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Joel Brondos

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THE BURSTING OF OLD WINESKINS: AN INVESTIGATION
INTO LUTHER'S WITHDRAWAL FROM AUGUSTINE AND
THE SCHOLASTICS AS EVIDENCED IN HIS
TREATMENT OF *OPUS OPERATUM*
AND *OPUS OPERANTIS*

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
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by

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PROLOGUE

Man often plays the tinkerer, wanting to know how things work so that he can work them for himself. He is of the impression that somehow he might improve upon the workings which he has comprehended by experiment, with the intent that he is better served when he is most in control.

Current ecclesiastical concerns about being effective are a manifestation of this urge to fiddle with the Means of Grace. Anxiety about effectiveness spills over into the realms of preaching, teaching, evangelism, stewardship, and virtually every other aspect of church life. The suggestion then arises that historical-traditional forms may be valid but are not necessarily effective. Such an approach leads us back to an Augustinian path which Luther eventually discovered to be a dead end.

Luther came to realize that effective talk is not by nature grace talk. Something done "sure-fire" is powerful, but then not in the way of gift. We do well today if we do not revert to an Augustinianism which attempts to figure out God's work by entangling ourselves in philosophical deliberations or sociological criteria about effectiveness

and validity. Such efforts fall too easily into an anthropocentric synergism or a fatalistic monergism. Instead, we would focus with the mature Luther on the gospel as something received rather than something performed, expecting to find a Christ who is synonymous with grace and faith—gifts given rather than works performed.

I would like to acknowledge with gratitude those who played significant parts in the completion of this thesis: Dr. Wayne Schmidt, graduate studies chairman, who directed this thesis through the proper channels and who also facilitated in the procurement of grant monies without which this degree could not have been completed; Dr. Norman Nagel, advisor and mentor, who drew the thesis forward with choruses of *ibunt de virtute in virtutem* and hospitality; Dr. Ronald Feuerhahn, reader *pro re nata*; Ruth Jacobs, thesis secretary, who thankfully did not let one jot or tittle pass; Rev. Robert Roethemeyer and Mr. Mark Bliese, library staff who skillfully scouted my way *ad fontes*; the evangelical Lutheran congregation of St. John, Vincennes, Indiana, for its patience and patronage, Mrs. Babette Baldridge, congregational secretary, who assisted with typing and kept the door closed and the phone quiet; and my dear wife Marilyn and sons, Caleb, Jason, and Andrew, who

suffered husband and father to miss numerous meals and evening hours in the course of this work. *Deo gratias.*

INTRODUCTION

Students of Luther's early theology tend to focus initially on his break from justification by works of the law into a justification by grace through faith. Their attention is drawn to Luther's slashing away at every form of Pelagianism and any vestige of *facere quod in se est*. Those who see his development solely in those terms tend to date his *Durchbruch* earlier than others. The present investigation, however, attempts to reveal another vital aspect of Luther's reformation, without which one's understanding of both Luther and the Gospel is incomplete.

The renunciation of justification by works and the distinction between Law and Gospel left Luther standing on only one leg. The other foot had yet to stand sure. The Gospel was not fully uncovered for Luther in the rudimentary acknowledgment that man does nothing for his salvation and that God does everything. Such a statement leaves the door open to a deterministic and fatalistic world view. Condemning synergism merely by promoting its monergistic opposite fails to distinguish between the God who is working according to His irresistible power and the God who is

gifting according to His resistible means in Christ.¹ The position which denies a cooperative free will in matters of grace and salvation easily falls prey to charges of determinism or fatalism.² Where Augustine could be of tremendous help with the former, he was of no assistance with the latter. For Augustine, God can be said to work in a monergistic way that is always powerful and not resistible.

In the Heidelberg Theses, we are confronted with the Augustinian Martin Luther who touted Augustine as Paul's most faithful interpreter.³ Later, however, we come to know

¹On monergism and justification see Thomas Manteufel, "Martin Luther and the Concept of *Opus Operatum*," ThD dissertation, University of Iowa, December 1988, pp. 59-61.

²Luther's confession of a bound *arbitrio* was attacked from a position which stated that determinism was the logical and necessary consequence of denying the freedom of the will.

³See also Luther's earlier letter to John Lang, prior of the Erfurt Eremites, of May 18, 1517: "Our theology and that of St. Augustine are going ahead, and they reign in our University and it is the Lord's doing. Aristotle is gradually going down, perhaps into eternal ruin. It is wonderful how out of favour are the lectures on the Sentences. Nobody can hope for an audience unless he professes this theology, i.e., the Bible or St. Augustine or some other doctor of real authority in the Church." Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, 60 vols., (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883), Br. 1, 99, 8 (hereafter cited WA), translated in Gordon Rupp, *The Righteousness of God*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1953) p. 194. This brief letter is also found translated in Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, 55 vols., vol. 48, gen. ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House and Philadelphia: Fortress

a Luther who withdrew from Augustine: "At first I devoured, not merely read, Augustine. But when the door was opened for me in Paul, so that I understood what justification by faith is, it was all over with Augustine."⁴ This paper hopes to sail forward with Luther in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, steering cleanly between the Scylla and Charybdis of synergism and determinism, a way which neither Occam nor Augustine had plotted clearly.

The Heidelberg Disputation of April 1518 serves as the springboard for this study. It was in the prolegomenon and theses of that disputation that the praise of Augustine and the properties of *opus operatum* and *opus operantis* stand together. Other foundational works on *opus operatum*, such as the doctoral dissertation of Thomas Manteufel, provide the backdrop for an inquiry into the middle and late years of Luther's writings—years such as 1531 and 1540 when Luther expressed in his correspondence an apprehension that the *opus operatum* idea would show up again.⁵ As the study progresses, it is hoped that the reader will see that the

Press, 1955-), pp. 41-42 (hereafter *LW*). See *WA* 18,99,8-13.

⁴Table Talk Recorded by Dietrich (1532), no. 347. *LW* 54:49.

⁵Noted in Carl F. Wisløff, *The Gift of Communion*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), p. 92 where he directs the reader in his footnotes to Luther's letters found in *WA* Br 6.112.59-73; Br 6.192.8-12; Br 9.27.264-274.

connection between Augustinian theology and *opus* terminology are closely intertwined and that this observation would lead the reader to share Luther's later apprehensions with the result that something better may be received with thanksgiving.

LUTHER AND OPUS AT THE HEIDELBERG DISPUTATION

On April 26, 1518, a district vicar of the Augustinian Hermits presided over a general meeting of his order in their Heidelberg cloister. Both envied and winsome, he incurred the anger of some who had been his teachers and captured the interest of some who would be his students.

Controversy was in the air. This district vicar was one who firmly held the opinion that chapters of the Augustinian order should follow the strict rule, contrary to the more lenient tendencies of others in the order.⁶ He also had recently been advancing certain theological propositions against the lucrative church practice of marketing indulgences. Those who had come to Heidelberg with defenses prepared against those fronts were caught off-guard when they found the attack pressed from an angle they had not expected and could not have anticipated. Martin Luther, about to conclude his term as district vicar, was not merely attempting to expose and challenge the clerical corruption of his day.⁷ He was taking on Goliath Scholasticism with an Augustinian armor, accoutrement with which he would find he was ill-fitted.

⁶See Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), pp. 98-105.

⁷*ibid.*, p. 231.

Some suggest that the congregation's vicar, Johann von Staupitz, was attempting to ameliorate the tension by having Luther present theses not directly related to the sale of indulgences or his *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*.⁸ If this had been Staupitz' hope, it was soon dashed. Luther's approach was quickly perceived as a dangerous novelty. The lowest ranking professor in the audience, Georg Nizer, blurted out, "If the peasants hear of this, they will stone you," whereas Luther's seasoned Eisenach professor, Jodokus Truttvetter, would later grade Martin's paper with a black theta - the mark of *thanatos*, death. In a letter of May 18, 1518, Luther wrote of these matters to George Spalatin, stating that

"The doctors willingly allowed my disputation and debated with me in such a fair way that they have my highest esteem. Theology seemed to be some strange thing to them; nevertheless they fought it keenly and with finesse . . . My theology is like rotten food to the people from Erfurt."⁹

The theses which Luther presented (defended by his associate Leonard Beier) were divided into two parts: the theological and the philosophical, summing up, as Gordon

⁸E.g. the introduction of H. Grimm's translation of the Heidelberg Disputation, *LW* 31:37.

⁹*LW* 41:61-62. *WA*, Br 1,173,23-30. See *Martin Luther: Ausgewählte Werke*, eds. H. H. Borchardt and G. Merz. (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1938), vol. 1, p. 482 (hereafter cited *MA*).

Rupp states, "a good deal of Luther's theological development over ten years."¹⁰ If it is true that Luther was asked to present theses less provocative than his *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*, he may have concurred only to the extent that he could couch his attack on Scholasticism with the weaponry of Augustine—a cogent procedure in a presentation to members of his chapter of the Augustinian order. Perhaps behind the shield of Augustine, he could lop off the head of Scholasticism, contrasting Neoplatonic Augustinianism with the Aristotelian Occamist Augustinianism.¹¹

Augustine and the Theological Theses

Heralding Augustine as the "most faithful interpreter of Paul," Luther sallies forth summarizing what he most values in the saint from Hippo. In Theses 1-12 Luther chooses to deal first with the law, works, and sins, contrasting the works of God with the works of man for

¹⁰Gordon Rupp, *The Righteousness of God*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1953), p. 223.

¹¹Regarding Augustine's Neo-Platonism, see John J. O'Meara on "St. Augustine Against the Academics," volume 12 of the Ancient Christian Writers series, (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1950), pp. 19-22; and 193-197. "To Neo-Platonism he looked for the rational explanation of everything. He wished not merely to believe, but to understand. . . . Authority was definitely represented by the Catholic Church. Reason seemed to lie with the Neo-Platonists, although he did not subscribe to everything that they said" (p. 22).

progressing up the ladder of righteousness (*ad iusticiam promovere*). The works of men fail to advance them before God. The law is God's work. Even the "natural precepts" (*naturalia dictamina*)¹² are God's work by virtue of His role as Creator. Human works can surmount neither the law nor natural precepts in order to achieve a state of righteousness (Thesis 1-2).¹³ Even the works which God does *through* man cannot be claimed by man as his own merited righteousness before God (Thesis 6).

Furthermore, works which are perceived cannot be trusted or relied upon: "Although the works of man always seem attractive and good, they are nevertheless likely to be mortal sins. Although the works of God always seem unattractive and appear evil, they are nevertheless really immortal merits." (Theses 3-4, emphasis added). The distinction between evident worldly appearances and hidden

¹²Cf. "natürliche Eingebung," *MA* vol. 1, p. 131; "natürliche Vernunft," Martin Luther, *Luther Deutsch*, ed. Kurt Aland, (Stuttgart: Ehrenfried Klotz Verlag, 1951), vol. 1, p. 379 (hereafter cited *LD*).

¹³"A comparison of the teachings of Augustine and Luther on justification shows that they interpret this term quite differently. Augustine means by justification the renewal or gradual transformation of man into the image of God. Luther understands by it the forgiveness of sins, the imputation of righteousness for the sake of Christ." Uuras Saarnivaara, *Luther Discovers the Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), p. 14.

heavenly realities testifies to the Neo-Platonic Augustinian influence upon Luther.

In Theses 7-12, it is a pious fear of God (*pio Dei timore*) which distinguishes mortal sins from venial sins. It is not the sinful human works themselves, but the lack of the fear of God which places human works in the category of mortal sins. The most requisite fear is that of the judgment of condemnation (*iudicium damnationis*, Thesis 11) and that in every work. Again, the difference between what is perceived and what is real comes to mind in that one must fearfully (*timentur*) consider sins to be mortal so that they will *in reality* (*tunc vere*) be venial in the sight of God (Thesis 12).

The second section deals primarily with the denial of freedom of the will (Theses 13-18), clearly echoing Augustine's anti-Pelagian writings. Luther cites *On The Spirit and the Letter, Against Julian, Concerning Reprimand and Grace*,¹⁴ and mentions works against the Pelagians in general. It is in this section that the reliance on

¹⁴Richard Balge notes that Luther had been including references to *On the Spirit and the Letter* in marginal notes for his lectures on Lombard's *Sentences* in the early years of 1508-1509. "Martin Luther, Augustinian," *Luther Lives*, ed. by E. C. Fredrich, Siegbert Becker, and David P. Kuske, (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1983) p. 9. See also Hans-Ulrich Delius, *Augustin als Quelle Luther*, (Berlin: Evangelisch Verlags Anstalt, 1984).

Augustine is most explicit in the sense that Luther notes the citations by name. Otherwise he only mentions them in the first and fifth theses and in his corollary quoting Augustine's *Retractions*. Besides these, he also includes a few quotes in his proofs from St. Gregory, another Neo-Platonist. Luther does, however, make such copious use of the Scriptures that Martin Bucer was led to write to his friend Beatus Rhenanus: "With answers that are as brief as they are acute, drawn from the Holy Scriptures, he overcomes everyone with admiration."¹⁵

This second grouping of theses bears its fruit in the seventeenth and eighteenth theses—but in a way which seems to admit a contradiction in terms. On one hand the denial of the will's freedom does not necessarily "give cause for despair," since it arouses "the desire to humble oneself and seek the grace of God" (Thesis 17). He expounds further on this thesis: "To say that we are nothing and constantly sin, when we do the best we can, does not mean that we cause people to despair (unless they are fools); rather, we make them concerned about the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." At the same time, however, this desire leads one to despair: "It is certain that man must utterly despair

¹⁵Quoted in H. Boehmer, *Road to Reformation*, trans. John W. Doberstein and Theodore G. Tappert, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1946), p. 208.

of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ" (Thesis 18). It is as though Luther wanted to rule out ultimate despair in favor of a utilitarian despair, a desperation which prepares one for grace. Yet, might not man despair of his ability to despair? This question Luther does not propose in order that all may be clear. Luther proceeds without progressing, failing to advance beyond Augustine and leaving the waters sufficiently clouded.

In the third section (Theses 19-24), Luther lays a charge against those who would pursue theology through the invisible things of God.¹⁶ He bestows the title *theologus gloriae* upon those who maintain that glory is perceptible in created things (*quae facta sunt*).¹⁷ In contrast, the

¹⁶See Leif Grane's treatment on Luther's theology at this point in the Heidelberg Disputation, "Luther's Kampf um die Erneuerung der Theologie (1515-1518)," *Modus Loquendi Theologicus*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975) pp. 150-151. Also, Alister McGrath offers a context in which Luther's argument is heard, especially in the assembly of Occamist Augustinians: "The fundamental contention of nominalism or terminism in its strict and proper epistemological sense is that all things which exist to the mind are merely particulars: there is no genuine or objective identity in things which are not in themselves identical. This may be contrasted with the realist position which concedes the existence of universals, arguing that the apparent situation is the real situation." Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 2 vols., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), vol. 1, p. 168.

¹⁷" . . . durch das Geschaffene," LD 1:388.

theologus crucis calls a thing what it actually is (*dicit id quod res est*). It comprehends what may be known about God through sufferings and cross.¹⁸ This section has drawn the attention of many scholars since it represents Luther's clear distinction between the phrases "theology of the cross" and "theology of glory." These terms are not introduced in Theses 19-21 as abstract concepts in and of

¹⁸Harold Grimm appends the definite article to "cross" in his American Edition translation (*LW* 31:52-53). This may add more than what Luther intended. To begin with, the *passiones* are not identified as Christ's sufferings nor is it specified as to how one "comprehends" (*intellecta conspicit*) such sufferings. If they are in fact Christ's sufferings. Sufferings and cross are played off against good works ("for they hate cross and suffering and love works and the glory of works"). The subject of the good works is not Christ. One must then decide whether Luther is contrasting such love of works with Christ's suffering and cross, or with the Christian's own sufferings and crosses borne in life. That the latter is more likely may be seen in Luther's contemporary discussions on indulgences, for example, "From this you can now see how, ever since the scholastic theology—the deceiving theology (for that is the meaning of the word in Greek)—began, the theology of the cross has been abrogated, and everything has been completely turned up-side-down. A theologian of the cross (that is, one who speaks of the crucified and hidden God), teaches that punishments, crosses, and death are the most precious treasury of all . . . blessed is he who is considered by God to be so worthy that these treasures of the relics of Christ should be given to him; rather, who understands that they are given to him. For to whom are they not offered? As St. James says, 'Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials.' For not all have this grace and glory to receive these treasures, but only the most elect of the children of God" (*LW* 31:225-226; *WA* 1,613,21-33). One might prefer the term "cross theology" over "theology of the cross," the latter term meaning something different to modern readers.

themselves but are rather intimated in reference to one who is called a "theologian," one who does the work of theology. In Thesis 24 the "theology of the cross" is singled out as the ingredient which keeps man paradoxically from using the best in the worst manner.

The Neo-Platonic Augustinian thread wends its way through these theses as well. One cannot rise to see the invisible realities of God by surveying the visible world. It is a "cross theologian" (*theologus crucis*) who sees things as they really are (*id quod res est*), comprehending the manifest things of God¹⁹ through sufferings and cross.

In the fourth section, righteousness comes not through the law and works—not by working much but by believing much in Christ (*multum credit in Christum*) (Thesis 25). In Thesis 26, law and grace stand against each other as opposites, "The law says, 'do this,' and it is never done. Grace says, 'Believe in this,' and everything is already done." In his explanation of this thesis, Luther writes, "For through faith, Christ is in us, indeed, one with us. Christ is just and has fulfilled all the commands

¹⁹Grimm translates "manifest things of God" for *posteriora Dei*. In sufferings and cross one does not see God manifest, *stricte dictu*, but sees only the back side of God in the sense of Exodus 33:23 ("Then I will take away My hand and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen" [The New King James Version of the Holy Bible, (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983)]).

of God, wherefore we also fulfil everything through him since he was made ours through faith."²⁰

The theological section reaches its climax in Theses 27-28. "Actually, one should call the work of Christ an acting work [*opus operans*] and our work an accomplished work [*opus operatum*], and thus an accomplished work pleasing to God by the grace of the acting work."²¹ In his proof

²⁰LW 31:56. "*Sic enim per fidem Christus in nobis, imo unum cum nobis est. At Christus est iustus et omnia implens Dei mandata, quare et nos per ipsum omnia implemus, dum noster factus est per fidem.*" WA 1,364,23-26.

²¹ Generally speaking, we understand the *opus* terms throughout this thesis in the sense outlined by Manteufel: something completed and worked by workers (*opus operatum*); the action that worked or brought about the completed work (*opus operans*); the action of the worker (*opus operantis*). Manteufel, p. 6. See also LW 35, p. 63, n. 37, "*Opus operatum* is an action that is done, completed, finished, considered as such without reference to the doer of it," and n. 38, "*Opus operantis* is an action considered with reference to the does of it, the action of the one acting." Other lexical works from various centuries may also be consulted. See, for example, the entry on *opus operatum* in the 1619 edition of Johann Altenstaig's *Lexicon Theologicum*, as well as other lexical works listed in the bibliography below. One interesting footnote yet to be investigated by this researcher is found in Arthur Landgraf, *Dogmengeschichte der früh Scholastik*, (Regensburg: Friedrich Postet Verlag, 1956), volume 2, p. 319, n. 103, wherein he mentions Isidor of Seville's encyclopedia of the early 7th century ("*ihrem ganzen Charakter nach [zudem benützen sie schon die Terminologie *opus operans* und *opus operatum*] unecht sind und der Zeit der vollständigen Klärung angehören,*") which would help draw a line from Augustine to Peter of Poitiers. In any case, the reader, however, should be aware that Luther does not seem satisfied with the classical definitions of these terms. In the course of this investigation, instances will be cited to show that Luther attempts on some occasions to redefine these terms, hoping

(*probatio*) of this twenty-seventh thesis, Luther describes a Christ who "lives in us through faith" (*in nobis habitat per fidem*) with the result that he "arouses us to do good works through that living faith in his work" (*movet nos ad opera per vivam illam fidem operum suorum*).

In this thesis a radical redefinition has taken place. Christ is here put forward as the operator rather than the priest or the recipient in sacramental or sacrificial action. Where the subject of *opus operantis* is the priest, the question takes on Donatistic character and perspective.

If Luther was pursuing a line of reason analogous to that found in the Donatistic controversy of Augustine's day we would anticipate his arguing for the objectivity or validity of something. This, however, is not evident in the context. Sacramental objectivity is not the issue. No sacramental medium is being investigated. Rather, the discussion is being pressed from the perspective of obedience to and the fulfillment of God's Law via the immediate influence of the Christ.²²

to conform them to the Christocentric theology which he confesses.

