

The Study of the Fundamentals of Martin Luther's Theology in the Light of Ecumenism¹

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It is not unusual in the history of academic disciplines that new ideas concerning the fundamentals of a particular discipline emerge either by accident or as a result of impulses from another field of scholarship. This is the case also in today's Luther research. Two particular fields can be named from most recent history, fields with significant impulses for new insights: ecumenism and philosophy. The *philosophical* impulses are connected with the task of locating Luther's theology in regard to both scholasticism, which preceded Luther, and the philosophy of the modern times, which succeeded him. *Ecumenism* presents its own challenges for Luther research and Lutheran theological tradition. It is the latter issue that I wish to address here, touching upon the issues related to philosophy only as far as it is helpful in light of ecumenical questions at stake.

The ecumenical impulses originate, above all, from two sources: Lutheran–Orthodox theological discussions, on the one hand, and Lutheran–Catholic theological encounters, on the other. The challenge issued to Luther research by Lutheran–Orthodox discussions lies in the theme “Luther and the doctrine of divinization,” whereas Lutheran–Catholic cooperation in Luther research has set out to clarify the theme, “Luther as a theologian of love.” Especially the late Catholic Luther specialist Peter Manns has unraveled the latter topic with his fruitful Luther interpretation.

The first of these two topics, “Luther and *theosis* (divinization),” is fundamental in the sense that it gives expression to the patristic standard of comparison that all these three denominations share and that can serve as a starting point in their process toward a common understanding. Furthermore, this topic brings to the fore the underlying philosophical (especially ontological) premises of Luther interpretation. The topic, “Luther as a theologian of love,” in turn, nowadays constitutes a fundamental task for Lutheran–Catholic research and conversation.

Clarification of the problems related to Luther and *theosis*, on the one hand, and analysis of the philosophical premises of Luther research, on the other, complement each other as research tasks. A monograph has been written on each of the two topics by Finnish theologians Simo Peura and Risto Saarinen.² Furthermore, clarification of the questions related to the theoretical and ontological premises of Luther's theology have consequences for the study of different areas of his theological thinking. Among these areas are Luther's concept of doctrine (on which Eeva Martikainen, former professor of theology at the University of Joensuu, wrote a monograph), his view of doctrinal formulations, and his conception of the nature of the objects of faith; Luther's theology of faith in general (addressed in Finnish Lutheran Juhani Forsberg's

1. German original: “Grundlagenforschung der Theologie Martin Luthers und die Ökumene” in Tuomo Mannermaa, *Der im Glauben gegenwärtige Christus. Rechtfertigung und Vergottung. Zum ökumenischen Dialog, Arbeiten zur Geschichte und Theologie des Luthertums*, Neue Folge 8 (Hannover: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1989), 183–200.

2. Simo Peura, *Mehr als ein Mensch? Die Vergöttlichung als Thema der Theologie Martin Luthers von 1513 bis 1519*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für europäische Geschichte, Mainz 152 (Mainz: Zabern, 1994), (first published in the series of the Institute for Systematic Theology/University of Helsinki, 1990.) Risto Saarinen, *Gottes Wirken auf uns. Die transzendente Deutung des Gegenwart-Christi-Motivs in der Lutherforschung*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für europäische Geschichte, Mainz 137 (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1989), (first published in the series of the University of Helsinki, 1988).

dissertation *Pater fidei sanctissimus*³) continues to be a central topic. In the following, I shall concentrate on the two topics arising from Luther research, namely, the doctrine of *theosis* and the theology of love.

In ipsa fide Christus adest: the point of contact between divinization and justification

It is a well-known fact that one of the central doctrines of patristic theology is that of divinization, that is, deification: *theosis*, *theopoiesis*. In the Lutheran church, its formal equivalent is the doctrine of justification. In quest of a basis common to both these doctrinal entities, it has become apparent that from the Lutheran point of view, this basis can be found in the motif of the presence of Christ in faith (*in ipsa fide Christus adest*).

If the concept of the presence of Christ in faith is to be regarded as the point of contact between the doctrine of divinization and that of justification, it must be possible, then, to express the central content of both these doctrines with the help of this concept. Thus, the Lutheran motif of *in ipsa fide Christus adest* must represent the intention of the doctrine of divinization—and, in fact, the doctrine of justification must itself be a kind of doctrine of divinization, when seen from the point of view of the “present Christ” motif.

This thesis, according to which the doctrine of justification is itself a kind of doctrine of divinization, is not commonplace in academic discussion, nor is it an isolated statement without any parallels. German theologian Georg Kretschmar has interpreted Lutheran theology from this starting point; and in Scandinavia, Regin Prenter has stated that the *theosis* of a human being and the doctrine of justification share the same intention. It is true, however, that this inner kinship between *theosis* and the doctrine of justification has not been generally accepted in academic research. However, this state of affairs cannot be regarded as the negative conclusion of discussion; rather, the present situation is based on the fact that this particular problem has not yet been thoroughly discussed.⁴

Real participation in the life of God in divinization and justification

From the point of view of its own intention, the core of the patristic doctrine of divinization can be formulated as follows: The divine life has become manifest in Christ. Within the church, which is the body of Christ, human beings share in this divine life. In this way, they become participants in the “divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). This “nature,” or the divine life, permeates their essence like leaven, in order to restore it to its original state as the *imago dei*. Regardless of the fact that there are several variants of the doctrine of *theopoiesis*, the following two classic formulations express the underlying idea of this doctrine: Firstly, Irenaeus says, pregnantly: “[*Jesus Christus*] *propter immensam suam dilectionem factus est quod sumus nos, uti nos perficeret esse quod ipse est.*”⁵ The second formulation originates from Athanasius: “He (Christ) became man, so that we might be divinized.”⁶ Thus, the notion of real participation in the divine life in Christ is the center of the doctrine of divinization. As we all know, the later interpretation of the doctrine of divinization by Archbishop Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) claims that in *theosis* the human being does not (directly) participate in the essence proper of God, but only in the energies of his essence. Unfortunately, these and other inner problems of the doctrine of divinization cannot be discussed further here.

