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THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY: TOWARD INTEGRATING *THEOSIS* AND JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

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PRECIS

This essay uncovers certain salvation-history presuppositions of the Lutheran doctrine of justification and their implications for theological anthropology in dialogue with Orthodox understanding of the human vocation in the doctrine of *theosis*. The Lutheran doctrine of justification offers an Eastern answer to a Western question: Jesus Christ, in his person the divine Son of God, is our righteousness. He is the one who in obedience to his Father personally assumed the sin and death of humanity and triumphed over these enemies on behalf of helpless sinners, bestowing on them his own Spirit, so that, by the ecstasy of faith, they become liberated children of God in a renewed creation. While not asking the same question as in the West about divine righteousness, Orthodoxy's doctrine of *theosis* offers a genuinely theological anthropology, which strictly thinks of the human being as the unfinished creation of the triune God. The human being is never to be reduced to his or her "nature" but is called as a person by the Person of Jesus Christ to become the concrete person united in love with other persons in the infinite, tri-personal life of God. Integrating these two anthropologies, we see that justifying faith wholly involves the human will and its uncoerced participation, yet not in any Pelagian sense in which the will retains its Adamic form of autonomy over against God. Justifying faith is the concrete, nonmeritorious synergy of the new person in Christ with the Holy Spirit, inasmuch as on this side of the reign of God's coming in fullness, the new person in Christ is nothing other than the sinner whom the Lord Jesus mercifully and effectively claims by the Spirit. In this light, the apparent dispute about the freedom of the will is shown largely to be the fruit of conceptual confusion. Yet, a baffling question about original sin remains for further reflection.

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Introduction

It is arguable today that the historical-critical task of the convergence method in ecumenical studies is largely accomplished and that we are in a stage of reception, the results of which are not yet fully clear.¹ In that case, the way forward lies in mutual theological experimentation.² The North American bilateral volume, *Salvation in Christ: A Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue*,³ brims with new theological possibilities for the construction of an evangelical and orthodox theological witness in a post-Constantinian world. The present study is undertaken in the prospect of building critically upon the achievements of the official bilateral dialogue, yet with the freedom to experiment and explore integrative possibilities. I venture that it will be by doing theology integratively that we will, in Orthodox theologian John Breck's words, "transcend our differences of history and culture, in order to discover the depth and breadth of the theology that does in fact unite us."⁴ We can integrate the concerns of each theological tradition by turning together *ad fontes*. "[T]he native tongue of Christians, for the theological expression as well as for speaking of the Christian life, is the language of the Bible," the dialogue reported.⁵ "[B]oth traditions have continued to employ the language of the Bible as the primary vehicle of theological expression and spiritual understanding."⁶

Of course, such a turn to the language of the Bible is not so simple today. Speaking from the Lutheran side in the time of a profound crisis of faith and Christian identity⁷ after the collapse of Protestant biblicism,⁸ there is a perceived need to recover the Orthodox, that is, the early Catholic understanding of the authority of Scripture in the church.⁹ The vision here is of a process of Holy Tradition¹⁰ whose content is the divine economy or salvation history.

¹Harding Meyer, "The Ecumenical Dialogues: Situations—Problems—Perspectives," *Pro Ecclesia* 3 (Winter, 1994): 24-35.

²See Kenneth Paul Wesche and Paul R. Hinlicky, "Theses from Svätý Jur," *Pro Ecclesia* 4 (Summer, 1995): 265-267.

³John Meyendorff and Robert Tobias, eds. and intro., *Salvation in Christ: A Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1992).

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁷See the special issue, "What Is to Be Done?" *Lutheran Forum*, vol. 28, no. 3 (August, 1994).

⁸See the "Crisis of the Scripture Principle," in Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. 1, tr. George H. Kehm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), pp. 1-14.

⁹See the author's study of Ignatius and Polycarp: Paul R. Hinlicky, "Evangelical Authority," *Lutheran Forum* 27 (November, 1993): 58-62; and idem, "Evangelical Authority, Part Two," *Lutheran Forum* 28 (February, 1994): 58-62.

¹⁰On the Orthodox side, see chap. 8, "Tradition and the Traditions," in Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, ed. John H. Erickson and Thomas E. Bird (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), pp. 141-168. On the Lutheran side, see chap. 12, "Quo Vadis, Petre? Tradition from Irenaeus to Humani Generis," in Heiko Obermann, *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), pp. 269-296.

The Agreed Statement on Revelation of the Lutheran-Orthodox international joint commission states:

The revelation of God, even as contained in Scripture, transcends all verbal expressions. It is hidden from all creatures, especially from sinful man (Greek: the 'old man'). Its true meaning is revealed only through the Holy Spirit in the living experience of salvation, which is accomplished in the church through the Christian life. This catholic experience of salvation in the church is at the same time the only authentic expression of the true understanding of the Word of God.¹¹

Here the concepts of the church as the eucharistic community extending through time and space, salvation as forgiveness and newness of life, and the authority of revelation as enacting the salvation event are mutually integral. Assuming this kind of reintegration of the understanding of authoritative revelation *in the church* and as an *experience of salvation*, I will be trying in what follows to uncover the salvation-history presuppositions of the Lutheran doctrine of justification and its implications for theological anthropology in dialogue with Orthodox understanding of the human vocation.

Theological Anthropology in the Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue

Classical Christian faith posited the notion of a universal humanity. This belief in the unity of humanity corresponds to faith in God the Creator and the divine plan of salvation. The horizon of human life on the earth, when it is construed as a meaningful history, is the reign of God. Vice versa, the very notion that human life on the earth coheres in and as meaningful history is an act of faith in the reality of the reign. It is a truism that secular thought since the Enlightenment has lost this faith and, with it, this theological anthropology—a turn of events that dogmatically devastated classical Lutheranism, as

¹¹Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue: *Agreed Statements, 1985-1989* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1992), p. 15. Michael Plekon has pointed to root commonalities in the two traditions: "The orthodox or 'right worshiping' practices included the maintenance of communal eucharistic liturgy at which all communed, in both kinds, rejection of the imperial papacy and the proper governance of local churches by bishops and councils, and the correct understanding of the eucharist as a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving" (Michael Plekon, "We Have Seen the True Light: Liturgy and Life in the Orthodox Church," *Bride of Christ*, vol. 18, no. 3 (1993), p. 14; cf. Jaroslav Pelikan's account in *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)*, vol. 2 in *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 281ff. Theology, Plekon stressed, is *sacred theology*, a *churchly enterprise* whose living taproot must be firmly sunk in the soil of the community's prayer and praise, drawing its first-order experience and speech from that worship that is inspired by the gospel. Theology in the modern world is in trouble, in part, because our experience of the worshiping community is radically fractured, and our worship reflects not only thanksgiving to God for the gift of God's Son but also sinful human divisiveness and arrogance that wound the body of Christ. The community of praise and prayer in which we share is neither optional nor neutral theologically; it is the living source in the Spirit for theological work, for good or ill. This rudimentary fact ought also to entail critical awareness of the distortions created for theology by the disunity of the church.

Wilhelm Mauer has searchingly described.¹² That loss is the broad contemporary context, however, for all Christian traditions; indeed, in some ways it provides the chief motive of ecumenical theology itself. It is also the reason why we must speak today of the *renewal* of theological anthropology. In today's context, justification by faith easily becomes an abstract declaration of divine permissiveness¹³ that leaves secularized persons to work out their own spiritual ruin with a foolishly happy conscience. It ceases to represent the shattering and transforming event of encounter and communion with the crucified but risen Lord Jesus, a submission to God's holy judgment and a surrender to God's redeeming mercy—in short, a *conversion* to the reign of God. Justification by faith becomes a declaration of divine favor that hangs in mid-air, without providing any vision of who the human person is and what he or she is to become.

In a view in which the encounter with Christ and communion with him by the Spirit is the text, and justification by faith the commentary on it, however, there must be an answer to the question, What is the human person? The classical answer is, in words that are familiar from the Orthodox theological tradition: To be human is to become divine. To miss this calling is to fall short of humanity, as God wills humanity to be. Sin is a radical alienation from the human vocation, whose consequence is the equally radical fate of death. Apart from some such theological anthropology as this, justification by faith loses its claim to magnify the redemption in Christ and becomes mere anthropology; so reduced, it is, in fact, in danger of becoming an ideology of secularization with a happy consciousness. In order to avoid this ironical fate, Lutheran theology will have to recognize that its relation to Orthodox theology is one of an asymmetrical dependence on the classical tradition of the ancient and undivided church, of which living Orthodoxy claims to be the representative.

Yet, that relation is not simple. With the basic orientation to the question of justification, Lutheranism is a version of Augustinianism. In this orientation, it will line up with Roman Catholicism and experience all the customary theological tensions with Eastern Orthodoxy pertaining to the role of faith and the church in history. This divergence becomes most visible in *Salvation in Christ's* discussions of anthropology wherein a perfectly blunt divergence about the freedom of the human will appears to surface,¹⁴ which I shall take up in conclusion. The solution to this disagreement, I will argue, depends on extricating anthropology from a philosophical frame of reference that debates about the antinomy of freedom and necessity within a closed cosmos and that is still perhaps unconsciously bound to the old faculty psychology. Rather, we

¹²See Wilhelm Mauer, *Historical Commentary on the Augsburg Confession*, tr. H. George Anderson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 118-119.

¹³For abundant contemporary evidence of Lutheran reasoning in the form, "let us sin that grace may abound," see "A Collection of Responses from ELCA Academicians and Synodical Bishops to *The Church and Human Sexuality: A Lutheran Perspective*, First Draft of an ELCA Social Statement" (Chicago, 1994).

¹⁴Meyendorff and Tobias, *Salvation in Christ*, inter alia pp. 26, 29, 61, 126.

need to restore theological anthropology to the dramatic thought modes of the biblical narrative of salvation history¹⁵ where the fundamental conflict between Adamic and christic humanity unfolds. Here, human autonomy is exposed as bondage to Adam's rebellion, and slavery to Christ intimates perfect human freedom, "the glorious liberty of the children of God." In this salvation-history frame of reference, both the Eastern stand for the integrity of the human person against Gnosticism and the Western stand for the all-sufficiency of the grace of Christ against Pelagianism can and must be thought together on the basis of a fresh appropriation of the ancient church's christological and trinitarian teaching.

On the one hand, this integrative vision of theological anthropology will imply that the Lutheran doctrine of justification, and the Christology that it requires, in fact had to appeal to Eastern Orthodoxy over the head, so to speak, of the Augustinian tradition, as Robert Jenson has suggested in a penetrating analysis.¹⁶ Evidence for this could be drawn from the vast yet well-trampled and equally well-controverted grounds of the *Weimar Ausgabe* of Luther's works.¹⁷ However, I have chosen a lesser known, though not less significant, second-generation Lutheran theologian, Martin Chemnitz, as the source for the distinctive interpretations I will be offering.¹⁸ In terms of the history of theology, this will suggest that Lutheranism offers an Eastern answer to a Western question. In order to be the answer to the question of God's justice in history, Jesus Christ in his person must be the divine Son of God, who personally assumed the sin and death of the world and triumphed over these enemies on behalf of helpless sinners, bestowing on them his own Spirit so that they become, by the ecstasy of faith, liberated children of God in a renewed creation.

