

Concordia Theological Seminary

**JUSTIFICATION AND DEIFICATION
IN LUTHER'S THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS**

SOME PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

(WITH A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PERTINENT RESOURCES)

A Research Report

Submitted to Dr. Heino O. Kadai

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For Sacred Theology Credit

'Luther's Theology in Survey'

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The Week of *Exaudi* 1994

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1. INTRODUCTION

Recent dialogues between Lutherans and Eastern Orthodox theologians (*e.g.* the Lutheran–Orthodox dialogue in the United States and the dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church) have focused on the doctrine of Salvation under the alternative approaches of Justification and Deification. These efforts have included a reliance on the theology of Dr. Martin Luther as a possible point of intersection between the two approaches to Soteriology, and some encouraging progress has been made along this particular trek.¹ While the place of Luther's "personal" theology is neither clearly nor uniformly defined among Lutherans, the presupposition is that if Luther could live with something, or perhaps even embrace it, then Lutherans ought to be ready at the very least to consider it.

Now, it is recognized by virtually all interpreters of Luther that his theology — including his doctrine of Justification — is characterized by the *Theologia Crucis*, the Theology of the Cross. With this in mind, it seems worthwhile to compare the distinctive elements of his Theology of the Cross to the central concepts of Deification.

Thus, in this paper, we will attempt the following:

(a.) to present a concise description of Luther's Theology of the Cross as an entire theological system: a system that is intimately related to Luther's discovery of "Justification by grace through faith," but a system that is even more fundamentally a theology of revelation, faith,

¹ *cf.* SIMO PEURA, "Christus Praesentissimus," in *Pro Ecclesia* 2 (1993): 364ff. [Hereafter cited in-line, according to the format: (Peura: ##).]

the Word of God, Christology, and the "experience" of faith (rightly understood); in particular, we will utilize the masterful work of Walther von Loewenich;²

(b.) to highlight the chief components of the Eastern Orthodox concept of Deification (*Theosis*), relying especially upon the writings of the late John Meyendorff, including his study of St. Gregory Palamas;³

² WALTER VON LOEWENICH, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (1976). The discussion of Luther's Theology of the Cross in Chapter Two is taken substantially from Loewenich. Page references to his work are thus provided broadly for each section.

Other important resources for the study of Luther's Theology of the Cross include the following: PAUL ALTHAUS, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (1966); GERHARD EBELING, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought* (1970); HEINO O. KADAI, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," in *Accents in Luther's Theology* (1967); ALISTER E. MCGRATH, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (1985); REGIN PRENTER, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (1971); E. GORDON RUPP, "Luther's Ninety-Five Theses and the Theology of the Cross," in *Luther for an Ecumenical Age* (1967); HERMAN SASSE, "Luther's *Theologia Crucis*," in *Lutheran Outlook* (1951); JOS E. VERCRUYSSSE, "Luther's Theology of the Cross at the Time of the Heidelberg Disputation," in *Gregorianum* (1976); PHILIP S. WATSON, *Let God Be God!* (1947); RANDALL C. ZACHMAN, *The Assurance of Faith* (1993). An excellent survey is provided in the M.Div. Thesis by ALLEN W. SCHADE, *The Theology of the Cross* (1973).

³ JOHN MEYENDORFF, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (1964). [Hereafter cited in-line, according to the format: (Meyendorff, *Palamas*: ##).]

Key resources on the Eastern Orthodox understanding of *Theosis* include the following: CRAIG BLAISING, "Deification: An Athanasian View of Spirituality," *Evangelical Theological Society Papers* (1988); CARR COLLINS, "Theosis: Deification of Man," *Diakonia* 15 (No. 3, 1980); AGNES CUNNINGHAM, "The Witness from Alexandria: *Athanasius contra mundum*," *Communio* 14 (Winter 1987); I. H. DALMAIS and GUSTAVE BARDY, "Divinisation," *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique* 3 (1957); BEN DREWERY, "Deification," *Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Gordon Rupp* (1975); ELEUTERIO FORTINO, "Sanctification and Deification," *Diakonia* 17 (No. 3, 1982); JULES GROSS, *La divinisation du chrétien d'après les Pères grecs. Contribution à la doctrine de la grâce* (1938); VIGEN GUROIAN, "The Shape of Orthodox Ethics," *Epiphany* 12 (Fall 1991); STANLEY S. HARAKAS, "Eastern Orthodox Christianity's Ultimate Reality and Meaning," *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 8 (1985); VERNA HARRISON, "Some Aspects of Saint Gregory the Theologian's Soteriology," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 34 (Spring 1989); MAURICE HIMMERICH, *Deification in John of Damascus* (1985); CHESLYN JONES, GEOFFREY WAINWRIGHT, and EDWARD YARNOLD (editors), *The Study of Spirituality* (1986); STEPHEN JULI, *The Doctrine of Theosis in the Theology of Saint Maximus the Confessor* (1990); VLADIMIR LOSSKY, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (1974); VLADIMIR LOSSKY, *Orthodox Theology* (1978); MYRRHA LOT-BORODINE, *La déification de l'homme selon la doctrine des Pères grecs* (1970); GEORGIOS MANTZARIDIS, *The Deification of Man* (1984); JOHN MEYENDORFF, "New Life in Christ: Salvation in Orthodox Theology," *Theological Studies* 50 (September 1989); JOHN MEYENDORFF, *Christ in*

(c.) to identify areas of possible correspondence and harmony between Luther's Theology of the Cross and the Eastern Orthodox concept of Deification; and

(d.) to illustrate from some of Luther's own writings — namely, his *Lectures on Galatians* (1535) and his *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John* — where correspondence and harmony between *Theosis* and *Theologia Crucis* might in fact be present.

Eastern Christian Thought (1975); JOHN MEYENDORFF, "Theosis in the Eastern Christian Tradition," *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern* (1989); JOHN MEYENDORFF and ROBERT TOBIAS (editors), *Salvation in Christ* (1992); PANAYIOTIS NELLAS, *Deification in Christ* (1987); KEITH NORMAN, *Deification: The Content of Athanasian Soteriology* (1980); GEORGE PAPADEMETRIOU, "The Human Body According to Saint Gregory Palamas," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 34 (Spring 1989); SYMEON RODGER, "The Soteriology of Anselm of Canterbury, An Orthodox Perspective," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 34 (Spring 1989); B. SARTORIUS, *La doctrine de la déification de l'homme d'après les Pères grecs* (1965); DUMITRU STANILOAE, "Image, Likeness, and Deification in the Human Person," *Communio* 13 (Spring 1986); GREGORY TELEPNEFF and JAMES THORNTON, "Arian Transcendence and the Notion of *Theosis* in Saint Athanasios," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 32 (Fall 1987); NICOLAOS P. VASSILIADES, "The Mystery of Death," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 29 (Autumn 1984); KENNETH WESCHE, *The Defense of Chalcedon in the 6th Century* (1986).

2. LUTHER'S THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

2.1. *Theologia Crucis* (cf. von Loewenich: 17ff.)⁴

(a.) While finding its focus and center in the Crucifixion of Christ, the Theology of the Cross is larger than this one event. The Theology of the Cross is the distinctive mark of all theology and of the entire theological task. It describes an approach and a perspective for the formulation and articulation of all theological statements.⁵

(b.) Specifically, the Theology of the Cross is a theology of revelation, of the way and manner in which man knows God. The contrast is with the "theology of glory," which seeks to know God according to His inner being through direct or immediate knowledge. The Theology of the Cross does not brood over the inner being of God, but knows God only as He has revealed Himself.

(c.) This revelation of God, by which He is known in the Theology of the Cross, is an *indirect* revelation, a view "from the rear." God is known, not through His created works (nor in the works of men), but through suffering and the cross. Just as the "works," by which God is *not* known, include the created works of God and the works of men, so do "suffering and the cross" begin with the Cross of Christ and from there embrace the suffering and cross of all those in Christ.

(d.) Because God reveals Himself indirectly and is found only where He has hidden Himself, that is, under suffering and the cross, His revelation addresses itself to faith and is received only by

⁴ On These five key points of the Theology of the Cross, cf. also ALISTER E. MCGRATH, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (1985): 149ff. [Hereafter cited in-line, according to the format: (McGrath: 149ff.).] cf. also PAUL ALTHAUS, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (1966): 25-34. [Hereafter cited in-line, according to the format: (Althaus, *Theology*: 25-34).]

⁵ cf. also GERHARD EBELING, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought* (1970): 226ff. [Hereafter cited in-line, according to the format: (Ebeling: 226ff.).]

faith. The Theology of the Cross is a theology of faith, since only faith comprehends the true reality of the cross.⁶

(e.) Because of God's self-revelation through the cross and suffering, the Theology of the Cross gives the cross and suffering of Christians a special place, as well. "Good works," at least as a means of approaching God, are "dethroned," while sufferings are prized and treasured. Suffering is a mark of Christianity, having been sanctified by the suffering of Christ and the revelation of God through His suffering.

2.2. *Deus Absconditus* (cf. von Loewenich: 27ff.)

For Luther, all religious speculation is a theology of glory, which never leads to a knowledge of the true God. Any theology of glory falters, because it fails to take the significance of the cross into account. The cross shows that there is no direct knowledge of God for man. The cross makes this one thing perfectly clear for Luther: our God is a *hidden God*. (cf. also McGrath: 161ff.; also, Ebeling: 227; also, Althaus, *Theology*: 20–24)

The Heidelberg Disputation (cf. von Loewenich: 28ff.)⁷

The Theology of the Cross is a theology of revelation. Man *should* have a natural knowledge of God, through which the "invisible things" of God are visible in the works of creation. But due to sin, man fails to recognize God in His works. For man, creation does not reveal but conceals God's essence and will. Because God wants to be known, He reveals Himself in a new way, namely, through the cross.

⁶ cf. also HEINO O KADAI, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," in *Accents in Luther's Theology* (1967): 244. [Hereafter cited in-line, according to the format: (Kadai: 244).]