3. Juhani Forsberg, *Das Abrahambild in der Theologie Luthers. Pater fidei sanctissimus*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für europäische Geschichte, Mainz 117 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1984), (Ph.D. diss., University of Helsinki).

4. On this topic, see especially Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

5. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*. V, preface

6. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 54.

When one looks for Lutheran motifs analogous to the notion of divinization, one is confronted with the obvious fact that Lutheran tradition undoubtedly is familiar with the idea of the divine indwelling in the believer (*inhabitatio dei*). A classic passage on the doctrine of *inhabitatio* is found in the Formula of Concord, according to which God, in the fullness of God's essence, is present in the believer. It is of special significance that the notion that only God's "gifts" (not God personally) are present in the believer is rejected in the text. However, from the point of view of Lutheran self-understanding, the Formula of Concord gives rise to a problem. Namely, its definition concerning the relation between *justification* and the *divine indwelling* in the believer is terminologically different from that of Luther. Thus, in the Formula of Concord, *justification by faith* merely denotes forgiveness of sins, which is *imputed* to a human being on the basis of the obedience and merit of Christ. At the same time, the *inhabitatio Dei* is made a separate phenomenon, which, at least logically, *follows* justification:

We must also explain correctly the discussion concerning the indwelling of God's essential righteousness in us. On the one hand, it is true indeed that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who is the eternal and essential righteousness, dwells by faith in the elect who have been justified through Christ and reconciled with God, since all Christians are temples of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who impels them to do rightly. But, on the other hand, this indwelling of God is not the righteousness of faith of which St. Paul speaks and which he calls the righteousness of God, on account of which we are declared just before God. This indwelling follows the preceding righteousness of faith, which is precisely the forgiveness of sins and the gracious acceptance of poor sinners on account of the obedience and merit of Christ.⁷

It is a well-known fact that the Formula of Concord drew on the later theology of *Melanchthon* in introducing the idea that the presence of the Trinity in faith is not the same thing as the "righteousness of faith." Justification is understood here in a one-sidedly forensic manner, namely, as the acceptance of a human being on account of the work of Christ. Thus, the *inhabitatio Dei* is not regarded here as the righteousness of God (*iustitia Dei*), "on account of which we are declared just before God," but merely as a *consequence* of the righteousness of faith, that is, of the forgiveness of sins. Luther himself defined the relation between justification and the *inhabitatio Dei* differently. His thinking was throughout christological: justification, on the one hand and the presence of God or sanctification, on the other, are one in the person of Christ. Luther did not separate the person (*persona*) of Christ and his work (*officium*) from each other. Instead, according to Luther's teaching, *Christ himself*, both his person and his work, *is* the righteousness proper or the righteousness of faith, which is valid before God. *Christus non exigit propiciationem, sed ipse est propiciatio.*⁸ Christ—that is, his entire person and his entire work—is present in faith (*in ipsa fide Christus adest*). In the person of Christ, the "favor" (*favor*) of God (that is, the forgiveness of sins and the removal of God's wrath) and his "gift" (*donum*; God himself, present in the fullness of his essence) unite. At least from the point of view of terminology, justification and the real presence of God in faith are in danger of being separated by the one-sidedly forensic doctrine of justification adopted by the Formula of Concord and later Lutheranism.

In Luther's theology, however, both these motifs are completely united in the person of Christ. Christ is both the *favor* and the *donum*, inseparably but at the same time unconfusedly, to use the Chalcedonian expressions. According to Luther, Christ (both his person and his work), who is present in faith, *is* identical with the righteousness of faith. Thus, the motif of the

7. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles Arand et al (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 548-549.

8. *Vorlesung über den 1. Brief des Johannes* [Lectures on the First Epistle of St John] (1527), D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, vol. 20, ed J.K.F. Knaake et al (Weimar: H Böhlau), 638, 9 (lecture notes). (WA denotes subsequent references to the Weimar edition of Luther's Works.)

presence of Christ in faith occupies a much more central place in the theology of Luther himself than in later Lutheranism. Therefore, it is easier to find a point of contact with the patristic concept of divinization in Luther's theology. The idea of the divine life in Christ, which, owing to God's mercy, is present in faith, is at the very core of the theology of the Reformer. From the point of view of this core, it is easy to understand why Luther expressed the patristic doctrine of the happy exchange, the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* between Christ and the Christian, and, indeed, even the very doctrine of divinization using the formulations originating from Irenaeus and Athanasius.

