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TRINITY AND DIVINE PASSIBILITY IN MARTIN LUTHER'S 'THEOLOGIA CRUCIS'

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INTRODUCTION

Luther was certainly aware of the dictum of the Athanasian Creed: 'Whoever wants to be saved should think thus about the Trinity.'¹ The doctrine of the Trinity is indispensable to an understanding of the economy of salvation. This paper begins with an account of the doctrine of the Trinity, which Luther had received from the church, with a view to establish a conceptual framework for his understanding of God's suffering. It must be borne in mind that we are dealing with Luther who wrote in the sixteenth century, that is, at the time when the doctrine of justification by faith had become central to the Christian faith. The doctrines of the Trinity, Christ and salvation constitute the major constituents of Luther's *theologia crucis* in that none of them can be viewed independently of the others. Just as Luther developed his Christology in view of the doctrine of justification by faith, he also developed his doctrine of the Trinity with the work of the triune God upon us. It will be made clear that by God's 'suffering' Luther means the suffering which God undergoes by becoming a 'human sinner', dying on the cross. That is why Luther said that the Father does not suffer, only the Son does. But of course the Son, too, is God. That is how Luther affirmed Theopaschitism, but repudiated Patripassianism as the early Church did. The distinctiveness of the Father from the Son, according to Luther, allows the Son to suffer and die under the Father's judgement and abandonment. Yet the shared deity of the three Persons means no less that God suffers and dies for us in the Son, and no less than God lives in us

¹ This article, now in a modified form, originally appeared as chapter five in *The Suffering of God According to Martin Luther's 'Theologia Crucis'* (Bern/New York, 1995). The primary source for this study is the critical edition of Luther's work, the *Weimar Ausgabe*, most of which have been translated into English. The English translation of Luther's works, abbreviated as *LW*, will be used in this presentation. References from the original language, abbreviated as *WA*, will be made where helpful.

by his Spirit. Since Luther's *theologia crucis* is about God's saving relation to us, not about how God might be in and for himself, the economic Trinity is the conceptual framework from which the reformer began to conceive of God's suffering in and through the incarnate and crucified Christ. Though Luther distinguished the immanent Trinity from the economic Trinity, because of his insistence of the unity of God, the suffering of Christ touches the immanent Trinity as well as the economic Trinity.

LUTHER'S TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

The doctrine of the Trinity, mysterious as it is, is not an outgrowth of metaphysical speculation but of revelation. For Luther, it is an *articulus fidei*, confessed by biblical writers, uninvented but uncovered by later Creeds and historians.² Because it is an article of faith, Luther said: 'Here the whole grammar must adopt new words, if it speaks of God.'³ 'Through philosophy and reason one can say and believe nothing correctly concerning these things of the Divine Majesty; however, through faith one can say and believe everything correctly.'⁴ His intensive preoccupation with the old ecclesiastical theology of the Trinity is evident in his *The Three Symbols* (1538), *On the Councils and the Churches* (1539), and *On the Last Words of David* (1543).⁵

Luther offered a long excursus on the doctrine of the Trinity in his *On the Last Words of David*. In it the starting point is Psalm 33:6 wherein three Persons are named: the Lord, his Word and his Spirit; and yet David did not acknowledge more than one Creator.⁶ 'The Lord does not do His own work separately, the Word does not do His own work separately, and

² Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia, 1966), p. 200. For a detailed study of Luther's doctrine of the Trinity, see Reiner Jansen, *Studien zu Luthers Trinitätslehre* (Frankfurt, 1976).

³ See WA 39², 303, 12ff. (*Promotionsdisputation von G. Major und J. Faber*, 1544).

⁴ See WA 39², 340, 12ff.

⁵ See LW 34, 199ff.; WA 50, 262-83 (The Three Symbols); LW 41, 3ff.; WA 50, 546, 12ff. (On the Councils and the Churches); LW 15, 265ff.; WA 54, 28-100 (On the Last Words of David). These texts are dealt with by Klaus Schwarzwäller, *Theologia Crucis: Luther Lehre von Prädestination nach De Servo arbitrio*, 1525 (München, 1970).

⁶ LW 15, 302.

the Breath does not do His work separately.⁷ In all his trinitarian remarks, Luther neither separated the single Divinity nor mingled the three persons. He followed the premise of the Creed of Athanasius which declared: 'This, however, is the real Christian faith, that we honor one single God in three Persons and three Persons in one single Godhead.'⁸ This premise prohibits the assignment of a work to each Person in the exclusive sense that the other two Persons have nothing to do with it, for then God's unity would be given up. In order to avoid tritheism, Luther affirmed Augustine's principle that the works of the Trinity in relationship to all that is outside the Trinity remain inseparably one. God acts in full unity with himself. It follows from this principle, '*opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*' that the three persons are one Creator.⁹ On the other hand, the difference among the three persons in the Godhead must not be obscured in order to prevent mingling the three Persons into one person, as Sabellius, the Arians, Macedonians, the Jews and the Moslems did, each in their own way.¹⁰ Luther remained, as Lienhard notes, faithful to the thought of Augustine when he spoke of the immanent relationships within the framework of which the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit must be distinguished, while at the same time the persons must not be separated in their economic action towards the creature *ad extra*.¹¹ In God's own life, the persons are distinguished, not separated. So, too, in his action with us the persons are distinguished, not separated. Luther distinguished the persons by saying

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ LW 34, 205. See also Ian Siggins, *Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ* (New Haven, 1970), p. 226.

⁹ LW 15, 302. See also 'The Smalcald Articles, 1537' in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. & ed. by Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia, 1959), p. 291, where Luther made similar statements.

¹⁰ LW 15, 303. Cf. LW 37, 361 (Confession concerning Christ's Supper, 1528), where Luther made his confession of faith in the 'sublime article of the majesty of God' (i.e., the Trinity).

¹¹ Marc Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, trans. J. A. Bouman (Minneapolis, 1982), p. 322. Bernhard Lohse, in his *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and His Thought*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia, 1986), p. 166, also asserts that Luther, following Augustine, expressed strong reservations about the concept of 'person', preferring the concept of 'relationship'.

[W]hen I go beyond and outside of creation or the creature and move into the internal, incomprehensible essence of divine nature, I find that Holy Scripture teaches me – for reason counts for nought in this sphere – the Father is a different and distinct person from the Son in the one indivisible and eternal Godhead. The difference is that He is the Father and does not derive His Godhead from the Son or anyone else. The Son is a Person distinct from the Father in the same, one paternal Godhead. The difference is that He is the Son and that He does not have the Godhead from Himself, nor from anyone else, but the Father, since He was born of the Father from eternity. The Holy Spirit is a Person distinct from the Father and the Son in the same, one Godhead. The difference is that He is the Holy Spirit, who eternally proceeds both from the Father and the Son, and who does not have the Godhead from Himself nor from anyone else but from both the Father and the Son, and all of this from eternity to eternity.¹²

Luther grounded the real difference between the three Persons not in their *opera ad extra*, but rather in their *opera ad intra*, the inner-trinitarian relations.¹³ Thesis 40 of his *Disputation on The Divinity and Humanity of Christ* (1540) also affirms the interdependence of the three Persons in Incarnation.¹⁴ To clarify this point, Luther gave a crude illustration used by the Scholastics, particularly Bonaventure.

If, for example, three young women would take a dress and clothe one of them with this dress, then one could say that all three were dressing her; and yet only one is being attired in the dress and not the other two. Similarly we must understand here that all three Persons, as one God, created the one humanity, clothed the Son in this, and united it with His Person, so that only the Son became man, and not the Father or the Holy Spirit. In the same way we should think also of the dove which the Person of the Holy Spirit adopted and of the voice which the Person of the Father adopted.¹⁵

¹² LW 15, 303.

¹³ Jansen, *Studien zu Luthers Trinitätslehre*, p. 197: 'Damit hat Luther dargelegt, daß der reale Unterschied zwischen den drei göttlichen Personen nicht in ihren *opera ad extra*, sondern nur in ihren *opera ad intra*, den inter-trinitarischen Relationen, zu finden ist.'

¹⁴ WA 39², 95, 19-21: 'Eadem ratione haereticum esset vulgatum illud: Tota trinitas operata est incarnationem filii, sicut duae puellae tertiam induunt, ipsa simul sese induente.'

¹⁵ LW 15, 306.

If the differentiation among the three Persons lies in their immanent-trinitarian relations with one another, then why are the peculiar and distinctive works assigned externally to each Person by way of differentiation? God wants to be known by us as one God in three Persons. So that we know God as such, he reveals himself accordingly in his Word and in Holy Scripture. 'By ourselves we could not ascend into heaven and discover what God is or how His divine essence is constituted.'¹⁶ For this purpose, the triune God must use visible creatures for his revelation, accommodating himself to human capacity so that we may understand that which is to be revealed. Following Augustine, the word 'creature' for Luther must be viewed in two different ways: (i) absolutely – how it is in itself as a creature or work, *per se*, of God. In that sense, 'all creatures are God's work', the one work of all three persons 'without distinction'. (ii) relatively – how God uses the creature(s) toward us. 'Here distinctive images, forms, and revelations of the three distinct Persons come into being'.¹⁷ This is concretely seen in the story of Jesus' baptism. God employs the 'dove' as an image or revelation, of the Holy Spirit. 'This is a distinctive image, which does not portray the Father or the Son but only the Holy Spirit.' All three Persons want the dove to depict and reveal distinctively only the Person of the Holy Spirit, so that we become certain that 'God's one essence is definitely three distinctive Persons from eternity.'¹⁸ The same point is made about Jesus' humanity, which reveals to us the Son alone. Though the form of humanity is the 'same creation of all three Persons', it is the 'peculiar and special' form or revelation of the Son alone. 'For thus it has pleased God, that is, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that the Son should be revealed to and recognised to humankind in this form or figure of humanity as a Person apart from the Father and the Holy Spirit in one eternal essence of divine nature.'¹⁹ In like manner the Father is revealed to us in the form of the 'voice', a distinctive revelation of him alone in the one, indivisible divine essence. For Luther, Augustine's theory of the distinction between reality and sign can be applied to the Trinity only in a modified sense: 'But here in this sublime subject it means more. For

¹⁶ LW 15, 397.