⁷ cf. MARTIN LUTHER, "Heidelberg Disputation"; also, Kadai: 238–239.

In the cross, God conceals Himself in the weakness and misery of human suffering — where no one would expect God to be — and thereby reveals Himself as the hidden God. He becomes visible as He conceals Himself. He is recognized and known nowhere else than in the shame of the cross. As God Himself is hidden in sufferings, so also are His works and power revealed in weakness and His wisdom in foolishness. (cf. also Kadai: 240–241; also, Ebeling: 238)

The Bondage of the Will (cf. von Loewenich: 31ff.)⁸

God confronts us first of all in His Word, in which He is "known to us" and "has dealings with us." Because we cannot grasp God Himself as He is in His nature and being, He has clothed Himself in the Word, in order to reveal Himself. Yet, even as we deal with this revealed God, we dare not forget the hidden God. In so far as He does not reveal Himself in His Word, God remains hidden to us; in this capacity, we can have no knowledge of or dealings with Him.

Just as God is revealed only in concealment, so can *faith* be directed only to what is concealed, hidden, and invisible. Indeed, concealment is a necessary characteristic of the objects of faith, including God. Thus, the revealed God of Scripture, with Whom we must concern ourselves, is one and the same hidden God Who is not revealed. It is precisely because of the revealed God that faith knows about the hidden God.

The Genesis Lectures (cf. von Loewenich: 38ff.)⁹

The Genesis lectures (1535–1545) are especially rich in their presentation of Luther's thought on the hidden God. Here, the "hidden God" is the wonderful, incomprehensible God, Whose works

⁸ cf. MARTIN LUTHER, *The Bondage of the Will*; also, Althaus, *Theology*: 274–286.

⁹ cf. MARTIN LUTHER, *Lectures on Genesis*.

are inaccessible to reason. God's activity takes place in concealment, so that the flesh sees none of it. Only faith, as the conviction of things not seen, recognizes God's ways in that which appears to be exactly the opposite.

God cannot be comprehended without a covering of "word" or "works"; if He wants to reveal Himself, He must hide Himself. Because Luther considers it part of God's essence to reveal Himself, it therefore also belongs to His essence to conceal. This "proper work" of revelation through concealment takes place especially through the "alien work" of suffering. God appears even to His people as "nothing" and under the mask of "the worst devil." At this stage in Luther's theology, God's hiddenness and revelation relate to each other in succession, as when the believer knows God only through His "back parts."

One should not speculate about the God Who remains hidden, *i.e.*, the "nude" God of Supreme Majesty. Faith "sees" the God Who is truly revealed in the hiddenness of the cross. In the first instance, God is "hidden" in the sense that man cannot know (and should not try to know) God as He is. In the second case, God is "hidden" under cross and suffering, precisely for the sake of revealing Himself to man. (*cf.* also McGrath: 164–165ff.)

2.3. Theology of Faith (*cf.* also McGrath: 174ff.)

2.3.1. The Critical Delimitation of Faith

Faith and Synteresis (*cf.* von Loewenich: 52ff.)

Scholasticism explicitly established a point of contact in man for reception of the divine. Various described, this point of contact was identified as "*synteresis*," or roughly, "conscience." According to this doctrine, there is present in man a capacity for the divine, such that man is in

principle able to recognize and desire the good. Clearly, Luther had to reject the doctrine of synderesis, because of its semi-Pelagian implications. Man does not, in fact, possess true knowledge as the result of an aptitude for it, but only through cross and suffering. Nevertheless, Luther did at first attempt to combine the doctrine of synderesis with his own new insights. It was the realization of the radical corruption of human nature and the sufficiency of grace that finally ended Luther's efforts to preserve this Scholastic doctrine.

For Luther, it is unthinkable, within the framework of the Theology of the Cross, that the synderesis should have the significance of a "divine attribute in man." Yet, also for the Theology of the Cross, man is not indifferent to all that God wants to accomplish in him. Luther would never think of denying the saying of Augustine: "Thou has made us for Thyself, and our souls are restless until they find their rest in Thee." Man is created for fellowship with God, and the knowledge of God and faith do have a psychological side. However, the restlessness of "synderesis" is not a foundation to build upon, but an accusation that points man beyond and outside of himself. The watchword is *turning around*, not turning inward.

Faith and Understanding (cf. von Loewenich: 58ff.)

In Luther's early theology, the idea of understanding is placed in an especially close relationship to the idea of faith. Luther has been accused in this respect of inheriting the Neoplatonic influence of Augustine, but Luther breaks from Neoplatonism at several crucial points. Among these decisive differences is the theological idea of "understanding" as possible only by grace and only through faith. Philosophical understanding must always proceed from observation of concrete and visible phenomena. Spiritual understanding is possible only by faith, which is contrary to that which is

apparent and observable. Theology "sees" and thereby understands the invisible by faith, which is obtained only by grace. Thus, faith and understanding belong together.

Faith and Reason (cf. von Loewenich: 65ff.)

Luther uses the term *reason* in a three-fold sense: (1.) as a process of logical conclusions, (2.) as a cultural factor, as the mind that is active in secular matters, as presupposition for all human cultural endeavor, and (3.) in the metaphysical religious sense as the principle of a world view. His view toward reason in each case is different.

Reason in the metaphysical religious sense as the principle of a world view is harshly rejected. Here it belongs in the same category with the Law; law and reason are both a human activity that seeks to glory in itself against the work of God. Luther's battle against reason is specifically directed at reason in this sense. Reason as a cultural factor, on the other hand, is accepted as a valid use of reason. Luther was no despiser of human culture. In this connection even the "pagan" Aristotle is given his due. With respect to reason as a process of logical conclusions, Luther's attitude is more complex.

Reason does not come beside the authority of Scripture as a second foundation. Rather, as a formal process of drawing conclusions it teaches how to make proper use of authority and shows how one must build on this foundation. For this undertaking, reason can be useful and must be allowed to function. Yet, at times, even this role of reason must be rejected. Where logical conclusions contradict the articles of faith, one must have recourse to another dialectic and philosophy, which is called the Word of God and faith. In articles of faith, the disposition of faith is to be exercised, not the philosophical intellect.

Thus, in sum, reason is confined to a status of servitude. The cross alone puts everything to the test. Reason is valid in its domain, but reason is a human work, and therefore judgment is pronounced upon it. For the cross is the judgment of all human glory. The way of the cross means the surrender of human glory and a plunge into foolishness. One who has caught something of the wisdom of the cross knows that reason is a "dangerous thing." It is about as helpful in leading to God as the law; indeed, reason and law are the twin foundations of a theology of glory. Both are toppled by the Theology of the Cross.

Faith in Opposition to Experience (cf. von Loewenich: 77ff.)

A person has faith when he has renounced everything that he possesses, when he has abandoned everything in the presence of God. A stance of faith means that man perceives the impossibility of his stance before God, even though it might appear irreproachable in the eyes of men and to his own conscience. Faith is from first to last the negation of self, the thoroughgoing demolition of one's own glory.

The renunciation of self by faith is not easy, but one who does not reject himself will be rejected by God. The principal work of faith is to confess oneself guilty, which means dying and self-denial. Thus, the new life of faith is a life of the cross, that is, of death in its most shameful form. Faith does not begin with the elating experience of God's nearness but with terror because of God's remoteness. Faith is therefore kindled by a contrary experience. (cf. also McGrath: 154ff., 170ff.)

Luther held to the end of his life that faith and experience are often mutually exclusive. Seeing and believing stand in sharp contrast. What we can see or what we can verify by natural means cannot be an object of faith. In its essence the object of faith must be hidden and dare not be accessible either to sense perception or to rational thought. (cf. also Kadai: 247)

The knowledge of faith comes into constant contradiction to the other methods of knowing. Not only is it completely different from them by its very nature; it comes to insights that they can only regard as absurd. For not visible but invisible things are the objects of faith. For Luther, HEBREWS 11:1 always remains the classic definition of faith. Here faith does not deal with a reality, but only with the "evidence of things that do not appear," just as in this life we do not have the reality itself but only the witness of things. Thus, the idea of faith is strongly eschatological. As the evidence of things that do not appear, faith draws the believer away from all that is visible; as the assurance of things hoped for, it directs him to eternal things, which are, however, not present but future.

The power of faith is the turning away from appearance toward God, clinging to Him without wavering. Thus, there are two mutually exclusive ways of looking at things: either by looking at something within the present situation, or in faith. It must be considered a temptation of Satan when man judges by what he feels within himself. Faith does not ask about that. This is the great miracle of faith, by which it lives, that the man who feels nothing but his God-forsakenness may still believe in the gracious God.

As Luther matured in his theology, he developed a greater emphasis on a positive idea of faith, in which he began to stress the present possession of faith rather than the expectancy of future blessing. While Luther at first defined faith more as opposition to experience, he later became more interested in the content of faith; trusting in the promise moved to the fore. The object of faith was no longer simply the invisible, but concretely the Word of God. This development is really a matter of degree and emphasis. The correlation between faith and the Word was always present with Luther, and so also did the negation of all objective experience as an essential element of faith continue to the end. In fact, clinging to the Word sets man free from his own feeling and thinking.

As faith clings to the Word, it renounces the given objective and embraces the invisible. (cf. also Althaus, *Theology*: 43–59)

Faith and Hope (cf. von Loewenich: 89ff.)

Faith and hope are almost identical for Luther. Both are directed to the future; therein lies the difference between the knowledge of faith and the knowledge of the present. Thus, in their positive aspects, faith and hope both involve a certainty about future blessings. Through faith and hope, there is already a grasping of God and the citizenship of heaven. Nevertheless, the negative aspect of hope must never be forgotten.

In the strict sense, hope is always a matter of waiting for the opposite. It is always in contradiction to the reality that surrounds us. Both in the view of grace as making righteous and in the view of grace as declaring righteous, the process of justification is incomplete without this idea of hope. This part of the Theology of the Cross is too intimately entwined with Luther's central thought ever to be given up. Our righteousness does not yet exist in fact, but in hope. The great tension between the invisible and the visible cannot be fully removed even by the Word and Sacraments. Thus, eschatology remains in the middle between hope as a grasping of God in the present and hope as an expectation for the future.

