

Exchange, Atonement, and Recovered Humanity: Martin Luther on the Passive Obedience of Christ

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Abstract: This article engages Luther's doctrine of Christ's passive obedience (*obedientia passiva*)—a theme that comes to fullest expression in his *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/5). There, Luther argues that the sins of the godless become the true possession of the vicariously suffering Son. In turn, Christ's atonement for the sake of the world underwrites a soteriology of the creature's renewed humanity in which the sinner is reoriented outwardly in loving servitude of the neighbor. Luther's *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520) provides the contours of this linkage most fully. This article therefore seeks to elucidate the connections between God's exposure to sin at the cross and the subsequent logic of the human's recovered relation to the other within the creation.

1. Introduction

Luther places the passive obedience (*obedientia passiva*) of the crucified Christ at the center of his doctrine of the atonement. In this, Luther eagerly contends that at the crucifixion, God's exposure to his opposite comes in the form of an exposure to sin, thereby intensifying the scandal of God's cruciform

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self-donation to humanity.¹ In his suffering, Christ gives himself to humans so as to resituate them with regard to the neighbor. Creation is therefore ‘reopened’

- 1 Crucial studies of Luther’s writings on this matter and espousing a ‘passibilist’ perspective on Luther—treated at length in David Luy’s *Dominus Mortis: Martin Luther on the Incorruptibility of God in Christ* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), pp. 16–55—include Kjell Ove Nilsson, *Simul: Das Miteinander von Göttlichem und Menschlichem in Luthers Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966); Theobald Beer, *Der fröhliche Weschel und Streit: Grundzüge der Theologie Luthers* (Leipzig: St. Benno-Verlag, 1974); Marc Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ: Stages and Themes of the Reformer’s Christology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982); Axel Schmidt, *Die Christologie in Martin Luthers späten Disputationen* (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1990); Johann Anselm Steiger, ‘The *Communicatio Idiomatum* as the Axel and Motor of Luther’s Theology’, *Lutheran Quarterly* 14 (2000): pp. 125–58; Florian Schneider, *Christus praedicatus et creditus: die reformatische Christologie Luthers in den ‘Operationes in Psalmis’ (1519–1521), dargestellt mit beständigen Bezug zu seiner Frühzeitchristologie* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2004); Dennis Ngien, *The Suffering of God According to Martin Luther’s ‘Theologia Crucis’* (Vancouver: Regent College, 2005). See also Neal J. Anthony, *Cross Narratives: Christology and the Location of Redemption*, Princeton Theological Monographs Series 135 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010); Philip Ruge-Jones, *Cross in Tensions: Luther’s Theology of the Cross as Theologico-Social Critique*, Princeton Theological Monographs Series 91 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2008); Paul R. Hinlicky, *Luther and the Beloved Community: A Path for Christian Theology after Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 31–65; Hinlicky, ‘Luther’s “Atheism”’, in *The Devil’s Whore: Reason and Philosophy in the Lutheran Tradition*, ed. Jennifer Hockenberry Dragseth (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), pp. 53–60. More broadly, see also Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. John W. DeGruchy, trans. Christian Gremmels, Eberhard Bethge, Renate Bethge, with Ilse Tödt, vol. 8 in Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010); Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003). See the ubiquitously cited article of Ronald G. Goetz, ‘The Suffering God: The Rise of a New Orthodoxy’, *The Christian Century* 103 (1986): pp. 385–9. See also *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering*, ed. James F. Keating and Thomas Joseph White, O.P. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); as well as the rather interesting, if eccentric, proposal of Slavoj Žižek to enlist the figure of the cross and the Christian legacy of the west in his version of dialectical materialism: Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2009). See also Marius Timmann Mjaaland, *The Hidden God: Luther, Philosophy, and Political Theology* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana, 2015), who therein enlists Luther’s anti-metaphysical disposition for decidedly philosophical, rather than strictly dogmatic, ends. On the *genus tapeinoticon*, and its rejection in later Lutheranism, see *Formula of Concord (FC), Solid Declaration (SD) VIII 43*, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), p. 624 [Hereafter cited as *BC* with page numbers]. It has often been argued that it is later, with the onset of modernity, that Luther’s nascent insights about divine suffering in Christ resurface, after the establishment of Lutheran identity, especially in the era of confessionalization with the *Formula of Concord* and the dogmatic traditions of Lutheran orthodoxy in the seventeenth century. Knut Alfsvåg registers an interesting dissent from this narration of the story, suggesting that Luther’s penchant for viewing humanity and divinity together is a distinctly anti-modern one. See Knut Alfsvåg, ‘Martin Luther og den inkarnatoriske virkelighetsforståelsen’, *Teologisk Tidsskrift* 6 (2017): pp. 195–208.

to the creature, to use the language of Oswald Bayer,² such that humans likewise donate themselves to the other in a vocation of vicarious suffering. Through an engagement with Luther's doctrine of the atonement, I intend to unearth a logic that links Christ's passive suffering under the law with the re-humanized life of the redeemed in self-giving love for neighbor. Luther not only expands the cross's offensiveness by proposing God's exposure to sin in addition to death, but he also underwrites an account of human life in relation to others that places the human amidst the world alongside the cross.³ The Christian is simultaneously 'a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none', and also, 'a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all'.⁴ Luther's logic of Christ's suffering and its implications for creaturely restoration are thus the prime subject matter of the following examination. I will conclude by tracing the connection between these two dimensions of Luther's thinking on the passive obedience of Christ and make recommendations as to its importance as well.

Luther's *oeuvre* is vast, but he articulates his view of Christ's passive obedience most clearly in three major documents. *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520), *Against Latomus* (1522), and the *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/5) contain important elements of Luther's doctrines of the atonement and the person of Christ, especially with what we might call an 'acquisitive' account of Christ's relation to sin. What follows highlights the interplay between Christ's (1) taking of sin from sinners and (2) the way in which Christ's passive suffering funds a vision of Christian life as the creature's re-humanization. Across Luther's writings the notion of a 'joyous exchange' (*fröhliche Weschel*) between Christ and sinners functions importantly in the development of the doctrine of justification by faith alone.⁵ On Luther's logic, since Christ has truly taken sins

2 See Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 106–15; Bayer, *Living By Faith: Justification and Sanctification*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Lutheran Quarterly Books* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), pp. 27–8.

