

MARTIN LUTHER AND SCHOLASTICISM

In his masterly treatment of the roots of Lutheranism, García-Villoslada lists the decadence of late-medieval scholasticism, especially Ockhamism, as a major root¹. What this present study wishes to do is to corroborate the judgment of Villoslada on one point: to show that Luther followed the Ockhamists of the two centuries before his time and, indeed, went one step beyond them. It must therefore be kept in mind that what is to follow deals with only *one* aspect of *one* root of Lutheranism, though it will be seen that it is important in understanding Luther's thought. It is an aspect of late medieval theology which has been missed by nearly all students of the period and, when it has been glimpsed partially by a few, it has not been documented or stressed.

The topic on which we wish to concentrate concerns an application of the notion of divine absolute power. It teaches that the power which God has exercised, or could exercise without changing the natural and supernatural orders He has established, which power is called God's ordained power, *potentia ordinata*, does not exhaust the divine power, but that God retains the power (His absolute power, *potentia absoluta*) to overturn both these orders; and that His absolute power is limited only by the principle of non-contradiction, and not by the divine wisdom or goodness.

About 1300 A.D. philosophers began to apply this notion of divine absolute power to many aspects of the physical, moral, and supernatural orders. For example, they taught that we cannot be sure of the existence of the physical world because God, by His absolute power, could give us life-like sensations of it without it being there; that the only moral imperative is obedience to God, that no other content of the natural or revealed moral law is unchangeable, that God could, by His absolute power, even command us to hate him; and that God, by his absolute power, could sin and be damned in a human nature assumed by Him. These samples of the applications of the notion of divine absolute power give us an idea of the importance of the change in philosophical climate at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Earlier publications have shown that the new climate began with Duns Scotus and spread rapidly through the Franciscans in the

¹ R. GARCÍA-VILLOSLADA, *Raíces históricas del Luteranismo*, Madrid, 1969.

Scotist school and even more so through the Franciscans in the school begun by William of Ockham, since Ockham expanded greatly on Scotus's applications of the notion of divine absolute power².

Not only Franciscan writers embraced the doctrine, though, since it was accepted by Dominicans³, Augustinians⁴, Carmelites⁵, and members of the diocesan clergy⁶. It was present almost everywhere in the fourteenth century, finding its strongest support in the *Commentary on the Sentences* of Peter of Ailly in 1376-77. Peter, in the name of divine absolute power, removed all necessity from the natural and supernatural orders except the principle of non-contradiction and the principle that rational beings must obey God if He commands them⁷. Though peaking in the late fourteenth century, the doctrine was to continue, quite strong, into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. But, in the fifteenth century, it encountered a school which refused to accept it: Thomism⁸.

Martin Luther was thoroughly conversant with the Ockhamism of his day, particularly with the philosophy and theology of William of Ockham (c.1290-1347), Peter of Ailly (1350-1420), and Gabriel Biel (c.1410-1495). This school, for him, was the best fruit of scholasticism. According to Melanchthon, Luther could recite Gabriel and Peter almost verbatim, and he read Ockham's writings often and at length, preferring them to the works of St. Thomas Aquinas or Duns Scotus.

"He could recite Gabriel and the Bishop of Cambrai [Peter of Ailly] almost word by word from memory. He read Ockham's works often and at length. He

² K. BANNACH, *Die Lehre von der doppelten Macht Gottes bei Wilhelm von Ockham*, Wiesbaden, 1975; L. A. KENNEDY, *Early- fourteenth-century Franciscans and Divine Absolute Power*, forthcoming in *Franciscan Studies*; John Went, *O.F.M.*, and *Divine Omnipotence*, in *Franciscan Studies*, 47 (1987), 138-170; Andrew of Novo Castro, *O.F.M.*, and *the Moral Law*, in *Franciscan Studies*, 48 (1988), 28-39; *The Fifteenth Century and Divine Absolute Power*, in *Vivarium*, 27 (1989), 125-152.

