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Luther and Calvin on God: Origins of Lutheran and Reformed Differences

Roland F. Ziegler

I. The Doctrine of God

The doctrine of God is traditionally not one of the doctrines that is controversial between Lutherans and Calvinists. There were in the past some rather nasty polemics, since some Lutherans were strongly opposed to the doctrine of double predestination and thought that it would change the character of God. But in the ecumenical dialogues between Lutherans and Reformed churches, the issue of the doctrine of God did not come up. Instead, the usual suspects—the Lord's Supper, predestination, law and gospel, Christology—were topics of discussion.

But is the difference in the doctrine of Christology such that there is also a difference in the doctrine of God? After all, the *genus maiestaticum*, the doctrine that the human nature of Christ shares in certain attributes of the divine nature, is a classical point of controversy between Lutherans and the Reformed. The problem is, though, that this is a classical difference not only between Lutherans and the Reformed, but also between Lutherans and the Roman Church. Thus, the *genus maiestaticum* was vehemently rejected by the post-Tridentine polemical theologian Robert Bellarmine, who attacked Chemnitz and continued to be written against in the school theology afterwards.¹ Thus, if there is a difference in the doctrine of God specific to the relation between Luther and Calvin or

¹ Cf. Robertus Bellarminus, *Opera Omnia* (Paris, 1870; repr., Frankfurt am Main: Minerva-Verlag, 1965), vol. 1, book 3, chap. 9: "Secundo, ex unione hypostatica sequitur communicatio idiomatum, quae quidem communicatio non est realis respectu ipsarum naturarum, quasi ipsa Divinitas facta sit passibilis, et humanitas realiter sit facta omnipotens, ut volunt Lutherani" (281). (In the second place, from the hypostatic union there follows the communication of attributes, which is not, to be sure, an actual communication with respect to the natures themselves, as if the divinity itself were made passible, and the humanity made actually omnipotent, as the Lutherans intend.) [Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.] Ludwig Ott offers the following definition of the hypostatic union from the Roman Catholic perspective: "The nature of the Hypostatic Union is such that while on the one hand things pertaining to both the Divine and the human nature can be attributed to the person of Christ, on the other hand things specifically belonging to one nature cannot be predicated of the other nature." Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (St. Louis: Herder, 1957), 161.

Lutherans and the Reformed, it cannot be connected with the *genus maiestaticum*. A more promising way seems to be to focus on predestination and its consequences for the doctrine of God. I will give special attention to Luther's *On the Bondage of the Will*, since Luther singled out this work together with the catechisms for its significance among his many writings, and because this writing has been used by Calvinists to claim the unity of Luther and Calvin versus a later Melanchthonian shift on the side of the Lutherans—a different “Melanchthonian blight.”

II. Luther's Doctrine of God

Deus Absconditus

Luther's interest is soteriological, not metaphysical. He is interested not in God as he is in himself, but in how God encounters us in a saving way. For Luther, God is not a distant reality. Though Luther stresses the distinction between creation and creator and therefore the ontological difference between God and the world, God nevertheless permeates and is present everywhere and in everything. He sustains and governs his creation in every respect. But not every encounter with God is an encounter with the salvific God. There are at least three distinct ways of this encounter which cannot be easily unified. First, God encounters us as the creator who governs and sustains his creation according to his good will, rewarding those who obey his commandments and punishing those who transgress them, as Luther summarizes in the Small Catechism in the Conclusion of the Commandments. Second, God also encounters us as the Redeemer in Christ. Finally, there is the reality of the hidden and puzzling rule of God, God as the hidden God.² There is no christological revelational monism in Luther's theology as one finds in, for example, Karl Barth. Rather, there is a tension in Luther's understanding of God, so much so that in Luther research the question has been asked whether there is a dualism in Luther and if Luther has a unified concept of God.³ The tension is between God hidden and God preached, God as the one who works everything and God as the one who sustains and executes his law and redeems humanity.

In the nineteenth century, Theodosius Harnack, in his two-volume work on Luther's theology, opposed Albrecht Ritschl's monistic understanding of God, writing:

² Cf. Oswald Bayer, “God's Omnipotence,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 23 (2009): 85–102, esp. 90–92.

³ Cf., e.g., Frederik Brosché, *Luther on Predestination: The Antinomy and the Unity Between Love and Wrath in Luther's Concept of God*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Studiae doctrinae Christianae Upsaliensia 18 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1978).

God is in a double and equally real relation to the fallen world, outside of Christ and in Christ. Outside of Christ, as the one who, in his majesty as creator, transcends creation and is unattainable by it, who carries and governs it as by the immanent power of his will, but only in this way, that he governs it in his wrath and therefore can only be experienced by the world as the averted, unbearable, and terrible God. In Christ, though also as the God hidden and absolute, but who has not only turned and revealed himself to us in his saving grace, but has in this manner made himself accessible, has bound and pledged himself, in such a way that we can know and grasp him, tolerate him and be comforted by his certainty.⁴

There are several ways in which Luther can talk about the hiddenness of God. God can be hidden *sub contrario*, that is, in the sense of the Heidelberg Disputation, God is hidden in weakness and shame and the despised, or God is hidden in ordinary things. These we shall not investigate here.⁵ Rather, we are looking at the way in which God is hidden so that he deals with us but is inaccessible and even dangerous for humanity.

God Hidden in His Majesty

God in his majesty is of no concern to us, as Luther says in his exposition of Genesis 22:16:

But when they say this, they imagine most of all that God is untruthful, unjust, and unwise; for they have no other knowledge of God than a philosophical or metaphysical one, namely, that God is a being separate from the creatures, as Aristotle says—a being that is

⁴ "Gott in einer doppelten und gleich realen Relation zu der gefallenen Welt steht, außer Christo und in Christo. Außer Christo, als der in seiner Schöpfermajestät sie weit transzendierende und von ihr unerreichbare, welche sie zwar als der zugleich ihr immanente Kraft seiner Willensmacht trägt und regiert, jedoch nur so, daß er in ihr seinen Zorn walten läßt, und darum auch von ihr nur als der abgewandte, unerträgliche und schreckliche Gott erfahren werden kann. In Christo, zwar auch als derselbe in seiner Majestät verborgene und absolute Gott, der sich aber in seiner Erlösergnade nicht nur zugewendet und geoffenbart, sondern sich als diesen für uns so faßbar gemacht, sich uns so gebunden und versichert hat, daß wir ihn erkennen und ergreifen, ihn dulden und uns seiner gewiß getrösten können." Theodosius Harnack, *Luthers Theologie: mit besonderer Beziehung auf seine Versöhnungs- und Erlösungslehre*, Neue Ausgabe, 2 vols. (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1927), 1:103.

⁵ Cf. Hellmut Bandt, *Luthers Lehre vom verborgenen Gott: Eine Untersuchung zu dem offenbarungsgeschichtlichen Ansatz seiner Theologie*, Theologische Arbeiten 8 (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1958), 24–84; David C. Steinmetz, "Luther and the Hidden God," in David C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 23–31.

truthful and contemplates the creatures within itself. But of what concern is this to us? The devil, too, has such a knowledge of God and knows that He is truthful. But when knowledge is imparted about God in theology, God must be known and apprehended, not as remaining within Himself but as coming to us from the outside; that is, we must maintain that he is our God. That first Aristotelian or philosophical god is the god of the Jews, the Turks, and the papists; but he is of no concern to us. But our God is he whom the Holy Scriptures show, because He gives us His epiphany, His appearance, Urim and Thumim, and speaks with us.⁶

For Luther, the issue is not that the beliefs of the philosophers, Jews, Muslims, and Papists are wrong. They are right in their belief that God is a transcendent reality. The point is simply that theology deals with a God who comes to man and gives himself as God for humanity. Here again Luther shows his basic soteriological interest. He is not interested in God in himself, but God for us, without denying that God in himself is a reality.

But not only is this God of no soteriological interest, he has to be avoided. God in his majesty is humanity's enemy. Muslims and Papists deal with God in his majesty, which, or rather who, creates nothing but despair in the hour of death.⁷

⁶ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1986), 4:145 [henceforth *LW*]. "At illi ipsi cum maxime hoc dicunt, maxime omnium Deum mendacem, iniustum, insipientem, esse sentiunt. Non enim aliam notitiam de Deo habent, quam Philosophicam aut metaphysicam. Quod Deus est ens separatum a creaturis, ut ait Aristoteles, verax, intra se contemplanus creaturas. Sed quid haec ad nos? Diabolus etiam sic Deum cognoscit et scit esse veracem, sed in Theologia quando de agnitione Dei docetur, agnoscendus et appraehendendus est Deus, non intra se manens, sed ab extra veniens ad nos, ut videlicet statuamus eum nobis esse Deus. Ille prior Aristotelicus vel Philosophicus Deus Iudaeorum, Turcarum, Papistarum Deus est, nihil vero is ad nos. Sed quem sacrae litterae monstrant: is nobis Deus est, quia dat nobis sua Epiphania, suam apparitionem, Urim et Thumim, et loquitur nobiscum." Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe [Schriften]*, 65 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993), 43:240,21–32 [henceforth *WA*].