3 See Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification*, trans. Kirsi I. Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005); Tuomo Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love: Martin Luther's Religious World*, trans. Kirsi I. Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010); *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995). See also Sun-Young Kim, *Luther on Faith and Love: Christ and the Law in the 1535 Galatians Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014). See also Christine Helmer, *The Trinity and Martin Luther*, rev. ed. (Bellingham: Lexham, 2017).

4 Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520), in *Luther's Works*, American Edition, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, 82 vols. (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955–), 31, p. 344 [Hereafter cited as *LW* followed by volume and page numbers].

5 See Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, pp. 19–21.

from sinners, they no longer belong to the ones he forgives.⁶ Freedom for neighborly love and service to the other is the natural extension of Luther's view of justification. The task at hand is to explicate the connection between Christ's passive obedience and the kind of suffering for others that this means for those justified by faith.

2. Luther's Reconstruction of Divine Love

Contextualizing the following discussion in terms of Luther's *theologia crucis* as initially developed in his *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518) will prove helpful, given the kind of creative love Luther identifies in Christ's cruciform self-giving. In this celebrated disputation, Luther charges the inherited theology of works with failing to take sin seriously enough.⁷ This is because of the sinner's self-deceptive tendency to perform works he or she wants to do in order to elicit divine pleasure at the expense of truly good works. According to Luther, sinners often do not notice that their most treasured deeds are offensive to God because of the sinner's faithless self-assertion in the case of these self-chosen works.⁸ Here Luther also develops his account of God's salvific action *sub contrario* (under the form of the opposite). Luther argues that God reveals himself not in ways intuitively thought to be good and beautiful, but rather in the horror and ugliness of weakness, especially at the cross.⁹ God reveals himself in this way to mortify human reason and elicit the sinner's rejection of him. God's dispensation of mercy in the tragedy of the crucifixion is, then, truly free and unilateral, offered apart from human cooperation, contribution, or merit. Only then is justifying faith created by God's word. Luther thus reconstructs the salvific significance of love: for God's love 'does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it'.¹⁰ Faith is not formed by love (*fides caritate formata*), but rather is formed by an antecedent love from God in forgiveness. God gratuitously and

6 Luther does not have in mind a theory about the fallenness of Christ's humanity or the Son's theoretical peccability. Luther instead reaches for the kind of doctrine of atonement in which Christ takes sins from sinners throughout the course of his ministry, and culminating in his crucifixion. Christ's death embodies the final duel he wages against sin's oppression of the creatures he comes to save. On the issue of Christ's sinlessness and the question of the Son's peccability, see Ian A. McFarland, *The Word Made Flesh: A Theology of the Incarnation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2019), pp. 130–8.

7 Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), *LW* 31, pp. 40–1, 45–8.

8 *LW* 31, pp. 40, 47.

9 *LW* 31, pp. 39–41, 42–57. Steven D. Paulson begins his precis of Lutheran systematic theology by suggesting that 'Lutheran theology begins perversely by advocating the destruction of all that is good, right, and beautiful in human life. It attacks the lowest and highest goals of life, especially morality, no matter how sincere are its practitioners'. Paulson, *Lutheran Theology* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2011), p. 1.

10 *LW* 31, p. 41.

unilaterally brings into being what was not there before, which means that divine love is creative love.¹¹

Luther further develops his restructured theology of love in *The Freedom of a Christian*. There, he imagines God's justification of sinners as a 'marriage' between Christ and the believer. This union is not abstract, but always configured by the mediating self-communication of Christ in his word of promise and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.¹² Thus divine love is not only creative, but also creational, since it is mediated through earthly means. Where Christ's word is, there also will be faith. Luther identifies three 'benefits' or 'powers' of faith. The first such 'power' is the Christian's total freedom from the law. By virtue of Christ's forgiveness, the law has no standing by which to address its condemnation to the Christian. Secondly, faith freely and spontaneously confesses Christ's lordship and the truthfulness of his promising address. Finally, Luther identifies the union between Christ and the believer as a sort of 'marriage' in which Christ's righteousness, innocence, and immortality become the believer's possession.

On the other hand, Christ comes to possess all that belongs to sinners: sin, death, and even damnation. Luther describes this as a sort of one-flesh union in which the exchange is total and nothing is held back on either side.¹³ Faith in the word of promise is the 'wedding ring' which binds the union together.¹⁴ On account of this linguistically mediated union, Luther suggests that '[Christ] shares in the sins, death, and pains of hell which are his bride's. As a matter of

11 *LW* 31, p. 41. See Steven D. Paulson and John W. Hoyum, 'Luther's Theology of the Cross', in *Martin Luther in Context*, ed. David M. Whitford (New York: Cambridge, 2018), pp. 283–9.

12 On Luther's revision of an inherited motif, see Jack D. Kilcrease, 'The Bridal-Mystical Motif in Bernard of Clairvaux and Martin Luther', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 65 (2014): pp. 263–79.

13 Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520), *LW* 31, p. 351. Luther writes,

The third incomparable benefit of faith is that it unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. By this mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul become one flesh [Eph. 5:31–32]. And if they are one flesh and there is between them a true marriage—indeed the most perfect of all marriages, since human marriages are but poor examples of this one true marriage—it follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil. Accordingly the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as though it were its own, and whatever the soul has Christ claims as his own. Let us compare these and we shall see inestimable benefits. Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's; for if Christ is a bridegroom, he must take upon himself the things which are his bride's and bestow upon her the things that are his. If he gives her his body and very self, how shall he not give her all that is his? And if he takes the body of the bride, how shall he not take all that is hers?

