# CHRISTIAN CONTRADICTIONS

# THE STRUCTURES OF LUTHERAN AND CATHOLIC THOUGHT

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#### CHAPTER I

#### Luther's Revolution

What I want to do in this chapter is to convey the structure of Lutheran thought. One could of course do this in the abstract, as an 'ideal' system of thought, drawing on numerous Lutheran theologians by way of illustration. I have decided however that this would unnecessarily complicate the chapter and that it is preferable simply to turn to Luther as the progenitor of a tradition, leaving the discussion of later Lutheran theologians considered in their own right to subsequent chapters. I shall however draw on a whole variety of Lutheran commentators on Luther, thereby conveying something of a wider tradition, indeed of different schools of Lutheran thought and divergent emphases. Catholics, as we shall see, have too often treated Luther as though he were a 'one-off', his thought the result of some personal problem or disposition. On the contrary, Luther was the founder of a vibrant tradition, one way of structuring Christian belief. I shall make one exception to this policy of confining myself to Luther and those who commentate directly on Luther. I shall at points make reference to the thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I do this both because I do not consider Bonhoeffer elsewhere (and he seems important) and also because no one more markedly than he took up and translated Lutheran insights, expressing them in other form. I believe that reading Bonhoeffer gives one insights into Luther and not simply vice versa.

I shall structure this chapter in the following manner. In the first part I shall consider Luther's understanding of the 'self' (if one can use such a term for a sixteenth-century man) and the human relation to God, returning once and again to the theme of 'extrinsic' righteousness. I believe this to be quite fundamental to grasping Luther and crucial to the contrast with Catholicism. In the remainder of the chapter I shall turn to a wider exposition of Luther's thought, showing it to revolve, as I have already mentioned, around

a dialectic which is repeated in one or another guise. The chapter is, thus, something other than a general introduction to Luther's thought and is rather orientated to the task at hand. I must apologise to readers who are already familiar with Luther. It seems necessary to start at the beginning.

It was in September 1520 that an Augustinian friar, Martin Luther, sent a remarkable essay in Latin and in German, together with a conciliatory letter, to Pope Leo X. Luther was threatened with the bull 'Exsurge Domine', which entailed excommunication, the burning of his books, and the requirement of recantation within sixty days. The essay was entitled 'On the Freedom of a Christian'. Luther was a learned man, a university professor and biblical exegete, trained in the original biblical languages and making use of texts which had not been available to scholars for a thousand years until his time. The essay represents the conclusions which, as we shall see, he had arrived at through courses of lectures delivered during the previous eight years. His position in this essay is exactly commensurate with that of his great Galatians lectures (perhaps the high point of his career as a theologian) given in the first half of the 1530s.<sup>2</sup>

The essay concerns – significantly, for this is fundamental to Luther – 'Christian Freedom'. It argues that the Christian is free from all works; and that this man, freed from worrying about his acceptance by God, is available to become a servant (or slave) in the service of his neighbour. Hence it revolves around the paradox: 'A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.' (Cf. Romans 13.8.) At the climax of the essay Luther encapsulates his theology in a nutshell. 'We conclude, therefore,' he writes, 'that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbour' (another way of expressing this same paradox). He adds: 'Otherwise he is not a Christian.' This then for Luther is the hallmark of what it means to be a Christian. The Christian is one who lives *not in himself*, but in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> For good general introductions to all aspects of Luther's thought in English see Gerhard Ebeling, Luther: An Introduction to his Thought, trans. R. A. Wilson (London: Collins Fontana, 1972; first published 1964) and Philip Watson, Let God be God! An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther (London: Epworth Press, 1947).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> In saying this I do not mean to imply that there was no development in Luther's thought. There was – notably in the matter of the sacraments following the controversies with the left wing of the Reformation in the late 1520s. But the basic structure remains remarkably constant subsequent to the breakthrough to a full Reformation position in 1520.

Christ; and this in turn leads (as the essay demonstrates) to the service of the neighbour. Using technical language (for this is how these words are used in Lutheran theology) Luther writes: 'By *faith* he is caught up beyond himself into God. By *love* he descends beneath himself into his neighbour.' The relation to God is one of 'faith', to the neighbour of 'love'. It is this structure and the theological anthropology which is involved which we shall now proceed to explore.

The notable work of scholarship to mention here (unfortunately untranslated) is Wilfried Joest's Ontologie der Person bei Luther. The book considers Luther's discarding of a medieval 'Aristotelian' framework. Within such a framework the human is understood as a kind of derived substance, which has independence (in German Selbständigkeit, literally that which can stand on its own feet) existing in and for itself. Of such a substance (or essence) qualities or attributes can be predicated; hence the person, within Catholic theology, is said to be in a 'state' of grace or of sin, or equally one can speak of 'infused' virtues.<sup>5</sup> It was with this tradition that Luther broke, in what must be counted a profound revolution in the history of Western thought. By contrast, Luther understands the person as one who is 'carried' by another. That power acts through him. Writes Joest: 'And this not in the indirect sense that God's work makes possible our work, imparting the capability to us, but in the strong and immediate sense that God himself works in our work; so that our work - if the question of predication is in any way relevant – can only be said to be his work.'6 Joest thus proposes that, were one to speak of the intrinsic nature (Wesen) of the person, one would have to say that it

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> I shall in this chapter put terms of importance in bold italics where they are explained.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> WA (Weimarer Ausgabe) 7:38.6-9 (German), 7.69.12-15 (Latin); J. Dillenberger (ed.), Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings (Garden City, NY: Anchor Doubleday, 1961), p. 80. My italics.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Joest holds that this Aristotelian understanding comes into medieval thought through Boethius, who understands persons as self-contained entities. Boethius writes: 'Persona est rationalis naturae individua substantia.' ('Liber de duabis naturis et una persona', π, MSL 64, 1343; quoted by W. Joest, Ontologie der Person bei Luther (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), p. 233.) This is essentially the Catholic understanding. Hence the Philosophisches Wörterbuch, ed. W. Brugger, SJ (fifth edn 1953), quoted by Joest, p. 234, defines substance thus: 'Substance is that which has its being (Sein) not in another, but in and of itself (in sich und für sich) has independence (Selbständigkeit).' And again, in the Handlexikon der Katholischen Dogmatik, ed. J. Braun (1926) we find, under 'person' (p. 227, quoted by Joest, p. 235, note 6): 'The completion of a person in him/herself (das Insichabgeschlossensein) and thereby the self possession (Sichselbstbesitzen) of each subject belongs to a person on account of his reason/intelligence.'

