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Creator est Creatura

Luthers Christologie
als Lehre von der Idiomenkommunikation

Herausgegeben von
Oswald Bayer und Benjamin Gleede



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onszettel gegen den schlesischen Edelmann.²⁴ Der Bote wurde übrigens in Nürnberg bei seiner Rückkehr verhaftet. Schwenckfeld selber fertigte noch eine Antwort auf Luthers Zettel, die aber erst im Zusammenhang seiner Auseinandersetzung mit Flacus im Jahr 1555 publiziert wurde.²⁵ Doch machte Schwenckfeld Luthers Malediktionszettel abschriftlich sogleich bekannt, so daß Luther darauf 1544 in seinem *Kurzen Bekenntnis vom Heiligen Sakrament* polemisch zu sprechen kam und seine unumwundene Absage an Schwenckfeld wiederholte.²⁶

Luther's Anti-Doctism in the Disputatio de divinitate et humanitate Christi (1540)

Paul R. Hinlicky

I know of no God except him who became man.
Therefore, I also desire to have no other God.¹

1. Introduction

It is characteristic of much scholarship that Luther's adherence to the unity of Christ's person in the Incarnation – a stance which came to definite form in the Reformer's mind through the Eucharistic controversy of the 1520s – is thought to bring him into the vicinity of Monophysitism and even Doctism.² Marc Lienhard's study of Luther's christology is representative:

"There where God is, there is found also the man Jesus. Ubiquity is at the very heart of a theology of revelation, which considers the mystery of God revealed in Jesus Christ [...]. But difficulties arise because Luther considers this ubiquity, within the framework of the 'communication of attributes', as

1 Martin Luther to Oecolampadius in the "Marburg Colloquy", in: Luther's Works: The American Edition, ed. J.J. Pelikan/H.C. Oswald/H.T. Lehmann [hereafter: LW], Vol. 38, Philadelphia 1999, 82. The statement was in response to Oecolampadius statement "that we ought not to adhere to the humanity of Christ so closely but be lifted up to his divinity".

2 Manfred Schulze calls attention to the fact that in Luther's view of church history the ancestors of contemporary "sacramentarians" were not the Arians but the Gnostics and Doctists. So it is not by accident that precisely in the Eucharistic controversy Luther is already warning against those who say the flesh is of no avail: "soon Martin, Manichaeus, and Valentinus will appear, teaching that Christ did not have a real body but a phantasmal one." (Martin Luther and the Church Fathers, in: The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West, Leiden/New York 1997, 595; Schulze cites WA 23, 201,21-202,2).

24 WABr 10, 427.

25 Vgl. Weigel, Luthers Beziehungen, 473-480 und 882-884.

26 WA 54, 141,1-142,16.

of Docetism.⁷ In his great late treatise *On the Councils and the Church* (1539) from the same period, Luther could criticize Nestorius on the same basis:

"If it seems strange to Nestorius that God dies, he should think it equally strange that God becomes man; for thereby the immortal God becomes that which must die, suffer, and have all human *idiotia*. Otherwise, what would that man be with whom God personally unites, if he did not have truly human *idiotia*? It would be a phantom, as the Manichaeans had taught earlier."⁸

Butches, in Luther's analysis, makes the same error from the opposite direction: he does not "see that he must deny the human nature of Christ if he rejects the divine *idiotia* of the human nature."⁹ In Luther's mind the *communicatio idiomatum* works to reject Docetism in all directions. If that is so, it would appear that contemporary critics are either imposing an alien conception on Luther, or in fact have a material dispute with him regarding the very sense of Christological error. One gets the impression that by Docetism interpreters question whether a Christology offers a plausible or realistic construction of the human consciousness of Jesus, a view going back through Schleiermacher¹⁰ to the Antiochene school of the ancient church.¹¹ But this will

The Christology of Luther's opponent in the 1540 Disputation, Caspar Schwenckfeld, arises from a one-sided reading of Luther's eucharistic christology that seeks to find a "middle way" between Luther and Zwingli by adopting Zwingli's spirit-flesh dualism in the interpretation of John 6 to affirm a real, albeit "spiritual" presence of the Lord. Synthesizing dualism with Luther's view of the presence of Christ produces a man [Jesus] was God and should have been able to comport himself in a divine manner, but he did not do so; he abstained and was despoiled, comporting himself like a simple man [WA 17/II, 242,35] or again, 'Like other human beings he ate, drank, slept, walked, stood, hungered, thirsted, was cold, was hot, became tired, clothed himself, prayed, living like any other person before God and the world. And all this he could have left and comported himself differently – as a God' [WA 17/II, 244,67]; cf. also *ibid.*, 176: "United to the divinity in a hypostatic union, the humanity knows a definite heightening. It disposes of a power which distinguishes it from other human beings. The hypostatic union does not remain without effect on the humanity of Jesus thus united to the divinity [...]. But the uneasiness remains [...].] a too one-sided Johannine Christ, which takes account of the glory of Christ, but not of his true humanity, those human limitations to which the synoptics and Luther himself [...] bear witness about Christ."

Oswald Bayer calls attention to this at the outset of chapter one above. In § 97,5 of *The Christian Faith*, ed. H.R. Macintosh and J.S. Stewart, Vol. 2, New York 1963, Friedrich Schleiermacher, having just appropriated the Antiochene christology of the Indwelling Logos, turns to "the theory of a mutual communication of the attributes of the two natures to one another" as something "also to be banished from the system of doctrine and handed over to the history of doctrine" (411) since in such a communication "nothing human could have been left in Christ since everything human is essentially a negation of omniscient omnipotence" (412). In the same vein, Luther was rediscovered with such vigor in the 19th century "was obscured by *communicatio idiomatum* (Luther: Witness, 390f.). But Lienhard is also defending Luther against the charge of the Catholic scholar Yves Congar that the humanity of Christ for Luther is merely "the theater" of a drama. If this is right, "it would not be possible to say with truth that God operates through Christ, but only in him." According to Lienhard, Congar's critique overlooks the confrontation be-

8 LW 41, 103.

9 *Ibid.*, 109.

10 *Ibid.*, 109.

11 M. Lienhard, Martin Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ, Stages and Themes of the Reformer's Christology, trans. E.H. Robertson, Minneapolis 1982, 229. Cf. *Ibid.*, 175f.: "But the question which can hardly be avoided is: Has Luther not wrongly divinized the man [Jesus] as it not dangerously near to the teaching of Docetism to write, 'The man [Jesus] was God and should have been able to comport himself in a divine manner, but he did not do so; he abstained and was despoiled, comporting himself like a simple man' [WA 17/II, 242,35] or again, 'Like other human beings he ate, drank, slept, walked, stood, hungered, thirsted, was cold, was hot, became tired, clothed himself, prayed, living like any other person before God and the world. And all this he could have left and comported himself differently – as a God' [WA 17/II, 244,67]; cf. also *ibid.*, 176: "United to the divinity in a hypostatic union, the humanity knows a definite heightening. It disposes of a power which distinguishes it from other human beings. The hypostatic union does not remain without effect on the humanity of Jesus thus united to the divinity [...]. But the uneasiness remains [...].] a too one-sided Johannine Christ, which takes account of the glory of Christ, but not of his true humanity, those human limitations to which the synoptics and Luther himself [...] bear witness about Christ."

a divine property communicated to the humanity. One might well ask how Docetism can be avoided"³

The later Luther's emphasis on the glory of Christ can give "the impression that a certain deification of human nature tends to threaten the basic principle of the theology of the cross, which affirms the revelation of God hidden in the weakness of the humanity, but not transforming this human weakness into the divine glory"⁴

In conclusion, Lienhard speaks of "two divergent tendencies" between the paradox of divine power hidden under human weakness in the theology of the cross and the *communicatio idiomatum*, taken as a theological explanation of the Incarnation, which leads to an "illegitimate divinization of the man Jesus". In this latter, "Luther, it seems to us, contradicted the eschatological perspective [of the theology of the cross][...] At the very heart of his thought, we find a fracture"⁵

There is considerable irony in this indictment, and arguably as well a fundamental confusion about what "Docetism", not to say "Monophysitism" is and why these should be regarded as errant. There is irony because in a succinct statement of the reformer's mature Christology, *Disputatio de divinitate et humanitate Christi* from 1540, we find Luther arraying himself – with the help of the *communicatio idiomatum* – against a genuine representative of Monophysitism, Caspar Schwenckfeld, with the warning that it is *the latter's* teaching that bears the seed

3 M. Lienhard, Martin Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ, Stages and Themes of the Reformer's Christology, trans. E.H. Robertson, Minneapolis 1982, 229. Cf. *Ibid.*, 175f.: "But the question which can hardly be avoided is: Has Luther not wrongly divinized the man [Jesus] as it not dangerously near to the teaching of Docetism to write, 'The man [Jesus] was God and should have been able to comport himself in a divine manner, but he did not do so; he abstained and was despoiled, comporting himself like a simple man' [WA 17/II, 242,35] or again, 'Like other human beings he ate, drank, slept, walked, stood, hungered, thirsted, was cold, was hot, became tired, clothed himself, prayed, living like any other person before God and the world. And all this he could have left and comported himself differently – as a God' [WA 17/II, 244,67]; cf. also *ibid.*, 176: "United to the divinity in a hypostatic union, the humanity knows a definite heightening. It disposes of a power which distinguishes it from other human beings. The hypostatic union does not remain without effect on the humanity of Jesus thus united to the divinity [...]. But the uneasiness remains [...].] a too one-sided Johannine Christ, which takes account of the glory of Christ, but not of his true humanity, those human limitations to which the synoptics and Luther himself [...] bear witness about Christ."

4 *Ibid.*, 255.

5 *Ibid.*, 378f.

6 Translated from the Latin text of WA 39/II, 92–121 by Christopher B. Brown for *Project Wittenberg*. The translation is in the public domain and may be found at: www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-home.html. I have modified this worthy effort slightly at several points especially in the Theses (cf. the appendix below).

than in the divine person assuming a human nature to itself in the act of communicating properties of its divine nature to it and experiencing its human passions as its own. The trinitarian distinction between nature (*natura, ousia*) and person (*persona, hypostasis*) which Luther takes for granted strikes important interpreters like Jörg Baur as a "weakening" of his best insight.¹⁴ As we shall see, however, for Luther it is the trinitarian *person* which remains the active agent of the *communicatio idiomatum*. In any case, not even the proper (Neo-) Chalcedonian doctrine of the personal union will satisfy the demand of modern Jesuita-

try for psychological plausibility.¹⁵

faith in "the natural union", i.e. "that the God-Logos had taken up the human nature into the unity of his unique substance and made it the perfect organ of His deity... If humanity was not deified in Christ, but if in His case His humanity was merely united with the divinity by the *prosopon* or person, then what effect can a union such as that have for us. That formula can only be of advantage either to the detested "moralism" of the Antiochens, or to mysticism, which bases its hope of redemption on the idea that the God-Logos continually unites himself anew with each individual soul so as to form a union." (History of Dogma, trans. N. Buchanan, Vol. IV, New York 1961, 222). In this cunning fashion, Hammack indicates the background of Luther "mystical" doctrine of the "joyful exchange" as also his genuine debt to Chalcedon.

Jörg Baur, art. Uniquität, TRB 34 (2002), 224-241 (immensely shortened version of chap. 6 below). I am most happily indebted to Professor Baur for this excellent summation of his extensive study in the field, which may be found in his fascinating and translations given from this article in what follows are my own). Baur argues that despite its apparent naive fundamental rule – where you put God there you must also put the humanity – unveils a break with the traditional concept of the person, the second trinitarian person (*hypostasis*), the Logos, who is not, Baur claims, essentially affected through the transition from the status of *logos ansarkos* to *logos ansarkos*. In so far as Luther acknowledges that deity indeed cannot suffer or die, it leads him only to the traditional language: the person which God is suffers according to the humanity, the person is crucified according to the humanity. Yet Luther can also attribute the suffering of the Crucified to both natures, and not only to the person, as if to a third thing beyond the two natures. In this regard, the works and sufferings are no act nor experience of a humanity used by God as an instrument, but are *communicatio operationum et passionum*. The result is that for Luther the humanity is no parallel organ to the deity, no mere hull of the kernel which is the deity within: "cum nihil possit magis dici haereticum quam humanam naturam esse vestem divinitatis" (cited from WA 39/II, 95, 13f). From this angle, Baur comments, the reproach that Luther is a Marcionite docetist appears to be senseless. Yet, one wants to ask Prof. Baur, whether a *communicatio operationum et passionum* by which the Logos is itself affected in the transition from *ansarkos* to *ansarkos* dialectically presupposes that transition and with it the difference in natures and whether this state impart himself bodily.

15 On Justinian's anathematism and Neo-Chalcedonianism, see Fellikan, Tradition, 271. D. Kingston Sigism, Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ, New Haven/London 1970, 224 articulates the objection: "Now it is easy to see how a problem of terminology arises. Simultaneously 'person' has to serve for the [immutable] hypostasis of the

be something quite distinct, both historically and theologically, from the denial "that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" (1 John 4:2) which the Apostolic Father Ignatius of Antioch first identified as the deviant teaching of "docetism".¹² In the same way, as we shall see, for Luther the error of Monophysitism lies in locating the unity of Christ in the divine nature as such, which must then assimilate the human to itself,¹³ rather

11 Cf. Fellikan, The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol. 1, Chicago 1971, 251: "The theology of the hypostatic union could do justice to the predominant tendency of the Bible, which was to speak quite indiscriminately of the divine or the human in Christ while retaining the same subject; it could not do justice to those passages in which this tendency was replaced by language about the growth of Jesus." Fellikan names the view of Theodore of Mopsuestia and his followers "the indwelling Logos christology", i.e., the "indwelling of the Logos in a man whom he had assumed" (Ibid., 252). The "religious intent" was "to take seriously the fact of moral development in the man Christ Jesus and thus to guarantee his status as simultaneously Redeemer and example" (Ibid., 253). He notes that the Antiochenes could describe this "moral" union of the Logos and Jesus of Nazareth as a "personal" union, "neither a union according to *ousia*, as was the union in the Trinity, nor a union according to nature, as was the union of soul and body. Either of these definitions would obliterate the distinction between the divine and the human, produce a monstrosity, and make salvation through Christ impossible" (Ibid., 252). On the exact contribution of Theodore and his pupil Nestorius to the development of the concept of *communicatio idiomatum* cf. chap. 2, paragraphs 2.3. and 2.4. above.

