Kari Kopperi

The Theology of Paradoxes

Martin Luther's Disputation in Heidelberg, 1518



Academic Studies 109

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Refo500 Academic Studies

Edited by
Herman J. Selderhuis

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Volume 109

REFORC CONNECTING ACADEMICS

Kari Kopperi

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Martin Luther's Disputation in Heidelberg, 1518

VANDENHOECK & RUPRECHT

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek:
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data available online: https://dnb.de.

© 2025 by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Robert-Bosch-Breite 10, 37079 Göttingen, Germany, an imprint of the Brill-Group (Koninklijke Brill BV, Leiden, The Netherlands; Brill USA Inc., Boston MA, USA; Brill Asia Pte Ltd, Singapore; Brill Deutschland GmbH, Paderborn, Germany; Brill Österreich GmbH, Vienna, Austria)
Koninklijke Brill BV incorporates the imprints Brill, Brill Nijhoff, Brill Schöningh, Brill Fink, Brill mentis, Brill Wageningen Academic, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Böhlau and V&R unipress.

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Cover design: SchwabScantechnik, Göttingen
Typesetting: le-tex publishing services, Leipzig
Printed and bound: Hubert & Co, Ergolding
Printed in the EU

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage | www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com
E-Mail: info@v-r.de

ISSN 2198-3089 (print) | ISSN 2197-0165 (digital)
ISBN 978-3-525-50223-5 (print)
ISBN 978-3-647-50223-6 (digital) | ISBN 978-3-666-50223-1 (eLibrary)

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Foreword to the First Edition

When I chose Luther's theology of the cross in the Heidelberg Disputation as the topic for my master's thesis, I didn't know what I was getting into. In the autumn of 1982, I chose an interesting topic on which I could write a thesis with a reasonable amount of human effort. However, the Heidelberg Disputation took its toll, and it is only now, almost 15 years later, that I have completed my work.

There have been many twists and turns along the way, the most remarkable being Luther's journey into the history of ideas and the philosophy of the Renaissance. Thus, the section initially intended as a background chapter to the doctoral thesis began to take on a life of its own. It was published as a separate book in the summer of 1994 (*Luther of the Renaissance: Introduction to the History of the Ideas of the Reformation*). The detachment of the background chapter significantly changed the content of this study, as I could leave the description of the historical background to less importance and concentrate on the subject itself. However, working on the Reformation's conceptual and historical background was necessary and enabled me to complete the dissertation.

Many people have helped me in my research over the years, and I would like to thank them for their support. My teacher, Professor Tuomo Mannermaa, deserves special thanks. From the beginning, he has encouraged and supported me in my research and given me vital advice on my research problems. In the essential phase of the research process, the research project on the Reassessment of Reformation Theology, funded by the Academy of Finland, formed an inspiring working community in which we explored the many fascinating questions of Luther's theology. Among the project's researchers, Simo Peura, Antti Raunio, Anja Ghiselli, Sammeli Juntunen, and Pekka Kärkkäinen have read my texts at various stages and provided critical feedback.

My colleagues in the Department of Systematic Theology have supported my work in many ways, and the discussions in the department's coffee room have inspired me. I have received precious guidance from Academy Professor Simo Knuuttila and Assistant Professor Reijo Työrinoja regarding medieval theology and philosophy. Professor Risto Saarinen, as my licentiate thesis supervisor and my dissertation's pre-supervisor, gave me important and encouraging advice at crucial stages of my research. Eeva Partio, the former caretaker of the department, was selfless in helping me with many practical matters related to my research.

A grant from the Institute for European History (*Institut für Europäische Geschichte*, Mainz), a grant from the Oskar Salonen Foundation, and grants from the Leo and Regina Weinstein Foundation have enabled my research. I would

also like to thank the parish of Rekola, which was sympathetic to the research interests of their young pastor during the early stages of the study. Towards the end, I received important encouragement from my colleagues at the Parish Institute in Järvenpää.

During the completion phase of my research, Anna-Liisa Karjalainen read my manuscript and corrected the language. Olli Hallamaa's contribution to the technical layout of my study was crucial. The Suomalainen Teologinen Kirjallisuusseura has kindly accepted my dissertation for publication in its series.

My wife Marjaana deserves special thanks for helping me complete my research. Since the first drafts in the autumn of 1982, she has read my texts and given me essential and often critical feedback. With Marjaana's comments and encouragement, this study was completed. Matias and Joonas have been remarkably patient with my work since, especially in its last few months, the dissertation took up Dad's time and especially the family computer.

In Vantaa on St Mary's Day 1997
Kari Kopperi

Foreword to the Revised Edition

This study was initially published in 1997 as a doctoral thesis in Finnish at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki. Already at that time, I was planning to translate my dissertation, and international colleagues I met at research meetings expressed their wishes for a translation of my book. Unfortunately, I was busy working in various educational and ecclesiastical positions. I was, therefore, unable to respond to their requests.

I had long thought that the translation project would never happen, but discussions in the summer of 2022 at the International Luther Congress in Thousand Oaks, California, changed my mind. My research on the Heidelberg Disputation would still be relevant. My current position as General Secretary of the Bishops' Conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland also allows me to focus on theology. When several friends and colleagues encouraged me to proceed with the project, I decided to take up the challenge.

It was clear from the beginning that this was not just a translation. My research needed some updating. Since the appearance of my dissertation, various interesting studies have been published on both the theology of the cross and the themes of the Heidelberg Disputation. I needed to study them. I also continued to work on some of the themes related to my research. I should thus include new observations in the translation.

When I look at the result, I see that the update has had a particular impact on the study's footnotes, where I discuss current research. In editing the footnotes, I have considered that in the Finnish-language dissertation it was natural to refer to domestic literature, but in the international research, I have tried to use international translations of the studies in question. I cite the original Finnish research and the international translation in some places.

The text itself has remained almost unchanged, but some of the comments on the literature in the text have needed to be updated. This version has two new subchapters. The first is the section on contextual interpretations of the theology of the cross in the research review (Chapter 2.6). I have used my article *Missio Dei from the Perspective of the Theology of the Cross* (Kopperi 2013) and edited it into my study. The second addition is in the hypothesis chapter of the study, where I present the biblical basis for the theology of the cross (Chapter 3.2). This passage was included in my article *The Theology of the Cross* (Kopperi 2010, 163–165).

Translating is always a challenge. Translating complex theological ideas from one language to another is difficult and often involves modifying the original idea's presentation style. Things need to be said slightly differently from how they were

initially written. I have used various technical tools in this work, but after using them, I have had help completing the text from Jim West of the United States.

I would like to thank Professor Herman Selderhuis for accepting my research for the Refo500 Academic Studies. I would also like to thank my friends, colleagues and loved ones, especially my spouse Eeva, for their support and encouragement during this process. My hope of course is that the international version of my dissertation will somehow meet the wishes expressed at those earlier conferences for such an edition and contribute to research on the Heidelberg disputation.