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Joest, Ontologie, pp. 261-2.

lies not in himself but in God, who relates to the person from 'outside', and upon whom in faith he leans.<sup>7</sup> There is what we may call (adapting a phrase of Philip Watson's) a transfer of centre of gravity,<sup>8</sup> so that now the Christian lives by and through another.

The corollary of such a structure is that the human being is only able to come 'to' himself, to become an integrated whole, as he is based in another (which is God). That is to say the Christian lives extrinsically, in Christ in God. The Christian is 'caught up beyond himself' into God. That which allows this 'transfer of gravity' - the term which designates it - is faith. Joest quotes Günther Metzger here, who writes that for Luther: 'The unity of the life "before God" does not lie in the human himself.' As I have put it, the human only comes 'to' himself as he bases himself in God. Metzger continues: 'In his attempt to bring about an integration in his life, the human comes up against the fact that the basic axis of his life is only to be understood with reference to an extra se.'9 The corollary of this is that all attempts to become integrated (to come to oneself) on one's own as a self-subsisting entity (for example with the help of God's infused grace) must fail. This follows from what it is to have a God; God, to be God, must be absolutely fundamental to the self being itself. Thus in Luther – and following him in Lutheran thought – the human is said to live extra se (outside himself) by an alien righteousness. That the Christian lives 'not in himself' but 'in God' is, as I have already suggested, nothing less than what it means to be a Christian. The Christian has a new sense of self, which is not a sense of self as a self-subsisting entity but rather a sense that he lives excentrically to himself. What is entailed in being a Christian is as radical as that.

Luther was of course aware of the depth of the revolution in which he was caught up. He was part of the new learning which was penetrating the university of Wittenberg. Joest in fact thinks that Luther was questioning the Aristotelian notion of 'substance' from his earliest lectures on the psalms of 1513–15, recognising that *substantia*, where he finds it in his Vulgate text, designates something very different from the underlying Hebrew. <sup>10</sup> In the years immediately prior to the public challenge which he issued in 1517 Luther's

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>8</sup> Watson, Let God be God!, pp. 34, 52, etc.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Günther Metzger, Gelebter Glaube: Die Formierung reformatorischen Denkens in Luthers erster Psalmenvorlesung (1964), p. 184; quoted by Joest, Ontologie, p. 249, note 57.

<sup>10</sup> Joest, Ontologie, pp. 238-9.

writings are spattered with negative references to the use to which Aristotle was being put in theology. It was far from the case that, in objecting to the sale of indulgences, Luther was simply speaking out against a perverse manifestation of medieval theology and only later did this draw a theological revolution in its train. Luther had already made the essential theological moves – from which there followed his objection to a particularly blatant outworking of what he considered a perverse theology. Writing to two friends in February 1517, Luther comments that 'Aristotle is gradually going down, perhaps into eternal ruin'. Indeed his last work prior to the outbreak of the indulgence controversy, his so-called 'Disputation Against Scholastic Theology' of 4 September 1517, culminates in a condemnation of the influence of Aristotle in theology.

The discarding of the medieval Aristotelian basis gives a novel feel to Luther's theology. Luther understands the human *relationally*, whether in relationship to God, or as attempting to be independent of God. Thus he writes:

The Christian, therefore, is not righteous *formally*, not righteous according to *substance* or *quality*... but righteous according to a relation to something; that is, with reference to the Divine grace and free remission of sins, which belong to them who acknowledge their sin, and believe that God favours and pardons them for Christ's sake. 12

And again: 'For faith is not, as some of our moderns dream, a "habitus", quiet, snoring and sleeping in the soul: but it is always turned towards God with a straight and perpetually looking and watching eye.' We are righteous not on account of some intrinsic quality we possess, but because God, for the sake of Christ, holds us to be righteous. Luther is here well aware of the biblical understanding of grace as favour. He writes:

Between grace and gifts there is this difference. Grace means properly God's favour, or the goodwill God bears us, by which He is disposed to give us Christ and to pour into us the Holy Ghost, with his gifts . . . In giving us the gifts He gives but what is His, but in His grace and His regard for us He gives His very self. In the gifts we touch His hand but in His gracious regard we receive His heart, spirit, mind and will. <sup>14</sup>

What is crucial is God's attitude towards us.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> WA Br 1.99.8-13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Selected Works of Martin Luther, vol. 1, trans. H. Cole (London: W. Simpkin & R. Marshall, 1826), pp. 88-9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> WA 5.460.9-10. <sup>14</sup> WADB 7; 8.10-22.