²²One might understand Luther's use of the *opus* terms in light of the Augustinian principle, "When God crowns our merits, it is nothing but his own gifts that he crowns." In an Augustinian schema, our merits could be considered *opera*

Thus, it makes little sense to read an objective-sacramental understanding of the *opus* terms retroactively into this context. One might, however, read Luther's use of the terms here forward into the later sacramental considerations in order to consider whether Luther's ultimate rejection of these Scholastic terms was different in kind from the objections of Karlstadt, Melanchthon, Chemnitz, Walther and others. It might also prove to be a major reason why Luther did not later strive to retain the *opus* terminology for describing sacramental objectivity, validity, or efficacy.

Luther's use of the *opus* terminology in Thesis 27 demonstrates an awareness that the terms originated in a context dealing with something other than a defense of the objectivity in the sacramental action of the Lord's Supper. He nowhere makes reference to Peter of Poitiers's coining of the terms in the *loci* of predestination and the

operata and Christ's crowning would be his *opus operantis* and Luther can say such a thing as "*Christus est opus Dei*," WA 4,61,22 (Cf. WA 1,309,17-18 where Luther uses exactly this expression in his *Asterisks* of 1518). Anders Nygren illustrates this Augustinian principle in *Agape and Eros*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953) pp. 514 and 622. He notes several instances in Augustine's writings besides *Epist. CXIV*, cap. v, 19 where this idea appears, e.g. "*Quod ergo praemium immortalitatis postea tribuit, dona qua coronat, non merita tua. . . . Coronat autem in nobis Deus dona misericordiae suae.*" *In ev. Jn.*, tract. iii. 10. See also *Conf.*, lib. IX., cap. xiii. 34.

foreknowledge of God.²³ Neither does he cite Peter's subsequent linking of the terms to the sacrament of Holy Baptism as a means of peering into the topic of predestination. One might consider what kind of questions are raised, however, when predestination and the foreknowledge of God are juxtaposed over sacraments objectively and subjectively viewed. If the sacraments were to be treated in the *locus* of subjective justification (a term not used by Luther), Luther would then be confronted with the consideration of *objective* sacraments establishing a *subjective* justification. Such questions lie in wait for later Lutheran systematicians who would categorize justification in objective and subjective terms—an investigation which is beyond the scope of this paper. If, however, this movement is already implicit in Luther's pursuits, then one might expect him to draw a connection between the *opus* constructs as used in predestination contexts and those used in sacramental contexts, but we do not find him travelling that way.

Luther is very much concerned with the subjects of the verbs—who is doing what *coram Deo*? This question will

²³See Alister McGrath, "The Anti-Pelagian Structure of 'Nominalist' Doctrines of Justification," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 57 (1981):108-111. Also by the same author *Iustitia Dei*, 2 vols., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), vol. 1, p. 128-129.

run headlong into the issue of objective sacraments. Perhaps the tension in this scheme underlies the whole question of the use of *opus* constructs—something which Luther is attempting to describe. Was Luther in the Heidelberg Theses moving towards the emphasis of objectively valid causes or was he opting for subjectively apparent effects such as the ability to despair in true humility—or was there yet another path?

When Luther explains Thesis 27 by stating that the good works of Christians are the result of an arousing, he describes a stimulation which comes upon one who has observed and been instructed by the works of a Christ. These works draw one upward and outward.

If we look at them, we are moved to imitate them. For this reason the Apostle says, "Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children" [Ephesians 5:1]. Thus deeds of mercy are aroused by the works through which he has saved us, as St. Gregory says: "Every act of Christ is instruction for us, indeed, a stimulant."²⁴

Yet Luther is not clear as to where Christ's works are to be sought. In the Scriptures which relate his suffering servanthood? In one's self where Christ is living? In one's works which are stirred in us by Christ's works (*excitantur ab operibus eius*)? A great divide remains between the Christ observed and the Christ communicated

²⁴LW 31:57; WA 1,364,32-36.

wherein Christ is "one with us" as described in his explanation of the twenty-sixth thesis.²⁵

Thesis 28 throws back its own light upon Thesis 27. There the love of God "does not find but creates that which is pleasing to it," while human love "comes into being through that which is pleasing to it."²⁶ Love thus described radiates a creative power. It serves as a medium for the divine *fiat*, making lovable what otherwise were objects of righteous wrath. Here Luther would turn an objective genitive into a subjective genitive when he opposes the Aristotelian dictum that "the object of love is its cause." If such a proposition were true, then the entire Augustinian schema would collapse, reflecting a situation in which love would be drawn downward to its objects rather than drawing its objects upward from earthly appearances to heavenly realities. Attacking the position which would otherwise have turned Augustinian ideology on its head, Luther believes that he has struck at the heart of the Aristotelian school, hoping to demonstrate that "philosophy is contrary to theology." Turning the phrase, he maintains that the economy of salvation proclaims an

²⁵LW 31:56. "*Sic enim per fidem Christus in nobis, imo unum cum nobis est,*" WA 1.364.23-24.

²⁶LW 31:57; WA 1,365,1-2.

object of love which is not its cause: "Sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive. . . . This is the love of the cross, born of the cross, which turns in the direction where it does not find good which it may enjoy, but where it may confer good upon the bad and needy person."²⁷

Augustinian is the placement of "God" as the subject of "love" as subjective genitive, the fundamental operation of God in Augustine's school of thought. Love is God's creative work, operating in man to make him lovable and pleasing to God: "The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it."

Luther, however, does not here explicitly link the "love of God" in Thesis 28 with the "Christ" of Thesis 27. One might infer from what has been written that there is a connection, but the manner of Luther's argument allows one to posit a priority of love for which Christ is then an agent. Where Christ is love's agent rather than love's identity, there grace must be seen in terms of power rather than as gift. Augustinian ways of speaking about Christ, love, and power will ultimately be burst by Luther's exposition of the Scriptures. From this position stated at Heidelberg, it is consequently contingent upon Luther to fit

²⁷LW 31:57; WA 1,365,11-15.

the sacraments into this schema—if he can—but for now his focus is fixed on a Scholastic-Aristotelian target.

Luther notes that Aristotelianism has its own sort of anti-synergistic passivity when he writes: "all power of the soul is passive and material and active only in receiving something."²⁸ Here, however, he is operating not from the viewpoint of man but of God. It is contrary to theology to suggest that God is a being which in all things "seeks those things which are its own and receives rather than gives something good."²⁹ Luther maintains that God's love is not of the sort which seeks and receives love from man so that man's love must first be operative prior to grace. Rather, the love of God "flows forth and bestows good. Therefore, sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive."³⁰ He posits that "This is the love of the cross, born of the cross, which turns in the direction where it does not find good which it may enjoy, but where it may confer good upon the bad and needy person."³¹

²⁸LW 31:57.

²⁹LW 31:57.

³⁰LW 31:57.

³¹LW 31:57.

While all this may be marshalled in evidence against a synergistic view, it fails to address a monergistic power-love which is irresistible. As long as this issue remains unattended, it imperils salvation by grace through faith as promise and gift. Augustinian monergism may be argued favorably against an Aristotelian optimism but it falters when pressed from other angles. This might have become apparent to Luther in the previous year when he suggested that Karlstadt check the teachings of the *scholasticos doctores* against the writings of Augustine. Karlstadt, who had resisted Luther's teachings on justification, set out to disprove Luther by studying Augustine but was instead so caught up in Augustine that he went even farther with the bishop of Hippo than Luther was prepared to go. Alister McGrath writes,

It is at this point that differences between Luther and Karlstadt are clearly discernable. In his works dating from this early period, Karlstadt appears as a remarkably faithful interpreter of Augustine, where Luther often appears as his critic. Thus Karlstadt follows Augustine in developing an antithesis between law and *grace*, rather than *gospel*, and emphasizes the priority of *grace*, rather than *faith*.³²

³²Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), vol. 2, p. 21. See also Alister McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, (New York: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1985), pp. 44-46, and Gordon Rupp, *Patterns of Reformation*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), pp. 55-63.

Such issues are not in the forefront when Luther comes to the theological climax of the Heidelberg Theses which is followed by a philosophical *denouement*.

The Aristotelian Philosophical Theses

The philosophical grouping consists of twelve theses which attempt "first of all to prove that the scholastics understand Aristotle incorrectly, but at the same time to make clear that Aristotle can provide support neither for theology nor for natural philosophy."³³ Scholastic theologians typically maintained that theology and Aristotelian philosophy were practically inseparable and virtually compatible. For example, Johann Bonemilch von Laaspe, the suffragan bishop and Erfurt professor, maintained: "Without Aristotle, no one becomes a doctor of theology."³⁴

Luther realized the sharp contrast between Augustinianism and Aristotelianism. The debate, however, was nothing new to Luther's time.³⁵ It had been ebbing and

³³Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation*, trans. James L. Schaaf, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 234-235.

³⁴WA Ti 5, no. 5967. Cited in Brecht, vol. 1, p. 34.

³⁵In Heidelberg particularly, the differences between Scholasticism and Humanism had been felt for quite some time. James Overfield notes that in the mid-1400's the University of Heidelberg resisted any progress suggested by humanism, being deeply entrenched in Scholasticism. Peter

flowing from the thirteenth century roughly paralleling the initial coining of the two *opus* phrases. Alasdair MacIntyre thoroughly and aptly describes the rival schemes of inquiry between the two:

In certain aspects it seemed to be the case that the Augustinian scheme could be true only if the Aristotelian was false, and vice versa. Hence at once an Augustinian dilemma. Admit the Aristotelian corpus into the scheme of studies and you thereby confront the student with not one, but two claims upon his allegiance, claims which at key points are mutually exclusive. Exclude the Aristotelian corpus from the scheme of studies and you put in question both the universal, integrative claims of Augustinianism and the claims of the university, at least as understood in Paris. It was on the ability of the protagonists of Augustinianism to resolve the issues posed by this dilemma that the fate of their doctrine turned, something which became increasingly more evident in each successive decade of the thirteenth century So the Aristotelian philosopher and the Augustinian theologian appealed to rival and incompatible standards both in evaluation and in explanation.³⁶

Luder (a relative of Martin?) first introduced humanist lectures in Heidelberg between 1456 and 1461 and some tolerance was shown but classes were poorly attended, especially after Luder moved to Erfurt in 1461. Elector Frederick I failed to replace Luder with another salaried humanist. Conducting the disputation in Heidelberg, Luther was in the heart of matters between Scholasticism and Humanism, the *via antiqua* and the *via moderna*, Aristotle and Augustine. James Overfield, *Humanism and Scholasticism in Late Medieval Germany*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 55-56.

³⁶A. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), pp. 109-112. On Luther's Augustinianism against the Scholastics, see also Leif Grane, "Luthers Kampf um die Erneuerung der Theologie (1515-1518)," *Modus Loquendi Theologicus*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), pp. 23-200.

Shortly after the conclusion of the disputation, Luther made the following statement showing that it was his real intent to delineate the incompatibilities between Aristotelianism and Augustinianism.³⁷ For Luther, the Occamist Augustinians could only juxtapose the two by a misunderstanding of one or the other or both. In this case, he claims it is their faulty understanding of Aristotle—if only they understood Aristotle rightly, they would not trifle with it:

These theses were discussed and debated by me to show, first, that everywhere the Sophists of all the schools have deviated from Aristotle's opinion and have clearly introduced their dreams into the works of Aristotle whom they do not understand. Next, if we should hold to his meaning as strongly as possible (as I proposed here), nevertheless one

³⁷Alister McGrath notes that a confusion can arise "by the variety of interpretations placed upon the term 'Augustinian' by historians and theologians alike. At least four senses of the term may be distinguished in writings of contemporary medieval scholarship." These we summarize from McGrath as follows: 1) the theology of the Latin west in general in so far as it represents a refraction of that of Augustine; 2) The theology of the Augustinian Order such as the Order of the Hermits of St. Augustine without necessarily corresponding to the teaching of Augustine—an "Augustinian" theology need bear no relation to that of Augustine just as the early Franciscan school bears no relation to that of Francis; 3) the theology of a specific group within the Augustinian Order, which corresponds to a greater extent with the teaching of Augustine; and 4) a theology which corresponds to that of Augustine, particularly in relation to his teaching on original sin, freedom of the will, and predestination. *Iustitia Dei*, vol. 1, pp. 173-174. In the course of this paper, Luther is represented as an Augustinian of the fourth order while the majority of those gathered for the disputation at Heidelberg represent the third.

gains no aid whatsoever from it, either for theology and sacred letters or even for natural philosophy. For what could be gained with respect to the understanding of material things if you could quibble and trifle with matter, form, motion, measure, and time—words taken over and copied from Aristotle?³⁸

The Occamist Augustinians who had gathered at Heidelberg—whether during the course of the debate or subsequently—must have perceived Luther's intimations that they were incompetent as regards both their Augustinianism and their Occamist Aristotelian Nominalism,³⁹ but it was not Luther's intent merely to be contentious. He was probing a course which would bring him to judge the former to be equally unsatisfactory in confessing the Gospel as the latter.

The Occamist Augustinian Dichotomy

Luther had grouped his theses into two sections entitled "Theological Theses" and "Philosophical Theses." In the former, he promotes Augustine, "the most faithful

³⁸LW 31:70; WA 9,170,1-9.

³⁹A. McGrath would clarify that Occamism was not Nominalism or Terminalism in its pure sense, preferring the term *via moderna*. (*Iustitia Dei*, vol. 1, p. 166.) "...the term *via moderna* has been employed to refer to the theological school based upon the teachings of William of Occam, including such theologians as Pierre d'Ailly, Robert Holcot, Gabriel Biel, and Wendelin Steinbach. The term Nominalism has frequently been employed in the past to designate this school and we therefore propose to indicate the reasons for preferring the term *via moderna*."

interpreter of Paul." In the latter, he contends against Aristotle. And yet this division is not so purely maintained. In the twenty-seventh thesis of the theological section, two Scholastic terms are introduced. The fact that they come toward the end of the theological theses may be an indicator that he wished to use them as a bridge from one group to the other. Yet, as Borchardt and Merz note in the Munich Edition of Luther's Works:

Here Luther draws from the Scholastic sacramental doctrine for his theological terminology where *ex opere operato* and *ex opere operantis* were understood. To be sure, Luther's leaning upon this distinction was only formal.⁴⁰

As noted above, Luther's use of the term need not have come from the Scholastic sacramental doctrine, per se. It was not sacramental doctrine which gave birth to these terms.⁴¹ Rather, the terms themselves seem to have

⁴⁰Borchardt, H. H. and G. Merz. *Martin Luther: Ausgewählte Werke* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1938) 2nd ed., Band 1, p. 481. *Luther lehnt sich hier in seinen theologischen Ausdrücken an die scholastische Sakramentenlehre an, wo ex opere operato und ex opere operantis unterschieden werden (vgl. u. A. Bd. 2, 205, 225 und Anmerkungen dazu). Freilich ist Luthers Anlehnung an diese Unterscheidung nur formal. Denn das opus operantis des Priesters (das Handeln des vollziehenden Priesters) vermag nach Luthers Lehre dem opus operatum (dem gemäß der Einsetzung Christi vollzogenem Sakrament) keine Kraft zu verleihen, während das opus operatum des Christen allein dadurch Kraft hat, daß es geschieht durch das opus operantis (sc. Christi).*

⁴¹Michael Schmaus maintains that the terminology of *opus operatum* and *opus operans* are not in sacramental

influenced the Scholastic doctrine on the sacraments. Concern for the context of the source, however, would not salvage a salutary use of the terms. Luther's attempt to utilize this pair of scholastic expressions in a Christological manner would ultimately prove unsatisfactory, but at the time it marked a significant development sure to seize upon the ears of his audience. What had it been about *opus operatum* and *opus operantis* that made Thesis 27 a particularly salient point to be disputed among those gathered at the Heidelberg cloister? Luther's audience was primarily composed of Occamist Augustinians.⁴² Was it merely their Occamism that he was provoking as he set about constructing these theses? The second set of theses seems more apt to accomplish this. What then?

theology but rather in the realm of Christology: "*Die Terminologie vom opus operans und opus operatum ist in die Theologie nicht im sakramentalen, sondern im christologischen Bereich eingedrungen, nämlich in der Behandlung der Frage nach den guten und den bösen Momenten in der Kreuzigung Christi,*" *Katholische Dogmatik*, (Munich: Max Hueber Verlag, 1964), vol. 4, p. 85.

⁴²See Heinrich Boehmer, *Road to Reformation*, trans. John W. Doberstein and Theodore G. Tappert, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1946), p. 207: "Thus, like the ninety-seven theses of September 4, 1517, they [the Heidelberg Theses] were directed primarily against the Occamists, who were represented in the audience not only in goodly numbers but also with some distinction. Representing the Erfurt Occamists, there appeared his old teacher, Usingen, who had entered the Black Cloister there in 1512."

To Luther "Occamist Augustinianism" may have appeared oxymoronic.⁴³ What place did Aristotelian nominalism have with Neo-Platonic Augustinianism?⁴⁴ Perhaps Luther, without fully foreseeing where the impetus would take him, was proceeding to distill Neo-Platonic Augustine from Aristotelian Scholastic impurities. Through this process Luther would come to discover in later years that what had not evaporated was not worth keeping, as Jeremiah Schindel and Theodore Bachmann maintain: "Ultimately, Luther's solution lay not in the preference for *operantis*

⁴³"How was it that a movement which was initially so hostile towards scholasticism came to develop a scholasticism of its own within so short a period? The full importance of this question has only recently been appreciated, as it appears to point to an important link between late Renaissance Aristotelian humanism and Protestant (especially Reformed) theology." Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 3.

⁴⁴See Gordon Rupp's discussion of Luther critics, typified by Pere Congar, who at one moment can describe Luther as a Realist and a Platonist and then in the next breath as a Nominalist, Occamist and Aristotelian: "The confusion is not Luther's but his critic's, who does not pause to disentangle the two kinds of dualism, the Biblical tension of 'flesh' and 'spirit' and the Platonic and Neo-Platonic dualism of soul and body. Getting Luther wrong at this point, he consequently blurs Luther's doctrines: just as two lenses in field-glasses, wrongly focussed, affect the whole landscape which is viewed through them. It is perhaps significant that P. Congar does not quote one famous statement of Luther about the Church: 'That I have called the Church a *spiritual assembly* you have insultingly taken to mean that I would build a Church as Plato builds a state that never was.'" *The Righteousness of God*, p. 334.

over *operatum*, but in the rejection of the *opus* altogether."⁴⁵

Were these terms an adaptation of Augustinian thought and language? Was Luther borrowing them from the Scholastics, intending to sift them through an Augustinian sieve? At times Luther seems to bear some reliance on both as Rupp has advanced while reviewing Luther's early lectures on Romans:

Luther stands midway between the long mediaeval discussion of these problems and the Protestant controversies which were to occupy the next century and a half. He owes much to St. Augustine, but he owes something, too, to the Nominalist tradition. With St. Augustine, he stresses the grace and glory of God, and the bondage of the human will apart from grace, in the things pertaining to salvation. But with the later schoolmen he is concerned for the Divine Liberty, for the God who is "debtor to nobody" . . . and he has the Occamist distrust of secondary causes. Above all, he is concerned for the immutability of God, for with this is bound up the faithfulness of the divine promises. Luther has a horror of contingency, where chance or the unpredictable spontaneity of the human will might mock the purposes of God. . . . he knew in his own experience and in that of others, that speculation on such subjects might easily lead to terrible despair.⁴⁶

B.A. Gerrish suggests that it was Luther's own experience with Occamism that led him to reject Occamism:

Luther was, in many respects, an Occamite, so that his assault on reason's capabilities in the domain of

⁴⁵Jeremiah J. Schindel and E. Theodore Bachmann, *LW* 35:64, n. 39.

⁴⁶Rupp, pp. 185-186.

theological assertions may well have been suggested to him by his training in the *via moderna*. . . . The truth of the matter is that Luther's own distinctive contribution to the Nominalists' "critique of reason" finally made the Nominalists themselves the chief objects of his attack. . . . what may have been, at the outset, a distrust born from Nominalist teaching became, in the end, a distrust of reason precisely in the teachings of the Nominalists themselves. But it will also be shown how the habits of thought which Luther detected chiefly in the Nominalists he detected in Thomas Aquinas, too; indeed, in Luther's judgment, it was St. Thomas himself who, by the introduction of the Aristotelian ethical and metaphysical categories into theology, laid the foundations for the peculiar way in which the later Schoolmen allowed legalism to corrupt the Gospel of Christ.⁴⁷

The terms in question originated with a scholar who worked in the Western Augustinian tradition, yet it is even more interesting to note that these terms came into use during the century when the great Aristotelian-Augustinian debate began and blossomed. Generally, Peter of Poitiers (d. 1205), a disciple of Peter Lombard, is credited with being the first to use *opus operatum* as a theological term.⁴⁸ It was then taken up by Hugo (d. 1210), Innocent III (d. 1216), Praepositinus (d. 1217), William of Auxerre

⁴⁷B.A. Gerrish, *Grace and Reason*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 114.

