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Jesus Christ and the Modern Sinner: Karl Barth’s Retrieval of Luther’s Substantive Christology

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Despite Karl Barth’s lasting commitment to the Reformed tradition of John Calvin, it is the thought of Martin Luther that casts a long shadow over Barth’s theology. As George Hunsinger points out,

At certain vital points Barth follows Luther not only, broadly speaking, against Calvin and the Reformed tradition, but also against the main lines of the Lutheran tradition. There are points, in other words, where Barth actually retrieved Luther in order to stand with him not only against modernity, but also against the rest of the Reformation.

If we refocus the historical lens upon Barth and Luther, they can be seen to stand like bookends on the shelf of the modern age, with Luther standing at the beginning of what historians now call “early modernity” and Barth standing at its end. Barth looked back for the sake of looking forward and in so doing engaged in intense study of Luther. Barth absorbed aspects of Luther’s theology that allowed him to articulate Christian theology in deeper and more sophisticated ways over against modernity, which had through the course of the Enlightenment set the criteria for how we know what we know and thus how we articulate the sinner’s relationship to Jesus Christ. As Hunsinger has noted, Barth “almost alone among modern theologians” granted “uncompromising precedence to the Reformation over modernity itself.” He did not reject modernity, but he “refused to allow secular epistemologies to set the terms for the validity of the gospel.”

Barth’s mature Christology, seen in his Church Dogmatics, vol. IV, published in the early 1950s, has been a central channel into comparisons of his theology with that of Luther. Both Karin Bornkamm and Gerhard Ebeling have demonstrated that Luther and Barth share a Christocentrism in the best sense: clearly this was one thing Barth learned from Luther. Bornkamm has shown how Barth transformed Luther’s conception of the offices of Christ as priest and king for the sake of forging a relationship between Christology and soteriology.

Ebeling traces the christological impulses that Barth took from Luther, even while Barth formed his own criticisms of the Reformer in the Church Dogmatics. But Barth had already begun retrieving aspects of Luther’s Christology almost thirty years earlier. One example of this is a lecture that Barth gave in 1929 in Münster on theology and ethics titled “The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life.” After a decade that included two lecture cycles in dogmatic theology and intense engagement with Roman Catholic theology, Barth dove into the works of Augustine, Calvin, and Luther. The result was a lecture on theology and ethics titled “The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life” that displays Barth’s deepening understanding of Luther’s Christology.

In this essay I briefly present Luther’s Christology from his 1535 Galatians commentary and show how Barth reached back to retrieve this for his own theology despite the drastically different epistemological landscape of the two thinkers brought about by the Enlightenment. Barth reached over Enlightenment notions of rationality and morality to retrieve Luther’s substantive Christology, and in so doing he left behind the psychological and historical interpretations of the person and work of Christ by thinkers such as Werner Elert and Karl Holl. Luther’s theology provided Barth with the resources to pull Christology out of the grip of Enlightenment understandings of the individual as an autonomous agent and show that reconciliation of the human to God by God and through God alone need not be beholden to modern theories of rationality or morality.

**Martin Luther’s Christology in the Galatians commentary**

The richness of Martin Luther’s Christology has provided scholars with a wide variety of angles from which to analyze it. Ebeling has tried to capture its expanse under the terminology of a “forensic-antithetical” Christology. Finnish scholars such as Tuomo Mannermaa have focused their attention on the aspect of deification in Luther’s early work. Bernhard Lohse, and in more detail Ian Siggins, have approached Luther’s Christology from a more inductive angle, laying out the wide span of images that Luther employed, from his appropriation of motifs of Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux to his borrowings from medieval piety and the New Testament.

This variety, however, does not weaken two fundamental commitments visible in all aspects of Luther’s Christology: his commitment to the Chalcedonian formula and his commitment to human salvation as the central function and purpose of Christ’s person and work. These two commitments are summed up in the Small Catechism: “I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father in eternity, and also a true human being, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned human being.”