Naturally, this unfolding of Luther's theology is based on the premise that the presence of God in the believer is to be regarded neither as a mere external personal relation, nor as a mere inner unity of wills but, above all, as a real union of being. This view of Luther finds clear expression in the formula *Christus forma fidei*, which Luther himself often used in connection with the doctrine of justification. According to Luther, the relationship of the Christian with God is both a personal relation and an inner unity of wills; above all, however, it is a real union of being:

Sic ut Christus sit obiectum fidei, imo non obiectum, sed, ut ita dicam, in ipsa fide Christus adest. Fides ergo est cognitio quaedam vel tenebra quae nihil videt, Et tamen in istis tenebris Christus fide apprehensus sedet, Quemadmodum Deus in Sinai et in Templo sedebat in medio tenebrarum.⁹

Other schools of thought on the nature of the presence of Christ

Certain philosophical-theological traditions that have often served as hermeneutical guidelines for Luther research have crucially impeded the appreciation of the above-mentioned theological motif of Luther, which emphasizes the real nature of God's presence in faith. These traditions have been more or less influenced by the Kant interpretation of German theologians Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889) and Wilhelm Herrmann (1846–1922). Systematic analysis of the influence of these traditions on Protestant theology would be one of the most important research tasks of the present. Unfortunately, it is not possible to discuss this subject in depth here. Thus, I would like to confine myself to an outline of some of the elements included in these traditions (for a further treatment, I would refer to the dissertation of Risto Saarinen, in which he analyzes the philosophical premises of Luther scholarship).

The first of the research traditions hampering the recognition of the real-ontic nature of the presence of Christ is the very influential theological-philosophical conception of Albrecht Ritschl and Wilhelm Herrmann. These theologians have developed the transcendentalist hermeneutics of Christian faith, which seeks to explicate the content of faith with the help of the *a priori* premises, which are there in human beings enabling them to understand the content of faith. Here I would like to refer to the study by the late Finnish theologian Simo Kiviranta (1936–2004) and his analysis of Ritschl's ideas of philosophy and the study of history. In this conception, the *a priori* "place" of religion in the human being is indicated by means of a decisively important distinction. This distinction, which is fundamental for the justification of religious faith from the point of view of philosophy, is that between "person" and "nature." As

9. *In epistolam S. Pauli ad Galatas Commentarius ex praelectione D. Martini Lutheri collectus* (1535), WA 40/I:228, 34–229, 15–18. "Christ is the object of faith, or rather not the object but, so to speak, the One who is present in the faith itself. Thus faith is a sort of knowledge or darkness that nothing can see. Yet the Christ of whom faith takes hold is sitting in this darkness as God sat in the midst of darkness on Sinai and in the temple," "Lectures on Galatians (1531)," *Luther's Works—American Edition*, vol. 26, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2002), 1955–1986. (LW denotes subsequent references to the American Edition of Luther's Works.)

“nature,” the human being is part of mechanical causality and belongs to the domain of theoretical reason. As “persons,” however, human beings are beyond nature because of their will, that is, because of their practical reason, which sets values. All propositions concerning faith, if they are to be religious propositions, must express this distinction between person and nature, and it must be possible to reduce them to this distinction. Because only nature involves “being,” judgments concerning being involve only nature. The domain of person, in contrast, finds expression only in the value judgments of practical reason.

When religion is interpreted from the standpoint of this distinction, the relationship of the human being with God cannot be a union of being, but merely a unity of wills, that is, an ethical-personal relation. Because it is practical reason that constitutes the human being as “person,” and because theoretical judgments concerning being are valid in the domain of “nature” only, it is a *naturalization* of God to apply ontological judgments to him, said Ritschl. He thought that if the relation between the human being and God is regarded as a relationship which involves being, God is seen as part of nature; thus, God is made an idol, and religion is transformed into a pagan-style nature religion. As it happens, however, in both mysticism and in the doctrine of divinization the human being’s relationship with God is seen as a union of being. For Ritschl, therefore, both mysticism and *theosis* represented heathen, nature-like, and “physical” religion. This view of *theosis* has had a corrupting impact on Protestant theology ever since.

I do not think that the reach of the influence that the transcendental–ethical justification of religion has had upon the later understanding of Christian faith can be overestimated. One example of the outcome of this influence is German theologian Adolf von Harnack’s (1851–1930) conception of the history of dogma, and his negative appraisal of the doctrine of divinization. Ritschl’s influence can also be recognized in German theologian Karl Holl’s (1866–1926) interpretation of Luther’s theology. For Holl, the presence of Christ in faith ultimately denoted the human being’s will, which is inspired and kindled by the will of God. The well-known problems in Holl’s understanding of justification also arise from this very same “ontology of will” (*Willensontologie*). If the renewal of a human being means the renewal of his or her will, and if the will is the center constitutive to the human being, then justification merely signifies a one-dimensional renewal in which there is no place for the permanent *extra nos* of the righteousness which is *in nobis*. This example taken from Holl’s thinking shows, among other things, that the *extra nos in nobis* can be maintained only through the view that Christ himself, in his own reality (or, to use a scholastic way of speech, *in se*, that is, *in his substance*) is and remains our righteousness.