2.3.2. The Positive Realization of Faith

Faith as Experience (cf. von Loewenich: 93ff.)

Faith does not exclude every kind of experience. It is not an hypostasis floating in the air but a reality. Only with the subjective reference of "I believe" can we speak of faith, but this presupposes

some kind of experience. If faith is to be achieved as an act in the subject, it cannot be something purely trans-subjective.

We learn to know God only through the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit uses experience as His school. Consequently, experience is the legitimate way of getting to know God. Experience brings the affection with it. Holy Spirit, experience, affection move into one line. Where there is genuine personal faith, experience must follow. In this respect, experience practically becomes the criterion for faith.

Faith is something positive throughout, not an impotent negation; faith produces experience and creates possession. It might take a long time until experience arrives, but it will not fail for one who perseveres. Against speculation, only experience can learn to know God's goodness and power. Here the antithesis is clear: The emphasis on experience is directed against a faith that is solely a concern of the mind. (*cf.* also Althaus, *Theology*: 60–63)

The subjective reference of faith is expressed especially in the idea of trust. In the critical delimitation of the idea of faith the main emphasis was placed on faith as that which is believed (*fides quae creditur*). Here faith as an activity (*fides qua creditur*) is given its full due. The subjective element of faith shows itself as trust. To the extent that faith as antithesis to all objective experience desires to show itself efficacious in the subject, it assumes the concrete form of trust. Faith and experience intersect in trust.

When the subjective reference of faith is given expression, different *grades* of faith are also possible. Of course, faith is faith. As such, it meets man's other functions as something absolutely new. Concerning faith there is no more nor less, but only an either-or before God. From the perspective of the subject, however, it is possible to speak of very distinct differences in degrees of

loftiness. Thus, some people manage only a puny, unformed faith that remains ineffectual in life, while others prove their faith heroically (*e.g.*, the martyrs).

To the extent that faith proves itself in experience, there is also a possession of faith. I possess what I experience. As something enters the consciousness it becomes an intellectual possession. Since faith has a specific content, that content becomes a possession. Also, as faith is seen in the sense of hope, this possession will also be a possession of future blessings. As you believe, so you have.

Finally, faith may be defined in this context as the basic stance out of which all true expressions of Christian piety proceed. For while faith as such eludes objective experience, it asserts itself in acts that are accessible to experience. Faith is the invisible point of unity that holds together the visible multiplicity of such expressions. It is neither equal to the sum of its expressions, nor can it be equated with any one of them, but it is their all-pervasive point of reference. Faith *is* not experience, but it *is experienced*, even if in a broken form.

Works proceed from faith, but no work is in itself a proof of faith. No direct identity between faith and works takes place, and so there is no unbroken experience of faith. On the other hand, there is no faith that is not related to experience. For faith always calls for assertion and formation, and this formation belongs to the realm of experience.

The Substantive Definition of Faith (*cf.* von Loewenich: 101ff.)

To the positive element of the idea of faith belongs also a determination of its content. Faith is not merely a negation; it lives by its very specific content. For Luther the faith by which one believes is inconceivable apart from the faith that is believed. Thus, according to Luther, the following belong together: (1.) faith and the Word, and (2.) faith and Christ.

It has already been shown that the definition of faith as "the evidence of things not seen" does not exclude the thought of its relationship to the Word. In the Word there arises for Luther the strength to believe contrary to his experience. This Word is true, however, only for faith, which is more than merely regarding something as true. Historical "faith" is not enough; special faith is required.

Historical faith keeps its distance from its object. It does not leap over the historical chasm between itself and the time of Jesus, and so it can only view the events of Scripture as a spectator. Special faith, by contrast, receives the accounts of Scripture for their effect; it does not remain neutral in relation to these accounts, but feels itself participating in them to the highest degree. Special faith knows that "this concerns me." For the event to which faith is directed is not historical in the sense of an event that is closed and lies in the past, but one that is new every day through faith. Thus, the difference between historical and special faith involves an element of experience.

On the other hand, because faith is directed only and alone to the Word, it renounces all objective experience. Through the Word, the believer is freed from all anxious self-observation, freed from attaching value to his own pious feelings and experiences, and freed ultimately from his own empirical self. The Word cuts through all the bonds that would tie faith to one's empirical condition.

Faith also belongs with Christ, and Luther cannot speak of faith without thinking of Christ. As little as the idea of God can be seriously achieved apart from Christ, so little does Luther know of a faith in which the content is not determined by Christ. For Christ is the ground and the content of faith. Both "through Christ" and "through faith" must be said; neither may be separated from the other. Thus, one cannot come before God *sola fide*. On the contrary, faith has its origin in Christ.

Christ is the only object of faith. Faith may also direct itself to other things (*e.g.*, the Word), but it either has Christ in mind in them, or it is not "in its proper function." Thus, the significance of *propter Christum*:— It is the foundation for being a child of God, and so also the only source of certainty for the person who has been accepted by God. As such, Christ is not only the object of faith, but also the ground for making faith possible.

Luther goes even one step further. The connection between faith and Christ is so intimate that with faith the presence of Christ Himself is posited. Christ is the object of faith, or not the object but, so to speak, the One Who is present in the faith itself. This does not express identity between Christ and faith, but reduces their belonging together to its most acute form.

The fact that Christ and faith belong together clearly shows that faith is not a leap into a vacuum. It perhaps gropes in the darkness — and precisely there runs into Christ. It moves away from all experience and experiences Christ. Christ is the firm possession of this faith. As faith looks away from all other objects, it arrives at this Object. This union with Christ must be viewed according to the Theology of the Cross. For when Luther speaks of Christ, he is thinking of the cross. Thus, just as the cross is revelation in concealment, so is union with Christ consummated only when the believer is "destroyed and rendered formless."

2.3.3. The Unity of the Two Definitions of Faith (*cf.* von Loewenich: 107ff.)

In the first section, experience was considered as a collective term for mental and sensory perceptions, and thus as the epitome of man's natural capabilities of receiving the phenomena of the intellectual and sensory world. This idea of experience is in direct opposition to faith, since faith must be delimited against every natural ability if its peculiarity is to be preserved. To this extent, the contrast between faith and experience is fully justified.

In the second section, however, experience was qualified by faith. Faith actually asserts itself in experience understood in this way. Here experience does not stand alongside faith but is a consequence of faith. In this respect, then, faith and experience stand in a positive relationship to each other.

Experience has been called the school of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the experience of faith is a work of the Holy Spirit. He has been the teacher wherever the believer has experienced something of God's goodness and love, wherever a holy joy has filled his heart. In this way, the "supernatural" character of this experience is clearly stressed. For by regarding it as the work of the Holy Spirit, it is withdrawn from a purely empirical causality.

The experience of faith is experience in the Holy Spirit. That is to say, this experience is in no way to be derived empirically, and yet, it makes the claim of being a real experience. This remarkable doubleness is characteristic of the entire new life created by the Holy Spirit.

2.4. Life Under the Cross (*cf.* von Loewenich: 112ff.)

The doctrine of the cross, which has decisively determined the idea of God and of faith, will be understood only in a life under the cross. The cross of Christ and the cross of the Christian belong together. In Luther's Theology of the Cross, "doctrine and life" agree. The meaning of the cross reveals itself only in suffering experience. Thus, a theologian of the cross does not shun suffering, like a theologian of glory; he embraces suffering devoutly, as though an holy relic. For God Himself is "hidden in sufferings" and wants to be worshiped as such.

The Hiddenness of the Christian Life (cf. von Loewenich: 114ff.)

Just as God is a hidden God, and as faith is the evidence of things that do not appear, so also is the life of the Christian hidden. These three statements belong together in the most intimate way. One follows from the other. The Christian life is hidden because it is a life of faith. The Christian life can never be fully identified with the empirical life; it is always an object of faith and, as such, it is hidden. This hiddenness is so deep that even the saints themselves are unaware of their own most personal life. They have no idea about the adornment in which they stand before God.

The hidden life of the Christian is a reality, but it is not perceived. The new life is not the object of empirical experience, but often enough is in opposition to it. Sin and righteousness in the Christian are in the same relationship as reality and hope. His righteousness consists in God's imputation. But God's judgment on man, which alone has ultimate reality, is manifest only to faith, not to direct perception.

Luther's view of justification is to be understood in this perspective. In Christ the sinner is righteous. The reality of Christ is stronger than the reality of sin, but it is a reality of faith and therefore a hidden reality. In this point, Luther's doctrine of justification is a concrete application of his Theology of the Cross.

The hidden life of the Christian is a spiritual life; that is to say, a life in the Holy Spirit. As such, it is truly real and yet hidden. The spiritual man is buried with Christ, he has died to the world and the world to him. He understands what the world can never comprehend.

Since the spiritual man remains an empirical, carnal man, the Christian life is a double life. The old man stands beside the new man. In this doubleness lies the hiddenness of the Christian life; for if man were unequivocally spiritual man, he would not be hidden. But for now, the new man is always hidden under the old.

The double life of the Christian cannot be definitive. The tension between new and old demands a resolution. The hidden life must one day come out into the open. Here again the eschatological character of the Theology of the Cross is revealed. Just as the contrast between the hidden God and the revealed God will end when faith is allowed to attain to sight, so also the Christian life will one day shed its hiddenness.

The Christian Life as Discipleship in Suffering (cf. von Loewenich: 117ff.)

The Christian estate must be hidden under contrary appearances. Its glory must present itself in lowliness, its nobility in disgrace, its joy in grief, its hope in despair, its life in death. The hiddenness of the Christian life expresses itself in practice in a very perceptible way. In concrete terms, the hiddenness of the Christian life is a following of Christ in His cross and suffering.

