

The Significance of the *Sola Fide* and the *Sola Gratia* in the Theologies of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) and Martin Luther (1483-1546)¹

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Introduction

In this paper I would like to articulate how the reform grounded on careful bible studies in the 16th century preceding the Tridentine Council had a parallel in the reform of the 12th century preceding the 4th Lateran Council. In both reforms, one strain of theologians endeavoured to revitalize an “evangelical” reading of the bible, and in these endeavours the Pauline letters and Matthew 5 seen through the lenses of John played a key role,² whereas another strain stressed canon law and interpreted the bible through this spectrum.³ In both reforms, if we are to grasp their true meaning and scope, it is of paramount significance to avoid reading later theology into texts, which both in time and scope preclude such a reading. In the 12th century reform Bernard of Clairvaux was a key figure as in the 16th century reform Luther was a key figure, and as we should not read 13th century Scholasticism of Thomas Aquinas or 20th century Neo-Scholasticism into Bernard’s texts, we should not read 17th century orthodoxy or 20th century neo-orthodoxy into Luther’s texts.⁴

In the following, I will concentrate on the two principles considered central to the Lutheran reformation in order to outline similarities or at least a structural continuity between Bernard and Luther, namely the principles of *sola fide* and of *sola gratia*.

But first a brief account of the 12th Century reform movement.

¹ This presentation on the special session “Luther in Medieval Context” at the Medieval Congress in Kalamazoo 2010 is an abbreviated and slightly altered version of an article with the same title in *Luther-Bulletin* (December 2009): 20-43. In the latter I also relate Luther’s reform principles to those of the Italian reform Catholics during the Tridentine and throw in a perspective on the abuse of the constructed term “mysticism”.

² Bernard’s *De diligendo Deo* is just one but a very good example of that. In this treatise Bernard builds his case around 1 John 4: 20 (God loved us first) in conjunction with e.g. Rom 4: 2 (creation is God’s gift), Matthew 5: 43-48 and Mark 12: 29-34 (Deut 6:4) (the love of God, love of self and neighbour and love of enemy). On Luther’s bible reading as “Paul read and understood through John”, see Bo Holm, “Luthers dobbelte udlægnings-‘princip’: Skriften alene – troen alene,” Niels Thomsen & Henrik Brandt-Pedersen (eds), *Det står skrevet. Essays om 2000 års bibelfortolkning*, København: Anis 2004: 29.

³ There is no doubt that Bernard was opposed to the concentration of power in Rome when it acted according to Canon law solely and not according to the gospel (see note 4 below). In this respect Bernard is as vehement as Luther.

⁴ In my endeavors to make a forward reading of Bernard, I will mainly cite from or refer to his Latin writings as they are rendered in Jean Leclercq et al (eds), *Sancti Bernardi Opera I-VIII*, Rome 1957-1977, hereafter abbreviated SBO. To make an equally forward reading of Luther, I will mainly cite from *Martin Luther, Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar Ausgabe), Weimar 1883ff, hereafter abbreviated WA.

The Reform of the 12th Century and the scripture alone⁵

The 12th century was a time of reform that primarily took the form of a renewal of the traditional theology, especially the doctrine of grace and salvation central also to the understanding of the sacraments and the church. As pointed out by Leclercq and Constable, the renewal led to a diversification of theologies within three theological groupings: scholastic theologies, monastic theologies, and the theologies of intellectual circles. It culminated in the years between 1125 and 1150 when Bernard's career was at its height. Bernard's wish for renewal is spelled out in hard criticism of the establishment at large, not least of the church for abandoning a true and honest Christian life⁶ - a critique he based on in-depth bible studies as well as on his studies of texts by such figures as Origen and Augustine, thus combining eastern and western theology in his own cocktail. Like many of his contemporaries and the 16th century reformers, Bernard wanted to resume the ideals of the primitive church (*ecclesia primitiva*) associated with peace and social harmony (Acts 4:32). The most important ideal of the time was the ideal of apostolic life, a reform of the life of the desert fathers. According to the Cistercians this apostolic life could be realized as a reviving of the Benedictine Rule, but even more so by reviving Paul's own description of his apostolate as it was patterned in scripture: as the shame of the cross. Several times Bernard reminds his ecclesial superiors that a true apostolic ministry, following the apostolate as defined by Paul (1

⁵ The following account is based on my book, *Bernhard of Clairvaux. Theolog eller mystiker?*, Copenhagen: Anis 2008: 25-30. See also the groundbreaking articles by Giles Constable, "Renewal and Reform in Religious Life: Concepts and Realities", and Jean Leclercq, "The Renewal of Theology", in Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable, *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, Oxford: Clarendon 1982: 37-67 and 68-87.