¹⁷ LW 15, 308. Luther quoted favourably Augustine's distinction between *res* and *signum*, especially from his work, *Christian Doctrine*, I.1. He illustrated this as follows: 'Smoke is a reality, a thing *per se* and at the same time a sign of something else, something which it is not but which it indicates and reveals, namely, fire.'

¹⁸ LW 15, 307.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

the humanity of Christ is not a mere sign or a mere figure, as the dove and the voice also are not empty figures or images. No, the humanity in which God's Son is distinctively revealed is reality, it is united with God in one Person, which will sit eternally at the right hand of God.²⁰ God reveals himself as Father by the sign of a voice, and as Spirit by the sign of a dove. But these signs occur in a singular, passing event, while Jesus' humanity is eternally bound to the Son of God. Here it becomes clear how much Luther's view of the incarnation affects his understanding of the Father and of the Holy Spirit, as he said, 'the Father is not known except in the Son through the Holy Spirit'.²¹ The sign of the voice and the sign of the dove are recognised only as they are related to the sign-reality of the incarnation.

The guiding concept for the unity of operations of the Godhead, for Luther, is 'appropriations', which appears in his creedal explanations.²² Father, Son and Holy Spirit are, at the same time, Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier even though the Trinity functions *ad extra* as one.²³ *Communicatio operationes* is a development of the doctrine of the economic Trinity. But Luther in his use of it never neglected to insist that God is inseparably one *ad extra*. In his commentary on Genesis 1 and John 1, he followed the ascriptive patterns of Augustine and Hilary by associating the articles on the Father, Son and Holy Spirit with creation, redemption, and sanctification respectively.²⁴ He stressed the unity of the works of the Godhead: 'Nor is it possible in this manner to divide God subjectively, for the Father is not known except in the Son and through the Holy Spirit.'²⁵ The appropriations therefore function to give the certainty of God's triunity ('*Dreieinigkeit*').²⁶ We assert the Trinity because the *opus indivisum trinitatis* is a three-fold work. This two-fold emphasis on God's unity and threefoldness is found in Luther's interpretation of the Apostles' Creed.

²⁰ LW 15, 308.

²¹ LW 1, 58; WA 42, 44 (Genesis).

²² See 'The Apostles' Creed', in LW 24, 202ff. and 'The Creed' in 'The Small Catechism' and 'The Large Catechism', in *The Book of Concord*, pp. 344-5 & pp. 411-20 respectively.

²³ LW 15, 309.

²⁴ LW 1, 49-50, 60-61 (Genesis 1); LW 22, 19ff. (John 1).

²⁵ LW 1, 58.

²⁶ Though Luther did not coin the term '*Dreieinigkeit*', he facilitated its origin.

These are like different clothes, that one does not mix together among the Persons. For however creating and sustaining all things, atoning for sins, forgiving sins, awakening from death and giving the gift of eternal life are works that no one other than God can do, nevertheless there are special works here that are ascribed to each Person distinctly, so that Christians have one simple, certain understanding, that there is only one God, and nevertheless three Persons in the one indivisible Essence, just as the holy fathers read diligently in Moses, the Prophets, and the writings of the Apostles and have held intact against all heretics.²⁷

In these remarks on the unity of the triune God Luther seemed, according to Bornkamm, to render the distinction of the Persons insignificant.²⁸ Yet, Luther justified the '*Ordnung der Personen*' theologically: 'For He [Father] is the fountainhead or wellspring (so to say) of the Godhead [Divinity] in the Son and the Holy Spirit, and when the Father is mentioned, the Son cannot be divorced from Him but must simultaneously be named and meant. Likewise the Holy Spirit is named and meant together with the Father and the Son, because none of the Persons can be a separate God apart from the others.'²⁹ While Luther emphasised the *homoousio*-unity in the Western tradition more than he emphasised the primacy of the Father in the Eastern tradition, he stopped short of the heresy of modalism: The Son is a Person distinct from the Father. Thus 'strictly speaking', in Lienhard's finding, 'there is a balance in Luther between the Western tradition with its own insistence on the *homoousios* [Augustine] and the Eastern tradition in its affirmation of the primacy of the Father [Basil].'³⁰ Where Athanasius stressed the unity of divine nature, the Cappadocians emphasised the threefoldness of the divine *hypostases*, giving primacy to the Father, 'the fountal principle in the consubstantial triad'. 'The Father is He out of whom and toward whom the Son and the Holy Spirit are reckoned, and by the communication of His nature He makes the unity of the Trinity.'³¹

In his excursus, *The Three Symbols*, Luther quoted favourably Athanasius, who distinguished the three Persons: 'The Father is of no

²⁷ See WA 41, 276, 39ff. as quoted in Jansen, *Studien zu Luthers Trinitätslehre*, p. 199. Translation is mine.

²⁸ Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, trans. Eric W. & Ruth C. Gritsch (Philadelphia, 1969), pp. 114-20.

²⁹ LW 15, 316.

³⁰ Lienhard, *Witness to Jesus Christ*, p. 165.

³¹ See Edmund J. Fortman, *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Philadelphia, 1972), pp. 75-6.

one, neither born nor made nor created. The Son is of the Father, not made or created but born. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son, not born or created, but proceeding.³² For the eternal begetting of the Son by the Father, Luther turned to Psalm 27, 'The Lord said to me, "You are my son, today I have begotten or borne you."³³ While the theologians of the Eastern Church designate John 15:26 as the biblical ground for their rejection of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son, Luther tried to justify the '*filioque*' precisely from this biblical reference.³⁴ John 15:26 in Luther's translation read: 'When the Comforter comes, whom I shall send to you, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will testify of me.' Therefore the Holy Spirit 'proceeds' from the Father and is 'sent' by the Son. To be 'sent' and to 'proceed', for Luther, are basically nothing other than two different aspects of the same act so that we can assert at once: the Holy Spirit 'proceeds' from both the Father and the Son.³⁵ Luther continued his argument in the line of Augustine: 'Just as the Son is born of the Father and yet does not depart from the Godhead, but on the contrary remains in the same Godhead with the Father and is one God with Him so also the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and is sent by the Son, and does not depart from the Godhead either, but remains with the Father and the Son in the same Godhead, and is one God with both.'³⁶ For the Son, to be sent is to be referred to his 'origin' from the Father; likewise for the Holy Spirit to be sent is to be referred to his procession from the Father and the Son. In this discussion the relation between the immanent and the economic Trinity is brought into view. More precisely, the relation is brought into view when Luther related the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit on the one hand to the temporal missions of the Son and the Spirit in the world on the other.³⁷

The 'eternal immanent birth' of the Son and the 'eternal immanent proceeding' of the Spirit constitute Luther's view of the difference of the Persons in God.³⁸ How the connections of their immanent relationships exist in the Godhead cannot be grasped by reason, but can

³² LW 34, 216ff.

³³ Ibid. See also LW 12, 49 (Psalm, 1532).

³⁴ LW 34, 217.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ See Augustine's *de Trinitate*, IV. 20, 29, as cited in Bertrand Margerie, *The Christian Trinity in History*, trans. Edmund J. Fortman. Studies in Historical Theology, vol. 1 (Still River, Mass., 1982), p. 48.

³⁸ LW 34, 216-17.

only be believed. It is not even to be investigated by angels, who with joy nevertheless incessantly behold it. It is sufficient that we might grasp a certain distinction of the Persons in the Godhead. Thus Luther finally came to assert:

These, then, are the differences between the Persons as given to us in the gospel. Whoever wishes to do so can ponder on it further, but he will find nothing of certainty. Therefore we ought to stay with this in all simplicity and be satisfied with it, until we arrive in heaven, where we shall no longer have to hear it or believe it, but clearly see and apprehend it.³⁹

Speaking about the immanent Trinity, Luther reasoned *a posteriori* from biblically-witnessed salvation history in the world back to God's eternal essence.⁴⁰ If Christ is born physically in our history, yet is the Son of God, he is born eternally in God. If God the Father is the Creator of the world, then God's origin must be in himself, from whom the Son and the Holy Spirit obtain their essence. God's historical revelation in three Persons mirrors God in his eternal essence. Statements on the immanent Trinity could therefore be derived through inferring the essence of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit from the way they are revealed to us. These statements maintain that God is 'beforehand in eternity', as the One that he reveals himself to be.⁴¹ Torrance's words reflect Luther's: God 'has opened up himself to our knowledge in his own being as Father, Son and Holy Spirit for what he has revealed of himself to us through Christ and in the Spirit he is in himself.'⁴² We know the Trinity only because we see God acting in Jesus and the Holy Spirit (economic Trinity). From this, the immanent Trinity could be deduced. Luther interpreted the economic Trinity as the self-manifestation of the immanent Trinity.⁴³ In other words, statements on the immanent Trinity

³⁹ LW 34, 218.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ LW 34, 218. Cf. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and trans. T. E. Torrance (Edinburgh, 1962-1975), vol. 1.1, p. 383. Barth insisted that 'as Father, Son and Holy Spirit God is, so to speak, ours in advance', thereby bringing together the inner and outer being of God.

