

Joar Haga

Was there a Lutheran Metaphysics?

The interpretation
of communicatio idiomatum
in Early Modern Lutheranism



Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

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Oslo, November 2011

Joar Haga

Joar Haga, Was there a Lutheran Metaphysics?

Preface

An intensive study of the Christology of Luther and the Lutheran theologians of the early modern period is still controversial, at least if one expects relevant theological insights. Although hardly anyone would seriously repeat Harnack's judgement on Luther's "horrible speculations about the ubiquity of the Body of Christ"¹, it is nevertheless undeniable that in the so-called "Luther Renaissance" of the 20th Century, the Christological expressions of the Reformer were only hinted at by one of its last proponents.² Not to mention the reservations blocking any fruitful reception of "the complete nonsense"³ of Christology in High Orthodoxy.

Even the praiseworthy study by Marc Lienhard avoided what was commonly regarded as a suspect form of Docetism by Luther.⁴ Instead, he presented a picture of Christ which was adapted to common sense and Christian normality.

The difficulties alluded to here, namely to represent the breadth and radical meaning of the Christological insights of Lutheran Christology in a non-attenuated way, are to be taken seriously.

The severity of the problem F. Ch. Baur 1843 formulated as follows: "The Godman as taught by the Church includes an irresolvable contradiction in itself"⁵, since the contrast "between reason and faith" is stated as insurmountable.⁶ This implies, however, "the decision to return to" a historically superseded "position."⁷

According to this verdict the only possible solution would be either the Hegelianizing change of Christology – "in the reasoning of the subject, a unity between finitude and infinity is formed, because the subject is just as knowing an infinite"⁸.

Or: a variety of idealized "Jesuslogies", which turns the poor rabbi from Nazareth into the standard-bearer of their own humanitarian enlightenment.

1 Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* 3, (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1932), 875.

2 Gerhard Ebeling, Art. Luther II. Theologie, in *RGG*³, Band 4, 1960, Sp. 513, at the bottom; Sp. 516, last paragraph.

3 Friedrich Loofs, Art. Kenosis, in *Protestantische Realenzyklopedie*, Band 10, 1901, 262, 25 f.

4 "Il faut également se demander dans quelle mesure il peut éviter l'accusation de docétisme, si une propriété divine telle que l'ubiquité est attribuée à la nature humaine." Marc Lienhard, *Luther Temon de Jésus-Christ*, (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1973), 357.

5 F. Ch. Baur, *Die christliche Lehre von der Dreieinigkeit und Menschwerdung Gottes, Dritter Theil*, (Tübingen: C.S. Osiander, 1843), 999.

6 *op.cit.*

7 *op.cit.*

8 *op.cit.*

In the present work, Joar Haga documents for an English speaking audience that F. Ch. Baur's claimed decision must not lead into the cul-de-sac of pious fantasies, or to the rocky desert of orthodox hard heads.⁹

For the rock of contradiction, that stumbling block of reason's possibilities, is not an irrational revelation phenomenon which in turn is streamlined into dogma. It concerns the fact that finite subjects cannot be constituted through themselves, either as individuals or as a collective. Although this is evident to modern consciousness, it is still a disputed circumstance.

The Lutheran Christological tradition – even in its diversity of internal tensions – would have a particular offer, namely to be read as the determination of the person and story of Jesus Christ as the new location of human constitution by the executive unreserved communication.

Göttingen, Oktober 2011

Jörg Baur

9 *op.cit.*

Introduction

In his influential systematic theology, the father of modern Protestant theology, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768 – 1834), stated that Martin Luther’s interpretation of Christ’s two natures was “alien” to genuine Reformation thought. According to him, Luther’s account of the Chalcedonian dogma should be left behind to history.¹ Around one hundred years later, the towering figure of the history of dogma, Adolph von Harnack (1851 – 1930), could even claim that parts of Luther’s Christology equalled “the worst phantasies of the nominalist sophists” and had set the Reformation back by two hundred years.² What appalled these thinkers the most was Luther’s doctrine of Christ’s omnipresent body, the so-called ubiquity. They followed Immanuel Kant in his rejection of metaphysics – and theology, for that matter – as having any role outside the moral sphere. Luther had, after all, rejected the scholastic theology with its implied Aristotelian metaphysics, and replaced philosophy’s role in theology with the teaching of the Bible.

Luther did indeed reject some aspects of Aristotle’s metaphysics and its role in theology. But in his work as a theologian of Holy Scripture, Luther did not leave the metaphysical problems unanswered by confining himself to an otherworldly fideism. Instead he grappled with the hard questions of reality. In many ways, it is possible to claim that, as a theologian of Scripture, Luther sharpened these problems. He insisted on the *enduring* presence of an incarnated God in Christ as a theological given fact. This reality of the incarnation could not be taken away or abstracted, as the Eucharistic controversy with Zwingli revealed. When challenged, it needed a careful theological and philosophical treatment. Moreover, Luther’s fervent rejection of Zwingli’s solution showed the existential nerve of the question. After the controversy, at the theological negotiations of Marburg in 1529, Luther claimed that Zwingli and his followers had a different spirit. This raises the first question of this thesis: Is it really possible to claim that the questions concerning Christ’s presence are alien to the thought of Luther and of the subsequent generations of “Lutheran” theologians?