¹⁵There is considerable contemporary discussion surrounding the "narrative identification of God" (George Lindbeck). An early representative of this thinking under postmodern conditions is found in Reinhold Niebuhr's rediscovery of Augustine. See, e.g., his *Faith and History: A Comparison of Christian and Modern Views of History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949).

¹⁶Robert W. Jenson, *Unbaptized God: The Basic Flaw in Ecumenical Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992).

¹⁷David S. Yeago's groundbreaking Luther interpretation will establish this claim on the basis of the *Weimar Ausgabe*. For a preview, see his "Grace and the Moral Life," an address delivered on October 30, 1995, at the Aquinas-Luther Conference in Hickory, NC; and idem, "The Promise of God and the Desires of Our Hearts: Prolegomena to a Lutheran Retrieval of Classical Spiritual Theology," *Lutheran Forum* 30 (May, 1996): 21-28, 30.

¹⁸Chemnitz was driven by a powerful sense of the solidarity of the Lutheran Reformation with the doctrine of the ancient, undivided church. Chemnitz did theology in large part as patristic study. The crown of his theological achievement was his Christology, which grounded the doctrine of justification by faith in what we can economically designate as the mainstream, Cyrillian teaching of the church after Chalcedon. Given the state of knowledge at that time and the cultural strangeness that the ancient Eastern church had to represent to sixteenth-century Germans, Chemnitz's is an inspiring achievement. His works that are translated into English are *Loci Theologici*, vols. 1 and 2, tr. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1989); *The Lord's Supper*, tr. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1979); *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion*, tr. L. Poellot (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1981); and *The Two Natures in Christ*, tr. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1971).

On the other hand, at the same time honesty demands explicit recognition of the critical role that the hermeneutical use of the doctrine of justification by faith¹⁹ can play over against tradition, that is, when the sense of classical Christology is grasped radically as the justification of the sinner by faith alone. One has to think today of such an innovation as the ordination of women, which may prove to be the single most divisive event in the church's history. Certainly, not all Lutherans today favor the ordination of women. Nevertheless, the argument is made with justice that the ordination of women is a telling example of the use of the Reformation principle as a criterion by which the authenticity and faithfulness of the church to the gospel is tested. Since women, just as men, can be priestly instruments of the Spirit in the community—that is, are persons capable of serving the divine Word in the sacraments, which offers and effects the presence of salvation in Christ—the question is forced: Why should women thus not be ordained? The burden of proof is therewith shifted upon opponents, on the express analogy of the Pauline argument in the early church for table-fellowship between Jews and gentiles, in which the use of justification by faith as criterion of authentic church life first emerged. By clinging to traditional practice, are we setting aside the new thing that God is doing in Jesus Christ, the *koinonia* where there is neither Greek nor Jew, slave nor free, male nor female? This further implies that resistance to the ordination of women manifests a less than authentic understanding of the gospel, even resistance to the Spirit's leading. That implication, to say the least, is offensive to many exponents of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions today. They see in such arguments both the absence of classical christological focus on the person of Jesus Christ, whom the ordained ministry represents, and a radical secularization and reduction of the priestly office to mere functionalism. We seem to have come to an unbridgeable impasse.

¹⁹Bp. Michael C. D. McDaniel expressed the hermeneutical function this way: "The Reformation doctrine of imputed righteousness safeguards the unconditional character of God's promises in Christ" (Meyendorff and Tobias, *Salvation in Christ*, p. 76). This is to say critically and decisively that offering God's unconditional promise in Christ is what the church ought to be about. Nothing ought to get in the way of this that would obscure rather than lift up Christ as saving Lord. Disputes in the church are to be decided on the basis of this critical principle in a conciliar fashion, in the pattern of the ancient church. As pertains to this hermeneutical meaning of justification, there in fact may be no substantive dispute between Lutherans and Orthodox. We will have to test this, of course. William Rusch pointed out in the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue on justification that, if, as a "metalinguistic stipulation" or a "metatheological rule," the Lutheran doctrine of justification means that "all church teaching and practices should function to promote reliance or trust in the God of Jesus Christ alone for salvation," and that, "[i]f Eastern patristic theology has done this, whether or not it has employed the vocabulary of justification, [then, from the Lutheran perspective] it is within the limits of legitimate diversity in the Christian Tradition" (in H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess, eds., *Justification by Faith*, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue 7 [Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1985], p. 133, my emphasis). On the hermeneutical function, see further in Anderson et al., *Justification by Faith*, pp. 47-48, 69-70. By the same token, this interpretation of the meaning and status of the justification doctrine reminds us that what is authoritative for the Lutheran church is not Martin Luther's theology as such but the confessional writings, especially the Augsburg Confession.

Yet, it ought to be discomfiting to Lutherans that so little of the actual ecumenical church heeds their peculiar call to faithfulness, a call that in turn can only be issued seriously if it is ecumenically intended. Moreover, I will be showing that Lutherans in particular cannot sustain their own doctrine of justification without classical Christology (and that implies as well a high view of the ordained ministry). The aporia that surrounds this contemporary conflict over the ordination of women is real, therefore. We shall have to bear with it for the foreseeable future. It seems crucially important to acknowledge this situation openly and not suppress it, so that we can begin to construct a real way forward. An ecumenical method that only conciliates past disputes is doomed to perpetual frustration, because in the nature of the case the church can only move forward toward its eschatological destiny. The burning question is whether the ordination of women is a step forward toward, or a falling away from, that hope. It is not the purpose of this study to answer that question, although posing it this way indicates from another angle the pertinence of a theological anthropology that does not reduce a person to his or her nature but, rather, sees personhood itself in the transcendence that fulfills created nature in love of God and all creatures.

Understanding the "Western" Perspective

It is necessary today patiently to explicate one's understanding of the "Western" perspective. No common understanding of this much controverted term can be taken for granted. Indeed, it is arguable that the "West" is less a monolithic tradition than a sometimes creative, sometimes destructive, never completely controlled conflict of traditions about the justice of God in history. The general problem of justification, sanctification, and anthropology was tackled in the discussion in *Salvation in Christ* about the relation between the "Christ in us," said to represent the East, and the "Christ for us," said to represent the West. The problem of the relation of these two perspectives was taken up subsequently in an incisive essay by former Lutheran Ross Aden (whose chief insight that faith is "the bridge between justification and sanctification"²⁰ I will be following). Aden made the observation in passing that "in the eyes of the Orthodox, we [Lutherans] share a largely unconscious presupposition with the mainstream of Western theology: that salvation has to do with the satisfaction of the demands of the Law of God, that is, of divine justice."²¹ This observation is somewhat overstated, since not an Augustine nor a Thomas, neither a Luther nor a Calvin would *reduce* salvation to satisfaction of the Law. They would, indeed, all view satisfaction of the Law as the negative presupposition of salvation, howsoever they went on to conceive

²⁰Ross Aden, "Justification and Sanctification: A Conversation between Lutheranism and Orthodoxy," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 1 (1994), p. 109 (see pp. 101-109).

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 95.

of that. That makes all these figures Westerners. Moreover, the Western theological frame of reference concerning divine justice in history remains important and is defensible, though not in a way that fails to integrate today the Eastern understanding of salvation as eternal communion in the triune God, let alone contradicts it.

Yet, John Breck provocatively asked in *Salvation in Christ* whether "Western theories of redemption and salvation simply do not require that Jesus Christ be ontologically identified with the godhead."²² One could easily come to this conclusion today, though historically there is great evidence against it.²³ Breck's question overlooks the gaping, jagged hole in tradition that was created in the West generally and in Lutheranism particularly by the Enlightenment. Yet, it had been precisely the pre-eminent Westerner and hyper-Augustinian Anselm who asked, "*Cur deus homo?*" in order to fathom the atoning death of Jesus. Eastern criticism that Anselm reduced the Incarnation to the satisfaction of divine law may have some merit, but it is not to the point of Breck's question. Melancthon certainly thought that justification is ours freely for Christ's sake just because Christ is the God-Man who rendered infinite satisfaction for the sin of all. Indeed, it is precisely Anselm against whom so many of his contemporary Western descendants today are in revolt, including not a few Lutherans who shamelessly try to rescue Luther from Anselm's clutches—usually by heaping abuse on poor Melancthon! One must concede, however, a fatal flaw in Western, Augustinian soteriology that does not so much require as permit christological failure. Explaining this has much to do with explicating the inner conflict that drives the "West."

The distinctive Western perspective is created by the preoccupation with the question of the justice of God in history. The East experienced the rise of Byzantium, but the West knew the trauma of the fall of Rome in the fifth century. From that time forward the West was stamped by Augustine's account of that daunting turn of events in the *City of God*. So essential to the Western perspective did this question about God's justice in history become that we experience it even today in the post-Christian developments in the West, as unbelief grounds itself in the failure of all the modern attempts at a theodicy. When the question of divine justice is made central in theological reflection, as it has been in the West, faith puts itself in a very risky position. The enormous temptation arises to compensate for the threat and pain of the world's disorder with a human—indeed, religious—activism, and then to view this activism as essential to the very credibility of the God whom faith believes.

²²Meyendorff and Tobias, *Salvation in Christ*, p. 116.

²³John Reumann expressly asked in a 1980 anniversary commemoration of the Augsburg Confession: If we had to choose on a biblical basis between the functional soteriological assertion of Article IV that we are justified freely for Christ's sake or the ontological assertion of Article III about the two natures in one person, would there be any doubt today that Lutherans would choose the former? John Reumann, "The Augsburg Confession in the Light of Biblical Interpretation," *LWF Report* 9 (June, 1980): 3-34.

It was such an idolatry of works-righteousness that the young Luther attacked, like Augustine before him, in his theology of the cross.²⁴

Renewing Luther's and Augustine's criticism at the beginning of this century, Karl Barth spoke critically of "religion" in this sense of a human activism that is surreptitiously compensating for its own unbelief. Such religiosity is the apex of human idolatry. The alternative to this idolatrous temptation in religion itself is to meet the world's disorder and pain, beginning with one's own unbelief even as a Christian, with the proclamation, confession, and service of Jesus Christ, thinking strictly that Christ alone is and can be the credibility of faith in this still unredeemed world. Or, turning again to Luther's characteristic formulation of this critique, we can say: If all that Christ does is reveal and enable a human way to justification, then Christ need be no different in kind from Moses or Mohammed. Breck is quite right to read much modern Western theology as a variation on this line. If Christ is the justice of the reign of God, however, and if Christ is the saving justice of God that opens wide the prison gates and sets the prisoners free, then Jesus Christ in his actual, historical humanity must be the only and eternal Son of his Father, who accomplished this liberation once and for all *sub Pontio Pilato*, who today and forever intercedes for his people, who will on the last day bring to pass all that he promised to accomplish. Only so can faith rest in this Christ, discover its true service, and discipline itself against that idolatry that Barth, Luther, and Augustine discerned in religious activism. That critical protest is the essence of the classical Western theological perspective.