³ L. A. KENNEDY, *Robert Holcot, O.P.*, and *Divine Absolute Power*, forthcoming.

⁴ L. A. KENNEDY, *Two Augustinians and Nominalism*, in *Augustiniana*, 38 (1988), 118-128.

⁵ L. A. KENNEDY, *Late Fourteenth-century Theological Scepticism at Oxford*, in *Vivarium*, 23 (1985), 124-151; *The 'Sentences' of Osbert of Pickenham, O.Carm.*, in *Carmelus*, 35 (1988), 178-225; *Michael Aiguani, O.Carm.*, and *Divine Absolute Power*, in *Carmelus*, 37 (1990), 81-87.

⁶ L. A. KENNEDY, *Divine Omnipotence and the Contingency of Creatures, Oxford, 1330-1350*, in *The Modern Schoolman*, 42 (1984-85), 249-258; *The Fifteenth Century and Divine Absolute Power*, in *Vivarium*, 27 (1989), 125-52.

⁷ L. A. KENNEDY, *Peter of Ailly and the Harvest of Fourteenth-century Philosophy*, Lewiston, N. Y., 1986.

⁸ L. A. KENNEDY, *The Fifteenth Century and Divine Absolute Power*, in *Vivarium*, 27 (1989), 125-52.

preferred Ockham's genius to Thomas and Scotus"⁹.

Luther accepted some teachings of Ockhamism and reacted against others. We are not able here to list in detail all these teachings. We are concerned with only one of them which was accepted by Luther. The matter is complicated because Luther may not have been aware that he was accepting it from the Ockhamists, and because, in accepting it, he went beyond it. But a strong case can be made that, if the Ockhamists had not developed their theories of divine absolute power, Luther may never have taught his central doctrine: that we are justified by faith alone.

Let us, then, examine the teaching of the Ockhamists (and some Scotists) concerning justification, see how it was affected by the application to it of the notion of divine absolute power, and finally consider Luther's acceptance of this teaching and his development of it. The Scotists and Ockhamists recognized that, in the present order of things, it is charity, love of God for His own sake, which makes one pleasing to God; it is charity which makes actions acceptable to God and meritorious of eternal life. But these men held that this is true only of the present order; God could establish another order in which a person possessing charity would not be pleasing to God, would not merit, and would not receive eternal life, and in which a person without charity could be pleasing to God, could merit, and could receive eternal life. Such an order could be established by God's absolute power.

These authors therefore considered that there is no *necessary* connection between charity on the one hand and pleasing God, meriting, and entering eternal life, on the other; this connection is *arbitrary*. There is not in charity something which requires that God be pleased with it; being accepted by God, in itself, is independent of charity; it depends solely on God's free decision. This was the common teaching of the Scotists and Ockhamists, and Luther would have read it in Biel's *Commentary on the Sentences*, of which he had a copy.

"Charity is required for salvation not because of charity's excellence but because it pleased God and His most benign will"¹⁰.

⁹ "Gabrielem et Cammeracensem pene ad verbum memoriter recitare poterat. Diu multumque legit scripta Occam. Hujus acumen anteferebat Thomae et Scoto". P. MELANCHTHON, *Oeuvres de Luther*, Wittenberg, 1546, vol. 2, preface; in *Corpus Reformatorum* VI, 159. Quoted by P. VIGNAUX, *Luther, Commentateur des Sentences*, Paris, 1935, 45.

¹⁰ "Quod ergo caritas requiritur ad salutem non est propter perfectionem caritatis sed propter beneplacitum Dei et suae benignissimae voluntatis". *Sentences*, I, d. 17, q. 3, a. 3, nota b; Tübingen, 1973-84, F.

God could, for example, make being pleasing to him, meriting, and being saved, dependent on some other property in a person. This property, said the Scotist Paul Scriptoris, O.F.M. (c.1462-1505), could be any positive entity other than one intrinsically evil.