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6. Luther wrote this commentary in 1531, but it was not published until 1535.
10. See Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 220, notes 8, 9.
The first commitment, seen in the words “true God and true human being,” points to the ancient christological dogma from the Council of Chalcedon in 451, which established that the one person of Christ is constituted by two natures, divine and human, unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, and inseparably. The second commitment is to soteriology, seen in the words “He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned human being.” Luther rarely speaks of the person of Christ without referring to his saving work on our behalf. The name Christ means reconciliation of the sinner to God; Christ is reconciliation.

Luther’s double commitment to the Chalcedonian formula and to the explicit salvific function of Christ has been called by Hunsinger a “substantive” Christology. Christ as very God and very human is the sole agent who initiates and fully completes the reconciling action that takes place between God and the human. No other component or action is necessary in a substantive Christology for reconciliation to be “real” for the human individual.

An account of the substantive nature of Luther’s Christology can be seen in his Galatians commentary, where he writes.

For you do not yet have Christ even though you know that He is God and man. You truly have Him only when you believe that this altogether pure and innocent Person has been granted to you by the Father as your High Priest and Redeemer, yes, as your slave. Putting off His innocence and holiness and putting on your sinful person, He bore your sin, death, and curse: He became a sacrifice and a curse for you, in order thus to set you free from the curse of the Law.

(Luther's Works [hereafter LW] 26:288)

When Christ steps before God in our place as the sinner to be punished, He not only initiates but also completes our being made righteous in God’s eyes. There is no other process outside of Christ alone that initiates and completes the justification of sinners. Neither the sanctification of the sinner nor the workings of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life functions the way that Christ’s saving work does—a saving work that is embodied in Christ’s very person. Christ’s person embodies the precedence of God’s grace over any “good works” of our own. Luther states, “Christ took the initiative. . . . He did not find a good will or a correct intellect in me, but He Himself took pity on me. . . . By a mercy that preceded my reason, will and intellect. He loved me. . . . so much that He gave Himself for me” (LW 26:175).

Reconciliation begins with Christ alone. And it is completed in Christ alone: “. . . victory over sin and death, salvation and eternal life. . . . come. . . . by Jesus Christ alone” (p. 138). There is no gradual getting better or gradual transformation in the sinner. Justification is not completed by a process of sanctification. It is this once-and-for-all sense of Christ’s person and actions on our behalf that makes Luther’s Christology a substantive Christology. His actions need no enhancement or outside aid and do not continue upon some gradual scale within the human being. What Christ began, Christ fully completes for us.

The righteousness that comes to us through Christ’s reconciling act is a righteousness that brings with it its own new life. We are given a life that is not our own. for Christ’s own righteousness acts upon us, takes us over. It decenters and destabilizes the center of our own egos. for it is the righteousness of Christ’s person and not of our own person. Luther claims, “I do indeed live in the flesh, but I do not live on the basis of my own self” (LW 26:170–71). When we live in Christ, we are no longer the one who controls this reality in our lives. The presence of the person of Christ

12. Hunsinger, Disruptive Grace, 284.
displaces ourselves as the center of our lives. We cannot scale this reality in our lives down to a size that we can grasp and thus control, for the righteousness of Christ does not become a quality that inheres within the human being (cf. LW 26:127), nor is it somehow infused into the human to give him or her a new identity as non-sinner. It is a reality that remains distinct from us and greater than ourselves.

Indeed, the new life in Christ thrusts individuals into an existence of contradictions: We are now saints while still being sinners. As Luther states, when we believe the good news that Christ died for us, we "are reckoned as righteous, even though sins. and great ones at that, still remain in us" (LW 26:234). Thus, although Christ starts and finishes our reconciliation with God, we, living in the here and now, do not shed our old sinful ways. We are not rid of our sin. Luther writes,

These two things are diametrically opposed: that a Christian is righteous and beloved by God, and yet that he is a sinner at the same time. For God cannot deny His own nature. That is, He cannot avoid hating sin and sinners: and He does so by necessity, for otherwise He would be unjust and would love sin. (p. 235)

This is the heart of Luther’s classical doctrine of the simul iustus et peccator. In this life, we live a life of opposites, of being a saint and sinner at the same time.

