LUTHERAN PERSPECTIVE ON NATURAL THEOLOGY

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Abstract. This article examines Martin Luther's view of Natural theology and natural knowledge of God. Luther research has often taken a negative stance towards a possibility of Natural theology in Luther's thought. I argue, that one actually finds from Luther's texts a limited area of the natural knowledge of God. This knowledge pertains to the existence of God as necessary and as Creator, but not to what God is concretely. Luther appears to think that the natural knowledge of God is limited because of the relation between God and the Universe only one side is known by natural capacities. Scholastic Theology built on Aristotelianism errs, according to Luther, when it uses created reality as the paradigm for thinking about God. Direct experiential knowledge of the divinity, given by faith, is required to comprehend the divine being. Luther's criticism of Natural theology, however, does not appear to rise from a general rejection of metaphysics, but from that Luther follows certain ideas of Medieval Augustinian Platonism, such as a stark ontological differentiation between finite and infinite things, as well as the idea of divine uniting contradictions. Thus the conflict between faith and reason on Luther seems to be explicable at least in part as a conflict between two different ontological systems, which follow different paradigms of rationality.

1. INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITION OF THE ISSUE

Lutheran theology and natural theology sometimes seem to be related to each other as water is to fire. Luther's criticism of metaphysical speculation and the limits of natural reason concerning God, as well as the idea that God is only accessible under the contraries of his metaphysical being in the human Jesus Christ, may seem to render all natural theology not only an impossible endeavour, but one that should be avoided too.[1] But is this view

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[1]   This suspicion is connected to a tradition of criticism towards Metaphysics in modern interpretations of Luther. It is supported by approaches at Luther's thought that can be character-

entirely correct? In this article my aim is first to attempt to construct what I would consider a proper interpretation of Luther's view of natural theology, its possibility and limits, and then to evaluate it and ask whether one can reach different conclusions on the possibility of natural theology when one places Luther's view in a wider philosophical and theological context. In analysis of the nature of Luther's thought I am building upon the so-called Platonism thesis of Luther's thought, discussed for the most part of the last Century, though rejected by the existentialist and personalist interpreters of Luther's ontology.[2]

As a starting point of my examination I will use a definition of natural theology offered on the Gifford Lectures website. According to it, "Traditionally natural theology is the term used for the attempt to prove the existence of God and divine purpose through observation of nature and the use of human reason. Seen in a more positive light natural theology is the part of theology that does not depend on revelation."[3] The definition implies that there are two methods of natural theology: the observation of nature, and the use of human reason. Though they may be in some cases considered as interrelated parts of the same process, in the face of Lutheran theological epistemology one needs to make a distinction between these two, i.e. a theoretical or *a priori* approach, and en empirical or *a posteriori* approach.

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ized as Ritschlian, Existentialist and Barthian, which all agree in their rejection of metaphysics, though from different grounds. See Martikainen (1992: 5-21); Juntunen (1998: 129-131). A noticeably more positive attitude has been exemplified by the so-called Confessional Lutherans, who have made attemps at building or at least defending the place of natural theology within Lutheran thought. As examples of this see Montgomery (1998) and Loikkanen (2015). One can also mention an extremely polemical article of the confessionalist Swedish Luther Scholar Tom G.A. Hardt (1980), which nevertheless includes a useful overview on some of Luther's textual passages concerning the natural knowledge of God.

[2]   On the Platonism thesis in the history of Luther research, see the licentiate thesis of Karimies (2013).

[3]   The Gifford Lectures (2016).

2. LUTHER'S REMARKS THAT CONCERN NATURAL THEOLOGY, AND HOW TO UNDERSTAND THEM

2.1 The Inevitability of Natural Theology

A classical text to open the discussion on natural theology in the Lutheran tradition is the Heidelberg Disputation from 1518. In the theses 19-22, which are traditionally considered the central definition of the Lutheran Theology of the Cross, Luther states that

> "19. That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who watches (conspicit) the invisible things of God understood through God's works.
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> 20. He deserves to be called a theologian, who understands the backside (posteriora) and visible things of God as watched (*conspecta*) through suffering and the cross.
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> 21. A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross says what the thing actually is.
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> 22. That wisdom which sees (*conspicit*) the invisible things of God as understood from his works swells, blinds and hardens everyone."[4]

The text is often interpreted as a rejection and condemnation of speculative, rational and metaphysical theology: Knowledge of God is not gained by speculating the wonders of the created world by human reason. Rather, the knowledge of God is found in Christ, under his humanity and suffering on the cross, which are the opposite and backside (*posteriora*) of the invisible glorious properties of God.[5] But is it actually at all correct to read Luther's condemnation of the theology of glory as a rejection of metaphysical

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[4]   WA 1, 354, 17-24: "19. Non ille digne Theologus dicitur, qui invisibilia Dei per ea, quea facta sunt, intellecta conspicit, 20. Sed qui visibilia et posteriora Dei per passiones et crucem conspecta intelligit. 21. Theologus gloriae dicit malum bonum et bonum malum, Theologus crucis dicit id quod res est. 22. Sapientia illa, quae invisibilia Dei ex operibus intellecta conspicit, omnino inflat, excaecat et indurat." I have used my own translation here to emphasize Luther's use of the words conspicere [...] per, i.e. to look at something through something and not merely in something.

