

Luther's Divine Aeneid

Continuity and Creativity in Reforming the Use of the Bible

By Erik H. Herrmann

No one can understand Virgil in the *Bucolics* or *Georgics*,
unless he has been a shepherd or farmer for five years.
No one understands Cicero in his letters,
unless he has been engaged in some aspect of the state for twenty years.
No one should believe that he has sufficiently tasted the Holy Scriptures,
unless he has governed churches with the prophets for a hundred years.
(Thus was it such a great miracle with John the Baptist, Christ, and the Apostles.)
Essay not this Divine Aeneid, but bowing before it, adore its every trace.
*We are beggars. This is true.*¹

I Introduction

The title of this essay echoes what appears to be Luther's final writing, scribbled on a scrap of paper two days before he died. But this essay is not an analysis of this text—others have done this already.² Rather, I use this text as a sort of 'attunement' for the question of Luther's reform of the Bible and its use. Like the final lines of Statius' *Thebaid* which he quotes, it is Luther's epilogue, providing a thematic and linguistic orientation at the end of his life that encapsulates, in a most beautiful way, his pursuit and goal of reform. It also brings together many of the impulses and movements that

¹ WAT 5; 317,12–318,3 (author's translation); cf. WA 48; 241,1–7; WAT 5; 168,27–35.

² E.g. O. BAYER, *Vom Wunderwerk, Gottes Wort recht zu verstehen. Luthers Letzter Zettel* (KuD 37, 1991, 258–279). Cf. also H. OBERMAN, *Wir sein pettler. Hoc est verum: Bund und Gnade in der Theologie des Mittelalters und der Reformation* (in: DERS., *Die Reformation. Von Wittenberg nach Genf*, 1986, 90–143).

touched Luther and his thought: the *classical sources* of Cicero and Virgil so central to Renaissance humanism, the role of *experience* that has roots in rhetoric but also held such a crucial place in Christian mysticism, and the profound expression of *humility* which takes up the most cherished posture of monastic-mendicant piety. But at the center, of course,—the subject matter of the text—is Luther’s concern for the Holy Scriptures. For Luther it is a divine thing, a source of inexhaustible wisdom, a gift and veritable miracle. On the one hand, much of Luther’s view of the Bible is quite traditional. His assumptions about the nature of the Scriptures as the fount of divine revelation, as a prophetic text, as a text that speaks of the spiritual life imparted by Christ—in all of these Luther stands as an heir of deeply rooted Christian practice and reflection. But Luther is also a creative and critical force within this tradition, reshaping, redefining, and reforming the way in which all Christians read and encounter the Bible.

But which tradition? It’s quite clear that Luther does not speak from a context of monophony—the intellectual and spiritual harvest of the Late Middle Ages is rich and diverse. Naturally, we are dealing with a complex confluence of movements and influences in Luther, but it is in particular the *monastic* and *mystical* element that I wish to emphasize here, especially as it relates to his view of the Scriptures and his various reforms aimed at its use throughout the Christian life. There are several reasons why one might prefer this direction. First, that Luther’s attitudes, development, and reforms occur as an observant Augustinian friar is not merely incidental. His new insights into the gospel, his university reforms, his pastoral concerns and reforms of popular *Geistlichkeiten*,³ all occurred from within Luther’s monastic context and as an expression of it. While he certainly did not effect these changes in isolation from his Wittenberg colleagues, one should not pass over the point made in various ways by Luther scholars: »the Wittenberg Reformation was the work of a monk.«⁴ An attempt to understand

3 Cf. S. HENDRIX, Martin Luther’s Reformation of Spirituality (LuthQ 13, 1999, 249–270), 252: »In Luther’s mind, false spirituality or *Geistlichkeit* comprised the external devotions of late medieval piety—the countless masses and vigils, devotion to saints and pilgrimages to their shrines, the penitential system with its indulgences, and the entire world of monasticism.«

4 U. KÖPF, Monastische Traditionen bei Martin Luther (in: Luther – zwischen den Zeiten, hg. v. CH. MARKSCHIES / M. TROWITZSCH, 1999, 17–35), 20f (author’s translation).

and explain Luther's approach to the Bible within this context seems to be the most obvious and natural.

Second, the earlier ambivalence and disinterest in the positive influence of the monastic and mystical context on Luther has been largely corrected, especially in the last several decades.⁵ From Luther's more general, unexpressed debt to monastic theology and spirituality,⁶ to the specific appreciation of monastic writers like Bernard of Clairvaux,⁷ to the possible shape that his own Augustinian order had on his thought and reforming work,⁸ Luther's monasticism is no longer viewed as merely the context that he must outgrow and discard. However, before such research on Luther's debt to monasticism was firmly established, the interpretation of Luther's

- 5 U. KÖPF, *Martin Luther als Mönch* (Luther 55, 1984, 66–84); DERS., *Monastische Traditionen* (see n. 4); B. HAMM, *Frömmigkeitstheologie am Anfang des 16. Jahrhunderts. Studien zu Johannes von Paltz und seinem Umkreis* (BHTh 65), 1982; IDEM, *The Early Luther: Stages in a Reformation Reorientation*, trans. by M. LOHRMANN, 2014; S. OZMENT, *Homo Spiritualis: A Comparative Study of the Anthropology of Johannes Tauler, Jean Gerson and Martin Luther in the Context of Their Theological Thought*, 1969; K.-H. ZUR MÜHLEN, *Nos Extra Nos. Luthers Theologie zwischen Mystik und Scholastik*, 1972; H.A. OBERMAN, *Simul gemitus et raptus: Luther and mysticism* (in: *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought*, ed. by IDEM, 1986, 126–154); *Gottes Nähe unmittelbar erfahren. Mystik im Mittelalter und bei Martin Luther*, hg. v. B. HAMM / V. LEPPIN, 2007; V. LEPPIN, *Transformationen. Studien zu den Wandlungsprozessen in Theologie und Frömmigkeit zwischen Spätmittelalter und Reformation*, 2015; DERS., *Die fremde Reformation. Luthers mystische Wurzeln*, 2016; *Medialität, Unmittelbarkeit, Präsenz. Die Nähe des Heils im Verständnis der Reformation* (SMHR 70), hg. v. J. HABERER / B. HAMM, 2012.
- 6 E.g. R. SCHWARZ, *Luthers unveräußerte Erbschaft an der monastischen Theologie* (in: *Kloster Amelungsborn 1135–1985*, hg. v. G. RUHBACH / K. SCHMIDT-CLAUSEN, 1985, 209–232).
- 7 E.g. TH. BELL, *Divus Bernhardus. Bernhard von Clairvaux in Martin Luthers Schriften* (VIEG 148), 1993; B. LOHSE, *Luther und Bernhard von Clairvaux* (in: *Bernhard von Clairvaux. Rezeption und Wirkung im Mittelalter und in der Neuzeit* [Wolfenbütteler Mittelalter-Studien 6], hg. v. K. ELM, 1994, 271–301); F. POSSET, *Pater Bernhardus: Martin Luther and Bernard of Clairvaux* (CistSS 168), 1999.
- 8 E.g. A. ZUMKELLER, *Martin Luther und sein Orden* (AAug 25, 1962, 254–290); H.A. OBERMAN, *Headwaters of the Reformation: initia Lutheri – initia reformationis* (in: IDEM, *Dawn* [see n. 5], 40–88); D. STEINMETZ, *Luther and the Late Medieval Augustinians: Another Look* (CTM 44, 1973, 245–260); E. SAAK, *High Way to Heaven: The Augustinian Platform between Reform and Reformation* 1292–1524 (SMRT 89), 2002.

theology of the Word was already long underway and questions of his hermeneutical shift and his handling of Scripture had been given a distinctive stamp. Consequently, it is Luther's *discontinuity* with his medieval past, his anticipation of modern, existential interpretations and hermeneutics, the correspondence of his reflections on theological language to modern, linguistic theory, and the linguistic constitution of human identity and community that continues to animate the literature on Luther's theology of Scripture and the Word.⁹ Reflection on the function of language in general and theological language in particular is, of course, not a modern phenomenon. Luther is clearly engaged with the perennial questions of the relationship of linguistic and verbal signs (*signa*) to the objects (*res*) they signify, the grammatical and dialectical problems of language about God, and their implications for biblical interpretation.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Luther has frequently emerged as a dynamic *Gesprächsteilnehmer* for the modern and late-modern condition. It is perhaps a net gain to translate Luther into our sphere—and in many ways, it is the more difficult and critical task. But there is also a perceived loss for the historian who endeavors, as Bernhard