Sustaining that radical protest, however, requires an even more radical christological affirmation than generally seems available in the West. It was modern liberal Protestant theology, as Barth keenly saw, that drove a truck through the fateful ambiguity in the West's preoccupation with the question of divine justice in history. It turned Jesus Christ into the mere model of ideal humanity and God into the benign guarantor of human moral or religious activism. Revelation (of God's moral will) replaced salvation (uniquely accomplished by God in Christ's death and resurrection) as the fundamental category for God's action in the world. Yet if, as Lutherans classically contended, faith in Jesus Christ alone justifies, that can only be so if "Jesus Christ is ontologically identified with the godhead" and, we might add, if the godhead is ontologically identified by the man Christ. Robert Bertram retrieved this classical Lutheran reappropriation of Eastern Christology over against modern liberal Protestant theology and stated the contemporary issue with some sharpness in his contribution to the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue on Mary and the Saints:

²⁴See the early Luther's "Heidelberg Disputation" in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), pp. 30-49. On Barth, see Robert Jenson's stimulating study, *God after God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future, Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (Indianapolis, IN, and New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1969).

Quite a different danger that neither Melancthon nor Luther seems to have reckoned with, nor yet needed to, is the sort of reductionist Christology in which the saints are not so much promoted to christological responsibilities as Christ is demoted to theirs. In this alternative all Christ does is what the saints admittedly do, too: transmit, communicate, reveal upward—in that sense, "mediate"—a pre-assured divine grace that would have obtained anyway, with or without Christ, except that we might not have known about it.

On such a view, from the outset there never was any real alternative to divine mercy being like divine judgment or wrath, which only in Christ—that is, in God as a human being—is historically overcome for all other humans. Against such a tepid christological background the danger of the saints competing with Christ is probably a nonproblem because by contrast with more classical Christologies this revelationist Christ has little to do that is all that unique and might not just as well be shared or delegated among his members.²⁵

As Bertram's acknowledgement of the ambiguous witness of contemporary Lutheranism indicates, in speaking in the name of Lutheranism today one thinks and speaks as an exponent of a theological tradition that is itself controverted. That is reason all the more for seeking a new solution by integrating the Western concern with God's justice in history with the Eastern vision of the human vocation. What does it mean to be human, if Jesus Christ is, in accord with "more classical christologies," "God in human form" who overcomes the wrath of God at sin's despoiling of creation and bestows the Spirit so that the new person of faith can arise and live? How is Jesus Christ, together with those who believe in him, the justice of God?

The Justice of God

The classical Lutheran insight is captured (but also obscured, as is the fate with all slogans) in the doctrine of "justification by faith." When a slogan ceases to illuminate and itself becomes a cause of confusion and darkness, it has outlived its usefulness. Possibly that is the case with "justification by faith," as significant theologians like Paul Tillich have argued.²⁶ The theological presupposition of the notion of justification, inherited from Israel, is that the Lord God, the Creator of all, alone has the right to judge the creation, either to justify or to condemn. The exercise of this right would be an act that at once

²⁵H. George Anderson, J. Francis Stafford, and Joseph A. Burgess, eds., *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary*, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue 8 (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1992), p. 261.

²⁶Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 227. Tillich, incidentally, tends to illustrate an opposite Lutheran reaction to the set of problems I am taking up, insofar as he abandoned the Western form of the question about the justice of God and took up in his Christology of the New Being an Eastern soteriology oriented to the victory of God and life over death and the demonic (cf. vol. 2, p. 178). Tillich's idiosyncrasies do not allow such generalizations to be pressed too strictly.

asserts the divine sovereignty and at the same time determines and reveals the meaning of history. Such a judgment would constitute the end of history. Revelation of the justice of God would, in essence, represent a claim to knowledge of the end of history aforesaid. This act of divine judgment pertains particularly to the human race, which is God's proxy in the created realm, and in this precise relation is responsible to God for the realization of God's loving purpose in creation. This means that the dignity and burden of every human soul as a unique historical biography is that it must justify itself before God. To be human is to answer for what one has done with one's life, as all of Jesus' parables of stewardship and final judgment attest. As Ernst Käsemann has explicated Rom. 2:1-11, Paul's doctrine of justification,

is not a refutation of the Jewish view of justification in judgment. Instead it is its radical confirmation. . . . all historical destiny presses not merely toward its consummation (Dodd) but also toward the disclosure of its meaning, or, better, of the will at work in it. . . . The doctrines of justification and judgment are inseparably linked in Paul . . . because the concern in both is the Creator's right as Lord of creation as this works itself out in the creature. . . . A doctrine of justification which avoids the concept of judgment loses its character as proclamation of the lordship of God . . .²⁷

Tillich regarded this prophetic and apocalyptic background of the concept of justification as impossibly alien to modern thinking, though one suspects that he, and many other critics have been reacting as much against influential individualistic and legalistic reductions of the doctrine. Such reductionisms have been the target of Käsemann's ample polemic, insofar as these transform the grand narrative of the Bible to a petty, egotistic preoccupation with inner peace and personal immortality, indifferent to the fate of the rest of the creation. In any case, the concept of justification—and the theological problem it designates of the right and righteousness of the Creator God and the meaning of human history—is not exclusively a Lutheran concern. It is central to Pauline and Augustinian theology and virtually dominates the Western theological tradition (in distinction, not necessarily in opposition, to the East). Lutherans and Roman Catholics today claim a "material convergence" on justification as a major biblical theme, with a solid claim to articulate what is essential to the Christian message.²⁸ Anthropologically, justification is presupposed in any theology that seeks to ground human freedom in God's creative Word, which renders the human creature uniquely responsible to God, rather than by appeal to human faculties or a natural essence.²⁹

²⁷Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, tr. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 55-56.

²⁸On the biblical claim, see John Reumann, *Righteousness in the New Testament*, with responses by Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Jerome D. Quinn (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; New York and Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982); on the historical and systematic claims, see Anderson, Murphy, and Burgess, *Justification by Faith*.

²⁹See Wolfhart Pannenberg's early but still groundbreaking discussion of "man as history" in *What Is Man? Contemporary Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, tr. Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970).

Though maligned as a "law-court metaphor" that traps theological thought in legalism, the law-court metaphor comes from Israel's prophets. Their entire legacy is activated in this terminology, so that justification concerns God's right as the Creator of creation or, we might say, the justice of the reign of God that Jesus proclaimed. To sketch out in brief the Pauline theology that Lutherans have read as a synopsis of the whole biblical salvation history: This justice of the God of Israel, to which the law and the prophets attest, becomes a human being's, not as the one who does justice but as one who trusts Another's doing of justice on his or her behalf and so completely identifies with this Other, Jesus Christ. That is why righteousness is said to become a human being's by faith alone and not by works, even the works of divine justice that a believer goes on to do as a member of Christ's body. That this is so is a matter of Christology and pneumatology, inasmuch as the very event of entrusting self to Christ and Christ's justice is something effected by the Spirit sent from the exalted Christ.

In his merciful claim upon helpless sinners for God's reign, Jesus realized in his cross and resurrection the justice of the reign of God that he had proclaimed. In his life and death for others, Jesus fulfilled the law of love in loving even the lawless. If this Jesus has been raised and vindicated by his Father, his one act of perfect justice in our human history is valid before God and therefore justifies all those who entrust themselves to him, even as the unleashed Spirit of the risen Jesus spreads the glad news of it across the face of the earth, persuading that it pertains and is valid to all who hear it. This is a spiritual persuasion that erupts as the gathering and assembling of a new humanity drawn from all the nations, in the ecstatic, eucharistic praise of God. In turn, this praise of God, this orthodoxy, this eucharistia is the in-breaking of God's reign on earth. The Lord God of Israel triumphs gloriously in gathering the praises of the redeemed gentiles. Where is the justice of God on earth, in history? The Pauline answer is: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).³⁰ The justice of God is revealed in the gospel concerning his Son, which in turn embodies itself as the new community of faith, the body of the risen Christ on the earth. Allegations of individualism find a fairer target in later Pietism and Existentialism than in the original Lutheran vision, which is close to Paul. Melancthon could begin his *Loci* with the claim, "The human race has been so created and then so redeemed that we as the image and temple of God might celebrate the praises of God. For God wills to be known and worshipped."³¹ All of theology flows from this primordial claim about the true knowledge and praise of God given in the gospel, so that there is a spiritual community on earth that worships the Father, confesses the Son, and serves in the Spirit.

³⁰Biblical quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version* (New York: Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., 1989).

³¹Cited by Chemnitz, *Loci*, vol. 1, p. 49.

Apart from the just-implied trinitarian coherence in the economy of salvation, however, the doctrine of justification hangs in mid-air. That would be a misunderstanding of it that Luther already corrected in his own lifetime. Confronted with early Protestant sectarian misunderstanding of his doctrine, Luther asserted the catholicity of the Reformation doctrine with reference to the Trinity, as is evident in the following summary paragraph from his *Confession concerning Christ's Supper* (1528):

These are the three persons and one God, who has given himself to us all wholly and completely, with all that he is and has. The Father gives himself to us, with heaven and earth and all the creatures, in order that they may serve us and benefit us. But this gift has become obscured and useless through Adam's fall. Therefore the Son himself subsequently gave himself and bestowed all his works, sufferings, wisdom and righteousness, and reconciled us to the Father, in order that restored to life and righteousness, we might also know and have the Father and his gifts.

But because this grace would benefit no one if it remained so profoundly hidden and could not come to us, the Holy Spirit comes and gives himself to us also, wholly and completely. . . . He does this both inwardly and outwardly—inwardly by means of faith and other spiritual gifts, outwardly through the gospel, baptism, and the sacrament of the altar, through which as through three means or methods he comes to us and inculcates the sufferings of Christ for the benefit of our salvation.³²

Wilhelm Mauer, moreover, has demonstrated that Melancthon drew upon this very trinitarian recital by Luther of salvation history in composing the Augsburg Confession, Lutheranism's basic doctrinal standard. Thus, the biblical and patristic concept of a trinitarian salvation history constitutes the theological framework in which the doctrine of justification by faith was worked out. If the framework of salvation history³³ derived from Luther's confession of 1528 cited above undergirds the doctrine of justification, then justification as a doctrine becomes the sharpest expression of this salvation history "theology of the Kingdom of God." Mauer has written:

After presenting the process of justification in CA 4, [Melancthon's final version] gives its basis in God's present action through Word and Spirit (CA 5) and its divinely acceptable effect in our good works (CA 6). Although justification forms the thematic core for these three interrelated articles, it is basically part of one event for which God repeatedly creates a new beginning by his spiritual rule in Word and Sacrament, and which continues in the good works of the faithful. . . . *In this arrangement*, CA 4 is the 'chief article,' the article upon which the church stands or falls.³⁴

"In this arrangement"—that means, as Mauer stressed, in the context of a renewal of trinitarianism.³⁵

If Lutheran theology today, however, should no longer be able to think of

³²Lull, *Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, p. 56.

³³Mauer, *Historical Commentary*, pp. 262-267.

³⁴Ibid., p. 290, emphasis mine.