⁶ Bernard's *De consideratione libri V* (SBO III: 393-493). *De consideratione* (hereafter abbreviated *Csi*) was written 1148-53 for pope Eugene III and is not only a defence for the separation of the two swords, the word (*verbum Dei*) of the church and the military force of the king, but *a fortiori* an attack on the pope and his institution for not respecting this separation and rather swinging the secular sword, for abuse of power, and for putting more weight on canon law than on what is the church's sole task: to preach the word of God. That this was not a new insight in light of his disappointing experiences from the second crusade is visible from the fact that he stated the very same in his *De moribus et Officio episcoporum* (hereafter abbreviated *Mor*) written for archbishop Henry of Sens c.1127 (SBO VII: 100-131) and in his *Sermo de Conversione ad clericos* (hereafter abbreviated *Conv*) written for the clerics in Paris c. 1140 (SBO IV: 69-116).

Cor 2:2; Gal 6:14) , has nothing to do with dominion, but everything to do with serving God and the people of God by way of the word.⁷

Significant to Bernard's methodology is the combination of *sola scriptura* and experience, which as its main purpose has the communication of the gospel (*evangelizare*). Bernard time and again points to Paul's didactics and pedagogical strategy when he explicates how this evangelization, the communication of the Christian message in and through Christ, should take place. Bernard foremost explicates this method in the Song of Songs,⁸ where it is laid out by way of his rich metaphorical theology in his first ten sermons. Since this text is so complex, with an on the surface rather erotic content, his addressee is solely the educated monk who, grounded on solid bible studies and on his own experience (SC 3), is able to understand the Song of Songs in its true sense of ceremonious praise of God. It should be noted, however, that what Bernard in SC 3 determines experience comes close to what Luther would most often simply call faith or the fruits of faith. Thus Bernard explicates the experience of the monks' as faith's victory over the world (cf. 1 John 5:4) through God's wonderful deeds, through the gift of a new life, the forgiveness of sins and his promises. In other words, Bernard highlights the experience of a faith given by God, the faith in God's forgiveness of sins and God's promises, which later becomes central in Luther's teaching. Again, pondering on Psalm 39, Bernard points to God as the sole source of life and faith:

If you look back on your experience, is it not in that victory by which your faith overcomes the world, in 'your exit from the horrible pit and out of the slough of the marsh' (Ps 39:3), that you yourselves sing a new song to the Lord for all the marvels he has performed? Again, when he purposed to 'settle your feet on a rock and to direct your steps' (Ps 39:3-4), then too, I feel certain, a new song was sounding on your lips, a song to our God for his gracious renewal of your life. When you repented he not only forgave your sins but even promised rewards, so that rejoicing in the hope of

⁷ In his letter to Archbishop Henry of Sens, Bernard sums it up in this one-liner: "In omnibus, exemplo Apostoli, honorificabitur ministerium vestrum: ministerium, inquam, non dominium." Mor I,3 (SBO VII, 103). The same formulation is to be found in Csi V. See also SC 25, 8 where Bernard identifies the honour of the apostolate as that of the shame of the cross (Gal 6:14), and Csi II, 12 and IV, 12, where he signifies the cross as "our heritage".

⁸ Bernard wrote 86 sermons on the Song of Songs, beginning at the Advent of 1135 and continuing until his death in 1153. I will quote the Latin wording from SBO I and II, these *Sermones super Cantica Cantorum* hereafter abbreviated SC.

benefits to come, you sing of the Lord's ways: 'how great is the glory of the Lord (Ps 137:5).'⁹

As can be seen from the citation, Bernard in the genre of the sermon from the very inception emphasizes the importance of scripture and faith (*fides*) together as *the* basis of a Christian life. Such a Christian life is God's giving of a new life (*pro indulta novitate vitae*) constituted by God's forgiving of sins (*peccata dimisit*) in tandem with his giving promises for a better future (*promisit ...spe futurorum bonorum*). The emphasis is not on some airy idea of an individual experience but on the experience from faith. Already in SC 1, Bernard underlines that everything is God-given, and that even the doxological praise of God, the sublime example of which is the Song of Songs, is a gift of God (SC 1, 10). In this song God who is love (*caritas*) and the grown human (*homo*) meet in what is metaphorically described as a kiss (*osculum*), a picture taken directly from the Song (SC 1, 11). Simultaneously, Bernard stresses that such an experience through faith is only the result of daily struggles (*in quotidianis exercitiis et bellis*), human terrestrial life being an ongoing warfare in order to keep from what is carnal, mundane and devilish (SC 1, 9).¹⁰

The sermons on the Song of Songs are emblematic for Bernard's metaphorical theology, in which he constantly employs biblical metaphors, translates them into the everyday life of his audience, and combines them with images or experiences from that everyday life in order to communicate the Christian *euangelion*. In Bernard's perception, scripture by way of human words and imagery opens the way to understanding God's mysteries, making God enter our affections,¹¹ whereby he strikes the chords of Luther's understanding of scripture as its own interpreter (*scriptura sui ipsius interpres*),¹² though avoiding the problems of Luther's perhaps too simply put principle.