That question is closely connected to the second main question of this thesis, namely *how* Christ is present in the world? It seems that the sheer complexity of the verb “to be” in its present tense, when applied to Christ in connection with the sacrament, places Luther under an obligation to reveal

1 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube: Nach den Grundsätzen der Evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange Dargestellt* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1999), §97,5.

2 Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1932), 3,875.

some of the philosophical tenets of his understanding of divine presence in this world. For Luther, the interpretation of how the two natures of man and God are united in Christ was a particularly important doctrine in that respect. Paramount to the understanding of that relation was a concept of the ancient Church, namely *communicatio idiomatum*. It meant that the divine and human nature mutually exchanged or shared their properties, and it characterised the unionist profile of Luther's Christology.

The concept of *communicatio idiomatum* proved to be fruitful for the metaphysical concerns of the Reformation, too, such as the understanding of God and God's nature: Could the divine nature share the almighty God's most extreme properties, such as omnipresence, to a human being? Could the holy and exalted God receive the lowly properties of human nature? At the same time, *communicatio idiomatum* raised profound anthropological concerns: Was the finite, sinful human nature capable of receiving divine properties? In what kind of preconceived anthropological structure is Christ to be placed in? After all, the incarnation implied at least some kind of connection between heaven and earth, between divine thought (or will) and human imagination on one level or another.

The concerns about the nature of humanity and divinity respectively pointed to an underlying problem of a more philosophical nature, namely how revelation is understood in a world of reason: How are theology and philosophy related? What are the conditions for a rationality which includes both sciences? As soon as the question of God and man in Christ was asked, the philosophical framework was activated too. One could argue that these concerns are always at hand when Christological core questions are asked. True as that may be, many of the figures of the Reformation had extensive training and profound understanding in philosophy, in addition to their theological abilities. Therefore we can expect a certain acquaintance with the profound problems at hand.

These questions – and the responses to them – were interwoven with a wider cultural break with the heritage of the Middle Ages. The profound social, economic and political changes which accompanied the Reformation not only led to a more profound individualism and self-reflection, but it also changed the image of what a human being was, or could be. Throughout the Middle Ages, there was a sense of a common nature between the species made in the image of God. The anthropological *substance* was a premise which the Middle Ages shared with ancient philosophy, but that premise was replaced by the notion of *subjectivity* in the Reformation. The notion of self and selfhood pushed the question of the human make-up to the fore and Christology played a role in that new construction of the self. Christ was, after all, the new man. One could perhaps say that Christology was intimately correlated with anthropology, and that changes in the understanding of Christ led to changes in the understanding of man too.

In addition, the reformulation of dogma was highly political in itself: The

Roman Empire, *Imperium Romanum Sacrum Nationis Germanicæ*, as it were, was “holy”. It means that its political unity and stability rested on an ecclesiastical unity, and that – ultimately – dogma was the basis of that unity. To challenge Church doctrine was therefore a political threat, too. This is important to bear in mind as a horizon for the arguments we can find among the reformers.

Choice of theme and structure

In order to gain an understanding of how Luther’s Christology and its metaphysical aspects were interpreted in that larger context of theologians whom we now call “Lutheran”, we will trace how some important figures of the next generations responded to these problems. Many of those who regarded themselves as followers of Luther were trained by his colleague, Philipp Melancthon. He is a particularly important figure in this respect, because his solution to the metaphysical problems of Christology portrayed some important differences from that of Luther. The following generations had to come to terms with these differences, and develop further on their – partly differing – foundations.

“The presence of salvation” has recently been singled out as the most characteristic notion of Lutheran post-Reformation Christology.³ Compared to the main confessional alternatives, the Lutherans stand out in their interest in preserving the *unity* of the natures. Both the Thomist interpretation of Christ in post-Tridentine Catholic theology and the emphasis on the instrumental role of Christ in his salvific activity in the reformed tradition have a stronger concern of keeping the natures apart, not mixing or confusing them, as the four negative adverbs of Chalcedon underline.⁴ The “Cyrillic” flavour of Lutheran Christology – as opposed to the other’s more “Nestorian” versions – is particularly visible in the interpretation of the doctrine of *communicatio idiomatum*. The exchange of properties of the respective natures, particularly the human nature receiving everything that the divine nature has: Omnipotence, omniscience and – alas – the difficult omnipresence.