⁷ "Cum isto deo sey vnuerborren [sc. unverworren]; qui vult salvus fieri, relinquat deum in Maestate, quia iste et humana creatura sunt inimici. Sed illum deum apprehendas, quem David, qui est vestitus suis promissionibus, ut Christus adsit, qui ad Adam dicit: 'Ponam inimicicias,' 'et ipsum,' etc. Den Got mus man haben, Ne sit nudus deus da cum nudo homine. Cum Papa et Mahomete est praesumptio, donec ad mortis horam, da ghet desperatio er [sc. her] nach." (Let him not be confused with that God; let him who wants to be saved leave God in his majesty, because he and the human creature are enemies. But you should apprehend that God whom David

apprehended, who is clothed in his promises, so that Christ may be present, who says to Adam, "I will put enmity," "and him," etc. For God must have a man, lest he be a naked God there with a naked man. The pope and Mohammed are presumptuous up to the hour of death; despair follows.) WA 40.II:329,9-330,3 (MS). "Sepe audivistis hunc Canonem urgendum in sacris litteris, ut debeamus abstinere a speculatione maiestatis; humano corporis non est leydlich ista speculatio, taceo mentis." (You have often heard that this rule is to be urged in the Holy Scriptures, that we ought to refrain from speculation on the majesty; such speculation is unbearable for the bodily man; I keep silence in my mind.) WA 40.I:75,9-76,1, Lectures on Galatians (MS) 1531, on Gal 1:4. "Neque enim coram Maestate quisquam consistere potest, sed in solum Christum est respiciendum. . . . Deus enim omnibus aliis modis incomprehensibilis est, in sola autem carne Christi est comprehensibilis. In quo Christo nihil vides nisi summam suavitatem et humanitatem, qui pro nobis mortem crucis sua sponte adiit, ut nos liberati a peccatis suam iusticiam per fidem in ipsum haberemus et vitam aeternam. Hoc objecto erigitur animus et concipitur vita. Reliqua omnia sunt spectra irae et mortis, inter quae tamen nullum est periculosius quam spectrum Maestatis divinae." (For no one is ever able to endure before the Majesty, but one must consider Christ alone. . . . For God is incomprehensible in all other ways, but comprehensible in the flesh of Christ alone, and in this Christ you see nothing but the greatest sweetness and humanity, who for us went freely to the death of the cross, that we, having been freed from sins, might have his righteousness and life eternal through faith in him. When he has been placed in the way, the spirit is encouraged and life is affirmed. All the rest are specters of wrath and death, among which nothing is more perilous than the specter of the divine Majesty.) WA 25:107,2-4, 11-15 (Scholia in Isaia, from the second edition 1534, on Isa 4:6). "Sepe dixi vobis et semper dico et mortuo me recordamini, quod omnes diabolici doctores heben oben an et deum praedicant a Christo abgescheiden ut not in scholis olim. Si vis securus esse contra mortem, peccatum etc., laß dir nicht einreden, quod non sit alius deus quam qui est missus. Incipe sapientiam et scientiam tuam a Christo et dic: nescio alium deum quam in illo homine et ubi alius ostenditur, claude oculos." (I have often said to you, and I always say—remember it when I am dead!—that all the devilish teachers go on and preach God divorced from Christ, as was once our distress in the schools. If you wish to be safe from death, sin, etc., do not let them convince you, because there is no other God than he who has been sent. Let your wisdom and knowledge begin with Christ, and say: I do not know any other God than the one who is in that man, and where another appears, shut your eyes.) WA 28:101,1-7 (Sermons on John 16-20, 1528/9, on John 17:3). "Hic primus gradus erroris est, cum homines derelicto Deo involuto et incarnato sectantur nudum Deum. Postea cum hora iudicii venit et sentiunt iram Dei, iudicante Deo ipsorum corda et examinante, tum desinit Diabolus eos inflare, desperant igitur et moriuntur. Ambulant enim in nudo sole et deserunt umbraculum, quod liberat ab aestu, Esa. 4 [Isa 4:6]. Nemo igitur de Divinitate nuda cogitet, sed has cogitationes fugiat tanquam infernum et ipsissimas Satanae tentationes. Sed hoc curemus singuli, ut maneamus in Symbolis istis quibus ipse Deus nobis revelavit: In Filio nato ex virgine Maria, iacente inter iumenta in praesepti, In verbo, in Baptismo, in coena Domini et Absolutione. Nam in his imaginibus videmus et invenimus Deum, quem sustinere possumus, qui nos consolatur, in spem erigit, salvat. Aliae cogitationes de voluntate beneplaciti seu substantiali et aeternae occidunt et damnant." WA 42:295,26-38. "This is the first stage of error, when men disregard God

God Outside His Word vs. In His Word

Luther can call this distinction also the nude God versus the clothed God. God as he is in himself is not available to us; God has to clothe himself to interact with us. The object of faith is not simply God, but God clothed in his promise.

Therefore He [sc. God] puts before us an image of Himself, because He shows Himself to us in such a manner that we can grasp Him. In the New Testament we have Baptism, the Lord's Supper, absolution, and the ministry of the Word. These, in the terminology of the Scholastics are "the will of the sign," and these we must consider when we want to know God's will. The other is His "will of good pleasure," the essential will of God or His unveiled majesty, which is God Himself. From this the eyes must turn away, for it cannot be grasped. In God there is sheer Deity, and the essence of God is His transcendent wisdom and omnipotent power. These attributes are altogether beyond the grasp of reason; and whatever God has purposed by this "will of His good pleasure" He has seen from eternity. An investigation of this essential and divine will, or of the Divine Majesty, must not be pursued but altogether avoided. This will is unsearchable, and God did not want to give us an insight into it in this life.⁸

as He has enveloped Himself and become incarnate, and seek to scrutinize the unveiled God. Later on, when the hour of judgment arrives and they feel the wrath of God, when God is judging and investigating their hearts, then the devil ceases to puff them up, and they despair and die. For they are walking unsheltered in the sun and are abandoning the shade, which gives relief from the heat (Is. 4:6). Let no one, therefore, contemplate the unveiled Divinity, but let him flee from these contemplations as from hell and the veritable temptations of Satan. Let it be the concern of each of us to abide by the signs by which God has revealed Himself to us, namely, His Son, born of the Virgin Mary and lying in His manger among the cattle; the Word; Baptism; the Lord's Supper; and absolution. In these images we see and meet a God whom we can bear, one who comforts us, lifts us up into hope, and saves us. The other ideas about 'the will of His good pleasure,' or the essential and eternal will, slay and condemn." *LW* 2:47-48 (Lectures on Genesis, on Gen 6:6).

⁸ *LW* 2:46-47 on Gen 6:6. "Ergo imaginem sui proponuit, quia se nobis ita ostendit, ut apprehendere eum possimus. Nos in novo Testamento habemus Baptismum, coenam Domini, Absolutionem et ministerium verbi. Haec sunt, ut Scholastici vocarunt, voluntas signi, in quae intuendum est, cum Dei voluntatem scire volumus. Alia est voluntas beneplaciti, substantialis voluntas Dei seu nuda Maiestas, quae est Deus ipse. Ab hac removendi oculi sunt. Non enim potest apprehendi. In Deo enim nihil est nisi divinitas et substantia Dei est immensa sapientia ac omnipotens potentia. Haec rationi simpliciter sunt inaccessabilia: Quicquid hac voluntate beneplaciti Deus voluit, ab aeterno vidit. De hac voluntate substantiali et divina nihil scrutandum, sed simpliciter

The revealed God and God in his majesty are not simply identified; otherwise the counsel to avoid and to flee God in his majesty would be superfluous. Rather, God in his majesty is unfathomable, so that human beings cannot deal with him. What seems especially to characterize him is his infinite wisdom and omnipotence, but not his love. This coincides with the characteristics of God enumerated in Rom 1. Thus, one can venture that it is God in his majesty of which the Gentiles have a glimpse in creation. The absolute will of God, the *voluntas beneplaciti* (will of good pleasure), is hidden to human beings. Christians are to cling to the signs he has given, in which he has made himself accessible, but has not emptied himself in such a way that there is no God outside of word and sacraments anymore. But there is no God *pro me* (for me) outside of them, that is, no God in whom human beings are to trust.

How, then, can one speak of this God in his majesty at all? Luther is not going in the direction of a neoplatonic mysticism à la Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita or John of the Cross. No, the hidden God, or God in his majesty, is not absolutely unknowable—otherwise, of course, there would not even be the term “hidden God.” Human beings can know that God is there and working.⁹ Actually, it is unavoidable that human beings be aware of the hidden God: his presence impresses itself on them.¹⁰ This

abstinendum est, sicut et a maiestate divina: est enim inscrutabilis nec voluit eam Deus proponere in hac vita.” WA 42:294,32–295,3.

⁹ Cf. Th. Harnack, *Luthers Theologie*, I:93: “Der verborgene Gott ist ihm nicht der schlechthin jenseitige und unbekannte, sondern ‘der glorreiche Gott, wie er, verborgen in seiner Majestät, wirkt Tod und Leben und Alles in Allem,’ oder Gott allein nach seinem transzendenten und immanenten *Schöpferverhältnis* betrachtet. Insofern ist freilich Gott auch hierbei der offenbare, als er sich uns in der Schöpfung, näher in der Vernunft, dem Gewissen und auch dem Gesetz manifestiert hat, aber damit ist weder der scharfe und feste Unterschied aufgehoben, der zwischen ihm und der Kreatur besteht, noch haben wir ihn hier anders, als in seiner unerforschlichen, unerreichbaren und für uns Sünder unleidlichen Majestät.” (The hidden God is for him not merely the distant and unknown God, but “the glorious God who, hidden in his Majesty, works death and life and all in all,” or God dealt with only according to his transcendent and immanent *creator relationship*. Thus far God is indeed the revealed God, as he has manifested himself to us in creation, and more closely in reason, the conscience, and even in the law, but in this way, neither is the sharp and immovable distinction that exists between him and the creature removed, nor do we have here anything else than in his insearchable, unreachable, and—for us sinners—in sufferable Majesty.) This is the same way in which Elert coordinates law and the hidden God.