³⁵Ibid.

faith as the work of the Spirit in each person as, and only as, a communal eucharistic event; if, from the opposite direction, it does not know how to understand the Spirit's work in the sanctification of life in a way that does not render justification nugatory; if it does not know how to continue on from Rom. 3-5 to speak with the Apostle Paul in Rom. 6-8 (let alone 9-11!) without experiencing some traumatic disorientation, then in time Christology and pneumatology will have to come apart and mark alternative paths to righteousness. The latter state will be worse than the first. However, the justice of God is supposed to be manifest on the earth in that new community of Christ that praises the Father, in the Son, by the Spirit.

"Theosis" Designates a Different Issue

It would be a mistake to superimpose the foregoing problematic on our understanding of the Eastern doctrine of *theosis*. The doctrine of *theosis* is not answering the Western question: Where in history is the justice of God? To try to press it into service this way would distort it entirely. The doctrine of *theosis* is of another order. It is a theological anthropology, a theological reflection on the human vocation in light of the whole economy of God. It is answering the questions: Why has God created life? Is life good, even in face of its negation by death? What is the purpose or goal of existence? What am I to achieve with my life? Why has God entered into human existence? Why has Christ condescended to communion with us? Why has Christ poured out his Spirit, Lord and Giver of life, upon us? As Fr. Kallistos Ware has written: "To believe that man is made in God's image is to believe that man is created for communion and union with God, and that if he rejects this communion he ceases to be properly man."³⁶ Fr. John Meyendorff wrote:

the main stream of Byzantine theology uncovers the same vision of man, called to "know" God, to "participate" in His life, to be "saved," not simply through an extrinsic action of God's, or through the rational cognition of propositional truths, but by "becoming God." And this *theōsis* of man is radically different in Byzantine theology from the Neoplatonic return to an impersonal One: it is a new expression of the neo-testamental life "in Christ" and in the "communion of the Holy Spirit."³⁷

Theosis is a master concept that seeks to articulate the intention of God in all the divine works and, thus, the human vocation. At the end of *The Spirit of Eastern Orthodoxy*, Jaroslav Pelikan observed that, through all its history, Eastern Orthodoxy "continued to hold to the doctrine of the Creator and of the creation that it had formulated against the Manichaeans and their succes-

³⁶Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, 1979), p. 67.

³⁷John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979), p. 3.

sors.”³⁸ Historically speaking, opposition to Gnosticism was the soil on which the doctrine of *theosis* grew. In the same chapter, Pelikan considered in some detail how little East and West, proceeding from different though not necessarily contradictory perspectives, were able to understand each other. Only recently have Western theologians overcome apprehensions of pantheism to acquire a proper and appreciative understanding of *theosis* as a profound vision of the sanctification of life, of the content of divine salvation as communion in the trinitarian life of God.

In this connection, Meyendorff called attention to Vladimir Lossky’s *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* as not only “a brilliant introduction to the most essential aspect of Orthodox theology, but also [as] an Orthodox challenge to the understanding of God-man relations which prevailed in Western Christianity.”³⁹ Noting that “it is not less difficult to pass from the notion of divine Being to that of created being,”⁴⁰ Lossky articulated the unique angle of vision involved in a genuinely *theological* anthropology, that is, one that strictly thinks of human being as the unfinished creation of the triune God. In theological anthropology, the human being is not to be reduced to his or her “nature” but is called as a person by the Person of the Logos in Jesus Christ to become the concrete person united in love with other persons in the infinite, tri-personal life of God.

Lossky built this vision on the patristic idea of the eucharistic vocation of humanity who, “being in ceaseless communion with God, would be able to transform the whole world into paradise.”

Finally, there remaining nothing outside himself but God alone, man had only to give himself to Him in a complete abandonment of love, and thus return to Him the whole created universe gathered together in his own being. God Himself would then in His turn have given Himself to man, who would then, in virtue of this gift, that is to say by grace, possess all that God possess by nature. . . . Since this task which was given to man was not fulfilled by Adam, it is in the work of Christ, the second Adam, that we can see what it was meant to be.⁴¹

Lossky further worked out this theological anthropology with the help of the trinitarian dialectics of nature and person in the life of God.⁴² *Theosis* is the primordial human calling, which has been recapitulated in Christ and enabled anew to believers in him by the gift of the Holy Spirit. To be a person, then, is to be an individual human nature in ecstasy of faith and freedom of love. It is to be made anew like the Son of God who lets go of the nature he possesses

³⁸Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)*, vol. 2: *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 295.

³⁹“Foreword,” in Lossky, *Image and Likeness*, p. 9.

⁴⁰Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, tr. Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius (London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1957), p. 91.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁴²Lossky, *Image and Likeness*, pp. 111-139.

for love of another, yet not as a loss or repudiation of that nature but, rather, as its very fulfillment. Just as a believer in Christ is joined to his Body where the redemption of human nature in Christ is in force, just so that believer receives Christ’s promised Spirit in whose power he or she becomes the person whom God calls him or her to become.

Precisely this self-surpassing openness to God and others in love elaborated in time, as a historical passage consisting in the sanctification of life, is what makes a human being a person—or, failing that, dehumanizes. “Man created ‘in the image’ is the person capable of manifesting God in the extent to which his nature allows itself to be penetrated by deifying grace.”⁴³ Thus, in the infinite becoming of the eternal life that begins in baptism, the human creature fulfills its calling, participating in the infinite love of the Father, with the Son, in the Holy Spirit. Sanctification tells of this new history created by the gospel, in Christ, through the Spirit. It is essentially a matter of eternal life, life in God’s life of love, *theosis*. Deification “of the creature will be realized in its fullness only in the age to come, after the resurrection of the dead. This deifying union has, nevertheless, to be fulfilled ever more and more even in this present life, through the transformation of our corruptible and depraved nature and by its adaptation to eternal life.”⁴⁴

Lossky follows on this with expressly stated consequences that seem baffling to Western ears in light of the Reformation conflict over justification. On the one hand, Lossky holds that *theosis* is meaningless without human cooperation, “for it is in this synergy, in this co-operation of man with God, that the union is fulfilled.”⁴⁵ On the other hand, he holds with equal emphasis that the “notion of merit is foreign to the Eastern tradition.”⁴⁶ Further,

[G]race is not a reward for the merit of the human will, as Pelagianism would have it; but no more is it the cause of the ‘meritorious acts’ of our free will. For it is not a question of merits but of a co-operation, of a synergy of the two wills, divine and human, a harmony in which grace bears ever more and more fruit, and is appropriated—‘acquired’—by the human person. Grace is a presence of God within us which demands constant effort on our part.⁴⁷

This notion of non-meritorious synergy, so curious to Western ears, indicates once again how East and West have been asking different questions. It is worth a brief digression on the Reformation-era conflict to fill this picture out, so that the promise of Lossky’s notion of nonmeritorious synergy is not lost on Westerners.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁴⁴Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p. 196.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 197-198.

Declaratory (Forensic) and Effective Grace: The Reformation Conflict

In the polemical thrust and parry against Tridentine Roman Catholicism, Lutherans came to associate appeal to the Holy Spirit with the performance of meritorious works of love and the concept of "infused grace." Embarrassingly for them, however, it was Augustine himself who had originated the concept of infused grace as an interpretation of his beloved text, Rom. 5:5: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." Among many such examples the following statement from Augustine's key anti-Pelagian writing, *On the Spirit and the Letter*, is typical:

... the grace of God was promised to the new testament even by the prophet, and ... this grace was definitively announced to take this shape, — that God's laws were to be written in men's hearts ... This is the gift of the Holy Ghost, by which love is shed abroad in our hearts, — not, indeed, any kind of love, but the love of God ... by means of which the just man, while living in this pilgrim state, is led on ... to the actual vision, that, face to face, he may know even as he is known.⁴⁸

Augustine is thinking of a personal encounter with divine love of such overwhelming power that it changes and continually changes the human person from a state of self-satisfaction to one of eager striving for the eternal communion with God. In this, Augustine differs not a whit from his Eastern contemporaries nor, for that matter, from contemporary Platonists. The difference lies in the fact that Augustine has rediscovered the motif of justification in Paul as an answer to the acute question about God's justice in history and integrates that with his Plotinian cosmology. For Augustine as a result the believer is righteous in hope, in anticipation of what by God's grace he or she will be when at last he or she sees God face to face. The believer has *this hope*, having set out on the way of love of God in the power of the love of God that has been graciously bestowed by the Spirit in the sacraments by virtue of the merit of Christ. This believer will be righteous *in reality* in the eschatologically achieved condition, when he or she in fact loves God above all in the unbreakable power of the direct vision of God.

Reacting against the Tridentine condemnation of Lutheran doctrine, a condemnation that appealed with justice to this very Augustinian thought about grace-working-transformation, Lutherans defended "extrinsicism" (Christ for us, not Christ in us, as the basis for justification). Their polemically stated doctrine of justification as "forensic" held that righteousness is already securely ours, inasmuch as nothing less than God's eschatological verdict of pardon is reckoned or imputed to faith alone. Nothing can surpass the eschatological verdict. Faith in turn is nothing but the prayer of the penitent thief on the cross to be remembered by Jesus. Faith is nothing but the empty

⁴⁸Philip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5: *Saint Augustine: Anti-Pelagian Writings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971 repr.), p. 104.

hands that grasp hold of Christ, his offer of forgiveness, his promised righteousness. Here it is as though the world had ended, and already we stood before the judgment seat of God. What is at stake for the Lutherans is the objectivity and unsurpassable validity of the gospel as the revelation aforesaid of the eschatological judgment of God. Reacting to Trent, Chemnitz specified:

The point at issue between us and the papists is that they teach that the sinner cannot and must not stand in sure confidence that he is in grace and that his sins have been remitted to him — even when in earnest repentance and true faith created in us by the Holy Spirit on the basis of the Word of God he lays hold on the promise of grace and at the same time upon the Mediator Himself, the Son of God who is our righteousness.⁴⁹

The Tridentine doctrine, by contrast, was understood by Lutherans to imperil the believer's certainty of faith. It seemed to stake the believer's relation to God — whether or not one was "just" in God's final reckoning — on the future success of achieving personal transformation, success that depended in the final analysis on one's own willpower, that must avail itself of the offered grace. This further suggested to Lutherans that Trent did not understand the righteousness of Christ as the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel. Rather another idea of the righteousness of God, say as the fulfillment of God the Creator's rightful demand on the creature, stands over and above the righteousness of Christ as that to which believers must attain. By virtue of Christ's merit, grace is infused through the sacraments. That means that the dynamic power to love God (created grace) is communicated by the Holy Spirit to believers; in the power of this infused grace, believers are empowered to transform themselves until they actually become fully righteous before God, that is, the spiritual creatures God created them to be, who love God wholly and purely. Here it is as though a long future and a great pilgrimage stretched before us in which to prepare ourselves for judgment day. In Lutheran eyes, this Tridentine theology left believers "suspended in doubt" about their basic standing before God and could obscure the persistence and power of continuing sin in the life of the redeemed. It would, therefore, lead either to spiritual despair or to spiritual pride.