God does not abandon us to the tension of saint and sinner, however. Christ’s own presence to the reconciled sinner never ceases. It is an ongoing event. He is our "pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night" [Ex. 13:21] to keep God from seeing our sin” (p. 232).

In that Luther emphasized Christ as the mediator, he was able to express the work of Christ in both the past, what he did as mediator for us on the cross, as well as in the present, what Christ does for us today:

“Christ Himself is the life that I now live” (p. 167). The mediator comes to us continually. “Today Christ is still present to some,” Luther states, “but to others He is still to come. To believers He is present and has come: to unbelievers He has not yet come” (p. 240). Thus, there is a clearly actualistic element in Luther’s Christology that modern theology can draw upon. Christ does not remain in static, Aristotelian categories but spans the divide between God and human, between past, present, and future, between action and substance, between saint and sinner. Luther’s Christ is the One who comes, who is coming.

The mechanism that binds the reconciled sinner to Christ is faith. This is a core aspect of Luther’s Christology in the Galatians commentary. “Through faith, the human participates in this saving reality of Christ who is present in the Word. This faith is a union with Christ."13 Luther writes,

... these three things are joined together: faith, Christ and acceptance or imputation. Faith takes hold of Christ and has Him present. enclosing

Him as the ring encloses the gem. And whoever is found having this faith in the Christ who is grasped in the heart, him God accounts as righteous. (LW 26:132)

This faith is inseparably connected to Christ’s personal presence to us and to the destabilized lives that we live as the simul iustus et peccator. Faith is the epistemological underpinning of Luther’s understanding of the “I yet not I” in Christ. “The life I live. I live on the basis of faith.” Luther states. “For the time of life that I am living I do indeed live in the flesh, but not on the basis of the flesh and according to the flesh, but in faith, on the basis of faith, and according to faith” (LW 26:170).

But this inseparable connection to Christ’s personal presence is not depicted as some kind of mystical union with Christ or “spiritual” faculty that then allows the believing human to make inspired statements about God (LW 26:28–29:287). Although Christ is present to us through faith, he still remains beyond the reach of natural human reason, in the “cloud of faith” (p. 287). Luther states, “how [Christ] is present—this is beyond our thought: for there is darkness” (p. 130). Thus, it is precisely the concept of faith that maintains the distinction between Christ and the reconciled sinner. It maintains the distance between Christ’s mediating activities and the natural activity of our human intellect, which, finally, are still under the control of sin, death, and the devil. As Marc Lienhard puts it, “Christ is a reality ‘pro nobis’ and ‘in nobis’ but he is and remains ‘extra nos.’”  

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Thus, faith cannot be understood to be identical with human reason. For Luther, faith is a “mode of cognition” that is not identical to human reason. 15 Faith is not the natural human capacity to understand or to comprehend in the way it understands objects around itself. Luther disputes the “Sophists” on this point, arguing that even though the “natural endowments” of human reason are capable of mastering physical, civic, and political matters, the intellect is in fact corrupt and inept in matters of the knowledge of God. A completely other form of “comprehending” is necessary in order for knowledge of God to arise in the human being. When we discuss faith, Luther states, “we are in an altogether different world—a world that is outside reason” (LW 26:234).

Nonetheless, faith neither destroys reason nor renders it impotent in its own sphere. Faith is essentially a different kind of rationality, an “understanding” that moves beyond reason: it has its source and function in a manner different from natural human reason.