⁴⁸For comprehensive histories of these terms, see Constantin von Scházler, *Wirksamkeit der Sakramente; Ex Opere Operato in ihrer Entwicklung innerhalb der Scholastik und ihrer Bedeutung für die christliche Heilslehre*, (Munich: n.p., 1860), and Arthur M. Landgraf, "Die Einführung des Begriffspaares Opus Operans und Opus Operatum in die Theologie," *Divus Thomas*, 1951, pp. 211-213.

(d. 1231), Albertus Magnus (d. 1280), Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), Bonaventure (d. 1274), and Duns Scotus (d. 1308). Later the terms are found in Biel (d. 1495) through whom Luther most likely came to be familiar with them.⁴⁹

In his doctoral thesis, Thomas Manteufel has demonstrated Luther's familiarity with the medieval scholastic *opus* terminology evidenced as early as 1513 in his treatment of Psalm 111:3 in the Vulgate,⁵⁰ although not much room is given to investigate whether and in what way Luther may be carrying on a distinctly Augustinian tradition when he takes up these terms or whether Luther is leaning on a Scholastic systemization.⁵¹ Karl Bauer writes that these lines of thought are previously found in Augustine, citing particularly *On the Spirit and the Letter of the Law*.⁵²

In this earliest known occurrence in his writings, Luther treats *opus operantis* and *opus operatum* in a context having nothing in particular to do with the Lord's Supper.

⁴⁹This is Helmut Hennig's intimation as put forth in his work "Die Lehre von Opus Operatum in den lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften," *Una Sancta* 13 (1958): 123.

⁵⁰Thomas Manteufel, "Martin Luther and The Concept of Opus Operatum," ThD. dissertation, University of Iowa, December 1988, pp. 63-67.

⁵¹Places where Manteufel does mention Luther's use of Augustine may be found on pp. 41, 55-56, 114-115, 162, 203.

⁵²Karl Bauer, "Die Heidelberger Disputation Luthers," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 21 (July 1901): 258.

Manteufel describes a Luther who utilizes the *opus* terms to relate a kind of cooperation in faith between God and man.

Luther:

. . . regards praise and every other work of faith as a joint work of God and man. It is man's own work and yet also God's work. This description corresponds to the concepts of *opus operantis*, the work of the *operans* or worker, and *opus operatum*, the result produced, which also has a significance derived from God's involvement, as great, righteous, acceptable and so forth. The most important making or *opus operantis* in these actions is the divine involvement.

Luther distinguishes between the "works of God's hands," as His creatures either in the natural or the spiritual realm, and the "works of God," as accomplishments worked by Him through them. The first are made monergistically, by God alone. The second are done by the creatures in cooperation with God.⁵³

Thus, by a monergistic work, unlovable man is made lovable and is subsequently able to cooperate in lovely works.

When the monergistic first part is defined *mediately* (as they are for the early Luther in the sacraments), it can then also be described in terms of objectivity and validity. Manteufel offers the position of Luther on Baptism circa 1516:

The grace of baptism is regularly and always equal as far as it comes from the side of God and the sacrament. It can, however, be unequal, insofar as regards the ministers, merit, the passion of Christ, and the receiving subject. For the inference of this conclusion I presuppose that the

⁵³Manteufel, pp. 64 and 66.

effect of Baptism is twofold. A certain effect results absolutely from the *opus operatum* or administered sacrament, the obstacle having been put aside, the merit of the devotion of the administrator as well as the recipient having been disregarded. A certain affect results not from the *opus operatum*, but the *opus operans* or disposition of merit of the administrator or recipient. And the first effect of Baptism, resulting from the *opus operatum*, is properly the sacramental effect. Secondly, it is to be noted that several causes concur for the effect of Baptism: the principal effective cause, namely, the glorious God Himself; secondly, the meritorious cause, which is the passion of Christ, from which the sacraments have efficiency; thirdly, the dispositive cause of the receiving subject; fourthly, the dispositive cause of the conferring minister; and according to any of these the grace conferred in Baptism can be variegated.⁵⁴

Faith, identified as an *opus operantis*, is seen as the monergistic work of God: "The work and power of God is faith, for He Himself makes men righteous and works all virtues."⁵⁵ Manteufel finds this view of *opus operantis* extant throughout Luther's writings where faith is treated as an *opus operantis* in the use of the sacrament, being called for in both preparation and subsequent use.⁵⁶

⁵⁴Manteufel, p. 73. WA 1,151,2-15.

⁵⁵Manteufel, p. 76. WA 3,532,13-14.

⁵⁶Manteufel, pp. 77-78. He puts this finding in opposition to that of Oswald Bayer who suggests that "Luther's later view rejects the notion of a necessary *opus operantis* in the sacrament, because it is a work of preparation before the sacrament, rather than brought about by it," Oswald Bayer, *Promissio*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), p. 102-103.

It was not within the scope of Manteufel's dissertation to investigate Luther's reliance upon Augustine, but there may be some merit in discussing whether the *opus* terms were in the Augustinian tradition or rather a reaction to it. If the *opus* terms are in accord with Augustine's monergistic theology, then when Luther discredits the terms he also, albeit implicitly, discredits Augustine in this matter. While such an investigation lies beyond the present limitations of this researcher, the heavy preponderance of the monergism of God and the making of man lovable by a gracious power without man's cooperation is clearly in the Augustinian tradition. Augustinian, too, are examples of the irresistible desire to distinguish systematically between man's work and God's work—but one still cannot come free from a sort of "monergistic cooperation" where God is doing all the work, but man is seen as cooperating or acting in accordance with God where the sacraments are consecrated and administered. In a purely monergistic model, positions like this must be inserted so that man is seen as something more than a puppet. Working within these parameters, one inevitably gets caught up with the human side of things, pondering efficacy and validity in terms of man's part.

Was this the case for Luther? We note again that Luther's use of *opus* constructs in Thesis 27 does not come initially in a sacramental context but in the expounding of Christ's work in us making us "pleasing to God by the grace of the acting work [*operis operantis*]." ⁵⁷ Is this a discussion of objective and subjective, of valid and effective? The understanding of the *opus* terms here hangs on the understanding of Christ. According to this model, Christ is the one who works in us through our imitation of him and in fulfillment of the commands of God which have been given us through faith. There is nothing very sacramental about that. In fact, as the evidence below hopes to demonstrate, the sacraments as means of grace mitigate against such a position. This Augustinian Christ does not fare any better in the sacraments than does a square peg in a round hole-and in this thesis Luther appears to be squarely in the Augustinian tradition. Nevertheless, Luther continues to perceive his discomfiture as being prompted by Scholasticism rather than Augustinianism. The pressure which Luther senses, however, is that of a new wine maturing; Augustinian wineskins can contain this way of speaking about Christ as little as the Scholastic variety. If Christ is indeed the one doing "the work of the one doing

⁵⁷LW 31:56; WA 1,364,28-29.

the work" as reinterpreted by Luther in Thesis 27's *opus operantis*, then other parts of the model of which *opus operantis* is a part must also change commensurately. At stake for *opus operantis* is the understanding of Christ: A change in the understanding of Christ will work a change in the understanding of faith. What then of *opus operantis*? Can it still be used in a salutary manner? These are questions which cannot be answered merely by treating Scholasticism as the arch-enemy and Augustinianism as the lone ranger.

In this sense, Luther's attack on the Scholastics must not be caricatured as merely charging them with semi-Pelagianism—as if Luther was doing to the Scholastics what Augustine had done to the Pelagians.⁵⁸ The Scholastics

⁵⁸Alister McGrath contests the opinion that the Nominalists were semi-Pelagians. "It appears that the context of later 'Nominalist' doctrines of justification—such as Biel's—makes a Pelagian or 'semi-Pelagian' interpretation very difficult to sustain. . . . The charge of Pelagianism against Biel can only be sustained by ignoring the context within which he sets his doctrine of justification, or by misunderstanding the nature and purpose of the dialectic between the two powers of God as used by the 'Nominalists' to emphasize the radically contingent nature of the ordained order of salvation." Alister E. McGrath, "The Anti-Pelagian Structure of 'Nominalist' Doctrines of Justification," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 57 (1981):107-119. The citation above is found on pages 118-119. Articles which expose a superficial understanding of Scholastic theology may lead those who hold such an understanding to think that Rome is not all that different. This might be investigated as a possible consequence of the discovery of what is similar between

were, in a manner of speaking, attempting to run God by His attributes—something not unlike what Augustine had done. The Scholastics, however, had far outdone Augustine in dogmatizing their own universal formulations to describe God's relationship to man in the efficacy of sacraments. Their method sought to define God systematically and then conclude how He must work on the basis of such attributes. The end result seemed to dovetail easily with the conclusions reached in the Pelagian schema, thereby suggesting a "semi" Pelagianism which could have been inaugurated through a faulty reading of Aristotle.

Luther believed that Thomas and the Scholastics did not understand Aristotle correctly:

For Aristotle speaks of subject and accidents so very differently from St. Thomas that it seems to me this great man is to be pitied not only for attempting to draw his opinions in matters of faith from Aristotle, but also for attempting to base them upon a man whom he did not understand, thus building an unfortunate superstructure upon an unfortunate foundation.⁵⁹

Augustinianism and Scholasticism. A tangent to this present work is the proposition that the later Luther realized and surpassed that cursory caricature of Rome which is now held by many Lutherans and that the maintenance of such a position threatens to obscure the very identity of Lutheranism today with the inability to make such a distinction.

⁵⁹LW 36:29; WA 6,508,22-26.

Yet it would not ultimately suffice for Luther merely to replace an Aristotelian position with a Neo-Platonic Augustinianism. Herman Sasse notes:

The root of Augustine's understanding of the sacrament as a sign is not the Bible but his Neo-Platonism. The sacrament is a visible sign of the invisible *res* or *virtus*. . . . One can understand that Zwingli and all his successors appealed to Augustine as their authority. Augustine was not yet able to describe the *proprium* of this Sacrament as the schoolmen did when they distinguished three strata in this Sacrament; that which is sign only (*sacramentum tantum*); the *res*, i.e. the invisible grace; and in between these two, that which is sign and *res* (*sacramentum et res*). The *sacramentum tantum* (mere sign) is bread and wine. The *res tantum* is the bond of love between the members of Christ's mystical body; the *sacramentum et res* is the body and blood of Christ, which is *res* in relationship to the real *res*. This is an attempt on the part of medieval theology to overcome the weakness of Augustine's theory. . . . Actually, this complicated distinction proves that Augustine's distinction of *signum* and *res* cannot be applied to the Sacrament of the Altar. Augustine himself, as shown later, was unable to understand the Eucharist in that way which would abolish the Real Presence.⁶⁰

Saarnivaara echoes this same conclusion when he writes that:

The Luther of the Heidelberg disputations knows as yet only the second part of the work of God, the renewal by the gift of grace and forgiveness as its supplement. In the spring of 1518, Luther's conception of justification still is of the Augustinian type.⁶¹

⁶⁰Herman Sasse, *This is My Body*, (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977), p. 21, n. 10.

⁶¹Uuras Saarnivaara, *Luther Discovers the Gospel*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), p. 91.

In the Heidelberg Theses, Luther's attempt to solve one problem merely created another. Striving to renounce synergism, Luther presses a pair of Scholastic *opus* terms into service while putting an Augustinian spin on them. In Occamist Augustinianism we are confronted with the dichotomy in a nutshell.

If Luther's writings seem a bit nebulous under such scrutiny, it is no wonder. On the one hand the great monergist Augustine can speak of a cooperating grace, and on the other the Scholastics, as Chemnitz notes, can cite Augustine in support of their position when they quote from *Against the Donatists*:

It makes no difference, when one is treating of the integrity and sanctity of a sacrament, what the man believes who receives the sacrament and with what kind of faith he is imbued. It is indeed of the greatest importance for the way of salvation, but for the question of the sacrament it is of no importance. For it can happen that a man has a perfect sacrament and a false faith.⁶²

In our own century, Anders Nygren has commented:

Something similar is also true of the contrast between Platonism and Aristotelianism in Medieval thought. From the point of view of method the distinction may be important, but if we turn our

⁶²Augustine, *Against the Donatists*, Bk. 3, ch. 14, as quoted in Chemnitz, *The Examination of the Council of Trent*, 4 vols., trans. by Fred Kramer, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), 2:88. *Fieri enim potest, ut homo integrum habeat sacramentum, et perversam fidem*. E. Preuss, *Examen Concilii Tridentini*, (Berolini: G. Schlawitz, 1861), p. 252b.

attention to the basic religious and ethical motif, we find again that it is in both cases the same. Of all the distinctions mentioned, it can be said that although they may give expression to a tension, perhaps even an opposition, yet it is always an opposition on a common basis, and the most important thing is not what divides but what is held in common.⁶³

If this is true, then one might expect that Luther's attempts to dwell on the *differences* between Augustinian Neo-Platonism and Scholastic Aristotelianism would eventually lead him to see what they held in common. If what they held in common failed to satisfy, Luther would have to look elsewhere for direction in proclaiming the Gospel in its full sweetness. To test this, we must move beyond Heidelberg, beyond the early Luther, to see if in fact Luther was able to sustain his claim that Augustine was Paul's most faithful interpreter over against the Scholastics.

⁶³Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), p. 611. McGrath maintains that ". . . realism is effectively the *via media* between nominalism and universalism." *Iustitia Dei*, vol. 1, p. 168.

LUTHER AND OPUS AFTER THE HEIDELBERG DISPUTATION

In this chapter, the *opus* trail leads us out of the Heidelberg Theses into the later contexts where these constructs are used by Luther. A cursory review finds them woven into his work even as late as the Genesis lectures which concluded about one year prior to Luther's death. Along the way we will note the specific instances in which they are used to discover whether Luther uses or develops the terms and their related concepts differently than that evidenced in the Heidelberg Disputation. If so, how and where does the transformation occur? Is the transformation permanent?

This section will be concerned primarily with the texts in which Luther uses *opus* terminology, noting also related writings in the same periods, recognizing that he addresses similar concerns in passages which are dedicated to something other than debating the use of these Scholastic terms. Similarly, while the terms *opus operans* and *opus operatum* were not initially limited to loci dealing with the Lord's Supper, we find them most often referenced by Luther

in such contexts. Thus we will note particularly the writings of Luther that deal with the Lord's Supper.

The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body
of Christ and the Brotherhoods
December, 1519

The first consideration of *opus* constructs after the Heidelberg Disputation comes in the context of a sermon on the Blessed Sacrament. Luther defines first what a sacrament is¹ and works from there. At this juncture, Luther acknowledges that *opus* terminology is intimately connected to the basic understanding of the nature of what the mass or the sacrament is:

There are many who regardless of this change of love and faith rely upon the fact that the mass or the sacrament is, as they say, *opus gratum opere operato*, that is, a work which of itself pleases God, even though they who perform it do not please him. From this they conclude that however unworthily masses are said, it is nonetheless a good thing to have many masses, since harm comes [only] to those who say or use them unworthily. I grant everyone [the right to] his opinion, but such fables do not please me. For [if you desire] to speak in these terms, there is no creature or work that does not of itself please God, as is written in Genesis 1, "God saw all his works and they pleased him." What is the result if bread, wine, gold, and all good things are misused, even though of themselves they are pleasing to God? Why, the consequence of that is condemnation. So also here: the more precious the sacrament, the greater the harm which comes upon the whole community from its misuse. For

¹LW 35:49; WA 2,742,5-14.

it was not instituted for its own sake, that it might please God, but for our sake, that we might use it right, exercise our faith by it, and through it become pleasing to God. If it is merely an *opus operatum*, it works only harm everywhere; it must become an *opus operantis*. Just as bread and wine, no matter how much they may please God in and of themselves, work only harm if they are not used, so it is not enough that the sacrament be merely completed (that is, *opus operatum*); it must also be used in faith (that is, *opus operantis*). And we must take care lest with such dangerous interpretations the sacrament's power and virtue be lost on us, and faith perish utterly through false security of the completed sacrament.²

In the Neo-Platonic Augustinian way of thinking, a *signum*-sacrament is good, right, and salutary only when what it signifies (*res signata*) is operative. *Opus operatum* here refers to a sacrament that is nothing more than a dead-end *signum*.³ *Opus operantis* is the exercise of faith which

²LW 35:62-63; WA 2,751,18-752,3. Regarding "many masses," Oberman writes, "One should not expect such mystical experiences every time one takes communion. They are extra gifts *ex opere operantis*, above and beyond the normal satisfaction *ex opere operato*. Frequent communion is therefore advisable. One should be grateful for this gift of union when it occurs; but when it does not happen, one should remember that the kingdom of God exists in love and not in the sweet experience of the union." Heiko Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, (Durham, NC: n.p., 1983), p. 358.

³"In general, Luther sees *opus operatum* as the mark of heathenism: 'All religions which disagree with the true Christian religion are *ex opere operato*: "This I will do, it will be pleasing to God." But we must hold fast the rule that all *opus operatum* is idolatry.'" Wisløff, p. 48, citing WA Ti 5, No. 5504. Cf. LW 54:436. This quote attributed to Luther in the winter of 1542-1543 is anachronistic, though some scholars seem to treat this term synchronistically as if it means the same thing whenever it

serves as the vital and essential transmitter between the *signum* and the *res signata*. "Already here, Luther rejects *opus operatum* and has opted for *opus operantis*, that is, that the sacrament has its effect solely on the basis of faith, which it requires—not by itself, apart from faith."⁴

In *The Sacrament of Penance* which appeared in mid-October of that same year, Luther writes:

Everything, then, depends on this faith, which alone makes the sacraments accomplish that which they signify, and everything that the priest says come true. For as you believe, so it is done for you. Without this faith, all absolution and all sacraments are in vain and indeed do more harm than good. There is a common saying among the teachers that goes like this: Not the sacrament, but the faith that believes the sacrament is what removes sin. St. Augustine says this: The sacrament removes sin, not because it takes place, but because it is believed. For this reason in the sacrament one must studiously discern faith."⁵

This primacy of faith, however, is spoken of in such a way that the matter of the sacrament itself is deemed subordinate. The way Augustine puts it and the way Luther describes it, the impression could be furthered that one could do without the external sign of the sacrament as long

is used—but this is not necessarily to be assumed in Luther's case.

⁴Martin Luther, *Studienausgabe*, 4 vols. to date, (Berlin: Evangelische Verlags-Anstalt), I, 282, n. 70. See, for example, *LW* 35:64, n.39.

⁵*LW* 35:11; *WA* 2, 715, 30-38.

as one could be prompted toward the *res signata*, a movement which is accomplished by faith.⁶ The external sign serves primarily to prompt one toward the thing signified, the movement from the sign to the reality being accomplished by faith.⁷ And yet a third thing enters: the words of Christ.

⁶See *Treatise on the New Testament* (1520), "The words are the divine vow, promise, and testament. The signs are the sacraments, that is sacred signs. Now as the testament is much more important than the sacrament, so the words are much more important than the signs. For the signs might well be lacking if one only has the words; and thus without sacrament, yet not without testament, one might be saved. For I can enjoy the sacrament in the mass every day if only I keep before my eyes the testament, that is, the words and promise of Christ and feed and strengthen my faith on them." *LW* 35:91; *WA* 6,363,4-11. Note also Wisløff's reference to Luther citing Augustine's "*crede et manducasti*" (believe and you have eaten): "The very reference to this tradition shows that it is not Luther's intention to claim that the sacraments are utterly unnecessary. The question revolves around exceptional instances, and even in the exceptional instances the question turns upon a certain relation to the sacrament, namely, that one desires it," Wisløff, p. 27.

⁷"In the *Sermon on Penitence*, in the *Resolutiones*, and in the *Asterici*—all written in 1518—Luther rejects the doctrine that the sacrament is efficacious *ex opere operato*, that is produces its effect unless the recipient obviates this effect by an actual sin or by the intention to commit a sin. In the passages concerned, the Reformer refers to the old sentence: "Not the sacrament, but the faith of the sacrament, justifies. Faith must precede, not only accompany, the reception of the Sacrament. Divine grace, then, is active in us even before we receive the Sacrament, and this is true, according to Luther, even of Baptism. This understanding of the relationship between faith and sacrament means, indeed, the end of the *ex opere operato*, though by no means a rejection of the objective character of the Sacrament. It was modern Protestantism that read its negation of the objective means of grace into the words of the 'young Luther.' The Sacraments do not create faith; they are rather accepted by faith, and serve, as acts of God, to

The absolving words of the priest are a ground of certainty as *externum verbum*. They deliver what they say. They are words of *promise*. The counterpart of faith is here the words of Christ as given in the absolution: "[Forgiveness of guilt] depends exclusively upon the word of Christ and your own faith. For Christ did not intend to base our comfort, our salvation, our confidence on human words or deeds, but only upon himself, upon his words and deeds."⁸ Where Christ was the operator behind *opus operans* and *operis operantis* at Heidelberg in 1518, faith steps in to take the reins of *opus operantis* in 1519.

