

**The Trinitarian Doctrine of Grace in  
Martin Luther's *The Bondage of the Will***

**Dissertation by  
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2018**

This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Divinity

## Abstract

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### **The Trinitarian Doctrine of Grace in Martin Luther's *The Bondage of the Will***

The most systematic work Martin Luther ever created was his *De servo arbitrio / The Bondage of the Will* (1525), his powerful polemic against the leading Humanist of his day, Erasmus, who had criticized Luther in his *De libero arbitrio diatribe sive collatio / The Freedom of the Will* (1524). Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* is regarded as a work representing the organic unity of his entire theological thought; it can be seen as his theology in a condensed form. In spite of the immense significance of Luther's magnum opus, its theological structure and content have so far not yet been satisfactorily revealed.

Much research has been conducted on certain detailed aspects of this work of Luther's, such as the problems of the free will, determinism, and predestination. The basic weakness of those analyses is that the details of *The Bondage of the Will* can be correctly understood only on the basis of a comprehension of the basic systematic theological idea of his work. The very kernel of Luther's own thought and the deepest intentions of his theology in this work are best comprehended by analyzing the inner structure and cohesion of his own thinking and by seeing how his own argumentation developed in his dispute with Erasmus.

The task of this study is to expose the fundamental systematic theological idea and structure in Luther's *The Bondage of the Will*. The method employed in the present study is a comprehensive systematic analysis of Luther's thought in his work. Attention will be paid to the conceptualization of issues by Luther, to his main propositions and the arguments he uses to support his claims, and to the structural principles and the core body of his thinking system. The history of theological and philosophical thought is taken into consideration as far as it enlightens Luther's own theological conceptualizations. The present work avoids interpreting Luther by external criteria and, instead, attempts to understand the authentic immanent foundational ideas of his theological thought. The debate between Luther and Erasmus contained genuine paradigmatic differences in their understanding of the Christian faith, but also some misunderstandings, even intentional misinterpretations. The present study aims at clarifying these conceptual differences and confusions and at exploring the possibility of some degree of reconciliation between the conflicting views.

My hypothesis is that Luther's own specific and comprehensive understanding of the Trinitarian theology of grace, with special emphasis on Pneumatology, alongside the more obvious Christology, strongly linked with the theology of creation, is the fundamental thought structure of his magnum opus. This enables him to get rid of the common Late Medieval teaching of the free choice of the human being, represented by Erasmus. Above all, Luther is a theologian of grace, *sola gratia*. *The Bondage of the Will*, the most Pneumatological treatise he ever wrote, offers a radical and comprehensive Trinitarian theology of grace.

Luther understands the human being as an "ecstatic" creature who receives his/her existence and the quality of his/her existence from *extra se*. Luther argues for this

paradigm in terms of the theology of creation, Christology, Pneumatology, and soteriology. As such, the human being was created a creature which is destined for union with his/her Creator in the Holy Spirit who is the actual presence of the Creator in his creature, God sharing his life with the human being. After losing this original state of union, the human being became a battlefield of the opposing transcendental powers, Satan and sin on the one side, and God and his grace, on the other side. The human is free in “things below oneself,” in matters that belong to daily human life, but he/she is not free in “things above oneself,” in matters that transcend the human being. Luther sees sin as human infirmity, inability to get rid of unbelief and pride which destroyed the human’s union with God. The human being cannot change his/her evil orientation but must continue such as he/she is: this is Luther’s concept of “the necessity of immutability”; he applies this philosophical concept to soteriological usage. The human being is in a desperate situation in regard to his/her capacities of contributing to his/her own salvation; here Luther follows his logic of *theologia crucis*.

Both in terms of creation and salvation, the human being is meant to be in an intimate union, in a communion of life, with the Triune God. Luther develops a strong soteriology, understood in terms of an intimate union between the Triune God and the human being. This union is not primarily a cognitive-rational and morally responsible relation, as Erasmus was inclined to think, but an actual-ontic and existential union with Christ in the Holy Spirit, *koinonia/unio cum Christo in Spiritu sancto*. The quality of a human being’s life in this world and his/her eternal beatitude depends on whether his/her person is or is not in union with the Holy Trinity. In his Trinitarian theology of grace, Pneumatology, arguably neglected in Medieval times, is powerfully revived. Luther’s conception of divine grace, with some peculiarities of his own, recalls Augustine’s doctrine of grace, differing from the soteriological views of Scholasticism and Nominalism.

The present study culminates in a systematic presentation of the three dimensions of Luther’s Trinitarian doctrine of grace: First, contrition, conversion, and faith are effected by God’s Spirit, *sola fide* is a thoroughly Pneumatological concept – a fact not sufficiently emphasized in Luther research. Second, Luther sees the union with Christ simultaneously as a Christological and as a Pneumatological reality - again a view not underscored in research. Third, sanctification means growth in love by way of being increasingly controlled by the Holy Spirit, who is the essence of divine love. This three-dimensional conception of grace can be supported by other works of Luther’s mature theology.

There are strong points of contact with Johannine, Pauline, Augustinian, and Greek Patristic theology here; a more detailed analysis of these connections is not in the scope of the study at hand, but it is left to further research. The results of the study intensify the ecumenical potential of Luther’s doctrine of grace. Moreover, these results contribute an amendment to the Finnish school of Luther interpretation where the Pneumatological dimension is underemphasized in the first and the second dimensions of Luther’s doctrine of grace. Finally, the possibility of some degree of reconciliation between the views of Erasmus and Luther will be considered at the end of the study.

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## 1. Introduction

Martin Luther never wrote “a systematic theology”; he did not create anything comparable with John Calvin's *Institutio Christianae religionis*. But yet Luther was a theological thinker trained in the best academic theological and philosophical tradition of his day. The most systematic work Luther ever created was his *De servo arbitrio / The Bondage of the Will* (December 1525), his powerful and polemic reaction against the criticism of Erasmus, the leading Humanist of Reformation times, in his *De libero arbitrio diatribe sive collatio / The Freedom of the Will*<sup>1</sup> (September 1524). Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* became a major theological document of the Lutheran Reformation.

Luther's opus has long been an object of great interest, and a great number of investigations and interpretations have been published concerning this major work of his.<sup>2</sup> There are researchers who regard *The Bondage of the Will* as the greatest theological work Luther ever wrote; according to some, the very heart of the Christian faith is at issue in this opus.<sup>3</sup> Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* is regarded as a work representing the organic unity of his theological thought: it can be seen as his theology in a condensed form.<sup>4</sup> In spite of its title, Luther's treatise does not only deal with the problem of “free choice,” it is about the entire disposition of the human creature toward the Creator and the Creator's

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<sup>1</sup> This is the most commonly used English translation of the name of Erasmus' work; literally the title means *Discourses or Comparisons on the Free Will*. According to Robert Kolb, 2017,451, *diatribe* in Late Medieval Latin meant “a learned exchange of ideas.” For a historical introduction to this work of Erasmus, see Lesowsky 1969. About the role of Humanism for the Reformation and Luther, see Oberman 1993,211-218; see also Hägglund 1984a, Junghans 1985, and McGrath 1985,40-53.

<sup>2</sup> During the past over hundred years, a great number of published articles deal with the conflict between Erasmus and Luther. Because of the limit of space, only the best and the most relevant ones are included in the present study.

<sup>3</sup> Wolfgang Behnk offers an exhaustive introduction into modern discussion and research concerning Luther's *De servo arbitrio*; see Behnk 1982. Harry J. McSorley discusses widely the research and interpretation concerning Luther's work in question; see McSorley 1969,7-21,300-302. Klaus Schwarzwäller provides a comprehensive guide to research on *De servo arbitrio* in the German speaking area during a period of a hundred years from the 1860s to the 1960s; see Schwarzwäller 1969. For a detailed historical introduction into *De servo arbitrio*, see Freitag 1908 (WA 18,551-599). Reinhuber 2000, 244-259, and Kolb 2005, 360-370, include more recent studies on Luther's opus. We will analyze the various interpretations of this major work of Luther in the next Section (1.2) of the present study.

<sup>4</sup> Brecht 1990,235.

disposition toward his sinful human creatures.<sup>5</sup> Luther himself regarded this work, alongside his catechisms, as his most important treatise.<sup>6</sup>

Much has also been written about the relationship between Luther and Erasmus – these two major figures of the European Reformation period – and about their polite and respectful correspondence beginning during the first half of 1519, but later changing into a growing tension between these two influential theologians who never met.<sup>7</sup> It has been said that the debate between Luther and Erasmus was “one of the most famous exchanges in Western intellectual history.” The very heart of the Reformation was at issue here.<sup>8</sup>

The aim of Erasmus’ *The Freedom of the Will* was just to critically touch on one doctrinal statement of Luther presented in his *Assertio omnium articulorum* (1520) in which he confuted the pope’s threat of excommunication: “I shall confine my controversy strictly to this one doctrine (*cum unico illius dogmate conflictabor*),” Erasmus defined the purpose of his treatise.<sup>9</sup> But this one difference of opinion was the tip of the iceberg which indicated the complete difference in method, structure, and content of theology between the two authors. The difference regarding the concept of will was hardly the real critical point, more decisive were their differing concepts of the faith and their conflicting ways of interpreting the content of Scripture.<sup>10</sup> Luther rightly

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<sup>5</sup> Hägglund 1984b,190,193.

<sup>6</sup> WABR 8,99,7-8, Nr. 3162 (July 1537).

<sup>7</sup> A detailed historical investigation of the relationship between Erasmus and Luther is provided by Ernst-Wilhelm Kohls; see Kohls 1972 & 1978. A short, comprehensive but penetrating description of their relationship is offered by Kolb 2017. Chantraine, 1981, makes a historical and theological comparison between the two. On the relationship between Luther and Erasmus, see also Bornkamm 1958, Boisset 1962, Dörries 1970, Kerlen 1976, 212-227, Clair 1980, Olin & Smart & McNally 1982, Aland 1991, Grane 1997, Cortright 1998, Kunze 2000, Kaufmann 2005, and Erwin 2007. On the evolvement of the thought and theology of Erasmus, see Meissinger 1942, Kohls 1966a & 1966b & 1968, Bainton 1969, Stupperich 1977, Gerrish 1979, Weiland & Blockmans & Frijhoff 1988, Huizinga 2010, and Kroeker 2011.

<sup>8</sup> O’Malley 1974,47. Luther’s close colleague Philipp Melanchthon wrote to Erasmus in his letter of 30 September, 1524, that all of Luther’s theological views were essentially related to the question of free will. Hans Joachim Iwand maintained that “evangelical theology stands and falls with this doctrine of the unfree will.” See Iwand 2008 and McSorley 1969,11-12.

<sup>9</sup> *Diatribae* Ia3; Walter,3,4-5; LCC 17,36.

<sup>10</sup> Holeczek 1984,145.

implied that Erasmus and he himself represented different paradigms of Christianity, *formae Christianismi*.<sup>11</sup> The topics discussed were not, for Luther, subchapters in a theological or philosophical debate. For him, the fundamental understanding of the core of the faith – the question about divine saving grace – was at stake. Therefore, in Luther's reaction to Erasmus we can see the very essence of Luther's theological thinking; it “reveals the organic nature of Luther's entire theology.”<sup>12</sup>

In his work, Luther created a comprehensive defense of the theology of grace, or of the gospel, as he put it. Luther demonstrated his passion for showing how Christianity is above all a religion of the unconditional grace of the Triune God. Anything, even the least thing, that compromises this totally theocentric conception of grace, will destroy the gospel, the kernel and core of the Christian faith. Luther felt that it is exactly this issue which was threatened by Erasmus' critical work – hence, his massive reaction.

## 1.1 The Root of the Conflict between Luther and Erasmus

The dispute between Luther and Erasmus was based on Luther's treatise *Assertio omnium articulorum* of December 1520 (published in January 1521) in which Luther rejected the accusations made by Pope Leo X in his bull *Exsurge Domine* of 15 June 1520.<sup>13</sup> The pope pointed out 41 errors in Luther's writings, demanding that he recant them; in his response, Luther commented on each of them, vigorously defending his own position. Luther's treatise is extreme in thought and abrupt in style; this might be understandable, as Luther wrote his defense under great pressure.

After the disputation of Leipzig in July 1519, Luther had been surrounded by many influential opponents, and in February 1520 the universities of Louvain and Cologne had

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<sup>11</sup> Luther employs the concept *forma Christianismi* a few times in his *The Bondage of the Will*: see WA 18,610,14 & 611,1.

<sup>12</sup> Kolb 2005,19.

<sup>13</sup> For the historical background of *Assertio omnium articulorum M. Lutheri per bullam Leonis X. novissimam damnatorum*, see Kerlen 1976, 127-142. On the idea of *assertio* as a literary style, see Kerlen 1976 and Bader 1985. When we in the present work refer to Luther's *Assertio*, the references, in fact, are made to the 36<sup>th</sup> article of the treatise.



repudiated his teaching. In June 1520, the pope issued his bull whereby he demanded that Luther recant the mentioned errors within sixty days or face excommunication. Luther received the bull on 10 October, and he began to write his defense against the pope at the beginning of December; on 10 December he demonstrated against papal hegemony by publicly burning the bull and the books of the Canon Law. Moreover, on 28 November, Luther had received an invitation to be examined by the secular authorities at the Diet of Worms, to be held at the beginning of 1521.

It is worth noting here that, when Luther wrote his response to Erasmus in 1525, his *The Bondage of the Will*, his situation was by no means easier; quite on the contrary: the disaster of the peasants' revolt had humiliated Luther, making his situation ever more embarrassing, and the rise of the spiritualistic movements (Schwärmerei) and the "heavenly prophets" caused him much trouble.<sup>14</sup> Luther created his theological magnum opus in the midst of many conflicting tensions and pressures.

The most important part of Luther's *Assertio* is his extensive comment on the 36th sentence in the pope's list of 41 "heretic" propositions of Luther. This, in fact, is Luther's thesis number 13 of the Heidelberg disputation (25 April 1518): "Free will, after the Fall, exists in name only, and as long as it does what it is able to do, it commits a mortal sin." / "*Liberum arbitrium post peccatum res est de solo titulo, et dum facit, quod in se est, peccat mortaliter.*"<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> On Luther's relation to the spiritualists, see Lindberg 1983,55-130.

<sup>15</sup> WA 7,142,23-24. For the thesis 13 of *Disputatio Heidelbergae habita*, see WA 1,354,5-6. The occasion at Heidelberg was the triannual meeting of the general chapter of the Augustinians in Germany. The general vicar of the German Augustinians, Johan von Staupitz, had asked Luther to inform the brothers about the new theology; the chosen themes concerned sin, free will, and grace. The theological position of Heidelberg (1518) was reaffirmed in the disputation of Leipzig in the following year (1519). For an extensive analysis of Luther's disputation at Heidelberg, see Kopperi 1997.

Luther's consistent criticism of the notion of *liberum arbitrium* can be clearly noted in many of his major writings before 1525. For instance, in his *Lectures on Romans* (1515-1516) Luther said arguments supporting free choice are "empty words." WA 56,355,3-14; 382,16-26. See also *Commentary on Galatians* (1519), WA 2,458,8-19; 586,26-36; *Operationes in Psalmos* (1519-1521), WA 544,15-24; 615,27-31; *Resolutio disputationis de fide infusa et acquisita* (1520), WA 6,92,29-33. Luther's critical comments on the concept of *liberum arbitrium*, most often together with the notion of the *facere quod in se est* principle, are incredibly frequent in his works throughout his career; many of these will be documented in the course of the present study.

It was Luther's principal object when writing his *Assertio*, by referring to Augustine as an authority, even using Augustine's special concept of *servum arbitrium*,<sup>16</sup> to reaffirm a total repudiation of the common Late Medieval doctrine of a free preparation for receiving grace, according to which "to those who do what they can, God does not deny his grace" / "*facientibus quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam suam.*" Especially influential was the teaching of Gabriel Biel, a leading Late Medieval theologian in the tradition of Nominalism or *Via moderna*. According to his interpretation of the doctrine of grace, God has made a pact according to which he will grant his grace to persons who freely choose to do what they as natural creatures are able to in order to turn to God in repentance and to please him through morally good works; whoever prepares him/herself to receive grace, necessarily receives it. The human being has the ability of freely choosing the act of loving God. In fact, the minimal requirement for receiving God's saving grace was "not to maintain an obstacle to grace."<sup>17</sup> Luther confirmed his repudiation this Late Medieval

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<sup>16</sup> In his explanation to thesis 13 of Heidelberg Luther already referred to Augustine; he quoted freely Augustine's work *De spiritu et littera* III,5; WA 1,359,38-360,1. It was Luther's aim to refute the allusion of free choice by clinging to a strong doctrine of sin represented by Augustine. When explaining the mentioned thesis, Luther also introduced the term *servum arbitrium*, quoting it from Augustine's work *Contra Iulianum*; WA 1,360,2. In fact, the passage referred to by Luther was the only time when Augustine employed the mentioned term in his works, although the substance of the matter is an organic part of his theological thought. See *C. Iul.* II,8,23; PL 44,689. In the Leipzig disputation (1519) Luther repeated the term *servum arbitrium* from Augustine's *Contra Iulianum*; WA 2,647,9-16. See also WA 2,422,17-22; 434,2-25.

Luther himself mentioned the term *servum arbitrium* for the first time in his *Lectures on the Romans* (1515-1516), and even then he took it as a quotation from Augustine; WA 56,385,17-18. See also WA 1,148,10-12 (*Disputationsthesen für Bartholomäus Bernhardi*, September 1516) where Luther comments on Augustine's term. Luther included a similar introduction of the term, as taken adopted from Augustine, in *The Bondage of the Will*; WA 18,665,10-11. It is quite evident that Luther accepted this term of Augustine as such, and without giving further justification for its use, he integrated this term as part of his overall defense of the principle of *sola gratia*. Heiko A. Oberman sharply remarks that the title of Luther's treatise "could much better have been called 'The Majesty of God.' That would immediately have revealed what was at stake, while rendering it less shocking." Oberman 1993,212. See also McSorley 1969,90-93.

<sup>17</sup> Luther interprets in his *Assertio* the axiom of *facere quod in se est*: "Praeparat se, inquit, ad gratiam per opera moraliter bona." WA 7,142,33. Luther rejected those teachings of Nominalism or *Via moderna* which emphasize man's natural ability to prepare himself for the reception of divine grace. The principle of *facere quod in se est* was common in Late Medieval theology, with various nuances: God does not give his grace unless the human being first does what he/she can, i.e., ceases to consent to sin, becomes contrite, confesses his/her sins, and beseeches the merciful God. To the person who does this, God necessarily grants his grace. The well-known theologian of the *Via moderna*, Gabriel Biel, stated: "Ex quo hoc elicitor quod iste facit quod in se est, qui illuminatus lumine rationis naturalis aut fidei vel utroque, cognoscit peccati turpitudinem, et proponens ab ipso resurgere, desiderat divinum adiutorium quo possit a peccato mundari, et Deo suo creatori adhaerere. Haec facienti Deus gratiam suam tribuit necessario..." *Canonis misse expositio, pars secunda, lectio LIX P*; Oberman & Courtenay 1965,443.

According to Biel, even after the Fall, the human being is able to freely love God, and he/she has retained the minimal capacity of disposing him/herself toward the reception of grace. Through a minimal free voluntary act of his/her natural soul, the human being merits the *donum superadditum* of grace which

doctrine as early as in his *Lectures on Romans* (1515-1516), and thereafter he consistently criticized it in his writings.<sup>18</sup>

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enables the justification of the sinner; without this free act no justification is possible. This logic is based on the principle of *meritum de congruo*, proportionate merit: A finite act of the human being brings about grace which is infinitely greater, as God is greater than the humans. Being critical of the Scholastic doctrine of habitual grace, *Via moderna* adheres to the idea of *pactum*, a covenant between God and the human race: In his *potentia absoluta*, God has made a promise to freely accept (*acceptatio divina*) those who first do what they can for their salvation. "...tantum est ex gratuita acceptatione divina, sic se obligare volentis operanti. Meritum de congruo est actus libere elicited acceptus ad aliquod bonum retribuendum, non ex debito iustitiae. ... bonus motus naturalis animae peccatori, quo facit quod in se est, sine quo non daretur gratia iustificans, est meritum gratiae de congruo." *Ibid.*, *lectio LIX N*; Oberman & Courtenay 1965,441.

Although critical of the Scholastic idea of habitual grace, Nominalism does not, however, adhere to the Augustinian concept of the Holy Spirit as the substance of divine grace. The role of the Holy Spirit is thus even more limited in the Nominalistic concept of grace than it was in the Scholastic concept. The Scholastics still emphasized the decisive role of the Spirit as the efficient cause of conversion, whereas the Nominalists replace the initiative effect of the Spirit with the human initiative of *facere quod in se est*. Heiko A. Oberman says about Biel's position: "Whether justification, the reception of the *gratia prima*, takes place before or at the moment of confession, in both cases man has 'to do his very best' with the intention to confess at his earliest convenience. This *facere quod in se est* is the necessary disposition for the infusion of grace and implies a movement of the free will..." Oberman 1963, 152.

On Gabriel Biel's concept of justification, see Grane 1962a,49-261, McSorley 1969,199-215, McGrath 1986a,76-78, Halverson 1998,168-171, and Dieter 2001,183-193. On William Ockham's and other Nominalists' doctrine of grace, see Dettloff 1963 and Halverson 1998,113-121. On Luther's relation to Nominalism, see Hägglund 1955, Grane 1962a,9-48, and Cleve 1968. On the definition of the term *Via moderna*, see McGrath 1985,53-63, and 1986,166-172. James A. Nestingen, 2005,10, correctly states that the theological context of Erasmus was "modern," not Medieval or typically Roman Catholic, as commonly assumed. Robert E. McNally, 1982,11, says that Erasmus was critical of Catholicism, and yet not accepted by the Protestants: "Erasmus was independent; and this independence put him in the middle of two contending forces."

On the historical origin and development of the concept *facere quod in se est*, see Landgraf 1952, 249-264, Oberman 1962, McSorley 1969, 167-179, and McGrath 1986a, 83-90. According to Auer, 1942, 229-262, the principle appeared in Western theology in the 13th century. Although this doctrine became commonplace under the influence of Nominalism, even Thomas Aquinas had maintained: "Videtur quod ex necessitate detur gratia...facienti quod in se est...homo infallibiliter gratiam consequitur." *Summa theologiae*, 1/2, q.112, a.3. See also 1/2, q.109, a.4. McSorley, 1969, 168-169,190, underscores that, according to Thomas, this possibility of preparing oneself for grace is itself effected by grace: "A man cannot prepare himself for grace without the help of grace." See *Summa theologiae*, 1/2, q.109, a.6. The very fact that a person does not present an obstacle to grace is itself the result of grace. The basic difference between Thomas and *Via moderna* was that, according to Ockham and Biel, the human being could by natural powers freely prepare him/herself for grace, McSorley maintains and concludes that Luther had the right to criticize Nominalist view and had Thomas on his side.

<sup>18</sup> WA 56,89,15-16; 382,16-26. Confirming the doctrine of free choice as the way of law, Luther concludes: "Where now is free will (*liberum arbitrium*)? Where are those people who are trying to affirm that we of our own natural powers can produce the act of loving God above all things? ...it is simply impossible for us of ourselves to fulfill the law..." WA 56,355,3-8; LW 25,344. Luther calls "Pelagians" those who teach the "Pelagian notion" of the *facere quod in se est* principle; WA 56,502,14-20. Theodor Dieter concludes Luther's position: "Luther, on the contrary, did not ask whether an act of loving God is accepted by God. Rather, he insisted that such love of God cannot come into being without grace; therefore, 'loving God without grace' is a contradiction in terms and not possible even under God's absolute power." Dieter 2014,38.

There is a trend in Luther research to argue that the young Luther's doctrine of justification found its inspiration elsewhere, not in Augustine's anti-Pelagian writings. Jairzinho Lopes Pereira has

In the Late Medieval period, the debate on free will took place in the context of the Christendom, i.e., in Europe where almost all citizens had received a Christian Baptism. Consequently, using terms such as contrition, repentance, or conversion obviously did not principally refer to the conversion of a non-Christian to the Christian faith, but they were related to the teaching on the free preparation for receiving God's renewed forgiveness of sins with the aim of encouraging the baptized Christians to use the sacrament of the Penance or Confession more often and to strive to live sincere Christian lives. The discussion touches on the conditions for authentic personal faith.

In Medieval theology, the concept of justification and the sacrament of Penance were closely linked; the term was used to describe the reconciliation of a lukewarm or nominal Christian with God in the act of confessing one's sins and receiving absolution. Original sin was forgiven in Baptism, Penance was continually needed for receiving the fresh forgiveness of sins committed after Baptism, either venial or mortal. Without this renewal of grace, the baptized might risk their salvation. The baptized Christian had the duty of freely *ex puris naturalibus* loving God and his/her neighbor. This was linked with the concept of congruent grace: in his fairness, "God does not require of any man that he do more than he really can," and when he does this, he deserves God's grace.<sup>19</sup>

This Late Medieval teaching on grace was leaning on the assumption of the free choice or free decision of the human being, *liberum arbitrium*.<sup>20</sup> This principle implies a type of fair

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quite convincingly argued that this is not the case; on the contrary, the young Luther's call to reforming the church began essentially as a deliberate attempt to re-establish Augustine's genuine teaching of Paul's radically grace-oriented nature of salvation. See Lopes Pereira 2010. The present study will confirm this to be true in Luther's confrontation with Erasmus as well.

<sup>19</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1-2, q.109, a.4, and Oberman 1962. Luther makes a critical comment in his *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/1535): "...the sophists pretend that they love the Son of God and give themselves for him. For they teach that purely by his natural endowments (*ex puris naturalibus*) a man is able to perform the 'merit of congruity' and to love God and Christ above all things. ...And this was the origin of the little verse: 'God does not require of any man that he do more than he really can (*ultra posse viri non vult Deus ulla requiri*).'" WA 40/1,291,15-18; 292,19; LW 26,172-173. In his *Lectures on Romans* (1515-1516) Luther, following the Augustinian paradigm, strongly states that a true love of God "does not arise out of nature but only from the Holy Spirit." WA 56,391,7-8; LW 25,381. For Augustine's Pneumatological understanding of loving God, see *De spir. et litt.*, III,5; CSEL 60,157,110-24; XIV,26; CSEL 60,189,18-181,4. On Augustine's theology of love, see Burnaby 1947.

<sup>20</sup> For an analysis of the term *arbitrium*, see Section 1.4 below.

play between the human being and God, the idea of the human freedom of choice playing a decisive role. According to the teaching of Nominalism or *Via moderna*, God has made a pact with the humans: It is the responsibility of the human being to take the first minimal step, and then God, in his abundant grace would take a huge step in pardoning the sinner and granting him/her his grace. For Luther, this teaching on the freedom of the human being meant that the human has the capacity of meeting the demand of God's law; this was an attempt at self-justification, and as such it would only increase the sinner's guilt *coram Deo*, not justify him/her. Luther referred to Augustine's statement in his *De spiritu et littera*: "For free choice is capable only of sinning, if the way of truth remains hidden." / "*Nam neque liberum arbitrium quicquam nisi ad peccandum valet, si lateat veritatis via.*"<sup>21</sup> In relation to sin and to divine redemptive grace, the human being has no capability of free choice; as a fallen creature he/she cannot but continue to sin (Augustine's principle of *non posse non peccare*). Consequently, doing what one freely and naturally can as a preparation for grace cannot be the condition for God's mercy.

Augustine's concept of Pneumatological *gratia increata*, which he represented with exceptional clarity in his book *De spiritu et littera* in 412, is an indispensable theological background for both Luther's *Assertio* and his *De servo arbitrio*.<sup>22</sup> The Augustinian link

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<sup>21</sup> *De spir. et litt.* III,5; CSEL 60,157,19-20. Luther quotes freely and imprecisely: "Liberum arbitrium sine gratia non valet nisi ad peccandum." Luther mentions mistakenly that he refers to Ch. IV of Augustine's work. WA 7,142,27-28.

<sup>22</sup> In the history of theology, Augustine, especially the old Augustine, is the authority who created a concept of grace and justification understood very much as the actual effect of the third person of the Trinity upon human beings. His emphasis on grace as a gift of divine presence, *bonum increatum*, presented to the human being without any cooperation on the human side, has a strong Pneumatological strain, this being most forcefully put forward in one of his main anti-Pelagian works concerning the doctrine of grace, in his *De spiritu et littera* of 412. Augustine's doctrine of grace is firmly based on the Trinitarian dogma, the basic preassumption being the Holy Spirit understood as the bond of love, *vinculum caritatis*, between the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is the reality of divine love which proceeds from the Father and is delivered to fallen mankind through the Son. Thus, the essence of divine salvific grace is the same love who the Triune God himself is; in his gracious revelation God communicates himself in person, not some separate substance of grace, to sinners. See *De Trin.* V,11(12)-12(13); CC 50,218-220, and XV,17(27)-18(32); CC 50A,501-508. On Augustine's doctrine of grace, see Burnaby 1947, Chéné 1961, Burns 1980, Hamm 1981, and McGrath 1986a,24-32. Risto Saarinen demonstrated that many aspects of the Augustinian doctrine of Pneumatological grace were transmitted to Luther via Peter Lombard's *Sententiae in IV libris distinctae*. See Saarinen 1987.

Even before Luther there was in Late Medieval Augustinianism a certain kind revival of the Augustinian doctrine of grace, including its Pneumatological aspect. This *schola Augustiniana moderna*, whose major figure was Gregory of Rimini, is the background for Luther's critique of the emphasis of the habitual grace in the Medieval doctrine of justification. "Luther argues that the habit required in justification is none other than the Holy Spirit." McGrath 1986a,154.

becomes even more perceptible because Luther is inclined to develop his argument in terms of Pneumatology by placing the human *liberum arbitrium* and the gracious effect of the Holy Spirit in contraposition. Most often Luther's treatment of the doctrine of grace leans on Christological argumentation, but in *The Bondage of the Will* he operates primarily with Pneumatological concepts. Rejecting the criticism of the pope, Luther asks: "Is the Spirit not the very grace which you say just helps the free choice to achieve its consummation? ... Do you not see that the Spirit and the free choice are contraries?" / "*Nonne Spiritus est gratia, qua tu dixisti liberum arbitrium iuvari et eius praeparationem consummari? ... Nondum vides, Spiritum et liberum arbitrium esse contraria?*"<sup>23</sup>

After the Fall, the natural human being is lacking God's Spirit, and therefore any appeal to the possible natural powers of his/her supposedly free choice cannot help him/her; preparation for grace "by doing what you can" / "*faciendo quod est in se*" is completely impossible, according to Luther. The human being *sine Spiritu* cannot but evade the truth and fight against God's grace and Spirit; any preparation for grace *ex natura sua* is totally out of the question.<sup>24</sup> Here, in his *Assertio*, without yet further developing his argument, Luther plants the seed for a Pneumatological comprehension of divine grace that becomes ever more visible in his *The Bondage of the Will*. Here the Augustinian Trinitarian theology of grace, with a strong emphasis on Pneumatology, arguably neglected in Medieval times, is powerfully revived.

In order to annul all trends of synergism or Semipelagianism, Luther denied any human activity in relation to conversion and justification. He clung to a strong concept of necessity understood as God's *necessitas absoluta* by which God operates all of his salvific

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For a detailed analysis of Luther's criticism of the Scholastic notion of habitual grace which becomes real through love, see Schwarz 1962 and Mannermaa 2010,9-25. On the doctrine of grace of Thomas Aquinas, see Bouillard 1944. On the relationship between the doctrine of grace of Thomas and Luther, see Vorster 1965, Oberman 1966, Brantschen 1966/1967, Pesch 1967, Janz 1983, and Dieter 2001,193-213. On Rimini's doctrine of grace, see Grane 1962b and Halverson 1998,5-10,143-157.

<sup>23</sup> WA 7,144,21-24.

<sup>24</sup> Luther makes a strong statement: "Ex supradictis abunde cognovimus...liberum eorum arbitrium et prudentia carnis, summis viribus concupiscens contra Spiritum, odiens ea quae sunt Spiritus et legis Dei. Et quomodo possibile est, ut sine Spiritu ex natura sua possit pro Spiritu concupiscere seu ad Spiritum se praeparare faciendo quod est in se? In gratia dum fuerit, natura eius talis est, ut contra gratiam indomitum pugnet, et extra gratiam talis esse poterit natura eius, ut Spiritus iuvet?" WA 7,147,14-21.

events: “everything happens by absolute necessity” / “*omnia de necessitate absoluta eveniunt.*” Defending the 36<sup>th</sup> sentence, Luther adhered to John Wycliffe’s necessitarian emphasis condemned by the Council of Konstanz (1414-1418), and made himself sound somewhat deterministic.<sup>25</sup> In his polemic against the notion of *facere quod in se est* Luther went so far as to say that God causes even the evil deeds in godless men: “God effects the evil deeds in the impious” / “*mala opera in impiis Deus operatur.*”<sup>26</sup> This alarmed Erasmus.

When encouraging the Christians to live an authentic Christian faith and life, Late Medieval theology and spirituality focused on the conditions of grace on the human side, emphasizing the contingent aspects of justification, whereas Luther concentrated on the theocentric perspective, expressing what the justification of a sinner means from the point of view of the almighty God. As a result, Luther’s argumentation sounded necessitarian. Looking at the things *ad inferna*, from the human point of view, they seem “arbitrary and contingent,” but looking at them *ad superna*, from God’s perspective, “everything is necessary” / “*omnia sunt necessaria.*”<sup>27</sup>

Writing under great pressure, Luther put forward his argumentation in quite an abrupt and non-differentiated way, leaving room for misunderstandings. The brief and somewhat exaggerated statements of Luther concerning absolute necessity could not be accepted by Erasmus, who saw them in blatant contradiction to any conception of theodicy: it was impossible for Erasmus to accept God as the cause of evil in man. Erasmus was alarmed

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<sup>25</sup> WA 7,146,4-8. It is worth noting that Erasmus had read the longer Latin, not the shorter German, version of Luther’s *Assertio omnium articulorum*. The German version, *Grund und Ursach aller Artikel* (WA 7,308-457), published after the Latin one, does not contain Luther’s teaching on absolute necessity; Luther had probably already noted that his language was too hyperbolic, causing misunderstandings among readers and deleted the most deterministic expressions. See McSorley 1969,262,264. Bernhard Lohse assumes that, originally, reading the works of the Humanist Laurentius Valla may have had an influence on Luther’s adherence to the idea of necessitarianism; the concept did not really belong to Luther’s own vocabulary. Lohse 1988, 136-137. On the influence of Valla on Luther, see also Lindhardt 1997.

<sup>26</sup> Here is the unhappy statement of Luther’s *Assertio* which perplexed Erasmus most: “Via enim hominis est ea, quam ipsi vocant naturalem virtutem faciendi, quod est in se. Ecce haec non est in arbitrio hominis seu liberi arbitrii: quid ergo liberum arbitrium est nisi res de solo titulo? Quomodo potest sese ad bonum praeparare, cum nec in potestate sit suas vias malas facere? Nam et mala opera in impiis Deus operatur...” WA 7,144,30-35.

<sup>27</sup> WA 7,146,27-31.

about Luther's making Christianity a religion without a logic of various *causae*: the responsibility of the human being plays no role in his/her relation to God, but God performs all things in the world and in individuals through the *necessitas absoluta* of his own decision and will. The good and merciful God cannot be responsible for the evil in human life; such a God would be "both insane and cruel" (*vel insanis vel crudelis*). Consequently, it is the human being him/herself who made and still freely makes wrong choices and decisions, thus causing evil. According to Erasmus, Luther's view of absolute necessity inevitably leads to an idea of an "unjust" God which is a self-contradictory and totally unacceptable concept. A complete annihilation of free will makes it impossible to comprehend God's righteousness and mercy, Erasmus assumes.

Teaching the idea of "absolute necessity" leads to a perverted view of God, Erasmus claims: "Moreover, those who deny free choice entirely, but say that all things happen by absolute necessity (*absoluta necessitate fieri omnia*), aver that God works in all men not only good but even evil works (*fatentur Deum in omnibus operari non solum opera bona, verum etiam mala*). Whence it would seem to follow that just as man can by no reason be said to be the author of good works, so he can in no way be said to be the author of evil works. Although this view seems plainly to ascribe cruelty and injustice to God (*Deo tribuere crudelitatem et iniustitiam*) a sentiment offensive to pious ears..."<sup>28</sup> Erasmus found absolutely unacceptable Luther's implication that God is the ultimate author of the evil deeds of human beings. He saw that Luther regards God as the efficient and operative cause of the evil in human beings, so God is the agent producing a mutation from natural goodness to its perversion. But as we go on to analyze Luther's argumentation in detail, we shall see that Luther absolutely cannot make the Creator responsible for the destruction of his own good creation. There lies a grave misunderstanding here, partly caused by Luther himself.

By limiting God's omnipotence over human will, Erasmus intended to maintain a picture of a good and just God; this is possible only by admitting some, in fact, just a very slight responsibility on the human side: the human being must have the minimal capacity of free decision in relation to God and to sin: "But this, meanwhile, is to be avoided, that while we are wholly absorbed in extolling faith, we overthrow free choice, for is this is done

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<sup>28</sup> *Diatribes* IV12; Walter,85,16-23; LCC 17,92. See also *Diatribes* IV5; Walter,80,4-81,5.



away with I do not see any way in which the problem of the righteousness and the mercy of God is to be explained (*quo pacto possit explicari quaestio de iustitia deque misericordia Dei*).”<sup>29</sup> Erasmus’ criticism of Luther seems justified; but as a matter of fact, we will later learn that Luther was not a determinist. His extreme statement in his *Assertio* – “God effects the evil deeds in the impious” – was a sort of mistake, an ambiguous and hyperbolic expression open to misunderstanding – even Luther himself later noticed that. By this extreme statement, Luther himself is guilty of the misunderstanding.<sup>30</sup>

Because of Luther’s confusing expression, Erasmus understood that Luther regarded the omnipotent God as the *causa efficiens* of the evil in human life; Luther claimed that God was the agent producing a mutation from natural goodness to its perversion. But as we turn to Luther’s *The Bondage of the Will*, in which he elaborated and clarified his mode of thinking, we shall see that this is not the case. God is not the efficient or operative cause of evil, but rather, in the sense of *causa instrumentalis*, he uses already existing evil as a medium and instrument of his general providence in all of his creation. The understanding

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<sup>29</sup> *Diatribes* IV7; Walter, 81, 19-22; LCC 17, 89. Erasmus stresses God’s justice; the human being could not be reckoned as guilty and responsible for his/her sin unless it was a free voluntary choice: “If the power to distinguish good and evil and the will of God had been hidden from men, it could not be imputed to them if they made the wrong choice. If the will had not been free, sin could not have been imputed, for sin would cease to be sin if it were not voluntary, save when error or the restriction of the will is itself the fruit of sin (*nisi cum error aut voluntatis obligatio ex peccato nata est*). Thus the responsibility of rape is not imputed to the one who has suffered violence.” *Diatribes* IIa7; Walter, 25, 12-18; LCC 17, 50. Here, in fact, Erasmus’ criticism misses the point because he describes the human situation before the Fall, whereas, Luther’s denial of free will focuses on the postlapsarian state of humanity. Moreover, in Luther’s view, all humanity is in the exceptional state mentioned here by Erasmus: in the state of error and the “imprisonment” of the will caused by the Fall of the human race.

<sup>30</sup> In the Wittenberg (1546) and Jena (1557) editions of Luther’s complete works, the editor Georg Röhrer inserted a paragraph expressing Luther’s regret for using necessitarian terminology: “I could wish indeed that another and a better word had been introduced into our discussion than this usual one, ‘necessity,’ which is not rightly applied either to the divine or the human will. It has too harsh and incongruous a meaning for this purpose, for it suggests a kind of compulsion, and the very opposite of willingness, although the subject under discussion implies no such thing.” Positively, this could be seen as “immutability of the will of God and the impotence of our evil will, or what some have called the necessity of immutability.” Quoted from Kolb 2005, 26-27. In Section 4.2 of our study we shall see what Luther means by “the necessity of immutability.” After 1525 Luther abandoned the ambiguous concept of divine necessity. Kolb 2005, 274-275 & 2017, 456.

Another place where Luther seems confused in his *Assertio* is where he exaggerates by denying the natural human freedom in carrying out “natural operations” of life (*naturales operationes operari*); WA 7, 145, 28-34. This, of course, is in contradiction with his understanding of the freedom of the human will in relation to “things below oneself” (*in rebus se inferior*), clearly taught in his *The Bondage of the Will* and in his other works. Even in his *Assertio* Luther remarks that “free decision is non-existent in relation to God, but it functions in our works in this aeon.” WA 7, 146, 32-33.

of God's omnipotence is an expression of Luther's conception of *forma Christianismi* drastically differing from that of Erasmus, who – for the sake of justice – wishes to see a limit to God's omnipotent influence.

In their debate, both Luther and Erasmus had their limitations. Luther did not approach the challenge offered by the great Humanist in terms of a rational solution to the problem of theodicy or the juridical system of justification within the construction of the Scholastic logic of different *causae*. Quite consciously, Luther overlooked many of the intellectual problems raised by Erasmus; instead, the framework of his approach was based on the theological conception of the transcendence of human reality. What determines man's destiny and the quality of his life is not his juridical-like relationship to God but his immediate and intimate relationship to the transcendent: His will and his life are ruled and directed either by the Holy Spirit of the Triune God or by the oppressive and perverse power of the personal enemy of God and man, Satan himself – *tertium non datur*.

Luther did not pay much attention to the intellectual questions at stake, but he rather emphasized the religious nature of these problems. If Late Medieval Catholic soteriology focused on the application of divine grace to the human situation, Luther, on the contrary, concentrated on the theocentric nature of that same grace. If Erasmus was primarily worried about the metaphysical question of theodicy itself, Luther concentrated on the consequences to soteriology caused by the acceptance of Erasmus' rational solution to the dilemma of theodicy. In his dispute with Luther, Erasmus did not prove to be a specially original theological or philosophical thinker; rather, without much reflection of his own, he spoke eloquently in favor of a commonsensical recognition of the commonplace Late Medieval *Via moderna* principle of *facere quod in se est*. Erasmus is a better rhetorician than a thinker.<sup>31</sup>

Luther spoke a language of biblical and theological realism: there is no discrepancy between the linguistic symbols and the things they represent – they are one and the same

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<sup>31</sup> An excellent analysis of the rhetorical skills and style of Erasmus in his dispute with Luther is offered by Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle; see Boyle 1983. See also O'Rourke Boyle 1977 On the rhetoric of Erasmus, see also Hoffmann 1994, Matheson 1998,216-222, and Rummel 2004,32-35.

reality; the words themselves carry the reality they speak about.<sup>32</sup> He was not interested in an analysis of the philosophical and intellectual problems involved; rather, he intended to establish his realistic position on the basis of straightforward biblical language, he trusted in the self-efficient *prima facie* clarity of God's word. Following this realism, the focus of his theological approach was on the question about the human race *extra Spiritum*, and, therefore, under *regnum diaboli*; it is not the intellectual problem concerning God's justice or theodicy, but the power of Satan which prevents conversion to the divine truth.<sup>33</sup> Luther is a theologian existentially participating in the battle between the "principalities"; for him theology is a matter of life and death.

Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* has very often been treated as a book concerned mainly with the classical problems of the freedom of the will and the question of divine predestination. Our brief analysis of the root of the conflict between Luther and Erasmus, however, points to the fact that, in Luther's overall theological argumentation in his magnum opus, the transcendence of human existence, a person's relation to God's Spirit or to the opposing spiritual power – understood in terms of realistic biblical language – has a decisive role. Consequently, it is obvious that in Luther's theology the central doctrines of grace and justification, the theological foundation for understanding the relationship between God and the human being, are conceived very much in terms of Pneumatology. In *The Bondage of the Will*, Pneumatology is an inherent part of Luther's conception of divine grace and of the justification of a sinner.

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<sup>32</sup> Reijo Työrinoja offers a philosophical analysis of the realistic nature of Luther's theological language. He sums up Luther's "extreme theological realism": "Luther's conception seems to presuppose that the words, as used by Scriptures, are no *terms* (in the sense of philosophy and logic) at all. ... The language of revelation is *nova lingua*, because for God the word and the thing signified are one and the same reality. Its 'new words' not only refer to the divine things, but the things themselves are carried and brought by them." Työrinoja 1987,236. Työrinoja, 1986,169-170, characterizes Luther's concept of belief as "a non-epistemic, i.e., a specific notion of religious belief." A careful analysis of Luther's relation to his philosophical background is offered by Bengt Hägglund, who suggests that, although philosophy and theology investigate the same truth, theology maintains its methodological autonomy in Luther's thinking. See Hägglund 1955,95-97. Antti Raunio maintains that *The Bondage of the Will* "must be understood as a strongly theologically concentrated work, whose author has escaped the traditional metaphysical ways of thinking." Raunio 1997,61. On Luther's theological realism, see also Metzke 1965.

<sup>33</sup> "Quid enim est universum genus humanum, extra Spiritum nisi regnum Diaboli (ut dixi) confusum chaos tenebrarum?" WA 18,659,6-7. In his direct reference to Erasmus, Luther depicts the bondage of the human beings under Satan, stating that it is not at all a question of intelligence; WA 18,659,27-33. Lohse, 1988, 133-134, notes that Erasmus did not comprehend Luther's "strictly theological argumentation" in their dispute.

## 1.2 Varying Interpretations of *The Bondage of the Will*

In spite of the immense significance of Luther's magnum opus, its theological structure and content have so far not yet been satisfactorily analyzed and exposed. Most interpreters have focused on Luther's opus as a philosophical-theological treatise against the idea of free will. Some see Luther's thought deterministic and find in this work a strong doctrine of predestination – even a doctrine of double predestination. There have been a great number of voices heavily criticizing this book of Luther's.<sup>34</sup>

Klaus Schwarzwäller's *Shibboleth: Die Interpretation von Luthers Schrift De servo arbitrio seit Theosius Harnack* (1969) offers a detailed presentation of German-language research on *The Bondage of the Will* during the period of 100 years from the 1860s to the 1960s.<sup>35</sup> Schwarzwäller shows how research and interpretation have been strongly influenced by Kantian philosophy: the ethical concept of a "moral religion" has been the basis on which the researchers have turned very critically against the incomprehensible thought of Luther on assumed "mechanical determinism" and predestination under the irrational and arbitrary rule of the hidden God, *Deus absconditus*. The paradoxes of Luther have been as detestable to modern researchers as they were to Erasmus five centuries ago – and often even for similar reasons.

Schwarzwäller's work shows that the themes of the Trinity and of the Holy Spirit were virtually never mentioned in the German research of *The Bondage of the Will* over one hundred years; even Christological implications were very weak. It is quite amazing to observe what a powerful influence philosophical and other preconceptions exercised on the German Luther scholars. The Christological, Pneumatological, and Trinitarian nature of Luther's treatise remained practically unnoticed during the period.

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<sup>34</sup> For instance, Loewenich, 1976,34, and Koivisto 2012,151, maintain that Luther represents the doctrine of double predestination. Helmut Bandt is one of the Luther scholars who criticizes the Reformer on similar grounds as Erasmus did. Bandt says that Luther's effort to explain the relation between God and evil in necessitarian terms is "not an especially convincing attempt," this being "one of the manifest weaknesses" of Luther's book. Bandt 1958,123. Alister E. McGrath blames Luther for negative necessitarianism, he makes a comparison of Augustine and Luther: "For Luther, it is God who is the author of sin. For Augustine, it is man who is the author of sin. ...Luther explicitly teaches a doctrine of double predestination, whereas Augustine was reluctant to acknowledge such a doctrine..." McGrath 1986b,15-16.

<sup>35</sup> McSorley, 1969,300-302, offers a much shorter overview of literature over the same period.

According to Schwarzwäller, one of the main influential figures in this strain of interpretation from the 1860s onward was Albrecht Ritschl, a heavily Kantian influenced Lutheran theologian who openly recommended a rejection of Luther's "wretched concoction" which teaches an unacceptable irrational concept of an arbitrary and unjust God of determinism. This contradicts not only rational moral religion but also "the moral organization of humanity" and the principles of "the moral order of the world."<sup>36</sup> In Ritschl's opinion, Christianity is all about Christ's "actual effect on the subjective consciousness of the believer" enabling the person's knowledge, emotion, and will for a better moral behavior.<sup>37</sup> After Ritschl, Karl Holl in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century created a school of Luther research based on the philosophical premises of Neo-Kantian philosophy. According to Holl, God reveals himself in "the consciousness of duty."<sup>38</sup> Luther's Christianity is a religion of conscience in which faith means the unity of wills between God and man, not a unified being. Holl underscores the distance between God and the human beings, all kinds of "mystical" elements are excluded. God's gift to humanity is only his *favor*, forgiveness, no *donum*, no presence of a gift.<sup>39</sup>

Risto Saarinen has convincingly demonstrated how other philosophical trends at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century also made an impact on Luther research: The idealistic philosophical paradigm created a so-called "effective" ontology which could replace "traditional" metaphysics as a methodological foundation of research. Luther interpretation saw the relationship between God and the human being as an actualistic effect or influence in which the distance between God and the believer was emphasized; the notion of a union between God and the human was utterly unthinkable.<sup>40</sup>

Among the negative critics of *The Bondage of the Will*, Schwarzwäller sees one exception: Hans Joachim Iwand understood Luther's treatise as a fundamental defense

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<sup>36</sup> Schwarzwäller 1969,20-25.

<sup>37</sup> Saarinen 1988,25-33.

<sup>38</sup> Holl 1921,35-37.

<sup>39</sup> Holl 1921, 36,81-83. Saarinen 1988,71-88.

<sup>40</sup> Saarinen 1988.

and confession of the doctrine of justification: “Who does not agree with Luther at all points of *The Bondage of the Will*, has understood neither Luther nor the idea of the Reformation,” Iwand concludes. He took note of the Christological and the Pneumatological content of Luther’s thought.<sup>41</sup> Inspired by Iwand, Schwarzwäller himself emphasizes Christology and God’s word – he follows the paradigm of the Christologically centered kerygmatic theology of the word, *die Theologie des Wortes*. At the end of his *Shibboleth*, Schwarzwäller mentions briefly the connection of Luther’s treatise with the economical doctrine of the Trinity and with the Holy Spirit as “a guide leading us to Jesus Christ.”<sup>42</sup> Schwarzwäller’s book is a research survey, not a piece of research on the text of *The Bondage of the Will*, consequently, his suggestions still need to be tested by a careful analysis of Luther’s text.

Schwarzwäller’s other book, *Theologia crucis: Luthers Lehre von Prädestination nach De servo arbitrio* (1970), is a detailed hermeneutical commentary on *The Bondage of the Will*. He goes through Luther’s treatise section by section commenting on them on the basis of the internal logic of Luther’s work as well as making extensive references to Luther’s other writings. Schwarzwäller aims at an immanent and sympathetic explanation of “Luther by Luther,” but his method is lacking systematic rigor and clarity.

Schwarzwäller rightly sees the Trinitarian motif in Luther’s opus, but a kerygmatic Christological hermeneutic dominates his analysis, even though in Luther’s treatise Christology is less explicit than the work of the first and the third persons of the Trinity. Schwarzwäller’s Christocentric approach is motivated by his concentration on forensic justification in the form of the proclamation of the gospel, God’s word.<sup>43</sup> Luther’s denial of free choice is interpreted as an extreme confession of his doctrine of justification *sola gratia* and it is one form of his “theology of the cross”: The annihilation of human

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<sup>41</sup> Reference to Iwand from Schwarzwäller 1969,57-62. Iwand presented his view in a number of journal articles in the 1930s.

<sup>42</sup> Schwarzwäller 1969,115-116.

<sup>43</sup> “So begegnet also bei der Trinitätslehre die gleiche Struktur wie bei der Christologie: Luther handelt von Christus, indem er die Rechtfertigung verkündigt...” Schwarzwäller 1970,208.

capacities in relation to God's grace is God's method of creating the assurance of salvation which in no way depends on its human receiver.<sup>44</sup>

Schwarzwaller's interpretation of Luther shows that the interpretational framework of the theology of the word is an inadequate interpretational paradigm for understanding Luther's *The Bondage of the Will*. The kerygmatic theology of the word of God, the dominating paradigm in German theology in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is a preconception which prevents the interpreter from seeing the deeply Trinitarian, or even "mystical" and "sacramental" view of grace in Luther's work.<sup>45</sup> Schwarzwaller's criticism of the philosophically conditioned Luther research and his open-minded and elaborated analyses of *The Bondage of the Will* point to the Trinitarian understanding of the doctrine of grace. But the results of his work are not yet thorough and clear enough to reveal Luther's deep insight of the union between the sinner and the Triune God – the work must go on. The conservative North American Luther interpretation is also dominated by kerygmatic theology, consequently, the truly Trinitarian and Pneumatological essence of Luther's doctrine of grace as participation in Christ is not recognized.<sup>46</sup>

A Catholic Luther scholar, Harry J. McSorley, in his *Luther: Right of Wrong? An Ecumenical-Theological Study of Luther's Major Work, The Bondage of the Will* (1969 in English, 1967 in German), makes a great effort in trying to show that Luther was a true Catholic theologian who rejected the "Neo-Semipelagian" doctrine of grace in Nominalism prevalent in the Late Medieval period teaching: the natural ability of the

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<sup>44</sup> Schwarzwaller 1970,57-62,209.

<sup>45</sup> Schwarzwaller identifies the influence of the Holy Spirit with the preaching of the gospel; a Christological-Pneumatological union between the Triune God and the sinner is completely invisible to him. Schwarzwaller 1970,107-108 & 1971,9,36-37. Oswald Bayer is one of the more recent Luther interpreters following the paradigm of the theology of the word. In his *Martin Luther's Theology*, Bayer shows some sympathy to the idea of the believer participating in God's nature as long as it is seen taking place exclusively through divine promise and God's nature is defined in terms of communicative being: "If God is understood as Word, then the Trinity is to be comprehended as dialogue: God, within himself, is communication, relationship, a relational 'three-nes.'" Bayer 2008,341.

<sup>46</sup> Mark C. Mattes is a typical representative of the American evangelical interpretation of Luther. He sees only the forensic and the effective dimensions of Luther's doctrine of justification lacking reference to Pneumatology. Mattes sees Mannermaa's understanding of justification in terms of a union and participation in Christ as unnecessary, since God's "objective" word alone effects and contains everything. Mattes 2014.

human being in his/her own psychic capacities to freely remove the obstacles to grace and to prepare for the reception of grace. McSorley sees Luther as a “genuine Catholic theologian” in harmony with Augustine and even with Thomas Aquinas and the other early Scholastics, who accepted the notion of the slavery of the human will but rejected determinism or necessitarianism. God’s *gratia praeveniens* liberates the free will of the human being so that he/she can freely respond to the initiative of divine grace. The only element in Luther’s thought McSorley wants to change is his assumed “uncatholic” feature – “necessitarianism” – too categorical a denial of the freedom of the will even under the influence of and activation by God’s grace.<sup>47</sup>

McSorley’s thorough work is the best tradition-historical and philosophical analysis of Luther’s magnum opus. But there are some problems too. His analysis of the actual text of *The Bondage of the Will* is only 71 pages of the total of 398 pages of his book which covers the whole history of Christian theology. He concentrates on the philosophical problems of the concept of necessity, which, in fact, is to some extent useless because Luther overlooks and refuses to discuss philosophical problems in his treatise as we shall see (see Section 4.2. of our study). Luther only accepts and uses the idea of “the necessity of immutability” and applies it to his theological thought.

Moreover, McSorley pays no attention to Christology, Pneumatology, or the Trinitarian conception of grace in *The Bondage of the Will*; the Holy Spirit is hardly even mentioned in his book. Limiting his task to philosophical analysis, McSorley is not able to penetrate the true theological nature of this great treatise of Luther, which is deeply theological – hardly at all a philosophical tract. Moreover, McSorley does not see Luther’s fundamental distinction between the “things below oneself” where the human being has free will, and the “things above oneself” where he/she has no free will. This distinction helps to realize the true realm of freedom and the limits of freedom.

In recent years, there have been some fresh attempts at understanding Luther’s *The Bondage of the Will*. Thomas Reinhuber in his *Kämpfender Glaube: Studien zu Luthers Bekenntnis am Ende von De servo arbitrio* (2000) concentrates on the question of what

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<sup>47</sup> McSorley 1969,110,168-169,190,213-215,310-335,367-369. McSorley says that one of the reasons for the dominance of the incorrect emphasis of human freedom in the Late Medieval doctrine of grace was ignorance concerning the decisions of the Second Council of Orange in 529 which affirmed the Augustinian teaching; the documents were not rediscovered until the 1530s. McSorley 1969,293.



kind of a conception of God comes out of Luther's so-called "Confession" at the end of his magnum opus. Reinhuber's approach is basically philosophical, he does not at all pay attention to Luther's doctrine of grace, Christology, Pneumatology, or the Trinitarian nature of Luther's theology. Consequently, it is quite obvious that Reinhuber, in spite of his careful and erudite work, is not able to recognize the theological core of Luther's great treatise.