12 Cf. W. R. Schoedel, Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch, Hermenia Series, Minneapolis 1985, 64: "One pole of Ignatius' christology – the emphasis on the reality of the incarnation – sanctions the godly use of the things of this world. Everything is pure to the pure (cf. Tit. 1:15). Another pole of Ignatius' christology – the emphasis on the reality of the passion – lends reality to a hostile world (To the Ephesians 10:3). Such world affirmation and world denial are not contradictory. Both are rooted in Ignatius' emphases on the inescapable obligations that faith and love – and the incarnation – entail." This dialectic of affirmation and denial grounded in the "incarnation" is the reason Ignatius disputes docetist teaching, e.g. in his letter to the Smyrnaeans 6: "Mark those who hold strange doctrine concerning the grace of Jesus Christ which came to us, how that they are contrary to the mind of God. They have no care for love, none for the widow, none for the orphan, none for the afflicted, none for the prisoner, nor the hungry or thirsty. They abstain from the eucharist and prayer, because they do not allow that the eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which flesh suffered for our sins, and which the Father in his goodness raised up." (J.B. Lightfoot/J.R. Harner (eds.), The Apostolic Fathers: Revised Greek Texts with Introductions and English Translations, Grand Rapids (MI) 1984).

13 In the background here lies Adolf von Hammack's influential argument that Chalcedon, under the influence of Leo's Tome, deprived the Church of the East of its

2. OVERVIEW

Theses 1–24 make the argument that in Christ words receive a new signification in the sense of connotation, even while retaining the same reference in the sense of denotation. Thus one must distinguish between old and new senses of the word 'creature' when the term is applied to the unique person of Christ. Thus, while it is true that Christ is creature with respect to his humanity, here creature nevertheless has the significance, not of separation from the Creator as it does in the old, philosophical use of language, but of unity with the Creator in a new theological language given with the gospel narrative, as parsed by its *formulae loquendi* and thus confessed as the *fides catholica*.

Theses 25–32 turn polemically against Schwencckfeld's christological innovation in teaching the complete assimilation of the human nature of the glorified Christ to the divine in the transition from the state of humiliation to the state of glory, such that it would be wrong any longer to call Christ a creature. Luther unravels what he regards as logical blunders in Schwencckfeld's reasoning, since he sees a contradiction where in fact an *unavoidable equivocation* has occurred on account of the paradigm shift from the old language of philosophy to the new language of theology. This blunder is what puts Schwencckfeld into the vicinity of Eutyches (whom Luther in the treatise *On the Councils and the Churches* similarly evaluated as more inept than malicious). In passing Luther wants also to expose what he regards as a morally culpable (1) disregard of the sense or intention of speech for the purpose of trapping an opponent in words, (2) abuse of argument by selective citation which take thoughts out of context, and (3) sectarian logomachy which is destructive of faith. He does this in order to expose what heresy really is.

In *Theses 33–50*, Luther argues for 'fitting' interpretation of the *Rather and the Scriptures* in light of the inefability of the personal union as a divine act and thus of the inadequacy of any simile from created unities aptly to express it, even cherished and beautiful images traditionally employed by orthodox teachers and sanctified by long use. A charitable construction of the intention must be made, in view of the fact that all orthodox teachers, i.e. within the Chalcedonian boundaries, know that Christ's person is not *compounded* out of the two natures (as any image of it from spatial unities inevitably appears), but rather is uniquely *constituted* (as a temporal-historical act) in the *personal* union of the two natures by the loving obedience of the Eternal Son in his mission of redemption. This uniquely constituted personal unity must be *thought*, not merely imaged, and the thought itself will be a meager

Theology in the controverted tradition of Luther might try to see with Luther what the errors are in Monophysitism and Docetism by looking with the aged Reformer at the same subject matter, namely, the confession of the *fides catholica* of "the one Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man". The fruitfulness of such an exposition of the *Disputatio* of 1540 should be measured not only by the possibilities it offers for better historical understanding, but above all by the contribution it makes to the present confession of the same Lord. In other words, the task undertaken here is not only to describe Luther's legacy in Christology, but to do so with a view to developing it for today. Since the 1540 *Disputatio* is little known in English speaking circles¹⁶ (curiously ignored in the selection made for *Luther's Works: The American Edition*), I will first provide an overview of argument. Then I will turn to detailed historical and theological exposition of the theses. The division of the argument is my own.

Son in His divine essence, and for the lowly figure of Christ. How can we maintain both identity and contrast between God's majesty and Christ's humility? (Nor, we may say in passing, in the manner Gustaf Wingren suggests: 'For Luther, it is just *majesty* that is humble' [cited by Sigfrin from *The Living Word*, 206].) With this parallel dismissal of Wingren's solution (not to mention Philippians 2), however, the real compatibility of divine personhood with the "lowly figure" Jesus in the glory that comes down to the depths in creative love is lost from view. "The person of the Word thus acts in assuming, and effects its union with the manhood without change in itself, since the process of becoming refers only to the nature passively assumed. The immutability of the divine essence is preserved in this way, but at the expense of making the biblical testimony equivocal. The presumption that the divine hypostasis is a *priori* immutable and impassible continues to influence [Luther] [...] on the ground that 'life cannot die,' Luther asserts that Christ the Word remained alive when Christ the man died..." (Ibid., 225). The "paradoxical result" of Chalcedonian personal union, even in Luther, "has been an Apollinarian Christ" (Ibid., 226). This is the well-known liberal Protestant assessment, which Sigfrin traces to Adolf von Hamack's judgment that Luther is "unsuccessful in reinterpreting the old orthodoxy in terms of his new and living faith [...]. Remnants of the philosophers' God persist, despite his radical insistence that whatever rational apprehension of God we may possess, it is to be abandoned for the lively knowledge of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This should lead us to a complete reworking of the truth enshrined in the sentence, 'Christ maintained His Godhead unaltered when he became man' [WA 47, 55,6] For it should mean that even what we know of God's unchangeability is determined by what we discover of it through faith in Christ [...]. The unchangeability of God must never be determined by our profoundest metaphysics or our loftiest speculations, but only by what God has revealed." (Ibid., 240). Is it "profound metaphysics" or the most elementary biblical theology of the God who creates *ex nihilo* to distinguish between the creator and the creature, the immutable and the mutable, etc.?

16 For a succinct historical account, see M. Brecht, Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church 1532–1546, trans. J.L. Schaaf, Minneapolis 1993, 324ff.

distinctions between philosophy and theology, the old and new languages, and the intriguing idea of theology as the grammar of the Holy Spirit working out of the Scriptures can hardly be overestimated. Theology is not faith seeking understanding in the sense of opinion seeking knowledge or representational thought seeking conceptual comprehension, but in the sense of faithfully communicating the meaning of the Spirit from the book of the Spirit, i.e. in a word, the person of Jesus Christ as the new and saving unity of Creator and creation, in language true to him and intelligible to the public.

3. The New Signification of Creature in Christ (Th. 1–24)

The Theses begin with a self-conscious appeal to the *fides catholica*, i.e. against innovators and sectarians. Luther has in mind particularly the christological teaching of the Fourth Ecumenical Council in 451. This reference is demonstrated later on in Thesis 31 by the association of Schwenckel's teaching (that Christ's glorified human nature is no longer creature) with Eutyches whose teaching of course had been condemned at Chalcedon. But one wonders how the reformer at this late stage of his theological career may appeal to catholic faith, *alongside or even without reference first of all to Scripture*, to ascertain the correct rule for speaking about Christ. Scripture alone, it seems, does not suffice: even John 1:14, "The Word was made flesh", seems to be expressed in-eply, as it can be taken to suggest a substantial metamorphosis of the divine Logos into a creature of flesh. In Thesis 14, Luther claims the evangelist would have better expressed the matter by saying "The Word is incarnate or made fleshly". Have we here Luther *correcting* the words of Scripture in the light of the later *fides catholica*?¹⁸ In fact Luther freely corrects the inept words of both Scripture and tradition for the sake of the Word, i.e. in the light of the fundamental

¹⁸ Schullze's excellent study rightly notes that "the four 'principal Councils' of Nicea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon were [for Luther] all distinguished by the fact that they did not resolve on any new articles of faith, still then unheard-of, but provided genuine instruction from Scripture. A Council is nothing but a court of law, which reaches its decisions in line with the 'ancient law' of the church, which is recorded in Scripture. The doctrinal pronouncements of the four principal Councils are really 'Holy Scripture' for Luther, because they derived from genuine exegesis of Scripture by the Fathers of Councils. To modern researchers this interpretation of the Councils in the Roman Empire appears naive and uncritical" (Luther and the Church Fathers, 590). Perhaps, but the more significant observation is that Scripture and the Ecumenical Councils form for Luther a hermeneutical whole. See the discussion of Thesis Four below.

understanding, not any kind of penetrating intellectual comprehension. Accordingly one must be especially wary of being misled by analogies, apparent logical implications, illustrations and dictionary definitions all of which could easily introduce foreign chains of thought and lead

astray.

In *Theses 51–56*, Luther concludes this discussion of hermeneutics by using the traditional example from the logic textbooks of the "Ethiopian who is white, with respect to his teeth", in order to render the confession of "Christ who is creature, with respect to his humanity", acceptable to those who scruple, under the impact of Schwenckel's accusation, that somehow this carefully formulated confession of Christ as true creature subverts the confession of Christ as true God. In passing Luther criticizes 'depraved logicians' who force different meanings out of grammatically alternative expressions of the same matter.¹⁹ The point of the grammatical illustrations given in this section is to show how the premarital resort to logical analysis, in place of the primary rhetorical account of the sense of the text, can obscure and make uncertain what should be acknowledged in terms of external perspicuity as the clear sense of Scripture's ordinary language.

The first question in theology, conceived of as a grammar of the Spirit working out of the canonical Scripture as source, is not "Do I believe it?" or "Is it true?" but, "What is the sense?" Only then does a second kind of question arise: "Do we understand the Word in the words, the letters in the Spirit?" Having mastered these primary arts in reading Scripture grammatically and theologically, the theologian finally aims at speaking the matter discovered so simply that it is communicated to the public of today in lucid and certain words given by the Spirit in the sense that the Spirit intends. Rhetorical and logical analysis, dogmatic inquiry, public confession – that is the order of theological work Luther tacitly commends here.

Finally, in *Theses 57–64* Luther puts one important corollary of the foregoing – that heresy consists in the sense of what is being said (not in verbal mistakes or inept expressions) – into the context of the overarching battle between the Holy Spirit and Satan over public confession before the world of the one saving Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man. The importance of this observation for understanding Luther's

¹⁹ This raises a complex question about the relation of dialectic (logic) and grammar (rhetoric) in Luther, as well as the sources in humanism which inform him. See J. Lindhardt, *Martin Luther: Knowledge and mediation in the Renaissance*, Texts and Studies in Religion 29, Lewiston (NY) 1986 and T. P. Dost, *Renaissance Humanism in Aldershot u.a. 2001*. Support of the Gospel in Luther's Early Correspondence: Taking All Things Captive,

conviction of universal Christian faith in "one Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man", Thesis 15 is *inclusivae*: "It is rightly taught that in this manner the manner of speaking (*usum loquendi*) preserved in the *scriptures* and in the *orthodox fathers* should prevail" (my emphasis). Thus the problem of how the catholic fathers (and also the canonical Scriptures) are to be 'fittingly' (*commode*) interpreted, so that the Spirit-intended sense provided in the *usum loquendi* can be distinguished from the many well-intended but inept expressions found in the Fathers (and the Scriptures) will require much attention in what follows. Certainly it is *this* problem of *what the Spirit intends* which generates Luther's significant but difficult conclusion of the *Disputatio*: heresy does not lie in words, but in the sense of speech (Thesis 57). So the final Thesis 64 reads: "This is what it means to be a heretic: one who understands the Scriptures otherwise than the Holy Spirit demands". The problem – obviously – is that the sense of theological speech is nonetheless provided, preserved and protected by Spirit-given *usum seu formulas loquendi*. As Luther puts it in the *Praefatio* of the Disputation:

"Therefore in order that we might somehow understand, God has given us *formulations of speech*, that Christ is God and man in one person, etc."¹⁹

We have two circles here. First, why should some human speech, like the ecclesiastical formulation 'two natures in one person', be privileged over other human speech, like the canonical but inept John 1:14, and received as the one intended by the Spirit? Second, how is the Spirit-intended sense of speech to be known without an arbitrary appeal from one set of words to another? Let us call the former circle hermeneutical and the latter theological.

19 WA 39/II, 98, 15: "Ideo ut capere aliquomodo possimus, dedit Deus nobis formulas loquendi, quod Christus sit Deus et homo in una persona, etc." (emphasis mine).
 20 By this time a lot of water has flowed under the bridge since the debate with Eck. The conflicts with incipient Protestant sectarianism, of which the present *Disputatio* is a witness, have robbed Luther of any biblicalist naïveté. For a fuller discussion of this claim and its import for today, see P. R. Hinlicky, *The Lutheran Dilemma*, Pro Ecclesia 8 (1999), 391–422.