⁹ SC 1, 9: "Ceterum vos, si vestram experientiam advertatis, nonne in victoria qua vicit mundum fides vestra, et in exitu vestro de lacu miseriae et de luto faecis, cantastis et ipsi Domino canticum novum quia mirabilia fecit? Rursus cum adiecit statuere supra petram pedes vestros et dirigere gressus vestros, puto quod et tunc nihilominus pro indulta novitate vitae immissum sit in os vestrum canticum novum, carmen Deo nostro. Qui, cum paenitentibus vobis non solum peccata dimisit, sed insuper promisit et praemia, non multo magis spe gaudente futurorum bonorum, cantastis in viis Domini, quoniam magna est Gloria Domini?" The English translations in this article are from Kilian Walsh, *Bernard of Clairvaux. On the Song of Songs I: sermons 1-20*, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications 1981.

¹⁰ See Reinhold Seeberg, *Die religiösen Grundgedanken des jungen Luther und ihr Verhältnis zu dem Ockamismus und der deutschen Mystik*, Berlin und Leipzig: Verlag von Walter de Gruyter & Co. 1931: 30-31.

¹¹ In a formulation knit together from Eph 5:15, 1 Cor 2:7 and Prov 11:20, Bernard explains it thus in SC 74, 2: "Nos autem in expositione sacri mysticque eloquii caute et simpliciter ambulantes, geramus morem Scripturae, quae nostris verbis sapientiam in mysterio absconditam loquitur; nostris affectibus Deum, dum figurat, insinuat." (SBO II, 240f).

¹² Luther formulated this much debated principle in his response to pope Leo X's bull "Exsurge Domine" *Assertio omnium articulorum M. Lutheri per bullam Leonis X. novissimam damnatorum* (1521), in which he defended any of

One can to a great extent read the whole pattern in Bernard's reformation theology in his 86 sermons on the Song of Songs. It is therefore little wonder that Luther quite early was attracted to these sermons by Bernard. Of his more than 500 citations from Bernard's texts, Luther's elaborate citations are primarily to Bernard's *Sermones super Cantica Canticorum*.¹³ But Luther also favoured Bernard's 125 sermons to the liturgical year, *Sermones per Annum*, normally considered to contain the weightiest part of his Christology.

The principle of faith alone

In 1931, the Lutheran dialectical scholar Reinhold Seeberg published a booklet in which he compared the so-called mysticism of Ockham with that of Luther. Seeberg here propagated an overwhelming difference between Luther's understanding of faith and that of the mystics', which he contended was faith as "Einzelausführung", though he did find Luther inspired by the mystics in the sense of an "Eindruck und Ausdruck einer Lebensvereinigung mit Gott".¹⁴ I shall not go into a discussion whether there may be some truth in such a claim with regard to Luther as opposed to Ockham. Rather, I would like to highlight two other points. Firstly, one could dismiss Seeberg's claim as simply a typical example of Lutheran scholarly arrogance and reductionism of the dialectical theology, which was preoccupied with classifying theology according to standards set by their own new Luther research. Secondly, even if one buys into the mysticism classification, the contention that Luther's perception of faith should be fundamentally different from that of the so-called mystics and of Bernard simply does not hold. In Bernard's case, the formulations from SC 1, 9 (cf. above) alone contradicts Seeberg's claim that the mystics perceive faith as a once and for all experience. Like Luther, Bernard, actually emphasizes that faith is a quotidian struggle and hence an ongoing process.

Karl- Heinz zur Mühlen's study of Luther falls within the same tradition as Seeberg and Vogelsang where it is important to document Luther's originality in his "Ockamistic training". In this vein, zur Mühlen holds that Bernard's bridal mysticism does not build on faith, only on experience. According to zur Mühlen Bernard's bridal mysticism is a state of *amor extaticus* where bride and bridegroom are united in a love union – in practice as a "mystical experience" of

the 41 articles for which he was condemned as binding truths, exactly because they are grounded in scripture. For the formulations on the meaning and significance of scripture, see esp. WA VII, 96,4 -99,2.

¹³ According to Theo Bell, Luther cited directly and indirectly 125 times from Bernard's sermons on the Song of Songs, and of these about one third are references to Bernard's *Perdite vixi* in SC 20, 1. *Divus Bernhardus: Bernhard von Clairvaux in Martin Luthers Schriften*, Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern 1993: 361.

¹⁴ Seeberg 1931: 29-30.

“excessus”, which is quite in contrast with Luther’s perception of the union of bride and bridegroom through the word in a “raptus” of faith. With a reference to Luther’s sermon on Hebrews 3-7, zur Mühlen states that for Luther faith is the sole uniting factor between the heart of man and God, uniting it with the word of God. Zur Mühlen therefore claims that Luther transferred the so-called *amor extaticus* leading to the mystical rapture to faith and finds proof for his claim in the fact that Luther normally translates “faith” (*fides*) with “confidence” (*fiducia*), an argument also found with Seeberg.¹⁵