Gerhard O. Forde is one of the rare Luther scholars who, in his *The Captivation of the Will: Luther vs. Erasmus on Freedom and Bondage* (2005), correctly emphasizes the key role of Pneumatology in *The Bondage of the Will*. God's Spirit is the sole agent of conversion and change: "The presence or absence of the Holy Spirit holds the key. ... Above all it is clear that God the Holy Spirit is the agent of change, not the sinner or, for that matter, the believer. ... The entry of the Spirit into one's life is not a polite choice but a radical change, something more like an invasion, a breaking into the house of the 'strong man armed,' a move, or rather a being moved, from death to life."<sup>48</sup> Forde's miniature study is a meditative and homiletical reflection, it does not aim at a scholarly elaboration of the Pneumatological dimension in Luther's thought.

The best modern study available up to now is Robert Kolb's *Bound Choice, Election, and Wittenberg Theological Method* (2005). This extremely scholarly and knowledgeable work, however, dedicates only 56 pages (pp. 11-66) to analyzing Luther's *The Bondage of the Will*, and it operates basically with the English translation of this opus. Kolb concentrates on the reception of Luther's treatise among his Wittenberg students, not so much on the peculiar substance of this work as such or on the paradigmatic differences between Erasmus and Luther. More importantly, Kolb's work does not expose the Trinitarian logic and the Pneumatological concentration of Luther's theology of grace. Kolb rightly sees the dilemma of "God's responsibility for evil" as the crucial problem in the reception of Luther's teaching on unfree will, but he does not proceed to show in detail how Luther deals with Erasmus' criticism about an "unjust and cruel" God, which was the immediate reason for the conflict between the two.

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<sup>48</sup> Forde 2005,56-59.

Our survey of the research situation shows that the theological core of Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* has not yet been satisfactorily analyzed and revealed. Moreover, it is equally true that the Pneumatological dimension and the Trinitarian nature of Luther's doctrine of grace have not been deeply enough understood in Luther research.<sup>49</sup> It is evident that such a satisfactory analysis of *The Bondage of the Will* which would open up a comprehensive understanding of Luther's profound theological thinking in his work is still lacking. Besides, Luther's Pneumatology in general is a hugely undervalued, even neglected, field in Luther research. Carter Lindberg comments on Lutheran theology: "Pneumatology is a central issue but there is an astounding lack of studies not only in regard to renewal movements but to Luther himself."<sup>50</sup>

Our initial exploration of the roots of the conflict between Luther and Erasmus (see above, Section 1.1) already indicated that Pneumatology plays a key role in *The Bondage of the Will*, being an essential part of the Reformer's Trinitarian vision of divine grace and the foundation of his criticism of the notion of free choice. Compared with his later works, Luther's writings up to 1525 had a greater Pneumatological potentiality concerning his doctrine of justification. It may be that, partly due to historical reasons, when faced by the rise of various forms of spiritualism as well as religiously motivated political radicalism, Luther was more inclined to cling mainly to Christological terminology.

It is astonishing that, as a rule, the best-known general presentations of Luther's theology are lacking a thematic treatment of the Reformer's Pneumatology; even his doctrine of the Holy Trinity receives very little attention. For instance, Paul Althaus' *Die Theologie Martin Luthers* (1966 in English, 1962 in German) devotes less than two pages to Luther's concept of the Trinity and offers only a three-page survey on his Pneumatology; this survey is linked with the history of ecclesial authority.<sup>51</sup> Following the customary Lutheran confessional interpretation of Luther, Althaus mentions the Holy Spirit when speaking about the new life of the Christian, "the beginning of the new creation."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> On the research of Luther's teaching on the Trinity, see Jansen 1979, Helmer 1999,5-25, and Kärkkäinen 2003.

<sup>50</sup> Lindberg 1983,306.

<sup>51</sup> Althaus 1966,199-200,341-344.

<sup>52</sup> Althaus 1966,234-235.

Alongside the Christologically based kerygmatic theology of the word, the German Luther interpretation has the existentialist version of the theology of the word. The main figure of the existentialist interpretation was Gerhard Ebeling; his influence on Luther research has been huge. An existentialist theologian, Ebeling sees reality in terms of an actualistic “relational ontology” instead of the “old metaphysical” category of realistic or essential ontology. In his thought, God’s word is a “word event” (Wortgeschehen), an ever moving actualistic relationship of being addressed by God that creates an experience of security, “a certain conscience,” in the human being’s relationship with God. In Ebeling’s Luther interpretation, Christ and the Holy Spirit are replaced by the supposed Reformatory exclusivity of “word and faith” (Wort und Glaube). In accordance with “relational ontology,” in Ebeling’s interpretation of Luther’s teaching on justification, grace can never become a gift, *donum*, abiding in the human person, but justification is “a verbal relation” and “a fundamental change of the human situation.” For Ebeling grace must be a “word event” outside the human being; otherwise, grace would become a possession of the sinner and thus his/her “self-righteousness”.<sup>53</sup> “God does not associate himself with man otherwise than through the word of promise.”<sup>54</sup>

Ebeling’s *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought* (1972 in English, 1964 in German) is weak in both Christology and Pneumatology. He deals with Pneumatology only under the title “The Letter and the Spirit.”<sup>55</sup> When Ebeling speaks about the Holy Spirit in Luther’s theology, Pneumatology becomes a subtitle of the theology of the word: “It is this Christologically orientated understanding of the Spirit which gives rise to the concentration on the relationship between the word and faith (Wort und Glaube) which is fundamental to Luther’s theological thinking.”<sup>56</sup> Moreover, in his broad three-part *Lutherstudien* (1971-1985) Ebeling does not mention the Holy Spirit when he speaks about Luther’s understanding of grace and justification. Similarly, another existentialist interpreter of Luther’s thought, Friedrich Gogarten in his *Luthers Theologie* (1967), pays

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<sup>53</sup> Ruokanen 1982,173,212-215,303-304. See also Ruokanen 1989.

<sup>54</sup> Ebeling 1971,299.

<sup>55</sup> Ebeling 1972,93-109.

<sup>56</sup> Ebeling 1972,106.

no attention to Pneumatology.<sup>57</sup> It is a rule that German works on Luther's theology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century are scanty indeed in their treatment of the third person of the Trinity.

Walter Mostert, a student of Gerhard Ebeling, follows the existentialist paradigm of word and faith and interprets Luther's Pneumatology in anthropological terms: "The Holy Spirit creates in an individual human being a human reality, namely the faith, in which the human being recognizes his/her own truth and righteousness in the true and righteous man Jesus Christ."<sup>58</sup> Bernhard Lohse, in his balanced and well done exposition of Luther's theology, when analyzing the debate between Erasmus and Luther, refers only to Christology with no mention of Pneumatology or the Trinitarian dimension of Luther's teaching of grace in *The Bondage of the Will*.<sup>59</sup>

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only one monographic study was published on Luther's Pneumatology, and that was outside Germany: Regin Prenter's *Spiritus Creator* (1954 in German, 1944 in Danish). This is still the principal presentation of Luther's Pneumatology. The basic shortcoming of Prenter's work is his concentration on Luther's polemical texts in which he criticizes the spiritualists (Schwärmer); quite surprisingly, he pays no specific attention to *The Bondage of the Will* which is the most Pneumatological text Luther ever wrote.<sup>60</sup> This approach does not make it possible to see the positive, substantial Pneumatological accent present in Luther's own theology adequately; Pneumatology, an essential and vital part of Luther's Trinitarian theology, is undermined in Prenter's work. Moreover, Prenter thematically interprets Luther as in sharp contradiction to Medieval Catholic theology. Since Augustine, Pneumatology has been closely linked with the idea of divine love, but Prenter sees Luther in a blatant confrontation with this tradition: Luther uses "outwardly" Augustinian terminology, but

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<sup>57</sup> Gogarten, in his article of 1950, presents an ethically argued interpretation of *The Bondage of the Will*.

<sup>58</sup> Mostert 1990,32.

<sup>59</sup> Lohse 1995,178-187. Exceptionally, Eilert Herms represents a short analysis of Luther's Pneumatology in his catechetical writings; see Herms 1987.

<sup>60</sup> Prenter 1954,14. One third of the main text of Prenter's book, pp. 205-300, concentrates on Luther's dealing with the "spiritualists." On some minor contributions to Luther's Pneumatology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, see Kärkkäinen 2003,14-26. One of them is Kurt Dietrich Schmidt's article of 1950; see Schmidt 1967. See also the scheme of Schwarzwäller, 1971, for Luther's Pneumatology.

“he gives a new content to the traditional formulations.”<sup>61</sup> According to him, Luther renounces the “Augustinian speculation of *caritas*” according to which the Spirit has poured into the human heart love towards God thus fulfilling God’s law and requirement in the human being.<sup>62</sup>

Prenter makes an attempt to show that in Luther’s theology “the infusion of the Holy Spirit” into the human being does not mean a sacramentally mediated grace which creates a “new nature” in the human being, as Augustine and Scholasticism would teach. God’s Spirit remains always God’s *opus alienum*, “God’s real and effective presence (Gottes wirkliche und wirkende Gegenwart)”; as the Spirit, God himself is “really present (*realiter gegenwärtig*).”<sup>63</sup> The expressions Prenter uses are a bit ambivalent; he seems to emphasize the real presence and influence of the Holy Spirit in the human person, but at the same time, he is against any notion of a union between the divine and the human, or “lifting human nature to the level of super nature,” because this would lead to unhealthy “synergism.” Therefore, in his Luther interpretation, Prenter speaks in actualistic terms of presence and effect, event and happening, forcefully defending the forensic-judicial nature of justification: “What makes us whole human beings, God’s children, is not a *donum* as a part of our essence, but that *gratia* or *favor Dei* which is inseparably bound with the *donum*. And *favor Dei* is and remains fully outside us.”<sup>64</sup> The saving grace is not based on the notion of a union but on the idea of a relation and effect: first, opposing all kinds of “unevangelical mysticism,” Prenter maintains that the Christological-Pneumatological grace is not inside but outside the justified sinner; second, it is the task of the Holy Spirit to bring about an “experience of Christ” (*Christuserfahrung*).<sup>65</sup> Prenter’s interpretation leaves open the question of whether and, if so, in what manner, God’s Spirit is actually present in the human being.

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<sup>61</sup> Prenter 1954,21.

<sup>62</sup> Prenter 1954,29. We will see later, in Section 5.2, that what Prenter denies here is a part of Luther’s doctrine of grace in *The Bondage of the Will*. Prenter clearly follows the interpretation of Augustine by Anders Nygren in his famous *Eros och Agape*, an interpretation motivated by Kantian deontological ethics: Augustine created a “synergistic” concept of *caritas* which mixes the human *eros* with the divine *agape*. See Nygren 1930.

<sup>63</sup> Prenter 1954,34.

<sup>64</sup> Prenter 1954,55,106.

<sup>65</sup> Prenter 1954,67-73.

In his analysis of Luther's Pneumatology, Prenter, a Dane, is linked with the dominant German "theology of the word of God" or kerygmatic theology. It seems as if in this interpretational paradigm the person of the Holy Spirit is replaced by the entity of "God's word."<sup>66</sup> Prenter's interpretation is ambivalent: On the one hand, he recognizes the effect and presence of Christ's Holy Spirit in justification; on the other hand, he follows the mode of kerygmatic theology emphasizing that only the existentially effective oral word, i.e., the actual preaching of the forgiveness of sins, is gospel and grace proper.<sup>67</sup>

Ulrich Asendorf's *Die Theologie Martin Luthers nach seinen Predigten* (1988) is a delightful sign of an awakening interest in Luther's Pneumatology on German soil; in this work there is a separate chapter on Pneumatology<sup>68</sup> and some comments on the need for further exploration in this field. Asendorf points to the centrality of the work of the Holy Spirit in Luther's theology – this acknowledgement happens now for the first time in German Luther research. He rightly states that in Luther's theology, Christology and Pneumatology are intimately connected with each other, so that one cannot understand Christology without Pneumatology, and vice versa.<sup>69</sup> According to Asendorf, even the basic distinction between law and gospel cannot be understood without an emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit. Luther's understanding both of the gospel and of divine love are deeply involved with Pneumatology, in much the same way as in Augustine's thought.<sup>70</sup> Asendorf does not, however, link Luther's doctrine of justification directly with Pneumatology.

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<sup>66</sup> Kärkkäinen, 2003,14-15, describes the early foundational work of Rudolf Otto on Luther's Pneumatology (Otto 1898) as a "reduction to the empirically described influence of the word and the faith"; this leads to "a profanation of the Holy Spirit."

<sup>67</sup> Prenter 1954,45,107-110,119.

<sup>68</sup> Ch. 4 of his work has the title "Der Heilige Geist"; Asendorf 1988, 203-304.

<sup>69</sup> "Wieder erschienen Christologie und Pneumatologie in engster Verbindung, so daß die Christologie ohne die Pneumatologie nicht zu entfalten ist und umgekehrt." Asendorf 1988,338.

<sup>70</sup> Asendorf 1988,354.

The philosophical and cultural context of German Protestant theology in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries exercised deep influence on Luther research. It has been pointed out, especially in modern Luther research in Finland, initiated by Tuomo Mannermaa, that the investigation and interpretation of Luther's thinking has been significantly influenced by Neo-Kantian philosophy and by various forms of German Idealism.<sup>71</sup> This *Vorverständnis* for researching Luther makes many of the classical features of Luther's theology, such as his strong Trinitarian accent, obscure or even invisible.<sup>72</sup> It is obvious that the use of anthropocentric methods of theology makes it impossible to comprehend the Trinitarian structure of Luther's theology in its entirety. Moreover, the implementation of the conception of actualistic or relational ontology for theology, instead of the classical realistic and substantial ontology, makes it difficult to comprehend some vital dimensions of classical theology in Luther's thinking, especially the idea of the sinner's union with Christ in the Holy Spirit.

Under the influence of philosophy, the German paradigm maximizes the idea of an "effect" and of a "relation" and minimizes the notion of a union in the communication between the Trinity and human beings. The modern paradigm emphasizes the distance between God and human beings and eliminates the possibility of understanding saving divine grace in terms of a sacramental or "mystical" intimate union between the Triune God and the sinner. The possibility of a "real-ontic" union between God and the human being in the Spirit is replaced with an actualistic and distant relationship through the "word event" between the two. The basic feature of the Finnish interpretation of Luther is its emphasis on justification as the participation of the sinner in Christ, especially in his divine nature and divine love. This means participation in divine life and in the very being of God, *de facto*, deification, which is effected by divine love. It is through faith that the entire Godhead is present in the believer. The believer's union with Christ is called "real-ontic," marking a distinction between this and the existential-ethical "relational" or actualistic "effect" models of the German interpretational paradigms.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> On the new "Finnish school" of Luther research, see Mannermaa 1989 & 2005 & 2010; Peura 1990a; Juntunen 1996; Braaten & Jenson 1998; Vainio 2010; Saarinen 2014 & 2017,181-203.

<sup>72</sup> Eeva Martikainen maintains that in German Luther research, under the influence of Kantian philosophy, criticism of all that is "metaphysics" prevails; consequently, a distance from classical ontology makes it impossible to see the significance of Trinitarian theology for Luther. Martikainen 1987,25.

It has been the intention of Tuomo Mannermaa and his Finnish school of Luther interpretation to see the union of the sinner with Christ (*unio cum Christo*) or the inhabitation of God (*inhabitatio Dei*) in the human being at the center of the justification of the sinner, not just as a reality of sanctification that takes place after the forensic-legal justification, as was taught in confessional Lutheranism after Luther. Union with Christ is not only an independent consequence of forensic justification (*favor*, forgiveness of sins), but it is the essence of justification because Christ gives himself as the gift of grace (*donum*, the real presence of Christ in the sinner). For Luther the *favor* and *donum* aspects of justification form an indivisible entity, while for later Lutheran theology these two aspects were distinguished from one another. It also became customary to call *favor* the “forensic” aspect and *donum* the “effective” aspect of justification; the former denotes the sinner’s being “declared” justified and the latter the sinner’s being “made” righteous. In the present work we will see that Luther understands the notion of union with Christ in such a way that it will cover and include both of these aspects into an inseparable unity.<sup>74</sup>

The Finnish school has made a great accomplishment in understanding the authentic nature of Luther’s doctrine of grace. Olli-Pekka Vainio correctly maintains: “Thus transformative union with Christ forms the Christocentric context for justification: where sins are forgiven, faith is given as a free gift and the sinner corrupted by sins receives a new life as he or she shares the life of Christ. . . justification can refer to everything that happens when faith is given to the sinner. . . . If the presence of Christ is just a logical

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<sup>73</sup> For the definition of the “real-ontic union,” see Mannermaa 1989,185-191, and Peura 1990a,299. For “relational ontology” and “word event” in Gerhard Ebeling’s Luther interpretation, see Ruokanen 1982 & 1989. See also Saarinen 1988.

<sup>74</sup> There are some German Luther scholars who emphasize the centrality of the idea of “the presence of Christ in faith.” For instance, Wilfried Joest regards the notion of *Christus praesens* as a basic motif of Luther’s thought: “Daß die Personpräsenz Christi den Glauben qualifiziert, ist keineswegs nur eine gelegentlich auftretene Redeweise, sondern ein immer wieder begegnendes Grundmotiv in Luthers Denken. Wir finden es in frühen und in späteren Schriften.” Joest 1967,368. Joest even recognizes the notion of *unio cum Christo* in Luther: the idea of union includes both the “forensic” and the “effective” aspects of Luther’s doctrine of justification so that righteousness at all points always remains *iustitia aliena* of Christ himself. Joest 1967,370-376. It is very likely that Mannermaa was inspired by Joest’s interpretation of Luther in his *Ontologie der Person bei Luther* and developed it into a radically “ontological” direction by connecting it with the Patristic conception of deification. Mannermaa’s closest student Simo Peura strongly pleads for the unity of forensic and effective justification. Peura 1997.



consequence of faith, then faith has to be a *human* achievement.”<sup>75</sup> The Finnish interpretation rightly sees all the aspects of justification in terms of a union between Christ and the sinner.

The Finnish school of Luther research had not paid much attention to Luther’s Pneumatology until Pekka Kärkkäinen published his *Luthers trinitarische Theologie des Heiligen Geistes* (2003). Kärkkäinen concentrates on the Trinitarian nature of Luther’s thought, with only some reference to his doctrine of grace; *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther’s most Pneumatological treatise, does not become a topic in Kärkkäinen’s work. Consequently, his monograph opens up the pathway but does not sufficiently explore the soteriological depth of Luther’s Pneumatology.

Kärkkäinen explains the role of the Holy Spirit in Luther’s theology as a mediator and “vivifier” (Lebendigmacher) of the gospel of Christ.<sup>76</sup> The simultaneity of the union with Christ as a union in the Holy Spirit – or participation in Christ as participation in the Holy Spirit – is not emphasized enough in Kärkkäinen’s analysis. Kärkkäinen notes, however, that in his writings before 1520, Luther sees the role of the Holy Spirit “in bringing about the union between Christ and the human being, but the union itself is mostly described in Christological terms.”<sup>77</sup> Kärkkäinen comes to the conclusion that, from 1520 onward, Luther emphasized more clearly “the parallelism of the divine sending of the Son and of the Spirit”: the presence of the Spirit is a reality in itself, not just a derivation from Christology.<sup>78</sup> This is an important notion, and we shall see that in *The Bondage of the Will* this development has reached its peak: Luther adapts Pneumatological terminology to the very idea of the participation of the sinner in Trinitarian life. In the present study we will see that the role of the Spirit is not just that of an “instrument,” but the Spirit is Christ himself in the sinner.

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<sup>75</sup> Vainio 2015,468. On the dichotomy of “forensic” vs. “effective,” see also Vainio 2004,35-69,76.

<sup>76</sup> Kärkkäinen 2003,112-113,239. For Finnish interpretations on Luther's Pneumatology, see also Erikson 1980 and Kvist 1989.

<sup>77</sup> Kärkkäinen 2003,134,137.

<sup>78</sup> Kärkkäinen 2003,198-199.

In sum, three problems concerning the Finnish school of Luther research can be pointed out: First, union with Christ or the inhabitation of God in the sinner is interpreted almost exclusively in Christological terms; most often Pneumatology enters the discussion only when speaking about sanctification; consequently, the Trinitarian character of justification is not strong enough. Second, justification is still often seen as a two-part reality: forensic justification proper – which now is deepened by the notion of a union with Christ – and the “effective” or “transformative” change of the justified sinner by the Holy Spirit – which traditionally was seen in terms of union.<sup>79</sup> Third, the Finnish interpretation has had difficulty in combining the notion of the union of the sinner with the divine person of Christ with the notion of the historical facts of salvation, the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet, Mannermaa implies that the forensic imputation of the righteousness of Christ, based on the atonement on the cross, and the inhabitation of Christ in the Christian mutually presuppose each other.

The present study aims at developing the Finnish paradigm further by showing that *The Bondage of the Will* implies a three-dimensional doctrine of grace in which the notion of the Christological-Pneumatological union between God and the human being is the essence of (1) the conversion of the sinner and the birth of faith by the effect of God’s Spirit, (2) the union of the sinner with Christ in the Holy Spirit, both with his divine person and with his historical works of salvation, and (3) the change of the believer by participating in divine love in the Holy Spirit. Finnish Luther research has not yet paid much attention to *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther’s most Pneumatological text. (The Finnish paradigm of Luther research will be discussed in more detail in Section 8.2.)

Our research survey has shown that Luther scholars have not yet fully explored the theological core of Luther’s magnum opus. There has been extensive critical concentration on the issues of free will and determinism, but the overall paradigmatic

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<sup>79</sup> In Section 8.2 we will see that this is a problem with Tuomo Mannermaa’s interpretation of Luther. In his seminal work, *Mehr als ein Mensch: Die Vergöttlichung als Thema der Theologie Martin Luthers von 1513 bis 1519*, Simo Peura, differing from Mannermaa, fully recognizes the simultaneity of the Christological and Pneumatological dimensions of justification. Referring to Luther’s *Lectures on Romans*, he speaks about “the totality of the gift”: “Zu dieser Totalität des Schenkens gehört auch...die Gabe des Heiligen Geistes. Der Reformator ist der Ansicht, daß der Heilige Geist durch den Glauben in das Herz und in das Innerste des Menschen eingegossen wird, wenn das Wort der Gnade an die Ohren klopft. Der Heilige Geist wird aber nicht nur als Gabe unter anderen Gaben geschenkt, sondern er ist auch selbst an der Eingießung der Gnade, der Gerechtigkeit und der anderen Gütern Christi beteiligt.” Peura 1990a,211-212.

differences between the thought systems of Erasmus and Luther have not been satisfactorily detailed. For Luther his magnum opus is his manifesto on the slavery of the human being by sin and on the Trinitarian God's grace liberating the sinner from his/her bondage. And this liberation has a powerfully Pneumatological character in *The Bondage of the Will*.

Why have researchers been so blind to Luther's Pneumatology? Three reasons could perhaps be mentioned. First, as pointed out above, German Protestant theology by and large has been under the heavy influence of Kantian Enlightenment and its rationalism; consequently, the paradigm of an "ethical religion" and the *Entmythologisierung* of the "supernatural and mystical" elements of faith have been dominant. Second, the Trinitarian doctrine has been seen as a part of the "old metaphysics" which must be rejected in the "modern" world view and theory of knowledge; old substantial "metaphysical ontology" has been replaced by an actualistic "relational ontology." Third, there has always been an exaggeration of the opposition to all possible symptoms of "spiritualism" (Schwärmerei) in German Lutheranism: the person of the Holy Spirit has been replaced with the more "sober" concept of "God's word."

It is clear that Luther's Pneumatology, being an essential part of his Trinitarian doctrine of grace, has not been satisfactorily analyzed or properly understood in Luther research so far. There is a big gap here to be filled. *The Bondage of the Will* was the one among Luther's works in which he concentrated on the Holy Spirit more than in any other. A comprehensive systematic analysis of his magnum opus will open up a new perspective on the true Trinitarian nature of Luther's theology of grace in which Pneumatology, alongside Christology, has a central place.

### **1.3 Task, Method, and Sources of the Study**

Reflection on Luther's thought in relation to the teachings of Augustine, Scholasticism, and Nominalism or *Via moderna* helps to a certain extent to understand the logic and meaning of his *The Bondage of the Will*. Using external criteria to enlighten the intellectual background and context in which Luther dwelt and developed his own theological thinking cannot, however,

explain the true, authentic nature of Luther's own thought. The specific problems appearing in *The Bondage of the Will* can be correctly understood only on the basis of comprehending the basic systematic theological idea of his work. The very kernel of Luther's own thought and the deepest intentions of his theology in this work are best comprehended by analyzing the inner structure and the inner coherence of his own thinking, and by seeing how his own argumentation evolved and became visible in his dispute with Erasmus.

A new, comprehensive, and profound approach to the problems involved may be gained by analyzing the overall structure of the central features of Luther's theology in this work of his, not just by concentrating on some special questions limited in their scope. By means of this it becomes possible to arrive at a new interpretation of *The Bondage of the Will*. This is how, in the present study, I intend to approach Luther's work. My aim is both to reproduce a historically reliable understanding of Luther's magnum opus and to make an attempt at an authentic systematization of his theological thinking in his opus. My reading of Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* is both a careful historical exegesis and a systematic theological close reading of Luther's text and thought. I, however, consciously try to avoid imposing too much systematicity on Luther's thinking; as Luther had no explicit intention to be a "systematic" theologian, perhaps the best way of reading him is a conceptualization of the core body of his theological thought in *The Bondage of the Will*.

To some extent, my study is also a contemporary intellectual contextualization, reading Luther's work in the context of modern Luther research and interpretation. As a Finnish researcher, I will naturally pay special attention to the strengths and weaknesses of the so-called "new Finnish interpretation of Luther" launched by Professor Tuomo Mannermaa in the early 1980s. During recent decades, this new approach to Luther has attracted considerable attention in the theological world.<sup>80</sup> In Section 8.2, I will make a critical and creative amendment to Mannermaa's interpretation of Luther's doctrine of grace, understood as a union with Christ, and, more specifically, in terms of *theosis* or deification. The results of my analysis of Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* will complement Mannermaa's

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<sup>80</sup> See Saarinen 2014 & 2017,181-203; Vainio 2010 & 2015; Braaten & Jenson 1998.

interpretation of Luther's *Lectures on the Galatians* (1532/1535); Mannermaa's seminal interpretation of Luther is based on his analysis of these lectures of Luther.<sup>81</sup>

By and large, my analysis and interpretation of Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* is linked to the paradigm of the Finnish school of Luther research. Most obviously, I recognize the idea of a "union with Christ" as the paradigmatic model which in an authentic way expresses Luther's conception of grace and justification based on his reading of Paul. As we shall see, the "union with Christ" model does not, however, contradict the more traditional juridical-forensic interpretation of Luther's doctrine of justification; rather, it is a completion of the traditional paradigm. I am self-critically aware of the contextuality of my work – all theological work has its unavoidable context. Still, I insist on the relevance of my interpretation.

The task of this study is to analyze and expose the fundamental systematic theological structure and content of Luther's theological thinking in *The Bondage of the Will*. It is my hypothesis that Luther's own specific and comprehensive understanding of the Trinitarian theology of grace, with special emphasis on Pneumatology, alongside the more obvious Christology, and with a strong link with the theology of creation, is the fundamental thought structure and content of his magnum opus. This enables Luther to get rid of the rationalistic-juridical paradigm in the doctrine of grace, common in Late Medieval teaching and consistently represented by Erasmus, which leads to an emphasis on the anthropological conditions for receiving God's grace.

As shown above, both Pneumatology and the Trinitarian conception of grace in *The Bondage of the Will* have been heavily undermined in previous research. The present study aims to be a groundbreaking analysis exposing the essentially Pneumatological and Trinitarian structure and content of Luther's magnum opus neglected in Luther research. The study will make the necessary Pneumatological corrective to the understanding of Luther's theology, especially to his doctrine of grace. Luther's solution to the problems of free choice, necessity, or predestination can be seen in the correct light only in the context of his overall argumentation in his *The Bondage of the Will*.

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<sup>81</sup> Tuomo Mannermaa, *In ipsa fide Christus adest: Luterilaisen ja ortodoksisen kristinuskonkäsityksen leikkauspiste* (Helsinki: Finnische Gesellschaft für Missiologie und Ökumenik, 1979). The English translation, by Kirsi Stjerna, is *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).

The method employed in the present study is that of a comprehensive systematic analysis of Luther's thought in his work. Systematic analysis has five dimensions: Attention will be paid to (1) the concepts and the conceptualization of issues by Luther, to (2) his main propositions and claims, to (3) the arguments he uses to support his claims, and to (4) the structural principles and the coherence of his thought system. Moreover, (5) the implicit presuppositions and the fundamental intuitions of his theological thinking will be pointed out; here, attention needs to be paid to the theological-philosophical background and context of Luther's theological formation as far as it enlightens Luther's own theological conceptualization. The systematic analysis of Luther's thought system begins with a careful close reading of his text. Systematic analysis can reveal the fundamental ideas and the entire structure of the author's thinking and how different parts of the thought system are related to one another. This analysis may expose some implicit, unspoken basic presuppositions, principles, conditions, and structures underlying the thinking of the author. The present work avoids interpreting Luther by external criteria, and instead, attempts to understand in depth the genuine immanent and intrinsic ideas of his theological thought.

This work of Luther is also a piece of art in which style and theology belong together: the genre and style of *The Bondage of the Will* are an inseparable part of its meaning. In his defense of grace, Luther employed the whole array of hyperbolic, paradoxical, and existential rhetoric.<sup>82</sup> He speaks vividly about the core issues and the deepest concerns of human existence in its relation to transcendence – the bondage of sin and liberating divine grace, a transfer from anguish to certainty. This is the drama of human existence and the drama of divine salvation. The theological struggle in this work is inseparably connected with the actual context of life and the conflict between faith and unbelief therein. A confessional theologian, Luther argues very much as an insider of the drama at stake, using the first-order

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<sup>82</sup> A formal rhetorical analysis, however, is not a task of the present study. On Luther's rhetoric, see Nembach 1972, Matheson 1998, and Stolt 2000. Peter Matheson comments on Luther's "drastic vocabulary": "...the monstrous evil of the Reformation's opponents could not be defeated 'with a gentle voice, and a discreetly opened mouth'; ordinary people would not be reached without forthrightness. Luther's natural inclination was to be mild, good, gentle, pure, and merciful, but the abuses in the Church and the exploitation of the laity forced him to be outspoken and aggressive. Only drastic language, Luther himself argued, could reveal the fantasies of his opponents for what they were." Matheson 1998, 11-12.

language of faith.<sup>83</sup> Erasmus, on the contrary, looks at the issue more coolly, as a rational observer, using second-order language.

In his magnum opus Luther is utterly immersed in the drama of human life – the drama of the captivity and the liberation of the human race from the slavery of sin and death. Rhetoric, especially hyperboles and paradoxical expressions, are an intrinsic part of Luther’s method of demonstrating the ultimate dependence of humanity on God. This all offers a special challenge to a truthful understanding of Luther’s real thoughts. His rhetorical language must be comprehended on the basis of the real substance of his arguments, which he repeats over and over again, rather than paying too much attention to the rough edges or the rhetorical surface of his ideas, which could, at least in some cases, appear to be misleading. My reading of Luther does not aim at an analysis of his rhetoric as such, but attention will be paid to how Luther, as a preacher and counselor, speaks to the actual drama of life in the context of the spirituality of his time.

The main sources of the study are Luther’s *De servo arbitrio / The Bondage of the Will* (1525) and Erasmus’ *De libero arbitrio diatribe sive collatio (Diatribe) / The Freedom of the Will* (1524). In addition to *The Bondage of the Will*, some other relevant works of Luther from the period of the 1510s-1530s are referred to in order to show the wider foundation of his theological convictions visible in his magnum opus.<sup>84</sup> In Section 8.2 special emphasis will be put on Luther’s mature doctrine of grace in his *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/1535), the foundational text of Tuomo Mannermaa’s interpretation of Luther, and it will be compared with Luther’s doctrine of grace in *The Bondage of the Will*.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Schwarzwäller, 1970,62, emphasizes the confessional character of Luther’s work.

<sup>84</sup> One of the sources, of course, is the already analyzed *Assertio omnium articulorum M. Lutheri per bullam Leonis X. novissimam damnatorum* (1520). Robert Kolb rightly states: “Therefore, the study of the argument of *De servo arbitrio* is of little significance if not placed in the larger context of other works by the Reformer in other circumstances. ... Thus, each topic in this work cannot be considered apart from the larger and long-term development of his theology.” Kolb 2005,19.

<sup>85</sup> The sources of the English translations of the original Latin texts are mentioned whenever used; other translations, without any mention of an English source, are created by M.R. For the sake of consistency, I write *Deus* and *Spiritus*, when it signifies God’s Holy Spirit, always with a capital letter even when the original Latin sources might use a small letter.

## 1.4 A Note on Terminology

This is a terminological note the content of which will become more fully documented during the analysis of *The Bondage of the Will* in the course of the present study. Luther makes a certain distinction between the Latin terms *voluntas* and *arbitrium*. It seems most appropriate to translate the term *voluntas* as “will” and the term *arbitrium* as “choice” or “decision.”<sup>86</sup> *Voluntas* can be seen as a permanent phenomenon of the human psyche, whereas *arbitrium* should be understood as a more punctual act of choice. Luther regards the naturally good phenomenon of will, *voluntas*, as being part of the psychic constitution of the human being, being similar to reason and emotion. Will is an inherent part of the human soul created by God, it is naturally good and free within the limits given to it. The faculty of free will is limited to “things below oneself,” *res se inferior*, things which belong to the natural and social life of human beings. Will is a psychic appetitive energy or *potentia appetiva* which, according to Luther, can be seen as essentially free and unconstrained in itself, though vitiated and burdened to some extent by the consequences of sin.<sup>87</sup>

In Luther’s thought, the human psyche is limited by a lack of capacity for freely choosing or making decisions concerning the fundamental direction of the will’s relation to the reality superior to the human being or “things above oneself,” *res se superior*.<sup>88</sup> This limitation in the freedom of choice or *arbitrium* belongs to the very nature of humanity, it existed from the very beginning of the creation, not only after the Fall. According to Luther, humans never had the capacity of absolutely free choice: in the state of integrity, the human being’s *arbitrium* was a “servant” of God, but after the Fall it became the “slave” of sin. For Luther, in “things above oneself” the true freedom of humanity equals humble and obedient servanthood under the

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<sup>86</sup> This is also the vocabulary adopted by the American edition of *Luther's Works*.

<sup>87</sup> In the Heidelberg disputation (1518) Luther had already confirmed the true freedom of the “natural will”: “Sed impossibile est, quod velle sit coactivum et non liberum: necessario est liberum et necessario libere vult.” WA 1,366,15-20.

<sup>88</sup> Luther used similar terminology, such as *se inferiora* and *supra se*, in his *Lectures on Romans* (1515-1516); see WA 56,385,20-21. Luther had adopted the view that the human being can freely choose things “below oneself” but no one can choose God as an object of one’s love from his philosophical teachers Jodocus Trutfetter and Bartholomaeus Arnoldi de Usingen. Kopperi 1997,119. Wilfried Joest confirms Luther’s distinction between the free decisions within the reality of this life and the bondage of the will at the center of the person or the “striving of the heart.” Only “God’s loving power” can liberate the person from the slavery of evil. Joest, a typical German Luther interpreter, does not make any reference to Luther’s Pneumatological language. Joest 1983.



Creator and loving the Creator above everything else, whereas after the Fall, seduced by Satan to a fallacy of absolute freedom as independence from the Creator, humanity fell under the imprisonment of sin and evil. In this state of “captivity” it is utterly impossible for the human being to freely avoid sin or to freely choose the good connected with one’s relation to God and salvation. Here Luther to some extent differs from Augustine who emphasizes the freedom of human choice in the state of integrity – although, even for Augustine, actually there was only the negative freedom of choosing sin and losing the original grace.<sup>89</sup>

For describing and explaining the lack of freedom of human choice, *arbitrium*, Luther employs the Augustinian concept of “the bondage of the will,” *servum arbitrium*.<sup>90</sup> This expresses the fact that, while humans did not have an absolutely free choice even in the beginning of creation, after the Fall their situation is much graver: human choice is alienated from the Creator and has become the “slave” of unbelief, disobedience, and lack of love. Consequently, in this state the person, living outside the saving grace, freely, willingly, and gladly, without any coercion, may do evil; his/her naturally free *voluntas* is the servant of his/her imprisoned *arbitrium*.

In his analysis of the Augustinian doctrine of original sin, Ian McFarland comes to conclusions which are analogous to our remarks on Luther’s distinction between *voluntas* and *arbitrium*: “...the doctrine of original sin does not render the will impotent: whether for good or ill, human beings do what they will. The doctrine of original sin does, however, remind us that what human beings will is not itself a matter of the will’s choice. The will’s basic orientation toward or away from God is not itself within the compass of the will...” As a moral category, human will is free but as an ontological category the human choice of the will’s fundamental orientation is in “a disorder that inescapably conditions all our doing – and thereby reminds us that our hope properly rests in God’s doing rather than our own.” Ultimately, Augustinian

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<sup>89</sup> For more discussion on the different nuances of Augustine and Luther, see Section 5.2 below. It is necessary to note that outside *The Bondage of the Will* Luther does not use the term *arbitrium* as a concept concerning man's relation to “things above oneself” fully consistently; sometimes he uses the term simply to mean natural acts of decision or resolution made by an individual or by a group. See, for instance, *De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium* (1520), WA 6,499,9; and *Die sieben Bußpsalmen* (1525), WA 18,500,3 and 503,25,31.

<sup>90</sup> For a detailed discussion on this concept, see note 16 above.

pessimism aims at “*magnifying divine grace* by stressing the utter impotence of human beings to guarantee their own existence before God.”<sup>91</sup>

Luther follows Augustine in teaching that although human will, *voluntas*, is free to function in accordance with its basic orientation, for good or for bad, this fundamental orientation itself toward or away from God, *arbitrium*, is not something the human being can freely choose. Notger Slenczka summarizes Luther’s conception: “Being bound by sin means being a sinner freely, but without the capability to govern this direction of will.”<sup>92</sup> According to Risto Saarinen, in *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther does not rule out the naturally free will, but he “denies the autonomous power of choosing between two contrary opposites. . . . People cooperate willingly in both their carnal and spiritual actions; the only restriction is that the will cannot autonomously change its fundamental direction, in particular from its natural or carnal state towards the spiritual state.”<sup>93</sup>

Here it is important to note that Luther makes this distinction between doing good or doing evil on the basis of his fundamental distinction between “the two kingdoms” or “two regimes” of God: What is said here about the captivity of human choice applies to the human being *coram Deo*, in front of God, in relation to “things above oneself.” This does not negate Luther’s strong conviction that *coram mundo / hominibus*, in this world, in relation to “things below oneself,” on the foundation of natural moral law based on creation and found in everyone’s rational conscience, even a godless person is able to perform morally good deeds. Luther firmly believes in the ability of any human being, regardless of his/her faith or of lack of it, to be a highly ethical person.

Erasmus, who fails to make a proper distinction between the *duo regna* or “the two kingdoms” of God, i.e., God’s work as the Creator and as the Redeemer, does not differentiate the various functions of the voluntary part in the human soul. As a result, Erasmus can use *voluntas* and *arbitrium* as synonyms, or at least he does not see any essential difference between the two concepts; he emphasizes the overall liberty of human voluntary activity. There is no distinction

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<sup>91</sup> McFarland 2007,156-157. On Augustine’s concept of the will, see also Rannikko 1997 and Holmström-Hintikka 1997.

<sup>92</sup> Slenczka 2014,230.

<sup>93</sup> Saarinen 2011,129-130. Our analysis of Luther’s conception of “the necessity of immutability” in Section 4.2 will show that the interpretations given here are correct. See also Boyle 1984b.

between how human will operates as a natural phenomenon and what its relation to “the things above” is; for Erasmus both *voluntas* and *arbitrium* are terms referring to the natural, free potentialities of the human psyche in its relation to all reality.<sup>94</sup>

## 2. Erasmus and Luther: Two Different Paradigms of the Christian Faith

As Luther himself claimed, the paradigms of Christianity, *formae Christianismi*, between himself and Erasmus differ from each other in a significant way. Based on a systematic analysis of the main concepts and structures of thought as they appear in the writings of Luther and Erasmus, we may discover a profound difference in the theological thinking systems of the two. In order to make it easier for the reader to follow my analysis and argumentation in the present study, I offer a tentative comprehensive description of the distinct characteristics of the two different paradigms; the actual verification of my claims will be offered in the detailed analysis of the sources in the subsequent chapters.

### 2.1 The Paradigm of Erasmus: God’s Fair Treatment of the Humans

For Erasmus, the relationship between God and the human being is a kind of fair play in which God’s generous and abundant mercy can be experienced by a human being who is

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<sup>94</sup> According to Luther, the Scholastic theologians, when speculating on human will, already lost the distinction between “things above oneself” and “things below oneself”: “Hence that argument of the Scholastics about free will (*pro libero arbitrio*) is most foolish: ‘I have the freedom to govern a cow or to throw away money; therefore I have the freedom to do what pleases God and to serve him.’ But that is the same as if you said: ‘I can tread on the earth with my feet and walk on the earth; therefore, I can also go into the heavens and walk on the clouds.’ Indeed, from this creation man has free knowledge and power to rule and deal with those lesser than himself (*cum sese inferioribus*). But to govern himself and to do what pleases his superior (*suo superiori placeant*), he neither knows nor is capable of. There free will ends; there he is necessarily blind, powerless, yes, dead and condemned.” *Deuteronomion Mosi cum annotationibus* (1525), WA 14,585,28-36; LW 9,51.

Later in his *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/1535) Luther powerfully criticized the Medieval theologians for “dragging political and domestic statements into the church” thus mixing law and ethics with gospel and grace: “But the sophists drag these statements into the spiritual realm where a man cannot do anything but sin...But in external matters, that is, in political and domestic affairs, man is not a slave but a lord of these physical matters. ...For the realm of human reason (*regnum rationis humanae*) must be separated as far as possible from the spiritual realm (*a spirituali regno*).” WA 40/1,292,24-293,17; LW 26,174.

sincerely open towards the Creator. Concerning this relationship, there are some just rules and principles which can be rationally perceived and morally accepted. God has made a pact or covenant with humanity revealing his merciful good will and the ways in which human beings can become connected with his saving grace.

Erasmus's theology focuses on the idea of relation and on the conditions and means of establishing this relation. Both parties, God and humans, have their responsibilities in creating this connection, although the responsibility of the human beings is just very minimal if compared with the abundant generosity of God. Humans have a responsibility – although really a very minimal one (*nonnihil, scintillula, tantulum, aliquantulum, modiculum, modicula*) – for their own relationship with God. This is the responsibility of making a fundamental decision, whether, first, to become contrite and seek God's saving grace, and whether, second, to apply or not to apply oneself to God's grace when God offers this to a person. This naturally free human ability of seeking salvation and attaching or not attaching oneself to divine grace was in Late Medieval theology called "free choice," *liberum arbitrium*. The definition of *liberum arbitrium* by Erasmus runs: "By free choice in this place we mean a power of the human will by which a man can apply himself to the things which lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from them." / "*Porro liberum arbitrium hoc loco sentimus vim humanae voluntatis, qua se possit homo applicare ad ea, quae perducunt ad aeternam salutem, aut ab iisdem avertere.*"<sup>95</sup> Erasmus clarifies his meaning by a natural analogy: "And this they consider to be within the power of our own choice – that we may apply our wills to grace, or turn away from it, just as we can open our eyes to the light that is borne in upon them or close them again."<sup>96</sup>

Erasmus is a typical representative of the doctrine of grace of the Late Medieval Nominalism which promotes the principle of *facere quod in se est*: God has made a pact (*pactum*) with humanity promising that any human doing the very minimum "what he/she can" will be granted God's generous saving grace; "God shall not deny his grace to anyone who does

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<sup>95</sup> *Diatribes* Ib10; Walter, 19,7-10; LCC 17,47. Luther correctly reproduces Erasmus' definition word by word in WA 18,661,30-32. In another place Luther defines the intention of Erasmus like this: free choice is "a power, by which man is able to apply himself to the things that pertain to eternal salvation" / "*vis, qua se homo applicare potest ad ea, quae sunt salutis aeternae.*" WA 18,658,19-20; LW 33,98. The intention is the same as in the original statement of Erasmus, although the negative alternative of "turning away" is not mentioned. We may conclude that Luther understood the true intention of Erasmus' definition.

<sup>96</sup> *Diatribes* IIa11; Walter, 30,6-10; LCC 17,53. Erasmus repeats the same analogy in *Diatribes* IV9; Walter, 83,19-24.

what he/she can” / “*facientibus quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam suam.*” Those who by their own free initiative become contrite and long for God, desire his love and grace, will necessarily be given divine saving grace. And by this very same freedom of choice, they can “apply themselves to the things that lead to eternal salvation” once offered by God to them. Free choice has thus two functions: first, it is a free decision to seek God and forgiveness in contrition; second, it is a free “application” to the saving grace offered by God.

In accordance with the teaching of the Late Medieval Catholic Church, Erasmus believed that baptized Christians would become more sincere believers and disciples if they confessed their sins and received forgiveness in the sacrament of Penance. Erasmus followed the teaching of his day according to which impenitence is a sin that can never be forgiven – here the responsibility is fully on the human side. If the person does not take the responsibility for being sorry for his/her sins and long for divine mercy, he/she might lose God’s saving grace. Contrition or the lack of it is fully the responsibility of the human being; this is the starting point for Erasmus’ understanding of the concept of *liberum arbitrium*: it is the free, unconstrained decision of the human being whether he/she becomes contrite, needful of grace, or not. In fact, divine, saving grace as such is even for Erasmus a full and entire gift of God; but this gift cannot be delivered unless the human mind first becomes contrite, needful of grace, and unless the thus converted person “applies” him/herself to given grace. Creating the conditions for the reception of grace is the responsibility of the human side.

Luther remarked that the question about impenitence is exactly the core of their dispute: “... impenitence is the unforgivable sin (*impenitentia autem peccatum irremissibile est*). This is what your moderate Skeptical Theology leads us to. Therefore, it is not irreverent, inquisitive, or superfluous, but essentially salutary and necessary for a Christian, to find out whether the will does anything or nothing in matters pertaining to eternal salvation. Indeed, as you should know, this is the cardinal issue between us (*cardo nostrae disputationis*), the point on which everything in this controversy turns. For what we are doing is to inquire what free choice can do, what it has done to it, and what is its relation to the grace of God.”<sup>97</sup> Luther concentrated on the consequences to soteriology from Erasmus’ solution to theodicy; in his opinion, accepting free choice by limiting God’s omnipotence in the realm of human freedom has devastating consequences for the doctrine of grace.

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<sup>97</sup> WA 18,613,23-614,6; LW 33,35.

Luther's complete exclusion of human freedom, and therefore of human responsibility, in matters of salvation disturbed Erasmus; as we have seen, this was the motive for Erasmus to write his *The Freedom of the Will* or *Diatribes* against Luther. Erasmus was shocked by the idea of an "unjust and cruel" God who saves and damns sinners with no reference to their readiness to become contrite and to long for saving divine grace. Reading Luther's *Assertio* of 1520, Erasmus thought that Luther supports a strong version of determinism, according to which God even "compels the human beings to evil." In Erasmus' view, a righteous and good God could never judge a human being for something that he/she is not able truly to be responsible for.

According to Erasmus, denial of free decision and, consequently, of human responsibility, would not only twist our understanding of God's righteousness but it would also open the door to all kinds of immorality: "Let us, therefore, suppose that there is some truth in the doctrine which Wycliffe taught and Luther asserted, that whatever is done by us is done not by free choice but by sheer necessity (*non libero arbitrio, sed mera necessitate fieri*). What could be more useless than to publish this paradox (*hoc paradoxon*) to the world? Again, suppose for a moment that it were true in a certain sense, as Augustine says somewhere, that 'God works in us good and evil, and rewards his own good works in us, and punishes his evil works in us'; what a window to impiety would the public avowal of such an opinion open to countless mortals!"<sup>98</sup>

Erasmus dislikes the use of paradoxes in theology; consequently, he is not at all happy with Luther's rhetoric and method of theology. Erasmus is a theologian of tranquility, he has a deep aversion to exaggerating and extreme statements. He thinks that Luther, when defending God's grace, has gone too far and is too extreme; he is using too many paradoxes and hyperboles. As a rational theologian, he himself wishes to follow the *via media* of harmonizing between conflicting positions concerning the debate on free choice: "But where axioms are put forward in the disputing of truth, I do not consider paradoxes of this kind should be used, for they are almost riddles, and in these matters it is moderation which pleases me at any rate. Pelagius has no doubt attributed too much to free choice, and Scotus quite enough, but Luther first mutilated it by cutting off its right arm; then not content with

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<sup>98</sup> *Diatribes* Ia10; Walter, 9, 20-10, 7; LCC 17, 41.

this he thoroughly cut the throat of free choice and despatched it. I prefer the view of those who attribute very little to free choice, but most to grace (*qui nonnihil tribuunt libero arbitrio, sed gratiae plurimum*). . . . The result of this moderation will be the achievement of some good work, albeit imperfect, from which no man can arrogate anything to himself; there will be some merit (*erit aliquod meritum*), but such that the sum is owed to God (*cuius summa debeatur Deo*). . . .almost everyone admits free choice, but as inefficacious apart from the perpetual grace of God (*inefficax absque perpetua Dei gratia*), lest we arrogate aught to ourselves.”<sup>99</sup>

As pointed out above in Section 1.1, it was Luther himself who by his unfortunate expressions in his *Assertio* of 1520 aroused the criticism of Erasmus. When trying to prove that the idea of free choice is a mere speculative concept without any reality, thus being just a means of self-justification for the sinner,<sup>100</sup> Luther made two extreme statements which can be rather misleading: First: “What else could free choice be but a mere word? In what way could man prepare himself for that which is good, when it is not in his power even to make his ways evil? For it is God who effects even the evil works in the impious (*nam et mala opera in impiis Deus operatur*)...”<sup>101</sup> Second: “It is not in anyone’s own power to think of the good or of the evil, but everything happens by absolute necessity (*omnia de necessitate absoluta eveniunt*)...”<sup>102</sup>

Is Luther as extreme a determinist as Erasmus claims that he is, or does the overall structure of Luther’s theological thought offer a somewhat different solution to this issue which alarmed Erasmus? We shall later see that, after all, Luther does not represent philosophical determinism. Neither strong determinism nor its theological application in the form of the doctrine of double predestination will get support in Luther’s *The Bondage of the Will*.

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<sup>99</sup> *Diatribes* IV16; Walter,90,5-31; LCC 17,96.

<sup>100</sup> In fact, Luther had argued in a similar manner already in the Heidelberg disputation in April 1518: “*Liberum arbitrium post peccatum res est de solo titulo, et dum facit, quod in se est, peccat mortaliter.*” WA 1,354,5-6. This quotation from the Heidelberg disputation is the 36<sup>th</sup> sentence condemned by the pope; WA 7,142,23-24.

<sup>101</sup> WA 7,144,32-35.

<sup>102</sup> WA 7,146,6-8.

## 2.2 The Paradigm of Luther: Union by God's Monergistic Grace

Erasmus was also concerned about the renewal of the church in his day, but he was not focusing on the gospel of grace like Luther, but on the moral principles of the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>103</sup> Luther's paradigm of the Christian faith, his *forma Christianismi*, differs significantly from the conception of Erasmus. For him, the relationship between God and the human being is not that of a rational and juridical relation or of a morally acceptable fair play.<sup>104</sup> Rather, it is an intimate union of being, or a communion of life, between God and the human being. By its true nature, this union is not primarily a cognitive, rational, or moral reality, but an ontological or real-ontic<sup>105</sup> and existential union with Christ in the Holy Spirit, *koinonia/unio cum Christo in Spiritu sancto*. For Luther, the rational, juridical, and moral dimensions play a crucial role in the human community in God's earthly kingdom or regime, "in front of the world and people," *coram mundo et hominibus*, in "things below oneself," *in rebus sese inferior*. The two debaters use theological language differently: The rational language which Erasmus employs for speaking about the human being's relation to God, in regard to "things above oneself," Luther can only apply to describe the human being's relation to other people. What for Erasmus is a soteriological language is for Luther only ethical speech.

According to Luther, the human being's relation to "things above oneself," "in front of God," or in front of the demonic power of sin and evil, is not in his/her own control, but he/she exists under the influence of powers far greater than him/herself. The human being neither understands nor masters the "game" or its rules in his/her relationship with the transcendental realities. The humans exist and live under the influence of these realities, no matter whether they themselves are aware of the fact or not. Should there be changes in the human's relation

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<sup>103</sup> Lohse 1995,179.

<sup>104</sup> Friedhelm Krüger points to a basic difference in the theological paradigms of Erasmus and Luther: "Erasmus und Luther betreiben beide ihre Schriftauslegung in einzigartiger Konzentration auf Christus. Die Differenz zwischen beiden wird deutlich, wenn man fragt, was jeder von ihnen unter Christus verstanden hat. ... Während Luthers Christologie demnach am *Rechtfertigungsgedanken* orientiert ist, entwirft Erasmus seine Christologie vom Gedanken der *Inkarnation als Akkommodation* her. In Christus entdeckt sich die göttliche Ordnung, und indem er den Menschen in diesen Erkenntnisvorgang mithineinnimmt, bringt er auf den Weg zur Restitution durch Anleitung zur Ethik." Krüger 1986,244-245. Klaus Schwarzwaller, 1969,107, emphasizes "the ethical existence" as the heart of Erasmus' thought. Peter Matheson, 1998,218, makes a relevant point: "The God of Erasmus was one of order, not Luther's God of apocalyptic renewal."

<sup>105</sup> "Real-ontic" is a key term typically used by Tuomo Mannermaa in his interpretation of Luther.



to the realities “above oneself,” it is always a wonder and a miracle, God’s free gift which surprises the human being. Consequently, according to Luther, the human is free to choose neither his/her contrition nor conversion.

*The Bondage of the Will* is through and through a Pneumatological work; the same doctrine of grace which is powerfully argued for in Christological language in many of Luther’s other writings is expressed here in a language and thought structure dominated by Pneumatology. Why does Luther need such a strong Pneumatology in order to meet the criticism of Erasmus? There are two main reasons for that.

First, Pneumatology is crucially important for Luther when emphasizing the Augustinian notion of prevenient grace and thus demonstrating the *sola gratia* nature of salvation. The Holy Spirit is the effective, real, and living power which brings about a change in the human’s relation to God. God’s Spirit can affect the human being so that he/she becomes aware of his/her sinfulness, lack of faith and love, and therefore of the need of grace and forgiveness. Only God’s effective power, his Holy Spirit, can bring about contrition, and eventually conversion, by first humiliating the human being through the works of God’s “left hand,” or the “second use of the law” which makes the sinner guilty before God by showing that he/she is not fulfilling the requirements of the divine law of love.