**Karl Barth and the modern challenges to Christology**

*The Enlightenment’s turn to the subject.* The period of the Enlightenment brought with it a sustained focus upon the human individual as an independent, rational, and moral agent. The intense scrutiny upon the workings of the human mind and the rise of science in the Enlightenment made it almost impossible for twentieth-century theologians to bring together in theological anthropology the incompatible opposites of the “I yet not I,” the saint-sinner of Luther’s theology, or even the Chalcedonian formula of Christ as very God and very man, and still be taken seriously. Further, theologians no longer could claim that hu-

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man knowledge of God was a distinct but still true and valid "knowledge," for it does not arise from logical thinking, scientific experiment, and mathematical reasoning. "Faith" as a form of knowledge proved no match for the Enlightenment concept of human rationality. Indeed, the distinction that Luther made between faith and reason was possible because the concept of natural human rationality had not yet been elevated to the normative status that it was in the Enlightenment. Before the Enlightenment insistence that morality and rationality obey certain rules of logic and science, there was still room for Christ to be an "effective Subject" in the rational, moral agent. As the effective Subject in humans, Christ imputed his righteousness to us through faith. He was the reference point for rational thinking and moral decision making in faith. In Luther's theology, Christ was the reference point for every "good work" that came from the human individual, and good works were understood as a consequence of the immediacy and activity of Christ within the believing sinner. This immediacy and activity kept the human rational ego decentered, allowing it to be a moral subject only by virtue of the "I yet not I." It did not stand on its own two feet.

The Enlightenment transformation of the understanding of human rationality hustled Christ the effective Subject out of theories of knowledge. This can be seen clearly in the thought of Descartes. Although the Christian tradition was no stranger to a sense of inwardness (Augustine had already found a way to God through a flight inward), it was anchored in the human subject's connection to God—in Luther's case, to the effective and personal presence of Christ in faith. Descartes loosed the inwardness of the human subject from its divine mooring, making it no longer necessary for human reason to operate solely by virtue of reference to the divine presence. He assigned a power—the power of "self-mastery"—to human reason that excluded any possibility of conceiving the human ego as decentered. Human reason was unified, and effective in and of itself: no other effective Subject operated within it. The "I yet not I" central to Luther's Christology was lost.

Immanuel Kant took Descartes' understanding of the autonomy of reason one step further, proposing that the very nature of "reason" meant that one behaves in an ethical manner as well. He pulled morality into the orbit of the Enlightenment notion of reason, endowing the human with an unprecedented sense of moral freedom. This autonomous morality was "accessible and accepted by every moral agent:" the human individual him- or herself, without any mediating presence from a divine subject, had the capacity to act according to one's "good will." The moral nature of humans became rooted in autonomous reasoning, thus excluding any need or possibility that an external force or being could work upon the human to make one into a moral being.

Charles Taylor has judged Kant's moral theory to be "a powerful... revolutionary force in modern civilization. [His idea] seems to offer a prospect of pure self-

activity, where my action is determined . . . ultimately by my own agency as a formula-
tor of rational law.” Natural reason itself
is an instrument that formulates and sets
moral principles: it alone obligates humans
to do good works. It alone produces righ-
teousness.

The philosophical consensus about
human rationality and morality ushered in
by Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant
and Descartes was worlds apart from the
early modern understanding of the human
of Luther’s era, where rationality reached
its limit in relationship to the divine being
and where morality was made possible by
nothing other than the divine action.

**Lutheran theology and the “face” of Jesus Christ.** While the Enlightenment granted
a new autonomy to human reason, it could
do so only by limiting reason to the sphere
proper to it. namely. the sphere of history.
“Reason” could no longer draw credible
conclusions about anything that lay outside
history and the logical sequence of events
that make history. Speaking of Jesus as
ttrue God and true man became impossible.
Credible speaking of Jesus Christ was re-
stricted to speaking of Jesus the man. Jesus
the historical figure, the divinity of whom
could be established only from what we
know about his humanity “from below.”

Throughout the nineteenth century into
the early twentieth, leading thinkers such as
Elert promoted Christologies based solely
on Christ’s historical appearance. on the
“face” of Christ. His physical presence—
his ‘face’—was the only reality of God that
humans needed to see. In the life of Jesus
as a purely historical figure, humans have
the full, visible, complete face of God di-
rectly and immediately before them. Jesus
Christ did not reveal a God behind and
beyond himself. His person and work were
not considered revelation.