The second hermeneutical tradition that has contributed to the obscuration of the real nature of the presence of Christ also goes back to Ritschl, but in a different theological context. From the ontology of German philosopher Hermann Lotze (1817–1881), Ritschl adopted the idea that God can be known only in the acts (*Akten*) of God’s effects (*Wirkungen*) on human beings. According to Ritschl (and here he differs from Lotze), the origin of these effects, as well as their ontological nature *an sich*, remains unknown. From this selective adoption of Kant’s and Lotze’s positions arises actualism, “*Aktualismus*,” which has had a significant influence on the understanding of both revelation and the concept of the word in dialectical theology. As for theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968), the essential has been said in an article which has remained almost unnoticed, namely, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer und Karl Barths *Offenbarungspositivismus*” by Danish Lutheran theologian Regin Preter (1907–1990).¹⁰ Finnish theologian Eeva Martikainen (1949–2010), in turn, analyzed the influence the “actualistic” understanding of the word exerts on Luther interpretation, and the ecumenical implications of this stance, in her

10. Regin Preter, *Die mündige Welt* 3 (Munich: Weissensee, 1959), 11-41.

monograph, *Evangelium als Mitte: Das Verhältnis von Wort und Lehre in der ökumenischen Methode Hans Joachim Iwands*.¹¹

To mention a position different from the Barthian conception represented by Iwand, the analyses presented by German Lutheran scholar Reinhard Schwarz in his important book, *Fides, spes und caritas beim jungen Luther*, can be referred to as examples of the existential–theological use of the anti-ontological concept of “act.” Justifiably, Schwarz emphasizes that in the theology of the young Luther, grace is not a habit (*habitus*), not an inherent and accidental quality in the human being. From this fact Schwarz draws the conclusion that grace is not a “physical, that is, ontological” attribute of *fides*, either.¹² According to Schwarz, Luther does not regard Christ as “an essence which exists in itself.” Schwarz says: “This is not an ontological expression of what *fides* is in itself, but rather an expression of the relation in which faith keeps itself, and of the relation which faith opens up for the human being.”¹³

According to Schwarz, *gratia* does not dwell in a human being as a “quality which exists in itself.” Rather, the mode of its presence is the “actuality” (*Aktualität*) of the power of God in “the human existence which understands itself in the light of its relation to both God and itself.” Basically, Schwarz interprets the term *substance*, which is of crucial importance for our topic, as denoting an existentially “firm foundation.” It is worth noting, however, that Schwarz himself also briefly refers to the possibility that Luther may have interpreted the concept of substance differently; in this case, *substance* would mean that the saving goods (*bona, Güter*) that a human being is to receive in the future *subsist in him or her*.¹⁴ Thus, in addition to the biblical view of substance, Luther also retained the scholastic (philosophical) view of it. To my understanding, this observation is of crucial importance and calls for correction of the above-mentioned thesis of Schwarz. Naturally, Luther did not rely on any particular scholastic ontology, but he nevertheless used the concept of substance in the scholastic fashion, that is, as a technical term that denotes *ens in se*. For Luther, grace was not an accidental habit in a human being. However, this certainly does not mean that Luther denied the nature of grace as substance. On the contrary, if grace is not a habit—or an accident, that is, *ens in alio*—it must be a substance, a reality which exists in itself, *ens in se*. This is the view represented by Luther.

A text by Luther as a corrective of the ethical-actualistic hermeneutical tradition

An early text by Luther can be introduced here as a corrective to both traditions mentioned above. Luther’s *Christmas Sermon* from 1515 elucidates, in an interesting way, both the relationship between divinization and justification and his use of certain philosophical terms, for example, *substance*. In the sermon, Luther first explains the meaning of justification using the classic formulation of the doctrine of divinization:

Just as the Word of God has become flesh, in the same way it is certainly necessary that the flesh becomes Word. Namely, the Word becomes flesh precisely in order that the flesh might become Word. In other words: God becomes a man, so that man might become God. In this way, power becomes weak, so that weakness might become powerful. The Logos clothes Himself with our form, shape, image and likeness, in order to clothe us with His image, form and likeness. Thus, wisdom becomes folly, so that folly might become wisdom. This applies to

11. Eeva Martikainen, “Evangelium als Mitte. Das Verhältnis von Wort und Lehre in der ökumenischen Methode Hans Joachim Iwands,” *Arbeiten zur Geschichte und Theologie des Luthertums. Neue Folge* 9 (Hannover: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1989), (first published in Finnish in 1980, Ph.D. diss., University of Helsinki).

12. Reinhard Schwarz, *Fides, spes und caritas beim jungen Luther* (Berlin, 1962), 61–62.

13. “Hier wird also nicht ontologisch ausgesagt, was die fides an sich ist, sondern in welcher Relation sie sich hält und welche Relation sie dem Menschen eröffnet.” *Ibid.*, 63.

14. *Ibid.*, 75, note 184.

everything that is in God and in us, to the extent that He takes upon Himself everything that is ours, in order to confer to us that which is His.¹⁵

This text shows that for Luther the concept of the happy exchange and the notion of the *communicatio idiomatum* between the Logos and a human being give an accurate expression to the central content of the doctrine of divinization.

Luther's usage of the term *substance* in this sermon also helps us to understand correctly the doctrine of justification (and divinization). Luther emphasizes that the fact that the Word becomes flesh and the flesh becomes Word does not imply a change in the substance of either the human being or God. God is not transformed into a human being, nor is the human being transformed into God. Furthermore, God does not cease to be God, nor does the human being cease to be a human being. Both retain their substance. Thus, the use of the concept of substance does not imply a "physicalization" of God, or a pantheistic fusion of God and the human being. On the contrary, it is through this concept that Luther maintains the difference between Creator and creature. Even in the *unio*, God and the human being remain realities that exist in themselves (*ens in se*); in other words, they remain separate substances.