Although it makes sense, both from a historical and a systematical viewpoint, to describe the broad confessional Christology in the wake of Luther as held together by a “unionist” continuity, a closer look reveals both a tension between different positions and a development within that confes-

3 Walter Sparr, “Jesus Christus V. Vom Tridentinum bis zur Aufklärung,” *Theologische Realenzyklopedie* 17 (1988): 4.

4 The four adverbs from the Council of Chalcedon (451) are describing the relation between the two natures in Christ: “[...] without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation.”

sional camp. The doctrinal development, whether it may be labelled wholly “new”, or rather as a refinement of an original doctrine,⁵ nevertheless occurred due to changing intellectual circumstances towards the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century. The new interest in Aristotelian philosophy originating in the reception of Aristotle’s works in Italy and Spain, but also in Protestant Germany through Melanchthon’s work in philosophy, brought about a new emphasis on intellectual rigour which was arguably new to the kind of theology that was originally propagated in Wittenberg. The growth of philosophy, culminating in the introduction of metaphysics to the students in the philosophical faculty – less than hundred years after the subject matter was banned from the curriculum – was in some ways alien to the straightforward Bible-interpreting theology of Luther. But the theologians of the second, third and fourth generations in the tradition of the Augsburg Confession, as it were, had to get to grip with a new set of problems. Perhaps more precisely for this work, they had to answer the old questions of Christology in new situations, qualified through a much more intense work on how the relation between theology and philosophy was interrelated, and what consequences their answers had for the person of Christ.

At the same time, in order to explain the “controversy of concord”, as a modern interpreter labelled the conflict within the camp of Lutheran theologians,⁶ it is necessary to look for the *cause* of that controversy, not only depicting the solutions between the confessional alternatives. Indeed, it is easy to neglect that there were Christological models with substantial differences at work among the two main reformers working in Wittenberg, namely Luther and Melanchthon. This work tries to identify some of the main theological differences between the two: How can these differences throw light

5 Jörg Baur and Theodor Mahlmann stand out as two modern representatives of each tradition. One should be aware of the implications for Church policy in these traditions, particularly for Protestant Germany: Baur emphasises the differences between Luther and Melanchthon, and makes it thereby difficult to speak of a doctrinal union between Lutheran and Reformed Churches, an idea which was paramount for the Neo-protestant movements in the 19th and 20th Century. Mahlmann, on the other hand, takes the mature Melanchthon and his interpretation of Eucharist and Christology as the established norm among theologians of the Augsburg Confession. By labelling the intellectual rationale behind the protest against Melanchthon’s Christology as new, Mahlmann strengthened the forces which will stabilise a Protestant union. Jörg Baur, “Auf dem Wege zur klassischen Tübinger Christologie. Einführende Überlegungen zum sogenannten Kenosis-Krypsis-Streit,” in *Luther und seine klassischen Erben* (1977; repr., Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1993), 204–89; Theodor Mahlmann, *Das neue Dogma der lutherischen Christologie. Problem und Geschichte seiner Begründung* ([Gütersloh]: Gütersloher Verlagshaus G. Mohn, 1969).

6 She thereby balanced the attack on the Formula of Concord from the Reformed critic Rudolf Hospinian, who labled it a document of discord (*Concordia Discors*), and the response from the Lutheran theologian Leonard Hutter defence of the project as a real concord (*Concordia Concors*). Irene Dingel, *Concordia controversa: die öffentlichen Diskussionen um das lutherische Konkordienwerk am Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte, 63; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1996).

on the later development among Lutheran theologians? Whereas Luther sharply formulated the problem of integrating Christology within a metaphysical framework with a fixed rational anthropology, and even called for a “new language”,⁷ Melanchthon tried to preserve a bridge between theology and philosophy by offering an interpretation of Christ within his rather Neoplatonic anthropology, combining elements of philosophy and theology in a higher synthesis. How does the difference between them shed light on the controversy in the coming generations? Is it possible to discern a double line of Christological thought in Wittenberg, some sort of diastatic notion which continued to erupt as new controversies? Or is the difference between Melanchthon and Luther just a matter of nuances within the same train of thought?

Melanchthon operated in many ways in a different communicative space than Luther. Whereas his older friend and colleague at the University of Wittenberg was a dramatic figure, occupied with existential questions of life and death, Melanchthon was a balanced political figure. His reputation as the “teacher of Germany” [*praeceptor Germaniae*] not only acknowledges Melanchthon’s immense erudition, but it describes his work in reforming the curriculum for a new institution, the Protestant University. Whether this difference *necessarily* would lead to different solutions to the questions which are treated in this thesis is perhaps an overstatement, but it is nevertheless important to have these differences in mind.

As it has already been noted, Christology among the Lutherans was not only occupied with presence itself, but the presence of something, namely the presence of *salvation*. The questions of Christology had not only theoretical interest, but also were deeply embedded in the soteriological concern of Luther’s Reformation of theology. To understand the historical development and controversy over *communicatio idiomatum* and the presence of Christ, it seems fruitful to elaborate on Luther’s own interpretation of the locus. It was, after all, commonplace for later generations to refer to him as a point of reference, particularly when the Formula of Concord was established as ecclesiastical law.

How does the soteriological embedment of Christology, stated in Luther’s 1520 essay on Christian freedom affect the understanding of presence? To answer that, we will examine Luther’s great treatise on the Eucharist, the *Confession concerning Christ’s Supper* (1528). Here, the profile of his Christology reaches a dramatic level as an alternative to the scholastically trained Swiss reformer, Ulrich Zwingli. Last, but not least, I will consider the great disputations on Christology from 1539 and 1540 in order to further elaborate on the philosophical implications of Luther’s Christology.

Why did Melanchthon promote a different interpretation to that of Luther?