Christians must become like their Master in all things. They must therefore take Christ's disgrace upon themselves. The Christian life is one of lowliness, just as surely as Christ lived here on earth in the state of humiliation. The Christian life is a discipleship of suffering. It displays its lowliness in that it leads into suffering. Christ's suffering is still repeated daily in the life of the believer. As such, these sufferings are a work of the Holy Spirit. Their purpose is the unfolding of faith. Thus, suffering is a sanctuary that hallows man. It is nothing else but following the cross. The Christian life according to the Theology of the Cross is "being crucified with Christ."

Being crucified with Christ takes place in two ways: inwardly through mortification, and outwardly through enmity of the world. Thus, Baptism stands not only at the beginning of the Christian life; it signifies the entire Christian life, a dying to the world and a rising with Christ. Through suffering with Christ, the Christian is conformed to Him. Like Christ, the Christian

renounces the "form of God" and puts on the "form of a servant." Simply put, to be conformed to Christ means nothing else than experiencing the fact of the cross.

The Cross and the Christian Life (cf. von Loewenich: 123ff.)

The Christian life brings peace, joy and happiness to the Christian. But these are found only under the cross. As such, they are perceptible only to faith. The world sees nothing of this peace, joy and happiness; feeling and experience go away empty-handed. The peace, joy and happiness of the Christian life are received only by faith and only in hope. They are determined eschatologically through and through.

What is true for the individual Christian in this respect is also true for the kingdom of Christ and His Church. This kingdom is spiritual and therefore hidden. The cross stands in its midst. In this life, it is a kingdom of faith. The Church, too, is hidden. Its hiddenness is given expression in the Church's form of suffering, which Luther regarded as its greatest treasure. The true Church is a Church of martyrs. Yet, despite its suffering, the Church is the only thing in the world that has permanence. In the parousia, it will gain the victory and be revealed in a visible glory.

Humility, Trial, and Prayer (cf. von Loewenich: 129ff.)

Humility is the most basic virtue of life under the cross, just as pride is the real and greatest sin. Luther discovered, however, that *humilitas* in the Scriptures hardly ever refers to the monastic virtue of "humility"; it must be taken to mean lowliness, nothingness, and being suppressed. In this sense, humility is perfected self-knowledge before God. Thus, for Luther, humility becomes most intimately connected with faith. Faith teaches humility, since faith is a total rejection and denial of

the self and a reliance on God's grace. In this negation of all human claims, faith is one with humility.

In humility it is above all the hiddenness of the Christian life that is given expression. It corresponds to the faith that sees nothing and feels nothing. To this the idea of *tentatio* or trial contributes the content. Here the general character of hiddenness and lowliness appears in a lively up and down. Humilitas and faith are constantly put to the test in trial, and in trial the existential character of faith achieves its highest demonstration.

For the Theology of the Cross, the worst kind of trial consists in not having any trial, since trial keeps faith in motion. Faith remains alive only when it continues to overcome offense. It experiences God's mercy only when it has felt God's wrath, and continues to feel it. This happens in trial. Trial destroys every presumption, leads man to a true knowledge of himself, and prevents pride from rising in him. If faith is thus aroused in trial, it will be stronger when the trial is overcome. Thus, the Christian should gratefully receive the trial as a gift from God. He is not to reflect on the trial but experience it.

In trial the existential character of faith comes to its full expression. The same must be said of prayer. Trial teaches prayer; prayer overcomes trial. Prayer is the self-realization of faith. Prayer and faith belong together in the most intimate way.

True prayer is always a prayer with empty hands. The true praying man has nothing but God, and Him only by faith. A "secure" man cannot pray. The validity of prayer consists in no way in a man's worthiness, nor in anything that he might be able to contribute. It is God's Word and promise alone that make a prayer good and acceptable to God.

It is not a bad sign, but a very good one, if things seem to turn out contrary to the request of prayer. Conversely, it is not a good sign if everything turns out favorably for the requests. The

work of the hidden God is similarly hidden under that which appears contrary to man's conceptions and ideas. Revelation is present only in concealment. Accordingly, apparent non-answer is the best answer. To the praying person God becomes hidden, so that faith in prayer penetrates from the hidden God to the revealed God.

The certainty of being heard in prayer is a certainty of faith. As such, it is more certain than empirical or rational certainty. Without this certainty, prayer is fruitless; indeed, it would be sacrilege, a robbing of God's honor. By the same token, to regard God as truthful under all circumstances is the highest form of worship and the highest religion.

The Theology of the Cross does not exclude the concreteness of the "godly life," but rather demands it. For prayer is not a little garden of Paradise, where the one who is weary of the Word of the cross might take a little rest. No, prayer is just the battleground where the sign of the cross has been raised.

3. DEIFICATION

3.1. The Eastern Orthodox Concept of Deification

The Western Church has often accused the East of betraying the Biblical faith of Christendom "in favor of a vague platonizing form of pantheism." Nowhere has this accusation been more common than in the case of Deification.¹⁰ Nevertheless, although the term *Theosis* was adopted from a Neoplatonic religious vocabulary, the late John Meyendorff insists that the *content* of Deification is thoroughly Christological and Theocentric.

Deification reflects the paradoxical Johannine affirmation that the "Word was God" and that it "became flesh" (John 1:1,14), so that created human beings might not boast in the face of God in their "fleshly" nature, but be "in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor 1:29–30), members of His Body, anticipating the eschatological fulfillment when God will be "all in all" (1 Cor 15:28). (Meyendorff, "Theosis": 471)

Thus, Deification "reflects the experience of Christ's divinity." God became man, and the Son of God assumed human mortality, so that by His life, death and Resurrection He might become the first of a new, deified humanity. He is the New Adam — the Forerunner, the Trailblazer, the Firstborn of mankind in communion with God. (Meyendorff, "Theosis": 471)

"In the Orthodox understanding Christianity signifies not merely an adherence to certain dogmas, not merely an exterior imitation of Christ through moral effort, but *direct union* with the living God, the total transformation of the human person by divine grace and glory—what the Greek fathers termed 'deification'...(theosis)." The most important Scriptural foundation for this doctrine of Deification is II PETER 1:3–4, but passages with similar connotations are also considered, *e.g.*, PSALM 82:6, JOHN 14:17, ROMANS 8:11, I JOHN 3:2, *etc.* "Salvation is understood to mean 'participation' or 'sharing' or 'fellowship' with God, or 'indwelling' in the words of the Gospel of

¹⁰ JOHN MEYENDORFF, "Theosis in the Eastern Christian Tradition," *Christian Spirituality* (1989): 470. [Hereafter cited in-line, according to the format: (Meyendorff, "Theosis": 470).]

John." Salvation as Deification does not imply that created human beings "become God" in a pantheistic sense. On the contrary, Deification takes place when believers "let God be God" for them, that is, when they "enter into a personal relationship with God through Baptism and participate fully in God's life through the sacraments in the church, the body of Christ." ¹¹

In the history of Byzantine theology, Deification was consistently understood as the goal of man, a "natural destiny" that is reached only through the grace of God. As such, it is the "exaltation of nature, not its destruction or alteration." This goal of Deification is the process of becoming "as much as possible like and in union with God" — a "participation through grace in that which surrounds the nature of God." It was realized perfectly and fully in the Incarnation of the Son of God, in Whom "generic" human nature was deified. This nature of man had been established in the Creation for communion with God, but it was "darkened by its existential condition subsequent to Adam's sin." Deification is the restoration of the intended communion between God and man, beginning with the human life and death of Christ. Thus, Deification describes the Eastern understanding of *salvation in Christ*. It lies behind the Christology of Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers, Cyril of Alexandria, John of Damascus, *etc.* "God became man, that man might become divine." At the Council of Nicaea, the confession of the Son as *homoousios* with the Father ensured that fellowship with Christ must be understood as communion with God, *i.e.*, as Deification. Likewise, at the Council of Constantinople, the confession of the Holy Spirit as divine was also

¹¹ JOHN MEYENDORFF and ROBERT TOBIAS (editors), *Salvation in Christ* (1992): 19–20. [Hereafter cited in-line, according to the format: (*Salvation*: 19–20).]

required, since "deification of man as sanctification is rooted in the work of the Holy Spirit." If the Spirit was not true God, then "man would be neither sanctified nor deified." ¹²

In Eastern Orthodox theology,

Sin entered the world because the mind of man had been beguiled by Satan, who was jealous of the special relationship which man was destined to have with God. The sin of Adam was a personal act of his own free will that deprived him of the means of fulfilling his destiny, which was to overcome, by virtue of his personal relationship with the logos, the mortality of his human nature. Satan by his trickery gave death its fundamentally unnatural and unjust rule over mankind.¹³

Thus, for the East, "original sin" is not a universal guilt of all mankind, inherited from Adam, but "the bondage of the human race to death." The sin of any individual is never the consequence of human nature, which remains the good creation of God; rather, sin is always the expression of personal choice, just as it was for Adam and Eve. "It is not transmitted by natural means from one generation to the next, but re-emerges afresh in each child of Adam. No one inherits the guilt of his ancestors; each man or woman is responsible only for the acts of his own free will." Yet, it is recognized that all men sin, for though there is no universal *guilt* inherited from Adam, there is a

¹² "Theosis," *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, edited by Alexander P. Kazhdan, *et al.* (1991): 2069.

[Ukrainian Roman Catholic theologian, Dr. P. T. B. Bilaniuk] defines *theosis* as sanctifying activity on the part of the Trinity whereby human beings are assimilated to, that is, either incorporated into or made like, God the Father, through the mediation of Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit. Three dimensions of *theosis*, "creational," Christological and pneumatic, are distinguished. The creational dimension deals with humanity as dependent on God, as the image of God, and therefore, as ontologically good. The Christological dimension of *theosis* deals with the relation between the church and Christ's salvific work. The pneumatic dimension presents the Holy Spirit as Christ's co-worker in *theosis*. HENRY EDWARDS, "Justification, Sanctification and the Eastern Orthodox Concept of *Theosis*," *Consensus* 14 (1988): 67. [Hereafter cited in-line, according to the format: (Edwards: 67).]