Luther seems deferentially to make use of these constructs for the sake of the academic readership which had grown accustomed to such terminology, which is beginning to show signs of strain like old wineskins filled with the new wine coming to maturity. Ultimately, Luther gives it up as a vain endeavor:

All this comes from the fact that they pay more attention in this sacrament to Christ's natural body than to the fellowship, the spiritual body. Christ on the cross was also a completed work which was well pleasing to God. But to this day the Jews have found it a stumbling block because they did not construe it as a work that is made use of in faith.

assure the faithful of God's grace." Herman Sasse, *This is My Body*, (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977) p. 66-67.

⁸LW 35:12; WA 2,716,15-18.

See to it, then, that for you the sacrament is an *opus operantis*, that is, a work that is made use of, that is well pleasing to God not because of what it is in itself but because of your faith and your good use of it. The Word of God too is of itself pleasing to God, but it is harmful to me unless it also pleases God. In short, such expressions as *opus operatum* and *opus operantis* are vain words of men, more of a hindrance than a help.⁹

Thus far, *opus operatum* has deferred to *opus operantis* which defers to faith, which defers to Christ. In this light, one might recognize that Luther is not here merely criticizing a "magical" use of the sacrament as later Lutherans were to do with their anathemas against *ex opere operato*,¹⁰ a charge which many numerous scholars, Roman Catholic and Lutheran, have protested as being an unfounded

⁹LW 35:63-64; WA 2,752,4-14.

¹⁰This phrase developed considerably later than the other terms and may in some citations bear a different connotation. It might be interesting to note that *ex opere operato* is found in the *Concordia* only in the Augsburg Confession and its Apology. A study of the sources in Reu's *The Augsburg Confession* illustrates the phrase *ex opere operato* was not to be found in the earliest form of the *Confessio Augustana*, nor in the document presented to the Emperor, but only appears in the *editio princeps* of 1530-1531 See M. Reu, *The Augsburg Confession*, (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1930), pp. 181 and 231. Manteufel pointed out in his corrigenda for this thesis that "What is said here is true with regard to AC XIII (i.e., was added in 1531 *editio princeps*), but the phrase does appear in XXIV, 29." The reason for this later emendation has yet to be discovered by this researcher.

accusation today as well as in the 16th Century.¹¹ Carl Wisløff, for example notes that:

Protestants constantly misunderstand the Catholic teaching concerning the operation of the sacrament *ex opere operato*. This doctrine aims to express two things. Negatively, that sacramental grace is not given on the basis of the subjective worthiness of the officiant or the recipient. Positively, the sacramental grace is occasioned by the validly administered sacramental sign.

. . . it must be said that, also in Catholic circles, no one maintains that the liturgical act as such has the power of propitiation. The efficacy of the sacrifice of the mass has its basis in the fact that the sacrifice is Christ's own sacrifice. As the sacrifice of the Church—and here the liturgical aspect may be brought in—the sacrifice of the mass works *quasi ex opere operato*, and as the sacrifice of the celebrating priest and of those who co-sacrifice it works *ex opere operantis*, that is, *secundum dispositionem offerentium* ["by the act of one doing it," that is, "according to the spiritual condition of those offering the sacrifice."]¹²

¹¹Bellarmino, for example, criticized Melanchthon's use of *opus nostrum ex opere operato* as missing Luther's point—and doubted whether Luther ever really addressed the crux of the problem. See Wisløff, *The Gift of Communion*, pp. 56-59.

¹²Carl Wisløff "Worship and Sacrifice," in *The Unity of the Church*, ed. Vilmos Vajta, p. 47 and 155. For an example of a mechanical-magical judgment against *ex opere operato* see John G. Deterding, "Lutheran *Sola Fide* vs. Roman Catholic *Ex Opere Operato* on the Basis of the Confessions," BD thesis, Concordia Seminary, 1947. Modern Roman Catholicism would respond: "The *opus operatum* does not mean that the sacraments produce their proper effects in an automatic and mechanical way or by some sort of magic. The mediation of grace, both in its actual occurrence and in its 'measure', is also essentially dependent on the disposition of the recipient (which is a condition, not a cause). It depends on the faith of the recipient (DS 1528) as he lays himself open and surrenders to the sacramental grace, as

In the sixteenth century, Johannes Mensing bristled against Melanchthon's treatment of the phrase in the *Apology to the Augsburg Confession*. He complains that Luther and his comrades accuse the theologians of works righteousness in a simple-minded way. He counters that:

. . . what takes place in the sacraments must (in so far as it is a work in itself, *opus operatum*) not be in vain, but a sheer work of God and Christ, which cannot be without any power. In contrast, the work of man does not extend to the soul where God does not work within. Now let everyone understand who can whether in my baptism Christ's word be not more and better than my own. When I believe, that is my work, but under Christ. When Christ baptizes me, it is His work; my faith in my baptism is *opus operans*, the baptism in itself and considered apart from my faith is where Christ works without me. The effect is justification or forgiveness of sin. Let anyone understand who will whether I do more for my justification, or Christ, who gives me faith along with the forgiveness of sin. Therefore, when the theologians say that the sacraments of Christ are rich in grace or give grace *ex opere operato*, they speak thus to honor Christ as the chief distributor of the sacraments. Our teachers are clean of

also on the intention of the recipient (DS 782, 1806, 1877) and of the minister 'to do what the Church does' (DS 1611f., 1617)" *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, Karl Rahner, S.J. ed., New York: Crossroads Publications, 1975, p. 1479. ". . . It is clear that sacraments are only efficacious in faith, hope and love. Hence they have nothing to do with magic rites. They are not magic because they do not coerce God, and so because they are God's free act upon us. Moreover, they have nothing to do with magic because they are efficacious only to the extent that they encounter man's openness and freedom. If a person responds to God's offer with an acceptance, he has to profess, of course, that this acceptance of his also takes place by the power of God's grace," Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, New York: The Seabury Press, 1978, p. 414.

conscience and far from all Anabaptists, consecrated against all arguments of the Lutherans and the Anabaptists when they say that in the sacrament of Christ there is an invisible power and grace, which, with all our cooperation, works justification, forgiveness of sin, renewal, new birth, infusion of faith and all virtue—to which we who are working add nothing, not even to believe, but suffer and let everything along with the Holy Ghost to be given to us *ex opere operato*, and this Christ does now certainly, where He finds our hearts not resisting or fundamentally false, so as to permit sin in unbelief or by an evil will.¹³

In a number of respects, one might easily imagine the Luther of 1519 in agreement with the Mensing of 1533—and yet it is probably not the early Luther whom Mensing addresses, but the later Luther, author of *Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests*, 1533. In 1519, however, Luther cautions against a use of *opus operatum* because it too easily impedes the description of how faith makes use of the sign [res]. Luther's early understanding of faith sees it as that which is operative in moving from the *signata* to the *res signata* itself. Here we find Luther critical of *opus operatum* because it does not extol the primacy of faith working toward the epitome of love. His descriptions of faith, however, still attribute to man the doing of the

¹³Johannes Mensing, *Antapologie* (1533-1535), pt. II, fol. CIX-CXII, quoted in Hugo Laemmer, *Die Vortridentischkatholische Theologie des Reformations-Zeitalters aus den Quellen dargestellt* (Berlin: Gustav Schlawitz, 1858), pp. 220-221; translated in Manteufel, p. 6.

verbs: "We must take care lest the sacrament's virtue and power be lost on us," and the sacrament is "a work that is made use of" through "your good use of it."

Early Luther describes Christ's work as a completed *opus* which one must apply to himself through faith. In such a formulation, Christ has completed his work—but this is of no avail unless it becomes effective in us appropriated by faith. In Heidelberg's Thesis 27, Christ was working in us to make us pleasing to God. Here the mass is from God to us, "not instituted for its own sake, that it might please God, but for our sake." This was something more than the traditional *opus* terms could convey.

A Treatise on the New Testament
July, 1520

In his *Treatise on the New Testament*, the emphasis is still on heavenly realities, not trusting our senses to perceive rightly the things of grace among the mundane.

"If we desire to observe the mass properly and to understand it, then we must surrender everything that the eyes behold and that the senses suggest . . . until we grasp and thoroughly ponder the words of Christ, by which He performed and instituted the mass and commanded us to perform it. For therein lies the whole mass, its nature, work, profit, and benefit."¹⁴

¹⁴LW 35:82; WA 6,355,21-27.

Here lingers the Augustinian concept of lower to higher, visible to invisible, the sign and the heavenly reality to which the sign points (*signum* and *res signata*):

So we constantly find in the Scriptures many of these signs, given along with the promises . . . For we poor men, living as we do in our five senses, must always have along with the words at least one outward sign to which we may cling and around which we may gather—in such a way, however, that this sign may be a sacrament, that is, that it may be external and yet contain and signify something spiritual; in order that through the external we may be drawn into the spiritual, comprehending the external with the eyes of the body and the spiritual or inward with the eyes of the heart.¹⁵

There is also the concentration of the whole mass in “the words of Christ, by which he performed and instituted the mass.” Not what we see but what we hear Christ say is decisive. His words and faith are not yet fully correlative. This may be observed in the subsequent document where the words loom so large as to downgrade the sign (done in a way already by Luther's rejection of *opus operatum*). Later, Christ's body and blood will have their *proprium* along with his words. Then Luther's use of the *opus* terms will have spent their usefulness. Such freight they are unable to carry.

The correlation of faith and the words is advanced when the words are *promise*. To the promise, signs are added

¹⁵LW 35:86; WA 6,359,1-3 & 6-9.

which in contrast with the words are regarded as external and subordinate; "Pay more heed to the word than to the sign."¹⁶ "Without the words, nothing is derived from the mass."¹⁷ When Luther emphasizes the words, he is not merely interested in the speaking of them as if they were an incantation. That would be an *opus operatum* way of speaking. In emphasizing the words he is also emphasizing the one whose words they are. These words are *Christ's* words. They are incarnational in that there is no sense in which they are symbols which point to some ideal; they cannot be dissected into *signum* and *res signata* but must be certain: "For he desired this to be so certain that he himself even died for it."¹⁸ On one hand Luther exhorts the Christian to the work of setting the words of Christ as precious stones and keeping them, while on the other hand he confesses that they must be given:

Everything depends, therefore, as I have said, upon the words of this sacrament. These are the words of Christ. Truly we should set them in pure gold and precious stones, keeping nothing more diligently before the eyes of our heart, so that faith may therefore be exercised. Let someone else

¹⁶LW 36:67; WA 6,533,29-30. "Nos ergo aperientes oculum discamus magis verbum quam signum, magis fidem quam opus seu usum signi observare."

¹⁷LW 35:82; WA 6,355,27-28. "On wilche nichts von der meß empfangen wirt."

¹⁸LW 35:88; WA 6,360,27-28.

pray, fast, go to confession, prepare himself for mass and the sacrament as he chooses. You do the same, but remember that this is all pure foolishness and self-deception if you do not set before you the words of the testament and arouse yourself to believe and desire them. You would have to spend a long time polishing your shoes, preening and primping to attain an inheritance, if you had no letter and seal with which you could prove your right to it. But if you have a letter and seal, and believe, desire and seek it, it must be given to you, even though you were scaly, scabby, stinking and most filthy.¹⁹

Shortly thereafter, Luther would draw the reader into the thinking that:

. . . the mass is nothing else than a testament and sacrament in which God makes a pledge to us and gives us grace and mercy. I think it is not fitting that we should make a good work or merit out of it. For a testament is not a *beneficium acceptum*, sed *datum*, it does not take benefit from us but brings benefit to us.²⁰

The movement in *datum* is from God to man. This stands opposed to any synergistic understanding of mass as sacrifice, from man to God (*beneficium acceptum*), but it is also inherently incompatible with a monergistic understanding which works love by a sovereign, divine operation. Implicitly, it also shows the inadequacy of the term *sacramentum* to stand alone as the counter to *sacrificium*. *Beneficium* delivers the freight of the Gospel here.

¹⁹LW 35:88; WA 6,360,29-361,7.

²⁰LW 35:93; WA 6,364,17-21.

Having previously stated that the terms *opus operatum* and *opus operantis* were more of a hindrance than a help, Luther is not satisfied merely to restate the terms in this treatise. Neither does he see much value in debating them:

"It is easy to say that a mass is effective whether it be performed by a pious or a wicked priest, that it is acceptable *opere operati* or *opere operantis*. But to produce no other argument except that many people say this, and that this has become the custom, is poor proof for its correctness."²¹

Instead, Luther all the more clearly opts for faith over *opus*, preferring to concentrate on faith than on works of the priestly office: "For faith must do everything. Faith alone is the true priestly office."²² Faith, in this treatise, is not yet correlative with the *data*. The contexts, however, suggest that Luther is moving toward a *fides* that cannot be without its incarnational *datum*—the means of grace—so that one might possibly even say: "God doesn't give faith; He gives gifts." Luther has all along described faith as extant without mentioning how it comes to

²¹LW 35:102; WA 6,371,10-14.

²²LW 35:101; WA 6,370,24-25. The editor's note 39 in the American edition notes that Luther used this expression ["*Lasst uns des gewissen spielen und das ungewisse farenn.*"] as a German equivalent of Augustine's "*Tene certum, dimitte incertum*".

be. The latter he is unable to do without mentioning the *datum*.

So, Luther presses on, keeping synergistic tendencies well out of the way when he places the emphasis somewhere other than works for the sake of certain faith—even though he has yet to describe how this priestly faith comes to poor miserable sinners:

Let us hold fast to that which is sure and let the uncertain go. That is, if we would help these poor [departed] souls or anyone else, let us not take the risk of relying upon the mass as a sufficient work [*genugsam Werk*]. Rather, let us come together in the mass with priestly faith present in every urgent need, in Christ and with Christ, praying for the souls [of the departed], and not doubting that we will be heard. Thus we may be sure that the soul is redeemed. For the faith which rests on the promise of Christ never deceives or fails.²³

Midway through 1520, the mass as it was being conducted was seen by Luther more in terms of a work performed than as a means of grace—and it was a work incapable of providing the one thing that was absolutely necessary: “In short, the mass must do all kinds of things, except its own distinctive work, namely, faith.”²⁴ In following the line of reasoning which rejected the mass as an *opus operatum* and extolling faith as *opus operantis*,

²³LW 35:103; WA 372,4-11.

²⁴LW 35:108; WA 6,375,20-21.

Luther was hindered in identifying faith with its content as bestowed through the external means, a recognition which dawned with the words of absolution. By pursuing the debate this way, Luther seems to have inadvertently severed faith from its means. He would later reunite sacrament and faith apart from the *opus* terminology, but some progress may be seen in the months which immediately followed.

The Babylonian Captivity of the Church
October, 1520

In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther continues the momentum away from works and into faith which led him to make open condemnations like: "those who have made the sacrament an *opus operatum* and a sacrifice teach monstrous and wicked doctrines."²⁵ After some preliminary considerations on various topics such as whether Thomas understood Aristotle correctly, Luther establishes that "sacrament" is a *testament*, a promise sealed by the death of the one who makes it as opposed to a good work and a sacrifice.²⁶ Since the sacrament is a promise, access to it "is to be gained not with any works or power or merits of

²⁵LW 36:37; WA 6,513,11-13.

²⁶LW 36:37-38; WA 6,513,14-33.

one's own, but by faith alone. . . . In no other way can man come to God or deal with Him than through faith."²⁷

Secondly, Luther maintained that "God usually adds some sign as a memorial or remembrance of the promise, so that thereby we may serve him the more diligently and he may admonish us the more effectually."²⁸ Luther, however, criticizes those who direct their attention primarily to the sign rather than to the promise:

In the first place, not one of [the theologians of the Sentences] treats of that which is first and foremost, namely, the testament and the word of promise. And thus they make us forget faith and the whole power of the mass. In addition, they discuss exclusively the second part of the mass, namely, the sign or sacrament; yet in such a way that here too they do not teach faith but their preparations and *opera operata*, participations, and fruits of the mass.²⁹

Faith is the crux of the matter. Luther writes:

Hence we see how great is God's wrath with us in that he has permitted godless teachers to conceal the words of this testament from us and thereby to extinguish this same faith as far as they could. It is already easy to see what is the inevitable result

²⁷LW 36:8; WA 6,514,12-13 & 21-22. See also LW 36:39; WA 6,514,13-17, "For where there is the Word of the promising God, there must necessarily be the faith of the accepting man. It is plain, therefore, that the beginning of our salvation is a faith which clings to the Word of the promising God, who, without any effort on our part, in free and unmerited mercy takes the initiative and offers us the word of his promise."

²⁸LW 36:43; WA 6,517,39-518.2.

²⁹LW 36:44; WA 6,518,25-29.

of this extinguishing of the faith, namely, the most godless superstition of works and the prescribing of works immediately crowd into their place. By them we have been carried away out of our own land, as into a Babylonian captivity, and despoiled of all our precious possessions. This has been the fate of the mass; it has been converted by the teaching of godless men into a good work. They themselves call it an *opus operatum*, and by it they presume themselves to be all-powerful with God. Next they proceed to the very height of madness and after inventing the lie that the mass is effective simply by virtue of the act having been performed, they add another one to the effect that the mass is none the less profitable to others even if it is harmful to some wicked priest who may be celebrating it.³⁰

It is at this point that a fissure between Luther and Augustine becomes especially apparent. In stating his opposition to the idea that "the mass is effective simply by virtue of the act having been performed," Luther is countering the basic line of reasoning used by Augustine in his writings against the Donatists, albeit in a different context.

It was almost inevitable, pursuing the particular course that he did, that Luther would have to deal with the subject matter raised by the Donatist controversy as well as the solution proposed by Augustine, for while it was the thirteenth century that gave birth to the *opus twins*, it was Augustine's dispute with the Donatists that generated their conception. It is surprising, however, that when Luther

³⁰LW 36:46-47; WA 6,520,7-17.

does touch on the matter initially, he makes reference to the work of Gregory (559-604) rather than that of Augustine (354-430):

From the above everyone will readily understand the often quoted saying of Gregory: "A mass celebrated by a wicked priest is not to be considered of less effect than one celebrated by a good priest. Neither would a mass of St. Peter have been better than that of Judas the traitor if they had offered the sacrifice of the mass." This saying has served many as a cloak to cover their godless doings and because of it they have invested the distinction between the *opus operatum* and the *opus operantis*, so as to be free to lead wicked lives themselves and yet benefit other men. Gregory speaks the truth, only they misunderstand his words. For it is true beyond a question that the testament or sacrament is given and received through the ministration of wicked priests no less completely than through the ministration of the most saintly.³¹

Why did Luther select the later Gregory when Augustine was the propagator of such thinking? Was it because Luther was not aware of Augustine's anti-Donatist writings? Not likely. Was it because Gregory had summarized the argument so concisely or that Luther's audience would more readily

³¹LW 36:55; WA 6,525,27-35. See Carl F. Wisløff, *The Gift of Communion*, trans. Joseph M. Shaw, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), pp. 132-133: "With respect to the essence of the mass we are all alike, lay people and priests. This last point is supported by citing Gregory's word to the effect that a bad priest's mass is not worth less than a good priest's. But this statement had been used by the tradition in support of the teaching concerning the difference between *opus operatum* and *opus operantis*. *Ex opere operato* the mass is valid in every single instance, because the sacrificial gift and the principal sacrificing priest is the same in every instance."

identify themselves with Gregory than with Augustine or that Luther mistakenly attributed an Augustine citation to Gregory? Perhaps. But could it be that Luther already foresees a weakness in this line of reasoning which he will later have to deal with—and that he would rather do so in response to Gregory than in response to Augustine “the most faithful interpreter of Paul”? For the moment, however, Luther has other fish to fry. He is intent on filleting the catch of the day, knifing away the scales of an *opus* theology to get at the meat of the Gospel by grace through faith which is not of works:

Now the mass is part of the gospel; indeed, it is the sum and substance of it. For what is the whole gospel but the good tidings of the forgiveness of sins? Whatever can be said about forgiveness of sins and the mercy of God in the broadest and richest sense is all briefly comprehended in the word of this testament. For this reason popular sermons ought to be nothing else than expositions of the mass, or explanations of the divine promise of this testament; this would be to teach the faith and truly to edify the church. But in our day the expounders of the mass make mockery and jest with allegorical explanations of human ceremonies.³²

Earlier he had stated:

You have seen that the mass is nothing else than the divine promise or testament of Christ, sealed with the sacrament of his body and blood. If that is true, you will understand that it cannot possibly be in any way a work; nobody can possibly do anything in it, neither can it be dealt with in any other way than by faith alone. However, faith is

³²LW 36:56; WA 6, 525, 36-526-4.

not a work, but the lord and life of all works. Who in the world is so foolish as to regard a promise received by him or a testament given to him as a good work which he renders to the testator by his acceptance of it? What heir will imagine that he is doing his departed father a kindness by accepting the terms of the will and the inheritance it bequeaths to him? What godless audacity is it, therefore, when we who are to receive the testament of God come as those who would perform a good work for him!³³

Luther is well on his way to dismissing the first half of the *opus operatum/opus operantis* duo. But he is also hinting at the dismissal of the classical understanding of latter term. He has previously consigned *opus operantis* to the faith of the believer, removing it as a term which would direct one's attention to the work of the priest. In this portion of *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther implicitly demonstrates that when he has dismissed the sacrament as an *opus operatum* he has also in effect dismissed the necessity to concern one's self with an *opus operantis* since the benefit of the sacrament is not dependent on a work which they have performed:

For in consecrating and administering, the priests are our servants. Through them we are not offering a good work or communicating something in an active sense. Rather, we are receiving through them the promises and the sign; we are being communicated unto in the passive sense. This is the view that has persisted with respect to the laity right up to the present day, for of them it is said not that they do something good but that they

³³LW 36:47-48; WA 6,520,22-31.

receive it. But the priests have strayed into godless ways; out of the sacrament and testament of God which ought to be a good gift received, they have made for themselves a good deed performed [*facto sibi bono opere*], which they then give to others and offer up to God.³⁴

Clearly, Luther wanted to part company with those who considered the sacrament as *opus operatum*, a good deed performed. This was evident to Luther because even in the institution of the sacrament, Christ was not performing a good work but was proffering a sign:

"When He instituted this sacrament and established this testament at the Last Supper, Christ did not offer Himself to God the Father, nor did He perform a good work on behalf of others, but, sitting at the table, he set this same testament before each one and proffered to him the sign."³⁵

Here it is *testament* which runs as the counterpart to sign and not the *res signata* with faith acting as the operative movement which attains the *res signata*. In the latter operation, *opus operantis* can still be at work giving its definition to faith. That is no longer the case when faith has "testament" and "promise" as its counterpart—and these have pulled "sign" into their service from its former service to *res signata*.