"Although the habit of charity has been chosen by the divine will so that a person possessing it is worthy of eternal life, still it would be possible for God, by the divine absolute power, to do this for any positive thing to which no intrinsic moral malice is annexed"¹¹.

William Rubi6, O.F.M. (c.1290-after 1336), a Scotist who had read Ockham, said that this property could be any virtue, such as faith, temperance, or courage.

"Thus, if He wanted to decree it for any other virtue, He could decree that, for example, everyone possessing such a virtue (say, faith or temperance or courage) would be accepted into glory"¹².

According to Robert Holcot, O.P. (c.1290-1349), an Ockhamist on many points, this property could be any natural act, such as getting hungry or thirsty.

"God can accept into eternal life any natural acts, such as getting hungry, getting thirsty, stepping down, and so on"¹³.

For Francis of Meyronnes, O.F.M. (c.1285-after 1328), a Scotist, God could give eternal life to anyone possessing any virtue, or any other quality, spiritual or corporeal, such as being curly-haired.

"A second difficulty is whether God could have placed in any other quality or virtue such passive acceptance as has been placed in charity and appropriated by it. I say yes, and not only in one that is infused but also one that is acquired, and not only in a spiritual but also in a physical one, so that, for example, everyone with curly hair would be accepted into eternal life"¹⁴.

¹¹ "Quamquam ille habitus qui est charitas habeat a divina voluntate hanc conditionem quod habens eam est sic dignus [vita eterna], tamen de potentia Dei absoluta esset Deo possibile hanc conditionem ponere in omni ente positivo cui non intrinsece est annexa malicia moralis" *Sentences*, I, d. 17; Tübingen, 1498, fol. 147vb.

¹² "Ita, si voluisset ordinare, de omni alia [virtute] potuisset ut, scilicet, omnis tali virtute, puta fide vel temperantia vel fortitudine, informatus esset ad gloriam acceptatus." *Sentences*, I, d. 46, q. 2; Paris, 1518, fol. 239vb.

¹³ "Deus potest acceptare ad vitam eternam omnes actus naturales ... sicut esurire, sitire, descendere, et huiusmodi". *Sentences*, I, q. 1; Lyons, 1510, F.

¹⁴ "Secunda difficultas est: si talem acceptationem passivam positam et appropriatam charitate potuisset Deus ponere in quacumque alia qualitate vel virtute ... Dico quod sic, non solum infusa sed etiam acquisita, et non solum spirituali verum etiam sensibili, ut scilicet omnis crispus acceptaretur ad vitam eternam". *Sentences*, I, d. 27, q. 2; Venice, 1520, fol. 69vb.

All these doctrines are contained implicitly, of course, in Ockham's teaching that God, by His absolute power, could damn a person possessing charity and reward with eternal life a person not possessing it. These doctrines are contained implicitly in this teaching of Ockham since it is equivalent to making the simple absence of charity what makes a person pleasing to God, capable of meriting, and worthy of eternal life.

"Thus I see no reason why God cannot infuse charity in someone and yet ordain him to eternal punishment, and also why someone actually possessing charity can not be in hell, by God's absolute power, and also why God cannot accept another person, who lacks charity, into eternal life"¹⁵.

This was standard teaching among both Scotists and Ockhamists. The Scotist Paul Scriptoris taught that, by divine absolute power, charity could be compatible with hatred of God¹⁶. This was taught also by Robert Holcot, O.P.¹⁷. Many Ockhamists also held that charity and mortal sin could be compatible; for example, Robert Holcot¹⁸, John Major (1467-1515)¹⁹, and James Almain (d. 1516)²⁰. The Scotists Nicholas de Orbellis, O.F.M. (d. 1475)²¹, and William Rubio²², along with Robert Holcot²³, claimed that persons in the state of mortal sin could be in everlasting bliss. And that God could damn someone possessing charity was taught by Duns Scotus, O.F.M. (1260-1308)²⁴, Peter Aureoli, O.F.M. (c.1280-1322)²⁵, Francis of Meyronnes, O.F.M.²⁶, William Rubio²⁷, Paul Scriptoris²⁸, and Robert Holcot²⁹.