However, one should not overlook the fact that when making these claims, zur Mühlen does not read or build his interpretation on Bernard’s own texts. Whilst citing Luther’s own text, zur Mühlen does not give this privilege to Bernard and thus does not base his signification of Bernard’s “Brautmystik” on a reading of Bernard’s own text, but on one single interpretation of Bernard’s “Brautmystik”, namely that of Étienne Gilson. Now, Gilson was a prominent Thomist theologian, whose great achievement in the 1930s was to rehabilitate Bernard as a theologian of the highest esteem alongside Thomas. But in the enterprise of comparing Bernard’s and Luther’s theologies, Gilson was not a neutral reader. It was Gilson’s goal to show that his understanding of “théologie mystique” was rooted in a Catholic theology and tradition very far from a Lutheran theology. As part and parcel of his rehabilitation of Bernard, Gilson was eager to keep a “différence radicale” between, on the one hand, his own holy Bernard in juxtaposition with his “théologie mystique” read through Thomist lenses (running the risk of making Bernard a pre-Thomist) and, on the other hand, the heretic Luther and his doctrine of justification.¹⁶ Either zur Mühlen overlooked this or he had shared interests, only from a Lutheran point of view.¹⁷

Having sketched this interest by what has been a dominating vein in Lutheran scholarship it is time to sketch what Bernard actually says about faith.

¹⁵ Karl Heinz zur Mühlen, *Nos extra nos. Luthers Theologie zwischen Mystik und Scholastik*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1972:106-07; Seeberg 1931: 26-27. Berndt Hamm seems in strange ways to end up the same place, equating Bernard with a peculiar understanding of “Gottesliebe im Mittelalter” to be absolutely discerned from, though vaguely evidenced, the “Zentralstellung des allein rechtfertigenden Glaubens in der Reformation”, in “Von der Gottesliebe des Mittelalters zum Glauben Luthers”: 35. Cf. above, note 27.

¹⁶ Étienne Gilson, *La théologie mystique de saint Bernard*, Paris : Vrin 1980 (4th edition): 59 and 169. Gilson’s groundbreaking book was originally published in 1934.

¹⁷ It has been typical of particularly German Lutheran scholarship to distinguish between theology and the so-called mysticism. In this vein, German Lutheran scholars from Ritschl over Harnack and Seeberg to the Oberman-school have tended to stress scholastic theology as a real theology comparable to Luther’s in order to set the “différence radicale”, at the expense of monastic theology such as Bernard’s despite the fact that Luther preferred the latter at the expense of the former. See my article, “Justification and Grace. Did Luther Discover a New Theology or Did He Discover Anew the Theology of Justification and Grace?”, *Studia Theologica* vol. 57, no. 2 (2003): 143-163, esp. 145-149. For the same strategy in Bernhard Lohse’s works, see my article, “Ein fürtrefflicher Munch. Luther and the Living out of Faith,” in Christoph Bultmann, Volker Leppin and Andreas Lindner (eds), *Luther und das monastische Erbe*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2007: 221-241.

“I too believe that man is saved through faith alone.”¹⁸

Bernard’s clear statement that man is saved through faith alone falls in his famous response to Hugh of St. Victor. In a letter, now lost, Hugh addressed Bernard about a soteriology he found near sectarian.¹⁹ Bernard in his response vehemently stresses the universality of God’s salvation as well as God’s grace being prior to damnation, wherefore preaching is and must be a public act in the church of believers (Ep. 77, 2-3). This, on the other hand, means that faith and obedience cannot be required from those who have never heard the gospel proclaimed, for faith is not part of natural law (*lex naturalis*), but part of the word of grace (*verbi gratia*). Consequently, proclamation must precede faith, as faith comes from hearing the word of God (*fides ex auditu*) (cf. Rom 10:14-17). Like Luther later, Bernard time and again emphasizes that faith is a gift of God and that this faith leads to (or rather: is) a praising of God. In other words: God is both the subject and the object of faith. Therefore, in Bernard’s theology the relation between faith and love is precisely the opposite of that laid out by Gilson and zur Mühlen, and thus very close to Luther’s understanding:

In Bernard’s understanding, faith can never be dissociated from the golden rule (Deut 6:4-5; Mark 12:29-34; Matthew 22:34-40; Matthew 5:43-48), a stance not unlike Luther’s in for example his *Treatise on Good Works*: “real good works spring from faith” Quite on the contrary, it is a gift and an expression of God’s love that will lead to man’s love for God as well as for the

¹⁸ Ep 77, 8: “credens et ipse sola fide hominem posse salvari.” Bernard formulates this clear statement in 1125 in the famous letter to Hugh of St. Victor, in which he explicates his view on the sacraments – a letter that was paradigmatic for Hugh’s later doctrine on the sacraments. Bernard explains that baptism is not in itself salvific. It has to be preceded and accompanied by the proclamation of the word of God (SBO VII, 184-200), a teaching that Hugh echoes and for which he, like Bernard, slides into oblivion of a church that prefers scholastic theology with a Thomistic bent. Bernard repeats his teaching in SC 66, which is directed toward a strong selection teaching along with a Donatist understanding of ministry by sectarian groupings in Germany in 1143-45. See esp. SC 66, 7-9 (SBO II, 182-184).