We may however note in passing that it is the use made of Aristotle within theology which Luther finds objectionable. (It may well be a mistaken use of Aristotle, which in some respects turns his meaning on its head.) For Luther (as we have already seen in discussing 'The Freedom of a Christian') the constitution of the 'person' must always come before the 'works' that he does. Person gives rise to works; it is not that doing works serves to constitute the person. Freed, through his relation to God, from worry about himself, the person is turned in love to serve the neighbour. Or to put this another way, theology leads to ethics (and not ethics to theology). In illustrating this point in 'The Freedom of a Christian' Luther takes the obvious biblical example: the good tree bears good fruit. 'The fruits do not make trees either good or bad, but rather as the trees are, so are the fruits they bear.'15 Taking a second example, Luther writes:

Illustrations of the same truth can be seen in all trades. A good or a bad house does not make a good or a bad builder; but a good or a bad builder makes a good or a bad house. And in general, the work never makes the workman like itself, but the workman makes the work like himself.

The example is drawn straight from the Nicomachean Ethics! 16 The problem is not Aristotle per se; indeed Luther might be said to have some kind of a 'virtue ethics', in which (precisely) the nature of the works is dependent on the prior constitution of the person. The problem is the medieval notion of the *habitus*, whereby practising good works is supposed to lead to intrinsic goodness, the foundation of medieval and Catholic theology. That is to say ethics is held to lead to theology (the relationship with God). The Luther turns this on

I shall say here a little more about the quiet revolution which had overtaken Luther during the years between 1513 and 1520 and through this return to our main theme as to what it means to live extra se. We are fortunate in having Luther's sets of lectures for those years. They have come under intensive scrutiny by scholars. Par-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> WA 7.32.14-15 (German), 7.61.34-5 (Latin); Dillenberger (ed.), Selections, p. 70. (Cf. Matt.

<sup>7.16 – 20.)</sup>Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, book II, ch. I, p. 56, trans. J. A. K. Thomson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), p. 56.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> See Steven Ozment: 'Luther spied in this philosophical position the model for the arguments of the new Pelagians. ('Luther and the Late Middle Ages' in R. M. Kingdom (ed.), Transition and Revolution: Problems and Issues of European Renaissance and Reformation History (Minneapolis, MN: Burgess, 1974), p. 119.)

ticularly impressive is David Steinmetz's comparison of the young Luther's theology with that of his mentor and confessor Johannes Staupitz. 18 What stands out is Luther's originality from the start. Luther casts his theology in terms of a relationship to a promise (we may again say relationally); a promise to which one responds in trust or faith (fiducia). Thus he writes that Aristotle cannot help us when scripture proposes that 'faith is the substance of things hoped for' (Heb. 11.1). 19 Steinmetz comments that for Staupitz by contrast: 'The future is not a problem, but neither is it a source of consolation or of hope.' Staupitz remains within what Steinmetz calls the 'wellworn tracks of medieval theology'; he continues to understand the relationship to God in terms of 'love' (not faith). But for Luther the spiritual person is one who trusts, who has faith; a change which, Steinmetz comments – in what must be counted an understatement - was 'a theological shift of great importance in the history of Western Christianity'.<sup>20</sup>

Whether there is a particular date at which this paradigm shift takes place is of course difficult to say. The evidence points rather to a gradual evolution in Luther's thought until (by 1520) all the pieces are in place. The Romans lectures of 1515-16 in particular read uncommonly like the mature Luther. Yet it seems that, at that point, Luther held what would later be referred to as an 'analytic proleptic' position. That is to say, he thought that God holds us to be just for Christ's sake (in this at one with the later Reformation position) but in the knowledge that we shall finally be just (in ourselves). If this is a correct interpretation of Luther at that date, he later comes to abandon it in favour of the position that God reckons us to be fully and unconditionally just now. By the Hebrews lectures of 1517-18 we seem to have the full 'extrinsic' position. Luther distinguishes a righteousness based on works and one 'hidden in God'. He writes: 'Faith is the glue or bond, the Word and the heart are two extremes, but by faith are made one spirit as a man and wife are made one flesh.' And again: 'Oh it is a great thing to be a Christian man, and have a hidden life, hidden ... in the invisible God himself, and thus to live in the things of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> David Steinmetz, Luther and Staupitz: An Essay in the Intellectual Origins of the Protestant Reformation (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1980 and Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> WA 4.168.1, quoted by Steinmetz, Luther and Staupitz, p. 61.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Steinmetz, Luther and Staupitz, pp. 66, 140.

the world, but to feed on him.'21 The Christian has the typically Lutheran double sense of self. Life is no longer held to be an Augustinian via to God, in which we are (internally) transformed through working with God's grace. What may then be said of these lectures from the immediate years before the outbreak of the Reformation is that Luther comes to separate justification from ethics. What impresses him (for example as he exegetes the Psalms) is the theme of complete reliance on God, rather than a concern for the internal goodness of the person. Luther writes that it is the man 'who sees himself as even the most vile who is most beautiful to God'.<sup>22</sup> Luther's interest centres on God's word and promise, and the response of faith or trust.

It was at some point during these years that Luther underwent what in retrospect he remembered as a decisive breakthrough. (From his connecting it with his second course of lectures on the Psalms it would have to be dated 1519, but the actual date has long been a matter of dispute among scholars, many dating it much earlier.) Luther was apparently in the small alcove (which one can still see) which forms an extension (owing to the fact that there is a tower on that corner of the building) to the room which was his lecture theatre; hence Luther's 'tower' experience. He tells us that he had been 'seized with a great eagerness' to understand Paul in the Epistle to the Romans (1.17), where Paul writes of the justice/righteousness (iustitia) of God, 'the just shall live by faith'. Luther writes: 'For I hated this word "justice of God", which by the use and custom of all doctors I had been taught to understand philosophically as they say, as that formal and active justice whereby God is just and punishes unjust sinners.' However irreproachable his life as a monk, he felt himself in the presence of God (coram deo – a phrase which will come to have the greatest significance for Lutherans) 'to be a sinner with a most unquiet conscience, nor would I believe him to be pleased with my satisfaction'. 23 Luther continues that he did not love but hated this 'just God' who punished sinners, as though it were not enough to be ruined by original sin and crushed by the law of the Ten Commandments and then God through the gospel brings 'his wrath and justice to bear on us'. In this state, he writes: 'I knocked with

 $<sup>^{21}</sup>$  WA 57, lectures on Hebrews, 157, 1–3; WA 57, lectures on Hebrews, 215, 1.