Martin Luther read some of Scotus. We do not know whether he

¹⁵ "Unde non video quin Deus caritatem alicui possit infundere et tamen ordinare ad penam eternam, et etiam quod aliquis actualiter in caritate possit esse in inferno, de potentia Dei absoluta, et etiam potest unum alium non habentem caritatem acceptare ad vitam eternam". *Quaestiones Variæ*, I, in *Opera Theologica*, St. Bonaventure, 1967ff., VIII, 11. See also *Reportatio*, II, q. 15; V, 358.

¹⁶ *Sentences*, I, d. 1; Tübingen, 1498, fol. 50va.

¹⁷ *Determinationes*, IX; Lyons, 1510, E.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, J.

¹⁹ *Sentences*, IV, d. 10, q. 4; Paris, 1519-28, fol. 51vb.

²⁰ *Sentences*, III, d. 17, q. 1; Paris, 1518, fol. 88vb.

²¹ *Sentences*, I, d. 45, q. 1; Paris, 1517, fol. L5vb.

²² *Sentences*, I, d. 46, q. 2; Paris, 1528, fol. 239vb.

²³ *Determinationes*, IX; Lyons, 1510, G.

²⁴ *Opus Oxoniense*, IV, d. 46, q. 1, n. 11; Lyons, 1639, X, 253.

²⁵ *Sentences*, I, d. 44, q. 1, a. 5; Rome, 1596-1605, 1060.

²⁶ *Sentences*, II, d. 27, q. 1; Venice, 1520, fol. 155rb. Also I, d. 27, q. 2; fol. 69va-vb.

²⁷ I, d. 46, q. 2; Paris, 1518, fol. 239vb. See also I, d. 17, q. 1; fol. 146rb.

²⁸ *Sentences*, I, d. 1; Tübingen, 1498, fol. 50va.

²⁹ *Determinationes*, IX; Lyons, 1510, G.

read any of the Scotists we have mentioned or any Ockhamists other than Ockham, Peter of Ailly, and Gabriel Biel. He certainly could have read the printed work of Paul Scriptoris, which appeared in 1498, or of Robert Holcot, which appeared in 1510. And he could have found the same teaching in an unusual book edited by John Picard, O.F.M. (d. before 1506), published in Milan in 1506, *Thesaurus Theologorum*. This book contains selections from the writings of eighteen Franciscans, five Dominicans, five Augustinians, two Carmelites, and three diocesan clergy. The selections follow the structure of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, and the authors quoted are always arranged in the same sequence. The book is a goldmine of information on any particular topic one looks up, especially since it contains quotations from some authors whose works were never printed elsewhere³⁰. Luther could have read in this book the teaching of his Augustinian confrere Gregory of Rimini (c.1300-1358) that God can accept into eternal life persons lacking charity. He could also have seen the teaching of Stephen Brulefer, O.F.M. (d. c.1497), that God, though He now accepts acts informed by charity as worthy of eternal life, could have selected some other virtue, or even a bodily quality.

"God doesn't accept an act informed by charity with absolute, but with conditioned, necessity. And He could have placed that acceptance in some other virtue, and even in a bodily property"³¹.

All Scotists and Ockhamists agreed that, as a matter of revealed fact, God has chosen charity as that which renders a person pleasing to Him, able to merit, and worthy of eternal life. Their speculations, they all admitted, were in the realm of what might have been, and what even now could be if God wished. What Luther did was to say that, *as a matter of fact*, God has chosen not charity but faith as that which makes a person pleasing to Him and destined for eternal life.

"They [the scholastics] call love 'the grace that makes one acceptable', namely, that justifies ... In this manner they completely transfer justification from faith and attribute it solely to love ... But all these things are monstrosities ...

