and John Calvin.¹ In order to understand the two Reformers properly, we will read

¹ For this article I used some arguments and parts of my previous article, "Revisiting Luther's Theology of the Eucharist", *Perichoresis* 5.1 (2007): 97-116.

their work against the background of Thomistic theology and the background of contending, contemporary arguments like those of Zwingli and others. Due to constraints of space and purpose, we will not deal with the Eucharist controversy and its developments that involved theologians such as Carlstadt, Erasmus, Oecolampadius, Melanchthon, Bucer and Westphal.²

The Background of the Controversy: The Roman-Catholic View of the Eucharist

It has become a truism that, in order to understand the theology of the Eucharist in Roman Catholicism, one must become familiar with the place of Sacraments in the theology of Thomas Aquinas; in particular, with his integration of Aristotelian categories into the overall discourse over the Eucharist.³ A sacrament, argued Thomas Aquinas (1226-1274), is “the sign of a holy thing so far as it makes men holy”; indeed, “the sacred sign of the invisible sacrifice”.⁴ But to understand the notion of “sign” we must be aware of the fact that Aquinas inclined more toward Aristotelian metaphysics than the platonic dualism that had influenced Augustine and earlier medieval thought. As such, since “it is part of man’s nature to acquire knowledge of the intelligible from the sensible”, sacraments must be sensible things: “just as in the Divine Scriptures spiritual things are set

² One of the best works on this subject remains that of Phillip Schaff, “The Eucharistic Controversy”, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 7, *Modern Christianity. The German Reformation* (Electronic Version, Christian Classics Ethereal Library), sections 103ff.

³ For an overview of these issues see Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House, 1985, 1990), 1115ff.; Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, The Christian Tradition, vol. 4 (London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 52-59; Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 308-320; Berkouwer, *The Sacraments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 188ff.; Rob Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace* (Kansas, MI: Beacon Hill Press, 1991).

⁴ *Summa Theologica*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981), Part 3, Quest. 60, art. 1.

before us under the guise of things sensible".⁵ The Aristotelian categories helped Aquinas explain how bread and wine could enclose the physical body of Christ while remaining unchanged in their external aspects.⁶ In the first place, Christ's expression "this is my body" should be interpreted literally, just as it was originally intended. Also, one must exhibit faith that it is Christ's body indeed which is present in the sacraments.⁷ Luther too will speak about taking Jesus' words seriously and approaching the sacraments in real faith. Then, common sense teaches one that the substance of the bread (matter plus form) could not change by itself in the substance of the body of Christ. But such a change "can be made by the power of an infinite agent, which has control very all being, because the nature of being is common to both forms and to both matters".⁸ The act of transformation—or *transubstantiation*—then occurs because the very words of Christ, "this is my body", are repeated by the

⁵ Ibid, article 4.

⁶ See *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, J. Barnes ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1984), vol. 1:170 ff.; 2:1624 ff.; Coppleston F., *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 1, "Greece and Rome" (New York: Image Books, 1983) 302ff. For Aristotle an individual, that is, a particular being like "this chair", is a *primary substance*, whereas "chair", as an abstract concept delineating the whole class of chairs is a *secondary substance*. The primary substance consists of a synthesis between *matter*—or substratum, the ground of all being—and *form*, "the shape present in the sensible thing". The substratum exists only as a potential entity until joined by form. Hence form is its principle of actualization, giving the substratum (matter) its shape and individual configuration. Belonging to the same individual being there are such things as qualities; for example color, height and the like. Aristotle called them accidental attributes, because they were dependent on the substance in which they inhere. In other words they are relative or temporary properties, "something which may either belong or not belong to any one and the same-self thing". In the case of whiteness, for example, "there is nothing to prevent the same thing from being at one time white and at another not white.

⁷ Thus Aquinas explains that "the presence of Christ's true body and blood in this sacrament cannot be detected by sense, not understanding, but by faith alone, which rests upon Divine authority" (Quest. 75, Art. 1, Pt. 3).

⁸ *Summa Theologica*, Q. 75. Art. 4, Part. 3.

priest at consecration. Hence, by divine power, the substance of the bread and wine is sacramentally converted into the substances of the body and blood of Christ in such a way that the accidents of both bread and wine remain visible.⁹ In other words, the “new substance” of the accidents is the Divine power which now sustains them.¹⁰ This argument is essential to understanding Luther’s objection against both Scholastic sophistry and the misuse (or misunderstanding) of Aristotelian metaphysics.