Järvenpää, All Saints' Day 2024
Kari Kopperi

1. Introduction

The view of a fundamental difference between Catholic and Protestant interpretations of Christianity has long dominated ecumenical debates. Many scholars, such as Eilert Herms and Rudolf Malter, have even argued that the Reformation created an irreconcilable conflict (*Grundverschiedenheit*) between Catholic and Protestant theology. In the theological debate, the Catholic interpretation of Christianity, and in particular the theology of Thomas Aquinas, has sometimes been described as a theological-philosophical system based on metaphysical assumptions and Aristotelian philosophy. Many scholars of Luther's theology have argued that the Reformation replaced this medieval theological-philosophical system with a new existentialist understanding of the relationship between God and man. In Protestant theology, many protestant scholars have asserted that Luther's new interpretation of the nature of theology and the relationship between theology and philosophy was one of the decisive causes of this transformation.[1]

In recent years, however, the view of the fundamental difference between the interpretation of Lutheranism and Catholic Christianity has been called into question. On the one hand, in ecumenical dialogs, Catholics and Lutherans have sought common ground on key theological issues, such as the doctrine of justification.[2] Indeed, the resulting documents often point out that many of the disagreements that arose during the Reformation are misunderstandings on one side or the other. In some cases, the course of history and the churches' own increasing self-understanding have also meant that old disagreements or doctrinal condemnations no longer have any real meaning.[3] Elsewhere, theological research has revealed several features of Luther's theology that link his thought much more closely to patristic and medieval Catholic theology than Protestant theology has generally believed.[4]

---

1 See Saarinen 1989a, 1–4.

2 In this respect, the most significant ecumenical projects of recent years have been the plan for a joint Lutheran-Catholic declaration on the doctrine of justification (*Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*) and the plan to dismantle doctrinal condemnations between churches (*Lehrverurteilungen – kirchentrennend?*). See e. g., Saarinen 1994a, 32–33, 151–157. Joint Declaration 1997; Auf dem Weg zur Gemeinschaft 2018.

3 See, e. g., *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (41): "The teaching of the Lutheran churches presented in this Declaration does not fall under the condemnations from the Council of Trent. The condemnations in the Lutheran Confessions do not apply to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church presented in this Declaration."

4 This observation has been influenced firstly by an increased knowledge of medieval theology and philosophy, which has helped to see in Luther's thought features that are related to the medieval tradition (see, e. g., Kirjavainen 1987; Martikainen 1987; Työrinoja 1986; 1987; 1990 [=2002];

Third, closer examination of scholarly research on Luther's theology shows that many interpretations of Luther's thought over the last hundred years depend on a solid philosophical preconception.[5]

According to several Finnish studies, a so-called neo-Kantian understanding of Luther's theology dominated research in the 20th century with the help of the so-called relational "influence thinking", which excludes all evaluations of being. This interpretative tendency began with the neo-Protestant theology of the 19th century. At that time, Albrecht Ritschl, Adolf von Harnack, and Wilhelm Herrmann, among others, argued that the Reformation liberated Christian theology from the metaphysics based on the analogy of being characteristic of medieval Catholic theology and discovered a new way of thinking that emphasized personal and ethical religiosity. One of its key arguments was the idea of the opposition between nature and person. While the natural sciences consider creation governed by mechanistic laws, the spiritual sciences – like theology – emphasize the development of personality, experience of value, and ethics, which elevate human beings above a merely naturalistic nature.

The neo-Protestants of the 19th century drew attention to Luther's critique of scholastic theology, the use of Aristotelian philosophy, and metaphysical reflections. They interpreted Luther's critique of scholasticism as a critique of metaphysical thinking about being, replacing it with a new theological epistemology no longer concerned with the essence (*Wesen*) of things but their effects (*Wirkung*). In their view, the arguments about God and his being are no longer the interest of scientific theology but only the human relationship with God and the effects produced by this relationship, which is central to religious faith.

Neo-Protestant theology has been of considerable importance to studying Luther's theology. In early twentieth-century theology, for example, it was taken for granted that Protestant and Catholic theology, using metaphysical concepts, were mutually exclusive opposites. Indeed, many protestant theologians characterize Luther's theology as anti-Catholic and anti-metaphysical. This seemingly exaggerated view has characterized later interpretations of Luther's theology. It can be seen, for example, in the transcendentalist justification of religion by early twentieth-century theologians.[6] It is also evident in Karl Holl's interpretation of Luther's

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White 1994). Similarly, Luther's theology represents a classical interpretation of Christianity, the essential content is his theology of love based on participation (Mannermaa 1989b; 1998a; 1998b; Peura 1994; 1998b; Raunio 1993 [2001]). Luther's theology contains features of the Renaissance's theological and philosophical thinking. See Spitz 1963, 237–266; 1985; Junghans 1985; Kopperi 1994b; Saarinen 2013; 2014; Tortoriello 2023.

5 See e. g., Mannermaa 1981; 1992, 52–69; 1998; 1999b; Martikainen 1987, 9–25; Peura 1994, 9–45; Saarinen 1989a; 2010.

6 Mannermaa 1992, 55–56.

emphasis on the religion of conscience, developed after World War I[7] and most recently in the much supported relational-personal or existential interpretation of Luther by Gerhard Ebeling and his school.[8]

The interpretive tradition – the paradigm – of Luther's theology that neo-Protestant theology has produced is problematic. It fails to clarify the core ideas of Reformation theology with sufficient reliability because it is grounded in the philosophical preconceptions of its own time, 19th-century neo-Kantian philosophy. As a result, many of the themes of Luther's theology have been misinterpreted, and his thought has not been adequately linked to his time's philosophical and historical context. Such a tradition of interpretation is also fruitless for ecumenical debate since it assumes that Catholic and Protestant theology are inherently opposed. Because of the problems identified, Finnish theological research in recent decades has sought to reassess the theological content of the Reformation and, at the same time, to find a reliable and ecumenically more fruitful corrective to Luther's theological interpretation. These studies have focused on the problems of the history of research on the one hand and the central but problematically interpreted themes of Luther's thought on the other.[9]

Research reveals that Luther's Disputation in Heidelberg in April 1518 is particularly interesting.[10] Firstly, it comes at a critical time for the Reformation. In the September 1517 Luther prepared 97 theses for the *baccalaureus biblicus* disputation of Franz Günther. In these theses Luther strongly criticized the scholastic theology of his time.[11] A few months later, he published his famous Ninety-Five Theses.[12] In the debate that ensued, Luther was able for the first time to defend his theses

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7 See Mannermaa 1981; 1992, 56–60; Saarinen 1989a, 91–112; 1990, 108–109.

8 Ruokanen 1982, 72–83, 110–115; Juntunen 1996, 11–19.

9 See e. g. Forsberg 1984; Huovinen 1981; 1991; Juntunen 1996; Kärkkäinen P. 2005; Mannermaa 1979a [=2005]; 1983 [=2010]; 1992; 1999; Martikainen 1987 [=1992]; 1995; Peura 1994; Raunio 1993 [=2001]; Ruokanen 1982; 2021; Saarinen 1989a; 2014b; Vainio 2008; Karimies 2017 and the following collective works Thesaurus Lutheri 1987; Tutkimuksia Lutherin ajattelumuodosta 1987; Luther und Theosis 1990; Luther und Ontologie 1993, see esp. Saarinen pp. 167–182; Nordiskt Forum 1 1993; Luther und die trinitarische Tradition 1994; Widerspruch 1997; Union with Christ 1998; Engaging Luther 2010.