Because modern Protestantism did not
think in terms of the God outside history,
the Christology of a Lutheran like Elert did
not seek a Christ who mediated between
humans and a God who was perceived as an
ultimately unknowable metaphysical “Fa-
ther.” The face and life of the historical
Jesus was enough for natural human reason
to discover and know God in God’s full-
ness. This kind of intense focus upon
history, and the rather uncritical and naive
trust in history and human reason that ac-
companied it, was prevalent among Protes-
tant thinkers of Barth’s day. The substantive
Christology of Luther lay buried deep in
the layers of history. which makes the fact
that Barth retrieved this aspect from Luther
all the more remarkable.

**Barth’s retrieval of a substantive Christol-
ogy.** Already in Barth’s early theology
from the decade of the 1920s, before he
even considered writing the massive *Church
Dogmatics* (first begun in 1932), he di-
played a keen interest in the theology of the
Reformation, but he harbored doubts about
the accuracy of his Lutheran contemporar-
ies’ representation of Luther’s theology.

The Protestantism of the era, with its strong
historicizing and psychologizing tenden-

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21. Claude Welch. *Protestant Thought in
the Nineteenth Century 1870–1914*, vol. 2 (New
22. Werner Elert. *Die Lehre des
Luthertums im Abriß* (Münich: Beck. 1924).
29. For a similar Lutheran perspective. see
Auseinandersetzung mit der dialektischen
Theologie.” in *Zeitschrift für systematische
Theologie* 1 (1923/24): 771. See also Barth’s
Unterricht in der christliche Religion*, vol. 2
(Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich. 1990).
par. 15:22. for his references to Elert and
Althaus. (Hereafter Unterricht)
cies evident in thinkers like Elert, was completely inadequate for truthful talk of the God of Jesus Christ. After the outbreak of World War I and the profoundly disturbing involvement of leading Protestant theologians in justifying the aggression of the German nation, Barth could no longer accept a doctrine of revelation that read God’s actions and intentions directly from the events of history. The Lutheran view that only the humanity of Jesus Christ was a positive and direct revelation of God on the surface of history became unacceptable to him. If Jesus Christ was the true Savior, God had to be at work in him. The historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth needed to be part of something greater than himself.

In his preparations for his seminal cycle on dogmatic theology, begun at the University of Göttingen in 1924, Barth discovered for himself the ancient Chalcedonian Christology by which Christ was truly God, truly human, unmixtioned, undivided, unconfused, and unseparated. What this discovery did was allow Barth to move his theology beyond the historical, psychological ghetto of modern Christology and closer to that of Luther, closer to a substantive Christology in which Christ’s own person and work starts and completes our reconciliation with God. Precisely because humans come to know Jesus Christ as both God and man, his saving actions on our behalf are a real and effective reconciliation:

That Jesus Christ is this one, the incarnated Logos God, is the absolute decisive presupposition for his work... One can not interpret the officium meditorum, the completion of reconciliation between God and the human, one will always misinterpret it if one does not previously know who the mediator, who the completer is in this act, who the representative of this officium is. The work of Christ has its very particular character, its very particular qualification, its very particular gradient determined through that which is effective here, through the very union with God which Christ finds himself in.

Contrary to his Lutheran contemporaries, Barth established that Christ’s work cannot be understood on the basis of the historical figure of Jesus alone. Knowing who Christ is and what Christ does comes only from knowing that he is united to the Father as very God and very human.

“The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life.” In 1929, five years after his first lectures in Göttingen, Barth pushed even more against psychologized, historicized Christology in a lecture he gave at a theological conference in Elberfeld, Germany, titled “The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life.” Using Luther, Barth demonstrated here how a substantive Christology of Jesus Christ the mediator functions as a critique of the Enlightenment understanding of the human as a rational, moral agent. Barth’s targets were soteriologies like that of Holl, whose emphasis on Christianity as a religion of “conscience” essentially canceled out any need for a substantive Christology.