"The use is permitted in so far as it is not discordant with the sense of Scripture", *The Alud* gives us: "Theology does not look so much at words as at the sense"²¹

Theology, as Luther understands it, works within this circle of the *fides catholica* in which Scripture and its dogmatic exegesis in the ecumenical councils form a hermeneutical whole.

This hermeneutical circle is not vicious, nor does it contradict the primacy of Scripture, if we bear rigorously in mind what the first thesis actually says. For the task of theology here presupposed by Luther is not so much the individual monastic or academic *credo ut intelligam* as a public and churchly *credimus ut confiteamur*.²² In the latter case theology also attains a genuine *cognitio Dei* – "in order that we might somehow understand, God has given us formulations of speech" – but in, and only as, the Incarnate Son (not through him as an earthly symbol on the way to a heavenly substance) and so grasps in Christ the reconciliation of humanity to God, which the eternal Son brings to the earth and enacts in his history among us as the Incarnate One. There is here no fact as-sumption that faith in the Incarnate One represents the lowest order of representational knowledge (opinion), accepted on account of ecclesiastical authority, but now seeking in theological speculation its proper fulfillment in the certainty of intellectual comprehension of its object, as the Anselmian tradition thinks of theology, *fides quaerens intellectum* (which Luther, the Augustinian monk, knew well).²³

By contrast, for Luther faith in the Incarnate Son is the present conviction of the invisible future things of God promised through the gospel ('forgiveness of sins, life and salvation' as the *Small Catechism* put it); thus faith itself is *divine* faith, a work and gift of Christ's own Spirit, communicated to the penitent in the 'joyful exchange' when the present Lord sovereignly comes and bears away her guilt and woe. Faith is thus this certain, particular knowledge of God bestowed in promises spoken by the present Christ through the Spirit *at this juncture of the*

21 WA 39/II, 109, 19–21 (A): "Licet uti, quando non discordant in sensu a scriptura sancta", ebd., 16f. (B altitud): "Theologia non spectat iam verba, quam sensum";

22 Kenneth Hagen had called this Luther's *enarratio* method: "to set forth in detail Paul's theology in the public arena [...] to take the message out and apply it, that is, to tell the story in public [...] to go public against the devil" ("Luther on Atonement – Reconfigured, Concordia Theological Quarterly 61 (1997), 254).

23 Cf. B.F. Eckhardt, Jr., "Anselm and Luther on the Atonement: Was It 'Necessary'?", *San Francisco* 1992, 10: "Luther was well acquainted with the works of Anselm, as is clear from his marginal notes of 1513–1516(?) [...] [He was] quite familiar with the entire corpus of major treatises, as well as a number of letters. Luther included a brief and tidy summary of the *Cur Deus Homo*, as well as several students' notes on the pages, indicative of a careful study (WA 9, 104–114)." Cf. also ibid., 88, 136 for the difference in method Luther adopts in contrast to Anselm's *sola ratione*.

ages. Theology in that case means the field in a cosmic conflict of the Spirit, on the one side, who aids believers to know Christ aright and guards against all deviations which would lead to the loss of God's promises, against Satan on the other side, who in cunning malice turns even formal theological truths about Christ into lies and deceptions. The present *Disputatio* must be understood within this apocalyptic framework of Luther's forensic conception of history;²⁴ indeed it concludes with emphatic reference to this over-arching battle in Theses 61 and 62:

"such is the simplicity and the goodness of the Holy Spirit, that his people, when they speak falsely according to grammar, speak the truth according to the sense. Such is the craftiness and the wickedness of Satan, that his people, while they speak truly according to grammar, that is, as to the words, speak lies according to theology, that is, according to the sense."

Naturally, the goodness of the Spirit is not permission to indulge in bad grammar. Instead, just as faith knows God in the Incarnate Son, Luther will discover the condition for the possibility of theological truth in human words in that Christ as (*the new*) creature provides the analogy, as we shall see, *the image of God*, by means of which the new language of theology speaks truly, here and now, on the earth and in history.

In any case, Luther's appeal to *fides catholica* means to receive orthodox *formulae loquendi*, such as 'two natures in one person', as guiding truths given by the Spirit. There is no *petitio principii*, because the project is not to found what humanly speaking can be no more than opinion on putative divine revelation, no matter whether this foundation of revealed knowledge will be located in Scripture or tradition or both. He rather appeals to the authority of the orthodox *formulae loquendi* as Spirit-given, because on *reasoned examination* (as in the present *Disputatio*) these patterns of teaching show themselves apt instruments of the confession of the unique person of Christ, *the One and only Person who unites God and humanity in a new covenant of mercy, against Satan's deceptions, who would divide anew this saving unity of God and humanity by attacking Christ's person through deviant teaching*. The unity of Christ's person is materially, i.e. with regard to human salvation in the cosmic battle between God and Satan, axiomatic for Luther: "ut unum dominum Christum confiteamur verum Deum et hominem". The point of

24 H.A. Oberman, Luther: Man between God and the Devil, trans. E. Walliser-Schwarzbart, New Haven/London 1989, 266f.: "Holding fast to the Gospel was indeed much, but it did not constitute a 'success'. For Luther reformation was the beginning not of modern times but of the Last Days [...]. The only progress he expected from the reformation was the Devil's rage, provoked by the rediscovery of the Gospel. [...] God himself would bring about reformation through consumption; it would be preceded by the Devil's counterreformation".

Luther's 'confessional' (in the original 'apocalyptic' meaning of the word as *witness* in a controversy) theology is to confess Christ as being in person the new covenant between God and humanity, particularly in the time of trial, i.e. whenever and whenever Satan seeks to undo what God had done. Christological talk is not idle religious or philosophical curiosity about the relation of the finite and the infinite but knowing *witness* in a forensic conception of history, informed and well grounded *testimony* in the eschatological trial.

Argument XVII of the *Disputatio* contains the statements: "in theology we have our own rules." On this basis, *communicatio idiomatum* is rightly characterized as a 'rule for christological talk' (Tyorinoja), i.e. which lays bare the sense of the Incarnation in this apocalyptic frame-work as God's saving act, not a 'theory' which seeks to explain the inf-²⁵table. The *communicatio idiomatum* is the prime instance of "the rules of its own" which Luther ascribes to theology so understood in distinction from philosophy. In the present *Disputatio*, this rule for talking rightly about Christ is said by Luther to follow ("sequitur") from the twofold substance and unity of person articulated in Thesis 2. So Luther understands the *communicatio idiomatum* as *analytic* to the catholic confession of the two natures in one person, i.e. it is a rule which simply makes

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This rule historically arose from the Chalcedonian definition and was given classic statement in John of Damascus' *On the Orthodox Faith* and so passed into the general knowledge of the Western church. It belongs to the deep structure of Luther's entire thought and manifests itself especially in his teaching on the joyful exchange. This is a central discovery of M. Lienhard: "Thus two realities are important to obtain salvation. First, *Christ*, i.e., the presence of Christ, thanks to the proclamation of the Word; then faith. The union of these two realities, *fides Christi*, constitutes one of the dominant themes in Luther's thought. When Christ is thus present in the *fides Christi* to save human beings, he takes upon himself the sin of believers and gives to them his righteousness. A kind of exchange is effected between Christ and the believer – what the reformer calls the 'the [sic] joyous exchange'" (Luther: *Witness*, 59). "This theme [the joyful exchange] appears in the Fathers, particularly in Athanasius and Augustine. It came to Luther by way of the Christmas liturgy [...]. Luther limited the exchange to sin and justification. He adopted the Pauline interpretation of the ancient theme. One will note in any case how often this theme underlines the active role of Christ in our salvation. He comes to us by the Word, gives us a righteousness which permits us to appear before God, takes from us the sin which separated us from God." (Ibid., 60). "In this connection we find again the theme of joyous exchange. In fact, Christ is stripped; he makes himself a servant in order to assume our sin. Thus we become free. He snatches us from our slavery and makes us children of God [...]. he insists that the divinity was truly present in the man Jesus. That is a fundamental intention which recurs incessantly in his thought, to which the Kenotic theologians of the 19th century do not remain faithful [...]. Love drives Christ to the incarnation and animates him during the whole of his earthly life. The true miracle is not the incarnation, but the love of Christ (WA 10/III, 432)." (Ibid., 176). But this latter, we shall see, is a false antithesis.

fusions Luther can say redundantly in the *Præfatio*: "The natures are joined *personally* in the unity of person"³⁰

Thus the fact that Luther turns in the following theses to expositing that for Luther this *communicatio* really occurs in Christ's person; to deny this would be, for him, tantamount to denying the reality of the incarnation itself with its saving sense for human beings. The hypothetical union, the canonical depiction of the one Lord, the Gospel's presentation of the unitary subject, is primary; the rule is derivative. Just because it is so in the gospel narrative that the man forgives sins and the Son of God suckles at Mary's breast, a rule about the communication of attributes in the personal union must guide our speech in response to this figure Christ, if our speech about him is to be true *to him*, as also to the gospel's promise of salvation *through him*. Ontological, not solely verbal communication is indicated by the little word *recte* in Thesis 3: "So that those things which pertain to man are *rightly* said of God, and, on the other hand, those things which pertain to God are said of man", not abstractly or generically, to be sure, but with reference to the one Lord Jesus Christ in his history with us and for us. The *communicatio* rule rests upon the *est* of the Incarnation, not a *significati*

It is not meant then as a hyperbole but as proper predication: "it is true to say: This man created the world, and this God suffered, died, was buried, etc." (Thesis 4, my emphasis). The property of God as Creator is truly attributed to this man; the property of man as sufferer is count of the personal obedience of the Eternal Son enacted in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, with the result that whoever apprehends the Person of Jesus Christ in his history with us by means of this rule of the exchange of attributes rightly understands the sense of the saving incarnation as *commertium admirabile, frohlicher Wechsel*: The Eternal Son becomes our death to give us his life, he becomes our sin to give us his righteousness, he becomes our flesh to give us his Spirit. In the man's fellowship with sinners, God eats and drinks and rejoices; in the man's acts of healing and liberation, God creates worlds anew; in the man's agony, God confronts God and God, so to say, surpasses God to justify the ungodly and give life to the dead.

The *communicatio idiomatum* rule draws all this out into the open. It unpacks the notion of incarnation with respect to the particular man participating in the divine ubiquity, it is one thing for Jesus to be present, another for him to be present "for you".

30 WA 39/II, 98, 6: "Sunt illae naturae coniunctae personae in unitate personae" (my emphasis).

Jesus and identifies the divine personal agent here "who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:21). Consequently it is clear to the believer in any hell that he or she really remains hidden in Christ with God and from these depths will rise at Jesus' call when he comes again with God's promised kingdom to make the world new – since *realiter* nothing in all creation can separate from the love of Christ. Luther's confessional theology is at its root that of the martyrs, whose victory is already now manifest in their brave defiance of the prevailing theology of glory with its lie about God's blessed impassibility as distant apathy rather than engaged agape. With this reflection, we see that 'impassibility' is not the self-evident, univocal concept it is taken to be; the concept can as readily be deployed to parse the blessed gods of the Stoics as the faithfulness of the biblical Lord. Luther's God is in fact impassibly, unchangeably, immutably love that reveals this eternal glory in coming down to the depths.

Thus Jörg Baur argues that in Luther's christology the old, metaphysical language is at once claimed and transcended. Metaphysically there is no proportion between the finite and infinite. But this aporia is overcome from the side of infinity in the constitution of the person of Christ. Thus Christ can only be spoken of in new language from the side of finitude about the "glory of God" which for our sakes comes down to the depths. The "inglorious glory of the murdered God", the same glory of "his body in the Supper", negates the old metaphysical view of glory, as if Christ sits at the right hand of God on a comfortable couch unconcerned with the work of feeding us. The new theological language of glory has Christ, not presiding over things at a distance but entangled in the *miseria* of the course of world history.³¹

If it is so, however, that "this man created the world", so that this Jesus who harkens hell is as such inescapable ("to him every knee will bow on heaven and earth"); if it is so that "God alone is Creator, also specifically the creator of redemption, who brings to salvation those who do not seek his salvation", who "converts those who do not wish to be converted and resist him"³² just because the gospel encounter with the all-present Incarnate Son is inescapable, then Satan, that prince of dualism seeking ever to separate creation and redemption, God and humanity, spirit and flesh, is defeated in the action of personal faith and public confession of the Incarnation – whose reality and sense is laid bare to understanding by the *communicatio idiomatum* rule, when

31 Cf. bel. chap. 6 at n. 148f.
32 Schütze, Luther and the Church Fathers, 583.

which for Luther can say what God is *not*, if not declare what God is – remains true and important for the theology of the incarnation as its very presupposition. The eternal Son is not morphed into abstract humanity, emptied out into something else in a merely verbal display of oratorical fireworks. The infinite does not cancel itself into some finite. The Eternal Son, who was personally, concretely and specifically thirsty, in servitude and dying once and for all on the Cross, is not to be thought of as having thus become impersonally, abstractly and generally “thirsty, servitude and death” (Thesis 6). While this radically kenotic kind of locution has been popular in some 20th century political and liberation theologues, it is a construal that Luther here expressly rules out as so much confused gibberish, so far as it is seriously intended to say something like: God has died, given up deity, and transferred his office to suffering humanity, which must now arise as a god to become its own creator and redeemer. That, for Luther, would be monstrous.