Yet Aquinas still shared into the mystical worldview of sacraments that was typical of Patristic theology. As such he finds in sacraments “the very *cause* of our sanctification, which is Christ’s passion; the *form* of our sanctification, which is grace and the virtues, and the *ultimate end* of our sanctification, which is eternal life”. And all these effects are generated by the sacraments, since Christ, who is the very character of the sacraments, imprints Himself on the soul of the believer.¹¹ We will show that, Luther too will later speak about the believer’s transformation wrought by the Holy Spirit (pouring in love) through the proclamation of the Word in the sacraments.

⁹ However, Aquinas had to specify that these accidents do not inhere in their original substance anymore; the new substance is now Christ’s body and blood. The accidents “continue in this sacrament without a subject” because “God who is the first cause both of substance and accident, can by His unlimited power preserve an accident in existence when the substance is withdrawn ..., just as without natural causes He can produce effects of natural causes” (Q. 77, Art., Pt. 3). This argument is essential to understanding Luther’s objection against Scholastic “sophistry”. On Aquinas’ view on “accidents” and “substance” see also Coppleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 2, “From Augustine to Scotus” (New York: Image Books, 1983), 326ff.

¹⁰ See also Mark Dever, “The Church”, *A Theology for the Church*, D. Atkin ed. (Nashville, TN: B&N Academic Publishers, 2007), 827.

¹¹ Ibid., art. 4; see also Quest. 63. Peter Lombard elaborated on this aspect in a similar manner before Aquinas. In his *Sentences* he argued that sacraments “were not instituted merely in order to signify something, but also as a means of sanctification”. From *The Catholic Tradition—Mass and the Sacraments*: vol. 1, Rev. Charles J. Dollen et al, eds. (Willmington, NC: Consortium, 1979), 194.

The mystical influences, integrated along with Aristotelian physics, led Aquinas to his belief that the Lord's Supper embodies the very sacrifice of Christ and "works in man the effect which Christ's Passion wrought in the world".¹² It has the "nature of a sacrifice inasmuch as in this sacrament Christ's Passion is represented, whereby Christ offered Himself a Victim to God (Ephesians 5:2).¹³ That is because in this sacrament "the body is offered for the salvation of the body, and the blood for the salvation of the soul (according to Leviticus 18:14, 'the life of the animal is in the blood'), although each works for the salvation of both, since the entire Christ is under each".

As far as the effects are concerned, as a *sacrifice* the sacrament "has satisfactory power".¹⁴ Aquinas qualifies this assertion by further explaining that "although this offering suffices of its own quantity to satisfy for all punishment, yet it becomes satisfactory for them for whom it is offered, or even for the offers, according to the measure of their devotion, and not for the whole punishment". Though Aquinas' ideas here do not fully reflect the theology of "works righteousness", the object of Luther's attack in the controversy over the Mass, one will note an apparent tendency toward requiring the sinner to amend his spiritual life before he or she approaches the sacraments.

Martin Luther

We may now assess better the critique, and also the integration by Luther, of some elements of Aquinas' theology of the Eucharist. In the following pages we will review Luther's notion of *divine presence* in the Eucharist (the doctrine of Consubstantiation), the role of *faith* in the Eucharist, the issue of the *worthiness of the believer* and the Eucharist, and his rejection of the *Eucharist as sacrifice*.

¹² Quest. 79, Art. 2, Pt. 1, 2.

¹³ Ibid., Art. 7.

¹⁴ Ibid., Art. 5.

Not surprising, for Luther a *sacrament* must integrate three parts, namely, *sign*, *significance*, and *faith*.¹⁵ The bread and the wine help believers reflect on the life and passion of Christ, which may in turn help one truly understand his or her own personal experience. The bread reminds the believer of Jesus' own life and good works, while the blood points to His passion, martyrdom and death.¹⁶ It also helps the believer face the spiritual struggles that he endures in this fallen world. For when "I" see these signs, Luther exclaims, "I" am reminded that amidst all misery and tribulation and Satan's attacks "I have on my side Christ's righteousness, life, and sufferings, with all holy angels and the blessed in heaven and all pious men on earth".¹⁷

Luther believed that, apart from philosophical speculation, the elements teach one that "Christ and all saints are one spiritual body".¹⁸ Thus to "receive this sacrament in bread and wine ... is nothing else than to receive a sure sign of this fellowship and incorporation with Christ and all saints".¹⁹ The *significance* of the sacraments should be understood against the background of Luther's ideas of *sin*, *fallenness* and *human despair*. As he put it: "Though I am a sinner and I have fallen, though this or that misfortune has befallen me, nevertheless I will go to the sacrament to receive a sign from God that I have on my side Christ's righteousness, life, and sufferings".²⁰ But how does all this work?