[5]   See e.g. Mannermaa (2010: 27-66). In general, the theology of the Cross is usually seen to represent revelation (either historical Christ, proclaimed word, or subjective experience, as in the existential sufferings of the Christian) and taken as an epistemological principle of theol-

speculation as a method of theology, i.e. as a method which yields knowledge concerning God? Does not Luther actually in thesis 19 imply, that there indeed are invisible properties of God (*invisibilia Dei*), which can be "watched", or speculated (*conspicere*), as understood (*intellecta*) through the works of God, the created universe?[6] The probation of thesis 19 seems to consider this knowledge not as something that cannot be attained, but as something which is of little worth.[7] Thesis 24 likewise states, that the wisdom which comes from the speculation of the invisible things is not in itself evil, but is misused.[8] I therefore argue that Luther's point in the disputation is not to deny that the speculation of the creation would per se yield knowledge concerning God. The problem rather lies in the quality of that knowledge.

Luther namely states in the *Lectures on Romans* (1515-1516) that all human beings possess a concept of God or have a certain recognition of him (*notio divinitatis*).[9] By this concept of *notio divinitatis* Luther appears to mean a concept which can be described as abstract in a very specific way.

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ogy (*Erkenntnisprinzip*) which excludes and contradicts natural theology and metaphysics. See Blaumeiser (1995: 26-90); Kopperi (1997, 25-82; 2010).

[6]   Luther's term for works of God, "*facta*", and the allusion to Romans 1:20 point to the created things, i.e. the knowledge of God accessible through creation. This is also manifest in how these works are presented as opposite to the knowledge that comes through Christ, i.e. revelation.

[7]   WA 361, 34-36: "Patet per eos, qui tales fuerunt Et tamen ab Apostolo Roma. 1. stulti vocantur. Porro invisibilia Dei sunt virtus, divinitas, sapientia, iusticia, bonitas &c. haec onmia cognita non faciunt dignum nec sapientem."

[8]   WA 1, 354, 27: "Non tamen sapientia illa mala nec lex fugienda, Sed homo sine Theologia crucis optimis pessime abutitur."

[9]   See WA 56, 11-12 and WA 56, 176, 14-177, 17: "*Deus enim illis manifestauit.* Ex hoc itaque dat intelligere, Quod etiam naturalia bona ipsi Deo sunt tanquam largitori ascribenda. Nam Quod hic de naturali cognitione loquatur, patet ex eo, quod subdit, quomodo illis manifestauit, scil. per hoc, Quod *Inuisibilia eius a conditione mundi operibus intellecta conspiciuntur* (i. e. naturaliter ex effectibus cognoscuntur) i. e. ab initio mundi semper ita fuit, Quod 'Inuisibilia eius' etc., q. d. ne quis Cauilletur, Quod nostro tempore solo potuerit Deus cognosci. A conditione mundi vsque semper potuit et potest. Sed vt clarius Apostolus in istis probationibus intelligatur, Volo meo sensu aliis spectantibus modicum ludere et vel auxilium vel Iudicium expectare. Quod omnibus, idolatris tamen precipue, manifesta fuerit notitia Dei, sicut hic dicit, ita vt inexcusabiliter possint conuinci se cognouisse Inuisibilia Dei, ipsam diuinitatem, item sempiternitatem et potestatem eius, ex hoc aperte probatur, Quia omnes, qui idola constituerunt et coluerunt et deos vel Deum appellauerunt, item immortalem esse Deum i. e. sempiternum, item potentem et adiuuare valentem, certe ostenderunt se notionem diuinitatis in corde habuisse. Nam Quo pacto possent Simulachrum vel aliam creaturam Deum appel-

Luther seems to think there are two sources for this concept. On one hand he states that it is in human hearts and it is impossible to be obscured, that is, it exists as an *a priori* category. Luther refers to this concept also as the major (term) of the practical syllogism, and a theological *syntheresis,* which refers to an innate ability of moral discrimination.[10] The moral laws at least in some sense are derived from the innate knowledge of God. The reason that Luther connects the knowledge of God to the major term of the practical syllogism is probably because Luther appears to follow the idea that God is the highest good and as such the principle of goodness.[11] According to Luther human beings necessarily know both that God exists as well as that he has certain divine attributes, e.g. that he is eternal, all-powerful, immortal, capable to help, invisible, wise, righteous and merciful to those invoking him. This knowledge exists in the natural reason as a self-evident first principle, which in itself cannot therefore be falsified, though it might be in some cases denied. This knowledge also has an epistemological justification, as Luther seems to think that the principles of natural reason are known by some kind of divine illumination, which has God as its source. However, in the Fall the light of the reason has become dimmed, so that compared to the light of faith it is weak and feeble and not suited to deal with the spiritual, incomprehensible