⁴² Thomas E. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh, 1988), p. 67.

⁴³ Eilert Herms, *Luthers Auslegung des Dritten Artikels* (Tübingen, 1987), p. 118: 'Older: die ökonomische Trinität ist die Selbmanifestation der immanenten.'

are nothing other than the theological premises for the economic Trinity. In order to show the relation between the economic and immanent Trinity, Luther asserted emphatically that there is one Son and one Spirit, yet of two different 'births' or 'proceedings'. The Son, who is born in the world, and the Spirit who proceeds into the world are born and proceeded 'beforehand' in God's eternal essence. Luther wrote of such trinitarian apriorism:

Therefore it was indeed fitting that the middle Person was physically born and became a Son, the same who was born beforehand in eternity and is Son, and that it was not the Father or the Holy Spirit who was thus physically born and became a Son. ... The Holy Spirit proceeds physically, the same who proceeds in eternity and is neither born nor Son. And thus the Father remains of himself, so that all three Persons are in majesty, and yet in such a manner that the Son has his Godhead from the Father through his eternal immanent birth (and not the other way round), and that the Holy Spirit has his Godhead from the Father and the Son through his eternal immanent proceeding. The Son shows his eternal birth through his physical birth, and the Holy Spirit shows his eternal proceeding through his physical proceeding. Each of them has an external likeness or image of his internal essence.⁴⁴

Luther interpreted John 15:26 both immanent-trinitarianly and economic-trinitarianly so that the knowledge of God the Father to which we can ascend through the Son and in the Spirit is a knowledge of God as he eternally is in himself as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. This means that before God created, redeemed and poured forth his Spirit to sanctify, he already existed eternally as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. The *opera trinitatis ad extra* and the *opera trinitatis ad intra* thus are distinguished, but not separated. God *in se* and God *pro nobis* cannot be separated. Though he distinguished with the tradition the immanent Trinity from the economic Trinity, he insisted on their unity by affirming that God is 'beforehand in eternity'. So what we encounter in revelation in the economic Trinity corresponds to what God is in eternity, the immanent Trinity.

Nevertheless the weight of Luther's theology concentrates on the discussion of the economic Trinity, from which the immanent Trinity can be deduced.⁴⁵ He conceived of God according to his work or God as

⁴⁴ LW 34, 218. Cf. LW 24, 292-3.

⁴⁵ This interpretation has been offered by Jansen, *Studien zu Luthers Trinitätslehre*, pp. 204-5.

he wishes to be known in the Incarnate Son. His evangelical emphasis reinforces the way he must travel: to consider God primarily in terms of his saving work in his people or in terms of faith's experience of God's salvific activity. 'Or, to put it mediievally, God in his *operationes ad extra*, in his *potentia ordinata*.'⁴⁶ There appears in Luther a lively penetration of the article on the Trinity by his doctrine of justification by faith. While Luther on the one hand said that the article on the Trinity is 'the highest article in faith – the article on which all the others hang', on the other hand, he said of the 'main article [of the creeds], the one concerning Jesus Christ', that 'all the others attach themselves to it and firmly support it'.⁴⁷ From this we conclude, as Elert did, that Luther 'recognized more and more the Christological approach to the doctrine of the Trinity as the only one that was compatible with his theology'.⁴⁸ Christology and Trinity must not be neatly separated, for both are related to the Reformer's soteriology. This is evident in the exposition of the three articles in the Creed of his *Large Catechism* (1538) where Luther explained:

Here in the Creed you have the entire essence of God, his will and his work exquisitely depicted.... In these three articles God has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of his fatherly heart, his sheer unutterable love. He created us for this purpose, to redeem and sanctify us. Moreover, having bestowed upon us everything in heaven and on earth, he has given us his Son and Holy Spirit, through whom he brings us to himself. ... We could never come to recognize the Father's Favor and grace were it not for the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the Father's heart. Apart from him we see nothing but an angry and terrible judge. But neither could⁴⁹ we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁶ John Loesch, *The Divine Community. Trinity, Church and Ethics in Reformation Theologies* (Missouri, 1981), p. 18. Loesch accepts Regin Prenter's understanding of the Trinity in terms of the 'motion' analogy. Both develop, on the basis of Luther's Christmas sermon on Trinity of 1514, an image of the Trinity in terms of 'the moving, the moved and rest' (p. 20). See also Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, trans. John M. Jensen (Philadelphia, 1953), pp. 173ff., where he discussed this topic.

⁴⁷ See WA 7, 214, 27ff.; WA 50, 266, 37.

⁴⁸ Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, vol. 1., trans. Walter A. Hansen (St Louis, 1962), p. 217.

⁴⁹ See The Creed in *The Large Catechism*, p. 419. See also The Creed in *The Small Catechism*, pp. 344-5. See also Friedrich Mildenerger, *Theology*

In the doctrine of the Trinity, we meet the same structure as in Christology: just as Luther developed his Christology in terms of justification, he developed his doctrine of the Trinity in terms of the work of the triune God in us. What is established here is that God alone is the one who acts, who is as Father, Son and Spirit the *justificans ac salvator hominis peccatoris*.⁵⁰ Hence in keeping with the dominant emphasis of soteriology, Luther not only stuck to his own rule – to view God primarily in terms of his saving activity towards us, but he also refrained from speculation about the characteristics of the immanent Trinity. God is in himself what he does in us, the former being the premise for the latter.⁵¹

THEOPASCHITISM VIS-À-VIS PATRIPASSIANISM:

The essential idea of the school of modalism was that there is one Godhead, designated as Father, Son and Spirit. These terms do not stand for real distinctions, but are successive revelations of the same Person. Father, Son and Spirit are identical. The modalistic solution to the mystery of threeness and oneness was, then, not three distinct Persons, but one Person with three different names or roles which are appropriate and applicable at different times.⁵² Modalism safeguards the '*monarchia*'

of the Lutheran Confessions, trans. Edwin L. Lueker (Philadelphia, 1983), p. 147.

⁵⁰ See Lohse, *Martin Luther*, p. 167, who observes that Luther understood the dogma of the Trinity in light of the doctrine of salvation. 'To this extent, [Luther] was part of the line of theological development begun by Athanasius. Athanasius felt that the Arians' rejection of the doctrine that the Son was of one substance with the Father (*homoousios*) called the meaning of the redemption into question. Luther felt, however, that this connection between the dogma (i.e. the Trinity) and soteriology is even closer.'

⁵¹ For further dialogue on the doctrine of the Trinity, see Robert W. Bertram, 'When is God triune?', *Dialog* 27 (1988): 133; Paul R. Hinlicky, 'Some Questions to Bertram on the Trinity', *Dialog* 18 (1989): 307-8; Ann Pederson, 'A Question to Bertram and Luther on the Trinity', *Dialog* 28 (1989): 308-9; Bertram, 'Again on the Trinity: Bertram Responds', *Dialog* 29 (1990): 60-61. For Bertram, Luther's theological thinking is strictly concrete: in Jesus Christ we know *Deus revelatus qua Trinitas*, revealed as Jesus Christ, his Father and their common Spirit. Outside of this particular context, we just do not know an immanent Trinity.

⁵² *LW* 34, 208. Cf. John N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London, 1968), pp. 119-23.

(unicity) of God by teaching that God '*simpliciter*' (i.e., Father) was incarnated in the Son.⁵³ It follows from this that the Father suffered along with Christ, since he was present in and identical with the Son. This idea, labelled 'patripassianism', was condemned as a heresy. Praxeas' concession that the Father suffered only with the Son did not impress Tertullian:

[Our heretics] indeed, fearing to incur direct blasphemy against the Father, hope to diminish it by this expedient: they grant us so far that the Father and Son are two; adding that, since it is the Son who indeed suffered, the Father is only his fellow-sufferer. But how absurd are they even in this conceit! For what is the meaning of 'fellow-suffering,' but the endurance of suffering along with another? Now if the Father is incapable of suffering, he is incapable of suffering in company with another; otherwise, if He can suffer with another, He is of course capable of suffering.⁵⁴

The main reason for the rejection of patripassianism was not so much its conflict with the hellenistic concept of divine impassibility as with the biblical revelation.⁵⁵ The distinguishing characteristic of patripassianism, Sarot notes correctly (i.e., in terms of the history of dogma), does not lie in its denial of divine impassibility but in its refusal to make a distinction between the Father and the Son.⁵⁶ Patripassianism erred in its failure to endorse the trinitarian distinctions between the Father and the Son. However the writings of the patripassianists must be understood for

⁵³ See Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, pp. 83, 85, 100, 112, 119-23 as cited in Marcel Sarot, 'Patripassianism, Theopaschitism and the Suffering of God: Some Systematic and Historical Considerations', *Religious Studies* 16 (1990), p. 370. Tertullian means by '*Pater*' the first person of the Trinity, whereas the modalists use '*Pater*' in the more original sense as '*God simpliciter*'.