7 Stefan Streiff, “*Novis linguis loqui*”. *Martin Luthers Disputation über Joh 1,14 “verbum caro factum est” aus dem Jahr 1539* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993).

To answer that question, it is necessary to probe the actual theological writings where he publicly revealed his view, namely in the responses to the Bremen controversy and the relevant passages in his commentary on the letter to the Colossians. But the problem of Christology is not only tied to theological views, it is part of philosophy, too, particularly anthropology. How can Melanchthon's doctrine of the soul explain the choices he made in Christology? In order to answer that question, we will turn to his interpretation of Aristotle on the soul, too.

How did the next generation of theologians respond to the metaphysical challenge of Christology? By investigating how the – arguably – main suppliers of Christological ideas to the Formula, Johannes Brenz and Martin Chemnitz, develop their solutions in light of Luther and Melanchthon, an important question is posed: Could the different Christological elements from Luther and Melanchthon be reconciled in the Formula of Concord?

The problem could also be solved differently, as the critics of the Formula showed. They all belonged to the same tradition of the Augsburg Confession, and Tileman Heshusius, Daniel Hofmann and Johannes Kepler were important figures, too. By their opposition, they expose that the options for the theologians were not confined to the alternatives given by fathers of the Formula of Concord.

The third and last main chapter concerns what we may label the last flowering of Christological controversy between the Lutheran theologians, namely the controversy between members of the theological faculty in Giessen and their colleagues in Tübingen in the late 1610s and early 1620s. The controversy reflects the problem of how union between the natures of Christ should be understood in an intellectual environment that, more thoroughly than before, was trained in philosophical questions, and therefore reflected the metaphysical tenets more profoundly in their theological reasoning.

Whereas the theologians in Giessen, with Balthasar Mentzer as the leading figure, considered the kenotic notion of Philippians 2 to be a *real* refrain of Christ's divine properties in the assumption of flesh, the theologians in Tübingen, with Theodor Thumm as the key thinker, regarded the kenotic notion to be merely a *hidden* reality which was always there. In the vast material which their dispute sparked off, this controversy reveals how their arguments reflect a more general understanding of the relation between philosophy and theology. How did they qualify the concept of *praesentia* in the relationship between Creator and Creation? This becomes acute in the understanding of growth and development: When chapter 2 in the Gospel according to Luke said of the child Jesus that he "grew in wisdom", how should that be understood with regard to the relation between the natures? Last, but not least, which particular words of Scripture function as *regulative* to the interpretation of *communicatio idiomatum*?

Some definitions and reflections on method

Communicatio idiomatum is not a concept of the Reformation, but has its roots in the ancient church. Already Gregory of Nazians (325/329–390) mentions mutual interpenetration between the natures in Christ (*perichoresis*) in one of his letters.⁸ For the western tradition throughout the Middle Ages and in the Reformation, too, the classic reformulation from John of Damascus (650–?) played an important role in defining the concept. In the third book of his *De fide orthodoxa*, as his writings were known in the West, he uses the understanding of *communicatio idiomatum* developed by Maximus Confessor (580–662) to defend the adoration of Christ's humanity.⁹ A particularly important work for the transmission of the unionist Christology in the universities was the Sentences of Peter Lombard (1100–1160).¹⁰ This collection and evaluation of Patristic texts – mostly from Augustine – was arranged thematically and used as material for disputations and discussions. In book three, which concerns the incarnation and relevant discussions, there is extensive material which reflects the concerns of this dissertation. Luther lectured on Lombard's Sentences from 1509 to 1511, and was familiar with the scholastic setting of the term.¹¹

The long history of the concept, or what it refers to, is important for the present work. First of all, there is a cluster of dogmatic themes attached to it. A quick look on Peter Lombard's table of contents, for example, reveals that the two-nature doctrine of Christ involves questions of Mariology, moral theology and the like. It seems important therefore to consider the *scope* and *intent* of the use of *communicatio idiomatum* on the chosen material. Luther's use of the term is not general in the scholastic sense of the term; it has a specific target, even if it may have more general implications. I would therefore argue that the material itself helps the interpreter to narrow the scope of the term.

Formally, when a concept such as *communicatio idiomatum* is chosen as the starting point and thematic focus for an investigation into Church history in the Reformation, one can assume that it is to be placed in the tradition labelled

8 It is found in letter number 101, *MPG* 37, 181C. Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus-God and Man* (London: The Westminster Press, 1968), 297. McGuckin does not only underline Gregory's reference to the dance *perichoresis* allegedly eludes to, but also to his apophatic framework: *Perichoresis* "exceeds anything that corporeality can conceive of as a complex union." John Anthony McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 306–7.

9 Rowan Williams, "Jesus Christus II," *Theologische Realenzyklopedie* 16 (1987): 742.

10 For the importance of John of Damascus to Peter Lombard, see Marcia L. Colish, *Peter Lombard* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 1,418 ff.