¹⁰ Cf. Luther’s comment to the effect that all pagans agree on God being omnipotent and foreknowing: “Mansit nihilominus semper aculeus ille alto corde infixus tam rudibus quam eruditis, si quando ad rem seriam ventum est, ut sentirent necessitatem nostrum, si credatur praesentia et omnipotentia Dei. Atque ipsamet ratio naturalis,

distinction is not metaphysical speculation, and the hidden God is a reality of which all mankind is aware. If this seems to be paradoxical, maybe one should meditate on Romans 1:20: "For since the creation of the world God's *invisible* qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly *seen*."

God Working in Everything

This God rules and does everything in the world:

For what we assert and contend for is this, that when God operates without regard to the grace of the Spirit, he works all in all, even in the ungodly, inasmuch as he alone moves, actuates and carries along by the motion of his omnipotence all things, even as he alone has created them, and this motion the creatures can neither avoid nor alter, but they necessarily follow and obey it, each according to its capacity as given by God; and thus all things, even including the ungodly, cooperate with God.¹¹

quae necessitate illa offenditur et tanta molitur ad eam tollendam, cogitur eam concaedere, proprio suo iudicio convicta, etiam si nulla esset scriptura." WA 18:719.17-22. "Nevertheless, there has always remained deeply implanted in the hearts of ignorant and learned alike, whenever they have taken things seriously, the painful awareness that we are under necessity if the foreknowledge and omnipotence of God are accepted. Even natural Reason herself, who is offended by this necessity and makes such efforts to get rid of it, is compelled to admit it by the force of her own judgment, even if there were no Scripture at all." Martin Luther and Desiderius Erasmus, *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, ed. E. Gordon Rupp and Philip S. Watson, Library of Christian Classics 17 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 244 [henceforth *Luther and Erasmus*].

¹¹ *Luther and Erasmus*, 288-289. "Hoc enim nos asserimus et contendimus, quod Deus, cum citra gratiam spiritus operatur omnia in omnibus, etiam in impiis operatur, Dum omnia quae condidit solus, solus quoque movet, agit et rapit omnipotentiae suae motu, quem illa non possunt vitare nec mutare, sed necesario sequuntur et parent, quolibet pro modo suae virtutis sibi a Deo datae, sic omnia etiam impia illi cooperantur." WA 18:753,28-33. Cf. Luther's *Exposition of the Magnificat*, 1521: "'Der do mechtig ist.' Damit nympt sie doch alle macht und krafft allen creaturn und gibts allein gotte. O, das ist ein grosse kunheit und grosser raub von solchem jungen, kleynenn Megdlin, darff mit einem wort alle mechtigen kranck, alle grosztetigen krafftlos, alle weysen narren, alle berumpten zuschanden machen, unnd allein dem eynigen got alle macht, that, weysheit und rum zueygen. Den das wortlin 'der do mechtig ist' ist also viel gesagt: Es ist niemant, der etwas thue, szondern, wie sanct Paulus Eph. i. sagt: 'Allein got wirckt alle ding, in allen dingen, und aller creaturn werck sind gottis werck,' wie wir auch sprechen ym glauben: 'Ich gleub in got vatter, den almechtigen.' Almechtig ist er, das in allen unnd durch allen unnd ubir allen nichts wirckt, denn allein seine macht." WA 7:574,3-13. "'He who is mighty.' Truly, in these words she takes away all might and power from every creature and bestows them on God alone. What great boldness and robbery on the part of so young and tender a maiden! She dares, by this

Luther is not afraid to apply this strong view of God's rule also to the events of his day. On August 29, 1526, King Louis II of Hungary lost a battle, his kingdom, and his life at Mohacz, beaten by the Turkish army. From this battle came the Turkish rule over Hungary that was to last for one hundred fifty years. Earlier, Luther had started a book for the king's wife, who was sympathetic to the Reformation. After the news from the battle had arrived, Luther revised the book and published it as *Four Comforting Psalms to the Queen of Hungary*, stating in his preface that this misfortune had happened through God's power and ordination (*Vorsehung*, a word also used for predestination), and that it was a visitation from God and a sign intended not, as Luther hoped, to express God's wrath or displeasure, but to encourage the queen to trust alone in the heavenly Father.¹² Here and in similar cases where Luther takes on the prophet's mantle and interprets history one may ask whether he does not do what he otherwise decries: To interpret the hidden will and government of God without the word of God.¹³

God and Evil

Such a strong view of God's involvement in the world raises the question whether God does evil things. In 1525, Luther wrote a letter to the Christians in Antwerp in the Spanish Netherlands warning against one of the prophets who had visited him. Among other issues, the question of God's relationship to evil came up. Luther wrote:

Most of all he insisted that what God decrees is good and that God does not want sin, which without a doubt is true, and it did not help that we too confessed that. But he did not want to go so far as to say that God, even though he does not want sin, nevertheless orders that it happen, and such ordering does not happen without his will, for who forces him to order it thus? Yea, how could he order it, if he did not want to order it? Here he went aloft with his head and wanted to grasp how it is that God does not want sin and yet wants to impose it,

one word, to make all the strong feeble, all the mighty weak, all the wise foolish, all the famous despised, and God alone the Possessor of all strength, wisdom, and glory. For this is the meaning of the phrase: 'He who is mighty.' There is none that does anything, but as St. Paul says in Ephesians 1: 'God accomplishes all in all,' and all creatures' works are God's works. Even as we confess in the Creed: 'I believe in God the Father, the Almighty.' He is almighty because it is His power alone that works in all and through all and over all." *LW* 21:328.

¹² WA 19:552,16–20; 553,2–9.

¹³ For Luther as a prophetic interpreter of history, cf. Hans Preuss, *Martin Luther: Der Prophet* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1933), 210–237; Heinz Zahrnt, *Luther deutet Geschichte: Erfolg und Mißerfolg im Lichte des Evangeliums* (München: Paul Müller, 1952).

and he intended to scoop out the abyss of the divine majesty to see how these two wills might coexist. . . . I say, God has forbidden sin and does not want it; this will is revealed to us and is necessary for us to know. But how God orders or wills sin, this we are not to know, because he has not revealed it to us."¹⁴

In *On the Bondage of the Will*, Luther compares the connection between God's rule and evil to the rider riding a lame horse or a craftsman using a bad tool.¹⁵ The outcome will be determined in some respect by the weakness of the horse or the defectiveness of the tool, but there is no action without the craftsman, that is, God, wielding the tool. God does not create evil, he finds it. Whence evil comes Luther does not address.¹⁶ Since God is the one who continually acts in his creation and whose creation can do anything only because it is upheld by the "movement of divine power," Luther cannot follow Erasmus, who denies any involvement of God in evil actions, since the price Erasmus pays is to make God a bystander.¹⁷ But God cannot cease from this movement without ceasing to be God.¹⁸

A special case of the question of God and evil is the hardening of hearts. The classical passage for this is of course the hardening of Pharaoh in Exodus. Against Erasmus, who rejects God as the author of the hardening of Pharaoh and sees Pharaoh as the one who hardens himself, Luther insists on the literal reading of the texts. God not only gives opportunity to Pharaoh to harden himself, God actually hardens. For

¹⁴ "Am meysten aber facht er da hart, Das Gotts gepot gut were, und Gott nicht wollt sunde haben. Willchs on zweyffel war ist, und halff nicht, das wyr solchs auch bekanten. Aber da walt er nicht hynan, das Gott, wie wol er die sunde nicht will, so verhenget er doch, das sie geschilhet, und solch verhengnis geschicht ia nicht on seynen willen, Denn wer zwingt yhn, das er sie verhenget? Ja wie künd ers verhängen, wenn ers nicht wollte verhängen? Hie fur er mit seinem kopff hynauff, und wollt begreyffen, wie Gott sunde nicht wollt, und doch durchs verhängen wollt, und meynet, den abgrund Göttlicher maiestät, wie diese zween willen möchte miteynander bestehen, auszuschöpfen. . . . Ich sage, Gott hat verboten die sunde und will der selben nicht. dieser wille ist uns offenbart und not zu wissen. Wie aber Gott die sunde verhenget odder will, das sollen wyr nicht wissen, denn er hats uns nicht offenbart." WA 18:549,29-38; 550,6-9.

¹⁵ WA 18:709,28-36; *Luther and Erasmus*, 233.

¹⁶ "Non igitur quispiam cogitet, Deum, cum dicitur, indurare aut malum in nobis operari (indurare enim est malum facere), sic facere, quasi de novo in nobis malum creet." WA 18:710,31-33. "Let no one suppose, therefore, when God is said to harden or to work evil in us (for to harden is to make evil), that he does so by creating evil in us from scratch." *Luther and Erasmus*, 234.

¹⁷ For the movement of divine power, cf. WA 18:709,10-26; *Luther and Erasmus*, 232-233.

¹⁸ WA 18:712,19-24; *Luther and Erasmus*, 236.