Quoted by Ozment, 'Luther', p. 126.
 Satisfaction: within Catholicism, the act of contrition which one performs after penance, such that the earthly punishment for the sin is removed.

importunity at Paul in this place, with a burning desire to know what [he] could intend.'

Then Luther breaks through:

At last, God being merciful, as I meditated day and night, pondering the connection of the words, namely, 'The Justice of God is revealed, as it is written, the Just shall live by faith', there I began to understand that Justice of God in which the just man lives by the gift of God, i.e. by faith, and this sentence, 'the Justice of God is revealed in the Gospel' to be understood passively as that whereby the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, 'the just shall live by faith'. At this I felt myself to be born anew, and to enter through open gates into paradise itself. From here, the whole face of the Scriptures was altered. I ran through the Scriptures as memory served, and collected the same analogy in other words as opus dei, that which God works in us; virtus dei, that in which God makes us strong; sapientia dei, in which he makes us wise; fortitudo dei, salus dei, gloria dei.

And now, as much as I formerly hated that word 'Justice of God' [iustitia Dei] so now did I love and extol it as the sweetest of all words and then this place was to me as the gates of paradise. Afterwards I read St Augustine, 'On the Spirit and the Letter', <sup>24</sup> and beyond all hope, found that he also similarly interpreted the justice of God as that with which God clothes us and by which we are justified. <sup>25</sup>

Whether this is a correct reading of Paul, or indeed of Augustine, is a question which lies beyond the scope of the present work. But it was a revolution. When Luther speaks of the 'justice of God' as being 'passive' he does not mean (as a Catholic might be inclined to think) that it is we who, without merit, receive justice. He means that we live not by our justice (even though that justice should be given to us by God) but by God's justice. Thus in his reply to Latomus (a theologian from the faculty of Louvain which had ruled against Luther, and the man whom Luther thought the most impressive of those who wrote against him in the early years), Luther comments that 'righteousness is not situated in certain qualities in our nature, but in the mercy of God'. It becomes clear that such an understanding of justice carries with it a particular theological anthro-

<sup>24 &#</sup>x27;The Spirit and the Letter' 15: "The righteousness of God hath been manifested." That is the righteousness of which they are ignorant who would establish their own, and will not be subject to that other. "The righteousness of God" – not the righteousness of man or the righteousness of our own will – the righteousness of God, not that by which God is righteous, but that wherewith he clothes man, when he justifies the ungodly.' (J. Burnaby (ed.), Augustine Later Works, The Library of Christian Classics, vol. XIII (London: SCM Press and Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1955), p. 205).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> WA 54.185.12–186.21 (preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> WA 8.92.39.

pology.<sup>27</sup> One's sense of self is bound up with another, with God, as one knows one's self through God's acceptance of one. To trust in another (the meaning of faith) is after all, as we have said, to transfer one's centre of gravity to that other.

We should explore this sense of what we may call 'excentricity' in Luther further. The Lutheran theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg writes: 'Luther not only added the notion of trust, but he wanted to emphasise that the personal centre itself changes in the act of trust, because the trusting person surrenders to the one in whom such confidence is entrusted.' Pannenberg comments that: 'The point was crucial in Luther's argument, but difficult to grasp. Even his friends did not fully understand his intuition at this point.' Melanchthon too spoke of faith in terms of trust, but he failed to grasp 'Luther's profound insight that faith by way of ecstasis participates in the reality of Christ himself and therefore transforms the faithful into Christ's image'. Consequently in Melanchthon's theology justification is somewhat wooden and juridical 'while in Luther's language it had a mystical flavour'. Pannenberg judges that in this respect Calvin came closer to Luther. 'But even Calvin did not realise that the very foundation of the traditional concept of a personal self was shaken by Luther's discovery concerning the nature of faith.'<sup>28</sup> Pannenberg considers this understanding of faith Luther's 'most important and imperishable contribution to theology'. I agree that this new understanding of the self (if one may use such a term for Luther) is fundamental to his thought.

Of course one might say of such a Christ-mysticism that it is simply Pauline.<sup>29</sup> It is interesting here to compare Albert Schweitzer's discussion of what he calls Paul's Christ-mysticism. Schweitzer writes: 'For [Paul] every manifestation of the life of the baptised man is conditioned by his being in Christ. Grafted into the corporeity of Christ, he loses his creatively individual existence and his natural personality. Henceforth he is only a form of manifestation of the personality of Jesus Christ, which dominates that corporeity.'

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> See Heiko Oberman: 'The "extra nos" is for Luther the connection between the doctrine of justification and a theological anthropology.' ("Iustitia Christi" and "Iustitia Dei": Luther and the Scholastic Doctrines of Justification', Harvard Theological Review 59:1 (1966), 21.)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> W. Pannenberg, 'Freedom and the Lutheran Reformation', *Theology Today* 38 (1981), 287–97.

<sup>29</sup> See Gal. 2.20: 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.'