The Peril of "Translating"

In this light we can see how it will lead to all manner of confusion if, despite the superficially similar emphasis on transformation, a Tridentine transformationist theology of *justification* is imputed to the Orthodox, whose master concept of *theosis* is not asking the same question. It is certainly true that Orthodoxy sees in the *transformation* of the believer, as understood by the term "*theosis*," the very substance and sense of salvation as eternal life in the triune

⁴⁹Chemnitz, *Loci*, vol. 2, p. 506.

God. This transformation, however, is not being thought at all in terms of the problem of justification, certainly not in the Tridentine claim of a meritorious achievement on the basis of which one becomes, as it were, worthy of the grace of salvation. The Orthodox are indeed concerned with the reality of human transformation, but as the reality of God's saving work in us, not as merit. Moreover, they conceive of this transformation as the immediate work of God's *uncreated* grace, not at all as a mechanical process that could work by virtue of a supernatural charism that is separable from the personal reality of the Holy Spirit. No doubt for such reasons, William G. Rusch warned in his contribution to Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue on justification, "How the Eastern Fathers Understood What the Western Church Meant by Justification": "The process of *theosis* cannot validly be translated into the categories that lie behind the sixteenth-century debate on justification. Nor should attempts be made to fit *theosis* into an Augustinian framework."⁵⁰ Yet twice, it seems, the Lutheran-Orthodox common statement in *Salvation in Christ* tried to state the problem of Lutheran and Orthodox understanding of one other's soteriology by mutually "translating" the terms into each other's frameworks.

For a first example, witness the assertion that "[f]or the Lutherans 'justification' and 'sanctification' are two distinct theological categories, one designating God's declaration of righteousness, the other the gradual process of growth in the Christian life," while it said by contrast that the "Orthodox believe that 'justification' initiates a change in human beings and begins the process of growth . . . Hence they see 'justification' and 'sanctification' as one divine action."⁵¹ Or, for a second instance, we read, "Whereas the Orthodox see righteousness as the inner transformation toward 'God-likeness' (i.e., sanctification in Lutheran terminology), Lutherans say that righteousness is imputed to humans."⁵² A method of comparing and contrasting verbal similarities taken from incommensurable structures of thought cannot clarify much. It is not at all sure that these statements about Lutheran doctrine are even true. Consider how Chemnitz spoke about this:

The doctrine of the Gospel . . . instructs us concerning the twofold benefit of Christ, namely, reconciliation and sanctification or renewal. It contains the promise of the remission of sins, free reconciliation, adoption, and acceptance unto eternal life, for the sake of Christ the Mediator. It also contains the promise of the Spirit of renewal, who works in us both to will and to do, so that after we are justified we can also begin the new obedience.⁵³

Certainly the seeds of the later idea surface here of an "order of salvation" that thinks in sequential terms ("after we are justified we can also begin . . .") about

⁵⁰Anderson, Murphy, and Burgess, *Justification by Faith*, p. 142.

⁵¹Meyendorff and Tobias, *Salvation in Christ*, p. 19.

⁵²Ibid., p. 24.

⁵³Chemnitz, *Loci*, vol. 2, p. 501.

a psychological process of conversion. The Pauline simultaneity of the gift of the Spirit and justifying faith is not quite in force. Notice that Chemnitz speaks of a twofold benefit of the one gospel, the one Christ. Notice that the first of these is not a sheerly extrinsic declaration but an effective and objective conciliation of humanity to God and that the second is not a "gradual process of growth" but a qualitative "new obedience." This picture from Chemnitz already suffices to complicate any too-easy idea that justification and sanctification in Lutheran theology are "two separate categories," psychologically conceived and sequentially ordered.

Returning to *Salvation in Christ*, we can ask how the alleged pure and sole forensicism of Lutheranism coheres with John Breck's correct reference to Carl Volz's paper wherein Lutheran Volz "affirms that 'justification makes the sinner "good" . . . There is an ontological change in Baptism that brings with it the indwelling Christ and the very real presence of the Holy Spirit."⁵⁴ The "ontological" change, for Lutherans, is that the baptized has been united with Christ, dies with him to rise with him, and thus becomes righteous by participation in his righteousness. Lutherans teach that, in spite of this, original sin continues after baptism, so that the redeemed are *simul justus et peccator*. We will have to return to the difficult question this raises at the end. Notwithstanding, we must observe that the method used in *Salvation in Christ* sometimes seems, certainly not intentionally, to cast the Orthodox in the image of Tridentine transformationists over against a radical Lutheran forensicism. We cannot be satisfied with this. *Theosis* designates another question entirely; nor is the Lutheran doctrine of justification exclusively forensic.

Justifying Faith Is the Work of the Spirit

To understand this phenomenon we have to dig a little deeper. Lutherans have learned so sharply to distinguish their version of the doctrine of justification from Augustine's that they often imagine themselves to have leaped over the centuries and retrieved a pure world of Paulinism over against which Catholic-Orthodox differences pale into insignificance. In fact, they have recently learned (for example, in the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue VII on justification) to say most precisely that Lutherans and Roman Catholics agree that justification is by grace alone; the divisive issue in Western Catholicism has been whether this justification by grace is ours through faith alone or by faith and its meritorious works of love. This latter would mean that there is an actual human achievement of righteousness that God recognizes and rewards, even if, when "God rewards our merits," as Augustine explained, he merely "crowns his own gifts." God gets all the credit, but, for justification to be real and not just a "legal fiction," righteousness must refer to the human

⁵⁴Meyendorff and Tobias, *Salvation in Christ*, p. 117.

achievement of obedience. Through the example of Christ and by his gracious gift of the Holy Spirit, this achievement of righteousness has become a new possibility for believers. Now they strive in their lives to become worthy of the grace they have received. Against this possibility of re-introducing merits as a factor on which to rely for justification before God (this, strictly speaking, is what is called semi-Pelagianism by Lutheran orthodoxy), Lutherans have correlated the concepts of faith alone and grace alone with reliance on Christ alone as redeemer *through all of Christian life*. For them, *this new life* of faith's exclusive reliance on Christ and Christ's righteousness, which is sanctification, is the communication and work of the Holy Spirit.

Obviously, here faith means something other than an intellectual acceptance of the dogmas of the church. Such a faith would in fact be only an intellectual work and, hence, also a wholly trivial basis of justification—so trivial as very much to require supplementation by meritorious works of love for it to be taken seriously. Justifying faith as *the life* that relies wholly on Christ is radical and total self-identification with Christ, on the basis of Christ's radical self-identification with sinners, culminating in his death in their God-forsaken place on the cross. Chemnitz defines justifying faith precisely as such a conversion, as the act in which any human person is conciliated to the new reality of reconciliation that God has accomplished in Christ's death and resurrection. Justifying faith is a "knowledge or an understanding" of the "decree and history of redemption," which is firmly persuaded "that the universal promise applies also to" one's own self. On the basis of this knowledge of the Word of God, "by the working of the Holy Spirit, the heart or will conceives a groaning or desire" to receive what is promised. As a result—Chemnitz, the theologian who is vocationally a pastor and a preacher, switches here to the second person—you "turn away with your mind, your will, and your heart from looking at your sins and feeling the wrath of God and begin to look to the Lamb of God"; in this turning away from self to Christ, "trust is added." The wholly passive act of trust in Christ is simultaneously the action of turning away from all other claimants on human allegiance. This trust, viewed in terms of its human vigor, may be so weak as to be indiscernible; "it struggles in time of trials with doubt, with the anxieties of a troubled conscience, even with sin, death, the devil and hell itself." Yet "this weak faith is still true faith, and it justifies . . . not because it is so firm, robust and perfect a virtue, but because of the object on which it lays hold, namely Christ." For Christ is One who has previously and wholly identified himself with sinners; to accept him, no matter how feebly, is to accept him in this personal act of his solidarity and mercy for oneself, the sinner. Christology thus entails an anthropology. "From this faith there follows a confidence which has access to God . . . so that the heart, feeling the new life and joy in God, happily rests in God, even under the cross, in persecution, finally in death itself, and it has an 'undoubting hope of the glory of God.'" From Chemnitz's presentation, we can see that justifying faith wholly involves the human will or heart and its uncoerced participation, but not in

any Pelagian sense in which the will retains its Adamic form of autonomy, that is, its freedom over against God. "Faith is not a work of our nature or natural free will, but it is a gift and work of the Holy Spirit who kindles, nourishes, increases and preserves knowledge and firm assent in our mind and trust in our will."⁵⁵ Would it not be right then to describe justifying faith as the concrete synergy of the new person in Christ with the Holy Spirit? Is not the new person in Christ nothing but the sinner whom Jesus mercifully and effectively claims, as depicted in the Gospels and enacted anew in the sacrament of Holy Baptism?

According to classic Lutheran theology, there is a real change in human beings created by the presence of the person of Christ in faith. Because Christ is present in faith, believers cease to rely on their own achievement, die to self and world, refuse all other lords and would-be gods, and learn instead wholly and exclusively to rely on Christ and his righteousness.⁵⁶ They "begin to look to the Lamb of God." In such obedience *of faith* to the righteousness *of God* revealed *in Christ*, believers give God all the glory and so fulfill the Spirit of the Law, who frees them in turn to become agents of Christ's love on earth. This worship of faith is no legal fiction whatsoever but a truly radical change that anticipates the coming of the reign. It sings with the refrain of 1 Cor. 15:51-52—we shall be changed! Such real change requires the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, since self-abandoning faith in Christ alone can only be the resurrection work of the Lord and Giver of Life, an act of new creation, summoning forth a new history and synergy of God and creature.

Faith, then, is not an autonomous human work that assents to a religious proposition on its own terms and then needs to be supplemented by love. Justifying faith is the death and resurrection of surrendering oneself to Christ as saving Lord. Such faith is the sovereign work in the human person of the Holy Spirit. So understood, an eschatologically determined concept of the sanctification of life is also implied. Sanctification is not an autonomous human response to God's initiative but is God's initiative itself, the gospel of salvation itself, in a second, but every bit as crucial and necessary, form or use. Sanctification is salvation itself, working itself out aforesaid in the new obedience of believers. This sanctification of life is not a return to life under the law. Rather, it is objectively grounded in the hope of the resurrection of the dead. It is Pentecost. Believers who are living between the times live in this hour, in this place, within this concrete nexus of relationships and responsibilities in confidence of the resurrection of the dead. They are to consecrate every act and every suffering to the victory over death, the eternal communion in God. So by faith they sanctify this present historical life to the future reality of the reign. Living this way, they dispute the objective powers of sin, death,

⁵⁵Chemnitz, *Loci*, vol. 2, pp. 502-503.

⁵⁶See the interpretation of effective justification and sanctification in Gerhard O. Forde, *Justification by Faith—A Matter of Death and Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

and devil and the hold that they have over humanity, even as they eagerly strain for the fulfillment of their trust in eternal life in God.