As to the effective work of the Spirit, “by inwardly changing the human being,” he “raptures” the sinner from the realm of sin, unbelief, and Satan to the realm of grace, faith, and Christ. The Spirit creates faith and trust in the Savior Jesus Christ in the sinner whom he has moved. The Holy Spirit “enlightens” Christ to the sinner, brings him/her to Christ, and connects the person with the Savior. When God’s Spirit moves the human being, he touches the person in every aspect – *totus homo*, the entire person, is under the influence of the Holy Spirit, not just his/her will, intellect, or affect. Crucial for Luther’s concept of grace is not just a change in the sinner’s relation to God or in his/her qualities, but a change in the entire person of the sinner.<sup>106</sup> Luther’s foundational principle of *sola fide* is by definition a Pneumatological

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<sup>106</sup> “Luther criticizes Scholastics like Pierre d’Ailly and Biel in that for them grace does not significantly alter the person; it only changes the meritorious character of what people can in principle achieve by their natural powers.” Dieter 2014,38.

concept: faith is not a result of human psychic functions, but a gift and a “new creation” by the Holy Spirit, *Spiritus Creator*.<sup>107</sup>

In front of God, the crucial question is that about the quality of the human person, not his/her endeavors or actions. God’s grace aims at changing the entire person, not just his/her behavior or deeds. “For if the man himself is not righteous, neither are his works or endeavors righteous (*si enim ipse iustus non est, nec opera aut studia eius iusta sunt*); and if they are not righteous, they are damnable and deserving of wrath.” Consequently, “no works and no aspirations or endeavors of free choice count for anything in the sight of God, but are all adjudged to be ungodly, unrighteous, and evil.”<sup>108</sup>

The real change in the person happens only by the efficient power of God’s Holy Spirit who makes a sinner contrite, brings about a conversion, creates faith, and unites the sinner with the Triune God’s own life. This is Luther’s biblical axiom: “we do not become children of God except by being born of God” / “*dum filios Dei non fieri nisi nascendo ex Deo*.”<sup>109</sup> Free choice is a human psychic potential which Luther intends to replace with the reality of the Holy Spirit. Pneumatology represents a theocentric mode of thought which turns the conventional Late Medieval approach upside down: in Luther’s model, interest is not focused on what the human psyche can or cannot accomplish, with or without divine grace; instead,

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<sup>107</sup> Understanding faith as a reality inspired and infused into human hearts by God’s Holy Spirit was a clear accent in Luther theology already prior to his debate with Erasmus. For instance, in *Operationes in Psalmos* (1519-21) Luther says: “Optime autem vocatur fides lumen vultus Dei, quod sit illuminatio mentis nostrae divinitus inspirata et radius quidam divinitatis in cor credentis infusus.” WA 5,118,1-3. Moreover, in his sermons a few years before writing *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther emphasized grace and faith as the reality infused into the human being by the Holy Spirit through the external media of grace. He says, for instance: “faith is the gift of the Holy Spirit (*fides est donum Spiritus sancti*);” God “strikes the ears” of a sinner in order to “infuse the Holy Spirit through the word”; “it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to teach internally Christ”; “the Spirit plants Christ in you and you in him”; by the infusion of the Spirit man is made “one thing and one spirit with God”; “you cannot attain this faith, unless God’s Spirit infuses it into you”; “faith is not the human being’s own work, but God must infuse it into his/her heart”; “God puts his finger into your ears, so that he pours his Holy Spirit into you through his word and gives you a believing heart”; “who stays in Christ has the same Spirit and gifts as he has.” See, for instance: WA 10/3,311,20-23 (*Predigt 236*, 7 September 1522); WA 11,70,1 (*Predigt 282*, 22 March 1523); WA 12,570,5-13 (*Predigt 305*, 24 May 1523); WA 11,139, 7-13 (*Predigt 319*, 24 June 1523); 167,35-39 (*Predigt 339*, 23 August 1523); 184,12-14 (*Predigt 347*, 27 September 1523); WA 14,293,11-13 (*Predigt 411*, 15 November 1523); WA 15,686,30-34 (*Predigt 488*, 14 September 1524); 725,30-31 (*Predigt 493*, 23 October 1524); WA 16,584,12-20 (*Predigt 556*, 22 July 1526); WA 17/1,129,15-19 (*Predigt 587*, 18 March 1525); WA 17/1,471,20-21 (*Predigt 635*, 19 November 1525). On Luther’s doctrine of inspiration, see Ruokanen 1985.

<sup>108</sup> WA 18,772,7-11; LW 33,270.

<sup>109</sup> WA 18,777,10-11.

he concentrates on the possibilities of God, on what his all-present and all-effecting Spirit is doing. Only the sovereign and free Omnipotent is able, through his Spirit, to impart faith to the human being, *ubi et quando visum est Deo*.<sup>110</sup> Lack of the Pneumatological perspective, crucially important for Luther, has been one of the weaknesses of many interpretations of his *sola fide* concept. Without the clear Pneumatological accent, the principle of “through faith alone” would be under the threat of becoming an anthropological concept, which certainly is not Luther’s idea – for him it is totally a theocentric reality.

The central place of Pneumatology in the doctrine of justification safeguards the idea of the absolutely free mercifulness of the divine and sovereign Almighty who effects conversion and faith and offers his grace wherever and whenever it pleases him; here Luther’s emphasis lies in understanding the Holy Spirit as the agent of movement, change, effect, liveliness, intimacy, unity, ubiquity, and freedom in the works of the divine Godhead. In his reply to Erasmus, Luther employs a strong Pneumatological language in order to create a massive defense of the monergistic nature of God’s sovereign saving grace, *sola gratia*. Luther sees this as opposed to all human-centered misinterpretations which are based on hidden religious pride and self-love, and as such they just lead to the futile attempts of a sinner to justify him/herself before God.

Second, Luther needs a strong Pneumatology to show how salvation is not just a change in the juridical relation of the sinner with God, but a “real-ontic” union of the human being with the life of the Triune God. As we shall see in Section 8.1, Luther’s doctrine of grace, even in *The Bondage of the Will*, includes the conception of justification as a forensic-judicial imputation of the fruits of the cross of Christ and his personal righteousness to the sinner; but in this Pneumatologically oriented treatise Luther’s emphasis is on the conception of the union between God and the sinner. The soteriological work of God’s Spirit aims at creating a real and intimate union between God and the human being when making the Triune God really and truly present in the person and life of the human; the Spirit leads her/him to an intimate union with the Savior.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Resembling the well-known axiom of the Reformation (most clearly expressed in the fifth article of *Confessio Augustana* of 1530), Luther says: “cum liber sit ille Spiritus, ac spiret, non ubi nos volumus, sed ubi ipse vult.” WA 18,602,14-15.

<sup>111</sup> In a remarkable way, in his *Commentary on Galatians* (1519), Luther underscored the ontological realism of divine grace in terms of Pneumatology; it is only through the Holy Spirit that grace can be really

The quality of a human being's life in this world and his/her eternal beatitude depends on whether his/her person and life are or are not in a union with the person and life of the Holy Trinity. The real change in the human being's relationship to God and his saving grace is not a matter of a distant juridical relation based on God-given rules of fair play, as Erasmus would consider it, but that of an intimate and instant personal union of life between God and the human. This is how Luther understands the great Reformation principle of *sola gratia* in his *The Bondage of the Will*: "by grace alone" annihilates all – even the most minimal – attempts at self-justification.

Above all, Luther is a theologian of grace, the notion of *sola gratia* being the heuristic core of his thought; in his *The Bondage of the Will*, the most Pneumatological treatise he ever wrote, Luther offers a radical theology of grace. Luther's conception of divine grace, with some peculiarities of his own, recalls the fundamentally Augustinian doctrine of grace, differing from the soteriological views of Scholasticism and Nominalism. Luther's theology is best understood as a protest against the Scholastic and Late Medieval theologies of grace. It is in line with his contrasting concept of Christianity, characterized by the theology of the cross and accompanied by a strong soteriology understood in terms of an intimate union between the Triune God and the human being.

Luther's Pneumatologically accentuated Trinitarian vision of divine grace was not something Erasmus would comprehend. Astonishingly, Erasmus never mentions the Holy Spirit when dealing with the issues of grace, justification, or salvation. He only discusses God's Spirit when speaking about the theological teaching authority in the church.<sup>112</sup> According to Erasmus, in the early church, holy life and the powerful signs of the Spirit visible in a theological teacher were the proof of the "apostolic spirit" which legitimated his authentic

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delivered to humanity: "For when God is favorable, and when he imputes, the Spirit is really received, both the gift and the grace. Otherwise grace was there from eternity and remains within God, if it signifies only a favorable disposition in the way that favor is understood among men. For just as God loves in very fact (*diligit reipsa*), not in word only, so, too, he is favorably disposed with the thing that is present, not only with the word (*favet re praesente, non tantum verbo*)." WA 2,511,17-21; LW 27,252. In a sermon of the same year when Luther wrote *The Bondage of the Will*, he emphasized that in the Holy Spirit God gives his grace not only through his work or word but he is present himself "in the human hearts" as "the living God"; "the word is a bridge and step through which the Holy Spirit comes to us." WA 17/1,125,23-126,13 (*Predigt* 587, 18 March 1525).

<sup>112</sup> See *Diatribes* Ib4-Ib8; Walter,14-18; and *Diatribes* IV17; Walter,92,1-5. See also Chapter 9 below.

Christian doctrine; apostolic authority was guaranteed by the miraculous signs of the Holy Spirit. After the canon of the New Testament was perfected, the specific *testimonia Spiritus* became unnecessary and vanished; thereafter, the authoritative teaching was exercised by those who held a position of ministry in the apostolic succession, no specific demonstration of the Spirit was needed. This is all Erasmus has to say in his *Diatriba* about the Holy Spirit; thus, Erasmus shows his complete neglect of the Pneumatological aspect in the doctrine of grace.

Now we turn to a detailed analysis of the theological substance of the magnum opus of Luther and on the debate between him and Erasmus.

### **3 Luther's Theological Method of Conflict and Distinction**

#### **3.1 The Human Being as a Battlefield of the Opposing Transcendental Powers**

In Luther's theology, the human being is a creature whose quality of existence is crucially dependent on his/her relationship to the invisible transcendental realities – no matter whether the person him/herself believes those realities exist or not. Every human being is like a battlefield where the two opposing transcendental authorities fight each other over the control of the human will, mind, and heart. Especially the voluntary part of the human being is like a field of conflict between the two *mutuo bellacissimi*<sup>113</sup> hostile transcendental powers.

On the one side there are the powers of destruction: “the offense of unbelief,” *incredulitatis crimen*, love of self, pride, Satan, the world, and flesh. On the other side there are the goodness and grace of the Triune God, Christ and his cross and resurrection, and the effective and transforming power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of the Triune God creates contrition and conversion by the power of his prevenient grace, *gratia praeveniens*; he creates faith in Christ and love for God and neighbor, and he makes the union of God and the human being a reality.

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<sup>113</sup> WA 18,750,10.

Luther develops in his *The Bondage of the Will* a solid view of the total dependence of the human being on one of the two opposite transcendental realities. Heiko A. Oberman has convincingly demonstrated Luther's dualistic Christian and theological identity as a "man between God and the devil."<sup>114</sup> When emphasizing the necessity of the transcendental orientation of the human *arbitrium*, Satanology becomes extremely important; it is a conceptual necessity as a counter-concept to Luther's emphasis on Pneumatology. It is necessary to note that, when speaking about the reign of Satan in the human world, Luther does not mean that people would generally be possessed by Satan or demons, such a possession being a special case of its own. It is also not a matter of intimate personal union, *unio personalis*, as in the case of the Spirit of Christ and the believer – such a union would not even be possible between two created entities, between a human being and a fallen angel or a demon, because only the Spirit of the Creator can create an intimate union with his creature. Luther means that people are oppressed and forced under the rule of personal evil so that they cannot but do what he wills, i.e., they cannot but flee God, turn their back on him, continue in their lack of faith and lack of love toward God, pretending to be their own God.<sup>115</sup>

In Luther's understanding, there is no "neutral" space between these two transcendental powers. "It is, moreover, a mere dialectical fiction that there is in man a neutral and unqualified willing (*medium et purum velle*)..."<sup>116</sup> Between disobedience and grace, there is no empty space. This is the reality of the spiritual kingdom, *coram Deo*, in matters "above oneself." But, of course, according to Luther, there can be neutrality and freedom in the human's relation to the earthly things, *coram hominibus*, in matters "below oneself":

"You who imagine the human will as something standing on neutral ground and left to its own devices (*esse rem in medio libero positam ac sibi relictam*), find it easy to imagine also

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<sup>114</sup> See Oberman 1993.

<sup>115</sup> Luther uses expressions like "Satanae potentia oppressum esse" (WA 18, 658, 24-25), "sub regno et spiritus Satanae" (WA 18,743,33) or "sub deo huius saeculi" (WA 18,635,7). In his interpretation of *The Bondage of the Will*, Werner Otto follows Gerhard Ebeling's existentialist interpretation of Satan in demythologizing the reality of personal evil: Satan signifies "symbolically the situation of the human being's distance from God," "Satan is nothing more than the mask disguising the absence of God." Otto 1998,149. Ebeling 1972,223. Similarly, Thomas Reinhuber, commenting on Luther's demonology, speaks about the "responsibility" of theology in the face of science not to use "irritating" language. Reinhuber 2000,56-57. Here modern liberal theological interpretations of Luther join the rationalism of Erasmus.

<sup>116</sup> WA 18,670,1-2; LW 33,115.

that there can be an endeavor of the will in either direction, because you think of both God and the devil as a long way off, and as if they were only observers of that mutable free will; for you do not believe that they are the movers and inciters of a servile will, and engaged in most bitter conflict with one another. ... For either the kingdom of Satan in man means nothing, and then Christ must be a liar, or else, if his kingdom is as Christ describes it, free choice must be nothing but a captive beast of burden for Satan (*liberum arbitrium nihil nisi iumentum captivum Satanae*), which can only be set free if the devil is first cast out by the finger of God.”<sup>117</sup> A bit later Luther goes on, saying, “...Satan is by far the most cunning and powerful ruler of this world, as we have said, and as long as he reigns the human will is not free nor under its own control, but is the slave of sin and Satan, and can only will what its master wills.”<sup>118</sup>

When arguing against the concept of free choice, Luther deliberately employs an antithetical language which leaves no “neutral” space between (*medium*) the two transcendental realities; in the human being’s relation to the “things above oneself,” there is no neutrality. In matters which are not within human control there cannot be any neutrality, a person is dominated by one of the two transcendental realities. By his dualistic language Luther aims at exemplifying the absolute necessity of Christ and grace to bring about change in the human situation:

“For unless everything said about Christ and grace were said antithetically (*opponantur contrariis*), so as to be set over against its opposite – for instance, that outside of Christ there is nothing but Satan, apart from grace nothing but wrath, apart from light only darkness, apart from the way only error, apart from the truth only a lie, apart from life only death – what, I ask you, would be the point of all the discourses of the apostles and of Scripture as a whole? They would all be in vain, because they would not insist on the absolute necessity of Christ,

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<sup>117</sup> WA 18,750,5-15; LW 33,237. This is one of the two times when Luther uses the expression “a beast of burden,” *iumentum*, in *The Bondage of the Will*.

<sup>118</sup> WA 18,750,33-35; LW 33,238. The theme of the two opposed transcendental realities is in an ever increasingly way visible in Luther's sermons during a few years before he wrote his *The Bondage of the Will*. He emphasizes that anyone who is without God's Spirit, exists *in regno diabolo*, “if you do not have the Spirit of Christ, you are under the rule of the devil”; “you have either the Holy Spirit or the spirit of the devil” being under the rule of the devil is especially true of those who trust in their own free choice: *liberum arbitrium est servus diaboli*. See, for instance: WA 11,195,20-21 (*Predigt 351*, 18 October 1523); 202,7-9,24-27 (*Predigt 356*, 8 November 1523); WA 14,237,6-11 (*Predigt 400*, 6 September 1523); WA 15,429,15-20 (*Predigt 441*, 31 January 1524); 459,31-460,11 (*Predigt 446*, 28 February 1524); 714,24-34 (*Predigt 491*, 9 October 1524); WA 17/1,137,1-7,31-32 (*Predigt 588*, 19 March 1525); WA 16,398, 8-12 (*Predigt 531*, 10 September 1525).

which in fact is their chief concern; and they would not do so because some intermediate thing would be found, which of itself would be neither evil nor good, neither Christ's nor Satan's, neither true nor false, neither alive nor dead, perhaps even neither something nor nothing, and that would be called 'the most excellent and exalted thing in the whole race of men'! Choose then which you please. If you grant that the Scriptures speak antithetically, you will be able to say nothing about free choice but what is contrary to Christ, namely that error, death, Satan, and all evils reign in it. If you do not grant that they speak antithetically, then you enervate the Scriptures, so that they lose their point and fail to prove that Christ is necessary. Hence, inasmuch as you maintain free choice, you cancel out Christ and ruin the entire Scripture (*dum liberum arbitrium statuis, Christum evacuas et totam scripturam pessundas*).<sup>119</sup>

For Luther it is self-evident that, in relation to "things above oneself," if the human being is without the Spirit of Christ, he/she is unavoidably oppressed by the power of the enemy, Satan: "In a word, since Scripture everywhere preaches Christ by contrast and antithesis (*per contentionem et antithesin*), as I have said, putting everything that is without the Spirit of Christ (*sine Christi Spiritu*) in subjection to Satan, ungodliness, error, darkness, sin, death, and the wrath of God, all the texts that speak of Christ must consequently stand opposed to free choice; and they are innumerable, indeed they are the entire Scripture."<sup>120</sup>

The conflict between Christ and Satan does not equate to the distinction between the *duo regna / coram Deo et coram mundo / se superior et se inferior*, but it is the dualist conflict of the opposing transcendental realities in the realm of *se superior*: "For Christians know that there are two kingdoms in the world, which are bitterly opposed to each other. In one of them Satan reigns... He holds captive to his will all who are not snatched away from him by the Spirit of Christ (*qui non sunt Christi Spiritu ab eo rapti*)... In the other kingdom, Christ reigns, and his kingdom ceaselessly resists and makes war on the kingdom of Satan. Into this kingdom we are transferred, not by our own power but by the grace of God (*non nostra vi, sed gratia Dei*)... The knowledge and confession of these two kingdoms perpetually warring against each other with such might and main would alone be sufficient to confute the dogma

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<sup>119</sup> WA 18,779,17-32; LW 33,282.

<sup>120</sup> WA 18,782,21-25; LW 33,287.



of free choice, seeing that we are bound to serve in the kingdom of Satan unless we are delivered by the power of God (*nisi virtute divina eripiamur*).”<sup>121</sup>

Why does Luther speak so much about Satan in *The Bondage of the Will*, whereas Erasmus does not even mention Satan in his *Diatriba*? Conceptually, Satan is the transcendental opponent of the Triune God’s omnipresent and omnipotent Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Father the Creator and of the Son Jesus Christ. Luther employs the two concepts of God’s Spirit and Satan, a fallen spiritual being, extensively in order to speak convincingly and powerfully about the slavery of sin in humanity and about divine grace as the only remedy which has the ability to liberate humanity from this slavery. Although Satan is a created being with limitations, yet he is much more powerful than the human beings; consequently, humans cannot liberate themselves from Satan’s influence by their own powers.

Although the image of Satan is very important in Luther’s language of biblical realism, it must be noted that he does not believe in ontological dualism of divine power. Satan is a fallen angel, a fallen creature whose power and influence, after all, are limited. Satan is “God’s Satan” in the sense that he only has “the power permitted by God” / “*potestas permissa a Deo*.” Satan, being the active enemy of God and of the human beings, can even be used as God’s instrument: “Now in all this, Satan still reigns in peace; under this movement of divine omnipotence he keeps his court undisturbed.”/ “*In his vero omnibus Satan adhuc in pace regnat et atrium suum quietum possidet sub motu isto divinae ominipotentiae*.”<sup>122</sup> Luther does not give any explanation for why God permits certain power and influence to this horrible enemy of humanity. This remains one of the secrets of the hidden God, *Deus absconditus* (cf. below, Section 7.1).

Luther uses the imagery of Satan to demonstrate how human beings are utterly impotent in doing anything for their own liberation from the imprisonment of unbelief and sin. Without the intensive use of this imagery, it would not be possible for Luther to defend his radical idea of *sola gratia*. This terminology depicts the impotence of the human being to free

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<sup>121</sup> WA 18,782,30-783,1; LW 33,287-288.

<sup>122</sup> WA 18,710,8-10; LW 33,177. Luther recalls here the thinking of Augustine, according to whom God, who is “the giver of all power of achievement, but not of all acts of will,” may, in his sovereign providence, even use evil for achieving good; Satan exercises only limited power, *potestas permissa daemonibus*. *De civ.* X,21; CC 47,294,1-2.

him/herself from the imprisonment of despising God, of self-love, and of lack of faith in and love of God – all these anti-God realities are personified in Satan, the fallen high angel.

A rational modern interpreter of Luther might say that Satan is a “mythical” symbol of these negative qualities of humanity. But for Luther, who sticks to biblical and theological realism, Satan is a truly existing personal entity. For him, the Holy Spirit and Satan are telling concepts, whereas Erasmus does not employ them at all in his own doctrine of grace. Here is a striking difference between the two thinkers. Here we see most clearly the fundamental difference of the two debaters. This difference could be described as a conflict between Luther’s traditional theological realism and Erasmus’ “modernism.” Erasmus is a man of “modernity,” *Via moderna*, who does not have much interest in emphasizing the “mythical” imagery of the Christian faith, whereas Luther is a biblical and theological realist who takes the traditional imagery at face value.

For Erasmus the drama of sin and salvation takes place in the sphere of human life, in anthropological reality, whereas for Luther, this is a drama of the transcendental powers which are beyond human comprehension and intervention. In the face of Luther’s vivid Satanology, his opponent’s moderate and sophisticated understanding of the power of sin in the human world turns pale; in his *Diatribes* Erasmus knows nothing about Satan – sin only “wounded” man’s capability of free decision which is “not extinct.”<sup>123</sup> Emphasizing Satan is Luther’s method of demonstrating the enormous power and influence of “the sin of unbelief” (*incredulitatis crimen*), so characteristic of fallen humanity. With his strong antithetical and dualistic imagery, Luther wants to prove that belief in the free choice of the human being in his/her relation to transcendental realities is a fallacy. Luther employs this powerful language in order to destroy the premise of religious pride and self-justification by debasing trust in free choice. We could even say that Luther’s forceful attack on religious pretense is his powerful proclamation against the nominal Christianity of his day. Erasmus also criticized the lack of a true Christian spirit and life in his time and wished to renew the church, but his message and methods were different.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Clearly referring to man’s relationship to God, sin, and grace, Erasmus states: “Quamquam enim arbitrii libertas per peccatum vulnus accepit, non tamen extincta est, et quamquam contraxit claudicationem, ut ante gratiam propensiores simus ad malum quam ad bonum, tamen excisa non est...” *Diatribes* IIa8; Walter, 25, 23-26.

<sup>124</sup> On Erasmus’ ideas about reforming the church, see Gebhardt 1966 and Holeczek 1984.

### 3.2 Distinction between Law and Gospel

For Erasmus there is no distinction between God's "two kingdoms" or "two regimes," *duo regna*, the sphere of natural human social life with its own moral principles on the one hand, and the sphere of the human being's relation to the transcendental realities on the other hand. A clear distinction between law and gospel is absent in Erasmus' theology. Luther could be right in his critical comment: "...*Diatribes* makes no distinction whatever between expressions of the law and of the gospel; for she is so blind and ignorant that she does not know what law and gospel are."<sup>125</sup> Luther goes on, saying: *Diatribes* "makes no distinction between words of law and of promise";<sup>126</sup> making "no distinction between the words of promise and law," it does not matter to *Diatribes* "whether grace stands or falls."<sup>127</sup>

Moreover, Erasmus' *The Freedom of the Will* "has no idea of making any distinction between the Old and the New Testament, for she sees almost nothing in either except laws and precepts, by which men are to be trained in good manners," Luther says. He claims that Erasmus' writing understands nothing about "the new birth, renewal, regeneration, and the whole work of the Spirit (*totum negocium Spiritus*)."<sup>128</sup> Consequently, Erasmus has no use for the concepts of the Holy Spirit and Satan in his understanding of grace; he, rather, works with anthropological and moral terminology which belongs to the natural realm of human life.

The rational and juridical principles and concepts of natural human life are normative to Erasmus' idea of grace. When describing the human's relationship with God, he employs rational concepts of natural moral law, such as freedom, moral responsibility, and justice, typical of the human's role in the earthly realm. In Luther's theology, these realities are operative only in the earthly realm of the humans; in Erasmus' theology they belong to all relations of the human being, including both his/her relation to fellow humans and to God. From Luther's point of view, applying moral principles to the doctrine of grace leads to mixing gospel with law and grace with human moral efforts and merits. Gospel becomes

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<sup>125</sup> WA 18,680,23-25; LW 33,132. For a comprehensive presentation of "Luther's hermeneutics of distinctions," see Kolb 2014.

<sup>126</sup> WA 18,683,28-29.

<sup>127</sup> WA 18,698,15-23.

<sup>128</sup> WA 18,693,5-9; LW 33,150-151.

“ethical,” it is mixed with moralism, no longer being the unconditional and prevenient gift of divine favor. This all happens because Erasmus makes no distinction between the things “above” the human being, *se superior*, and the things “below” the human being, *se inferior*. There is no doctrine of *duo regna* in Erasmus, so crucially important for Luther’s theological method.<sup>129</sup>

Erasmus follows the Medieval theological paradigm according to which the human being is able to love God and the neighbor on the basis of his/her natural endowments, *ex puris naturalibus*. Luther does not deny the moral capacities of the human being in the realm of this world, but he vehemently rejects the application of this natural ability to the human being’s relation with God. Doing that would mean mixing law with gospel and self-righteousness with God’s grace. In his *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/1535) Luther makes a statement which is fully in accordance with his thought in *The Bondage of the Will*: “When the sophists say that the natural endowments are sound, I concede this. But if they draw the inference: ‘Therefore a man is able to fulfill the law, to love God, etc.,’ then I deny the conclusion. I distinguish the natural endowments from the spiritual; and I say that the spiritual endowments are not sound but corrupt (*spiritualia non esse integra sed corrupta*), in fact, totally extinguished through sin (*per peccatum prorsus extincta*) in man and in the devil. Thus there is nothing there but a depraved intellect and a will that is hostile and opposed to God’s will – a will that thinks nothing except what is against God.”<sup>130</sup>

In *The Bondage of the Will* Luther’s basic distinction is expressed clearly here: “...free choice is allowed to man only with respect to what is beneath him and not what is above him (*non respectu superioris, sed tantum inferiori se rei*). That is to say, a man should know that with regard to his faculties and possession he has the right to use, to do, or to leave undone, according to his own free choice, though even this is controlled by the free choice of God alone, who acts in whatever way he pleases. On the other hand in relation to God, or in matters pertaining to salvation or damnation, a man has no free choice, but is a captive, subject and slave either of the will of God or the will of Satan (*in rebus, quae pertinent ad*

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<sup>129</sup> Kolb, 2005,49, rightly states: “Erasmus’ ideas regarding free choice proceed from the presupposition that there is only one dimension to humanity, and it is all wrapped up in acts of obedience to God’s law.”

<sup>130</sup> WA 40/1,293,22-28; LW 26,174.

*salutem vel damnationem, non habet liberum arbitrium, sed captivus, subiectus et servus est vel voluntatis Dei vel voluntatis Satanae).*”<sup>131</sup>

Luther explains further: The human being “is divided between two kingdoms (*duo regna*).” In the first one, “he is directed by his own choice and counsel (*suo arbitrio et consilio*) ... in the things beneath himself (*in rebus sese inferioribus*).” Here the human being has “the free use of things according to his own choice.” “In the other kingdom, however, man is not left in the hand of his own counsel, but is directed and led by the choice and counsel of God...”<sup>132</sup> The human being has free choice in earthly matters but not in matters concerning his/her relation to God: “We know that man has been constituted lord over the lower creatures (*inferioribus se*), and in relation to them he has authority and free choice, so that they obey him and do what he wills and thinks. What we are asking is whether he has free choice in relation to God, so that God obeys man and does what man wills, or rather, whether God has free choice in relation to man, so that man wills and does what God wills and is not able to do anything but what God wills and does.”<sup>133</sup>

In accordance with his view of the two kingdoms, Luther teaches about the two kinds of righteousness or justice, *duae iustitiae* or *duplex iustitia*. In the things of this world, in relation to “righteousness of the civil or moral law,” the human being has free choice and free will, but not in relation to “God’s righteousness”: “And suppose I allow that free choice can by its own endeavor achieve something – good works, let us say, or the righteousness of the civil or moral law (*iustitiam legis civilis vel moralis*) – yet it does not attain to the righteousness of God (*iustitiam Dei*), nor does God regard its efforts as in any way qualifying it for his righteousness, since he says that his righteousness functions apart from the law.”<sup>134</sup>

In support of the scheme of two kinds of righteousness, Luther refers to Paul: “For Paul clearly distinguishes the two righteousnesses, attributing one to the law and the other to grace

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<sup>131</sup> WA 18,638,5-11; LW 33,70.

<sup>132</sup> WA 18,672,7-19; LW33,118-119.

<sup>133</sup> WA 18,781,8-13; LW 33,285.

<sup>134</sup> WA 18,767,40-768,2; LW 33,264.

(*duas iustitias, alteram legis, alteram gratiae tribuens*)...<sup>135</sup> Luther explains Paul's teaching in Romans 4 on the "twofold righteousness of Abraham (*duplex Abrahae iustitia*)": "First, there is the righteousness of works, or moral and civil righteousness (*una est operum, id est, moralis et civilis*); but he denies that Abraham is justified in God's sight by this (*hac negat eum iustificari coram Deum*), even if he is righteous in the sight of men because of it (*coram hominibus per illam iustus sit*).<sup>136</sup> What made Abraham righteous in God's sight was his "righteousness of faith (*iustitia fidei*), which does not depend on any works, but on God's favorable regard and 'reckoning' on the basis of grace (*favente et reputante Deo per gratiam*)."<sup>136</sup>

The righteousness of this world belongs to human social life, morality, and law; the righteousness in front of God is based on divine grace, the work of Christ, and the influence of the Holy Spirit, received in faith: "But Paul denies that anything outside this faith is righteous in the sight of God (*quicquid extra fidem hanc est, negat esse iustum coram Deo*); and if it is not righteous in the sight of God, it must necessarily be sin. For with God there is nothing intermediate between righteousness and sin, no neutral ground, so to speak, which is neither righteousness nor sin. ...righteousness if faith is present (*iustitiam, si fides assit*), sin if faith is absent."<sup>137</sup> According to Luther, one should not mix these two kinds of righteousness, as Erasmus does, because then gospel is destroyed by being changed into law. Trying to display one's own moral justice in order to please God is sin, it is an expression of human self-righteousness for Luther – and self-righteousness is always a severe sin.

In Luther's theology the first use or the civil use of God's law, *usus primus* or *usus civilis* – the Ten Commandments, the Golden Rule, the Double Commandment of Love, all also recognized as natural moral law by rational human conscience – belongs to the social reality of human beings. In matters of social life, humans can freely make rational moral choices on the basis of the natural moral law which is engraved on every human conscience and also taught by God's law revealed in Scripture – this all belongs to the realm of the first use or the civil use of God's law.

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<sup>135</sup> WA 18,768,5-6; LW 33,264.

<sup>136</sup> WA 18,771,37-772,18; LW 33,270-271.

<sup>137</sup> WA 18,768,15-21; LW 33,264.

The content of God's law is always the same but it has two varying uses. In front of God, Luther sees that law has only one use, the second use, *usus secundus* or *usus paedagogicus*, which shows that humans are sinners and needful of grace because they cannot fulfill God's law of love. Through law "man is shown what he ought to do, not what he can do (*ostenditur homini quid debeat, non quid possit*)."<sup>138</sup> And consequently, "through law comes knowledge of sin, not virtue in the will (*per legem cognitio peccati, non virtus voluntatis*)."<sup>139</sup> "But the work of Moses or a lawgiver is ... to make man's plight plain to him by means of the law and thus to break and confound him by self-knowledge, so as to prepare him for grace and send him to Christ (*ad gratiam praeparet et ad Christum mittat*) that he may be saved."<sup>140</sup>

Furthermore, Luther explains, "Now, when sins are unrecognized, there is no room for a remedy and no hope of a cure... Therefore, the law is necessary to make sin known so that when its gravity and magnitude are recognized, man in his pride who imagines himself well may be humbled and may sigh and gasp for the grace (*humiliatur superbus et sanus sibi visus homo et gratiam suspiret*) that is offered in Christ."<sup>141</sup> All Luther says here concerns his understanding of the second use of God's law: making the sinner needful of divine grace and forgiveness.

Luther seems to assume that no conversion is possible unless divine activity first in some way touches the human affect (*affectus*), the lively core of personality.<sup>142</sup> In Luther's thought, affect is not only the emotional part of the human being but the principle of personal individuation in every human being, comprising all the lively aspects of man's inner life, the various functions of his/her psyche (rational, emotional, and voluntary capacities) and his/her spirit or "heart"

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<sup>138</sup> WA 18,676,16, see also *ibid.*,2-3; LW 33,125.

<sup>139</sup> WA 18,677,20-21; LW 33,127. Luther often repeats Paul's expression *per legem cognitio peccati*; see, for instance, WA 18,766,8,22.

<sup>140</sup> WA 18,679,33-36; LW 33,130-131.

<sup>141</sup> WA 18,767,4-8; LW 33,262.

<sup>142</sup> Some texts of 1525 offer good illustrations of what Luther means by affect being influenced by the Spirit; the human affect can be changed only by the Holy Spirit. See WA 17/1,125,17-30 (*Predigt 587*, 18 March 1525); 282,1-7 (*Predigt 609*, 11 June 1525); WA 13,519,30-520,2 (*Praelectiones in prophetas minores*; on Haggai, September 1525). On the concept *affectus* in Luther's earlier works, see Schwarz 1962,172-191, and on the notions of this concept in the history of theology, see *ibid.*,417-420.

(the innermost being) – regardless of the anthropological terminology used.<sup>143</sup> When the Holy Trinity works for the re-establishment of the intimate relationship between God and the human being, he begins to break into human intimacy by means of destroying the hard cover of falsehood separating the human being from God’s truth. Law, in the sense of the second use, is necessary for efficiently affecting human inner life. It is needed for liberating the human being from the slavery of Satan by revealing the demonic lies that everything is fine, waking up the human affect from its self-satisfied sleep in sin, and shattering the hard shell of religious pride and self-righteousness so that God can, through his Spirit, enter the innermost part of the human person. Without the law that makes the human being worried and alarmed by his/her situation and needful of divine grace, he/she would remain a slave of evil forever. Thus, God uses his law as an instrument of his good and merciful purpose of preparing the sinner for grace.

In Luther’s view, Erasmus, who makes no distinction between God’s *duo regna*, is mistaken when using the commands of the law as exhortations to the *liberum arbitrium* of the human being for preparing to receive God’s grace. Erasmus believes that the many biblical exhortations to repent and to be converted prove that it is the human being’s own responsibility freely to respond in order to be attached to divine grace (cf. Chapter 9 below). Luther denies this: “...by the command to love we are shown the essential meaning of the law and what we ought to do, but not the power of the will or what we are able to do, but rather what we are not able to do (*quid debeamus, non autem vis voluntatis aut quid possimus, imo quid non possimus*)...” Here Luther believes that his interpretation is supported by the Scholastics who follow here the Augustinian line: “For it is well known that even the Schoolmen, with the exception of the Scotists and the Moderns, affirm that man cannot love God with all his heart... So the fact remains, even on the testimony of the Scholastic doctors, that the words of the law are no evidence for the power of free choice, but show what we ought to do and cannot do (*quid debeamus et quid non possimus*).”<sup>144</sup>

Differentiating the teachings of Scholasticism from those of Nominalism, Luther is conscious that his position is supported by the Scholastics, though not by the *Via moderna*, the latter

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<sup>143</sup> Birgit Stolt maintains that both Augustine and Luther followed biblical anthropology in which “the heart is the spiritual organ of knowledge, the innermost center of personality intelligible only to God.” “Im Herzen geschieht die Begegnung mit Gott.” Stolt 2000,50.

<sup>144</sup> WA 18,681,24-34; LW 33,134.



being close to the position of Erasmus. The Scholastics recognize that the human being cannot by his own capacities, without divine grace, accomplish the demand of the divine law to be converted and to love God above everything else. The biblical exhortations are *forma legis*, which cannot give the human will the power to perform what is demanded. In Luther's interpretation, even the Scholastics support the view that the exhortations of the gospels are not in support of *liberum arbitrium*, but demonstrate what we are unable to do.<sup>145</sup>

In Luther's understanding, human performance or works in the sphere of things "below oneself," in the natural and human world, cannot function as a preparation for receiving God's grace, as Erasmus assumes. By his/her good deeds, the human being "may be prepared for grace and so call forth the mercy of God (*ut praeparetur ad gratiam ac Dei misericordiam erga se provocet*)," Erasmus says.<sup>146</sup> This kind of person becomes "a candidate for the highest grace," and moved by God's "peculiar grace," by the way of "his alms and prayers and his devotion to sacred studies, and by listening to sermons, as well as by appeals to good men for their prayers and other deeds morally good," and he/she attracts toward him/herself "the highest grace" which is "the grace that carries things to a conclusion (*gratia, quae perducit usque ad finem*)."<sup>147</sup>

Luther underscores that human efforts do not attract God's favor, they have no function in relation to "things above oneself": "If through the law sin abounds, how is it possible that a man should be able to prepare himself by moral works for the divine favor? How can works help when the law does not help?" It is only by the efficient power of God's Holy Spirit that true change in the human being's relation to God can happen: "But to call a man without the

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<sup>145</sup> This was exactly the position of Augustine; according to him, the demands and the fear of God's law may change man's life, *coram hominibus*, but it has no effect *coram Deo* because a servile fear is the opposite of enjoying love of God; law cannot fill the human heart with love. Augustine – employing Pauline terminology – sets against each other the Spirit and the law on the one hand, and the Spirit and the flesh on the other: no commandments or exhortations can change the human heart or the voluntary inclinations of man, directed by the "flesh," i.e., by pride and self-centeredness in loving oneself instead of God. If the inner part of man is not changed by the power of God's love, i.e., by the Holy Spirit, no justification is possible: "...quia et quicumque faciebant quod lex iubebat non adiuvante Spiritu gratiae, timore poenae faciebant, non amore iustitiae. Ac per hoc coram Deo non erat in voluntate, quod coram hominibus apparebat in opera...Circumcisionem autem cordis dicit, puram scilicet ab omni inlicita concupiscentia voluntatem; quod non fit littera docente et minante, sed Spiritu adiuvante atque sanante." *De spir. et litt.* VIII,13; CSEL 60,165,21-166,3

<sup>146</sup> *Diatribes* IIa11; Walter,29,9-10; LCC 17,52.

<sup>147</sup> *Diatribes* IIa11; Walter,29,16-30.21; LCC 17,52-53.

Holy Spirit ‘upright and God-fearing’ is the same as calling Belial ‘Christ.’<sup>148</sup> Luther even goes as far as saying that everything the human being does in the realm of social life is *extra gratiam Dei* and “is worth nothing in the sight of God, and is not reckoned as anything but sin” if offered as a merit to God – even though they might be ethically good deeds as such. Human works *coram hominibus* may be morally good, but they have no positive soteriological function.<sup>149</sup>

The commandments and exhortations of the law cannot empower the human being to please God, as Erasmus assumes. In Luther’s theology, the purpose of the second use of the law is to demonstrate the weakness of the human being, to humiliate and make the sinner alarmed by his/her state of affairs by showing what he/she should do but is not able to do, and thereby leading the sinner into God’s grace. Luther demonstrates the dead end of human efforts to meet the requirements of God’s law: “And as to *Diatribes*’ pert question, ‘Why is room given to repentance if no part of repentance depends on our choice but everything is done by necessity?’ I reply: You can say the same with regard to all the commandments of God, and ask why he gives commandments if everything is done by necessity. He gives commandments in order to instruct and admonish men as to what they ought to do, so that they may be humbled by the knowledge of their wickedness and attain to grace (*agnita sua malicia humiliati perveniant ad gratiam*), as has been abundantly said.”<sup>150</sup>

Luther’s concept of the bondage of the will has a soteriological function: for him, teaching the captivity of the human will, *servum arbitrium*, equates with powerful preaching of the law in the sense of the second use of God’s law. This message makes the human being desperate about his/her own lack of ability to turn to God, to become contrite, or to have faith. Becoming conscious of and worried about one’s own infirmity and slavery “drives the sinner to Christ.” Luther has two functions for the second use of the law: first, doctrinal, showing the *sola gratia* nature of the Christian gospel by separating all kinds of moral exhortations from the gospel itself; and second, pastoral, homiletical, and rhetorical – preparing the sinner for conversion by way of making him/her needful of Christ.

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<sup>148</sup> WA 18,738,36-38 & 739,11-12; LW 33,219-220.

<sup>149</sup> WA 18,752,12-15; LW 33,240.

<sup>150</sup> WA 18,736,27-32; LW 33,216. For Luther’s understanding of the concept of “the necessity of immutability” see Section 4.2.

In an interesting manner, Luther interprets the concept of “conversion” in terms of law and gospel, he establishes a “double use” of the concept. According to the “legal use,” a demand to be converted, “to change one’s life,” leads the human being into desperation as he/she understands that he/she cannot bring about his/her own conversion; in this sense, an exhortation for conversion prepares the human being for grace or *iustitia aliena* coming from outside his/her own psychic capacities. According to the “evangelical use,” which is the principal rule in Luther's theology, biblical language about conversion is the offer of divine grace to fallen humanity; it is God's own “conversion” by becoming a man and the Savior of fallen mankind in Jesus Christ.<sup>151</sup>

The demand for conversion does not cause the actual conversion; quite to the contrary, it drives the human being into despair about his/her own inability to change the ultimate premises of his/her own life; this position of Luther's is an exact opposite of the *Via moderna*'s teaching on the same principle. One of the favorite quotations from Scripture used by those supporting the idea of *facere quod in se est*, was Zechariah 1:3: “Return to me, and I will return to you.” / “*Convertimini ad me et convertar ad vos.*” Erasmus also used this verse as one the biblical proofs to support his argumentation.<sup>152</sup> The same biblical verse was, in fact, also utilized by the Pelagians to support their view that God's grace is given on the basis of merit; Augustine turned critically against such an interpretation.<sup>153</sup> According to Luther, if God turns toward the human being, i.e., offers his grace, on condition that the human first freely converts him/herself toward God, it would mean recognizing the human being's capability of ceasing to sin, of moving from lack of faith to faith by his/her own power. If this were accepted, if the human being can rid him/herself of the overwhelming bondage of sin, God's grace would be reduced to some kind

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<sup>151</sup> WA 18,682,10-20. Marilyn J. Harran, who analyzed Luther's concept of conversion in his works before 1520, says that the fundamental meaning of conversion is the conversion of God toward man; “well acquainted with the various meanings,” Luther “chose to see the fundamental meaning of *conversio* to be the act of God becoming man in the incarnation.” Harran 1983,23-24.

<sup>152</sup> *Diatribes* IIa15; Walter,34,22-25. Gabriel Biel, quoting the same verse, comments: “Meretur ergo peccator gratiam de congruo, faciendo quod in se est, quae est bonum spirituale.” *Canonis misse expositio, pars secunda, lectio LIX P*, Oberman & Courtenay 1965,443.

<sup>153</sup> *De grat. et lib.* V,10; PL 44,887.

of *auxilium*, some support in a process of justification in which the human being has a major active role. This was the position of Pelagius.<sup>154</sup>

## 4 The Enslavement of the Human Being

### 4.1 Sin as Infirmary

In his magnum opus, Luther does not interpret sin primarily in juridical terms, as an offense against God's law or a violation of his holiness resulting in guilt. The juridical understanding certainly is emphasized in some other works of Luther and is not absent in *The Bondage of the Will* either. Here Luther underscores sin as unbelief which cuts off the intimate relationship between the human being and his/her Creator resulting in the imprisonment of the human being by sin, evil, and death and in his/her inability to liberate him/herself from this slavery. Luther focuses on the consequences of sin which are obvious in common human experience. Differing from Luther, Erasmus would follow the more traditional Catholic interpretation of sin as moral and juridical offenses against God and neighbor.

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<sup>154</sup> Luther mocks the Nominalist interpretation of Zech. 1:3: “‘If you shall return (*si conversus fueris*), I also will restore you (*convertam et ego te*),’ that is, if you leave off sinning, I also will leave off punishing you, and if after returning you live a good life, I also will do good to you by turning away your captivity and all your ills.” WA 18,681,3-6; LW 33,133. A year later, in 1526, Luther continued his criticism in his *Praelectiones in prophetas minores*: “Because all the sophists have taken this passage as a declaration in favor of free will, we must not leave this unnoticed. ...I deny the consequence which is drawn from the imperative verb to the indicative. ...I am not told here what I can do but what I should do. You see, ‘Return to me, etc.,’ is the word of the law. Consequently this text does not speak in favor of our will but against free will.” WA 13,550,26-551,1; LW 20,9.

Among the strongest documents of Luther's drawing away from the doctrines of Nominalism prior to 1525 were his *Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam* of 4 September 1517 and his *Resolutio disputationis de fide infusa et acquisita* of February 1520. In the former document, referring to Augustine as an authority, Luther established his view that it is false to state that man's inclination is free to choose between good and evil. Being in the bondage of sin, the human being has an *appetitus captivus*, i.e., his/her will is the captive of evil, rebelling against God and grace. In this state of captivity, the human will cannot remove the obstacles of grace *naturaliter* without the grace operative in the Spirit. Luther firmly denies any notion of *facere quod in se est* as a mode of *dispositio ad gratiam Dei*. WA 1,224,15-19; 225,17-19, 29-30,35-36; 227,1-3. For a commentary, see Grane 1962a; see also Schwarz 1962.

In the latter document, rejecting any nuances of the axiom *facere quod in se est*, which is the basic preassumption for the term *fides acquisita*, faith based on the human person's natural capacity, Luther emphasizes the Pneumatological reality of *fides infusa*. His eleventh conclusion runs: “Fides acquisita est penna Struthionis, sed infusa est Spiritus vitae.” WA 6,93,29-30. Later he says: “Nam fides infusa est Spiritus vivens, quae non aufertur, nisi spes et charitas simul auferantur.” WA 6,95,29-30.

Luther's criticism of free decision is the general framework within which he develops his understanding of sin in *The Bondage of the Will*. Deceived by Satan, the human being was lured into thinking that he/she could become independent from his/her Creator, and possess *liberum arbitrium* in regard to the ultimate premises of life or the things “above oneself.” Desire to possess free choice and an illusion of becoming “like God” coincide – this is exactly what happened in the Fall, Luther thinks. Like Satan, humans fell into the fallacy that they could be liberated from the relationship of humble obedience under their Creator and be subjected to no one at all; this is the essence of the diabolic sin as self-sufficiency, self-love, and pride.

Even before writing *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther had already described the essence of sin as human desire to get rid of God: “man himself wants to be God, and does not want God to be God.”<sup>155</sup> This is a deception, because the human being cannot him/herself control the ultimate premises of his/her own life, and he/she cannot exercise free decision on matters concerning the utmost limits of his/her own existence. Misled in laying trust in his/her own free decision, the human being became a servile slave of a new master – Satan himself. In relation to what is “above oneself,” *liberum arbitrium* is nothing but a deceitful diabolic principle of religious pride. Here Luther’s hamartiology is similar to Augustine’s conception of sin as pride, *superbia*, and self-love, *amor sui*.<sup>156</sup>

In a remarkable way, Luther stresses sin as “weakness,” *infirmitas*, inability to be free. This is caused by “the oppression of Satan,” *oppressio Satanae*, which makes the human being impotent, imprisoned by an alien power. Consequently, the human is not free to “apply himself to the things which lead to eternal salvation,” as the definition of Erasmus runs. Criticizing this stance, Luther says: “What else does this mean but that free choice or the human heart is so held down by the power of Satan (*Satanae potentia oppressum*) that unless it is miraculously raised up by the Spirit of God (*nisi Spiritu Dei mirabiliter suscitetur*) it

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<sup>155</sup> According to Luther's famous words in *Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam* of 4 September 1517, “man is by nature unable to want God to be God; indeed, he himself wants to be God, and does not want God to be God.” WA 1,225,1-2; LW 31,10.

<sup>156</sup> On Augustine's understanding of the original goodness of rational beings and their fall into pride, *superbia*, see *De Gen. ad litt.* XI,13 (17); CSEL 28.1,345,23-346,3. The good order of love created by God was perverted by *superbia* and *amor sui*; thus humanity exists in a state of “the perverted order of love” (*perversa ordo amoris*): human beings love themselves, their desires, and created things, not their Creator, as their *summum bonum*. Ruokanen 1993,37-42,60-67.

cannot of itself either see or hear things that strike the eyes and ears themselves so plainly as to be palpable? Such is the misery and blindness of the human race!”<sup>157</sup>

Luther does not mean that the humans became demon-possessed – that would be a biblical term for some special cases, but he clearly says that they came under the “oppression of Satan,” *oppressio Satanae*; sometimes Luther uses the expression *imperio Satanae pressus*.<sup>158</sup> The whole of humanity is “oppressed,” severely affected by the imprisonment of the evil one. Moreover, as pointed out above, it is impossible for Luther to think of a personal union between Satan and a human being: only the uncreated Spirit of God, not a created spirit or an angel, can have a *unio personalis*, an intimate union, with a human person.

Luther denies the natural ability of the human being to prepare him/herself for the reception of divine grace by his/her free choice; he replaces this Late Medieval scheme by his doctrine of the efficient unitive power of God’s Spirit; only the Spirit is able to bring about a change in the chaos caused by the oppression of the evil one: “For what is the whole human race without the Spirit but the kingdom of the devil, a confused chaos of darkness.” / “*Quid enim est universum genus humanum, extra Spiritum nisi regnum Diaboli confusum chaos tenebrarum?*”<sup>159</sup>

In Luther’s *The Bondage of the Will*, the most severe consequence and the most obvious appearance of sin is weakness, *infirmitas*, caused by human slavery under evil in the state of unbelief. Even the “tiniest spark (*modicula scintillula*)” of free choice, emphasized by Erasmus, is “a captive and slave of the devil (*captiva et serva diaboli*),” Luther maintains.<sup>160</sup> The root of this slavery is lack of faith or “the sin of unbelief (*incredulitatis crimen*),” as Luther likes to put it. Unbelief means human contempt of God’s goodness and grace and rebellion against God, causing alienation from the Triune Creator. In this state of weakness and impotence, oppressed by the superhuman enemy, the human being is totally unable freely to become contrite, to turn to God, or to attach himself to divine grace.

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<sup>157</sup> WA 18,658,23-27; LW 33,98.

<sup>158</sup> WA 18,676,18.

<sup>159</sup> WA 18,659,6-7; LW 33,98.

<sup>160</sup> WA 18,637,10-12.

According to Luther, the notion of free choice, the concept of *liberum arbitrium*, is closely linked with the concept of unbelief because it trusts more in human abilities than in God's favor. The notion of free choice teaches: "...the offense of unbelief (*incredulitatis crimen*) lies precisely in having doubts about the favor of God, who wishes us to believe with the utmost possible certainty that he is favorable. We thus convict them on the evidence of their own conscience that free choice, when it is devoid of the glory of God, is perpetually guilty of the sin of unbelief, together with all its powers, efforts, and enterprises."<sup>161</sup>

Luther firmly denies any possibility of the human being freeing her/himself from the state of the lack of faith. At the human being's own disposal there is no "power (*vis*)" that could liberate him/her from the slavery of unbelief. The requirement of the divine law to have faith in and love of God can only prove the human's total incapacity for doing so; the law can only bring about "the awareness of our own weakness (*notitia infirmitatis*)" and thus make humans aware of their sin, i.e., their lack of faith and love. Knowing what one is obliged to do does not enable him/her to do so; on the contrary, the obligation of the law just exposes the weakness of humanity and the impossibility of becoming liberated from evil: "The whole meaning and purpose of the law is simply to furnish knowledge, and that of nothing but sin; it is not to reveal or confer any power. For this knowledge is not power (*cognitio enim non est vis*), nor does it confer power, but it instructs and shows that there is no power there, and how great a weakness there is (*quanta sit ibi infirmitas*). For what else can the knowledge of sin (*cognitio peccatis*) be but the awareness of our own weakness and wickedness (*notitia infirmitatis et mali nostri*)."<sup>162</sup>

Typical of his sarcastic rhetoric, Luther critically remarks on Erasmus: "*Diatribes* dreams that man is sound and whole...Scripture, however, lays it down that man is corrupt, and what is more, that he displays a proud contempt and ignorance of his corruption and captivity."<sup>163</sup> In a similar tone, Luther goes on describing the human being's deception by Satan: "Scripture, however, represents man as one who is not only bound, wretched, captive, sick, and dead, but

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<sup>161</sup> WA 18,769,19-23; LW 33,266.

<sup>162</sup> WA 18,677,10-14; LW 33,127.

<sup>163</sup> WA 18,674,6-1; LW 33,121-122.

in addition to his other miseries is afflicted, through the agency of Satan his prince, with this misery of blindness, so that he believes himself to be free, happy, unfettered, able, well, and alive. For Satan knows that if men were aware of their misery, he would not be able to retain a single one of them in his kingdom... It is Satan's work to prevent men from recognizing their plight and to keep them presuming that they can do everything they are told."<sup>164</sup>

## 4.2 "The Necessity of Immutability"

Erasmus heavily criticized Luther for using the deterministic idea of "absolute necessity," *necessitas absoluta*. Erasmus implied that, according to Luther's interpretation, God even "compels or forces the human beings to evil deeds." It is a pity that Luther employed this philosophical concept which he did not properly reflect upon, but directly gave it a specific theological interpretation. Later he even regretted taking up the term necessity.<sup>165</sup> It was not his intention to enter the complicated discussion on predestination, but to demonstrate the incapacity and weakness of the human being. Luther employed the idea of "absolute necessity" for rhetorical use: it is a hyperbole expressing the lack of freedom and the absolute incapacity of the human to make any movement toward his/her own salvation.

Quite clearly Luther is critical of the Scholastic conceptual distinction between two types of necessity in the analysis of God's activity in relation to human voluntary potentialities. Luther withdraws from the intellectual task of philosophically differentiating between the aspects of "the necessity of the consequent," *necessitas consequentis*, and "the necessity of the consequence," *necessitas consequentiae*, as expressing the two modes of the divine will. Scholastic theologians aimed at demonstrating that God's necessary foreknowledge is not the absolute cause of events, but it is compatible with the contingency of the created world and with free will.<sup>166</sup> For instance, Thomas Aquinas makes this distinction: "the necessity of the consequent" meaning absolute necessity which excludes all contingency, and "the necessity of the consequence" meaning conditional necessity which includes contingency. Thomas

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<sup>164</sup> WA 18,679,23-33; LW 33,130.

<sup>165</sup> See note 30 above.

<sup>166</sup> See WA 18,719,12-17. For a commentary on the distinction between the two necessities, see Knuuttila 1977,145-147, and Dieter 2014,41-42.



supported the latter view, according to which necessity arises *a posteriori* on the basis of a previous series of contingent acts or events.<sup>167</sup> "The necessity of the consequence" arises out of contingent circumstances which may change, therefore it is a conditional necessity, leaving a certain space for human decision in his/her relation to God.

Luther clearly does not want to enter any philosophical discussion on the Medieval distinction between the concepts of *necessitas consequentis* and *necessitas consequentiae*, absolute necessity and conditional necessity. He is familiar with these concepts but he deliberately rejects any use of them by noting that "nothing has been achieved by them except that the ignorant have been imposed upon by empty talk and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge."<sup>168</sup> Luther criticizes Erasmus for escaping from the true theological questions to useless Scholastic nuances which he does not understand: "Here *Diatribes* gives up; she deserts the standard, throws away her arms, and quits the field, making out that the discussion has to do with Scholastic subtleties about the necessity of consequence and consequent, and she has no desire to pursue such quibbles."<sup>169</sup> Luther is right, Erasmus, having no appetite for philosophy, in his *Diatribes* offers no rational discussion on the various nuances of the concept of necessity.

In *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther is aware of the Scholastic distinction, but he avoids discussing it and, instead, proposes his own alternative. He denies all contingency which leaves room for human decisions in man's relation to *se superior*. But at the same time Luther, following Thomas, intends to avoid any notion of "the necessity of coercion," *necessitas coactionis*, a necessity forcefully imposed on human beings by God. Luther's model is the idea of "the necessity of immutability," *necessitas immutabilitatis*, based on his Pneumatologically branded overall conception of the captivity of human choice, *servum arbitrium*, which is subject to either one or the other of the transcendental spiritual powers: God's Holy Spirit or unbelief and Satan. The concept of "the necessity of immutability" was known in Medieval

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<sup>167</sup> See *Summa theologiae* I, q.14,a.13 & q.19,a.8.

<sup>168</sup> WA 18,719,12-17; LW 33,190.

<sup>169</sup> WA 18,721,10-12; LW 33,193; see *Diatribes* IIIa9.

theology; now Luther invigorates it by making it a vital part of his conception of fallen humanity.<sup>170</sup>

The concept of the necessity of immutability expresses well Luther's theological intention. This idea of necessity means that the human being is unable to change his/her basic orientation in relation to the "things above oneself": the human cannot stop sinning and get rid of unbelief, and he/she is not able to connect him/herself with the saving grace and eternal life of God. The human person is the slave of sin and unbelief, and he/she is in a state of weakness or infirmity, being unable to make any change take place in his/her relation to sin and to divine saving grace. "Now, Satan and man, having fallen from God and been deserted by God (*deserti a Deo*), cannot will good, that is, things which please God or which God wills; but instead, they are continually turned in the direction of their own desires, so that they are unable not to seek the things of self (*non possint non quaerere quae sua sunt*). ...their nature is corrupt and averse from God (*corruptam et aversam naturam habeant*)."<sup>171</sup>

Luther was criticized by Erasmus for using a deterministic concept of necessity, as if God would force people to do evil. This kind of god is not only unjust but also cruel. To this criticism Luther reacted by developing his concept of the necessity of immutability. He underscores that this concept does not accept the idea that God would compel anyone to evil but, on the contrary, the human being freely and willingly continues according to his/her own misled orientation being fully unable to change the direction of his/her will by making a free choice of a new orientation of his/her mind and heart. Here Luther clearly renounces the idea

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<sup>170</sup> Luther already firmly denied the identification of the term *immutabilitas* with the term *coactio* ten years before writing *The Bondage of the Will*. Without going into detail on Luther's discussion on necessity and predestination in his *Lectures on Romans* (1515-1516), it should be noted that Luther argued in this work that a sinner sins willingly, he cannot escape his captive condition by his own power; therefore, he is in his sins by a necessity of immutability. But any possibility of coercion is excluded: "...sed nullus coacte et invite est in peccato. ...tales enim necessario sunt in peccato necessitate immutabilitatis, sed non coactionis." WA 56,386,1-5. Berndt Hamm shows that, before Luther, Medieval theology accepted the notion of *necessitas immutabilitatis*, but strictly denied any notion of *necessitas coactionis*. Hamm 1977,427. Here Luther, in fact, follows a generally accepted interpretation, whereas Erasmus is ignorant of it.