⁵⁴ Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean* 15. 402ff. Also cited in Colin Grant, 'Possibilities for Divine Passibility', *Toronto Journal of Theology* 4 (1988), p. 5.

⁵⁵ For a contrary view, see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, 1984), who argues that the key reason for the repudiation of Patripassianism was its conflict with the hellenistic conception of divine impassibility. Cf. Sarot, 'Patripassianism, Theopaschitism, and the Suffering of God', p. 370.

⁵⁶ Sarot, 'Patripassianism, Theopaschitism and the Suffering of God', p. 370. See also John Mozley, *The Impassibility of God: A Survey of Christian Thought* (Cambridge, 1926), pp. 33ff.

the purpose of this study in the context of the question: how does one reconcile belief in the incarnation, which is integrally related to the nature of God, with belief in an impassable God? Because the axiom of divine impassibility was assumed by Tertullian, he rejected the idea that the Father 'fellow-suffered' on the cross. Hence the new term coined by Moltmann, 'patricompassianism', does not meet with Tertullian's objection, and cannot be used to distinguish itself from 'patripassianism'.⁵⁷ Strictly speaking, 'patricompassianism', for Tertullian, is identical to 'patripassianism', both of which fail to distinguish the trinitarian persons sufficiently.⁵⁸

How did Luther avoid the heresy of 'patripassianism', a variation of modalism? First, he maintained a unity of the Godhead with 'distinctions', arguing against Sabellius who juggled the three Persons into one Person.⁵⁹ Luther, in speaking about the economy of salvation, refused to distinguish the Persons with respect to God's works *ad extra* so that what is done by one Person must be ascribed to all three 'without distinction'.⁶⁰ 'In relation to us, He is one God.' Nevertheless 'within

⁵⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Future of Creation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia, 1979), p. 73. Moltmann coins this new term 'patricompassianism' to indicate the theological position which advocates a trinitarian understanding of the suffering of God, according to which 'the Son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of the Son'.

⁵⁸ Sarot, 'Patripassianism, Theopaschitism and the Suffering of God', p. 372. See Jung Young Lee, *God Suffers for Us: A Systematic Inquiry into a Concept of Divine Passibility* (The Hague, 1974), p. 74, where he, by rejecting patripassianism, rejected 'the unity of Godhead without distinction'. Kazoh Kitamori, in his *Theology of the Pain of God*, trans. Shinkyō Suppanska (Virginia, 1965), p. 15, also rejected patripassianism: 'My theology, however, cannot be identified with patripassianism unless the critics can prove that I made reference to God the Father as the One who suffered on the cross.' See Warren McWilliams, *The Passion of God: Divine Suffering in Contemporary Theology* (Atlanta, 1985), p. 21, where he labels many theologians as the 'new patripassianists', including Moltmann, James Cone, Geddes MacGregor, Kitamori, Daniel Day Williams, and Jung Young Lee. McWilliams calls them 'new' because they insist on stronger trinitarian distinctions than 'the old patripassianists'; Baron von Hügel, *Essays and Addresses on Philosophy of Religion*, series II (London, 1926), pp. 205 & 363. Hügel used *passio/compassio* distinction to support divine impassibility, while Tertullian rejected such a distinction in his attack on the patripassianists.

⁵⁹ LW 15, 303.

⁶⁰ LW 15, 311.

Himself,' said Luther, 'He is distinctive in three Persons.'⁶¹ The unity of Godhead 'with distinction' is to be maintained as seriously as the unity of God's acts *ad extra* 'without distinction'. Second, we must ask how Luther understood the doctrine of Incarnation. Is the whole Trinity incarnate? To this Luther replied no. The divine nature, for him, designates one person of Trinity or the whole Trinity (*tota divinitas*). Thesis IV and X of his *Promotionstheses für George Major* read: '*Ut quaelibet person sit ipsa tota divinitas, ac nulla esset alia.*' '*Et tamen verum est, Nullam personam esse solam, quasi alia non sit, divinitatem.*'⁶² It is inaccurate to say that the divine nature in itself becomes incarnate; rather we say it is the divine nature in the Person of the Son which becomes incarnate, that is, one Person alone. Likewise it is inaccurate to say that the divine nature suffers or dies. But we can say that the divine nature of the Son, one Person of the Trinity, *quando capitur pro persona* suffers or dies. Contrary to Nestorius's position, Luther provided his own reading of the Council at Ephesus in AD 431: 'We Christians must ascribe all the *idiomata* of the two natures of Christ... equally to him. Consequently Christ is God and man in one person because whatever is said of him must also be said of him as God, namely, Christ has died, and Christ is God; therefore God died – not the separated God, but God united with humanity.'⁶³ Luther explained this in his *Disputation On the Divinity and Humanity of Christ* (1540):

For we also say that God is one and not more; but that unity of substance and essence has three distinct persons, just as Christ's nature is united in one person. Therefore, when it is said: Divinity is dead, it then implies that even the Father and the Holy Spirit are dead. But this is not true since only one person of the divinity, the Son was born, died, and suffered, etc. Therefore, divine nature, when it is understood as the person, was born,

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² WA 39², 287, 21-2. See also LW 11, 226; LW 15, 305-6; Liemhard, *Witness to Jesus Christ*, p. 322.

⁶³ LW 41, 103. For Luther, the Council at Ephesus 'condemned far too little of Nestorius, for it dealt with only one *idioma*, that God was born of Mary. Thus the histories relate that it was resolved in this Council, in opposition to Nestorius, that Mary should be called *Theotokos*, "bearer of God," even though Nestorius denied to God in Christ all *idiomata* of human nature such as dying, cross, suffering and everything that is compatible with the Godhead. This is why they should not have just resolved that Mary was *Theotokos*, but also Pilate and the Jews were crucifiers and murderers of God...' (p. 104).

suffered, died, etc.; it is true. Therefore a distinction must be made. If you understand divine nature as the whole Divinity or unity, then the argument is false; for Christ is not the whole Trinity, but only one person of the Trinity. Therefore, there is only one God. Let us proclaim here how it can be that those three persons are one God and one being. But we believe that these things are incomprehensible; if they could be understood, there would be no need to believe.⁶⁴

Lienhard observes that Luther began with the divinity of Christ and then moved to the three Persons. Siggins explained:

Because the Son is one undivided essence with the Father and the Spirit, where we hear one person speak, we hear the entire Deity. So when we grasp the Son of God we grasp the Father too: the whole Trinity is known in the Person of Jesus Christ: 'Since Christ, who is one undivided Person, God and man, speaks to us, we are sure that God the Father and God the Spirit – that is the whole divine Majesty – is also present and speaking. So God is entirely comprehended in this one person and you need not nor dare search elsewhere.'⁶⁵

When Luther said 'the whole Trinity is found in this Man', he did not intend modalism; rather all the divinity (*tota divinitas*) is present in the Son taken in isolation, but the Son alone is not the only Person, as if there were no other. The unity of the Trinity, for Luther, goes beyond what we meet at the level of the creatures or that of mathematics.⁶⁶ Here Luther employed a 'new' language to explain the mystery of the unity of the Trinity. This grammar assumes new utterances, since it wishes to speak about God. Numerical order ceases to be one, two, three: '*Cessat etiam numeri ordo: unus, dua, tres.*'⁶⁷ Within creation it is indeed valid; but here there is no order with respect to number, place, and time. Thus we must establish another form of speaking than that which has to do with creation. Words like 'coeternity', 'co-equality', 'image', 'nature', must thus be employed in a new way. Thesis VI of his

⁶⁴ WA 39², 110, 5-17. See Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York, 1981), p. 235, who claims that Luther used the name 'God' generically and promiscuously for the following: (i) the nature of God; (ii) the second Person of the Trinity; (iii) the Persons of the Father and the Spirit.

⁶⁵ Lienhard, *Witness to Jesus Christ*, pp. 163ff.

⁶⁶ WA 39², 287, 24.

⁶⁷ WA 39², 303, 24.

Promotionsthesen für Georg Major explains this: 'Ac hic aliquid diceretur improprie, tamen res ipsa defendenda est per scripturas contra Diabolum.'⁶⁸ In his disputation on *The Word was Made Flesh* (1539), Luther replied to argument 16 of Dr Jonas: 'There is a distinction of unity and trinity in theology. But such a distinction is in philosophy. Therefore there is, in theology, some necessary mathematical philosophy.'⁶⁹ After asserting, in reply, that 'the Trinity in theology is vastly different from the way it is accepted in mathematics', Luther then concluded: 'We say that mathematics should remain in its own sphere and domain. We are not concerned with disputing about trinity and unity, because mathematics cannot concede that trinity is unity. ... Even if it is not true in nature, it can very well be true in God, and it is.'⁷⁰ It is possible to say that which is trinitarian can be one thing; in God there is both unity and trinity.⁷¹

The unity of the divine nature means that each Person is in himself truly God: the Father is wholly God, the Son is wholly God, and the Spirit is wholly God. But there is only one God, yet three distinct Persons. Only God the Son, was born, suffered, and therefore he alone was on the cross. Because the Person of the Father is distinct from the Person of the Son, said Luther, 'we should not say that the Father suffered for us' on the cross.⁷² To say that the Father suffers on the cross is, for Luther, to follow the rules of the *mathematica*; but our new language is effectively *contra Diabolum*. The Son is the being of God, going out of himself, becoming incarnate, assuming the servant form and becoming obedient unto death on the cross. In his sermon on John in 1537, Luther wrote: 'The two natures dwell in the Lord Christ, and yet He is but one Person. These two natures retain their properties, and each also communicates its properties to the other.'⁷³ Luther referred to the doctrine of *communicatio idiomatum*, according to which the properties of the two natures in Christ are communicated not only to the *concretum*

⁶⁸ WA 39², 287, 15-16.