Luther, a God who only watches is like the God of Aristotle.¹⁹ Luther explains the hardening thus:

God confronts his [sc. Pharaoh's] badness outwardly with an object that he naturally hates, without ceasing inwardly to move by omnipotent motion the evil will which he finds there; and Pharaoh in accordance with the badness of his will cannot help hating what is opposed to him and trusting in his own strength, until he becomes so obstinate that he neither hears nor understands, but is possessed by Satan like a raving madman.²⁰

In the discussion of the hardening of Pharaoh, Luther addresses the objection that this seems to be unfair of God, even evil. Luther rejects this argument. Whatever God does is by definition good. There is no law for him. True, if man would do it, it would be evil. If man does not understand that, it is his problem.²¹ One could therefore say that God is truly outside of the law; he is the font of the law.²²

¹⁹ WA 18:706,22-23; Luther and Erasmus, 228.

²⁰ *Luther and Erasmus*, 235. "Quare induratio Pharaonis per Deum sic impletur, quod foris obicit maliciae ejus, quod ille odit naturaliter, tum intus non cessat movere omnipotente motu malam (ut invenit) voluntatem. Illeque pro malicia voluntatis suae non potest non odisse contrarium sibi et confidere suis viribus, sic obstinatur, ut neque audiat neque sapiat, Sed rapiatur possessus a Satana, velut insanus et furens." WA 18:711,33-38.

²¹ "Sed ego non intelligo, quod est bonum. Pharaon obduratur, est malum in oculis tuis, videtur malum, et si tu ipse faceres, malum esset, sed quia deus facit, bene facit. Non habet regulam, mass, gesetz, ergo non potest transgredi ea." (But I do not know what is good. Pharaoh is hardened, this is bad in your eyes, it appears bad, and if you were to do that, it would be bad, but because God does it, he does well. He has no rule, measure, law, therefore he cannot trasgress them.) WA 16:141,3-6, Sermons on Exodus (MS), 1524-1527. Cf. *De servo arbitrio*: "Deus est, cuius voluntas nulla est causa nec ratio, quae illi ceu regula et mensura praescribatur, cum nihil sit illi aequale aut superius, sed ipsa est regula omnium. Si enim esset illi aliqua regula vel mensura aut causa aut ratio, iam nec Dei voluntas esse posset. Non enim quia sic debet vel debuit velle, ideo rectum est, quod vult. Sed contra: Quia ipse sic vult, ideo debet rectum esse, quod fit." WA 18:712,32-37. "He is God, and for his will there is no cause or reason that can be laid down as rule or measure for it, since there is nothing equal or superior to it, but it is itself the rule of all things. For if there were any rule or standard for it, either as cause or reason, it could no longer be the will of God. For it is not because he is or was obliged so to will that what he wills is right, but on the contrary, because he himself so wills, therefore what happens must be right." *Luther and Erasmus*, 236-237. "Non dignatur Deum caro gloria tanta, ut credit iustum esse et bonum, dum supra et ultra dicit et facit, quam definivit Codex Iustiniani vel quintus liber Ethicorum Aristotelis." WA 18:729. "Human nature does not think fit to give God such glory as to believe him just and good when he speaks and acts above and beyond what the Code of Justinian

Why, then, does God not simply change the evil will of men?

This belongs to the secrets of his majesty, where his judgments are incomprehensible (Rom. 11:33). It is not our business to ask this question, but to adore these mysteries. And if flesh and blood is offended here and murmurs (cf. John 6:61), by all means let it murmur; but it will achieve nothing; God will not change on that account. And if the ungodly are scandalized and depart in great numbers (John 6:66f.), yet the elect will remain. The same must be said to those who ask why he permitted Adam to fall, and why he creates us all infected with the same sin, when he could either have preserved him or created us from another stock or from a seed which he had first purged.²³

Luther is aware of the problem. There seems to be a glaring contradiction between the God who is preached as merciful and good and the God who nevertheless permits men to remain in sin and even hardens them in their sin. Luther confesses: "I myself was offended more than once, and brought to the very depth and abyss of despair, so that I wished I had never been created a man, before I realized how salutary that despair was, and how near to grace."²⁴ Thus, Luther does not provide a solution to the problem.

Deus Absconditus and Predestination

Luther's *On the Bondage of the Will* is not *per se* on predestination; rather it is on the question of the free choice of fallen man. But Luther's strong view of God's rule, together with his thesis that human freedom in the sense of Erasmus, that is, the freedom to choose good and evil

has laid down, or the fifth book of Aristotle's *Ethics*." *Luther and Erasmus*, 258. It is therefore quite obvious how Luther would answer the so-called Euthyphro dilemma.

²² An analogy is the traditional position of the monarch of the United Kingdom: The monarch can do no wrong and cannot be prosecuted; cf. Book 1, chap. 7 of William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 4 vols., ed. Thomas McIntyre Cooley and James De Witt Andrews (Chicago: Callaghan and Co., 1899), 1:214.

²³ *Luther and Erasmus*, 236. "At cur non simul mutat voluntates malas, quas movet? Hoc pertinet ad secreta maiestatis, ubi incomprehensibilia sunt iudicia eius. Nec nostrum hoc est quaerere, sed adorare mysteria haec. Quod si caro et sanguis hic offense murmuret, Murmuret sane, sed nihil efficiet, Deus ideo non mutabitur. Et si scandalisati impii discedant quam plurimi, Electi tamen manebunt. Idem dicitur illis, qui quaerunt: cur permisit Adam ruere, et cur nos omnes eodem peccato infectos condit, cum potuisset illum servare et nos aliunde vel primum purgato semine creare." WA 18:712,24-31.

²⁴ *Luther and Erasmus*, 244. "Ego ipse non semel offensus sum usque ad profundum et abyssum scirem, quam salutaris illa esset desperatio et quam gratiae propinqua." WA 18:719,9-12.

independently from God, is incompatible with God's omnipotence and foreknowledge, has consequences for predestination. It means, first, that God is the author of salvation, because human beings since the fall cannot choose to believe. This choice has to be created in them by God. But what about those who do not believe? Does it not follow from the connection between providence and predestination that Luther has to conclude that they do not believe because God does not want them to believe? What about the passage in Ezekiel 33:11 that says that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked? For Luther, this passage refers to the revealed God, the preached God, not "that hidden and awful will of God whereby he ordains by his own counsel which and what sort of person he wills to be recipients and partakers of his preached and offered mercy."²⁵

Erasmus protests that this is absurd, since it presumes that God at the same time deplores the death of his people which he works in them. Luther readily admits that there is a contradiction. The hidden God works "life, death, and all in all," he "neither deplores nor takes away death."²⁶ Luther can go so far as to say that God does will the death of the sinner "according to that inscrutable will of his."²⁷ But this is not for us to speculate about or investigate. It is enough that we know that God is in charge and that God does many things that he has not revealed to us in his word. Here the tension in Luther's view of God becomes an open contradiction: the hidden and revealed God, the God who works life and death and all things and the God who saves, cannot be synthesized to form one concept. The unity of God cannot be imagined. God can be respected, adored, feared, and trusted, but never understood or conceptualized. The practical solution to this is simply to follow God's orders, revealed in his word, and to trust this word, trust in Christ, and avert one's eyes from the reality of the hidden God.²⁸ Here God is against God, and no theodicy or solution to the problem of continuing unbelief can be given. Luther is confident that the unity of God will be revealed in the eschaton, and then we will understand. Until then, though, Christianity continues to offend

²⁵ *Luther and Erasmus*, 200. "Non de occulta illa et metuenda voluntate Dei ordinantis suo consilio, quos et quales praedicatae et oblatae misericordiae capaces et participes esse velit." WA 18:684,35-37.

²⁶ *Luther and Erasmus*, 201. "Caeterum Deus absconditus in maiestate neque deplorat neque tollit mortem, sed operator vitam, mortem et omnia in omnibus." WA 18:685,21-23.

²⁷ *Luther and Erasmus*, 201. "Sic not vult mortem peccatoris, verbo scilicet, Vult autem illam voluntate illa imperscrutabili." WA 18:685,28-29.

²⁸ One sees here why Luther counsels that one avert one's eyes from the hidden God: looking at the hidden God or God in his majesty will lead to despair.

not only reason in its quest for conceptual unity but also the ethical feeling of humanity. But this is necessary in order to destroy both the hubris of reason and the desire of man to judge God according to his own standards.

Change in Luther?

But did not Luther change his mind, retreat from his extreme statement in *On the Bondage of the Will*, and soften his language in his Lectures on Genesis? After all, the Formula of Concord itself wants his comments on Genesis 26 to be read as the final interpretation in this question.²⁹ A careful look at the Formula, however, reveals that there is no confessional warrant for softening Luther's original position. First, the Formula does not say that Luther changed his mind. Second, a close reading of the relevant Genesis lectures shows that Luther does not address all the questions discussed in *On the Bondage of the Will*, and certainly retracts nothing.³⁰ Luther is addressing two questions: How does one combat a fatalistic misunderstanding of the doctrine of predestination that leads to contempt of word and sacrament, and how can a Christian be certain of his election?