³². For we hold ... that a man is justified by faith ...³³ ... for only faith in

³⁰ There is an account of it in E. WEGERICH, *Bio- bibliographische Notizen über Franziskanerlehrer des 15. Jahrhundert*, in *Franziskanische Studien*, 29 (1942), 178-180.

³¹ "Deus non accipit actum caritate informatum necessitate absoluta, bene conditionata. Et illam acceptationem potuisset ponere in alia virtute, et etiam in habitu corporali". J. PICARD, *Thesaurus Theologorum*, Part I, d. 17; Milan, 1506, fol. 107ra.

³² *Lectures on Galatians*, V, 6; in *Luther's Works*, St. Louis and Philadelphia, 1957ff., v. 27, p. 28.

³³ *Lectures on Romans*, III, 28; *ibid.*, v. 25, p. 33.

the word of Christ justifies ..."³⁴.

Luther was the first person, the first scholastic, to teach this. In so doing he accepted the teaching that God could make something other than charity (namely, faith) that which justifies human beings, that is, makes them pleasing to God and destined for eternal life. And he went beyond his scholastic sources by saying that this is what God has actually done³⁵.

Let us now see what led Luther to accept this doctrine. It is well known that he was worried about his own salvation. He agonized over it, was tormented by the thought that he might be damned, and did not see how he could be sure of avoiding serious sin and displeasing God. This "dark night of the soul" lasted for a long while, but it came to an end during the academic year 1518-19 when he had an experience in the tower in his monastery in Wittenberg. He often spoke of it later, and especially in the preface to the 1545 Latin edition of his works. The experience was definitive for him, flooding him with joy. What he saw was that God justifies not by faith vivified by charity but by faith alone. And he immediately began to interpret the whole of Scripture in accordance with this insight. Indeed, it was to become the cornerstone of his teaching.

"However I, who felt myself to be a sinner with a most troubled conscience before God, though I lived as a faultless monk, could not trust that God was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, indeed I hated, this just God who punishes sinners. I raged with a violent, confused conscience. Then I began to understand 'God's justice' as that justice by which a just man lives, that is, one based on faith. At this point I felt myself to be completely reborn, and to have entered through the open gates of Paradise itself. Thereupon the whole of Scripture showed me a new face straightway"³⁶.

Why was it that this brought Luther such joy? The answer is that it provided him with two helps in solving his anguish over his being saved. First, Catholic teaching, repeated in the Council of Trent, is that no one

³⁴ *Proceedings at Augsburg*; *ibid.*, v. 31, p. 271. See also *The Freedom of a Christian*; *ibid.*, v. 31, p. 366.

³⁵ See H. DENIFLE, *Luther et le Luthéranisme*, trans. J. PAQUIER, III; Paris, 1912, 224.

³⁶ "Ego autem, qui me, utcumque irreprehensibilis monachus vivebam, sentirem coram Deo esse peccatorem inquietissimae conscientiae, nec mea satisfactione placatum confidere possem. Non amabam, imo odiebam, iustum et punientem peccatores Deum ... Furebam ita saeva et perturbata conscientia ... Ibi 'iusticiam Dei' coepi intelligere eam qua iustus dono Dei vivit, nempe ex fide ... Hic me prorsus renatum esse sensi, et apertis portis in ipsum [text: ipsam] paradisum intrasse. Ibi continuo alia mihi facies totius Scripturae apparuit". *Opera Omnia*, prologue, Jena, 1564, fol. 5v-6r. For the dating of the Tower Experience see H. GRISAR, *Luther*, I, London, 1913, 378 and 386. See also R. WEIJENBORG, *La charité dans la première théologie de Luther (1509-1515)*, in *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, 45 (1950), 645-46.

can be absolutely sure here on earth that he possesses the love of God; the most he can have is "moral" certainty.

"... since no one can know, with the certainty of faith which excludes all error, that he has attained to the grace of God³⁷. Though a person may boast that he has trust and confidence that his sins have been forgiven, and may rely on that trust alone, we cannot say that his sins are forgiven, or have been forgiven"³⁸.