But confused gibberish in the church’s life is common and the sense is not always evil: “both the scriptures and many fathers do not distinguish between the concrete and the abstract in many predicates of human nature” (Thesis 10). Luther gives as an example in Thesis 11 the *Te Deum* sung daily in the church, which speaks as if the Eternal Son assumed (an individual, hypostatic) human person, rather than (an an-hypostatic) human nature. This would result in the two sons of Nestorianism, if taken strictly. The proper meaning is rather that the Eternal Son assumed a human nature into the unity of his own divine person to constitute the one Lord Jesus Christ and his history with us. Yet confused language in the church can be tolerated and forgiven (though not encouraged or imitated, Thesis 16), especially when it appears in traditional doxology, so long as the sense is right, as determined by the context of speech and the announced intentions of the speaker. That is why Luther states (as he now approaches his real op-

tion which Luther himself insists cannot and is not to be explained but only believed. He acts out of character when he adduces a theory to justify the Word of God to man. It is not his wont to explain the inexplicable.” “This analysis is so wrong-headed that it is difficult to know where to begin to untangle the errors: in terms of the present *Disputatio*, it obviates the very distinction between abstract and concrete predication on which the argument turns. It begs the question of natural theology or philosophy’s knowledge of the difference or separation of the finite and the infinite, or religiously the awareness of divine majesty, which for Luther is hardly a matter of arbitrary *a priori* definitions of the natures. On the other hand, Sigisigns ignores that the problem that not even paradoxes can be believed if they are not understood (at least as paradoxes). But the fundamental error he makes is consistently to regard the *communicatio* as an explanatory theory, when as Sigisigns himself has to acknowledge it works for Luther as rule to exposit the Gospel’s presentation of Christ and so guide our confessing of Christ.

the reference is to that particular man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.

“It is true that Christ created the world before he became human...” (Arg. II). There is for Luther at least *prima facie* a distinction between the Logos *asarikos* and *ensarikos* in the very telling of incarnation as an event, no less for us than for the Trine God. Nevertheless the historical creature Jesus is the same Person as the Eternal Christ, the Son of God. The dramatic claim of Thesis 4 points to this one and same divine person, the Eternal Son, before and after becoming man – likened in Argument II to a crowned King who is, however, the same person as the infant born naked years ago. It does so in order to focus attention on the self-same personal identity, expressed and manifest in the loving act of condescension, which actually constitutes the one Lord Jesus Christ in his history with us in time. To appreciate this divine and loving act for human salvation as a free and personal act, one *must* observe philosophically that it is not abstractly true that humanity forgives sin, creates worlds, or raises the dead. It is not generally true that divinity suffers, thirsts, or cries out in distress and pain. The truths brought out by the *communicatio idiomaticum* are specific and concrete and indeed *new* truths concerning the person of Jesus, not abstract negations of the well-established natural meaning of concepts, the reckless mongering of paradoxes and other illogical illocutions so fashionable in today’s church.

Generally and abstractly philosophy rightly distinguishes between God and humanity as between uncreated Creator and created creature. These concepts represent two distinct natures, one *causa sui* and the other not.³³ Moreover, this philosophical truth of natural theology –

33 Thus Sigisigns, Luther’s Doctrine of Christ, 233f. has to concede that Luther accedes to the tradition here. To be sure, Luther the ‘Nominalist’ “has led us to believe that to possess human nature”, “to possess divine nature”, means simply ‘to be man’, ‘to be God’, the conclusion that Christ is both God and man (*communicatio naturarum*) rests on the observation that He acts and speaks appropriately to both. “But with the turn to the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomaticum*,” “this same speaking and acting are called ‘properties’ or ‘attributes’, whose unity is said to be effected by Christ’s being God and man [...] such terminology seems redundant [Occam’s razor!]; in fact, it escapes tauology only if the content can be given to the distinction between a nature and the function of a nature.” But in fact, Sigisigns concedes, “Luther certainly makes such a distinction. ‘Essence implies a condition, whereas its expression implies an act [...] We know Christ is (always) God in essence, because He (sometimes) acts divinely; we know He is (always) man by nature, because He (sometimes) acts humanly’. Luther’s use of the *communicatio*, then, is saved from tauology, but at the expense of seeming to rest upon an *a priori* definition of the natures [...]. It not only seems to, but actually does, reverse the order Luther otherwise adopts, since he occasionally uses the rule of the *communicatio* as an *a priori* device for explaining Scripture’s paradoxical conjunction of the divine and human in Christ – a conjunc-

"For in Christ, humanity signifies the assumed, not subsistent [i.e. individual hypostasis, or person], human nature. But 'man' signifies a subsistent person [who in this case is a member of the Trinity, the divine Son]."

Hic est unus homo, cui nullus est similis.³⁴ – This is an extraordinary statement. In what sense can it be intended? Traditionally of course Christ is said to be like us in all things, except sin. Luther shares in this conviction about the sinless humanity of Christ, the New Adam. Characteristically, he develops the notion along the Pauline lines of 2 Cor. 5:21: this sinless one was made to be sin for our sakes. It is in this action for redemption that the incomparable personal uniqueness of the one Lord Jesus Christ in his history is manifest as the innocent One "who was made a curse for us". He comes as God in the flesh to become the One forsaken by God; this love-bound mission to the cross articulates his unique personal identity. In response to the proposition that just as Christ was made a curse, so also he was made humanity, Luther re-

ports:

"Rather than analogy, we must follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and as he himself prescribes, so we must speak. That Christ was made a curse for us, there signifies something truly concrete, that is, Christ was made a sacrifice, a victim for us"³⁵

Thus the soteriological meaning of the incarnation lies in this true concrete. The sense is not that abstract humanity has morphed into abstract divinity (such a crude notion is not in any case what the Eastern church means by *theosis*³⁶), let alone divinity into humanity, but that God made his Son accursed in the place and for the sake of sinful humanity (cf. also Arguments XXI and XXII) in order to bring about a new communion of persons, divine and human: united with Christ in the power of the Spirit to the glory of the Father, a *trinitarian* theosis. But this soteriological sense follows from the uniqueness of the "unus homo, cui nullus est similis".

These considerations bring us finally to the central idea of this first part of the *Disputatio*, to that which "is nevertheless certain: all termi-

34 WA 39/II, 116f. (A): "Here [in theology] is one man to whom no one is similar".

35 Ibid., 109,6-9 (Arg. XIII).

36 See P. R. Hinlicky, *Theological Anthropology: Towards Integrating Theosis and Justification by Faith*, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 34 (1997), 38-73 and V.-M. Kärkkäinen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (MN) 2004. Luther's view of *theosis* is Trinitarian, thus avoiding any implication of a natural fusion of creator and creature in place of a kind of analogue of the personal union: "The Son Who lives because of the Father promises us in turn that we shall live because of Him, sharing all that is His except His eternal divine essence, and to this extent He will make us partakers of his divinity." [WA 33, 231,32; 235,16], cited in Stigins, *Luther's Doctrine of Christ*, 198.

ponent in this matter) that some dare to say: "Christ is a creature", even though this appears to mean that Christ was created (Theses 13). Luther in Argument VII of the *Disputatio* attributes such an 'invert' turn of phrase to doxological wonder at the personal decision of the Creator to become a creature. Such wonder led Augustine and other fathers into ecstatic but imprecise speech, which can be allowed, though it must be used with care lest it lead astray the weak and simple.

What can systematically mislead when applied to the Incarnation, Luther tells us, are "etymology, analogy, [logical] implications, and examples", taken from the mundane experience which philosophical reason seeks to understand. Such philosophical or rational attempts to comprehend the object of faith on immanent terms unwittingly draw the inefable miracle of the incarnation into the mundane frame of reference and inevitably then alter its true sense as a divine and personal action harboring a promised new world. In the Arguments Luther gives several examples of what he has in mind.

In Argument XIII, the proposition is put forward: "Paul says: Christ was made a curse. Therefore by the same principle (*ratione*) it could be said: Christ was made humanity." In response to this, Luther draws on the distinction between abstract and concrete predications, which was explored earlier in Argument XI. There he held that concrete terms have personal significance, while abstract ones pertain to the modes of a nature. Christ is man (*homo*), not humanity (*humanitas*), as the former concrete term refers to the personal union in which the Person of the Eternal Son took a human nature into itself and so constituted the one Lord Jesus Christ, who is concretely *homo* but not abstractly (a member of the class of) humanity. While man and humanity are said to be synonyms in philosophy (in the sense that the concrete human person is always a member of the class, humanity, and the class of humanity is always composed of human persons), theology requires that this one concrete man, Jesus Christ, belongs not to the class of human persons, but to the class of divine persons, i.e. the Holy Trinity. In Argument XXV, Luther allows that

"man and humanity are synonyms *simpliciter* in philosophy, but in theology they are not" because "in theology, here is one man to whom no one is similar [...]. Therefore [these terms] differ in theology and philosophy. If it were said that the divine person assumed a man, that is, a human person, it would follow that there were two persons, but this is intolerable. Therefore it is rightly said that the Word assumed human nature [i.e. thus distinguishing between *homo* and *humana natura*]."

Or again at the conclusion of Argument XXVII:

shifts from philosophy to theology with this preaching of the Spirit, as does the use; in this shift, the Spirit thus provides his own new language, with its own rules or grammar of signification. One must therefore pay attention to an *unavoidable equivocation* (cf. Thesis 26), which arises when the same word referring to the same entity is deployed once in the old, philosophical way and again in the new, theological way. There is no contradiction entailed, if this is kept in mind, for a contradiction must make contrary notions of one and the same entity in one and the same sense. But the connotation shifts with the frame of reference and the use.

As it is explained in Argument VII:

"For the Holy Spirit has his own grammar [...] and we must remain content with the pattern prescribed by the Holy Spirit [...]. A creature, in the old use of language, is that which the creator has created and distinguished from himself. But this meaning has no place in Christ the creature. There the creator and the creature are one and the same."

The problem created by Schwenckfeld's denial of the creature in Christ is solved by accounting for the contexts in which Christ is spoken of. In the old use of language, the word signifies "a thing separated from divinity by an infinite mode" ("rem a divinitate separatum infinitis modis"; Thesis 21). In Argument XX, Luther calls this a "philosophical

in the resurrection. By the incarnation the Son of God humbled himself and assumed the *forma servi*. He became *humilitas* so that his divinity was emptied out and hidden in the flesh [...]. the public proclamation of the divinity and power of Christ is done per spiritum sanctificationis, which was not given before the resurrection of Jesus [...]. By the work of the Holy Spirit the resurrection is really taken from the hidden sphere of God into the message of the gospel, so that the risen Christ lives his *life in our midst in this message* [...]. the center in the Word of God is the risen Christ himself [...]. the outward Word does not become the Word of God until the Spirit causes the risen Christ to live his life in that Word" (Ibid., 111f.). "If the presence of Christ in the Word shall be nothing else than the presence of his image or the presence of a correct doctrine about him then there naturally will be no space for a sovereign Spirit and his free work. In that case the Spirit becomes a synonym for warm feelings or superfluous accompaniment to the natural influence which comes from the figure of Jesus or the correct doctrine about him" (Ibid., 125). Lienhard likewise calls attention to Luther's theologically formative exegesis of Roman 1:2-4 in this connection: "Christ in the flesh is God hidden and not recognized as such. After the resurrection, his rule begins in the sense that the Holy Spirit glorifies him and makes him known for what he is, the Son of God in the flesh of the son of David. This rule is exercised through the apostolic Word. The real source of it is the Holy Spirit. By the public proclamation [...]. Christ is instituted in his rule. Thus he become the Son of God with power [...]. the work of the Holy Spirit, i.e., the glorification of Christ by preaching, the manifestation of what he has been since the incarnation, the proclamation of the divinity of this man who suffered. That is the true elevation of Christ [...] the distinction between what Christ is and the fact of being recognized for what he is, which fact is linked to preaching" (Luther: Witness, 55).

nology receives in Christ a new signification in the same thing signified".³⁷ This means that the "words man, humanity, suffered, etc., and everything that is said of Christ, are new words" (Thesis 23), not in the sense of pointing out some "new or different thing" but by signifying the same entity "in a new and different way" ("nove et aliter"; Thesis 24). We are in all cases, then, speaking about Jesus the man, the One who suffered along with everything else that is told about him. Dennis Bielefeldt has rightly commented on this:

"It is important to preserve the original meaning of a word even within a theological context if one is not to compromise God's real incarnation in theological phrases like 'God is in Jesus', or 'Christ's body is in the bread'. [...] If the meaning of 'human being' [is changed to mean] 'uncreated person that God becomes' [i.e. Schwenckfeld's apparent teaching], then 'God becomes a human being' does not really assert the infinite becoming finite; it does not really assert the communication of idioms so necessary for salvation [...]. The everyday meaning of terms remains important. God really did become what God is not; God became a flesh and blood human being".³⁸

So the ordinary or mundane reference (the *significata*) remains, but it is placed into a new framework with a new use, as it must be if the same man has been raised from death and revealed by the Spirit as the Eternal Son incarnate.³⁹ This transition occurs for us according to Luther through the gospel by the Spirit's proclamation of Jesus as raised from death, by means of which a resurrection to faith is bestowed which now perceives this same crucified Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, who lived and died and reigns also 'for me'.⁴⁰ The context of meaning

37 WA 39/II, 94, 17f. (Th. 20): "certum est tamen: omnia vocabula in Christum novam significationem accipere in eadem re significata."

38 D. Bielefeldt, Luther, Metaphor and Theological Language, Modern Theology 6

(1990), 121-135, 125.