Luther's line of inquiry forced the reconsideration of other contingencies such as the role of the priest in the

³⁴LW 36:49; WA 6,521,27-33.

³⁵LW 36:52; WA 6,523,22-25.

mass. But when Luther wants to contrast sacrament with sacrifice, he still allows himself to say that regardless of the administrant, the sacrament and testament: ". . . works its own work in the believer but an alien work in the unbeliever."³⁶ The sacrament "works its own work"—an *opus operatum*. This felicitous inconsistency demonstrates that Luther has something more to say about the sacraments but has yet to find a way to say it. Clearly Christ offers the bestowing gifts of the mass in the way of a testament whose direction is decisive:

Therefore, just as distributing a testament or accepting a promise differs diametrically from offering to sacrifice, so it is a contradiction in terms to call the mass a sacrifice, for the former is something that we receive and the latter is something that we give. *The same thing cannot be received and offered at the same time, nor can it be both given and accepted by the same person, any more than our prayer can be the same thing as that which our prayer obtains, or the act of praying the same thing as the act of receiving that for which we pray.*³⁷

As Luther sought to be freed from the inconsistencies which were the consequence of understanding

³⁶LW 36:56; WA 6,526,9-10.

³⁷LW 36:52; WA 6,523,38-524,3, emphasis added. WA 6.523.24, "*in mensa sedens singulis idem testamentum proposuit et signum exhibuit.*"

sacrament as an *opus*,³⁸ he was likewise moving away from the understanding of the sacrament as a lower-to-higher *signum*:

Yet all are agreed that the sacraments are "effective signs" of grace, and they reach this conclusion by this one argument: If the sacraments of the New Law were mere signs, there would be no apparent reason why they should surpass those of the Old Law. Hence they have been driven to attribute such great powers to the sacraments of the New Law that they think the sacraments benefit even those who are in mortal sin; neither faith nor grace are required—it is sufficient that no obstacle be set in the way, that is, no actual intention to sin again. Such views, however, must be carefully avoided and shunned, because they are godless and infidel, contrary to faith and inconsistent with the nature of the sacraments. For it is an error to hold that the sacraments of the New Law differ from those of the Old Law in the effectiveness of their signs. For in this respect they are the same.³⁹

Luther was here making a passing reference to a question that had been the subject of scholastic debate: the question of whether one could learn anything about the effectiveness of New Testament sacraments by drawing comparisons to the Old Testament sacrifices. Asserting the primacy of faith over works, Luther is able to conclude:

The difference, then, between the legal symbols and the new and old signs is that the legal symbols do not have attached to them any word of promise requiring faith. Hence they are not signs of justification for they are not sacraments of the faith that alone justifies, but only sacraments of

³⁸"It is certain, therefore, that the mass is not a work which may be communicated to others but the object of faith (as has been said), for the strengthening and nourishing of each one's own faith." *LW* 36:51; *WA* 6, 523, 6-7.

³⁹*LW* 36:64-65; *WA* 6, 531, 31-532, 2.

works. Their whole power and nature consisted in works, not in faith. Whoever performed them fulfilled them, even if he did it without faith. But our signs or sacraments, as well as those of the fathers, have attached to them a word of promise which requires faith and they cannot be fulfilled by any other work. Hence they are signs or sacraments of justification, for they are sacraments of justifying faith and not of works. Their whole efficacy, therefore, consists in faith itself, not in the doing of a work. Whoever believes them fulfills them, even if he should not do a single work. This is the origin of the saying: "Not the sacrament, but the faith of the sacrament justifies." Thus circumcision did not justify Abraham and his seed and yet the Apostle calls it the seal of the righteousness by faith because faith in the promise to which circumcision was added was the spiritual circumcision of the foreskin of the heart which was symbolized by the literal circumcision of the flesh. In the same way it was obviously not Abel's sacrifice that justified him, but it was his faith by which he offered himself wholly to God, and this was symbolized by the outward sacrifice.

Thus it is not baptism that justifies or benefits anyone, but it is faith in that word of promise to which baptism is added. This faith justifies and fulfills that which baptism signifies. For faith is the submersion of the old man and the emerging of the new. Therefore the new sacraments cannot differ from the old sacraments, for both alike have the divine promises and the same spirit of faith, although they do differ vastly from the old symbols—on account of the word of promise, which is the sole effective means of distinguishing them. . . . The sacraments, on the contrary, are not fulfilled when they are taking place, but when they are being believed.

It cannot be true, therefore, that there is contained in the sacraments a power efficacious for justification, or that they are effective signs of grace. All such things are said to the detriment of faith and out of ignorance of the divine promise. Unless you should call them effective in the sense that they certainly and effectively impart grace where faith is unmistakably present. But it is not

in this sense that efficacy is now ascribed to them; as witness the fact that they are said to benefit all men, even the wicked and unbelieving, provided they do not set an obstacle in the way—as if such unbelief were not in itself the most obstinate and hostile of all obstacles to grace. To such an extent have they exerted themselves to turn the sacrament into a command and faith into a work. For if the sacrament confers grace on me because I receive it, then indeed I receive grace by virtue of my work and not by faith; and I gain not the promise in the sacrament but only the sign instituted and commanded by God. Thus you see clearly how completely the sacraments have been misunderstood by the theologians of the *Sentences*. In their discussions of the sacraments they have taken no account either of faith or of promise. They cling only to the sign and the use of the sign and draw us away from faith to the work, away from the word to the sign. Thus, as I have said, they have not only taken the sacraments captive, but have completely destroyed them, as far as they were able.

Therefore, let us open our eyes and learn to pay heed more to the word than to the sign, more to faith than to the work or use of the sign.⁴⁰

While this argumentation might have been appropriate to counter those scholastics who maintained an efficacy by *opus operatum*, it would prove wholly insufficient and unsatisfactory in later discussions with those who would maintain an immediate working of faith and grace, such as the Anabaptists. It was not enough merely to say that "it is not baptism that justifies or benefits anyone." Such a statement would leave the door open for others to promote things about the sacraments that Luther himself could then

⁴⁰LW 36:65-67; WA 6,532,19-533.32.

not confess, for example, that the Spirit can work faith apart from means or that the sacraments are themselves unnecessary. Luther's thinking is not complete at this point because he does not anticipate that argument which sees faith as separated from the means, means which bestow the gifts creating and strengthening faith.

Faith is apparently to be present if the sacraments are to be something more than works which merit God's pleasure, but Luther has not specified *how* faith comes to be in those who would receive the sacraments rightly. He anticipates this question when he writes that, "Faith is a work of God, not of man, as Paul teaches. The other works he works through us and without our help, but this one alone he works in us and without our help."⁴¹ He neglects, however, to make an explicit connection between faith, God's work, and the sacraments as would be shown in subsequent writings.⁴² Thus, in 1520, even though he realizes that the

⁴¹LW 36:62; WA 6,530,17-18.

⁴²E.g. *The Misuse of the Mass* (1521), where Luther alludes to an intimate connection: "Here you see clearly that no work of satisfaction or sacrifice of reconciliation is of any use; only faith in the given body and the shed blood reconciles. Not that faith does the reconciling in and of itself, but it lays hold on and obtains the reconciliation which Christ has performed for us. Much less can your foolish work or sacrifice, which takes place without Christ and without faith." LW 36:177; WA 8,519,17-22.

opus constructs cannot bear the freight of the Gospel, he still has not managed to uncouple its load from his intellectual engine.

Early in the following year, Luther's fourth response to the papal bull *Exsurge Domine* was printed. He is unequivocal in his criticism that the sacraments do not confer grace merely by their outward performance and presses further the *opus operantis* idea:

My opponents have taught that the holy sacraments give grace to anyone, even if he does not repent his sin and has no intention to do good. They claim it is enough that he not "put an obstacle in the way," that is, that he be without wanton intention to sin. . . . Besides the removal of the obstacle, that is, the evil intention, the reception of the sacrament requires not only genuine repentance for sin, but the worthy reception of the sacraments also requires that there be a firm faith within the heart.⁴³

He will not allow for grace apart from faith and an intention to do good,⁴⁴ stating that: "without faith, no sacrament is of any use, indeed, it is altogether deadly and pernicious. . . . Without faith, no one can have any dealings with God, nor receive his grace."⁴⁵ Faith is what pleases God and is sufficient unto salvation:⁴⁶ ". . . it is

⁴³LW 32:12-13; WA 7,317,28-36.

⁴⁴LW 32:13; WA 7,319,10-13.

⁴⁵LW 32:15; WA 7,321,28-29 & 34.

⁴⁶LW 32:15; WA 7,322,9-12.

better, if faith is not present, to stay far away from these words and signs which are the sacraments of God."⁴⁷

In this document Luther does not appear to be confronting Scholastic terminology; hence the *opus* terms are not used. Rather, Luther is grasping for the Gospel purely preached: "But what Christ does, or why he is there, we hear neither preached nor rightly taught by anybody."⁴⁸ Freed from the terms which had entangled him, Luther begins to speak of faith that only receives:

From all this, I think it is clear that faith is necessary for the sacrament, a faith which does not doubt that it receives everything which the words declare and the sacraments signify. Their twaddle about the 'putting away of the obstacle' is profitless, indeed it is heretical to claim that with the mere "putting away of the obstacle" without faith, grace is granted by the sacrament. This saying, taken from the teachings of St. Augustine, holds true, "Not the sacrament but the faith in the sacrament makes righteous and saves." And in his commentary on the Gospel according to St. John, St. Augustine says of baptism, "The word is added to the element, and there results a sacrament," and again, "The water touches the body, yet purifies the soul, not because of the work or the pouring, but because of faith."⁴⁹

Luther's way of speaking about faith led him to a lumping together of "sacraments" as is evidenced by

⁴⁷LW 32:16; WA 7,322,24-25.

⁴⁸LW 32:17; WA 7,324,23-24.

⁴⁹LW 32:17; WA 7,324,25-35. See Augustine, *On the Gospel of John* [John 15:3] (*In Ioannis Evangelium*). Migne 35, 1840; also LW 31:193, n. 69.

statements like: "Christ knew very well that we receive everything in one kind, indeed by faith alone, without the sacrament, yet it was not without reason that he instituted both kinds."⁵⁰ When Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, and Holy Communion are lumped together under a word like *sacramentum*, their particular *propria* and beauty of gifts is diminished. It would not be surprising to find Luther using the word *sacramentum* with decreasing frequency in his later years in favor of a speaking about the gifts in their particular means.

In his sermon of Maundy Thursday that year, less than a week before he departed for Worms, he preaches unfettered by scholastic terms, not attempting to meet academics on their own ground. Here he preaches for the people that they might receive the Lord's Supper in full assurance of faith rather than in obedience to a command of the church.

He continues to maintain that there is no benefit for those who "openly live in sin or who wilfully harbor evil thoughts."⁵¹ Nor is it profitable for those who come

⁵⁰LW 32:62; WA 7,399,28-30. Cf. *Treatise on the New Testament*, ". . . the sacraments are all of one kind, and it is the nature of a sacrament or testament that it is not a work but only an exercise of faith." LW 35:93; WA 6,364,29-31.

⁵¹LW 42:171; WA 7,692,2-4.

out of habit or merely because the church orders it or performs it. He includes a citation from Augustine's *Preaching on Psalm 21* here that "the sacrament seeks a hungry, thirsty, and desirous soul which yearns for it," sounding much like he would in the *Large Catechism*. Such a faith and desire in effect render the *opus operantis* inoperative: "After all, the sacrament—even God himself—can bestow nothing on you against your will. Since God's gifts are so great, they demand a great hunger and desire, but they avoid and shun from a forced and unwilling heart."⁵²

Luther still has the tendency to speak of faith as some quality in man: "The greater and more fervent this desire is in you, the better fit you are to receive the sacrament," and yet "when a man has this hunger and so is prepared for the sacrament, he must carefully avoid receiving it while trusting in his own worthiness."⁵³ Still, Luther draws nearer to an objective gift being given through the words of Christ: "Every Christian should have these words close to himself and put his mind on them above all others. . . . We should take all of these words to heart, placing our trust in them and not doubting that with these the Lord invites us to be his guests at this abundant

⁵²LW 42:172; WA 7,693,9-11.

⁵³LW 42:173; WA 7,693,24-25 & 694,4-6.

meal,"⁵⁴ and, "Worthy reception of the sacrament, however, is not based on our diligence and effort, our work and prayers, or our fasting, but on the truth of the divine words."⁵⁵

"A person should receive the sacrament on the strength of these words, be mindful of them, and not doubt that in him there takes place the intent and content of those same words of Christ, namely that Christ's body is given for him and that his blood was shed for him, and that he is an heir of the New Testament, that is, of God's grace and favor for eternal life. Faith creates godliness and drives out all sin, grants strength in sickness, enlightens in all blindness, heals all evil inclinations, guards against sin, and performs every good deed. In brief, the fruit of such faith is that never can there remain any frailty; for in faith the Holy Spirit is given, and thereby a man loves God because of the abundant goodness received from him."⁵⁶

For Luther, the description of faith no longer bears a Neo-Platonic movement from lower to higher but speaks rather of what is given to the broken:

The only question is whether you thoroughly recognize and feel your labor and your burden and that you yourself fervently desire to be relieved of these. Then you are indeed worthy of the sacrament. If you believe, the sacrament gives you everything you need.⁵⁷

Still later that year, Luther penned *The Misuse of the Mass*, continuing to deal with the Sacrament of the Altar

⁵⁴LW 42:173; WA 7,694,18-19 & 21-23.

⁵⁵LW 42:174; WA 7,695,10-12.

⁵⁶LW 42:175; WA 7,695,29-696,7.

⁵⁷LW 42:177; WA 7,697,19-22.

apart from scholastic semantics. Even though he does not make an explicit reference to the *opus* terms, we may still recognize that he is leaving them behind. For Luther if the mass is a sacrifice, it is sufficient that it is done, an accomplished fact. It is not a sacrifice, but a promise. The nature of a promise is such that it cannot be performed. It can only be received. That which was necessary to be performed was completed by Christ and is now a promise offered in the sacrament.

His estimation of Augustine is not spoken of in such superlatives as was done in the Heidelberg theses when he here makes reference to Augustine's *Confessions*:

Do we not see in Augustine many errors, which he retracts, which would all have damned him if he had not been preserved by his faith? . . . That is, they are not as yet perfect; but by virtue of their faith, already begun and still increasing, they are not lost.⁵⁸

As he decries the misuse of what the Lord has instituted, he makes a point of noting that the life of faith is not a progressive thing, but something which satisfies and fills:

It is the desire of a true faith, however, that one should go to the sacrament because he desires it from his heart and is seeking grace, mercy, and the forgiveness of his sins—because he hungers and thirsts

⁵⁸LW 36:188; WA 8,528,27-29 & 33-35.

after righteousness. For this precious royal feast benefits, satisfies, and fills a hungry and empty soul.⁵⁹

This statement represents a kind of a threshold, for faith is on the verge of being described not as an inner impulse or action of man, but as that which is created when a hungry and empty soul is offered Christ who comes through His gracious means.

Concerning the Ministry
Late 1523

In *The Babylonian Captivity*, Luther commended us "to pay more heed to the word than to the sign, more to faith than to the work or use of the sign." In *Concerning the Ministry* three years later, he is doing just that. Luther had been extolling the necessity and vitality of faith as opposed to a mere working of a work, but he had yet to describe how the Lord God creates and sustains this faith graciously. By 1523, the "power" of the Word is running things and this in turn would create the need to radically redefine some key theological terms.

⁵⁹LW 36:226; WA 8,560,29-32. Recalling the *pauper vel eregnum* of the twenty-eighth thesis of the Heidelberg Disputation, we note that there it pointed to a non-deducible, non-gradiationable kind of love in Christ which could not be contained in Augustine's process terminology. Here they are flooded with the Lord's bounty of giving. Love follows faith.

This had been occurring earlier in the year with his writing on *The Adoration of the Sacrament*. "By the eating of this bread he has a share in everything that my body has and does and suffers—not by virtue of the bread or the eating but by virtue of God's promise,"⁶⁰ and again,

This word is the whole Gospel. You will observe and understand that it says nothing about a sacrifice or a good work but about a present and a gift which Christ offers and gives to us and which we should receive and with faith appropriate and hold fast. . . . For this sacrament is the Gospel.⁶¹

Luther's estimation of Augustine is portrayed in his words "Don't let anyone pull you away from the Word through any statement of man, be it Augustine, Jerome, Bernard or even an angel."⁶² Augustine helped Luther to distance himself from a sacrament which is necessarily efficacious and which may be accredited as a God-pleasing human-transforming work. Yet it was not enough to deny what the sacrament is in terms of a human operator. Luther had to say what the sacrament

⁶⁰LW 36:283; WA 11,438,5-9, Note, too, in this context how Luther responds to the use of the term "signifies" as found two paragraphs earlier when he wrote "Likewise with reference to the sacrament. If they want to say that the bread is not Christ's body but merely *signifies* it, they should indicate wherein it is contrary to faith for the bread to be the body of Christ and the wine to be his blood."

⁶¹LW 36:288-289; WA 11,442,13-16 & 22-23.

⁶²LW 36:289; WA 11,443,1-3.

was in terms of what Christ says and thus does (and how that comes about as *donum* in opposition to *opus*):

With this kind of quarreling they both get off the track, so that they emphasize the sacraments and neglect the words. The sacrament then becomes a mere work and faith perishes. For while they busy themselves trying to decide how they may properly know Christ and do him abundant service, they never do get around to considering what he does for them in the sacrament and why he is there and what they are supposed to receive from him, just as if he were there solely for their worship and service. We have it backwards when in the sacrament we think of the works that we ourselves might do and accomplish for the sacrament and pay no attention to the works that the sacrament is supposed to do and accomplish for us.⁶³

In *Concerning the Ministry*, Luther reiterates that something in the priest is not the operative power behind the sacraments. When Luther has driven out this demon, however, he must take care that seven more do not come rushing in to fill the void so that the last state is worse than the first. The vacancy created by this exorcism leads to the greater question: If the sacraments are not themselves automatically effective merely because they are done by a minister of the church, of what use is the one who administers them? Or as Luther himself put it: "What is the use of struggling to secure this office for us who know Christ?"⁶⁴

⁶³LW 36:295; WA 11,448,15-24.