So justifying faith is for Luther a rapture or ecstasy, a personal Pentecost. Even for Melancthon the passive faith that God reckons as righteousness simultaneously and progressively transforms the believer by taking him or her out of self into Christ by faith and into the neighbor by love. The passive faith that merely receives Christ is simultaneously, by virtue of the living, acting, speaking Christ who is believed and the quickening, inspiring, guiding Holy Spirit whom he bestows, an ecstatic new existence. Contrary to a highly misleading statement in *Salvation in Christ* that “Lutherans have emphasized the language of vicarious atonement, imputation, and forensic justification, rather than the language of participation and communion,”⁵⁷ Luther consistently and essentially expounded his doctrine of justification in the dramatically participatory and communal language of the joyful interchange between faith and Christ, the bride and the bridegroom. Roman Catholic scholar Jared Wicks, seeing this with real clarity, commented on “the exchange with Christ outside myself”:

At the exact center of spiritual existence, according to Luther, the believer is realizing his situation as one of participation and exchange with Christ, of Christ's inhesion and cementing him to himself, and of a transforming exchange between his sin and Christ's righteousness. In 'apprehending faith' I lay hold of his victory as the death of my sin and of his consummate righteousness as mine by grace. In passivity under the rapture of grace, I am taken out of my lost state into the sphere of Christ's invincible righteousness.⁵⁸

Chemnitz's theology often corrects Melancthon's less “personal and communal” tendencies with fresh draughts from Luther and the church Fathers. The declaration of justification is always predicated to the human person in Christ, the person as Christ himself embraces and lays hold of him or her through the gospel and its sacraments, the person whom the Spirit is summoning to the concrete conversion of a reciprocal, if asymmetrical, self-identification with Christ. This is concretely membership in the community, the Risen Lord's earthly body. By the same token, sanctification, if it is indeed the work of the Holy Spirit of Jesus and his Father, proceeds on the basis of the objective reality of Christ's self-offering and merciful approach to sinners. Consequently viewed, the result of the exposition of faith in terms of its content (namely, the crucified but risen Christ who bestows his Spirit in the same breath as he announces pardon and peace—Jn. 20:19-23)—would abolish any distinction between justification and sanctification as two separable things, as though we could have Christ at all apart from the Spirit and the Spirit's sanctifying work or the Spirit apart from Christ and Christ's merciful righteousness. On the

⁵⁷Meyendorff and Tobias, *Salvation in Christ*, p. 21, emphasis mine.

⁵⁸Jared Wicks, *Luther and His Spiritual Legacy* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983), p. 137.

contrary, we shall have to think of justification and sanctification as two distinct ways of talking about one and the same event of faith's union with Christ by the Holy Spirit.

In this light, the definite accent on “vicarious atonement, imputation, and forensic justification” by Lutherans has a different thrust: it means that the new relationship to God in Christ covers the future sins of the believer as well as the past, barring only the mortal sin of despair. The issue of one's ultimate destiny is decided. There is no condemnation for them who are in Christ Jesus. Justification expresses the unsurpassable, eschatological verdict. Safety in Christ Jesus, therefore, consists in the mere faith that ever welcomes him as saving Lord. Of course, this new relationship under grace appropriated by faith is for the same reason embattled in this as-yet-unfinished drama; it must be renewed every day over against the continuing power of the sin, the flesh, and the world. Nevertheless, the Christian really lives under grace, every day, through all of life. The sanctified life, the life in the Spirit, is nothing but the struggle to walk by faith in this as-yet-contested world. So it is that the just will live by their faith, and faith is their holiness aforesaid.

The regrettable truth, however, is that in their polemical antithesis to Roman Catholic teaching, Lutherans have rarely elaborated their theology in this direction in modern times. That led to a further irony, already signaled in the late Melancthon's theological drift, that is, the secularization and psychologizing of the concept of faith in the absence of an adequate doctrine of the Holy Spirit. One begins to think of faith as the first human step in a process of conversion, leading to justification, after which comes sanctification. Then, inevitably, faith becomes an act of the autonomous will that must have at least such freedom and power as to move itself toward grace—and essentially one thereby produces a Protestant version of the Tridentine doctrine of justification, only lacking in Rome's sacramental resources. Under the further press and duress of the Enlightenment and Pietism, consequently, faith became more and more for Lutheranism an autonomous act of the moral faculty, a decision pertaining to one's self-understanding or, in conservative versions, an act of belief in supernatural truths of revelation. Faith was no longer seen as the synergy of the new person with the Holy Spirit given in Christ. The huge failure to correlate the concept of faith as exclusive reliance on Christ with a doctrine of the Holy Spirit that could actually offer and provide this faith, elaborate it as a way of life—indeed, as a sanctification of this life lived as an historical journey to eternal communion in God—would mean in time both the secularization of the concept of faith and the loss of the true import of the doctrine of justification as a grammar of the encounter with Jesus Christ, his righteousness, and his claim to be our saving Lord.

So, there is a huge irony here. In the Western context, Lutherans were allergic to the term “synergy” because of the Pelagian connotation it had for them, suggesting a self-initiated movement to God that, as such, could merit the grace of justification. This allergic reaction rendered them incapable of

grasping or utilizing it in its Eastern sense to describe the new person of faith, who works with the Spirit in the battle against the flesh. In the West, consequently, secularized and psychologized faith eventually devolved into *Ichtheologie*, talk about the human ego. Correspondingly, theologians, having lost the Trinity as a living way of thinking of God and become functionally Unitarian since Schleiermacher, no longer knew how to think responsibly about the God of the gospel. Over against this massive modern reduction of Lutheran theology and deformation of Lutheran anthropology, the Finnish-Russian dialogue rightly concluded that “the traditional Lutheran doctrine of justification contains the idea of the deification of man. Justification and deification are based on the real presence of Christ in the word of God, the sacraments, and in worship.”⁵⁹ If that is so, it also means that, inasmuch as justifying faith is the gift the Spirit, we are not talking about two steps but about two aspects of one and the same act of the Spirit. Faith is, in one sense, always passively received over against the old, Adamic person, but in another aspect it is the synergy of the new person in Christ with the Spirit and, in this aspect, as Aden described it, “an active human responsiveness to the saving action of God.”⁶⁰

If that is so, the worry become fully visible—that a substantive mutual delimitation between justification and sanctification, between Christ for us and Christ in us, derived from the Augustinian framework and polemical antithesis of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic conflict—has misled the authors of *Salvation in Christ*. Rusch’s categorical judgment was intended to prevent a Western co-optation of the distinct Orthodox concern⁶¹ to understand salvation as a real communion with the triune God. East and West must meet and must try to think together, but “translation” is not the way to do this. As Bishop Michael C. D. McDaniel wrote: “Theological insights that have developed in diverse traditions must be integrated without violating the integrity of those traditions.”⁶² He then offered this possibility, not as a matter of “translating” one tradition into the framework of another, as Rusch rightly prohibited but, rather, of “integrating” them: “The Lutheran concern to specify the *means* of salvation and the Orthodox concern for its *meaning* are two insights into the one unspeakably wonderful reality that God, by grace alone, for the sake of Christ alone, has forgiven our sins and given us everlasting salvation.”⁶³ McDaniel is surely right about this.

As a Lutheran, I want to say that the Orthodox doctrine of *theosis* is simply true, that justification by faith theologically presupposes it in the same way that Paul the Apostle reasoned by analogy from the resurrection of the dead

⁵⁹*Dialogue between Neighbors: The Theological Conversations between the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland and the Russian Orthodox Church, 1970-1986*, ed. Hannu T. Kamppuri (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola Society B-17, 1986), p. 19.

⁶⁰Aden, “Justification and Sanctification,” p. 102.

⁶¹Meyendorff and Tobias, *Salvation in Christ*, p. 114.

⁶²*Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 83, emphasis in original.

to the justification of the sinner. Indeed, justification as declaration of faith in Christ is unwarranted except as an anticipation of the end of history and the unambiguous coming and revelation of the reign of God. Lutherans are confused about justification today because they have neglected this presupposition, to wit, that the point of justification is to bring us into communion with God through Jesus Christ. Justification is not to be understood as a theological alternative to *theosis* (as the various secular theologies of today urge) but, rather, as a commentary about how to communicate it in the present epoch between the times. In turn, the goal and content of salvation as *theosis* and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, which that opens up for Lutheranism, clarifies the desperately muddled understanding of the relation of justification and sanctification in modern Lutheranism.

Sanctification is not the moral progress that essentially autonomous Christians achieve to demonstrate themselves worthy of the justification they have graciously received—let alone is it the celebration of antinomianism to which certain “radical Lutherans” have apparently declined in reaction against the foregoing caricature. Justification stands for nothing other than the radical conversion of a person to the reign of God revealed in the death and exaltation of Christ, an act of personal re-creation by the Holy Spirit. How could the doctrine of Saul who became Paul on the road to Damascus mean anything else? Such it is merely to believe in Jesus Christ. If justification obtains to faith that surrenders to Christ’s righteousness, sanctification is the new obedience of the justified who are in Christ’s sphere of sovereignty, in that by faith they sanctify their historical existence to the reign of God, living in hope of the victory over death. With such help from the doctrine of *theosis*, then, we see that justification and sanctification are not two separate theological categories at all but two distinct ways of speaking of the same saving event of faith’s union with Christ, corresponding to the distinct but inseparable works of Christ and the Spirit.

Justification, Sanctification, and Anthropology

Kallistos Ware offers a passage that, if it holds, reveals the deep christological affinity that exists in Lutheran and Orthodox soteriologies and makes their integration possible:

This notion of salvation as sharing implies—although many have been reluctant to say this openly—that Christ assumed not just unfallen but *fallen* human nature . . . Christ lives out his life on earth under the conditions of the fall. He is not himself a sinful person, but in his solidarity with fallen man he accepts to the full the consequences of Adam’s sin. He accepts to the full not only the physical consequences, such as weariness, bodily pain, and eventually the separation of body and soul in death. He accepts also the moral consequences, the loneliness, the alienation, the inward conflict.

It may seem a bold thing to ascribe all this to the living God, but a consistent doctrine of the Incarnation requires nothing less.⁶⁴

The words "a consistent doctrine of the Incarnation—a soteriology that articulated the ancient church's definition of Christ's divine person in terms of his life, work, suffering, and triumph as the human person "who was put to death for our sins and raised again for our justification"—could stand as the summary of the doctrine of justification. The critical point on which justification as a hermeneutic insists is that only *faith* can accept *such* a gift *truly*, as the gift of a divine and merciful justice that Christ personally *is*, as the eternal Son who humbled himself and took on the form of a servant. At the same time, the hermeneutical function holds only if justification as a doctrine is based upon and expresses precisely this Christ in the truth of the profoundest depths of his communion with humanity—the unfathomable divine justice of his sin-bearing. This is the communion of Christ in utter rejection and God-forsakenness, communion with the lost at the cross, with sin itself that he makes his own in the holiest act of loving and embracing sinners. The paradoxical communion of God with God-forsakenness in the cross of the Incarnate Word is the communion that includes sinful, fallen humanity. Indeed, we might say it includes only the sinner, only the lost, only the helpless. It is this very fellowship that is offered and realized anew in every sermon, bath, and supper. Therefore, it has on-going force as a criterion of the life of the church, which can never be anything other than this communion of divinely loved, claimed, and forgiven sinners with Christ the Crucified but risen Lord. Wherever the cross is taken seriously as the revelatory apex of the saving condescension of God (Mk. 15:39), this merciful divine justice that reconciles sinners shows itself as *the inner meaning of the visible unity of the church that believes in Christ, the only Son of God. Justification on account of Christ and the true unity of the church as a visible koinonia of faith in this Christ define each other.*

How does the foregoing sketch of justification as a *christological doctrine*⁶⁵ in the context of the trinitarian history of salvation bear upon the anthropological issues? In the perspective of biblical salvation-history, we face the difficult problem of contradictory statements about the human creature: created by God little less than the angels for the destiny of communion with God; a rebel against God who has made creation a living hell and justly deserves temporal and eternal death. It is not possible to exposit justification as a doctrine of the saving work of Christ without simultaneously assuming a radical doctrine of sin. Both the forensic aspect of justification as a declaration of pardon for Jesus' sake and the eschatological qualification of this declaration as a revelation aforesaid of the end of history reckon with the powerful persistence of sin in the life of the redeemed. Nor is the knowledge of radical

⁶⁴Ware, *Orthodox Way*, p. 107.