14 *LW* 31, p. 352.

fact, he makes them his own and acts as if they were his own and as if he himself had sinned'.¹⁵ Luther celebrates Christ's gifted righteousness, which overpowers and disarms death on behalf of sinners.¹⁶ He envisions the saving act of Christ as his inextricably close identification with the sinners he forgives. On account of this union between Christ and the believer, effected by the word of promise, the Christian is simultaneously free and subject: free from the condemnation of the law, but now subject to the neighbor in love.¹⁷ Just as Christ bears human sin in his atoning death, so also do Christians come to bear the sins and burdens of their neighbors in faith's transformation of creaturely life.

Luther's simultaneously christological and soteriological discussion of Christ's acquisition of sin is set forth similarly in *Against Latomus*.¹⁸ This highly polemical engagement involves the teaching of justification by faith alone and its proper relation to the Christian's new obedience in service to the neighbor. At a critical point in the argument with Latomus, Luther again develops an acquisitive account of the Son's suffering for sin in the atonement. He returns to the matter of sin's seriousness, and charges those who offer a figurative expression of Christ's removal of sin with softening its sting to render sin manageable. Luther writes, 'there is a metaphor not only in the words, but also in the actuality, for our sins have truly been taken from us and placed upon him, so that everyone who believes on him really has no sins, because they have been transferred to Christ and swallowed up by him, for they no longer condemn'.¹⁹ Luther denounces artificial distinctions between guilt and the attribution of punishment, since punishment which one does not authentically feel is no punishment at all.²⁰ Instead, Luther affirms an 'effective attribution' which is 'wholly genuine, except that [Christ] did not deserve it'.²¹ The only 'metaphorical' element Luther detects in this great exchange between the sinner and the savior is that Jesus did not actually 'deserve' the punishment he received. In himself, the person of Christ is righteous. Yet insofar as Christ has taken sins unto himself, the law's judgment is both real and justifiable.

Here, the theme of Christ's vicarious and passive obedience under the law emerges more explicitly—something he treats at greater length in the *Lectures on*

15 *LW* 31, p. 352.

16 *LW* 31, p. 352.

17 *LW* 31, p. 344.

18 See Anna Vind's retrieval of this work in *Latomus and Luther: The Debate: Is Every Good Deed a Sin?* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018). See also Anna Vind, "'Christus Factus est Peccatum Metaphorice': Über die theologische Verwendung rhetorischer Figuren bei Luther unter Einbeziehung Quintilians", in *Creator est Creatura: Luthers Christologie als Lehre von der Idiomenkommunikation*, ed. Oswald Bayer and Benjamin Gleede (Berlin: Walter DeGruyter, 2007), pp. 95–124.

19 Martin Luther, *Against Latomus* (1521), *LW* 32:200.

20 *LW* 32, p. 201.

21 *LW* 21, p. 201.

Galatians.²² So far, we observe that Luther's *theologia crucis* involves a crucial reconstruction of divine love. God's favor is not attracted to the vestiges of goodness and beauty that remain in humans. Rather, God cleaves to fallen creatures in the interest of removing their sin. This is not the transformation of the sinner from vice to virtue, but is the sinner's journey with Christ from death to life.²³ God's love is both creative, in that it makes faith, and also creational, in that God uses earthly means to deliver the benefits of Christ's atoning death.

3. Luther on Christ's Passive Suffering

Later, lecturing on the Epistle to the Galatians, Luther expands the foregoing account of Christ's taking of sins in his exegesis of Paul's statement that Christ has become a 'curse' in order to free humans from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13). According to his own person, Christ possesses righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, but desires to clothe the sinners he forgives with these properties. In forgiveness, Christ not only shows himself to have these attributes in the abstract, but comes to give them concretely as well through his vicarious suffering. Christ possesses these attributes in himself, but according to Luther, Jesus puts them to work on behalf of sinners in his removal of their sin and subsequent forgiveness. In this sense, Luther's fixation on the action of giving, taking, and self-giving in Christ's saving work indicates a crucially 'eventful' reconstruction of christology—one which Johann Anselm Steiger concludes involves a scandalous historicization of metaphysics.²⁴ What Luther is after is not the protection of Christ's divine attributes in the abstract but their deployment for the sake of human salvation. To know that Christ in himself is holy is one thing, but it is salvation to know that his holiness is donated to the sinner as a gift. But what this all means is that Christ's obedient, passive suffering—coordinated with his forgiving activity—involves divine exposure to sin, thus intensifying the cross's horror in the process of amplifying Luther's evangelical proclamation.

Christ's self-giving means the appropriation of the worst features of sinners in exchange for the righteousness, innocence, and blessedness which belong to him—now shared at the cross with human beings. While Christ does not suffer on his own account, according to Luther, he does suffer for others. Luther writes,

Christ took all our sins upon Himself, and for them He died on the cross. Therefore it was appropriate for him to become a thief, as Isaiah says (53:12)

22 See Robert W. Bertram, 'How our Sins were Christ's: A Study in Luther's *Galatians* (1531)', in *The Promising Tradition: A Reader in Law-Gospel Reconstructionist Theology*, ed. Edward H. Schroeder (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary in Exile, 1974), pp. 7–21.

23 See an important passage in Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* (1525), *LW* 33, p. 62.

24 Johann Anselm Steiger 'Communicatio Idiomatum', pp. 128–9.

. . . And all the prophets saw this, that Christ was to become the greatest thief, murderer, adulterer, robber, desecrator, blasphemer, etc., there has ever been anywhere in the world. He is not acting as His own Person now. Now He is not the Son of God, born of the Virgin. But He is a sinner, who has and bears the sin of Paul, the former blasphemer, persecutor, and assaulter; of Peter, who denied Christ; of David, who was an adulterer and a murderer, and who caused the Gentiles to blaspheme the name of the Lord (Rom. 2:24).²⁵

Luther stretches his language to express the seriousness of Christ's desire to forgive sin. Christ is not merely a figural mediator whose death is a foregone conclusion or the simulated acting-out of a theoretical exchange which occurs in God's triune life behind the events of creation's history. Here, Luther stresses the real and historical character of the atonement as a drama in which Christ's saving work is temporally executed.²⁶ Christ does not gesture to a transaction absent from Calvary, but enacts his taking of sins from sinners in the most brutally physical sense possible, which culminates with his death.