Luther sees the fatalistic misunderstanding as a despising and negation of God's revelation. He who argues from the omnipotence and rule of God against honoring God's revealed will is blaspheming. But Luther does not argue against the premise that salvation depends on predestination or that God knows everything and that therefore everything happens by necessity. The premise is true; the problem is the relation of this premise to the revealed God in such a way that the revealed God is effectively denied. Faith knows this premise, but faith relates to the promise of God in Christ and clings to it. The hidden God is to be left in his mystery and this question is to be left alone. The same is true for the problem of dealing with somebody who is afflicted by the question of predestination. The only way this can be addressed is through the present action of the preached God. "Am I elected?" Yes, if "you listen to Him, are baptized in His name, and love His Word, then you are surely predestined and are certain of your salvation. But if you revile or despise the Word, then you are damned; for he who does not believe is condemned (Mark 16:16)."³¹

²⁹ FC SD II, 44.

³⁰ WA 43:457,31–463,17. An English translation can be found in LW 5:42–50.

³¹ LW 5:25. "Si hunc audieris, et in nomine eius baptizatus fueris, et diliges verbum eius, tum certo es praedestinatus, et certus de tua salute. Si vero maledicis aut contemnis verbum, tum es damnatus. Quia, qui non credit, condemnatur." WA 43:459,31–34.

III. Calvin's Doctrine of God

The Quest for a Principle in Calvin

During the nineteenth and early-twentieth century, it was popular to assert that the doctrine of predestination was the central dogma of Calvin and the Reformed churches. This thesis, however, has long since been rejected.³² The quest for such a center of Calvin's theology is ongoing and need not concern us here. In the present study, I will mainly use Calvin's *Institutes*, for the sake of convenience. His *Institutes* was fundamentally reworked twice: in 1539, when it changed from a catechism to a manual on dogmatics, and in 1559, the last edition published during Calvin's lifetime, when he changed it to be more or less an exposition of the Apostles' Creed.³³ Contrary to Luther, who subdivided the Creed into three articles, Calvin chose four chapters, following patristic expositions, which see the work at the end of the Creed not as the work of the Holy Spirit alone, but

³² Cf. Charles Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 244–248; Wilhelm Niesel, *Die Theologie Calvins, Einführung in die evangelische Theologie 7* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1938), 152. Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, 13 vols. (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1948–1970), II/2:92, called the thesis that predestination is the fundamental article of Calvin's theology from which all other articles are derived "heller Wahnsinn" (utter madness). Cf. also Fred H. Klooster, *Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 14: "The claim that predestination was the central doctrine in Calvin's theology, an *a priori* principle from which he drew out his whole theological system by logical deduction, is without warrant. He did not engage in speculative, frigid, theoretical reasoning in discussing predestination." Charles Partee, in his article "Calvin's Central Dogma Again," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 18 (1987): 191–199, finds the central point of Calvin's theology in the concept of "union with Christ." Albrecht Schweizer, who, according to Partee, *Theology of John Calvin*, 244, subscribed to this opinion, in fact does not. His book *Die protestantischen Centraldogmen in ihrer Entwicklung innerhalb der reformierten Kirche. 1. Hälfte: Das 16. Jahrhundert* (Zürich: Orell, Fuessli und Co., 1854) is about the "central Protestant dogmas" (plural), and he says of Calvin only that he "vollendet abschliessend den Lehrbegriff in seinem ganzen Inhalte, geleitet von der Idee der ewigen Rathschlüsse" (completes in a concluding manner the doctrinal statement in its entire content, led by the idea of the eternal decrees). The central Protestant dogmas are, according to Schweizer: grace and faith, election and the power of the will, foreknowledge, predestination, and the necessity or chance of all occurrences and human acting (Schweizer, *Die protestantischen Centraldogmen*, 16).

³³ For the discussion on the structure of the *Institutes*, cf. Partee, *Theology of John Calvin*, 35–43. For the Latin original of the *Institutes* of 1559, the following edition is used: Petrus Barth and Guilelmus Niesel, eds., *Joannis Calvini Opera selecta*, vol. 3–5 (Monachii: In aedibus Chr. Kaiser, 1928–1936) [henceforth OS]. The English translation used is *John Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., Library of Christian Classics 20–21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960) [henceforth ET].

of the Spirit in communion with the Father and the Son.³⁴ Thus, the trinitarian dogma structures the *Institutes*. Calvin has no other locus on God in the *Institutes* except this locus on the Trinity, and there is no discussion of God's essence and attributes.

Knowledge of God as Practical, not Speculative

Calvin opens his *Institutes* with this statement: "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves" (1.1.1).³⁵ In good Augustinian tradition, Calvin desires to know God and the soul, and nothing else. But a true knowledge of oneself is not possible unless one knows God (1.1.2).³⁶ It is the worship of God that solely distinguishes man from animals. Man is the being that worships God (1.3.3).³⁷ True knowledge of God is not the mere conviction that there is a God, but also that we "grasp what befits us and is proper to this glory, in fine, what is to our advantage to know of him. Indeed, we shall not say that, properly speaking, God is known where there is no Religion or piety" (1.2.1).³⁸ Calvin is not interested in an abstract knowledge of God: "What help is it, in short, to know a God with

³⁴ Thus Jan Koopmans, *Das altkirchliche Dogma in der Reformation*, Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie 22 (München: C. Kaiser, 1955), 110. This division is present already in the first edition of the *Institutes*; see Petrus Barth, ed., *Joannis Calvini Opera selecta*, vol. 1 (Monachii: In aedibus Chr. Kaiser, 1926), 68–96. It is also present in the Geneva Catechism of 1545; see E.F. Karl Müller, ed., *Die Bekenntnisschriften der Reformierten Kirche: in authentischen Texten mit geschichtlicher Einleitung und Register* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1903), 118,15–17.

³⁵ ET 1:35. "Tota fere sapientiae nostrae summa, quae vera demum ac solida sapientia censi debeat, duabus partibus constat, Dei cognitione et nostri." OS 3:31,6–8.

³⁶ "Rursum, hominem in puram sui notitiam nunquam pervenire constat nisi prius Dei faciem sit contemplatus, atque ex illius intuitu ad seipsum inspicendum descendat." OS 3:32,10–12. "Again, it is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinizing himself." ET 1:37.

³⁷ "Unum ergo esse Dei cultum, qui superiores ipsos reddat, per quem solum ad immortalitatem aspirator." OS 3:40,26–27. "Therefore, it is worship of God alone that renders men higher than the brutes, and through it alone they aspire to immortality." ET 1:47.

³⁸ ET 1:39. "Iam vero Dei notitiam intelligo, qua non modo concipimus aliquem esse Deum, sed etiam tenemus quod de eo scirer nostra refert, quod utile est in eius gloriam, quod denique expedit. Neque enim Deum, proprie loquendo, cognosci dicemus ubi nulla est religio nec pietas." OS 3:34,6–10. Cf. 1.12.1: "Dei notitiam non esse positam in frigida speculatione, sed secum trahere eius cultum; ac obiter attingimus quomodo rite colatur." OS 3:105,8–10. "The knowledge of God does not rest in cold speculation, but carries with it the honoring of him." ET 1:116.

whom we have nothing to do?" (1.2.2).³⁹ Calvin is not interested in what God is in himself, but what God is in relation to the world and humanity. In the context of Exod 34:6-7 he says:

Here let us observe that his eternity and self-existence are announced by that wonderful name twice repeated [sc. Jehovah]. Thereupon his powers are mentioned, by which he is shown to us not as he is in himself, but as he is toward us: so that this recognition of him consists more in living experience than in vain and high-flown speculation. (1.10.2)⁴⁰

With the theological tradition, Calvin upholds that God's "essence is incomprehensible; hence, his divineness far escapes all human perception" (1.5.1).⁴¹ The only way to know God, therefore, is not by speculation or direct access to his essence but through his works (1.5.9).⁴² The works of God are essentially twofold: creation and redemption.

Natural and Revealed Knowledge of God

God reveals himself in two ways: first as the creator, then as the redeemer. The universal revelation of God leads to a certain "awareness" of God that is innate. The *consensus gentium* ("consensus of the Gentiles," i.e., the universal opinion of mankind) shows that this knowledge of God is part of the human condition; pagan idolatry is the sign of a distorted and twisted knowledge of God. True atheism is therefore impossible (1.3.3). In fallen man this innate knowledge is nevertheless either suppressed or corrupted. Through sin, mankind rejects God as he has revealed himself

³⁹ ET 1:41. "Quid denique iuvat Deum cognoscere quocum nihil sit nobis negotii?" OS 3:35,16-17.

⁴⁰ ET 1:97. "Ubi animadvertamus eius aeternitatem καὶ αὐτονομίαν, magnifico illo nomine bis repetito, praedicari: deinde commemorari eius virtutes, quibus nobis describitur non quis sit apud se, sed qualis ergo nos: ut ista eius agnitio vivo magis sensu, quam vacua et meteorica speculatione constet." OS 3:86,14-19.

⁴¹ ET 1:52. "Essentia quidem eius incomprehensibilis est, ut sensus omnes humanos procul effugiat eius numen." OS 3:45,4-6.