Luther's understanding of *faith*, the third part of the sacrament, is essential here. In his view, "it is not enough to know

¹⁵ *Luther's Works*, 35:49. The sign equals the external and visible elements of the Eucharist, the bread and the wine. See my article "Revisiting Luther's Theology of the Eucharist", 103.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 35:59; see also Nischan B., "Fractio Panis", *Church History* 53 (1984): 17-29.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 35:54.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 35:51.

¹⁹ One may not see some apparent, old Catholic vestiges here, since this work comes in the beginning of Luther's career as a Reformer.

²⁰ *Luther's Works*, 35:54.

what the sacrament signifies". One "must also desire it and firmly believe that you have received it".²¹ It is very likely that Luther's concept of faith differs from the Catholic idea of "intellectual assent" to a revealed truth or Church teaching.²² Faith, for Luther, conveys one's existential trust in the person of Christ, an attitude often born out of one's suffering or guilty consciousness. Here too the believer trusts in Christ's ability to help him or her overcome the conflict; for "as if he were what we are, he makes whatever concerns us to concern him as well, and even more than it does us".²³ Yet Luther does not end on a note of despair.

In his words "This is my body which is given for you, this is my blood which is poured out for you. As often as you do this, remember me", it is as if Christ were saying "I will make your suffering and misfortune my own ... And I leave you this sacrament as a sure token of all this, in order that you ... may be strengthened, and also bear one another in the same way".²⁴

To sum up, by the sign we "are pledged, granted, and imparted Christ", his life, good works along with his passion and martyrdom, in order that we may be strengthened in tribulation and in turn strengthen others as well". And finally, "just as the bread is made out of many grains ground and mixed together ... we become one loaf, one bread, one body, one drink, and have all things in common".²⁵ The Lord's Supper is a pledge which assures the Christian that he or she truly belongs to the kingdom of God; a sure union with Christ's sufferings, death, and resurrection.

Now, to differentiate further between Aquinas' and Luther's view of the Eucharist we must also ask "Who is worthy of the

²¹ Ibid., 35:60.

²² See Packer, J. "Faith", *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter Elwell ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 401.

²³ Ibid., 35:59.

²⁴ Ibid., 35:55.

²⁵ Ibid., 35:58.

cup?" In the view of Aquinas, professing sinners should "not be allowed to touch this sacrament", and the priest must not share the Lord's body and blood with them.²⁶ Only those who confess and renounce their sins and are reconciled with the Church can approach the Lord's Table and receive Christ's grace. Yet, according to Luther, "this holy sacrament is of little or no benefit to those who have no misfortune or anxiety, or who do not sense their adversity".²⁷ Throughout his entire theology he argued that sin "assails us as long as we live", that is, "the sin which remains in our flesh after baptism: the inclination to anger, hatred, pride, unchastity, and so forth".²⁸ Hence, the reason why God has imparted us the sacraments was to "strengthen and encourage us against sin". And it is also God, believes Luther, who says "take this sign by which I give you my pledge that this sin is assailing not only you but also my Son, Christ". That is why the believer must hear Christ's words, "Which is given for you. Which is poured out for the forgiveness of sin".²⁹

Another dimension of Luther's theology of the Eucharist was touches on the critical issued of the Mass as *sacrifice* and *works* versus the Mass as *promise and grace*. According to Aquinas, as far as its effects are concerned, as a *sacrifice* the sacrament "has satisfactory power".³⁰ He argues that "although this offering suffices of its own quantity to satisfy for all punishment, yet it becomes satisfactory for them for whom it is offered, or even for the offers, according to the measure of their devotion, and not for the whole punishment".³¹

In the vision of Luther the sacrament is primarily a *promise* where Christ proclaims forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.

²⁶ *Summa Theologica*, Q. 80, Art. 4, Pt. 3.

²⁷ *Luther's Works*, 35:55.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 35:53.

²⁹ *Luther's Works*, 36:176.

³⁰ *Summa Theologica*, Q. 80, Art. 5.

³¹ For the Catholic understanding of the Mass as "propitiatory" see also M. Osterhaven, "The Lord's Supper", *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 654.

ing.³² The Christian “believes Christ to be true in these words, and does not doubt that these infinite blessings have been bestowed upon it”. What follows, then, is “a most sweet stirring of the heart, whereby the spirit of man is enlarged and enriched (that is love, given by the Holy Spirit) ... and made a thoroughly new and different man”. That is why, if the Lord’s Supper is a promise, it cannot be a *sacrifice* offered up by the priest on behalf of the people. Christ “has sacrificed Himself once (Hebrews 7:27; 9:25-26) henceforth he will not be sacrificed by anyone else”.³³ Furthermore, “We do not”, Luther argues, “offer Christ as a sacrifice, but ... Christ offers us” and he offers Himself willingly on our behalf.³⁴