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lare vel ei similem credere, Si nihil, quid esset Deus et quid ad eum pertineret facere, nossent? Quomodo hec attribuerent lapidi vel ei, cui lapidem similem estimabant, si ea non crederent ei conuenire? Nunc Cum teneant, Quod Inuisibilis quidem sit diuinitas (quam in multos tamen deos distribuerunt), Quod qui eam habeat, sit Inuisibilis, sit immortalis, sit potens, sit Sapiens, sit Iustus, Sit clemens inuocantibus, Cum ergo hec adeo certe teneant, Quod etiam operibus profiteantur, sc. Inuocando, colendo, adorando eos, in quibus diuinitatem esse putabant, certissime sequitur, Quod notitiam seu notionem diuinitatis habuerunt, Que sine dubio ex Deo in illis est, sicut hic dicit. In hoc ergo errauerunt, Quod hanc diuinitatem non nudam reliquerunt et coluerunt, Sed eam mutauerunt et applicuerunt pro votis et desyderiis suis. Et vnusquisque diuinitatem in eo esse voluit, qui sibi placeret, Et sic Dei veritatem mutauerunt in mendacium. Cognouerunt ergo, Quod diuinitatis siue eius, qui est Deus, sit esse potentem, Inuisibilem, Iustum, immortalem, bonum; ergo cognouerunt Inuisibilia Dei sempiternamque virtutem eius et diuinitatem. Hec Maior syllogismi practici, hec Syntheresis theologica est inobscurabilis in omnibus. Sed in minore errabant dicendo et statuendo: Hic autem i. e. Iupiter Vel alius huic simulacro similis est huiusmodi etc." The words of the Bible verse Luther is commenting are printed in italic.

10   See also WA 42, 374, 6-16.
11   See Karimies (2015).

and divine things, only corporeal and earthly things.[12] The loss of the higher spiritual light of faith in the Fall has therefore lead to the consequence that though the human being knows the abstract properties of God by the light of reason, he does not attribute them to the concrete, invisible and incomprehensible divinity, i.e. the actual God, as reason lacks the intuitive knowledge of him, though it knows he exists. Instead of the actual God the human being rather attributes these properties either to concrete created objects (idols), or to deities which are abstract conceptualizations of some specific created goods, such as power or wealth, or to other false conceptions. This idea is behind Luther's saying that faith and trust create one's God, i.e. the human being divinizes that which he puts his utmost trust in.[13] The *apriori* notion of God necessarily leads, according to Luther, to the human being constructing some kind of deity.

Luther, however, appears to think that one can also arrive at the concept of God by inferring backwards from the effects to the source. With reference to Romans 1:20 Luther states that the invisible attributes of God have been possible to see since the beginning of the world, which means, that God is and has been naturally knowable from his effects, i.e. as their cause. This kind of reasoning, to which Luther referred in the thesis 19 of the Heidelberg disputation, also can induce some attributes of God by observing the created good things, as the good apparent in the natural things is to be ascribed to God who is its giver and creator.[14] The knowledge of God attained this way therefore relies on reasoning *a posteriori*: it is based on the empirical reality

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[12]   See e.g. WA 7, 550, 28-551, 11; WA 39, I, 175, 4; WA 42, 292, 4-5; 374, 11-16; WA 57, b197, 6-13. The exact relationship of the light of the natural reason to the light of faith in the terms of the theory of divine illumination is somewhat unclear, as Luther at some places speaks of the natural light, which the reason has, in contradiction to the divine light of faith, but at other places refers also to the light of reason as "something divine" (*divinum quiddam*), and as inscribed to the heart by God.

[13]   WA 56, 176, 14-178, 17. See also WA 30, I, 132, 32-133, 8; WA 40, I, 360, 2-361, 11.

[14]   WA 56, 176, 14-22: "*Deus enim illis manifestauit.* Ex hoc itaque dat intelligere, Quod etiam naturalia bona ipsi Deo sunt tanquam largitori ascribenda. Nam Quod hic de naturali cognitione loquatur, patet ex eo, quod subdit, quomodo illis manifestauit, scil. per hoc, *Quod Inuisibilia eius a conditione mundi operibus intellecta conspiciuntur* (i. e. naturaliter ex effectibus cognoscuntur) i. e. ab initio mundi semper ita fuit, Quod 'Inuisibilia eius' etc., q. d. ne quis Cauilletur, Quod nostro tempore solo potuerit Deus cognosci. A conditione mundi vsque semper potuit et potest."

as its source. Luther does not, however, seem to be greatly interested in making a distinction between these two sources of knowledge, or on differences between the methods of reasoning related to them, as he examines them in the same texts somewhat intermingledly. Nor does Luther appear interested in formulating or discussing exact arguments for the existence of God. He simply seems to suppose the idea of the Augustinian tradition, that the concept of God is known by natural reason, as well as to accept the Aristotelian Cosmological argument without further deliberation. In this sense Luther can even refer positively to the limited natural knowledge of God possessed by the Philosophers.[15]

2.2 The Problems of Natural Theology

Based on the examination of Luther's texts presented above one can conclude, that not only is natural theology possible according to Luther, but it is natural and inevitable for all human beings. Both pure reason and experience function according to him as sources of knowledge of God. Why therefore the criticism? Why does not one involved in this kind of speculation deserve to be called a theologian?

From Luther's texts the answer would seem to be, that because he or she is a metaphysician. According to Luther, namely, the speculation of the Godhead by the means of natural reason seems to necessarily lead to a qualitatively distorted conception of God, though abstractly or formally the conception might seem somewhat correct. My claim is, that this difference is based on a difference between two alternative metaphysical paradigms, or what Luther himself would call a difference between metaphysics and theology.[16] According to Luther the natural reason is always tied to visible things, and consequently the concepts it forms are based on those things.[17] Therefore when

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[See] also WA 56, 11-12: "*Inuisibilia enim* sc. bonitas, sapientia, Iustitia etc. *ipsius a creatura mundi* i. e. a creatione mundi *per ea quae facta sunt* / i. e. ex operibus, hoc est, cum Videant, quod sint opera, ergo et factorem necesse est esse *intellecta conspiciuntur*: non quidem per sensum, Sed per intellectum cognita *sempiterna quoque eius virtus* potestas hoc enim arguunt opera *et diuinitas* / i. e. quod sit vere Deus *ita ut sint inexcusabiles*."