⁶⁹ LW 38, 266; WA 39², 21, 26-8. See Graham White, 'Luther's View on Language', *Literature and Theology* 3 (1989), p. 205 (Translation is White's).

⁷⁰ Ibid. See also LW 38, 275; WA 39², 22, 4-10 (Translation is White's).

⁷¹ WA 39², 303, 18ff.

⁷² LW 24, 99-100; WA 45, 550-51 (John, 1538).

⁷³ LW 22, 491-2.

of his person, but also to each other.⁷⁴ On this delicate topic of God's suffering and dying, the authors of the *Formula of Concord* quoted Luther saying:

Unless God is in the balance and throws his weight as a counterbalance, we shall sink to the bottom of the scale. ... If it is not true that God died for us, but only a man died, we are lost. But if God's death and God dead lie in the opposite scale, then his side goes down and we go upward like a light or empty pan. Of course, he can also go up again or jump out of his pan. But he could not have sat in the pan unless he became a man like us, so that it could be said: God dead, God's passion, God's blood, God's death. According to his nature God cannot die, but since God and man are united in one person it is correct to talk about God's death when that man dies who is one thing or one person with God.⁷⁵

Here Luther justified his remarks on the suffering and death of God in Christ on the soteriological ground. Already in his *Church Postil* in 1522, Luther said if it is true that only the human nature suffers and the divine nature has no part in it, then Christ is of no more use to us than any other saint because his death is merely that of a human being.⁷⁶ Christ's achievement would then become a pure model for the faithful, turning Christ into only an exemplar. In order to redeem human beings from the power of death, God has to co-suffer and co-die in Christ. God lets himself be overtaken by death in the suffering and dying of Christ, and yet he remains the victor over death. For Luther, it is a theological axiom that Christ be affected by suffering even according to his divine nature, otherwise salvation through Christ's suffering and death are inconceivable to him. With this it becomes clear how closely the two-nature Christology and soteriology are linked in Luther's thinking.

The content of God-language, for Luther, is Christologically based. In the disputation of 1540, Luther wrote against Nestorius: "But," you object, "God cannot be crucified or suffer." I reply, "I know – while He is

⁷⁴ For an extensive study of Luther's usage of the doctrine of *communicatio idiomatum*, see chapter three of *The Suffering of God According to Martin Luther's 'Theologia Crucis'*.

⁷⁵ See WA 50, 590 (On Councils and the Church, 1539) as cited in *The Formula of Concord*, p. 599. Also cited in Ted Peters, *God – The World's Future* (Minneapolis, 1992), p. 198, where he argues, on the basis of his text, that 'for Luther the divine nature was present throughout the earthly life of Jesus, suffering the slings and arrows of human fortune'.

⁷⁶ See WA 10¹, 11ff. as cited in Jansen, *Studien zu Luthers Trinitätslehre*, p. 115.

not yet man." From eternity He has not suffered, but since He became man, He is passable. From eternity He was not man, but now, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin, He became God and man, one person, and the same things are predicated of God and man.⁷⁷ The Ockhamists insisted on the principle *nulla proportio est finiti ad infinitum*, emphasising the infinite gulf between the infinite and the finite, and correspondingly were unwilling to predicate the same of God and man. Here Aristotle and Luther are comrades against the Ockhamists. Luther wrote:

It is not possible to predicate the same of God and man. *Ergo* etc. Response: This is a philosophical argument: There is no proportion of creature and Creator, of finite and infinite. However, we do not so much make here a proportion as a unity of finite and infinite. If Aristotle were to hear the above argument, it would never make him into a Christian because he does not himself concede the aforesaid proportion because it is the same proportion of finite and infinite.⁷⁸

For Luther, the chasm between God and man, between Creator and creature, when one looks away from Christ, is even deeper than it is for philosophy.⁷⁹ This chasm between God and man is non-existent in Christ. Thesis 20 of the same disputation read: '*Certum est tamen, omnia vocabula in Christo novam significationem accipere in eadem re significata.*'⁸⁰ Nagel explains:

The traditional phrases 'according to his human nature' and 'according to his divine nature' Luther uses so that the distinction of the natures is not lost; but his usage of them has come free of the dualism which sees divine and human, heavenly and earthly, infinite and finite, impassable and passable, as opposites unreconcilable. They are if you look at God separately, and if you look at man separately, but in Christ this separation is gone. In Christ they have a new meaning; the old meaning applies only to them when separated. In speaking of him we may not speak of the divinity separated from the humanity, or of the humanity

⁷⁷ See WA 39², 101, 24-8 as quoted in Siggins, *Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ*, p. 236.

⁷⁸ See WA 39², 112, 13-21 as cited in Norman Nagel, 'Martinus: Heresy, Doctor Luther, Heresy! The Person and Work of Christ', in *Seven-Headed Luther, Essays in Commemoration of a Quincentenary 1483-1983*, ed. Peter Newman Brooks (Oxford, 1983), pp. 44-5.

⁷⁹ WA 39², 343.

⁸⁰ WA 39², 94, 17-18.

separated from the divinity. By such separation our Saviour and salvation are done. *Extra Christum non est Deus alius.*⁸¹

'For this Person (Christ) is both true God and true man, one Divine Being with the Father, one God, and therefore one voice or one word or one work. Therefore we can and must say: "God was crucified and died for me."⁸² The suffering of Christ as God's suffering lies in the concrete unity of his personal identity – the 'God-man' *in toto*. *In concreto*, the incarnate Son suffers in the act of his self-humiliation. Christ's humiliation is his own direct action as a whole person, an 'altogether pure and innocent person' who is constituted as 'God and man'. 'For in My own Person of humanity and divinity I am blessed, and I am in need of nothing whatever. But I shall empty Myself (Phil. 2:7); I shall assume your clothing and mask; and... suffer death, in order to set you free from death.'⁸³ This condescension is the condescension of the innocent Son of God and the innocent Son of Man, both becoming the Person of the sinful race, suffering and dying on the cross. The God who is known in Christ is the God who comes in lowliness or humility. The being of Jesus Christ in humility, suffering and dying on the cross is 'being' in self-humiliation, and the atonement effected by him is the 'act' of Christ's self-humiliation. By suffering, Luther means the kind of suffering which God does by assuming our sinnerhood in his incarnate Son. That is why Luther said the Father does not suffer in the sense of the firsthand cross-bearing of our sin and dying, only the Son does. As stated previously, 'not the separated God, but rather God united with humanity' dies. The 'separated God' is, for Luther, actually God who is the origin of the Incarnation – namely, the Person of the Father. The Father, in Luther's thinking, is the 'origin' of the Divinity, from whom

⁸¹ Nagel, 'Heresy, Doctor Luther, Heresy!', p. 47.

⁸² See WA 45, 301, 21-5 as cited in Lienhard, *Witness to Jesus Christ*, p. 338.

⁸³ LW 26, 32; WA 40¹, 448 (Galatians). Cf. Eberhard Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity. God's Being is in Becoming* (Grand Rapids, 1976), p. 87, where he quotes favourably Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV.1, pp. 246-7: 'In his [Christ's] passion and death, he did not therefore somehow "waive his divinity (somewhat like the emperor of Japan in 1945)", but was rather "in such a humiliation supremely God, in this death supremely alive," so that "he has actually maintained and revealed his deity precisely in the passion of this man as his eternal Son."' Moltmann, in his *The Crucified God*, pp. 214ff., says: 'the cross must be "evacuated" of deity, [if] by definition God cannot suffer and die...'

the Son and the Spirit derive their divinity. He is also, in that sense, the origin of the Incarnation. In his interpretation of the three names, where Luther spoke of the trinitarian Person of the Father he often said simply 'God'. In this sense the statement 'God in His nature cannot die' could be understood: as the Father, he cannot suffer dying, for as the Father he is the source of all life, that proves himself to be the victor over death.⁸⁴ The question of God's passibility therefore casts a new light on Luther's theology of the Trinity. While God as the Son is exposed to the suffering and dying of Jesus, still God as the Father remains the One from whom suffering and death can claim nothing. Luther conceived of the theology of the Trinity in such a way that it includes the Incarnation and passion of God in Christ, not as an addendum but as ontologically constitutive of God. With this the reformer distinguished himself clearly from modalism. Jansen writes of Luther:

For in his thinking, becoming human and Jesus Christ's suffering, death and resurrection are grounded in God's being itself. The theory of the Trinity as a differentiation in God's being makes it possible for the reformer to teach God's Incarnation and Passion of God in Jesus Christ. Precisely in this, Luther is far from metaphysical Monotheism, which teaches the intransitoriness, immutability, indivisibility, incapability of suffering and immortality of God.⁸⁵

Luther, like the orthodox Christology, rejected patripassianists who extended the suffering of Jesus' death to the Father. He reacted to the modalistic theopaschitism by predicating the suffering of death only of the Son. Christ suffered in his person; and this person, God's Son, is of one being with the Father. If God is in Christ, then whatever God the Son suffers becomes the suffering of God by the union of the Persons of the Trinity. In this manner the Father, though he does not suffer dying as the Son does on the cross, suffers through divine unity with the Son. 'The Father and the Son are one' (cf. John 14). The concept of *perichoresis* was already assumed by Luther as he said in his sermon on John 14 (1538): 'Believe Me that I am in My Father and the Father is in Me.'⁸⁶ Since the Father and the Son mutually coinhere in one another, it is appropriate to talk also here about a marvellous exchange. For Luther it is important that whatever is said of the Son must also be said of the Father, since the two, as Scripture affirms, are one. The suffering of

⁸⁴ Jansen, *Studien zu Luthers Trinitätslehre*, p. 119.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁸⁶ LW 24, 98; WA 45, 549.