10 StA 1, (186) 190–218, Same also WA 1, 353–374; WA 59, 409–426. Disputations were integral to medieval university education but seldom in monastic meetings. However, this was not entirely exceptional; some similar cases in the Reformation exist. See e. g., Hammer 1978/79. On the disputation tradition and related literature, see. Kopperi 1994b, 18–24; White 1994, 20–26. On disputations, see Weisheipl 1964, 176–184; Marenbon 1987, 19–20; Ashworth 1988, 166–168; Jardine 1988, 177–178, 183–184; Leppin 2014; Luy 2017. On Luther as a disputator, see. Hermelink 1932; Kiviranta 1983, 20–21. See also Gerber 1970; Hammer 1978/1979; Wolf 1952, 335–344.

11 *Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam* (=SD), WA 1, (221)224–228; StA 1, (163)165–172.

12 *Disputatio pro declaratione virtutis indulgentiarum* (1517), WA 1, (229)233–238; StA 1, (173)176–185.

and his theology at the triennial meeting of his order (the Augustinian Hermits) in Heidelberg in April 1518. For the Disputation,[13] Luther wrote 28 theological and 12 philosophical theses, in which he addressed vital theological questions, pondered the problem of the practice of philosophy, and clarified his relations with Aristotelian philosophy.[14] These questions were central to the neo-Protestants' interpretation of Luther and are thus also central themes in reassessing Reformation theology.

In his presentation, Luther uses rhetorical devices that give the listener the impression that the theses are more general and dismissive than they are. Luther

13 On the debate initiated by the 95 theses and the correspondence preceding the Heidelberg Disputation, see esp. Dokumente 1, 1, 19–32, 293–337; Dokumente 2, 23–29; WABr 1, 154–155; 160; 166–168; 173–174; Wicks 1983b. Cf. Köstlin 1903, 172–177; Kalkoff 1911, 408–428, 452–456, 572–573. The Disputation took place the day after the official meeting, 26.4.1518 (Bauer 1901, 244; Scheible 1983b, 316–329; cf. Köstlin 1903, 174–175; Junghans 1979a; 186; Mannermaa 1983, 7[=2010, 1]) at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Heidelberg (see Scheible 1983b; cf. e. g., Brecht 1981, 210) and was attended not only by Augustinian scholars but also by university professors and students, local bourgeoisie and members of the prince's court. Luther's traveling companion, Leonhard Beier, acted as a respondent, but his involvement is unknown during the Disputation. Research has often concluded that Luther might have defended at least the most crucial theses.

Several studies on the historical background of the Heidelberg Disputation exist; the most important are Bauer (1901), Brecht (1981, 198–230), Clemen (1906), Delius (1972), Scheible (1983a; 1983b), and Wicks (1983a, 48–56; 1983b). See also Atkinson (1968, 157–168); Bauer 1928, 53–57; Borth (1970, 37–41); Fausel (1955, 84–93); Henß (1983, 14–25); Kalkoff (1906; 1910–1912); Kaufmann 1991; Kolde (1878; 1879, 312–317); Kunzelmann (1974, V, 383–385, 475–477); Köstlin 1903, 172–177; del Pino (1980, 125–127, 131, 143–145); Schwiebert 1950, 323–330; Seebaß (1983); Weidmann (1968).

14 The surviving documents from the Heidelberg Disputation leave many questions unanswered. For example, we do not know which individual theses were debated, nor were Luther's explanations discussed. It is also unclear who acted as respondent. Martin Bucer (1491–1551) wrote the most significant description of the course of the Disputation in a letter to his friend Beatus Rhenanus (1485–1547), *Correspondance de Martin Bucer*, 1, 59–71 (cf. WA 9, 162, 19–168, 32). According to Kaufmann (1991), the description in Bucer's letter corresponds to the course of the Disputation. Therefore, he claims that neither the last theological nor the philosophical theses were discussed and that the explanations were written only after the Disputation. However, Kaufmann's interpretation is not convincing since the content of the Disputation culminates in theses which Bucer does not mention. It would seem odd, therefore, that the most essential theses should have been left out of the discussion altogether.

No mention of philosophical theses has survived, but descriptions in Luther's letters of the Heidelberg Disputation and his subsequent discussions with his former philosophy teacher Bartholomäus Arnoldi (Usingen) suggest that philosophical themes were discussed at the Heidelberg meeting. WABr 1, 169–171, 173–174. In his later statement, Luther claims that his thesis intended to show that the Scholastics did not understand Aristotle correctly. StA 1, 218, 1–8. See also Dieter 1992, 6–7; 2001, 432–433.

called his theses a theology of paradoxes (*theologia paradoxa*).[15] According to the rules of rhetoric, a paradox is a sentence formulated in a way that shocks the listener, making it seem more general and exclusionary than it is.[16] In this respect, Luther's theses were very successful, for in a debate one of the audience exclaimed, "If the simple peasants heard this, they would stone you and kill you!"[17] Indeed, the Heidelberg Disputation contains several arguments that meet the definition of a paradox.[18] Another technical means of presentation used by Luther is the so-called synecdoche, in which a part may express the whole or vice versa. For example, Luther sometimes speaks of philosophy, although he refers to the term philosophy only regarding some theological-philosophical concepts. This aspect has only sometimes been considered; therefore, Luther's critical remarks about scholastic theology and its philosophical concepts have been challenging to interpret correctly.

The Heidelberg Disputation is an essential text of Luther. Most Luther studies refer to it and, and its ideas have even served as a basis for interpreting Luther's theology.[19] Yet no monograph or systematic analytical study has so far been written on the Disputation, even though the need for one has been discussed over a century.[20]

Secondly, the content of the Disputation is also of interest to modern theology since it defines the content of two essential themes of Luther's theology, namely the theology of the Cross (*theologia crucis*) and the theology of love. Many have seen the former as the crystallization of Luther's new Reformation theology. In this interpretation, the theology of the Cross represents a dialectical way of thinking in which God's action is hidden in the opposite. In this idea, the theology of the Cross opposes scholastic metaphysical ontology. Walther von Loewenich developed this interpretative model in his famous work *Luthers theologia crucis* (1929). He described the theology of the Cross as a pervasive theological principle in Luther's thought, not constituting a separate theological locus but rather a way of doing theology.

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15 StA 1, 213, 26–30. Cf. WABr 1, 93–94, where Luther characterizes Karlstadt's theses as paradoxes and develops a play on words. On the meaning of paradoxes in Luther's theology, see, e. g., Lortz 19826, 152–154; 1987, 547–548 [1962]; 1987, 613–615 [1965]. On the importance of rhetoric for Luther, see Saarinen 1989b.

16 Junghans 1979b, 186.

17 WABr 1, 173, 27–29: "Si rustici hec audirent, certe lapidibus vos obruerunt & interficerent."

18 See esp. HDT 4, 7, 12, 13, 16, 22, 26; HDF 1, 2.

19 Eg., von Loewenich 1967[5] [1929]; Nygren 1936; Mannermaa 1983 [=2010]. According to Robert Kolb (2002), Luther's Disputation in Heidelberg "constitutes A paradigm shift within Western Christianity in the understanding of God's revelation of [God's] self, God's way of dealing with evil, and what it means to be human."

20 The need for a study of the Heidelberg disputation was first pointed out by Bauer 1901, 234–235.

The starting point for von Loewenich's interpretation of Luther is the distinction between the concepts of "theology of cross" (*theologia crucis*) and "theology of glory" (*theologia gloriae*) in the Heidelberg Disputation (Theses 19–21). By the theology of glory, Luther means, in this context, a way of thinking that seeks to understand the invisible attributes of God (*invisibilia Dei)* through the medium of created beings (*per ea quae facta sunt*). By contrast, the theologian of the Cross confines himself to the knowledge of the visible attributes of God (*visibilia Dei*), that is, the knowledge of God that arises from the Cross and the suffering of Christ (*cognitio Dei*). Based on this correct knowledge of God, the theologian of the Cross can judge other things correctly, whereas the theologian of glory turns good into evil and evil into good.