39 Siggins is correct to observe: "The referent is always the historical figure, the earthly personality named Jesus of Nazareth." But he misses Luther's penetrating insight into the *unavoidable equivocation* that occurs with the Spirit's transition from philosophical to theological discourse when he continues: "On this basis we assert the unity of the two natures in one person, because it is in the person called Jesus that we find divine and human modes of action [...]. side by side." (Luther's Doctrine of Christ, 224). This a perfect account of Pope Leo's *Tome*. What he misses here is that for Luther such a crude account is no more than *fides historica*, a philosophical observation of Jesus as a walking contradiction in terms. Siggins plays a shell game to give the impression that the fathers were imposing metaphysics arbitrarily on the Scripture rather than proceeding inductively from Scripture to doctrine, as Siggins says Luther does. But an example Siggins himself provides from Origen - of all the church fathers! - shows the opposite (Ibid., 209f.).

40 This is a fundamental result of Regim Prenter's seminal inquiry in Spiritus Creator, trans. J.M. Jensen, Philadelphia 1953: "In connection with Romans 1:1-4, Luther often points out that work of the Holy Spirit is to proclaim the divinity of Jesus Christ

erly God's and which works are alien. Reason can ask about God but cannot declare God (as Plato taught in the *Timaeus*).

Whatever Luther's complex debt to Nominalism, Luther's teaching on the incomparability of God the Creator should be situated within the Augustinian tradition's critical appropriation of Platonism's negative theology to articulate conceptually the prophetic critique of idolatry. The early Luther's critique in *The Heidelberg Disputation* expressly made this move when Aristotle was reproached for not recognizing "the absolute power of God" and "wrongly find[ing] fault with and de-rid[ing] the ideas of Plato"⁴³ Negative theology helped to loosen the mental grip that Aristotle's metaphysically constructed image of God, especially its particular construction of divine *impassibility as apathy*, had come to have in Christian theology. That was the image of deity as the self-identical nature rapt in its own perfection and so blessedly incapable of being troubled by any another, the 'ontotheological' (Heidegger) highest being within the framework of an eternal cosmos, the "false infinite" (Hegel) tacitly defined by its very opposition to the finite sphere and so itself in truth a delimited entity.

Here the power of God is not that of the Almighty Creator who works *all* things in creation, while remaining free, not to mention divine power to give creatively, even one's own self in Christ, for the sake of another who is inferior and unworthy. Rather here the power of God is the worship the divine perfection *taken as apathy* inspires, i.e. the ambition, which the divine perfection evokes in creatures, to become god-like according to this image of total self-possession. Such 'natural theology', according to the Heideberg Disputation's theology of the cross, will be no more than a projection of man's egocentric desire upon the abstract screen called 'divinity', which leaves hidden in the shadows the almighty power of the true God incarnate in the crucified Christ, the One whose glory is to come down into the depths.

The attempt of ontotheology to transcend the limits of reason and 'declare God' from below by means of analogies of perfection ascending from effects to cause betrays the distorted self-image of fallen man making an idol of the frustrated *sicut erit deus*. Against this Luther's reliance on Augustinian trinitarianism, with its motto *esse deus dare*, "to be God is to give", stands out in sharpest relief. With it comes a new possibility for analogy in the new language of theology. Neither the limits of reason nor the distortions of egocentric perception mean that there is or can be no analogy between the creature and the Creator, but

argument", which holds that "there is no *proportio* between the creature and the Creator, between the finite and the infinite." And in philosophy, Luther agrees, this is true.

Does that mean that Luther *qua* theologian decides for some brand of Nominalism as the true philosophy, which he regards in a dialectical way (as representing the 'old way) to correspond with theology (as the 'new way)? Without expressly denying this, Risto Saarinen has called attention to Luther's dependence on Augustine's modified Platonism,⁴¹ which also holds as a philosophical truth to the incomparability of God, without thereby committing to a conventionalist theory of words as empty in themselves and arbitrary in their representational function. Saarinen points out, following Tyrinnoja, that at least theologically Lutheran seems to be the veritable opposite of a Nominalist, an 'extreme realist', for whom divine words are true and living things ("veras et substantias res").⁴²

It is in any case true for Luther that there is no immanent analogy *available* to the fallen creation by which to know the Creator, who infinitely transcends it, beyond the bare acknowledgment of a transcendent causality to be feared and adored, not inquired into. Good philosophy (Plato's negative theology in preference to Aristotle's onto-theological metaphysics of deity) can recognize its ignorance here. It can critically say what God is not. It can understand that if there is a truly informative analogy immanent in the creation to inform of its Creator, human beings are in no position to ascertain it, not only because of sin, as theology teaches about the distorted egocentric perception which misconstrues what is fitting for God. But also at its best philosophical reason understands that it is in no position safely to infer from finite effect to infinite cause, as in the case of God, because the proportion between this cause and effect eludes all earthly models of causality (this is what Luther means by *ineffability*). Indeed, God's causality as Creator is ineffable in that the Almighty causes the *whole* of phenomena, "all things", and is thus beyond the grasp of any possible comparisons derived from our fragmentary and intra-systemic knowledge of causality. Couple this incapacity of the finite for the infinite with the distorted perception of the egocentric perspective of the fallen mind, and it further follows for Luther that philosophy cannot know which effects are God's and which the devil's, which works are prop-

41 R. Saarinen, *The Word of God in Luther's Theology*, Lutheran Quarterly 4 (1990), 40f.; "the Augustinian theory of signs, according to which all things are in some respect signs, and vice versa, that signs become closely related to things."

42 Ibid., 35.

which seems like light to natural reason, however, the "creature" in Christ now sheds the true light and provides the missing analogue. Jesus as the new creature, the New Adam, is none other than he who goes obediently to the cross in fulfillment of the double love commandment. This self-surrendering obedience of love restores to view the lost image of God under the conditions of fallenness. It is thus 'paradoxical' in the sense of contravening conventional wisdom, but not in the sense of a logical contradiction. In Jesus the creature, we see humanity as God wills it to be, the analogue which already now makes certain, adequate and responsible speech about God possible in human language, even in the darkness of the world paradoxically now lit by the light of the cross. For this son of Mary is the same person as the Son of God.

This is not a result which will please modern critics who are demanding a psychologically plausible "Jesus" as the touchstone of Christology which is not, as they think, to be 'Docetic'. Luther indeed thinks that the soul of Jesus cannot but be effected by the personal union: the Man, born of the Virgin, on whom the Spirit remains, appears to him as the new creation within the old, tree of the stain of original sin, without an hypostasis, i.e. autonomous 'personality' of its own, but rather a theonomous 'personality' wholly existing in the hypostasis of the Eternal Son. Even if we allow for some homiletical exaggeration in this respect, for Luther this 'humanity' is *miraculous*, as the traditional teachings which he appropriates of the Virginian conception and sinless obedience of Christ attest.⁴⁵ It is imperative to bear this point firmly in mind, because Luther will not differ from Schwenckfeld on this precise point. For Luther, as for Schwenckfeld, the true *humanity* of Christ is the miracle of the Spirit's new creation in time, the new formation of Adam from the dust and ashes of the Failure. The precise difference between the two will be that for Luther this new *creature* abides forever in and through a personal union with the Eternal Son. But for Schwenck-

45 For Luther, Jesus is as man 'more than a man', cf. Sigtins, Luther's Doctrine of Christ, 215: "There are two classes of man, he says, man for himself and the man from God. The second is a class of one, for Christ says that no one ascends to heaven but He Who descends from heaven, and thereby excludes everyone but himself [...]. In the nominalist logic, incidentally, this allows Luther to say both that Christ is man just like other men, and also that humanity is not predicated univocally of Christ and other men.) Christ assumed real flesh from His mother Mary, but since He was begotten not by flesh but by the Spirit, His flesh is to be distinguished from all other flesh born of Adam. 'By nature He is Mary's child, yet He has spiritual flesh, a true, divine, and spiritual body, in which there dwells the Holy Spirit Who begot Him and permeates His flesh with Spirit'. [WA 33, 262,34]"

only that any knowledge of it would come from above, correcting the egocentric distortion of reality in human beings (cf. John 1:18).

This 22 reads: "In the new use of language [the word creature] signifies a thing inseparably joined with divinity in the same person in an ineffable mode." "Creature", with its connotation of suffering and imperfection, is not naturally or philosophically an analogue of the Creator, as we have seen. There are many creatures. Which of them is the image of God? The "person", in the sense of the creature called in Genesis 1:27 to live before God in dominion of the creation might have been, if that status had not, according to Luther, been lost by the Fall. What, then, if God gives and declares himself in his own substantial-personal Word to re-create this lost personhood?

"It is a new locution, which was never heard before in the world. Christ is not a mathematical nor a physical word, but a divine and uncreated word, which signifies substance and person, because the divine word is the divinity [...]. Philosophically word means sound or voice, but theologially spoken word signifies the Son of God",⁴⁴

This is Augustinian trinitarianism, according to which the divine and uncreated Word is God's eternal self-expression. Now if this Word personally takes from the material of the fallen world and assumes to its substantial reality a human nature, then what God provides in the Word's incarnation is a newly created image of himself, constructing in this assumed humanity a *proporatio* between himself and the creation. God whom reason cannot declare from below thus declares himself from above in reasonable words of human language: Jesus *quae* creature is the New Adam who corresponds to God.

In fact in theology, "we make not only a proportion", Luther declares, "but a unity between the finite and the infinite", namely the personal union of the divine and human natures in Christ. "If Aristotle had ever heard or read this, he would never have been made a Christian", for he would never have conceded that there is any such *proporatio* of the finite and the infinite, not to mention unity, given in Christ. Why? *Ecce, homo!* It is the manifest *imperfection* of the suffering man Jesus, the incongruity of seeing glory of divine creative love for the godless in this man's godforsaken death, which would in no way seem 'apt' or 'useful' to Aristotle in his quest for excellence analogous to that epitome of cosmic perfection which he calls the divine. In this state of darkness,

44 Argument IV, WA 39/II, 103,5-10: "Est nova locutio, quae non est antea audita in mundo. Christus non est verbum mathematicum nec physicum, sed verbum divinum et increatum, quod significat substantiam et personam, quia verbum divinum est divinitas [...]. Philosophice hiesit verbum sonus aut vox, sed theologice loquendo verbum significat filium Dei."

rection into the divine nature, since the root of sin is thought to lie in the metaphysical separation of God and humanity, rather than any mysterious personal turning of the creature's will away from God's will in faithful disobedience. The root of moral evil is not located in the personal act of a sin of origin, but in the metaphysical evil of finitude, which renders the creature liable to inevitable sin. The remedy in turn will be less the forgiveness of sins and the regeneration of the human *person* to fellowship in the Trinity than a literally conceived rebirth into God the Father's being.⁴⁸

"How was creaturely man ever to transcend his obvious creaturely? By means of the regenerating activity of God, through Christ, as *Father* rather than as *Creator* [...]" "There is a vast difference between the creating office or work of God and his generating office or work" (CS XIV, 320f.);⁴⁹

We may leave aside here the question of how precisely Luther knew or understood Schwenckfeld's theology in detail.⁵⁰ On the one hand, what fires Luther's ire is Schwenckfeld's accusation that he with the Chalcedonian Fathers impugns Christ's deity in affirming that Christ is and remains creature according to his humanity. In the *Praefatio*, Luther inveighs:

"Even if the Fathers say that Christ according to his humanity is a creature, this could in any event be tolerated; but Schwenckfeld wickedly twists it: 'Therefore Christ is simply a creature'. Why, wicked man, do you not add that Christ according to his divinity is the Creator!'"⁵¹

Schwenckfeld either ignores or does not understand the teaching of Chalcedon, as elucidated by the *communicatio idiomatum* rule of the mature doctrine of the hypostatic union. In either case, that is because Schwenckfeld does not grasp the need to *discernere inter vocabula aequivoca*, and thus does not distinguish between old and new senses of

48 The term 'creature' applies to the state of humiliation, but even there "he was a new creature, a new man, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary; a new man, through whom and from whom the new birth and all other new men have their origin," (cited from CS V, 793 in *ibid.*, 36). "Although the man, Jesus, by reason of the physical birth of his flesh was also included here on earth in the order of creature, but in the new order of recreation or rebirth (CS VI, 136)" (*Ibid.*, 36).

49 *Ibid.*, 43.

50 Lienhard notes of Schwenckfeld: "He thought that, in his glorified human nature, Christ was no longer a creature [...]" (c. esp. WA 39/II, 100,1ff) [...]. Moreover, Schwenckfeld remarked that since Christ can be adored, that proves that he is not a creature (WA 39/II, 105,25ff). "Ironically," Schwenckfeld thought that he was being faithful to the ideas Luther himself had put forward concerning the ubiquity of Christ. In fact, he possibly intended only to carry Luther's reasoning to its logical conclusion" (Luther: Witness, 333).

51 WA 39/II, 99,12-15.

4. The Polemic against Schwenckfeld (Th. 25–32)

feld, the state of the creature, being overcome in time, is left behind by the Eternal Son by assimilation to the divine nature.

In Luther's opinion, Schwenckfeld is hardly a capable opponent; in the *Praefatio*, Luther calls Schwenckfeld "a man uneducated, inexperienced, and ignorant of everything, seeking praise for himself"⁴⁶ This invective is not, however, mere *ad hominem*, at least in Luther's view. The characterizes him as a "man without learning [or] training, and moreover without common sense", *because* he "does not know how to distinguish between words with more than one meaning." On account of elemental rhetorical errors, Luther holds that Schwenckfeld fails to see God in the creature Jesus – the humiliated and dying man – and therefore tries to find God in a deified humanity instead, as if the former were a creature (in the state of humiliation) and the latter had become creator (in the state of glory). This means that in place of a personal communion of natural properties in Christ, Schwenckfeld teaches what may be termed a dynamic Monophysitism. What could he have meant?