One will note again the importance of *faith* in Luther’s vision of the Eucharist. In his words, “we lay ourselves on Christ by a firm faith in his testament and do not otherwise appear before God with our prayer, praise, and sacrifice except through Christ and his mediation”. On the one hand, in the promise one receives God’s forgiveness simply by faith; in the sacrifice, on the other hand, “we present and give to God something of our own”.³⁵ The believer can bring nothing except his or her faith in God’s mercy and in Christ’s forgiveness; no purchase or exchange of favors, no human work. Faith allow God to apply His forgiveness to us, that is, through believing that “God is trustworthy and cannot lie (Numbers 23:19) that he keeps his promise”.³⁶ Hence the Lord’s Supper is a gift to be received in faith; it is divine grace which heals a troubled conscience and brings in “peace, life, inheritance, eternal honor and blessedness in God”.

³² *Luther’s Works*, “The Babylonian Captivity”, 36:40.

³³ *Luther’s Works*, “The Misuse of the Mass”, 36:146. See also Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 309ff.; For the general background of this controversy see also Berkouwer, *The Sacraments*, 259-78; Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, 55ff.

³⁴ *Luther’s Works*, 35:99. See also Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1117.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 35:169, 175.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 35:176.

Finally, it is important to discuss the notion of *the divine presence in the Eucharist*, a critical and often controversial dimension of the theology of Martin Luther. As we argued in the previous article, according to Dillenberger, "it is in the mode of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper that Luther's views set him in marked contrast to both the Roman Catholic and other Protestant traditions".³⁷ What Dillenberger had in mind by "other Protestant traditions" are the schools of Zwingli, Westphal, Calvin and the other reformers.

Even though our purpose here is not to argue for the degree of Roman Catholic influence upon, or distance away from, Luther, we should not underestimate the similarities between the two at this point. To understand Luther correctly, one ought to be aware that Luther sought to "preserve the truth of the 'Real Presence' found in the Roman position", and thus take Christ's words seriously.³⁸ Yet he also disagreed over the use by Aquinas of the metaphysics of Aristotle in the debate over the presence Christ in the Eucharist. Thus Luther gradually realized that the "opinions of the Thomists, whether approved by the council, remain only opinions, and would not become articles of faith even if an angel from heaven were to decree otherwise."³⁹

So, even though Luther disagreed over the use of Aristotelian metaphysics, he had to rely in his argument on the issues of

³⁷ *Martin Luther. Selections From His Writings* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1962), xxxii.

³⁸ Thus Rob Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace*, 217; Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1117ff.; see also the analysis of Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, 199-203.

³⁹ See 36:29 and the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians 1:8. Luther observed that Aristotle's accidents could not subsist apart from their subject; in other words, the accidents would have to be the accidents of this or that subject. But in Aquinas' interpretation, the accidents of bread and wine inhered not in their original substance, but in the divine power which sustained them in union with the new substance of the body and blood of Christ. And, Luther pointed out; this is a plain contradiction of what Aristotle meant on this subject.

faith and a literal interpretation of Christ' words "this is my body". He took "the words of Jesus quite literally at this point".⁴⁰ Hence, "For my part", he confessed, "if I cannot fathom how the bread is the body of Christ, yet I will take my reason captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5) ..., and firmly believe not only that the body of Christ is in the bread, but that the bread is the body of Christ". Even the human soul is "at the same time present throughout the whole body, even in the smallest toe".⁴¹ In essence, Luther shared in the interpretation of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Origen and other church fathers over the issue of the presence of Christ in the Sacraments.⁴²

Obviously, the controversy raised a series of collateral questions, such as whether Christ could be present in the Eucharist and sit at the right hand of the Father simultaneously?⁴³ Luther

⁴⁰ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1117.

⁴¹ *Luther's Works*, 36:338.

⁴² See Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, 197-98, and Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 312. On the similarity of this thought with the interpretation of Ambrose see *St. Ambrose on the Sacraments and on the Mysteries*, J. H. Stanley ed. (London: SPCK, 1950), 86-93. Also, for the impact of Ambrose on medieval theology see *Readings in Christian theology*, P. C. Hodgson and R. H. King eds. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1989), 269-270; note too H. O. Old, *The Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1975) and *A New Eusebius*, a new edition, J. Stevenson ed. (London: SPCK, 1987), 63-64, for Justin Martyr's view on the presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