9 E.g. J. VON LÜPKE, Luther's Use of Language (in: The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology, ed. by L. BATKA / I. DINGEL / R. KOLB, 2014, 143–155), 143: »The author Luther was essentially a linguistic theorist, not only in the sense that he continually thought about language but especially because his thinking was based in language and took its specific form linguistically. His theology is therefore certainly also linguistic *theory* [...] it is primarily and totally linguistic practice.« Some of the most important works on Luther and the Word/language are K. HOLL, Luthers Bedeutung für den Fortschritt der Auslegungskunst (1921) (in: DERS., Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte, Bd. 1, 1932, 544–582); G. EBELING, Evangelische Evangelienauslegung. Eine Untersuchung zu Luthers Hermeneutik (FGLP 10,1), 1942; DERS., Die Anfänge von Luthers Hermeneutik (ZThK 48, 1951, 172–230); A. BEUTEL, In dem Anfang war das Wort. Studien zu Luthers Sprachverständnis (HUTH 27), 1991; D. BIELFELDT, Luther, Metaphor and Theological Language (MoTh 6, 1990, 121–135); J. WOLFF, Metapher und Kreuz. Studien zu Luthers Christusbild (HUTH 47), 2005; O. BAYER, Martin Luthers Theologie. Eine Vergegenwärtigung, 2003; DERS., Leibliches Wort. Reformation und Neuzeit im Konflikt, 1992; J. RINGLEBEN, Gott im Wort. Luthers Theologie von der Sprache her (HUTH 57), 2010; CH. ARAND / R. KOLB, The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church, 2008; R. KOLB, Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God: The Wittenberg School and Its Scripture-Centered Proclamation, 2016.

10 Cf. VON LÜPKE, Language (see n. 9).

Lohse once said, »to put Luther back into the sixteenth century *and leave him there*.«¹¹

We must also acknowledge that Luther's view and reform of the Bible is not entirely the same thing as the development of his theology of the Word which has received the greater scholarly attention. Naturally, the two are related and inform one another, yet Luther's theology of the Word is a broader concept that embraces not only his view of the Scriptures, but also preaching, penance, the sacraments, ecclesiology—indeed creation, revelation, and redemption!¹²

But as one more narrowly focuses on Luther's handling of the Bible and his reforms of its use, one observes certain habits and assumptions in reading and interpretation that converge with the literary culture of monasticism—a culture of reading in which textuality and orality freely permeate one another.¹³ Thus, for example, when the *viva vox evangelii* is played off of the written text of the Bible, Luther is not displaying a fundamental denigration of the text in favor of the oral and aural—a theology of the Word over against a theology of the Scriptures.¹⁴ The ›voice‹ of the text and the speech of the Scripture—the *modus loquendi*—is assumed by Luther: »his language and imagery belong to a world in which the written word is simultaneously the word spoken and heard in full immediacy.«¹⁵

11 Cf. the introduction of B. LOHSE, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 1999, 3–10, that details the criteria for and challenges of describing Luther's theology. See also the insightful evaluation of the problem of Luther's relevance to modernity by G. EBELING, *Der kontroverse Grund der Freiheit. Zum Gegensatz von Luther-Enthusiasmus und Luther-Fremdheit in der Neuzeit* (in: DERS., *Lutherstudien*, Bd. 3: *Begriffsuntersuchungen, Textinterpretationen, Wirkungsgeschichtliches*, 1985, 366–394).

12 E.g. BEUTEL, *Anfang* (see n. 9); O. BAYER, *Schöpfung als Anrede. Zu einer Hermeneutik der Schöpfung*, 1990; RINGLEBEN, *Gott im Wort* (see n. 9).

13 Cf. B. CUMMINGS, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace*, 2002; W. GRAHAM, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion*, 1993; J. LECLERCQ, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, 1982.

14 Rather, the more fundamental contrast between sight and hearing that Luther wishes to make is between what is empirically perceived or experienced and what is believed. Cf. GRAHAM, *Beyond* (see n. 13), 150f.

15 Loc. cit., 152.

We begin with some general observations regarding monasticism and reform. Monasticism as a movement and ideal within Christianity has, since its transformation after Constantine, had an inherent reforming spirit. It is a call out of mediocrity, a summons to abandon a mere nominal adherence to Christianity in which »[...] the conventional ›good man‹ of pagan Rome had quite unthinkingly become the conventional ›good Christian‹ of the fifth century. The flamboyant courtesies of Late Roman etiquette could pass as ›Christian humility‹; the generosity traditionally expected of an aristocrat, as ›Christian almsgiving‹.«¹⁶ Though the ascetic ideal could be domesticated when recurrently institutionalized, the spirit of the living martyr effectively worked throughout the church's history as »the conscience of Christendom.«¹⁷ Time and again its reach was felt beyond the stones of the cloister: the Cluniac advancement of celibacy for the entire priesthood, for example, the penitential piety ensconced in Lateran the Fourth, or the *officium divinum* reflected in the popular *Book of Hours*.

As both the catalyst and benchmark for reform, monasticism was more than the *beau idéal* of devotion and religion; it was also engaged at the practical level in pastoral and catechetical endeavors to shape lay piety. Already in the 12th century, one can observe such pastoral effort to apply the »monastic life to all people, and the interiorization of monastic values and spirituality«—a veritable attempt to »monasticizing everyone.«¹⁸ Various orders went about this task differently, but this was especially evident among the mendicants, including the Augustinians. Eric Leland Saak has argued that such pastoral inculcations of, what Berndt Hamm has called a late-medieval *Frömmigkeitstheologie*, are best understood as efforts of »religionization.«¹⁹ A maturation of an earlier »Christianization,« »religionization,« according to Saak, embraces the late-medieval development »whereby religious life was extended to include, and indeed eventually was seen as obligatory for, every member of Christendom.«²⁰ For Saak this is

16 P. BROWN, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 1967, 347.

17 M. NOLL, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, 2012, 82.

18 G. CONSTABLE, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, 1998, 7.

19 See HAMM, *Frömmigkeitstheologie* (see n. 5); SAAK, *Heaven* (see n. 8).

20 Loc. cit., 723. Cf. the introduction of E. SAAK, *Catechesis in the Later Middle Ages I: The Exposition of the Lord's Prayer of Jordan of Quedlinburg*, OESA (d. 1380) (SMRT 188), 2014, 20f. See also J. VAN ENGEN, *Friar Johannes Nyder on Laypeople Living as Religious*

indeed a type of reform, but one that is distinctly part of monastic history in which its influence moves from a *centripetal* impulse to one that was increasingly *centrifugal*, affecting the whole religious climate in rich and diverse ways.²¹ It seems that post-schism, observant Augustinianism was particularly engaged in such pastoral work which included the ongoing reform of its own order, as one sees in the writings and activities of Jordon of Quedlinberg (c. 1299–1380), Gregory of Rimini (1300–1358), Antoinus Rampegolus (c. 1360–1423), Johannes von Paltz (c. 1445–1511), and Giles of Viterbo (1472–1532).²² Likewise, Johannes von Staupitz undertook such pastoral reforms at several levels: as vicar-general, as the architect of the theology faculty in Wittenberg, as a popular preacher, a writer of devotional literature, and as a critic of indulgences. And, theological differences notwithstanding, Luther's path of reform appears to be following furrows that Staupitz helped create.

It is perhaps easiest to see this in Luther's university curricular reforms. As we know, Staupitz was instrumental in shaping the theology faculty at Frederick of Saxony's new university in Wittenberg.²³ As a contributor to its statutes and the theology faculty's dean, Staupitz was able to ensure the regular staffing of Augustinian hermits as teachers of theology and philosophy. Likewise, the statutes set forth at the outset the lofty goals toward which the faculty should strive: Holy Scripture would be the standard of all knowledge, Augustine the »gymnasii nostri tutelarior deus,« and St. Paul—

in the World [in: *Vita Religiosa im Mittelalter*. Festschrift für Kaspar Elm zum 70. Geburtstag [BHSt.OS 31], hg. v. F. FELTEN / N. JASPERT, 1999, 583–615].

21 SAAK, Heaven (see n. 8), 722: »[religionization is] a period of rich religious ferment, from the renewed emphasis on the apostolic life present in the new monasticism and the canonical movement, to the rise of the mendicant orders, the spread of individualized religious devotion, the rise of lay piety, the emergence of ›semi-religious‹ groups such as the Beguines, confraternities, and the Modern Devotion, and finally observantism and the early Reformation.«

22 See especially SAAK, Heaven (see n. 8), 235–583. Also B. HAMM, Frömmigkeitstheologie (see n. 5).

23 Cf. M. WRIEDT, Staupitz als Gründungsmitglied der Wittenberger Universität (in: 700 Jahre Wittenberg. Stadt – Universität – Reformation, hg. v. S. OEHMIG, 1995, 173–186); DERS., Die Anfänge der Theologischen Fakultät Wittenberg 1502–1518 (in: Die Theologische Fakultät Wittenberg 1502 bis 1602, hg. v. I. DINGEL / G. WARTENBERG, 2002, 11–38).

the »tuba Euangelii«—the patron of the faculty.²⁴ When Luther occupies Staupitz's chair as *lectura in Biblia* in 1512, these ideals are quickly realized.