Thus, the union between God and a human being does not imply a change in their substances. One should not, however, draw from this fact the conclusion that the *unio* only involves their will and not their being. By contrast, in the incarnation the Logos has not only "taken upon Himself our flesh" but he "really *is* flesh," and, in the same way, "we do not only *have* the Word in faith" but "we even *are* the Word."¹⁶ Luther intentionally emphasizes the ontically real nature of the *unio*, by adding: "Who is born of the Spirit, *is* spirit."

In connection with this, however, Luther's text says something that, at first sight, seems to deprive the interpretation we have presented above of its justification; namely, "No one who believes will be given here that in which he believes." It is not Luther's intention, however, to deny here the real nature of the presence of Christ. Namely, he speaks of the same thing when he says later that the Christian will be given only the word (as faith in that which is to come), but not yet the matter itself (*nondum in re ipsa*). By this he does not mean that faith would merely be a relation to that which is to come. Rather, his intention is to say that the Logos has clothed himself with a material sign (that is, a voice, sound, or letter), and that in this life human beings cannot grasp the Logos without this material covering. *In statu gloriae* the Word will be there without voice or letter, but *in statu viae* it is covered with "sound, voice, and letter, just as honey is there in the bees-wax, the kernel in the nut, the marrow in the bone, or life in the flesh, or the Word in the flesh."¹⁷ Moreover, Luther also says that, in spite of the fact that the Word is hidden in external signs, "we nevertheless are already now the whole Word" (*totum verbum sumus*).¹⁸ "And so we are made into that which we have already assumed."¹⁹

Luther defends his view, according to which the human being becomes in faith "Word," with the help of very expressive philosophical analogies. He explains that according to Aristotle, inclination and its object (that is, love and the loved one) are the same. This oneness, however, must not be understood *substantialiter*, that is, as identity of the substances. When the *intellectus* and the *affectus* desire their object, they act like matter seeking its form. Because

15. "Sicut verbum Dei caro factum est, ita certe oportet et quod caro fiat verbum. Nam ideo verbum fit caro, ut caro fiat verbum. Ideo Deus fit homo, ut homo fiat Deus. Ideo virtus fit infirma, ut infirmitas fiat virtuosa. Induit formam et figuram nostram et imaginem et similitudinem, ut nos induat imagine, forma, similitudine sua: ideo sapientia fit stulta, ut stultitia fiat sapientia, et sic de omnibus aliis, quae sunt in Deo et nobis, in quibus omnibus nostra assumit ut conferret nobis sua." *In Natali Christi* [Christmas Sermon] (1515), WA 1:28, 25-32.

16. *In Natali Christi* [Christmas Sermon] (1515), WA 1:28, 41.

17. *In Natali Christi* [Christmas Sermon] (1515), WA 1:29, 13-15.

18. *Ibid.*, 11-12.

19. "...et sic sine dubio efficitur illud, quod assumimus." *In Natali Christi* [Christmas Sermon] (1515), WA 1:29, 8-9.

they desire (that is, do not subsist, or exist in themselves), they are mere potentiality. From the point of view of inclination, they are, in a certain sense, *nothing*, and they only become something that *exists* once they reach the object of their desire. For Luther, the crucial analogy between Aristotelian ontology, on the one hand, and theology, on the other, is connected with the following idea: “So their objects [the objects of the *intellectus* and the *affectus*] are their being and their act.” This analogy is found in the following excerpt:

Nec id mirum, quod nos verbum fieri oportere dixi, cum et Philosophi dicant, quod intellectus sit intelligibile per actualem intellectionem et sensus sensibile per actualem sensationem, quanto magis id in spiritu et verbo verum est! Sic enim Aristoteles ait: Intellectus impossibilis est nisi eorum, quae intelligit, sed potentia est ipsa omnia, et ipse est quadammodo omnia. Sic etiam appetitus et appetibile sunt unum, et amor et amatum, quae omnia substantialiter intellecta falsissima sunt. Sed sic quia intellectus et affectus dum desiderant sua Obiecta, in quantum sic desiderantes, habent se velut materia appetens formam, et secundum hoc, i.e. in quantum desiderantes, non autem in quantum subsistentes, sunt pura potentia, imo quoddam nihil et fiunt quoddam ens, quando obiecta attingunt, et ita obiecta sunt eorum esse et actus, sine quibus nihil essent, sicut materia sine forma nihil esset. Pulchra haec Philosophia sed a paucis intellecta altissimae Theologiae utilis est. Sic v.g. Deus Obiectum beatitudinis est ipsa essentia beatorum, sine qua beati nihil essent omnino, sed dum attingunt ipsum fiunt velut ex potentia aliqui id. Quare Deus est actus. Sed de hoc alias.²⁰

By means of this philosophical analogy, Luther wants to emphasize here the nature of the human being’s relationship with God as a union of being. Just as Luther states that Christ is the object of faith, or rather not the object, but the One who is present in the faith itself, in like manner he says, in the passage quoted above, about the *status gloriae*: “God as the object of beatitude is Himself the essence of the beatified.”