Schweitzer says that for Paul the phrase 'justification by faith' means 'righteousness, in consequence of faith, through the being-in-Christ'. Such was the state of Luther scholarship at the beginning of this century that Schweitzer apparently does not notice this sense in Luther, but this surely is exactly Luther's meaning. In these same years Karl Holl argued that Luther speaks of union with Christ, but not with God, in this faithfully following Paul who taught a Christmysticism but no God-mysticism. A

In recent years Finnish Luther scholarship in particular has developed such an insight into Luther in the most interesting fashion. Among Lutheran communities the Finns occupy a unique position in having (Russian) Orthodoxy as the chief ecumenical dialogue partner. That is not without significance in having prompted Finnish Lutheran scholars to consider an aspect of their own heritage which has lain undeveloped. Following the leadership of Tuomo Mannermaa, a group of theologians have become interested in the sense of theosis (or becoming God-like) of the Christian in Luther's work.<sup>32</sup> Mannermaa contends that Luther's thinking is 'ontological': we are ourselves in God.<sup>33</sup> He draws attention to earlier work of the Dane Regin Prenter, who shows that in faith the Sein of the human is taken up into the being of God.<sup>34</sup> We may say that faith implies an incorporation into (a participation in) God. (I am reminded of what my teacher Arthur McGill was wont to say: that for Luther the circumference of my self-understanding is now nothing less than my sense of God.) Thus Simo Peura, in this Finnish tradition, argues that for Luther the eternal life which is Adam's consists in a 'participation' in God. 35 While Antti Raunio comments that faith allows a participation (Teilhaftigkeit) in God's nature: 'Because Christ through faith dwells in the inner man, he stands

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> A. Schweitzer, The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: Seabury Press, 1968), pp. 125, 206-7.

<sup>31</sup> K. Holl, What Did Luther Understand by Religion?, ed. J. L. Adams and W. F. Bense (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1977), footnote, p. 84.

<sup>32</sup> See Simo Peura and Antti Raunio (eds.), Luther und Theosis: Vergöttlichung als Thema der abendlündischen Theologie (Referate der Fachtagung der Luther-Akademie Ratseburg in Helsinki 30. März-2. April, 1989, Helsinki and Erlangen, 1990).

<sup>33</sup> See his Der im Glauben gegenwärtiger Christus: Rechtfertigung und Vergottung zum ökumenischen Dialog (Arbeiten zur Geschichte und Theologie des Luthertums, new series, vol. VIII, Hanover: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1989).

R. Prenter, "Theologie und Gottesdienst" in *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Aarhus: Aros, 1977), p. 289.
 Simo Peura, 'Die Teilhabe an Christus bei Luther' in Peura and Raunio (eds.), *Theosis*, p. 123. For the significance of this remark see below pp. 242-4.

completely at Christ's disposal.'36 Both Prenter and Mannermaa think that this theme in Luther has a patristic basis and that (as was the case in the patristic period), Luther looks for example to 2 Peter 1.4 (which speaks of our being partakers of the divine nature). Referring to this text Luther writes: 'Through faith man becomes God. 37

Luther's 'mysticism' (and thus also his relation to the tradition of German medieval mysticism) has been a matter of dispute among Luther scholars. I am not myself convinced that the different things which have been said are necessarily incompatible. Returning to Holl's comment, we may note that Luther's is a so-called 'Christmysticism'. This distinguishes it from a (Catholic) mysticism which, cast in terms of love, leads to a fuller union with God. Anders Nygren (whose work we shall presently consider) argues that Luther was profoundly suspicious of a love which is to be designated *eros* or desire. By contrast Bengt Hägglund has criticised Nygren, pointing to the fact that Luther evidently approved of Tauler and the *Theologia* Germanica. But as Bengt Hoffman points out, Luther has a Christmysticism, as we have said. Moreover as Hoffman shows, for Luther it is always that the relationship to God in Christ leads to love for the neighbour (and not vice versa).<sup>38</sup> Thus it seems to me perfectly possible to speak of a Christ-mysticism, which operates through faith (which, as we shall see, if truly understood is a kind of love) which is at the same time true to the Lutheran structure and disposition. Nygren is not necessarily wrong, but nor are those for example in the Finnish school of scholarship. As Nygren himself puts it, for Luther the Christian ceases to be an independent centre of power alongside of God.<sup>39</sup> But this oneness with God is in faith, it centres on the will and is directed towards the neighbour. It is not to be described as a (neo-Platonic) ecstasy of love in which the human is drawn towards God.

What is unfortunate is that the richness of Luther's sense of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> A. Raunio, 'Die Goldene Regel als Gesetz der göttlichen Natur: Das natürliche Gesetz und das göttliche Gesetz in Luthers Theologie 1522-1523' in Peura and Raunio (eds.), Theosis, p. 180.  $^{\rm 37}$  WA 40, 1.182.15; cf. Mannermaa, Gegenwärtiger Christus, pp. 52f. (Galatians 2.7–9, 1535

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> B. R. Hoffman, 'On the Relationship Between Mystical Faith and Moral Life in Luther's Thought', Seminary Bulletin, Gettysburg, winter issue, 1975.

39 Agape and Eros, trans. P. S. Watson (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1969 (first

published 1953)), p. 734.

extrinsicity was so quickly lost to the Lutheran tradition. We have seen Pannenberg's comment on this. It was rather the forensic metaphors, already present in Luther, which were developed by Melanchthon. Following the Osiander controversy, mainline Lutheranism shied away from anything which might suggest the in-dwelling of Christ in the believer. (Andrew Osiander, professor in Königsberg, described justification as the in-dwelling of Christ's essential nature in the believer, thus abandoning Luther's emphasis on the external Word. The controversy raged in Prussia from 1549 to 1566.) By the time of the Formula of Concord of 1577, Lutheranism had moved towards a purely forensic understanding of justification, understood as a divine reckoning and to be carefully distinguished from any intrinsic human righteousness. Nevertheless that different emphases persisted seems to be evident from Martin Chemnitz's able Examination of the Council of Trent, written between 1566 and 1575 and translated from the Latin into German in 1576. Chemnitz roundly condemns that Council for suggesting that Lutherans 'taught that the believers have only the forgiveness of sins but that they are not also renewed by the Holy Spirit'. 40 What the recovery of Luther's sense could mean for ecumenical relations is something which I shall later consider.41

We may continue by noting that Luther's theological anthropology carries with it a certain epistemology. A good place to look in this regard is his exposition of the First Commandment in his *Greater Catechism*. Luther asks (we should note the framing of the question): 'What is it to have a god?'<sup>42</sup> What is God?' He responds:

A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need. To have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe him with our whole heart. As I have often said, the trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust are right [note the German for idol, Abgott – the opposite of God/that which turns away from God] then your god is the true God . . . For these two belong together, faith and God. That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your God.