¹³ GERALD BRAY, "Justification and the Eastern Orthodox Church," *Here We Stand: Justification by Faith Today* (1986): 104-105. [Hereafter cited in-line, according to the format: (Bray: 104-105).]

universal propensity for sin as a result of the Fall. "The sin of Adam introduced the reign of death into the world, and it is this evil dominion which now causes all men to sin." ROMANS 5:12 is interpreted accordingly: "By one man sin came into the world, and by sin death, *because of which* all have sinned." In other words, all men sin *because* all men are subject to death. (Bray: 105).¹⁴

Now, as already indicated, the Eastern Church understands Deification as the goal of human life. The Incarnation of the Son of God was a necessary prerequisite for this Deification, even apart from sin. Sin did make the Crucifixion necessary, but not as a means of "exacting a just retribution in the punishment of the only one worthy to make the sacrifice." The Cross vanquished not sin but *death*, "thereby making it possible for man to return to the state of Adam and renew his progress towards deification, secure in the knowledge that Christ had gone before, and that he had sent the Holy Spirit, who in the life-giving 'drug' of the sacrament applies Christ's victory to the Church." Thus, Eastern theologians typically do not think in the judicial categories of "justification." "Righteousness" is understood in terms of "sanctification and the final re-creation of all things in Christ." There is no emphasis on a "mathematical point" of conversion but on a continuing process of renewal. The superiority of Christian faith over the Jewish observance of the Law is the superiority of Christian righteousness made possible by the Incarnation, life, death, and Resurrection

¹⁴ Also, *cp.* the comments of John Meyendorff:

In the Eastern patristic tradition—and also, indeed, in the liturgical and sacramental experience of Eastern Christianity, the world, outside of Christ, is seen as having fallen under the empire of *Death*. This experience is different from the Western, more legalistic, post-Augustinian, medieval conception of "original sin" which makes every human *guilty* of the sin committed by Adam in paradise. In the East, the consequence of Adam and Eve's transgression is seen as a takeover of God's creation by the one whom the New Testament calls "prince of this world" and who is also the "murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44). It is Satan who controls human beings by imposing death upon them but also by pushing them to constant struggle for existence and temporary survival—a struggle that is, necessarily, at the expense of the neighbor: a struggle for *my* property, *my* security, and *my* interests. This struggle is, in fact, the very substance of *sin*, so that the liturgy of baptism begins with an exorcism of Satan. (Meyendorff, "Theosis": 471–472)

of Christ. Thus, the righteousness of a Christian exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees "in degree more than in kind," and a life of good works is necessary for salvation. Such a life, however, is the "fruit of grace" and a "righteousness by faith," since it is possible only through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, through which the individual participates in the "life-giving power of the risen Christ." Apart from Baptism, there is no righteousness at all, and the so-called "good works" of the heathen are a mere delusion. (Bray: 106–107).¹⁵

Whereas for Lutherans "Salvation" is primarily a matter of *Justification*, whereby a man is made right with God, for the Eastern Orthodox "Salvation" denotes the participation of man in the divine nature. Lutherans are one with the Roman Catholics in the Western tradition of being concerned primarily with the danger *from which* man is saved, *i.e.*, from sin, death and the power of the devil.¹⁶ The Eastern Church is far more focused on the life *for which* man is saved, *i.e.*, for *Deification*. Good works, in this Eastern perspective, do not "save" a man in the sense of justifying him, but they are an aspect of salvation inasmuch as they are part-and-parcel with living the divine life. The Lutherans typically speak of the decisive movement from unbelief to faith, from

¹⁵ A Russian Orthodox friend of the author writes, "that 'salvation' is by God's grace alone, [since] the grace of baptism is given when we have done nothing to 'earn' or 'deserve' it. But then it is up to us to *preserve* undefiled our baptismal garment. If we do defile it, and we all do, we are restored by the *labor* of our repentance & emendment, along with the *grace* of God's forgiveness & absolution" (Father Christopher Stade, House Springs, MO: November 1993). [It is interesting to note that Father Christopher grew up in a Lutheran home, being the son of Professor Stade (*R.I.P.*) of the old Fort Wayne Senior College. After "wandering" in his faith for a number of years, he was converted to Orthodoxy while teaching English as a second language in Greece.]

¹⁶ "The sixteenth-century Reformation of the Western Church was largely prompted by anxiety over sin, expressed in Luther's searching question, 'How do I find a gracious God?' It focused in all of its theological aspects on the relationship of God to an anxious humankind, seeking the meaning of existence and the assurance of salvation." WILLIAM G. RUSCH, "How the Eastern Fathers Understood What the Western Church Meant by Justification," in H. GEORGE ANDERSON, *et al.* (editors), *Justification by Faith* (1985): 131.

condemnation to justification. The Orthodox are far more concerned with "preaching to the baptized" and addressing the spiritual growth of one who is already a believer. Their focus is not so much "on the 'how' of salvation as on the 'content' of salvation" (*Salvation*: 14).¹⁷

3.2. St. Gregory Palamas

The concept of Deification was eventually articulated most precisely by Gregory Palamas in the fourteenth century. His attitude toward "natural theology," his particular understanding of *nature* and *grace*, and his distinctions between the divine *essence* and *energy, etc.*, all were endorsed by the Orthodox Church and are of prime importance for understanding Deification. Some comments on his theology will therefore serve as a final introduction to this Eastern doctrine.

¹⁷ "The Orthodox think of one continuous process, whereas the Lutherans distinguish the initial act of justification and regeneration from the process of sanctification.... The Orthodox speak about the quest for 'holiness' as a process based on divine-human cooperation. God's Holy Spirit, the 'source of sanctification,' bestows upon each human person the life of holiness made available in Christ, in the human nature he assumed for us. In a dynamic process, working 'from within,' the Holy Spirit leads human persons in the church 'from strength to strength, power to power, and glory to glory'" (*Salvation*: 30, 31). Again, consider the remarks of John Meyendorff:

Satan, who controls creation through death and sin, is overcome by Christ's *resurrection*. Here lies the hope, the freedom, and the ultimate joy of true and eternal life.... But salvation is not only a liberation from death and sin; it is also the restoration of the original human destiny, which consists in being the "image of God." The full meaning of that expression, found in the Genesis accounts of creation, also becomes clear through the divine identity of Jesus Christ. Being the Logos (John 1:1), he is also the living model according to whom every human being was created. He is, therefore, perfect human *because* he is also perfect God. In him, divinity and humanity—the model and the image—are united in a perfect personal unity ("hypostatic union"), and humanity finds its ultimate destiny in communion with God, that is, in *theosis*, or deification. (Meyendorff, "Theosis": 472)

Also, *cf.* a fine article that discusses salvation as Deification in the Eastern Orthodox tradition: JOHN MEYENDORFF, "New Life in Christ: Salvation in Orthodox Theology," *Theological Studies* 50 (September 1989). Meyendorff concludes this article with the following statement: "Redemption is not only a negative remission of sins but also and primarily a new freedom for the children of God in the communion of the new Adam."

Gregory's development of the doctrine of Deification initially came in response to Barlaam, the well-known "Calabrian philosopher," who represented a new wave of Eastern humanism that tended to prefer ancient Greek philosophy to Christian faith as a means of approaching (but never fully knowing) ultimate truth. Barlaam emphasized the transcendence of God and the inability of man to know anything outside of his sensory perception. Whatever could be known of God, could only be known by analogy.

Gregory responded to Barlaam that Deification — as a communion with God — is the only acceptable means of Christian "epistemology." It is true, he readily admitted, that man can learn something of God from the natural world, and that "knowledge and profane science" can be useful in their proper place. However, true knowledge of God — which *is* possible — is possible only through divine grace. Furthermore, while the "knowledge" acquired through nature adds nothing to salvation, the "knowledge" acquired through grace is absolutely necessary for salvation.

"God created Adam," writes Palamas, "in his own image and likeness...and introduced no evil disposition into him; rather, with the soul that he breathed into him, he also gave him the divine grace of the Spirit to preserve him in his first state and confer on him the (divine) likeness." By thus taking up again the Patristic conception according to which "nature" does not possess an autonomous existence, but *supposes* grace and communion with God, in order to fulfil its own true destiny, Palamas affirms that the likeness too is an effect of grace while presupposing the collaboration (*synergia*) of man: hence man *needs God* to attain the likeness, but God can only give what man accepts.... Essentially, therefore, nature *supposes* grace, and grace means participation in divine life. But the sin committed by man separated him from this grace, and left man alone with all the insufficiencies of his created nature. (Meyendorff, *Palamas*: 121)

"Nature" is for Gregory not a "static conception, but must always be considered in one or the other of its existential states." Prior to the Fall, nature existed in a state that implied *life* with God; "this was essentially the 'natural' state of nature." After the Fall, deprived of life with God on account of sin and disobedience, nature is forced "to rely on its own powers alone, a condition

basically contrary to its destiny, and involving death" (Meyendorff, *Palamas*: 122). The restoration of life, and therefore of nature to its own proper state, takes place in Deification, when God by His grace (through Baptism and Eucharist) returns man to communion with Himself in Christ.

The essential peculiarity of Palamas's thought is that for him "nature" and "grace" mean *dynamic* and *living* realities: as before the Fall human nature was in dynamic union with God, for that was its true destiny willed by the Creator, so, after Adam's sin, the absence of such a relation characterized his state through subjection to the Devil and mortality resulting therefrom.... [Gregory is always] defending communion with the living God as the only means of salvation for men, and combating the conception of salvation as an extrinsic justification which leaves man to live independently of God outside the "supernatural." That was not God's plan for man, and it was not for that that the Son of God put on flesh and clothed himself in a nature altogether similar to our own; He "became man that we might become God." Grace is therefore not a "thing" which God grants to nature either to "complete" its deficiencies, or simply to "justify" it, or to "add" to it a created supernatural, but it is the divine life itself. It was to live in communion with him that he created us, and it is because we abandoned him that we are subject to corruption and death from which baptism delivers us. (Meyendorff, *Palamas*: 163–164)

Because Palamas views grace and nature as dynamic and living realities — and salvation as a living communion with God in Christ — there can be nothing less than "synergy" between God and man in salvation by grace. Whereas the West treats salvation as being *rescued from something*, Gregory and the Eastern Orthodox tradition view salvation as an active participation in the divine life. Thus, for Gregory, good works are not done to earn or merit salvation; they are themselves an expression of the salvation itself, a concrete living of the divine life already here on earth.