On the other hand, Luther saw, we can be quite sure that we have faith. If faith, then, of itself justifies, we can know for sure that we are justified, that is, that we have God's favor, and that we will go to heaven when we die.

The second help Luther found in his new teaching is that faith is compatible with mortal sin. This was traditional Catholic teaching, of course, though the Church held that mortal sin is incompatible with being justified. Luther was to hold that faith is compatible with mortal sin and that mortal sin is compatible with being justified. He could hold such a teaching because, for him, justification is produced by God accepting a person. It does not depend of itself on something in the soul. Thus God could accept a person with faith alone; the person would not need to possess love of God, and could be in the state of mortal sin. God simply would not "impute" the sin.

"I take grace here to be, properly speaking, God's favor, as is right, and not to be a quality in the soul, as our modern theologians have taught³⁹. Thirdly, one who has faith is not damned even if he sins⁴⁰. Thus you see how rich a Christian or baptized man is, who cannot lose his salvation even if he wants to, no matter how great his sins, unless he refuses to believe⁴¹. Therefore it is true that before Him we are always in sins ...⁴² Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly ... No sin will separate us from the Lamb, even though we commit fornication and murder a thousand

³⁷ "... cum nullus scire valeat, certitudine fidei cui non potest subesse falsum, se gratiam Dei esse consecutum". *Canones et Decreta ... Concilii Tridentini*, sess. 6, cap. 9; Rome, 1564, fol. C6r.

³⁸ "Nemini tamen fiduciam et certitudinem remissionis peccatorum iactanti, et in ea sola quiescenti, peccata dimitti vel dimissa esse, dicendum est". Ibid.

³⁹ "Gratiam accipio hic proprie pro favore Dei, sicut debet, non pro qualitate anime, ut nostri recentiores docuerunt". *D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Weimar, 1881ff., VIII, 106, lines 10-11. See also line 20.

⁴⁰ "Tercio, hanc [fidem] qui habet, etiam si peccet, non damnatur". *Sermo de triplici iusticia*, ibid., II, 45, line 9.

⁴¹ "Ita vides quam dives sit homo Christianus sive baptizatus, qui etiam volens non potest perdere salutem suam quantiscunque peccatis nisi nolit credere". *De captivitate Babylonica*, ibid., II, 529, lines 11-13.

⁴² *First Lecture on the Psalms*, Psalm 51; in *Luther's Works*, v. 10, p. 237. See also B. A. GERRISH, *Grace and Reason*, Oxford, 1962, 114-15.

times a day⁴³. Therefore sin remains in the spiritual man ... For we are not called to ease but to a struggle against our passions, which would not be without guilt (for they really are sins and truly damnable) if the mercy of God did not refrain from imputing them to us"⁴⁴.

It is to the credit of Paquier that he saw not only that Luther transferred from charity to faith that in the person which makes him pleasing to God but also that Luther went further and made being in sin no obstacle to being pleasing to God.

"He will even push these principles to their ultimate consequences. He will thus go still further than his ancient masters. *As a matter of principle*, said the Ockhamists, God could have given a natural act a supernatural merit. *As a matter of fact*, says Luther, He goes one step further: He imputes the merits of Jesus Christ to a man whose nature and will remain evil, and He calls him to heaven"⁴⁵.

Ozment has also shown, in an important article, that Luther was the first one to teach that a person is justified by faith alone and that, while justified, he remains a sinner⁴⁶.

Having formulated his new doctrine, it was necessary for Luther to find a basis for it in Scripture and in Catholic tradition. He thought that he had successfully done so as regards the former, but realized that it was impossible as regards the latter. Accordingly he attacked the Pope and General Councils and charged them with teaching error. And, to do this, he had to interpret Scripture so as to reduce and, finally, nullify the authority of the Pope and the Councils.