Rather than continuing to develop lectures on the *Sentences*, Luther chose to begin with the central text of his monastic life: the Psalter. Certainly not an unprecedented choice,²⁵ it is nevertheless consonant with the direction of Luther's university reforms; namely, to place the Scriptures in the center of the theological curriculum. As we know, Luther carries on in this fashion, lecturing on Romans, then Galatians, then Hebrews, eventually inspiring similar lectures among the rest of the faculty.²⁶ The central role that Augustine's (anti-Pelagian) writings had for Luther and the other faculty during these early years of reform should not be set over against what was promoted primarily as a return to the Scriptures.²⁷ Likewise, the demonstrable humanist impulses present in Wittenberg at its inception ought not be construed as a rigid dichotomy between the new learning

²⁴ WRIEDT, *Anfänge* (see n. 23), 21 f.

²⁵ Cassiodorus had already designated the Psalter for novices as the entry point in the Scriptures: »Psalterii quoque proprium est quod per eum legis diuinae sanctitas introitur. Non enim tirones incohant a Genesi, non ab apostolo, non inter ipsa initia auctoritas euangelica sancta pulsatur; sed, licet psalterium quartus codex sit auctoritatis diuinae, primum tamen tirones incohantes scripturas sanctas, inde legendi faciunt decenter initium«; cited by G. EBELING, *Luthers Psalterdruck vom Jahre 1513* (in: DERS., *Lutherstudien*, Bd. I, 1971, 69–131), 69. Cf. JEROME, ep. 107, 12.

²⁶ E.g. Johannes Lang. Cf. R. WEIJENBORG, *Die Wittenberger Titusbriefvorlesung des Erfurter Augustiners Johannes Lang. Erstausgabe nach dem Vat. Pal. Lat. 132 mit Einleitung und Kommentar* (in: *Scientia Augustiniana. Studien über Augustinus, den Augustinismus und den Augustinerorden. Festschrift für Adolf Zumkeller zum 60. Geburtstag* [Cass. 30], hg. v. C. MAYER / W. ECKERMANN, 1975, 422–468); DERS., *Die Wittenberger Römerbriefvorlesung des Erfurter Augustiners Johannes Lang. Erstausgabe nach dem Vat. Pal. Lat. 132 mit Einleitung und Kommentar* (Anton. 52, 1976, 394–494).

²⁷ Luther's colleague, Johannes Dölsch, argues in his 1520 defense of Luther that Luther's urging of the Fathers and the Scriptures was a strategy to gently move the faculty over to Scripture alone; see the assessment of Dölsch's witness in L. GRANE, *Martinus Noster: The German Reform Movement, 1518–1521* (VIEG 155), 1994, 13 f. Luther's later description of the relationship between the Scriptures and the Fathers, *On the Councils and the Church* (1539) as brooks leading to the wellspring (WA 50; 519,33–520,10 = LW 41,20); cf. WAB 1; 602,44–46 (December 1519), and his preface to his *German writings*, 1539 (WA 50; 657,22–24).

and the older monastic piety. After all, humanism north of the Alps was especially a ›biblical humanism,‹ and its call to return to the sources of Christian theology—the Scriptures and the early Fathers—could be quite compatible with the approach of monastic theology. Like most at this time, Luther was eclectic when it came to achieving his goals: he simultaneously used and critiqued Erasmus »for the sake of theology and the salvation of the *brothers*«²⁸, and the »Martinus Eleutherius« of the humanists could still sign his letters as »Fr. Martinus Lutherus, Augustinianus.«

Thus, we will first claim that Luther's early reforms—especially his reform of the Bible and its use—can be best understood as an expression of late-medieval ›religionization.‹ His critique of indulgences with the extension of the monastic *semper penitens* into the »whole life« of all Christians and his reform of penitential literature all fit well into this framework.²⁹ Likewise, Luther would begin revising, almost programmatically, some of the most popular devotional literature to conform better to his new understanding of faith, e.g. *Ars moriendi*, *Tessaradecas consolatoria*, *Meditationes de passione Christi*, and the *Legenda aurea* (which he replaces with the German Psalter!).³⁰ Luther's reforms were thus simultaneously typical and exceptional. Because Luther maintained that the definitive attribute of the religious life was *faith* (rather than love), created and sustained by the word of Christ, all the traditional characteristics of *religiosi* were relativized. Neither defined externally by pious and charitable works or solemn vows, nor internally by virtues such as love, humility, and purity,³¹ the

28 WAB 1, 69–71, Nr. 27 (October 19, 1516): »[...] pro re theologica et salute fratrum [...]« [emphasis mine].

29 *Die sieben Bußpsalmen*, 1517 (WA 1, 154 f); *Instructio pro confessione peccatorum*, 1517 (WA 1, 257 f); *Sermo de poenitentia*, 1518 (WA 1, 317 f); *Ein Sermon von dem Sakrament der Buße*, 1519 (WA 2, 709 f.). Cf. Luther's »breakthrough« into the meaning of *poenitentia* from Staupitz, WA 1, 524–527; cf. also V. LEPPIN, »omnem vitam fidelium poenitentiam esse voluit.« Zur Aufnahme mystischer Traditionen in Luthers erster Ablassthese (ARG 93, 2002, 7–25).

30 Cf. HAMM, Early (see n. 5); R. RITGERS, *The Reformation of the Keys: Confession, Conscience, and Authority in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, 2004; HENDRIX, *Spirituality* (see n. 3).

31 Cf. Jordon of Quedlinberg's prerequisite attributes for spiritual understanding (*scientia spiritualis*): pure heart, humility, piety of prayer and fecundity of works; see SAAK, *Highway* (see n. 8), 360.

religious were now determined entirely by the Word that gives rise to faith. Thus, his reforms were ultimately aimed at advancing the central text of the religious life to all of Christendom: a German Bible with prefaces and marginalia, *Ein kleyen unterricht*, Postils, the reorientation of worship toward preaching, and a ›democratized‹ *lectio divina* that did not run the path of spiritual ascent, but rather acknowledges the descent of God through his Spirit, who is »nowhere [...] more present and more active than in the holy letters themselves, which he has written.«³² In the religious practice of *oratio, meditatio, tentatio*, the Christian learns the promises of the Scriptures even while facing the ambiguities and trials of one's earthly life. Likewise, Luther's reform of the hours of prayer: rather than an artificial structure imposed on the day for prayer (e.g. matins, lauds, vespers, compline, etc.), Luther encourages prayer in the hours that are dictated by the rhythm of daily life – morning and night when one gets up and lies down, as one journeys to work, and at the regular pause for meals.³³ In this we begin to see how Luther's approach to the Scriptures and his consequent reforms both spring from and yet reach beyond his monastic context.

II *Modus Loquendi Scripturae: Luther's Approach to the Bible*

It is of course well known that the center of monastic life is the *lectio divina*, a »holy reading.«³⁴ While the goal of this reading was the compunction of heavenly desire and union with God, the beginning was *grammatical*, the close, reverent study of the text, the prayerful rumination of words and phrases—read, marked, and inwardly digested.³⁵ One does not need to read far into the *Dictata* to observe that Luther has more in common with

³² WA 7, 97, 2–3. Cf. WA 12, 413, 32–34: »God is everywhere, but he is really to be found in the Holy Scriptures, in his Word, more than anywhere else.«

³³ Cf. Luther's prayers in the *Small Catechism*.

³⁴ The *lectio divina* was a regular and disciplined reading of the Scriptures going back to St. Benedict of Nursia (c. 480–543). The description of the practice as a four-stage process was articulated first in the writings of the twelfth-century monk, GUIGO OF CHARTREUX (d. 1193), *Scala Claustralium* [i.e. the »Ladder of Monks«], SC 163, 82–122.