[15]   See WA 42, 290, 15-22; Martikainen (1992: 39-40).

[16]   See e.g. WA 55, II, 535, 33-536, 41; 822, 637-642; WA 56, 371, 1-372, 25. See also Martikainen (1992: 29-44).

[17]   See footnote 12. See also Karimies (2013: 102-104; 130-132).

the natural reason forms a concept of God, it creates that concept using the abstractions of the created goods it knows. There is, however, for Luther a key qualitative difference between the created things (i.e. created goods), and the divine things (i.e. spiritual goods). This is that the created things are finite, perishable and lacking permanent existence (i.e. "empty"), whereas the spiritual things are infinite and eternal (i.e. "solid"). Luther seems to understand the nature of the divine infinity in a specific, Platonic manner: Divine goodness is unlike any limited or static object that could be possessed. Following the Platonic principle of the Good, it is something dynamic and self-diffusive, not static being, but overflowing and sharing of itself.[18] Luther also subscribes to the Augustinian idea, that one becomes through love like the object of one's love. If the object of love is empty and transitory, one becomes empty and transitory. If the object of love is God, one becomes in a certain way like God.[19] When one by faith possesses God as the highest good and begins to love God, one's soul is consequently filled with the divine ampleness.[20]

Out of this is born the distinction between the two kinds of love and two kinds of wisdom, carnal and spiritual. A person without faith is according to Luther internally 'empty' as he participates only in the created goods. This emptiness leads to the insatisfiable greedy love, as the created goods fail to satisfy the soul.[21] The basic affect of faith, on the other hand, possesses God as the self-diffusing goodness and leads person to freely and cheerfully serve God and other people, giving of himself.[22] The concept of wisdom, also often used by Luther, means some kind of general paradigm which is determined by experientially knowing or not knowing God. Whether one concretely knows the divine goodness or not gives its character to the theoretical

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[18]   WA 55, I, 302, 7-8; 676-678; 716-718; 753 gloss 13; WA 55, II, 81, 14-15; 119, 20-23; 154, 7-12; 247, 53-57; 284, 111-120; 367, 336-368, 337; 631, 60-64; 637, 225-227; 715, 484-488; WA 56, 75, 13-15; 253, 10-11. In the Heidelberg disputation Luther takes a positive stance towards Platonism in general, see Kopperi (1997: 173-239; 2010: 169-171); Dieter (2001: 619-631). Luther's ideas concerning the nature of the Good, however, seem to be related especially to the though of Bonaventure, see Karimies (2015).

[19]   WA 55, II, 879, 161-171; WA 56, 240, 31-241, 5; AWA 2, 43, 25-44, 3.

[20]   WA 55, I, 718; 718 gloss 6.

[21]   WA 55, II, 66, 15-67, 14; 338, 13-18.

[22]   WA 55, II, 638, 249-640, 285; WA 56, 8 gloss 4; WA 2, 500, 17-35; AWA 2, 40, 3-41, 10; 44, 7-16; 48, 1-49, 19. See also Karimies (2013: 113-118).

thought concerning God (as can be seen in Luther's use of the term in the-
sis 22 of the Heidelberg disputation), so that the same abstract concept (e.g.
"goodness") is understood in a different concrete manners in visible things
and in God.[23] The two kinds of love and wisdom, carnal and spiritual, thus
form for Luther two different opposite 'paradigms' through which one un-
derstands divine things in general. When a person forms by natural reason a
concept of God, and attributes to him divine properties, without the spiritual
wisdom that comes from experiential knowledge of God in faith, the person
uses in understanding the quality of those properties the abstractions of the
natural finite good things as his model. God's goodness is therefore under-
stood in the terms of an ultimate end (as Thomas Aquinas does), as an object
to be possessed, towards which one strives by doing good works, instead of
being the first cause of good works, freely given in faith, which would alter
the quality of the person itself. Most of Luther's criticism of Scholastic Theol-
ogy follows this model. The Scholastic thought is criticised of that it follows
the model of carnal love and wisdom of the flesh, and the reason of this is
its appropriation of Aristotelian metaphysics. Luther's own theology on the
other hand appears to utilize ideas from medieval Augustinian Platonism i.a.
concerning the nature of the goodness of God.[24] Luther's view of the capabili-
ties of the natural reason seems to be close to the theory of abstraction, as the
concepts of reason are derived from sensible forms. The spiritual intellect,
on the contrary, receives its concepts by direct internal illumination, not by
extracting them from sense experience.[25] Thus the object of one is for Luther
the sensible world and its abstractions as well as the sensible good, the object
of the other the spiritual and intellectual world and the spiritual good in itself.

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[23] See e.g. WA 56, 76 gloss 1; 237, 20-28; 329, 27-330, 5; 361, 19-363, 7; 406, 16-407, 2.