In the above-mentioned *Christmas Sermon* of 1515, Luther thus described his view of the nature of the relationship between God and the human being. Besides being crucially important for the theology of the young Luther, this view permeated his entire thinking, its influence reaching as far as his later *Lectures on Genesis*. Next I will discuss the two preconditions that constitute the *conditio sine qua non* for our interpretation, that is, our argument that justification can be understood on the basis of the doctrine of divinization.

Two prerequisites for understanding justification as doctrine of divinization

The first of the two prerequisites mentioned above is Luther’s theology of two kinds of love. In describing these two basic types of love, I do not automatically agree with the well-known “*eros–agape*” terminology of Swedish Lutheran theologian Anders Nygren (1890–1978). On the one hand, this conception of Nygren needs to be revised; on the other, scholars have not yet taken full advantage of the opportunities that it opens up. One of the many points on which Nygren’s analysis partially proves wanting but partially truly points a way forward is his idea of *agape* as a principle of fellowship. For Nygren, *agape* is a power creating “fellowship,” but not really a *vis unitiva* in the strict sense of the word. In Nygren’s view, *unio* belongs together with the *eros* motif.²¹ For Luther, by contrast, it is on the basis of *agape* that the *unio* between God and a human being takes place. *Agape* is the *vis unitiva* in the proper sense of the word.²²

20. *In Natali Christi* [Christmas Sermon] (1515), WA 1:29, 15-31.

21. See the entry on *unio* in the index of Anders Nygren, *Den kristna kärlekstanken genom tiderna. Eros och Agape*, (Stockholm, 1930). (English: Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson [London: SPCK, 1953]).

22. See Tuomo Mannermaa’s *Two kinds of Love*, trans. Kirsi I. Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), especially pages 78–102 and 108n3.

Luther's writings make a distinction between *amor Dei*, that is, the love of God (which Nygren describes as *agape*), and *amor hominis*, that is, human love (which Nygren interprets as *eros*). In the well-known thesis 28 of the Heidelberg Disputation, which is the last of the Disputation's theses, Luther defined the difference between these two kinds of love as follows: "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."²³ Thus, the love of God turns to that which is nothing and empty, in order to make it "something" and make it exist. In contrast, human love orients itself toward that which exists and which is good. Because human reason, which is guided by the latter kind of love, always finds its objects in something that exists, it can never understand that which is nothing. Nor can *amor hominis* love anything that is evil. God, by contrast, understands and loves that which is nothing and evil.

In his commentary on *The Magnificat*,²⁴ Luther elucidated his idea of these two kinds of love by describing their opposite directions. According to Luther, the eyes of God look into the depths only, whereas the eyes of human beings look to the heights. God's works are such that out of that which is "nothing, worthless, despised, wretched, and dead, God makes that which is something, precious, honorable, blessed, and living."²⁵ Human eyes, by contrast, are not willing to look into the depths where "poverty, disgrace, squalor, misery, and anguish" prevail.²⁶ Nor do human beings want to make the poor and the miserable into "something." "There is among men no creator who would make something out of nothing..."²⁷ To summarize: the love of God turns in the direction "where it does not find good which it may enjoy, but where it may confer good upon the bad and needy person."²⁸

Ultimately, the good that God gives is God Godself. In the incarnation and in faith, God unites this good, that is, Godself, to that which is evil. His works are such that something that *exists* emerges from *nothing*. In the happy exchange and *communicatio idiomatum*, the believer becomes a participant in all this. In order to understand what divinization is, it is crucial to appreciate that, instead of being based on *amor hominis*, this participation is based on *amor Dei* (*agape*). Divinization does not mean the human being's "ascension to heaven." On the contrary, it means that God, out of sheer grace, unites Godself with the human being "in the depths," in order to bestow upon him or her all God's "gifts," that is, all the attributes of his essence; these gifts also include love for God and love for neighbors. However, it is essentially important to note here that the relationship with God on the basis of *agape* is a *unio*. This is the first prerequisite for the understanding of justification as divinization.

Nygren's writings also say that the *agape* of God plays a very central role in the patristic doctrine of divinization—for example, in the theology of Irenaeus. It must, however, be considered an inappropriate simplification that Nygren regards only the first part of the *theosis* formula ("God became flesh") as an expression of the *agape* motif, and sees the latter part of the formula ("so that a man might become God") as an expression of the *eros* motif. According to Nygren, Irenaeus' doctrine of divinization does not remain "on the level of the sinful human being" but ascends "to the level of God," that is, ascends to the level of holiness and perfection—or, to rephrase once again, transcends to the domain of the *eros* motif.²⁹ Luther, in

23. Heidelberg Disputation (1518), LW 31:57. "Amor Dei non inuenit, sed creat suum diligibile, Amor hominis fit a suo diligibili." WA 1:365, 2-3.

24. *Das Magnificat verdeutscht und ausgelegt* (1521), WA 7:544-604. "The Magnificat (1521)," LW 21:295-355.

25. "The Magnificat," LW 21:299; WA 7:547, 4-9.

26. "The Magnificat," LW 21:300; WA 7:547, 25-26.

27. "The Magnificat," LW 21:300; WA 7:547, 30-31.

28. Heidelberg Disputation (1518), LW 31:57. "Et iste est amor crucis ex cruce natus, qui illuc sese transfert, non ubi inuenit bonum quo fruatur, sed ubi bonum conferat malo (et) egeno." WA 1:365, 13-15.