³⁵ Cf. LECLERCQ, Learning (see n. 13), 72f.

such a monastic reading practice than the scholastic *quaestio*.³⁶ Already in 1509, just as he was advancing beyond the *baccalaureus biblicus*, he laments to his friend over the tiresome method of philosophy and his desire to return to »a theology that gets at the core of the nut [*nucleum nicis*], the kernel of the wheat [*medullam tritici*], and marrow of the bones [*medullam ossium*].«³⁷ Likewise, in his introductory preparations for his first lectures on the Psalms, he describes the effort of interpretation as a kind of foraging and eating: »when I have a text that is like a nut with a hard shell, I immediately dash it against the rock and find the sweetest kernel.«³⁸

Such metaphors of tasting the Scriptures, of sweetness, of breaking through that which is indigestible to that which nourishes were exceptionally common throughout the monastic tradition.³⁹ »Scripture is therefore soundly composed of what is sweet to the taste [*dulcis ad gustandum*] and strong for nourishing [*fortis ad alendum*].«⁴⁰ The exegete is often likened to a bee who draws honey from the honeycomb or nectar from a flower—»scrutinize all things like busy bees, gather honey from flowers, and the Spirit from speeches.«⁴¹ Accompanying this metaphor is the idea that exegesis is a search for and extraction of that which is hidden. The Scriptures *prima facie* appear coarse and difficult—like the shell of a nut or the husk around a kernel of grain. Unsurprisingly, the means by which one arrives at this inner meaning is by moving from the literal sense of the text to its spiritual meaning: »once the shell of the letter [*cortice litterae*] has been uncovered, to find something still deeper and more sacred in the

36 Loc. cit., 5: »The important word is no longer *quaeritur*, but *desideratur*; no longer *sciendum* but *experiendum*.«

37 (Author's translation). In a letter to Johannes Braun in March 1509, Luther wrote, »Sum itaque nunc iubente vel permittente Deo Wittenbergae. Quod si statum meum nosse desideres, bene habeo Dei gratia, nisi quod violentum est studium, maxime philosophiae, quam ego ab initio libentissime mutarim theologia, ea inquam theologia, quae nucleum nicis et medullam tritici et medullam ossium scrutatur,« (WAB 1; 17,39–44, Nr. 5).

38 WA 55,1; 6, RGL 2.

39 See H. DE LUBAC, *Medieval Exegesis*, vol. 2, 2000, 162–178; cf. K. FROELICH, *Sensing the Scriptures: Aminadab's Chariot and the Predicament of Biblical Interpretation*, 2014, 85–114.

40 BRUNO, *Expositio in Exodum*, PL 164, 269 AB.

41 GUERRIC OF IGNY, *In solemnitate omnium sanctorum sermo*, PL, 185, 211 A: »Scrutantes singula velut apes sedulae mel de floribus, spiritum de sermonibus colligite.«

marrow of the spiritual sense [*medulla sensus spiritualis*],⁴² »the nut [*nux*] is sacred scripture, whose bark or shell [*cortex vel testa*] is the letter and whose kernel [*nucleus*] is the spiritual understanding.«⁴³

But the task does not come easily. To »taste« the Scriptures is an arduous »chewing« of the text, a *ruminatio*—not merely by reading (*lectio*), but also through prayer (*oratio*) and meditation (*meditatio*) one can finally taste and experience contemplation and union with the divine.⁴⁴ Such »tasting« and »experience« are virtually synonyms in the tradition. For example, Bernard of Clairvaux on Emmaus: »Blessed are those who know the taste of the happy experience [*gustu felicitis experientiae*], how sweetly [*dulciter*], how wonderfully the Lord deigns to reveal the Scriptures through prayer and meditation.«⁴⁵

The conflation of tasting and experience is well documented in Luther as expressions that indicate a fruitful encounter with Scripture.⁴⁶ Not only do we see this in some of Luther's earliest words and his final words on Scripture, but also in our *Lieblingsschriften*, Luther's two accounts of his exegetical breakthrough into the meaning of the biblical words *poenitentia* and *iustitia*.⁴⁷ That such an experience with the

42 BEDE, *In Esdram et Nehemiam allegoricae Expositionis libri tres*, PL 91, 808 B: »recto cortice litterae, altius aliquid et sacratius in medulla sensus spiritualis invenire.«

43 HONORIUS, *Expositio in Cantica Canticorum*, PL 172, 466B: »nux est sacra scriptura, cujus cortex vel testa est littera, nucleus vero spiritualis intelligentia«; Cf. RUPERT, *Liber in Deuteronomium*, PL, 167, 945 D; GREGORY, *Homiliae in Ezechielem*, PL 76, 1058 C: »latens in littera spiritualis medulla discutitur.«

44 LECLERCQ, *Learning* (see n. 13), 72 f.

45 BERNARD, *In feria II Paschatis*, PL, 184, 976 C: »Beati qui noverunt gustu felicitis experientiae, quam dulciter, quam mirabiliter in oratione et meditatione Scripturas dignatur Dominus revelare.« Cf. WILLIAM OF ST. THIERRY, *De natura et dignitate amoris*, PL 184, 397 C–399 D.

46 Cf. A. BEUTEL, *Theologie als Erfahrungswissenschaft* (in: *Luther Handbuch*, hg. v. DEMS., 2005), 454–461. WAT 1; 16,13; WA 18; 330,28; WA 24; 515,7; WA 10,2; 126,30f; WA 28; 644,4; WA 28; 644,21; WA 36; 506,18–21; WA 30,2; 673,15–17; WA 3; 549,33–35; WA 26; 55,35–56,1; WAT 2; 84,19f; WAT 4; 479,1–6.

47 WA 1; 525,18–21 (1518): »cum prius non fuerit ferme in scriptura tota amarius mihi verbum quam »poenitentia« [...] nunc nihil *dulcius* aut gratius mihi sonnet quam »poenitentia«; WA 54; 186,14f (1545): »Iam quanto odio vocabulum »iustitia dei« oderam ante, tanto amore *dulcissimum* mihi vocabulum extollebam.«

Scriptures is accompanied by great existential difficulty is likewise well-attested.⁴⁸

When it comes to Luther's direct engagement with the monastic tradition, the preeminent sources are Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Johannes Tauler.⁴⁹ All three are exemplars of monastic culture, exhibiting a complementary posture and method when interpreting the Scriptures. Luther is influenced by all three in various ways, but our focus here will be on Tauler and on the anonymous *Theologia Deutsch* that Luther associates with his thought. It is of Tauler that he famously writes

[...] neither in Latin nor in our language have I seen a theology which is more salvific and more consistent with the Gospel. Therefore, taste it and see [*gusta et vide*] how sweet the Lord [*quam suavis est dominus*] is after you have first tasted and seen [*gustaris et videris*] how bitter is whatever we are [*quam amarus est, quicquid nos sumus*].⁵⁰

In the same year—1516—Luther encountered another writing which, because of its deep affinities to Tauler's sermons, he regarded as either written by Tauler or dependent on him. Of this too, the so-called *Theologia Deutsch*, Luther would later write, »Next to the Bible and St. Augustine, no book has ever come into my hands from which I have learned, and desired to learn, more of God and Christ, and man and all things that are.«⁵¹

The importance of Tauler and the *Theologia Deutsch* for our question lies in the role that *passivity* plays in Luther's approach to the Scriptures.⁵²

48 E.g. *Preface to German Writings* (WA 50; 660,1–10): »Tentatio, anfechtung. Die ist der Prüffestein, die leret dich nicht allein wissen und verstehen, sondern auch erfahren, wie recht, wie warhafftig, wie süsse, wie lieblich, wie mechtig, wie tröstlich Gottes wort sey, weisheit uber alle weisheit. [...] Denn so bald Gottes wort auffgehet durch dich, so wird dich der Teuffel heimsuchen, dich zum rechten Doctor machen, und durch seine anfechtunge leren, Gottes wort zu suchen und zu lieben.«

49 This is not to exclude the importance of Staupitz as both mediator of piety and as advisor.

50 WAB 1; 79,58–64 (December 14, 1516). Cf. WA 1; 557,25–32; WA 9; 95,20–23; WA 10,2; 329,25 f.

51 WA 1; 378,21–23; WAB 1; 160,8–12 (to Staupitz, March 31, 1518): »Ego sane secutus theologiam Tauleri et eius libelli, quem tu nuper dedisti imprimendum Aurifabro nostro Christanno, doceo, ne homines in aliud quicquam confidant quam in solum Ihesum Christum, non in orationes et merita vel opera sua. Quia non currentibus nobis, sed miserente Deo salvi erimus.«

52 HAMM, Luther (see n. 5), 226–228.

That is to say, Luther's notion of passivity—to suffer God and the effects of his Word—is best understood as a reshaping of the mystical impulses of *humilitas* and *Vernichtkeit* (humility and annihilation) within the monastic tradition and in such late medieval writings as Tauler. And further, that the key to this transformation is Luther's peculiar distinction of law and gospel. One sees much of the groundwork for this perspective laid down in the work of Berndt Hamm and Volker Leppin.⁵³ However, because it is the coalescing of all of these themes *at the same time* that occasioned such transformation, I want to offer more detail on the nature and significance of this process.