In theological studies, the distinction between the theology of the Cross and the theology of glory refers to a broader theological overview of Luther's thought. In other words, Luther rejects scholastic theology as a theology of glory and represents a new Reformation theology, which he calls the theology of the Cross. In this case, the theology of the Cross refers to Luther's theological view of God's way of revealing himself in opposition to himself (*sub contrario specie*). According to Luther, God does not want to be known in his glory and majesty but in the lowliness, weakness, and suffering of the Cross of Christ. For this reason, theology must reject metaphysical speculation that seeks to define the attributes of God.

Many Protestant theologians argue that the distinction between the theology of the Cross and the theology of glory shows that Luther represents in his theology a modern ontological view based on the concept of relation, a characteristic of neo-Protestant theology. These interpreters take Luther's theses, which concentrated on the theology of the Cross (19–21), out of its context. However, almost immediately after the definition of the theology of the Cross, in theses 25–27, Luther uses expressions that put many interpretations of the Heidelberg Disputation into question. Moreover, in the final theological thesis of the Disputation (28), the Reformer presents a summary that can be considered an excellent example of a participatory theology of love. Most scholars seem to ignore these aspects in their studies.[21]

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21 Luther's theology of the Cross see alongside von Loewenich, e. g., Kadai 1967; Bühler 1981; Thaidigsmann 1981; 1983; Mannermaa 1983, 37–57 [=2010, 27–43]; McGrath 1985; Blaumeiser 1995; Ngien 1995; Dieter 2001, 107–130; Ghiselli 2005; Kopperi 2010; Luy 2014; Saler 2017; Westhelle 2019. See also Althaus 1926; 1963[2] [1962], 34–42; Schlink 1955; Sasse 1976 [1951]; Madsen 2007, chapter 3; Thiemann 2009; Tortoriello 2023. On the history of research on Luther's theology of the Cross, see, in addition to chapter 2 of this study, e. g., Korthaus 2007; Madsen 2007, chapter 4; Pöder 2016, 23–29.

In the history of interpretation of the theology of the Cross, many claim that Walther von Loewenich developed a positive view of Luther's theology of the Cross. However, Thomas-Andreas Pöder shows that Estonian Alexander Konstantin von Oettingen takes the theology of the Cross as a programmatic theological concept already in his writings published in 1859. See Pöder

Indeed, much of the research on the Heidelberg disputation focuses on the theology of the Cross at the heart of the Disputation. However, in doing so, many parts of the Disputation, especially thesis 25–27, have been neglected. The first genuine attempt at an in-depth analysis of the Disputation was in the thematic seminar on the Heidelberg Disputation held at the Fifth International Assembly of Luther Scholars (Lund, 1977). Several of the papers presented at the seminar were later published in a special issue of the *Lutherjahrbuch* in 1981, the most important of which is the comprehensive analysis of the Disputation by the Catholic Luther scholar Jos E. Vercruysse.[22] However, the article is relatively short and cannot yet be considered an exhaustive explanation of the Heidelberg disputation. Another necessary explanation is by Karl-Heinz Zur Mühlen in the 600th-anniversary book of the University of Heidelberg.[23] Although Zur Mühlen does not bring up many new perspectives on the interpretation of the Heidelberg disputation, he has managed to describe the consensus in the study clearly and consistently. In addition to the articles mentioned above, there are about twenty short articles on the Heidelberg Disputation, and there are several short sections in many Luther studies, but there is still no thorough overall analysis of the Disputation in its context.[24]

Theological research in recent years has focused not only on the theology of the Cross but also on Luther's theology of love. In the last theological thesis of the Heidelberg Disputation, Luther distinguishes between two opposing kinds of love,

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2016, 30–33, 147–148. On Oettingen's interpretation of the theology of the Cross, see especially pp. 155–236, 412–443, 469–474. In his extensive history of research, Korthaus highlights Martin Kähler and Bernhard Steffen, who sought to build a comprehensive view of the theology of the Cross even before Walther von Loewenich, see Korthaus 2007, 5–6, 26–85. For Korthaus's interpretation of the theology of the Cross, closely related to the views of the Gerhard Ebeling school, see 2007, 20–21, 363–403, esp. 368–369.

22 Vercruysse 1981. For more details on the seminar, see Zur Mühlen's report (1980a). In addition to Vercruysse, the special issue also included an overview of the history of research by Edgar Thaidigsmann (1981), an analysis of the concept of merit by Rune Södelund (1981), and an article on Luther's critique of Aristotle in the 25 theses of the Heidelberg Disputation by Karl-Heinz Zur Mühlen (1981).

23 Zur Mühlen 1985a.

24 Important for the theological content of the Heidelberg Disputation are, in addition to the above: Althaus (1963, 34–42); Blaumeiser (1995, 33–44, 149–150, 259–260, 279, 312, 423–431, 444–447); H. Bornkamm (1963, 49–63; 1975); Bühler 1981, 102–120; Dieter (1987; 2001); Ebeling (*LuSt* II, 2 1982, 60–183); Gerber 1970, 210–216; Grane (1975, 146–160); Jürgens (1975); Mannermaa (1983 [2010]); Modalsli (1980, 33–39); Peuckert (1948, 534–544); Peura (1990, 176–181, 184–197, 204, 210–211, 258–260, 263–270, 273–279, 290–291); Plathow (1981); Stange (1932, 51–74); Stürmer (1939, 25–48); Thaidigsmann (1983, esp. 14–47; 1987, esp. 26–36); Unholtz (1982); Vercruysse (1976); Weier (1976, 22–26); Zur Mühlen (1980a); Forde 1997; Kolb 2002; Ratke 2006; Korthaus 2007, esp. 344–357; Mjaaland 2016, 38–48; Evener 2021, 106–114; Tortoriello 2023, esp. 19–26, 106, 155–206, 311–345.

human love (*amor hominis*) and divine love (*amor Dei*). The study has considered whether this distinction is just another way of presenting the theological distinction between the theology of glory and the theology of the Cross or whether it contains an entirely new perspective on the interpretation of Luther's theology. For example, Anders Nygren considers the distinction as just another expression of the motives of *eros* and *agape*.[25] Another way of interpreting the theology of love in the Heidelberg Disputation is to see it in the context of the understanding of the law of God presented in the first thesis of the Disputation. In this case the whole Disputation is structured by Luther's idea that the law of God cannot help man to salvation, but the love of God can.[26] A third way of interpreting the theology of love is the notion of the love of God and the love of man as principles that structure Luther's theology. In this case, the distinction between, for example, the theology of the Cross and the theology of glory must be interpreted from the perspective of a theology of love.[27]

Apart from the history of the Reformation and the theological content of the Heidelberg Disputation, a third reason for its research interest is its philosophical theses and their explanations. In them, Luther takes issue with Aristotle's philosophy. He briefly refers to a better and more helpful philosophy, represented by Plato and Anaxagoras. At the turn of the 19th century scholars thought these philosophical theses reflected mainly the humanistic interests of Luther's theology.[28] However, there were also frequent doubts about the implausibility of philosophical theses. Otto Clemen emphasized the latter point of view, and he considered the explanations of philosophical theses not only doubtful but also purely philosophical and challenging to understand and, therefore, less attractive for theology.[29] The philosophical theses became the focus of theological research in a completely new

25 Nygren 1936, 502–559.

26 See, e. g., Vercruysse 1981.

27 See e. g., Mannermaa 1983 [=2010]. In addition to the above, Plathow (1981) and Dieter (1987; 2001, 76–80, 107–130; 2019) comment most strongly on the theology of love in the Heidelberg disputation.