<sup>171</sup> WA 18,709,12-18; LW 33,175-176. Here Luther again clearly recalls Augustine's axiom of the fallen humanity "not being able not to sin," *non posse non peccare*. In the Heidelberg disputation (1518) Luther had established his Augustinian position: human choice, captivated by sin, is free only to sin, *non sit liberum, nisi ad malum*. WA 1,359,35-36. For a further exposition, see Kopperi 1997,122.

of God compelling a human being to do evil; anyone lacking God's Holy Spirit does evil freely and willingly:

“Now, by ‘necessarily’ I do not mean ‘compulsorily’ (*necessario, non coacte*), but by the necessity of immutability (as they say) and not of compulsion (*necessitate immutabilitatis, non coactionis*). That is to say, when a man is without the Spirit of God (*vacat Spiritu Dei*) he does not do evil against his will, as if he were taken by the scruff of the neck and forced to it, like a thief or robber carried off against his will to punishment, but he does it of his own accord and with a ready will (*sponte et libenti voluntate facit*). And this readiness or will to act he cannot by his own powers omit, restrain, or change, but he keeps on willing and being ready... This is what we call the necessity of immutability (*necessitatem immutabilitatis*): It means that the will cannot change itself and turn in a different direction (*voluntas sese mutare et vertere alio non possit*), but is rather the more provoked into willing by being resisted, as its resentment shows.”<sup>172</sup> The results of our analysis here confirm what was said about the distinction between the naturally free *voluntas* and the enslaved *arbitrium* in Section 1.4 of our study.

This is the core of Luther's idea of necessity: In his/her present state of unbelief and alienation from God, the human being “has to serve sin,” he/she cannot but continue in unbelief and in the lack of love; human psychic powers can offer no remedy for liberation from this enslavement. By his/her willpower or decision of will, the human being cannot stop sinning, i.e., get rid of his/her unbelief and lack of trust in God and in his goodness and mercy. Only the Holy Spirit can bring about this change. In his/her relationship to “things above oneself,” the human being, if “left to himself without the Spirit of God, he cannot will or do good (*sine Spiritu Dei non posse velle aut facere bonum*). ...ungodly man cannot alter his aversion. It thus comes about that man perpetually and necessarily sins and errs until he is put right by the Spirit of God (*necessario peccet et erret, donec Spiritu Dei corrigatur*).”<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> WA 18,634,21-32; LW 33,64. Commenting on the quoted passage, Harry J. McSorley, 1969,318, accurately states: “Here *necessitas immutabilitatis* has nothing to do with God's foreknowledge and predestination, but is the result of sin and the absence of the Spirit.”

<sup>173</sup> WA 18,710,2-8; LW 33,176-177.

Luther connects his idea of the necessity of immutability with his vision about the transcendental influence of the two opposing powers on the human choice in “things above oneself”: “For if God is in us, Satan is absent, and only a good will is present; if God is absent, Satan is present, and only an evil will is in us. Neither God nor Satan permits sheer unqualified willing in us (*nec Deus nec Satan merum et purum velle sinunt in nobis*), but as you have rightly said, having lost our liberty, we are forced to serve sin (*amissa libertate cogimur servire peccato*), that is, we will sin and evil, speak sin and evil, do sin and evil.”<sup>174</sup> All that is said here, of course, in Luther’s thinking concerns the relation of the human being to his/her situation *coram Deo*, not *coram mundo* or *coram hominibus* where he/she can make naturally free moral and other choices. Because Erasmus does not make this fundamental distinction between the two kingdoms or regimes of God, *duo regna*, he is not able to understand Luther.

It is quite clear that Luther does not reflect on the concept of the necessity of immutability philosophically; for him it is a soteriological, more specifically, a hamartiological term describing the human being’s total inability to convert him/herself. He employs the philosophical term *necessitas* in the service of the rhetoric and proclamation of God’s truth. He puts this concept to a soteriological theological use; for him it is an analogy of the second or pedagogical use of God’s law which proves the imprisonment of humanity. The idea of necessity demonstrates the incapacity of the human to do that good which is required of him/her. The necessity of immutability is a concept illuminating the human condition: the human being is fully unable to do anything to change his/her own heart and mind, he/she “must continue the way which he/she is on.” This makes the human being hopeless and desperate about his/her own situation. The Holy Spirit uses this desperation to break off human pride, self-assurance, and self-righteousness. This destruction of self-love is the only door which opens up a new way to the sinner and “snatches” him/her into the realm of grace. In the sense of the second use of the law, Luther’s deterministic rhetoric is put into the service of proclaiming the law to sinners with the intention of making them contrite.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> WA 18,670,6-11; LW 33,115; see also WA 18,669,7-8,26-27.

<sup>175</sup> As we saw in Section 1.2, many interpreters of *The Bondage of the Will* criticize Luther for determinism, even for the doctrine of double predestination. But here Luther does not speak philosophically, instead, he employs the rhetoric of theological proclamation.

Luther uses some biblical examples to illustrate his argumentation. The paramount example is the pharaoh who, seeing the miracles and warnings of God, was not converted, but on the contrary, he became angry and his perverted will became more and more hardened. In those to whom God grants his Spirit a conversion takes place, those who lack this Spirit, become irritated and angry at God, this is what Luther calls “irritation of the impious,” *irritatio impiorum*.

In the case of the pharaoh, God sends tribulations in order to change his mind – God presses him by “law” in order to bring to him “gospel.” But the pharaoh, on the contrary, is irritated and becomes even more hardened in his evil will. The only solution for a change of the pharaoh’s basic orientation of *arbitrium* would have been the movement by God’s Holy Spirit in his innermost being, his mind and heart, but this was not given to him: “This provocation of the ungodly (*irritatio impiorum*), when God says or does to them the opposite of what they wish, is itself their hardening or worsening (*induratio et ingravatio*). For not only are they in themselves averse through the very corruption of their nature, but they become all the more averse and are made much worse when their aversion is resisted or thwarted. So it was when God proposed to wrest ungodly Pharaoh’s tyranny from him, he provoked him and increased the hardness and stubbornness of his heart by thrusting at him through the word of Moses... without giving him the Spirit inwardly (*intus Spiritum non dedit*) but permitting his ungodly corrupt nature under the rule of Satan to catch fire, flare up, rage, and run riot with a kind of contemptuous self-confidence.”<sup>176</sup>

When Luther continues to explain the grim fate of the pharaoh, he recalls Augustine’s hamartiological axiom of *non posse non peccare*, for a human being without God’s grace it is not possible not to sin: “...it becomes impossible for Pharaoh to avoid being hardened (*non possit vitare indurationem sui*)... God confronts his badness outwardly with an object that he naturally hates, without ceasing inwardly to move by omnipotent motion the evil will which he finds there (*intus non cessat movere omnipotente motu malam, ut invenit, voluntatem*), and Pharaoh in accordance with the badness of his will cannot help hating (*non potest non odisse*)

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<sup>176</sup> WA 18,710,22-30; LW 33,177-178. Augustine’s comments on the story of the pharaoh differ a bit from those of Luther; he says that it was both God and the pharaoh himself who caused this hardening of the heart, God by his just judgment, the pharaoh by his free decision (*per liberum arbitrium*). Here Augustine recognizes the negative freedom of decision. *De grat. et lib.* XXIII,45; PL 44,911. Schwarzwäller, 1970,139, comments on the story by noting that according to *The Bondage of the Will*, meeting God leaves no room for neutrality, it leads either to total self-surrender or to hatred toward God.

what is opposed to him and trusting in his own strength, until he becomes so obstinate that he neither hears nor understands, but is possessed by Satan and carried away like a raving madman.”<sup>177</sup>

Another important example in Scripture is Judas Iscariot. Luther explicitly states that, although God foreknew that Judas would betray Jesus, God did not use any coercion, but Judas committed the betrayal of Jesus freely and willingly because his bad will could not but do it: “I ask you, are we now disputing about coercion and force (*coactione et vi*)? Have we not plainly stated in so many of our books that we are speaking of the necessity of immutability (*necessitate immutabilitatis*)? We know that the Father begets willingly, and that Judas betrayed Christ by an act of will (*Judas volendo prodidit Christum*); but we say this willing was certainly and infallibly going to occur in Judas himself if God foreknew it.”<sup>178</sup>

It belongs to God’s omnipotence that he knows everything, but God’s foreknowledge does not mean that he would be the efficient cause of bad will. Luther blames Erasmus for wrongly accusing him of employing the concept of “the compulsion of the consequent” (*coactio consequentis*).<sup>179</sup> Luther is absolutely against this idea of God compelling anyone to do evil. Here Luther, in fact, agrees with Erasmus: God cannot be the cause of evil, otherwise he would not be good. In a curious way, when discussing Judas, Luther makes a positive reference to the Scholastic principle of “the necessity of the consequence,” conditional necessity, although he otherwise withdraws from any philosophical analysis of the Medieval concepts of necessity. This is the only case of this kind in *The Bondage of the Will*: “For example, there is a necessity of consequence if I say: God foreknows that Judas will be a traitor, therefore it will certainly and infallibly come about that Judas will be a traitor.” Before saying this, Luther explicitly rejects the strong version of the absolute necessity, “the necessity of the consequent”: “But the necessity of the consequent, with which they console

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<sup>177</sup> WA 18,711,31-38; LW 33,179. A few lines later, Luther repeats that evil will “cannot do other than will evilly (*non possit nisi male velle*).” WA 18,712,9. It was a chief aim of the old Augustine to refute the Pelagian teaching on the possibility of not sinning (*posse non peccare*) by showing that, according to sound biblical Christian doctrine, after the Fall the human being cannot by his/her natural powers avoid sinning. See *De gest. Pel.* XXX,55; CSEL 42II,108,18-110,25.

<sup>178</sup> WA 18,720,31-35; LW 33,192-193.

<sup>179</sup> WA 18,722,26-27.

themselves, is a mere phantom and diametrically opposite to the necessity of consequence.”<sup>180</sup>

When defending his position against the criticism of Erasmus, Luther strongly rejects any notion of coercion to evil on God’s part; here Luther is in full agreement with Augustine.<sup>181</sup> Because it is the property of God to know everything in all places and at all times, he foreknows the evil will of Judas without being the efficient cause of it; God’s foreknowledge does not imply coercion. Because Judas has a bad will and, according to the truth of the necessity of immutability, he is unable to change his will, he is bound to become a traitor – even though this is in no way coerced upon him, and therefore, there is a certain trait of contingency in his fate. In his foreknowledge and omnipotence, God may use the immutable bad will for his good purposes. This kind of instrumental use of evil is part of God’s providential care of his creation.

But what, then, is the ultimate efficient cause of and the original reason for the evil will? How could any evil creep into the creation of God who is both absolutely good and omnipotent? Luther’s magnum opus provides neither speculation on it nor an attempt to solve the dilemma. Here Luther follows Augustine who openly admits there is no solution to the very origin of evil will. The classical problem of theodicy finds no solution in Luther’s *The Bondage of the Will*.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> WA 18,722,16-19; LW 33,195.

<sup>181</sup> In his philosophical analysis of Augustine’s conception of the will, Esa Rannikko concludes that Augustine strictly rejects the Pelagians’ accusation that he is teaching deterministic coercion to evil. Without divine grace, the human being cannot avoid sinning, but he/she is sinning freely and willingly, enjoying evil-doing. On the other hand, when a human being has been given the gift of faith by God, he/she believes freely and willingly, without any coercion. Rannikko 1997. Harry McSorley held that Luther’s argument concerning divine necessity – “God damns those who cannot avoid deserving damnation” – places him outside the Roman Catholic Tradition. McSorley 1969,347. See also Nestingen 2005,19. Our research shows that Luther is in agreement with Augustine, he does not represent determinism. Consequently, McSorley’s claim does not hold up.

<sup>182</sup> According to Augustine, it is impossible for the human being to find the efficient cause of the evil choice of the rational beings, angels and humans. The evil itself is not effective but defective, turning away from God, the supreme good, to something of less reality; this is the beginning of an evil will. Turning from him who supremely exists to something of a lower degree of reality is “contrary to the order of nature” and therefore it is evil. Augustine is not able to explain why this *perversio naturae* could happen in the first place: “To try to discover the causes of such defection is like trying to see darkness or to hear silence.” We can be aware of them “not by perception but by absence of perception.” See *De civ.* XII,6-8; CC 48, 361,93-362,11. McSorley, 1969,343, criticizes Luther for his “failure to discuss the origin of sin, and through his emphasis on the all-embracing activity of God, Luther seems to make God the actual originator of sin.” We may respond: If Augustine could not solve the problem, how could Luther have done it? As we

With all his reasoning here, Luther just aims to support his main argument: “free choice is nothing / *liberum arbitrium nihil est*.”<sup>183</sup> The rational being cannot change the wrong direction of his/her voluntary activity but he/she must carry on the will’s selfish orientation. No *liberum arbitrium*, which could in itself avoid hardening of the human heart, exists. There is no free choice which could “avoid hardening if God does not give the Spirit (*ne induretur, nisi Spiritum dederit Deus*), or to merit mercy if it is left to its own devices.”<sup>184</sup> The hardening of the will of the pharaoh was inevitable “since God does not change it inwardly by his Spirit (*Deus Spiritu intus eam non mutet*).”<sup>185</sup>

In Luther’s thought, it is completely impossible to assume that God would be the effective cause, *causa efficiens*, of anything evil. But in his majesty and foreknowledge, God can use the already existing evil as a tool for his overall good providential purposes. A person with an evil orientation, imprisoned by a necessity of immutability, can be used by God in the sense of an “instrumental cause,” *causa instrumentalis*. “Since, then, God moves and actuates all in all, he necessarily moves and acts also in Satan and ungodly man. But he acts in them as they are and as he finds them (*agit autem in illis taliter, quales illi sunt et quales invenit*); that is to say, since they are averse and evil, and caught up in the movement of this divine omnipotence (*rapiantur motu illo divinae omnipotentiae*), they do nothing but averse and evil things. ... Here you see that when God works in and through evil men (*in malis et per malos operatur*), evil things are done, and yet God cannot act evilly although he does evil through evil men (*non posse male facere, licet mala per malos faciat*), because one who is himself good cannot act for an evil purpose; yet he uses evil instruments (*instrumentis utitur*) that cannot escape the sway and motion of his omnipotence.”<sup>186</sup>

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have seen in our study, Luther certainly did not make God responsible for evil. Similarly, Reinhuber 2000,177-180.

<sup>183</sup> WA 18,722,13.

<sup>184</sup> WA 18,708,11-13; LW 33,174.

<sup>185</sup> WA 18,711,20-22.

<sup>186</sup> WA 18,709,21-31; LW 33,176. Luther explicitly denies the possibility that God could “create evil in us from scratch.” WA 18,710,31-33. Here Luther follows Augustine who firmly repels any accusation of God being the author of evil; he who himself is the supreme good, *summum bonum*, presenting the goodness of existence to all things, cannot possibly produce anything that is evil: “Quocirca mali auctor non est qui omnium quae sunt auctor est, quia in quantum sunt, in tantum bona sunt.” *De div. quaest.* XXI; CC 44A,26,10-11.



God's instrumental use of the already existing bad wills is clearly stated by Luther: "God works evil in us, i.e., by means of us (*per nos*), not through any fault of his, but owing to our faultiness, since we are by nature evil and he is good; but as he carries us along by his own activity in accordance with the nature of his omnipotence, good as he is himself he cannot help but do evil with an evil instrument (*aliter facere non possit, quam quod ipse bonus malo instrumento malum faciat*), though he makes good use of this evil in accordance with his wisdom for his own glory and our salvation."<sup>187</sup> God may use human evil as his instrument by allowing the evil things to happen, with the overall purpose of bringing about an effect which is in accordance with his providence as the governor of all the events taking place within his creation and in accordance with his plan of salvation. When God uses evil as his instrument, he does it in order to attain something good by so doing – God who is perfect goodness cannot, in his overall providence, but have a good will and act for good purposes.

Here Luther's view echoes Augustine's anti-Manichean manifesto: *natura est bona*, nature is by definition good – even the created nature of Satan himself – because all nature was created by God and all entities exist because their being participates in the being of the supreme good, *summum bonum*, in God himself. No evil nature exists, but evil equals the perversion of the goodness of created nature (*perversio naturae*), the perversion of will and love (*perversio voluntatis et amoris*): the creatures do not love their Creator as their supreme good, but their will and love are twisted to love the created things, this world, power, pleasure, etc. as their highest good. It is the greatest manifestation of God's omnipotence that he can, by his grace, change and heal this perversion of the human will and love; when working for this aim, he can use evil as an instrument of his general good providential purposes. Luther can agree with Augustine's grand vision of hope: after all, the Triune God and his grace are far greater than all evil that can be caused by fallen rational beings.<sup>188</sup>

Interestingly, when commenting on the fate of the pharaoh, Erasmus also implies the idea that the pharaoh could not but continue being hardened in his heart and his condition would only

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<sup>187</sup> WA 18, 711,2-7; LW 33,178.

<sup>188</sup> "Omne autem quod est, in quantum est, bonum est. Summe enim est illud bonum, cuius participatione sunt bona cetera. Et omne quod mutabile est, non per se ipsum, sed immutabilis boni participatione, in quantum est, bonum est." *De div. quaest.* XXIV; CC 44A, 29,7-11. See also *De civ.* XI,22; CC 48,340-341, and Ruokanen 1993,157-162.

become worse when confronted by God's reproach. Drawing on Origen's interpretation Erasmus says: "...Origen, in the third book of his work *On Beginnings*, thus explains the difficulty, and declares that an occasion of hardening was given by God, but he would throw back the blame on Pharaoh who, by his evil deeds, was made more obstinate through those things which should have brought him to repentance, just as by the action of the same rain cultivated land brings forth excellent fruit, and uncultivated land thorns and thistles, and just as by the action of the same sun, wax melts and mud hardens, so the forbearance of God that tolerates the sinner brings some to repentance and makes others more obstinate in wrongdoing."<sup>189</sup>

Erasmus repeats his point a bit later emphasizing that the pharaoh was not forced to become more obstinate: "God willed Pharaoh to perish miserably, and he willed it rightly, and it was right for him to perish. Yet he was not forced by the will of God (*nec ille coactus est Dei voluntate*) to be obstinately wicked."<sup>190</sup> But the interpretation of Erasmus is unstable, because in this context he also says that the pharaoh freely chose evil: "Now, in truth Pharaoh was created with a will that could turn either way, but of his own wish he turned to evil, and with his own mind preferred to follow evil rather than obey the commandments of God."<sup>191</sup> Here, however, is the possibility of some reconciliation between the views of Luther and Erasmus: two out of three of Erasmus' comments are more or less in harmony with Luther's idea of the necessity of immutability.

Luther's concept of the necessity of immutability does not include a doctrine of predestination of individuals, not to speak of a concept of double predestination. He avoids using the term *predestinatio* in *The Bondage of the Will*, and the few times when he mentions the term, he employs it in a soteriological usage. In one of the very few occurrences of this word, Luther connects the idea of predestination, not with a reference to individuals, but with his defense of the sovereignty of God's grace in his eternal plan of salvation: "For if grace comes from the purpose or predestination of God, it comes by necessity and not by our own

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<sup>189</sup> *Diatribes* IIIa2; Walter, 47, 17-25; LCC 17, 65.

<sup>190</sup> *Diatribes* IIIa6; Walter, 50, 13-15; LCC 17, 67.

<sup>191</sup> *Diatribes* IIIa3; Walter, 48, 23-25; LCC 17, 66.

effort or endeavor, as we have shown above.”<sup>192</sup> At the very end of *The Bondage of the Will*, in its final section, Luther interprets the concept of predestination as depending on God’s foreknowledge, which as noted above, does not mean coercion: “For if we believe it to be true that God foreknows and predestines all things (*Deus praescit et praeordinat omnia*), that he can neither be mistaken in his foreknowledge nor hindered in his predestination, and that nothing takes place but as he wills it, as reason itself is forced to admit, then on the testimony of reason itself there cannot be any free choice in man or angel or any creature.”<sup>193</sup>

In *The Bondage of the Will* there is one strict expression where Luther says that God “loves and hates in accord with his eternal and immutable nature”: “And it is this fact that makes complete nonsense of free choice, because God’s love toward men is eternal and immutable, and his hatred is eternal (*aeternus et immutabilis sit amor, aeternum odium Dei*), being prior to the creation of the world, and not only to the merit and work of free choice; and everything takes place by necessity in us (*omniaque necessario in nobis fieri*), according as he either loves or does not love us from all eternity, so that not only God’s love but also the manner of his loving imposes necessity on us.”<sup>194</sup> It is important to note that Luther does not represent here any doctrine of double predestination; on the contrary, he means that according to his very nature, God loves the human beings immutably, but equally immutably he hates sin and evil. This is God’s true nature as God, and therefore, his unchangeable love and hatred are necessary. In Luther’s magnum opus there is no trace of a doctrine of predestination applied to individual human beings; his sayings using this kind of vocabulary are all related to God’s universal saving grace and to his universal plan of salvation.

In *The Bondage of the Will*, predestination is a concept which expresses the immutability of God’s saving will, his plan for the redemption of fallen and imprisoned mankind. Luther’s scanty remarks on predestination express his confession of faith: the creative and saving will of

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<sup>192</sup> WA 18,772,38-40; LW 33,272. Simo Knuuttila correctly affirms that Luther is not principally interested in the question of general determinism or indeterminism, but he discusses human will in relation to God; Luther has a soteriological interest. Knuuttila 1977,148. The soteriological use of the concept of predestination was evident already in 1517 when Luther set against one another the doctrine of predestination and the concept of free choice: “Optima et infallibilis ad gratiam praeparatio et unica dispositio est aeterna Dei electio et praedestinatio.” *Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam* (1517), WA 1,225,27-28.

<sup>193</sup> WA 18,786,3-7; LW 33,293.

<sup>194</sup> WA 18,724,32-725,4; LW 33,199.

the Triune God remains always the same – it is the Creator’s good intention toward the beings which he created to be companions of his love. The prospect of Luther's conception of divine predestination, in the sense of necessitarianism, is to emphasize God as the sole efficient cause of grace. Here Luther resembles Augustine, who says that divine will alone is the efficient cause of everything, *omnis causa efficiens*; his will effects everything, but no one can explore what causes the divine will to do so. Because God is God and we are not, we cannot possibly explain and understand the reason behind why God wills what he wills.<sup>195</sup> So understood, God's will is not only unchangeable but also irresistible, he performs the good, merciful deeds he decides to without any failure. Predestination understood in terms of *necessitas immutabilitatis* is an attribute of the God who is simultaneously both unchangeably loving and infinitely omnipotent. So comprehended, Luther's necessitarianism is quite opposite to the picture of the "unjust and cruel" God painted by Erasmus.

In *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther seems to avoid discussing the question of whether or not the human being is able to resist God's grace; he is inclined to implicitly promote the idea of *gratia irresistibilis* converting the human being, him/her given no possibility of rejecting the effect of the Holy Spirit. In some texts prior to 1525 Luther seems to have accepted some kind of possibility of the human being’s preventing his/her conversion by resisting the Holy Spirit; the human being finds excuses for his/her sins and refuses to confess them.<sup>196</sup>

In certain places in *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther shows some indecision about the possibility of *aversio* from grace or the *induratio* of a sinner as an act of his own will. After

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<sup>195</sup> “Sed omnis causa efficiens est. Omne autem efficiens maius est quam id quod efficitur. Nihil autem maius est voluntate Dei; non ergo eius causa quaerenda est.” *De div. quaest.* XXVIII; CC 44A,35,3-5.

<sup>196</sup> The view that the human being could resist grace is, naturally, possible in Luther's early writings when he was still closer to the Nominalist tradition. For instance, in his *Dictata super Psalterium* (1513-1516), when interpreting Psalm 1:1, he says: “Tria scelera sunt omnia peccata, scilicet infirmitatis contra Patre, ignorantie contra Filium, malitiae vel concupiscentiae contra Spiritum sanctum. Quattuor autem scelera sunt istis assumptis addere excusationem in illis et confessionem eorum negare, que faciunt ipsum stare in via sua durissima cervice. Et ideo non convertitur nec potest converti, quia directe claudit sibi portam misericordiae et resistit Spiritui sancto ac remissioni suae.” WA 3,16,12-18.

Mainly in his writings of 1520 Luther comments a few times on the traditional discussion on the possibility of placing an obstacle to sacramental grace, *obicem ponere*. This problem, mainly being related to the question of mortal sins, does not throw new light on the actual issue we discuss in relation to *The Bondage of the Will*. See, for instance, Luther’s comments on the first article in *Assertio*, WA 7,101,11-102,25, and *Resolutions disputationis de fide infusa et acquisita*, WA 6,92,9-93,8. In the latter text Luther clearly states that, by his free decision, the human being cannot avoid placing an obstacle to grace. Commenting on the ninth conclusion, Luther rejects the following argument: “Sunt enim qui dicunt, satis esse non ponere obicem, id est non formare propositum malum peccati, et hoc hominem bene posse ex libero arbitrio.” WA 6,92,29-30.

explaining the universal salvific will of God, aimed at the salvation of all, Luther answers the question: Why, then, are not all people saved? “The fault is in the will that does not admit him (*vitiumque est voluntatis, quae non admittit eum*).”<sup>197</sup> Commenting on Erasmus' imagery of a man standing at the crossing of two ways, compelled to choose one or the other of the paths,<sup>198</sup> Luther says: "Truly, therefore, we are at a crossroad, but only one way is open; or rather, no way is open (*altera vero via tantum patet, imo nulla patet*), but by means of the law it is shown how impossible one of them is, namely, the way to the good, unless God gives the Spirit (*nisi Deus Spiritum donet*), and how broad and easy the other is if God permits (*si Deus permittat*)."<sup>199</sup>

First Luther admits that the human being may choose the wrong way, i.e., continue his/her turning away from and against God. This would simply mean that, although faced by an effective divine call, the person carries on his/her indifference or hostility toward God which is typical of the human being while living under the bondage of unfaith and Satan. But then Luther denies even this negative possibility of turning one's back on grace, saying God "permits" the human being to do this. If God permits a sinner to harden himself, this does not, however, mean that God is the efficient cause of that evil will and act. As we have seen, Luther firmly rejects any notion of *coercio ad malum* – this was the major accusation made by Erasmus against him. "Permitting" means simply letting the sinner carry on, continue on his/her own way as he/she has always done; therein is no element of compulsion. What Luther says in the quotation above is a view fully in accordance with his concept of the necessity of immutability: the human being cannot but continue to serve that transcendental power to whom his/her *arbitrium* is subjected. A change in orientation, the liberation of *servum arbitrium* from the enslavement of unbelief, sin, and Satan, becomes possible solely by the effect of the Holy Spirit, Luther emphasizes. We may raise the question, why then, is the efficient power for conversion by the Holy Spirit given to some and not to some others (we will come back to this problem in Section 7.1).

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<sup>197</sup> WA 18,686,5-8; LW 33,140.

<sup>198</sup> See *Diatribes* IIa14; Walter,32, 22-33,5.

<sup>199</sup> WA 18, 677,1-4; LW 33,126.

## 5 Pneumatological Emphasis in the Doctrine of Grace

### 5.1 A Fully Theocentric Conception of Grace

In his debate with Luther, Erasmus concentrates on the anthropocentric and immanent aspects of grace: how divine grace can be received by humans. He deals with the conditions and requirements by which a human being can be connected with God's saving grace. The focus is on the human side, Erasmus begins from below, from the human situation.

As shown above, Erasmus was alarmed by Luther's extreme claims on the idea of necessity in his *Assertio*; the solution of Erasmus to avoid creating an image of an "unjust and cruel" God was to allow a minimal responsibility of free choice to the human being in regard to one's salvation. Luther rejects this solution: "For suppose they do attribute as little as possible (*minimum*) to free choice, nevertheless they teach that by means of this minimum we can attain to righteousness and grace. Nor have they any other way of solving the problem of why God justifies one man and abandons another than by positing free choice, and inferring that one has endeavored while the other has not, and that God respects the one for his endeavor but despises the other, and he would be unjust if he did anything else."<sup>200</sup>

Using a statistical analogy, we might say that, for Erasmus, salvation is 99.9% God's sole grace, and only 0.1% the human being's own responsibility of free choice. For Luther, however, this kind of grace is "cheap grace" which ridicules the entire idea of divine grace which is a perfect free gift of the Triune God. "If free choice merits only very little (*modicum*), and grace does the rest, why does free choice receive the whole reward (*cur totum praemium accipit liberum arbitrium*)?"<sup>201</sup> While Erasmus admits minimal freedom and responsibility to the human side for being connected with saving divine grace, Luther sees that this understanding promotes secret pride on the human side. The natural human being is

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<sup>200</sup> WA 18,769,38-770,4; LW 33,267. In this context, Luther tries to show that Erasmus represents the concept of "condign merit," *meritum de condigno*, but here Luther clearly exaggerates. With certainty we might say that Erasmus follows the more moderate idea of "congruous merit," *meritum de congruo*, which was commonly accepted by Nominalism in Late Medieval Catholic theology. See WA 18,770,7-19. Erasmus likes to use the term *minimum*; see, for instance, *Diatribes* IIIc1; Walter, 68,13. Sometimes he employs the term *perpusillum*: e.g., *Diatribes* IV7; Walter,82,11. A few times he uses the expression *nonnihil*: e.g., *Diatribes* IV16; Walter,90,11.

<sup>201</sup> WA 18,733,7-9; LW 33,211.

driven by “love of self in all the things of God and men.”<sup>202</sup> If you admit any degree of *liberum arbitrium* – even the very minimum – to humans in matters of salvation, you strengthen their self-love and spiritual pride. The minimal movement of the mind, after all, gets “the whole reward.”

In his polemical rhetoric Luther goes as far as saying that the Pelagians were more honest in their synergism than Erasmus, because they “purchase the grace of God” by their maximal “whole, full, perfect, great, and many efforts and works,” whereas those in favor of free choice do exactly the same with their minimal act: “it is a very little thing, and almost nothing, by which we merit grace.” Luther makes a sarcastic remark on “cheap grace”: “If we must have error, then, there is more honesty and less pride in the error of those who say that the grace of God costs a great deal, and so hold it dear and precious, than of those who teach that it costs only a trifling amount, and so hold it cheap and contemptible.”<sup>203</sup> Luther concludes his argument by rejecting any role of human deeds in relation to God’s saving grace: “For if we are justified ‘apart from works,’ then all works are condemned, whether small or great (*sive sint pusilla, sive magna*)...we are justified only by his grace apart from all works, and therefore apart from the law itself, in which all works, great and small, congruous and condign, are included.”<sup>204</sup>

Luther aims at destroying any trust in free choice by his pointed comments on the miserable state of the natural human being. False trust in free choice is no solution to the tragic condition of humanity – as we have seen (Section 4.1 above), a fallacy of independence from the Creator was in the core of the Fall and now this fallacy only keeps open the gates to the influence of all kind of sin and evil: “In short, the reign of Satan in men could not have been described in fewer or more expressive terms than by his saying that they are ignorant of God and despisers of God. That betokens unbelief (*incredulitas*), it betokens disobedience, sacrilege, and blasphemy toward God; it betokens cruelty and lack of mercy toward our neighbor; it betokens love of self in all the things of God and men (*amor sui in omnibus rebus*

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<sup>202</sup> WA 18,28-29; LW 33,269.

<sup>203</sup> WA 18,770,21-36; LW 33,268.

<sup>204</sup> WA 18,771,11-13,27-29; LW 33,269.

*Dei et hominum*). There you have a picture of the glory and power of free choice!”<sup>205</sup> Secret religious pride and self-love, lack of faith and love, are linked together with the illusion of free choice; this is the illusion which Luther aims to destroy.

Differing from Erasmus, Luther’s doctrine of grace has a very strong theocentric mode. Luther begins from above, from God’s monergistic activity when giving saving grace and the gift of faith to humans. He focuses on what the Triune God is doing in order to save humanity by delivering his saving grace to humans. Luther emphasizes what God does when he connects human beings with his saving grace, he is not concerned about the requirements given to humans in order to receive this grace. On the contrary, Luther intends to annihilate and destroy all human conditions and requirements for grace; this is in accordance with the fundamental structure of his theological thought: *theologia crucis*.

## **5.2 God’s Holy Spirit – The Actuality of Grace**

Luther’s Pneumatological understanding of the saving divine grace is firmly established on his theology of creation (see also below, Section 6.2). According to Luther, at the very moment when God created the human being, he blew his Holy Spirit, *Spiritus Creator*, into the innermost part or the “spirit” or the “heart” of the human being. The Spirit was the giver of life and the provider of the intimate union between God the Creator and the human being created in his image (*imago Dei*). As long as God’s Spirit indwelt the human, the human being had an intimate connection through an “air-hole” (*spiraculum*) with the Creator and his holy and imperishable life; consequently, he/she could not die. The Spirit of the Creator established an intimate relationship of love between the human and his/her Maker; being created in “God’s image” meant that the human being was able to know and love his/her Creator.<sup>206</sup>

According to Luther’s theological interpretation of the creation, when the first human beings became disobedient to their Creator, he took away his Spirit from their hearts, the innermost

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<sup>205</sup> WA 18,762,37-763,4; LW 33,256.

<sup>206</sup> See Ruokanen 1985 and Peura 1990b.



part of the human person became “an empty room” lacking its original inhabitant. Consequently, the human beings became dominated by sinful tendencies of self-love and pride, their will and ability to love God above everything else was lost and their love of the neighbor was drastically weakened. After losing God’s Spirit, the humans became mortal, because flesh cannot exist eternally without an intimate connection to God’s imperishable Spirit. The human nature “has been vitiated by sin through the withdrawal of the Spirit (*subtracto Spiritu*).”<sup>207</sup> The will of the rational beings (in this case, the will of Satan) became bad after losing the intimate contact with the Creator: “In this way he [God] finds the will of Satan evil, not because he creates it so, but because it has become evil through God’s deserting it (*non autem creans, sed deserente Deo*) and Satan’s sinning...” As to the humans, the “slavery of God” was replaced by the “slavery of evil.”<sup>208</sup>

Luther’s dualistic vision of the human will being under the influence of conflicting transcendental powers is clearly illustrated in his famous imagery of the “beast of burden” and its two riders: “And this we do readily and willingly, according to the nature of the will, which would not be a will if it were compelled; for compulsion is rather (so to say) ‘unwill’ (*noluntas*). But if a Stronger One comes who overcomes him and takes us as his spoil, then through his Spirit we are again slaves and captive – though this is royal freedom – so that we readily will and do what he wills. Thus the human will is placed between the two like a beast of burden (*humana voluntas in medio posita est, ceu iumentum*). If God rides it, it wills and goes where God wills... If Satan rides it, it wills and goes where Satan wills; nor can it choose to run to either of the two riders or to seek him out, but the riders themselves contend for the possession and control of it.”<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> WA 18,708,31-33.

<sup>208</sup> WA 18,711,7-8; LW 33,178.

<sup>209</sup> WA 18, 635,12-22; LW 33,65-66. Luther used the image of *iumentum* a few times in his earlier works. For instance, in his *Dictata super Psalterium* (1513-1516), Luther calls the carnal man living under the law “a beast”; he connects the idea of being a *iumentum* with “being always with the devil (*semper cum diabolo*).” WA 3,591,20-31; 487,14-20. WA 3,591,20-31. In his sermon of 12 October, 1516 (*Predigt 30*), Luther contrasts those who live under the tyranny of the devil (*sub tyrannide diaboli*) with those who are *iumenta Dei*. WA 1,93,32-94,4.

Cf. Augustine's vivid description of “the commander inside the human being sitting in the human heart”: “Sic et in unoquoque hominum intus est imperator, in corde sedet; si bonus bona iubet, bona fiunt; si malus mala iubet, mala fiunt. Cum ibi sedet Christus, quid potest iubere, nisi bona? Cum possidet diabolus, quid potest iubere, nisi mala? In tuo autem arbitrio Deus esse voluit, cui pares locum, Deo an diabolo; cum paraveris, qui possidebit, ipse imperabit.” *Enarr. in Ps.*, Ps. 148,2; CC 40,2166,23-28.

The image of the beast ridden by either God or Satan was quite generally known in the Middle Ages, its origin being from Augustine, who says that either Christ is or the devil is in command of the

In Luther's Pneumatological scheme of grace, the change of the evil orientation of the will as well as the weakness of the human will can only be changed by the effective power of God's Holy Spirit. Only God's Spirit can expel the "rider" sitting on the "beast of burden." The change of the will takes place when the Holy Spirit, *Spiritus Creator*, lost in the Fall, re-enters the human heart or the innermost part of the human person. The Holy Spirit is the only power that can liberate the human heart from the oppression of unfaith and Satan, the human being has no capacity of freeing him/herself and getting rid of the oppression of the evil one; the power of oppression is much too huge and heavy for human psychic resources.

The basic motive of Luther's criticism of Erasmus claims that no human psychic or moral endeavor, no act of free choice, can solve the root problem of human tragedy, "the sin of unbelief." The solution can only be a Pneumatological one: only God's Holy Spirit can change the human mind and heart, make him/her contrite and long for the Savior and divine grace. The Reformation principles of *sola gratia*, salvation by God's grace alone, and *sola fide*, justification through faith alone, are powerfully Pneumatological concepts; this is a fact which has been undermined in Luther research so far. Why so?

The rationalistic presuppositions of modern theological interpretation are one reason for the lack of a Pneumatological perspective, as we saw above, in Section 1.2. In the "enlightened" modern Western theology, which emphasizes the ethical and the existentialist interpretation of the Christian faith, the ideas of the person of the Holy Spirit and his transcendental opponent Satan more or less belong to "mythological" imagery of the old world view not comprehensible to "modern man." Modern theology may follow its tendency of demythologization (*Entmythologisierung*) for hermeneutical reasons, trying to make religious truths relevant and acceptable to the people of "modern" times. But applying these modern hermeneutical ideas to Luther research does not help us understand the authentic meaning of his theology, perhaps quite on the contrary, it prevents us from seeing the biblical and theological realism – and eventually the genuine intention and content – of Luther's thought.

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human heart and the human *arbitrium*. The Scholastics also employed the image of a horse and its rider for demonstrating the relation between will and grace. Luther, being closer to Augustine, differs from the Scholastic image by regarding the third person of the Holy Trinity himself, not grace as a separate entity, to be the rider. Luther's picture concentrates on the intimacy of the personal relationship between God and man. For the origin and history of this image, see Adam 1962 and McSorley 1969, 335-340. Wannenwetsch, 1994, makes an ethical analysis of the image of the beast; there is no reference to Pneumatology.

For this reason, in the present study I do not intend to “modernize” Luther’s strong imagery and language; it would be done at the cost of losing the deeper understanding of his theology.

Moreover, German Lutheran theology in particular has always been very sensitive to all forms of “enthusiasm” or “spiritualism” (*Schwärmerei*); therefore, the biblical concept of God’s Spirit has almost been replaced by the more “sober” concept of “God’s word” (*das Wort Gottes*).<sup>210</sup> Consequently, if Pneumatology is weak in theology, it is almost impossible to understand the idea of the sinner having *koinonia/unio cum Christo in Spiritu sancto*, crucially important to Luther. Without a clear understanding of Pneumatology, it is impossible to comprehend the main idea of Luther’s *The Bondage of the Will*. Therefore, much of the research has focused on philosophical concepts, such as free will, necessity, and predestination, thus missing the main point (cf. above, Section 1.2).

In the final, concluding part of his magnum opus, Luther highlights his Pneumatological vision for the liberation of humanity from the slavery of the evil one: “If we believe that Satan is the ruler of this world, who is forever plotting and fighting against the kingdom of Christ with all his powers, and that he will not let men go who are his captives unless he is forced to do so by the divine power of the Spirit (*nisi divina Spiritus virtute pulsus*), then again it is evident that there can be no such thing as free choice (*nullum esse posse liberum arbitrium*). Similarly, if we believe that original sin has so ruined us that even in those who are led by the Spirit it causes a great deal of trouble by struggling against the good, it is clear that in a man devoid of the Spirit there is nothing left that can turn toward the good (*nihil in homine Spiritus inani reliquum esse, quod ad bonum sese verti possit*), but only toward evil.”<sup>211</sup> Again, we must be reminded that here Luther speaks about the human being’s relation to the realities “above oneself,” he does not deny the freedom of moral choice in matters of human and social life in this world.

Even in the state of integrity, before the Fall, the human being needed the divine grace of God’s Spirit in order to do that good which pleases the Creator. After losing this grace and the Spirit, it is utterly impossible for the human to make any free choice in his/her relation to

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<sup>210</sup> Typical of this strain of thought when introducing Luther’s doctrine of grace, Wolf-Dieter Hauschild employs the concept of *Wortgnade*. Hauschild 1984,491.

<sup>211</sup> WA 18,786,7-14; LW 33,293.

God's grace or bring back the lost "first fruits of the Spirit": "Although the first man was not impotent when he had the assistance of grace (*assistente gratia*), yet by means of this precept God shows him plainly enough how impotent he would be in the absence of grace (*impotens absente gratia*). But if that man, even when the Spirit was present, was not able with a new will to will a good newly proposed to him, that is, obedience, because the Spirit did not add it to him, what should we be able to do without the Spirit in respect of a good that we have lost? It is thus shown in that first man, as a frightening example and for the breaking down of our pride (*nostra superbia conterenda*), what our free choice can do when it is left to itself and not continually and increasingly actuated and augmented by the Spirit of God. If that man could do nothing toward increasing his share of the Spirit, whose first fruits he possessed, but fell away from the first fruits of the Spirit, how should we in our fallen state be able to do anything toward recovering the first fruits of the Spirit that have been taken away, especially when Satan now reigns in us in full force."<sup>212</sup> Here Luther employs an argument *a minore ad maiorem*: if the human being was unable to keep on willing good when the Spirit was present, how much more impossible it is for him/her to will good now when God's Spirit is absent. Luther aims at showing how absurd Erasmus' defense of *liberum arbitrium* is.

Luther assumes that Adam and Eve, even in their state of integrity did not have a free choice in "things above them." Freedom in the human being's relation to *se superior* was never a part of the constitution of the human soul; rather, the humans were created to be obedient servants and worshipers of their Creator. Servitude under God belongs to the essence of good human nature.<sup>213</sup> Interpreting Genesis 2:17 in *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther says that God "took away from man the dominion over one part of the creatures (for instance, over the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) and willed rather that he should not be free (*non liberum voluit*)."<sup>214</sup> Here Luther implies clearly that even in the very beginning the human being had no freedom in relation "things above him/herself," namely, the knowledge of the true good and evil.

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<sup>212</sup> WA 18,675,26-37; LW 33,124.

<sup>213</sup> In his *Deuteronomion Mosi cum annotationibus* (1525), Luther makes it plain that from his/her creation the human being exercised free choice in dealing with those lesser than him/herself, but in relation to his/her superiors the human being has no freedom of choice: "quae suo superiori placeant, neque novit neque potest, ibi cessat liberum arbitrium." WA 14,585,32-35.

<sup>214</sup> WA 18,672,3-4; LW 33,118.

Here Luther's thinking resembles that of the mature Augustine: even in Paradise the human beings could not, without the assistance of God, "live well (*bene vivere*)," but they had the capability of choosing to "live wickedly (*male vivere*)."<sup>215</sup> According to Augustine, in the beginning God granted free choice to the human beings, but they could use this freedom rightly for loving God as the supreme good (*summum bonum*) only by the power of the Holy Spirit – without the Spirit *liberum arbitrium* was bound to be corrupted.<sup>215</sup> The human beings had their freedom within the grace of God, but they "lost this liberty (*amissa libertate*)," original grace was lost and sin captivated humanity, Luther explains, following the logic of Augustine.<sup>216</sup> After the rule of Satan entered humanity, "human will is not any longer free (*voluntas humana iam non libera*)."<sup>217</sup> The human beings had freedom of will insofar as they wanted that which is good in loving their Creator; but after choosing evil, they became its slave and could no longer choose not to sin. Freedom to do good was not absolute freedom but freedom guaranteed by divine grace. Falling from this grace, only freedom to sin is left.

After the Fall, only the Spirit of God can liberate the human will from the slavery of evil: "If God works in us, the will is changed, and being gently breathed upon by the Spirit of God, it again wills and acts from pure willingness and inclination and of its own accord (*sponte*), not from compulsion (*non coacte*)... So not even here is there any free choice, or freedom to turn oneself in another direction or will something different, so long as the Spirit and grace of God remain in a man (*donec durat Spiritus et gratia Dei in homine*). In short, if we are under the god of this world, away from the work and Spirit of the true God (*sine opere et Spiritu Dei*), we are held captive to his will..."<sup>218</sup> "Christians, however, are not led by free choice but by the Spirit of God (*Christiani vero non libero arbitrio, sed Spiritu Dei aguntur*) (Rom. 8). And

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<sup>215</sup> The emphasis is typical of Augustine's later works, he states in *De civitate Dei* (413-426): "...ita bene vivere sine adiutorio Dei etiam in paradiso non erat in potestate; erat autem in potestate male vivere, sed beatitudine non permansura eti poena iustissima secutura." *De civ.* XIV,27; CC 48,451,20-23. Moreover, in *De spiritu et littera* Augustine maintains: "...praeter quod creatus est homo cum libero arbitrio praeterque doctrinam qua ei praecipitur quemadmodum vivere debeat accipiat Spiritum sanctum, quo fiat in animo eius delectatio dilectioque summi illius atque incommutabilis boni, quod Deus est..." *De spir. et litt.* III,5; CSEL 60,157,11-15 When commenting on Peter Lombard's *Sententiarum libri quatuor* in 1510, Luther confirmed the Augustinian notion of the possibility of *liberum arbitrium ad malum* in the beginning of the creation. WA 9,71,5-40.

<sup>216</sup> WA 18,669,7,27. Robert Kolb affirms Luther's Augustinian position in *The Bondage of the Will: Even in Eden human creatures were depending on God' creative grace. Human will could never be absolutely and independently free because of humanity's "creaturely dependence" on the Creator. Kolb 2005,51-52.*

<sup>217</sup> WA 18,750,34.

<sup>218</sup> WA 18,634,37-635,8; LW 33,65.

to be led is not to lead, but to be carried along (*agi vero non est agere, sed rapi*), as a saw or an ax is wielded by a carpenter.”<sup>219</sup>

Luther explicitly denies the position represented by Erasmus and Late Medieval theology according to which – although the natural human being cannot merit God’s saving grace – through a free act of contrition and through moral deeds he/she can prepare him/herself for the reception of the effective divine grace, God’s gift of salvation. This kind of preparation belongs to the sphere of the law in Luther’s theology, it has nothing to do with grace and salvation. In Luther’s view, trying to follow the requirements of the law has no influence on receiving grace. Human psychic orientation or moral deeds belong to the sphere of *se inferior* or *coram hominibus/coram mundo* and they have no effect on the human being’s relationship to the things *se superior* or *coram Deo* where the human being’s relationship with the Triune God and his grace will take place.

As we have seen, in Luther’s understanding, the law can only show the human’s inability and incapacity for doing anything to prepare to receive God’s grace. In front of God, the law is not a positive educator for the human reception of divine grace, as Erasmus would see it, but is the terrible critic and judge of the sinner, making him/her desperate about his/her possibilities of preparing him/herself in any way for the reception of grace. This is the second use of the law for Luther: law pushes the sinner to Christ by making him/her desperate about salvation. The law tells what you should do, but yet you are not able to do that.

God’s Holy Spirit can be given only to those whose hidden religious hubris and self-love are being destroyed by the requirements of the law impossible for the human being to fulfill. Only those who become desperate about themselves can receive the Holy Spirit. Thus, the justification of the sinner, his/her taking into the realm of divine saving grace, takes place through the effective power of the Holy Spirit: this is *iustificatio per Spiritum sanctum*. “Who, you say, will take pains to correct his life? I answer: No man will and no man can, for God cares nothing for your correctors without the Spirit (*sine Spiritu*), since they are hypocrites. . . . But the elect and the godly will be corrected by the Holy Spirit (*per Spiritum sanctum*), while the rest perish uncorrected.”<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> WA 18,699,11-13; LW 33,160.

<sup>220</sup> WA 18, 632, 3-6; LW 33, 60-61.

In *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther very clearly unites the effective grace of God with the actual power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Justification of the sinner is inseparably and simultaneously both a Christological and a Pneumatological reality. Grace and Spirit are almost synonyms: “Grace or the Spirit is life itself, to which we are led by God’s word and work.” / “*Si quidem gratia vel Spiritus est ipsa vita, ad quam verbo et opere divino perducimur.*”<sup>221</sup> “...there is simply no one, unless he is thoroughly imbued with the Holy Spirit (*nisi Spiritu sancto perfusus*), who knows, believes, or desires eternal salvation...”<sup>222</sup>

In regard to the requirements of God’s law, the idea of human free choice and the efficient power of God’s Spirit are diametrically opposite: Free choice is “ruled by Satan” and therefore it rejects “grace and the Spirit that fulfills the law (*gratiam et Spiritum, qui legem impleat, respuat*).”<sup>223</sup> “...the fact is that in the sight of God those who are most devoted to the works of the law are farthest from fulfilling the law, because they lack the Spirit that is the true fulfiller of the law (*Spiritu carent, legis consummatore*), and while they may attempt it by their own powers, they achieve nothing. So both statements are true and both types are accursed – those who do not abide by the law, as Moses puts it, and those who rely on works of the law as Paul puts it; for they each lack the Spirit (*uterque enim Spiritum exigit*), without whom the works of the law, no matter how much they are done, do not justify...”<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> WA 18,663,17-18; LW 33,105. Even in his earlier works, Luther already typically understood justifying grace as the reality of the Holy Spirit: “It is evident that this cannot be understood to be anything but the justifying grace of the Spirit...” *Resolutiones disputationum de indulgentiarum virtute* (1518), WA 1,590,1-3; LW 31,184. In his *Commentary on Galatians* (1519), Luther equated the Spirit and grace: “Euangelium, quod est Spiritus et gratiae doctrina...” WA 2,461,11. Moreover, he emphasizes justification as the work of the Spirit in this *Commentary*: “Now is not the fact that faith is reckoned as righteousness a receiving of the Spirit? So either he proves nothing or the reception of the Spirit and the fact that faith is reckoned as righteousness will be the same thing. ...For when God is favorable, and when he imputes, the Spirit is really received, both the gift and the grace (*vere accipitur Spiritus, donum et gratia*).” WA 2,511,13-18; LW 27,252. Typical of his theological thought, Luther says in his *Deuteronomion Mosi cum annotationibus* (1525): “Through the hearing of the word of the Holy Spirit is given; by faith he purifies the heart...For the Spirit blows where he wills, not where we will. But when the Holy Spirit is received by faith, then we are justified by him without any work of our own, only by the gift of God...” WA 14,681,20-24; LW 9,184.

<sup>222</sup> WA 18,663,36-37; LW 33,106.

<sup>223</sup> WA 18,698,11-13.

<sup>224</sup> WA 18,765,15-20; LW 33,259-260.

Here Luther recalls Augustine's true teaching in his *De spiritu et littera*: The Holy Spirit, as divine love, is the fulfiller of God's law which is the law of love.<sup>225</sup> For Augustine, the Spirit is the substance of divine love, i.e., as perfect love he is *plenitudo legis* in person; perfect divine love is the perfect fulfilment of God's law which is the law of love. Thus, Pneumatological love, being the fulfiller of the divine law of love, is the substance of the righteousness inhabiting man; when God's Spirit indwells a sinner, the perfection of God's law is in him/her as alien righteousness, *iustitia aliena*; consequently, the person is reckoned justified *coram Deo*.

In Augustine's conception, grace means participation in the non-created divine life, in the personal, divine reality of the Spirit of Jesus Christ and of his Father. This differs from the Scholastic conception of grace as the supernatural *habitus* or *gratia creata*, in which the elements of both the divine grace and of the human soul are united.<sup>226</sup> In this respect, Luther's

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<sup>225</sup> Augustine maintains: "Quid sunt ergo leges Dei ab ipso Deo scriptae in cordibus nisi ipsa praesentia Spiritus sancti, qui est digitus Dei, quo praesente diffunditur caritas in cordibus nostris, quae plenitudo legis est et finis praecepti?" *De spir. et litt.* XXI,36; CSEL 60,189,9-12. "...hic Spiritus sanctus, per quem diffunditur caritas in cordibus nostris, quae plenitudo legis est, etiam digitus Dei in euangelio dicitur." *De spir. et litt.* XVI,28; CSEL 60,181,28-182,2. Luther teaches the same idea also in his *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/1535): "For the law cannot be fulfilled without the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit cannot be received without Christ." WA 40/2,168,15-16; LW 27,131. See also Kärkkäinen 2003,112,115.

<sup>226</sup> A chief difference between the doctrine of Augustine and the Scholastic concept of grace and justification lies in the latter's idea of establishing a mediating element between the divine Godhead and human beings. Thomas Aquinas rejected the Augustinian identification of grace and the Holy Spirit because, he thinks, the infinite Spirit is incompatible with the finite human being. In Augustine's thought, grace always remains an extrinsic divine quality of *gratia increata*, whereas in Scholasticism grace is viewed as an intrinsic quality of the soul or *gratia creata* infused into the human being.

Under the influence of Aristotelian philosophy, Thomas criticized Augustine's Pneumatological concept of grace and admits that the Spirit is the efficient cause of grace in the sense of *gratia praeveniens*, but the Spirit in person is not given to man: "Si igitur mittens designetur ut principium personae quae mittitur, sic non quaelibet persona mittit, sed solum illa cui convenit esse principium illius personae. Et sic Filius mittitur tantum a Patre, Spiritus sanctus autem a Patre et Filio. Si vero persona mittens intelligatur esse principium effectus secundum quem attenditur missio, sic tota trinitas mittit personam missam. Non autem propter hoc homini dat Spiritum sanctum, quia nec effectum gratiae potest causare." *Summa theologiae* I,q.43,a.8. See also *Summa theologiae* II, 2,q.23,a.2, where Thomas turns against the Augustinian view of love as *inhabitatio Spiritus*, according to which "love is the Holy Spirit himself inhabiting the human soul": "Non enim motus caritatis ita procedit a Spiritu sancto movente humanam mentem quod humana mens sit mota tantum et nullo modo sit principium huius motus, sicut cum aliquod corpus movetur ab aliquo exteriori movente. Hoc enim est contra rationem voluntarii, cuius oportet principium in ipso esse."

According to Thomas, God does not communicate his *gratia increata* in the form of a direct presence of the Holy Spirit in the human being as a perfect gift of righteousness, but non-created divine grace creates a supernatural quality or habitus of grace within the soul or within the psychic potentialities of the human, thus becoming *gratia creata*. The human being is not justified instantly, merely on the basis of the gift given to him, but grace is seen as *gratia gratum faciens*, grace making a sinner righteous, righteousness thus becoming concrete in his ever-increasing love toward God and his neighbor. Grace as *forma* is sacramentally infused into the human being as *gratia sive iustitia infusa*, making him/her able to cooperate with grace in love and in virtuous deeds. On the basis of this *meritum de congruo* acquired as a result of divine-human cooperation, the human being becomes ever more loveable to God and gains more habitual grace which becomes the property of the human soul; the human being is imputed righteous on the basis of *iustitia acquisita* thus acquired. See *Summa theologiae* I,q.43,a.1-8; II,1,q.106, a.1-



understanding of grace, critical of Scholasticism, fits in with Augustine. The basic view of Augustine, with its emphasis upon love – as far as it is conceived as a Pneumatological reality – would not contradict Luther's basic notion of *gratia increata*. The Augustinian notion of love does not need to be far from Luther's understanding of grace, although it is not a central theme in *The Bondage of the Will*.<sup>227</sup> In this sense we could say that Luther's doctrine of grace was not a novelty; he chose the original Augustinian alternative over against the Medieval developments of this doctrine.

There are two chief strains of thought in Luther's Pneumatology in *The Bondage of the Will*: First, the Holy Spirit is the efficient cause producing repentance, conversion, and faith in the human being, thus breaking the bondage of the *servum arbitrium* under Satan's servitude and shifting the human *arbitrium* into the realm of God. This dimension of Luther's conception of Pneumatological grace corresponds to Augustine's understanding of operative or effective grace, understood as *gratia praeveniens*.<sup>228</sup>

Second, the Holy Spirit is not only the efficient cause of the change in human decisions concerning man's superiors, but the Spirit himself is also the substantial reality in question: he is *gratia increata divina* in person because he is the Spirit of Jesus Christ and of his Father. The presence of the Spirit equals the personal presence of Jesus Christ himself and of his *iustitia*

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2; and II,1, q.111,a.1-3. On the doctrine of grace in High Scholasticism, see also Auer 1942, Hamm 1977, 312-339, and Lonergan 2000.