Historical scholarship has established that for Schwenckfeld

"Adam was not the true, ideal or perfect man which God had intended [...] (CS) XII, 87)" to participate in divine life, since Adam "had the capacity to sin (*posse peccare*) [...]" Adam's creaturely, which for Schwenckfeld connoted separation from God, antithesis to the divine, and even a negation of the true concept of true humanity, i.e. man as participant in the divine nature (IV, 646; XV, 170)"⁴⁷

Thus he regarded the earthly Jesus as the new creature, the new Adam; he is the One elected to attain deification, which Schwenckfeld thought transmuted with Jesus' resurrection, when he left behind the earthly or created state of separation from God and entered glory. So in glory he remains human, by which Schwenckfeld seems to have meant an individual spirit or personality, but no longer creature, as that connotes passivity, separation from God and liability to sin. This connection between the creature's natural condition and its liability to sin was centrally important to Schwenckfeld's soteriology. Christ as human personality is no longer creature because, united eternally to God by nature, he is now no longer capable of sinning. Incapacity for sin requires for Schwenckfeld a realistically conceived regeneration or resur-

46 WA 39/II, 97, 7; "homo inductus, imperitus ac ignarus omnium quert sibi laudem".

47 Mater, Schwenckfeld, 41.

the term 'creature' as used philosophically or theologically respectively. Thus he systematically misunderstands the traditional christological affirmation that Christ is creature with respect to his humanity and with his innovation alters the sense of the Incarnation as a saving event, i.e. from providing for a new communion of persons to a transformation of one nature into another.

If one uses the term 'creature' for Christ in its old sense to speak of one created separate from God, Luther points out, then one never was an orthodox Christian, but an Arian, teaching that there was a time when Christ the Logos did not exist but came into being, thus, a creature by nature ontologically separated from God. When one uses the term 'creature' for Christ in the new sense of the human nature personally united to God, however, there is no danger of diminishing Christ's uncreated deity. On the contrary, this usage has the virtue of specifying it: the uncreated deity of the Son of God is manifest in his becoming the son of Mary. Here divine power of creativity radiates in a creature's self-giving love, the glory of God which comes down to the depths to make something out of nothing, good out of evil, something beautiful and valued out of what is worthless, ugly and mean. *This is creative love, almighty love, the manifestation of the love of the one and only Creator ex nihilo* – the real glory of the almighty God penetrating the depths. Catholic faith with the Gospel of John sees the glory of true deity in the humanity that gives its life in death for others. And if not there, one will never see it. To philosophy, this may appear as senseless or perhaps pernicious paradox – the Pauline "folly". But it need not be so. In theology, we "have seen his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14b) – not in heaven but here on the earth, in the way of Mary's Son to the cross. Schwenckfeld therefore "barks in his own empty confusions against his own dreams regarding the creature in Christ." So much for Schwenckfeld.

Except for a warning about the future, Luther began the *Præfatio* saying that the reason for holding the disputation is that the students should be instructed and armed against future snares of the devil. In our present passage, in Theses 30–32, Luther issues this warning: although Schwenckfeld "concedes that God was made flesh" and "has not yet dared to deny that flesh is a creature", nevertheless "Eutyches dwells hidden in such heretics, ready someday to deny that the Word was made flesh." Again, it is not a question here of how well Luther has understood Schwenckfeld. It is an arguable matter. It is not clear that Luther grasps how Schwenckfeld regards the creaturely status of the Incarnate Son as a necessary prelude belonging to the state of humiliation, since it is this condition of the creature which Christ over-

comes in the flesh and so makes the way for humanity's deification. In that case, it is not correct, strictly speaking, to cast suspicion on Schwenckfeld's undoubted dynamic Monophysitism as if it were *eo ipso* tacit or incipient Docetism. Schwenckfeld's Christ really came (though he does not remain) in the flesh. Real participation in (for the sake of overcoming) the creaturely state by the divine nature is integral to the Monophysite soteriology. Yet Luther's suspicion sounds in the warning given in Thesis 32:

"They make a theatrical pretext, conceding in appearance that the Word was made flesh, ready someday to deny it, after it is denied that there is a creature in Christ."

However Luther's interpretation of Schwenckfeld is judged,⁵² the passage remains instructive for our understanding of Luther's Christology. Luther here sets himself unalterably in opposition both to Monophysitism and to Docetism as he understands these, even if, as we have suggested, he perhaps confuses to a degree the two errors with each other. That is a challenge to contemporary interpreters of Luther, involving a number of questions. First, do critics of Luther's alleged Monophysite tendency themselves perpetuate Luther's apparent confusion of Monophysitism with Docetism? Second, if the real problem of Monophysitism is that it replaces the ineffable divine act of the personal union with a naturalistic image of metamorphosis, and, moreover, if a genuine Monophysitism does not deny that the earthly Christ came as a real creature of flesh and blood, then what really is the error of Docetism? Third, if Docetism is something distinguishable from Monophysitism, and if Luther, whose very commitment to the *communicatio idiomatum* is *eo ipso* a commitment to the *two* natures of Chalcedon against Mono-physitism, then the question becomes precise: is Luther's (Alexandrian) brand of (Neo-) Chalcedonian Christology "naively Docetic"? What would that mean?

5. The Theological Circle (Th. 33–56)

In this section of the *Disputatio*, Luther lists traditional similitudes illustrating the personal union:

"clothing and a body [...] as God and man constitute one person." "The whole Trinity worked the incarnation of the Son, as two girls dress a third,

52 According to Mater, Schwenckfeld denied the charge of Docetism, that Christ's flesh came from heaven. "He had no chimerical body (*phantastischen Leib*, IX, 778), but "assume 'our flesh'" to save us (Schwenckfeld, 59). According to CS IV, 113 Jesus had to flesh which was visible, passible, and mortal." According to IX, 778), but

while she at the same time dresses herself." "The condition of divinity and humanity is like the union of form with matter", or "the condition is like matter to form." "The divinity is compared to fire and the humanity to iron." "As the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ." (Theses 37f, 40-44).⁵³

Some of these are characterized as inept or even heretical, others relationally more apt or even "most beautiful", yet all of them are judged, strictly speaking, "to limp". As similitudes drawn from earthly experience they are inadequate to express the ineffable union of the human and divine in Christ's person. In spite of metaphors more and less apt, all these writers in fact "deny that Christ is composed [of two natures, as the metaphors inevitably suggest] though they affirm that he is constituted [by the person of the divine nature who assumed a human nature to himself in the incarnation]" (Thesis 45).

In other words, Luther here only reiterates the traditional qualification that all metaphors applied to ineffable things must be purified of unworthy associations and *thought* in a manner fitting for God, so that the images do not take on a life of their own through 'etymology, analogy, [logical] implication and illustrations' and so cease to be servants of the actual subject matter, i.e. the Incarnation as a divine act reconciling and uniting God and humanity. In this light, Luther can say "all of them *reasoned* (sapient) in a correct and catholic way, so that they are to be pardoned their inept way of speaking" (Thesis 49, my emphasis). On the other hand, "it is wicked", given the weakness of human nature and the difficulty of the subject, "when you know that the sense of someone's teaching is pious and sound to make up an error out of words ineptly spoken" (Thesis 34).

Well said! But one still wants to ask: How are we to know this 'pious and sound' sense apart from *words, words, words*? We now come to the second of the two circles mentioned above, not the hermeneutical circle of Scripture and ecclesiastical tradition which forms a kind of ex-

53 In its interesting to note that the later Melancthon restores these suspect analogies to illustrate a christological union suspiciously similar to the nominalist suppositional theory: "An inseparable union of both natures, divine and human, occurred [...] the external second person of the Godhead and this human nature [...]. even as soul and body can be in one unified person [...]. The human nature, soul and body, is supported [*getragen*] by the divine in such a way that there is a unified person, as one's body is supported by the soul in such a way that he is a unified person [...]. The divine nature glows [...] as ore glows in red hot iron." (Th. Melancthon, On Christian Doctrine: Loc. Communes 1555, trans. C.L. Manschreck, Grand Rapids (MI) 1982, 31). He also restricts the communicatio idiomatum to verbal predication (34), not in respect to being but to preaching and service. Thus the cry of dereliction does "not refer to being, but to the then present performance in which he humbled himself" (35).

ternal boundary for the orthodox Christian confession over against deviations in teaching, but now to a theological circle, so to say, operating within Luther's new and theological language. Here the Word in the words and the Spirit in the letter point to one another and thus together, and only together, yield the saving sense of a new unity of God and humanity forged in Christ, gifted with his Spirit and so made confessors in the world of the heavenly Father's coming reign against Satan and his hosts. It is in this context that theologians must also be confessors against error in teaching injurious to the gospel, i.e. error in teaching that undermines the foundation of saving unity with false ideas about Christ. Here really lies the *crux* of the interpretation of the *Disputatio*. My suggestion is that the theological circle at work in Luther's new theological language is a *perichoresis* of Spirit and Word, such that Trinitarian personalism provides the key to parsing 'words, words, words'.

In an important study of the semantical issues raised in the *Disputatio*, Dennis Biefeldt has urged a solution of this problem, which *could* be compatible with Trinitarianism, given certain clarifications. To put his solution rather too baldly: the saving sense is delivered by dialectical self-cancellations forced upon ordinary or philosophical language by the sheer paradoxical theological assertion of the 'infinite in the finite', which *assertio* itself is said to open up its own field of transcendence apart from relying on *any* immanent analogue. From the perspective of this proposed solution, however, Biefeldt is forced to acknowledge what appear to be

"tensions [...] inhabiting Luther's] views on theological language [...]. While theology is a grammar of the Holy Spirit, it is also a fallible human discipline. Theology is something one learns, something one can get better doing, something in which human experience plays an important role. For Luther theology as human word about God's word is itself God's Word both because it is grounded in the Spirit's scripture and it mediates the presence of the Spirit. Yet paradoxically, this language remains fully human."⁵⁴

As these dualistic commonplaces about theology as a human word and work might pass unnoticed today where the confessional nature of the-ology, as Luther understands it, is not in mind, Biefeldt evidently sees no need to provide any specific evidence that Luther thinks this way. But the claim seems most unlikely, on the basis of the present *Disputatio*, in that it is theology which appears here as the *nova lingua* of the Spirit, with its own rules, in contrast to philosophy, which represents the human word and work.

54 Biefeldt, Luther on Metaphor, 123.

In a somewhat differing account of the "tension" – what I have referred to in Luther's own words as the *unavoidable equivoication* –, Biefeldt explains that it arises because Luther allows no natural ontology to provide the underlying ground of continuity that could yield a term of comparison between God and creation, and yet at the same time insists that God's Word is spoken in human words. On the one hand,

"Assuming ontological inventories can contain only actual and conceptually possible beings, the divine state of affairs about whether [*sic*, which] Luther is most concerned *must be excluded* from every such inventory. Many of the ultimately significant divine states of affairs, or facts of the 'heavenly realm', or 'real' *theological essences* are not *ontological* [i.e. *mundane*]."⁵⁵

On the other hand,

"Luther believes that the propositional content [including, presumably, *ontological* descriptions] of theological and doctrinal sentences is necessary for any existential appropriation of those sentences on the part of the believer [...] Such discourse is a 'grammar of the Holy Spirit' [...] grounded in scripture, which is itself 'a book of the Holy Spirit'."⁵⁶

Biefeldt is right about the latter, but the former assumption of thorough-going Nominalism in Luther is problematic. Even more problematic is that Biefeldt seems willing to sacrifice the latter notion to the former. Biefeldt proposes that Luther's new theological language consists, not of metaphors of comparison, but in "interaction metaphor" (i.e. paradox) in which

"the collision of literal, philosophical senses is needed to establish a 'theological sense' which can then reference the infinite in the finite [...]. The ground of this metaphor is not ontological [i.e., *intramundane*], for there is no 'underlying' similarity between the infinite and the finite by which the 'fittings' of the metaphor is established."⁵⁷

55 Ibid., 127. This is an assumption and not a neutral one. But one observes that if, as Christian faith affirms, the world is God's creation, then ontological inventories of all possibilities reside in the mind of God, who gives existence only to those which conform to his wisdom and love, so that what finitely exists somehow reflects this finiteness of power, wisdom and love, even if that reflection is unavailable to the egocentric mind of man, whose sin distorts perception of reality in constituting creation as mere nature. The unavailability of an analogue does not entail its non-existence or its contingent production, and Christian faith has important – anti-Docetist, anti-Gnostic – reasons to insist that, if not for sin, the world would manifest its Creator's praises every new day.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid., 127.