In an essay on Luther’s doctrine of justification, Holl argued against the traditional substantive Christology of Luther. To Holl, the contradiction between the holy God and the sinful human could not be solved by simply pointing to Christ’s person and work as the mediator between them. God meets the sinner with the in-

27. Unterricht 29:75.
tention to forgive and transform “the human into his own image.” 30 Christ does not represent this intention and therefore does not function as a mediating “third thing” in the meeting of God and the sinner. God’s intention can turn into actual forgiveness only when the human’s own intentions and actions turn toward the good. Thus, God actually meets not the sinner but rather the human as moral agent who strives to fulfill the Law—as a doer of good works. Reconciliation of God and the human is therefore not an event where the enmity between God and the sinner is resolved: it is merely a “meeting of good wills.” God justifies the one who is already justified. 31 The completion of reconciliation depends, finally, upon the moral fiber of the autonomous individual. The transformation of the individual into the imago Dei may or may not take place: justification is the “foundation for a new life.” 32 but it is up to the individual to gradually get better. 33

Such a moralistic soteriology rejects the central role of Christ as mediator between God and the sinner. It has no need for a substantive Christology because “sin” is no longer perceived as a devastating ontological force. Sin is a misguided good will, but a good will nevertheless. The human rational agent remains rational and able to make moral decisions, even as a sinner. For rationality contains morality within itself. Sin is merely a discrepancy between rationality and morality whereby sinful actions occur when human moral intentions do not follow reason.

To Barth, however, the rational and moral constitution of the autonomous individual does not help us get better and better. Sin brings the rational, moral agent to his or her knees. Sin is about the rational, moral agent’s own struggle against God: it is human resistance to grace, not a description of intentions. The struggle against this enmity toward God is undertaken by Christ and Christ alone, the Reconciler Spirit. Using Luther’s simul iustus et pecator, Barth expresses the externality of Christ’s work upon us. The human will never cease to acknowledge and confess, in all seriousness, that one’s having been justified is utterly not in oneself, and consequently not in one’s human unbelief. Indeed, the Christian is simul pecator et justus and the surmounting of this irreconcilable contradiction does not lie in the Christian . . . but is the action of the Word of God, the action of Christ, who is always the One who makes one out to be a sinner, in order to make one (though a sinner) into a righteous human. 34

Not we but Christ conquers our “radical evil and hate” toward the living God. 34

This retrieval of a substantive Christology had implications for both human reason and human morality. Barth countered the rationalism in contemporary theories of justification using the terminology of reason itself. He argued that the only activity that humans can ever really know is our own. Human rationality, therefore, only perpetuates our enmity toward God. Our insistence upon our own limited, self-enclosed rationality, and on controlling everything through our reason, does not bring us knowledge of God’s work in Christ.

In “The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life” he writes that reason “in its unbelief, in its stubbornness, in its meek self-righ-

31. Holl. 97–98.
32. Holl. 98.
teousness. in which it wishes to remain by itself ... does not wish to hear of something radically different from its own workings” (pp. 19, 20). The exercise of reason does not bring us insight into God’s activities: “What we can make evident to ourselves is always our own activity. Even when we set this under the prefix of grace, it still remains our own working” (pp. 24–25).

With these claims, Barth locates a “blind spot” in human rationality that can be filled only by Christ, for it is Christ alone who mediates himself to us through a “continual giving” of himself into faith, whose righteousness is “established as true in our flesh” (p. 29). In so doing, Barth reintroduces Christ as the effective Subject, so significant to Luther’s theology, into an understanding of the modern sinner in relation to God. The rational agent is indeed subject, but a subject whose agency has limits in relation to God’s reconciling activity. It is “I yet not I” who comes to know God.