¹⁹ Abelard’s doctrine on God’s predestined selection, a very strong double predestination that may have inspired Calvin, translates Augustine’s doctrine of hereditary sin into a doctrine of hereditary abilities and hereditary punishment. See *Expositio in epistolam Pauli ad romanos*, in *Petri Abaelardi Opera Theologica, Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio medaievalis* 11, Turnholti: Brepols 1969: 39-340. William of St. Thierry was so shocked that he asked Bernard to enter the matter and to begin the case against Abelard for making Christ’s salvation into a mockery. Cf. my article, “Beåndet af nåde til moden menneskelighed” (“In-spired by Grace to Mature Humanity”), Bo Holm and Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen (eds), *Nåden og den fri vilje*, Copenhagen: Anis 2006. Edward Little and Damien Van den Eynde, however, have shown that Bernard very likely was warned against Abelard and his school already around 1125 by Hugh – long before the condemnation of Abelard in 1140. Hugh’s letter seems to have posed questions concerning the teaching of Abelard or someone from his school in that both the highly selective salvation doctrine and intention moral are raised as specific problematic questions. But Bernard, who was befriended with Abelard, would not compromise his powerful friend by mentioning his name, despite his uneasiness with Abelard’s teachings. See E. Little, “Relations between St. Bernard and Abelard before 1139”, Basil Pennington (ed), *Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, Studies Commemorating the Eighth Centenary of his Canonization*, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications 1977: 165; and D. van den Eynde, *Essai sur la succession et la date des écrits de Hugues de Saint-Victor*, Rome: Pontificium Athenaeum Antonianum 1960: 132-137.

human being, for oneself and for one's neighbour and eventually one's enemy, in a circulation of love, as Bernard explicates it in his treatise *De diligendo Deo* (8, 23-29).²⁰ The faith that comes from God's love and in the line of Pauline theology is aimed at inter-human love, love of neighbour and love of the body will keep humans back from rapture (Dil 8, 30). Bernard holds that the "rapture" [not an "excessus" as Seeberg would have it!] of the soul which is its most perfect and highest state, cannot ... take place before the resurrection of the bodies" (Dil 9, 30).²¹ Bernard continues his emphasis on this earthly life by stressing the goodness of the body/flesh: "While in the flesh it [the soul] moves by faith which necessarily acts through charity, for if it does not act, it dies" (1 Cor 5:7 and Gal 5:6).

Faith's testimony consists of elements that we re-find in Luther's concept of faith which is a belief in God's forgiveness *propter Christum* and Christ's death on the cross *pro nobis*: man's sins are forgiven (SC 1, 9) as Christ died for our sins (*propter delicta nostra*) and rose for our justification (*propter iustificationem*), and as God sent the Holy Spirit for our protection (*ad protectionem nostram*) and shall return for our consummation (*consummationem nostram*) (Dil 3, 9). Also, in a manner not seen before, Bernard stresses that faith needs Christ as the crucified, both because Christ as the crucified combated evil and because his crucifixion was an redeeming act for the individual, *pro me*, and for humanity as such, *pro nobis*.²²

In response to zur Mühlen's view of Bernard's "Brautmystik", it is important to stress that Bernard does not begin to speak by way of the nuptial imagery. In fact it is not till he has set the scene of faith as faith in God, creator and saviour, Bernard introduces the metaphor of the wedding and marriage between God and the human world, either as the relationship between God and the individual (the soul) or as the relationship between God and the whole church. And when explicating the character of this divine-human bond, Bernard underscores that this marriage is not a contract, as marriages in the feudal society would be, but an expression of the spontaneity of love

²⁰ *De diligendo Deo* is hereafter abbreviated Dil.

²¹ English translation by Robert Walton, *On Loving God*, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications 1973 and 1995 from the Latin in SBO III, 111-154.

²² For example SC 43, 4: "Propterea haec mihi in ore frequenter, sicut vos scitis; haec in corde semper, sicut Deus: haec stilo meo admodum familiaria, sicut apparet; haec mea subtilior, interior philosophia, scire Iesum, et hunc crucifixum." (SBO II, 43). Bernard quotes 1 Cor 2:2 ("I will know of nothing else than Jesus Christ, and him as crucified") at least 15 times and Gal 6:14 ("As for me, I can boast of nothing else but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ") 17 times, and thus clearly promotes a Pauline theology of the cross. For a list of all references, see Ulrich Köpf, "Schriftauslegung als Ort der Kreuzestheologie", in Dieter R. Bauer and Gotthard Fuchs (eds.), *Bernhard von Clairvaux und der Beginn der Moderne*, Innsbruck/Wien: Tyrolia Verlag 1996: 194-213, here 196, notes 14 and 16. Köpf coins Bernard's theology of the cross an "Umorientierung" in that Bernard employs the cross both in an objective sense as a victory over evil and in a subjective sense as Christ's redeeming act *pro me* and *pro nobis*.

that is in itself a reward.²³ Two points thus should be made: (1) Bernard does not engage in the bridal imagery or even elaborate on the relationship between God and man till SC 7; (2) This imagery, however, is solely aimed at explicating the character of the God relationship as one of faith. By way of this imagery, Bernard describes how both the individual soul, who loves the Word (SC 7, 2), and the church, who loves Christ (SC 12, 11), have a constant longing for their bridegroom, Christ, with whom they are united in faith and in hope. The faithful bride is wandering in faith and in the shade of faith, the flesh of Christ, not suited for seeing God face to face while here on earth (SC 48, 7), the church being the *communio fidelium* where believers share in the same love and hope for life eternal in the triune God.²⁴ Salvation is thus protologically programmed in faith (Christ is *donum*) and is to be acted anticipatorily, however imperfect, in that God forms man after Christ's self-giving love (Christ is *exemplum*).²⁵