⁴² "Unde intelligimus hanc esse rectissimam Dei quaerendi viam et aptissimum ordinem: non ut audaci curiositate penetrare tentemus ad excutiendam eius essentiam, quae adoranda potius est, quam scrupulosius disquirenda: sed ut illum in suis operibus contemplemur quibus se propinquum nobis familiaremque reddit, ac quodammodo communicat." OS 3:53,18-23. "Consequently, we know the most perfect way of seeking God, and the most suitable order, is not for us to attempt with bold curiosity to penetrate to the investigation of his essence, which we ought more to adore than meticulously to search out, but for us to contemplate him in his works whereby he renders himself near and familiar to us, and in some manner communicates himself." ET 1:62.

and creates an idol. Additionally, man follows his evil impulses and because of his sin destroys and distorts the knowledge that has been given to him (1.4.1-2). The content of this natural knowledge is the divine wisdom, as it can be seen in creation, especially in the creation of man, since man is a "clear mirror of God's works" (1.5.4).⁴³ The governance of the world ought to inspire worship, but man despises the creator. Ultimately, creation shows the goodness of God and should therefore induce love in man (1.5.6).⁴⁴ This is all obvious, even though not one in a hundred sees it:

In no greater degree is his [sc. God's] power or his wisdom hidden in darkness. His power shows itself clearly when the ferocity of the impious, in everyone's opinion unconquerable, is overcome in a moment, their arrogance vanquished, their strongest defenses destroyed, their javelins and armor shattered, their strength broken, their machinations overturned, and themselves fallen of their own weight; and when their audacity, which exalted them above heaven, lays them low even to the center of the earth. (1.5.8)⁴⁵

God's power in creation should also lead man to expect greater deeds of God in the afterlife, and to belief in the punishment of the wicked after death (1.5.10). But all of that comes to naught, since sinful man corrupts this revelation of God, so that even the wisest philosophers are stupid in regard to God (1.5.11). Natural revelation results only in condemnation, so that God had to speak in a different way. Thus in his revelation he first restores the knowledge of himself as the creator to Adam, Noah, and the Patriarchs (1.6.1). Special revelation, as it is collected and codified in the Scriptures, thus serves first to identify who the true God is and to distinguish him from idols. Men do not believe the Scriptures because of rational arguments, but because the Spirit, who spoke through the prophets, creates faith. Thus, Scripture is self-authenticating (1.7.4-5).

⁴³ ET 1:55.

⁴⁴ Cf. 1.14.2, where Calvin says that the creation of man at the end of the six days should lead the Christians "to contemplate God's fatherly love toward mankind, in that he did not create Adam until he had lavished upon the universe all manner of good things." ET 1:161-162. "Considerandus est paternus Dei amor erga humanum genus, quod non ante creavit Adam quam mundum omni bonorum copia locupletasset." OS 3:154,11-14.

⁴⁵ ET 1:61. "Nihilo magis aut potentia aut sapientia in tenebris latent; quarum altera praeclare emergit dum impiorum ferocia, omnium opinione insuperabilis momento uno retunditur, arrogantia domatur, diruuntur validissima praesidia, tela et arma comminuuntur, vires infringuntur, machinationes evertuntur, et sua ipsarum mole concidunt: quae supra caelos se efferebat audaci, in centrum usque terrae postternitur." OS 3:52,32-38.

The knowledge of God in and through the Scriptures confirms the truth of the natural knowledge of God, namely, that he is wise, good, the governor of the universe, punishing and rewarding. But this is not enough; to distinguish God from idols, he has to be confessed as triune: "Unless we grasp these [sc. the three persons of the Trinity], only the bare and empty name of God flits about in our brains, to the exclusion of the true God" (1.13.2).⁴⁶ True knowledge of God is therefore always trinitarian. The Old Testament must therefore also be understood in a trinitarian way. "God" can refer to the Father, but it can also refer to Christ, as he too is called Jehovah (1.13.23).⁴⁷ Calvin agrees with Irenaeus that "the God who of old appeared to the patriarchs was no other than Christ" (1.13.27).⁴⁸

Providence

Providence is for Calvin a part of knowing God as the creator of the world. As the creator, he has not retired. Without seeing God as the one who is present and active in his creation, man does not truly understand what it means for God to be creator (1.16.1). The providence of God excludes for Calvin any concept of fortune and mere chance. Everything is part of God's governance, which is not only some kind of oversight or simply a description of God as the first mover or the first cause (1.16.3). God gives good or bad weather, rich or poor harvest; all is in his hand (1.16.5). He gives children to men and refuses them (1.16.7). Such a view, according to Calvin, is not Stoic, that is, deterministic. The Stoics assume a causal determinism: because every action is caused by a natural entity, it is therefore determined. In Christianity, however, it is God who is "the ruler and governor of all things, who in accordance with his wisdom has from the farthest limit of eternity decreed what he was going to do, and now by his might carries out what he has decreed" (1.16.8).⁴⁹ There is therefore no true chance or contingency.⁵⁰ Calvin adds, however, that for mankind the

⁴⁶ ET 1:122. "quas nisi tenemus, nudum et inane duntaxat Dei nomen sine vero Deo in cerebro nostro volitat." OS 3:109,21-23.

⁴⁷ "Nam si est Jehovah, negari non potest quin idem sit ille Deus qui per Iesaiam alibi clamat, Ego ego sum et praeter me non est Deus [Isa. 44. a. 6]." OS 3:141,17-20. "For if he is Jehovah, it cannot be denied that he is that same God who elsewhere proclaims through Isaiah, 'I, I am, and apart from me there is no God' [Isa. 44:6 p.]." ET 1:150.

⁴⁸ ET 1:156. "Deum qui olim apparuit Patribus non alium fuisse quam Christum." OS 3:148,4-5. Cf. *Corpus Reformatorum*, 101 vols., ed. Karl G. Bretschneider et al. (Halle, Berlin, Leipzig, and Zurich, 1834-1962), 9:706.

⁴⁹ ET 1:207. "Deum constituimus arbitrum ac moderatorem omnium, qui pro sua sapientia ab ultima aeternitate decrevit quod facturus esset." OS 3:198,26-28.

⁵⁰ Calvin, 1.16.8, claims for this view Basil and Augustine.

true reasons for this are hidden. The "order, reason, end, and necessity" of events are hidden to humanity and are therefore "in a sense" fortuitous (1.16.9).⁵¹ For the Christian the future is open; he waits in suspense to see what will happen, but knows on the other hand that nothing that will happen has not previously been seen and ordained by God (1.16.9). This also means that the Christian in the midst of trouble has to suspend judgment, never doubting God's governance and the goodness and justice of God's secret plan (1.17.1). Christians rather have to adore the mystery (Rom 11:33-34), in keeping with what Deuteronomy 29:29 says of God's providence: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but what is here written, to you and your children" (Deut 29:29), that is, Christians are to follow the will of God as it is communicated in the words of the Scriptures, but are to leave the mystery to God (1.17.3-5).

As for the relationship between providence and evil, Calvin follows the Christian tradition in stating that the devil, though a creature of God, is evil through a perversion that was not caused by God. Evil is "utterly alien" to God (1.14.16).⁵² Also in keeping with the Christian tradition, Calvin, referring to Job 1:12; 2:6 and to the deception of Ahab through a lying spirit sent from God (1 Kings 22:20-22), asserts that the devil is under God's rule and can therefore do nothing without the will and assent of God.

Therefore Satan is clearly under God's power, and is so ruled by his bidding as to be compelled to render him service. Indeed, when we say that Satan resists God, and that Satan's works disagree with God's works, we at the same time assert that this resistance and this opposition are dependent upon God's sufferance. (1.14.17)⁵³

Thus, there is no dualism. Calvin adds, however: "I am not now speaking of Satan's will, nor even of his effort, but only of his effect" (1.14.17).⁵⁴ God uses the devil in his governance of the world to educate the faithful, who cannot be overcome by the devil. Sinners, nevertheless, are rightfully handed over to the devil (1.14.18). God also uses sinners: "Thieves and murderers and other evildoers are the instruments of divine providence"

⁵¹ ET 1:208.

⁵² ET 1:175; "alienissimum," OS 3:166,20.

⁵³ ET 1:176. "Constat ergo sub Dei potestate esse Satanam, et sic ipsius nutu regi ut obsequium reddere ei cogatur. Porro, quum dicimus Satanam Deo resistere, et illius opera cum huius operibus dissidere, hanc repugnantiam ethoc certamen a Dei permissione pendere simul asserimus." OS 3:167,21-26.

⁵⁴ ET 1:176. "De voluntate iam non loquor, nec etiam de conatu, sed de effectu tantum." OS 3:167,26.

(1.17.5).⁵⁵ God is not the cause of their evildoing; that lies in the wicked themselves. Ultimately, they have to serve the good according to God's plan. God therefore not only permits evil, he uses it.

Absalom, polluting his father's bed by an incestuous union, commits a detestable crime [II Sam 16:22]; yet God declares this work to be his own; for the words are: "You did it secretly; but I will do this thing openly, and in broad daylight" [II Sam 12:12 p.]. (1.18.1).⁵⁶

The same is true for the execution of God's judgment on Israel through the Assyrians and Babylonians. It is God who uses the cruelty, imperialistic ambition, and utter barbarity of these great nations to execute his judgments, without thereby making the deeds of the Assyrians or Babylonians right (1.18.1).

Election and Reprobation

The chapter on election had a continually shifting place in the *Institutes*. In the first edition, which was patterned after Luther's Small Catechism, there was no chapter on election. In the editions from 1539–1554, providence and predestination are connected, but in the last edition of 1559 they are separated from one another.⁵⁷ Whereas providence is part of knowing God as the creator, predestination is the final chapter of soteriology, after Christology, and is thus part of knowing God as the redeemer, not as the creator. No true knowledge of grace is possible without the knowledge of predestination (3.21.1). Calvin wants to discuss predestination only within the parameters of Scripture. He insists, however—probably against Melancthon—that such a discussion is necessary and salutary, even though human curiosity can be a problem. Foreknowledge and predestination are distinguished, and a ranking—as if God first knows and then predestines—is rejected. Foreknowledge extends over everything, while predestination is the decision about the eternal fate of mankind:

We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he determined with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not

⁵⁵ ET 1:217. "Fures et homicidas, et alios maleficos, divinae esse providentiae instrumenta." OS 3:208,25–26.