⁶⁴LW 40:28; WA 12,185,1-2.

When the Sacrament of the Altar is seen in this way, a chain reaction is set off—one must also view differently those who administer that sacrament. Herein, the Sacrament of the Altar is reduced to its least common denominator: "Even this remembrance is nothing else than a preaching of the Word."⁶⁵ God's Word is the active ingredient: "For today no other sacrifice is possible than that which is sacrificed and perfected by the Word of God, and since the Word (as we said) is common to all, the sacrifice too must be one pertaining to all."⁶⁶ It was commonality of the faith which prompted Luther in 1520 in the *Treatise on the New Testament* to speak of faith "which makes us all priests and priestesses."⁶⁷ In *Concerning the Ministry* the Word comes first. Without it there can be no faith. The Word is not preached without preachers who are the Lord's gifts as servants of the Word without which the church perishes. To speak now of the ministry as a gift along with the Means of Grace was to speak in a way that was all the more alien to the scholasticism of his day. Care must be taken, however, to note that in the context of the greater question Luther

⁶⁵LW 40:22; WA 12,180,36-37.

⁶⁶LW 40:29; WA 12,185,33-36.

⁶⁷LW 35:102; WA 6,371,22-23, "der uns alle zu pfaffen und [pfeffin] macht."

had not yet altogether settled into a way of speaking about Christ in the way of His gifts. *Concerning the Ministry* was not yet his most evangelical confession of the sacraments. For that reason it cannot serve as his most evangelical confession of the office of the holy ministry.

Marshalling the evidence that neither Christ nor Paul baptized, Luther emphasized the preaching of the Gospel as the primary office, a procedure which he maintains is: "forced upon us by necessity and is commended by the common understanding of faith. For since the church owes its birth to the Word, is nourished, aided and strengthened by it, it is obvious that it cannot be without the Word."⁶⁸ The Christian's ultimate concern is this: "He needs only attend to the substance which is the Word of God, and, full of faith, believe that he can do and attain all that he knows is promised therein,"⁶⁹ and he attributes a certain immaturity of faith to the recipients of his letter when he writes: "Let it be thus until you grow up and fully know what is the power of the Word of God."⁷⁰

"They think that their sacrifices effect grace by the doing of the act of sacrifice itself and not by the person doing it (*opere operati, non operantis*).

⁶⁸LW 40:37; WA 12,191,16-18.

⁶⁹LW 40:39; WA 12,192,31-33.

⁷⁰LW 40:41; WA 12,194,29-30.

They are led to defend such abominable sacrilege by arguing that God regarded favorably the sacrifice of Cain even if he did not so regard Cain as a person. Defending their own sacrifices they say that a sacrifice is an external work, even if offered by one who is damned and unacceptable. But in the church nothing at all counts unless the person first be acceptable, as Abel was, and he was in God's favor not by sacrifice, but by faith and spirit."⁷¹

Thus far, Luther has demonstrated that the sacraments are not something we do and offer to God (*sacrificium*) but rather his bestowal of gifts to us (*beneficium*) which are to be used in the certainty of Christ's words as promise and testament. They are not the ends in themselves. But if they are not ends, are they then the means toward that end? As yet he has not described the sacraments in an altogether gift and gracious way since they are external signs which must be worked upon by a living faith. His incapacity to describe all this leads him to say, "We must reckon with a cross."⁷²

Malachi
1525

Six years after the Heidelberg Disputation, in a series of lectures on the minor prophets, we find the last instance of Luther's use of the present active participle of the *opus* terms. Where once *opus operantis* had been

⁷¹LW 40:29; WA 12,186,5-11.

⁷²LW 40:42; WA 12,195,11.

extolled, it is now tossed onto the same ash heap with *opus operatum*. Here it is noted that *opus operantis*, *opus operatum* and *ex opere operato* were not initially congruous terms, but in this case there seem to be clear parallels:

The Mass, then, is not this sacrifice about which he here speaks, whether you imagine it is *ex opere operantis* or *ex opere operato*. Otherwise even fornication *ex opere operato* would not be sin, because a woman is a good creation of God, just as they say a sacrament is. Nevertheless, all the commandments have regard for the work of the doer. One does not ask how good the thing is but whether one uses it well or badly. Also, a pure sacrifice requires a pure sacrificer.⁷³

Later in the same year, Luther preached three sermons dealing with the Lord's Supper and Confession which came to be published in a single treatise entitled *The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ—Against the Fanatics*. It demonstrates that Luther does not seek to retain *opus* terms as a focal point in his teaching on Holy Communion. One does not further the Gospel by extolling an objectivity of the sacraments just as one does not further the Gospel when faith is spoken of in terms of a movement from lower to higher, external to internal, material to spiritual. Luther is not at his best when he attempts to systematize Gospel and sacrament as he does in this following quote:

"In this sacrament there are two things that should be known and proclaimed. First, what one

⁷³LW 18:396-397; WA 13,681,14-19.

should believe. In Latin this is called the *objectum fidei*, that is, the work or thing in which one believes or to which one is to adhere. Second, the faith itself, or the use which one should properly make of that in which he believes. The first lies outside the heart and is presented to our eyes externally, namely, the sacrament itself, concerning what we believe that Christ's body and blood are truly present in the bread and wine. The second is internal, within the heart, and cannot be externalized. It consists in the attitude which the heart should have toward the external sacrament. Up to now I have not preached very much about the first part, but have treated only the second which is also the best part."⁷⁴

Here, the "best part" is that which is "internal, within the heart, and cannot be externalized." In doing his theology this way, Luther lapses into the Latinesque modes of expression which rendered both Augustine and the Scholastics superfluous. Following this way of speaking, he goes on to describe an attitude which can be experienced and a presence that can be felt in the heart by faith. But at this late date, a substantial difference must be noted:

"Again, I preach the gospel of Christ, and with my bodily voice I bring Christ into your heart, so that you may form him within yourself [*dass du ihn in dich bildest*]. If now you truly believe, so that your heart lays hold of the word and holds it fast within it that voice, tell me, what have you in your heart? You must answer that you have the true Christ, not that he sits there, as one sits on a chair, but as he is at the right hand of the Father. How that comes about you cannot know, but your heart truly feels his presence and through the experience

⁷⁴LW 36:335; WA 19,482,15-25, 483,14.

of faith you know for a certainty that he is there."⁷⁵

Christ comes into the heart by way of the preaching of the Gospel and yet faith is still spoken of within the range of *opus operantis*. He had made a similar statement some six years earlier, but here it is in the altogether different context of his polemics against the *Schwaermerei* which pushed him to greater clarity, driving him beyond a mere denial of what the sacrament was not, but rather what it was. He continues to disregard an *opus operatum* paradigm: "This then is what we call the correct use of the sacrament. It is not a matter of mere performance and of rendering obedience to the church, for even a pig might go to the sacrament in this way."⁷⁶ There is one problem, however. The fanatics would not disagree with this rejection of the *opus operatum* and would have been comfortable with the *opus operantis* of Luther's earlier writings.

While one might doubt that Luther was ever speechless, he had yet to work through to an adequate theological vocabulary. This may be the reason for Luther's attempt to balance at least three things simultaneously: 1) the objectivity of what has been instituted in Word and

⁷⁵LW 36:340; WA 19,489,9-16.

⁷⁶LW 36:350; WA 19,507,25-27.

Sacrament as being actually given; 2) the denial of the benefit of the mere performance of what has been instituted; and 3) the defense of the freight of the *opus operantis* way of thinking which had served him previously. The latter defense is what particularly causes the observer to gasp as Luther wobbles while attempting to balance the terms, at one moment leaning to an objective monergism and the next leaning into a an anthropocentric reference where the individual was the subject of the verbs. Even though Luther had previously noted that *opus operantis* did not suffice any more than *opus operatum*, he had not formulated a suitable substitute. But that would begin to change in the subsequent months.

With the writing of *That These Words of Christ, "This is My Body," etc. Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics*, Luther gets back to doing what he does best. Unfettered by scholastic terminology, he lets his skilled exegesis and keen rhetoric take the issue in hand. This work, however, was not merely page upon page of exegetical or rhetorical exercises. Rather, Luther was dealing with the concept of "signifies" and its two levels of lower and higher, or internal and external, which had come into Augustine's work through his reliance upon an upward Neo-Platonic schema.

Luther must argue against a Zwinglian position which maintains that the bread and the wine symbolize or signify Christ's true body and blood. That position distinguishes between a physical eating and a spiritual eating of Christ's body and blood.⁷⁷ The physical-spiritual distinction was not entirely unlike that which Luther had outlined six or seven years earlier. While he never discounted the physical eating (*opus operatum*), it was the spiritual eating (*opus operans*) that was really effective. The Zwinglian position, however, dismissed any possible saving value from the physical eating of the bread and wine, Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper, and wanted to maintain only the spiritual eating. Luther maintains:

Have we not taught in many books that in the Supper two things are to be kept in mind? One, which is the supreme and most necessary point, consisting of the words, "Take, eat, this is My body," etc.; the other is the sacrament or physical eating of the body of Christ.⁷⁸

This statement betrays a subtle but essential change in Luther. An editor to the American Edition of Luther's Works remarks: "Note the dual emphasis in the word 'sacrament:' in *LW* 36:335 [*Against the Fanatics*], he contrasted 'sacrament' (as the given 'object of faith') with

⁷⁷*LW* 37:84-86; *WA* 23,177,3-178,34.

⁷⁸*LW* 37:86; *WA* 23,178,24-27.

inward faith."⁷⁹ In this citation, Luther contrasted 'sacrament' with physical eating. This indirect change blossomed several pages later with a statement which would not have been made in Luther's earlier writings, nor can the likes of it be found in all of Augustine's writings: "Thus, all that our body does outwardly and physically, if God's Word is added to it and it is done by faith, is in reality and in name done spiritually."⁸⁰ The two have come together as one.

This being done, one might think that *res signata* is done for in Luther. But it is not. Shortly thereafter, Luther begins an apology for Augustine which pits the Augustinian understanding of *signum* against the understanding of "sign" maintained by Zwingli, Oecolampadius, and the Fanatics: "To be sure, they regard St. Augustine as their own."⁸¹ Luther is intent on sticking with Augustine's terminology, lauding him as boldly as he had in 1518 in Heidelberg:

Holy Christendom has, in my judgment, no better teacher after the apostles than St. Augustine. Should this dear and holy teacher be so reviled and defamed by the fanatics as to be regarded as the cloak and support of their poisonous, deceptive

⁷⁹LW 37:86, n. 147.

⁸⁰LW 37:92; WA 23,188,8-10.

⁸¹LW 37:104; WA 23,208,29-30.

teaching? To this I answer No as long as I have breath.⁸²

Thus, in this treatise, Luther finds himself not only defending the words of the Lord against the fanatics, but also the reputation and teaching of Augustine.

Before another twelve months passed, Luther was penning his *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*. In it he relentlessly presses on much the same way as he did in *This Is My Body*, making clear what many today would refer to as the real presence of Christ's body and blood. With numerous references and illustrations he sets out to refute the Zwinglian error that the body of Christ is located in and so limited to heaven. By doing that, Luther has also in effect moved away from an Augustinian schema of lower to higher, earthly to heavenly.

"For the new testament is promise, indeed, much more: the bestowal of grace and the forgiveness of sin, i.e., the true gospel. Although the cup is a material thing, yet because it becomes sacramentally united with the blood of Christ or with the new testament, it is rightly called a new testament or the blood, and one may point to it and say, 'This is a new testament; this is the blood of Christ . . .'. Therefore, he who drinks of this cup really drinks the true blood of Christ and the forgiveness of sins or the Spirit of Christ, for these are received in and with the cup. Here is received no mere figure or sign of the new testament or of the blood of Christ. . ."⁸³

⁸²LW 37:107; WA 23,214,6-10.

⁸³LW 37:325-326; WA 26,468,32-469,1.

A similar passage also illustrates a departure from Augustine:

"St. Paul and Luke say that the new testament is in the Supper and not the sign or figure of the new testament. Figures or signs of the new testament belonged to the old testament, among the Jews. He who admits that he has the figure or sign of the new testament admits that he does not yet have the new testament; he has taken a backward step and denied Christ and has become a Jew. Christians ought to have the new testament itself, without figure or sign. They may have it hidden under an alien form, but they must have it truly present. Now if the new testament is present in the Supper, then forgiveness of sins, Spirit, grace, life and salvation must be there. All these are embraced in the Word. For who would know what was in the Supper if the words did not proclaim it?

See, then, what a beautiful, great, marvelous thing this is, how everything meshes together in one sacramental reality. The words are the first thing, for without words the cup and the bread would be nothing. Further, without bread and cup, the body and blood of Christ would not be there. Without the body and blood of Christ, the new testament would not be there. Without the new testament, forgiveness of sins would not be there. Without forgiveness of sins, life and salvation would not be there. Thus the words first connect the bread and cup to the sacrament; bread and cup embrace the body and blood of Christ; body and blood of Christ embrace the new testament; the new testament embraces the forgiveness of sins; forgiveness of sins embraces eternal life and salvation. See, all this the words of the Supper offer and give us, and we embrace it by faith."⁸⁴

What is said in this context is beyond the capacity of *opus operantis* and *opus operatum* because everything is offered and given in the words of the Supper with the bread and

⁸⁴LW 37:337-338; WA 26,478,25-479,8.

wine, with Christ's body and blood, with forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation.

Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests
1533

True to his words in the opening of his great confession on the Lord's Supper, Luther is through with the fanatics and writes no more to them.⁸⁵ In 1533, Luther is drawn back into a kind of argument which lends itself to the old way of speaking. Late in the controversy Luther is pressed into the question about whether a mass is valid. The concern is whether Christ's body and blood are really there. Second outline: whether the priests who celebrate the private mass are administering a genuine sacrament or not. . . . Luther is compelled to ask whether such a celebration might be no sacrament at all.

The year 1533 was not the first time Luther condemned the private mass. In a letter to Melanchthon as early as August 1, 1521, Luther had vowed: "I will no more celebrate a private mass forever."⁸⁶ In his introduction to this work, Martin Lehmann recalls an era in which men were

⁸⁵LW 37:162; WA 26,261,23.

⁸⁶LW 36:x; This citation can be found in the American Edition, LW 48:281 where it is translated "But I also will never say another private mass in all eternity." See also LW 36:54, 257-256.

empowered to celebrate the mass as priests who offered Christ as sacrifice most often for the benefit of souls in purgatory as may be observed in Tetzels which prompted Luther's pastoral concern. Lehmann notes that:

With the introduction of the private mass by Pope Gregory I (590-609), the consecration of priests came to be understood as a sacrament. In Luther's view it was both deplorable and wrong that the consecration of priests had become a sacrament under the papacy, particularly because the consecration often took place for the specific purpose of having the priest say private masses, which eventually became a lucrative source of income for the church.⁸⁷

Luther feared that in conducting private masses he had committed sheer idolatry, worshiping mere bread and wine rather than Christ's body and blood.⁸⁸ Recounting that which troubled him in his early years, he remembers that he took no consolation in calling himself a consecrated cleric. He speaks of having performed the consecration "validly" because it was spoken in earnest and with all possible devotion⁸⁹ and yet he came to fear that the mass was being offered with the same agenda followed by the heathen in their sacrifices.⁹⁰ "Conversion" (i.e. transubstantiation) was effected contrary to the ordinance and intention of

⁸⁷LW 38:143-144.

⁸⁸LW 38:149; WA 38,197,17-34.

⁸⁹LW 38:150; WA 38,197,25-28.

⁹⁰LW 38:151; WA 38,198,23-26.

Christ, for one's self and not for the community (*communio*). As he looked back over the previous fifteen years, Luther was unaware of any public preaching about Christ and his death. He came to realize that he had not become a cleric for the sacrament but rather a cleric for the sacrifice,⁹¹ making what ought to be a common meal into a sacrifice to God for individual persons. Instead, the sacrament ought to be distributed to the community of Christ to strengthen its faith and to praise Christ publicly.

First, at these private masses, Luther argued that there was no one present who should and can effect conversion, namely, a man who believes in Christ. Perhaps this line of reasoning implies an *opus operantis* lurking in the background as an essential factor. As long as one speaks in a cause-and-effect mode, one must come up with an operative factor such as "a man who believes in Christ." Second, the persons are not present for whom one should effect the conversion and to whom the body and blood of Christ should be given out, namely the Christian community or people. Third, the proper intention and fruit or usage which Christ desires are not present; for the sacrament has been instituted to nourish and to strengthen the Christian community and to preach and praise Christ.⁹² This led

⁹¹LW 38:152; WA 38,199,15-16.

Luther to conclude that "...neither are you a priest nor is the bread the body of Christ in your mass"⁹³ and that "You speak the words and receive the sacrament but, nevertheless, receive nothing but mere bread and wine. For the person, the church, is not present."⁹⁴ It takes two for a sacrament; it takes two for there to be a gift.⁹⁵

Thus, Luther attempted to console himself by resorting to the "old armor" which he had learned to put on and use while under the papacy. What had now come to be an antiquated defense against his concerns he states:

I had said mass according to the faith and intention of the church [*scilicet intentionem et fidem ecclesiae*]. For even though I did not have the right [*recht*] faith and intention, the church did have the right [*recht*] faith and intention. For that reason my mass and consecration had to be valid [*recht*].⁹⁶

Where the mere *opus operatum* held no consolation for Luther, that he as an ordained cleric was performing the work, the implied *opus operantis* proved to be an equally inadequate flying buttress to support the massive *opus*

⁹²LW 38:152-153; WA 38,200,1-7.

⁹³LW 38:153; WA 38,200,18-19.

⁹⁴LW 38:153; WA 38,200,32-33.

⁹⁵LW 38:154; WA 38,201,7-9.

⁹⁶LW 38:155; WA 38,202,3-6. Note how the translator changes from "right" to "valid" in translating *recht*. Does this bring a different sense of meaning into the English?

operatum doctrine. "Even if the priest confesses or says that he believes and has spoken the words effecting transubstantiation, one must not and dare not believe him."⁹⁷ Whatever operation might have been evidenced in the priest's beliefs was incapable of supplying what is needed before God, granting no certain peace of mind to the Christian: "Even if a lay person or an auditor were sure that his private cleric is speaking the words [of institution], how does he know with certainty that he is uttering them in faith?"⁹⁸

Luther is contrasting the kind of faith suggested by *opus operantis* with the faith which receives what is being given, namely, Christ's body and blood when he writes:

For where there is no faith, there the Holy Spirit and his work are also not present. Consequently, in such a mass [i.e., the *missa privatum*] nothing is administered or communicated to Christians or to the church; therefore, one cannot say that although the body and blood of Christ are not present on account of the cleric, nonetheless they are there on account of those who receive the sacrament in true faith.⁹⁹

Luther's sharp criticisms here divulge his belief that a sacrament founded upon *opus operatum* assisted by *opus operantis* was really no sacrament at all: "For they have

⁹⁷LW 38:164-165; WA 38,210,34-211,2.

⁹⁸LW 38:168; WA 38,213,31-32.

⁹⁹LW 38:169; WA 38,214,27-32.

offered mere bread and wine to Christians as Christ's body and blood."¹⁰⁰ And again,

"For although we did have baptism, sacrament, and the word, they were nevertheless so perverted and obscured by human doctrine and abuse . . . that we could no longer glory in them, but had to comfort ourselves with strange masses, our own works, monkery, pilgrimages, veneration of the saints, and similar matters in a manner no different from the way in which the Turks and the Jews console themselves with their works and worship."¹⁰¹

Perverted and obscured by human doctrine and abuse as evidenced in the *opus* framework, the Word, sacrament, and baptism have been robbed of the glory in Christ for Christians: "And after they have thus stolen it from Christendom, they give and sell in its place their *opus operatum*, their own sacrifice and work."¹⁰² Luther considers the crumbling superstructure of ecclesiastical practices founded upon such doctrines to be beyond repair, "What is the use of continually patching up and improving the fur if hide and hair are not in good condition?"¹⁰³

Luther instead directs to what is most sure: "Where God's word is pure and certain, there everything else must be: God's kingdom, Christ's kingdom, the Holy Spirit,

¹⁰⁰LW 38:158; WA 205,37-206,1.

¹⁰¹LW 38:159; WA 38,206,25-32.

¹⁰²LW 38:159-160; WA 38,207,5-7.