<sup>227</sup> In particular, Tuomo Mannermaa has pointed out that the concept of love has an important role in Luther's doctrine of justification. See Mannermaa 1989, 96-105, 200. Texts prior to 1525 can be shown where Luther speaks about love and the Holy Spirit in a very Augustinian manner. For instance: "Nec est ullus hic libero arbitrio locus, quum Spiritus sanctus inspirat animam. Ita inspirat, ut animam humanam amore inflammet ac rapiat ad bona, ut non possit non amore complecti legem. ...Primum quidem in nobis per Spiritum sanctum incenditur amor Dei, et ideo prior nos amat Deus." *Predigt 103*, 27 May 1520; WA 9,464,20-22,29-30.

<sup>228</sup> Augustine emphasizes that God has the sole initiative in conversion; the human being's free choice cannot change the sinner's situation, but only worsen it. In line with the notion of *gratia praeveniens*, Augustine says that the Spirit is like an "earnest of God's free bounty" so that the human being "may be fired in heart to cleave to his Creator": "...neque enim credere potest quodlibet libero arbitrio, si nulla sit suasio vel vocatio cui credat, profecto et ipsum velle credere Deus operatur in homine et in omnibus misericordia eius praevenit nos..." *De spir. et litt.* XXXIV,60; CSEL 60,220,16-19. See also *De gest. Pel.* III,6; CSEL 42/2,57,25-26: "Hoc enim Spiritu, non viribus propriae voluntatis reguntur et aguntur qui filii sunt Dei." Augustine maintains that, by the power of his Spirit, God may convert even such persons who have "wills which are perverse and contrary to the faith": "Ergo Spiritus gratiae facit ut habeamus fidem...etiam perversas et fidei contrarias voluntates omnipotentem Deum ad credendum posse convertere." *De grat. et lib.* XIV,28-29; PL 44,898.

*aliena*.<sup>229</sup> Thus the union of the human being with Christ in the Spirit makes the righteousness of Christ a present reality in an individual, Christ himself being the substance of the divine grace in person presented to the sinner, thus making him/her reckoned as righteous *coram Deo*. Christ in his Holy Spirit in the sinner is the core of the justification of the sinner: Because the presence of Christ, with his personal righteousness and holiness, his divine life, and his gifts of salvation accomplished on his cross and in his resurrection, is in the sinner, the sinner is declared and imputed as justified *coram Deo*.

We may conclude: the living and ubiquitous Spirit of the Father and of the Son, of the Creator and of the Redeemer, is both the Giver and the gift, both the Donator and the *donum* itself. Luther's Pneumatology first directs its criticism especially at Nominalism with its teaching on the concept of free choice expressed in the notion of *facere quod in se est*, and, second, it directs its criticism at Scholasticism with its teaching on justification based on the idea of habitual or created grace in the human soul produced by a process of cooperation between divine grace and the human being, yet God's grace always being the initiator and the main agent of the process.

### 5.3 Flesh or Spirit

Luther sees that, in his/her relationship to God and sin, which means, in relation to “things above oneself,” the human being has only two alternatives: existence in “flesh” or in “Spirit,” *tertium non datur*. The two realms are irreconcilably in conflict: being in the state of flesh, unbelief, sin, Satan, and law is diametrically opposite to being in the state of God's Spirit, grace, and faith. In his/her relation to the transcendental realities, the human being has no neutral position; he/she exists in his/her own sinful situation under the misleading harassment

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<sup>229</sup> The concept of *duplex remissio*, which appeared in Luther sermons briefly prior to his writing *The Bondage of the Will*, contains the mentioned two aspects: “Remittere peccata est dupliciter, quando cor immutatur et Spiritus infunditur.” *Predigten des Jahres 1524*, WA 15,711,5-6. First, grace is the efficient cause of changing the human heart, and second, grace means the *infusio* of the Spirit into the human being.

David Vincent Meconi, when analyzing Augustine's conception of deification, underscores that “the Spirit is the principle of union”: “As the principle of communion, the Spirit unites human persons to the Son as well as to one another within the Son's own body, thus effecting two essential components of Augustine's doctrine of deification: divine union and divine indwelling. ... The Spirit is thus the love between the persons...” Meconi 2014,221-222. See also Meconi 2013.

of the evil one, or he/she exists under the influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit in the state of grace. The world as such, being without God's Spirit, grace, and faith, exists in the state of "flesh": "... 'world' means everything that has not been taken out of the world into the Spirit, as Christ says to the apostles: 'I took you out of the world...'”<sup>230</sup>

In his understanding of "flesh and Spirit" Luther draws from the biblical teaching of Paul and John: "In short, Paul's division is confirmation enough of what we teach, for he divides men as doers of the law into two classes, putting those who work according to the Spirit (*Spiritu operatores*) in one, those who work according to the flesh (*carne operatores*) in the other, and leaving none in between. ... It is thus clear that Paul takes the same view as Christ, who in John 3 says that everything not of the Spirit is of the flesh, no matter how splendid, holy, and exalted it may be, even including the very finest works of God's law, no matter with what powers they are performed. For there is need of the Spirit of Christ, without whom all our works are nothing else than damnable (*Spiritu enim Christi opus est, sine quo nihil sunt omnia nisi damnabilia*). ... everything connected with the works of the law is condemned if it is without the Spirit. And one of the things without the Spirit is that very power of free choice (*sine Spiritu est vis illa liberi arbitrii*) – for this is the matter at issue – which is held to be the most outstanding thing a man has.”<sup>231</sup>

Luther underscores the conflict between flesh and Spirit with strong expressions, interpreting it as transcendental dualism under the rule either of Satan or of the Holy Spirit: "In Romans 8, where he [Paul] divides the human race into two types, namely, flesh and Spirit, just as Christ does in John 3, he says: 'Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.' ... What else is the meaning of 'You are not in the flesh if the Spirit of God is in you' but that those who do not have the Spirit are necessarily in the flesh (*necessario in carne eos esse, qui Spiritum non habent*)? And if anyone does not belong to Christ, to whom else does he belong but Satan? Clearly, then, those who lack the Spirit are in the flesh and subject to Satan (*stat igitur, qui Spiritu carent, hos in carne et sub Satana esse*).”<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> WA 18,21-23; LW 33,277.

<sup>231</sup> WA 18,765,22-24,32-40; LW 33,260-261.

<sup>232</sup> WA 18,774,19-30; LW 33,274.

All who are without the Holy Spirit are by definition also without faith and out of grace. Consequently, a relationship of grace, union between the sinner and the Triune God, can take place solely if one has God's Spirit and faith created by the Spirit; the human being's own free choice cannot accomplish this because free choice lacks the Spirit and, therefore, lacks faith: "Paul here calls everything flesh that is without the Spirit (*sine Spiritu*), as we have shown. ...those who are without faith are not yet justified (*eos qui sine fide sunt, nondum iustificatos esse*); and those who are not justified are sinners... Hence, free choice is nothing but a slave of sin, death, and Satan, not doing and not capable of doing or attempting to do anything but evil."<sup>233</sup>

Lacking the Holy Spirit means being under the rule of the enemy, there is no neutral ground between the two: "We call ungodly anyone without the Spirit of God (*sine Spiritu Dei*), for Scripture says it is to justify the ungodly that the Spirit is given (*Spiritum donari, ut impium iustificet*). But when Christ distinguishes the Spirit from the flesh by saying: 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh,' and adds that what is born of the flesh cannot see the Kingdom of God [John 3:3,6], it plainly follows that whatever is flesh is ungodly and under the wrath of God and a stranger to the Kingdom of God. And if it is a stranger to the Kingdom and Spirit of God, it necessarily follows that it is under the kingdom and spirit of Satan, since there is no middle kingdom between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan (*non sit medium regnum inter regnum Dei et regnum Satanae*), which are mutually and perpetually in conflict with each other."<sup>234</sup> Luther very definitely denies any possibility of neutrality in the human being's relationship to the transcendental reality of *se superior*. There is no neutral medium area, the human being is either in the state of flesh, sin, unbelief, and self-love, or in the state of Spirit, grace, faith, and love of God. But there is neutrality, of course, in natural "things below oneself" in the earthly realm: "With men (*Apud homines*), of course, it is certainly a fact that there are middle and neutral cases (*media et neutralia*)..."<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> WA 18,775,1,14-18; LW 33,25.

<sup>234</sup> WA 18,743,27-35; LW 33,227.

<sup>235</sup> WA 18,768,22; LW 33,264.

Luther thinks in terms of *totus homo*: he does not divide the human person into his/her “better part and lesser part” (*potior pars/vilior pars hominis*) as Erasmus does. The entire human person exists either in the state of flesh or in the state of Spirit. In Erasmus’ thought, free choice belongs to the “better part” which is not contaminated by sin.<sup>236</sup> For Luther, on the contrary, all that is not Spirit is flesh, even the “highest part of the human being” is mere “flesh” without God’s Spirit being present. Luther goes to the extreme by stating that this “very best of the human nature is cursed” without the Spirit. Making the “better part” of the human intact of sin means that it does not need Christ and his grace, this leads to a false deification of the human being, especially of his/her free choice:

“If the higher part of man is sound (*sana est potior pars hominis*), it does not need Christ as its redeemer, and if it does not need Christ, it triumphs with a glory above that of Christ, since in taking care of itself it takes care of the higher part, whereas Christ only takes care of the lower (*viliozem*). Then the kingdom of Satan, too, will be nothing, since it will rule only over the lower part of man, and in respect of the higher part will rather be ruled over by man. So by means of this doctrine concerning the governing part of man, man will come to be exalted above Christ and the devil, or in other words, he will become Lord of lords and God of gods. . . . free choice . . . is the principal part, and a sound and virtuous part, which does not even need Christ, but can do more than God himself and the devil can.”<sup>237</sup> Here Luther directs his sarcasm towards Erasmus, who regards free choice as “the best part of man.”

Luther accuses Erasmus of placing the human free choice outside God’s saving grace. Erasmus sees free choice as naturally good and intact in its relation to God. In Luther’s view, the essence of self-righteousness lies in applying this human capacity, which belongs to the human being’s relation to the “things below oneself,” to his/her relation to the “things above oneself”: “Or if the power of free choice is not wholly in error or damnable, but sees and

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<sup>236</sup> In fact, Erasmus himself does not use this terminology which Luther applies to him: *potior pars/vilior pars hominis*. He says that “not every human affect is flesh,” but in every human being there is the noble “rational” part of the soul which can be called human “spirit”: “Nec tamen omnis affectus hominis est caro, sed est, qui dicitur anima, est, qui dicitur spiritus, quo nitimur ad honesta, quam partem animi rationem vocant aut *hegemonikon*, id est principalem . . .” Erasmus explicitly rejects the claim that “the most excellent part of human nature (*in hominis natura praestantissimum*) is none other than flesh.” *Diatribae* IIIb4; Walter, 63, 13-16; 64, 1-2; LCC 17, 76. Here Erasmus could get support from the Scholastic teaching, according to which the integrity of *imago Dei* was maintained even after the Fall.

<sup>237</sup> WA 18, 744, 14-24; LW 33, 228.

wills what is virtuous and good and what pertains to salvation, then it is in sound health and has no need of Christ the physician, nor has Christ redeemed that part of man; for what need of light and life is there where there is light and life? And if that part has not been redeemed by Christ, the best thing in man has not been redeemed, but is in itself good and saved (*per sese bonum et salvum*).”<sup>238</sup> With some irony Luther notes that for Erasmus free choice is “that good, righteous, and holy power which even in an evil man has no need of Christ.”<sup>239</sup>

In the final section of his magnum opus Luther says: “To sum up: If we believe that Christ has redeemed men by his blood, we are bound to confess that the whole man (*totum hominem*) was lost; otherwise, we should make Christ either superfluous or the redeemer of only the lowest part of man (*partis vilissimae redemptorem*), which would be blasphemy and sacrilege.”<sup>240</sup> Here his aim is to show how fully he disagrees with Erasmus on the concept of *liberum arbitrium*: Erasmus sees this human ability as the “highest” or intact part of the human soul, Luther damns it as cursed, as it is without God’s Spirit.

So, for Erasmus, divine grace becomes the auxiliary remedy to perfect one’s salvation already put into motion by the human being’s own initiative. Luther criticizes Erasmus for teaching that “free choice is a power of the will that is able of itself (*potest a seipsa*) to will and unwill the word and work of God...it can also in some small degree do the works of the law and believe the gospel (*potest et aliquantulum facere legem et credere Euangelio*). ...even if something else prevents your completing it (*prohibente alio perficere non possis*).”<sup>241</sup>

Grace, of course, is also necessary for salvation in Erasmus’ view, but grace is impotent without human consent and cooperation. Luther would say exactly the opposite: the human will is entirely impotent without divine grace. Here Luther attacks Erasmus for “divinizing” human free choice: “What is left here to grace and the Holy Spirit? This plainly means attributing divinity to free choice (*divinitatem libero arbitrio tribuere*), since to will the law and the gospel, to unwill sin and to will death, belongs to divine power alone. ...free choice is

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<sup>238</sup> WA 18,779,34-39; LW 33,282.

<sup>239</sup> WA 18,780.8-9.

<sup>240</sup> WA 18,786,17-20; LW 33,293.

<sup>241</sup> WA 18,664,1-7; LW 33,106.

a divine term and signifies a divine power.”<sup>242</sup> Luther’s main intention is to powerfully defend the principle of *sola gratia*. The change in the human person which makes a union with Christ possible and thus justifies the sinner can take place solely by the effective action of God’s own Holy Spirit, not through any human psychic activity which is nothing else than human “flesh,” impotent to liberate anyone from the oppression of sin and evil. This is a notion which makes the divine Trinitarian grace true and authentic grace on which everything depends; it is not just some sort of auxiliary remedy – “cheap grace.”

## **6 The Trinitarian Nature of Pneumatological Grace**

### **6.1 Christological Grace Made Operative by the Holy Spirit**

In Luther’s theology, as also in Pauline theology, which Luther is depending on, Christology and Pneumatology are inseparably connected. The Spirit of God makes the sinner contrite, needful of the grace of Christ; the Spirit brings the unbeliever to Christ by converting him/her and creating trust and faith in the Savior. Moreover, the Holy Spirit makes Christ present in this faith and in the innermost person (“spirit” or “heart”) of the human being. Only God’s Spirit can, by creating conversion and faith, overcome “the offense of unbelief” thus expelling “the oppression of Satan.” Only the Spirit can intimately unite the human being with Jesus Christ, make the person of Christ together with his gifts of salvation truly present in the human person - it is exactly in his Holy Spirit how Christ indwells the sinner. So, without the efficiency and the presence of the Holy Spirit, Christological grace has no connection with and no impact on the sinner. Pneumatology makes Christology operative.<sup>243</sup>

But, on the other hand, without Christ the Holy Spirit has neither any message nor any saving grace, without Christ the Spirit would have no soteriological function. The Holy Spirit has no “other” gospel than the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is his very task to make Christ and his cross known and understood or to “glorify” Christ among humanity. We might even say that

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<sup>242</sup> WA 18,664,11-16; LW 33,107.

<sup>243</sup> In many works prior to *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther already emphasized the inseparability of Christology and Pneumatology. For instance, his *Commentary on Galatians* of 1519 teaches a concept of grace which consistently combines Christology with Pneumatology; see, for instance, WA 2,458,24-26; 490,27-33; 511,11-21; 536,23-32.

Luther's Pneumatology is a kind of "dynamic Christology" or "Christology in motion." Luther uses as synonyms the expressions "God's grace," "grace of Christ," and "grace of the Spirit," as well as the expressions "the Spirit of Christ" and "the Spirit of God." This vocabulary reveals the deeply Trinitarian nature of Luther's understanding of divine grace. When the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, "glorifies" or makes known Christ and his work, he simultaneously makes known the Father who sent his Son. Here Luther follows especially the theological logic of the Gospel of John.

The structure of Luther's doctrine of grace, or justification, is thoroughly Trinitarian. This is one of the places in *The Bondage of the Will* where he expresses this Trinitarian scheme *in expressis verbis*: "What need is there of the Spirit or of Christ or of God if free choice can overcome the motions of the mind toward evil?" The original Latin reveals clearly the Trinitarian nature of this sentence: "*Quid opus Spiritu? Quid Christo? Quid Deo? si liberum arbitrium vincere potest animi motus ad turpia?*"<sup>244</sup> The work of the Spirit is the work of Christ and the work of the Father, i.e., the work of the Trinity; Luther follows the Patristic Trinitarian logic: *opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt.*<sup>245</sup>

Here is a very clear Trinitarian statement of Luther, with the notion of both the Christological and Pneumatological reality of grace: "For in the New Testament the gospel is preached, which is nothing else but a message in which the Spirit and grace are offered with a view to the remission of sins, which has been obtained for us by Christ crucified (*sermo, quo offertur Spiritus et gratia in remissionem peccatorum per Christum crucifixum pro nobis impetratam*); and all this freely and by the sole mercy of God the Father (*gratis solaque misericordia Dei Patris*), whereby favor is shown to us, unworthy as we are and deserving of damnation rather than anything else."<sup>246</sup> The mercy of the Father is given through the suffering of Christ, and the fruit of the cross of Christ is offered to sinners by the influence of the Holy Spirit.

For Luther, justification means an intimate relationship between the two personal realities: the Triune God and the sinner. Justification is an intimate union between the persons, Christ

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<sup>244</sup> WA 18,676,11-12; LW 33,125.

<sup>245</sup> Sometimes Luther explicitly mentions this Patristic principle; for instance: "Consequitur Patrem, Filium, Spiritum sanctum esse unum magistrum..." WA 17/1, 43,7-8 (*Predigt* 575, 5 February 1525).

<sup>246</sup> WA 18,692,19-693,1; LW 33,150.



on the one side, and the sinner, moved by the Holy Spirit of Christ and of his Father, on the other. For Erasmus, salvation is a relationship of justice and of fair play, the rules of which are laid out by God, but where the human being has his/her own responsible role. Luther criticizes Erasmus for admitting free choice to function “naturally” *sine gratia Dei, sine Spiritu sancto*; here Luther equates grace with the Spirit.<sup>247</sup> Because *Diatribes* affirms free choice, “Christ and God’s Spirit count for nothing (*Christus et Spiritus Dei nihil sint*)” in it, Luther claims.<sup>248</sup>

As we have learnt, because of the peculiar character of the debate between Erasmus and Luther, in *The Bondage of the Will* Luther concentrates on the Pneumatological dimension of the saving grace. In this treatise he speaks more about the Holy Spirit than in any other of his major works. Concentration on God’s Spirit does not, however, mean neglecting the Christological dimension of divine grace. Especially towards the end of his work, Luther increasingly uses Christological language; for instance: “The law is no help, much less can he help himself. There is need of another light to reveal the remedy. This is the voice of the gospel, revealing Christ as the deliverer from all these things (*vox Euangelii ostendens Christum liberatorem ab istis omnibus*). It is not reason or free choice that reveals Christ.”<sup>249</sup>

The grace of Christ and free choice are diametrically opposite; defending free choice means overlooking the efficacious work of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, it is literally also a negation of Christ: “John says here, not only that grace is not received by any effort of ours, but that it is received through another’s grace or another’s merit (*alieno gratia seu alieno merito*), namely, that of the one man Jesus Christ. ...I wish the defenders of free choice would take warning at this point, and realize that when they assert free choice they are denying Christ (*abnegatores Christi*). For if it is by my own effort that I obtain the grace of God, what need have I of the grace of Christ in order to receive it? Or what do I lack when I have the grace of God? Now, *Diatribes* has said, and all the Sophists say, that we secure grace and prepare ourselves to receive it by our own endeavor, even if not ‘condignly,’ yet at least

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<sup>247</sup> WA 18,688,20.

<sup>248</sup> WA 18,692,11-13.

<sup>249</sup> WA 18,766,29-32; LW 33,262.

‘congruously.’ This is plainly a denial of Christ (*est negare Christum*), when it is for his grace that we receive grace...<sup>250</sup>

Establishing free choice in “things above oneself” means despising the atonement accomplished by Christ on his cross; for Erasmus, free choice is more important than the holy blood of Jesus, Luther claims: “They do not believe that Christ is their advocate with God, and obtains grace for them by his own blood...they abandon him as a Mediator and most merciful Savior, and count his blood and his grace of less value than the efforts and endeavors of free choice.”<sup>251</sup> It is through the very suffering on the cross that Christ earns the Holy Spirit for sinners: “*Christus... fuso sanguine Spiritum...nobis emit.*”<sup>252</sup>

Luther connects Christology with Pneumatology because it is the task of the Holy Spirit to connect the sinner with Christ. It is the Christological word of God which the Holy Spirit makes vivid and efficient that creates faith and establishes a union between the sinner and the Savior. Without this living connection, Christ and his work would remain historical facts just to be memorized. Luther explains the operation of saving grace and the creation of faith as the work of the Holy Trinity over against the incapacity and ignorance of free choice outside faith. Liberating the sinner from the bondage of unbelief is exactly the work of the Holy Trinity; the Father draws the sinner to Christ by “pouring out” his Holy Spirit:

“But the ungodly does not come even when he hears the Word, unless the Father draws and teaches him inwardly (*nisi intus trahat doceatque Pater*), which he does by pouring out the Spirit (*largiendo Spiritum*). There is then another ‘drawing’ than the one that takes place outwardly; for then Christ is set forth by the light of the Spirit (*ostenditur Christus per illuminationem Spiritus*), so that a man is rapt away to Christ (*qua rapitur homo ad Christum*) with the sweetest rapture, and rather yields passively to God’s speaking, teaching, and drawing that seeks and runs himself. ...Here you see that it is sin not to believe in Christ (*peccatum esse, non credere in Christum*). And this sin is surely not seated in the skin or the

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<sup>250</sup> WA 18,777,26-778,1; LW 33,279-280.

<sup>251</sup> WA 18,778,12-16; LW 33,280.

<sup>252</sup> WA 18,687,2-3. Luther also expresses this interesting idea in one of his sermons of the same year that he wrote *The Bondage of the Will*: “Christ has through his blood and death atoned for all our sins and he has earned his Spirit for us.” WA 17/1,125,27-28 (*Predigt* 587, 18 March 1525).

hair, but precisely in the reason and the will. But when he makes the whole world guilty of this sin, of which experience shows that the world is as ignorant as it is of Christ until the convincing Spirit reveals it (*ut quod Spiritus arguente reveletur*), then it is evident that in the sight of God free choice, with its will and its reason alike, is reckoned as a captive of this sin and as damned by it. Therefore, so long as it is ignorant of Christ and does not believe in him, it cannot will or strive after anything good but necessarily serves this sin without knowing it.<sup>253</sup>

The justification of a sinner is a Christological reality of *sola gratia*. In *The Bondage of the Will* this Christological grace has taken a profoundly Pneumatological form; it is still the same *gratia increata* of the merciful God who makes a sinner justified by presenting the sinner both the forgiveness of sins accomplished by Christ on his cross and the personal righteousness of Christ, his own holy person. Holding to the classical theological principle of *opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*, it is possible for Luther to create a doctrine of justification in terms of Pneumatology. Luther has a capacity for creative theological thinking so that he can move flexibly within the framework of the Trinitarian dogma and apply his basic presumptions of justification in varying ways.

Pneumatology represents divine initiative and freedom, God's monergism, distinct from and in contrast to any notion of the natural capacities of the human soul which could make a contribution to one's own salvation. The Holy Spirit makes the fruits of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection an instant and intimate reality which can touch the intimate center of the human personality thus changing the ultimate limits of a person's existence. Luther required this strong Pneumatological emphasis in order to prove the impossibility of a natural human disposition toward God's grace.

Free choice does not know Christ; it exists in the state of unbelief, i.e., in the state of sin. This situation can be changed only by the power of the Spirit of the Father and of Christ, the action of the Trinity. The Spirit effects contrition and conversion, creates faith, and connects the sinner with Christ and his saving grace. According to Luther, Trinitarian grace, the effective changing power and the real presence of the Holy Spirit of the Father and of the Son, is given to the sinner through the mediation of the "word and work of God," i.e., through

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<sup>253</sup> WA 18,782,7-21; LW 33,286-287.

preaching the law and gospel as God's word, and through the sacraments: "By the words of God, moreover, I mean both the law and the gospel, the law requiring works and the gospel faith. For there is nothing else that leads either to the grace of God or to eternal salvation except the word and work of God (*verbum et opus Dei*). Grace or the Spirit is life itself, to which we are led by God's word and work (*gratia vel Spiritus est ipsa vita, ad quam verbo et opera divino perducimur*)."<sup>254</sup>

In Luther's soteriology, "God's word" (*verbum Dei*), "God's work" (*opus Dei*), i.e., the sacraments, and his Holy Spirit always belong together. God gives his grace through his word, written, spoken, and sacramental, but without the simultaneous efficient "inward movement of the Spirit (*Spiritus intus movens*)" the word alone would not bring about a change in the human situation, it would just remain a letter, not Spirit: "everything depends on the power and operation of the Holy Spirit (*totum pendeat in virtute et opera Spiritus sancti*)."<sup>255</sup> And the other way around, the Spirit is never given without the word: "It has thus pleased God to impart the Spirit, not without the Word, but through the Word (*non sine verbo, sed per verbum tribuat Spiritum*), so as to have us as cooperators with him when we sound forth outwardly what he himself alone breathes inwardly wherever he wills (*quod intus ipse solus spirat, ubi voluerit*), thus doing things that he could of course do without the Word, though he does not will so to do."<sup>256</sup>

When analyzing Luther's understanding of the work of God's Holy Spirit, it is self-evident that, according to his teaching, divine grace is mediated through *verbum externum*, through the readable, audible, and material elements: the word and the sacraments. This is the emphasis which, in the face of various forms of spiritualism arising especially during the first half of the

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<sup>254</sup> WA 18,663,14-18; LW 33,105. It is typical of Luther to emphasize the inseparability of God's word and God's Spirit. For instance, in his *Commentary on Galatians* (1519) he said: "...the word of God is not heard even among adults and those who hear unless the Spirit promotes growth inwardly. Accordingly, it is a word of power and grace when it infuses the Spirit at the same time that it strikes the ears. But if it does not infuse the Spirit, then he who hears does not differ at all from one who is deaf." WA 2,509,1-5; LW 27,249. See also WA 9,463,13-17; 468,29-35. The close link between Luther's conception of the union and his sacramental theology is emphasized by Kärkkäinen 2003,201-209.

<sup>255</sup> The idea that a medium of grace is efficient only if *res ipsa* becomes a *res praesens* by the vivification of the Holy Spirit, is common in Luther's writings prior to *The Bondage of the Will*. For instance, in his sermon of 12 October 1516 (*Predigt 31*), Luther says: "Nam poenitentia interior est vera contritio, vera confessio, vera satisfactio in Spiritu." WA 1,99,1-2. Moreover, this is a clear theme of his *Commentary on Galatians* of 1519, and *Praelectiones in prophetas minores* of 1524-1526. See, for instance, WA 2,511,11-21, and WA 13,519,30-31.

<sup>256</sup> WA 18,695,25-31; LW 33,154-155.

1520s, becomes ever more emphatic in Luther's writings of that period. But it is important to note that even when facing the new challenges, Luther maintains the consistency of his Pneumatology in *The Bondage of the Will*, and lays emphasis on the spiritual and *internum* aspect in his understanding of the mediation of divine grace. The word and the sacraments are subordinated to become the vehicles of Pneumatological grace, *vehiculi Spiritus sancti*, which grace is "life itself," *ipsa vita*. According to Luther, the word of God remains a mere external entity which does not in any way affect its hearer or receiver if God does not, "by pouring out his Spirit," "draw and teach him inwardly." The function of the Spirit is Christo-centric: it is the task of the Spirit to set Christ forth, and by the illumination of the Spirit the human being "is rapt away to Christ." God pours out his Spirit *per verbum*, but also the opposite is true: without the presence of the Spirit the preached or the sacramental word would not accomplish anything; what is outwardly given becomes a reality of divine grace by the "internal inspiration of the Spirit" – and this will occur whenever and wherever God wills.

## **6.2 The Analogy of Creation in the Doctrine of Grace**

Luther's Pneumatological scene is firmly established on his theology of creation; the work of the third person of the Trinity is inseparable from the creative work of the first person, the Father. Human beings were created in "God's image" (*imago Dei*) which means that they shared divine life through the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit (cf. above, Section 5.2). Luther sees that the concept of God's Spirit is absolutely necessary for a correct understanding of creation: the Spirit was the personal mediation of the divine Godhead through whom divine life was communicated to the human beings created in God's image; the Spirit enabled *inhabitatio Dei* in them. The very presence of the Holy Spirit made the human being a participant in life divine, incorruptible, and immortal. The theological view of the intimate unity between God and humans in creation has a strongly Pneumatological notion. Moreover, Luther assumes that in the state of integrity the human soul and body were vivified by the immediate presence of *Spiritus Creator* inhabiting the human being.

Luther understands the human being as an "ecstatic" creature who receives his/her very existence and the quality of this existence from *extra se*. As such, the human being was made a creature who is destined for a union with his Creator in the Holy Spirit, the Spirit being the

actual presence of the Creator within his creature, the way in which and the means through which God shares his being and life with the human being. This is Luther's paradigmatic interpretation of Christianity which differs drastically from the more rational and juridical theological *scopus* of Erasmus. The communication between God and the human being for Erasmus is that of a somewhat distant relation, whereas, for Luther it is that of an intimate union.

The Pneumatological dimension of Luther's theology of creation is even more clearly discernable in some of his works closely preceding *The Bondage of the Will*, for instance, in his *Operationes in Psalmos* (1519-1521) and *Predigten über das erste Buch Mose* (1523-1524) where he teaches that God's *Spiritus Creator* offered the human being an intimate participation in his Creator's presence, inspiring in him divine life and invigorating natural psychic propensities as living realities. The Creator established an "airhole" (*spiraculum*) between himself and the human being, this is what made human an *imago Dei*.<sup>257</sup> Moreover, in the great work of his later years, *Vorlesungen über I. Mose* (1535-1545), Luther sees the crucial difference between the human beings and other living creatures in Pneumatological terms: The physical life of the humans is similar to that of the animals, but "the Holy Spirit dignifies the nature of man in such a glorious manner and distinguishes it from all other creatures" that, eventually, the human being was "made according to the image and likeness of God." Because of the presence of God's Spirit, the human had "a twofold life: a physical one and an immortal one."<sup>258</sup>

*Spiritus* is a concept well suited to expressing the idea of the "ecstatic" nature of human existence: human life depends on and participates in life that is outside itself – the very fact of breathing (cf. *spiro*) proves that. The human being is a part of something that is greater than

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<sup>257</sup> In *Predigten über das erste Buch Mose* Luther says in his sermon on Gen. 2:7 of 19 April 1523 (*Predigt 377*): "...Deus mihi inspiravit, et illud vitam dat quod conservat vitam hominis, et vita est ubi illud spiraculum est, ubi spiraculum non est, ibi ne vita quidem, estque signum vitae, et invenitur in naribus et nullibi nisi in facie." WA 14,119,25-28. See also in *Operationes in Psalmos* Luther's exposition of Ps 18:16, where he comments Gen. 2:7 (probably in early 1521), WA 5,514,4-9. On Luther's conception of the three divine inspirations, inspiration in creation, inspiration in salvation, and inspiration in revelation or prophetic inspiration, see Ruokanen 1985, 49-82.

<sup>258</sup> "Observandus igitur est praesens textus, quo ita magnifice ornat et ab omnibus aliis creaturis separat Spiritus sanctus humanam naturam. Corporalis quidem seu animalis vita similis erat futura bestiarum vitae. ...Sed quod additur: conditum esse hominem ita in animale vitam, ut esset tamen factus ad imaginem Dei et similitudinem...Habuit igitur Adam duplicem vitam: animale et immortalem..." WA 42,42,36-43,7; LW 1,57.

him/herself; the human being receives his/her existence and the liveliness of his/her body and psyche from *extra se*. Luther thus seems to make a distinction between that which is the innermost part of the human being, i.e., his/her spirit, and the psychic potentialities like will, reason and emotion. *Spiritus* is the principle of participation in divine life, the human spirit being a participant in the Spirit of the life-giving God. The trichotomic aspect of Luther's theological anthropology is quite visible: the human being consists of three parts – body, soul, and spirit. Luther seems to be much closer to the Patristic views than to the later dichotomic concepts in Catholic theology.<sup>259</sup>

Luther's trichotomic view of the human being is a conception that suits his Pneumatology well: grace as the Pneumatological *gratia increata* is not a reality being restricted to the sphere of human psychic energies like will, reason, or affect, but grace goes deeper into the human being, into his/her innermost "spirit" or "darkness" which is unknown and secret even to the human being him/herself. Luther's thinking resembles the Pauline idea of the intimate unification of the human being and the Triune God, expressed in the theology of Paul very much in Pneumatological terminology. Similarly Augustine, especially in his *Confessions*, underscores the mystical nature of the innermost part of the human person: "You [God] were with me but I was not with you."<sup>260</sup> Under the influence of rationalism and of the paradigm of *Entmythologisierung*, the modern interpreters of Luther do not recognize any trace of trichotomy in Luther's theology; consequently, they lack a precondition for understanding *The Bondage of the Will* correctly.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> When analyzing Luther's concept of death, Eero Huovinen pointed to the trichotomic aspect of his anthropology. Yet, as Huovinen points out, one should be cautious not to oversimplify Luther's view because he employed a great variety of symbols and terms for his anthropology. See Huovinen 1981,42-43.

<sup>260</sup> "Et ecce intus eras et ego foris et ibi te quaerebam et in ista formosa, quae fecisti, deformis inruebam. Mecum eras, et tecum non eram." *Conf.* X,27; CC 27,175,2-4. "...nec ipse scit spiritus hominis, qui in ipso est, tu autem, Domine, scis eius omnia, qui fecisti eum." *Conf.* X,5; CC 27,158,3-4.

<sup>261</sup> In his analysis of Luther's Pneumatology, Regin Prenter expresses the typical trend of Luther research prevailing during the first half of the 20th century. The classical realistic ontology being weakened and partly replaced with an actualistic and relational mode of reality, justification is understood predominantly as an outward forensic *favor*; the intimate unity between the Triune God and the human being becomes difficult to understand: "Das, was uns zu ganzen Menschen macht, zu Gottes Kindern, ist nicht das donum als ein Stück unseres Wesens, sondern die mit dem donum unlösbar verbundene gratia als favor Dei. Und favor Dei ist und bleibt völlig außerhalb von uns." Prenter 1954,55. Here Prenter polemically calls *donum* a "part of our substance"; this, of course, is not Luther's understanding. Rather, Luther agrees with Prenter that Christ's righteousness remains always *iustitia aliena* even though it is not "outside us" but given as an intimate union of the sinner with Christ.

The aspect of Pneumatology related to the theology of creation becomes visible especially in analyzing how Luther understands the Fall. Original sin consists of the breaking of the human being's intimate union with the Triune God; now the human being is lacking direct participation in divine life, and exists in the state of corruption and perversion of life, doomed to death. This is the case because of "the loss of the Spirit"; the human being now lives *extra Spiritum* or *sine Spiritu Dei* and under *potentia Satanae*. Due to the disobedience, the first human beings lost their intimate relationship with the Creator: "the Holy Spirit was taken away from them." Ever since, the human nature "has been vitiated by sin through the withdrawal of the Spirit (*subtracto Spiritu*)."<sup>262</sup>

In Luther's doctrine of grace, divine grace means exactly the restoration of this intimate union of the human being with his/her Triune Creator. "Godless is a person without the Holy Spirit"; justification happens by the power of the Spirit who recreates the lost union. This means "justification through the Spirit (*Spiritu iustificentur*)."<sup>263</sup> For Augustine, original sin consists of *privatio boni*, the loss and lack of the original righteousness and of eternal life; for Luther "the loss" is even more drastic: by "losing the Holy Spirit," human beings lost their intimate relationship with their Creator.<sup>264</sup>

In *The Bondage of the Will* there is a theologically extremely important analogy between Luther's understanding of God's first creation and his "second creation" or "new birth," the justification of the sinner. This analogy strongly unites Luther's Christological and Pneumatological doctrine of grace with the creative work of the first person of the Holy Trinity, the Father. The human being "did nothing to create him/herself"; in a similar way he/she cannot do anything to "recreate" or to give "rebirth" to him/herself, to transfer him/herself from the state of unbelief to the state of grace and faith in Christ. It is a sovereign and monergistic decision of God that causes the creation of the human beings, this divine will Luther calls "necessity": "we do not come into being by our own will, but by necessity /*nos*

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<sup>262</sup> WA 18,708,31-33. See also WA 18,659,6-7,22-23; 710,1-3. Luther's *Assertio* contains a similar line of thought: "Si enim Spiritus in hominibus non manet, mortui sunt coram Deo." WA 7,144,1-2.

<sup>263</sup> WA 18,760,39.

<sup>264</sup> In his *Vorlesungen über 1. Mose* (1535-1545) Luther says: "Nam natura destituta Spiritu sancto ab eodem malo spiritu agitur, quo agitatus est impius Cain." WA 42,201,41-202,2.



*non fieri nostra voluntate, sed necessitate.*”<sup>265</sup> It is the very nature of God to express his goodness in his absolutely free creative and saving activity. The following is one of the main passages from Luther’s *The Bondage of the Will*; here the theology of creation, the work of the first person of the Trinity, is analogically and intrinsically united with the soteriological work of the third person:

“Before man is created and is a man, he neither does nor attempts to do anything toward becoming a creature, and after he is created he neither does nor attempts to do anything toward remaining a creature, but both of these things are done by the sole will of the omnipotent power and goodness of God, who creates and preserves us without our help (*nos sine nobis creantis et conservantis*)... In just the same way, before man is changed into a new creature of the kingdom of the Spirit, he does nothing, and attempts nothing to prepare himself for this renewal and this kingdom, and when he has been recreated he does nothing and attempts nothing toward remaining in this kingdom, but the Spirit alone does both of these things in us, recreating us without us and preserving us without our help in our recreated state (*utrumque facit solus Spiritus in nobis, nos sine nobis recreans et conservans recreatos*)...”<sup>266</sup>

In a remarkable manner Luther makes an analogy between his theology of creation – God working in the sphere of his natural regime – and his doctrine of grace – God effecting the salvation of the sinner in the sphere of his spiritual regime. The focus is on the total passivity of the human side; God acts and effects all this *sine nobis*: the human being can neither create nor recreate him/herself. In his natural regime God works alone, within his sovereign power and initiation as the Creator of all, without anyone interfering in his work, he himself being the efficient and operative cause of both creation and providence. Analogously, he works in his spiritual regime as the sovereign, graceful Redeemer for the new creation of sinners and for their perseverance in grace. In the spiritual regime everything is effected by the Holy Spirit, the human being being in a state of total passivity.

The ability of creation and that of new creation are divine properties only; both activities take place without any cooperation or influence on the part of the creatures. It is only the Holy

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<sup>265</sup> WA 18,719,28.

<sup>266</sup> WA 18,754,1-12; LW 33,242-243.

Trinity who can accomplish these things; consequently, only God has genuinely free choice, *liberum arbitrium*, because it is only he who can create something *ex nihilo*. Only God has true freedom of will because only he has the capacity of bringing about the result and completion of what he wills. In Luther's theology, in the realm of new creation it is the appropriate function of God's Holy Spirit to make the changes happen in the human will, from lack of faith to faith. If the human being were able to change his/her basic orientation from unbelief to faith, from sin to grace, he/she would have the capacity of free choice, *liberum arbitrium*, in fact, he/she would have a divine ability of creating something *ex nihilo* – and that is a sheer impossibility.

Luther is convinced that the analogy between the first creation and the second creation or the new birth through divine grace fully destroys the doctrine of free choice: "But granted foreknowledge and omnipotence, it follows naturally by an irrefutable logic that we have not been made by ourselves, nor do we live or perform any action by ourselves, but by his omnipotence. ... Thus God's foreknowledge and omnipotence are diametrically opposed to our free choice. ... This omnipotence and the foreknowledge of God, I say, completely abolish the dogma of free choice (*haec inquam omnipotentia et praescientia Dei funditus abolent dogma liberi arbitrii*)."<sup>267</sup> Luther sees Erasmus' defense of free choice as a wrong way by divinizing the human will and human capacities; he makes a fatal mistake in giving a divine attribute to the human being enslaved by sin and evil. For Erasmus, God's grace becomes effective only after the initiative freely performed by the human agent first; the human being must "open the door" to God's grace in order to make it operative. For Luther, this kind of understanding destroys the reality of God's sovereign grace making it just "cheap grace."

Creating an analogy between the original first creation and the soteriological new creation or the new birth of the sinner, Luther defends his basic conviction: Let God be God! In his/her own self-righteousness, in illusions about his/her capacities of stopping sinning and doing something – even the slightest thing – to establish a saving relationship with God, the human being is "naturally unable to want God to be God; indeed, he himself wants to be God, and

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<sup>267</sup> WA 718,20-32; LW 33,189.

does not want God to be God."<sup>268</sup> This is where the logic of Erasmus' teaching on God's fair deal with humanity eventually will lead. Luther's comprehension of the monergistic activity of the Creator is in harmony with the Scholastic concept of the work of the first person of the Trinity: As the sole Creator of the universe, God is the only necessary being and the only necessary origin, *prima causa* of all existence; except God, everything else is contingent, non-necessary. Luther applies this theology to soteriology: The Holy Spirit is the only necessary reality and effective power which can recreate the broken relationship between the Creator and the human being by reuniting human life with divine life, the human person with the life of the Holy Trinity.

The human being's ability of free decision in his/her relationship to "things above oneself" is reduced *in nihilum* because the object which this decision concerns is comparable with God's creative work: by his/her choice and will, the human being has never created and can never create anything that exists, neither can he/she himself, by his/her own initiative, produce the *gratia increata* needed for the redemption from the bondage of sin. Both the creation of existing entities and their soteriological recreation are exclusively divine actions which God, in his eternal wisdom and power, has decided to perform. With respect to the origin of being and of goodness, human choice is nothing; God's free, pre-existent, and immutable decision is the sole efficient cause which alone brings about such things.

The most fundamental characteristic of Luther's criticism of free decision is based upon the notion that, in man's relationship to *se superior*, free choice is nothing but a hollow word with no reality in itself because it cannot itself produce that reality in whose concern it intends to make a decision. In Luther's thinking, the *esse* of the phenomenon of free choice presumes its *efficacia*: only what effects, exists. Because it is a sheer absurdity to think that the human being could be either his/her own creator or his/her own redeemer from evil, the whole idea of free choice, in respect to the prerequisites of human reality, collapses. Both the creation of existing substances and the providence of newly created saving grace are exclusively divine actions, which God alone, in his eternal wisdom and power, has the capacity to perform.

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<sup>268</sup> See note 155 above. For an interpretation of this principle of Luther, see Watson 1947. Robert Kolb summarizes the idea of Luther's magnum opus: "'Let God be God' can serve as an apt summary of *De servo arbitrio*." Kolb 2005,32.

By his analogy between creation and new birth/new creation or the justification of the sinner, Luther is able to speak powerfully for his profound theological commitment to the principle of *sola gratia*, which totally excludes the possibility of free choice in matters of salvation. Here there is also a certain analogy with the Augustinian and Scholastic axiom of *gratia naturam non tollit sed perficit*: nature and grace, creation and salvation, are inseparably linked; salvation means the liberation, purification, and perfection of the originally good creation of God through the soteriological efficacy of the Holy Trinity.<sup>269</sup> Luther, however, does not develop this particular strain of thought in *The Bondage of the Will*; rather, here he sticks to the imagery of analogy, not to the ontological, essential connection between creation and salvation.

But in his great commentary on Genesis, *Vorlesungen über 1. Mose* (1535-1545), Luther makes the connection between creation and grace very clear, even by the way of employing Pneumatological terminology: “But now the gospel has brought about the restoration (*reparetur*) of that image [of God]. ...From this source our other righteousness has its origin, namely, that newness of life through which we are zealous to obey God as we are taught by the Word and aided by the Holy Spirit. ...Moreover, this also is brought about by the gospel, that the Holy Spirit is given to us, who offers resistance in us to unbelief, envy, and other vices... In this manner this image of the new creature begins to be restored by the gospel (*incipit imago ista novae creaturae reparari per euangelium*) in this life, but it will not be finished in this life.”<sup>270</sup>

## **7 A Theology of Paradoxes: Necessity as a Soteriological Concept**

### **7.1 Is God Just?**

Why does it seem that some are chosen to be converted by the effective power of God’s Holy Spirit while others continue in the state of the necessity of immutability in their unbelief and stubbornness without any conversion? *Cur alii et non alii?* Erasmus was very concerned

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<sup>269</sup> Augustine states in his *De spiritu et littera*: “...non quod per naturam negata sit gratia, sed potius per gratiam reparata natura.” *De spir. et litt.* XXVII,47; CSEL 60,201,19-20

<sup>270</sup> WA 42,48,11-28; LW 1,64-65.

about this problem, and he heavily criticized Luther for giving a wrong answer to the question. The solution Erasmus offered was admitting minimal responsibility and freedom to the human side; God is not responsible for anyone's destruction, only a wrong human choice is to be blamed. This is the only way of maintaining the credibility of the full justice and goodness of God.

In discussing the question of *omissio Spiritus sancti*, Luther does this when explaining certain biblical figures who seem to be exceptions to the general rule. It is evident that Luther is quite deliberately cautious when touching upon this delicate theological problem; it is more likely that, according to him, here we come to an area of divine mystery which is by no means transparent to us. Refusing the infusion of the Spirit may be part of God's providence, but the reasons for doing so are not transparent or understandable to any human being. Luther avoids saying much about the question for which no specific revelation exists and which clearly exceeds the capacity of the human reason to comprehend. There is an even more important reason: the human beings should not try to intrude themselves into the mystery which belongs solely to the Holy Majesty.

Luther discusses the question at length in relation to biblical interpretation: Why did God not change the mind of the pharaoh by the effective power of his Holy Spirit, but let the pharaoh continue to harden his heart in accordance with the idea of the necessity of immutability? The evil will must go on until it is stopped and changed by something that is more powerful than human resistance to God; why did God not do this in the case of pharaoh?

Luther's solution to the dilemma was a distinction between the concepts of "the revealed (or self-revealing) God," *Deus revelatus*, and of the "hidden (or self-hiding) God," *Deus absconditus*.<sup>271</sup> God reveals his universal saving will and activity in Jesus Christ. His word must be preached to all so that as many as possible might be given the saving grace. Fredrik Brosché sees Luther's distinction between the revealed (*Deus revelatus*) and hidden God (*Deus absconditus*) in terms of the *usus* or practice of God and the *notitia* or the knowledge or mind of God.<sup>272</sup> On the *notitia* level, i.e., in regard to knowing who is to be elected and why

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<sup>271</sup> On Luther's distinction between *Deus revelatus* and *Deus absconditus*, see Blanke 1928, Bandt 1958, Adam 1963, Hermann 1981, and Matsuura 1984. On the historical background of the concept of *Deus absconditus*, see Weier 1967.

<sup>272</sup> On the distinction between the two levels, and on the overall problem of predestination in Luther's writings, see

and how, we are in total darkness; it is a secret of *Deus absconditus* about which we have no knowledge at all. It is the specific divine property of God to know and to decide matters like this; trying to speculate about such decisions proves to be arrogance typical of Satan and of the sinner who thinks him/herself to be a god.<sup>273</sup> After all, Luther shows no interest in speculating about the divine psychology of predestination; he refuses the right to theorize about the potential decisions and actions of God – what God might or might not do. Instead, he concentrates on what God is actually doing in his salvific historical deeds. In fact, Luther prefers the concept of “election” to that of “predestination,” the notion of election is more biblical and more suitable to his theological use.<sup>274</sup>

In Luther’s view, we are compelled to be content with and to restrict ourselves to the *usus* level of election, i.e., to revelation, according to which we know that God wills everyone to be saved. Christ died for everyone, the church must preach conversion, both in the sense of law and gospel, to everyone, and deliver the sacraments, thus extending the media of divine grace to all. This is how God calls his elect to his kingdom; it is not up to any human being or human instance to decide whether someone belongs to the elect or not. On the whole, Luther’s concern on election does not concentrate on the question of how the divine election is analytically applied to individuals but rather focuses on the perspective of the totality of God’s saving activity in the human world.<sup>275</sup>

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Brosché 1978. On Luther’s concept of predestination, see also Erikstein 1957, Rost 1966, Schwarzwäller 1970, Reinhuber 2000,208-226, and Härle & Mahlmann-Bauer 2009; on its relation to the later confessional Lutheran development, see Söderlund 1983,20-28. For a comparison of Luther’s understanding of predestination with Augustine, see Nygren 1956. On Luther’s dialectic concept of God in *The Bondage of the Will*, see Martikainen 1997 and Reinhuber 2000,132-143.

<sup>273</sup> “We now understand why Luther designated affliction concerning predestination as diabolical. It is an attempt by the individual to use his own judgment in translating awareness of predetermination from the *notitia* to the *usus* level. This is also an illustration of the original sin of trying, in disbelief, to usurp knowledge which belongs to God alone.” Brosché 1978,142.

<sup>274</sup> Emil Brunner comments on Luther: “Er erkennt, daß diese Prädestinationslehre spekulative, natürliche Theologie ist, und erfaßt den biblischen Erwählungsgedanken als Erwählung in und durch Jesus Christus.” Brunner 1946,349. Robert Kolb says: “When the term ‘predestination’ occurs in *De servo arbitrio*, however, it is mostly used in a more general way than specifically to refer to the salvation of the elect.” In the years after 1525, Luther became hesitant regarding the use of this term. Kolb 2005,39. On the concept of election in Luther and Lutheranism, see Liefeld 2006.

<sup>275</sup> Brosché, 1978,208, says: “The particularism which is implied by the concept of *Deus absconditus* is in fact overshadowed. Here, the truth seems to be that the doctrine of predetermination has no relevance whatever on the *usus* level.”

As we saw above, in Section 4.2, for Luther, neither predestination nor election are metaphysical problems to be solved; these terms express a doctrine which is needed for practical use. What interests Luther is the actual use of these ideas in Christian proclamation for the purpose of the conversion and salvation of sinners; it would be no exaggeration to say that his interest is mainly pastoral and practical. In *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther maintains that the very little the human beings can say about the inscrutable decisions of the Holy Majesty involves two elements of the *usus* level of election: law and gospel. According to Luther, the notion of predestination belongs to the content of the Christian faith because, first, it frightens the sinner by shaking the foundations of his/her self-righteousness by showing the inability of the sinner to do anything for his/her own salvation – here predestination is law. Second, the notion of election serves the proclamation of the gospel as an expression of the immutability of the saving will and of the plan of salvation of the Triune God. As such, it brings consolation and assurance of salvation to those who are crushed by the anxiety about their own eternal destiny and are weak and uncertain in their faith – here election is gospel (we will focus on this second aspect in Section 7.2).

The notion of predestination as law means showing the sinner that he/she cannot by any means of his/her own approach God, please him, or do anything for his/her own salvation. The human being lives as the captive of sin and Satan, having no freedom of choice, no possibility of making a decision to change the transcendental orientation and premises of his/her own life. The eternal salvific decision of God has all the initiative in saving sinners, God will eventually save those whom he, by his eternal and immutable decision, had elected to be in Christ and to share his forgiveness and grace. When defending his position against the claims of Erasmus, Luther emphasizes that the purpose of the doctrine of God's predestination in Christian proclamation and teaching is to drive the human being into desperation (*ad desperationem de se*) about his/her own possibilities of being saved.

God, who reveals himself in his word, wills that all the human beings be saved. But the hidden God makes decisions and choices which are fully incomprehensible and utterly beyond human knowledge and understanding. God's justice cannot be comprehended by humans: *iustitia sua sit incomprehensibilis*. The hidden will of God does not follow the logic of human reasoning, as Erasmus would demand, Luther does not permit God's will the transparency required by Erasmus. Luther turns polemically against Erasmus who makes no distinction between the revelation and the concealment of God. In Luther's view, God's will

itself is the norm and rule for itself, it cannot be subjected to any other principle or rule outside itself: *nulla est causa nec ratio; ipsa est regula omnium*. Luther explains:

“*Diatribes*, however, deceives herself in her ignorance by not making any distinction between God preached (*Deum praedicatum*) and God hidden (*Deum absconditum*), that is, between the Word of God (*verbum Dei*) and God himself (*Deum ipsum*). God does many things that he does not disclose to us in his word; he also wills many things which he does not disclose himself as willing in his word. Thus he does not will the death of a sinner according to his word; but he wills it according to that inscrutable will of his (*voluntate imperscrutabili*). It is our business, however, to pay attention to the word and leave that inscrutable will alone. For we must be guided by the word and not by that inscrutable will (*verbo enim nos dirigi, non voluntate illa inscrutabili oportet*). After all, who can direct himself by a will completely inscrutable and unknowable?”<sup>276</sup>

Luther maintains that we must be content with adhering to God’s revelation and salvific actions, to the level of *usus*, revealed and given to us in God’s word. Trying to expose God’s “logic,” asking why God does what he does is a question arising from curiosity based on religious pride and philosophical hubris. It is the very nature of God that we cannot know his mind or understand his decisions. By definition, *Deus absconditus* is the majesty whose decisions “we have no right to inquire,” *non licet quaerere*. The human attempt to penetrate the divine mind is totally a futile effort. God’s hidden will cannot be scrutinized, it can only be respected and worshipped in humility.<sup>277</sup> In faith, the human being should trust that God is good and, therefore, he also is righteous and just. Luther goes on explaining his meaning:

“It is enough to know simply that there is a certain inscrutable will in God, and as to what, why, and how far it wills, that is something we have no right whatever to inquire into (*non licet quaerere*), hanker after, care about, or meddle with, but only to fear and adore. . . . But why that majesty of his does not remove or change this defect of our will in all men, since it is not in man’s power to do so, or why he imputes this defect to man, when man cannot help

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<sup>276</sup> WA 18,685,25-686,1; LW 33,140.

<sup>277</sup> Werner Otto does not see here the main point of Luther, the humiliation of human religious pride. Rather, Otto neutralizes Luther’s dialectic by assimilating the idea of the hidden God with the notion of the revealed God. Otto 1998,265-265,270-271. Similarly, Thomas Reinhuber also fails to see here Luther’s intention to humiliate the naturally proud human being. Reinhuber 2000,225-226.



having it, we have no right to inquire (*quarere non licet*); and though you may do a lot of inquiring, you will never find out.”<sup>278</sup> “You cannot judge God,” Luther means.

Here are two more statements which confirm Luther’s position here: “And who are we that we should inquire into the cause of the divine will (*ut voluntatis divinae causam quaeramus*)? It is enough to know that God so wills, and it is becoming for us to reverence, love, and adore his will, putting a restraint on the rashness of reason.”<sup>279</sup> “...we must not ask the reason for the divine will (*voluntatis vero divinae rationem quaerendam non esse*), but simply adore it, giving God glory that, since he alone is just and wise, he does no wrong to anyone and can do nothing foolishly or rashly, though it may seem far otherwise to us. With this answer the godly are content.”<sup>280</sup>

Now again, Luther defends his basic theological conviction: Let God be God! It is an expression of miserable human religious arrogance trying to explain the inscrutable mind and will of God. Luther demands humility instead of pride. His teaching on the hidden God is deeply rooted in his theology of the cross and in his rhetoric of proclaiming the gospel: let human pride be destroyed, this shall make the human being needful of grace, and let God be God who saves the humans *sola gratia* and therefore deserves their praise and adoration. Erasmus, in fact, admits: “For there are some secret places in the Holy Scriptures into which God has not wished us to penetrate more deeply (*adyta quaedam, in quae Deus noluit nos altius penetrare*) and, if we try to do so, then the deeper we go, the darker and darker it becomes, by which means we are led to acknowledge the unsearchable majesty of the divine wisdom, and the weakness of the human mind.”<sup>281</sup> Erasmus does not specify what these secrets in Scripture are, nor is there any reference to God’s election, he refers to Romans 11:33 and Isaiah 40:13. Erasmus wishes here to emphasize in a general sense the inscrutability of the Holy Scripture.

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<sup>278</sup> WA 18,686,1-3,8-11; LW 33,140.

<sup>279</sup> WA 18,695,31-34; LW 33,155.

<sup>280</sup> WA 18,632,23-26; LW 33,61.

<sup>281</sup> *Diatribes* Ia7; Walter, 5,17-21; LCC 17,38.