Luther's painfully physical description of Christ's taking of sin requires a similarly recalibrated view of the law and its place in Christ's suffering. The law is not an ahistorical standard by which behavior is measured, but is, rather, an historical actor in this drama that Luther personifies as a voice declaring guilt to those it addresses. Luther refuses abstraction in relation to the law, thereby relativizing it in terms of its accusatory function.²⁷ Luther's view of atonement places Christ himself on the receiving end of the law's declaration of guilt. Fully and temporally identified with accusation, the law discovers Christ in his fraternization with sinners and finds him guilty. Luther writes that 'this general Law of Moses included Him, although he was innocent so far as His own Person was concerned; for it found Him among sinners and thieves. Thus a magistrate regards someone as a criminal and punishes him if he catches him among thieves, even though the man has never committed anything evil or worthy of

25 Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/5), *LW* 26, p. 276.

26 See Gerhard O. Forde, 'Caught in the Act: Reflections on the Work of Christ', *Word & World* 3 (1983): pp. 22–31.

27 On the relationship between the law's function and its essence, see the following selection of literature: Wilfried Joest, *Gesetz und Freiheit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961); Gerhard Ebeling, 'On the Doctrine of the *Triplex Usus Legis* in the Theology of the Reformation', in *Word and Faith*, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), pp. 62–78; Gerhard O. Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate: An Interpretation of Its Historical Development* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969); James A. Nestingen, 'The Antinomian Controversy in the Lutheran Reformation', (St. Paul, MN: Luther Seminary, unpublished M.Th. Thesis, 1978); Walter R. Bouman, 'The Concept of the "Law" in the Lutheran Tradition', *Word & World* 3 (1983): pp. 413–22; Nicholas Hopman, 'Lex Aeterna and the Antinomian Disputations', *Lutheran Quarterly* 30 (2016): pp. 152–80.

death'.²⁸ Paradoxically enough, though Christ himself is innocent, the law is vindicated in its attack on him, since the sins of all people are located with him because of his association with the unrighteous. As a matter of his own responsibility, Christ is innocent. But since Christ has appropriated sin in the act of forgiving it, the law makes its justifiable verdict of guilt.

No reflexive need to punish sin on the part of the Father is necessary in Luther's account, nor is some sort of theoretical reconciliation of the rarified attributes of justice and mercy. Luther redirects his attention to the acquisitive and associative actions of Christ with regard to the godless. The various activities of Christ in his earthly ministry demonstrate his desire to be with the sinful, the unclean, and the outcast. By being with them, Christ comes to bear their burdens vicariously. Luther writes, 'Christ was found among sinners; but of His own free will and by the will of the Father He wanted to be an associate of sinners, having assumed the flesh and blood of those who were sinners and thieves and who were immersed in all sorts of sin'.²⁹ The Father does not offer Christ before the punishment of the law in order to defend divine honor from the offense of sin, but to disarm the law's power to oppress the sinners it threatens.

When the merciful Father saw that we were being oppressed through the Law, that we were being held under a curse, and that we could not be liberated from it by anything, He sent His Son into the world, heaped all the sins of all men upon Him, and said to Him: 'Be Peter the denier; Paul the persecutor, blasphemer, and assaulter; David the adulterer; the sinner who ate the apple in Paradise; the thief on the cross. In short, be the person of all men, the one who has committed the sins of all men. And see to it that You pay and make satisfaction for them'. Now the Law comes and says: 'I find Him a sinner, who takes upon Himself the sins of all men. I do not see any other sins than those in Him. Therefore let Him die on the cross!' And so it attacks Him and kills Him. By this deed the whole world is purged and expiated from all sins, and thus it is set free from death and every evil.³⁰

Luther notes that Christ's atoning work under the punishment of the law also entails justification by faith alone, for if Christ's death only sets forth a model for Christians to imitate—and therefore to mimetically participate in the

28 *LW* 26, pp. 277–8.

29 *LW* 26, p. 278. See also p. 279: 'Therefore Christ not only was crucified and died, but by divine *love* sin was laid upon Him. When sin was laid upon Him, the Law came and said: "Let every sinner die! And therefore, Christ, if You want to reply that you are guilty and that You bear the punishment, you must bear the sin and the curse as well"'. (emphasis mine). In this sense, Luther reads the atonement as the triumph of divine, self-donating love, over the law, in its creative and forgiving bestowal upon the sinful human.

30 *LW* 26, p. 280.

accomplishment of salvation³¹—Christ is ‘segregate[ed] . . . from sins and from sinners’.³²

Instead of rendering Christ’s death as exemplary of how Christians themselves should behave (*Christus exemplar*), Luther enjoins his readers to find Christ ‘wrapped up in their flesh and blood’ by virtue of his incarnation.³³ Likewise, Christians must ‘wrap [Christ] and know him to be wrapped up in our sins, our curse, our death, and everything evil’.³⁴ If Christ is known as such, ‘all the fanatical opinions of our opponents about justification by works’ are done away with.³⁵ Any notion of *fides caritate formata* (faith formed by love) is ruled out, for Luther, since such a gesture would ‘unwrap’ Christ from sin and transfer the responsibility for sin’s removal to the cooperative activities of humans in conjunction with infused grace.³⁶