[24] On Luther's criticism of Scholastic Theology regarding its application of teleological view
of human moral action to theology, which Luther sees as an opposite of the concept of grace,
see Luther's *Disputation against Scholastic Theology*, theses 36-44; 55-56; 75-80 (WA 1, 226-
228); *Heidelberg disputation* theses 25-28 (WA 1, 354, 29-34). Luther's view of divine action
rather follows the Platonic model of overflowing goodness, see Karimies (2015). The view
of Thomas is seen as an opposite of the Platonic model by Kretzmann (1990) as well as te
Velde (1995: 30-35). In Kretzmann's opinion the idea of the Father as *fontalis plenitudo* as
represented i.a. by Bonaventure is "directly repudiated by Aquinas". On Luther's critique of the
Aristotelian model of acquired virtue see also Dieter (2001: 149-256).

[25] See e.g. WA 55, I, 520 gloss 17.

Without access to the spiritual world, granted by faith, a human being cannot according to Luther properly understand the nature of the spiritual things.

Luther's view of the qualitative difference between the nature of God and the nature of the created things also sheds light on how he understands the function of the Creation as a sign of God. For Luther the created world is objectively, i.e. in its essence, a sign of God:

There is more philosophy and wisdom in this verse 'I will open my mouth in parables' than if Aristotle had written a thousand Metaphysics. This is because through it it is learned, that every visible creature is a parable and full of mystical instruction, according to how the Wisdom of God arranges all things beautifully and all things are made in wisdom. Every creature of God is a word of God 'For he spoke, and they were made'. Therefore creatures are to be beheld as utterances of God. Therefore to fix the heart in created things is to fix it in the sign instead of the reality, which is God alone. 'The invisible things of God are understood from these works', Romans 1.[26]

However, due to the qualitative difference between God and the created reality one cannot by inductive reasoning arrive from the sign to the signified (without creating a qualitatively erratic conception). Rather, according to Luther, to understand the signification of the created word properly, one needs to be acquainted with the divine reality which it signifies. The sign is properly understood only when the reality it signifies is seen.[27] For Luther this happens

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[26]   WA 55, II, 535, 33-536, 41: "Plus philosophie et sapientie est in isto versu: 'Aperiam in parabolis os meum', quam si mille metaphysicas Scripsisset Aristoteles. Quia hinc discitur, quod omnis creatura visibilis est parabola et plena mystica eruditione, secundum quod sapientia Dei disponit omnia suauiter et omnia in | sapientia facta sunt, Omnisque creatura Dei verbum Dei est: 'Quia ipse dixit, et facta sunt.' Ergo Creaturas inspicere oportet tanquam locutiones Dei. Atque ideo ponere cor in res creatas Est in signum et non rem ponere, que est Deus solus. 'Ex operibus enim istis Inuisibilia Dei intellecta conspiciuntur', Ro. 1."

[27]   WA 55, II, 342, 126-140: "Quia omnia opera Creationis et veteris legis signa sunt operum Dei, que in Christo et suis sanctis facit et faciet, et ideo in Christo illa preterita tanquam signa omnia implentur. Nam omnia illa sunt transitoria, significantia ea, que sunt eterna et permanentia. Et hec sunt opera veritatis, illa autem omnia vmbra et opera figurationis. Ideo Christus finis omnium et centrum, in quem omnia respiciunt et monstrant, ac si dicerent: Ecce iste est, qui est, nos autem non sumus, Sed significamus tantum. Vnde Iudei arguuntur Psal. 27. quod non intellexerunt opera et in opera, i. e. opera in veteri lege non intellectualiter aspiciebant, Sed tantum carnaliter, non vt signa et argumenta rerum, Sed res ipsas. Quia quod intelligitur, Inuisibile est ab eo, quod videtur, aliud longe. Vnde Apostoli Annunciauerunt opera Dei (scil. in Christo facta) et exinde Intellexerunt facta eius, i. e. res preteritas in gestis et creationis,

through the light of faith, not the light of natural reason. The natural reason can only comprehend the material causes or quiddities, not the efficient and the final cause. Its knowledge of the first cause is also very limited, as explained.[28] The first problem of the natural theology, following Luther, therefore lies in that the natural reason conceives the relationship between God and the created world incorrectly, using the finite created world as its paradigm. The created things, however, differ qualitatively from God in a way which the natural reason cannot arrive to by observing the created things alone. Due to the epistemological limitations of the human reason after the Fall the reason cannot comprehend the divine being in a correct way, if it does not first have an intuitive or experiential cognition of the divinity, which is grated only by faith. The abstractive reasoning which uses the exemplars of the divine properties as they exist in the finite created world arrives at qualitatively incorrect conclusions regarding the nature of the divine attributes as they exist in God. It can correctly induce, for an example, that God is good, but it does not know, what the divine goodness actually is like.[29]

There is, however, also a second obstacle which impairs the capacity of the human reason to think about God. Luther appears to think that the human reason is discursive and analytic in approaching its objects. The divine wisdom, i.e. what God is and how he works, on the other hand, reconciles and unites contradictions.[30] In the created world the good, powerful, lofty etc. things are distinct from the evil, weak, and lowly. Therefore when human wisdom attempts to seek God, it uses the naturally good, powerful, magnificent etc. things as the foundation of its abstractive reasoning. This is theology of glory. God, however, becomes in a special manner present and accessible in the created world under

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scil. intelligentes, quoniam ista opera Christi in illis olim sint figurata et significata. Quia tunc perfecte intelligitur signum, quando res ipsa signi videtur."

[28]   WA 39, I, 175, 7-176, 3; WA 56, 371, 1-372, 25. See also Ebeling (1982: 333-431) and Lohse (1958: 63-65; 75-76).