We may now summarize the argument thus far:

1. Martin Luther was very worried about the certainty of his salvation.
2. He found the answer to this worry in his Tower Experience.
3. He taught that justification is brought about by faith alone.
4. For him, justification is acceptance by God, no intrinsic quality in a person being absolutely necessary. God could base acceptance on any quality He wished.
5. For Luther, being justified is compatible with being in the state of

⁴³ *Letter to Melanchthon, Aug. 1, 1521; in Luther's Works*, v. 48, p. 282.

⁴⁴ *Commentary on Romans; ibid.*, v. 25, p. 339.

⁴⁵ "Il poussera même ces principes à leur dernières conséquences; ainsi, il ira encore plus loin que ses anciens maîtres. *De droit*, disaient les nominalistes, Dieu pourrait donner à un acte naturel un mérite surnaturel. *De fait*, dit Luther, il va plus loin encore; à un homme dont la nature et la volonté demeurent mauvaises, il impute les mérites de Jésus-Christ, et il l'appelle au ciel". J. PAQUIER, *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, Paris, 1899ff., IX, 1252-53. Emphasis has been added.

⁴⁶ S. E. OZMENT, *Homo Viator: Luther and Late Medieval Theology*, in *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective*, ed. S. E. OZMENT, Chicago, 1971, 142-54.

mortal sin.

6. Scotists and Ockhamists for two centuries before Luther taught that justification is acceptance by God, no intrinsic quality in a person being absolutely necessary. God could accept any quality He wished as a condition for justification.

7. And, according to Scotists and Ockhamists, being justified could be compatible with mortal sin; indeed, mortal sin could be the condition making one acceptable to God.

8. Luther therefore could have found in his scholastic predecessors much of the material for his theology of justification. What he did was to say that what these writers had considered a possibility he considered to be actually the case. He held that God justifies human beings by faith, not charity; and that faith and justification are compatible with being in the state of mortal sin. The scholastics he read had held that God could have justified us by faith, and that justification could be compatible with being in the state of mortal sin.

This study claims to show that Luther's two teachings concerning justification (that it is brought about by faith alone, and that it is compatible with being in the state of mortal sin) can be found, not as *de facto* true but as *de iure* possible by divine absolute power, in the Scotists and Ockhamists in the two hundred years preceding Luther. It is possible that Luther was not explicitly aware that he was following them in this matter, but it is unlikely that he would ever have thought of this doctrine if the materials for it had not been at hand in many of his scholastic predecessors.

One need only read the *Sentences* of Peter of Ailly to see the pitiful state of scholastic philosophy and theology in the pre-Reformation period. That such a person as Peter, perhaps the leading ecclesiastic of his day, could teach a complete philosophical scepticism shows to what an extent the fideism of Scotus, and especially of Ockham, had pervaded the Christian consciousness. Whether fideism produced the obsession with the notion of divine absolute power, or the latter produced the former, there is no doubt that they accompanied one another and were the chief hallmarks of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century thought. Among the many unfortunate results of the applications of the notion of divine absolute power was the one we have seen. To teach that love of God could be dispensed with in the supernatural order trivializes this love and renders the divine plan highly arbitrary. Once this has been accepted it is but a short step to assert the primacy of faith.

This study has pointed out one of the fruits of toying with the notion of divine absolute power; and it is "by their fruits that you will

know things". This notion is not, as Weijenborg asserts when dealing with Gabriel Biel, a "fairly innocent" one⁴⁷. In our contemporary technological society it seems to be true that, once something becomes possible, sooner or later it is done, no matter how abhorrent others may find this. The incessant rehearsal, by Luther's predecessors, of extreme possibilities in the order of salvation was also bound to be followed by what others considered merely a possibility being alleged as an actuality.

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⁴⁷ "Si le réformateur a réellement compris, même superficiellement, l'enseignement gabrieliste ... il ne pourrait que difficilement trouver du venin dans la distinction assez innocente des deux puissances". R. WEIJENBORG, *La charité dans la première théologie de Luther (1509-1515)*, in *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, 45 (1950), 628.