Discussing Paul’s remarks on the cursedness of Christ, Luther turns again to the question of the law in the conflict between Christ’s work for sinners and divine justice. Instead of discerning some final and abstracted continuity between wrath and love, Luther relocates God’s righteousness from wrath to his merciful desire to forgive. God’s merciful disposition leads to Christ taking sin as a substitute under the law’s curse and condemnation. Two things converge in conflict: the power of sin, which is the law (1 Cor. 15:56), and the essential property of God’s righteousness, which is divine mercy.³⁷ The law attacks Christ at the cross, though it is unable to see that ‘He is a Person of invincible and eternal righteousness’.³⁸ Luther finds the duel between divine mercy and divine justice even ‘more amazing and outstanding’ because it is carried out in the person of the Son himself and the public events of his life.³⁹ Yet it is a duel in which the mercy that is God’s character triumphs over his wrath. Christ is not appeasing the law so that it can be reordered to its true purpose of structuring human life. Rather, the duel of mercy and justice is one of ‘God overcoming God’, such that the divine wrath manifested in the law is silenced before the promising words of mercy spoken by Christ.⁴⁰ What Luther has done with the law is rendered it an actor in the story of salvation which addresses Christ

31 I am thankful to Mark C. Mattes for using the terminology of ‘mimetic participation’ to identify certain descriptions of how Christians imitatively share in Christ’s own life. See Mattes, ‘The Thomistic Turn in Evangelical Catholic Ethics’, *Lutheran Quarterly* 16 (2002): pp. 65–100.

32 *LW* 26, p. 278.

33 *LW* 26, p. 278.

34 *LW* 26, p. 278.

35 *LW* 26, p. 279.

36 *LW* 26, p. 279. Cf. p. 269.

37 *LW* 26, p. 281. See 1 Cor. 15:46.

38 *LW* 26, p. 281.

39 *LW* 26, p. 281.

40 See Luther’s comments in a somewhat different context in his *Lectures on Genesis*, *LW* 6, pp. 125–45.

clothed with human sin. Though just in its accusation of Jesus, Christ's righteousness overcomes the law's accusation, culminating in the resurrection. Easter thus testifies to the triumph of God's mercy over his wrath.⁴¹

Taking this assertion as both magnificent and detestable, Luther links Arianism with efforts to mitigate the radical nature of Christ's proximity to wickedness in the atonement. By denying the full divinity of Christ, Arianism insulates divinity from contaminating closeness to human transgression.⁴² Luther's alternative christological proposal makes a reversal, in that divine mercy is creative in relation to its opposite by bringing forth faith where there was none before. As in his earlier discussion of the *theologia crucis*, divine love does not seek vestiges of goodness to transform, but sins to remove and forgive.⁴³ Luther charges his interlocutors with confusing 'this divine power' to remove sin with their own works, and 'in this way have made us true God by nature'.⁴⁴ God's own 'nature' in this case is his mercy, which God expresses and actualizes in the events of Christ's suffering and death. Faith grasps what the word about Christ then declares. Faith in the word is not a mystical process of ascent, nor gradual, imitative, and participatory union with God.⁴⁵ For justifying faith in Christ, there is 'in fact no sin any longer, no curse, no death, and no devil, because Christ has conquered and abolished these. Accordingly, the victory of Christ is utterly certain'.⁴⁶ Faith in Christ, the external reality of his removal of sin, and his word of forgiveness are what provide the assurance of salvation. Justifying faith, mediated by the promise, then constitutes the 'marriage' or 'union' of Christ and the Christian.⁴⁷

Drawing his discussion to a close, Luther concludes with a grammatical argument in favor of his description of Christ's acquisition of sin in the saving act of his death. He writes,

41 See Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, pp. 87–113.

42 *LW* 26, p. 282.

43 *LW* 31, p. 41.

44 *LW* 26, p. 283.

45 *LW* 26, p. 284.

We must look at this image and take hold of it with a firm faith. He who does this has the innocence and the victory of Christ, no matter how great a sinner he is. But this cannot be grasped by loving will; it can be grasped only by reason illumined by faith. Therefore we are justified by faith alone, because faith grasps this victory of Christ. To the extent you believe this, to that extent you have it. If you believe that sin, death, and the curse have been abolished, they have been abolished, because Christ conquered and overcame them in Himself; and He wants us to believe that just as in His Person there is no longer the mask of the sinner or any vestige of death, so this is no longer in our person, since He has done everything for us.

46 *LW* 26, p. 285.

47 See *LW* 31, p. 352.

it is more pleasing if the precise meaning of the terms is preserved for the sake of greater emphasis. For when a sinner really comes to a knowledge of himself, he feels himself to be a sinner not only concretely or adjectivally, but abstractly and substantively. That is, he seems to himself to be not only miserable but misery itself; not only a sinner, and an accursed one, but sin and the curse itself.⁴⁸

This great exchange between Christ and the sinner is where ‘all the curses of the Law were gathered together in Him’. Luther celebrates these events of Christ’s passive obedience as the ‘adorable myster[y] of Scripture’ and ‘the true cabala’—something hinted at before, but now fully revealed in the saving act of the crucified one for the unrighteous.⁴⁹

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- 48 *LW* 26, p. 288. It is in this way that Christ comes to experience the wrath of the law in its fullness, not just on a theoretical or metaphorical level, but so truly as if he had committed the sin of every sinner: ‘For all the curses of the Law were gathered together in Him, and therefore He bore and sustained them in His own body for us. Consequently, He was not only accursed; but He became a curse for us’. (p. 288). ‘Concreteness’ as opposed to ‘abstraction’ in christology appears in Luther’s writings in a variety of places, but most especially in his later trinitarian and christological works. The distinction is an inheritance from nominalism, and functions importantly in Luther’s account of the *communicatio idiomatum*. See some of the literature treating Luther’s rather fraught relationship with nominalism: Graham White, *Luther as Nominalist: A Study of the Logical Methods Used in Martin Luther’s Disputations in Light of Their Late Medieval Background* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola Society, 1994); Bengt Hägglund, *Theologie und Philosophie bei Luther und in der occamistischen Tradition: Luthers Stellung zur Theorie von der doppelten Wahrheit* (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1955); Bengt Hägglund, ‘Was Luther a Nominalist?’ *Concordia Theological Monthly* 28 (1957): pp. 441–52; Luy, *Dominus Mortis*; Thomas Osborne, ‘Faith, Philosophy, and the Nominalist Background of Luther’s Defense of the Real Presence’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63 (2002): pp. 63–82; Dennis Bielfeldt, ‘Luther’s Late Trinitarian Disputations: Semantic Realism and the Trinity’, in *The Substance of the Faith: Luther’s Doctrinal Theology for Today*, ed. Paul R. Hinlicky (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), pp. 59–126; Paul R. Hinlicky, ‘Luther’s New Language of the Spirit: Trinitarian Theology as Critical Dogmatics’, in *The Substance of the Faith: Luther’s Doctrinal Theology for Today*, ed. Paul R. Hinlicky (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), pp. 131–90; Theodor Dieter, ‘Luther as Late Medieval Theologian: His Positive and Negative Uses of Nominalism and Realism’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther’s Theology*, pp. 31–48; Mark C. Mattes, ‘Luther’s Use of Philosophy’, *Lutherjahrbuch* 80 (2013): pp. 110–41; Mark C. Mattes, *Martin Luther’s Theology of Beauty: A Reappraisal* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), pp. 15–42.
- 49 *LW* 26, pp. 290–1.