11 Cf. Josef Wieneke, *Martin Luthers Notizen anlässlich seiner Vorlesung über die Sentenzen des Petrus Lombardus Erfurt 1509/1511* (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1994). See also Dorothea Vorländer, *Deus incarnatus. Die Zweinaturenchristologie Luthers bis 1521* (Untersuchungen Zur Kirchengeschichte; Witten: Luther-Verlag, 1974).

the *history of doctrine*, or perhaps more narrowly the *history of dogma*. To a large degree, the present work should be placed in that tradition, too. The actual concept is a *dogmatic* construction, used to summarise central concerns in the Christian faith. It does not rely much on political history, or practical aspects of Church history itself, such as private piety, liturgy and ecclesiastical concerns.

It is perhaps closer to the tradition called *intellectual history*, because it searches to place the interpretation of that Christological term within the wider development of philosophical ideas in Early Modern Europe. The setting among the larger traits of European intellectual history – the horizon, so to speak – and its heuristic ambition has some consequences for the methodology used in the present work: It draws heavily upon the hermeneutical tradition.¹² *Communicatio idiomatum* by the Lutherans is interpreted in the horizon of the common Christian and philosophical tradition.

Although the dissertation does not intend to research the relationship between the intellectual world and its correlation with the practical concerns of society, it is necessary to be aware of the concrete cultural environment in which the interpretation of the concept takes place. This might be self-evident for a historian, but here I want to point out how the rather lofty discussions on the subject have an acute ecclesiastical relevance: For Luther, the question of Christology is intimately connected with the question of real presence in the Eucharist, and the conditions for faith at all. This proximity to the central concerns of soteriology indicates a more far-reaching relevance to the discussions than what their lofty distinctions may convey.

What does such a relevance to the ecclesiastical state of affairs imply methodologically? One implication is that the concept at stake has a wider significance than a mere intellectual one, it affects other areas of life than discussions between philosophically trained theologians. Therefore, it is not merely conceptually relevant, but socially embedded, too.¹³ As it has already

12 This complex is touched upon by Gadamer in his discussion on how the text should be protected from misapprehension, and is profoundly ethical: The reader must be ready to be told something from the text: “Wer einen Text verstehen will, ist vielmehr bereit, sich von ihm etwas sagen zu lassen”. This “etwas” is stabilised through his striking belief in the possibility to isolate the content: “Die hermeneutische Aufgabe geht von selbst in eine sachliche Fragestellung über und ist von dieser immer schon mitbestimmt”. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1960), 253.

13 For the social relevance of intellectual concepts, I am indebted to the analyses of Koselleck. As Koselleck observes, there is a different attitude to the sources as texts between the two disciplines. While the concentration on texts is obvious in *Begriffsgeschichte* by its emphasis on philosophical terminology, *Sozialgeschichte* only uses texts to get to grips with the “facts” behind the texts: Social structures, the relation between different groups and classes within society etc. The concepts are *embedded* in political systems, and cannot be abstracted into mere linguistic games. Through an analysis that is focused upon the *pragmatic* aspect of political terminology, Koselleck displays how some economical, political or sociological structures are necessary preconditions for understanding the semantic of the concept. The concept is thereby

been mentioned, due to the dependence of the Holy Roman Empire's on dogmatic unity, a break away would simply mean to call for a war. This perspective makes it necessary to be aware of the *institutional* aspect when *communicatio idiomatum* is discussed. The world in which the theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth Century inhabited was a profoundly religious world. Their opinions – at least their public ones – were never mere opinions, but always interwoven with the political and judicial realities of that world. To be vigilant of that simple fact is an important virtue in the work of a historian. That is true even when a rather theoretical concept is considered.

not only *indicating* political and social relations, but it is itself an element in producing these relations. Reinhard Koselleck, "Begriffsgeschichte und Sozialgeschichte," in *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979), 107 – 29.

Joar Haga, Was there a Lutheran Metaphysics?

Luther's new interpretation

The role of Christology in Luther's understanding of salvation

To understand how crucial Christology is for the theology of Luther, it seems fruitful to consult its role in soteriology, namely as a basis for the *salvation* of humankind and the role it plays for the practice of the Church.

The question of human salvation was raised very early in Luther's engagement with Christological themes.¹ A very dense and mature account of his early Christology – especially with regard to soteriology – is presented in 1520 with his “On the freedom of a Christian”. In the controversy with the reformer of Zürich, Ulrich Zwingli, the implications of Luther's interpretation of Christ are considered with regard to the sacraments. The conflict between them was ignited as early as 1525, but the most interesting writing for the present work concerns Luther's final work in their debate, namely “From the Eucharist of Christ” (1528). Here, the intimate connection between Christology and the Eucharist is stated most clearly. Of particular interest are the categories of presence, borrowed from the first professor of theology at the University of Tübingen, Gabriel Biel.

It is among Luther's later writings, especially in the Christological disputations at the end of his life, however, that we can find some of his most far-reaching statements concerning theology's place among the sciences. Here, some of the thoughts from the important Heidelberg theses (1518) are brought together with his mature interpretation of Christ's person, particularly in the “Disputation on John 1:14” (1539) and the “Disputation on the divinity and humanity of Christ” (1540).