Christ as the eternal Son is therefore also that of the Father because of their divine unity. In God's own life the Father and the Son are distinguished (the Son, not the Father, dies), but not separated (the Father wills the death of the Son and knows – suffers – the death of the Son). Modalistic forms of the theopaschite doctrines are rejected by Luther. But a qualified version of 'patripassianism' is attributable to Luther's theology, that is, by the principle of *perichoresis*: the Father suffers in and through the divine unity with the Son. This is in accordance with Luther's *theologia crucis* in which the triune God is one with the crucified Jesus. That God is identified with the crucified Jesus compels theology to speak of God in a trinitarian way, affirming not only the distinctions in God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit but also their unity.

DIVINE PASSIBILITY IN THE ECONOMIC TRINITY VIS-À-VIS THE IMMANENT TRINITY

The question as to whether the polarity between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity may be that of impassibility and passibility is the focus of concentration in this section. We know that, for Luther, only in Christ is God revealed as a suffering God who bears the judgement of sin *pro nobis*. In the cross the Father surrenders the Son in love; the Son surrenders himself as an act of his perfect obedience to the Father who sends. That God the Son became incarnate and suffered death and dereliction on the cross is an expression of God's self-giving love. The death of Jesus is, then, the definitive revelation of God, not only of the Father but also of the Son, which he is from eternity. If Jesus Christ is not eternally divine, as Arius claimed, there is no revelation of God. The death of Jesus is, for Luther, the definitive act of God going out of himself in self-giving love, going into the far country to perform the act of self-sacrifice on the cross. God is most himself precisely in the act of self-sacrificing death of his Son on the cross. In this act faith recognises God's divine being, which is found and recognised in Christ's humble obedience, which achieves for us salvation. The Holy Spirit leads us into the accomplished act of redemption, into the suffering love of the cross, that is, of the Son through whom we are restored to the Father. The work of the Holy Spirit thus is to communicate to us the gospel that, in Christ's cross and resurrection, the divine blessing has conquered the divine curse. 'The work (of redemption) is finished and completed, Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by his sufferings, death, and resurrection, etc.'

But if the work remained hidden and no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, lost. In order that this treasure might not be buried but put to use and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to be published and proclaimed, in which he has given the Holy Spirit to offer and apply to us this treasure of salvation. Therefore to sanctify is nothing else than to bring us to the Lord Christ to receive this blessing, which we could not obtain by ourselves.⁸⁷

The love of God that suffers the sinful world and the divine wrath, and eventually conquers them is mirrored and revealed through the Spirit. All three persons work together as one God, the God of our salvation. It is God as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit who saves.

Luther's theology of the cross is primarily concerned with God as he wills to be found. God has designated a place and person, showing us where and how he can be found. Luther instructed us to listen to God's Word alone if we wish to learn who God is and what his will is towards us. Hence we are to follow the way of the baby in the cradle, at his mother's breasts, through the desert, and finally to his death on the cross. Luther's doctrines of the incarnation and of the economic Trinity provide the conceptual framework in which he conceived of God's suffering, that is, God's suffering in the concrete unity of Christ's personal identity. As has been stated, God's eternal impassibility is presupposed in Luther's thought. He, in his *Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ*, stated: 'From eternity, He has not suffered, but since He became man, he is passible.'⁸⁸ 'Inasmuch as he is God, he did not suffer, because God is incapable of suffering.'⁸⁹ The assertion of God's suffering, for Luther, can only be made *in concreto*, that is, in the person of Jesus, the God-man *in toto*. Though God *in abstracto*, that is, God 'by himself' does not suffer, God in his sovereign freedom determined himself in his Word, and hence became passible in Jesus Christ out of his unfathomable love toward the sinner. That is why Luther insisted that if we are to know God truly we 'look at no other God than this incarnate and human God', the righteous One who has acted and suffered in his self-humiliation

⁸⁷ 'The Large Catechism', p. 415. Cf. 'Confession concerning Christ's Supper', in *LW* 37, 366: 'the Holy Spirit... teaches us to understand this deed of Christ which has been manifested to us, helps us to receive and preserve it, use it to our advantage and impart it to others, increase and extend it...'

⁸⁸ See *WA* 39², 101, 24 as cited in Siggins, *Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ*, p. 236.

⁸⁹ *LW* 38, 254.

according to the *ratio vicaria* between the sinner and Christ. God as God does not suffer; but he suffers salvifically for us in the Son's concrete unity of the human and divine nature. Accordingly Luther's understanding of God is against that which tends to anchor God's suffering love in the pre-Incarnation Trinity, and finally in an extra-Incarnation Trinity, where suffering loses all its meaning. Once we retreat to this sort of divine aseity and sovereignty, we have little left for the Incarnation to do except to reveal a God who would have been what he is anyway, with or without the Incarnation. For Luther God as God, unlike human creatures, does not suffer because there is nothing in God's deity that gives rise to suffering. Divine suffering is affirmed when God constitutes humanity in himself, bearing our sin and mortality ontically. The greatest marvel occurs when God in Christ receives that which is alien to himself but proper to humanity – the suffering of the opposition or discontinuity between God and man. God in Christ suffers the opposition, and eventually suffers it into defeat, effecting for us reconciliation with God.

With respect to the issue of whether Christ's suffering is attributable to God in his immanent life, it is helpful to recall that for Luther, the incarnate One is taken into the immanent life. '[T]he humanity in which God's Son is distinctively revealed is complete, it is united with God in one Person, which will sit eternally at the right hand of God.'⁹⁰ God, who became incarnate, continues to be incarnately human. Christ's home-coming to the Father is his exaltation as the 'whole person' of the God-man. If God continues to be incarnately human, the question must then be, concerning God's passibility, whether the still incarnately human Son of God continues to bear our sin and mortality. Luther answered with a 'qualified' yes: yes, but the sin and death which the once humiliated Lord now carries are the sin and death as 'overcome' and 'vanquished' in the cross and resurrection. As Luther wrote in *A Sermon on Preparing to Die* (1519):

He [Christ] is the living and immortal image against death, which he suffered, yet by his resurrection from the death he vanquished death in his life. He is the image of the grace of God against sin, which he assumed, and yet overcame by his perfect obedience. He is the heavenly image, the one who was forsaken by God as damned, yet he conquered hell through

⁹⁰ LW 15, 308; WA 54, 62-3.

his omnipotent love, thereby proving that he is the dearest Son, who gives this to us all if we but believe.⁹¹

Since the incarnate One is eternally exalted, the Son of God therefore continues to bear our sin and mortality, but in a new sense that springs from their having been defeated and overcome in the cross and Easter. The incarnately human Son's return to the Father is a return with our sin and mortality, which he has 'suffered', 'vanquished' and 'overcome'. In this way the cross as a crisis which the divine life wills to suffer in the humiliated Lord is eternally in God, but not as a crisis eternally; but as a crisis 'overcome' in his 'exaltation and glorification after the resurrection.'⁹² Consequent upon Christ's victory, he, who 'is' Lord over creatures from eternity, was 'made' Lord in time and as such was and is therefore crowned with glory and honour.⁹³ God's eternal Son and the incarnate Son are one person, who continually bears our sin and mortality, although in the form of sin and mortality overcome. Suffering, an aspect of God's humble act in human history, is thus carried into the divine life of God. This means Christ's suffering has reached God's immanent life, and Luther has avoided driving a wedge between God *ad intra* and God *ad extra*. God's love must be conceived as 'suffering' love inasmuch as the cross of the eternal and incarnately human Son exists in the divine life of God.

The burning question of Luther is not whether there is an intra-trinitarian life in God's inner Being in the sense of how God might be in-and-for-himself, but rather what the gospel of Christ bestows upon us. Nevertheless, that there is an immanent Trinity as the God 'beforehand in eternity' is affirmed by Luther. Luther had no wish to occupy himself with speculation upon the immanent relations within the Godhead for that smacks too much of a *theologia gloriae*. Luther's emphasis is to know God in Jesus Christ, that is, in the triumphant act of loving and giving where he makes himself our righteousness and salvation. The reality of Christ as God-with-us and God-for-us is that which concerns Luther, not how God may be in-and-for-himself. Nevertheless Luther did affirm that God's essence is located in the incarnate Son, and since this is

⁹¹ LW 42, 107; WA 2, 691, 18-19. See also LW 51, 192; WA 10³, 49 (5th Sermon at Wittenberg, 1522), where Luther said Christ is 'the eternal satisfaction for our sin'.

⁹² LW 42, 107; WA 2, 691, 18-19.