[29]   One can therefore ask whether Luther accepts or rejects the principle of analogy. To me it appears that Luther would accept the analogy of being in principle, but would reject that one can make use of it to arrive at a correct conception of God. The world is indeed for Luther a creation of God, which has a causal relation to its Creator, and by this it can be known that there is a Creator, but the specific nature of this relation cannot be known by observing the created world alone, and thus the specific nature of the Creator remains unknown.

[30]   See e.g. WA 55, I, 860 gloss 13; WA 55, II, 379, 669-380, 682; AWA 2, 309, 2-7.

the opposites of what are the apparent equivalents of his divine properties, i.e. under visible evil, weakness, suffering etc. This pertains especially to the Incarnation, but also to the action of God in general. Luther writes:

Therefore note, that as blessed divinity, i.e. wisdom, light, virtue, glory, truth, goodness, salvation, life and every good thing was hidden under the flesh, when instead in the flesh all evil appeared, such as confusion, death, cross, infirmity, weakness, darkness and worthlessness, (for thus different and most dissimilar thing appeared to outward eyes, ears, touch and to all powers of the whole man than what was hidden inside), so it is in the same way always up to the present day.[31]

Behind Luther's way of thought is a specific ontological idea according to which it is "greater" and more proper for God to be present under contraries and unite them, than to be present under simply one kind of things. A fitting description of the divinity, according to Luther, is that it is "all in everything" (*omnia in omnibus*), present and effective in all things.[32] For God to be truly great and miraculous his highness needs to be present in most low things and his essence needs to surpass the differences of the created order. Luther links the incarnation to this idea. The incarnation of Christ is the most proper work of God as an expression of this character of the divine nature, because in Christ the mutual opposites come together and are united by divine wisdom.[33] The ontological motive is, however, connected to a soteriological motive: As it is impossible for the human reason to seek God under the contraries (of his apparent properties as manifest in the nature, i.e. in the lowliness), the hiddenness of the salvific (i.e. incarnatorial and sacramental) presence of God guarantees Luther's central theological tenet of *sola gratia, sola fide, solo Christo*. Through

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[31]   WA 55, II, 720, 69-75: "Vnde Nota, Quod sicut sub carne abscondita fuit benedicta diuinitas, i. e. sapientia, lux, virtus, gloria, veritas, bonitas, salus, vita et omne bonum, cum tamen in carne apparuerit omne malum vt confusio, mors, crux, infirmitas, languor, tenebre et vilitas (Sic enim aliud et dissimillimum apparuit foris oculis, auribus, tactui, immo omnibus viribus totius hominis ei quod intus latuit), Ita vsque modo semper."

[32]   AWA 2, 309, 2-7: "est iam deus vere omnia in omnibus, aequus et idem, simul tamen inaequalissimus et diversissimus. Ipse est enim, qui in multitudine simplex, in simplicitate multiplex, in inaequalitate aequalis, in aequalitate inaequalis, in sublimitate infimus, in excelsis profundus, in intimis extremus et e diverso. Sic in infirmis potens, in potentibus infirmus, in stultis sapiens, in sapientibus stultus, breviter, omnia in omnibus."

[33]   WA 55, II, 73, 11-18; WA 57, b189, 7-19; b201, 10-b202, 8.

grace given in Christ, i.e. under the *visibilia* of the passions and the Cross, the human being may receive faith, which also grants the proper understanding of the *spiritualia* and *invisibilia*. Thus the humanity of Christ is "the door", the entrance point and the ladder of ascent to the spiritual world too.[34] This forms the central idea of the theology of the Cross. It is not theology concerned just with the humanity of Christ, but the humanity, suffering and the cross rather form the starting point through which God depreciates the natural wisdom (which has an incorrect conception of him) and grants the human being a new theological intellect, an intellect which properly comprehends both the created world as well as the invisible attributes of God as seen through the cross, and along with it, not separated from it.[35] Thus the theologian of the cross can "say what the thing actually is", seeing all things as understood (*intellecta*) through the cross and passions.[36]

One is entitled to pose here the question, whether the idea that Christ stands at the center of everything as the reconciling principle, is ontological and philosophical, or a Christological and religious one. In my opinion the two cannot be separated. As we saw, Luther appeared to be related in his view of God as the highest good to Medieval Platonist Augustinianism. The idea of self-giving goodness as the central character of the divinity has its specific background in the Augustinianism of Richard St. Victor and Bonaventure, who applied the ideas of Pseudo-Dionysios to Western Trinitarian theology.[37] Same Platonist Augustinian tradition would appear to be also behind Luther's conception of Christ as the center in which mutual opposites come together and

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[34]   See e.g. WA 55, II, 668, 29-32; WA 57, b99, 1-10; b222, 10-23; WA 1, 362, 15-19.

[35]   See e.g. AWA 2, 106, 17-108, 5, where Luther discusses the birth of the intellect of faith and experiential cognition of God in the passions, and how they are related to the Cross of Christ. For a closer examination of this process see Karimies (2013: 118-124).