⁵⁶ ET 1:230. "Absalon incesto coitu, patris torum polluens, detestabile scelus perpetrat. . . . Deus tamen hoc opus suum esse pronuntiat; verba enim sunt, Tu fecisti occulte: ego vero palam faciam, et coram sole hoc." OS 3:220,35–221,4.

⁵⁷ Klooster, *Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination*, 21, sees in Calvin's study of Romans, undertaken between the first and second editions of the *Institutes*, the reason for the inclusion of predestination in the *Institutes*.

created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death. (3.21.5)⁵⁸

Israel as a people, as well as individuals within Israel, are examples of God's free election. The elect are sealed by call and justification, while the reprobates are shut off from the knowledge of God and sanctification; thus it is revealed what awaits them (3.21.5). Election does not depend on any foreknowledge of merits on the side of those who are elected. Thus far there is no difference between Calvin and the Lutherans. The problem, of course, starts when the second part of Calvin's thesis, reprobation, is defended. Reprobation pertains to those "whom he created for dishonor in life and destruction in death, to become the instruments of his wrath and examples of his severity" (3.24.12).⁵⁹ Evil men do not convert, even though God could convert them. Why he does not convert them is God's mystery, as Calvin quotes Augustine (3.24.13).⁶⁰ The same is true with respect to the fall of Adam. Why God did not prevent the fall is not known to us. It is known, however, that it did not happen outside and against God's rule, so there must be some good purpose to it.⁶¹ No injustice is done to the

⁵⁸ ET 2:926. "Praedestinationem vocamus aeternum Dei decretum quo apud se constitutum habuit quid de unoquoque homine fieri vellet. Non enim pari conditione creantur omnes: sed aliis vita aeterna, aliis damnatio aeterna praeordinatur. Itaque prout in alterutrum finem quisque conditus est, ita vel ad vitam vel ad mortem praedestinatum dicimus." OS 4:374,11-17.

⁵⁹ ET 2:978. "Quos ergo in vitae contumeliam et mortis exitium creavit, ut irae suae organa forent, et severitatis exempla." OS 4:423,22-23.

⁶⁰ The quote is from Augustine, *On Genesis in the Literal Sense*, 11.10.13.

⁶¹ Cf. Calvin's comment on Gen 3:1: "When I say, however, that Adam did not fall without the ordination and will of God, I do not so take it as if sin had ever been pleasing to Him, or as if he simply wished that the precept which he had given should be violated. So far as the fall of Adam was the subversion of equity, and of well-constituted order, so far as it was contumacy against the Divine Law-giver, and the transgression of righteousness, certainly it was against the will of God; yet none of these things render it impossible that, for a certain cause, although to us unknown, he might will the fall of man. It offends the ears of some, when it is said God willed this fall; but what else, I pray, is the *permission* of Him, who has the power of preventing, and in whose hand the whole matter is placed, but his will? I wish that men would rather suffer themselves to be judged by God, than that, with profane temerity, they should pass judgment upon Him; but this is the arrogance of the flesh to subject God to its own test." John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, 2 vols., trans. John King (Edinburgh: Printed for the Calvin Translation Society, 1847-1850; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 1:144. Cf. Heinz Otten, *Prädestination in Calvins theologischer Lehre* (München: Kaiser, 1938; repr., Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1968), 97: "Calvin aber lehnt es ausdrücklich ab, Gott

reprobates. After all, they are evil and deserve the judgment they receive from God. But this is not enough; God created them so that "by the just but inscrutable judgment of God" he shows "forth his glory in their condemnation" (3.24.14).⁶² Calvin does admit that we do not completely understand the reason for the reprobation, but, he asserts, we should simply admit our ignorance before the mystery of God (3.24.15). God does not make man sin; rather, sin proceeds from the will of man. Thus man is responsible for his own sin: it is his sin, and he is the doer. The ultimate cause of reprobation, though, is God himself.⁶³ With this distinction Calvin

zum Billiger oder gar zum Urheber der Sünde Adams zu machen; er weist darauf hin, daß das Wie eines Gesehens, das Gottes Praescienz und Dekret unterliege, der menschlichen Beurteilung unzugänglichste; der Mensch aber habe festzuhalten, daß Gott völlig unschuldig sei, und im übrigen sein Nichtwissen einzugehen. Die Heiligkeit Gottes verbietet eine Lösung, die die Alleinschuld für den Abfall nicht mehr dem Menschen zuschiebt. Damit ist aber auf jede Lösung überhaupt verzichtet; es müssen solche einander aufhebende Aussagen nebeneinander stehen bleiben und miteinander gesagt werden." (Calvin, however, expressly refuses to make God into the assenter or, indeed, into the author of Adam's sin; he indicates that the character of the perspective that underlies God's prescience and ordinance is utterly impenetrable by human judgment; man, however, has to maintain that God is completely guiltless and, in the end, admit his own ignorance. The holiness of God forbids a solution that no longer pins the blame for the fall exclusively on man. In this way, however, every solution is completely abandoned; the two mutually exclusive expressions must remain standing alongside one another and be said simultaneously with one another.) NB: Lutherans like to accuse Calvin of rationalism and a lack of respect for the mysteries of God. I think this charge is unjustified. Calvin is not a rationalist, whatever that means, and he readily accepts the mystery in stating that the reprobation of the wicked is a part of the inscrutable will of God which has to be revered and not inquired into; cf. the conclusion of Calvin's treatment of predestination, *Institutes* 3.24.17: "Now when many notions are adduced on both sides let this be our conclusion: to tremble with Paul at so deep a mystery; but, if froward tongues clamor, not to be ashamed of this exclamation of his: 'Who are you, O man, to argue with God?' [Rom. 9:20 p.]. For as Augustine truly contends, they who measure divine justice by the standard of human justice are acting perversely." ET 2:987. "Porro ubi multa ultro citroque adducta fuerint, sit haec nobis clausula, ad tantam profunditatem cum Paulo expavescere: quod si obstrepant petulantes linguae, non pudeferi in hac eius exclamatione, O homo tu quis es qui litigas cum Deo [Rom. 9. d. 20]? Vere enim Augustinus perverse facere contendit qui iustitiae humanae modo divinam metiuntur." OS 4:432,2-8. Cf. also Calvin's assertion that godly minds cannot "reconcile the two matters that man when first made was set in such a position that by voluntarily falling he should be the cause of his own destruction, and yet that it was so ordained by the admirable counsel of God that this voluntary ruin to the human race and all posterity of Adam should be a cause of humility." Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, quoted in Klooster, *Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination*, 81.

⁶² ET 2:981.

⁶³ Cf. Klooster, *Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination*, 70-71.

avoids making God the author of sin, a charge he always rejected. But what about statements like Ezekiel 33:11, "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live," or 1 Timothy 2:4, "[God] will have all men to be saved, and come unto the knowledge of the truth"? Calvin really can only deal with Ezekiel by conditioning the gospel: All this passage says, according to Calvin, is that God is willing to forgive sinners

as soon as they are touched by repentance. . . . But experience teaches that God wills the repentance of those whom he invites to himself in such a way that he does not touch the hearts of all. . . . So it seems to be deceptive on the side of God, but it is not, because it makes those who do not believe inexcusable (3.24.15).⁶⁴

Calvin has to redefine completely what "not willing the death of the sinner" means in order to be able to uphold his doctrine of reprobation. As for 1 Timothy 2:4, this and similar passages deal not with the eternal decree but with the *ordo salutis*, that is, they describe how God saves: "they proclaim that there is ready pardon for all sinners, provided they turn back to seek it" (3.24.15).⁶⁵ With this interpretation, however, these passages are no longer gospel in the Lutheran sense—which is the biblical sense—but are turned into law.

The Systematic Question: Predestination, Providence, and Christology

As we have seen, the development of the place of predestination in the *Institutes* shows a shift towards Christology. What is the driving force behind the doctrine of election? Is it Christology? Christian Link sees two different motives in Calvin.⁶⁶ One is the christological impetus, that is, that God elects in Christ. The other is that whereby predestination becomes part of providence and governance, and Christ is only the medium of election. Link characterizes the problem thus: "Calvin distinguishes methodically (and altogether consistently) between the 'secret election of God' and its christological 'mirror,' just as he substantially distinguishes between the 'heavenly decree' and its execution and consequence, the

⁶⁴ ET 2:983–984; cf. 3.24.17: "For by so promising he merely means that his mercy is extended to all, provided they seek after it and implore it." ET 2:985. "Sic enim promittendo nihil aliud vult quam omnibus expositam esse suam misericordiam qui modo eam expetunt atque implorant." OS 4:430,7–9.

⁶⁵ ET 2:984.

⁶⁶ Christian Link, "Calvins Erwählungslehre zwischen Providenz und Christologie," in *Calvin im Kontext der Schweizer Reformation: Historische und theologische Beiträge zur Calvinforschung* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2003), 169–193. What follows is a summary of Link's argument.

salvific work of Christ."⁶⁷ The christological foundation is seen in the beginning of the discussion of predestination in the *Institutes* of 1559 (2.21.1).