In the 1520s, Luther had deployed his interpretation of the *communicatio idiomatum* in the context of the eucharistic controversy as a supporting feature of his case for the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine.⁵⁰ But it is in the *Lectures on Galatians* where Luther actually radicalizes his ‘use’⁵¹ of the doctrine in a different soteriological register. Christ’s acquisitive relation to sin appears shameful, contrary to the divine law, and perhaps even nihilistic in its embrace of suffering and death.⁵² But Luther’s description of Christ’s suffering does not so much constitute a theology of ‘misery loves company’, as Gerhard O. Forde once termed it,⁵³ but instead embodies an expansion of his *theologia crucis* in which God’s forgiveness is creative of faith where there is none.⁵⁴ God in Christ is drawn to sinners in order to forgive them, remove their sin, and thus recover true humanity’s lost original innocence. This final step of the argument involves specifying what these creative dimensions of Christ’s forgiveness actually are. We now turn to the link between Luther’s view of Christ, justification, and atonement and the recovery of creation.

4. Luther and Recovered Humanity

The implications of Luther’s comments on Christ’s taking of sin in the atonement have been interpreted variously. Steven D. Paulson, for example, has specified the place of the law in Luther’s doctrine of the atonement.⁵⁵ On the other hand, the new Finnish school of Luther research, associated with Tuomo Mannermaa, is notable for advancing a reading of Luther’s *Lectures on Galatians* which interprets important passages of the commentary regarding Christ’s presence in faith (*in ipsa fide Christus adest*) in terms of deification.⁵⁶ Themes of ‘exchange’,

50 See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor: Introduction to the Reformer’s Exegetical Writings*, *Luther’s Works Companion Volume* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), p. 139.

51 See Simeon Zahl, ‘Tradition and its “Use”’: The Ethics of Theological Retrieval’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 73 (2018): pp. 308–23.

52 Though not about Luther himself, David Bentley Hart has charged some of Luther’s modern disciples—Eberhard Jüngel, specifically—with a kind of ‘late romantic nihilism’ that surrounds their appropriations of the theology of the cross. See Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 157.

53 See Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. viii, 83, 86.

54 *LW* 31, p. 41. See also Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, p. 148.

55 See Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, pp. 87–113.

56 See Risto Saarinen, ‘Justification by Faith: The View of the Mannermaa School’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther’s Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L’ubomir Batka (New York: Oxford, 2014), p. 254. See also Risto Saarinen, ‘Im Überschuss: Zur Theologie des Gebens’, in *Word—Gift—Being: Justification—Economy—Ontology*, ed. Bo Kristian Holm and Peter Widman (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2009), pp. 73–85.

like those discussed above, figure prominently in efforts to cast Luther's view of justification as a version of *theosis*.⁵⁷ While the Finnish reading of Luther has been critically scrutinized elsewhere,⁵⁸ I suggest here a reorientation of inquiry that traces the creative implications of Christ's passive suffering in terms of 're-humanization' or the recovery of true humanity. The preceding account of Christ's vicarious self-giving illuminates and specifies the dynamics of this recovery of creation. As Luther understands it, humanity in this case is not an enclosure from others, but involves a likewise self-giving orientation towards the neighbor in love.⁵⁹ Recovery of humanity in neighbor-love is the product of Christ's own taking of humanity in the incarnation as well as sin at the cross. Christ's acquisitive relation to sinners frees justified creatures to life within creation where they likewise come to acquire the burdens and struggles of their neighbors.

This is the direction Luther takes his discussion in the context of *The Freedom of a Christian*.⁶⁰ It is certainly imaginable that Luther might, like the neo-Chalcedonians before him, deploy a radical account of the *communicatio*

57 See Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, pp. 13–22.

58 See William W. Schumacher, *Who Do I Say That You Are: Anthropology and the Theology of Theosis in the Finnish School of Tuomo Mannermaa* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010); Timo Laato, 'Justification: The Stumbling Block of the Finnish Luther School', *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 72 (2008): pp. 327–46; Gordon L. Isaac, 'The Finnish School of Luther Interpretation: Responses and Trajectories', *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 76 (2012): pp. 251–68; Javier A. Garcia, 'A Critique of Mannermaa on Luther and Galatians', *Lutheran Quarterly* 27 (2013): pp. 33–55. A weakness of the Finnish reading is that it construes Luther's real, instead of legally fictional, account of justification in terms of *theosis* rather than the *verbum efficax* (effective word). Even Robert W. Jenson—certainly a sympathizer with the new Finnish school—makes precisely this point in 'Response to Tuomo Mannermaa, "Why is Luther So Fascinating?"' in *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 24. In this, I also gesture approvingly at the contribution of Oswald Bayer, who has pinpointed *promissio* (promise) as the critical turn in Luther's reformational discovery of an effective word which performs the content it declares. See Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, pp. 50–7. In any case, the argument here is that such union must be taken as linguistically mediated in Christ's forgiveness which is actually accomplished in the historical events of his saving, atoning act. Thanks are due to Joshua C. Miller for crystalizing this insight for me.