1 Dorothea Vorländer has in her study shown how early the particularities of Luther's interpretation of Christ are shown: It does not only point towards the union of God and man, but sees that union as important for man's salvation. Already in the glosses on Peter Lombard's Sentences 1509 are signs of a more soteriological understanding of Christ present. She shows for example how the speculative question “is it possible to unite finite and infinite being in Christ?” is omitted, a question one could expect was raised from a theologian in the Occhamist tradition. Instead, Luther asks “how is it possible to see God in man Jesus?” (p.46). In Luther's *Dictata super Psalterium 1513–1514*, the question is turned into an epistemological rule: The humanity of Christ is crucial, because that is the place where God can be found (p. 86). In the first lecture on the Romans 1515–1517, the doctrine of Christ's two natures is connected to the understanding of satisfaction. The flesh of Christ may be without sin, but by his incarnation, his suffering and death, he has “become sin” and taken on himself our punishment (p. 123). Vorländer, *Deus incarnatus. Die Zweinaturenchristologie Luthers bis 1521*.

On the freedom of a Christian (1520)

One of the most profound expressions of how deeply salvation and Christology are intertwined is given in Luther's essay on freedom from 1520. Here we can find a dense, Christological interpretation of what Luther later formulated as theology proper in a classic statement:

To know God and man is divine wisdom and what characterises proper theology [...] therefore the proper subject of theology should be the guilty, desperate man and the justifying God or saviour.²

The concentration on the act of justification as the *center* of theology is given a *Christological* rationale in Luther's treatise on the freedom of a Christian (1520). His interpretation of Christ in this writing is not only "the most perfect expression of a Reformation understanding of the mystery of Christ",³ but forms an indissoluble connection to God's justification of the sinful man.⁴

2 *Cognitio dei et hominis est sapientia divina et proprie theologica [...] ut proprie sit subiectum Theologiae homo reus et perditus et deus iustificans vel salvator.* WA, 40II, 327. Cf. Althaus poignant expression: "[...] die theologische Erkenntnis Gottes und des Menschen ist "relative" Erkenntnis, das heisst Erkenntnis beider in ihrer Beziehung zueinander, ihrer sowohl ontologischen wie personalen *relatio*. Es hat den gleichen Sinn, wenn Luther sagt: Das Thema der Theologie ist Christus."

3 Wilhelm Maurer, *Von der Freiheit Eines Christenmenschen. Zwei Untersuchungen zu Luthers Reformationsschriften 1520/21* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1949), 25.

4 The position of the treatise as an authoritative expression of central elements in Luther's theology, is seen from the circumstances it was written in. Luther had already received the threat of excommunication from Rome, but on recommendation from the papal nuncio Karl von Miltitz (1490–1529) he agreed to write a letter to the Pope and date it prior to receiving the threat. Together with the letter, the treatise was attached as an explication of the central teachings of Luther. It does not have the polemical attitude of the later Reformation writings, although both its style and content suggest anything else than humility before the papal authority. Luther addresses the Pope as if he was of the same rank, and underlines the inner freedom as the core of Christian life. This does not, however, blur the status of the treatise as a positive summary of Luther's theological development at that point. Cf. Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1983–87), 382–90. Luther wrote a German version, too, which Maurer (and Brecht) regarded as the original. Birgit Stolt, on the other hand, argued quite convincingly that the Latin version was earlier. Her argument rests on an analysis of the formal rhetorical composition of the Latin version: Birgit Stolt, *Studien zu Luthers Freiheitstraktat : Mit Besonderer Rücksicht auf das Verhältnis der Lateinischen und der Deutschen Fassung zu Einander und die Stilmittel der Rhetorik* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1969), 114–17. In his thorough presentation of the arguments of both Maurer and Stolt, Reinhold Rieger summarises the discussion by giving the German text priority. Reinhold Rieger, *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen. De libertate christiana* (Kommentare zu Schriften Luthers; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 5–12. I must admit that I regard the outcome of the discussion to be quite limited with respect to the subject matter of the treatise. Should an earlier version be given priority because of its alleged originality? Or is the later version to be seen as a more accomplished work? It is even more difficult if one considers the bilingual ability of Luther: In the faithful transcripts of Röhrer, where the supposedly true mixture of German and Latin is presented, it gives a much more precise impression

At the outset, Luther states that a Christian man has two contradictory natures, which Luther labels freedom and servitude, but also spiritual and corporeal, interior and exterior:

A Christian is a free master of everything, subject to none. A Christian is a dutiful servant of everything, subject to everyone.⁵

What is the cause of this double identity? Although Luther refers to Paul, who declares a Christian to be a free man – subject only to love – it is clear that it is Christ who has merited and given it. There exists a similarity between a Christian and Christ, according to Luther. Christ is lord over all and has a divine form, at the same time [*simul*] he is born of a woman, is under the law and has the form of a servant.⁶ Luther sees the double identity of a Christian as a parallel structure to the identity of Christ.