⁴³ Oecolampadius, Luther's critic on the subject, could not grant him this premise, for "the nature of a body is to be in one place. A body which can be at the same time in many places will not be regarded as a true body" (*LW* 37:55). Luther's argument came to depend on the classical formulation of the communication idiomatum (the interchange of attributes) developed by Cyril in 431. Cyril sought to defend the dual nature of Christ—God and man—against the heresy of Monophysitism. Hence he argued that because of the union of the two natures in one hypostasis, predicates belonging to one nature could be applied to the other. In this way Luther thought he was right to contend that Christ's divine attributes could be conjoined with the physical bread and body, just as his divine nature coexisted with the human nature in Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

argued that the notion of *presence* must be understood as a synonym for *power*, conveyed by the very phrase "He sitteth at the right hand of the Father". Hence, as God's very activity manifested in the universe, *power* must be essentially present "even in the tiniest tree leaf". In his view, power "is uncircumscribed and immeasurable, beyond and above all this or what may be".⁴⁴ He also argued that one's acceptance or rejection of the *ubiquity* of Christ would depend on his or her concept of body. As Pannenberg pointed out, Luther insisted that "by union with the divine Logos, Christ's human nature has taken on the divine attributes of majesty, including omnipresence ... so that the exalted Christ can be present in the Eucharistic elements".⁴⁵ Luther believed that as God, ultimately Christ "is above body", and "above spirit, above everything man can say or think".

However, in contrast to the Catholic vision and argumentation of the notion of "divine presence", the concept put forward by Luther always had a practical force to it. Not that Luther was incapable of scholastic argumentation. Yet, from the very beginning his purpose was to appropriate the doctrines of Christendom to the heart, mind and practice of the common believer. This also was the case with the controversy of the "presence of Christ" in the Eucharist.

We will now shift our analysis of the concept of the Eucharist to John Calvin.

⁴⁴ *Luther's Works*, 35:57. Furthermore, as Creator and Sustainer of the universe God "must be present and must make and preserve His creation both in its innermost and outermost aspects". For wherever Christ is, the Godhead "itself is essentially and personally present", just as Christ was present in the womb of Mary and in the Godhead at the same time.

⁴⁵ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 312.

John Calvin and the Theology of the Eucharist

The Background of Zwingli's Symbolism

Along with Luther, Zwingli condemned the sacrificial value of the Mass as defined by the Catholic Church, where, the believer could obtain forgiveness through Christ's death on the cross reenacted in the sacraments.⁴⁶ He thus argued that "Christ, who offered Himself once for all on the cross, is forever the effectual sacrifice and victim for the sins of all the faithful".⁴⁷ But if this reenactment is an illusion, and if the bread and wine do not cleanse the sins of the participants, then why exactly would the Church celebrate the Eucharist?

In Zwingli's view, there exists no reason to invoke Christ's real presence in the Eucharist any more. Speaking rather of "commemoration", he argued that "the blood of Christ is given to us for drink that we may have a *sign* that what was once done on the cross holds good and is effectual forever".⁴⁸ Personal faith is the basis for salvation and the presupposition for the possibility to receive divine grace. The Eucharist, which is not an instance of perpetual expiation and forgiveness of sins, must always presuppose one's personal reconciliation with God through faith in the death and blood of Christ. Also, the words "this is my body" suggest nothing but a *semnificative* meaning by which Christ did not *identify*, but *associate* his body and blood with the bread and wine of the Passover Meal. True, there was grace bestowed at the cross, but that event cannot be replicated any more. Since the bread and wine function only as

⁴⁶ With some small corrections, the material on Zwingli also appears in my article, "Revisiting Luther's Theology of the Eucharist", *Perichoresis* 5.1 (2007): 97-116.

⁴⁷ See Darwell Stone, *A History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (London: Longman Press, 1909), vol. 2:38. Also on Zwingli see Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1119ff.; Osterhaven, "The Lord's Supper", 655; Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 312ff.; Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, 201ff.; Berkouwer, *The Sacraments*, 230, 287.

⁴⁸ Stone, *History*, 41. See also D. H. Tripp, "Protestantism and the Eucharist", 300.

a sign by which the church remembers the real grace bestowed at the cross, it is doubtful whether they are able to convey grace or not. The “sacraments are given for a public testimony of that grace which is previously present to each individual”.⁴⁹ Grace and salvation are conferred by the Holy Spirit through personal faith, even before any sacramental act takes place.

The Old Testament View on Sacraments in Calvin's Institutes

Although Calvin's theology of the sacraments was essentially grounded in the New Testament writings, he often made use, especially when attempting to validate the practice of *infant baptism*, of the Old Testament concepts of *circumcision*, *sacrifice*, and *purification*. The classic scriptural reference on sacraments in the Old Testament goes back to Genesis 17:10, where “God said to Abraham ..., ‘This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: every male among you shall be circumcised’” (NRSV). Then, “to it were afterwards added purifications (Leviticus 11-15), sacrifices, and other rites (Leviticus 1-10) from the Law of Moses. These were the sacraments of the Jews until the coming of Christ”.⁵⁰

Since circumcision served as a *token* and “reminder” of God's promise of the “blessed seed” to Abraham, where God was to bless him, his nation, and all the earth's people, once this promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ (the “saving seed”), circumcision was abrogated and replaced by the two sacraments of the Christian Church, namely, “Baptism and the Lord's Supper”.⁵¹ In its historical context circumcision commanded as much spiritual and religious value as Baptism did after Christ himself instituted it. In the view of Calvin, the Apostle Paul also taught that “baptism is today for Christians what circumcision was for

⁴⁹ Ibid., 41-42.