28 See e. g., Bauer 1901; Köstlin 1903.

29 Clemen (1906, 109) originally intended to publish the Explanations of the Philosophical Theses as a critical edition. However, due to the manuscript's messiness and the content's difficulty, he limited himself to the first two theses. He also justified his abandonment by claiming that the remaining propositions were purely philosophical and, therefore, less interesting. "Die darauf noch folgenden Probationes zu den anderen philosophischen Thesen sind rein philosophisch. Da sie zu umfangreich sind, der Text vielfach korrupt zu sein scheint und der Sinn mir an vielen Stellen dunkel geblieben ist, muß ich auf die Wiedergabe dieser Stücke verzichten." Inappropriateness has been stressed, among others. Bauer 1901, 265–268; Stange 1932, 52–56.

way when, in 1979, Helmar Junghans published a complete set of explanations of the philosophical theses and demonstrated their authenticity.[30]

Interpreting philosophical theses has been challenging for modern research for several reasons. First, the philosophical part of the Heidelberg Disputation is a rare exception in Luther's output, for he engages in quite concrete philosophical reflection. Second, Luther's proposed alternative to scholastic Aristotelianism is surprising in light of the prevailing view in the study since he seems to value Platonic philosophy. A third exciting question is the relationship of the philosophical part of the Disputation to the theological theses.

The first occasion to discuss the explanation of the philosophical theses was a special thematic seminar at the International Conference of Luther Scholars (Erfurt, 1983). However, they could not achieve a consensus on the interpretation of the theses.[31] At the time of the writing of my dissertation, I had at my hand Theo Dieter's then unprinted dissertation (1992), in which he analyzed in detail the philosophical theses of the Heidelberg Disputation. Dieter then completed his research, and he published it as *Der junge Luther und Aristoteles* (2001).[32] In his analysis, Dieter focuses on the content of Luther's critique of Aristotle, its justification, and studies whether of Luther's criticism bases on an acceptable interpretation of Aristotle. Dieter's study is an excellent analysis of the background and content of individual theses, but he does not answer the most exciting questions for theological research. How can the relationship between the theological and philosophical parts be understood? Why does Luther present 12 philosophical theses after his theological theses? Are there broader theological interests behind them?

The above points show that the Heidelberg Disputation is crucial in explaining Martin Luther's thought and the Reformation's theology. The Disputation is at the heart of Luther's theological thought; its content still needs to be thoroughly analyzed, and one part of the Disputation is entirely new and unexplored source material. Moreover, the study of the Heidelberg Disputation is justified because its interpretation reveals problems that require correction in earlier Lutheran studies.

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30 Junghans 1979c. Ebeling *LuSt* II:2, 71–73; Zur Mühlen 1985b and the editors of the Weimarer Ausgabe, who 1983 published the explanations of the philosophical theses WA 59, (406–) 409–426 support Junghans' view of the authenticity of the explanations of the philosophical theses. Between Clemen and Junghans' writings, few have studied the philosophical part of the Heidelberg disputation, which have made scattered remarks on the content of the philosophical part. The most significant in this respect is a short section of Peuckert (1948, 534–544) in his extensive study of the 1500s, in which he considers Luther, even at the time of the Heidelberg Disputation, as a neo-Platonic seeker. See also Süss 1969, 44–79.

31 Zur Mühlen 1985b.

32 Dieter 1992; 2001. The later study includes the earlier analysis of the philosophical theses of the Heidelberg Disputation, pp. 431–631.

However, the most significant and unresolved problem for interpreting the Heidelberg Disputation is the relationship between its theological and philosophical theses.

The present study seeks to answer the above questions. Therefore, its task is to analyze the content of Luther's Heidelberg Disputation. The study will pay particular attention to the relationship between the theological and philosophical parts of the Disputation and will, therefore, focus on both the theological and philosophical theses and their explanations (*resolution/probation*).

The *study's method* is a systematic analysis in which Luther's ideas are interpreted from his own point of view. The analysis is neither evaluative nor comparative in nature. The text will be analyzed in its historical context without attempting to understand Luther's thoughts through genetic research. The study will, therefore, use the standard methods of basic research in the history of ideas to analyze historical texts.

The sources of the study are the most recent text-critical editions of the theological and philosophical part of the Heidelberg Disputation, as well as text fragments of Luther closely related to the Disputation.[33] The study also examines Luther's texts that illuminate his thinking in the Heidelberg Disputation.[34]

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33 The text of the theological part (=HDT) and its critical introduction is in *Martin Luther. Studienausgabe*(*StA*) 1, (186) 190–218. Cf. WA 1, 353–374; Stange 1928, 34–44, 451–452; 1932, 51–74. The Theological Theses were first published as early as 1520 in Zwolle under the title *DE LEGE ET FIDE CONclusiones xxviii cum resolutionibus Martini Lutheri* (=28 Conclusions on Faith and Law with Explanations by Martin Luther). This text was discovered in 1982, and von Rabenau (1987) published a facsimile edition. In his foreword, he states that Luther did not edit or revise the text and that it contained some essential and exciting deviations from the text-critical edition.
The text of the philosophical part (=HDF) and the text-critical introduction are in Weimarer Ausgabe (WA) vol. 59, (406–) 409–426; cf. Junghans 1979c; Ebeling *LuSt* II:2, 66–77. Dieter (1992), in his doctoral thesis, makes some minor substantive revisions to the text of the WA. See also Dieter 2001.
The texts of the Disputation are at the end of this study. Therefore, the references do not usually provide direct quotations from the Heidelberg disputation but refer directly to the thesis (HDT/HDF) and its explanation (resolutio/probatio, Pr) or the edition page and the line numbers. For more details on textual criticism, see the text appendix.

34 Essential writings of Luther are the *Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam* (1517 =SD; StA, 1, 165–172); the First Commentary on the Psalms (*Dictata super Psalterium*, 1513–1515; WA 3 & 4, 1–62); *Divi Pauli ad Romanos Epistola* (1515; WA 56 & 57, I); *Divi Pauli ad Galatas epistola* (1516/17; WA 57, II); *Divi Pauli apostoli ad Hebreos epistola* (1517/18; WA 57, III); Texts related are 95 Theses (e. g. *Disputatio pro declaratione virtutis indulgentiarum*, 1517; WA 1, 233–238; *Ein Sermon von Ablaß und Gnade*, 1517; WA 1, 243–246; *Resolutiones disputationum de indulgentiarum virt*ute, 1518; WA 1, 525–628). Some of Luther's sermons, disputations, and marginal notes before the Heidelberg Disputation are important. In some cases, the views expressed in the Heidelberg disputation must be compared with relevant Luther's texts written after the Disputation.