This same understanding of God being hidden from humans not only outside of faith (*extra fidem*), but also in faith (*in fide*), since believers live in God's protective shade (*in umbraculo*) we find almost *verbatim* by the young Luther in a comment to Ps 90 (91) from 1515.²⁶ Heiko Oberman who, siding with Bernhard Lohse, admitted that Luther equated contemplation and faith²⁷ just like Bernard ("to have believed is to have seen"; SC 70, 2). Nonetheless, whilst

²³ Dil 1, 17 and esp. 4, 17: "affectus est, non contractus amor redditur". It will not be inaccurate to render affectus as the spontaneity of love or the powerful desire, for God. Bernard seems to have inspired Luther, who vehemently stresses the spontaneity of Christian faith in his *Tractatus de libertate Christiana/Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen*. WA 749-78; LStA 2, 263-309. Bernard also seems to have inspired Luther in his exposition of the marriage between bride and groom as this wonderful duel. For this, see my article "Justification and Grace" (cf. note 38): 154.

²⁴ SC 12,11: "Gratias tibi, Domine Iesu, qui nos carissimae Ecclesiae tuae aggregare dignatus es, non solum ut fideles essemus, sed ut etiam tibi vice sponsae in amplexus iucundos, castos, aeternosque copularemur, revelata et ipsi facie speculantes gloriam tuam, quae tibi communis pariter est cum Patre et Spiritu Sancto in saecula saeculorum." (SBO I, 67).

²⁵ This duplex understanding of Christ as *donum et exemplum* is at the bottom of Bernard's critique of Abelard's teaching as he renders it in Ep 190 VII, 17 (SBO VIII, 31): "traderet hominibus formam vitae vivendo et docendo, patiendo autem et moriendo caritatis metam praefigeret. Ergo docuit iustitiam, et non dedit; ostendit caritatem, sed non infundit; et sic rediit in sua?" Bernard cannot accept that Christ is seen simply as a (moral) example, because such a view ignores Christ's giving himself on the cross. In my reading of Bernard's *De diligendo Deo*, this treaty is shaped around the duplex understanding of Christ as *donum et exemplum*, a bending of the old Augustinian understanding of Christ as *sacramentum et exemplum*. But Bernard refines and complicates it further by making it into a triplex understanding of the already given salvation on the cross (*donum*), the exemplary salvation in self-giving love (*exemplum*), and the eschatological consummation of salvation (*sacramentum*). See my book, *Bernhard of Clairvaux* 2008: 79-80. Cf. Luther who adduces this same duplex view on Christ in his *Eyn kleyn Unterricht* (1521-22), WA 10 1,1: 8-18.

²⁶ Luther, *Dictata super Psalterium*, WA 4, 64, 24-65,6: compare 65, 28-31.

²⁷ Cf. Heiko Oberman, "Simul gemitus et raptus: Luther und die Mystik", Ivar Asheim (ed), *Kirche, Mystik, Heiligung und das Natürliche bei Luther. Vorträge des Dritten Internationalen Kongresses für Lutherforschung, Järvenpää, Finland 1966*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1967: 20-59, here 26 and 45.

affirming Luther's employment of the so-called "Brautmystik",²⁸ Oberman characterizes Bernard's bridal imagery as being that of another and grotesquely erotic kind.²⁹

However, Oberman seems to forget that Bernard's carnality language is taken from biblical imagery itself and, as we see in for example sermons 2-8 to the Songs, employed allegorically to unfold hardcore doctrine, primarily Christology and soteriology – or Christ's incarnation and crucifixion, *in carne* and *per carnem*.³⁰ Besides, Luther does not stand back in such carnality in his rendition of the bridal union in his *Treatise on the freedom of a Christian*.³¹ Here Luther plays on the same erotic language in his texture of the Songs, Eph 5 and Hos 2 when like Bernard explicating the happy exchange of Christ, the bridegroom, and the believer, the bride - the soul laying (*copulat*) with Christ).³²

The principle of grace alone

"What is hidden about us in the heart of God will be revealed for us and his Spirit testifies and persuades our spirit that we are the children of God. But he convinces us of this by calling and justifying us by grace through faith."³³ In other words, Christ is the *iustitia aliena* of man.

In Bernard's phraseology, the church comes into being only through the heart of God by way of God's justice and mercy, for "we are given grace."³⁴ Concurrently, the most important function of the church is that of being a communion of love between Christ and the faithful. In fact, the church is only church by way of the symbiosis in which Christ through his active suffering has established the peace and union that is the *telos* of the church. As a community, the church members are given room to act as the bride to whom Christ offers his grace, and at the same time

²⁸ L.c.: 40.