⁵⁰ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T. McNeill ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 4.3.20.

⁵¹ See Wallace, “Sacraments”, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 965, for this concept in the theology of Reformation.

the ancients".⁵² As the physical expression of circumcision was to be transcended by a new spiritual transformation effected by God in the believer's heart, so has water baptism been thought to coincide with our being regenerated by the Spirit, as we die and rise again to a renewed spiritual and moral life (Romans 6:3; Colossians 2).⁵³

Calvin's Sacramental Theology

The Triadic Role of the Sacraments: Signification, Matter and Effect

It is imperative that one should continually refer back to the three major theories of the Eucharist as he or she seeks to make sense of Calvin's own views. Although not all scholars agree with this interpretation, Calvin appears to have sought a middle path between the sacramental theologies of Aquinas and Luther, on the one hand, and Zwingli's memorialist views on the other.⁵⁴ Hence he felt comfortable to describe the Eucharist both in *semiotical* (related to signs) and *soteriological* (related to salvation and sanctification) categories. In the first place, the signs which are the bread and wine *signify* "for us the invisible

⁵² *Institutes*, 4.9.24.

⁵³ Hence the concept of "heart circumcision", in Deuteronomy 30:6, "the Lord your God will circumcise your heart ... so that you will love your God with all your heart and with all your soul"; also see Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4; 9:25.

⁵⁴ Thus Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 313; Berkouwer, *The Sacraments*, 230ff. Calvin will guard us that "we should not, by too little regard for the signs, divorce them from their mysteries, to which they are so to speak attached. Secondly, we should not, by extolling them immoderately, seem to obscure somewhat the mysteries themselves" (*Institutes*, 4.17.5). For a more controversial interpretation of Calvin's theology of the Eucharist in relation to those of Aquinas, Luther and Zwingli see Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1119; Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin*, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 337ff., and also the references cited by Berkouwer in *The Sacraments*, 230. For the historical development and formation of Calvin's theology of the Eucharist see Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Developments of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House, 1997), 329-355.

food that we receive from the flesh and body of Christ".⁵⁵ But God has intended them not only as outward signs, but also as instances of nourishment in a spiritual banquet "where Christ attests himself to be the life-giving bread, upon which our souls feed unto true and blessed immortality". Believers do not only observe their covenantal relationship with God through the Lord's Supper, but they also feed on Christ's body, which sustains and keeps the life of their body as well (observe Calvin's use of such words like "nourish, refresh, strengthen, and gladden").

Even before the Passover meal, Christ related his death and resurrection (the *matter* of the sacraments) to our life and salvation when he said: "The bread which I shall give you is my flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world" (John 6:51). The Scholastics would contend that in the Eucharist believers eat the real body and drink the very blood of Jesus. As we noted, Zwingli rejected any emphasis on literalism, and preferred to speak rather of the *remembering* significance of the Lord's Supper. For Calvin, personal belief precedes the grace of the sacraments (via Zwingli) and makes it possible that one eats Christ's flesh and receive his grace in the sacraments (contra Zwingli). In other words, individual faith, while sufficient to appropriate divine grace apart from the sacraments, does not invalidate the grace bestowed through the Lord's Supper (the *effect*—materialized in righteousness, sanctification, and eternal life). Since God employs all necessary means to bring about the believers' final glorification He has resolved to achieve this in part through the institution of the Lord's Supper. There "the believers are nourished unto eternal life".⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Calvin, *The Institutes*, 4.17.1.

⁵⁶ *The Institutes*, 4.17.8.