The hypothesis of this study is as follows. First, the hypothesis is that the Heidelberg Disputation is coherent in content, is theological, and must be interpreted in terms of Luther's theological motives.[35] Its content is structured by the distinction made in the last theological thesis (28) between the love of God (*amor Dei*) and the love of man (*amor hominis*). Luther's question, and the real problem of the Heidelberg Disputation, is the theological question: What is true wisdom before God? In other words, how can man come to know God, and how does true love for God and neighbor arise in man? Luther answers that man cannot attain true wisdom before God by obeying the law's commandments and doing good deeds, not by a good moral attitude or theological or philosophical speculation. The only possibility is to focus on God's revelation in the Cross and the suffering of Christ. For Luther, in true theology, man cannot reach God by himself, but God must first make man nothing, save him, and effect faith and love in him. Thus, Luther does not seek to put forward any new theological-epistemological principle. Instead, he seeks to explain how God saves man and how religious faith puts human wisdom in its proper place in both theological and philosophical matters.

Second, the hypothesis is that the tradition of scholarship based on neo-Protestant theology described above has misinterpreted Luther's thought. Although in the Heidelberg Disputation, Luther criticized scholastic theology and the philosophy and metaphysics associated with it, calling it a theology of glory, his aim was not to reject all the ontological views of late medieval theology and defend a new personal-ethical interpretation of Christianity, as was thought in neo-Protestant theology, but rather to reject some of the misconceptions in scholastic theology. In the Heidelberg Disputation, for example, Luther uses expressions that refer concretely to the real presence of God in the Christian. In justifying his theology, Luther sometimes appeals to classical philosophy, and in the philosophical part of the Heidelberg Disputation, for example, he appreciates Plato's view of the participation of ideas.

The present study tests this hypothesis by first analyzing the different interpretations of the Heidelberg Disputation (Chapter 2). The aim is to show that Albrecht Ritschl's views on Luther's theology had a decisive influence on interpreting the Heidelberg Disputation. Not even Walther von Loewenich's thesis on the fundamental meaning of Luther's theology of the Cross changed the interpretative tradition. However, von Loewenich's view is in opposition to A. Ritschl's interpretation of the theology of the Cross. An analysis of the history of research must begin in the middle of the 19th century when the decisive patterns of interpretation of Luther's theology were established. In addition to neo-Protestant theology and von

35 I have tentatively referred to this in my article on the theological purpose of the philosophical part of the Heidelberg Disputation, Kopperi 1993.

Loewenich's interpretation of the theology of the Cross, the study will pay particular attention to the interpretation of Luther by the Gerhard Ebeling school and to the studies that have dealt in depth with the content of the Heidelberg Disputation. The purpose of the history of research is to clarify the problems encountered in the study and, beyond the introduction, to demonstrate the need for a more thorough correction. The end of this history of research will present new interpretations of the theology of the Cross inspired by contextual theologies.

After the history of the research, we return to the interpretative hypothesis outlined above by specifying a few aspects relevant to the interpretation of the Heidelberg Disputation (Chapter 3). First, the context of the Disputation clarifies its content since the Heidelberg Disputation closely intertwines with Luther's debate with scholastic theology. In this context, it is worth paying particular attention to the view of the two loves expressed in the final theological thesis of the Disputation, which structures both the content of the Heidelberg Disputation and Luther's theology more broadly. Second, Luther's view of the relationship between theology and philosophy clarifies his theological interpretation of love. Indeed, Luther's thought includes an implicit theory of the relationship between theology and philosophy, knowledge of which is a prerequisite for interpreting the theses of the Heidelberg Disputation.

In the analysis of the Disputation, the interpretive hypothesis is tested by first (chapter 4) clarifying the content of the theological part of the Disputation from the perspective of human love and God's love. Second (chapter 5), the content of the philosophical theses is analyzed, starting with an analysis of the relationship between the theological and philosophical parts of the Disputation. Finally, the analysis of the philosophical part will show that its real aim was originally theological. The final chapter of the study (Chapter 6) summarizes the results obtained.

2. The Heidelberg Disputation in the Comprehensive Interpretations of Luther's Theology

2.1 Neo-Protestant interpretation of Luther's epistemological method

In a 19th-century study, the Freemason Theophilos claimed that Luther was the greatest philosopher of the entire Christian cultural development.[1] Theophilos's extraordinary claim is not an anomaly but a fitting reflection of the standard view in evangelical theology of Luther's unique place in Western history. Many protestant theologians have claimed that medieval Catholic theology is bound with Aristotelian philosophy and ancient metaphysics. In his Reformation theology, Luther's critique of Aristotle, metaphysics, and scholastic theology marks a decisive break in the history of Western thought, affecting theology and philosophy. In other words, Luther developed a completely new theological way of thinking, which differs fundamentally from the metaphysics of antiquity and scholasticism.[2]

The above view has been justified in the theology of the 20th century by appeals to, for example, the critique of scholasticism in the Heidelberg Disputation and the theology of the cross. The academic theology of the 19th century already laid the foundations of this view. At that time, theologians drew inspiration both from the thought of Immanuel Kant and from the neo-Kantian philosophy that emerged after him, including Hermann Lotze and Hermann Cohen.[3] There was a great need for such a theology in the 19th century, as the scientific debate dominated by a critique of metaphysics based on Kant's philosophy. Many theologians saw it as a real threat to theological science since questions about the existence of God, for example, had traditionally been the domain of metaphysics. In evangelical theology, however, Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889), the developer of the so-called neo-Protestant theology, thought that Kant's philosophy was fundamentally rooted

1 "..., daß Luther nicht bloß kirchlicher und theologischer Reformator gewesen ist, sondern auch für die Philosophie und die gesammten Wissenschaften maßgebend, als der *größte Philosoph der Christlichen Kulturentwicklung* anzusehen." Theophilos 1870, 1. (italics by the author).

2 For example, Malter (1980, 6–7) constructs a model of transcendental-practical metaphysics from Luther's theology, which he considers the basis of modern philosophical thought. In the 20th century, scholars have debated Luther's relationship to metaphysics. Mjaaland (2016) presents an interesting analysis of the debate and Luther's views; see esp. 38–45, 69–71, 115–121, 178–179.

3 See for example. W. Herrmann 1966–67, I, 104–123; II, 88–113, 206–232; 318–323. See also Saarinen 1989a, 4, 62–63.

in a Christian worldview.[4] He also claimed that the Reformer had found an entirely new way of approaching theological questions in terms of epistemology. A. Ritschl believed that Reformation theology could respond scientifically to the problems posed by modern philosophy and guarantee theology its proper and legitimate role in the field of personal religion and ethics.[5]

A. Ritschl's neo-Protestant theology was to play a crucial role in Lutheran theology and the study of Luther's theology. His influence on the interpretation of Luther's theology has only received sufficient attention in recent years. According to Tuomo Mannermaa, a central feature of A. Ritschl's theology was the emphasis on the distinction between nature and person, characteristic of neo-Kantian philosophy. A. Ritschl thought that human nature is dependent on the mechanical causality of nature and that it is for theoretical reasons that it be examined. On the other hand, the human person is above the mechanical world of nature by his will, i. e., his practical reason, which sets values. Religious propositions must, therefore, express this distinction between nature and the person, and the claims of religious belief cannot be expressed in terms of value judgments of being but only in terms of value judgments of practical reason. Suppose one begins to speak of God in metaphysical concepts of being. In that case, this inevitably leads to a naturalization of God and makes God part of finite nature, i. e., an idol. Therefore, Post-Ritschlian theology has tended to emphasize that the relationship between man and God must not be described as a relation of being but as a relation of wills, i. e., an ethical-personal relation. According to Mannermaa, A. Ritschl's theology represents some kind of actualism. A. Ritschl claims that God is known only by his acts in man. The origin and quality of these influences themselves, however, remain unknown to man.[6]

Mannermaa and his students have refined this interpretation since then. Risto Saarinen has been the most thorough researcher on the broad influence of A. Ritschl and his school of theology on Luther studies.[7] According to Saarinen, the theology represented by A. Ritschl can rightly be called transcendental influence thinking, which is already evident in the first sentence of A. Ritschl's principal

4 See for example. A. Ritschl 1887, 15: "Das moralische Argument Kant's aber steht unter dem unverkennbaren Einfluß der christlichen Weltanschauung."