Instead the 'interaction metaphor' is said to be based upon the radical discontinuity between human and divine perspective, the necessary contradiction that comes about as the believer comes to see things from "the standpoint of the eyes of God."⁵⁸

"In the collision of meanings between 'God' and 'human being' in 'God is a human being', a theological sense is established whereby reference is made to that which is not, to the God-man, to the 'theological essence' inverting every philosophical resemblance."⁵⁹

With this odd reference to the "God-man" as to what "is not", Biefeldt invokes what he calls a "heavenly" or "trans-ontological order", "beyond Being", one presumes) which, he tells us, is the *res ineffabilis* that cannot be expressed in the ontological categories (of this world) but anticipates the eschatological judgment – "seeing in the eyes of God"

Biefeldt's solution to the problem of how we are to know the Word in the words without losing the Spirit in the letter sharpens the question before us nicely. Are we to read Luther in this section of the *Disputatio* as repudiating wholesale the traditional smiles in favor of contradictions, which paradoxically work to point beyond all that is earthly to a wholly other reality? Biefeldt resorts to the Luther statement, 'Christ is sin', to exemplify his meaning here: "there is no underlying ontological similarity supporting the assertion, 'Christ is sin'. Rather, the assertion is made true from the standpoint of the divine. It is the inexpressible theological essence of Christ and sin which is referenced by the theological sense brought about by the collision of the philosophical meanings of 'Christ' and 'sin'."⁶⁰

Although one wonders about referencing an inexpressible theological essence, surely there is something right in this analysis in pointing to the divine and personal decision which constitutes the one Lord Jesus Christ in his mission from the Father in the Spirit to be that New Adam, "who knew no sin, yet was made to be sin." That stunning exchange of predicates cannot be deduced on any immanent basis for which sinlessness and sin must be contraries – or else all reasoning collapses into chaos. The same applies, as we have seen, to the 'Word became flesh'. Yet are we to think then that Luther falls headlong into a trap when he evaluates, as he surely does in Theses 36–44, the relative merit of the various metaphors of Incarnation, as if any of them could be more or less apt? Or rather has Luther not introduced a rule precisely for ordering and evaluating 'comparison metaphors' as they apply, not to some sphere of infinity which comes on the scene in an

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid., 128.

60 Ibid., 130.

If it matters to Luther thus to evaluate the metaphors of comparison for their relative aptness in proclaiming the personal union as God's saving unity with us in the person of his Son, it is not, as Bielefeldt rightly sees, because he is searching in them for an immanent *analogia entis* with which philosophical reason could make the Incarnation intelligible on its own earthly terms within its cosmic frame of reference. It is rather because the Word, having assumed a human nature and made it his own forever, has thus made itself comparable to worldly things in specific ways (e.g., Christ is like a Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep, not like a thief or a robber who abandons them when danger comes), and in this way understandable for believers in the battle of the ages. If that is so, in the end we use the awkward and not fully adequate formula, "that Christ according as he is a man is a creature" to say truly what is meant by the Incarnation, even though some may "not be pleased by this or not understand it" (Thesis 51). In that case, does not the notion that Christ is creature provide an analogue by which the *nova lingua* can speak truly both of God and the creation?

Bielefeldt's solution, it seems to us, is vulnerable to a danger,⁶² if it is not more carefully integrated into classical dogmas of Christ and the Trinity, as indeed Luther himself labors to do in our *Disputatio*. It is possible to confuse what is under discussion. For Luther, Christology is about the assertion of the ineffable Incarnation by the gospel and its confessors in the contest with Satan. It is commonplace in modern Protestant theology since Kant and Kierkegaard, however, to think that the problem of Christology is how to effect an event of ineffability or extra-ontological transcendence in time and space without any immanent basis or mediation. The cost of this move, however, is dialectically to remove all adequate and responsible talk of God to the beyond and to speak only in a veiled and indirect way on earth – in an incognito. The Incarnation thus becomes an immanently groundless pointer. But-Luther's mere *das Dass*, an abstract assertion of the infinite in the finite in the form of logical paradox. This rhetoric smashes our idols and leaves us speechless, to be sure. It also leaves a spiritual vacuum into which seven devils worse rush to fill. One is led by such dialectical self-cancellations of ordinary meaning to private, if reverent silence, neither to churchly doxology nor public confession.

62 A danger, which Bielefeldt himself is manifestly quite concerned with as well. Thus, 1528 to the definitive mode" (cf. bel. chap. 6 at n. 283). blood of Christ could lead to a pansacramental presence separable from the bread and the wine", which is why Luther himself "restricted the presence in the Supper in the present criticism is intended as a friendly one.

explosion of finite meaning, but to the ineffable incarnation presented and made known in the gospel narrative? Is not Luther working toward a rule (something like: "constituted by the personal action of the Son, not composed like a compound of two natural elements") specifying the soteriological sense of the divine action, by which sense then comparisons are to be regulated? It seems that the latter is the case. We should hardly be able to account for Luther's sharp and incisive critique in Theses 46–48 of the *insulsus* (insipid, absurd, tasteless) suppositional Christology of the Nominalists, which has us imagining the personal union in the *portentose* (bizarre, fantastic) manner of the divine nature undergoing an independent humanity as it works out its own salvation.⁶¹

61 Lienhard on Biel's teaching: "Thus only the statement, *Christus est creator* can be made without qualification. As for the statement, *Christus est creatura*, it must be handled with all the care that we have indicated [i.e. only indirectly, only according to the humanity etc]. There again, Luther goes beyond the Occamist position, because for him the hypostatic union is not reduced to the *suppositale* union [the divine person supporting the human nature], but is truly a union within the person and it finds adequate expression in the communication of attributes, conceived *realiter*." (Luther: Witness, 333). The Occamists teach that "the human nature does not become [...] *persona Christi*, but is carried and elevated (*susstantiatur*) by the persona divina (Luther: Witness, 333). Luther agreed with this Occamist christology, but in the late Disputations, he began to oppose it: "The two natures constitute one and the same person and the person of Christ is composed (*constituitur*) of the one and the humanity (WA 39/II, 100.18; 110.22)." (Ibid., 329). In this light, Jörg Baur's polemic against Melancthon's apparent retreat to suppositional Christology seems justified: In the 1555 Loci, Melancthon wrote: "the human nature, soul and body, is supported [*gestützt*] by the divine in such a way that there is a unified person, as one's body is supported by the soul in such a way that he is a unified person" (cf. bel. chap. 6 at n. 321f.). This is exactly the image of the incarnation that Luther seeks to abolish. At the same time, Baur's polemic against the trinitarian notion of person as a "tertium" weakening the communication of natures seems misplaced. Baur argues that rightly understood for Luther "the Person of Christ is his being for us and for all creation." True, particularly in articulating how the incarnation affects the *us* and *all* Logos. Yet Baur continues to argue that in this way "the compulsion of thought and representation to understand Christ according to the model of an identical personality is broken through and the secret of Christ as the event of the miraculous becomes God, almighty and immortal, both not in themselves but rather through the act of taking up and making community." (Ubiquität, 239 cf. chap. 6 bel., paragraphs 6.4.3. and 6.4.4.). But "person" rightly understood designates this very agency which eternally receiving his being from his Father and returning himself to the Father in the love of the Spirit. The same person exists in time by including the sinner in his own receiving of the Father's good pleasure and giving himself back by loving obedience in the Spirit to the Father. This temporal receiving in the birth from the Virgin and the bath in the Jordan and self-giving in the Garden and on the cross constitutes the unique personal identity of Jesus his being for us and for all creation." Baur does concede that the reprieve of the real presence of the body and

None of this has anything to do with Luther, for whom knowledge of the separation of the finite from the infinite is a rational and natural insight of true philosophy, not of theology. If one fails to grasp this, one can think that it is the business of theology in Luther's tradition first to generate a genuinely trans-ontological or trans-worldly reference, through paradoxical semantical negations of the finite, with absurd locutions like 'God is a man'. But to this nonsense, Luther could respond: Why not, God is an ox? God is Michael Jackson? God is Pink? Why *Jesus?* It is hard to see how a sheer contradiction, which threatens to descend into sheer nonsense or sheer fideism, can issue in anything more than an abstract antithesis, a "false infinite" determined merely by its abstract opposition to abstract finitude, that never truly expresses the saving reality of the infinite in the finite in the touchability, tastability, visibility (1 John 1:1ff) of mercy.

Luther's concern in this *Disputatio* is precisely the opposite: the Christ presented and confessed in the gospel *unites* the finite and the infinite, a contradiction in terms that *good* philosophy can never allow on its own immanent basis, but which really transpires with the shift to the new theological discourse. Bielefeldt's criticism of Tyornioja's identification in Luther of "the Word of God with talk about the Word of God,"⁶³ is wrong-headed; it is in serious contradiction to his own best intentions, and indeed his previous acknowledgement of what he characterized as Luther's 'tension'-laden view of theological language. But we must take care that this 'tension' is *Luther's* unavoidable equivocation at the juncture of the ages, not one created by the imposition of post-Kantian, Kierkegaardian-existentialist categories on Luther.

To put our conclusions positively, we agree theologially with Saarninen that

"from the logical point of view we must admit that the theological language speaks in an 'improper' sense and that theological concepts are, grammatically speaking, metaphors. But from God's point of view the "from the logical point of view we must admit that the theological language speaks in an 'improper' sense and that theological concepts are, grammatically speaking, metaphors. But from God's point of view the words become one in act of witness in analogy to the personal union itself. Between the Word and the words. For Luther theology is confession, and Word and that just as he is reading Luther's theology of the incarnation through Kierkegaardian lenses, he is also illicitly modernizing Luther's view of the relation of Disputation, Luther is insisting on the divinely given *formulas loquendi*. One suspects that no evidence for these claims, when it seems the case that in our quences of revealed names rigidly designating inconceivable objects" Bielefeldt offers no evidence for these claims, when it seems the case that in our the divine" and he concludes with a polemic flourish: "not merely a parroting of se- Theology is human interpretation [...]. Such an enterprise is a finite speaking about Word of God in scripture and the theological interpretation of the Word of God. However, Luther, however, carefully distinguishes between the theologian's language is the Word of God itself is to elevate the theologian to the Luther on Metaphor, 129. Bielefeldt writes in criticism of Tyornioja: "To say that the

Word of God is the only true and proper language and human languages are nothing but improper metaphors of that Word."⁶⁴

Theology, in other words, precisely as the "new language" and "grammar of the Spirit", is only possible in daring to speak by faith in Jesus 'from God's point of view'. Thus we agree historically with this statement of Lienhard:

"the incessant effort of Luther in the Disputations to make clear the miraculous reality of the incarnation [...]. The fact [of the incarnation] precedes the thought. Such thought has to let itself be corrected, transformed, and reoriented by this unique and new reality, which shocks our usual way of thinking"⁶⁵

When we understand that it is not and can never be the ineffable mode or manner of the person union – the miracle – which Luther seeks to comprehend in theology, but rather the reality and sense of "the one Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man" as our salvation, we see that the-ology, unlike philosophy, asserts here a specific and concrete unity of the finite and the infinite. For the sake of clarity about what is meant in this assertion the following formulas are both necessary and apt: "with respect to humanity, Christ is a creature" and "with respect to divinity, Christ is creator" and "these two are one concrete person, Jesus." These Spirit-given *formulae loquendi*, moreover, are the reflected Word of God, in that they confess, or same-say, the Word of God's self-testimony in the gospel. That – is Luther's meaning, whether or not we today can follow him in it.⁶⁶

64 Saarninen, Word of God, 36f. Bielefeldt would protest that this puts the theologian in the divine perspective. But that is precisely Luther's claim. Indeed, it is Bielefeldt's claim when he speaks of the believer coming to see things from the eyes of God!

65 Lienhard, Luther: Witness, 326.

66 Cf. Sigging, Luther's Doctrine of Christ, 237; "Faith is finally bound to confess that all His words and actions – even those by which we know Him to be a man – are in the fullest sense words and actions of the person of the Word. The implications of this confession stupefy the imagination; but this is Luther's confession." This in contrast to Sigging's own evident sympathy for Zwingli's reservations regarding Luther "stupendous" confession (Ibid., 236), and his own corrective paraphrase of Luther's *communicatio* to a figurative "as if": "The soteriological claim of the gospel, he writes, can be made in "far more lucid and straightforward ways" than by Luther's use of the *communicatio* rule: "the claim, on the one hand, that we must take the perfectly human words and deeds of Christ as if [i] they were the words and deeds of God, and on the other, that the relationship of unity and mutual indwelling in the Holy Trinity now extends to the manhood of Christ and thus also to us, His body [...]. [Ye] here Luther, the model of clarity, becomes strangely lurid and abstruse. The soteriological thrust is quite obscured" (Ibid., 231). "What, then, has been gained by stating this concern in such complex guise, replete with physical analogies and decked out in learned phrases"? (Ibid., 232). Zwingli himself could not have argued for the *aliosis* better.

such.⁶⁸ "This is what we must take our stand on", understanding by the Incarnation a unity freely decided by the Eternal Son which accordingly abides forever, the same One who appears preaching in Galilee and headed toward Jerusalem and so on in the gospel narrative. This axiomatic truth comes in the first place from neither Scripture nor Tradition, but from the Spirit of Christ effectively speaking this singularly through the gospel: "the one Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man", our new testament relation to God.⁶⁹

Luther's theological circle of interpretation, in other words, may be understood as the real relation between Christ and the Spirit at work in the generation and sustenance of the *fides catholica* through the preaching of the gospel. Just as it is the Spirit of Christ who reveals the man Jesus as the crucified and risen Son of God in bestowing faith, so it is the 'this one Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man' who can and does give his own Spirit to evoke faith as he calls through the gospel. The sense of the Spirit is Jesus as Christ, the God-man; the God-man Jesus Christ gives his own Spirit in order that believers may be snatched from Satan's snares to apprehend him aright.

Appeal at this juncture to the "epistemic primacy" of Trinitarianism as a solution to the riddle of the Word in the words and the letters in the Spirit is not without support in the text of the *Disputatio*, nor indeed in the very nature of the controversy with Schwenckfeld. Mater points out that Schwenckfeld in his genuinely Monophysite Christology tended to collapse the Spirit into the glorified Christ, even on occasion identifying them.⁷⁰ But Luther has a lively sense of the personal distinctions and their respective functions in the economy of salvation; it surfaces in Argument XV, where the communication of attributes, or the Incarnation, is *limited* to the incarnate Son:

"When therefore it is said that 'the divinity died', then it is implied that the Father too and the Holy Spirit have died. But this is not true, for only one

68 Cf. B.D. Marshall, *Trinity and Truth*, Cambridge 2000, 46f.: "It seems that no practice is more primitively embedded and persistently maintained in the Christian community than that of calling upon Jesus, or, we could say equally well, of calling upon the Father through and with Jesus in the Spirit. Therefore the beliefs upon which this practice depends are the ones which are most central for this community: those which identify the crucified Israelite Jesus as raised by the Father, in the Spirit whom Jesus and the Father have poured out on all flesh [...] these beliefs will be epistemically primary for the church. That is, the church will decide about the truth of other beliefs by seeing how well they fit, or cohere, with the beliefs which constitute its identification of the true God."