The purpose of this commandment, therefore, is to require true faith and confidence of the heart, and these fly straight to the one true God and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> M. Chemnitz, Examination of the Council of Trent, part 1, trans. F. Kramer (St Louis, MO: Concordia, 1971).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> See below pp. 242-4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> The expression 'to have a god' is found in Augustine. (Cf. Holl, *Religion?*, p. 86.)

cling to him alone . . . I repeat, to have a God properly means to have something in which the heart trusts completely.  $^{43}$ 

It is an 'existential' epistemology, in the sense that that in which I trust is 'God' for me. We are at the polar extreme from a philosophical theology in which I should (in abstraction from myself) commence by asking after the nature and properties of God.

Given such a quotation, one is tempted to ask whether Luther would be delivered by trusting – even though it should turn out that there is no God! Referring to this passage the Luther scholar Walther von Loewenich writes:

It is not that in Luther's case theology is reduced to anthropology but that theology and anthropology belong together such that they cannot be sundered. That is to say, when Luther speaks of God, he must at the same time speak of the human. 'A God is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in all need.' Luther's theology does not begin with a general doctrine of God, with God's aseity, or the immanent Trinity, only then afterwards to turn to what this God in his abstract nature means for me. To Luther that would represent the speculation of a theology of glory, sapientia doctrinalis, not sapientia experimentalis . . . When Luther speaks of God, he speaks of that God who has turned towards humankind and directed them. Thus Luther cannot speak of God without also speaking of humanity. On the other hand, Luther cannot speak of humanity without also speaking of God. There no more exists for Luther a theology which has been disengaged from anthropology than an anthropology which could be disengaged from theology.<sup>44</sup>

This may be thought a very important matter to grasp, which profoundly differentiates Luther from what is more commonly the tenor of Catholic theology.

This existential sense (as I have called it) is brought out very well through a consideration of Luther's understanding of the real presence in the sacrament (and again a contrast with the Catholic sense of things is pertinent). Luther believes without qualification in the 'real presence'; but he disagrees with (Aristotelian) disingenuous explanations of it in terms of transubstantiation, whereby there is said to be a change in the *substance* of the bread into the body of Christ, while the *accidents* (of whiteness, staleness, etc.) remain the same. We may be sure that Christ is present in the eucharist because

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> WA 30,1.133.1-134.6; M. Luther, The Large Catechism of Luther, trans. R. H. Fischer (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 9 (1529).

<sup>44</sup> W. von Loewenich, Wahrheit und Bekenntnis im Glauben Luthers: Dargestellt im Anschluss an Luthers grossen Katechismus (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1974), p. 16.

he has promised to be present there (again the theme of promise and response). 'The Holy Spirit', Luther comments, 'is greater than Aristotle'!<sup>45</sup> What interests us however is the *manner* of Christ's presence. For Luther it could never be that the elements somehow become *in and of themselves* the body and blood of Christ (such that one could reserve the sacrament). Rather is Christ present *pro me/pro nobis* (in relation to me/us) as persons hear the word of the gospel, the outward material signs lending greater assurance. A Lutheran pastor must consecrate the elements anew at every sick person's bedside.

Compare here Dietrich Bonhoeffer who, in a very radical statement, is in effect simply commensurate with Luther. In his *Christology*, Bonhoeffer speaks of Christ as present pro me/pro nobis. For Bonhoeffer the risen Christ takes the form of the word of preaching, sacrament and community. Post the ascension these things are Christ in relation to me/us. Bonhoeffer is not saying that Christ is made known through them. That Christ is pro me is, he says, not a historical statement but an ontological one. 46 To speak of Christ, or God, being pro me/pro nobis in this tradition is to speak of the way in which God is God to us. It is an epistemological statement. It is not as though we should start from philosophical notions of God, arrived at through reason, and then as it were by a subsequent move decide that God is present to us. Nor is God present as 'substance'. Rather is it that the form that God in Christ takes is to be present pro me/pro nobis in relationship. Again, in his 1535 Galatians commentary Luther speaks of Christ not as an object (Objekt), but as an 'object for faith'. 47 The intermediate figure between Luther and Bonhoeffer in this respect is surely Søren Kierkegaard, whose epistemology we shall discuss later. 48

Taking this understanding yet further, for we learn much here, Luther has a profound sense of the ubiquity of Christ. Thus when the Swiss Reformation argued against the real presence, saying that Christ had a 'local' presence and that that was now 'at the right hand of the father' (with the consequence that he was not present on the altars of the world) Luther was incredulous, responding that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> WA 6.511.6; Dillenberger (ed.), Selections, p. 270 ('The Babylonian Captivity of the Church').

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, trans. J. Bowden (London: Fontana, 1966), p. 47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> See Tuomo Mannermaa, 'Theosis als Thema der finnischen Lutherforschung', in Peura and Raunio (eds.), *Theosis*, p. 14.

 $<sup>^{48}</sup>$  See below pp. 253-5.