Both Tauler and the *Theologia Deutsch* were indicative of the increasing tendency in the late Middle Ages for intense introspection leading to the admission of one's own sinfulness and helplessness.⁵⁴ For Tauler this feeling of helplessness was intensified by a feeling of abandonment, a veritable hell on earth. But Tauler argued that such inner, spiritual annihilation was essential, and that only when one's soul was empty and nothing, could God then be born in it. The anonymous German text speaks in the same way.⁵⁵

53 E.g. V. LEPPIN, *Die fremde Reformation. Luthers mystische Wurzeln*, 2015, 117–122.

54 Cf. B. MCGINN, *The Presence of God*, vol 4: *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany*, 1300–1500, 2005, 285–289; B. HAMM, *Wollen und Nicht-Können in der spätmittelalterlichen Bußseelsorge* (in: *Spätmittelalterliche Frömmigkeit zwischen Ideal und Praxis* [SuR.NR 15], hg.v. DEMS. / TH. LENTES, 2001), 111–146.

55 E.g. *Theologia Deutsch*, Capitulum 11 (in: *Der Franckforter »Theologia Deutsch«*. Kritische Textausgabe [MTU 78], hg. v. W. VON HINTEN, 1982), 84–85, 21; 85, 28–36: »Cristus sele musset yn die helle, ee dan sie czu hymmel qwam. Also muß auch des menschen sele. Aber wie das geschee, das mercket: Wanne sich der mensche selber bekennet vnd an syhet vnd findet sich selber also boße vnd vnwirdig alles des gutes vnnd trostes, das ym von got ader von den creaturen gescheen mag, sundern nicht anders danne eyn ewig vordammen vnd verloren seyn vnd düncket sich auch des selben vnwirdigk seyn. Ja er dunckt sich vnwirdick *alles* leidens, das ym yn der czeit gescheen kan, vnnd das eß willich vnd recht sey, das alle creatur wider yn seyn vnd thun ym leyden vnnd pyne an, vnd ist des alles vnwirdigk. Auch dunckt yn recht, das er ewiclichen vordampt sal seyn vnd ioch eyn fußschemel sold seyn aller teufele yn der helle, vnd diß alles noch vnwirdig, vnd wil ader mag keynes trostes ader erloßunge begern wider von gote noch von creaturen, sundern er wil gerne vngetrost vnd vnerlost seyn, vnd ym ist nicht leit seyn vordampniß vnd leiden, wan eß billich vnde recht ist vnd ist nicht wider got, sundern eß ist der wille gotis, vnd das ist ym lieb vnd ist ym wol do mit. Ym ist alleine leit seyne schult vnd boßheit, wanne das ist vnrecht vnnd wider got, vnd do mit ist ym we vnd vbil

One sees in his *Randbemerkung* to Tauler and his other writings from this time that it is precisely this theme to which Luther is drawn. In his lectures on Romans, he makes allusions to Tauler or borrows his language to stress our passivity before the judgment and justification of God.⁵⁶ In order that God might form us into that which is pleasing to him, he must first destroy our present form and thoughts.⁵⁷ God only comes into us, unless he first destroys us and what is ours through the cross and sufferings.⁵⁸ »It is like going into destruction and annihilation [*perditionem et anihilationem*].«⁵⁹ Likewise, the significant, extended explanation to thesis 15 in the *Resolutiones* (1518) continues this theme as he again recommends Tauler, unequivocally, as a teacher of such inner sufferings.⁶⁰

Now this is certainly not the first time that Luther focuses on humility or the experience of divine judgment.⁶¹ The theme pervades his first lectures in the Psalms, especially as he reproduces the thought of Bernard of Clairvaux. For example:

Always therefore we sin, always we are impure [...] we are always in motion, and we who are righteous always need to be made righteous. For this it comes that every righteous-

czu mute. Vnd diß ist vnd heißet ware ruwe vmmb die sunde. Vnde wer also yn der czite yn die helle kumpt, der kumpt noch der czite yn das hymmelrich vnd gewynnet seyn yn der czeit eynen vorsmack, der vbirtrifft allen lusten vnnd freude, die yn der czite von czitlichen dingen ye gewart ader geworden magk. [...] Nu lesset got den menschen nicht yn disßer helle, sunder er nympt yn an sich, also das der mensche nichts enrucht danne allein des ewigenn gutis vnd bekennet, das dem ewigenn gute als vberwol ist, vnde seyne wunne, fride vnd freude, rue vnnd genuge. Vnd wanne den der mensche nicht anders enrucht noch begert dann das ewige gut vnd ym selbes nicht, so wirt des ewigen gutis frede vnd freude vnd wunne vnde luste, vnd was des ist, alles des menschen, vnd so ist der mensche ym hymmelrich. Disse helle vnd diß hymmelrich seyn czwen *gut*, sicher wege dem menschen yn der czite, vnd wol ym, der sie recht vnd wol findet, wanne diße helle vorgehet, das hymmelrich bestet.«

56 Cf. WA 56; 227–229.

57 Cf. WA 56; 378.

58 WA 9; 102,10f: »Et sciamus, quod deus non agat in nobis, nisi prius nos et nostra destruat (i. e. per crucem et passiones).«

59 WA 56; 379; cf. WA 1; 363,25–37.

60 Cf. WA 1; 557,25f.

61 For Luther's *Humilitätstheologie* see E. BIZER, *Fides ex auditu. Eine Untersuchung über die Entdeckung der Gerechtigkeit Gottes durch Martin Luther*, 1958.

ness for the present instant is sin with respect to that which must be added in the following instant. For in truth blessed Bernard says, »When you begin not to desire to become better, you cease to be good.« For there is no place to stop *in via Dei*. Delay is itself sin.⁶²

But Tauler offers an interpretation and intensification of this experience beyond Bernard that gives a singular focus to the *salutary role* of such divinely imposed spiritual agony in the path toward justification and spiritual union with God. Furthermore, this movement from a Bernardian understanding of humility to the mystical annihilation in Tauler seems to have more accurately reflected Luther's own personal *Anfechtungen*. In the *Resolutiones*, after praising Tauler as possessing »more solid and sincere theology than is found in all the scholastic teachers,« Luther suggests that this theology speaks directly to his own experience:

I myself »knew a man« [2 Cor 12:2] who claimed that he had often suffered these punishments, in fact over a very brief period of time. Yet they were so great and so much like hell that no tongue could adequately express them, no pen could describe them, and one who had not himself experienced them could not believe them. And so great were they that, if they had been sustained or had lasted for half an hour, even for one tenth of an hour, he would have perished completely and all of his bones would have been reduced to ashes. At such a time there is no flight, no comfort, within or without, but all things accuse. [...] In this moment (strange to say) the soul cannot believe that it can ever be redeemed other than that the punishment is not yet completely felt. Yet the soul is eternal and is not able to think of itself as being temporal. All that remains is the stark-naked desire for help and a terrible groaning, but it does not know where to turn for help. In this instance the person is stretched out with Christ so that all his bones may be counted, and every corner of the soul is filled with the greatest bitterness, dread, trembling, and sorrow in such a manner that all these last forever.⁶³

It is during this same period of time that Luther engages Tauler that we also witness a fundamental shift in Luther's understanding of law and gospel. Before his lectures on Romans, the law is *not* the primary agent of such humility and repentance. In fact, in the *Dictata* the law is given virtually

62 WA 55,2; 973,234–253: »Semper ergo peccamus, semper immundi sumus [...] semper sumus in motu, semper Iustificandi, qui Iusti sumus. Nam hinc venit, vt omnis Iustitia pro presenti instanti sit peccatum ad eam, que in sequenti instanti addenda est. Quia Vere dicit B. Bernardus: ›Vbi incipis nolle fieri melior, desinis esse bonus.‹ Quia non est status in via Dei, ipsa mora peccatum est.«

63 WA 1; 557,23–558,8.

*no role in relation to sin whatsoever.*⁶⁴ Rather, Luther's understanding of law and gospel in his first lectures is entirely determined by the structure of *Heils- und Offenbarungsgeschichte*.⁶⁵ As in the exegetical tradition before him, the law is merely an Old Testament phenomenon. To be *sub lege* is to be under the jurisdiction of the law in the Old Testament, especially the ceremonial law. As such, it is, for Luther, the time of the letter—of *figura, umbra, carnalia*, and *temporalia*. Luther will even interpret Pauline passages that explicitly talk about the role of the law in the same manner: The law under which »we were confined, held until that faith yet to be revealed« (Gal 3:23), is consistently interpreted as the law's preparation of Israel for Christ—not through revealing sin but by teaching through *figura*.⁶⁶