¹⁰³LW 38:170; WA 38,215,9-10.

baptism, the sacrament, the office of the ministry, the office of preaching, faith, love, the cross, life and salvation, and everything the church should have."¹⁰⁴ When Luther frees the mass from the *opus* constrictions, he sees all aspects of Christ's kingdom flowing freely. He does not hesitate to execrate that which obstructs such a free-flowing Gospel:

At this point it is again necessary to note the difference between the sacrilege and the holy place. For the private lords go too far with their consecration and chrism; they claim to be the persons who produce the sacrament or effect conversion *quasi ex opere operato*, that is, they boast of possessing such power, by virtue of their chrism or consecration, that by speaking over the bread and wine, forthwith the body and blood of Christ must be present (although by the working of God) . . . However, if one demands from them an argument which could prove that God has tied his power in this manner to their chrism (of which God knows nothing) and to their *opus operatum*, they direct us far from the beaten path, saying, "It is the intention of the church." This suffices; they need no further proof.

For this reason you should note and know that such a doctrine is the doctrine of the abomination, that is, that a priest on the strength of chrism or consecration changes bread into the body of Christ, *ex opere operato*, by means of his speaking or action. It is all such an ugly lie and odor as the chrism itself is. The holy place of church teaches that neither priests nor Christians produce a single sacrament; even the holy Christian church itself does not do so. Our office is called and ought to be not one of producing or effecting conversion but solely one of offering and bestowing. For example,

¹⁰⁴LW 38:196; WA 38,237,11-14. Note here that "love" is not an operating factor but rather a fruit and result.

a pastor or preacher does not produce the gospel and by means of his preaching or office his word does not become the gospel; otherwise, everything he would say would have to be the gospel. He only offers and bestows the gospel through his preaching. The gospel is there beforehand and must be there beforehand; this gospel our Lord Christ has produced, brought about, and left behind as a legacy.¹⁰⁵

Thus, what a pastor or preacher does is not an *opus* in the classical sense at all, but only an offering and bestowing. Granted, someone might wish to describe this offering and bestowing as works, but that would only serve to obscure the Gospel gifts. Someone might wish to retain an *opus* systematization, but that would not be a very Christian thing to do—and about as sensible as using a screwdriver to hammer a nail into the wall. Luther points elsewhere:

This command and institution [Matthew 28:19] do it; they cause the water and the word to be a baptism. Our work or action *ex opere operato* does nothing; for it is not therefore called a baptism because I am baptizing or doing the work, even if I were holier than St. John or an angel; but my baptizing is called a baptism because Christ's word, command, and institution have ordained that water and his word should be a baptism. This ordinance of his, I say, and not our action or *opus operatum* constitutes baptism. Our action only offers and bestows such baptism, ordained and constituted by Christ's command and institution. For this reason alone he alone is and remains the one true, eternal

¹⁰⁵LW 38:197-198; WA 38,238,11-239,7.

baptizer who administers his baptism daily through our action or service to the day of judgment."¹⁰⁶

Opus operatum, then, gives way to Christ as one who has instituted, offers, and bestows, as is further evidenced when Luther writes:

So too, it is not by any doing, speaking, or working that bread and wine become Christ's body and blood. Much less is it by the chrism or consecration. Rather, it is caused by Christ's ordinance, command, and institution. . . . it is not our work or speaking but the command and ordinance of Christ which make the bread the body and the wine the blood, beginning with the first Lord's Supper and continuing to the end of the world, and it is administered daily through our ministry or office.¹⁰⁷

The question for Luther is no longer "How can the sacrament be effected by the work or intention of man?" Rather, he is concerned only with confessing and being given what Christ has instituted and promised to sinners who have been crushed under the guilt of the Law.

In summary, the offices and sacraments do not belong to us but to Christ, for he has ordained all this and left it behind as a legacy in the church to be exercised and used to the end of the world; and he does not lie or deceive us. Therefore, we cannot make anything else out of it but must act according to his command and hold to it.¹⁰⁸

Luther here confesses Christ in a way that the *opus* terms could in no way convey. These terms have become altogether

¹⁰⁶LW 38:198-199. WA 38,239,20-30.

¹⁰⁷LW 38:199; WA 38,240,1-3,11-14.

¹⁰⁸LW 38:200. WA 38,241,28-31.

superfluous for Luther—except to be used as semantic icons—a rhetorical shorthand—when referring to the position held in the Roman church. Luther confesses such a Christ who surely bestows in this way what he has won for us. Of its achievement and bestowal there is no room for doubt, speculation, or conjecture, for not only has Christ instituted this—He also locates Himself there for the benefit of burdened hearts.

Despite all the ink Luther shed in this treatise to clarify his position ("This book, however, in the course of my writing it, has become longer than I had planned . . ."¹⁰⁹), he was still misunderstood. Perhaps because it was so long, a hasty reading of it was to be expected. Or it may have been that some found themselves incapable of operating in anything but an Augustinian or Scholastic system, rejecting whatever did not fit that way of thinking. Whatever the case may be, Luther was soon afterward accused of tending toward a Zwinglian view of the Lord's Supper.¹¹⁰ Luther responded in *A Letter of Dr. Martin Luther Concerning His Book on the Private Mass* noting the difference between sacrament and mass:

¹⁰⁹LW 38:210; WA 38,250,25-27.

¹¹⁰See, for example, LW 38:217.

From this you can readily observe that I am not contending against the sacrament but against the mass, and would like to separate the sacrament from the mass so that the mass might perish and the sacrament alone, without the mass might be preserved in its honor and according to the ordinance of our dear Lord Jesus Christ . . . it is the mass when I sacrifice the sacrament to God for my sins and the sins of others as a work performed by human beings (whether they be evil or godly). This they have to acknowledge. It is the sacrament when I receive from the priest the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine."¹¹¹

If we would ask Luther, "What of *opus operatum*?", we are shown the best this term can do—a best which falls short of confessing Christ in the way of the Gospel. Any context wherein the mass is referred to as an *opus* has become detestable to Luther:

I am truly in earnest about meaning the loathsome business and abominable abuse of the holy sacrament according to which they sell their sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ (as they teach) to other Christians as a satisfaction for sin. Yet the ordinance of Christ clearly declares that his sacrament should be there and be used, not for satisfaction through our sacrificing, but for the forgiveness of sin through his blood.¹¹²

If we would ask the *opus operantis* question, "Who is working the work?" we are shown that the answers given here by Luther are too much for such terminology to convey:

But because the office, word, and sacrament are the ordinance of Christ and not of Judas or the devil, we permit Judas and the devil to remain Judas and the

¹¹¹LW 38:226-227, WA 38,267,5-9 & 28-32.

¹¹²LW 38:228; WA 38,268,4-10.

devil, and yet accept through them the blessings of Christ. . . . Offices and sacraments [*Die ampt und Sakrament*] always remain within the church; persons are subject daily to change. As long as we call and induct into the offices persons who can administer them, then the offices will surely continue to be exercised."¹¹³

Traditionally it was the priest who worked the work. His ordination empowered him to offer Christ as a sacrifice—an *opus operatum*. Luther has shown that such a foundation will not hold—neither the priest's faith nor the faith of the church. The sure ground is Christ alone. He is there. He is present with his words that for which he has his minister there to speak them; "We hear Christ himself through the pastor's mouth speaking to us and commanding that we should take bread and wine at his word, 'This is my body,' etc., and in them according to his command eat his body and drink his blood."¹¹⁴ Where Christ is giving out his gifts, then, the matter is left in no doubt. A sermon of 1539 on 1 Peter 4:7-11 reflects this:

We his ministers should be conscious—and the people should so be taught—that efficacy of office is not of human effort, but is God's power and work. In other words, that which the office was designed to accomplish is not effective by virtue of our speech or action, but by virtue of God's commandment

¹¹³LW 38:201; WA 38,241,14-21.

¹¹⁴LW 38:200; WA 38,240,20-23. Note also Luther's sermons on the Gospel of John (1537-1540), "Who is speaking? The pastor? By no means! You do not hear the pastor. Of course, the voice is his, but the words he employs are really spoken by my God." LW 22:528.

[*Befelhs*] and appointment [*Ordnung*]. He it is who orders [*thun geheißen*]; and himself will effectively operate through that office which is obedient to God's command [*und durch solch Ampt, so es in seinem Befelch gehet, wirken und kräftig sein will*]. For instance, in baptism, the Lord's Supper and absolution, we are not to be concerned about the person administering the sacraments or pronouncing absolution—who he is, how righteous, how holy, how worthy. Worthiness or unworthiness of either administering or receiving hand effects nothing; all the virtue lies in God's command and ordinance [*sondern darumb, daß Gottes Befelch und Ordnung da ist*].¹¹⁵

We are thus left with no dubious anthropocentric reference. No distance between lower and upper, external and internal, remains. What is all and all together described as gift cannot be described in an Augustinian monergistic way. Neither can *opus operatum* and *opus operantis* be utilized to describe this Gospel work as nothing but gift. Where a man has not been crushed to death by the Law, there God's ordinance and mandate cannot be described as gift given.

¹¹⁵Martin Luther, Sermon on 1 Peter 4:7-11 for the Sunday after Ascension Day as recorded in John Nicholas Lenker's *Sermons of Martin Luther*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), vol. 1, p. 327. Spellings are those of the Erlangen edition of Luther's works: *Dr. Martin Luther's sämtliche Werke* (Erlangen: Carl Heyder Verlag, 1843), vol. 8, p. 314. The American Edition gives a different rendition of this sermon, one of three which appear in the Weimar edition. Lenker suggests that forms of this postil are found as early as 1525 in pamphlet form but the date assigned to this version is May 18, 1539.

The Genesis Lectures
1535-1545

By 1535, Luther's *Great Confession* and other lengthy treatises on the Lord's Supper have covered what he has to say about the subject. Further writing would not further the discussion. Occurrences of *opus operatum*, then, surface in more circumscribed contexts, as in those of his commentaries on Galatians, where Luther has this point to make.

"Not that the Law is wicked or damnable; for the Law, circumcision, worship, etc., are not condemned for their inability to justify. But Paul inveighs against them because the false apostles maintained that by the sheer performance of these acts [Lat.], without faith, men are justified and saved. This Paul would not tolerate, for without faith all these things are fatal—the Law, circumcision, the adoption, the temple, worship, the promises, even God and Christ, are of no avail without faith. Therefore Paul speaks in broad and universal terms against anything that opposes faith, not only against ceremonies."¹¹⁶

Such quotes must be understood in light of all that Luther has brought to the subject previously. The editor of this work in the American edition claims that:

The phrase *ex opere operato* may simply mean that the validity of a sacrament depends on its proper administration in accordance with the institution of Christ rather than on the holiness of the officiant; in this sense Luther followed and accepted the Augustinian tradition. But in the later Middle Ages it had come to mean an almost automatic or even magical quality in the

¹¹⁶LW 26:122; WA 40^I, 217, 18-25.

sacramental act and it is against this interpretation that Luther is speaking here"¹¹⁷

Does this not represent an understanding of the *opus* terms which misses the confession of Christ and gifts which Luther has come to make in these later years?

Luther's contention is not with sacramental validity dependent upon proper administration. To consider the sacraments in terms of validity simply retreats into an Augustinian position which Luther had surpassed. Any reference to validity reverts to an *opus*-oriented view of the sacrament split into levels of lower and higher. This fails to convey the *donum* or *datum* nature of Christ giving himself for us, bestowed through the *officium* or *Amt* which he has established for bestowing his gifts. Valid-and-effective approaches toward explaining the means of grace may imply that if man conducts the ceremony rightly, God is compelled to do His part. When viewed in these terms, the sacraments are no longer means of *grace* but means of putting bridle and bit on the Lord God to lead him where and when we will by our valid ceremonies as opposed to the Holy Spirit working where and when he will. Luther may have attempted to fill the term "valid" with a Christocentric meaning—as he was accustomed to doing with other scholastic or Augustinian

¹¹⁷LW 26:122, n. 38.

terms—but this leaves one wondering what kind of validity he speaks about in each context, the traditional or the redefined.¹¹⁸ In any case, the anthropocentric reference implied by taking the traditional understanding of validity is idolatry. This he maintains in the Genesis commentary some four years later:

Thus the pope has converted the Lord's Supper into a horrible idolatry. Christ instituted it that we might eat and drink his body and blood in order to buoy up our consciences and to strengthen our faith, as he says (1 Cor. 11:24), 'Do this in remembrance of Me;' that is, 'Proclaim Me, give thanks to Me, and awaken your faith.' But the pope has kept the outward performance of the work [Lat.] and has completely done away with its true use in remembrance of Christ.¹¹⁹

And again:

The pope has been wholly absorbed in the same birth to such an extent that he has accommodated all godliness and religion to it, as when he taught that the Sacrament of the Altar is a mere work that is performed [*opus operatum*]-a work by which the godly manifest their obedience toward the church...but there I do not hear the God who calls and promises. No, there I hear a human being who is performing a work as the result of the first birth.¹²⁰

Luther tosses aside the works of the papacy as he would a worn out garment, but it is a garment which he himself has worn out over many years through many struggles. When he thus attacks the papacy or pens a sentence such as

¹¹⁸See *LW* 38:200; *WA* 38,241.

¹¹⁹*LW* 4:236; *WA* 43,305,13-18.

¹²⁰*LW* 4:346-347; *WA* 43,385,40-386,3 & 386,5-6.

"Now, monastic vows are only of a piece with a work that has been performed [*opus operatum*],"¹²¹ he is not being indiscriminate or careless. Those who have walked with Luther from his early to his later years know that much lies behind these statements. It is only the casual observer who might see little of interest in these statements, who might treat them anachronistically—or worse yet—who might pick up the rags Luther has tossed aside thinking that there might be some way of fixing them up for profitable use. Luther has something else to commend over the years which his lectures on Genesis span. Writing on Jacob's words to his household recorded in Genesis 35:3, "Then let us arise and go up to Bethel that we may make there an altar to the God who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone," Luther extols the means of grace not as completed objective works but as a bestowing testament:

He has given us Baptism, the Keys, Absolution, and the Lord's Supper not on account of the work itself that has been performed as the papists dream, but that we may recall the blessings of Christ who says, "This do in remembrance of Me, so that the heavenly message may sound forth in your midst, so that you may call upon Me, so that you may give thanks, so that you may hope in Me and be patient in

¹²¹LW 5:258; WA 43,607,6. Cf. LW 47:160-161; WA 53,436,26-29.

bearing the cross until I come and rescue from all evils."¹²²

In the same context he had already spoken of a connection between faith and the Word:

But the true worship is expressed in the New Testament with its 'This do in remembrance of Me; baptize in My name, etc.' It is horrible, however, that the pope makes a sacrifice and an *opus operatum* out of the Mass and abandons the real kernel of worship, which is to give thanks, pray, hope, and confess even under the cross and in disaster.¹²³

Months later, commenting on Jacob (Israel's) words to Joseph in Genesis 48:21, Luther speaks of the combination of faith and the Word which in the gospel remain inseparable:

But the Word which God promises must be connected with faith, which, like the Word and the promise, was not understood. And this was their customary teaching: the sacraments confer grace on those who partake of them. They confer grace without the Word and without faith. If someone is baptized, he has no need of faith. The sacraments have so much power that they give grace by the mere performance of the act. But this is the chief point of our doctrine: that a sacrament does not work grace without faith.¹²⁴

One might reasonably ask if the statement that "a sacrament does not work grace without faith" is really any different from Luther's way of speaking at Heidelberg. If this is true, it would not be the first time that Luther lapsed into

¹²²LW 6:234; WA 44,173,34-39.

¹²³LW 6:237; WA 44,175,36-40.

¹²⁴LW 8:192; WA 44,719,24-28.

old ways of speaking. But the context suggests that this is not the case:

For the promise and faith must be connected, as Paul says: 'Christ dwells in you through faith' (see Ephesians 3:17) . . . For what is a promise which no one believes but an empty thing? But it is a promise when a man believes it, relies firmly on it, and concludes that God is truthful.¹²⁵

This "faith" is not the same as that "faith" about which Luther spoke at Heidelberg. This faith does not pull itself up nor is pulled up from lower to higher; rather it is inseparable from its bestowed content, the promise—Christ himself. Luther notes that there are different kinds of "faith" when he describes and differentiates between a *fides historica* and a *fides salvifica*:

Historical faith does not rely on the Word or trust in it. No, it says: "I hear that Christ suffered and died, etc." But true faith judges as follows: "I believe that Christ suffered and died for me, etc. About this I have no doubt, and in this faith I find rest. I trust that Word in opposition to death and sin."¹²⁶

Thus Luther does not urge his readers to turn inward, but urges *Christus pro nobis*. Luther no longer surveys boundaries or movements between word and faith and sacrament and Christ; they are received together or they are not received at all. Nothing exists which could be misconstrued

¹²⁵LW 8:192-193; WA 44,720,3-4 & 6-9.

¹²⁶LW 8:193; WA 44,720,10-13.

as a progressive justification which would travel along some ladder of righteousness. The *opus* terms, as the later Luther aptly demonstrates, were not able to convey this.

On the Jews and Their Lies
1543

The last explicit occurrences of *opus operatum* come in Luther's lengthy excoriation of the Jews. Luther had at various times and places lumped the religion of the papists, Turks, and Jews together. He did not find himself entangled with theologians who tirelessly debated the difference and similarities between Old Testament sacrifices and New Testament sacraments. For Luther, what had happened to the New Testament sacraments in the church of Rome was comparable to what had happened to the Old Testament sacrifices by the time of the prophets. They had been turned into *opera operata* which is idolatry:

We proceeded to separate the word and faith from the sacrament (that is, from God and his ultimate purpose) and converted it into a mere *opus legis*, a work of the law, or as the papists, an *opus operatum*—merely a human work, which the priests offered to God and the laity performed as a work of obedience as often as they received it. What is left of the sacrament? Only the empty husk, the mere ceremony, *opus vanum*, divested of everything divine. Yes, it is a hideous abomination in which we perverted God's truth into lies and worshiped the veritable calf of Aaron. Therefore God also delivered us into all sorts of terrible blindness and innumerable false doctrines, and, furthermore, he permitted Muhammad and the pope together with all devils to come upon us.

The people of Israel fared similarly. They always divorced circumcision as an *opus operatum*, their own work, from the word of God, and persecuted all the prophets through whom God wished to speak with them, according to the terms on which circumcision was instituted. Yet despite this, they constantly and proudly boasted of being God's people by virtue of their circumcision. Thus they are in conflict with God.¹²⁷

Far from the mere spewing of vitriol against the Jews, Luther claims that the same thing was precipitated in the church by the papists:

Similarly [to circumcision], our children receive the complete, true, and full baptism, the word with the sign, and do not separate one from the other; they receive the kernel in the shell. God is present; he baptizes them and speaks with them, and thereby saves them. But now that we have grown old, the pope comes along—and the devil with him—and teaches us to convert this into an *opus legis* or *opus operatum*. He severs word and sign from each other, teaching that we are saved by our own contrition, work, and satisfaction . . . Thus our sacrament has become a work, and we eat our vomit again.¹²⁸

¹²⁷LW 47:161; WA 53,436,31-437-9.

¹²⁸LW 47:162; WA 53,437,38-438-7 & 9-11.

CONCLUSION

In late April, 1518, Luther was lauding Augustine as Paul's most faithful interpreter, but by mid October, 1521, Staupitz had absolved Luther of his monastic vow. Luther was no longer "Martin Luther, Augustinian,"¹ but, as Richard Balge notes, "in the things that mattered most he had left Augustine before he left the Augustinians."² And in 1532, Veit Dietrich recorded Luther as saying, "When the door was opened for me in Paul so that I understood what

¹This was how Luther identified himself in a letter to Cardinal Cajetan which later came to be published formally and known as the *Acta Augustana*. LW 31:264. Ironically, within days, he could technically no longer use that title even though he continued to live in the mostly abandoned Augustinian cloister. See Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), pp. 257-258.

²Richard D. Balge, "Martin Luther, Augustinian," *Luther Lives*, ed. by Edward C. Fredrich, Siegbert W. Becker, and David P. Kuske, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1983), p. 15. And yet, "Even after he had gone beyond Augustine in the penetration of the gospel and in the principles of interpretation, Luther could still call on him to 'say it well.' He brought the insights of his favorite teacher into discussions of ethics, history, government, marriage, the two kingdoms and the care of souls. In *The Smalcald Articles* and *The Large Catechism* he quoted Augustine's dictum that it is the Word which makes the sacraments what they are. . . . Long after he ceased to take a stand on or with Augustine, Luther could still speak appreciatively of the man whom he regarded as Paul's 'Most trustworthy interpreter.'" Balge, p. 18.

justification by faith is, it was all over with Augustine."³

Is it possible that what drew Luther away from the Scholasticism which he had studied in the first decade of the 16th century was the same thing that eventually drove him beyond the Augustinianism of the second?