²⁹ L.c.: 24. Oberman defended Vogelsang's tripartite and hierarchical classification of mystical theology into a Dionysian, Roman and German mysticism and placed Luther in the last and finest category.

³⁰ SC 6,3 (SBO I,27): Obtulit carnem sapientibus carnem per quam discerent sapere et spiritum. . . In carne, inquam, et per carnem potenter ac patenter operatus mira, locutus salubria, passus indigna, evidenter ostendit quia ipse sit potenter, sed invisibiliter saecula condidisset, sapienter regeret, benigne protegeret. Denique dum evangelizat ingratum, signa perhibet infidelibus, pro suis crucifixoribus orat; nonne liquido ipsum se esse declarat, qui cum Patre suo quotidie oriri facit solem suum super bonos et malos et pluit super iustos et iniustos?"

³¹ WA 7,54. 3f: "[Fides] animam copulat cum Christo, sicut sponsam cum sponso. Quo sacramento (ut Apostolus docet [Eph 5:32]) Christus et anima efficiuntur una caro." Cf. note 23.

³² Cf. Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology. A Contemporary Interpretation*, Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans Publishing Company 2008: 225-230, esp. 227. The book was first published in German: *Martin Luthers Theologie. Eine Vergegenwärtigung*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2003. The English translation is based on the third edition, 2007.

³³ My translation from In Dedicatione Ecclesiae V, 7 (SBO V, 393): "Quod de nobis latet in corde patris, nobis per ipsius Spiritum reveletur, et Spiritus eius testificans persuadeat spiritui nostro quod filii Dei sumus. Persuadeat autem vocando et iustificando gratis per fidem." Humans cannot obtain it by their own merit.

³⁴ SC 4, 3: "Gratia donatur".

this church is expected to return thanks for everything (cf. 1 Thess 5:18) and praise God for it.³⁵ Thus every merit according to Bernard is the merit of Christ as also Christ's mercy and justice will always surpass the sins of humans: "your justice is mine, because you are made my justice from God"³⁶

A forward reading of Bernard's own texts reveals that he perceives salvation and justification to be constituted by God's grace alone (*sola gratia*). It has been critiqued from the Luther scholars following Karl Holl that Bernard so tightly connects God's grace with God as love, but, really, this ought not to write him out of a genuine theology as I cannot subscribe to the view that Luther does not make such a connection.³⁷ Bernard's teaching is grounded in his intertextual reading of Paul and John: God not only loves creation, God is love *per se*. Faith and grace are combined in such a way that one cannot be without the other. Actually, the kiss of the mouth is the metaphor for this very reciprocity, and a sign that God will keep his promises of reconciliation (*promissae reconciliationis*). In Bernard's apt words the "happy kiss is a wonderful and astonishing honour, which is not simply mouth pressed to mouth, but God who unites with the human being."³⁸ The picture of God's bending towards humans in order to meet them in the kiss of the mouth simply depicts God's forgiveness, grace, peace and reconciliation in Christ: "For the sake of your sins he will die, for the sake of your justification he will rise, in order that you will be justified through faith and have peace with God."³⁹

The personal faith in Christ is essential to justification, not as an act, however, "because nobody will be justified in his sight by works of the law (Rom 3:19-20)" so that "conscious of our deficiency, we shall cry to heaven and God will have mercy on us (cf. 1 Mac 4:10). And on that day we shall know that God has saved us, not by righteous works that we

³⁵ SC 13, 1 (SBO I, 68): "Ad locum unde exeunt revertantur flumina gratiarum, ut iterum fluant... Qualiter dicit Apostolus: IN OMNIBUS GRATIAS AGENTES." Cf. Luther on the first commandment in his Large Catechism from 1529 and his 1535 Genesis lecture, in both of which he accentuates that God is a God from whom we can expect all good things and a God who desires to be praised and offered thanks by humans. BSLK 560.10-21 and WA 42, 81.3f.

³⁶ SC 61, 5 (SBO II, 151): "DOMINE, MEMORABOR IUSTITIAE TUAE SOLIUS. Ipsa est enim et mea; nempe factus es mihi tu iustitia a Deo."

³⁷ Cf. Luther, *Rationis Latomianae confutatio*, where he very clearly combines God's grace, forgiveness and love, WA 8, 103-115. Luther formulates his theology as a whole in dialectics, not in dualisms or dichotomies, and it is suspiciously artificial to separate God's operations of love.

³⁸ SC 2, 3 (SBO I, 10): "Felix osculum, ac stupenda dignatione mirabile, in quo non os ori imprimitur, sed Deus homini unitur." This wording sounds echoes in Luther's image of the happy exchange (*stupendum duellum*) in the regal marriage that was just as astonishing (*mirabile*) as Bernard's kiss. WA 7, 25. 34.