Luther addresses Erasmus' accusation of teaching an "unjust and cruel" God by reflecting his own experience of being desperate about his own inability to be certain of salvation:

"Admittedly, it gives the greatest possible offense to common sense or natural reason that God by his own sheer will (*mera voluntate sua*) should abandon, harden, and damn men... It has been regarded as unjust, as cruel, as intolerable, to entertain such an idea about God... And who would not be offended? I myself was offended more than once, and brought to the very depth and abyss of despair, so that I wished I had never been created a man, before I realized how salutary that despair was, and how near to grace (*gratiae propinqua*)."<sup>282</sup>

Luther himself explicitly says that he uses paradoxical expressions here. He uses his paradoxical rhetoric with the intention of annihilating the secret pride of the self-pious and of destroying the juridical logic of the "just" God promoted by Erasmus: "This is the highest degree of faith, to believe him merciful when he saves so few and damns so many, and to believe him righteous when by his own will he makes us necessarily damnable, so that he seems, according to Erasmus, to delight in the torments of the wretched and to be worthy of hatred rather than of love."<sup>283</sup>

The most extreme statement in *The Bondage of the Will* maintains: "It is likewise the part of this incarnate God to weep, wail, and groan over the perdition of the ungodly, when the will of the Divine Majesty purposely abandons and reprobates some to perish (*voluntas maiestatis ex proposito aliquos relinquat et reprobet, ut pereant*). And it is not for us to ask why he does so, but to stand in awe of God who both can do and wills to do such things."<sup>284</sup> Here Luther sets against each other *Deus revelatus*, Jesus lamenting over the hardness of his people, and *Deus absconditus*, his Father not granting them conversion by the power of his Spirit. There are no other equally strong statements in Luther's magnum opus; consequently, there is no reason to draw extreme conclusions from this one sentence.

In sum, for Luther, God is the hidden Sovereign, *Deus absconditus*, whose good will and providence is most often disguised under the opposite of his true nature. God's "logic" is that

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<sup>282</sup> WA 18,719,4-12; LW 33,190.

<sup>283</sup> WA 18,633,15-19; LW 33,62-63.

<sup>284</sup> WA 18,689,32-690,2; LW 33,146.

of his “hiddenness under the contrary,” *absconditas sub contrario*. Combining the question about God's election with the notion of *Deus absconditus* is perfectly in line with Luther's *theologia crucis*: the cross of Christ reveals that God acts in ways diametrically opposite to common human expectations.<sup>285</sup> The theology of the cross annihilates human speculation about any divine psychology or logic and completely ruins all grounds for the natural man's bargaining with God.

Luther discusses the very difficult question of why God let Adam fall into sin in the first place. And moreover, why, then, does he not by the power of his Holy Spirit change all the evil wills, which he, however, can use as instruments of his providence: “But why does he not at the same time change the evil wills that he moves? This belongs to the secrets of his majesty, where his judgments are incomprehensible (*incomprehensibilia sunt iudicia eius*). It is not our business to ask this question, but to adore these mysteries. . . . The same must be said to those who ask why he permitted Adam to fall, and why he creates us all infected with the same sin, when he could either have preserved him or created us from another stock or from a seed which he had first purged. He is God, and for his will there is no cause or reason that can be laid down as a rule or measure for it (*cuius voluntatis nulla est causa nec ratio, quae illi ceu regula et mensura praescribatur*), since there is nothing equal or superior to it, but it is itself the rule of all things (*ipsa est regula omnium*). For if there were any rule or standard for it, either as cause or reason, it could no longer be the will of God. For it is not because he is or was obliged so to will that what he wills is right, but on the contrary, because he himself so wills, therefore what happens must be right (*quia ipse sic vult, ideo debet rectum esse, quod fit*). Cause and reason can be assigned for a creature's will, but not for the will of the Creator, unless you set up over him another creator.”<sup>286</sup>

Here we see clearly the peculiarity of Luther's theological thinking: God's will is all in all, the monergistic sovereignty of the divine will utterly humiliates human religious reasoning. For God's actions, there are no “logical” causes and consequences reasonable to human comprehension; God's own will is the rule for itself. Erasmus requires transparent and fair

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<sup>285</sup> Klaus Schwarzwäller has chosen an appropriate title for his book on *The Bondage of the Will: Theologia crucis*. See Schwarzwäller 1970,142. On Luther's emphasis on the theology of the cross, see also Loewenich 1976, McGrath 1985, and Mannermaa 2010,27-43.

<sup>286</sup> WA 18,712,24-38; LW 33,180-181.

rules in God's dealing with humanity; Luther denies all that. For him it is the typical feature of God being God that he does not follow human logic in his dealings; nor is there any *lex aeterna* above his will ruling his decisions. This is exactly what makes him God and not just a projection of the human imagination. Luther loves to exploit this imagery of *Deus absconditus* for destroying human rationality and religious pride involved with self-justification. This is how Luther uses the concepts of *Deus absconditus* and his *notitia* as law soteriologically in order to make the sinners desperate of themselves – this desperation is the necessary preparation for grace, not the free contrition and search for God or morally pleasing deeds as Erasmus would assume.

In his final “Confession” at the end of *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther once more touches on the theme of the hidden *notitia* and decisions of *Deus absconditus* – this could even be seen as the climax of his magnum opus.<sup>287</sup> Ultimately, Luther's theology is a praise of the sovereignty of the Holy Trinity - “letting God be God.” This shows how important it was to him to stop measuring God's righteousness by the logic of human justice and rationality, and fully – we might even say blindly – to trust God's righteousness and mercy: “...there must be at least some acknowledgement of his divine wisdom so that he may be believed to be righteous where he seems to us to be unjust. For if his righteousness were such that it could be judged to be righteous by human standards, it would clearly not be divine and would in no way differ from human righteousness. But since he is the one true God, and is wholly incomprehensible and inaccessible to human reason (*totus incomprehensibilis et inaccessibilis humana ratione*), it is proper and indeed necessary that his righteousness also should be incomprehensible (*iustitia sua sit incomprehensibilis*)... But they would not be incomprehensible if we were able in every instance to grasp how they are righteous.”<sup>288</sup> It

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<sup>287</sup> On the special role of Luther's “Confession” in *The Bondage of the Will*, see Reinhuber 2000.

<sup>288</sup> WA 18,784,8-16; LW 33,290. Robert Kolb comments on these words of Luther: “This confession of God's total otherness, superiority, and lordship and the total dependence of the human creature upon the Creator is Luther's fundamental response to the question of God's justice. His faith clings to the person of his Creator, and in him, as he revealed himself in Jesus Christ, Luther found sufficient response to the unanswerable question.” Kolb 2005,65.

Luther is in agreement with Augustine who, referring to Romans 11:33 and 9:14, emphasizes the inscrutable wisdom and righteousness of God in persuading sinners to conversion. *De spir. et litt.* XXXIV,60; CSEL 60,220,20-221,4. The Pelagians thought that God would be unjust to judge those who had not received the gift of faith from God. Eleonore Stump concludes the following about Augustine's response: “As for the question *why* God wouldn't be unjust and *why* God gives this grace to some and not to others, Augustine takes refuge in the claim that God's judgments are inscrutable to us. Clearly, this is less than an optimally satisfactory conclusion.” Stump 2014,178.

seems as if Luther, in a hyperbolic and sarcastic manner, wishes to thwart and mock any attempt to master the mystery of divine graceful action.

There is no satisfactory answer to the question of God's election as a theoretical problem; the only alternative left is to concentrate on the practical or pastoral level of the dilemma.<sup>289</sup> As we have seen, there is a certain distinction between the *usus* level and the *notitia* level in Luther's understanding of divine predestination or election. The pastoral work of the Christian church is attached to the *usus* level of God's action and it consists of preaching conversion both as law – i.e., as demands and exhortations to repent, not to harden oneself – and as gospel – i.e., as God's "conversion" toward sinners, his descent into to the human world in Christ the crucified and in the Holy Spirit, who makes the righteousness of Christ an actual reality in human life. This is how Luther himself preached and counseled his flock. But, on the other hand, on the hidden level of *notitia*, God is the divine, secret Majesty, whose will and decisions are concealed from his creatures. Human reason is curious and wants to ask questions concerning the decisions made by the self-hiding God. But reason receives no answers; there is only an answer to the humble faith which trusts the will of God is good and just even though to human reason it does not seem so.

Once again here we see how Luther's conception of divine saving activity can be properly understood only on the basis of his theological mode of thinking, consisting of various distinctions: *duo regna*, *se inferior* and *se superior*, *voluntas* and *arbitrium*, law and gospel, *usus* and *notitia*, and finally: *Deus revelatus* and *Deus absconditus*. Luther's theology cannot be comprehended without noting the dichotomous nature of his theological thought and method. In his "Confession" at the end of *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther wishes to conclude his overall defense against Erasmus' criticism of an "unjust and cruel" God by referring to human vanity and arrogance which, in vain, try to measure divine righteousness by the standards of the human concept of justice: "...what is this perversity that makes us attack

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<sup>289</sup> According to Marilyn J. Harran Luther was reluctant, possibly for a pastoral motive, to discuss divine election and the human being's possible responsibility in resisting the Holy Spirit. Basing her argument on Luther's writings prior to 1520, Harran says: "The relationship between God's election and man's own responsibility for continuing on the path of disobedience is a complicated one and Luther avoided discussing it, believing that it might lead to doubt and fearful wonderings on the part of his listeners." Harran 1983,91-92.

God's righteousness and judgment only, and make such claims for our own judgment as to wish to comprehend, judge, and evaluate the divine judgment?"<sup>290</sup>

As we already have seen, in *The Bondage of the Will* Luther follows Augustine in that there is no rationally satisfactory explanation for the origin of evil or the problem of theodicy: Why did the Fall take place in the first place? "In this way he [God] finds the will of Satan evil, not because he creates it so, but because it has become evil through God's deserting it (*non autem creans, sed deserente Deo*) and Satan's sinning..."<sup>291</sup> Luther's argument implies a genuine Augustinian notion: no goodness exists independently, anything deserted by God is by definition evil, because God himself is the source and the sustainer of all goodness, he himself being the supreme good. According to Luther, the human beings must be content with the fact that the final solution to the problem of God's justice is an eschatological one. Only after this human history, in the new creation, might we get some understanding of why evil could enter good God's good creation, and to our questions why God acted as he did when dealing with evil and sin. "...he has promised us that when he reveals his glory we shall all both see and feel that he has been and is righteous."<sup>292</sup>

Here again we see the difference of the two paradigms or *formae Christianismi* in Luther and Erasmus: Luther is the theologian of the cross and humility in the face of the absolute sovereignty and mystery of the Triune God, whereas Erasmus is a thinker of justice and rational logic, focusing on the human conditions for receiving divine grace. Erasmus' "detestable and unjust God" is exactly the true God for Luther. It is the main intention of Luther's theology of the cross to destroy all possibility of boastful self-justification in the human's relation to God. He devotes his theology to the utmost demonstration of the *sola gratia* of the Triune God in his dealings with humanity.

Luther explicitly maintains that the relationship between God and the human being is not one which could be measured in rationally acceptable juridical terms of the "rights" of the human. It is a relationship of being based on the sole divine will and mercy; interpreting Paul in Romans 9, Luther says: "Paul is thus putting a check on the ungodly, who are offended by

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<sup>290</sup> WA 18,784,24-26; LW 33,290.

<sup>291</sup> WA 18,711,7-8; LW 33,178.

<sup>292</sup> WA 18,784,32-34; LW 33,290.

this very plain speaking when they gather from it that the divine will is fulfilled by necessity on our part, and that very definitely nothing of freedom or free choice remains for them, but everything depends on the will of God alone (*omnia in solius Dei voluntate pendere*). The way he checks them, however, is by bidding them be silent and revere the majesty of the divine power and will, in relation to which we have no rights (*in quam nos nullum ius*), but which in relation to us has full right to do whatever it pleases. Not that any injustice is done to us, since God owes us nothing (*neque fieri nobis iniuriam, cum nihil nobis debeat*), has received nothing from us, and has promised us nothing but what suits his will and pleasure.”<sup>293</sup>

It is the very foundational theological intention of Luther to crush all human delusions about the natural logic of reciprocal giving and receiving, i.e., the axiom of *facere quod in se est*, according to which God gives the human being his/her due if he/she only first does what he/she can. The truth is that as God’s creature the human being cannot communicate with his Maker on an equal basis; the relationship is solely the relation between a subject and a master. Luther intends to demonstrate the perfect freedom and sovereignty of the Omnipotent who will convert and save whom he wishes, when he wishes.

This God is the hidden God, the ultimate grounds of whose decisions remain concealed from us; if God were obliged to explain his reasons to human beings, he would no longer be God. His will cannot be affected or directed by any external cause, his absolutely free will is restricted by no compulsion or necessity from outside, but it itself is the very *prima causa* of everything: *ipsa est regula omnium*. The goodness of his will cannot be measured by any external criteria of logic: *nulla est causa nec ratio*. His will is not “just” because it may be consistent with some concept of goodness or justice which human beings are able to comprehend; the case is quite the opposite: God’s will itself is the criterion of goodness: something is good, if it caused by the will of God.

Erasmus was worried about the justice of God; in order to save the goodness of God he would rather restrict the function of divine omnipotence in relation to human will than to proclaim the absolute efficacy of divine will. “No harm can come to us from a God who is by nature just (*nec ulli posse fieri iniuriam a Deo natura iusto*)” is what Erasmus proclaimed as good

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<sup>293</sup> WA 18,717,32-39; LW 33,188.

news.<sup>294</sup> The solution of Luther, in contrast, manifests the absolute freedom and immutability of the hidden will of *Deus absconditus*, this will being to no extent affected by any kind of human psychic activity. There is no way of guaranteeing that such a God is just. For Luther the question about the goodness and justice of God is totally a matter of faith; the problem of theodicy is not overcome by reducing the omnipotence of God and by increasing active responsibility on the human side. It is Luther's theological passion not to reason about the inner logic of the hidden God. Instead, Luther wants to create extremes: It is the very nature of true faith to believe that God “has been and is righteous,” even in the face of facts which seem to contradict his goodness.

After all, believers satisfy themselves with the thought: “...since he alone is just and wise, he does no wrong to anyone (*nulli faciat iniuriam*) and can do nothing foolishly or rashly, though it may seem far otherwise to us. With this answer the godly are content.”<sup>295</sup> In the last resort, God's justice shall not be verified to human reason until the Last Day – the verification is an eschatological reality – now the human being must be content with putting his/her trust in the concealed goodness of God, who, however, has revealed himself enough in order to convince the human beings of his saving mercy and grace.<sup>296</sup>

## 7.2 Focus on the Certainty of Salvation

One of the main motives for Luther to underscore the bondage of the human choice – in fact, one of the main reasons to write *The Bondage of the Will* in the first place to confute Erasmus' criticism – was to fight the natural human self-boasting, arrogance, and hidden pride in matters of faith and religion. He especially wished to expose those who are “secretly proud” of their “minimal” contribution to their own salvation. Luther employs a soteriological use for the concept of *servum arbitrium*, the opposite of the concept of *liberum arbitrium* advocated by Erasmus.<sup>297</sup> The denial of human freedom in matters “above oneself” and the

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<sup>294</sup> *Diatribes* Ia8; Walter, 6, 19-20; LCC 17, 39.

<sup>295</sup> WA 18, 632, 24-26; LW 33, 61.

<sup>296</sup> Jun Matsuura comments on Luther's concept of God in *The Bondage of the Will*: “Die Frage nach dem *Warum* des göttlichen Handelns... bleibt unbeantwortet und muß es für Luther bleiben.” Matsuura 1984, 84.

<sup>297</sup> On the Augustinian origin of the term *servum arbitrium*, see note 16 above.



emphasis of the necessity of immutability expressing the slavery of the human will are a powerful way of exercising the second use of the law for Luther. This is extreme rhetoric used for describing the slavery of humanity and its desperate need of God's efficient grace. This becomes very clear when he speaks about how the "humiliation of our pride" (*humiliatio nostrae superbiae*) and the true knowledge and participation in God's saving grace (*cognitio gratiae*) belong together:

"God has assuredly promised his grace to the humble, that is, to those who lament and despair of themselves (*deploratis et desperatis*). But no man can be thoroughly humbled until he knows that his salvation is utterly beyond his own powers, devices, endeavors, will, and works, and depends entirely on the choice, will, and work of another, namely, of God alone. For as long as he is persuaded that he himself can do even the least thing (*tantulum*) toward his salvation, he retains some self-confidence and does not altogether despair of himself (*nec de se penitus desperat*), and therefore he is not humbled before God (*coram Deo*)... But when a man has no doubt that everything depends on the will of God, then he completely despairs of himself (*prorsus de se desperat*) and chooses nothing for himself, but waits for God to work, then he has come close to grace, and can be saved. It is thus for the sake of the elect that these things are published, in order that being humbled and brought back to nothingness (*in nihilum redacti*) by this means they may be saved. The rest resists this humiliation, indeed they condemn this teaching of self-despair, wishing for something, however little (*modiculum*), to be left for them to do themselves; so they remain secretly proud and enemies of the grace of God (*hi occulte manent superbi et gratiae Dei adversarii*)."<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> WA 18,632,28-633,5; LW 33,61-62. Luther had used the idea of "being reduced to nothingness" (*in nihilum redigitur*) in a similar way in his *Lectures on Romans* (1515-1516); WA 56,386,24-27. Explaining his 16<sup>th</sup> thesis in the Heidelberg disputation, Luther underscores the notion of humility and humiliation over against the principle of *facere quod in se est*. WA 1,360,28-361,5. In the sermon which Luther preached in Leipzig on 29 June, 1519 just prior to the famous disputation, he develops in a remarkable way the theme: despairing of oneself is the way to grace; despair is actually the only possible *praeparatio* for grace. See, for instance, WA 2,248,9-13. In 1521, repudiating the idea of *liberum arbitrium*, Luther revealed his theological programme to Jacob Latomus: *gratiae Dei et nostrae miseriae cognitio*. WA 8,56,12-14. In his extensive analysis of Luther's concept of *nihil*, Sammeli Juntunen has demonstrated how being a Christian means being *nihil ex se* and being constantly made nothing through the *opus alienum Dei*. After that, a Christian becomes an object of God's creating and justifying divine love. See Juntunen 1996.

In his rhetoric against Erasmus, Luther aims at the total humiliation and the utter annihilation of the natural man's hidden spiritual pride. The human being must become totally "desperate about oneself (*desperatio de se*)" and "be reduced to nothingness (*in nihilum redacti*)," facing even the horrible possibility that he/she is left outside God's saving grace and shall face eternal separation from God's goodness. Luther loves paradoxes, and he openly admits this in *The Bondage of the Will*. Here the paradox is: any person who has become totally "desperate about him/herself" is, paradoxically, already in the state of grace. He/she has lost all self-confidence in his/her capacity of meeting God's requirements or is completely in *aporia* about his/her certainty of salvation – and paradoxically, with no experience of security in what he/she has done or how he/she feels – he/she has right there been "raptured" into divine saving grace.<sup>299</sup>

The ideas of "desperation about oneself" and "reduction to nothingness" are both law and gospel: They are employed by Luther for destroying human pride and making the human being needful of God's love and mercy. But they also are concepts paradoxically directed towards the certainty of salvation; these ideas foster the freedom of the Christian from worrying about his/her eternal destiny. When the human being is "reduced to nothingness," one's salvation is entirely and completely dependent on God's work, it is fully taken off his/her own influence and control, and the certainty of salvation becomes possible because it is one hundred percent *extra se*, outside the human being, *sola gratia Dei*.

When looking at the personal history of Martin Luther, we are reminded of his anxiety about his uncertainty of salvation at a young age. He was deeply perplexed about his own spiritual situation, he was very worried about whether he is among the elect or belongs to the damned *massa perditionis* left outside divine saving grace. The question about the certainty of

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<sup>299</sup> Luther also teaches the same paradox in his *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/1535): "...maxime adest nobis, cum maxime sumus impotentes ac desperationi proximi." WA 40/1,584,24-25. He taught similarly in his earlier *Commentary on Galatians* (1519); WA 2,458,26-28. In his *Lectures on Romans* (1515-1516) Luther made rather an extreme statement: the best people are those "who in effect resign themselves to hell if God so wills, as is probably the case with many at the hour of death. These people are perfectly cleansed of their own will and the 'prudence of the flesh.'" WA 56,388,10-13; LW 25,378.

In the German-language theology from the 1930s to the 1970s *Predestinationsanfechtung* was a prominent theme in Luther research. Under the influence of existentialist theology, Luther's remarks on "the depth and abyss of despair" were seen as an existential struggle over one's uncertainty about belonging to God's elect. See Koivisto 2012,153. Our study, however, points to the fact that here Luther rather, using extreme rhetoric, emphasizes the total incapacity of the human soul to "do what one can" as a preparation for salvation. This is a powerful way of criticizing the principle of *facere quod in se est*.

salvation became a crucial issue for the young monk Luther. He suffered from the experience of not being able to create the right attitude of “contrition of love” for confessing his sins during the sacrament of Penance, he could not freely love God, and could not be sure that he had confessed all of his sins. In one word: he felt that he was unable to create the required psychic conditions for his relationship with God; this drove Luther into uncertainty and despair.<sup>300</sup> Against this background, it is no wonder that, at the age of 42, when writing *The Bondage of the Will*, the same theme, in retrospect, was still very relevant for Luther. And even much later, in his *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/1535), Luther forcefully fought against “the pestilence of uncertainty which has infected the entire church of the pope.”<sup>301</sup>

The distinction between the concepts of *Deus revelatus* and *Deus absconditus* helped Luther solve the problem of the certainty of salvation. The Holy Scripture clearly teaches the universal saving will of *Deus revelatus*; consequently, a sinner can trust in divine benevolence. But even more importantly, because God has taken the question of salvation completely “outside ourselves (*extra nos*)” into his own hands, this results in perfect peace in the scruples of salvation. For Luther, *Deus absconditus* is a way of speaking about the sovereign divine mercy and the human being’s assurance of salvation which is not within his/her own control. Paradoxically, both of the concepts of God, the revealed and the hidden God, serve the same end of the assurance of salvation.

Besides the negative concept of “necessity of immutability” (see Section 4.2 above), Luther employs the term *necessitas* for a strong positive soteriological use. Employing the idea of necessity is for Luther a way of speaking about the gospel in an extreme manner: it is good news about the monergistic power of saving divine grace, *sola gratia*.<sup>302</sup> It is a distinctive feature in Luther’s argumentation that he is aware of the Medieval philosophical debate on the various interpretations of the idea of necessity, but he does not take part in those discussions; he employs the concept for his soteriological use in defense of his core idea of

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<sup>300</sup> On the religious uncertainty of the young Luther concerning election and reprobation, see Bainton 1950,39-66, and Brecht 1981,82-88.

<sup>301</sup> WA 40/1,591,27-28. In his *Lectures* Luther recalls his spiritual experiences of uncertainty and despair as a young monk; WA 40/2,91-93.

<sup>302</sup> Wolfgang Behnk comes to a similar conclusion: in Luther’s theology, the necessitarian features of the divine will should be seen an extension of God’s *Heilswille*. Behnk 1982, 251-254.

*sola gratia*. In *The Bondage of the Will*, the idea of necessity belongs solely to the “things above oneself,” *res se superior, coram Deo*.

Luther is not aiming at a satisfactory philosophical solution to the problem of free choice, rather he intends to demonstrate theologically that without divine grace and the efficient work of the Holy Spirit the human being remains in the state of unfaith and in the servitude of evil, freely and willingly, without any coercion or constraint, doing what his/her master Satan wants him/her to do. He/she is unable *suis viribus* to change this situation. The inner orientation of the human being cannot be changed by any external compulsion or force; such a change can be brought about only by God’s Holy Spirit who touches the innermost person of the human being, *Spiritus intus movens*. As we have seen above, Luther’s view of “the necessity of immutability” is a confession of the total incapability of the human being to do the least thing in order to be freed from the bondage of unbelief, sin, and evil. It is a confession of sin and simultaneously a plea to the living God that he might send his Spirit to liberate the human from his/her servitude of Satan and to draw him/her into the realm of God’s saving *gratia increata*.

God’s will has simultaneously both potentiality and actuality (*et potentia et actus*): it not only wills something but it also effects and accomplishes what it wills: “For the will of God is effectual and cannot be hindered (*voluntas enim Dei efficax est, quae impediri non potest*), since it is the power of the divine nature itself (*naturalis ipsa potentia Dei*); moreover it is wise, so that it cannot be deceived.” This will of God happens *necessario et immutabiliter*, Luther emphasizes.<sup>303</sup> As a contrast to God’s efficient will which is both potential and actual, Luther underlines the impotence of the human will: “...to say that a man does not seek for God is the same as saying that he cannot seek for God (*non potest requirere Deum*).”<sup>304</sup>

Because God is the only necessary being, his will also happens necessarily: the necessity of God’s existence coincides with the necessity of his will. The contingent will of the contingent creatures cannot affect this divine will. According to Luther’s theological scope, this divine will is the benevolent will for creation and redemption. For this reason, those who have been taken into grace, can be absolutely sure and free of care for their salvation. Luther strongly emphasizes the soteriological assurance of God’s unchangeable will: “Here, then, is

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<sup>303</sup> WA 18,615,33-35; LW 33,38.

<sup>304</sup> WA 18,762,18-20; LW 33,255.

something fundamentally necessary and salutary for a Christian, to know that God foreknows nothing contingently, but that he foresees and purposes and does all things by his immutable, eternal, and infallible will.”<sup>305</sup> Paradoxically, Luther’s treatise on the bound will becomes a manifest of the Christian’s freedom.<sup>306</sup>

Luther links the necessary and immutable good will of God with his promises given in his historical revelation recorded in Scripture: “For if you doubt or disdain to know that God foreknows and wills all things, not contingently, but necessarily and immutably (*non contingenter sed immutabiliter praesciat et velit*), how can you believe his promises and place a sure trust and reliance on them? For when he promises anything, you ought to be certain that he knows and is able and willing to perform what he promises.”<sup>307</sup> Here Luther clearly combines the idea of God’s will necessarily happening with the certainty of the promises of salvation, not on a philosophical speculation on the relation between God’s “foreknowledge” and the “necessity” of the events. Luther looks at these concepts from the perspective of *sola gratia*; his argumentation is not philosophical but soteriological.

Luther’s position becomes very clear in his statement a bit later: “Therefore, Christian faith is entirely extinguished, the promises of God and the whole gospel are completely destroyed, if we teach and believe that it is not for us to know the necessary foreknowledge of God and the necessity of the things that are to come to pass (*praescientiam Dei necessariam necessitatemque faciendorum*). For this is the one supreme consolation of Christians in all adversities, to know that God does not lie, but does all things immutably (*immutabiliter omnia facit*), and that his will can neither be resisted nor changed nor hindered.”<sup>308</sup> For Luther, the concept of *necessitas* is serving the more important soteriological concept of *promissio Dei* which brings about the assurance of faith and salvation. The idea of the necessity of immutability applied to God is a divine attribute saying that God is simultaneously both absolute love and infinitely omnipotent. So comprehended, Luther’s

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<sup>305</sup> WA 18,615,12-14; LW 33,37.

<sup>306</sup> Gerhard O. Forde sums up: “Luther is finally the champion of freedom in the debate!” Forde 2005,43. For a further elaboration of Luther’s concept of freedom, see Forde 1982 and 1995. See also Pesch 1963 & 1985 and Schwarzwäller 2004.

<sup>307</sup> WA 18,619,1-5; LW 33,42.

<sup>308</sup> WA 18,619,16-21; LW 33,43.

necessitarianism is quite opposite to the picture of the "unjust, insane, and cruel" God painted by Erasmus.

Luther ends his magnum opus with his "Confession." Here he reveals the deepest motivation for his fight against the dogma of free choice and for his defense of the monergistic doctrine of *sola gratia*. The climax of Luther's work is a combination of theological and pastoral interests, defending the core of the authentic *forma Christianismi* and the true certainty of faith. When recalling his own personal history and his experiences of religious anxiety as a young man, this kind of emphasis is understandable; here Luther explicitly refers to his earlier experiences. He does not want to have any responsibility for his own salvation but leaves it fully in God's hands. This is the only way to achieve authentic and full assurance of salvation. It is the very intention of Luther to make salvation certain on the grounds that salvation is by no means dependent on the human agent, but it is fully a gift given *sola gratia*. The notion of divine election makes grace certain; if justification were to any extent, even to the very minimum, dependent on the disposition and receptivity on the human side, it would be uncertain.

Luther begins his "Confession": "For my own part, I frankly confess (*ego sane de me confiteor*) that even if it were possible, I should not wish to have free choice given to me, or to have anything left in my own hands by which I might strive towards salvation. For, on the one hand, I should be unable to stand firm and keep hold of it amid so many adversities and perils and so many assaults of demons, seeing that even one demon is mightier than all men, and no man at all could be saved; and on the other hand, even if there were no perils or adversities or demons, I should nevertheless have to labor under perpetual uncertainty and to fight as one beating the air, since even if I lived and worked to eternity, my conscience would never be assured and certain how much it ought to do to satisfy God. For whatever work might be accomplished, there would always remain an anxious doubt whether it pleased God (*reliquus esset scrupulus, an id Deo placeret*) or whether he required something more, as the experience of all self-justifiers proves, and as I myself learned to my bitter cost through so many years. But now, as God has taken my salvation out of my hands into his, making it depend on his choice and not mine (*Deus salutem meam extra meum arbitrium tollens in suum receperit*), and has promised to save me, not by my own exertion but by his grace and mercy. I am assured and certain (*securus et certus sum*) both that he is faithful and will not lie to me, and also that he is too great and powerful for any demons or any adversities to be able

to break him or to snatch me from him. ...Moreover, we are also certain and sure (*certi sumus et securi*) that we please God, not by the merit of our own working, but by the favor of his mercy promised to us...<sup>309</sup>

Paradoxically, this seeming lack of worry about one's own relationship with God is a paramount expression of the full trust in the goodness of the Triune God whose good will and promises of salvation cannot be doubted. This kind of thrusting oneself on abundant divine grace is a hallmark of Luther's theology. Luther's vision of grace is totally theocentric: Saving grace, being fully the gift of the Triune God, is grace with no doubts, with no uncertainty, because God and his promises cannot lie or fail. Therefore Luther, who as a young monk had suffered so much from his uncertainty whether his repentance and his disposition toward God would be sufficient and pleasing to God, declares the absolute theocentric certainty of salvation, independent of its receiver: "God has taken my salvation out of my hands into his, making it depend on his choice and not mine." The theocentric model of salvation is the only model providing the perfect peace of conscience and sufficient satisfaction of mind for a sinner. It is remarkable that the Pneumatologically verified certainty of salvation is also a major theme in Luther's *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/1535), another major theological treatise of his: "God has also sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, as Paul says here. Now Christ is completely certain that in his Spirit he is pleasing to God. Since we have the same Spirit of Christ, we, too, should be certain that we are in a state of grace (*debemus certi esse nos esse in gratia*), on account of him who is certain."<sup>310</sup>

On the basis of our analysis of *The Bondage of the Will*, we may come to the conclusion that the concepts of necessity, predestination, and election all are, for Luther, soteriological concepts which emphasize the salvation which comes as a perfect gift, with no human initiative or cooperation involved. These concepts debated in Late Medieval theology, in fact, are not very typical of Luther's own authentic theological thinking, but he uses them in his own "evangelical" way to emphasize the sovereign and monergistic divine grace. Considering

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<sup>309</sup> WA 18,783,17-37; LW 33,288-289. Klaus Schwarzwaller, 1970,131, sees the certainty of salvation as a main motif of *The Bondage of the Will*: "So gewi Gott wahrhaftig ist und wir Lugner, so gewiss und sicher ist uns darum unser Heil – wenn denn tatsachlich gilt, da Gott alles versieht und nichts dem Zufall oder gar dem homo mendax berlassen bleibt." Wolfhart Pannenberg, 1957, also connects Luther's notion of election with his search for the certainty of salvation.

<sup>310</sup> WA 40/1,577,20-23; LW 26,378-379. Luther discusses the question of the certainty of salvation extensively; see WA 40/1,574-579,586-591. We will take a closer look at Luther's *Lectures* in Section 8.2.

Luther's abrupt and concise statements in his *Assertio*, Erasmus may have had a reason to accuse Luther of teaching an "unjust and cruel" God. But Luther's answer to Erasmus, his great treatise, shows that the God taught by Luther is above all the God of eternal, immutable love and mercy. The problem of necessitarianism and predestination culminates in an insight into the inscrutable works of *Deus absconditus*, a perspective which negates all possibilities of human activity in relation to justification. Observing this leads to the notion that Luther's theology is best characterized as *theologia crucis*, God working *sub specie contrario*: He leads the human being into total despair as to his/her possibilities of acquiring grace in order to offer his grace to the sinner as a perfect gift without any prerequisites on the human side.

We might conclude that Luther's wrestling with the riddle between self-security and theocentric security is one of his most salutary contributions to theology. David Ford sums up Luther's position accurately: "He was acutely aware of the constant temptation of Christian communities, and especially their theologians, including himself, to find a security that is not the paradoxical security of being so utterly without security that one cries out to God and then is granted the security of the crucified Jesus Christ."<sup>311</sup>

## **8 A Comprehensive View of Luther's Doctrine of Grace**

### **8.1 The Three Dimensions of Grace**

The following is a systematization of Luther's doctrine of grace based on his *The Bondage of the Will*. But, as we have seen during the course of our study, it can be supported by a number of other works of Luther, especially those written during the time of the conflict between him and Erasmus and thereafter, reflecting the more mature phase in his theological development.

We could say that the Pneumatological conception of grace and justification in *The Bondage of the Will* is a variation on the same doctrine of divine grace which is present in a predominantly Christological form in many of Luther's other writings. It comprises both the aspect of the Holy Spirit being the efficient cause of conversion, the Augustinian emphasis on *gratia praeveniens* (contra Nominalism, but basically in agreement with Scholasticism), the aspect of a union with

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<sup>311</sup> Ford 2017,10.



Christ in the Holy Spirit, and the Augustinian notion of the human being's participation in *gratia increata* (contra the Scholastic concept of habitual grace, and diverging from the Nominalist notion of divine acceptance).

For instance, Luther's *Lectures on Galatians* of 1531 (published in 1535) teaches the same Augustinian principles of *gratia praeveniens* and of *gratia increata* principally in terms of Christology – also including the clear traits of Pneumatology – whereas *The Bondage of the Will* teaches the same doctrine principally in terms of Pneumatology. Justifying grace is not, as the Scholastics thought, the supernatural habitus of the human soul presented by divine grace and perfected by the cooperation of grace and of the human being thus becoming *gratia creata* or *iustitia acquisita*, a quality of the human soul. According to Luther, grace is the personal presence of Christ or the Holy Spirit of Christ in the innermost secrecy of man. On the basis of this *donum increatum* or *prima sive aliena iustitia*, the human being is perfectly justified *coram Deo*; what follows then as *secunda sive nostra iustitia*, or as *gratia cooperans* in Augustinian terminology, does not affect the human being's eternal destiny. In *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther touches only slightly upon this aspect of cooperative grace (see below), but what he means is compatible with the way he had expressed the doctrine of *secunda iustitia* in his other works.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Luther's *Lectures on Galatians* of (1531/1535) is an important source expanding and deepening his doctrine of grace. We will discuss this in the following Section 8.2. According to Tuomo Mannermaa's analysis of this work of Luther, justification is understood as the real-ontic union of a sinner and Christ; Christ and the sinner become "one and the same person." In accordance with the notion of *gratia increata*, Christ himself, dwelling in the faith of a Christian, is understood as the righteousness on the basis of which a sinner is righteous *coram Deo*. The human being is not given any supernatural quality of righteousness, as Scholastic theology taught, but Christ himself enters the life of the sinner, thus becoming the personal righteousness of the sinner. This understanding of Luther leads to a reinvigoration of the Patristic doctrine of deification, says Mannermaa: "Die Personen Christi und des Gläubigen werden im Glauben eins, was auf die Gefahr hin, des Heils verlustig zu gehen, nicht voneinander getrennt werden darf. Luther scheut sich nicht davor zu folgern, daß der Mensch im Glauben zu 'Gott' wird. Dieser im Protestantismus in Vergessenheit geratene Gedanke ist – richtig ausgelegt – ein organischer Bestandteil der Glaubenstheologie Luthers." Mannermaa 1989,52. A similar interpretation of Luther's *Lectures on Galatians* is offered by Martikainen 1987,83-88.

Simo Peura noted that it is typical of Luther in his earlier period to understand the terminology of Christological grace and the terminology of Pneumatological grace as nearly synonymous ways of speaking of one and the same reality. For a quote, see note 79 above; Peura 1990a,211-212.

Alistair E. McGrath sees a close affinity between Luther's Pneumatological and Christological terminologies as well, the former being Augustinian in tone: "...the relationship between *caritas* and the Holy Spirit is to be regarded as analogous to that between *iustitia* and Christ." McGrath 1985,85. McGrath, however, overlooks the Augustinian notion of the Holy Spirit, as the fulfilment of God's law of love, representing righteousness.

## **(1) The conversion of the sinner by the power of God's Holy Spirit**

On the basis of our analysis of *The Bondage of the Will*, we can come to the conclusion that Luther's comprehensive understanding of the doctrine of grace has three dimensions. (Point 1) The first aspect is the Augustinian notion of *gratia praeveniens*. The sinner has no ability to freely become contrite and change his/her mind or heart from the state of unbelief to faith. It is only the prevenient and effective action of the Holy Spirit which can touch the total personality of the sinner, make him/her contrite, needful of Christ and of God's forgiveness. Only God's Spirit can bring about conversion and create faith and trust in Christ and in the fruits of his cross and resurrection. Analyzing this first dimension of Luther's doctrine of grace is the main content of the present work, so we do not repeat here things already made clear above.

## **(2) Justification of the Sinner through Forgiveness of Sins and in Union with Christ**

(Point 2) Second, the Holy Spirit not only changes the unbelieving sinner, but he even makes Jesus Christ the Savior truly and personally present in the person of the human being whom he has converted. Because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and of the Father, it means that the Triune God himself enters the human person and remains dwelling in him/her.

In Luther's theology, the justification of the sinner has two aspects – Luther overcomes the divide between forensic and participatory approaches to salvation. (Point 2a) On the one hand, justification for Luther means *favor Dei*, the forgiveness of sins in the sense of the forensic and juridical declaration of the guilty non-guilty on the basis of the penal substitution of Christ on his cross. The guilt of the sinner is imputed to Christ, and the forgiveness of sins based on the atonement and redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ by his sacrifice on the cross is imputed to the sinner thus making him/her acceptable to God. The forensic-judicial aspect of justification means both the declaration of forgiveness and true and real participation in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The juridical aspect of justification, emphasizing the atonement and forgiveness in the blood of Jesus, is not a major theme in *The Bondage of the Will*, but it is clearly implied by Luther even in this work of his, showing that it is an integral part of his doctrine of grace. For instance, when criticizing those in favor of free choice, Luther says: "They do not believe that

Christ is their advocate with God, and obtains grace for them by his own blood...they abandon him as a Mediator and most merciful Savior, and count his blood and his grace of less value than the efforts and endeavors of free choice.”<sup>313</sup> Refuting Erasmus’ teaching that “the higher part” of the human soul, i.e., free choice, is intact, Luther states: “To sum up: If we believe that Christ has redeemed men by his blood, we are bound to confess that the whole man was lost; otherwise, we should make Christ either superfluous or the redeemer of only the lowest part of man, which would be blasphemy and sacrilege.”<sup>314</sup> Moreover, the juridical concept of imputing our guilt to Christ and his righteousness to us, all this reckoned (*reputare*) to the sinner through faith, is strongly emphasized in Luther’s comments on Romans 4 in *The Bondage of the Will*. He concludes: “He [Paul] repeats the word ‘reckoning’ (*reputandi*) nearly ten times in this chapter.”<sup>315</sup>

(Point 2b) On the other hand, justification means that divine grace in the sense of the concrete gift at hand, *donum Dei*, is given to the sinner: The gifts, forgiveness of sins, and the Giver, Christ himself, enter the human person at the same time. Christ is not just sending his gifts to the sinner from afar but he enters the person of the sinner in his own person. Thus, the fruit of the work of Christ, his cross and resurrection, as well as the qualities of his righteous and holy person, are simultaneously given to the sinner. The sinner participates both in the work, the cross and the resurrection of Christ, and in his personal righteousness and holiness. These all are given as free gifts to the sinner. “A happy exchange,” *commercium admirabile* (*fröhlicher Wechsel*), takes place: the personal properties of Christ – the merits of his work and his righteousness and holiness – are all imputed to the sinner, and the properties of the sinner – his/her guilt and all filth – are imputed to Christ. Justification means the indwelling of Christ in his Holy Spirit in the sinner, this results in a personal union, in an intimate union, between the two persons of Christ and the sinner, *unio cum Christo in Spiritu sancto*.

One might with good reason ask: Does Luther’s *The Bondage of the Will* really represent such a doctrine of grace in which an intimate personal union between Christ and the sinner are crucially important? Or are we reading into his text some preconceptions which are not

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<sup>313</sup> WA 18,778,12-16; LW 33,280.

<sup>314</sup> WA 18,786,17-20; LW 33,293.

<sup>315</sup> WA 18,772,18; LW 33,271.

truly there? In fact, the main theological theme of Luther's magnum opus is to prove and show that the third person of the Holy Trinity, the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, is the only real living agent and power which can bring about a change in the sinner's relation to God. The Holy Spirit is by definition a divine reality that effectively touches, moves, and then enters the human being's person. The entrance of the Holy Spirit into the human person takes place through the various functions of the human psyche, such as will, intellect, memory, and emotion, and then goes deeper into the "heart" or "spirit," i.e., the innermost secrecy of the human person. The Spirit uses the readable, audible, and sacramental media of God's word, entering the innermost part of the human being through bodily and psychic elements. "The vehicles of the Spirit" (*vehiculi Spiritus*) used by the Triune God when entering the sinner, are primarily the written, spoken, and sacramental word of God. In Luther's biblical realism, *per definitionem* the Spirit is a unitive power, a reality connecting the Triune God's life with the life of his creatures.

As we have seen (see Section 5.3 above), Luther is keen to follow Paul's Trinitarian theology of grace, especially clearly expressed in Romans 8. Being in the state of grace equals the fact of being "in the Spirit," not "in the flesh"; this means that "the Spirit of God dwells in you." Anyone lacking "the indwelling Spirit of Christ," which is a synonym of "the Spirit of God," is lacking grace and salvation. Having the Spirit equals the Pauline soteriological axiom: *Christos en humin*. By definition, Luther follows the Pauline logic of the Trinitarian mode of divine grace which *eo ipso* implies the fundamental idea of the indwelling of the Holy Trinity in the justified sinner.<sup>316</sup> Commenting on Romans 3, Luther says: anyone "unless justified through the Spirit (*nisi Spiritus iustificentur*)," shall be damned.<sup>317</sup>

The same principle informs Luther's interpretation of the Johannine writings. When interpreting John 3:3,6, in a similar manner Luther equates justification of the sinner with the reception of the Holy Spirit: "We call ungodly anyone who is without the Spirit of God, for Scripture says it is to justify the ungodly that the Spirit is given (*Spiritum donari, ut impium iustificet*)."<sup>318</sup> And again: "For there is need of the Spirit of Christ, without whom all our

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<sup>316</sup> See Luther's extensive comments on Romans 8: WA 18,774,17-775-5; LW 33,274-275.

<sup>317</sup> WA 18,760,38-39.

<sup>318</sup> WA 18,743,27-29; LW 33,227.

works are nothing else than damnable (*Spiritus enim Christi opus est, sine quo nihil sunt omnia nisi damnabilia*).<sup>319</sup>

As we have seen throughout the present study, there are numerous other expressions in *The Bondage of the Will* which strongly imply the idea that being taken into the state of grace, i.e., being justified *coram Deo*, equals the human will being changed by the efficacious power of God's Spirit and, consequently, the person becoming a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. The conversion of the sinner by the power of the Spirit and the intimate union of the sinner with the Holy Spirit of Christ and of his Father belong together. Luther follows the Augustinian axiom: God's Spirit does not change the human person outwardly from a distance but by his intimate, intrinsic presence and influence in the innermost part of the person.<sup>320</sup> In Luther's theology the actuality of divine saving grace and the presence of the Spirit of Christ and of the Father are one and the same reality. Here are just some examples of Luther's vocabulary in *The Bondage of the Will*: "...God cares nothing for your correctors without the Spirit, since they are hypocrites. But the elect and the godly will be corrected by the Holy Spirit, while the rest perish uncorrected."<sup>321</sup> Saving grace and the Holy Spirit, *gratia vel Spiritus*, are synonyms which always belong together in Luther's vocabulary in *The Bondage of the Will*.<sup>322</sup>

The fruits of the cross are given to the human being by the indwelling Spirit. The gospel is equated with the forgiveness of sins, which Christ accomplished on his cross, and is now given as the Spirit and grace of God: "For in the New Testament the gospel is preached, which is nothing else but a message in which the Spirit and grace are offered with a view to the remissions of sins, which has been obtained for us by Christ crucified..."<sup>323</sup> In a peculiar

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<sup>319</sup> WA 18,765,36-37; LW 33,260.

<sup>320</sup> Augustine emphasizes that God's Spirit works "intrinsically," not "outwardly" in the human heart: "Cum igitur haec appareat distantia veteris et novi testamenti, quod lex ibi in tabulis, hic in cordibus scribitur, ut quod ibi forensicus terret, hic delectet intrinsecus, ibique fiat praeuaricator Spiritum..." *De spir. et litt.* XXV,42; CSEL 60,196,11-15.

<sup>321</sup> WA 18,632,3-6; LW 33,60.

<sup>322</sup> See, for instance: WA 18,635,6; 636,17; 663,17; 664,11; 688,20; 696,31; 698,13.

<sup>323</sup> WA 18,692,21-22; LW 33,150.

manner Luther connects the cross with the Spirit by saying: Christ “purchased for us at the price of his shed blood the Spirit (*Christus...fuso sanguine Spiritum...nobis emit*).”<sup>324</sup>

In both aspects of justification, the juridical forgiveness and the personal union, the righteousness given to the sinner remains “alien justice,” *iustitia aliena*, the gifts of the cross and personal righteousness are the properties of Christ, not of the human person, they are given as gifts from outside to him/her. In this sense, both God’s *favor*, forgiveness of sins , and his *donum*, the gift of the presence of the Holy Spirit of Christ in the sinner, mean forensic justification based on the alien righteousness of Christ himself. This is an important notion because in Luther research often only the *favor* aspect of justification is seen as forensic, and the *donum* aspect is interpreted as effective justification or sanctification which implies a habitual change in the person. But as a matter of fact, for Luther, both *favor* and *donum* are the gifts of the *iustitia aliena* of Christ presented to the sinner, and they both are realities that are “infused” to the sinner by the presence of Christ in his Holy Spirit.<sup>325</sup>

Luther’s comprehensive conception of justification clearly includes both the juridical aspect of justification and justification as a personal union with Christ, *unio cum Christo* – these two aspects belong inseparably together: the fruits of the cross of Jesus are brought to the sinner by Christ who indwells the sinner in his Holy Spirit. Simultaneously, this means participation in divine life and in the personal holiness of Christ. As we have seen, distinct from the understanding of Erasmus, Luther sees the relationship of the human being in terms of an intimate union rather than as a relationship interpreted with rational terms of a just relationship or “fair play” between God and humanity. Justification means a union of being, a union of life (*unio, koinonia*), and participation (*participatio*) of the human being in the very life of the Holy Trinity in the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>324</sup> WA 18,687,2-3. Cf. note 252 above.

<sup>325</sup> In his writings prior to 1525 Luther had already developed the distinction between the two aspects of grace, *favor* and *donum*. A profound representation of the two aspects of grace is included in Luther’s treatise against Jacob Latomus, his critic in Louvain: *Favor* and *donum* both are gifts *extra nos* and they together form the reality of *tota gratia* which is “entirely infused” (*in totum effundantur*) into the sinner. The difference between the two concepts is in Luther’s emphasis of *favor* as grace which is the full forgiveness of all sins, and his understanding of *donum* as grace which “heals the sinner from sin and from all the corruption of his/her soul and body.” These two are both fully the gift of Christ’s *iustitia aliena*, and they belong inseparably together. See *Rationis Latomianae confutatio* (1521), WA 8,106,35-107,36.

### (3) Sanctification as an Increasing Ability to Love, Enabled by God's Holy Spirit

(Point 3) The third dimension of Luther's doctrine of grace emphasizes new life in the Holy Spirit of the Father and of Christ: the resurrected Jesus Christ begins to live his new life in the justified sinner in his Holy Spirit. As a "newborn" person the believer participates in the resurrected life of Jesus Christ. This snatches the human person into a process of change: by the power of the indwelling Spirit, he/she is taken into a life-long movement of healing and sanctification. Here Luther can agree with the Augustinian notion of *gratia sanativa*, healing grace; Luther himself employs concepts such as "second grace (*gratia secunda*)" or "second righteousness (*iustitia secunda*)."

"First grace (*gratia prima*)" or "first righteousness (*iustitia prima*)" has become a reality when the Holy Spirit creates conversion and faith in the sinner (point 1), and when the sins are forgiven since Jesus Christ indwells the sinner presenting the fruits of his cross and resurrection as well as his own righteousness and holiness to him/her (point 2). Second grace or second righteousness means an increasing control of the believer by the Holy Spirit, which will gradually result in real changes in the sinner's life, in sanctification, enabling the believer to love God and the neighbor more.

Luther follows the Augustinian Trinitarian idea according to which God's substance is love and Spirit simultaneously. Because the Holy Spirit is the pure divine love, he is also the perfect fulfilment of God's law of love.<sup>326</sup> The more fully the believer participates in God's Spirit, or the more the believer is filled by the Spirit, the more he/she will love God and neighbor and fulfill God's will in his/her own life.<sup>327</sup> This is not a requirement for justification but its free and spontaneous result and fruit of justification facilitated by God's Spirit. The extent to which the justified sinner will eventually be changed will not have any influence on his/her eternal salvation which is based solely on the gifts of the cross, of the resurrection, and of the personal righteousness of Christ.

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<sup>326</sup> Cf. Section 5.2 above.

<sup>327</sup> Simo Peura emphasizes the simultaneity of divine love and the Holy Spirit in Luther's conception of sanctification: "Die *caritas Dei* und der Heilige Geist bewirken somit im Menschen die fröhliche, willige und reine Gesinnung des Herzens und ermöglichen dadurch auch die Liebe zu Gott und zum Nächsten." Peura 1990a,139.

Following Augustine's teaching, Luther can state in *The Bondage of the Will* that the good works of love, which God gives the justified sinner through his Spirit as gifts, can, in fact, once received from God, be called "our own works": "I ask you, cannot things rightly be said to be ours which we have admittedly not made ourselves but have received from others? Why, then, should not the works be called ours that God has given us through the Spirit (*donavit nobis Deus per Spiritum*)? Are we not to call Christ ours because we have not made him but only received him?"<sup>328</sup> What Luther says here is based on the reality of the union: Because of the intimate union of Christ with the believer, his good deeds are presented as gifts to the justified sinner and, therefore, these good works become the shared deeds of Christ and of the human being. Christ and the believer share the same good deeds which are divine gifts to the believer. Accordingly, these good deeds can be simultaneously called "Christ's works" and "our works."

The notion of the Augustinian *gratia cooperans* is not strong in *The Bondage of the Will*; Luther concentrates on the question of the first grace, *gratia praeveniens*, and this is quite understandable because his dispute with Erasmus concerns the very initiation of faith through grace. But in *The Bondage of the Will* there are clear hints of the concept of the second righteousness; for instance, Luther says that "we may cooperate with" God "inside his kingdom by the special virtue of his Spirit (*nos ei cooperaremur...intra regnum suum singulari virtute Spiritus sui*)."<sup>329</sup> Luther speaks about "cooperation" (*cooperatio*) of the justified sinner with the Triune God under the influence of the Holy Spirit: "We too know that Paul cooperates with God (*Paulos cooperatur Deo*) in teaching the Corinthians... He also cooperates with God when he speaks by the Spirit of God (*Deo cooperatur, cum loquitur in Spiritu Dei*), and both do the same work." Similarly, the justified sinners can cooperate with God's Spirit: "Then, when he acts by the Spirit of grace in those whom he has justified, that is, in his kingdom, he actuates and moves them in a similar way (*similiter eos agit et movet*), and they, inasmuch as they are his new creation, follow and cooperate (*sequuntur et cooperantur*), or

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<sup>328</sup> WA 18,696,22-26; LW 33,156.

<sup>329</sup> WA 18,754,6-7; LW 33,243. The notion of *continua purgatio peccati* leading to *sanatio* was present in Luther's *Assertio* of 1520; WA 7,107,7-13. Harry J. McSorley, 1969,362, complains that Luther denies the genuinely Catholic notion of the human being's cooperation with God's grace. As our study has shown, this is true in relation to *gratia praevenies* which affects contrition, conversion, and faith; but in fact, Luther accepts the idea of cooperation in the third dimension of his doctrine of grace, the sanctification of the justified sinner.



rather, as Paul says, they are led [Rom. 8:14].<sup>330</sup> So, the believers are first moved by the Holy Spirit, and thereafter, led by the Spirit, therefore, they can cooperate with the Spirit.

Once being newly created by the Spirit, the justified sinner is called into the active service of God; God works in and through the believer enabling him/her to cooperate with God: "...it is for this he has created and preserved us, that he might work in us and we might cooperate with him (*ut in nobis operaretur et nos ei cooperaremur*), whether outside his kingdom through his general omnipotence, or inside his kingdom by the special virtue of his Spirit (*virtute Spiritus sui*). ...But he does not work without us (*non operatur sine nobis*), because it is for this very thing he has recreated and preserves us, that he might work in us and we might cooperate with him (*ut operaretur in nobis et nos ei cooperaremur*). Thus, it is through us he preaches, shows mercy to the poor, comforts the afflicted."<sup>331</sup> In fact, Luther already presented, in his *Lectures on Romans* (1515-1516), his conception of *prima gratia* covering the conversion and justification of the sinner (points 1 and 2 in our analysis) and of *secunda gratia* which enables the believer to "cooperate" with God's grace in the process of sanctification (our point 3).<sup>332</sup>

Luther's affinity with the doctrine of cooperating grace is most clearly visible in his conception of *duplex iustitia* which he presented thematically in his *Sermo de duplici iustitia* (March, 1519).<sup>333</sup> According to Luther, the "first righteousness" (*prima iustitia*) is the work of God who converts the sinner and imparts faith. Furthermore, *prima iustitia* is the *aliena iustitia* which presents the merits of Christ to a sinner as an extrinsic reality *ab extra infusa*; this righteousness

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<sup>330</sup> WA 18,753,25-27,33-35; LW 33,242. According to Augustine, God first, without any cooperation from the human side, effects in the human being the power to will what God wills; but once the human being begins to will, God cooperates with him. "Ut ergo velimus, sine nobis operatur; cum autem volumus, et sic volumus ut faciamus, nobiscum cooperatur." *De grat. et lib.* XVII,33; PL 44,901. From *radix caritatis* – who is the Spirit himself – grows good fruit; God's Spirit may change the orientation of the human *arbitrium* instantly, but vices and the bad inclinations of the human *voluntas* need a longer process of correction: "Non enim fructus est bonus, qui de caritatis radice non surgit. Porro autem si adsit fides, quae per dilectionem operatur, incipit condelectari legi Dei secundum interiorem hominem, quae delectatio non litterae, sed Spiritus donum est, etiamsi alia lex in membris adhuc repugnant legi mentis, donec in novitatem, quae de die in diem in interior homine augetur, tota vetustas mutata pertranseat liberante nos de corpore mortis huius gratia Dei per Iesum Christum Dominum nostrum." *De spir. et litt.*, XIV,26; CSEL 60,180.24-181,4

<sup>331</sup> WA 18,754,5-7,14-16; LW 33,243.

<sup>332</sup> WA 56,379,2-17.

<sup>333</sup> The sermon was printed and published in Leipzig in March 1519; Luther had probably written it already at the end of 1518; *Sermo de duplici iustitia* (1519), WA 2,

is perfectly sufficient for the justification of the sinner before God.<sup>334</sup> The first righteousness is given to the sinner via Baptism and renewed through the sacrament of Penance. In Baptism, original sin is forgiven and reconciled because the sacrament unites the sinner with Christ (*unus cum Christo*) who “absorbs” the original sin into himself.<sup>335</sup> What Luther says here about *prima iustitia* comprises the aspect of grace as the efficient cause in the form of an infused reality *ab extra* and the aspect of the substantial grace as *increated* and *aliena*, not becoming an intrinsic part of the soul.

The “second righteousness” (*secunda iustitia*), according to Luther's *Sermo de duplici iustitia*, is the result of the cooperation of the human being with the first righteousness given to him/her. Here Luther's view resembles clearly Augustine's concept of *gratia cooperans*: “*Secunda iustitia est nostra et propria...cooperemur illi primae et alienae.*”<sup>336</sup> Luther's terminology becomes explicitly Pneumatological in his *Sermo*. If the first grace takes away the consequences of the original sin and thus justifies the sinner, the aim of the second righteousness is to overcome actual sins in the Christian's life; this happens by “mortifying flesh and crucifying one's own lusts.” The mortification of actual sins is “the fruit of the Spirit,” the believer, moved by the Spirit, having an active part in surrendering him/herself to the Holy Spirit.<sup>337</sup> Luther introduced in his *Rationis Latomianae confutatio* (1521) a distinction between the concepts of “ruling sin” (*peccatum regnans*) and “ruled sin” (*peccatum regnatum*): although the justified believer remains a sinner, Christ's Holy Spirit can increase his rule over the believer's sins so that real changes become possible.<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> “Duplex est iustitia Christianorum, sicut et duplex peccatum est hominum. Prima est aliena et ab extra infusa. Haec est qua Christus iustus est et iustificans per fidem...” WA 2,145,7-10.