59 Oswald Bayer has probed the ethical dimensions of Luther's view of human life in creation, especially the three estates. These ethical features are tangential to the argument being advanced here, but are worth noting at this point. See the items collected in Bayer, *Freedom in Response: Lutheran Ethics: Sources and Controversies*, trans. Jeff Cayzer (New York: Oxford, 2007).

60 *LW* 31, pp. 358–371.

idiomatum in service to a broader vision of creation's deification.⁶¹ In Luther's case, it is creaturely subjection to the neighbor that is the central anthropological upshot of the great exchange between Christ and the Christian. In the *Lectures on Galatians*, Luther must digress with his exposition of Gal. 3:13 and move on to the next verse, but when he deals with the issue topically, he first interprets the implications of Christ's acquisition of sin for justification—as canvassed above—but then moves on to the Christian's relation to the neighbor. As a result of atonement and justification, the Christian is 'a perfectly free lord, subject to none'.⁶² Faith in the promise of the gospel possesses the benefits of Christ inexhaustibly. Bayer has helpfully elucidated the creational dimensions of the means of grace through which the gifts of Christ are apprehended by faith, using J.G. Hamann's coinage of creation as God's address to the creature *through* the creature (*Rede an die Kreatur durch die Kreatur*).⁶³ Bayer correctly grasps that God's mercy is creative of what was not there before and also thoroughly creational, since mercy is mediated through the earthly means of word and sacrament. Likewise, creatures remain embodied and therefore subject to the conditions of earthly life.⁶⁴ This is true in terms of their reception of the means of grace by which they grasp Christ by faith, but is also true in terms of their continuing relationship to the other.

Therefore, Luther traces the other side of the paradox of Christian freedom: 'A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all'.⁶⁵ Having explicated the doctrine of justification already, Luther takes care to patrol the distinction between works done in service to the neighbor and the free forgiveness already won and bestowed by Jesus Christ in the word. These two kinds of 'righteousness' are not to be confused with one another.⁶⁶ According to faith, one is wholly at peace with God, truly possessing the righteousness of Christ. Luther compares the righteousness that faith grasps with the restoration of original Edenic innocence: 'Through his faith [the Christian] has been restored to Paradise and created anew'.⁶⁷ But since justified sinners remain in this earthly life, their external works are no longer directed to God but toward service of the other.

61 Cf. Maximus the Confessor on the issue of Christ being 'made sin' (2 Cor. 5:21) in *Ad Thalassium* 42, in *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, trans. Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken, Popular Patristics Series 25 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 2003), pp. 119–22. See also David S. Yeago, 'The Bread of Life: Patristic Christology and Evangelical Soteriology in Martin Luther's Sermons on John 6', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 39 (1995): pp. 257–79.

62 *LW* 31, p. 344.

63 See Oswald Bayer, *Schöpfung als Anrede: Zu einer Hermeneutik der Schöpfung* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1990), pp. 9–32.

64 'As long as we live in the flesh we only begin to make some progress in that which shall be perfected in the future life'. *LW* 31, p. 358.

65 *LW* 31, p. 344.

66 *LW* 31, p. 359. See Luther's treatise from around the same time *Two Kinds of Righteousness* (1519), in *LW* 31, pp. 297–306.

67 *LW* 31, p. 360.

Such works are not a supplement to the righteousness of Christ given as a gift, but they are meant to serve and benefit the neighbor. They come forth from faith, but are not an addition to it.⁶⁸ Distending the structure of sin as *curvatus in se*, Luther figures the re-humanized lives of the saints as reoriented externally. Therefore, 'A man does not live for himself' alone in this mortal body to work for it alone, but he lives also for all men on earth; rather, he lives only for others and not for himself'.⁶⁹ All activity in the earthly realm is to be guided by the needs and demands of the other.⁷⁰

All things in this life are then recovered as gifts once again. In his *Small Catechism*, Luther reads the first article of the Apostles' Creed as a catalog of God's gifts in creation, but they are only received as such from the vantage of faith in the crucified and risen Christ.⁷¹ In the same way, in *The Freedom of a Christian*, Luther reads works done for the neighbor as 'a surplus with which [the Christian] can by voluntary benevolence serve and do good to his neighbor'.⁷² Out of the great largesse of the God who creates and sustains all things, the Christian renders joyous service to others like Christ. Though Luther is cautious in this place to identify Christian action as imitative of Christ, the self-giving of Jesus is the form of life to which the Christian corresponds in the service of others. The divine Son has no lack of righteousness, for he was righteous apart from works just as the Christian is, but 'he did all this for our sake, that he might serve us and that all things which he accomplished in this form of a servant might become ours'.⁷³ The Christian is free from the burden of rendering accomplishments to God as meritorious service, but nonetheless in freedom can 'take upon himself the form of a servant, be made in the likeness of men, be found in human form ... to serve, help, and in every way deal with his neighbor as he sees that God through Christ has dealt and still deals with him'.⁷⁴ As Christ offered himself upon the cross for sin, so the Christian offers herself to the neighbor.⁷⁵

Since God's love 'does not find but creates what is pleasing to him',⁷⁶ God does not seek a reward in creatures for the redemption wrought by Christ. The

68 *LW* 31, p. 360.

69 *LW* 31, p. 364.

70 *LW* 31, p. 365.

71 Luther, *Small Catechism* (SC), The Creed, 1–2; *BC*, pp. 354–5. See also Koert Verhagen's argument that Luther and Bonhoeffer provide an alternative to many typically modern constructions of the relation between God and faith by closely linking creation and justification. See Verhagen, 'Justified *ex nihilo*: Retrieving Creation for Justification with Luther and Bonhoeffer', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 21 (2019): pp. 199–216, esp. pp. 203–4.