Calvin therefore directs Christians who want to be certain of their election not to the secret counsel of God, but to Christ, in whom salvation is found.⁶⁸ The problem is the doctrine of reprobation. It cannot be seen in Christ.⁶⁹ Rather, reprobation has its foundation in the special providence of God. The fall was ordained by God, and the reprobation is carried out according to God's secret will (3.23.1).⁷⁰ Also, in the conflict or tension between providence and Christology, between God as the one who does everything and God's particular work of salvation, the particular work is inscribed into the general work. That leads to a particular emphasis on certain attributes of God as opposed to others, for example, the sovereignty of God and his freedom as opposed to his condescending love.⁷¹

IV. Comparison between Luther and Calvin

A comparison between Luther and Calvin shows both similarities and differences. Both men see God as the one who governs everything and is intimately in charge of his creation. Against a tradition that sees God leading his creation on a long leash and thus allowing it freedom from him, both Luther and Calvin abhor such a *deus otiosus* (inactive God). Both face the same question: if God is so much in control and active in everything that change and contingency have no real place in the world, how is it that God is not responsible for evil? Both refuse to say that God is the cause of evil. Both uphold that God is the sole author of salvation, and that salvation is based on an eternal election in Christ. The logic of this view of God leads toward a doctrine of double predestination, and Calvin follows this path. The price he pays is that the statements on universal grace can no longer be taken literally. Luther chooses differently. Because of the distinction of the hidden and revealed God, Luther can maintain the

⁶⁷ "Calvin trennt methodisch (und zwar durchgängig) zwischen der 'heimlichen Erwählung Gottes' und ihrem christologischen 'Spiegel,' so wie er sachlich zwischen dem 'decretum caeleste' und dessen Ausführungen und Folge, dem Erlösungswerk Christi, trennt." Link, "Calvins Erwählungslehre," 189. This distinction also occurs in Otten, *Prädestination in Calvins theologischer Lehre*, 133.

⁶⁸ Cf. John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. John Kelman Sutherland Reid (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1961; repr., Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 113–114.

⁶⁹ Klooster, *Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination*, 77.

⁷⁰ The incomprehensible and hidden decree of God is situated in the doctrine on providence (1.17.2; 1.18.4).

⁷¹ Otten, *Prädestination in Calvins theologischer Lehre*, 134.

universal and direct rule of God while avoiding double predestination. If one wishes, one could say that according to Luther the sovereignty of God, his absolute rule, and his omnipotence are attributes of the hidden God, whereas the rule of the preached God is resisted and thwarted by the sin of man. This leads to a tension which is almost unbearable—or to the charge of dualism, or simply of logical inconsistency. Luther can live with this tension, because the alternative would be the loss of the comfort of the gospel—which is, after all, the point of God's revelation—either through double predestination or through synergism. Calvin can live with his doctrine only because, when push comes to shove, in the predestinarian affliction, he argues solely christologically and points the troubled Christian to Christ.

Later Lutheran and Reformed Teaching

The Lutheran Church did not simply continue with Martin Luther's theology. Even though the Formula of Concord names Luther as the foremost teacher of the Church of the Augsburg Confession, Melanchthon's influence is, though not discussed, nevertheless very much felt. Especially in the doctrine of predestination, FC XI takes up Melanchthon's concerns and excludes certain aspects of Luther's teachings in *On the Bondage of the Will*.⁷² This was possible because Luther himself had not repeated these teachings in his later writings, but had focused instead on the pastoral application of evangelical comfort to the person afflicted by *Prädestinationsanfechtung* (predestinarian affliction). What, then, were Melanchthon's concerns? Melanchthon was anxious to avoid determinism and the resulting fatalism. He was afraid that a strong understanding of God's universal rule and the necessity of all things would, as he had proposed in the first edition of his *Loci*, lead to making God responsible for evil.⁷³ Additionally, determinism would lead to fatalism, thus destroying the moral fiber of the people and making education and admonition impossible. Thus, in his later years, Melanchthon favored the three causes of conversion (i.e., the word of God,

⁷² The FC quotes *On the Bondage of the Will* only in article II. Article XI does not quote Luther once. Compared to the wealth of citations from Luther in articles VII and VIII, this is in itself a remarkable sign.

⁷³ Cf. Philip Melanchthon, *Loci Communes* 1521: *Lateinisch-Deutsch*, 2nd ed. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1993), §134 (p. 96): "Contra spiritus omnia necessario evenire docet [sc. caro] iuxta praedestinationem." (Against the spirit, [the flesh] teaches that all things happen by necessity, according to predestination.) Cf. Kolb, *Bound Choice, Election and Wittenberg Theological Method: From Martin Luther to the Formula of Concord* (Grand Rapids and London: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 81–94.

the Holy Spirit, and the human will), at least giving the impression of synergism.⁷⁴ Chemnitz, as one of the authors of the Formula, as well as many others who were consulted in the process leading to its composition and adoption, were students of Melanchthon, even though, like all good students, they had developed a critical and nuanced appreciation of their teacher. But they framed the doctrine of predestination along the lines of Melanchthon's concerns, not along the lines of Luther in *On the Bondage of the Will*. That means that the entire discussion of the hidden God is avoided and the revealed God is the sole subject of the article. Thus, there is no contradiction with Luther, but rather a reduction.⁷⁵ One could argue that this is actually following Luther's intention, after all: "Quod supra nos, nihil ad nos" (What is above us is of no concern to us). But I would suggest that there is a certain loss in FC XI. It was probably necessary to combat Calvinism, but the question remains whether the distortion of predestination, as it soon arose in orthodox Lutheranism with the introduction of the doctrine of *intuitu fidei*, is due to the fact that the reality of the hidden God was ignored.⁷⁶ The gain was that the gospel, unlike in Calvinism, was not conditioned or rendered questionable because of predestination; and this, after all, is a great success.

On the other side, in Calvinism, the doctrine of the divine decrees of salvation and damnation soon switched its place from soteriology to a position directly after the doctrine of God, before creation, and thus was severed from Christology. Theodore Beza, the successor of Calvin as the leader of the church in Geneva, was the most influential proponent of such a shift.⁷⁷ If it was not the central doctrine for Calvin, it seems to have

⁷⁴ But see Lowell C. Green, "A Review Article: *Law and Gospel: Philip Melanchthon's Debate with John Agricola of Eisleben over 'Poenitentia'*," CTQ 64 (2000): 66–67.

⁷⁵ Cf. Gottfried Hoffmann, "Luther und die Konkordienformel zur Prädestination," *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 5 (1981): 25–56.

⁷⁶ Cf. Edmund Schlink, *Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften*, 2nd ed. (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1946), 392.

⁷⁷ Cf. John S. Bray, *Theodore Beza's Doctrine of Predestination*, Bibliotheca Humanistica & Reformatica 12 (Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1975), 70–81; Gottfried Adam, *Der Streit um die Prädestination im ausgehenden 16. Jahrhundert: Eine Untersuchung zu den Entwürfen von Samuel Huber und Aegidius Hunnius*, Beiträge zur Geschichte und Lehre der Reformierten Kirche 30 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970), 48: "Beza hat den Bezug zwischen Prädestination und Christusverkündigung nicht genügend bedacht. Seine Theologie zeigt leidlich eine Antinomie zwischen Theo-logie [sic!] und Christologie. Die Christologie ist hier leidlich nicht mehr fundamental. Denn das Gottesverständnis wird nicht an Christus gewonnen, sondern Christus dem Gottesgedanken ein- bzw. Untergeordnet." (Beza did not sufficiently establish the relationship between predestination and the preaching of Christ. His theology

become the central doctrine for a certain form of Calvinism. The debates between supralapsarians and infralapsarians brought even more to the fore the emphasis on the sovereignty of God and lend themselves to the one-sided location of the doctrine of predestination in the locus on the providence of God. Thus, the answer to the question of how somebody can be certain of his salvation shifts from an emphasis on Christ as the mirror of election to what is known as the practical syllogism: I do good works; good works are done by the elect; therefore I am elect.

V. Conclusion

What, then, is the moral of the story? I think that what divides Luther and Calvin is what Edmund Schlink called the "problem of the theological syllogism."⁷⁸ How much can one deduce from Scripture, and how far can one integrate statements of Scripture into a logically coherent form? That God governs everything and nothing happens outside of his rule and will is true. Combined with the doctrine of bound choice, the theological train is on the track to double predestination. But this begets problems regarding the universal statements of the gospel, which have to be reinterpreted. The answer is not irrationalism or a rejection of logic and reason but an acknowledgment of the limits of both. Luther upheld not only the tension but the contradiction between our knowledge of God and the desire for metaphysical unity. In that he was truly a scriptural theologian.

unfortunately betrays an antinomy between theo-logy and Christology. Here Christology is unfortunately no longer fundamental. For the knowledge of God is not acquired in Christ, but Christ is subordinated as an "etc." to the concept of God.) Cf. also Ernst Wolf, "Erwählungslehre und Prädestinationsproblem," in Otto Weber, Walter Kreck, and Ernst Wolf, *Die Predigt von der Gnadenwahl: Karl Barth zum 10. Mai 1951*, Theologische Existenz heute NF 28 (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1951), 94.

⁷⁸ Edmund Schlink, "Der theologische Syllogismus als Problem der Prädestinationslehre," in *Einsicht und Glaube, Festschrift Prof. D. Dr. Gottlieb Söhngen*, ed. J. Ratzinger and H. Fries (Freiburg: Herder, 1962), 299-320.