⁶⁵For a fuller account of this interpretation of justification, see my forthcoming book, "A Future for the Church: What the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue Ought to Mean."

sin a trivial matter with respect to the church's authentic self-understanding and mission in the world. The holiness of the church does not lie in its sinlessness but in the mercy that the community manifests in Jesus' name.

What is at stake here is whether the church regards its fellowship as a feast for sinners at Jesus' invitation, whether it essentially thinks of itself in dynamic terms as mission of the reign of God, proclaiming repentance and forgiveness in Jesus' name to the nations. The problem of how simultaneously to think of human nature as the good creature of God and as radically corrupted by sin, so radically as to require for salvation its new creation, is a problem early Lutheranism faced in the Flacian controversy. The solution offered in the Formula of Concord, however, merely sets boundaries of orthodoxy, so that neither God's good creation nor the radical sin that corrupts fallen human nature is denied.⁶⁶ The problem, as many modern critiques have suggested, lies in the tacit concept of human "nature" itself.

Orthodox theologian Paul Wesche, developing ideas we have already considered in Lossky, has laid out something central to a biblically determined theological anthropology. It would see a

person . . . not understood in terms of the essence that makes him to be what he is, but in terms of his relation to the divine Person, Jesus Christ, the particular icon of the Father in whose icon human persons were made. . . . [It] will seek to explain the person not a particular example of an essence, but as a particular, free *willer* who chooses to be related to the divine Willer either in the attitude of obedience and love, or of disobedience and rebellion.⁶⁷

What a human person really *is* is the life-decision, made as and in a unique historical biography, toward Jesus Christ and his merciful claim upon all. A human being is that particular creature of God who will be whatever he or she will be by willing the will of Jesus Christ or not. There is and can be no final neutrality about Jesus. If we *are* what we freely will, then not to decide for Jesus is to decide against Jesus; human existence is concretely determined by the decision either to sustain our dead existence against Christ's will to enter into it and free us from its grip or to abandon the tomb of autonomy to rise into his life of obedience on the way into the reign of God. Freely and joyfully to enter upon this path in a communion of loving wills at Jesus' call is divine salvation itself. The event of Jesus' call that is sounded in the gospel and the personal Pentecost of faith in it is the liberation of the will enslaved to sin. Stubbornly and willfully to decline Christ's summons is eternal loss. In a biblically inspired theological anthropology, in which the will of God in Jesus Christ is the all-determining power, human beings concretely will be what they will in response to Christ, who simply is the first and last Word of the Lord.

⁶⁶On the Flacian controversy, see "Solid Declaration, Article I, Original Sin," in Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), pp. 508-519.

⁶⁷Kenneth Paul Wesche, unpublished paper presented at the Svätý Jur conference, July, 1994.

Let me juxtapose Wesche's understanding to a statement drawn from a very Lutheran, modern theologian, Helmut Thielicke. In my view, his *The Evangelical Faith*, under the provocative heading of the "Death of the Old Cartesian Self: Incorporation of the Self into the Salvation Event instead of the Reverse," succeeds in sharply restating the chief concern of Lutheran anthropology over against modern, secular anthropologies, a conflict that was prefigured in Luther's debate with Erasmus concerning the bondage of the will. Thielicke has written:

... what Paul is concerned about is not a new self-understanding but a new history and existence in and through which I am taken up into the history of Christ. "Christ in me" precedes "I in Christ." The self is determined by what has taken place, and does take place, on and to me, by what is thus before me and outside me . . . the Pauline thesis [is] that I am integrated into the salvation history enacted preventively outside me and before me. . . . encounter with God's Word as a believer does not mean that I draw God and his Word into my existence but that I can break away from my self-enclosed being and through the Word be drawn into God and his power and possibilities, so that I am born again.⁶⁸

Do the two depictions by Wesche and Thielicke of theological anthropology cohere? Insofar as we are returning to the biblical, salvation-history mode of thought, they in fact do. As the creature created by God and personally addressed by God, it would not be "my" salvation unless it is "I" who freely wills this future with God, in a synergy of love. This synergy, of course, is not symmetrical, as if between beings of equal nature. We are talking about a harmony appropriate to Creator and creature. As it happens, then, the "I" who freely wills this particular future of life in the triune God is and only can be the "I" of faith, which is concretely the I who died to rise again with Christ, the one who on our behalf actualized the will of God in the Garden of Gethsemane. As the Apostle states in the manner of a paradigm: ". . . it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). The obstacle to our appropriation of this paradigm of theological anthropology is the concept of "nature" as some substratum of perduring, self-subsisting stuff—in this case, the human I or self as a soul or an ego. Then we think of this soul or ego as what is supposed to be essentially human, and we even designate it as the image of God in us.⁶⁹ As a result of this thinking, we get drawn into questions about how much of the soul is God's good creation and how deeply or superficially it was wounded or deformed by sin. The idea that God's creation is fulfilled in an act of new creation, through death in union with Christ in prospect of sharing his resurrection, thus by faith in the

⁶⁸Helmut Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith*, vol. 1: *Prolegomena: The Relation of Theology to Modern Thought Forms*, tr. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), p. 153.

⁶⁹See Lossky's penetrating discussion of this problem and his critique of Nyssa's intellectualist tendency and legacy in anthropology in *Image and Likeness*, pp. 137-139.

redemption of our bodies—this seems metaphysically inconceivable or conceptually unintelligible.⁷⁰

But, does Scripture think this way about "nature" as some self-subsisting stuff, about the "will" as a faculty of a "soul"? Peter Brown, the contemporary patristic scholar, has suggested that the impact of biblical faith on classical culture was the virtual invention of the concept of the human will. For the Bible, the human creature is uniquely personal in that this creature exists as his or her history, as one's own stance toward the future of God. We are historical persons in that we either will the will of God or rebel against it. When we say that, we have said the decisive thing in theological anthropology. Lutheran anthropology never denied that the human person has a will; indeed, as Wesche stated, the human person *is* a willer. That would be absurd. In fact, the classical position only denies that this human, creaturely will has infinite possibilities and the capacity to actualize its choices, as the modifier "free" might imply.

On the contrary, the created human will is theologically limited; it is bound to the objective possibilities that God allows to it, as Wesche grasped when he stipulated the exclusive alternative before God of obedience or rebellion. Before God, the creaturely will can only be obedient or rebellious; the very idea that the human person is free to devise or define its own relationship to the Creator is itself usurpation of the Creator. The consequent notion of human autonomy is the rationalization of rebellion against the reign of God. Thus, the Christian idea of the human creature as a free willer is not to be confused with modern, secular ideas of human autonomy. Anticipating precisely this modern evolution of thought from his education in the late medieval nominalist *via moderna*, and correctly discerning its presence already in the Renaissance humanism of Erasmus, Luther criticized as idolatrous the ascription to human beings of the power to determine their own relation to God. Against this, Luther maintained that "free will" is, properly and strictly speaking, predicated only of God the Creator, who uniquely will be who God will be in the divine freedom that belongs to God alone. Otherwise, Luther argues against Erasmus, we evade the problem of God and beg the question by simply allowing to some other will than the God of Jesus Christ the final Word and true Authority.⁷¹ Luther's argument proved prophetic. Such systematic evasion of the question of God as about the "reality that determines

⁷⁰"The divine hypostasis of the Son descended to us and reunited in Himself created nature and uncreated nature in order that it might be possible for human hypostases to rise to God, reuniting in themselves, in their turn, uncreated grace and created nature, in the Holy Spirit" (Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p. 185).

⁷¹In the very argument against "free will," Luther, too, could speak emphatically of the synergy of the new person in Christ created by the Holy Spirit: God the Lord, who works all things, "does not work in us without us, for he re-created us and preserves us for this very purpose, that He might work in us and we might co-operate with Him. Thus he preaches, shows mercy to the poor, and comforts the afflicted by means of us. But what is hereby attributed to 'free-will'? What, indeed, is left it but—nothing! In truth, nothing!" (*Bondage of the Will*, tr. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston [Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1957], p. 268).

all things" (Pannenberg) is the essence of the secularism today that confronts all the Christian traditions.

Lutheran anthropology has further taught that "after the fall, free will exists in name only," that the possibility of choosing to repent and succeeding in this choice is not given to Adamic humanity. On the contrary, "we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves" until the living Christ by his Spirit actually transposes himself into sinfully bound existence and sets free through the forgiveness of sins. In the Apology, Melancthon stated with unmistakable clarity: "We deny the existence not only of actual fear and trust in God, but also . . . that human nature has the gift and capacity to produce it."⁷² He made a point of rejecting any

. . . claim that original sin is not some vice or corruption of human nature, but only the subjection to mortality that Adam's descendants bear because of his guilt, without any evil of their own. They go on to say that one is not condemned to eternal death because of original sin but, like a child born of a slave, is in this condition because of one's mother and not by one's own fault.⁷³

We can see from this passage how profoundly Augustinian Lutheran anthropology remained. It is as this failed, fallen human "nature" that all people exist. Such fallen human existence without true fear, love, and trust in God, in which rabid, disordered concupiscence fills the void, entails the further notion of inherited guilt. "When fear of God and faith are lacking, this is not merely actual guilt but an abiding deficiency in an unrenewed human nature."⁷⁴ The basic idea is clear enough. Because the "nature" inherited from Adam is corrupted by the absence of the true fear, love, and trust in God (which relation to God is integral to its created structure), the will of any individual is from the outset bound to sin, just as this disintegrating "nature" is doomed to death. In no way can human beings liberate themselves. The nature needs a redeemer; the will, a liberator.

Despite serious questions of intelligibility, it is, in the vastly changed context of modern secular culture, more apparent to both Lutherans and Orthodox that they teach something similar about original sin. John Meyendorff stated emphatically,

[B]y rejecting God, human freedom, in fact, destroys itself. Outside of God, man ceases to be authentically and fully human. He is enslaved to the devil through death. . . . It is not through his own activity or "energy" that man can be deified—this would be Pelagianism—but by divine "energy," to which his human activity is "obedient"; between the two there is a "synergy," of which the relation of the two energies in Christ is the ontological basis.⁷⁵

⁷²"Apology," in Tappert, *Book of Concord*, p. 101:3.