³⁹ SC 2, 8 (SBO I, 13): "Cuius rei signum? Indulgentiae, gratiae, pacis, et pacis cuius non erit finis. Hoc est ergo signum: Invenietis infantem pannis quidem involutum et positum in praesipio. Deus est tamen in ipso mundum reconcilians sibi. Moriatur propter peccata vestra, et resurget propter iustificationem vestram, ut iustificati per fidem, pacem habeatis ad Deum." Note that I added the *ouverture*, in which Bernard determines the kiss a sign of God's reconciliation with the world.

ourselves have done, but according to his mercy (cf. Tit 3:5).”⁴⁰ A strong Christology inseparable from soteriology that we later find in Luther’s writings, such as in his *Confession* of 1528, where Luther summarizes how the love and grace of the triune God teach human beings to recognize the wonderful blessing of Christ, the gift of all his works, suffering, wisdom and righteousness in order to reconcile them.⁴¹

In the same manner, Bernard in his treatise *De gratia et libero arbitrio* explains that our sins are not imputed due to God’s loving grace. In an almost “Lutheran” *pecca fortiter* manner, Bernard emphasizes: “True, we cannot be completely without sin or sorrow here on earth but we can, with the help of grace, avoid being overcome either by sin or by sorrow”, continuing: “not that they never sin, but that sin is not imputed to them either because it is atoned for by due penance, or is covered up by charity.”⁴²

Several similar formulations can be found both in his sermons, foremost in those of *On the Song of Songs*, and in his treatises, foremost in *On Grace and free choice* – and, which can hardly be overstated, always in a rendition of Paul. Especially the latter constitutes a commentary to Romans, so extensively quoted through the treaty, as this example shows:

Because he believed the one promising, with confidence he repeats the promise, which, arising out of mercy, must be fulfilled out of justice. Hence, the crown Paul awaits is a crown of righteousness, but of God’s righteousness, not his own. It is only that he should deliver what he owes and he owes what he promised. This is the righteousness Paul is relying on, the promise of God, lest, in any way despising it and seeking to establish his own, he might be failing to submit to God’s righteousness (Gra14, 51).

⁴⁰ SC 50, I, 2 (SBO II, 79) where the focal citations run: “quia ex operibus legis non iustificabatur omnis caro coram illo... Quia non ex operibus iustitiae quae fecimus nos, sed secundum suam misericordiam salvos nos fecit.” Compare Luther, WA 56, 199. 24-30.

⁴¹ WA 26, 505.38-506.12.

⁴² Gra 9,29: “Neque enim hic possumus penitus esse sine peccato seu miseria: possumus tamen, gratia iuvante, nec peccato superari, nec miseria... non quod omnino non peccent, sed quod peccatum ipsis non imputetur, quod vel punitur condigna paenitentia, vel in caritate absconditur.” The same thought that sin is not imputed due to God’s love, God’s righteousness or forgiveness is found in SC 23, VI, 15 (SBO I, 148-49). Concurrently, Bernard’s understanding of grace seems to be that of an imputed grace and hence to differ from Augustine’s *gratia infusa*. This is substantiated by the fact that baptism is not totally indispensable to Bernard. Cf. above, note 18.

In the sequence of Gra 13-14, Bernard stresses the grace as God's grace solely and explicates human merits as God's gifts (*dona Dei*), whilst pointing to human self-righteousness as a hindrance to acknowledging God's righteousness.

Likewise, we find the structure of faith as *donum Dei* in tandem with grace as *favor Dei*, though perhaps not always with that exact terminology, very close to Luther's in the confutation of Latomus in 1521.⁴³ This is for example the case in SC 1. Furthermore, both Franz Posset⁴⁴ and Theo Bell⁴⁵ have pointed to Luther's recurrent employment of Bernard's first homily *In annuntiatione Dominica* when explicating the doctrine of justification, beginning in his exposition of the letter to the Romans in 1515/1516. Luther did it so explicitly that he would sometimes interpret Paul by means of Bernard.⁴⁶ In fact, in so many ways Bernard's exposition of God's salvific grace appears to be similar to the doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone. Indeed, Luther praised Bernard's emphasis on personal faith in Christ as essential for justification. An example of that we find in Luther's Lectures on Romans, the commentary on 8:16-8, which quotes Bernard's *First Sermon on the annunciation*.⁴⁷

Conclusion

The theological conclusion I will draw in this context is that the finding of continuities between Luther and the tradition in which he was moulded does not reduce Luther to a lesser reformer or theologian. Quite to the contrary, by reading both Bernard and Luther in a forward manner, endeavouring to leave aside later interpretations of their texts and the reading of later doctrines and classifications into their formulations, their theologies become much larger, opening a wider scope towards ecumenicity.

⁴³ Luther, *Rationis Latomianae confutatio*, WA 8 103,35-104, 24. Cf. above, note 37.

⁴⁴ For example in Franz Posset, *Bernhardus redivivus*, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications 1999.

⁴⁵ For example in Theo Bell, *Divus Bernhardus: Bernhard von Clairvaux in Martin Luthers Schriften*, Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern 1993.

⁴⁶ Posset 1999: 242-249.

⁴⁷ Bernard's sermon can be found in SBO V: 234ff. A whole collection of such texts where Luther quotes or refers to Bernard is listed in C. Volz, "Martin Luther's Attitude toward Bernard of Clairvaux", *Studies in Medieval Cistercian History*, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications 1971: 186-204.