29. Nygren, *Den kristna kärlekstanken*, 206-209.

turn, thinks in a manner totally different from this as he says that in faith we become one with Christ and are throughout divinized because of the *agape* of God.

And so we are filled with ‘all the fullness of God’. This phrase, which follows a Hebrew manner of speaking, means that we are filled in all the ways in which He fills a man. We are filled with God, and He pours into us all His gifts and grace and fills us with His Spirit, who makes us courageous. He enlightens us with His light, His life lives in us, His beatitude makes us blessed, and His love causes love to arise in us. Put briefly, He fills us in order that everything that He is and everything He can do might be in us in all its fullness, and work powerfully, so that we might be divinized throughout—not having only a small part of God, or merely some parts of Him, but having all His fullness. Much has been written on the divinization of man, and ladders have been constructed by means of which man is to ascend to heaven, and many other things of this kind have been done. However, all these are merely works of a beggar. What must be done instead is to show the right and straight way to your being filled with God, so that you do not lack any part but have it all gathered together, and so that all you say, all you think and everywhere you go—in sum, all your life—is throughout divine.³⁰

This text exhibits Luther’s clear expression of the basis of his doctrine of divinization. The *unio* does not occur “above,” on account of human love; in contrast, it takes place “below,” in faith, on account of the love of God. According to Luther, the union based on the love of God is complete, whereas the union based on human love—namely, on the movement of the human being “upward” toward God—remains the uncompleted “work of a beggar.” Because the Word has become flesh, the human being who has the Word has “the whole of divinity.” Thus, faith does not merely have “some parts of God” but “all God’s fullness.” Because God is love—not only the “giver” of love,” but also its “substance”³¹—the believer participates in love, which is the substance of God. It is an effect of this love that Christians can begin to love God and their neighbors without self-seeking intentions. Thus, Christians really become Christs to their neighbors. Because the love of God dwells in Christians, they also begin to turn in the direction of God’s love, that is, toward the depths; they start loving those who are “nothing and evil.” From the point of view of Luther’s theology of love, this is the culmination of his doctrine of divinization.

The second prerequisite for the understanding of justification as a kind of divinization is Luther’s theology of the cross. Unfortunately, it is not possible to discuss here the history of the

30. “Und wir so erfüllet werden, ‘mit allerley Gottes fulle’, das ist auff Ebreische weyse soviel geredt: das wir erfüllet werden auff alle weise, damit er voll macht und voll Gotes werden überschuttet mit allen gaben und gnade und erfüllet mit seynem geyst, der uns mutig mache und mit seynem liecht erleucht und seyn leben ynn uns lebe, seyne selickeit uns selig mache, seyne liebe yn uns die liebe erwecke, Kurtz umb, das alles, was er ist und vermag, ynn uns vollig sey und krefftig wircke, das wir gantz vergottet werden, nicht eyn partecken odder allein etliche stuck Gottes habt, sondern alle fulle. Es ist viel davon geschrieben, wie der mensch soll vergottet werden, da haben sie leytem gemacht, daran man gen hymel steige und viel solchs dings, Es ist aber eytel pertecken werck, hie ist aber der rechte und nehiste weg hynan zu komen angezeygt, das du voll Gottes werdest, das diis as keynem stuck feyle, sondern alles auff eynen hauffen habist, das alles, was du redist, denckist, gehist, summa: deyn gantzes leben gar Gottisch sey.” *Predigt* [Sermon] (1525), WA 17 I:438, 14-28. In his treatise *The Freedom of a Christian*, Luther describes the *unio* in connection with his theology of the word: “Cum autem haec promissa dei sint verba sancta, vera, iusta, libera, pacata et universa bonitate plena, fit, ut anima, quae firma fide illis adheret, sic eis uniatur, immo penitus absorbeatur, ut non modo participet sed saturetur et inebrietur omni virtute eorum. Si enim tactus Christi sanabat, quanto magis hic tenerrimus in spiritu, immo absorptio verbi omnia quae verbi sunt animae communicat. Hoc igitur modo anima per fidem solam, sine operibus, e verbo dei iustificatur, sanctificatur, verificatur, pacificatur, liberatur et omni bono repletur vereque filia dei efficitur, sicut Iohan, 1. dicit ‘Dedit eis potestatem filios dei fieri, iis qui credunt in nomine eius.’” WA 7:53, 15-23.

31. “Deum esse charitatem, non solum largitorem, sed substantiam charitatis,…” *Vorlesung über den 1. Brief des Johannes* [Lectures on the First Epistle of St. John] (1527), WA 20:740, 15-16 (lecture notes).

interpretation of the *theologia crucis*. In the course of the interpretation history of the relationship between the *theologia crucis* and Aristotelian ontology, scholars have often thought that the actual intention of the theology of the cross is to refute the *analogia entis* doctrine of scholastic theology and corresponding metaphysics. Naturally, this research paradigm has brought something valid to the fore. However, the questions that are being asked within this framework are determined by the problems of today; therefore this paradigm is, in fact, anachronistic.