Christ is not in heaven like a stork perched in its nest.<sup>49</sup> Post the ascension, Christ is present everywhere. Again Bonhoeffer quotes Luther: 'When he was on earth he was far from us. Now he is far from us, he is near to us.'<sup>50</sup>

It is hardly surprising that there have been strongly existentialist interpretations of Luther given his way of thinking.<sup>51</sup> It would be difficult to say that they are distortions of Luther. May it not rather be that Luther (and subsequent Lutheranism) influenced Germanic philosophical thought? One wonders also for example whether there are not lines of connection between Luther and Hegel, something well beyond the remit of this book. In any case it was and is a very different mode of thought from the Catholic Aristotelian. It gives Lutheran theology a different 'feel' and makes comparison with Catholicism difficult. (It would seem however that these things are not nearly so true of Lutheran orthodoxy, which is wooden and 'propositional' by comparison.)

I shall turn in the remainder of this chapter to the question of the structure of Luther's thought as a whole. We should start with a consideration of the Lutheran formula *simul iustus et peccator*. This will lead us into a discussion of the difference between Luther and Augustine, faith and love, and the relation to the neighbour.

The formula *simul iustus et peccator* encapsulates the structure of Lutheran thought. As we have seen, the Christian lives by Christ's righteousness, a righteousness which is extrinsic to him. Thus he is, at one and the same time, both a sinner (in himself) but also righteous (in that he lives by God's righteousness). Heiko Oberman expresses this in a helpful manner. Righteousness is not one's property, but one's possession. (For example, the book that I have out of the library is in my possession but not my property.) The two words *possessio* and *proprietas* have different connotations in Roman law. Thus the *extra nos* shows that justification is not based on a claim of man, on a *debitum iustitiae*.<sup>52</sup> Another way of putting this is simply to say that God accepts the human just as he is for Christ's sake (and

 $<sup>^{49}\,</sup>$  See WA 26.422.27 (1528). (See also WA 23.132.)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, p. 45. No Luther reference given.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> See for example the work of Gerhard Ebeling, and of Karl-Heinz zur Mühlen (Ebeling's erstwhile assistant), in his books Nos Extra Nos: Luthers Theologie zwischen Mystik und Scholastik and Reformatorische Vernunftkritik und neuzeitliches Denken (Beiträge zur Historischen Theologie, ed. G. Ebeling, no. 46 and no. 59 respectively (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)), 1972 and 1980 respectively).

<sup>52</sup> Oberman, "Iustitia Christi", pp. 21, 25.

that which man is – at least in relation to God – is a sinner).<sup>53</sup> This for Luther is the message of the gospel, overturning our presupposition that we have first to be good before we can be accepted by God.

What it is important to notice, particularly in view of the debate with Catholicism, is that iustus and peccator are relational terms and we are involved in a relational understanding of what it is to be justified. There is a sense in which neither term refers to the inward 'state' of the person. Certainly neither is to be understood as a quality which could be predicated of the human, understood as a substantial entity. On the one hand God, for Christ's sake, holds the sinner to be just; he acquits us. (One can see why, following Romans, forensic metaphors, which are relational metaphors, have seemed to Lutherans to be peculiarly appropriate – God dismisses the case against us.) Thus we may say that we are indeed to be considered fully just. On the other hand when the human is placed *coram deo* (before God), faced with God's goodness he must necessarily judge himself a sinner. But again it is not so much that the human is a sinner in himself. It is not that there is nothing good in the human. It is simply that when one considers the nature of God, the human cannot bring anything to God, on account of which God could accept him. In relation to God, he must count himself a sinner. The human thus has a double sense of himself, as both fully just and vet also as a sinner.

There has been some confusion surrounding the term *simul iustus et peccator* in relation to Lutheran thought which it will be helpful to clear up at this stage. Luther does not himself use this term in so many words in his later work in which he has a fully developed Reformation position.<sup>54</sup> He does however use it in his early work, where it connotes something other than what it has come to mean within the Lutheran tradition. In his Romans lectures of 1515–16, in which (as we have said) he holds what would later be called an analytic proleptic position, Luther writes as follows.

See now . . . that at the same time the Saints, while they are just, are sinners. They are just because they believe in Christ, whose righteousness

<sup>53</sup> See Alister McGrath, 'ARCIC II and Justification: An Evangelical Anglican Assessment of "Salvation and the Church" (Latimer Studies, pamphlet no. 26, 1987), p. 23: 'Luther is one of the few theologians ever to have grasped and articulated the simple fact that God loves and accepts us just as we are – not as we might be, or will be, but as he finds us.'

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> However he does for example say: 'According to God's estimate (reputatio) we are wholly and completely righteous . . . but we are also truly wholly and completely sinners, however only when we look to ourselves.' (Cf. WA 39,1.563.13.) See also WA 39,1.564.4.

covers them and is imputed to them, sinners, however, because they do not fulfil the law and they are not without concupiscence. But they are like sick people in the care of a doctor, who are really ill, but only begin to be healed or made whole in hope, i.e. becoming well, for whom the presumption that they were already well would be most harmful, for it would cause a relapse. <sup>55</sup>

Note what has happened. The beginning of this passage sounds like a full Reformation position, the Lutheran *simul iustus et peccator.* But then the suggestion is made that the sick person will become whole – and it is actually unclear whether his being counted just depends on this.

By contrast Luther's mature position is exemplified by a quotation from the Galatians lectures of the early 1530s. It perfectly expresses what the Lutheran tradition has intended when it has spoken of the Christian as *simul iustus et peccator*. Luther is exegeting Paul's statement 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.'56 He writes:

There is a double life, my life and an alien life . . .

The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God.