64 Luther was certainly familiar with the idea from the tradition, but it appears very rarely and doesn't seem to have impacted his overall view of the law. So for example, glossing Ps 18:9, Luther contrasts the *nova lex*, which brings joy to the heart, with the law of Moses, which »crucifies the heart because it increases knowledge of sin,« WA 55,1; 162,11–164,1: »[...] lex autem Mosi crucifigit corda, quia auget conscientiam peccati.« Yet later in the psalm he notes that the law of Moses can only show external and carnal sins, not the hidden sins of the soul (loc. cit., 168, RGL 14). Augustine's interpretation of the law is reproduced in a gloss to Ps 77:5, WA 55,1; 548: »et legem posuit in israel per quam peccatores ostenderet esse et sic ad gratiam suspirare faceret«; RGL 9: »Idem est ›lex et testimonium‹ secundum b. Augustinum, dicitur autem testimonium [legis] his, qui ea non ›legitime vtuntur‹, quia per legem conuincuntur esse peccatores. His autem, qui ea, ad quem fugere debeant, vt liberentur. Vnde Ro. 3.: ›Nunc autem sine lege Iustitia manifestata est, testificata a lege et prophetis.‹« Nevertheless, the rest of the Psalm stresses the law as figure of the gospel. In a comment to Ps 15:4 (WA 55,2; 118,11–17), Luther follows Hugo Cardinalis and cites both Rom 5:20, »the law intervened to increase the trespass; but where it increased the trespass, grace also increased« and Rom 7:7, »through the law is knowledge of sin,« but then stresses that it is through grace by which one recognizes that sin abounds. Gal 3:22, »Scripture has concluded all things under sin,« cited three times in the lectures, is applied generally to the whole testimony of Scripture rather than the specific purpose and function of the law: WA 55,1; 290 (Ps 31:1); WA 55,2; 267,104–107 (Ps 49:14); WA 55,2; 889, 21 f (Ps 117:1). Cf. also Luther's comments to Faber's *Adnotationes*, WA 4; 497,11 f.

65 Cf. EBELING, *Anfänge* (see n. 9). For an analysis of Luther's understanding of the law in the *Dictata*, especially in relation to Galatians 3 and 4, see E.H. HERRMANN, »Why Then the Law?« *Salvation History and the Law in Martin Luther's Interpretation of Galatians*, 1513–1522, 2005, 67–146.

66 The ceremonial laws may foreshadow the confession of sins, but they do not actually produce such confession; this is the spiritual work of the faith to come; e.g. WA 55,2;

Likewise the »pedagogue unto Christ,« (Gal 3:24) is the didactic role of the ceremonial law among Israel which prepares them for Christ by teaching them a primitive faith. Through shadows and figures the law teaches Israel to anticipate an undisclosed but promised future. Thus, the primary function of the law was to positively inculcate *petere* and *expectare*—such was its *praepartio ad gratiam*.⁶⁷

858,173 f: »Nam quid aliud signifcat detractio pellis, Concrematio corporum extra castra, effusio sanguinis ante altare et exportatio cinerum, Nisi spiritualiter Confessionem peccatorum et malorum nostrorum? [...] Igitur Opus eius tunc erit spirituale, cuius Vos modo agitis figuram.«

- 67 E.g. WA 55,2; 876 f. My analysis of the *Dictata* is in disagreement with the interpretation put forward by J.S. PREUS, *From Shadow to Promise: Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to the Young Luther*, 1969 (esp. chapter 13, pp. 200–211). Preus wishes to see two kinds of promises emerging in Luther's understanding of the Old Testament situation: the temporal promises of the law and the eternal promise of Christ given first to Abraham. In placing these two in opposition to one another Luther is thought to create a »new hermeneutical divide« so that the distinction of law and promise is now found within the Old Testament itself rather than at the traditional dividing point of the two testaments. Preus cites both Ps 111 and Luther's gloss to Ps 104 as early examples of this new distinction. However, what is actually emerging is the character of the *law as promise*. Thus, when in Ps 104:10 the blessing promised to Abraham is said to be given to Israel in *praeceptum*, Luther glosses »quia credere in Christum tenentur,« i.e. observance of the »precept« entailed belief in Christ; WA 55,1, 694. The eternal promise of Abraham is figured in Israel's law until its fulfillment in Christ—thus the marginal explanation; 695, RGl 14: »In libro Exodi hoc faecit, cum populum doceret expectare promissum patribus eorum.« The law is not the same as the promise of Abraham, but neither is it »opposed« to it. It is a witness to it. When the ceremonial laws were regarded as figures of future things they functioned as promises, keeping the people of Israel in expectation of their future fulfillment. Likewise, in Ps 111 the »letter which hides the things of the spirit« is not, as Preus would have it, the bare promise in contrast to the law, but the *law as figure*. When the law was regarded as such and not as something to be sought and desired for its own sake, then it was not a mere letter but a sign pointing to a spiritual fulfillment beyond itself. Luther can be quite explicit about this point. See, for example, his scholia to Ps 118:1, WA 55,2; 892,35–39: »Quod lex Mosi non est mala nec maculata in se, Sed Quia Scribe, qui eam non cum spiritu intelligebant et docebant, faciunt eam maculatam. Nam lex Mosi habet vtrunque, Scil. literam significantem et spiritum significatum per literam. Et omnes qui eam susceperunt vt significantem et figuram futurorum, bene beati sunt et fuerunt.« Cf. WA 55,1; 584 (Ps 77:5): »testimonium i. e. legem futurae fidei et Iustitiae testem et preconem«; and its marginal comment (RGl

On the other hand, to be *sub gratia* is to live in the New Testament under the *nova lex*—the time of *res, veritas, spiritualia*, and *aeternalia*. Consequently, for the Christian, the law of Moses is theologically irrelevant. The Christian has only the gospel which must perform the conflicting offices of judgment and consolation. In the *Dictata*, it is the gospel that brings the New Testament penitent both the revelation of sin and absolution. Because the gospel is the only ›law‹ in the New Testament, it is simultaneously a demand that stands over and against the believer, a *iudicium*, and that which fulfills the demand, *iustitia*—both the source of angst and the only bearer of comfort.

A striking example of this theme is Luther's adoption of Bernard's triple advent of Christ, especially his so-called *adventus spiritualis*.⁶⁸ Following the themes in Bernard's six Advent sermons, Luther affirms that Christ not only came in the flesh and will come again at the Judgment, but he also comes between the two, *in medius*, to prepare the believer for glory. The Christian penitent daily longs for this spiritual visitation of Christ, to experience his grace and consolation.⁶⁹ But the presence of Christ also often

9): »[...] His autem, qui ea recte vtuntur, [testimonium,] quia demonstratur eis Christus in ea, ad quem fugere debeant, vt liberentur. Vnde Ro. 3.: ›Nunc autem sine lege Iustitia manifesta est, testificata a lege et prophetis‹; ibid., (Ps 77:10): ›testamentum dei legem, qua testatus est gratiam futuram in fide, vel ›legem Christi‹; WA 55,1, 834 (Ps 129:4): ›et propter legem tuam in qua promisisti misericordiam expectantibus te.‹ See HERRMANN, »Why« (see n. 65), 67–146.

68 Theo Bell notes that a copy of Bernard's *Sermones de tempore et de sanctis* (Basel, 1495) appears to have been in the Erfurt cloister library during Luther's time, BELL, *Divus* (see n. 7), 30. Luther cites from one of these sermons directly in the *Dictata* (WA 55,1, 704, RGl 5, [Ps 105:3]), from *In Adv.*, Sermo 3,7 (Sancti Bernardi Opera, vol. 4, 181,2–14). Bernard's combination of Ps 88:15 (96:2) and 1 Cor 11:31 appears elsewhere in Luther, e.g. in WA 55,2; 435,64–436,76; WA 55,2; 751,105–108. On a thematic analysis of Bernard's Advent sermons and Luther's use of them in the *Dictata* see HERRMANN, »Why« (see n. 65), 113–135. For a detailed study on the development of the *medius adventus* in Bernard's thought see C. STERCAL, Il ›Medius Adventus‹. Saggio di lettura degli scritti di Bernardo di Clairvaux (BCist 9), 1992.

69 WA 55,1, 667, RGl 1 (Ps 101): »[...] Tropologice autem est oratio pro aduentu spirituali Christi, quando anima a demonibus oppressa viciis, etiam foris in carne a mundo vexatur.‹ WA 55,2; 666,663–667 (Ps 84): ›Vnde deuotissima Est oratio huius psalmi, vbi dicit: ›Conuerte nos Deus‹ etc. Et illa vrgentissima: ›Nunquid inaeternum irasceris nobis?‹ Quia vehementer timet anima damnari, cum ceperit sentire peccatum suum et deside-

creates a feeling of contrition, for after tasting its grace, sin is even more abhorrent and the fear of eternal wrath returns.⁷⁰ Christ's spiritual presence both comforts the conscience for past sins and reveals present ones so that one always desires future consolation and deliverance.