Nevertheless, Palamas views the participation of man with God as happening *sola gratia*; that is, "it is not by their own efforts that Christians become 'eternal' and 'uncreated'; it is the divine life, which they only possess through grace, which gives them that character." Men become "gods," but only through *grace* and not through nature. Man "gratuitously acquires a condition fundamentally foreign to that of nature, and that condition is the divine life." Though man's proper state of nature

is the life with God, even prior to the Fall this communion with the divine was "supernatural" — a gift from God. Man is never "divine" in and of himself; he only *becomes* "divine" through a participation in the One Who is alone divine by nature. (Meyendorff, *Palamas*: 177–178)

In his development of the doctrine of Deification, it was also necessary for Gregory to articulate and clarify a distinction between God's *essence* and His *energy*. By doing so, he was able to preserve the transcendence of God — which Barlaam so insisted upon — while also supporting the participation of man with God in Christ. He showed that there is a real distinction in God between essence and energy; yet, both are uncreated. This distinction does not introduce any "complexity" in God, since it is not a question of two essential realities; both the essence and the energy belong to the one God. But while the essence remains incommunicable (outside of the Godhead), there is a "real and existential revelation of the divine life or *energy*" (Meyendorff, *Palamas*: 98). Gregory was able to make such a distinction, because Eastern theology identifies the source of the Godhead *hypostatically*, in the Person of the Father, instead of in the abstract "divine Essence." The essence and the energy of God each has its source in the concrete reality of Father, Son, and Spirit. Thus, God remains transcendent in His essence, even while man is deified in Christ through communion with the divine energy, which Gregory identifies with the grace of God.

4. DEIFICATION IN LUTHER'S THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

4.1. Epistemology

One of the most obvious points of similarity between Gregory's concept of Deification and Luther's Theology of the Cross is their mutual rejection of "natural theology" for salvific knowledge of God. In the case of both men, it was precisely their rejection of "scholastic" speculation that prompted an exposition of their own theological positions. Both recognize that man does have some degree of natural knowledge, but both likewise reject this knowledge as being not only insufficient but entirely non-beneficial for salvation. Gregory insists that man must have a true and real knowledge of God Himself; that this knowledge is granted through Deification, *i.e.*, through God's sharing of His own divine energies with man; and that such knowledge through Deification is made possible by the Incarnation of the Son of God. Though Luther's terminology is of course quite different, he too insists that man must know God as He truly is; that this knowledge is granted through God's special revelation of Himself, in which He opens up His Fatherly heart toward man; and that this revelation is found only in the Incarnate Son of God, most specifically in the Cross of Christ as the epitome of His humiliation unto death. Gregory and Luther both believe that God Himself and no creature is revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ.

4.2. Christology: True God & True Man

For Luther, as for the theologians of the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Greek Patristic tradition, the true divinity and true humanity of Christ are soteriological necessities (*cf.* Althaus, *Theology*: 179–200). For Gregory, Christ is the Archetype of all humanity; He above all men is most truly human, *because* He is truly divine. The Image and Likeness of God are realized perfectly in Him. Thus, it is through Him that all men are enabled to participate in the divine life.

"God became Man, so that man might become divine." The emphasis is clearly different in Luther, and yet, the essentials are similar. Christ must be true God, because only in Him do we see the Father. He must be true man, in order for us to see Him. He brings the whole fullness of the Godhead down to our level. In Christ, God reveals Himself, by concealing Himself in the flesh and blood of sinful humanity. The Theology of the Cross hinges on this very point: the Man on the Cross must be God Himself, revealed in the utter contradiction of suffering and death. In laying hold of this Man by faith, we lay hold of God Himself. We dare not look for God anywhere else.¹⁸

4.3. Faith

Luther's understanding of faith has been especially helpful in the dialogues between Lutherans and Eastern Orthodox theologians (*e.g.*, *cf. Salvation: 23*). In mind is the Reformer's strong identification of faith with Christ. Faith lays hold of Christ alone, in such a way that He is united to the believer. In the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, no less than Christ Himself is given to the Christian. On the other side of this same coin, the Theology of the Cross requires that faith draw the entire man into theology, and thereby into the Cross of Christ. The believer is conformed to Christ through suffering, *etc.* Thus, faith is not merely historical knowledge, nor is it primarily intellectual assent to right doctrine; rather, it is a trust and confidence that is willing to stake one's life and limb on the hidden salvation of God in Christ. The believer lets go of everything that belongs to himself, and lays hold of Christ alone. Thus, it is Christ Who constitutes the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. It is easy to see how this understanding of faith could mesh nicely with the concept of Deification, in which salvation is constituted by a

¹⁸ *cf.* also PHILIP S. WATSON, *Let God Be God!:* 127. [Hereafter cited in-line, according to the format: (Watson: 127).]

participation in the life of Christ. Certainly, both Martin Luther and Gregory Palamas are anxious to see Christ alone as not only the source but also the very content of grace, faith, and salvation. (cf. also Althaus, *Theology*: 211–223; also, Kadai: 248; also, Watson: 121)

4.4. *Imago Dei*

As also in the case of Gregory Palamas, it is unthinkable for Luther that "righteousness" and "salvation" could ever imply a life that is now lived independently of God. Such a life would be, by Luther's very definition, a life of sin and unbelief (cf. *Luther's Large Catechism*: 13ff.). For Luther, it is not the case that a man who has been justified and rescued from sin, death and the devil, now lives and moves from his own "new being." Not only does the man remain a sinner in this life, constantly in need of forgiveness — *simul iustus et peccator* — but precisely his entire new life is characterized by a living communion with God. The relationship with God that Adam and Eve experienced in the Garden prior to the Fall, the life of faith and trust that Luther understands to be the *imago Dei*, has been restored in Christ; in such a way that Christ, Who is *the* Image of God, is Himself the New Man, "Who daily arises to live before God in righteousness and purity forever" (cf. Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, Volume One: 62ff.; also, *Salvation*: 126ff.). Man's life is always *coram Deo*, lived before God. Such a life *en Christo* is the very content of salvation. It begins (and in a certain sense is immediately "complete") in the passive reception of the righteousness of Christ by imputation, and it continues in the active life of righteousness and purity forever. But it is always *in Christo*; the new life of salvation does not exist apart from the incarnate Son of God. Indeed, to be *coram Deo* outside of Christ is not salvation but damnation. Thus, for Luther, as in Deification, salvation is understood as communion with God through fellowship with Christ, by

which the very Image of God is bestowed upon man — never autonomously, but through an on-going participation in the divine humanity and life of Christ. (*cf.* also Althaus, *Theology*: 10)

4.5. Sanctification: Christ in Action ¹⁹

One of Luther's most popular metaphors for his doctrine of Justification is the image of a good tree producing good fruit. His point is clear: a man must first become righteous through faith in Christ before he can live a righteous life. That is to state the case negatively. But the metaphor also implies that a man who has been justified *will* produce the fruits of faith. For the "passive righteousness" of Christ produces an "active righteousness" in the believer. Thus, faith alone justifies, but faith is never alone; it is a busy and active thing that never ceases to do good works. For Luther, good works do not merit salvation, but they do express the salvation already bestowed in Christ by grace through faith. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20, *NASB*). So while it would be confusing and dangerous to say that "good works are necessary for salvation," it is most certainly true that "good works are necessary." Here, the parallels to Deification are obvious. For likewise in Gregory Palamas, the good works of the Christian are a visible, concrete expression of the divine life. Good works do not earn salvation; Deification cannot be "earned" but only received. But participation in the divine nature of Christ is realized in the active living of a Christ-like life. For Luther, the Theology of the Cross means that living such a life will include the Cross and suffering.²⁰

¹⁹ *cf.* MARTIN LUTHER, "Two Kinds of Righteousness."

²⁰ *cf.* PAUL ALTHAUS, *The Ethics of Martin Luther* (1972): 3–24; also, Althaus, *Theology*: 224–250.

4.6. Pneumatology ²¹

The *opus proprium* of the Holy Spirit is to take from Christ and share with us that which is of the Father (St. John 16:13–15). Thus, according to Luther, the Holy Spirit is called "holy," not only because of His inherent holiness as God, but primarily because of His sanctifying work. The Spirit makes me "holy" by bringing me into the Church and there uniting me with Christ, "even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it united with Jesus Christ in the one true faith" (*cf. Luther's Large Catechism: 72ff.*). The Spirit of God and of His Christ is given to His people — else, they do not belong to Him (Romans 8:9). But what does it mean to have "the Spirit of God"? Is this not a participation in the divine nature? Is this not Deification? The Spirit of God Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the "sons of God" (Romans 8:14–16). This is an area that could be most helpful in understanding Deification in the context of Luther's Theology of the Cross, especially since the promise of the Spirit in the Gospel of St. John was given at the very moment when our Lord was entering His Passion, and especially in light of St. Paul's further comments in Chapter Eight of Romans: "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, *heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us*" (Romans 8:16–18, *NASB*). Certainly for Luther, our participation in the divine nature of Christ begins with (and in this life always remains) a participation in His Cross and suffering. It is the Cross that the Spirit brings to make us holy, not only in the "passive" and "negative" sense of forgiveness and justification — though it is always that — but then also in the "active" sense of bearing the Cross and being crucified with Christ, both inwardly and

²¹ For an excellent discussion, *cf.* JOHN W. KLEINIG, "Luther on The Christian's Participation in God's Holiness," in *Lutheran Theological Journal* (1985): 21ff.

outwardly. Such bearing of the Cross is not simply a means of Deification; it is the experience of Deification itself, for in suffering we share the life of Christ. Thus, Luther considers the "holy possession of the sacred cross" to be one of the seven marks of the Church. "This too is a holy possession whereby the Holy Spirit not only sanctifies His people, but also blesses them." ²²

4.7. *Christus Victor*

Numerous scholars, including most notably Gustaf Aulén, have argued that Luther preferred the *Christus Victor* model in his understanding of the Atonement.²³ It is certainly true, at the very least, that Luther favors the imagery of victory over sin, death, the power of the devil, and even the wrath and Law of God Himself. These are the tyrants who were conquered on the Cross of Christ. Now, in using this image of the *Christus Victor*, Luther is much closer to the Eastern Fathers than he is to Augustine or Anselm and the other Fathers of the West. And as such, he is approaching the Cross with a concept intimately related to Deification. Christ is the Giver of Life, Who destroys the power of death. It is precisely His divinity that death is not able to handle or hold, and so by implication, the life He grants to men is obtained through a participation in His own divine life. But precisely here, the Theology of the Cross is in full force. For death and the devil are misled by the humble appearance of Christ on the Cross. The deceiver is deceived. Satan, as the personification of sinful unbelief, is unable to recognize God in the flesh and blood of Christ. And as a result, he is caught by his own trap. (cf. Aulén: 110f.; also, Watson: 130)

²² MARTIN LUTHER, "On the Councils and the Church": 164ff.