<sup>335</sup> “Haec est iusticia infinita et omnia peccata in momento absorbens, quia impossibile est, quod peccatum in Christo haereat...estque unum cum Christo, habens eandem iusticiam cum ipso. ...Et haec iusticia est prima, fundamentum, causa, origo omnis iusticiae propriae seu actualis...” WA 2,146,12-17.

<sup>336</sup> WA 2,146,36-37. On the idea of cooperation in Luther's theology, see Seils 1962 and Plathow 1985.

<sup>337</sup> WA 2,146,38-147,12.

<sup>338</sup> See WA 8,96,18-24. The Catholic interpreter of Luther, Jared Wicks, says that, although, according to Luther, many sins cannot not be abolished from human life, their effect may be limited by the work of the Spirit; a *peccatum regnans* can be changed into a *peccatum regnatum*. “It is thus the work of the Holy Spirit to purge out the *peccatum regnatum*, so that it will not rise up again to destroy us. But this gift of the Spirit who intends to free us completely by no means implies that our activity ceases...” Wicks 1989,536,543. See also Saarinen 2011,122-124.

But a difference also remains between Augustine and Luther: In the Augustinian tradition, especially in the Scholastic interpretation of it, the emphasis of sanctification is on the habitual change of the human person, created in God's image, into a more righteous and just person. By the power of divine grace and the influence of God's Spirit, the justified sinner is actually changed into a better person. The emphasis of Luther, however, is on the qualities of Christ through the Spirit in the human person: The change means growth and increasing participation in love, which, in fact, is the quality of Christ and his Spirit, not a quality of the human person. Accordingly, all the changes in the justified sinner are based on the growing influence of the presence of Christ in his Spirit in the believer, all the fruits of sanctification are qualities of Christ, not of the human person: "*Ista mutatio est donum et effectus Spiritus sancti.*"<sup>339</sup> Consequently, in Luther's theology of grace, sanctification is more radically Christ- and Spirit-centered than in Augustine and in the Scholastic reception of Augustine.<sup>340</sup>

When Luther describes "the sum of the whole New Testament (*summa totius novi testamenti*)" in *The Bondage of the Will*, he first speaks about the Trinitarian grace and then about the exhortations given in the New Testament to those already justified, being in the state of grace: "Then follow exhortations, in order to stir up those who are already justified and have obtained mercy, so that they may be active in the fruits of the freely given righteousness and of the Spirit (*strenui sint in fructibus donatae iustitiae et Spiritus*), and may exercise love by good works and bravely bear the cross and all other tribulations of the world."<sup>341</sup> The content of this process is the gradually increasing "rule of the Spirit of Christ" in the justified sinner. His/her ability to love God and the neighbor will gradually increase. This will make the person become more and more Christ-like. Luther follows Paul's teaching according to which the conflict between flesh and Spirit will never end in the justified sinner. Christian life is a constant conflict and struggle between the two, until the end of his/her life. But Luther sees it possible that as a result of the increasing control of Christ's Spirit in the human person, the

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<sup>339</sup> This is the basic statement of Luther when he describes the renewal of the believer by the Holy Spirit in his *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/1535). WA 40/1,572,20-21.

<sup>340</sup> On Augustine's teaching on sanctification, see Meconi 2013.

<sup>341</sup> WA 18,693,1-5; LW 33,150.

“fruit of the Spirit” can increase, and, consequently, real changes and real progress are possible.<sup>342</sup>

In Luther’s theological thought, all human beings, on the basis of their rational conscience, basically know the natural moral law of God, or “the law of Adam,” engraved on everybody’s conscience. On the basis of the creation, both Christians and non-Christians have a similar consciousness of what is good or bad, right or wrong: the content of the law is the same for all. Every human being is aware of the law of love: love your God and Maker above all and your neighbor as yourself. He/she also knows the principle of the Golden Rule and the essentials of the Ten Commandments. This is the same as the natural moral law given to the humans in creation, and it enables human beings to do morally good things in God’s “earthly kingdom or regime” in this world (*coram mundo, coram hominibus*), although the human being can never fulfil the requirements of this law in relation to God and, consequently, can never be justified *coram Deo* by the law. Moreover, because of the pride and self-love of the humans, they must constantly be reminded of “the law of Adam” or the law of love engraved on their conscience and taught in Scripture.<sup>343</sup>

What has been said here about the third dimension (point 3) of Luther’s doctrine of grace, the new life of the justified sinner in the Holy Spirit enabling a life-long growth in one’s ability to better love God and neighbor, is more than growth in the Christian’s moral or ethical resources. This all concerns deeply his/her relationship with the Triune God in a deepening union of love, which gradually heals the *imago Dei* in a Christian believer;<sup>344</sup> this shows up in a growing ability to love God and one’s fellow human beings. This progress in God’s “spiritual kingdom or regime” will also increase the ethical resources of a Christian in his/her social and secular life in God’s “earthly kingdom or regime.” The empowerment of the capacity of love *coram Deo*, as a gift of God’s Spirit, will offer significant and relevant resources for the moral behavior of the believer in human society ruled by natural moral law, which, in the last resort, is the law of love engraved on every human conscience by the

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<sup>342</sup> Luther highlights the conflict between “flesh” and “Spirit” in his *Lectures on Galatians*: “Thus there is great comfort for the faithful in this teaching of Paul’s, because they know that they have partly flesh and partly Spirit (*partim carnem partim Spiritum*), but in such a way that the Spirit rules and the flesh is subordinate, that righteousness is supreme and sin is a servant.” WA 40/2,93,19-21; LW 27,74.

<sup>343</sup> On Luther’s concept of law, see Haikola 1981.

<sup>344</sup> See the end of Section 6.2.

Creator. Luther believes that every Christian believer has a special motivation and energy to follow God's will in his/her everyday life. The Holy Spirit of the Father and of Christ empowers the Christian to love others better.

Our analysis of Luther's teaching on Christian life as a growth in love enabled by God's Holy Spirit and realized as cooperation between divine grace and the believer clearly excludes any notion of determinism in Luther's theological thinking. Unluckily, Erasmus was not aware of Luther's teaching on the idea of second righteousness; he accuses Luther of teaching the view that even in the state of grace a Christian "does nothing but sin."<sup>345</sup> This misunderstanding certainly does not match up with Luther's view.

## 8.2 An Amendment of Tuomo Mannermaa's Interpretation of Luther

The three-part structure of Luther's doctrine of grace being the basic structure of Luther's conception of grace in *The Bondage of the Will* can serve as an amendment of Tuomo Mannermaa's interpretation of Luther's doctrine of justification in his *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/1535).<sup>346</sup> Mannermaa's analysis of this important work of Luther's establishes the idea of the justification of the sinner through the personal presence of Christ in the sinner: in a union between Christ and the sinner the sins are "absorbed" and "destroyed" by the divinity of Christ and the sinner participates in the very divine nature and divine life of Christ himself. In a union with Christ, the believer is taken into a process of growth in which the increasing "rule of the Spirit of Christ" and participation in divine love, the essence of divine life, makes him/her more Christ-like. Mannermaa sees a close affinity between Luther and the Patristic concept of *theosis*, deification, although he does not show this connection in detail. There are no references to the church fathers in Mannermaa's work. Moreover, Mannermaa's interpretation exposes the truly Augustinian character of Luther's doctrine of grace: justification as participation in the divinity of Christ means participation in divine life which is love.

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<sup>345</sup> *Diatribes* IV14; Walter, 88, 21-22. Robert Kolb, 2005, 34, also emphasizes that Luther's thinking about God, freedom, and human life is very clearly distinguished "from the determinism of philosophical systems that assign to an impersonal fate the liability for all that happens."

<sup>346</sup> For an earlier interpretation of these *Lectures*, see Bornkamm 1963.

Mannermaa's interpretation of Luther's *Lectures on Galatians* is the foundation of the so-called Finnish school of Luther interpretation. Mannermaa presented his seminal interpretation in his miniature magnum opus *In ipsa fide Christus adest: Luterilaisen ja ortodoksisen kristinuskonkäsityksen leikkauspiste* (Helsinki: Finnische Gesellschaft für Missiologie und Ökumenik, 1979). The English translation is *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).<sup>347</sup> Mannermaa's interpretation of Luther's doctrine of justification in terms of deification has drawn a great deal of attention in Luther research and in modern ecumenical theology.<sup>348</sup> As a student of Mannermaa, I have learned to greatly appreciate my teacher's and my first *Doktorvater's* ingenious ecumenical achievement in his opening up a new perspective on Luther's theology of grace. In the following I shall not introduce Mannermaa's interpretation of Luther as such, but I will only pay attention to some evident problems in his interpretation of Luther's *Lectures*.

As we shall see below in our analysis, Luther's *Lectures on Galatians*, as a matter of fact, includes the same three dimensions of the doctrine of grace which we have found in his *The Bondage of the Will*: (Point 1) The work of God's Holy Spirit is the power creating conversion and justifying faith, *sola fide*. (Point 2) The cross and the resurrection, the work of Christ, are the foundation and the true content of grace; justification *sola gratia* means participation in the sacrificial atonement of Christ which brings about the forgiveness of sins, *favor Dei*, as well as participation in his imperishable life which overcame death (point 2a). But justification also includes the "real-ontic" personal presence of Christ in the sinner, *donum Dei*, or participation of the sinner in the person, righteousness, and divinity of Christ, the incarnated Son of God himself, *unio cum Christo in Spiritu sancto* (point 2b). (Point 3) The Holy Spirit of the Father and Christ, indwelling the person, involves him/her in a life-long process of change, a growth in love in participation through the Holy Spirit in Christ's divine life and love. This is Luther's understanding of sanctification.

All of these three main aspects, which we have already found in *The Bondage of the Will*, are explicit and fundamental in Luther's *Lectures on Galatians* which is the source of Mannermaa's interpretation of Luther's doctrine of justification. The sinner's forensic-

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<sup>347</sup> The English translation by Kirsti Stjerna is a faithful translation of the original Finnish, but there are some slight differences too. I use the English version but check its text with the original Finnish version. See also above, Section 1.3.

<sup>348</sup> Braaten & Jenson 1998; Vainio 2010 & 2004,35-57; Saarinen 2014 & 2017,181-203.

juridical justification and participation in the atonement of the cross, as well as his/her participation in the resurrection of Christ are more explicit in *Lectures* than in *The Bondage of the Will*. Moreover, the notion of the sinner's participation in the divinity of Christ is also more emphasized in the *Lectures*. Now we turn to some of the problems involved in Mannermaa's analysis of Luther.

First, Mannermaa overlooks the Holy Spirit as the sole agent and power which can create the faith that justifies (*sola fide*; point 1). Second, Mannermaa concentrates on the idea of the union between Christ and the sinner basing justification solely on the personal qualities of Christ, especially his divinity, in which the sinner may participate (point 2b); Luther's powerful teaching on the atonement, reconciliation, and redemption on the cross of Christ in his *Lectures* is clearly underemphasized (point 2a), Mannermaa's interpretation is silent in regard to this. Third, Mannermaa lays no emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in the union between Christ and the sinner (point 2a & b); as we have seen so far, the personal union between God and the justified sinner is deeply a Trinitarian reality for Luther, Christology and Pneumatology are substantially inseparable.<sup>349</sup> Mannermaa brings in Pneumatology only when analyzing Luther's idea of Christian life and sanctification (point 3). At this point, our findings in *The Bondage of the Will* and Mannermaa's interpretation of the *Lectures on Galatians* converge; no substantial differences exist here. I will not pay much attention to Luther's teaching on sanctification because here I do not find any significant difference between Mannermaa's and my own reading of Luther's *Lectures*.<sup>350</sup>

In the following, I will demonstrate how Luther himself emphasizes all the mentioned aspects in his *Lectures on Galatians*. Being justified in a personal union with Christ (point 2b) and being taken into the process of change or sanctification (point 3) means simultaneously also being justified because of the faith created by God's Holy Spirit (point 1), and being participating in the atonement in the blood of Jesus resulting in the forgiveness of sins, as well as in his resurrection (point 2a). All these elements are essential in Luther's doctrine of justification in his *Lectures* and in his overall theology. I will relate my own findings to a

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<sup>349</sup> It is quite amazing that in one of his most important articles "Hat Luther eine trinitarische Ontologie" Mannermaa does not pay any attention to the third person of the Trinity as God's soteriological agent but gives this role solely to God's word. In this aspect, Mannermaa echoes the Luther interpreters he criticizes for the lack of classical Trinitarian perspective. Mannermaa 1993.

<sup>350</sup> The second main part of Mannermaa's work is titled "The Presence of Christ in Faith and the Holiness of Christians" and it concentrates on sanctification and growth as a Christian. See Mannermaa 2005,47-86.

critical and creative discussion on Mannermaa's work. In the present exercise, I take my analysis of Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* as a background for my evaluation of Luther's *Lectures* and Mannermaa's interpretation of it.

One might argue that Mannermaa does not link his interpretation of justification as a personal union with Christ with the cross because, in traditional dogmatics, the doctrine of atonement, reconciliation, or redemption belongs to Christology. But in his *Lectures*, Luther explicitly states that the doctrine of atonement and the doctrine of justification are essentially the two aspects of one and the same reality: the gospel of the crucified Jesus Christ and the justification of the sinner through this gospel of grace are two dimensions of the same reality of salvation. In Luther's theology, the gospel of the cross and justification are essentially united, one cannot speak about justification without speaking about the cross and the holy blood of Jesus. It is impossible to create a doctrine of justification without the doctrine of atonement, reconciliation, and redemption.

Luther links the cross and justification in this way in his *Lectures*: "Then there comes, at the appropriate time, the saving word of the gospel, which says: 'Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven' (Matthew 9:2). Believe in Jesus Christ, who was crucified for your sins. If you feel your sins, do not consider them in yourself but remember that they have been transferred to Christ, 'with whose stripes you are healed' (Isaiah 53:3). This is the beginning of salvation. By this means we are delivered from sin and justified and eternal life is granted to us (*hoc modo liberamur a peccato, iustificamur et donatur nobis vita aeterna*), not for our own merits and works but for our faith, by which we take hold of Christ (*propter fidem qua Christum apprehendimus*)."<sup>351</sup> There are several instances in the *Lectures* where Luther clearly and directly links justification with the atonement and redemption on the cross which bring about the forgiveness of our sins.

According to Mannermaa's main thesis in the opening section of his work, the very incarnation of the Son of God brings about the abolition of the sins of all humanity; Mannermaa has no reference to the cross of Jesus. Mannermaa states in the Introduction of his work: "The first part of this study shows that Luther's doctrine of justification rests on the

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<sup>351</sup> WA 40/1,232,16-23; LW 26,131-132. The references here are all, unless otherwise mentioned, to the in 1535 published text of the *Lectures on Galatians*.



Christological thinking of the early church, which he interprets in a particular way. In his human nature, according to Luther, Christ *really* bears the sins of all human beings; in his divine nature, he is eternal righteousness and life. Christ wins the battle between sin and righteousness, and this takes place within his own person. Faith, in turn means participation in the person of Christ. When a human being is united with God, he or she becomes a participant not only in the human but also in the divine nature of Christ. At the same time a ‘communication of attributes’ (*communicatio idiomatum*) occurs: the attributes of the essence of God – such as righteousness, life, power, etc. – are communicated to the Christian.”<sup>352</sup>

Mannermaa adapts the Chalcedonian Christology of the two natures of Christ to a certain type of “personalism” in his interpretation of Luther. In a peculiar way, he equates the Patristic Christological notion of *communicatio idiomatum* with Luther’s favorite term *commercium admirabile* (*fröhlicher Wechsel*; this expression also has Patristic roots). The first concept speaks about the mutual exchange of the two natures of Christ, the latter about the exchange of the qualities of Christ (holiness, righteousness, eternal life, etc.) with the qualities of the sinner (unbelief, sinfulness, corruption, mortality, etc.). The first is an ontological Christological (in fact, a Trinitarian) concept; the latter is a soteriological term. Mannermaa mingles the two.

In Mannermaa’s interpretation, the decisive battle between the powers of evil and righteousness took place in the “person” of Christ; in Mannermaa’s entire work, there is no discussion on the “work” of Christ, his cross and resurrection. Mannermaa says explicitly that Luther “does not separate the person (*persona*) of Christ and his work (*officium*) from each other.” “Instead, Christ himself, both his person and his work, is the Christian righteousness, that is, the ‘the righteousness of faith.’ Christ – and therefore also his entire person and work – is really and truly present in the faith itself (*in ipsa fide Christus adest*). The favor of God (i.e., 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 in the person of Christ.”<sup>353</sup> It is easy to agree with Mannermaa that Christ in person and his work belong together, the Giver and his gifts are inseparable. But this does not mean that we should not pay any distinct attention to the works of Christ, to the historical facts of salvation, the cross and resurrection.

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<sup>352</sup> Mannermaa 2005,8. All italics in my quotations from Mannermaa are by Mannermaa himself.

<sup>353</sup> Mannermaa 2005,5.

Mannermaa explains his understanding of salvation through incarnation: “According to Luther, however, the Logos did not take upon himself merely human nature, in a ‘neutral’ form, but precisely the concrete and actual human nature. This means that Christ *really* has and bears the sins of all human beings in the human nature he has assumed. Christ is the greatest sinner (*maximus peccator, peccator peccatorum*).”<sup>354</sup> In Mannermaa’s subsequent direct quotation Luther says: “In short, he has and bears all the sins of all men in his body (*qui habet et portat omnia omnium peccata in corpore suo*) – not in the sense that he has committed them but in the sense that he took these sins, committed by us, upon his own body, in order to make satisfaction for them with his own blood (*pro illis sanguine proprio satisfactorius*).”<sup>355</sup>

A very long quotation from Luther reproduced by Mannermaa just a bit later demonstrates extensively the Reformer’s idea of atonement and redemption on the cross; in this quotation Luther says, for instance: “...the Son of God is a sinner and a curse...he suffered, was crucified, and died. ...the Son of God was crucified and underwent the torments of sin and death...the suffering Christ, who undertook to bear the person of all sinners and therefore was made guilty of the sins of the entire world (*qui personam omnium peccatorum gerendam suscepit ideoque reus factus est peccatorum totius mundi*).” Quite surprisingly, in his comments Mannermaa ignores Luther’s words about the cross and the atonement.<sup>356</sup>

Mannermaa’s view is based on the idea that salvation happened already in the “person” of Christ when his divine attributes overcame sin and death: “As a human being, Christ is the ‘greatest sinner of all’; at the same time, as the Logos, he is God, the ‘perfect righteousness and life.’ Therefore his person is marked by an extreme tension and a most profound contradiction. By his divine nature Christ is the ‘Divine Power, Righteousness, Blessing, Grace, and Life.’ These divine attributes fight against sin, death, and curse – which also culminate in his person – and overcome them. Hence, there is no sin or death, or curse anymore because ‘all sin is gathered together’ in Christ and he was thus the ‘only sinner.’ It is

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<sup>354</sup> Mannermaa 2005,13.

<sup>355</sup> WA 40/1,433,32-434,12; LW 26,277.

<sup>356</sup> Mannermaa 2005,14-15. Mannermaa quotes WA 40/1,434,29-36; 435,21-436,16; LW 26,278.

important to appreciate that the conquest of the forces of sin and destruction takes place within Christ's own person. He won the battle between righteousness and sin 'in himself.' Sin, death, and curse are first conquered in the person of Christ, and 'thereafter' the whole of creation is to be transformed through his person."<sup>357</sup>

Differing from Luther, Mannermaa needs no reference to the "work" of Christ in order to explain the drama of salvation; concentration on the incarnation and the "person" of Christ is enough for him. This, of course, can be seen as an essential part of the drama, but why should Mannermaa be silent on the other essential parts: Where is the drama of the cross and resurrection, so important for Luther and, of course, for Paul whom Luther is interpreting in his *Lectures*? Mannermaa explicitly states: "Salvation is participation in the person of Christ."<sup>358</sup> He continues to explain: "It is a central idea of Luther's theology that in faith human beings *really* participate in the person of Christ, and in the divine life and victory that come with him. Or, to say it the other way round: Christ gives his person to us through faith. 'Faith' means participation in Christ, in whom there is no sin, death, or curse. ...In Luther's view, faith is a victory precisely because it unites the believer with the person of Christ, who, in himself, *is* the victory. ...Christ himself *is* life, righteousness, and blessing, because God is all this 'by nature and in substance.' Therefore, justifying faith means participation in God's essence in Christ."<sup>359</sup> Moreover, Mannermaa adds, participation leads to the "happy exchange" in which "Christ takes upon himself the sinful person of a human being and bestows his own righteous person upon him or her."<sup>360</sup>

In Mannermaa's explanation, the victory of Christ took place at his incarnation; he does not refer to the cross or resurrection as a victory over evil powers – this is the essential truth for Luther. Consequently, in Mannermaa's interpretation, salvation means participation in the person, the divine attributes, and the divine essence of Christ – participation in the cross and resurrection of Christ is never mentioned by him, although it is several times clearly mentioned by Luther in the quotations reproduced by Mannermaa.

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<sup>357</sup> Mannermaa 2005,16.

<sup>358</sup> Mannermaa 2005,16.

<sup>359</sup> Mannermaa 2005,16-17.

<sup>360</sup> Mannermaa 2005,17.

After these explanations, Mannermaa quotes extensively from Luther's *Lectures*; in this quotation Luther explains the profound meaning of the atonement on the cross and of the resurrection of Jesus as the foundation of salvation and justification. In Mannermaa's quotation Luther, explaining Christ as "the Propitiator and Cleanser of the church," says for instance: "For, according to the theology of Paul, there is no more sin, no more death, and no more curse in the world, but only in Christ, who is the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world, and who became a curse in order to set us free from the curse (*qui factus est maledictum, ut nos a maledicto liberaret*). . . . But the true theology teaches that there is no more sin in the world, because Christ, on whom, according to Isaiah 53:6, the Father has laid the sins of the entire world, has conquered, destroyed, and killed it in his own body. Having died to sin once, he has truly been raised from the dead and will not die anymore (*Is semel mortuus peccato, resuscitatus vero ex mortuis, amplius non moritur*)."<sup>361</sup> In spite of quoting this text of Luther, Luther's teaching on the cross and the resurrection are left unremarked by Mannermaa.

In many of the quotations from Luther used by Mannermaa, the Reformer himself speaks about the atonement and redemption on the cross as the foundation and essence of grace and justification. Without the cross of Christ, there is no gospel, no forgiveness, and no grace. In his analysis Mannermaa does not pay attention to this aspect. In the following I will pick up some further evidence from Luther's *Lectures* on the importance of the cross; these are quotations not used by Mannermaa. Unfortunately, so far, no proper research on Luther's comprehensive teaching on the doctrine of atonement exists. It may well be that it would be difficult to do such research because Luther employs a variety of biblical and traditional concepts and imagery of atonement, reconciliation, and redemption; Luther probably has not a systematic view of the various dimensions of the cross. Here a plurality of views prevails in Christian theology; the church has never created any detailed or normative doctrine of the cross.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> Mannermaa 2005,17-18. WA 40/1,445,19-32; LW 26,285-286.

<sup>362</sup> "Indeed, while the conviction of redemption through Christ has always been the motive force of Christian faith, no final and universally accepted definition of the manner of its achievement has been formulated to this day." Kelly 1958,163.

Atonement and redemption by the blood of the Son of God is a frequent theme in Luther's *Lectures on Galatians*; here we refer to texts not quoted by Mannermaa. On his cross Jesus paid an "infinite price *pro me*"; his "own holy blood" brings about the "redemption" of humanity. Luther frequently uses expressions such as "Christ, the Son of God, was made a victim," "sacrifice," "propitiation," "expiation," and "satisfaction" for our sins. He is the "substitute" and "representative" of humanity who on his cross takes the sins of the world on himself. Luther dedicates extensive space to explaining these traditional motifs of the doctrine of atonement and redemption.<sup>363</sup>

Luther seems especially fond of speaking about the blood of Jesus: "He might have made satisfaction for all the sins of the world with only one drop of his blood (*potuisset enim per unicam guttulam sanguinis satisfacere pro peccatis mundi*), but now he has made abundant satisfaction."<sup>364</sup> "God...cannot be placated except by this immense, infinite price, the death and the blood of the Son of God, one drop of which is more precious than all creation (*eum non placari posse nisi hoc immenso et infinito pretio, scilicet morte et sanguine Filii sui, cuius una gutta praetiosior est tota creatura*)."<sup>365</sup>

It is the cross of Christ that destroys sin and its consequences: "...on his shoulders lie all the evils of the human race – the law, sin, death, the devil, and hell – all of which die in him, because by his death he kills them (*quae omnia moriuntur in eo, sua enim morte occidit ea*)."<sup>366</sup> "...Jesus Christ, the Son of God, dies on the cross and bears my sin, the law, death, the devil, and hell in his body (*in corpore suo*)"; "he bears all the sins of all men in his body...upon his own body, in order to make satisfaction for them with his own blood (*pro illis sanguine proprio satisfactorus*)."<sup>367</sup> In addition, Luther loves to speak about the "victory" of Christ on his cross over the powers of evil and over the law and God's wrath; this is the

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<sup>363</sup> See, for instance, WA 40/1,83-89, 232-233,273-278,295-299,433-437; LW 26,33-36,132,159-163,176-178,277-279.

<sup>364</sup> WA 40/1,232,31-33; LW 26,132.

<sup>365</sup> WA 40/1,295,30-34; LW 26,176.

<sup>366</sup> WA 40/1,273,26-29; LW 26,160.

<sup>367</sup> WA 40/1,274,24-25; LW 26,160. The unpublished text of Luther's *Lectures* emphasizes that Christ, when crucified, "kills sin in his body": "*Christus solus tollit et occidit peccatum in corpore suo*." WA 40/1,274,8-9. WA 40/1,433,32-434,12; LW 26,277.

gospel which “liberates” the sinners from the consequences of sin.<sup>368</sup> Luther summarizes: “...I immerse my conscience in the wounds, the blood, the death, the resurrection, and the victory of Christ (*immergo conscientiam meam in vulnera, sanguinem, mortem, resurrectionem et victoriam Christi*). Beyond him I do not want to see or hear anything at all.”<sup>369</sup> This is the central teaching of Luther in his *Lectures* overlooked by Mannermaa.

If compared with Gustaf Aulén’s famous *motivforskning* on the three paradigmatic models of interpreting the suffering of Jesus,<sup>370</sup> it is clear that Luther combines the “classical” *Christus victor* motif with the Anselmian doctrine of satisfaction and the post-Anselmian doctrine of penal substitution. Moreover, the Abelardian motif of the cross of Jesus deeply moving the human heart and molding the form of Christian existence is not absent in Luther’s theology either. One of the great weaknesses of Aulén’s analysis of the three main motifs of the atonement is that he does not link the cross of Jesus with its Old Testament background: the Passover meal (“the Lamb of God,” emphasized in all of the four Gospels) and the sacrificial system of the temple (Leviticus, interpreted typologically by Paul and by the Letter to the Hebrews). The notion of the sacrifice is lacking in Aulén’s analysis, yet it is an essential part of Luther’s interpretation of Paul.

Because Luther uses an abundance of soteriological imagery, it is impossible to place him in any particular interpretational framework, even though Aulén places him in the paradigm of *Christus victor*. Luther’s theological understanding of the cross of Jesus is rich: it includes elements of atonement, sacrifice, reconciliation, redemption, vicarious representation, penal substitution, expiation, satisfaction, transference of guilt, victory over the evil powers, participation in his death, etc. It is also evident that Luther does not follow the Patristic notion of the impassibility of the divine nature of Christ. Following the realistic and dynamic biblical language, Luther freely speaks about the suffering of the Son of God – “Christ, the Son of God was given into death for my sins (*Christus Dei Filius pro ipsis in mortem traditus*

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<sup>368</sup> See, for instance, WA 40/1,260-261,439-441; LW 26,151,281-282.

<sup>369</sup> WA 40/1,564,12-14; LW 26,369.

<sup>370</sup> Aulén 1931.

*est*)” – or even about “the blood of the Son of God (*sanguis Filii Dei*).”<sup>371</sup> Moreover, his emphasis is in accordance with the notion of *communicatio idiomatum*: what concerns the human nature of Christ also touches his divine nature; although his divine nature cannot die, it can and it did suffer.

Luther’s understanding of the cross of Jesus is inseparably linked with his doctrine of justification. He states that the gospel is the good news of the forgiveness of sins based on the atonement of sins on the cross of Jesus: “Believe in Jesus Christ, who was crucified for your sins. If you feel your sins, do not consider them in yourself but remember that they have been transferred to Christ (*ea translata esse in Christum*), ‘with whose stripes you are healed’ (Isaiah 53:3). This is the beginning of salvation. By this means we are delivered from sin and justified, and eternal life is granted to us (*iustificamur et donatur nobis vita aeterna*)...”<sup>372</sup> “...he gave himself for me – for me, I say, a miserable and accursed sinner, I am revived by this ‘giving’ of the Son of God into death...these words are the purest proclamation of grace and of Christian righteousness (*ista verba sunt purissima praedicatio gratiae et iustitiae Christianae*)...”<sup>373</sup> Because of his cross, Christ is “the Justifier and the Savior (*iustificator et salvator*).”<sup>374</sup>

In a significant manner, in his *Lectures*, Luther combines the dimension of participation, emphasized by Mannermaa, with the cross and resurrection when explaining the key verse Galatians 2:20: “Here Paul clearly shows how he is alive; and he states what Christian righteousness is (*quae sit iustitia Christiana*), namely, that righteousness by which Christ lives in us, not the righteousness that is in our own person. ...But here Christ and my conscience must become one body (*oportet Christum et conscientiam meam fieri unum corpus*), so that nothing remains in my sight but Christ, crucified and risen (*in conspectu meo nihil maneat nisi Christus crucifixus et resuscitatus*).”<sup>375</sup> After explaining at length the

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<sup>371</sup> See, for instance, WA 40/1,88,29-89,11; LW 26,3. WA 40/1,84,14. The passibility of the Son of God in Luther’s theology has been rightly emphasized by Jürgen Moltmann in his vindication of Luther’s theology of the cross. Moltmann 1974.

<sup>372</sup> WA 40/1,232,18-22; LW 26,132.

<sup>373</sup> WA 40/1,297,19-24; LW 26,177.

<sup>374</sup> WA 40/1,298,34; LW 26,178.

<sup>375</sup> WA 40/1,282,16-22; LW 26,166.

meaning of the atonement on the cross in another key verse, Galatians 3:13, Luther concludes: “This is how we must magnify the doctrine of Christian righteousness in opposition to the righteousness of the law and of works (*Ita oportet nos magnificare articulum de iustitia Christiana contra iustitiam legis et operum*)...”<sup>376</sup> Here Luther powerfully emphasizes a union with Christ as a union with the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ, true man and true God, not just with his divine nature.

In a way of a summary, we may conclude that Luther’s teaching about the cross is rather traditional, not as original and systematic as his teaching on the application of the fruit of the cross in his doctrine of the justification of the sinner. Mannermaa’s interpretation has a bias towards focusing on the reception of grace in terms of a personal union between Christ and the sinner at the expense of the objective historical dimension of salvation. Some might defend Mannermaa by saying that he takes the historical dimension for granted, and there is no need to mention it. But why should Luther so often mention that dimension, so essential in his doctrine of grace? *Argumentum ex silentio* is not convincing here.

It is obvious that Luther understands justification in terms of the forgiveness of sins and of the imputation of the gift-righteousness of Christ (juridical or forensic justification, *favor*), based on the atonement of the cross. But simultaneously, he also sees justification as participation in the fruits of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus as well as in the personal righteousness and the divine person of Christ (a “real-ontic” union with Christ, *donum*). Mannermaa concentrates on the latter, and even then he emphasizes only participation in the divinity of Christ with no mention of the fruits of his cross and resurrection.

Perhaps we might even say that here Mannermaa’s understanding of Luther has some kind of monophysitic bias: he is overemphasizing participation in the divine nature of Christ at the expense of the works of the historical person of Jesus Christ. We may raise this concern: Even the participation in the person of Christ is necessarily bound up with his deeds; the person and the work of Christ are both necessary for the justification of the sinner; as seen above, Mannermaa also underscores the inseparable unity of the person and work of Christ. The gifts and the Giver enter the life of the sinner simultaneously; the Giver cannot come

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<sup>376</sup> WA 40/1,438,18-19; LW 26,280.



without the gifts of his cross and resurrection, nor can the gifts be separated from the Giver and his holy, divine person.

Luther's deep commitment to Chalcedonian Christology is another fact which cannot possibly let him see salvation as the work of the divine nature of Jesus Christ only: salvation is the work of both of the natures, the human and the divine. For Luther, the historical man of Nazareth on the cross, the son of Mary, being simultaneously his Father's divine Son, is at the core of salvation. Moreover, the physical, historical resurrection of the same man is the guarantee of our future salvation. Mannermaa's biased line of interpretation could get support from certain Greek fathers, but he does not offer any references to the texts of the fathers.<sup>377</sup>

Now we take a look at the deficiency of Pneumatology in Mannermaa's interpretation of Luther's *Lectures*. Mannermaa criticizes the way later Confessional Lutheranism (*Formula of Concord*) separates justification and sanctification: first the sinner is justified by Christ, then the Holy Spirit will begin his sanctifying work in the believer. In a programmatic manner, Mannermaa states that justification and sanctification cannot be separated: they are one and the same reality based on participation in the person of Christ who is "present in the faith" of the believer.<sup>378</sup> Yet, in a peculiar way, in his work Mannermaa makes an important distinction: The first main part of his book ("The Doctrine of Justification and Christology") concentrates on justification in terms of Christology as participation in the divinity of Christ with no reference to the work of the Holy Spirit. But in the second main part of his work ("The Presence of Christ in Faith and the Holiness of Christians"), which concentrates on Christian life and sanctification, the theme of the Holy Spirit becomes the dominant one. This is a paradox because Mannermaa seems partly to commit the same mistake which he harshly criticizes in later Lutheranism: justification and sanctification, though linked, yet are somewhat different realities.

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<sup>377</sup> In fact, it is a bit amazing that no Finnish Luther scholar has done research on the Patristic ideas of deification, no accurate comparison of the early Christian teachings of *theosis* with Luther's theology has been provided. Stephen J. Chester, 2017, 203, for a good reason, says that assessing the claims made by the Finns "would require both a careful analysis of Orthodox concepts of *theosis* and a careful comparison of them with Luther." So far, no such studies exist.

<sup>378</sup> See Mannermaa 2005, 49.

One might argue that Mannermaa places the work of the Holy Spirit in the sphere of sanctification because Paul's *Letter to the Galatians* speaks about the Spirit mostly, but not exclusively, in its latter part. But in Luther's *Lectures* this is not the case: Luther sees the work of the Holy Spirit as crucially important from the very beginning of his commentary on Paul: The very conversion of a sinner and the birth of faith in his/her heart – the coming into existence of justifying faith – is already the very work of the Holy Spirit. This aspect is lacking in Mannermaa's interpretation. The very title of Mannermaa's magnum opus, *In ipsa fide Christus adest*, is a quotation from Luther's *Lectures* implying the presence of Christ in faith in and through his Holy Spirit – by definition the actuality of the “real-ontic” presence of any of the persons of the Trinity is a Pneumatological reality: “Christ... is present in the faith itself (*in ipsa fide Christus adest*). ... Therefore faith justifies because it takes hold of and possesses this treasure, the present Christ (*apprehendit et possidet istum thesaurum, scilicet Christum praesentem*).”<sup>379</sup>

In Mannermaa's magnum opus, there is no mention of the Holy Spirit effecting justifying faith, converting the unbeliever into a believer (point 1), or the presence of the Holy Spirit being a synonym of the “real presence” of Christ in the Christian (point 2) – the themes which we have seen to be essential for Luther's theology of grace in *The Bondage of the Will*.<sup>380</sup> As we have noted, for Luther the Pneumatological understanding of *sola fide* is crucially important to safeguard the theocentric nature of the conversion of the sinner from unbelief to faith.<sup>381</sup> Moreover, following Paul's theology, Luther understands the union with Christ simultaneously as a union with his Holy Spirit – Christology and Pneumatology coincide. For Luther, the Holy Spirit is not only a reality belonging to the dimension of sanctification (point 3), but the Spirit is crucially important at every phase of the justification of the sinner: in creating conversion and faith (point 1) – justification *sola fide* – and in the

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<sup>379</sup> WA 40/1,229,15-23; LW 26,131-132.

<sup>380</sup> Mannermaa's *Two Kinds of Love* is another important work where he analyzes Luther's doctrine of grace. It is symptomatic of Mannermaa's partial dependence on the traditional paradigm of Luther research, as he employs the vocabulary of “Luther's theology of the word/Word” and lays no emphasis on Pneumatology when interpreting Luther's view of justification. See Mannermaa 2010, 57-66.

<sup>381</sup> Olli-Pekka Vainio correctly warns about the danger of making faith a human achievement when separating the forensic *favor* aspect of grace from the notion of *donum* as a union with Christ: “If, however, we wish to argue for the view that *unio cum Christo* or *inhabitatio Dei* is the consequence of imputation, we face some surprising problems. What is faith, then? If the presence of Christ is just a logical consequence of faith, then faith has to be a *human* achievement.” Vainio, however, fails to mention Luther's Pneumatological emphasis of *sola fide*. Vainio 2015,468.

sinner's union with the work and with the person of Christ (point 2a & b) – it is exactly in and through his Holy Spirit that Christ is present in the sinner.

Mannermaa's interpretation of justification is clearly lacking the strong Pneumatology characteristic of Luther and his understanding of Paul in his *Lectures*. Someone might say these are self-evidently presupposed in Mannermaa's interpretation with no need to mention them. Again, we might ask: How convincing is this kind of *argumentum ex silentio*? Why then, does Luther so often explicitly mention them in the very work analyzed by Mannermaa? Luther mentions these points even in many quotations used by Mannermaa, but Mannermaa pays no attention to them.

Here again we look at some teachings of Luther in his *Lectures* overlooked by Mannermaa. As to the first function of the Holy Spirit effecting the conversion of the sinner and creating faith (point 1), Luther explains Paul's teaching on justification *sola fide* as the work of the Holy Spirit: God's Spirit creates faith in the unbeliever through the preaching of the gospel. When commenting on Paul preaching the gospel to the gentiles, Luther often uses expressions such as "the Holy Spirit came upon those who heard the word" and "cleansed their hearts by faith," etc.<sup>382</sup> "For just as through the gospel God gave the Holy Spirit to gentiles who lived without the law, so he gave the Holy Spirit also to the Jews, not through the law... but solely through the proclamation of faith (*per solam fidei preadicationem dedit Spiritum sanctum*)."<sup>383</sup> "...the Holy Spirit, who comes with the preached word (*qui cum verbo praedicato venit*), purifies our hearts by faith (*qui fide purificat corda*), and produces spiritual motivation in us."<sup>384</sup> "We are justified solely by faith in Christ, without works, and the Holy Spirit is granted solely by hearing the message of the gospel with faith (*solo auditu fidei Spiritum sanctum dari ad vocem Euangelii*)..."<sup>385</sup> "Then what does justify? ...hearing the proclamation of faith – when this is heard, it justifies (*audire sermonem fidei, is sermo auditus iustificat*). Why? Because it brings the Holy Spirit who justifies (*Quia affert Spiritum*

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<sup>382</sup> WA 40/1,150-156; LW 26,79-82.

<sup>383</sup> WA 40/1,332,26-29; LW 26,205.

<sup>384</sup> WA 40/1,572,20-23; LW 26,375.

<sup>385</sup> WA 40/1,336,25-26; LW 26,208.

*sanctum qui iustificat*).”<sup>386</sup> “We are justified through the Spirit by faith (*Iustificamur Spiritu ex fide*); “righteousness...is achieved by the Spirit through faith in Christ.”<sup>387</sup>

When interpreting Galatians 3:2, Luther creates a sharp contrast between “being justified by works of law” and “being justified by the Holy Spirit.” “For whatever is not the Holy Spirit or hearing with faith is clearly the law (*Quidquid enim non est Spiritus sanctus vel auditus fidei, hoc plane est lex*). We are dealing here with the issue of justification (*Versamur enim iam in causa iustificationis*).”<sup>388</sup> Luther implies that preaching of the gospel brings the gift of the Spirit to its hearers: God’s word gives the Spirit who brings about faith in those who hear the word. The human being does not have a free choice, only God’s Spirit, using God’s word as his instrument, can change the orientation of the human heart and create faith.

Faith and the work of the Holy Spirit belong together – this teaching is constantly repeated by Luther in his *Lectures*: “you received the Holy Spirit merely by hearing with faith (*solo auditu fidei accepistis Spiritum sanctum*)”; “the Holy Spirit was granted to you solely by your hearing with faith (*solo auditu fidei vobis datum esse Spiritum sanctum*)”; “through the gospel God gave the Holy Spirit to gentiles...he gave the Holy Spirit also to the Jews...solely through the proclamation of faith (*per solam fidei praedicationem dedit Spiritum sanctum*).”<sup>389</sup> Luther himself follows Paul’s teaching according to which justifying faith is the sole creation of the Holy Spirit, effected by the proclamation of the gospel. Consequently, without the monergistic work of God’s Spirit, there is no justification *sola fide*.

Curiously, Luther confronts Erasmus by name in his *Lectures* of 1531, he criticizes Erasmus’ interpretation of the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10. Following Peter Lombard’s interpretation in his *Sententiarum libri quatuor*, Luther says Erasmus holds the view that “Cornelius was a good man, righteous, one who feared God, gave many alms to the people, and prayed to God continually. Therefore he merited the forgiveness of sins and the sending

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<sup>386</sup> WA 40/1,336,30-31; LW 26,208.

<sup>387</sup> WA 40/2,23,25; LW 27,20. WA 40/2,32,30-32; LW 27, 27.

<sup>388</sup> WA 40/1,329,23-24; LW 26,203.

<sup>389</sup> WA 40/1,330,21-22,26-27; 332,26-29; LW 26,203,205. “Euangelium vero affert Spiritum sanctum...” WA 40/1,336,34. For more documentation, see WA 40/1, 329-337,400-403,572-580; LW 26, 202-208,255-256,374-381.

of the Holy Spirit ‘by congruity.’” In fact, referring to the case of Cornelius, Erasmus says in his *Diatribes*: “...a man may, with the help of God, prepare himself by morally good works for the divine favor (*per opera moraliter bona sese praeparare favori divino*), as we read of Cornelius, the centurion, who was not yet baptized and had not been inspired by the Holy Spirit...”<sup>390</sup> Here Erasmus represents the standard Nominalist doctrine of *facere quod in se est*. Luther, of course, fiercely denies that God pardoned Cornelius because of his seeking God and doing good works; he argues that Cornelius received God’s Spirit and “was justified by hearing with faith (*per auditum fidei iustificatus est*). Hence God does justify without the law.”<sup>391</sup>

In regard to the second function of the Holy Spirit in uniting the sinner with Christ (point 2), in his *Lectures* Luther frequently equates participation in Christ as participation in the Spirit. The justified sinner is “the temple of the Holy Spirit,” and it is just because of this that he/she can be justified. Commenting on Galatians 4:6, Luther says: “God has also sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, as Paul says here. Now Christ is completely certain that in his Spirit he is pleasing to God. Since we have the same Spirit of Christ, we, too, should be certain that we are in a state of grace (*cum eundem Spiritum Christi habeamus, debemus certi esse nos esse in gratia*), on account of him who is certain.”<sup>392</sup>

Mannermaa quotes a similar text from Luther where the Christological and Pneumatological dimensions of justification are closely connected, but Mannermaa neither comments on nor discusses Pneumatology here. In this quotation Luther says: “But so far as justification is concerned, Christ and I must be so closely attached that he lives in me and I in him (*oportet Christum et me esse coniunctissimos, ut ipse in me vivat et ego in illo*). What a marvelous way of speaking! Because he lives in me, whatever grace, righteousness, life, peace, and there is in me is all Christ’s; nevertheless, it is mine as well, by the cementing and attachment that are through faith, by which we become as one body in the Spirit (*unum corpus in Spiritu*).

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<sup>390</sup> *Diatribes* IIIb3; Walter, 62, 22-26; LCC 17, 75.

<sup>391</sup> WA 40/1, 337, 23-338, 18; LW 26, 209. Luther explicitly refers to Erasmus a few times in his *Lectures on Galatians*; his main criticism is that Erasmus teaches salvation by law, emphasizing human free preparation for receiving and even meriting divine grace, in the sense of *meritum de congruo*. See WA 40/1, 220, 4-29; 259, 26-33; 291, 29-294, 22; 500, 25-34. It is interesting that Luther’s debate with Erasmus is still strongly in his mind six years later when he started his *Lectures on Galatians* (1531).

<sup>392</sup> WA 40/1, 577, 20-25; LW 26, 378-379.

Since Christ lives in me, grace, righteousness, life, and eternal salvation must be present with him; and the law, sin, and death must be absent.”<sup>393</sup> Moreover, Luther sees the idea of “being filled with God” as a Pneumatological reality. Mannermaa quotes a sentence from Luther’s *Predigten des Jahres 1525* and highlights the idea of being “filled with God” but makes no reference to the Spirit, although Luther clearly says: “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.”<sup>394</sup>

It is clear that in his *Lectures* Luther sees the work of the Holy Spirit as crucial in the justification of the sinner: God’s Spirit converts the human mind and heart from lack of faith into faith – the faith which justifies the sinner, *sola fide*, is a monergistic gift of the Spirit (point 1). Moreover, the Holy Spirit unites the sinner with the gifts of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ (point 2a), and makes Christ present in faith enabling the believer to participate in Christ’s divine person and life (point 2b) – a union between Christ and the believer is simultaneously a union between the Holy Spirit and the believer. This conception is fully in accordance with Luther’s Trinitarian scope of the doctrine of grace: *opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*. Finally, the Holy Spirit renews the Christian in the life-long process of sanctification (point 3) in which “the rule of the Spirit of Christ” and the believer’s participation in divine love through participation in the divine nature of the Trinity can gradually increase and become stronger. Mannermaa only emphasizes the influence of the Holy Spirit in the last dimension (point 3) – at this point I agree with Mannermaa’s interpretation – the other dimensions of the work of the Spirit are overlooked by him.<sup>395</sup>

Luther represents a powerful theocentric and monergistic doctrine of the justification of the sinner. In order to be so, this doctrine must be essentially Trinitarian: the salvation the Father has given to his creatures in his Son can be objectively, monergistically, and effectively delivered to humanity only through the living and effective activity and presence of God’s

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<sup>393</sup> WA 40/1,284,20-28; LW 26,167-168. Mannermaa 2005,40.

<sup>394</sup> *Predigten des Jahres 1525 (Predigt 61)*, WA 17/1,438,16-18; the original text says: “Wir erfüllet werden auff alle weise, damit er voll macht und voll Gotes werden überschuttet mit allen gaben und gnade und erfüllet mit seynen geyst, der uns mutig mache...” Mannermaa 2005,45. (The English translation of Luther is taken from Mannermaa’s book.)

<sup>395</sup> In his other major work, *Two Kinds of Love*, Mannermaa offers a lively description of Luther’s teaching on Christian life: Christians are called to be “Christs” to their neighbors; “do to your neighbor what Christ has done to you.” See Mannermaa 2010,67-75.

Holy Spirit. A big problem in Mannermaa's interpretation of Luther is the weakness of Pneumatology, which leads into a weakness in the Trinitarian nature of justification and the doctrine of grace. This weakness in Pneumatology is even more surprising because of Mannermaa's vision of Luther's doctrine of grace as a true expression of the Augustinian heritage: As we have seen, for Augustine, justification as participation in divine love is the same as participation in God's Holy Spirit; why does Mannermaa emphasize only love and not also the Spirit?

Here we cannot but come to the conclusion that Mannermaa's Luther interpretation has some significant defects. And these defects appear both in Mannermaa's inability to link Luther's doctrine of justification with the cross, i.e., with atonement, reconciliation, and redemption, and in his reduced scope of Luther's Pneumatology. My amendment of Mannermaa is based both on my above remarks on Luther's *Lectures on Galatians*, paying attention to the content overlooked by Mannermaa, and on the results of my present study on Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* which clearly show that my remarks on Mannermaa's magnum opus have a foundation in the larger framework of Luther's theology.<sup>396</sup>

Why does Mannermaa offer a reduced, narrowed interpretation of Luther's comprehensive doctrine of grace in his *Lectures*? One might argue it is because of the context in which he wrote this small book of his: for an ecumenical dialogue between the Finnish Evangelical-Lutheran Church and the Russian Orthodox Church. He wished to emphasize the commonalities between the Orthodox doctrine of grace understood in the Greek Patristic terms of *theosis* and Luther's special emphasis on understanding justification as participation in the divinity of Christ. Perhaps it was not Mannermaa's intention to present the entire structure and content of Luther's doctrine of justification. Even if this were the case, there is a need to present an authentic understanding of the true, full, complete, and coherent Trinitarian doctrine of grace in Luther's *Lectures* and in his overall theology. Connecting *Lectures on Galatians* with *The Bondage of the Will* is helpful for seeing the more comprehensive view of Luther's doctrine of grace.

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<sup>396</sup> Antti Raunio, one of the students close to Mannermaa, sees the soteriology of Luther in a wider perspective which emphasizes Pneumatology and the cross. In his remarks on *The Bondage of the Will*, Raunio follows Mannermaa's paradigm by seeing Luther's conception of grace as "participation of the human being in divine love." But then Raunio continues: "Das Evangelium ist also ein Wort, mit dem der Geist und die Gnade zur Vergebung der Sünden durch den gekreuzigten Christus dargebracht werden." Raunio 1997,85.

This is also an ecumenical imperative: Paying due attention to all the above-mentioned aspects of the Trinitarian doctrine on justification will strengthen ecumenical dialogue on the doctrine of grace among the churches of the Reformation and between them and the Orthodox and the Catholic churches. For example, Pneumatology is a crucially important element in the Orthodox doctrine of *theosis*; therefore, strengthening the Pneumatological aspect of Mannermaa's interpretation of Luther's doctrine of justification will strengthen Mannermaa's intention of bringing Luther's view closer to Orthodox soteriology. It will also bring Luther's doctrine of grace closer to Pentecostal and Charismatic interpretations of divine grace; these interpretations are becoming more and more influential in the development of global Christianity in our times. Highlighting the atonement, reconciliation, and redemption on the cross of Christ keeps Luther's doctrine of grace strongly connected with several Protestant interpretations of grace as well as with Catholic soteriology. Tuomo Mannermaa opened up a new, fresh perspective on an ecumenically relevant interpretation of Luther's doctrine of grace. We need to take some further steps on this road.

## **9 Is there Any Possibility of Reconciliation between Erasmus and Luther?**

The debate between Luther and Erasmus contains expansive rhetoric with paradoxes and hyperboles. There are also misunderstandings, perhaps even intentional misinterpretations. In their argumentation, the two theologians follow conflicting lines of reasoning. Erasmus refers to reason, justice, morality, and established tradition. His true authorities are Scripture, fathers, councils, popes, scholars, and universities. It is impossible that during so many centuries so many ecclesial teachers and theologians all were wrong! In the final climax of his treatise Erasmus expresses his genuine goodwill towards Luther in defending the evangelical faith, justification *sola gratia et sola fide*; here Erasmus wishes to be on the same side as Luther. But he emphatically states that his evangelical position, for the sake of God's justice and the human's responsibility, includes the necessity of accepting the minimum of free choice – especially because this has been firmly supported for centuries by the teachers of the church, this clear consensus should not be confused by “certain paradoxes” promoted by Luther:



“Finally, if it has been shown how inconvenient, not so say absurd, are the consequences if free choice is entirely taken away (*si semel funditus tollatur liberum arbitrium*); if it has been clearly shown that, in accepting this conclusion, nothing is destroyed of what Luther has written in pious and Christian vein of the unbounded love of God, of rejecting all confidence in merits, of works and of our own powers, and of putting our whole confidence in God and his promises: now, then, I would ask that the reader will also consider whether it is reasonable to condemn the opinion of so many doctors of the Church, which the consensus of so many centuries and peoples has approved, and to accept in their stead certain paradoxes (*paradoxa quaedam*) on account of which the Christian world is now in an uproar. . . .with all my heart I favor true evangelical liberty and detest whatever is opposed to the gospel.”<sup>397</sup>

Erasmus is both a rationalist and an authoritarian Christian thinker. He is not convinced that Scripture alone can solve the problem of free choice, because “Holy Scripture is in very many places obscured by figures of speech, or even that in some places it seems at first sight to be self-contrary.”<sup>398</sup> Luther, by contrast, attaches his argumentation primarily to Scripture, *sola Scriptura*, especially to the clarity of its text and content (*claritas Scripturae*) as well as its capacity of self-explanation (*sui ipsius interpres*). The gospel of Jesus Christ is clear and can be understood on the basis of the text of Scripture. The gospel can be comprehended as such on the basis of reading Scriptural texts, without reference to external interpretative authorities.

Luther’s understanding of the theological authority of *sola Scriptura* is inseparably linked with Pneumatology and his concept of assertive statements, *assertiones*, which can be found in Scripture. In Scripture the “prophetic and apostolic doctrine, inspired by the Holy Spirit” can be understood because the same Holy Spirit who gave the message to the original writers will also enlighten the minds of its readers at any time.<sup>399</sup> It is God’s Spirit who gives Scriptural texts their status as the documents of absolutely certain truth, *assertiones*: “Nothing is better known or more common among Christians than assertion. Take away

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<sup>397</sup> *Diatribes* IV17; Walter,91,12-25; LCC 17,97.

<sup>398</sup> *Diatribes* IV17; Walter,91,8-10; LCC 17,97. Erika Rummel explains the traditionalism of Erasmus: “Once again he couples this authority with tradition and consensus. . . .Consensus and tradition emerge as essential decision-making tools for Erasmus the Christian skeptic...” Rummel 2004,32.

<sup>399</sup> Ruokanen 1985, 88-92.

assertions and you take away Christianity (*tolle assertiones, et Christianismum tulisti*).”<sup>400</sup> Even in the concluding sentence of his magnum opus, Luther in an authoritative manner maintains: “I for my part in this book *have not discoursed, but have asserted and do assert* (*non contuli, sed asserui et assero*), and I am unwilling to submit the matter to anyone’s judgment, but advise everyone to yield assent.”<sup>401</sup>

Luther criticizes Erasmus for being a skeptic in relation to Scripture and says: “The Holy Spirit is no Skeptic (*Spiritus sanctus non est Scepticus*), and it is not doubts or mere opinions that he has written on our hearts, but assertions more sure and certain than life itself and all experience.”<sup>402</sup> Luther fully trusts the “external clarity” (*claritas externa*) of Scripture: The texts “published to all the world” are clear and simple enough that the principal content of the text and the main intention of the writers can be easily comprehended by ordinary readers. Moreover, Luther also sticks to the “internal clarity” (*claritas interna*) of Scriptural texts: God’s Holy Spirit assures the reader of the divine truth of the gospel – “the divinely inspired doctrine (*doctrina divinitus inspirata*)” – which was given through the Spirit to and transmitted through the prophetic and apostolic authors of Scripture.<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> WA 18, 603, 28-29; LW 33, 21.

<sup>401</sup> WA 18,787,11-13; LW 33,295; emphasis by Luther himself.

<sup>402</sup> WA 18,605,32-34; LW 33,24. Marjorie O’Rourke Boyle, 1984a,75, mentions about the “modernism” of Erasmus: “His disputation was methodologically indebted to classical Skepticism, which was not a homogenous system but an epistemological critique of dogmatism itself.”

<sup>403</sup> In *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther speaks about “the double clarity of Scripture” (*duplex claritas scripturae*): “Una externa in verbi ministerio posita, altera in cordis cognitione sita. Si de interna claritate dixeris, nullus homo unum iota in scripturis videt, nisi qui Spiritum Dei habet...” WA 18,609,4-7. He also uses the idea of “two sorts of judgment” (*duplex iudicium*): “One is internal (*interior*), whereby through the Holy Spirit or a special gift of God, anyone who is enlightened concerning himself and his own salvation, judges and discerns with the greatest certainty the dogmas and opinion of all men. ... We have called it above ‘the internal clarity of Holy Scripture’ (*interior claritas scripturae sanctae*). ... There is another, an external judgement, whereby with the greatest certainty we judge the spirits and dogmas of all men, not only for ourselves, but also for others and for their salvation. This judgment belongs to the public ministry of the Word and to the outward office, and is chiefly the concern of leaders and preachers of the Word. ... This is what we earlier called ‘the external clarity of Holy Scripture’ (*externa scripturae sanctae claritas*). ... the Holy Scriptures are a spiritual light far brighter than the sun itself, especially in things that are necessary to salvation.” WA 18,653,13-31; LW 33,90-91. On Luther’s conception of the inspiration of Scripture, see Ruokanen 1985. On Luther’s doctrine of the clarity of Scripture, see Beißer 1966, Wolf 1967, and Oberman 1993,220-225. On the difference of the doctrine of clarity between Erasmus and Luther, see Kuss 1972.