Such a theology of humility is thoroughly Bernardian, destabilizing any sense of security in progress made, so that one is always *in via*, always in preparation, always progressing, always a beginner. Nonetheless, in the case of Luther, this equivocation of the gospel's office seems to have had a part in his sense of uncertainty, even to the point of despair.

But all of this is completely and strikingly different when we come to Luther's lectures on Romans during which he deeply engages two new sources: the anti-pelagian writings of Augustine and the sermons of Johannes Tauler. In these lectures, the law has a wholly different office from what Luther wrote earlier.⁷¹ Here the law is entirely obsessed with sin. All of the positive, didactic images disappear. The law as ceremonial *figura* is gone. Instead Luther sees that it is not the ceremonial law that Paul is concerned with, but the moral law.⁷² It is the *lex peccati*, forever coupled with transgressions.⁷³ Its primary function is to reveal sin, and not just external

rare iustitiam. Et sine dubio in hoc sensu Nunc Ecclesia istum psalmum cantit.« WA 55,2; 970,2255–2563 (Ps 118:116): »[...] Et Moralter de aduentu gratiae in animam contra tentationes exterioris hominis et mundi [...] Ita et Anima in tentationibus Expectat Visitationem gratiae eius, ne confundatur a carne victrice in peccatum seu diabolo per carnem vincente aut Impugnante.« WA 55,2; 1027,49–52 (Ps 125:4): »Sicut autem exponitur de aduentu Christi in Ecclesiam primo, ita de spirituali in animam, Cui redditur Laetitia salutaris, quando conuertitur eius Captiuitas per gratiam, et fit sicut consolatus et laetabunda et laudans.«

70 WA 55,2; 650,181–651,184 (Ps 84:6): »Sic enim et in [spi]rituali aduentu [est], Quod cor contritum [ma]xime tamen timet aeter[nam] iram, quia caepit sa[pere] et desiderare g[ratiam] et Christum et hor[re]re peccatum.« Cf. WA 55,2; 437,121 f and the *lex Christi* as both *iustitia* and *iudicium*.

71 See HERRMANN, »Why« (see n. 65), 147–193.

72 Cf. WA 56; 67, RGl 1; WA 56; 197,7–8.15–26 (Rom 2:12; *Sch*); WAB 1; 70,1 f, Nr. 27.

73 WA 56; 68,17 (Rom 7:10; RGl 2): »lex enim omne peccatum tangit.« Luther's understanding of »lex peccati« in the *Dictata* has nothing to do with the law itself but is another name for concupiscence, i. e. the »lex membrorum« or »lex carnis«; cf. Luther's *glosses on Lombard* (WA 9; 73,21 f). It is not until his Romans lectures that »lex peccati« first appears as another name for the law; cf. WA 56; 335, 6.

sins, but the deep root of original sin.⁷⁴ Such a complete humbling and bringing to naught is the law's only *praeparatio ad gratiam*.⁷⁵ On the other hand, the gospel now takes on the exclusive character of grace, mercy, and forgiveness.⁷⁶ It's previous conflicted character as *nova lex*⁷⁷ is rejected in favor of a definition entirely as gift.⁷⁸

74 E.g. WA 56; 254, 15–17 (Rom. 3:20, *Sch*): »Vnde idem est dicere: per legem cognitio ›peccati‹ siue ›peccatorum‹. Quia per ipsum cognoscimus nos peccatores et peccatum in nobis esse, malos et malum in nobis esse.« Cf. WA 56; 271, 7 f and 277, 12; 285, 16; 290, 4 f; 312, 1 f; WA 1; 86, 20 f. For the development of Luther's understanding of original sin, see L. БАТКА, Peccatum radicale. Eine Studie zu Luthers Erbsündenverständnis in Psalm 51 (EHS.T 847), 2007.

75 E.g. WA 56; 36, 10 (Rom 3:20; RGl 2): »Ad quid ergo lex? Vt humiliet superbos.« Cf. also the disputation of Bartholomäus Bernhardi, *De viribus et voluntate hominis sine gratia* (WA 1; 147, 10–19): »Homo Dei gratia exclusa praecepta eius servare nequaquam potest neque se vel de congruo vel de condigno ad gratiam praeparare, verum necessario sub peccato manet [...] Cognitio itaque legis facit superbum praevaricatorem, per donum autem charitatis delectat legis esse factorem [...] Lex data est ut gratia quaereretur, gratia data est ut lex impleretur [...] [148, 14 f] Homo, quando facit quod in se est, peccat, cum nec velle aut cogitare ex seipso possit.« Cf. WAT 5; 76, 10–12, Nr. 5346.

76 WA 56; 424, 8–17: »Nam lex non nisi peccatum ostendit et reos facit ac sic conscientiam angustat, Euangelium autem angustatis eiusmodi optatum nunciat remedium. Ideo lex mala, Euangelium bona, lex iram, Euangelium pacem nunciat. Lex dicit (Vt Gal. 3 allegat Apostolus): ›Maledictus omnis, qui non permanserit in omnibus, quae Scripta sunt in libro legis, vt faciat ea.‹ [...] Euangelium autem dicit: ›Ecce agnus Dei, qui tollit peccata mundi.‹ Lex conscientiam vrget peccatis, Sed Euangelium liberat eam et pacificat per fidem Christi [...] [426, 5–9] Igitur duo et duo contraria: Lex – peccatum, Quod ostendit et reum facit ac aegrum, immo damnatum probat. Euangelium – gratiam, Quam offert gratiam et peccatum remittit ac morbo medetur ad salutem.«

77 Cf. WA 56; 203, 10–12, which describes the lex Christi as »[...] lex sine lege, sine modo, sine fine.«

78 WA 56; 338, 20–339, 3: »Ideo Euangelium, si non recipiatur, vt loquitur, similiter est Litera. Et proprie Euangelium est, Vbi Christum predicat; Vbi autem arguit et reprobatur aut precipit, nihil aliud facit, quam quod presumentes de propria Iustitia destruit, vt gratiae locum preparet [...] Haec est rata differentia veteris et nouae legis, Quod vetus dicit superbis in sua Iustitia: tu debes habere Christum et spiritum eius; Noua dicit humiliatis in sua eiusmodi paupertate et Christum petentibus: Ecce hic est Christus et spiritus eius. Ideo qui aliter ›Euangelium‹ quam ›bonum nuncium‹ interpretantur, non intelligunt Euangelium, vt faciunt, qui ipsum in legem potius quam in gratiam mutauerunt et ex Christo nobis Mosen faecerunt.«

This reinterpretation of the Pauline doctrine of the law as the moral law (rather than *caeremonalia*) and the *cognitio peccati* as its chief purpose is clearly dependent on Augustine's anti-Pelagian writings.⁷⁹ But what stands out as truly unique is Luther's divorce of the law from its Old Testament context.⁸⁰ He is no longer interested in the *heilsgeschichtliche* orientation of law and gospel presupposed in the exegetical tradition, including even Augustine.⁸¹ He no longer identifies the *tempus legis* strictly as the time of the Old Testament. Law and gospel are now personal, existential categories, touching on the experience of sin and grace in the individual conscience. This shift from salvation history to one's experience, from the *heilsgeschichtliche* to the existential, is without precedent in the history of exegesis. Nonetheless, as one examines the Romans lectures and the writings that immediately follow, it would seem that it is precisely here where the monastic-mystical tradition continues as a stimulus for Luther, and in particular Tauler. Luther had found in Paul a dynamic of law and gospel that corresponded to both Augustine's vision of the law as the agent of humility (albeit within *Heilsgeschichte*) and the present experiences of spiritual suffering that Tauler and the *Theologia Deutsch* so vividly described.⁸² And like the law in Augustine, Tauler's *Vernichtheit* and *resig-*

79 Augustine had already come to this understanding of Paul in his letter exchanges with Jerome, and this was only strengthened in his writings against Pelagius. Cf. AUGUSTINE, *ep.* 82,20 (CSEL 34, 371,14–20; 372,13–373,4).