Barth further buttresses his argument against the abilities of human reason before God by qualifying the ability of faith as a mode of cognition, lest it too be swallowed up by the all-encompassing Enlightenment conceptions of reason. Even faith is “hidden from itself” (p. 30; emphasis added). Rational thought cannot not make “faith” into a living knowledge of God. This is the task of the Holy Spirit: “but the two things, the acknowledgement of this contradiction [sin] and the knowledge of its being surrounded, are not our own business, but are the Holy Spirit’s” (p. 31). Here, too, Barth does not allow the human “I” to take control of one’s own faith. Faith is mediated to the human by God and cannot be swallowed up by one’s sense of self as agent. The destabilizing “I yet not I” remains central to the identity of the believing Christian.

In his retrieval of a substantive Christology Barth also challenged the Enlightenment conception of a reasonable, autonomous morality, and destabilized the human as a moral agent. When Christ is understood as the sole effector of our reconciliation to God, the individual “person must be left out of consideration” (p. 26; emphasis added). Although human individuals are indeed agents of actions, any and every good work that we see as being “ours” is canceled out, and the “I yet not I” comes into effect. As Barth states, the work of Christ the Reconciler Spirit must be seen

in its fundamental and immutable [unaufliebar] restriction of everything that is our own work. Wherever the action of humans in themselves, in whatever pretense or form, is made into a condition of the human’s fellowship with God, there the Holy Spirit is forgotten, and there sin is committed in order to overcome sin. (p. 20)

Where human morality, the human will or conscience, is seen as the way to mediate the relationship between the sinner and God, the two aspects of reconciliation that need to be held together—justification and sanctification—fall away from each other. Justification turns into a slow, gradual
process by which the sinner thinks he or she could become a nonsinner through the good works that he or she performs (p. 21). Reconciliation then becomes a matter of the "divine gift and man's creative action combined in one" (p. 22, quoting Augustine). The "I yet not I" collapses into the willful human ego, and a substantive Christology is dissolved.

Barth was well aware of the implications of his modern epistemological interpretation of Luther's substantive Christology. When it is properly understood, first, as being fully undertaken, begun, and completed in Christ's person and work as the God-man, and further, as an event that is outside the control of our reasoning skills and moral abilities, the term "Christian" must take on a very particular meaning.

Supposing we decide to side... with Luther... to proceed with caution when we use the adjective "Christian" and to use the word in a way quite other than is the vogue in our victorious modern Christendom. What, then, is meant by such phrases as "Christian" view of the universe. "Christian" morality. "Christian" art? What are "Christian" personalities. "Christian" families. "Christian" groups. "Christian" newspapers. "Christian" societies...? Who gives us permission to use the adjective so profusely? (pp. 37-38)

**Concluding remarks**

What Barth gained from Luther's substantive Christology was a way to express the work of Christ upon the sinner that overcomes the human drive to relate to God as beings who are autonomous, reasonable, and good-willed. Luther's tight unification of Christ's person and work highlights that Christ's action as the God-man and mediator is something that is started and finished in our lives by Christ alone. In that Luther closely connected the person and work of Christ with the creation of faith as a mode of cognition that is distinct from natural human reason. his Christology limits the capabilities of natural human reason to comprehend and therefore control what God's actions are toward us. To Barth, this meant that when it comes to the God-human relationship, human reason has a distinct blind spot. Taking this blind spot seriously means that Christians, especially Lutherans, maintain a healthy critical distance to the process by which we weigh matters of moral weight using our everyday reason and common sense. The "I yet not I" as the foundation for rational thinking provides us with a critical check upon the way we go about trying to lead lives we would like to call Christian. Sustaining the faith that is beyond the reach of our control requires that Christ continually mediate himself to us as a Subject working within us.

Finally, taking Barth's retrieval of Luther's Christology seriously means bringing to light the falsity that lies in the concept of an autonomous "good will" that accompanies modern individuals' sense of self. Morality never arises out of ourselves, and moral actions always have enfolded within them some other hidden motive and external influence, whether it be economic, personal, idealistic, or practical. It is clear in the theologies of both Barth and Luther that the only external factor that can actually make our good actions good is the divine influence, which comes from beyond our ability to rationalize and control, which is mediated to us in the person of the crucified Christ who continually works upon us as God's Reconciling Spirit.
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