[36]   WA 1, 354, 17-22. Luther often emphasizes, that the natural reason sees only the *species* (i.e. visible forms) of things, whereas the intellect of faith sees the *res*, the things as they actually are. See WA 55, I, 520, 4-18; 520 gloss 20; WA 55, II, 56, 19-58, 1; 75, 25-76, 1; 179, 79-180, 107; 213, 124-140; 366, 291-304; 481, 481-488; 628, 430-445; 734, 109-735, 131; 758, 50-759, 55; 903, 342-364; 921, 872-897; WA 56, 70, 15-17; 445, 13-447, 27; WA 57, a93, 21-a94, 12; WA 57, b159, 5-15; WA 2, 578, 40-579, 7; AWA 2, 45, 17-18; 70, 16-23; 106, 19-108, 13; 132, 1-16; 139, 7-141, 18; 178, 24-29; 179, 17-182, 18; 199, 25-204, 5; 318, 5-19; 547, 16 - 548, 1-4 ;559, 17-560, 2; 617, 7-18; WA 5, 410, 36-38; 418, 9-419, 21; 474, 13-21; 506, 9-34; 555, 28-40; 570, 8-17; 623, 17-40.

[37]   On this background see Delio (2001: 39-53); Schumacher (2001: 117-121).

must be observed together. Luther's idea namely resembles the place of Christ as the reconciling principle in the theology of Bonaventure, where Christ as the *medium* (center) of everything is the farthest extension of the Trinity in the Platonic scheme of emanation and remanation, the exact point in which the created being is taken to participate in the divine life and begins to be drawn back to God, its source. Also Bonaventure describes Christ as the door and ladder in whom the human being can enter the spiritual world. The ideas seem to be related to each other through a number of figures employed by both. Luther and Bonaventure both emphasize that one should not contemplate just the essential properties of God, but admire their union with their opposites in Christ. In my opinion it might be fruitful to study the relation of Luther's Theology of the Cross to the Christology of Bonaventure further, as there seem to be structural similarities, which is most feasibly explained by them operating in the same Platonist Augustinian tradition.[38]

3. EVALUATION OF THE LUTHERAN PERSPECTIVE

What should one then think of the limits or possibilities of natural theology from the Lutheran perspective? If one should wish to uncritically follow Luther's thought, it would seem that the area, where it is possible to practise natural theology without being lead into false conclusions, is quite limited. Nevertheless, there is a narrow strip in which it exists: First of all, there is the concept of God, i.e. the *a priori* knowledge of his existence, which can be known by natural reason. Second, it is possible to reason backwards from the effect to the cause to the extent that it can be said, that because the Universe exists, God exists. Moreover, of God's attributes it can be said, that he is the cause of this known Universe. However, Luther's theology cautions that a concrete concept of God cannot be created by extrapolating from the properties of the Universe, as they exist in the Universe differently than they exist in God, and to know the

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[38]   On Bonaventure's Christology see Delio (2001: 84-95). Luther seems to be related to the tradition represented by Bonaventure through the use of a number of images, such as the picture of the two Cherubim facing each other, which is used to illustrate the unity of the mutually exclusive divine and human properties in Incarnate and Crucified Christ. Christ represents the mercy seat between them, who unites the opposites in his person and is the entrance to the spiritual word. See e.g. WA 57, b201, 17-b202, 8; *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* VI, 4-5; VII, 1-2.

exact nature of this difference both parts of the relation must be known. Luther therefore instructs, that without concrete knowledge (i.e. intuitive cognition, or spiritual experience) of the divinity as it is in itself, the divinity must be left "naked" and venerated as such.[39] This means that the limits of the human reason concerning its ability to comprehend God must be recognized, and one should abstain from attributing to the divinity any properties whatsoever in a concrete form, i.e. from giving any rendition of their concrete meaning. The attributes can be recognized only formally. In this sense God must remain incogitable, innominable and incomprehensible. The concrete content may only come from God's own self-revelation.[40]

However, one can also attempt to examine Luther's position from a wider perspective. Luther's dichotomy between faith and reason takes place within the context of a system where the scope of reason and the scope of faith are established by a definition. But is it actually valid? One way to approach the issue is to ask that even if one accepts as a hypothesis that the created and spiritual good are related to each other as Luther portrays, is it indeed necessary to have a personal experience, i.e. intuitive cognition, of the spiritual good in order to engage in critical and analytical thought concerning them, without falling into error of constructing conceptions which follow the false logic of the wisdom of the flesh? What if one is beforehand informed of these differences, taking Luther's notions as the starting point? Is that not what is done in this article? Is it absolutely necessary to have experiential knowledge of some thing, or even a category of reality, in order to be able to pursue analysis and argumentation within that field? Or would it be possible, even theoretically, to assume the

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[39]   WA 56, 177, 8-10: "In hoc ergo errauerunt, Quod hanc diuinitatem non nudam reliquerunt et coluerunt, Sed eam mutauerunt et applicuerunt pro votis et desyderiis suis." The caution is related to the concept of *nudus deus*, naked God, a concept of Luther's theology which is usually connected to a warning concerning metaphysical speculation of God outside of his revelation.