80 Luther explicitly describes this insight as his »Durchbruch.« WAT 5; 210,6f, Nr. 5518: »Zuor mangelt mir nichts, denn das ich kein discrimen inter legem et euangelium machet, hielt es alles vor eines et dicebam Christum a Mose non differre nisi tempore et perfectione. Aber do ich das discrimen fande, quod aliud esset lex, aliud euangelium, da riß ich her durch.«

81 See D. DEMMER, *Lutherus Interpres. Der theologische Neuansatz in seiner Römerbriefexegese unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Augustins* (UKG 4), 1968, 237–242; L. GRANE, *Modus Loquendi Theologicus. Luthers Kampf um die Erneuerung der Theologie 1515–1518* (ATHD 12), 1975, 46–49; IDEM, *Divus Paulus et S. Augustinus, interpres eius fidelissimus* (in: *Festschrift für Ernst Fuchs*, hg. v. G. EBELING / E. JÜNGEL / G. SCHUNACK, 1973, 133–146), 143 f; B. LOHSE, *Gesetz und Gnade – Gesetz und Evangelium. Die reformatorische Neuformulierung eines Themas der patristischen Theologie* (in: *Evangelium in der Geschichte*, Bd. 2: *Studien zur Theologie der Kirchenväter und zu ihrer Rezeption in der Reformation*, hg. v. G. BORGER u. a., 1998), 240–245.

82 Cf. WA 56; 263,31 f; 264,1–12; WA 56; 359,12–23.

natio ad infernum was shaped by irony:⁸³ experiencing the »bitterness« of ourselves and our failed morality precipitates tasting the »sweetness« of the Lord, the grace and forgiveness of the gospel.⁸⁴ Thus, Luther's reading of Tauler's theological description of what Luther acknowledged was his own personal experience⁸⁵ alongside Augustine's Pauline interpretation allowed him to fruitfully *misread* Augustine—perhaps intentionally—so that the *opus* of law and gospel corresponded to the daily, existential rhythm of humility and justification. For Luther, such confluence unlocked the mystery of suffering, of the divinely imposed *passio*—a passive faith, a passive righteousness, a passive posture toward the word of law and gospel, all grounded in the *passio Christi* of the cross in which dying overcomes death.⁸⁶

Consequently, the movement from »bitterness« to »sweetness« is no longer effected by one's exegetical labors or insights into the hidden spiritual sense—trying to crack the hard shell of the Scriptures. We are the »tough nut,« so to speak, that needs to be cracked! Neither is the goal of *unio* found in the unmediated union with God, rather it is union with Christ—God incarnate and clothed in his Word.⁸⁷ Thus, for Luther, the Scriptures are not merely the *occasion* for such union, they are its *agent*, the means by which we are both humbled and lifted up, transformed into what it promises.⁸⁸ »And God thus changes us into his word, but not his word into us.«⁸⁹ The *unio* between the soul and God has been exchanged for the union of faith

83 On the role of irony in Luther's theology see V. WESTHELLE, *The Scandalous God: The Use and Abuse of the Cross*, 2006, 44 f.

84 Cf. WAB 1; 79,58–64; WA 5; 163,26–29: »By living, yet more, by dying and being damned you become a theologian, not by understanding, reading, and speculating.«

85 See above, WA 1; 557,25 f.

86 Cf. WA 5; 165,33–166,16. See also HAMM, *Early* (see n. 5), 219 f; B. MCGINN, *Vere tu es Deus absconditus: The Hidden God in Luther and Some Mystics* (in: *Silence and the Word of God: Negative Theology and the Incarnation*, ed. by O. DAVIES / D. TURNER, 2002, 94–114).

87 Here Luther explicitly recognizes this weakness in Tauler's sermons which as *theologia mystica* and *sapientia experimentalis* speaks of the spiritual birth of the *uncreated Word*. But *theologia propria* is concerned with the spiritual birth of the *incarnate Word*—this is »the one thing needful« and the »best part.« WA 9; 98,14 f.

88 Cf. O. BAYER, *Promissio. Geschichte der reformatorischen Wende in Luthers Theologie* (FKDG 24), 1971.

89 WA 56; 227,4 f: »[...] ita nos in verbum suum, non autem verbum suum in nos mutat.«

and the Word—a *unio* that not only arrives at the culmination of Christian progress but also recurrently as a new beginning.

Luther could speak about the transformative power of the Scriptures already in his earlier writings,⁹⁰ but the language of mystical union is particularly vivid in the subsequent years, conveying the thoroughgoing passive relation that one has in connection to the Word. As faith clings to the promises, the Word absorbs (*absorbere*) us into itself, we participate (*participare*) in its powers, are saturated (*saturare*) and intoxicated (*inebriare*) by its promises.⁹¹ In the same vein, rather than the mystical birth of God in the womb of the pious soul, it is we who suffer a mystical birth in the womb of the Word—»*Euangelium est mamma, alvus dei.*«⁹²

Luther's reform of the Bible, in sum, is the transformation of Christian reading and devotional practices that humbly acknowledge that it is, in fact, Holy Scripture that reforms. Thus, Luther encouraged every Christian to daily attend to the Scriptures and provided as many avenues as possible in order that this might be realized. As such, Luther was not an advocate for a lay piety or a secular spirituality; rather, it is better to say that he brought religious life into the world in a way that his predecessors could not. Faith's renunciation of all things belonging to the self before the word of Christ has made all Christians mendicants, all are beggars. Holy Scripture is, *prima facie*, a lowly book, especially in contrast to the greatest literary achievements of humankind, like that of Virgil (Luther's favorite author); it is, nev-

90 WA 3; 397,9–11: »Et nota, quod Scripture virtus est hec, quod non mutatur in eum, qui eam studet, sed transmutat suum amatorem in sese ac suas virtutes«; cf. WA 1; 28,39–41.

91 WA 7; 53,15–20: »Cum autem haec promissa dei sint verba sancta, vera, iusta, libera, pacata et universa bonitate plena, fit, ut anima, quae firma fide illis adheret, sic eis uniatur, immo penitus absorbeat, ut non modo participet sed saturetur et inebrietur omni virtute eorum. Si enim tactus Christi sanabat, quanto magis hic tenerrimus in spiritu, immo absorptio verbi omnia quae verbi sunt animae communicat.«

92 WA 10,1,1; 232,13–15: »gottis uter [...] darynnen er unß empfehet, tregt und gepiertt, wie eyn weyb eyn kind ynn yhre muter empfeht, tregt und gepiertt«; WA 31,2; 370,21: »Uterus dei est Verbum divinum«; WA 40,3, 386,11: »Euangelium est mamma, alvus dei.« See also BEUTEL, Anfang (see n. 9), 227 f. The motif of the spiritual birth of God in the soul is a consistent theme throughout the tradition going back at least to Origen; see H. RAHNER, Die Gottesgeburt. Die Lehre der Kirchenväter von der Geburt Christi im Herzen des Gläubigen (ZKTh 59, 1935, 333–418).

ertheless, the inexhaustible ›divine Aeneid.‹⁹³ For it, too, recounts a wandering from the ruins of the past (*horesco referens!*), a pressing on through storm, labors, sorrows, even death—*sunt lacrimae rerum*—to the hope of a bright country and a new city. Compared to this book, all other writings and commentaries, even his own, should be ignored and forgotten for the sake of entering—upon one's knees (»*da kreuch eyne*«)—into the tabernacle of this text: »*Darumb hinein, hinein, lieber Christen! [...]* that we might seize, taste, and remain in the clear, pure Word of God itself; for there alone does God dwell in Zion.«⁹⁴

93 For the lowly form of Scripture as a *genus humile* see B. STOLT, Martin Luthers Rhetorik des Herzens (UTB 2141), 2000, 64–70.

94 WA 10,1,1; 728,9–22: »O das gott wollt, meyn und aller lerer außlegung untergiengen, unnd eyne iglicher Christenn selbs die blosse schrift und lautter gottis wortt fur sich nehme! Du sihest yhe auß dissem meynen geschwetz, wie unmeßlich ungleich gottis wortt sind gegen aller menschen wortt, wie gar keyn mensch mag eyne eynges gottis wortt gnugsam erreychen und vorkleren mit allen seynen wortten. Es ist eyne unendlich wort und will mit stillem geyst gefasset und betrachtet seyn, wie der 83. psalm sagt: Ich will horen, was gott selb ynn myr redet. Es begreiff auch sonst niemandt, denn eyne solcher stiller betrachtender geyst. Wer dahyn kund on glosiern und außlegen kommen, dem weren meyn und aller menschen glosiern gar keyn nott, ia, nur hynderlich. Darumb hyneyn, hyneyn, lieben Christen, und last meyn und aller lerer außlegen nur eyne gerust seyn zum rechten baw, das wyr das blosse, lautter gottis wort selbs fassen, schmecken unnd da bleyben; denn da wonet gott alleyn ynn Zion. AMEN.« Cf. WA 10,1,1; 193,11–16: »halt dich an diße gotliche wort, da kreuch eyne und bleyb drynnen wie eyne Haß ynn seiner steynritzen«; WA 32; 98,17–20. See also WA 50; 520,6–10: »Scripture, too, must remain master and judge, for when we follow the brooks too far, they lead us too far away from the spring and lose both their taste and nourishment.«