Luther's Pneumatological accent is perceptible in the way he understands Scripture as the word of God; this again is another means for observing and confirming the Pneumatological structure of Luther's doctrine of grace. The principle of the *claritas interna* of Scripture is an extension of the intention which is characteristic of Luther's framework of thought, *Spiritus intus movens*. According to Luther's idea of "the double clarity of Scripture," external clarity is guaranteed by the public ministry of the word, representing the succession of the apostolic witness to the gospel in the church. Because of the nature of the dispute he had with Erasmus, in *The Bondage of the Will* Luther lays emphasis on internal clarity. According to him, it is totally impossible to understand the totality or any part of Scripture without the Spirit of God: "For the Spirit is required for the understanding of Scripture, both as a whole and in any part of it." / "*Spiritus enim requiritur ad totam scripturam et ad quamlibet eius partem intelligendam.*"<sup>404</sup>

Luther's intention to emphasize the non-created, vivifying grace of the Holy Spirit finds a further extension in his concept of *assertio*.<sup>405</sup> Clinging to the idea of assertion, i.e., theological language making assertive claims, is one of the ways in which the reality of internal Pneumatological grace is always being expressed and transferred from era to era and from person to person. For Luther, the concept of *assertio* is a means of speaking about the relationship of the human being with the Triune God, and as such it is a thoroughly Pneumatological concept, meaning the certainty about Christ created in the human mind by the Spirit. Luther finds the assertive language of Scripture and of theology based on Scripture appropriate for expressing that Pneumatological encounter between God and the human which produces the assurance of faith; it is one way of expressing the effects of the Spirit indwelling the human being. Assertive language has to do with the real events of life: consciousness of sin and evil, penitence, and the grace of God in Christ. For Luther assertive language is the language of biblical and theological realism. In contrast to the skeptical views put forward by Erasmus, Luther uses *assertio* as a concept of commitment; to be a Christian means to be committed to the reality and to the word of the Triune God.

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<sup>404</sup> WA 18,609,11-12; LW 33,28. The Pneumatological efficacy of Scripture was also a theme in Luther's *Assertio* of 1520: "...scripturas non nisi eo Spiritus intelligendas esse, quo scriptae sunt, qui Spiritus nusquam praesentius et vivacius quam in ipsis sacris suis, quas scripsit, literis inveniri potest." WA 7,97,1-3.

<sup>405</sup> For an analysis of the concept *assertio* in Luther's works, see Kerlen 1976 and Bader 1985,136-170.

Because of his skepticism in relation to Scripture, Erasmus leans on the authority of the *magisterium* and of the authoritative theologians. For Luther, the fathers, councils, popes, and “sophists” or scholars are not necessarily needed for the authentic interpretation of Scripture; they might be helpful, but sometimes they are misleading. Like Erasmus, Luther is also an authoritarian theologian, but his authorities are different: the plain text of the Bible and the Holy Spirit, which together create assertive propositions. For Luther, Holy Scripture, full of God’s Holy Spirit, is clear and fully convincing in matters of divine grace and the salvation of the humans. Yet, Luther also believes that his interpretation represents and expresses the true intention of the early Christian Trinitarian and Christological dogma; he takes for granted that the ecumenical creeds are the hermeneutical norm of his theological exposition of Scripture.

Why, then, is it sometimes so difficult for people to understand the clear passages of Scripture? According to Erasmus, it is because of lack of education, knowledge, and intelligence. Ignorant people need the guidance of the church and its teaching office to correctly understand the Bible. For Luther the dilemma is a theological and spiritual problem. Because the personal enemy of God and humanity, Satan, opposes God’s word, it is difficult for humans to comprehend it: “...how great is the majesty and power of Satan over the sons of men, to make them neither hear nor take in the very clearest words of God (*clarissima verba Dei*). ...For it is not due to the weakness of the human mind (*imbecillitatis ingenii*), as you make out, that the words of God are not understood, but, on the contrary, nothing is more fitted for understanding the words of God than such weakness; for it was for the sake of the weak and to the weak that Christ both came and sends his word. It is due to the malice of Satan, who sits enthroned in our weakness, resisting the Word of God (*verbo Dei resistentis*). If Satan were not at work, the whole world of men would be converted by a single word of God once heard, and there would be no need of more.”<sup>406</sup> Here we can again see Luther’s motif of the theology of the cross: the *imbecilles* are more apt to understand God’s word than the wise of this world, including the most learned theologians of the church.

At the end of his work, Luther exhorts Erasmus to concentrate on his exegetical work, “study of languages,” and not to meddle with theological issues which he does not understand. In Luther’s opinion, theology is a very serious matter because it deals with the questions of our

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<sup>406</sup> WA 18,659,22-33; LW 33,99-100.

eternal destiny: one should not take it lightly. “I say this to let you see again how very perilous it is to venture into divine and sacred subjects without the Spirit of God and in the temerity of human reason.”<sup>407</sup> Luther accuses Erasmus of using mere rhetoric to deceive his readers: “Is this the way to play the part of a conscientious theologian?” Luther asks, and continues: “Such cunning craftiness might be tolerable in secular affairs, but in theology, where the simple and undisguised truth is sought for the salvation of souls, it is utterly hateful and intolerable.”<sup>408</sup> After all, Erasmus was neither a theologian nor a philosopher; he could perhaps best be seen as a genius of philology, a great master of languages and historical texts. He had no understanding of the view of sin, grace, and justification that Luther had gained from Paul and Augustine. He attempted to pursue ethical and anthropological issues within a theological framework; he was practicing bad philosophy in poor theological clothing.<sup>409</sup>

At the very end of *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther proposes to Erasmus that he should be content with his “own special gift” and “would study, adorn, and promote languages and literature” and not tangle with theological issues because “God has not willed or granted that you should be equal to the matter at present at issue between us.”<sup>410</sup> For Luther, after publishing *The Bondage of the Will*, the case with Erasmus was closed; he never wrote any other tract against Erasmus, although he made some casual comments in his lectures and other publications. Erasmus, on the contrary, feeling humiliated and bitterly offended, continued his concern with the conflict. During 1526-1527 Erasmus published his two-part *Hyperaspistes diatribae*, some 800 pages of apology and justification of his position.<sup>411</sup>

We may raise the question: After almost five centuries, would it be possible to see any chance of reconciliation between the two Late Medieval men and their varying paradigms of

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<sup>407</sup> WA 18,744,24-25; LW 33,228.

<sup>408</sup> WA 18,721,22-33; LW 33,194.

<sup>409</sup> Schwarzwäller 1970,86-87; Kolb 2005,26.

<sup>410</sup> WA 18,786,35-41; LW 33,294-295.

<sup>411</sup> The present study does not cover an analysis of these reflections of Erasmus. In his *Hyperaspistes diatribae* (*A Shield-Bearing Protector of the Diatribe*) Erasmus attacked Luther as a destroyer of all civil, religious, and cultural order. “He did not appear to have seen the theological and religious point of Luther’s thesis about sin and grace, and Luther did not trouble to answer him again. There was no reconciliation; Erasmus continued in acid contempt for Luther, and Luther ‘wrote off’ Erasmus as an enemy of God because he was an enemy of grace.” Packer 1966,221. On the aftermath of the debate, see also Mehl 1960 and Kolb 2017,457-458.

the Christian faith, *formae Christianismi*? Could, for instance, a fresh look at the connection between their theological thinking and the Augustinian doctrine of grace help us reconcile Luther and Erasmus – even though Augustine was a greater authority to Luther than to Erasmus? Now we can see the authentic Augustine more clearly, not through the lenses of Late Medieval interpretations of him. The Catholic analyst of the debate between Luther and Erasmus, Harry J. McSorley, has made a great effort in trying to show that the soteriology of the Late Medieval period was dominated by Nominalism or *Via moderna*, especially by the teaching of Gabriel Biel and his “Neo-Semipelagianism.” This was in contradiction not only to Augustine’s doctrine of grace but also to that of Thomas Aquinas and other early Scholastics. Moreover, Luther’s criticism of the soteriology of his time was also justified because the Catholic church had officially accepted the Augustinian doctrine of grace in the Second Council of Orange in 529; unfortunately, the documentation of this council, and consequently, the genuine Augustinian teaching, was unknown until the 1530s.<sup>412</sup>

Looking at this question from the point of view of the three dimensions of the doctrine of grace, we might say some hopeful words about the possibility of reconciliation. First, as to the concept of prevenient grace (point 1 in our study), Erasmus explicitly joins the Late Medieval *facere quod in se est* principle of *Via moderna* and follows the idea of the natural minimal capacity of *liberum arbitrium* of the human being as the first step of conversion. But Luther attempts to show that Erasmus is contradicting himself in doing this: sometimes he himself denies this capacity to the humans, sometimes he emphasizes this freedom outside grace. Luther notices that there is a discrepancy between Erasmus’ formal definition of free choice and his own explanation of its meaning: “Hence the free choice you define is a different thing from the free choice you defend; so now Erasmus, in contrast to the rest of us, has two free choices, and those entirely at variance with each other. . . . You grant that man cannot will good without special grace. . . . You grant, then, that free choice cannot will good. This means nothing else but that it cannot apply itself to the things which pertain to eternal salvation, as your definition cheerfully stated it could.”<sup>413</sup> If Erasmus, after all, is here closer to Augustine, and in fact, also to Scholasticism, rather than to the Late Medieval view of *Via moderna*, he would be not so far from Luther. Also, the Catholic analyst of the debate between Luther and Erasmus, Harry J. McSorley, came to the conclusion that Erasmus’

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<sup>412</sup> McSorley 1969,214-215,293.

<sup>413</sup> WA 18,668,4-11; LW 33,113.

interpretation of the human choice is better than his formal definition of free decision, *liberum arbitrium*.<sup>414</sup>

In his *Diatribes*, Erasmus listed three different approaches in the history of theology in regard to the problem of free choice.<sup>415</sup> The first is the “anti-Pelagian” position represented by Erasmus himself, he claims, and, according to him, by the majority of the ecclesial teachers: “Those who most extremely reject Pelagius, attribute most of all to grace (*plurimum tribunt gratiae*) and practically nothing to free choice, yet do not entirely remove it (*libero arbitrio pene nihil nec tamen in totum tollunt*), for they deny that man can will the good without peculiar grace (*sine gratia peculiari*)... Their view seems probably enough in that it leaves man to study and strive, but it does not leave aught for him to ascribe to his own powers.”<sup>416</sup> The second position Erasmus describes is that of Augustine, although he does not mention Augustine by name: “But harder is the opinion of those who contend that free choice is of no avail save to sin, and that grace alone accomplishes good works in us, not by or with free choice...”<sup>417</sup>

With criticism, Erasmus places Luther in the third, the strictest category which emphasizes the deterministic concept of necessity altogether denying any notion of freedom: “Hardest of all seem the view of all those who say that free choice is a mere empty name (*inane nomen*), nor does it avail either in the case of the angels or in Adam or in us, either before the grace or after grace (*nec ante gratiam nec post gratiam*), but it is God who works evil as well as good in us, and all things that happen come about by sheer necessity (*merae necessitatis*).”<sup>418</sup> As we have seen above in our study, throughout his *Diatribes*, the sharpest critical point of Erasmus was against Luther’s unfortunate wording in his *Assertio* on God’s “absolute necessity”: “God effects the evil deeds in the impious.” This was the greatest stumbling block for Erasmus; he comes back to this over and over again in his *Diatribes*. We have learned that Luther by no means represents necessitarian determinism; his conception, instead, is “the

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<sup>414</sup> McSorley 1969,285-287. See also McSorley 1970.

<sup>415</sup> *Diatribes* IIa12; Walter,30,22-31,13; LCC 17,53-54.

<sup>416</sup> *Diatribes* IIa12; Walter,30,22-29; LCC 17,53.

<sup>417</sup> *Diatribes* IIa12; Walter,30,29-31,3; LCC 17,53.

<sup>418</sup> *Diatribes* IIa12; Walter,31,8-12; LCC 17,54.

necessity of immutability” (see Section 4.2. above). Erasmus implies that Luther even denies the possibility of Christians freely doing good. This, as we have seen, is not Luther’s true opinion; he certainly asserts the cooperation of the justified person with God’s Spirit in the sense of the “second righteousness” (see Section 8.1 above).

Luther quotes Erasmus’ list of the three positions and comments on them. If the first position is that of Erasmus himself, according to Luther, it expresses a contradiction in Erasmus: although his definition promotes free choice both to good and to evil, his own real understanding maintains that desire for good requires the assistance of God’s grace: “The first opinion, then, when compared with itself, is such as to deny that man can will anything good, and yet to maintain that a desire is left to him which nevertheless is not his own.”<sup>419</sup> Here Luther could agree with Erasmus – a door for reconciliation is open.

Indeed, it seems that Erasmus, after all, is himself wavering between the idea of a true free choice and the idea of this freedom being possible only when aided by God’s grace. I pick up here some quotations from Erasmus’ *The Freedom of the Will* or *Diatribes* displaying the ambiguity of his position: “...if we are entangled in sins, let us strive with all our might and have recourse to the remedy of penitence that by all means we may entreat the mercy of the Lord (*ac domini misericordiam*) without which no human will or endeavor is effective (*sine qua nec voluntas humana est efficax nec conatus*).”<sup>420</sup> Free choice is the good gift of the Creator’s grace, Erasmus says: “And this very power of the soul with which a man embraces good when he knows it, and turns away from its opposite, is a gift of the Creator who might have made him a frog instead of a man.”<sup>421</sup>

For Luther, this gift of creation is imprisoned by sin and therefore inefficient in the human being’s relation to “things above oneself”; for Erasmus it is damaged by sin, but yet still workable when moved by God’s grace: “For although free choice is damaged by sin (*per*

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<sup>419</sup> WA 18,670,19-21; LW,115. Risto Saarinen notes: Luther is “arguing that Erasmus contradicts himself because he defends free decision but does not want to affirm such an obviously Pelagian concept. Luther often shows that Erasmus in fact teaches that divine grace is needed to turn the will towards good.” Saarinen 2011,128. Erasmus’ internal contradiction has also been pointed out by Schwarzwäller 1970,87-87,108-110, and Tracy 1987.

<sup>420</sup> *Diatribes* Ia8; Walter,6,12-15; LCC 17,39.

<sup>421</sup> *Diatribes* IIa9; Walter,26,12-16; LCC 17,51.



*peccatum vulnus accepit*), it is nevertheless not extinguished by it (*non tamen exstincta est*). And although it has become so lame in the process that before we receive grace (*ante gratiam*) we are more readily inclined toward evil than good, yet it is not altogether cut out (*excisa non est*), except that the enormity of crimes which have become a kind of second nature so clouds the judgment and overwhelms the freedom of the will that the one seems to be destroyed and the other utterly lost.”<sup>422</sup>

The grace operative here is, according to Erasmus, the “grace common to all” (*gratia omnium communis*) – he insists on calling it “grace” – given to all in creation and enabling the human being make a free decision to turn to God in order to receive saving grace proper: “The first [grace] is implanted by nature and vitiated by sin (*natura insita et per peccatum vitiata*) – but, as we said, not extinguished – which some call a natural influx. This is common to all (*omnium communis*), and remains even in those who persist in sin...man can so far make use of benefits of this kind that he may be prepared for grace and so call forth the mercy of God (*ut praeparetur ad gratiam ac Dei misericordiam erga se provocet*). On the other hand, there are those who deny that this can happen without peculiar grace. Since this grace is common to all, it is not called grace, though it really is grace (*cum re vera sit*)...”<sup>423</sup>

Moreover, Erasmus likes to emphasize that even the cooperation and consent of the human will with God’s will is, after all, fully the work and gift of God: “...in consenting, grace and the human will act together (*simul agit gratia et humana voluntas*), but in such a way that grace is the principal cause, and the secondary cause is our will (*principalis causa sit gratia, minus principalis nostra voluntas*). Since, however, the sum of the matter is attributed to him who brings the whole to performance, man cannot achieve anything by his own good works, and even the fact that he can consent and cooperate with divine grace is itself the work of God (*Dei munus sit*).”<sup>424</sup>

Erasmus wavers between freedom of choice and God’s grace moving the human will; in any case, he admits that divine grace is needed to empower free choice to function. He also

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<sup>422</sup> *Diatribes* IIa8; Walter, 25, 23-26, 2; LCC 17, 51.

<sup>423</sup> *Diatribes* IIa11; Walter, 28, 21-29, 12; LCC 17, 52.

<sup>424</sup> *Diatribes* IIIc4; Walter, 70, 11-16; LCC 17, 80.

wavers between the concepts of grace given in creation to all human beings and grace given by the special means of grace. Here again, the view of Erasmus seems, to some extent, to approach that of Luther and that of Augustine too. Following Augustine, Erasmus confirms that for freely loving God, the human being needed divine grace already in the beginning of creation, but Erasmus does not, like Luther, recognize the severity of the enslavement of this freedom by sin and evil after the Fall. In Luther's, as well as in Augustine's view, special Christological and Pneumatological grace is needed for the liberation of the sinners, the original grace of creation is not operative here because of the enslavement of the human being.

The second position mentioned by Erasmus and now commented on by Luther is that of Augustine which he developed in his *De spiritu et littera*: "For free choice is capable only of sinning, if the way of truth remains hidden."<sup>425</sup> "The third and the hardest opinion is that of Wycliffe and Luther, that free choice is an empty name and all that we do come about by sheer necessity (*omniaque quae fiunt, esse merae necessitatis*)."<sup>426</sup> After these comments, Luther concludes that all of the three positions listed by Erasmus, in fact, deny free choice and, therefore, they all express the basic idea of Luther himself: "God is my witness that I meant to say nothing else, and to have nothing else understood, by the words of the last two opinions than what is stated in the first opinion. I neither think that Augustine meant anything else, nor do I find any other meaning in his words than what the first opinion says, so that the three opinions cited by *Diatribes* are to me nothing but that one single opinion of my own (*una illa mea sententia*)."<sup>426</sup>

Luther concludes with an ironical comment on Erasmus' self-contradicting argumentation: "So *Diatribes* is really most unfortunate in taking up the cudgels against the last two opinions while approving the first, which is the same as they are; for once again, in her usual way, she condemns herself and proves our point in one and the same article."<sup>427</sup> In an interesting manner, Luther argues that all the three options listed by Erasmus express one and the same truth and they are equal to Luther's own position. If these three positions in the doctrine of

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<sup>425</sup> *De spir. et litt.* III,5; CSEL 60,157,19-20.

<sup>426</sup> WA 18,670,21-33; LW 33,116.

<sup>427</sup> WA 18,671,15-18; LW 33,117.

grace described by Erasmus all can be accepted by Luther, a great chance for reconciliation is at hand.

In another context in *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther claims that in matters of the doctrine of grace, not only John Wycliffe and Laurentius Valla, but above all, Augustine, whom Erasmus overlooks, is “entirely with me”: “*Augustinus, quem praeteris, meus totus est.*”<sup>428</sup> Luther energetically makes an attempt to prove that the Scholastic denial of free choice is much closer to his view than that of Erasmus. Following Augustine, “they say that free choice is the capacity for discerning and then also choosing the good if grace is present.” By its own power, free choice alone, without divine grace, “can do nothing but fall”; as we have seen, this is also Augustine’s position: originally human beings had only the freedom to fall; for maintaining their integrity they needed divine grace (see Section 5.2 above). Now Erasmus, contradicting both Augustine and the Scholastic teaching, makes “free choice equally potent in both directions, in that it is able by its own power, without grace, both to apply itself to the good and to turn away from the good.” In so doing, Erasmus “completely excludes the Holy Spirit with all his power as superfluous and unnecessary,” Luther claims.<sup>429</sup>

Erasmus seems to be left alone, supported only by the *Via moderna* interpretation of free choice; should he here follow the Augustinian and Scholastic teaching on free choice, he would be close to Luther as well. On the basis of the human being having been created in the image of God, Luther can accept the Scholastic idea of the “disposing quality or passive aptitude” of the human being to be “taken hold of by the Spirit and imbued with the grace of God.”<sup>430</sup> But he definitively denies the ability of the human being of freely, merely on the basis of the creation, doing anything towards becoming connected with God’s Spirit and grace. Because of the slavery of sin, the human decision is not operative in making any initiative in relation to divine grace.

Already at the beginning of his work Luther remarked that Erasmus himself stated that “without God’s mercy will is not efficient (*sine misericordia Dei voluntatem non efficacem*

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<sup>428</sup> WA 18,640,8-9; LW 33,72.

<sup>429</sup> WA 18,665,6-19; LW 33,108-109.

<sup>430</sup> WA 18,636,16-22; LW 33,67. For the similarities in the ideas of election and predestination between Thomas Aquinas and Luther, see Reinhuber 2000,213-217.

esse).”<sup>431</sup> In a very rhetorical manner, Luther tries to convince Erasmus that he also, in fact, denies the soteriological efficiency of *liberum arbitrium*: “What if I can prove from the words you yourself use in asserting freedom of choice that there is no free choice? What if I convict you of unwittingly denying what you seek so carefully to affirm? ... You make the power of free choice very slight and of a kind that is entirely ineffective apart from the grace of God. Do you not agree? Now I ask you, if the grace of God is absent or separated from it, what can that very slight power do of itself? It is ineffective, you say, and does nothing good. Then it cannot do what God or his grace wills, at any rate if we suppose the grace of God to be separated from it. But what the grace of God does not do is not good. Hence, it follows that free choice without the grace of God is not free at all (*liberum arbitrium sine gratia Dei prorsus non liberum*), but immutably the captive and slave of evil (*immutabiliter captivum et servum mali*), since it cannot itself turn to the good. ... What is ineffective power but simply no power at all? (*Quid est vis inefficax, nisi plane nulla vis?*)”<sup>432</sup> Luther tries to persuade Erasmus to come to his side by showing how Erasmus is contradicting himself in his argumentation.

Somewhat triumphantly, Luther concludes that even Erasmus, at least implicitly, accepts the limits of the human will and admits that only God can have truly free choice – if Erasmus were consistent, he would be compelled to agree with Luther. Erasmus should agree with Luther that only God can have a true freedom of choice; admitting this to the humans in matters “above oneself” would lead into a false deification of the human capacities, which of course is not acceptable to Erasmus: “It is settled, then, even on your own testimony, that we do everything by necessity, and nothing by free choice, since the power of free choice is nothing (*vis liberii arbitrii nihil est*) and neither does nor can do good in the absence of grace (*absente gratia*). ... It follows now that free choice is plainly a divine term (*liberum arbitrium esse plane divinum nomen*), and can be properly applied to none but the Divine Majesty alone; for he alone can do and does... whatever he pleases in heaven and on earth. If this is attributed to men, it is no more rightly attributed than if divinity itself also were attributed to them, which would be the greatest possible sacrilege.”<sup>433</sup> In his rhetoric Luther tries to persuade Erasmus to recognize that they both, in fact, are on the same side of the debate.

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<sup>431</sup> WA 18, 611,15-16.

<sup>432</sup> WA 18,635,23-636,10; LW 33,66-67.

<sup>433</sup> WA 18,636,23-32; LW 33,68.

Summing up our analysis in regard to the first dimension of the doctrine of justification (point 1 in our study), it seems to be true that Erasmus, after all, is not fully consistent in his interpretation of *liberum arbitrium*. He is not a very consistent systematic thinker. He is wavering between the traditional Scholastic interpretation of the Augustinian view and the novelty of the *Via moderna* teaching. Making Erasmus here more traditional rather than more modern, in the sense of Late Medieval thought, would make the difference between him and Luther much less severe.<sup>434</sup>

As to the second dimension of the doctrine of grace (point 2 in our study), as we have seen, Luther in his reading of Paul's theology in *The Bondage of the Will*, follows the Augustinian notion of justification as a union of the human being with, and as a participation in, the life of the Holy Trinity, effected by the power of the Holy Spirit. It seems that at this point Erasmus is very distant from Luther, as well as from Augustine, his interpretation of the doctrine of grace has no true reference to Pneumatology and it includes no notion of the concept of participation in or union with Christ. Erasmus is not at all Augustinian in this dimension of the doctrine of grace. Here a clear discrepancy between the two *formae Christianismi* remains.

Erasmus speaks about God's grace working in three stages: beginning, progress, and end. According to him, "in each individual action two causes come together, the grace of God and the will of man: in such a way, however, that grace is the principal cause and the will secondary." For Erasmus, all stages of grace happen as the cooperation of God's grace and the assent of the free human choice; but because *liberum arbitrium* is a gift of God's creation, all in fact happens by God's grace: "...a man owes all his salvation to divine grace, since the

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<sup>434</sup> Eleonore Stump has made an interesting suggestion which escapes both the synergism of the free choice and the determinism of predestination in understanding Augustine's doctrine of grace. Leaving behind the options of simply rejecting or accepting the God-given grace, she suggests a third option: under the persuasion of divine grace, the human will "simply fails to refuse grace." This "is not yet a good state of will," this is neither active preparation nor active response to God's grace. This option does not exclude the human involvement, yet the notion of *gratia praeveniens* could be preserved. "...if God gives grace only in response to a human willer's failing to refuse grace, then whether God gives grace or not will be up to the human willer alone." Stump 2014,181. This proposal of Stump is interesting because it avoids the problem of determinism, an issue so important to Erasmus, and yet there is no activism on the part of the sinner, a crucial concern for Luther. This suggestion is much more minimal than the "minimalism" of Erasmus, yet it is more rational than the paradoxical explanations of Luther. "A failure to refuse grace" could be seen as an analogy to Luther's idea of the total "desperation" of the sinner about his/her own possibilities of contributing to one's own salvation.

power of free choice is exceedingly trivial (*perpusillum*) in this regard and this very thing which it can do is a work of the grace of God who first created free choice and then freed it and healed it.”<sup>435</sup>

Luther, of course, would not accept this since free choice given in creation is enslaved by sin and evil and can be liberated only by the prevenient divine grace effected by God’s Holy Spirit. In fact, Erasmus understands correctly that Luther, while denying the ability of free choice to contribute to conversion and salvation, sees the human being as a totally passive object of the activity of God’s Holy Spirit. Erasmus sees rightly Luther’s true intention but regards it as “exaggeration” (*hyperbola*) and, therefore, does not accept it: “But although we see so little (*minimum*) attributed to free choice, yet to some [Luther] even this seems to be too much. For they would have grace alone to be working in us (*solam enim gratiam volunt in nobis agere*) and our mind in all things to be only passive as an instrument of the divine Spirit...”<sup>436</sup> And: “Having cut the throat of free choice, they teach that a man is now led by the Spirit of Christ...”<sup>437</sup> Erasmus quite correctly notices the Pneumatological character of Luther’s theology, especially his doctrine of grace, but rejects it, because the Holy Spirit has no major role in his own conception of grace.<sup>438</sup>

Here remains an irreconcilable point of controversy, a paradigmatic difference between the conceptions of divine grace. We are compelled to draw the conclusion that the most important difference between Luther and Erasmus is in their conception of the living and efficient presence of the Triune God’s Holy Spirit in the justification and salvation of the sinner. Erasmus does not recognize the role of the Spirit here, whereas for Luther, this true presence and effective influence of God has a crucial role in understanding the sinner’s

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<sup>435</sup> *Diatribes* IV8; Walter,82,27-83,11; LCC 17,90.

<sup>436</sup> *Diatribes* IV11; Walter,84,21-25; LCC 17,91-92.

<sup>437</sup> *Diatribes* IV14; Walter,88,19-20; LCC 17,95.

<sup>438</sup> Erasmus had, in fact, correctly noticed the Pneumatological accent in Luther’s theology. Referring to Luther’s works prior to 1524, he rightly remarks that “Luther attributes very little importance to scholarship, and most of all to the Spirit,” he does not respect the authorities so important to Erasmus: “doctors, councils, universities, popes, and the emperor.” *Diatribes* Ia6; Walter,4,27-5,7; LCC 17,37-38. Erasmus accuses the party of Luther of “having cut the throat of free choice” and “teaching that man is now led by the Spirit of Christ.” *Diatribes* IV14; Walter,88,19-20. Referring to the statements of Andreas Karlstadt in the disputation of Leipzig of 1519, Erasmus reproves those who see the human decision as totally passive, “velut organum divini Spiritus.” *Diatribes* IV11; Walter,84,24-25.

salvation *sola gratia et sola fide*. Many of the other aspects of their disagreement could be reconciled, several of them being based on misunderstandings and rhetorical exaggerations.

In regard to the third aspect of the doctrine of grace (point 3 in our study), sanctification, Luther, with some specifications, follows the basic outline of Augustine's doctrine of grace presented in his *De spiritu et littera* (cf. above, Section 5.2). According to this major treatise of Augustine, divine grace, to a certain extent, restores and heals the original freedom given to humanity in the beginning of creation. After sin, this freedom became captivated, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, the effective divine grace, it is again, to some extent, liberated and can cooperate with God's grace. Consequently, enabled by God's Spirit, the justified human being begins to grow in his/her ability to freely love God and neighbor. It is important to note that in the Augustinian framework the justified sinner's sanctification takes place as a cooperation between God's Spirit and the "liberated" human agent, there is no neutral human freedom independent from divine grace and the influence of the Holy Spirit: "*Ubi Spiritus, ibi libertas.*"<sup>439</sup>

As we noted, Luther does not emphasize this feature of Augustine's teaching on cooperation in *The Bondage of the Will* as he does in his *Lectures on Galatians*. This is most likely because a literal follow-up of Augustine would have weakened Luther's critical argumentation against Erasmus' teaching on free choice. But we have seen (cf. Sections 8.1 and 8.2 above) that Luther's theology contains a strong vision of the sanctification of the justified sinner, enabled by the Holy Spirit who indwells the person and enables his/her growth in loving God and neighbor; God's grace frees the believer to cooperate with God's Spirit. Following the Augustinian view, Luther sees the good works of a Christian as divine

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<sup>439</sup> On the one hand, Augustine emphasizes the reestablishment of the freedom of choice, *liberum arbitrium liberatum*, provided by God's grace: "Sicut enim lex per fidem, sic liberum arbitrium per gratiam non evacuatur, sed statuitur. ...per gratiam sanatio animae a vitio peccati, per animae sanitatem libertas arbitrii, per libertum arbitrium iustitiae dilectio, per iustitiae dilectionem legis operatio." *De spir. et litt.* XXX,52; CSEL 60,208,17-23.

But, on the other hand, Augustine strongly emphasizes that this freedom is possible only in the Holy Spirit: "Nec adtendunt in ipso nomine liberi arbitrii utique libertatem sonare; ubi autem Spiritus Domini, ibi libertas." *Ibid.*, 209,12-14. Augustine clearly represents the view that free choice granted to the believers is a Pneumatological reality, i.e., freedom enabled by God's Spirit: "...bene vivere donum esse divinum non tantum quia homini Deus dedit liberum arbitrium, sine quo nec male nec bene vivitur, nec tantum quia praeceptum dedit, quo doceat quemadmodum sit vivendum sed quia per Spiritum sanctum diffundit caritatem in cordibus eorum..." *De spir. et litt.* V,7; CSEL 60,159,11-15. See also *De grat. et lib.* XX,41; PL 44,905: "...gratia Dei...qua voluntas humana non tollitur, sed ex mala mutatur in bonam, et cum bona fuerit adiuvatur." Luther would not have difficulty in accepting this position of Augustine, although he himself uses slightly different wording, not mentioning the idea of "liberated free choice."

gifts which, once given, become the believer's "own" deeds which he/she can freely perform when empowered by God's Spirit. Luther could easily agree with Augustine's famous exclamation to God: "*Da quod iubes et iube quod vis.*"<sup>440</sup>

If Luther is often exaggerating, so too is Erasmus. Referring to Luther's *Assertio* he claims that, according to Luther, even the believers who are in the state of grace cannot but continue sinning: "They say that even those who are justified by faith do nothing but sin... And yet these same people assert that even when he has received grace, a man does nothing but sin. Luther seems to delight in this kind of extravagant statement (*hyperbola*)..."<sup>441</sup> This, of course, as we have seen, is not Luther's true opinion. According to Luther's doctrine of grace, the Christians, being the temple of the Holy Spirit of Christ and of his Father, are drawn into a life-long process of sanctification.

We might be permitted to conclude that in regard to the Augustinian notion of *gratia sanativa* or sanctification, Luther and Erasmus are perhaps not as contradictory as it seems on the basis of their polemical debate otherwise. As shown above, Luther is not a determinist, as Erasmus claims, he believes in the freedom of a Christian, i.e., of a justified sinner who is in the state of grace. Both of the debaters could affirm the Augustinian notion of divine grace, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which frees the believer from the slavery of sin and enables him/her to grow in the freedom of loving God and neighbor.

In Section 1.1 we referred to Luther's free, imprecise quotation from Augustine: "For without grace, free choice is capable only of sinning." / "*Liberum arbitrium sine gratia non valet nisi ad peccandum.*"<sup>442</sup> This is true in regard to the sinner's attempts to freely connect him/herself with saving divine grace, but once the person has become the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit of Christ and of his Father, the situation is changed. Translating the above sentence into a positive statement could mean: "In the state of grace, the believer is freed by the Holy Spirit to do God's will, i.e., to love God and neighbor." Here we have another possibility of reconciliation between Luther and Erasmus.

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<sup>440</sup> *Conf.* X,29; CC 27,176,9.

<sup>441</sup> *Diatribes* IV14; Walter,88,4-6,16-22; LCC 17,94-95.

<sup>442</sup> WA 7,142,27-28.



As we have learned, it was a misunderstanding by Erasmus to claim that Luther promotes a deterministic view of God as someone coercing human beings to evil. Now we have seen that it was another misinterpretation of Luther's intention by Erasmus to say that even in the state of grace the human being "cannot but sin." At these two points, Erasmus made Luther seem much more negative and gloomy than he really is. Had Luther never made some of his unhappy extremist statements in his *Assertio* of 1520, Erasmus might never have raised such fierce criticisms against him. Rectifying these misunderstandings opens up a chance for some degree of reconciliation between the two.

Over against the assumed pessimistic determinism of Luther, Erasmus devotes the greater part of his *Diatribes* to paraphrasing in detail passages from the Old and the New Testaments highlighting freedom against determinism. Erasmus summarizes: "Thus almost the whole of Scripture speaks of nothing but conversion, application, and striving after better things. All these go for nothing if once you admit that doing good or bad comes by necessity. Not less vain will be all those promises, all those threats, all those expostulations, all those reproaches, exhortations, blessings, and curses to those who have turned to better things or who have refused them."<sup>443</sup>

In fact, most of the places quoted by Erasmus, are calls for repentance to those whom God has chosen, *parenesis* to the believers who are already called to be God's people (Old Testament) or liberated by saving grace (New Testament) and are now exhorted to stay in grace and to follow God's will in their lives.<sup>444</sup> Most of the passages Erasmus brings forth could be accepted by Luther as teaching to the already justified sinners. Luther can fully accept the fact that God's word teaches the believers of the old covenant and the Christians of the new covenant how to live a life according to God's will.

Following Paul's and Augustine's teachings on sanctification or *gratia sanativa*, Luther recognizes the freedom of the Christian provided by God's grace; part of this freedom are the numerous exhortations given by Paul and other biblical authors reminding the believers about their high calling to live a new life in the Spirit. Liberated by divine grace, united with and

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<sup>443</sup> *Diatribes* IIa16; Walter, 35, 22-36, LCC 17, 56.

<sup>444</sup> See, for instance, *Diatribes* IIa14-IIb6; Walter, 32-45.

empowered by God's Holy Spirit, the believers are able to respond to these exhortations, even to cooperate with God's grace (*gratia cooperativa*). They can do this because they are no longer doing it just in their own natural capacity but filled and directed by God's Spirit. For Luther, the exhortations to the believers are not a law in the sense of "the third use of law" (*tertius usus legis*), typical of later Lutheranism and Calvinism, but dynamic parenetic reminders of the high calling and the new status of the believers who live in the freedom of the Holy Spirit – here Luther's follow's Paul's teaching on the freedom of the Christians.<sup>445</sup> The idea of the bondage of the will and the concept of *necessitas immutabilitatis*, typically describing Luther's understanding of people in the state of unbelief, do not apply here.

According to Luther, some of the biblical exhortations, however, are meant for godless unbelievers; using these in proclamations is how God, on the *usus* level of his program of salvation, calls people to conversion. On the level of his *notitia*, unknown to us, God freely decides whom his Holy Spirit will eventually convert (see the discussion on this distinction above in Section 7.1). Moreover, in Luther's view, many of the biblical exhortations are God's law which, in the sense of the second use of the law, calls people to contrition and repentance making them needful of grace. Unfortunately, Erasmus does not make any distinction between biblical exhortations directed to the believers and the non-believers; in a massive and non-specified manner, he employs all biblical imperatives for the defense of his free choice argument. Making a distinction between the exhortations as Luther does, would greatly diminish the controversy in biblical interpretation between Erasmus and Luther.

What Erasmus says about the cooperation of the justified sinner with God's grace, would be acceptable to Luther: "And the upshot of it is that we should not arrogate anything to ourselves but attribute all things we have received to the divine grace, which called us when we were turned away, which purified us by faith, which gave us this gift (*hoc ipsum donavit*), that our will (*voluntas*) might be *synergos* with grace, although grace is itself sufficient for all things and has no need of the assistance of any human will."<sup>446</sup> But what Erasmus says about the ability of *liberum arbitrium* to contribute for salvation, would not be acceptable to Luther: "...that the contribution of free choice is extremely small (*perpusillum*), and that this itself is part of the divine gift (*hoc ipsum esse divini muneris*), that we can turn our souls to those

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<sup>445</sup> See Haikola 1981,143-152.

<sup>446</sup> *Diatribes* IIIa5; Walter,71,5-10; LCC 17,81.

things pertaining to salvation (*ad ea, quae sunt salutis*), or work together (*synergein*) with grace.”<sup>447</sup>

Referring to the three dimensions of Luther’s doctrine of grace (cf. above, Section 8.1), we could summarize: Both Erasmus and Luther think that human choice must be empowered by God’s grace in order to move in the direction willed by God (point 1 in our three-dimensional scheme). But here the difference is that Erasmus speaks about the grace given in creation and it still is freely efficient even in the sinners, whereas Luther sees that this freedom has been lost because of sin and there is a need for the specific salvational-efficient movement of the Holy Spirit which alone can make the sinner contrite, convert him/her, and create faith. *Sola fide* is the work of the Spirit of Christ and of his Father, not a product of natural, creation-based human psychic activity. As we have seen, Erasmus is not systematic or consequent in his argumentation; he is confusing the Augustinian and Scholastic views with the teachings of *Via moderna*. Interpreting Erasmus from the point of view of *Via antiqua* would diminish the conflict between him and Luther.

As to the justification proper (point 2 in our study), as a follower of the Catholic tradition, Erasmus knows the conception of the juridical-forensic forgiveness of sins based on the atonement and satisfaction accomplished by Christ on his cross – in this respect there is no real point of controversy between the two. But Erasmus knows nothing about the union of the sinner with Christ in the Holy Spirit, the Trinitarian participatory conception of justification, so crucially important for Luther in *The Bondage of the Will* as well as in his *Lectures on Galatians*, as we have seen (see above, Section 8.2), is unknown to Erasmus. Consequently, the *sola gratia* aspect of justification is thinner and weaker in Erasmus’ theology when compared with Luther’s.

Finally, the two contestants do not substantially disagree in respect to their teaching on Christian life and sanctification (point 3 in our study). Both see the cooperation of the believer, being in the state of grace, with divine grace, and progress and growth in following God’s will in one’s life as possible. The only noteworthy difference here again is that for Luther, sanctification is powerfully both a Christological and Pneumatological reality: participating in Christ’s divine nature and life and being empowered and led by the Holy

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<sup>447</sup> *Diatribes* IV7; Walter, 82, 10-13; LCC 17, 89-90.

Spirit of divine love. Erasmus does not use similar language; he is more anthropocentric in his expressions.

We are justified in concluding: In *The Bondage of the Will*, in regard to all of the three dimensions of the doctrine of grace, Luther's teaching is strongly Pneumatological and participatory, emphasizing the union between the justified sinner and the Triune God, whereas in his *Diatribes* Erasmus lays emphasis neither on the Holy Spirit nor on the idea of a union. In regard to the doctrine of grace, a full reconciliation between Luther and Erasmus is not possible, but détente of a significant degree is conceivable – the differences and controversies are not as sharp as one would assume on the basis of the rhetoric of the two disputants. In their debate the two parties used strong and hyperbolic expressions, even exaggerations and deliberate misinterpretations, which led them to misunderstand each other even on issues where common understanding would have been possible.

Looking from a distance, we may see a chance of bringing the two closer to each other – even though their characteristics as theologians are so different: Luther is a passionate theologian of grace, powerfully employing the transcendental concepts of the Holy Spirit and Satan and highlighting justification as a union between the sinner and the Triune God. Erasmus is a man of letters, a rationalistic Humanist, focusing on the immanent anthropological conditions for receiving divine grace.

## **10 Conclusion**

The task of this study was to analyze the fundamental systematic theological structure and content of Luther's theological thinking in *The Bondage of the Will*. My hypothesis has been verified: Luther's own specific and comprehensive understanding of the Trinitarian theology of grace, with special emphasis on Pneumatology, alongside the more obvious Christology, and together with a strong link with the theology of creation, is the fundamental thought structure and content of his magnum opus. This was Luther's alternative to the rationalistic and juridical paradigm in the doctrine of grace, which focused on the anthropological conditions for receiving God's grace, common in Late Medieval teaching and consistently represented by Erasmus.

The present study has established a new understanding of Luther's theological paradigm in his major theological treatise. This is the first piece of research which reveals the centrality of Pneumatology and the Trinitarian conception of grace in *The Bondage of the Will*, heavily undermined in the previous research. The present study is an amendment of the German paradigm of the interpretation, represented by Klaus Schwarzwäller, lacking the understanding of the Trinitarian and Pneumatological depth in Luther's doctrine of grace. Luther's doctrine of grace cannot be understood correctly within the paradigm of relational ontology or the kerygmatic theology of God's word, commonly used in German Luther research.

Moreover, the results of our study clarify, expand, and amend the interpretations of the North American Luther scholars, the Catholic Harry McSorley and the Lutheran Robert Kolb, as well as the interpretations of the Finnish school initiated by Tuomo Mannermaa, which all have underestimated the Pneumatological aspect of Luther's theology and doctrine of grace. The study makes the necessary Pneumatological, and thus also the Trinitarian, corrective to the understanding of Luther's theology, especially to his doctrine of grace. Luther represents a powerful theocentric and monergistic doctrine of the justification of the sinner; his highest interest is to establish and defend a radical understanding of the principle of *sola gratia*. In order to do so, this doctrine must necessarily be essentially Trinitarian: the salvation the Father has given to his creatures in his Son can be objectively, monergistically, and effectively delivered to humanity only through the living, free, real, and effective activity and presence of God's Holy Spirit. Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* is consistently following the Patristic axiom: *opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*.

Luther strongly follows the Pauline and Johannine axiom, which also dominates Augustine's doctrine of grace; according to this paradigm, Christology and Pneumatology are inseparable: Participation in the salvational facts, the cross and resurrection of Christ, as well as participation in and union with the incarnated Son of God and his personal righteousness and divine nature can only take place under the effective influence and in the actual presence of God's Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the actuality, effect, and presence of Christological grace.

Because the previous research on *The Bondage of the Will* has not recognized the powerfully Trinitarian and Pneumatological nature of Luther's doctrine of grace, the interpretations of

this magnum opus of Luther's have not been able to satisfactorily expose Luther's theological thought. A major problem in previous Luther research, including Mannermaa's interpretation of Luther's doctrine of justification, is the underestimation of Pneumatology which leads to a certain weakness in perceiving the Trinitarian nature of Luther's doctrine of grace and also to a weakness in understanding his radically theocentric principles of *sola fide* and *sola gratia*. Without a strong Pneumatology, these concepts cannot be seen as entirely theocentric realities. The present study, revealing the profound Trinitarian and Pneumatological nature of Luther's doctrine of grace, intensifies the ecumenical potential of Luther's theology: Luther's theology of grace has profound connections not only with other Protestant theological traditions but also with the doctrines of grace in Catholic, Orthodox, and even modern Charismatic theologies.

The study at hand has shown that Luther's Trinitarian doctrine of grace has three dimensions in *The Bondage of the Will*. The idea of the union between the sinner and Christ in the Holy Spirit covers all the three dimensions of divine grace: the conversion of the sinner (point 1), the participation in Christ's divine person and in his cross and resurrection, and finally (point 2), the change of the sinner under the increasing control by God's Spirit (point 3).

(Point 1) Luther emphasizes the exclusivity of *gratia praeveniens*, the monergistic and prevenient effect of God's Holy Spirit in effecting contrition, conversion, and faith in the sinner. Luther powerfully turns aside all the arguments of Erasmus which he, following the commonplace teaching of *Via moderna*, employs in the defense of the minimal freedom of the human decision in matters of salvation.

(Point 2) In his magnum opus Luther understands justification primarily as the sinner's participation in and intimate union with Christ in the Holy Spirit. Christ in his own righteous and divine person, together with his work, the fruits of his cross and resurrection, enters the human being, thus in his own person, with his salvation-historical gifts, becoming the *iustitia aliena* of the sinner. The sinner participates both in the divine person of Christ in the Spirit, as well as in the cross, the atonement, and resurrection, the imperishable life of Christ.

It must be noted that Luther's doctrine of justification in his magnum opus understood in terms of a union and participation can also, simultaneously, be understood in terms of the forensic-judicial declaring and reckoning of the sinner non-guilty on the basis of the penal

substitution of Christ on his cross. The guilt of the sinner is imputed to Christ and the fruit of Christ's suffering is imputed to the sinner. The *favor* and the *donum* aspects of Luther's doctrine of justification are inseparable. And exactly because Christ in his divine and righteous person, in his Holy Spirit, together with the gifts of his cross and resurrection, enters the sinner, salvation is full and complete, even without any "effective change" in the so justified sinner. Both God's *favor*, forgiveness of sins, and his *donum*, the gift of the presence of the Holy Spirit of Christ in the sinner, mean forensic justification based on the alien righteousness of Christ himself. This is an important notion, because in Luther research often only the *favor* aspect of justification is seen as forensic, and the *donum* aspect is interpreted as "effective" justification or sanctification which implies a habitual change in the person. But as a matter of fact, for Luther they are both the gifts of the *iustitia aliena* of Christ presented to the sinner, and they are both realities that are "infused" into the sinner by the presence of Christ in his Holy Spirit.

(Point 3) The inhabitation of God's Holy Spirit, however, leads the justified sinner into a life-long process of growth in better loving God and neighbor. Here the Spirit capacitates the believer to cooperate with God's grace. The justified sinner lives in a state of constant conflict between flesh and Spirit, but under the increasing control and empowerment by God's Spirit, a real growth in love, a real change, is possible.

In all these three aspects, Luther proves to be a follower of Augustine's doctrine of grace, distancing himself from the Scholastic concept of habitual grace and from the Nominalist teaching on human responsibility and the minimal free initiative in relation to salvation. Luther's solution to the philosophical-theological problems of free choice, necessity, or predestination can be seen in the correct light only in the context of the overall framework of his Trinitarian doctrine of grace. Being aware of the philosophical problems involved, Luther is not interested in a philosophical discussion of these concepts, rather, he adapts them to a soteriological use in order to display his passionate defense of *sola gratia*.

For Luther, God's Holy Spirit is not just a reality emphasized in the dimension of sanctification (point 3), as Luther research, including that of Mannermaa, normally assumes. In Luther's doctrine of grace, the Holy Spirit is crucially important at every phase of the justification of the sinner: in creating conversion and faith (point 1) thus enabling justification *sola fide*; and in the sinner's participation in and his/her union with Christ and his gifts of

salvation (point 2). It is exactly in and through his Holy Spirit that Christ is present in the sinner.

Traditionally, Luther research, including the Finnish school, has normally distinguished only two dimensions in Luther's doctrine of justification: First, the forensic-judicial imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the sinner declaring the guilty non-guilty; second, the "effective change" of the sinner through participation and union with Christ. In the Finnish interpretation the forensic-judicial aspect has been amended by absorbing it into the dimension of the union of the sinner with Christ. The results of our research confirm that the notion of the union between Christ and the sinner in the Holy Spirit is at the core of Luther's entire doctrine of justification: union is not just leading to a change in the believer's life (point 3), but it is the very core of the entire reality of justification in which the participation in the person and divine nature of Christ in his gifts of salvation and can take place (point 2). Moreover, the notion of *sola fide* can be understood as a fully theocentric reality only in terms of the Pneumatological conception of *gratia praeveniens* (point 1); this is a perspective unscored in the Finnish interpretation of Luther. In all, Luther's doctrine of grace is best understood in its three dimensions rather than in two dimensions.

Our study has confirmed Mannermaa's seminal interpretation of Luther's doctrine of justification as a union between Christ and the sinner, and as a participation in the life and the divinity of Christ. We have found the same structure of thought in Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* that Mannermaa found in Luther's *Lectures on Galatians*. As a matter of fact, we have noted during the course of the present study how consistently Luther was already teaching many of these basic truths at least ten years before he wrote his treatise against Erasmus, starting from his *Lectures on Romans* (1515-1516). But our study has also shown that there is a need to amend Mannermaa's interpretation: It should, instead of two dimensions, adhere to the three dimensions of Luther's doctrine of grace. A fuller understanding of the Trinitarian and Pneumatological nature of divine grace will enable this amendment. Moreover, the Finnish interpretation should pay more attention to the sinner's participation in the cross and resurrection of Christ, alongside the notion of participating in the divine person and nature of Christ.

The study at hand has proved the dichotomous nature of Luther's theological method and thought in *The Bondage of the Will*. His thinking is strongly characterized by distinctions



between conflicting realities: Sticking to his biblical and theological realism, Luther affirms that, after losing the original state of union with the Creator, the human being became a battlefield of the opposing transcendental powers, Satan and sin on one side, and God and his grace on the other. The human is free in “things below oneself,” but not in “things above oneself.” This distinction of the two realities makes Luther’s theology fundamentally different from that of Erasmus. Although humans have freedom in this world in matters “below oneself,” they are not free in matters “above oneself”: Luther emphasizes human infirmity, the inability to get rid of unbelief and pride which destroyed the human’s union with God. The human being cannot connect him/herself with God’s saving grace by his/her own initiative or capacities. Here a distinction between law and gospel, unknown to Erasmus, is crucially important for Luther’s theological thought.

In *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther sees Christian theology as a drama of the captivity of humanity by sin and evil and of its liberation from this slavery by divine grace. In contrast to Luther’s paradigm, Erasmus sees the relationship between God and the human beings as one of fair play based on rationally acceptable just rules. Erasmus detests the exaggerations, paradoxes, and hyperboles employed by Luther. Erasmus is a theological thinker of cool rationality and tranquility, whereas Luther is one of great passion for divine grace: for him theology, dealing with the drama of the eternal destiny of the humans, is a matter of life and death. Here we have two different paradigms of Christian theology.

Erasmus was alarmed by the seeming determinism of Luther’s theology, painting an image of an “unjust and cruel” God. Erasmus wished to defend the idea of a just God, and for that he needed to reduce the omnipotence of God to a slight extent by increasing active responsibility on the human side. For Erasmus it would be impossible to accept the possibility of God’s punishment without the notion of the responsibility of the human beings based on freedom. It is Luther's theological passion not to reason about the inner logic of the hidden God, *Deus absconditus*. Instead, Luther wants to create extremes: It is the very nature of true faith to believe that God “has been and is righteous,” even in the face of facts which seem to contradict his goodness. He is God, and for his will there is no cause or reason that can be laid down as a rule or measure for it since there is nothing equal or superior to it, but it is itself the rule of all things. For if there were any rule or standard for it, either as cause or reason, it could no longer be the will of God. Cause and reason can be assigned for a creature’s will, but not for the will of the Creator, unless you set up over him another creator.

Luther's theology is best characterized as *theologia crucis*, God working *sub specie contrario*: he leads the human being into total humiliation and despair as to his/her possibilities of acquiring grace in order to offer his grace to the sinner as a perfect gift without any prerequisites on the human side. This, and only this, also makes divine grace absolutely certain and secure – the dilemma of the security of salvation was an extremely important existential question for Luther himself. Luther sees it as his mission to reveal and destroy all secret religious pride and to utterly destroy self-righteousness. Using his lively rhetoric, Luther describes how a sinner who is desperate about his/her inability to contribute to salvation is, paradoxically, already in the state of grace. This seeming lack of worry about one's own relationship with God is a paramount expression of a full trust in the goodness of the Triune God whose good will and promises of salvation cannot be doubted. This kind of thrusting oneself on abundant divine grace is a hallmark of Luther's theology. The theocentric model of salvation is the only model providing perfect peace of conscience and sufficient satisfaction of mind for the sinner.

Our study has shown that it was a misunderstanding by Erasmus to claim that Luther promotes a deterministic view of God as someone coercing human beings to evil. Now we have seen that it was another misinterpretation of Luther's intention by Erasmus to say that even in the state of grace the human being "cannot but sin." At these two points Luther seemed much more negative and deterministic than he really was. Had Luther never made some of his unhappy extreme statements in his *Assertio*, Erasmus might never have raised such strong criticism against him. After correcting these misunderstandings, we have opened up a chance for some degree of reconciliation between the two.

The present study sees a possibility of reconciliation to a certain degree between Erasmus and Luther. Erasmus is wavering between the traditional Scholastic interpretation of the Augustinian view on the notion of prevenient grace, *gratia praeveniens*, and the novelty of the *Via moderna* teaching emphasizing the freedom and responsibility of the human side (point 1 in our three-dimensional scheme). Seeing Erasmus as more traditional rather than more modern, in the sense of Late Medieval thought, would make the difference between him and Luther much less severe. Yet an important difference remains: Erasmus does not recognize the role of God's Holy Spirit in the contrition and conversion of the sinner.

We may also conclude that in regard to the Augustinian notion of *gratia sanativa* or sanctification Luther and Erasmus are not as contradictory as it seems on the basis of their polemical debate otherwise. Both see the cooperation of the believer, being in the state of grace, with divine grace and progress and growth in following God's will in one's life as possible (point 3 in our scheme). The only noteworthy difference here again is that, for Luther, sanctification is powerfully both a Christological and Pneumatological reality: it means participating in Christ's divine nature and life and being led by the Holy Spirit of divine love. Erasmus does not use similar language, he is more anthropocentric in his expressions.

Where the real discrepancy between the two debaters seems most severe is their different conception of justification proper (point 2 in our scheme). We are compelled to draw the conclusion that the most important difference between Luther and Erasmus is in their conception of the living and efficient presence of the Triune God's Holy Spirit in the justification and salvation of the sinner. Erasmus does not recognize the role of the Spirit here, he knows nothing about the intimate union of the sinner with Christ – his person and work – in the Holy Spirit or about the participation of the sinner in divine life. These are the central elements of Luther's conception in his energetic defense of the principles of *sola gratia et sola fide*. Here an irreconcilable point of controversy remains, a paradigmatic difference between the conceptions of divine grace.

We are justified in concluding: In *The Bondage of the Will*, in regard to all three dimensions of the doctrine of grace, Luther's teaching is strongly Trinitarian and Pneumatological, emphasizing the union between the justified sinner and the Triune God, whereas in his *Diatribes / The Freedom of the Will* Erasmus lays emphasis neither on the Holy Spirit nor on the idea of a union. In regard to the doctrine of grace, a full reconciliation between Luther and Erasmus is not possible, but a détente of significant degree is conceivable – the differences and controversies are not as sharp as one would assume on the basis of the rhetoric of the two disputants. In their debate the two parties used strong and hyperbolic expressions, even exaggerations and deliberate misinterpretations, which led them to misunderstand each other even on issues where common understanding could have been possible.

## 11 Abbreviations

CC

Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina.

CSEL

Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum.

LCC

The Library of Christian Classics.

LW

*Luther's Works*, The American Edition.

PL

*Patrologia Latina*.

WA

*D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimarer Ausgabe).

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*De diversis quaestionibus LXXXIII* (396), CC 44A, 7-91.

*Enarr. in Ps.*

*Enarrationes in Psalmos* (392-420), CC 38-40.

*De Gen. ad litt.*

*De Genesi ad litteram* (401-415), CSEL 28/1, 3-435.

*De gest. Pel.*

*De gestis Pelagii* (417), CSEL 42/2, 51-122.

*De grat. et lib.*

*De gratia et libero arbitrio* (426-427), PL 44, 881-912.

*C. Iul.*

*Contra Iulianum* (421), PL 44, 641-874.

*De spir. et litt.*

*De spiritu et littera* (412), CSEL 60, 155-229.

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