⁷³Ibid., p. 101:5.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 104:31.

⁷⁵Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, pp. 163-164.

Contemporary Orthodox theology would be chagrined to think that *its* affirmation of human freedom would in any way serve the cause of secularized Pelagianism in the West today—think only of Alexander Schmemmann's call to battle in the preface to his final book, *The Eucharist*:

It can be said without exaggeration that we live in a frightening and spiritually dangerous age. It is frightening not just because of its hatred, division and bloodshed. It is frightening above all because it is characterized by a mounting rebellion against God and his kingdom. Not God, but man has become the measure of all things. Not faith, but ideology and utopian escapism are determining the spiritual state of the world. At a certain point, western Christianity accepted this point of view: almost at once one or another 'theology of liberation' was born. Issues relating to economics, politics and psychology have replaced a Christian vision of the world at the service of God.⁷⁶

According to Schmemmann's penetrating analysis, moreover, the roots of this crisis lie deep in the church's own failure. There is a "deep abyss" between the concept of the kingdom of God—"the central concept in evangelical preaching"—and the "'experience' of the vast majority of contemporary Christians" for whom the reign has ceased to be "the central content and inner motivation of the Christian faith." He explained the modern loss in the church itself of the dynamic theology of salvation history this way:

They came to understand [the reign of God] only as the kingdom *to come*—at the end and *after* the end; referring only to the 'personal' death of individual believers. 'This world' and 'the kingdom,' which in the gospels are set side by side and in tension and struggle with one another, have come to be thought of only in terms of a chronological sequence: now—only the world; then—only the kingdom. . . . Christians gradually lost their awareness of it as something hoped for, as the desired and joyous fulfillment of all hopes, of all desires, of life itself, of all that the early church implied in the words, 'Thy kingdom come!'⁷⁷

Today Lutherans and Orthodox may ask together: What is it to be human, if the reign of God represents all true hopes, desires, life itself? What is the human person if he or she can forget this and cease to will it, even freely and willingly resist it? These are the questions to which we have pressed. I must indicate a solution, if only in outline.

Guilt in Adam—Freedom in Christ

One possibility can be dismissed. The apparent dispute about the freedom of the will is largely the fruit of semantic and conceptual confusions that arise from allowing philosophical anthropology too much power to define the questions. In the biblical perception, the human person *is* his or her obedience

⁷⁶Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*, tr. Paul Kachur (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), pp. 9-10.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 54.

or disobedience to the reign of God. If I will disobedience, I am that disobedience and the only solution of it is to cease. If we are the history that we will, the only solution to our history as sinners is to cease to exist. That means, radically, to surrender to the will of God, to cease to exist as the rebel I was, to die to sin and rise to a new existence in Christ, which means in turn to live the very synergy of love by which Christ's human will embraced and willed the will of his Father in the power of the Spirit. The traditional problems arose when the church spoke of the will, not according to the biblical perception of the human person as a totality but as a psychological faculty of the soul alongside reason and the emotions, and tried to assess what powers and duties this faculty possessed after the fall. Then it was a matter of theological coherence and the defense of the human creature against Gnostic slanders of it to affirm "free will," since in this context that meant free to transcend the impulses of passion and free to follow reason's dictates (and faith accordingly was conceived as the mind's apprehension and assent to supernaturally revealed truths formulated as dogmatic propositions or moral rules). For many reasons, however, this old psychological faculty is of less than little help to us today. The solution to the traditional debate that was cast in this form is to transcend it with the perception that, for biblical faith, the essential thing to say about the human person is that he or she exists as a personal will before the will of the Creator God for communion, as a response or a nonresponse to the living, active Word of God, for new life in the Spirit or eternally wandering in the wasteland of personal autonomy and spiritual death. In that case, the concerns of traditionally opposed accents in theological anthropology begin to cohere.

The concern of Orthodox anthropology has been to validate the dignity of the human person and the goodness of God the Creator. This has more than contemporary import against all manner of modern Gnosticism that makes of human beings sheer spirits imprisoned like innocent victims in the body of their social or familial circumstances. Orthodox anthropology protests this evasion of personal responsibility, this vilification of the life that God the Creator continues to create, this rejection of the human vocation to create a life and bring it completed to the reign of God. It points instead to faithless anxiety in the face of death as the source of our failure to praise and bless God for the gift of life. Yet, Christ has joined himself to us in our night of faithless darkness and won the brilliant victory of life over death by his resurrection, so that every human person can, in union with Christ, begin the healing of his or her life, no matter to what depths of degradation one has fallen. The apparent optimism of Orthodox anthropology is in reality an expression of its confidence in the sanctifying power of the Spirit unleashed by the resurrection and exaltation of the Lord Jesus. In the words of a wonderful author, Nicholas Arseniew, in his book, *Mysticism and the Eastern Church*, eucharistically grounded faith in the transfiguration of the world "grew out of the whole spirit and philosophy of primitive Christianity, out of its completely new, overwhelmingly and joyously astounding apprehension of the history of the world

as the process of redemption, glorification and restoration to God of the creature."⁷⁸ This "optimism" is theological, then; it expresses "that eschatological spirit, that discontent with the earthly, that yearning of the soul towards the glorified future which is inseparably linked with Christianity."⁷⁹

The concern of Lutheran anthropology has been to "magnify the honor of Christ" as the Redeemer of this same human person. This, too, has no little contemporary force over against the arrogance and easy conscience of modern people, who make of individual or collective freedom the essence of humanity. Lutheran theology protests this nihilistic illusion, the blindness over against the idols and demons that in reality drive a captivated humanity enslaved to its own arbitrary will to power. The cross of Christ exposes and judges the true state of autonomous humanity, so that every person like Simon who denied his Lord and Saul who persecuted him can be remade a Peter the Rock and a Paul the Apostle by the forgiveness of sin. The apparent pessimism of the Lutheran anthropology is in reality a reflection of the magnitude of the redemption that has taken place in the atoning death of Christ.

Thus, both traditions can converge in the conviction that theological anthropology is discerned in light of the image of Christ. The perception that the human person exists in his or her relations as a historical identity disallows essentialist appeals to the nature of things apart from the redemption in Christ. Whatever the image of God might have been beyond the designation of the human person as the one creature personally responsible to God, the image of God is now revealed in the loving obedience of Jesus Christ. Through the gospel, the risen Christ who lived and died for sinners comes as our Liberator. This means that following Jesus, in the power of the Spirit whom he sends, is the way to our humanity; discipleship is humanization. So, whoever is truly free is free to follow Jesus. This path leads us, in his company at every step along the way, through a death and resurrection to the life of the Holy Trinity. What leads us to the life of God is the fulfillment of God's creative will and the perfection of our true humanity.

If the divergence about the freedom of the will admits of a solution along this line, I fear the divergence over original sin is not so easily resolved. At one point in *Salvation in Christ*, John Breck claimed that Orthodox and Lutherans "fully agree in our rejection of the scholastic dogma of original sin, particularly as it implies the transmission of the sin and guilt of Adam to succeeding generations, like some genetic defect."⁸⁰ In this Breck is thinking with the Orthodox mainstream, which will accept a sin of origin by which death entered the world and alienated humanity from God, so that in fact all human beings inevitably sin. The idea of an inherited guilt's abiding in a corrupted nature for which an individual can be liable apart from his or her own act seems

⁷⁸Nicholas Arseniew, *Mysticism and the Eastern Church*, tr. Arthur Chambers (London: SCM Press, 1926), p. 141.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁸⁰Meyendorff and Tobias, *Salvation in Christ*, p. 110.

unintelligible and offensive to the created dignity of the human person. Yet, this notion is not some scholastic distortion; it is the product of the great Augustine. It is true that the Reformers disassociated themselves from Augustine's belief in the sexual nature of sin's transmission "like some genetic defect" caused by the concupiscence that attends sexual arousal. This may be the target of Breck's remark.

It is not true that Reformers rejected the doctrine of Original Sin. It is more true to say that they radicalized it, making it even more offensive (if that is possible). The true offense of the doctrine does not lie in any particular theory of transmission — it is enough to say with Rom. 5:12 that it was through one man's disobedience that sin entered the world. Nor does the doctrine's offense lie in some inducement to passivity. We have already seen that the point of language about human passivity is to give the Old Adam/Eve nothing to do. The work that believers surely do is to be the work of Jesus Christ, not some other work of their own invention. It is to be an actualization of Christ's justice, namely, selfless love of the poor and even of enemies, not an idolatrous activism that is actually seeking only self in all things. The scandal of the doctrine of original sin does not even finally lie in the problematic concept of a human "nature," as we have seen, which ought to serve in theology as an open-ended marker that designates the human creature as the one who is personally addressed by the Word of God.

Rather, the offense lies in the notion of the divine reckoning of a massive human solidarity in Adam as the culpable sin of each individual person. We are each regarded as personally liable for a failure in being into which we are born. Societies with highly individualistic sensibilities such as ours will not find this merely implausible, "like some genetic defect." On the contrary, Augustine emphasized the analogy to disease to explain the idea of original sin. That way of thinking about human problems is in itself attractive to the modern "therapeutic" mind. It ceases to be attractive, however, when the analogy breaks down and we call this disease "sin," the massive sin of the whole human race, for which each person is singularly liable. Modern people will find this idea morally offensive.

Orthodoxy always has found the Augustinian idea of "inherited guilt" strictly speaking unpersuasive, on the ground that guilt can only be one's own when the evil is the evil of one's own will. Thus, Kallistos Ware could affirm the aspect of human solidarity in Adam's sin without the complications involved in Augustine's ideas of sexual transmission and individual liability:

... human beings, made in the image of the Trinitarian God, are interdependent and co-inherent. No man is an island. We are 'members of one another' (Eph. 4:25), and so any action, performed by any member of the human race, inevitably affects all the other members. Even though we are not, in the strict sense, *guilty* of the sins of others, yet we are somehow always *involved*.⁸¹

⁸¹Ware, *Orthodox Way*, p. 81.

This seems to articulate the state of the problem quite adequately. Augustine's association of sexual desire with the concupiscence of original sin — and his explanation in quasi-biological terms of sin's transmission through sexual intercourse — is a serious error in theological anthropology (though I would not, in reaction, wish to exempt human sexuality from the corruption of sin). A question remains: Just as we can become righteous by virtue of self-entrusting faith in the righteousness of Another, have we not also become guilty by virtue of our acquiescence in the disobedience of another? Are we guilty, then, not only in the acts that we do but for acts that we fail — quite willingly — to do? Is there an activist bias in the usual notions of "free will" that causes us to overlook our wholly passive yet willing complicity in sin? A theological anthropology that asked this question might well penetrate the defenses of lovelessness in modern, or postmodern, people and show the necessity of Jesus Christ to them both as Savior and as the true image of God. That question might indicate a modest challenge of Lutheranism to Orthodoxy as well on the way to a better theological anthropology than either tradition has known.