The Power of the Sacraments: The Work of the Spirit and the Preaching of the Word

The sacraments are physical signs which have been also designed to bring about our spiritual nourishment and final redemption. But how could physical entities elicit grace? We want to argue that, along with the doctrines of divine sovereignty and Christology, one other instrumental element which informed Calvin's theology was his emphasis on the Holy Spirit.⁵⁷ Through "the secret power of the Spirit" the faithful are bound with Christ. The Holy Spirit applies the work of Christ to the individual believers who partake of the Lord's Supper faith.⁵⁸ Christ instituted the symbols of the Eucharist, and He *descends* on the believers through the Holy Spirit; hence the "spiritual" interpretation of the sacraments. Calvin also describes the dynamics of the Lord's Supper by using the idea of *spiritual ascent*. As we comprehend the ultimate meaning of the symbols, that is, the blood and body of Christ, the Holy Spirit *lifts* our minds and eyes to "seek Christ there in the glory of His Kingdom".⁵⁹ Rather than demanding that "God's power make flesh to be and not to be at the same time", one ought to simply allow the Spirit carry him or her in the presence of Christ.⁶⁰ Calvin's *sola scriptura* provided him with a pneumatological framework instrumental in defining the miracle of the Eucharist. Namely, this is Christ's union with us elicited by the Holy Spirit, who "alone causes us to possess Christ completely and have him dwelling in us".⁶¹ The bond so formed is "like a channel through which all that Christ himself is and has is conveyed to us".

⁵⁷ Thus Wendel, *Calvin*, 337ff.; Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1119ff.; Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 313ff.; Berkouwer, *The Sacraments*, 234ff.; Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin*, 338.

⁵⁸ Calvin, *The Institutes*, 4.17.33.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.17.18.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.17.24.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 4.17.12. Also see Romans 8:9, "Christ dwells in us only through His Spirit".

As in other situations, Calvin found it necessary to relate his sacramental theology to the Word of God; and specifically to the power of preaching. He saw the Lord's Supper as an instance when grace ought to be appropriated. But abuses were not uncommon, and one of them took the form of silence; namely, turning the Lord's Supper into a silent action at best completed by "some magic incantation" or "mumbled words" addressed to the sacraments. Calvin objected that the Lord's Supper became less oriented to the people, as the attention became focused more on the intention of the priest or on the elements themselves. It was against this abuse where Calvin contended that "whatever benefit may come to us from the Supper requires the Word".⁶² The Word to be proclaimed "edifies its hearers, penetrates into their very minds, impresses itself upon their hearts and settles there, and reveals its effectiveness in the fulfillment of what it promises". The faithful do not need to be perfect in order to benefit from the grace of the Lord's Supper. However, as in Zwingli's case, they need to exhibit faith and mutual love, and take seriously Paul's words to examine themselves before approaching the Lord's Supper.

"Praesentia Realis". *The Presence of Christ in the Sacraments*

Calvin agreed with Aquinas that the mystery of "Christ's secret union with the devout is by nature incomprehensible", and therefore, in order that the believers may fully benefit from the workings of grace, they were given visible signs best adapted to their small capacity.⁶³ The parallels between body and bread and between wine and blood enhanced people's understanding of the purpose of the mystical union, namely, "to confirm for us the fact that the Lord's body was once for all so sacrificed for us that we may now feed upon it, and by feeding feel in ourselves the working of that unique sacrifice". But along with the signs, one also has the words "take, this is my body which is given for

⁶² *The Institutes*, 4.17.39.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 4.17.1.

you" (1 Corinthians 11:24). How exactly, then, should one understand the reference to Christ's presence?

Along with Zwingli, Calvin believed that the only appropriate interpretation of Christ's words was to be *analogical*. In other words, since Christ's reference to the body "which is given for you" and the blood "which is shed for you" pointed to his passion and death, one must understand that "they had once for all been given for our redemption and salvation".⁶⁴ Therefore, when approaching the Lord's Supper "we are led by a sort of analogy to spiritual things", which in turn implies that the presence of Christ cannot be but spiritual.⁶⁵ Christ was already made the bread of life; he did suffer, died, and was resurrected in a definite moment of time. The logic, then, is this: *once for all* he gave his body to be made bread "when he yielded himself to be crucified for the redemption of the world"—*past tense*; *daily* "he gives it when by the word of the gospel he offers it for us to partake"—*present tense*.⁶⁶ It would be, therefore, unnecessary to speculate on how Christ is physically present in the elements, because he never intended his words in that sense in the first place.

Having been raised from the dead, Christ ascended to the right hand of the Father, thus eliciting the coming of the Holy Spirit in the world (strong emphasis on dispensations).⁶⁷ Unlike Luther, Calvin believed that Christ's body is contained in hea-

⁶⁴ Ibid., 4.17.3. See also Wendel, *Calvin*, 339ff.

⁶⁵ For the *spiritualistic* view on the Eucharist in the theology of Calvin see M. Eugene Osterhaven, *The Faith of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 655; W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 313; M. J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books House, 1985), 1119; K. Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 338.

⁶⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.5.