It was our intention in this thesis to investigate and demonstrate Luther's attempt in Thesis 27 of the Heidelberg Disputation to fill Scholastic terminology with Augustinian meaning, pressing such a synthesis into the service of the Gospel, but that this effort proved inadequate and unsatisfactory, bursting those old wineskins. This we strove to show in two parts. First, we surveyed Luther's Augustinianism evident in the Heidelberg theses in general and in Thesis 27 in particular, an effort on his part which was intended to counter Scholastic-Nominalist-Occamist methodology. Second, we considered Luther's ultimate withdrawal from both Scholastic terms and Augustinian ideology, suggested by his treatment of *opus operatum*, *opus operans*, and *opus operantis* after Heidelberg.

Initially, Luther aspired to work within the parameters of the traditional theological criteria established by Thomas Aquinas, Gabriel Biel, Duns Scotus, William of Occam, Peter Lombard and Augustine. Many

³Vide supra, p. viii.

dogmatic terms representative of these theologians must have struck Luther almost simultaneously at Erfurt, coming to him in such rapid succession as mandated by his rapid advancement. For this study, the *opus* word family commended itself well because of the synthesis between Scholastic terminology and Augustinian theology which Luther at Heidelberg attempted in Thesis 27: "Actually, one should call the work of Christ an acting work [*opus operans*] and our work an accomplished work [*opus operatum*]." ⁴ Later, when Luther was not so busy advancing through one licentiate after another, he was moved to reevaluate the content of that which had been handed down to him in the course of some rather pragmatic concerns. This began initially with his growing distress about indulgence marketing. It continued in the subsequent decades where he confronted a wide spectrum of opponents from Occamist Augustinians to Zwinglians. As evidence, we have offered herein his treatment of the *opus* terms.

The Heidelberg theses show Luther expressing an affinity between the Neoplatonic *signum* and *res signata*

⁴*Vide supra*, p. 10. The marginal notes of Luther's 1509-1510 lectures on Lombard's *Sentences* "show unmistakably that Luther came from the Erfurt Occamistic tradition of teaching," to the extent that in his early years "Even Augustine was interpreted in Occamistic fashion." Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 94.

concepts utilized by Augustine with the *opus operatum* and *opus operantis* terms utilized by the Scholastics. Granted, Augustine himself nowhere uses these *opus operatum* terms which were first coined by Peter of Poitiers in the early 13th century. Luther, however, detects a congeniality between the *opus* terms and that which he values in Augustine to the extent that he brings them together in Thesis 27 of the Heidelberg Disputation. These words he conscripted into service as a logical extension of the Augustinian paradigm, consistent with the Neo-Platonic model. *Opus operatum* concerns itself with the handling of the *signum* while *opus operans* concerns itself with the movement from the *signum* to the *res signata*.

At Heidelberg, Luther uses these terms in a context having nothing explicit to do with the sacraments. Thereafter, however, we find the terms almost exclusively in sacramental contexts, probably because the sacraments are the concrete, incarnational manifestation of what is going on between man and God. In the Lord's Supper, *opus operatum* is interchangeable with the objective aspect (the consecration and administration; the eating and the drinking) and *opus operantis* comes to be associated with the subjective aspect (the believing). *Opus operatum* - objective - valid. *Opus operantis* - subjective - effective.

Pursuing Luther's commandeering of the Scholastic *opus operatum* and *opus operans* terms into the Augustinian worldly appearance and heavenly reality schema at Heidelberg in late 1518, we noted that this synthesis did not stand for long. He expresses a serious dissatisfaction with the *opus operatum* portion of the paradigm in *The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ* of 1519: "If it [the sacrament] is merely an *opus operatum*, it works only harm everywhere; it must become an *opus operantis*."⁵ Luther, longing to determine how man can be transformed from worldly appearances to heavenly realities, weighed the effective possibilities of *opus operantis* against the *opus operatum*—but for how long could *opus operantis* bear the burden with which Luther saddled it?

Luther demonstrates his affinity with Augustine in propounding the Neo-Platonic schema of *signum* and *res signata*, which found expression in terms of worldly appearances and heavenly realities and in phrases like *quae facta sunt* and *id quod res est* in Theses 19 and 21. When he denies freedom to the will and asserts the utter desperation of his own ability to obtain grace by doing what is in him, he advances the case for divine monergism. Such divine

⁵*Vide supra*, p. 40.

activity becomes apparent only when man does not attempt to evade the law (*nec lex fugienda*) but remains obsequious under whatever cross God's wrath lays upon him, meeting it with a pious fear (*pio Dei timore*), trusting that immortal merits will be accredited to him if he does not attempt to sidestep the sufferings and judgment he receives under the sovereign hand of God. This is what Luther maintains at Heidelberg: God does not find but creates what is pleasing to him, crowning his work within us.⁶ His work in Christ is a work being worked (*opus operans*) while our work is a completed work (*opus operatum*). In this way Luther sought to promote a justification by grace apart from synergistic efforts and merits.

Luther worked this model for all it is worth, focusing on this matter with the same kind of zeal which he had attempted earlier when he pursued a justification *coram Deo* by the *poena* pattern of his monastery years. We followed his dogged persistence in subsequent writings to find some interchangeable terms which would enliven the old paradigms. At Heidelberg in 1518, *operans* is identified with Christ as the one doing the work. Less than a year later, however, faith does the work: "it is not enough that

⁶Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), p. 622.

the sacrament be merely completed (that is, *opus operatum*); it must also be used in faith (that is, *opus operantis*)."⁷ and then with faith, but ultimately such an enterprise frustrated Luther, "a vain endeavor, more of a hindrance than a help."⁸

Faith seemed to fare better when it was not associated with an *opus operantis* which moves one from lower to higher—from external to spiritual, from *signum* to *res signata*, from worldly appearances to heavenly realities—but rather when it was resting in the words and promise of Christ here and now. In his *Treatise on the New Testament* of July 1520, Luther was all too ready to hold fast to what was certain and let the uncertain heavenly spiritualities go.⁹ In *The Babylonian Captivity* published two months later, he considers the distinction between the *opus operatum* and the *opus operantis* to be a part of the cloak used to cover godless doings, misleading people into thinking that they were "free to lead wicked lives themselves and yet benefit other men."¹⁰

⁷*Vide supra*, p. 40.

⁸*Vide supra*, p. 44.

⁹*Vide supra*, p. 53.

¹⁰*Vide supra*, p. 57.

A significant transition took place when the counterpart to *signum* was no longer a heavenly, spiritual reality but rather a *testimentum*, the words and promise of Christ.¹¹ This sounded the death knells for the Augustinian schema of lower to higher—and it adds something essential to the argument which was lacking in his earlier writings. In *The Babylonian Captivity*, Luther sensed that *opus operantis* becomes an *opus operatum* when faith has done its work in effecting something gracious in the sacrament. Still, the demarcation of the sacraments into sign and benefit lingered. The sacraments are still “effective signs” even though one is to “heed the word more than the sign.”¹² This might have served well in confronting the papists in dealing with transubstantiation as he does in this document, but it was insufficient in dealing with the enthusiasts. What remains to be done after *The Babylonian Captivity* is the identifying of promise and testament with Christ Himself so that there is no Christ-less promise, i.e., that one does not receive the promise without actually receiving Christ Himself as He comes through gracious means.

Little incentive remained to resurrect the *opus* terms in order to maintain some kind of “objectivity” *per se*

¹¹*Vide supra*, p. 58.

¹²*Vide supra*, p. 64.

in the sacraments. Several other arguments offer additional deterrence. With *testimentum* and *beneficium* Luther is steered cleanly between the Scylla and Charibdis of monergism and synergism. To the port side lay the reef of seeing things in a monergistic-deterministic way, where divine power is thought to be efficacious in the mere *doing* of a sacrament. To the starboard lay the rocks of seeing things in a synergistic-Pelagian way, where an objective sacrament is made efficacious by a subjective faith. Luther asserted the conclusion that "It cannot be true, therefore, that there is contained in the sacraments a power efficacious for justification, or that they are effective signs of grace."¹³

Objectivity (where God does it all by His sovereign power) and subjectivity (where man makes it effective by the ingredient of his faith) serve only to create a *partem-partem* paradigm which might look good on paper but fails to manifest the Gospel. Human analysis might systematize the consideration of the sacraments into objective and subjective components. This, however, would be vivisection instead of vivification. The Gospel is nowhere apparent for the joy and edification where one merely considers the two in juxtaposition—and the terms cannot survive apart from

¹³*Vide supra*, p. 63.

each other, as is done among those who think it possible to maintain *ex opere operato* in a positive light while ignoring the *ex opere operantis* aspect.¹⁴ When Luther later speaks

¹⁴This is precisely what modern Roman Catholic theologians are doing. For example Richard McBrien writes: "On the other hand, it is the faith and hope of the Church as a whole that the world has been redeemed and that history itself will reach final salvation because of what God has already revealed and achieved in Christ. At least to this extent, the individual is assured that the grace of salvation is present and available in and through this sign (*ex opere operato*). We also know that each one of us remains free to give a 'Yes' or a 'No' (and this is the *opus operantis*)." *Catholicism*, Minneapolis: Winston Press, Inc: 1980, vol. 2, p. 737. See also Karl Rahner [DS = Decree on the Sacraments from the Council of Trent]: "Because God has offered himself unambiguously to the world in history, and because Christ with his life, his death and his resurrection is promised to the individual as his own destiny, God's offer of his grace to us has an absolute unconditionality and certainty which is effected by the word of God itself. To this extent we say that a sacrament is an *opus operatum*: as the unambiguous and efficacious word of God it causes of itself. But insofar as this sacrament is offered to a person in his individual and still open salvation history, he cannot say with absolute, theoretical certainty that he accepts with the same absolute certainty the word and the offer which comes to him from God with absolute certainty. But as the Council of Trent says (cf. D.S. 1541), not only is he given the power of a 'most firm hope,' but he is also obliged to have it, for the grace of God which comes to him in the sacraments has already mysteriously outstripped the possibility in him of a rejection of this grace. Prescinding here from sacraments which are administered to those who have not come of age, as the irrevocable and absolute word of the offer of God's grace the *opus operatum* of the sacraments encounters the *opus operantis* of the believer or the person who accepts God's act, it is clear that sacraments are only efficacious in faith, hope and love. Hence they have nothing to do with magic rites. They are not magic because they do not coerce God, and so because they are God's free act upon us. Moreover, they have nothing to do with magic because they are efficacious only to the extent that they encounter man's openness and freedom. If a person

of the Lord's Supper, Holy Absolution, and Holy Baptism, (most notably in the Smalcald Articles, and the Small and Large Catechisms)¹⁵ he does so most joyfully in the absence

responds to God's offer with an acceptance, he has to profess, of course, that this acceptance of his also takes place by the power of God's grace," *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, New York: The Seabury Press, 1978, p. 414. Where Lutherans have bought into this Augustinian schema, they are likely to see themselves very close to a "full communion" with the Roman Catholic Church on one hand and with the Reformed on the other, both of which find themselves in this Augustinian frame of thinking.

¹⁵Versions of the Small Catechism in German and its Latin translation in the *Concordia Triglotta* (CT) and the *Bekennnisschriften* (B) reveal some curious developments—as do the English translations of Tappert (T) and the *Concordia Triglotta*:

(CT) *Wie kann leiblich Essen und Trinken solche große Dinge tun?*

(B) *Wie kann leiblich Essen und Trinken solch groß Ding tun?*

(CT) *Qui potest corporalis illa manducatio tantas res efficere?*

(B) *Qui potest corporalis manducatio tam magnum quid efficere?*

(T) How can bodily eating and drinking produce such great effects?

(CT) How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things?

Note the difference between the *Bekennnisschriften's* singular and *Concordia Trigotta's* plural. For what reason? Furthermore, whoever is responsible for the Latin rendering in the *Concordia Triglotta* perhaps unwittingly used the word *res* which could lead some to think in terms of the Augustinian, Neo-Platonic understanding of the term with a resultant "effective grace" idea. Tappert's translation seems to be founded upon that Latin translation rather than the German original. To some (tongue-in-cheek) this might

of such systematized distinctions. The sacrament is a present offered and a gift given. The sacrament does not merely lead to Christ and his Gospel—the sacrament is the Gospel.¹⁶ There is no dividing it up into God's part and man's part, objective and subjective, *opus operatum/opus operantis, signum/res signata*. "We have it backwards when in the sacrament we think of the works that we ourselves might do and accomplish for the sacrament and pay no attention to the works that the sacrament is supposed to do and accomplish for us."¹⁷ In his 1528 *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*, Holy Communion is no mere representation of anything: "Here is received no mere figure or sign of the new testament or of the blood of Christ."¹⁸ Where misunderstandings might arise due to his description, Luther clarifies, "This is why Christ tells me to eat and drink—so

be immediately suspect. When the Gospel is having its way with Luther, we expect him to say it in German rather than in the mother tongue of the Scholastics. Tappert's translation, nonetheless, lends itself to an interpretation quite different from Luther's intent. The verbal form takes over the noun (*efficere* throws its weight into both "produce" and "effects" in Tappert's translation) leading one to think of Christ's body and blood as producing an effect rather than actually communicating the life and salvation in itself. Holy Communion then would serve the *signum/res signata* paradigm.

¹⁶*Vide supra*, p. 73.

¹⁷*Vide supra*, p. 74.

¹⁸*Vide supra*, p. 84.

that all this can be mine and benefit me as a sure pledge and sign. In fact, it's the very gift itself which he has provided for me in the struggle against my sins, death, and every misfortune."¹⁹ Any ideology which divides things into higher and lower, objective and subjective, worldly and spiritual vanishes with Luther's words: "See then what a beautiful, great, marvelous thing this is, how everything meshes together in one sacramental reality."²⁰ So, too, "faith" in the later Luther is not a movement from lower to higher, a progression from sign to reality as it was in his early writings. Faith lives in Christ who is present with his redemption and righteousness in Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, Holy Communion, Holy Scriptures.²¹

When Luther utilized the *opus* terms, he was shaping the question and, in a way, predetermining the answers. He ultimately abandoned the *opus* way of speaking but sometimes he lapsed back into an occasional *opus operatum* with all its

¹⁹Martin Luther, *Luther's Large Catechism: Anniversary Translation*, trans. by Friedemann Hebart. Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1985, p. 191. Perhaps a better rendering for "pledge and sign" might be "pledge and surety" as the Latin understood the German *Pfand und Zeichen* as *pignus et arrabo* [sic. from *arrhabo*, -onis].

²⁰Vide *supra*, p. 85.

²¹Vide *supra*, p. 97.

shortcomings even in later years,²² insisting that there are times when one must "stammer with the stammerers."²³ Luther preferred a way of proclaiming Christ, faith, and Gospel in the way of gift given rather than work performed. Christ is received and signs are consigned to the Jews.²⁴

Luther did not at the last cling to the ideological paradigms of Augustinianism nor the systematized philosophical vocabulary of Occamism in describing the Gospel by using the terms as they had been used or by filling the old terms with new meaning. At the same time, Luther did not invent new dogmatic terms to supersede the classic dichotomies that have come to our age through numerous controversies and textbooks such as valid and effective, subjective and objective, substance and accident, cause and effect, synergism and monergism, or even the later consecrationist and receptionist epithets.²⁵

²²*Vide supra*, p. 105.

²³Martin Luther, "Theses Concerning Faith and Law," (1535) *LW* 34:120-121. See Robin A. Leaver, *Luther on Justification*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), p. 14.

²⁴*Vide supra*, p. 85.

²⁵If anything, Luther introduced a way of speaking which did not divide things into dualistic categories, but rather set two seemingly mutually exclusive terms together in a paradoxical way, for example, that of "sinner" and "saint" as well as that of the "perfectly free master" and the "perfectly dutiful servant."

Such abstractions do more to constrict and delimit the living Word than to pronounce it, conveying no proper distinction between the Law that kills and the Gospel that enlivens which Luther characterized *sine qua non*.

In this survey, we have touched upon other external factors which may also have played a part in Luther's withdrawal from Augustinian frames of reference. For example, how could his Scholastic arch-rivals claim Augustine as their own? How did it affect Luther when he witnessed Karlstadt becoming deeply enamored of Augustine? How did Luther respond when he saw the Enthusiasts and Zwinglians eagerly quoting Augustine in order to further their own conclusions which were radically different from his? These, too, must have added to the inner unrest Luther had as he wrestled with an Augustinian way of thinking, speaking, and writing. In our day, however, we are not compelled to assume, for example, that Augustine's response to the Donatists was the only response nor the best response.²⁶ Neither was the later Luther. Still, there are

²⁶"It is necessary to make a clear distinction between the dogmatic content of Augustine's theology, and the terms and concepts which he originally employed to express this content. In particular, it may be emphasized that Augustine's theological vocabulary was frequently developed in a polemical context, in conscious opposition to his Pelagian or Donatist opponents, so that the form of his responses was frequently determined by the prior questions or objections of his opponents. The essential point . . . the dogmatic content of Augustine's theology had become

those who might continue to urge an *opus* emphasis, claiming that the giving of a gift can be described as a work. Luther would advise us to leave that way of speaking alone lest we "eat our vomit again."²⁷

This present thesis could be advanced along several lines. One might be further sensitized to identify the Western Augustinian Neo-Platonism which led to Peter of Poitier's establishment of the *opus* terms precisely at the time when Scholasticism was taking shape—and then to follow the continued usage of these terms in subsequent centuries.

One might also sample the spoonful of Luther's statements on the communion of infants²⁸ as well as his response to Augustine's dictum: *crede et manducasti*. If Luther were primarily to emphasize the *objectivity* of the

expressed in terms and concepts unknown to Augustine himself." Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), vol. 1, p. 174-175.

It is therefore a matter for consideration and discussion when one reads "The means of grace work *ex opere operato* (in the good sense, as applied against the Donatists)," *Scriptural Standards and Ecclesiastical Expectations for Servants in the Office of the Public Ministry* (II, B, 1, a.) produced by the Standing Committee for Pastoral Ministry and adopted for circulation and study in February, 1989, in response to Resolution 6-14 of the 1989 convention of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. Need we utilize such a dubious and freighted term as *ex opere operato* when we wish to confess the Means of Grace instituted by Christ?

²⁷*Vide supra*, p. 106.

²⁸See LW 35:111; 36:21,25; 38:208; 41:152; 54:58.

sacraments, we would expect him to approve of the practice of administering the body and blood of Christ to infants—or even a communion policy which worked effectively without regard for any quality of doctrine or faith in the recipients themselves. If, on the other hand, Luther were to emphasize the *subjective* or transforming nature of faith, we would expect him to press Augustine's dictum forward. A cursory review is not conclusive, but suggests that neither of these seems to be extant in the later Luther.

A researcher might then also investigate whether the dogmatic terminology of later Lutherans—from classical orthodoxy until the present—managed to perceive and maintain the distance between themselves and the Aristotelian/Neo-Platonic paradigms from which Luther had withdrawn himself in his latter years. But of all that might remain to further this study, one must resist the enticement to utilize Augustinian or Scholastic terminology and rationale which fail to see "what a beautiful, great, marvelous thing this is" where "everything meshes together in one sacramental unity," a unity where Christ bestows Himself—His body, His blood, His life, His salvation, His forgiveness—through His graciously instituted means for us.

EPILOGUE

Man can tinker only with what he can operate.

Grace, however, is inoperable. That is to say: any attempt on man's part to make grace effective alters the giving so that the gift is no longer gracious. *Si autem gratia non ex operibus alioquin gratia iam non est gratia.* "And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace," (Romans 11:6).

Gifts cease where operations begin. Christ ceases to come graciously where man intends to manipulate Him under the ruse of efficacy or validity. Man cannot work the means for himself. He cannot improve upon their efficiency by controlled experiment. He is at the mercy of God.

Gifts cease where alterations impinge. Christ comes as He is in the way that He does. Man does not configure the gifts according to his own ingratiating assessment. He cannot improve upon their design or character by innovative sociological experiment. A reconstructed gift is a gift not received. Those who attempt to operate, alter, validate, or improve upon the gifts are in fact attempting to operate, alter, validate or improve upon Him who gives Himself through the gifts.

Gifts cease where coercion imposes. Christ comes graciously through His instituted means—not by irresistible force or almighty power. Thus, grace and mercy are inoperable, inefficient, unalterable, resistible. Those who receive the gifts as they are given receive Christ Himself in a gracious and merciful way. To receive the gifts in any way other than the way in which they are given is to reject mercy and grace and to deny Christ.

This confession of Christ as gift serves neither as a concept nor a paradigm. It is neither an idea by which man may boost himself to a spiritual closeness to God nor a model for him to follow to an ideological higher state of being. It is Christ communicating Himself to us and for us, according to neither sovereign power nor anthropocentric cooperation. Deterministic monergism and enthusiastic synergism hold no weight where He comes as pledge and promise to the broken-hearted through His gifts.

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