69 Ibid., 5.

70 Mater, Schwenckfeld, 106.

6. The Grammar of the Spirit (Th. 57-64)

As we have already spoken throughout our exposition of the confessional nature of theology in Luther's apocalyptic understanding of the conflict of the Spirit and Satan, there is no need to reiterate here what was said above. But the question we raised at the outset now demands a precise answer: What is this sense that the Spirit urges? Which is the understanding of Scripture that the Spirit demands? Luther here makes clear that real error, i.e. false teaching about Christ which gives the victory to Satan, does not lie in the commission of verbal mistakes of expression. Not even the Bible stands such a test of verbal 'inerrancy', since Moses gives the commandments in two disparate versions! On the other hand, Satan himself quotes Scripture, though with wicked intent to tear asunder what God has joined together, just as his demons tried to tell the truth about Jesus but had to be silenced as abusers of this truth. *Words, words, words* – words that deceive as well as lead to the truth. Yet in this Babel of tongues, the Spirit causes the saints to speak the substantive truth according to his intended sense, while agents of the devil, even when saying something true, nevertheless lie about God. So how is one to find one's way to the Word through this cacophony of words, words, words! How is one to read the letters in the Spirit?

In Argument XXIV, the objection is posed that the humanity of Christ is an accident of the divine substance, since Christ is man accidentally, not substantially. Luther responds to this objection by noting that the "condition as man", in which Christ was found according to the Apostle, "signifies that he walked and lay down like any other man. Paul wishes to demonstrate that he was a true man, who suffered and spoke as a man". In Luther's view, Paul's anti-Doctetic sense will not come to proper expression if one speaks of the humanity as an "accident".

"Propositions concerning the accidents of man and God in Christ are not pure, therefore they are to be spoken of sparingly, and we must take our stand on the unity. This is so closely joined that in the whole nature of things no similar example can be given."⁶⁷

The unity of an accident with the substance that bears it is an impure and misleading analogy; but in theology, the argument runs the other way. Here we begin with a singularity of the one person Jesus Christ, which bears 'epistemic primacy', which is axiomatic for theological discourse as

body, then I only *seem* to wear these chains, I will only *seem* to be devoured by the beasts! The theology of the martyrs with its resurrection ethic is and must be antidocetic. On the other hand, as Luther complained: "if it cannot be said that God died for us, but only a man, we are lost."⁷⁴ If the body born from Mary only *seems* to be God, his suffering cannot help us; indeed he too is in need of a savior. The theology of the cross which knows God in suffering and the cross is and must be antidocetic. Cross and resurrection, understood *together* as in the Johannine 'theology of glory',⁷⁵ is antidocetic.

In the classical antidocetism of incarnational theology, the genuine identification of God with Jesus who acts in his Father's name for the sake of the ungodly is not the instrument of a revelation that is conceivable apart from his particularity of Jesus' life of mercy in the drama of the approaching kingdom. Apart from this, notions of divinity and humanity will simply revert to the more or less adequate accounts of the experience of fallenness and alienation which philosophy can give from within the seemingly eternal cosmic order, unaffected by the eschatological promise. But the *communicatio idiomatum* tells this particular story of Jesus in such a way that the very notions of divinity and humanity become mutually informative of the destiny of the world's salvation. Luther's antidocetic Christology does not stand apart from this classical antidocetism of the *fides catholica*. It belongs instead to one of its most *profound* expressions. If it has a future, it will come, as the aged Luther himself realized, when the existential and soteriological themes which dominated his life's theological work are re-anchored in the Trinitarianism of the *fides catholica*, and theologians in his tradition consequently worry less about what Jesus *did* than about what he *is doing*.

Luther's new way of theological thinking lends itself to the solution of contemporary quandaries as diverse seemingly as ecumenical convergence and the quest for the so-called historical Jesus; it offers help in the urgent need for constructing a Christian theology of the world-religions, not on the basis of some religious *a priori*, let alone the empirical reduction of the religions to a supposedly common psychic or social functions, but upon the universal presence of the Man for others operative everywhere.

74 LW 41, 103.

75 Cf. U. Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John: An Investigation of the Place of the Fourth Gospel in the Johannine School*, trans. L.M. Maloney, Minneapolis 1987.

person of the divinity, the Son, is born, dies, and suffers, etc. [...] Christ alone is not the whole Trinity."⁷¹

By the very token that 'Christ is not the whole Trinity', Luther experiences no internal pressure, as a Monophysite would who diminishes the concept of person in favor of nature or essence, to have Christ accomplish every function in the economy of salvation.

This is not a prescription for a merely academic theology. This theology thinks the catholic faith, the new covenant unity of God and humanity in the person of Jesus Christ and his history with us and for us. Whoever theologially apprehends the Son in the Spirit, that is, by faith, is joined with others to live to the Father now and forever. The new language about Jesus forms a corresponding new way of life in the new covenant community of Christ. Therefore the unholy spirit, at work through those who preach some other Christ who only appears to be creature or some other Creator than this dying man, is always trying to tear asunder what God has joined together in the joyful wedding of Christ and his people. Believers in Jesus Christ engage in this battle against Satan theologially by understanding and confessing the saving truth on which they stand before the world: the man Jesus created the heavens and the earth; this same Son of God suffered and died. And these are one Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man.

7. What is Docetism?

For Luther, as Jörg Baur has urged,⁷² the exaltation does not remove the human nature to some spiritual world, but rather "locates" it in the Almighty Creator's own nearness to the spatially and temporally determined world. God as Creator has for Luther many ways of being present, and this capacity must not be restricted by a philosophical delimitation of local presence to creatures and transcendental presence to the divine 'cause of causes'. If God demonstrates creative power by sundering the tomb and raising the body of Jesus from death, local presence is *not* definitive of authentic humanity and "man in this life is the simple material of God for the form of the future life."⁷³ The real union, the *est*, not the *significant*, of classical Christology, in the interim cuts in two directions. On the one hand, if Jesus only *seemed* to die, the apostolic father Ignatius cried out against those who deny reality of his

71 WA 39/II, 1107-13 (A).

72 Cf. bel. chap. 6 at n. 115-120.

73 *Disputatio de homine* (1536), th. 35 (LW 34, 139).

Appendix: English translation of the Theses

1. This is the catholic faith, that we confess one Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man.
2. From this truth of the double substance and the unity of the person follows the communication of attributes, as it is called.
3. So that those things, which pertain to man, are rightly said of God, and, on the other hand, those things, which pertain to God, are said of man.
4. It is true to say: This man created the world, and this God suffered, died, was buried, etc.
5. But these are not correct in the abstract (as it is said) of human nature.
6. For it cannot be said, Christ is thirsty, a servant, dead; therefore he is thirsty, servitude, death.
7. On that account this [statement] too is condemned: Christ is humanity, even though it is said: Christ is divinity.
8. Even though man and humanity are otherwise synonyms, as are God and divinity.
9. In the divine predicates or attributes there is not a difference of this kind between the concrete and the abstract.
10. Even though both the scriptures and many fathers do not distinguish between the concrete and the abstract in many predicates of human nature.
11. The Symbol sings, "When you took man (homo) upon yourself to deliver him", and Augustine often does the same.
12. Although the regular form of speech (as it seems) would be: "When you took humanity, or human nature upon yourself to deliver it."
13. Accordingly some are not afraid to say: Christ is a creature, although the statement would seem [to mean that] Christ is created.
14. And John 1 says: "The Word was made flesh," although in our judgment it would have been better said, "The Word was incarnate", or "made fleshly."
15. It is rightly taught, that in this matter the manner of speaking preserved in the scriptures and in the orthodox fathers should prevail.
16. Or rather, many things are allowed even to the fathers who are agreed to be orthodox, which we should not imitate.
17. On this account we should in this matter be wary of etymology, analogy, [logical] implications, and examples.
18. Just as in grammar certain heteroclitite nouns and irregular verbs are not subject to etymology, analogy, or example.
19. And generally, in every sort of subject and art, practice often dictates against the rule.
20. Nonetheless it is certain that in Christ all words receive a new signification, though the thing signified is the same.

21. For "creature" in the old usage of language and in other subjects signifies a thing separated from divinity by infinite modes.
22. In the new use of language it signifies a thing inseparably joined with divinity in the same person in an ineffable mode.
23. Thus it must be that the words man, humanity, suffered, etc., and every-thing that is said of Christ, are new words.
24. Not that it signifies a new or different thing, but that it signifies in a new and different way, unless you want to call this too a new thing.
25. Schwenckfeld and his frog-and-mouse warriors (batrachomyomachi) foolishly scoff when we say that Christ according to his humanity is called a creature.
26. A man without learning, training, and moreover without common sense, does not know how to distinguish between words with more than one meaning.
27. For those who say that Christ is a creature according to the old use of language, that is, as separated [from God], were never Christians.
28. But rather everyone vehemently denies that Christ is a creature in this way, which the Arians taught.
29. It is clear, therefore, that Schwenckfeld is barking at empty confusion against his own dreams about the creature in Christ.
30. And forgetting himself, the man concedes that God was made flesh, though he has not yet dared to deny that flesh is a creature.
31. But Butyches dwells hidden in such heretics, ready someday to deny that the Word was made flesh.
32. They make a theatrical pretext of conceding in appearance that the Word was made flesh, ready someday to deny it, after it is denied that there is a creature in Christ.
33. In these ineffable matters, therefore, this [rule] must be kept, that we interpret the teachings of the fathers (as is necessary) in a suitable way.
34. It is wicked, when you know that the sense of someone's teaching is pious and sound, to make up an error out of words ineply spoken.
35. For there were never any fathers or doctors who never spoke in an improper way, if you want to scoff at their teachings.
36. Sedulius, the very Christian poet, writes: "The blessed author of the world / Put on a lowly servant's form" and so through the entire church.
37. Although nothing more heretical could be said than that human nature is the clothing of divinity.
38. For clothing and a body do not constitute one person, as God and man constitute one person.
39. And yet Sedulius' thought was most pious, as his other hymns abundantly prove.

57. Therefore heresy lies in meaning, and not in words, as St. Jerome rightly said when he was provoked by his calumniators.
58. Otherwise Moses would be the greatest of heretics, for he recounts the Decalogue itself in different forms in Ex. 20 and Deut. 5.
59. On the other hand, anyone with a wicked meaning, even if he shall speak aptly and brandish the Scripture itself, is not to be tolerated.
60. For Christ did not permit the demons to speak when they testified that he was the Son of God, as if they were transfiguring themselves into angels of light.
61. Such is the simplicity and the goodness of the Holy Spirit, that his people, when they speak falsely according to grammar, speak the truth according to the sense.
62. Such is the craftiness and the wickedness of Satan, that his people, while they speak truly according to grammar, that is, as to the words, speak lies according to theology, that is, according to the sense.
63. Here it may be said: If you are lying, even in what you say truly, you lie; on the other hand, if you are speaking the truth, even in what you say falsely, you speak the truth.
64. This is what it means to be a heretic: one who understands the Scriptures other than the Holy Spirit urges.

40. For the same reason that common saying would be heretical: The whole Trinity worked the incarnation of the Son, as two girls dress a third, while she at the same time dresses herself.
41. Thus certain scholastics, who think that the condition of divinity and humanity is like the union of form with matter, could not be defended.
42. Others on the other hand [who think that] the condition is like matter to form, speak much more ineptly, if they are strictly judged.
43. Nor could that [image] be maintained, in which the divinity is compared to fire and the humanity to iron, even though it is a very beautiful image.
44. Nor could that [image] be tolerated which Athanasius puts forward: "As the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ."
45. For all deny that Christ is composed [of two natures] though they affirm that he is constituted.
46. But none have spoken more insipidly than the Modernists, as they are called, who of all men wish to seem to speak most subtly and properly.
47. These say that the human nature was sustained or supposited by the divine nature, or by a divine supposite.
48. This is said monstrously and nearly forces God as it were to carry or bear the humanity.
49. But all of them reason in a correct and catholic way, so that they are to be pardoned their inept way of speaking.
50. For they wished to utter something ineffable, and then every image limps and never (as they say) runs on all four feet.
51. If [anyone] is not pleased by this or does not understand it, that Christ according as he is a man is a creature, the grammarian consoles him.
52. Let him who has learned to discuss the same matter in various ways be commanded to speak as simply as possible.
53. As the Ethiopian is white according to his teeth, the grammarian could speak otherwise thus: The Ethiopian is white with respect to his teeth, or teeth in the Ethiopian are white, or, most simply, the Ethiopian's teeth are white.
54. But if this is unpleasant, let him say: The Ethiopian has white teeth, or the teeth in the Ethiopian are white, or, most simply, the Ethiopian's teeth are white.
55. Since in all these forms of speech the author wishes to signify the same thing, it is useless to seek an argument over words.
56. Thus since these forms of speech – Christ according as he is a man, or according to his humanity, or with respect to his humanity, or by his humanity, or in his humanity – mean nothing else than that he has a creature or has assumed a human creature, or, what is simplest, the humanity of Christ is a creature, the false logicians are to be condemned, who give different meanings to different grammatical forms of expression of the same matter.