²³ cf. GUSTAF AULÉN, *Christus Victor* (1986): 101ff. [Hereafter cited in-line, according to the format: (Aulén: 101ff.)]; also, Watson: 116ff.; also, ALISTER E. MCGRATH, "*Mira et nova diffinitio iustitiae*": 36ff.

4.8. *Deus Absconditus*

A most intriguing point of possible contact between Deification and the Theology of the Cross is the resemblance of Luther's dual understanding of "*Deus Absconditus*" to the distinction of *essence* and *energy* in Gregory. On the one hand, Luther speaks of the *Deus Absconditus* as the "nude" God of Supreme Majesty, Who always remains hidden and is never revealed to man. On the other hand, he speaks of the *Deus Absconditus* as the God Who reveals Himself through concealment, Who hides Himself in Christ on the Cross in order to make Himself known to faith. In a strikingly similar way, Gregory distinguishes between the incomprehensible and incommunicable divine *essence*, which always remains beyond the reach of man even in Deification, and the uncreated divine *energies* that are shared with man in Christ. This is an area that deserves investigation.

The previous items by no means represent an exhaustive list of possibilities.²⁴ They do, however, indicate a certain affinity between Luther's Theology of the Cross and the Eastern Orthodox concept of Deification. There are points of harmony and correspondence that can and should be explored. At this point, we turn to the writings of Luther himself, to see in the form of two concrete examples the way in which the *Theologia Crucis* and *Theosis* do come together.

²⁴ For example, one should also consider the relationship of the Theology of the Cross to Deification under the categories of Sacramentology, Eschatology, and "God Who is All in All." On these points, cf. Althaus, *Theology*: 345-403, 404-425, 105-129, 161-168.

4.9. The Lectures on Galatians (1535)

Writing against the scholastics, who taught that faith is a quality of the heart that must be formed through love and good works in order to save, Luther comments on GALATIANS 2:16.²⁵ In doing so, he brings together the idea so compatible with Deification, that Christ Himself is present in faith, with remarks that readily flow from his Theology of the Cross, namely, that faith takes hold of Christ in darkness. This very Christ, "Who is present especially when He cannot be seen," is the One Who is "grasped by faith," Who "lives in the heart," and Who as such is "the true Christian righteousness." Luther writes,

Where they speak of love, we speak of faith. And while they say that faith is the mere outline but love is its living colors and completion, we say in opposition that faith takes hold of Christ and that He is the form that adorns and informs faith as color does the wall. Therefore Christian faith is not an idle quality or an empty husk in the heart, which may exist in the state of mortal sin until love comes along to make it alive. But if it is true faith, it is a sure trust and firm acceptance in the heart. It takes hold of Christ in such a way that Christ is the object of faith, or rather not the object but, so to speak, the One who is present in the faith itself. Thus faith is a sort of knowledge or darkness that nothing can see. Yet the Christ of whom faith takes hold is sitting in this darkness as God sat in the midst of darkness on Sinai and in the temple. Therefore our "formal righteousness" is not a love that informs faith; but it is faith itself, a cloud in our hearts, that is, trust in a thing we do not see, in Christ, who is present especially when He cannot be seen.

Therefore faith justifies because it takes hold of and possesses this treasure, the present Christ. But how He is present — this is beyond our thought; for there is darkness, as I have said. Where the confidence of the heart is present, therefore, there Christ is present, in that very cloud and faith. This is the formal righteousness on account of which a man is justified; it is not on account of love, as the sophists say. In short, just as the sophists say that love forms and trains faith, so we say that it is Christ who forms and trains faith or who is the form of faith. Therefore the Christ who is grasped by faith and who lives in the heart is the true Christian righteousness, on account of which God counts us righteous and grants us eternal life. (Luther, *Galatians*: 129–130)

²⁵ "We know that a man is not justified by works of the Law but through faith in Jesus Christ." MARTIN LUTHER, *Lectures on Galatians*: 122. [Hereafter cited in-line, according to the format: (Luther, *Galatians*: 122).]

As Luther continues to comment on GALATIANS 2:16, he defines true Christianity as beginning with the imputation of righteousness by grace through faith for the sake of Christ. "Faith takes hold of Christ and has Him present, enclosing Him as the ring encloses the gem. And whoever is found having this faith in the Christ who is grasped in the heart, him God accounts as righteous.... But where Christ and faith are not present, here there is no forgiveness of sins or hiding of sins. On the contrary, here there is the sheer imputation and condemnation of sins." (Luther, *Galatians*: 132f.). From this point, then, Luther begins to discuss the evangelical understanding of good works. And here again, he speaks of Christ Who is present in faith, and also of life under the Cross.

Because you have taken hold of Christ by faith, through whom you are righteous, you should now go and love God and your neighbor. Call upon God, give thanks to Him, preach Him, praise Him, confess Him. Do good to your neighbor, and serve him; do your duty. These are truly good works, which flow from this faith and joy conceived in the heart because we have the forgiveness of sins freely through Christ.

Then whatever there is of cross and suffering to be borne later on is easily sustained. For the yoke that Christ lays upon us is sweet, and His burden is light (Matt. 11:30). When sin has been forgiven and the conscience has been liberated from the burden and the sting of sin, then a Christian can bear everything easily. Because everything within is sweet and pleasant, he willingly does and suffers everything. But when a man goes along in his own righteousness, then whatever he does and suffers is painful and tedious for him, because he is doing it unwillingly.

Therefore we define a Christian as follows: A Christian is not someone who has no sin or feels no sin; he is someone to whom, because of his faith in Christ, God does not impute his sin.... A Christian does not have anything to do with the Law and sin, especially in a time of temptation. For to the extent that he is a Christian, he is above the Law and Sin, because in his heart he has Christ, the Lord of the Law, as a ring has a gem. Therefore when the Law accuses and sin troubles, he looks to Christ; and when he has taken hold of Him by faith, he has present with him the Victor over the Law, sin, death, and the devil — the Victor whose rule over all these prevents them from harming him.

Therefore a Christian, properly defined, is free of all laws and is subject to nothing, internally or externally. But I purposely say, "to the extent that he is a Christian" (not "to the extent that he is a man or a woman"); that is, to the extent that he has his conscience trained, adorned, and enriched by this faith, this great and inestimable treasure, or, as Paul calls it, "this inexpressible gift" (2 Cor. 9:15), which cannot be exalted and praised enough, since it makes men sons and heirs of God. Thus a Christian is greater than the entire world. For in his heart he has this seemingly small gift; yet the smallness of this gift and treasure, which he holds in

faith, is greater than heaven and earth, because Christ, who is this gift, is greater.
(Luther, *Galatians*: 133–134)

Many of these thoughts are repeated as Luther builds to a crescendo in his comments on GALATIANS 2:19.²⁶ Here, the echoes of what could well be called *Theosis* are louder than those that bespeak *Theologia Crucis*. And yet, the entire context of Luther's comments is permeated with a discussion of Christ Crucified. Indeed, GALATIANS 2:19 begins with the words: "I have been crucified with Christ." The intimate presence of Christ in the faith and life of a Christian implies a mutual sharing in His Cross and Crucifixion. And paradoxically, as always in the Theology of the Cross, it is this very death by crucifixion that has won the victory of life. Luther writes,

"Not I, but Christ lives in me." Christ is my "form," which adorns my faith as color or light adorns a wall. (This fact has to be expounded in this crude way, for there is no spiritual way for us to grasp the idea that Christ clings and dwells in us as closely and intimately as light or whiteness clings to a wall.) "Christ," he says, "is fixed and cemented to me and abides in me. The life that I now live, He lives in me. Indeed, Christ Himself is the life that I now live. In this way, therefore, Christ and I are one."

Living in me as He does, Christ abolishes the Law, damns sin, and kills death; for at His presence all these cannot help disappearing. Christ is eternal Peace, Comfort, Righteousness, and Life, to which the terror of the Law, sadness of mind, sin, hell, and death have to yield. Abiding and living in me, Christ removes and absorbs all the evils that torment and afflict me. This attachment to Him causes me to be liberated from the terror of the Law and of sin, pulled out of my own skin, and transferred into Christ and into His kingdom, which is a kingdom of grace, righteousness, peace, joy, life, salvation, and eternal glory. Since I am in Him, no evil can harm me.