[40]   See e.g. AWA 2, 139, 7 - 140, 32; WA 56, 375, 1-378, 12. In the first text Luther uses the figure of the mountain of Exodus to represent the divine nature, which must be left untouched by human reason. The principle of the limit of reason is a central theme also in Luther's treatment of the so-called spiritual tribulations: In them one must not by reason attempt to deduce how to solve the apparent conflict between God's goodness and experienced suffering, but wait for help that comes from God and exceeds the options which are apparent to reason. Thus, for an example, the death of Christ on the Cross, which appeared as an ultimate defeat for the disciples, becomes the central salvific event, in which divine wisdom unites the contraries.

principles which govern that field of knowledge, and argue within them? For an example, is it possible for a blind person to learn optics or colour theory, so that he would be capable or arguing without error within that field? A similar question was posed by Henry of Ghent, who asked whether divine illumination was necessary for theological argumentation, or whether it would possible to pursue theological argumentation with the help of natural reason alone, like a blind man could discuss things which fall under the field of vision on the basis of what he has learned from others, without an experience of his own.[41]

But even if one would agree, that experience is not necessary for adequate theological argumentation, if one subscribes to correct principles, this does not mean that such undertaking could be called natural theology, as one would nevertheless have to accept those principles, which Luther seems to think are contrary to natural reason. However, as I have attempted to demonstrate, the conflict Luther sees as taking place between theology of the glory and theology of the cross can be construed also as a conflict between two theological systems, one of which can be broadly characterized as Aristotelian and the other as Platonic. Many principles, which according to Luther are peculiar to theology and the spiritual world, such as the idea of the divine plenitude, or that it is proper for the divinity to unite contraries, can also be found in Platonic philosophy. Even Luther himself seems to agree at in certain texts that the philosophies of Plato, Pythagoras and Parmenides are at least more suitable for dealing with theological questions than Aristotelianism.[42] The choice between different paradigmatic models which are used to conceptualize the divine may thus ultimately not be a choice between proper theology and fallen natural reason, but a choice between different historical and contextual views of reason and rational principles. Thus one could claim, that one can by "natural reason" (or at least by some of its instances) arrive at many questions to conclusions which are not far from Luther's view of God, as the historic Platonic tradition at instances promoted even by Luther illustrates. Of course there are also points which cannot be derived from rational speculation alone, for example the particular historical Christian narrative. One could theoretically, for an example, agree that it is

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[41]   See Työrinoja (2000).
[42]   See the philosophical theses of the Heidelberg disputation, WA 59, 424, 4-425, 18; Kopperi (1997: 225-235; 2010: 169-172); Dieter (2001: 619-631).

fitting for God to be incarnated, but it would seem that it is impossible to arrive by pure human reason or observation of the nature at the conclusion, that it is Jesus of Nazareth who is the God Incarnate. In this sense an extension of the field of natural theology would not threaten the centrality of Christ, which is of primary importance to Luther.[43] However, at this point one could also criticise the concept of natural theology as being ambiguous, insofar it is defined with the help of the concept of "natural reason" or "human reason". What is this reason, actually? Is it possible at all by reason alone to choose between different paradigmatic models examined in this article, between Platonism and Aristotelism, or in a more general sense, between empiricism and idealism, or different types of philosophical idealism? When Luther warns that the human reason should not overstep it limits, there may be some wisdom in it.

CONCLUSIONS

The present examination shows that a limited place for natural theology can be found within Lutheranism. Furthermore, I have attempted to demonstrate that it is incorrect to claim that Luther's criticism of natural theology would rise from a general rejection of a metaphysical way of thought. Rather, it seems that Luther's criticism should be understood from the perspective of a conflict between two different ontological systems, which can be broadly described as Aristotelian and Platonic. Luther's argument seems to be that though we can known the world is created and can possess an innate general concept of God, the created world cannot function as a paradigm for constructing a concrete concept of God, because only one side of the relation is known by natural reason. The relation between God and the Universe can only be comprehended correctly by the light of faith, because faith possesses intuitive and experiential knowledge of God as he is in his divine being. Without faith, a human being will create a qualitatively false concept of God, as the divine reality differs es-

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[43]   Luther also emphasizes, that God is hidden under contraries in the concrete historical works he does, not only in the person of Christ. This means, that the purpose of the things he does is only understood afterwards, not when they are taking place. Examples of this are even the personal sufferings of the believer, see e.g. WA 56, 375, 1-378, 2; AWA 2, 61, 6-16; 179, 15-182, 8. The hiddenness of God is therefore not only ontological, but also pertains to historical processes and personal experiences of the Christians.

sentially from the empirically known finite reality. However, beside Luther's emphasis on spiritual experience as a source of theological knowledge, his view of God nevertheless seems to be greatly indebted to the Platonic tradition. One can therefore question whether the natural reason necessarily leads to such an Aristotelian and, in Luther's view, distorted concept of God as Luther thought it does. Maybe part of the conflict is actually explained by different paradigms of rationality and not by an insolvable contradiction between faith and reason.

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WA 1, 350-374	Disputatio Heidelbergae habita. 1518.
WA 2, 433-618	In epistolam Pauli ad Galatas M. Lutheri commentarius. 1519.
WA 5	2. Psalmenvorlesung 1519/21 (Ps. 1 –22)
WA 7, 538-604	Das Magnificat verdeutschet und ausgelegt 1521.
WA 30, I, 125-665	Der große und kleine Katechismus Luthers
WA 39, I, 174-180	Die Disputation de homine. 1536.
WA 40, I	2. Galatervorlesung (cap. 1 –4) 1531
WA 42	Genesisvorlesung (cap. 1 –17) 1535/38
WA 55, I	1. Psalmenvorlesung 1513/15, Glossen
WA 55, II	1. Psalmenvorlesung 1513/15, Scholien
WA 56	Römervorlesung (Hs.) 1515/16
WA 57 a1-a108	Die erste Vorlesung über den Galaterbrief 1516/17.

WA 57, b1-238   Die Vorlesung über den Hebräerbrief

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