5 The most important for A. Ritschl's interpretation is his *Die Christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung* 18893 [1870], esp. 141–216 and *Theologie und Metaphysik* 18872 [1881]. For more on the starting points of A. Ritschl's thought, see Wrzecieonko 1964. On its influence on Luther studies, see Mannermaa 1992 [1984a], 55–61; 1987a, 22–26; 1990a, 12–18; see also 1979a, 9–18 [=2005,1–9]; 1981; Martikainen 1985, 85–94; 1987, 9–25; Peura 1994, 9–45, esp. 9–12; Raunio 1993, 21–38 [2001]; Saarinen 1989a, esp. 9–42; 1990.

6 Mannermaa 1992, 55–61.

7 Saarinen 1989a.

work.[8] According to Saarinen, A. Ritschl outlined a way of thinking about Luther's theology that distinguishes between a right and a wrong theological way of knowing (*Erkenntnisweise*). The wrong metaphysical way of thinking seeks to define the essence and substance of beings, while the right one understands historical events as a process of effects and considers effects to be the object of critical theological science.[9]

A. Ritschl believed that the theology he represented aligned with Martin Luther's intentions. In other words, Luther's theological goal would have been a new theological theory of knowledge (*Erkenntnistheorie*), free from the burdens of classical metaphysics, transcendental in essence, focusing not on the nature of God but on his influence in the world.[10] In A. Ritschl's view, Luther's theology was corrupted after him, since Melanchthon very quickly reverted to the old scholastic theology.[11] According to A. Ritschl, modern Protestant theology should seek to return to the original and correct interpretation of Christianity that had characterized Luther's theology.

Wilhelm Herrmann (1846–1922) interpreted Luther from a similar perspective.[12] In his view, Luther's Reformation discovery is expressed in the idea that religious knowledge does not seek to learn about God but about his influence on us (*sein Wirken auf uns*). Herrmann wants to give a theoretical justification for

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8 Saarinen 1989a, 25–32, 84–84, 229–230; 1990, 103. A. Ritschl 1889, 1: "Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung, welche ich darzustellen unternehme, bildet die Mitte des theologischen Systems. Diese Wirkungen Jesu Christi auf die als Sünder vorausgesetzten Menschen decken sich mit der Vorstellung von der Gründung der Gemeinde durch Christus und ihrer Erhaltung in seiner Kraft."

9 Saarinen 1990, 106.

10 Saarinen 1989a, 31. See A. Ritschl 1887, 59, where he states of Luther's theology: "Alle diese Gedanken folgen der Regel der Erkenntniß, daß die Sache in ihren erscheinenden Wirkungen, also daß eine geistige Person in ihrem Offenbaren Willen da ist und gegenwärtig ist. Dieser Gedanke beherrscht namentlich auch den gesammten reformatorischen Sprachgebrauch von Evangelium, promissiones, fides evangelii, fides promissionum."

11 See. A. Ritschl 1887, 60: "Dieser richtigen Erkenntnißtheorie entspricht ferner die Formel, in der Melanchthon in der ersten Ausgabe der Loci theol. (1521) die Aufgabe der Theologie überhaupt bestimmt: 'Hoc est Christum cognoscere, beneficia eius cognoscere, non quod isti (scholastici) docent, eius naturas, modos incarnationis contueri.'"
A. Ritschl 1887, 63: "Aber die Ueberschätzung Melanchthons ist noch so im Schwange, daß um der Wahrheit willen sie einzuschränken mir pflichtmäßig erscheint. Er also hat die neue von Luther aufgestellte Erkenntnißtheorie preisgegeben und die Theologie wieder in das alte Fahrwasser des scholaschtischen Appriorismus geführt, dessen Erzeugnissen die positiven Data der Offenbarung in lockerem Gefüge nicht mehr sprengen konnt."

12 W. Herrmann's most important works are his study Der Verkehr des Christen mit Gott (19217 [1886]) and his collection of articles Schriften zur Grundlegung der Theologie (1966–67). For more on Herrmann's thought, see O. Jensen 1975; Saarinen 1989a, 43–85; 1990, 106–108; Martikainen 1995.

his interpretation. Christian faith is not mystical or metaphysical but depends on the inner experience of absolute value in man generated by the historical Jesus. Thus, historical events give the Christian faith an external factual basis. Still, an inner experience of value in man elevates the human spirit above the natural world and gives rise to an inner and personal faith. Christian faith is thus a spiritual and individual consciousness, the effect of which manifests itself in the renewal of the will, in moral experiences, and the power of ethical volition.[13]

There are differences in the thinking of A. Ritschl and Herrmann, but the idea of the separation of nature and person, a central theme in Protestant theology, unites them. According to neo-Protestant theology, the example of Jesus elevates human life above nature into religious faith inspired to ethical life. Neo-Protestants saw such a view as consistent with Luther's Reformation theology and wanted to find a non-metaphysical epistemological justification for it that would stand up to scientific debate.[14]

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13 W. Herrmann 1966–67, II, 322; 1921, 226–230. See Saarinen 1989a, 61–62, 64–67, 74–76; 1990, 107.

14 Saarinen 1989a, 83–85. The Ritschlian tradition was widespread, and its influence can be seen, for example, in the old studies of the relationship between theology and philosophy in Luther's thought. Nitzsch (1883), for example, wants to defend Aristotelian philosophy and its use in the interpretation of evangelical Christianity while criticizing A. Ritschl's neo-Protestant theology. On the other hand, his thought also reflects a view of the religious-ethical nature of evangelical theology that is characteristic of neo-Protestant theology. When Nitzsch wrote his seemingly contradictory view, Ritschlian theology did not fully dominate Lutheran studies, and scholars could present various alternatives. See Nitzsch 1883, esp. 5–9, 13–19, 33–34.

In the dissertation of Ferdinand Bahlow (1891), the influence of the Ritschlian tradition is much more apparent. Bahlow mainly refers only to Nitzsch's work, although he does not make much reference to it. Nitzsch's study was the only reliable account of Luther's critique of Aristotle at the time, and therefore, Bahlow used Nitzsch's study to support his dissertation, albeit against Nitzsch's intentions. Bahlow presents the theological basis for his interpretation of Luther in full accordance with the emphases of the Ritschlian school. He says that Luther considered the scholastic doctrinal system corrupt and, therefore, began to develop an entirely new theological way of thinking (*Denkart*), which differed decisively from scholasticism. In Luther's theology, the Christian moral-religious life is a personal experience, a morality whose guiding force is the personal will. Indeed, Bahlow argues that the medieval interpretation of Christianity combined the divine and the human into a single entity but that the Reformation drew a sharp distinction between them. Reformation, in turn, enabled the Christian faith to purify of its alien elements. Bahlow 1891 see esp. 19–20, 26–30.