⁹³ See LW 12, 127, 131-2, where Luther distinguished between Christ's being Lord over creatures from eternity on the one hand and Christ's being made Lord in time.

what God really is in his revelation to man, Luther saw no need to inquire about some other essence, which by definition we cannot know. Luther saw no need to dwell on the *ad intra* life of God. Thus he did not develop a theology of relationships in which the suffering and dying person of the Son affect God the Father and God the Spirit in the inner divine life. However this does not mean that he said nothing of the immanent Trinity at all.

Although Luther refrained from speculating upon the relational dynamism in the immanent life, he did assert that 'the accomplishment of salvation, realized by the Father, the Son and the Spirit is determined in the very eternity of God.'⁹⁴ Any division between the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity would not only lead to modalism, but also call salvation into question. In Lienhard's words:

If there were two 'Gods' – the God who saves and God in himself – the assurance of salvation would be put in question. Add to that, modalism ultimately leads, wherein the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are reduced to different modes by which the divinity is manifest in history. But in its essence it remains beyond revelation. A division arises between God as he is and God as he acts. That is why it is also necessary to speak of the 'immanent' Trinity, even if, faced with mystery it is only possible to speak with hesitation and inadequately. But it appears that the saving act of God in history only translates what God is from all eternity, that is, to say action between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.⁹⁵

On this basis it is necessary to say with hesitation and inadequacy that the humiliation in history mirrors in God's inner life an eternal relation of obedience between the Father and the Son. Luther said in his sermon *Meditation on Christ's Passion*, 'Christ would not have shown this love for you if God in his eternal love had not wanted (willed) this, for Christ's love for you is due to his obedience to God.'⁹⁶ This text suggests that God has willed an eternal obedience of the Son to the Father who sends. There already exists in God's being a relationship of obedience between the Father and the Son, which, when the Son becomes incarnate, entails the Son's suffering. The obedience of the Son to the Father is an obedience rendered by God to himself. God the Son is one with the Father -- one of essence and will: 'I and the Father are one' (John 14). The obedience within the Godhead does not compromise the unity

⁹⁴ Lienhard, *Witness to Jesus Christ*, p. 319.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *LW* 42, 13; *WA* 2, 140, 30.

and equality of divine being, thereby avoiding the heresy of subordinationism. Against modalism, the unity within the Godhead is not a simple and an undifferentiated unity. For Luther, as for Augustine before him, persons are differentiated within the divine life by relations. The distinctions within the Godhead ensure the particular characteristic of each person. A modalistic form of patripassianism, that the Father comes and suffers as man, is denied. Because the Son comes, suffers and dies, there must be in God's relationships, in his eternal being and life, the form of obedience, which makes incarnation and Calvary possible. For the reformer, there is an eternal relation of the Son's obedience to the Father who sends, which constitutes the basis for the suffering of the Son in human history. There is in God a sending and an obeying, a giving and a receiving, an active as well as a passive obedient aspect. The Father gives the Son to death, as is proper to a reflection of his eternal relationship to him, and the Son willingly accepts and carries out the eternal plan of salvation. This is evident in Luther's treatise on *The Last Words of David*:

This passage from Daniel (Chap. 7:13-14) also powerfully presents the doctrine of the Godhead in three Persons and of the humanity of the Son; for the Person who gives must be distinct from the Person who receives. Thus the Father bestows the eternal dominion on the Son, and the Son receives it from the Father, and this is from eternity; otherwise this could not be an eternal dominion. And the Holy Spirit is present, inasmuch as He speaks these words through Daniel. For such sublime and mysterious things no one could know if the Holy Spirit would not reveal them through the prophets. It has been stated often enough that Holy Scripture is given through the Holy Spirit. In addition, the Son is nevertheless also a Son of Man, that is, a true human being and David's Son, to whom such eternal dominion is given. Thus we note that the prophets did indeed respect and understand the word 'eternal' which God used when He addressed David through Nathan and said (I Chron. 17:14): 'I will install My Son and yours in My eternal kingdom.'⁹⁷

The same idea emerges when Christ speaks about this in John 16:15: 'All that the Father has is Mine.' 'And of this "all" of the Father which belongs to the Son the Holy Spirit also partakes as Christ says in the same passage: "He will take what is Mine," which the Father has.'⁹⁸ That is patently saying that the Holy Spirit takes from both, from the

⁹⁷ LW 15, 291-291; WA 54, 48-9.

⁹⁸ LW 15, 193; WA 54, 49-50.

Father and the Son, the same single and complete Godhead from eternity. The relational dynamism in the immanent life of God consists of three poles: bestowing, receptivity and reciprocity. The pole of receptivity, which is the Son, is identified as passibility. Thus it is appropriate for God in the Son to be obedient unto death on the cross, to exhibit his deity in lowliness, for eternally there is a humility, a lowliness and receptivity in the triune nature of God. God's relation to what is *ad extra* reflects the relation which he has within himself from eternity. God's relation to man in the passion and death in his Son is, for Luther, a self-determined act of God. God says 'yes' to himself before he says 'yes' to suffering. Luther spoke of the foreordained will of God that the 'lamb' should be slain '*in promissio*' before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8).⁹⁹ The eternal will of God to suffer salvifically is seen in the Son's assuming the form of a servant, and becoming obedient unto death, even death on the cross. The Son willingly receives and carries out the role of an obedient servant to actualise reconciliation for humanity. The Son exhibits his 'inexpressible humility' of the cross (Matt. 11:29) until the Father 'exalts' him.¹⁰⁰ God has chosen to be found in the suffering and humiliation of the cross of Christ, in which God is most divine. 'God is to be found nowhere except in suffering and in the cross.'¹⁰¹ This means the humiliation of Jesus, in Luther's view, must not be distinct from his divine nature. Jesus' suffering in his humiliation and weakness is actually God's suffering in his humiliation and weakness. On the cross it is actually God who is there, God who suffers, and God who dies. In the incarnate Son, the eternal God has entered the lowest of the low, thereby exhibiting himself as one who is not infinitely removed from suffering and death. That the only suffering was that of Jesus in his humanity is therefore, according to Luther, not a satisfactory answer since it was the one Lord Jesus in the totality of his being (God-man *in toto*) and work who suffered and died on the cross.

What about the pole of bestowing, that is, the Father? As noted earlier, the nature of God is inseparable from the act of Jesus Christ. The patristic idea of *perichoresis* accentuates Luther's view that God's essence and God's act are inseparably one. Here the trinitarian-theological

⁹⁹ See LW 40, 215 (Against the Heavenly Prophets, 1525; cf. LW 34, 115; WA 39¹, 49 (Thesis Concerning Faith and Law, 1535); LW 40, 214; WA 18, 203 (Licentiate Examination, 1545): 'Christ was not in reality slain from the foundation of the world, except in promise only.'

¹⁰⁰ LW 12, 55 (Ps. 2:8).

¹⁰¹ WA 1, 362, 18-19.

axiom of *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* finds expression in the coinherence of the three persons in the one indivisible essence. Luther understood the act of Jesus Christ in his suffering as integral to the one essence of God. Because the Son is one undivided essence with the Father (and the Spirit), where we grasp the Son of God we grasp the Father too. The Trinity is known in the Son. The entire essence of God is found in the Person of Jesus Christ. 'For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily' (Col. 2:9). That the Father and the Son mutually coinhere in one another enables Luther to affirm a marvellous exchange between the Son's suffering and that of the Father. Since the Father and the Son are one in essence, as Scripture says, the eternal Son's suffering is therefore also predicated of the Father, except that the Father suffers through the compassion that he has for the Son who assumes the destiny of man into the inner life of God. 'The Father loves the Son,' declares John the Baptist (John 3:35).¹⁰² Christ's humiliation shows the eternal love of the Father; both the Father's love and the Son's love are identical. It is here that God's trinitarian nature of love is demonstrated. From the perspective of the Father, he loves the only begotten Son, and therefore suffers the forsakenness of the Son, 'the heavenly image', in order to communicate his eternal essence of love to the world.¹⁰³ The Son's true image is demonstrated in his willingness to accept this God-forsakenness, thereby also communicating the essence of God's love. Both the Father and the Son are united in their self-giving love, that gives up the Son on the cross. A modalistic doctrine of God endangers the trinitarian distinction of persons; a perichoretic doctrine of God allows Luther to see the differentiated ways in which God suffers uniquely as Father and Son. Whereas it is the Son who suffers dying on the cross, the Father participates as the 'fellow-sufferer', indicating that the Father's heart is open to the suffering of his beloved Son. As Luther said, 'rise beyond Christ's heart to God's heart,' and 'you will find the divine and kind paternal heart, and, as Christ says, you will be drawn to the Father through him.'¹⁰⁴ For our Christ says, 'Whoever beholds the Father's love also beholds Mine; for Our love is identical. I love you with a love that redeems you from sin and death. And the Father's love, which gave His only Son, is just as miraculous.'¹⁰⁵ The Father of Jesus Christ suffers, not from any deficiency in being, but from the abundance of love. 'For

¹⁰² LW 22, 495.

¹⁰³ LW 42, 107; WA 2, 691 (Preparing to Die).

¹⁰⁴ LW 42, 13; WA 2, 140, 30.