Meanwhile my old man (Eph. 4:22) remains outside and is subject to the Law. But so far as justification is concerned, Christ and I must be so closely attached that He lives in me and I in Him. What a marvelous way of speaking! Because He lives in me, whatever grace, righteousness, life, peace, and salvation there is in me is all Christ's; nevertheless, it is mine as well, by the cementing and attachment that are through faith, by which we become as one body in the Spirit. Since Christ lives in me, grace, righteousness, life, and eternal salvation must be present with Him; and the Law, sin, and death must be absent. Indeed, the Law must be crucified, devoured, and abolished by the Law — and sin by sin, death by death, the devil by the devil. In this way Paul seeks to withdraw us completely from ourselves, from the

²⁶ "Nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me" (Luther, *Galatians*: 167).

Law, and from works, and to transplant us into Christ and faith in Christ, so that in the area of justification we look only at grace, and separate it far from the Law and from works, which belong far away....

When it comes to justification, therefore, if you divide Christ's Person from your own, you are in the Law; you remain in it and live in yourself, which means that you are dead in the sight of God and damned by the Law....

But faith must be taught correctly, namely, that by it you are so cemented to Christ that He and you are as one person, which cannot be separated but remains attached to Him forever and declares: "I am a Christ." And Christ, in turn, says: "I am as that sinner who is attached to Me, and I to him. For by faith we are joined together into one flesh and one bone." Thus Eph. 5:30 says: "We are members of the body of Christ, of His flesh and of His bones," in such a way that this faith couples Christ and me more intimately than a husband is coupled to his wife. Therefore this faith is no idle quality; but it is a thing of such magnitude that it obscures and completely removes those foolish dreams of the sophists' doctrine — the fiction of a "formed faith" and of love, of merits, our worthiness, our quality, etc. (Luther, *Galatians*: 167–169)

4.10. The Sermons on the Gospel of St. John

In Luther's Sermons on Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen of St. John, delivered between Easter and Pentecost of 1537, the Reformer addresses with considerable force and clarity the union of Christ with His disciples. It is not surprising, therefore, that overtones of Deification are prominent; these will speak well enough for themselves in the quotes that follow. Lest the Cross be forgotten, however, it is important to remember the context of these chapters in the Gospel of St. John: the night in which our Lord was betrayed. The Cross looms large upon the horizon. And for Luther, as for John, the Cross and Crucifixion of Christ are the hour of His greatest Glory. Nothing could be more characteristic of the *Theologia Crucis*. And also for Luther, as for John, the Father is revealed only in this Man, Jesus Christ, the Word-made-Flesh. With these thoughts in mind, both Deification and Theology of the Cross are evident in Luther's comments. We let the eloquence of

their expression speak for itself. To begin with, Luther comments on ST. JOHN 14:20,²⁷ as follows:

[Christians] must learn to ignore death, to despise it through Christ, and to fix their thoughts on life alone. No sage, scholar, or saint can acquire this knowledge without Christ. In short, the world will never have and experience it. Indeed, it will not hear and heed this; for it regards it as the greatest folly and heresy. Therefore this is and ever will remain the knowledge of Christians; it is surely the chief Christian doctrine and understanding to be certain and, as Christ states here, to know that the Man Christ is really and truly in God, and God in Him — that He Himself is the true and living God. And then one must know that the same One who is in God is also in us, and we in Him. He who has this knowledge has everything.

For it is all-important, as we always say, to know that the direction comes down this way from above, from the Father through Christ, and ascends again through Him. For the Son comes down to us from the Father and attaches Himself to us; and we, in turn, attach ourselves to Him and come to the Father through Him. This is the reason for His incarnation and His birth of the Virgin Mary, that He might mingle with us, be seen and heard by us, yes, be crucified and put to death for us, and draw and hold us to Him. He was sent to draw up to the Father those who would believe in Him, just as He is in the Father. He forged these links between Himself and us and the Father, thus enclosing us in the circle, so that now we are in Him and He in us, just as He is in the Father and the Father is in Him. Through such a union and communion our sin and death are abolished, and now we have sheer life and blessedness in their stead. (Luther, *John*: 138–139)

Luther actually brings the Cross and Deification together rather beautifully in his discussion of ST. JOHN 15:3.²⁸ Here he discusses the way in which the imputed righteousness of Christ works to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Luther writes,

As I have said, man is first declared clean by God's Word for Christ's sake, in whom he believes. For by such faith in the Word he is grafted into the Vine that is Christ and is clothed in His purity, which is imputed to him as his own and is as perfect and complete in him as it is in Christ. All this happens through the Word, if it is received and accepted in faith. There I hear God's will and promise that He will forgive my sins for Christ's sake and will adjudge and regard me as clean. And when I lay hold of the Word by faith, it creates in me — through the Holy Spirit, who

²⁷ "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 14–16*: 137. [Hereafter cited in-line, according to the format: (Luther, *John*: 137).]

²⁸ "You are already clean by the Word which I have spoken to you" (Luther, *John*: 212).

works through it — a new heart and new thoughts, which adhere to it firmly and do not doubt but live and die by it. Because I cleave to it, for this reason whatever impurities and sins still cling to me are not imputed to me; but this weak, imperfect, and inchoate purity is reckoned as wholly perfect purity. God makes the sign of the cross over it and acknowledges it, and He closes an eye to the uncleanness that still remains in me. And where such cleanness comes into being through the Word in faith, God proceeds to improve and perfect it by cross and suffering, so that faith is increased and the remaining uncleanness and sin are daily diminished and purged until death. (Luther, *John*: 212)

Finally, in his comments on ST. JOHN 15:5,²⁹ Luther discusses the true Vine and branches in the manner of his familiar good tree – good fruit metaphor. It is a fitting conclusion to our study.

[The many people who assume for themselves the outward name and appearance of "Christian"] gleam and glitter far more beautifully than Christ with His true branches. "In comparison," Christ would say, "I appear, not as a vine but as the stalk of a wild thornbush, and you as thorn hedge. But do not take offense at this or be misled by attractive outward appearances and fine words. For I, and I alone, must be the One planted and placed by God Himself as the Vine; and you, if you hold to Me and remain in Me, shall be the only true branches, even if the devil and all the world say otherwise."...

A person is not a true branch of Christ by his natural strength and works. For the branch is not manufactured; it grows and it must be of the nature or species of Christ the Vine. The vine and the branches are not assembled or grafted, as is done with a little twig or a shoot on a dry stem; but the branches must be of the proper type — they must grow from Christ. For the mere name does not make you a Christian, nor does the fact that you live among Christians, as the apostle Judas and others did. People may dwell among Christians, pray, fast, partake of the Sacraments, and conduct themselves outwardly as Christians, so that they cannot be excommunicated; but in spite of all this they are not true branches. They are strange and withered twigs of thorns among the grapes, although they excel the others in appearance. But it will always be true that he who is a Christian must have emerged and grown naturally from Christ the Vine....

A Christian and a true saint must be a divine work and creation, the creature of a Master who with a single word can make everything out of nothing, and make it complete and perfect. No human effort, rule, or order can do this....

It is done in this manner: When I am baptized or converted by the Gospel, the Holy Spirit is present. He takes me as clay and makes of me a new creature, which is endowed with a different mind, heart, and thoughts, that is, with a true knowledge of God and a sincere trust in His grace. To summarize, the very essence of my heart is renewed and changed. This makes me a new plant, one that is grafted on Christ

²⁹ "I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit" (Luther, *John*: 224).

the Vine and grows from Him. My holiness, righteousness, and purity do not stem from me, nor do they depend on me. They come solely from Christ and are based only in Him, in whom I am rooted by faith, just as the sap flows from the stalk into the branches. Now I am like Him and of His kind. Both He and I are of one nature and essence [!], and I bear fruit in Him and through Him. This fruit is not mine; it is the Vine's.

Thus Christ and the Christian become one loaf and one body, so that the Christian can bear good fruit — not Adam's or his own, but Christ's. For when a Christian baptizes, preaches, consoles, exhorts, works, and suffers, he does not do this as a man descended from Adam; it is Christ Who does this in him. The lips and tongue with which he proclaims and confesses God's Word are not his; they are Christ's lips and tongue. The hands with which he toils and serves his neighbor are the hands and members of Christ, who, as He says here, is in him; and he is in Christ.

Behold, with the words "He who abides in Me, and I in him" (John 15:5) Christ wants to indicate that Christianity is not brought in from without; it is not put on like a garment, nor does it consist in the adoption of a new manner of living, which, like monasticism and self-chosen sanctity, is concerned with works. It is a new birth brought about by God's Word and Spirit; there must be an entirely new man from the bottom of his heart. Then, however, when the heart is born anew in Christ, fruits will follow naturally, such as the confession of the Gospel, works of love, obedience, patience, chastity, etc. (Luther, *John*: 225–227)

St. Gregory Palamas could only say *Amen* to that.

5. FINAL OBSERVATION AND CONCLUSION

Is there any hope of "success" in current and future dialogues between Lutherans and the Eastern Orthodox? *Yes* — depending on one's measure of success, but only by first coming to grips with the radically different traditions of East and West, and ultimately — while maintaining the integrity of confession on both sides — by seeking common ground and starting from the shared Christological heritage. Working from this common foundation, the Person and Work of Christ must be brought to bear upon both Justification and Deification.³⁰ For Christ is the One Who has taken our life to be His own, Who by His obedience has satisfied the Law and made us righteous before God, Who by His death has destroyed death, and Who has granted to us that we should receive His life to be our own in His Kingdom. Christ alone has saved us *from* our enemies of sin, death and the devil; Christ alone has saved us *for* participation in the divine nature.³¹ Thus, salvation must be understood Christologically in *all* its aspects (*cf.* Kadai: 260–261, 265). For it remains the case that any and all theology — and so also any dialogue — that wishes to be *Christian* in any true sense must finally answer above all else the questions of *Who Christ is* and *What Christ has done*. Precisely here is where the genius of Luther and his *Theologia Crucis* could be of great service, not only to the Church that bears his name, but also to the Church of the Orthodox East.

³⁰ "You are in Christ Jesus, Who became for us...*Righteousness and Sanctification*..." (I COR 1:30, NKJV).

³¹ "His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him Who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (II PET 1:3–4, NKJV).

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