That is to say: 'I do indeed live in the flesh; but this life that is being led within me, whatever it is, I do not regard as a life. For actually it is not a true life but only a mask of life, under which there lives another One, namely, Christ, who is truly my Life. This life you do not see; you only hear it as "you hear the sound of the wind, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes" (John 3.8). Thus you see me talking, eating, working, sleeping, etc.; and yet you do not see my life. For the time of life that I am living I do indeed live in the flesh, but not on the basis of the flesh and according to the flesh, but in faith, on the basis of faith, and according to faith.' [Paul] does not deny that he lives in the flesh, for he is doing all the works of an animate man. Besides, he is also using physical things – food, clothing, etc. – which is surely living in the flesh. But he says that this is not his life . . . He does indeed use physical things; but he does not live by them.<sup>57</sup>

There is the typically Lutheran double sense of self. It seems to me that it is much better to keep the term *simul iustus et peccator* for this

<sup>55</sup> WA 56.347.8ff.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Gal. 2.20. On the relationship between Paul and Luther's simul iustus et peccator see Wilfried Joest, 'Paulus und das Lutherische Simul Iustus et Peccator', Kerygma und Dogma I (1955), 269–320.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> WA 40,1.287, 288.

sense, which is that of Luther's mature theology, although he himself happens not to employ the term. Luther is at one with the later Lutheran tradition in his meaning.<sup>58</sup>

We can express the Lutheran simul in another way, which is present in the quotation which we have just given. The Christian has a double sense of time. He lives 'from' the future, in that his sense of himself now is derived from his sense of Christ. The future is not placed at the end of a via, a path, which consists in his own transformation. Rather - to repeat myself - the Christian lives 'from' that future, for his sense of himself is bound up with that future. It is in this sense that Luther is future orientated. The Christian bases himself on something which is not at his disposal, of which he knows through the promise. Thus the Christian lives by a kind of a dare, which is the nature of faith. He holds in faith to what is scarcely credible, that God accepts him fully and completely for Christ's sake. In this sense he believes against reason and on the ground of the revelation alone. Faith is eschatalogical in that through belief in that other future it is actualised in the present. Yet, while the Christian knows himself as accepted and living from that future, he is struggling with his present condition in the world. The Lutheran *simul iustus et peccator* thus brings with it a double sense not only of self but of time. This will be very important when we come to consider Bultmann, for whom the simul is markedly understood in terms of this double sense of time. Clearly it is a quite different sense of time from the Catholic, in which the human is at one 'place' (to put it figuratively) on the via which leads from the present to the future.

To continue: it has then not surprisingly been a central concern of Lutheran scholarship this century to distinguish Luther's position from that of Augustine. Within the Augustinian framework (which became that of Catholicism), whereby life is a *via* for our change, the term *simul iustus et peccator* could only mean that we are in part just, but in part still sinner. (And indeed Augustine uses the phrase exactly in this sense).<sup>59</sup> Compare this with Luther who says: 'The Christian

The entry for simul iustus et peccator by John O'Neill (a Reformed scholar) in A. Richardson and J. Bowden (eds.), A New Dictionary of Christian Theology (London: SCM Press, 1983, pp. 538-9) is wholly confusing here. Referring to this passage, O'Neill remarks: 'It seems unwise to use it as a key to Luther's thought from 1517 onwards.' But if we use the term for Luther's early theology, then we have not explained Luther's thought after 1517 nor what the term has come to connote in the Lutheran tradition!
 See D. 117.

is divided between two times: in so far as he is flesh, he is under the law; in so far as he is spirit, he is under the gospel.'60 (The paradox around which 'The Freedom of a Christian' is structured could equally well be described in these terms.) Obviously the most that I can do here is to make mention of the multi-pronged effort, on the part of various schools and scholars, to clarify the different structure of Luther's and of Augustine's thought. At the beginning of the century Holl, who is generally considered to have misread Luther in thinking that he held to an analytic proleptic position, nevertheless embarked on this task in his seminal lecture given at the Humboldt University in Berlin to mark the four-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation in 1917 (published in English as 'What did Luther Understand by Religion?').61 Scandinavian 'motif' research (which we shall later discuss) has played an important role; indeed it might well be said that the essence of motif research is the attempt to clarify the difference between Luther and the Augustinian Catholic position. Nygren, in many ways the leading figure of that school, published a crystal clear article 'Simul iustus et peccator bei Augustin und Luther' in 1939.62 After the war the Finn Uuras Saarnivaara carried this programme through in work published in English.<sup>63</sup> In terms of more recent German scholarship there is important work by Walther von Loewenich. 64 Also of significance has been historical scholarship documenting Luther's shift during the years 1513–19: I have mentioned David Steinmetz's painstaking analysis Luther and Staupitz. It is worth drawing attention to this volume of work, for it can scarcely be said that there is nothing available to Catholic scholars who continue to equate Luther's position with a Catholic Augustinianism.

Let me confine myself however to one interesting way of putting the Lutheran/Augustinian distinction, present in an article by the

<sup>60</sup> WA 40,1.526.2-3.

<sup>61</sup> Trans. J. Luther Adams and W. F. Bense (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1977).

<sup>62</sup> A. Nygren, 'Simul Iustus et Peccator bei Augustin und Luther', Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie 16 (1939), 364-79.

<sup>63</sup> See U. Saarnivaara, Luther Discovers the Gospel: New Light upon Luther's Way from Medieval Catholicism to Evangelical Faith (St Louis, MO: Concordia, 1951); and 'The Growth of Luther's Teaching on Justification: A Re-examination of the Development of Luther's Teaching of Justification from a Roman Catholic to an Evangelical Understanding' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1945).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> See W. von Loewenich, Duplex Iustitia: Luthers Stellung zu einer Unionsformel des 16. Jahrhunderts (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1972) and Von Augustin zu Luther: Beiträge zur Kirchengeschichte, Witten: Luther Verlag, 1959.