¹⁰⁵ LW 22, 255.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son' (John 3:16). This affirms that the God of Israel, the Father of Jesus Christ, was no apathetic being, whose essence is untouched by the pain and suffering of his beloved Son. Since the one undivided essence is located in the Son's act of self-humiliation, the redemptive act of Christ's suffering is integral to the one divine essence in the same Godhead.

Finally, what about the pole of reciprocity, that is, the Holy Spirit? Luther was wary of equating the Holy Spirit with passibility. Luther, in the third part of the *Confession*, designated the Person of the Holy Spirit as 'a living, eternal, divine gift and grace'.¹⁰⁶ With this he followed the old Western tradition which can be traced as far as Augustine, according to whom the Persons are distinguished from one another not in terms of substance, but in terms of unchangeable relations to one another in their *intra* life: paternity, filiation and gift.¹⁰⁷ In *De trinitate* XV. 19, Augustine provided an extensive account in which the Spirit is to be designated as *donum dei*. Thereby he sought to establish speculatively the *processus a patre filioque*, by understanding the Holy Spirit as the Father's and the Son's mutual love. The Spirit, the 'gift' of both the Father and the Son, is 'love', and thus, 'He reveals to us the common love by which the Father and the Son mutually love each other.'¹⁰⁸ Toward the end of the *De trinitate*, Augustine argued from the mutual-

¹⁰⁶ LW 37, 366. See also LW 51, 46 (Sermon on the Raising of Lazarus, John 11: 1-45, 1518) where Luther ascribed 'goodness' (or love) to the person of the Holy Spirit: 'For to the Father is ascribed power, to the Son, wisdom, and to the Holy Spirit, goodness, which we can never attain and of which we must despair'. This pattern of ascription is recognised by Loeschen in his *The Divine Community*, pp. 24ff. Luther stood in the Augustinian-Western, as Jansen notes, when he designated the Holy Spirit as Person and Grace eternally. See his *Studien zu Luthers Trinitätslehre*, p. 123. Concerning Luther's doctrine of the Holy Spirit, see Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*; Herms, *Luthers Auslegung des Dritten Artikels*; Arnold E. Carlson, 'Luther and the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit', *Lutheran Quarterly* 11 (May, 1959), pp. 135-148; E. L. Towns, 'Martin Luther on Sanctification', *Bibliotheca Sacra* CXXVI (April-June, 1969), pp. 115-22; Philip Watson, 'Luther and Sanctification', *Concordia Theological Monthly* 30 (April, 1959), pp. 243-59; Lorenz Wunderlich, 'The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life', *Concordia Theological Monthly* 28 (Oct., 1956), pp. 753-64.

¹⁰⁷ See Fortman, *The Triune God*, pp. 143-6.

¹⁰⁸ See Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 15, 17, 27 as cited in David Coffey, 'The Holy Spirit as the Mutual Love of the Father and the Son', *Theological Studies* 51 (1990), p. 122.

love to the 'communion' between the Father and the Son. This shows that the ideas of the mutual-love and communion become for him practically interchangeable.

And if the love by which the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father ineffably demonstrates the communion of both, what is more suitable than that He should properly be called love who is Spirit common to both.¹⁰⁹

Luther sought the scriptural foundation for Augustine's account of *filioque*. If, he concluded, the New Testament reveals to us that Jesus sends us as his own the Holy Spirit from the Father, as Augustine had said, then in the immanent Trinity the Holy Spirit must proceed from the Father and the Son as from a single principle.¹¹⁰ Since the Holy Spirit proceeds as a *hypostasis* from the Father and the Son, he must be in his person the 'ontological communion' of love that exists between them.¹¹¹ Thus there already is a mutuality of self-giving love in the immanent Trinity, awaiting its actualisation in human history: in love the Father surrenders the Son and in love the Son surrenders himself, and the Spirit of love is between them. This is the conceptualisation of the event of the cross in trinitarian terms: the Son relates to the Father in obedient suffering and love, and the Father suffers the loss of the Son, with the Spirit binding them, even in the loss. Because it is the Father's love that gives up his beloved Son, Luther could speak of the Father's 'suffering' the Son's suffering on the cross. In this patripassianism is affirmed as seriously as the Son's suffering except that the Son suffers dying on the cross. Only one of the Trinity suffered and died on the cross. It must be remembered that by 'suffering' Luther meant in the first place the sort of suffering which God the Son undergoes by becoming a human sinner, and dying. The assertion that the Father suffers is made possible because Luther assumed Augustine's conception of the love of the Father for the Son, according to which the Father suffers in compassion with the Son

¹⁰⁹ See Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 15, 19, 37 as cited in Jansen, *Studien zu Luthers Trinitätslehre*, p. 122.

¹¹⁰ LW 37, 366 (Confession on the Last Supper). Cf. LW 23, 273 (John, 1538): the Holy Spirit came forth not as one born but as one 'given' – that is, the Spirit is the bond of the Father and the Son, their common gift. Augustine's view of the Holy Spirit is also assumed by Luther in his exposition of John's Gospel (cf. John 7:37-39).

¹¹¹ Coffey, 'The Holy Spirit as the Mutual Love of the Father and the Son', p. 199.

in the Spirit of love. The passion and death of Jesus Christ is thus the revelation of God, i.e., the revelation of the immanent Trinity. The perception of the Suffering Christ as the lowly servant is thus carried into the inner life of God, allowing a predication of Christ's suffering not only of the economic Trinity but also of the immanent Trinity, the former being the self-manifestation of the latter.

The aforementioned informs us that Luther developed the Augustinian-Western tradition in a way which led him to affirm that the Father suffers in love over the death of his Son. However he did not exploit in detail the implications of the Father's love for the Son in the unity of the Spirit. That is to say, he did not fully develop a theology of an immanent relationship in which the suffering of Jesus Christ affects the Father and the Spirit. In keeping with his main emphasis on soteriology, the reformer focused his attention on the economic Trinity. This is evident in his explanation of the third part of the *Confession*, where we witness how quickly he shifted from a discussion of the immanent Trinity to that of the economic Trinity: 'By this Holy Spirit, as a living, eternal, divine gift and grace, all believers are adorned with faith and other spiritual gifts. ... These are three Persons and one God, who has given himself to us all wholly and completely, with all that he is and has.'¹¹² Following the confession of the Father's, the Son's and the Holy Spirit's divinity is a summary of the one indivisible work of the Trinity, whereby God's unity is again emphasised. In revelation God communicates himself in the economy of salvation, in virtue of which 'the one God in three Persons' has 'given Himself' entirely to us. The Father gives himself to us with all creatures, so that we and they may serve him; the Son gives himself to us for reconciliation with the Father, for justification and for our knowledge of God; the Holy Spirit gives himself to us so that we may appropriate the charity of Christ. The work of the Son and the work of the Holy Spirit are referred to one another. Luther dealt with the doctrine of the Trinity, as he did with his Christology, by referring to justification. In declaring our justification, God announces himself three times, each one differently. The whole *Confession* is trinitarian, speaking not of three different gifts from God, but rather of God's three-fold giving of himself as one act in the economy of salvation. In Luther's own words in his *Confession*:

These are the three persons and one God, who has given himself to us all wholly and completely, with all that he is and has. The Father gives

¹¹² LW 37, 366.

himself to us, with heaven and earth and all the creatures, in order that they may serve us and benefit us. But this gift has become obscured and useless through Adam's fall. Therefore the Son himself subsequently gave himself and bestowed all his works, sufferings, wisdom, and righteousness, and reconciled us to the Father, in order that restored to life and righteousness, we might also know and have the Father and his gifts.¹¹³

But because this grace would benefit no one if it remained so profoundly hidden and could not come to us, the Holy Spirit comes and gives himself also, wholly and completely. He teaches us to understand this deed of Christ which has been manifested to us, helps us receive and preserve it, use it to our advantage and impart it to others, increase and extend it. He does this both inwardly and outwardly – inwardly by means of faith and other spiritual gifts, outwardly through the gospel, baptism, and the sacrament of the altar, through which as though three means or methods he comes to us and inculcates the sufferings of Christ for the benefit of our salvation.

CONCLUSION

The economic Trinity stands in the foreground, by which we are told who God is and what he does *pro nobis*. Luther explicitly asserted that God is passible after the incarnation of the Son. His use of the doctrine of *communicatio idiomatum* supports his understanding of God's passibility. He did not concede the suffering of God *in abstracto*, i.e., when the divinity is considered 'in itself'; he conceded no more than the suffering of God *in concreto*, i.e., when the divinity is bound to the humanity in Jesus Christ. The logic of his two-nature Christology enables him to free the concept of God from the categories of Greek philosophy. Because God's eternal Son and the incarnate Son are one and the same, the suffering of Christ in human history is attributable to the eternal Son of God. The redemptive 'act' of the Crucified Christ is integral to the one indivisible 'essence' of God. In addition, his assertion that the immanent Trinity corresponds to the economic Trinity allows this study to take Luther a step further, thereby affirming ontologically that Christ's suffering reaches beyond the temporal state of the incarnation into God's eternal being. Since the 'economic' God of the gospel corresponds to the 'immanent' God, Christ's suffering in human

¹¹³ Cf. *The Large Catechism*, p. 419, where Luther's interpretation of the Trinity in soteriological terms as revelatory of God's love is confessed.

history therefore belongs to the *intra* trinitarian life of God. Consequently God, for Luther, ceases to be God in a Platonic sense that denies suffering and death to God's heavenly divinity.