⁶⁷ At this point Calvin argues that "the coming of the Spirit and the ascent of Christ are antithetical; consequently, Christ cannot dwell with us according to the flesh in the same way that he sends his Spirit ... When Christ said, 'You will not have me with you always,' he was speaking of the presence of the body" (4.17.26).

ven until he returns in judgment, “so we deem it utterly unlawful to draw it back under these corruptible elements or to imagine it to be present everywhere”.⁶⁸ But at the Eucharist the Lord is present, “for unless a man means to call God a deceiver, he would never dare assert that an empty symbol is set forth by him”.⁶⁹ How then should one resolve this apparent contradiction? Since believers live now in the age of the Holy Spirit, their partaking of the true Christ at the Lord’s Supper is enabled by the Holy Spirit as well. The Spirit, explained Calvin, “truly unites things separated in space”. Also, since the purpose of the sacraments is one’s participation in the blood and body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16), the mode of Christ’s presence would be less important, as long as “the Lord bestows this benefit upon us through his Spirit so that we may be made one in body, spirit, and soul with him”.⁷⁰ Paul declared in Romans 8:9 that “Christ dwells in us only through his Spirit”.

In conclusion, one could assume that Calvin’s concept of “real presence” implies a *spiritual*, not *physical* or *spatial* presence to be empirically validated by one’s sense observations. The presence, though spiritual, is real. Through the agency of the Holy Spirit the faithful were united with Christ, and by partaking of the sacraments they in fact partook from the real body and blood of Christ.⁷¹ Calvin used both the concept of *ascent* and *descent* in order to describe either Christ’s descent to us, or our ascent to Him through the power of the Spirit, as we “are lifted up to heaven with our eyes and minds to seek Christ there in the glory of his Kingdom”.⁷²

⁶⁸ Ibid., 4.17.12.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 4.17.10.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 4.17.12.

⁷¹ As Berkouwer argued in *The Sacraments*, 239, even though subsequent Lutheran theologians disagreed, Calvin and the reformers who followed him never intended to replace Christ with the Holy Spirit. They did not think of this work in terms of “replacement”, but rather “in terms of the work of the Trinity in the history of redemption.

⁷² Ibid., 4.17.18.

Conclusions

It should be fair to acknowledge that Calvin had much in common with Luther and Zwingli's views on the sacraments, and that they all owed the Catholic tradition its due respect for its crucial role during adversities. On the other hand, the differences between them have been so influential that one could not understand one without at least being informed in general of the theology of the others. In this sense, several concluding remarks are in order.

First, we believe that Luther, Zwingli and Calvin's polemical attitude against the traditional Scholasticism stemmed from his fear that, once the institutional church relegated to itself the doctrinal and moral authority due only to the Bible, this authority could be perverted and used toward inordinate human ends. One evocative example would be the Papal Mass, which "is a work by which the priest who offers up Christ ... to be a kind of appeasement to make satisfaction to God for the expiation of the living and the dead".⁷³ Calvin believed that, not only were many ministers taking advantage of this self-entrusted authority, but by this substitution they both deprived Christ of his honor, and snatch from him the prerogative of that eternal priesthood, and tried to cast him down from the right hand of his Father, where he cannot sit immortal without at the same time remaining eternal priest". Calvin concluded that in the Papal Mass human beings resolved to be their and other people's own redeemers.

Second, another disturbing issue the Reformers encountered was the Scholastic tendency to speculate, to bypass the plain meaning of the Scripture in order to provide rational support for doctrines like transubstantiation, and the like. And the Reformers cannot be accused of anti-rationalism here; not if one considers the impressive number of Patristic authors they often quoted from the originals in their works. Again, their main reason for objecting against Scholasticism was that one could easi-

⁷³ Ibid., 4.18.1-2.

ly manipulate the uneducated masses by appealing to the authority of the doctors of the Church. The Scriptures, Calvin believed, would be sufficient for matters of morality and salvation, which to be sure, were not the properties of the church and could not be offered for sale.

Finally, the question may be raised whether Calvin's doctrine of the Eucharist proved to be the better option in relation to the Thomistic, Lutheran, and Zwinglian formulations. We saw that in order to secure a literary interpretation of Jesus' words Aquinas had to begin with the premise of divine miracles and then reverted to Aristotelian metaphysics. Luther accused him of misrepresenting Aristotle's theory of substance and accidents, but in the end he came to an almost identical position: the physical body and blood of Christ are present in the elements of the Eucharist, as well as anywhere else in the world. Then, emphasizing personal faith and appropriation of grace, Zwingli dismissed both accounts as too literary and contradicting common-sense logic. He proposed instead a memorialist understanding of the sacraments, in which the idea of presence was at best analogical. Calvin believed that Christ himself was present in the Eucharist, but His presence transcends human logic, and cannot be defined in either Thomistic or Zwinglian terms. Also his view could be coined "the pneumatological" view of the sacraments, because he believed the Holy Spirit was instrumental in bringing about the believer's union with Christ.

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