How is this structure transferred from Christ to the believer? Following St Paul's description and the Platonic tradition,⁷ Luther insists on the interior aspect of man, the soul, as the place where the new man and true freedom is found. The exterior, man according to flesh and blood, belongs to the old world.⁸ That principle has an important negative aspect: Man cannot become free through external deeds, such as holy clothes and fasting.⁹ It is important to underline that the distinction between external and internal is a strict

of Luther's theological imagination than does, say, the harmonized versions of Veit Dietrich. Given the temporal proximity, it could be argued that the two versions should be regarded as a unity. For these problems, cf. Birgit Stolt, *Martin Luthers Rhetorik des Herzens* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

5 *Christianus homo, omnium dominus est liberrimus, nulli subiectus, Christianus homo, omnium servus est officiosissimus omnibus subiectus.* Martin Luther and Hans-Ulrich Delius [ed.], *Studienausgabe*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1979), 264, 17–18. The German translation reads: “Eyn Christen mensch ist eyn freyer herr / uober alle ding / vnd niemandt vnterthan. Eyn Christen mensch ist eyn dienstpar knecht aller ding vnd yderman vnterthan.” Luther and Delius [ed.], *StA* 2, 265, 6–9.

6 [...] *sic Christus, quanquam omnium dominus, factus tamen ex muliere, factus est sub lege, simul liber et servus, simul in forma dei, et in forma serui.* Luther and Delius [ed.], *StA* 2, 264, 23–25.

7 Jüngel traces the origins of the dualistic concept “man in man” to Plato's description of how of man's inner thing [ὁ ἐντὸς ἀνθρώπου] rules the other parts of man. Cf. Eberhard Jüngel, *Zur Freiheit Eines Christenmenschen. Eine Erinnerung an Luthers Schrift* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1978), 116–20.

8 *Homo enim duplici constat natura, spirituali et corporali, iuxta spiritualem, quam dicunt animam, vocatur spiritualis, interior, nouus homo, iuxta corporalem, quam carnem dicunt, vocatur carnalis, exterior, vetus homo, de quo Apostolus. 2. Cor. 4.* Luther and Delius [ed.], *StA* 2, 264, 18–20. The German reads: “[...] sollen wir gedencken / das eyn yglich Christen mensch ist zweyerley natur / geystlicher vnd leyplicher. Nach der seelen wirt er eyn geystlich / new / ynnerlich mensch genennet / nach dem fleysch vnd blut wirt er eyn leyplich allt vnd eusserlich mensch genennet.” Luther and Delius [ed.], *StA* 2, 265, 17–20.

9 [...] *et constat, nullam prorsus rerum externarum, quocunq; censeantur nomine, aliquid habere momenti ad iustitiam aut libertatem Christianam [...]* Luther and Delius [ed.], *StA* 2, 266, 6–8. The German translation is perhaps more to the point here: “So ists offenbar / das keyn eusserlich ding mag yhn frey / noch frum machen [...]” Luther and Delius [ed.], *StA* 2, 267, 5–6.

theological distinction for Luther. He does not follow Augustine in attributing the external to the sensory, lower faculty of man, and the inner to the rational, higher faculty of man.

On the contrary, he forms the whole argument after St Paul, as it is stated in 2 Corinthians 4:16 and Galatians 5:17.¹⁰ It is the whole man who is either relying on his external deeds in the presence of God, the *homo carnalis*, or the whole man relying on his internal justification in the presence of God, the *homo spiritualis*.¹¹ This marks a distance from the interpretation of Andreas Karlstadt and the later radicals, who saw Augustine's *De spiritu et littera*¹² as an attempt of explaining how the Spirit was given to man in order that he may fulfil the law. Luther, on the other hand, pointed to the imputation of a foreign justice outside man.¹³

It is only through the Word of God, the gospel of Christ,¹⁴ that man is made free. Christ preached is an external – even liturgical – act too, it could be argued, but it enters the hearer in a different way than exercises of the body.¹⁵ Luther claims that the *centre* of man is struck with Christ through faith in the external word, which he labels with a polyphony of biblical expressions: The soul, the heart, inner man, new man etc.¹⁶ The act itself happens as if “you hear your own God speaking to you”,¹⁷ as Luther expresses it.

10 Karin Bornkamm, *Christus – König und Priester. Das Amt Christi bei Luther im Verhältnis zur Vor- und Nachgeschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 168 ff.

11 Karl Heinz Zur Mühlen, “Innerer und äußerer Mensch. Eine theologische Grundunterscheidung bei Martin Luther,” in *Reformatorisches Profil* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 199–207.

12 Augustine's treatise was even included in the obligatory lectures of the second professor in Melancthon's University reform of 1536. No other extra-biblical books are mentioned. Helmer Junghans, “Die Geschichte der Leucorea zwischen 1536 und 1574,” in *Georg Major (1502–1574)* (ed. Irene Dingel and Günther Wartenberg; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2005), 16. For the difference between Carlstadt and Luther in the interpretation of *De spiritu et littera*, cf. Bernhard Lohse, “Zum Wittenberger Augustinismus. Augustins Schrift *De Spiritu et Littera* in der Auslegung bei Staupitz, Luther und Karlstadt,” in *Augustine, The Harvest, and Theology (1300–1650): Essays Dedicated to Heiko Augustinus Oberman in Honor of His Sixtieth Birthday* (ed. Kenneth Hagen; Leiden: Brill, 1990), 89–109.