72 *LW* 31, pp. 365–6.

73 *LW* 31, p. 366.

74 *LW* 31, p. 366.

75 *LW* 31, p. 367.

76 *LW* 31, p. 41.

Christian therefore avoids preferential treatment of the other, 'willingly spend[ing] himself and all he has, whether he wastes all on the thankless or whether he gains a reward'.⁷⁷ In this way, Luther asserts that the form of the Christian life is actually to be 'Christ to one another': 'Hence, as our heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our aid, we also ought freely to help our neighbor through our body and its works, and each one should become as it were a Christ to the other that we may be Christs to one another and Christ may be the same in all, that is, that we may be truly Christians'.⁷⁸ Luther adds that Christians are 'named after Christ, not because he is absent from us, but because he dwells in us, that is, because we believe in him and are Christs one to another and do to our neighbors as Christ does to us'.⁷⁹ Though a certain 'divinizing' sense of Christ's union with the believer is present in statements like this—speaking of Christ dwelling in the Christian⁸⁰—the orientation is externally focused on life in creation.

In the comment on Galatians 3:13, Luther eschews the sinful endeavor to claim works or union with God as one's own in a mystical process of imitative participation in God.⁸¹ To 'participate' in God is to participate in the humanity Christ took and redeemed at Christmas and Good Friday respectively. The divine 'life' shared with creatures is nothing other than Christ's own self-donation to humanity at the cross. Likewise, for humans to 'participate' in Christ's life is no less than participation in the neighbor:

See, according to this rule the good things we have from God should flow from one to the other and be common to all, so that everyone should 'put on' his neighbor and so conduct himself toward him as if he himself were in the other's place. From Christ the good things have flowed and are flowing into us. He has so 'put on' us and acted for us as if he had been what we are. From us they flow on to those who have need of them so that I should lay before God my faith and my righteousness that they may cover and intercede for the sins of my neighbor which I take upon myself and so labor and serve in them as if they were my very own. That is what Christ did for us. This is true love and the genuine rule of a Christian life. Love is true and genuine where there is true and genuine faith.⁸²

The Christian's very life is of course 'hidden with Christ in God' (Col. 3:3), having already died to sin. But the life now lived is 'not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into

77 *LW* 31, p. 367.

78 *LW* 31, pp. 367–8.

79 *LW* 31, p. 368.

80 See, of course, Gal. 2:20.

81 *LW* 26, p. 284.

82 *LW* 31, p. 371.

God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor'.⁸³ This 'putting on' of the neighbor, acquiring his burdens and bearing them as one's own, corresponds to Christ's own act of 'putting on' human nature along with human sin.

The 'wedding ring' of faith grasps Christ externally where he is given and bestowed through the means of grace: baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the word of promise that is preached.⁸⁴ These are simple and created means by which God deals with his creatures and by which he speaks to them.⁸⁵ In subjection to the neighbor, the Christian is reopened to the creation, not in duty's compulsion, but in the loving service rendered to others. As the passively obedient Christ suffered under the law for others, so also Christians suffer on behalf of one another within a world returned to them as a gift.

As in Bonhoeffer's twentieth-century appropriation of similar themes on Christ's suffering, worldliness, and love for the other, Luther's vision of the life of the redeemed is not escapist, but leans in to embrace the world.⁸⁶ A program of religious self-improvement is not what Christ bestows, but rather true humanity for justified sinners. Bonhoeffer's reflections on the problem of a religionless life—*etsi deus non daretur*—might be taken as a sort of gloss on the issues of Christ's own suffering and its intimate connection to human creatureliness.⁸⁷ Being a Christian 'means being human, not a certain type of human being, but the human being Christ creates in us. It is not a religious act that makes someone a Christian, but rather faith's sharing in God's suffering in the worldly life'.⁸⁸ Faith is thus not a strategy of moral transformation, but an encounter with Jesus Christ that incorporates believers into his own suffering for them.⁸⁹ Moral transformation is always partial and fragmentary, but the life of faith is whole and complete in Christ, given as a gift.⁹⁰ This 'sharing' in Christ himself does not mean the exit from the world but participation in this world through the neighbor. Where God comes to the world in the world, human beings receive their true humanity from the crucified and risen one.⁹¹

5. Conclusion

The foregoing has offered a sketch of Luther's doctrine of Christ's passive obedience (*obedientia passiva*) and its connections to a vision of recovered humanity. God's exposure to his 'opposite' in the form of human sin, such that

83 *LW* 31, p. 371.

84 *LW* 31, p. 352.

85 See Bayer, *Schöpfung als Anrede*, pp. 29–32.

86 Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, p. 501.

87 See Verhagen, 'Justified *ex nihilo*', 206–15.

88 Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, p. 480.

89 Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, p. 482.

90 Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, p. 482.

91 Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, p. 480.

the Son becomes it (2 Cor. 5:21), eventuates in the justification of sinners who are likewise caught up into the life of creation through service to the other. Luther's contribution, in these two respects, defies easy categorization. It is not so much divine suffering in Christ that Luther celebrates as it is the Son's eagerness to acquire the sins of sinners and remove them through his passive suffering. Thus Luther's 'crisis' for metaphysics⁹² at the inflection of early modernity should not be read as a proto-Hegelian speculative Good Friday. Rather, Luther's christology and doctrine of atonement are oriented to the soteriology of justification by faith and the proclamation of the same. Similarly, Luther's deployment of the *communicatio idiomatum* might also be linked to an account of salvation as *theosis* in a recapitulated neo-Chalcedonianism. Yet here it is a vision of recovered humanity and restored life amidst creation that emerges from Luther's account of the Christian's paradoxical, but simultaneous, freedom and servitude.⁹³

92 Thank you to Paul R. Hinlicky for this turn of phrase. See his *Divine Simplicity: Christ the Crisis of Metaphysics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016).

93 Thanks are due to Philip G. Ziegler and an anonymous reviewer for their helpful feedback on an earlier version of this article.