In connection with Romans 1:22, Luther emphasized in his Heidelberg Disputation that human beings have become “fools” because of sin. The Reformer’s intention, however, was not to reject the statement in Romans 1:20, according to which it has been possible to see the invisible reality of God in his works of creation ever since the making of the world. For Luther, the aim of the theology of the cross is neither to deny the possibility of applying the categories of creation to God, nor to claim that God does not manifest God’s being in the created being. When one wants to distinguish between the theology of the cross and the theology of glory, the best key providing access to this distinction is Luther’s theology of love. The *theologia gloriae* and the human love belong together. The *amor hominis* turns to that which exists and which is good, that is, toward that which is “great and glorious,” in order to get something from the loved one for itself. Human reason, which is guided by this human love, cannot see that which nevertheless *can* be seen of God in God’s works. In the sight of human reason directed by human love, God is the *summum bonum* and the *ens realissimum*, toward which love, according to Aristotle, is inclined in the same way as each natural form is inclined to the actualization of its substantial form. In entelechy, natural love (as an active inclination) already has in itself this substantial form which will be its actualization, and it actualizes this good (substantial form) through an act (*ergon*); in the same way, theologians of glory ultimately actualize their own good in their active inclination to the highest good. Theologians of glory always have to regard God as the highest good and the most real being. Thus, they cannot understand the God who—in humanity, weakness, and folly—is to be found in the depths and on the cross, and who has, out of sheer love, placed himself in the position of the evil and wanting human being.

This approach enables one to appreciate the fullness of Luther’s theology of the cross, without denying its various other components or without relying on far-reaching ontological presuppositions. Without attempting to address a host of related issues, I would just like to point out here that in Luther’s thinking, divinization is always hidden in *sub contrario*, as the theology of the cross suggests. It is not until the eschatological fulfillment that Christians will be like God in a manifest and empirical manner. In this life, God is present among human beings only in those places into which he, out of sheer love, has descended; God is among those who are “*nothing*” and evil:

“But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him,” that is, we shall not be the same as God but like Him, who is Life, Righteousness, and everything. And we shall participate in everything that is in God. Experience, as it is, will no longer be a covering, and it will be apparent that we are holy. For the time being, we are handed over to death, and we see everything in its opposite. There is nothing in us except temptations of the world, of ourselves, of the flesh and of the devil. Then, however, there will be no more persecution, temptation, or faintheartedness.³²

32. “‘Sed scimus, cum apparuerit’ in extremo die, erimus similes, non idem quod deus, sed similes ei, qui est vita, iusticia i.e. omnia, participabimus omnium, quae in deo sunt, experientia, sicut est, non erit operculum magis, apparebit non esse sanctos. Iam tradimur morti, videmus omnia contraria, nihil in nobis praeter scandala mundi et nostra, camis, diaboli. Tunc non erit persecutio, scandalum, pusillanimitas.” *Vorlesung über den 1. Brief des Johannes* [Lectures on the First Epistle of St. John] (1527), WA 20:698, 12-17 (lecture notes).

The idea characteristic of the theology of the cross that God reveals Godself in God's opposite is certainly not directed against the ontically real presence of Christ. This can be seen, for example, from the fact that in Luther's theology the intention behind the image of the darkness and cloud in which Christ is present is the theology of the cross. Form can be given only to that which has no form. Therefore, God must undress human beings of their form with his left hand, that is, bring them *in nihilum*, in order to raise them again with God's right hand. This is why faith is knowledge that knows nothing; namely, it has had its form taken away. And it is precisely in this "nothing," in this unknowing, "*in istis tenebris*," that Christ is really present, just as God was present in the darkness of the most holy place of the temple. "The flesh sees nothing there and comes to this conclusion: out of nothing, nothing comes into being. Nevertheless, through the word of consolation we see in this 'nothing' everything that is to come."³³

Luther as a theologian of love

On the basis of the doctrine of divinization, Luther's theology unfolds naturally as a theology of love. In faith, a human being participates in God. God is love; God is not only the giver of love, but, as we have said before, the substance of love. Thus, as Luther scholar P. Manns has stated, faith and love belong together essentially, or "sybiotically." Therefore, the entire content of the theology of Luther, the theologian of faith, can be studied from the viewpoint of the relation of this theology to the concept of love. At the same time, Luther himself can be seen, in quite a new fashion, as a theologian of love.

Luther concluded his summary of Christian faith, the treatise called "*De libertate christiana/Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen*" ("The Freedom of a Christian") with a brief *summa*:

It follows from all this that a Christian does not live in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbors; in Christ through faith, in his neighbors through love. Through faith, he ascends above himself to God; through love he descends again below himself, being all the time, however, in God and in divine love."³⁴

What is of essential importance in this context is the fact that to be "in faith" is to be in God and in God's divine love. Luther is, equally, both a theologian of faith and a theologian of love.

33. "Ibi caro nihil videt, concludit: Ex nihilo nihil fit, et tamen omnia futura videmus per verbum consolacionis in hoc Nihilo." "*Vorlesung über Jesaias* [Lectures on Isaiah] (1527-1530)," WA 31/II:363, 25-27. The stance that the human being must be created out of nothing is where Orthodox and Lutheran theology go their separate ways, because according to Luther there is no room for *synergeia* in the human being's relationship with God.

34. "Auss dem allenn folget der beschluß, das eyn Christen mensch lebt nit ynn yhm selb, sondern ynn Christo und seynem nehstenn, ynn Christo durch den glauben, ym nehsten durch die liebe: durch den glauben feret er uber sich yn gott, auß gott feret er widder unter sich durch die liebe, und bleybt doch ymmer ynn gott und gottlicher liebe." *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen* [The Freedom of a Christian] (1520), WA 7:38, 6-10.