13 Bernhard Lohse, *Luther Theologie in ihrer historischen Entwicklung und in ihrem systematischen Zusammenhang* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 162.

14 “[...] das wort gottis von Christo geprediget [my italics].” Luther and Delius [ed.], *StA 2*, 267,27.

15 Roger Jensen summarised it as such: “The body does not constitute the soul” (kropp virker ikke konstituere[d]e på sjel). Roger Jensen, *Subjektkonstitusjon Og Gudstale. Drøftelse Av Konstitusjonen Av Det Etske Subjekt i Moderniteten Med Særlig Vekt På Martin Luthers Antropologi Og Etik.* (Oslo: University of Oslo, 2004), 171.

16 The absence of locating that centre within a philosophical anthropology is striking. An expression of Luther's engagement with the question of how man is constituted is later found in his controversy with Erasmus (1525). Here, human will [*voluntas*] is the organising centre of man, but not in the traditional philosophical sense. Instead, the will is regarded as an animal, a mule, which can be controlled by either God or Satan. Luther is insisting on an ongoing fight between the powers in the core of man, and he strongly refuses any kind of free choice over against itself as self: *Sic humana voluntas in medio posita est, ceu iumentum, si insederit Deus, vult et vadit, quo vult Deus, ut Psalmus dicit, Factus sum sicut iumentum et ego semper tecum. Si insederit*

One tenet, important as it was for classical Christian anthropology, is left out of Luther's interpretation. This is not only due to the list itself, but has its reason from the dual structure in Luther's understanding of man. By framing anthropology as a relation between spirit and body, he omits the soul as being the *middle* part in a trichotomy. Traditionally the soul was considered a middle part, partaking both in spirit and body. It comprised the whole of man. This is particularly visible in the moral implications of the doctrine of grace *via moderna*, at least as Gabriel Biel understood it.¹⁸

The new reality of Christ created within man is captured by Luther first and foremost captured by the word *faith*. Due to the deprived nature of man, one should not consider the deeds, but rather concentrate on strengthening faith, he claims.¹⁹ Luther is not trying to eradicate good works from the life of a Christian, only to place them as consecutive to faith, as fruits of that new reality. He qualifies faith in terms well known in the mystical tradition of his monastic training: The soul clings to the words of God's promises in a way that it is *unified* with them, to the extent of being *absorbed* by these words. Luther underlines that the union is not solely participation, but through the union, the power of the words makes the soul satisfied and "drunk".²⁰ In addition, Luther applies classic Christological imagery to describe the union between the Word and the soul: The soul becomes exactly like the Word, just as the iron becomes red like the fire in their union.²¹

It becomes clear that the highest grace [*gratia*] does not consist in the freedom from the yoke under the law, or enabling the believer to show God his

Satan, vult et vadit, quo vult Satan, nec est in eius arbitrio, ad utrum sessorem currere aut eum quaerere, sed ipsi sessores certant ob ipsum obtinendum et possidendum. Martin Luther, *Studienausgabe* (ed. Hans-Ulrich Delius; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1979), 208,2–7. For a thorough discussion on the implications of such a possessed middle, cf. Thomas Reinhuber, *Kämpfender Glaube. Studien zu Luthers Bekenntnis am Ende von De servo arbitrio* (Berlin New York: De Gruyter, 2000), 43–55.

17 "[...] das du hoerist deynen gott zu dir reden" Luther and Delius [ed.], *StA* 2, 269,12–13.

18 As Oberman points out, the battle between a sinful life and a life obedient to God is located *within* the rational soul by Biel. It is the two faculties of the soul that are in war with each other. Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology. Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), 58–59. Biel's understanding was in concord with a Christian (neo-)Platonism prevailing in the Middle Ages. The soul was understood as a spiritual substance, composed of a superior part [*ratio superior*] which was directed toward the spiritual world, and an inferior part which was directed toward lower beings. Zdzislaw Kuksewicz, "The Potential and the Agent Intellect," in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (ed. Normann Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 596.

19 Luther and Delius [ed.], *StA* 2, 268, 34–270,3.

20 *Cum autem, haec promissa dei, sint verba sancta, vera, iusta, libera, pacata et vniuersa bonitate plena, fit, vt anima, quae firma fide illis adheret, sic eis vniatur, immo penitus absorbeat, vt non modo participet, sed saturetur et inebrietur omni virtute eorum [...]* Luther and Delius [ed.], *StA* 2, 272,12–15.

21 "[...] Wie das wort ist / sso wirt auch die seele von yhm / gleych / als das eyssen wirt gluttröd wie das fewr auss der voreynigung mit dem fewr" Luther and Delius [ed.], *StA* 2, 273,23–24.

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Joar Haga traces the Lutheran doctrine of *communicatio idiomatum*, the exchange of properties between the natures of Christ, as it developed in the 16th and the early 17th Century. Regarding it as the nerve of his soteriology, Luther stressed the intimacy of the two natures in Christ to such a degree that it threatened to end the peaceful relationship between theology and philosophy. Whereas earlier research identified two almost separate traditions of Lutheran Christology, this work portrays a more nuanced picture of how key thinkers responded to Luther's problem.

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