There are some fundamental similarities between Nitzsch's and Bahlow's interpretations. First, both accept the confessional assumption, characteristic of neo-Protestantism, that Luther consistently sought to break away from scholastic theology and pursue an original Pauline interpretation of Christianity, representing a completely different way of thinking from scholasticism. To oppose the papacy and the teachers of Catholic scholasticism was to reject scholastic Aristotelianism.

Second, both point out that the real object of Luther's criticism was the erroneous way in which scholastic thought combined theology and philosophy. In their understanding of the distinction

Albrecht Ritschl and Wilhelm Hermann do not pay particular attention to Luther's theology of the cross or the Heidelberg Disputation. Albrecht Ritschl's son Otto Ritschl, who also takes a stand on Luther's theology of the cross, expresses the views of their school in his extensive presentation of the history of dogma.[15] Otto Ritschl believes that Luther's theology of the cross is rooted in the old Catholic tradition and especially in the mysticism of Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Johannes Tauler. In his view, the theology of the cross is an integral part of Luther's so-called pre-Reformation theology since it reflects the Catholic monk's desire to love God and deny himself. From the point of view of Reformation theology, the theology of the cross is thus a negative phenomenon since it was precisely this theology that led Luther into an anxiety from which Catholic theology could not free him.[16]

Otto Ritschl saw the theology of the cross as an expression of the Catholic *humilitas*-motif, according to which the Christian must humble himself and love

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between theology and philosophy, the radical separation of nature and person characteristic of post-Ritschlian Protestant theology is evident. However, they both do so in somewhat unusual terms. For both Nitzsch and Bahlow, Luther sought a genuine religious faith free from philosophical attachments and sought to separate theology from philosophy. They argue that Luther's Reformation theology had a decisive influence on the development of the autonomy of philosophy in the history of ideas. This perspective explains their peculiar conclusions. Nitzsch valued Aristotle's philosophy and considered Luther's and Aristotle's philosophy consistent. He acknowledged Luther's criticism of Aristotle but explained it as being due to either misinterpretation of scholasticism or Luther himself. Bahlow, on the other hand, appreciated Luther's way of distinguishing between religious faith and secular wisdom. He also stressed Luther's role in developing the autonomy of philosophy and argued that Luther's Reformation theology made the birth of modern scientific research possible.

15 O. Ritschl 1912, 40–84.

16 O. Ritschl 1912, 40–43, esp. 42–43: "Sucht man unter diesen Gesichtspunkten zunächst der vorreformatorischen Theologie Luthers in ihrer relativ selbständigen Eigenart gerecht zu werden, so läßt sie sich im allgemeinen mit einem von Luther selbst für sie eingeführten Ausdruck als *theologia crucis* charakterisieren. Unter dieser Bezeichnung nämlich stellte er seine Auffassung vom Christentum der seiner Gegner als einer *theologia gloriae* entgegen, indem es ihm, wie seiner Meinung nach auch dem Apostel Paulus im Römerbrief, vor allem darauf ankam, alle Weisheit und Gerechtigkeit des Fleisches, mochte sie auch mit aufrichtiger Überzeugung vertreten werden, völlig zu zerstören, dagegen die Sündenerkenntnis in ihr Recht zu setzen und die Sünde groß zu machen, auch wo sie es nicht ist und auch nicht dafür gehalten wird. So aber ist für Luther seine Theologie des Kreuzes nicht etwa nur 'das große Thema der reformatorischen Jahre' gewesen, in denen er doch bereits über sie hinauswuchs. Vielmehr fassen sich in dem Ausdruck die charakteristischen Tendenzen und Motive aufs glücklichste zusammen, die Luther ursprünglicher Theologie, so weit wir sie zurückverfolgen können, am meisten eigentümlich gewesen sind. Es war der Wille zum Kreuz, durch den Luthers Sinnen und Denken seit seiner Bekehrung wohl ein Jahrzehnt hindurch getragen wurde. Und bereits 1509 hat er den Grundgedanken seiner *theologia crucis* unter Verwertung eines von Augustin entlehnten Begriffspaares in voller Deutlichkeit ausgesprochen."

the cross alone. When a Christian has humbled himself and become nothing, he has done enough before God and is righteous.[17] According to O. Ritschl, Reformation theology rejected this kind of Catholic humility. In his view, the theology of the cross was not a minor phenomenon since it helped Luther to understand the true meaning of Reformation theology. Otto Ritschl bases his interpretation of the theology of the cross on the texts of the young Luther.[18] He considers the texts written in 1518 and 1519, which use the phrase theologia crucis (*theologia crucis*), part of Luther's pre-Reformation writings. He, therefore, finds the Heidelberg Disputation to be a pre-Reformation text.[19]

Although many theologians interpreted the theology of the cross as part of Luther's Pre-Reformation theology, O. Ritschl's interpretation needed to stand up to more thorough scrutiny. It was marked, firstly, by an attitude and a lack of knowledge of medieval Catholic theology, which formed the idea that it is an essential opposite of Protestant theology, i. e., mysticism, metaphysics, and a dark piety of deeds.[20] The real problem, however, was the examination of Luther's works. The critical edition of Luther's works demonstrated that Luther also presented views like the theology of the cross in his later works.

Historical research also clarified the origin of Luther's Heidelberg Disputation and demonstrated Otto Ritschl's interpretation of the theology of the cross to be false. The first actual studies of the Heidelberg Disputation were published at the turn of the century, when Karl Bauer, Julius Köstlin, and Paul Kalkoff clarified its background and content.[21] Karl Bauer wrote a significant study on the early

17 O. Ritschl 1912, 49: "Vollkommene Gelassenheit nun ist die höchste Gerechtigkeit, die Menschen haben können. Wer in ihr freiwillig und gern ins Nichts, in den Tod, in die Verdammnis hineingeht, der hat wahrlich Gott genug getan und ist gerecht."

18 In particular, the *Early marginal notes* and the *Lectures on Romans*.

19 O. Ritschl 1912, 83–84. Hunzinger (1906, esp. 18–20) gives a similar interpretation and discusses Luther's theology in his *First Lectures on Psalms* (*Dictata super Psalterium*, 1513–1515). For Hunzinger, the pre-Reformation theology in the Psalm Lectures was still formal-ontological thinking (*formal-ontologisch*) but later developed into a Reformed religious-ethical (*religiös-sittlich*) principle.

20 The starting point for such thinking was already A. Ritschl's interpretation of Luther (see e. g., 1889, 141–143).

21 Bauer 1901. Karl Bauer's extensive article consists of two parts; the first relies on correspondence and other surviving documents of the historical background to the Disputation, Luther's journey, and events in Heidelberg. His study is still a reliable description of the events, and subsequent studies have only clarified it briefly. An example of Bauer's errors is his assumption that the Disputation occurred in a monastery of Augustinian hermits (Bauer 1901, 244). Indeed, Scheible (1983b, 316–329) showed that the Disputation was arranged in the Faculty of Philosophy. Bauer's most extraordinary claim is that Luther's opponent was the young Leonhard Beier (real name Leonhard Reiff, d. 1552). According to medieval custom, younger scholars usually acted as respondents to a disputation. The appendices to the Disputation (e. g., StA 1, 217, 19–20) support this standard